



# APPROACHING THE BUDDHIST PATH

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The Dalai Lama and Thubten Chodron

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APPROACHING  
THE BUDDHIST PATH

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*The Library of Wisdom and Compassion* is a special multivolume series in which His Holiness the Dalai Lama shares the Buddha's teachings on the complete path to full awakening that he himself has practiced his entire life. The topics are arranged especially for people not born in a Buddhist culture and are peppered with the Dalai Lama's own unique outlook. Assisted by his longterm disciple, the American nun Thubten Chodron, the Dalai Lama sets the context for practicing the Buddha's teachings in modern times and then unveils the path of wisdom and compassion that leads to a meaningful life and a sense of personal fulfillment. This series is an important bridge from introductory to profound topics for those seeking an in-depth explanation in contemporary language.



THE LIBRARY OF WISDOM AND COMPASSION • VOLUME I

# APPROACHING THE BUDDHIST PATH

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Bhikṣu Tenzin Gyatso,  
the Fourteenth Dalai Lama

*and*

Bhikṣuṇī Thubten Chodron



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## Prologue

THE WORLD WE LIVE IN is very different from the world at the Buddha's time, yet we human beings have the same afflictions and still experience physical and mental suffering. While the truth of the Buddha's teachings transcends historical eras, the way they are presented to practitioners in a given time is influenced by the specific culture, environment, and economic and political challenges. I encourage us to become twenty-first-century Buddhists—people whose view is rooted in the Buddha's message of compassion and wisdom and who also have a broad understanding of many fields, such as science—especially neurology, psychology, and physics—and other religions.

Our Buddhist knowledge must be expansive, not limited to just one topic, practice, or Buddhist tradition. We should try to learn about the teachings and practices of other Buddhist traditions and understand how they suit the particular dispositions and interests of the people who practice them. We may also include some of these teachings in our own practice. In this way, we will better appreciate the Buddha's skill as a teacher, which will reduce the sectarianism that limits us Buddhists from acting together to contribute to the welfare of all peoples and environments on our planet. We should also understand the full path to awakening and how different teachings can be practiced by the same individual at different points of his or her spiritual journey. This will clarify our personal practice as well as increase our respect for all Buddhist traditions and other religions.

To grow these understandings in ourselves, reciting prayers and mantras

is not sufficient. While perhaps increasing our devotion, these activities alone do not bring wisdom. In the modern world, we need to be realistic and practical, and for this, knowledge is essential. All of us want happiness, not suffering. Since both happiness and suffering arise in dependence on causes and conditions, we must know the causes of each so that we can train our minds to create the causes for happiness and abandon the causes for suffering.

All of us want a harmonious society. Since society consists of individuals, to bring about peace each individual must cultivate peace in his or her own heart and mind. Of course the ultimate aim of the Buddha's teachings goes beyond world peace to liberation from all rebirth in cyclic existence (*samsāra*), but the teachings can help us to create a more peaceful society while we are still in cyclic existence.

The material in this series accords with the general presentation of the Indian sages of the Nālandā tradition, who are held in esteem by all four Buddhist traditions in Tibet as well as Buddhist traditions in China. Most of the quoted passages come from these Indian sources, and in terms of the *method* aspect of the path—renunciation, bodhicitta, and the perfections of generosity, ethical conduct, fortitude, joyous effort, and meditative stability—there is little difference among them. Tibetan traditions follow Nāgārjuna and speak of the noncontradictory nature of emptiness and dependent arising as the essence of the *wisdom* aspect of the path, here we will emphasize Tsongkhapa's presentation of emptiness and sometimes mention teachings from the Nyingma, Kagyu, and Sakya traditions. Because the Pāli tradition emphasizes the Fundamental Vehicle which is common to all Buddhist traditions, we also cite passages from it.

In general, my teaching style does not follow the approach of the traditional *lamrim* (stages of the path) teachings. I like to speak a lot about emptiness and show its relationship to other aspects of the path; this way of presenting the teachings also flourished in ancient India. Many years ago, His Eminence Geshe Lungrik Namgyal, the Gaden Tripa at that time, said to his friends, "Understanding His Holiness the Dalai Lama's teachings is challenging because his way of presenting the material is special. He touches on this point and that, but we are unable to integrate everything into the traditional framework of the teachings." I wonder if this is praise

or criticism. In any case, please think deeply about the various topics in the manner explained. Contemplate how these topics relate to one another and to your life.

Bhikṣu Tenzin Gyatso, the Fourteenth Dalai Lama  
Thekchen Choling





## Preface

### *The Purpose of This Series*

EVERYTHING COMES ABOUT due to causes and conditions, and this series is no exception. Explaining some of its causes and conditions will help you understand the purpose of this series. Its ultimate purpose is to lead you, the reader, and other sentient beings to full awakening. Although many excellent works on the stages of the path, the lamrim, already exist, there is a need for this unique series. To explain why, I will share a little of my personal story, which is typical of the first generation of Westerners encountering Tibetan Buddhism.

Born in the United States, I grew up in a Judeo-Christian culture. I tried to believe in God, but that worldview didn't work for me. There were too many unanswered questions. When I was twenty-four, I attended a three-week Dharma course taught by two Tibetan lamas. One of the first things they said was, "You don't have to believe anything we say. You are intelligent people. Examine these teachings using reasoning. Practice them and see through your own experience if they work. Then decide if you want to adopt them." The attitude of *ehipaśyika*, or "come and see," that the Buddha spoke about in the sūtras attracted me. Studying, contemplating, and practicing the Buddha's teachings over time, I became convinced that this path made sense and would help me if I practiced it sincerely.

Like many young Westerners in the 1970s, I steeped myself in studying and practicing Tibetan Buddhism as best I could, considering that I didn't know the Tibetan language or much about Tibetan culture. Our Dharma education commenced with the lamrim—a genre of texts that lead readers through the progressive stages of the path to awakening. Here it is helpful

to look at the place of Tibetan lamrim works within the tradition. After the Buddha's awakening, he taught across India for forty-five years. Sensitive to the needs, interests, and dispositions of the various audiences, he gave teachings that were appropriate for them at that moment. After his passing (*parinirvāṇa*), the great Indian sages organized the material in the sūtras by topic points and wrote treatises and commentaries explaining these. After the Dharma spread to Tibet, Tibetan masters also wrote treatises and commentaries, of which lamrim literature is one type.

Tibetans see this development of treatises, commentaries, and commentaries on commentaries as a demonstration of the sages' kindness. The fortunate ones who were direct disciples of the Buddha had great merit and could attain realizations of the path without needing lengthy teachings. Since those of future generations had less merit, their minds were not as sharp, and they required more detailed explanations to dispel their doubts, generate the correct views, and attain realizations. Since people's minds are even more obscured and they have less merit now, new commentaries are needed. Our teachers thus said the sūtras are like freshly picked cotton, the Indian treatises and commentaries like woven cloth, and the lamrim texts like ready-made clothes. When the first generation of Westerners were introduced to the lamrim, we were told that everything we needed to know was in these texts, and that all we had to do to gain awakening was study and practice them correctly over time.

However, things didn't turn out to be that simple. From the very beginning of the lamrim, we had doubts about topics that for our Tibetan teachers were obvious. Precious human life, one of the initial meditations of the lamrim, speaks of our fortune being born as human beings, not as hell beings, hungry ghosts, or animals. Tibetans, raised in a culture that believes in rebirth and various realms of existence, accept this without question. However, for those of us raised in Christian, Jewish, or secular cultures that respect science, this is not the case.

Furthermore, while our Tibetan teachers talked about all phenomena being empty of true existence, we were wondering, "Does God exist?" When they taught selflessness, we were trying to find our souls or our true selves. When they explained dependent arising, we were seeking the one absolute truth independent from all else. Philosophically, our views did not coincide.

The traditional presentation of the teachings assumed that the audience had faith in the Buddha, Dharma, and Saṅgha and was free from doubts about religious institutions and issues around authority. The teachings were directed toward people who could separate their emotional needs from their spiritual practice and who would correctly understand the teachings. For example, they assumed we would not be overwhelmed with guilt when reflecting on our harmful actions; we would not harshly criticize ourselves when contemplating the disadvantages of self-centeredness; and we would not succumb to our culture's tendency to idolize the charismatic.

From our side, we Westerners assumed that all Tibetan teachers were buddhas and that the values we grew up holding—democracy, gender equality, care for the environment, and so on—would be perfectly embodied in Tibetan society.

All these assumptions on both sides were incorrect, and after a while many Westerners began to have difficulties with their Dharma studies and practices. The cultural difference was difficult for us and for our spiritual mentors, who were doing their best to teach people whose perspective on life was totally new to them. It took many years for all of us to realize that Westerners require pre-lamrim teachings. For us to grow in the Dharma, the stages of the path need to commence with material that meets our dispositions.

His Holiness the Dalai Lama understood this and adjusted his teachings in the West accordingly. Instead of beginning with a reliance upon a spiritual mentor elevated to the status of a buddha, he started with the two truths—how things appear to exist and how they actually exist. Rather than tell us that reciting a certain mantra a few times would protect us from rebirth in the hells, he explained the four truths of the *āryas*—those who nonconceptually perceive ultimate reality. Instead of saying that drinking blessed water would purify eons of destructive karma, he taught us about the nature of mind, the workings of the mental afflictions, and the possibility of attaining liberation. Diving into the philosophy that underlies the Buddhist worldview, he asked us to think deeply about it. He challenged us to doubt our anger and to open our hearts with compassion for all sentient beings. His was a no-nonsense approach, and when he learned that, contrary to Buddhist scriptures, the earth was not flat and revolved around the sun, he was quick to say that if science conclusively proves something,

we should accept it and not adhere to scriptural pronouncements to the contrary.

In this environment, in 1993, I requested an interview with His Holiness. The interview did not happen for another two years due to His Holiness's full schedule. During the interview, I humbly requested him to write a short lamrim text designed for non-Tibetans. A text that Tibetan geshe could use to teach Westerners, it would present the topics in an order suitable for people who did not grow up Buddhist and would deal with doubts and issues that non-Tibetans had about the Dharma. His Holiness agreed with the idea, but he immediately stipulated that a larger commentary should be written first and then points extracted from it to make a root text. He asked me to speak to senior Dharma students about the topics to include, gave me a transcript of a lamrim teaching he had recently given to use as a foundation, and asked me to begin. I spoke with many senior Western practitioners and assembled a list of questions, topics, issues, and doubts that they would like His Holiness to address.

Over the ensuing years, I met with His Holiness several times to address these topics and to show him the work I had done so far on the manuscript. In our time together, he taught specific subjects upon my request, offered deeper explanations of others, and answered the many questions that I had accumulated. He seemed to thoroughly enjoy these sessions and usually invited other geshe and his brother to come. I would ask a question, and they discussed the answer animatedly in Tibetan, with His Holiness asking the geshe what they thought, bringing up points they had not considered. After some time, the translator gave me the conclusion of the discussion.

As I continued to add more material from many of His Holiness's oral teachings and from our interviews, the manuscript became larger and larger. I came to see that the purpose of this series was to fill the gap between the short lamrim texts with teachings lamas gave in the West and the long philosophical treatises translated into English by scholars. Western practitioners needed a concise presentation in their own language of the major topics in the philosophical texts that could also be the basis for an analytical meditation on the lamrim.

In 2003, I began to read the manuscript aloud for His Holiness so he could check it. We soon realized that this would be a lengthy process that his schedule did not permit. In 2004, he asked his translator Geshe Dorje

Damdul to go through the manuscript with me. Geshela and I worked methodically until 2010 doing this.

His Holiness also clarified that this series was not meant solely for Westerners, but for all those who have interest in Buddhism—particularly the Nālandā tradition—and are keen to study and practice but need a new approach to it. Here he included Tibetans born in the Tibetan diaspora who have a modern education, as well as Asians from Taiwan, Korea, Vietnam, and so forth who are attending his teachings in Dharamsala, India, with increasing frequency and interest.

This series chiefly contains the teachings of the Nālandā tradition, the classical Indian Buddhist tradition stemming from the great monastic universities such as Nālandā, Odantapurī, and Vikramaśīla. This is the Buddhist tradition the Tibetans and to some extent East Asians inherited from classical India. However, His Holiness clearly stated that this series must be unique—it must not be limited to the Nālandā tradition but must also include information about and teachings from other Buddhist traditions. It was time, he said, that followers of Tibetan Buddhism learned more about diverse Buddhist traditions and their teachings. As he began to speak more and more in public talks about being a twenty-first-century Buddhist, I came to understand his wish to dispel wrong conceptions and stereotypes that practitioners of various Buddhist traditions had about one another and bring them closer together. For this purpose, he asked me to visit other Asian countries to learn about how they practiced the Dharma. I stayed in a monastery in Thailand and also visited Taiwan to learn from scholars and practitioners there. I continued intra-Buddhist dialogues with Buddhist monastics in the West at our annual Western Buddhist Monastic Gatherings and became familiar with the teachings of their Asian teachers. These were very rich experiences.

In the 2011 series of interviews, His Holiness clarified that to fulfill the above purpose, he wanted a book explaining the similarities and differences between the Pāli and Sanskrit traditions. While most books that introduce the many forms of Buddhism deal with more superficial topics such as altar layout, forms of worship, and so forth, this book was to deal with doctrine. He wanted people to think deeply about the Buddha's teachings and his skill in addressing the various dispositions and interests of his disciples. By this time the manuscript was too large to be a single volume. To fulfill His

Holiness's wish, I extracted and abbreviated portions of it to form *Buddhism: One Teacher, Many Traditions*, published by Wisdom Publications in 2014.

The present series, which will be published in several volumes, explains the path to buddhahood as set forth in the Nālandā tradition as practiced in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition. In some sections, it brings in teachings from other Buddhist traditions to enrich our understanding and give us a broader view of a topic. The series also incorporates several other purposes: it links study to daily life and formal meditation practice; it serves as a bridge for both new and seasoned practitioners from the short lamrim texts to the lengthy philosophical treatises; and it exposes the reader to the tenets and practices of other Buddhist traditions. Because some of the topics have already been explained in *Buddhism: One Teacher, Many Traditions*, we will sometimes refer you to that book.

### *Overview of the Entire Series*

We begin by laying the groundwork for the Buddha's teachings. The need for pre-lamrim material is evinced in a comment His Holiness made when we began working on the series: "The lamrim assumes that someone is already a practitioner with full faith in the Buddha. The main audience for the lamrim texts in all the Tibetan traditions is someone who already has some knowledge of rebirth and karma, the Three Jewels, reliable cognizers and their objects (Buddhist epistemology), and so on. We need to add introductory material to this series so the students are properly prepared." Also covered here are the meaning of faith, balancing faith and wisdom, seeking out a qualified spiritual mentor, relying on that person properly, and developing the qualities of a receptive student. These will help you to approach the Dharma as a twenty-first-century Buddhist.

Then we set the foundation for learning and meditating by explaining how to structure a meditation session on the lamrim. After again reflecting on the possibility that the continuity of our mindstream does not end at death but will take another body in another life, we look at the precious opportunity our present human life offers us and how to set our priorities. This leads us to reflect on the eight worldly concerns—ways in which we



get distracted from making our lives meaningful—and karma (volitional actions) and their effects, for the first step to having a meaningful life is to abandon harming others. In this way, we will know the causes for happiness and the causes of suffering so we can go about creating the former and abandoning the latter. The topic of karma is vast and of great interest to many people, so that is covered in depth.

We then proceed to explore the four truths of the āryas, those beings who directly realize the ultimate mode of existence. These four form the basic framework of the Buddha's teachings. The first two truths—true *duḥkha* and true origins—lay out our present unsatisfactory situation in cyclic existence and its causes, the afflictions that torment our minds and lie behind our suffering. We look at the twelve links of dependent origination—the process by which afflictions and polluted karma propel our rebirth in cyclic existence and the way we can free ourselves from it. This section delves into the psychology behind wrong views and disturbing emotions.

At this point we realize that we need the guidance of the Three Jewels—the Buddha, Dharma, and Saṅgha—who will teach us and show us the path to liberation through the example of their lives. Learning about the potential of our mind, the possibility to attain liberation, and our buddha nature increases our confidence that we can succeed in freeing ourselves from saṃsāra and attain nirvāṇa, a state of genuine peace. This is explained in the latter two of the four truths—true cessation and true paths—the state of liberation and the method leading to it. Included in true paths are the three higher trainings, the four establishments of mindfulness, and the thirty-seven aids to awakening—topics that are oriented toward practice in both daily life and meditation sessions. Through these we will calm our daily behavior, deepen our concentration, and gain wisdom, thus beginning to actualize our great potential.

But freeing ourselves alone is limited, considering that others suffer just as we do and they have been amazingly kind to us. To free ourselves from the prison of self-centeredness, we learn how to cultivate immeasurable love, compassion, joy, and equanimity, as well as *bodhicitta*—the intention to attain full awakening in order to most effectively benefit all sentient beings. Then we learn how to train in the perfections (*pāramitās*)—practices that enable us to bring our bodhicitta motivation to fruition by practicing

generosity, ethical conduct, fortitude, joyous effort, meditative stability, and wisdom. Imagine the kind of person you will become when all those wonderful qualities have become second nature to you.

Having generated the altruistic intention to attain full awakening, we now want to cultivate the wisdom realizing the nature of reality, the only counterforce that will completely and irreversibly eradicate all the afflictions and their latencies from our mindstreams. Here we learn the tenets of the various Buddhist philosophical systems, which have diverse views about the ultimate truth. Our job is to sort through them with the aid of the past great sages and discern the most accurate view, that of the Prāsaṅgika Madhyamaka tenet system.

This leads us to discuss the two truths—veil and ultimate. Veil truths are objects that appear true to a mind affected by ignorance, and ultimate truth is their actual mode of existence, their emptiness. After further reflection, we come to see the uniqueness of the Prāsaṅgika Madhyamaka view of emptiness as well as how to unite the concentrated mind of serenity (*śamatha*) and the analytic mind of insight (*vipaśyanā*) to realize the ultimate nature. Here we will also touch on the view of selflessness as understood in the Pāli and Chinese Traditions.

The Buddha also set out the paths and stages that practitioners traverse to attain their particular goals—liberation from saṃsāra or the full awakening of buddhahood. Learning these gives us a roadmap to follow on our spiritual journey and we come to understand the various qualities and realizations that are gradually developed on the path. They also enable us to check our meditative experiences with the generally accepted sequence of development.

We then learn about the pure land practice found in both the Tibetan and Chinese traditions, and this leads us to a discussion of Vajrayāna, which is a branch of the general Mahāyāna. The work concludes with an epilogue from His Holiness containing personal advice for his students.

This work is designed not simply to give you information about Buddhism, but to enrich your Dharma practice. To this end, most chapters contain summaries of the main points so that you can easily remember and reflect on them. Please take advantage of these to deepen your practice by contemplating what you read. The work would have become too long had reflections been inserted for every section, so where they are missing, please

review what you read and write out the main points for contemplation. This will help you to apply what you learn to your own experience and integrate the Dharma into your life.

The volumes of this work will be published one at a time. This way you can spend some time learning, contemplating, and meditating on the material in one volume, which will prepare you for the material in the following volume. The stages of the path are presented in a particular order in this series of volumes for the purpose of allowing you to grow into the more advanced and complex stages. Nevertheless, each volume stands alone as an explanation of its unique topic.

When giving public teachings to audiences of people with very different backgrounds and degrees of understanding, His Holiness doesn't shy away from introducing profound topics. Although he doesn't give a full explanation, he brings in advanced concepts and vocabulary in a concise manner. He doesn't expect everyone to understand these topics but is planting seeds for newer students to one day learn and understand the more complex teachings. He often will weave back and forth between general topics that most people can easily understand and difficult topics that only the learned will comprehend. Don't get discouraged if you don't understand everything all at once. The concepts and terms introduced in earlier volumes will be fleshed out in later ones.

This series is written in a similar style, although I tried to edit the material so that the reader is led from easier topics to more difficult ones. If you do not completely understand a topic the first or even second time, don't worry; the series is meant to be a resource for you on the path, a text to which you will repeatedly refer to deepen your understanding of the Dharma. Each time you read it, you will understand more due to the merit and wisdom you accumulated in the intervening time.

By learning the entire path from beginning to end, you will come to see the relationships between the various topics, which will enrich your practice. Although the stages are presented in a linear fashion, the knowledge and experience obtained from later stages will inform your meditation on earlier stages. As you continue to delve into the Buddha's teachings, you will find new ways to relate different points to each other in a creative and thought-provoking way. One of His Holiness's unique qualities as a teacher is his ability to draw threads from seemingly different topics

together to make a tapestry that continually draws us into more profound understandings.

### *Overview of Volume I*

This first volume and part of the second cover topics that form the basic approach of the Nālandā tradition. In the curriculum at a Tibetan monastery, many of these are embedded in larger texts and others are learned in public teachings. Here we extracted the most important points and incorporated them in one volume, so that people who did not grow up in a Buddhist culture or in a monastery will have the background that supports the study of the stages of the path.

Chapter 1 explores the role of Buddhism in the world: the purpose of our lives, the middle way between theistic religions and scientific reductionism, Buddhism's relationship with the other great world religions, and the meaning of being a spiritual practitioner in the modern world.

Chapter 2 delves into the Buddhist view of life: the explanation of the mind and its relationship to body, rebirth, and the self. The four truths of the āryas lay out the essential framework of the path, and to understand these more deeply, we investigate dependent arising and emptiness and the possibility of ending duḥkha—our unsatisfactory situation in cyclic existence.

Chapter 3 explores our minds and emotions, and furnishes some practical strategies for calming our minds as well as for developing a confident and optimistic attitude for approaching life and spiritual practice.

Chapter 4 is a brief survey of the historical development of the Buddha-dharma: the early Buddhist schools in the Indian subcontinent, Sri Lanka, and Central Asia; the Buddhist canons; and the philosophical tenet systems that began to form in India. More detailed information has been included in footnotes for those readers who are interested.

This leads to an examination in chapter 5 of the three turnings of the Dharma wheel—one schema for organizing the Buddha's teachings—as well as the authenticity of the Mahāyāna scriptures. This chapter concludes with an introduction to Tibetan Buddhism as the continuation of the Nālandā tradition in India.

Chapter 6 investigates the teachings, first by discerning reliable teachings and differentiating them from exaggerated statements given to encourage a

particular type of disciple, and then by ensuring we understand the correct point of the teachings we study.

Chapter 7 discusses cultivating a proper motivation for spiritual practice, since this is crucial to prevent fooling ourselves, getting sidetracked, or becoming hypocritical. This chapter brings us back to our inner heart and encourages us to cultivate the sincere wish to free both ourselves and others from cyclic existence and to attain full awakening. His Holiness also illustrates a practical way to cultivate and maintain a compassionate motivation.

Chapter 8 deals with how to progress along the path to full awakening as an initial, intermediate, and advanced level practitioner. This provides the framework for knowing where each topic the Buddha taught fits into the entire path, so we can practice the path in a step-by-step manner without undue confusion.

Chapter 9 speaks of the mental tools we will need to progress along the path, such as faith and wisdom. Here we'll understand the role of prayers and rituals as well as memorization and debate in cultivating the three wisdoms: the wisdom arising from learning, reflecting on the teachings, and meditating on them.

Chapter 10 anticipates some common challenges that practitioners could encounter and offers ways to overcome them.

In chapter 11, His Holiness shares some of his personal reflections and experiences practicing the path, so we can see how a genuine practitioner uses the Dharma in daily life.

Chapter 12 shifts our focus from personal practice to using Buddhist principles to guide our work in and for the world. The Buddha taught the Dharma not only for spiritual transcendence, but also as a method to create a healthier and more just society. Here we apply Buddhist ideas and practices to politics, business, consumerism, the media, the arts, science, gender equality, and respect for other religions as well as for other Buddhist traditions.

### *Please Note*

While this series is coauthored, the vast majority is in His Holiness's voice. I wrote the chapter on Buddhist history, all parts pertaining to the Pāli tradition, and some paragraphs here and there.

Pāli and Sanskrit terms are usually given in parentheses only for the first

usage of a word. Unless otherwise noted with “P” or “T,” indicating Pāli or Tibetan respectively, the italicized terms are Sanskrit. In most cases, Dharma terms and scriptural titles are in English, but when Sanskrit or Pāli terms are well known, those are used, for example Prajñāpāramitā for Perfection of Wisdom, and *jhāna* or *dhyāna*, the Pāli and Sanskrit names respectively for meditative stabilization. Sanskrit or Pāli spellings are used in sections concerning their respective traditions and in quotations from each tradition’s scriptures. For ease of reading, most honorifics have been omitted, although that does not diminish the great respect we have for these most excellent sages. Because it is awkward to gloss every new term when it first appears, a glossary is included at the end of the book. Unless otherwise noted, the personal pronoun “I” refers to His Holiness.

### *Acknowledgments and Appreciation*

I bow to Śākyamuni Buddha and all the buddhas, bodhisattvas, and arhats who embody the Dharma and share it with others. I also bow to all the realized lineage masters of all Buddhist traditions through whose kindness the Dharma still exists in our world.

Since this series will appear in consecutive volumes, I will express my appreciation of those involved in that particular volume. This first volume is due to the talent and efforts of His Holiness’s translators—Geshe Lhakdor, Geshe Dorje Damdul, and Geshe Thupten Jinpa—and of Samdhong Rinpoche and Geshe Sonam Rinchen for their clarification of important points. I also thank Geshe Dadul Namgyal for checking the manuscript; the staff at the Private Office of His Holiness for facilitating the interviews; the communities of Sravasti Abbey and Dharma Friendship Foundation for supporting me while writing this series; and David Kittelstrom for his skillful editing. I am grateful to everyone at Wisdom Publications who contributed to the successful production of this series. All errors are my own.

Bhikṣuṇī Thubten Chodron  
Sravasti Abbey



## Abbreviations

**T**RANSLATIONS USED IN THIS volume, unless noted otherwise, are as cited here. Some terminology has been modified for consistency with the present work.

- AN *Aṅguttara Nikāya*. Translated by Bhikkhu Bodhi in *The Numerical Discourses of the Buddha* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2012).
- AKC *Advice to Kunzang Chogyal*, by Dza Patrul Rinpoche, translated by Karen Lilienberg. <http://vajracakra.com/viewtopic.php?f=57&t=3287>.
- BCA *Engaging in the Bodhisattva's Deeds (Bodhicaryāvatāra)* by Śāntideva. Translated by Stephen Batchelor in *A Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life* (Dharamsala, India: Library of Tibetan Works and Archive, 2007).
- CŚ *The Four Hundred (Catuḥśataka)*, by Āryadeva.
- LC *The Great Treatise on the Stages of the Path* (Tib. *Lam rim chen mo*) by Tsongkhapa, 3 vols. Translated by Joshua Cutler et al. (Ithaca: Snow Lion Publications, 2000–2004).
- MN *Majjhima Nikāya*. Translated by Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi in *The Middle-Length Discourses of the Buddha* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 1995).
- RA *Precious Garland (Ratnāvalī)* by Nāgārjuna. Translated by John Dunne and Sara McClintock in *The Precious Garland: An Epistle to a King* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 1997).

- SN Saṃyutta Nikāya. Translated by Bhikkhu Bodhi in *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2000).
- Vism *Path of Purification (Visuddhimagga)* of Buddhaghosa. Translated by Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli in *The Path of Purification* (Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 1991).

APPROACHING  
THE BUDDHIST PATH



# 1 | Exploring Buddhism

A SPIRITUAL PATH IS ESSENTIAL to human life. Although advances in medicine, science, and technology have done much to improve the quality of human life, they have not been able to free us from all suffering and bring us secure and lasting happiness. In fact, in many cases, they have brought new problems that we did not face in the past, such as environmental pollution and the threat of nuclear war. Therefore, external improvements in our world are not sufficient to bring the happiness and peace that we all desire. For this, internal transformation through spiritual development is essential. For this transformation to occur, we need to follow a spiritual path.

Spiritual practice involves transforming our mind. Although our body is important, satisfying it does not bring lasting happiness. We must look inside ourselves, examining our attitudes and emotions to understand how profoundly they influence and shape our experiences. The Buddha comments (SN 1.62):

The world is led by mind and drawn along by mind. All phenomena are controlled by one phenomenon, mind.

The mind includes not only our intellect, but also all our cognitions, emotions, and other mental factors. The Sanskrit word for “mind,” *citta*, can also be translated as “heart.” It refers to all our consciousnesses—sensory and mental—and to the variety of mental states we experience. By subduing the afflicted aspects of our mind, our experience of the world is transformed, whereas if we seek to change only the external environment and the people

in it, we continually meet with frustration and disappointment because we cannot control the external world. It is only by developing the great potential of our mind/heart that we will be able to find a way out of our suffering and to truly benefit others as well.

In Buddhism, therefore, the obstacles we aim to eliminate are not external, but are afflictive mental states—distorted attitudes and disturbing emotions. The tools we use to counteract them are also mental—compassion, wisdom, and other realistic and beneficial attitudes and emotions that we consciously cultivate. The Buddha’s teachings, or Buddhadharma—what is commonly known as Buddhism—help us to differentiate realistic and beneficial attitudes, views, and emotions that accord with the way things are. The teachings also give us instructions regarding what to practice and what to abandon on the spiritual path. The Buddha taught from his own experience, and we are free to accept or reject his teachings, using valid reasons as well as our own experience as criteria.

### *The Purpose of Existence and the Meaning of Life*

The Buddha says (MN 46.2):

For the most part, beings have this wish, desire, and longing: “If only unwished for, undesired, disagreeable things would diminish and wished for, desired, agreeable things would increase!” Yet although beings have this wish, desire, and longing, unwished for, undesired, disagreeable things increase for them, and wished for, desired, agreeable things diminish.

What the Buddha says above is confirmed by our own experience. All of us want happiness and no one wants misery. Yet, despite our sincere wish, the opposite comes about. I believe the meaning and purpose of our life has to do with eradicating the causes of pain and increasing the causes of happiness, so that this deepest wish in the heart of each and every living being can be fulfilled.

I do not know of an overarching purpose for the existence of this world, and from the Buddhist viewpoint, there is not a clear explanation. We simply say that the existence of the world is due to causes and conditions, to

nature. The existence of this universe is a fact. How existence came into being and the possibility of ending suffering are quite different issues. We do not need to know how the world began in order to stop our suffering.

Everyone wants to be happy and peaceful and to avoid suffering. Even a person who doesn't know the purpose for the existence of the universe doesn't want to suffer. Such a person would never think, "Because there is no plan or big purpose, I will let myself suffer." Our body exists, and feelings of happiness and unhappiness exist. Whether our intellect understands the reason for our existence or not, we are concerned about the happiness of ourselves and others. By seeking to bring about this happiness, we give purpose and meaning to our lives.

The purpose of our life is happiness and peace, an internal feeling of well-being. To bring that about, we need material development and proper education. We also need spiritual development. By spirituality, I do not mean religious belief or rituals. For me, spirituality refers to the basic good qualities of human beings, such as compassion, affection, gentleness, and humility. When these qualities are well established in our hearts, we will have more peace of mind and will contribute to the happiness of others. Someone can be happy without religious beliefs but not without these basic good qualities.

Sentient beings—all beings with minds that are not fully awakened—experience two types of happiness and suffering: physical happiness and suffering (which occur at the level of our senses) and mental or emotional happiness and suffering (which occur at the mental level). As human beings, we are not different from animals, insects, and other beings with bodies; we are all basically the same in terms of seeking physical comfort and avoiding pain. But in terms of mental and emotional happiness and suffering, we human beings are very different from other species. We have human intelligence and thus have more capacity to think, remember, explain, and examine. For example, unlike animals, human beings may suffer mentally when they remember injustices their ancestors experienced. We may speculate about the future and become anxious or furious about situations that haven't occurred yet. Due to our imagination, we are much more sensitive on a mental level and experience so much joy and misery that is created by our mind. Because mental suffering is created by the conceptions in our mind, countermeasures that are likewise mental are important. Toward this

end, human beings have developed various religions, philosophies, psychological theories, and scientific hypotheses.

### *A Middle Way between Theistic Religions and Scientific Reductionism*

The more than seven billion human beings on our planet can be divided into three general groups: those who are not interested in religion, those who believe and practice a religion, and those who are actively hostile to religion. The first group, those who are not very interested in religion, is the largest. These people are concerned principally with their day-to-day lives, especially with financial security and material prosperity. Among this group there are two types. The first consists of people who have ethical principles and use them to guide their lives. The second values money, prestige, and pleasure above all else. Those guided by ethical principles are, in general, happier. Those who lack ethical restraint may gain more temporary benefit, but in the end, they do not feel good inside themselves about what they have done. Afraid that their devious means will be found out, they lack genuine self-confidence and inner peace. Many of our global problems are due to such a lack of ethical principles, which comes about when people do not know or care about the moral consequences of their actions. Without such knowledge and the restraint it produces, greed has free reign. We can see that many of our global problems would be solved if people lived with a sense of responsibility that comes from valuing ethical principles.

Of the other two groups, those who sincerely believe in a religion and practice it and those who are hostile to religion, the former also uses ethical principles and compassion to guide their lives, while the latter intentionally opposes religious ideas. Some people in the latter group say religion is the instrument through which the ruling class exploits others; others say that religion is just superstition or a cause of ignorance.

People in these three groups are the same in that they all seek happiness. There is no difference among them in this regard. The difference occurs in terms of what each group believes will lead to happiness. Except for those in the first group who privilege ethical values above personal gain, the rest trust principally in money and material comfort; the second affirms that



happiness comes primarily through ethical conduct as well as religious and spiritual practice; the third believes not only that happiness lies in the material world but also that religious ideas are irrelevant, make-believe, and counter to human happiness. Of these three groups, Buddhist practitioners belong to the second.

From one perspective, Buddhism is a religion and a spiritual discipline. Because Buddhist precepts and meditation are directly linked to mental training, it is also a science of mind. From another viewpoint, since Buddhism does not accept an external creator, it is not a theistic religion but a philosophy. Depending on how we look at Buddhism, we may describe it as a religion, a science of mind, or a philosophy. We do not need to say it is one and not the others, for Buddhism embraces aspects of all three.

We also see radical materialists who deny the existence of mind as an immaterial phenomenon, as well as religious believers who assert an external creator. We see people who stress logical reasoning and others who emphasize uncritical faith. It seems Buddhism does not fit in any of these categories. In contrast to religions that oppose critical investigation, Buddhism emphasizes that we should be skeptical, even of the Buddha's words. We have to investigate whether scriptural passages are reliable and true or not. If we find contradictory evidence, including scientific findings, we should follow what can be proven rather than what the Buddha said. The Buddha himself stated that his followers should not accept his teaching out of respect but after investigation and personal experiment. We have the liberty to examine and test the Buddha's teachings.

On the other hand, while Buddhism shares respect for logic and experimental proof, it doesn't deny the value of having faith and confidence in spiritually realized beings. Since our five senses are limited in what they are capable of knowing, scientific tools are not amenable to investigating many existent phenomena. So it seems that Buddhism is in between science and theistic religions. In the future, perhaps Buddhism may become a bridge between religion and science, bringing the two closer together.

I have met many times with people of other faiths as well as with scientists. Sometimes my Buddhist explanations have helped my Christian brothers and sisters practice their own faith. Other times, scientists in the fields of cosmology, biology, physics, and modern psychology have found common points between Buddhism and their disciplines. Some of these

scientists began our meetings thinking, “This will be a waste of time because Buddhism is a religion and religion doesn’t have much in common with science.” But after a few sessions, they were eager to learn about the Buddhist concepts of subtle particles or our explanation of the relation between the mind and the brain. This demonstrates the possibility of mutual understanding with practitioners of other religions and with scientists.

### *Buddhadharma and Other Religions*

There are two aspects to each religion: one is transformation of the mind or heart, and the other is the philosophy that supports that transformation. I believe that in terms of transforming human beings’ minds and hearts, all religions are in general agreement. They all teach love, compassion, forgiveness, nonharm, contentment, self-discipline, and generosity. No matter the religion, a person who practices it sincerely will develop these qualities. In every religion, we see many examples of ethical and warm-hearted people who benefit others.

The difference among religions occurs mainly in the area of philosophy. Theistic religions—Judaism, Christianity, Islam, and many branches of Hinduism—believe in a supreme being who created the universe and the living beings in it. Theistic philosophy supplies the reasons for the adherents of these religions to transform their hearts and minds. For them, all existence depends on the creator. The creator created us and loves us, and so in return, with gratitude we love the creator. Because we love the creator, we then must love the creations—other sentient beings—and treat them respectfully. This is the reason for our Jewish, Christian, Hindu, and Muslim brothers and sisters to be kind and ethical people.

Buddhism, on the other hand, speaks not of an external creator but of the law of causality. Our actions create the causes for what we will experience in the future. If we want happiness—be it temporal happiness or happiness that comes through spiritual realizations—we must abandon destructive actions and practice love, compassion, tolerance, forgiveness, and generosity.

While big differences exist among their philosophies, all religions agree on the good qualities for human beings to develop. For some people, the

Buddhist philosophy is more effective in cultivating these qualities. For others, the doctrine of another religion is more helpful. Therefore, from the viewpoint of an individual, each person will see one philosophy as true and one religion as best for him or her. But looking at all of society, we must accept the diversity and plurality of religions and of views of truth. These two perspectives—what is best for a given individual and what is best for society—do not contradict each other.

Even within Buddhism, our teacher, the Buddha, taught different philosophies to different people because he understood that due to each individual's disposition and interest, what is suitable for one person is not necessarily effective for another. Thus the Buddha respects individual views, be they within Buddhadharma itself or among individuals from various religions.

This series is written mainly for Buddhist practitioners, so some philosophical explanations naturally will not agree with people of other religions. However, as Buddhists we do not criticize those religions or the people who practice them. From a Buddhist viewpoint, the plurality of religions in the world is beneficial, for each individual must find a belief system that is suited to his or her disposition and interests. **Although the philosophy of another faith may not be correct from a Buddhist viewpoint, we must respect it if it benefits others.**

Whether we accept religion or not is an individual choice. But if we accept a religion, we should be serious in following it and make our way of life concordant with its teachings. If the teachings become part of our lives, we receive true value. In politics and business, hypocrisy and deception are commonplace and regrettable, but in religion they are totally deplorable. We must be sincere and cultivate a kind heart and tolerance no matter which religion we choose.

Once I met a Chilean scientist who told me that he reminds himself not to be attached to his particular scientific field. I think the same is true regarding religion because attachment leads to bias, which in turn brings a fundamentalist attitude that clings to a single absolute truth. While I was still young and lived in Tibet, I was a little biased against other faiths. However, upon coming to India, I met Thomas Merton, Mother Teresa, and people from many other religions. Seeing that the practice of other religions can produce wonderful people, I developed respect for other religions.

When my non-Buddhist brothers and sisters come to learn the Buddhadharma, I usually recommend that they do not think of becoming Buddhists. Buddhism does not proselytize or seek to convert others. You should first explore the religion of your family, and if that meets your spiritual needs, practice that rather than taking on Buddhism. In that way, you will avoid the difficulties of practicing a religion that exists within a culture foreign to your own and whose scriptures are written in languages that you do not understand. However, if your family's religion does not meet your needs and the Buddhadharma suits your disposition better, then of course you are free to become a Buddhist or to adopt some practices from Buddhism while retaining your previous religion.

The reason I advise people to first investigate their family's religion is that some people become confused when they change religions. A case in point is the family of a Tibetan lay official who fled Tibet in the early 1960s after the uprising against the Chinese occupation and became refugees in India. After the father passed away, one of the many Christian missionary groups who kindly helped refugees aided his wife and children. After some years, the wife came to see me and told me her story, saying that the Christians helped her a lot and gave her children an education, so for this life she is a Christian. But in the next life she will be a Buddhist!

To practice and benefit from the Buddha's teachings, you do not need to be a Buddhist. If certain teachings make sense to you, help you to get along better with others, and enable your mind and heart to be clearer and more peaceful, practice those teachings within the context of your own life. The Buddha's teachings on subduing anger and cultivating patience may be practiced by Christians, Jews, Muslims, Hindus, and those who do not follow any religion. Buddhist instructions on how to develop concentration and focused attention can be used by anyone who meditates, no matter what religion or philosophy they follow.

If you are interested in following the Buddhist path, I recommend that you first understand the Buddhist worldview. Take your time and learn how the Buddha describes our present state, the causes of our difficulties, our potential, and the path to actualize it. Explore the ideas of rebirth, karma and its effects, emptiness, awakening, and so on. Then, when you have some conviction arising from thoughtful reflection, you can consider following the Buddhist path.

## *Religion in the Modern World*

Once we adopt a religion, we should practice it sincerely. If we truly believe in Buddha, God, Allah, Śiva, and so forth, we should be honest human beings. Some people claim to have faith in their religion but act counter to its ethical injunctions. They pray for the success of their dishonest and corrupt actions, asking God, Buddha, and so forth for help in covering up their wrongdoings! People like that should give up saying they are religious.

Our world now faces an ethical crisis related to lack of respect for spiritual principles and ethical values. These cannot be forced on society by legislation or by science, and ethical conduct due to fear does not work. Rather, we must think and have conviction in the worth of ethical principles so that we want to live ethically.

The United States and India, for example, both have good governmental structures, but many of the people involved in them lack ethical principles. Self-discipline and ethical self-restraint on the part of political leaders, financial executives, those in the medical field, industrialists, teachers, lawyers, and all other citizens are needed to create a good society. But we cannot impose self-discipline and ethical principles from the outside. We need inner cultivation. That is why spirituality and religion are relevant in the modern world.

India, where I now live, has been home to the ideas of secularism, inclusiveness, and diversity for three thousand years. One philosophical tradition—in ancient times they were known as *Cārvāka*—asserts that only what we know through our five senses exists. Other Indian philosophical schools criticize this nihilistic view but still regard the people who hold it as *rishis*, or sages. In Indian secularism, they are respected by other traditions despite their different philosophy. In the same way, we must all respect those of other religions as well as nonbelievers. I promote this type of secularism, the essence of which is to be a kind person who does not harm others whether you are religious or not.

In previous centuries, Tibetans knew little about the rest of the world. We lived on a high and broad plateau surrounded by the world's highest mountains. Almost everyone, except for a small community of Muslims, was Buddhist, and very few foreigners came to our land. Since we went into exile in 1959, Tibetans have been in contact with the rest of the world;

we relate with diverse religions, ethnic groups, and cultures with a broad spectrum of views. We also live in a world where modern scientific views are prominent. In addition, Tibetan youth now receive a modern education in which they are exposed to views not traditionally found in the Tibetan community. Therefore it is imperative that Tibetan Buddhists be able to clearly explain their tenets and beliefs to others using reason. Simply quoting from Buddhist scriptures does not convince people who did not grow up as Buddhists of the validity of the Buddha's doctrine. If we try to prove points only by quoting scripture, these people may respond, "Why should I believe that scripture? Everyone has a book they can quote from!"

Religion in general faces three principal challenges today: communism, modern science, and the combination of consumerism and materialism. Regarding communism, although the Cold War ended many years ago, communist beliefs and governments still strongly affect life in Buddhist countries. For example, in Tibet the communist government controls who can ordain as a monk or nun and regulates life in the monasteries and nunneries. It also controls the educational system, teaching children that Buddhism is old-fashioned.

Modern science, up until now, has confined itself to studying phenomena that are material in nature. Because scientists by and large examine only things that can be measured with scientific instruments, this limits the scope of their investigations and consequently their understanding of the universe. Phenomena such as rebirth and the existence of mind as a phenomenon separate from the brain are beyond the scope of scientific investigation. Although they have no proof that these things do not exist, some scientists assume that they do not exist and consider these topics as unworthy of consideration. However, in the last two or three decades, I have met with many open-minded scientists, and we have had mutually beneficial discussions that have highlighted our common points as well as our diverging views. These discussions have been carried out with mutual respect, so that both scientists and Buddhists are expanding their worldviews.

The third challenge is the combination of materialism and consumerism. Religion values ethical conduct, which may involve delayed gratification, whereas consumerism directs us toward immediate happiness. Religion stresses inner satisfaction, saying that happiness results from a peaceful mind, while materialism tells us that happiness comes from external objects.

Religious values such as kindness, generosity, and honesty get lost in the rush to make more money and have more and better possessions. As a result, many people's minds are confused about what happiness is and how to create the causes for happiness.

As you begin to learn the Buddha's teachings, you may find that some of them are in harmony with your views on societal values, science, and consumerism, and some of them are not. That is fine. Continue to investigate and reflect on what you learn. In this way, whatever conclusion you reach will be based on reasons, not simply on tradition, peer pressure, or blind faith.

### *A Broad Perspective*

Dharma practice is not comprised of simply one meditation technique. Our minds are far too complex for one meditation technique or one Dharma topic to transform every aspect of our minds. Although some newcomers to the Dharma may want one simple technique to practice and may see progress by sticking to it, they should not think that in the long term this is sufficient to generate all the realizations of the path.

The Dharma encompasses an entire worldview, and practice necessitates examining all aspects of your life. Some of the Buddha's ideas will be new to you and may challenge some of your deeply held beliefs. Be open-minded and curious, investigate these ideas, and observe your mind. Check the teachings using reasoning and apply them to your life to see if they describe your experience. Do not accept them simply because the Buddha taught them, and don't reject them simply because they are foreign to your existing ideas.

If you cultivate a broad outlook and a deeper view about the meaning of life, you will understand not only this life but also the existence of many lives to come. In addition, you will understand your own happiness and suffering as well as that of the countless sentient beings who are similar to you in wanting to be happy and to avoid suffering. This broad view that considers many lives and many sentient beings will contribute to peace and happiness in this life.

If we are chiefly engrossed with our own personal happiness and problems and do not bother much about the happiness and suffering of others,

our vision is quite narrow. When we encounter difficulties, such a limited view will make us think that all the problems of the world have landed on us and we are the most unfortunate person alive. This pessimistic way of looking at our own life will make it difficult for us to be happy here and now, and we will drag ourselves through life day and night.

On the other hand, if we have a wider view and are aware of the experiences of other sentient beings, then when we encounter difficulties, we will understand that unsatisfactory experiences are not isolated cases happening to us alone but are the nature of cyclic existence; they happen to everyone. This mental attitude will help us to maintain stability in life and to face the situations we encounter in a productive way. To take it a step further, if we do not think solely about the betterment of this life and allow for the possibility of many subsequent lives, then when we encounter difficulties in the present, we will be better able to weather them and remain positive about the future. Thinking only about the pleasures of this life and putting all our hopes in this life alone, we feel let down when things inevitably do not turn out the way we wanted. Therefore a broad perspective of life and an understanding of the nature of *duḥkha*—suffering and dissatisfaction—helps us to improve our life now and in many lives to come.

In the first two of his four truths, the Buddha describes *duḥkha* and its causes. We may wonder, “Why should I think about this? It will only make me more depressed and unhappy!” Although reflecting on *duḥkha* and its causes may initially bring some uneasiness, suffering is still there even if we do not think about it in this systematic and purposeful way. If we simply let things take their course, suffering will strike when we are unaware and overwhelm us. We will be confounded regarding the nature of *duḥkha*, its causes, and how to eliminate it, and feelings of hopelessness and desperation may further complicate our situation and make us even more miserable.

Say we undergo a certain illness or injury for which we are not prepared. We have the suffering of the ailment, and on top of that, we also suffer feelings of shock and vulnerability. But if we know about a physical condition and calmly accept it, we go to a doctor for treatment. Because we have accepted the existence of that ailment and are ready to deal with it, even if the doctor prescribes surgery, we will accept it with happiness because we know that we are following a method to remove the suffering.

Similarly, if we know and accept the unsatisfactory nature of cyclic exis-



tence, we will be in a much better position to deal with it when it occurs. We should not simply wait until a tragedy strikes us but reflect on cyclic existence, learn about it, and have a method to face it.

As we now go on to investigate other topics, it's important that you know that I am nothing special. I am a human being, just like you. We all have the same potential, and that is what makes one person's experience relevant and expressible to others. If you have the idea that the Dalai Lama is some extraordinary, special kind of being, then you may also think that you cannot relate to or benefit from what I say. That is foolish.

Some people think I have healing powers. If I did, I would have used them to avoid gall bladder surgery. It is because we are the same that you may be able to derive some benefit from my words and experiences.



## 2 | The Buddhist View of Life

OUR MIND DETERMINES our state of existence. Someone with a mind stained by afflictions is a being in *saṃsāra*. Someone who has eradicated all *afflictive obscurations*—mental afflictions and the karma causing rebirth in *saṃsāra*—is a liberated being, an *arhat*. Someone whose mind has eliminated even the subtlest *cognitive obscurations* is a *buddha*. This is determined by the extent to which that person's mind has been purified. In this regard, the *Sublime Continuum* (*Ratnagoṭravibhāga*) speaks of three types of beings: polluted beings, who revolve in cyclic existence; unpolluted beings, who do not revolve in cyclic existence; and completely unpolluted beings, who are *buddhas*. A person's level of spiritual attainment does not depend on external features but on his or her state of mind.

Although we can practice Buddhist meditation and apply its psychology to our lives without becoming Buddhists, understanding the Buddhist worldview is essential to glean the full impact of the Buddha's teachings. In this chapter, we will investigate some of the most important aspects of the Buddhist worldview: the nature of the mind, the self, the four truths of the *āryas*, dependent arising and emptiness, and the possibility of ending suffering.

### *What Is Mind?*

Modern science focuses principally on gaining knowledge about the external world of matter. Scientists have developed sophisticated tools to manipulate even subatomic particles and have created instruments to measure minute changes in the chemical and electrical states of neurons. We now

know about stars light years away from Earth and tiny organisms that our eyes cannot see.

While science has made great strides in understanding the external world, matter, and its subatomic components, it has not given as much attention to the inner world of mind, consciousness, and experience. Science lacks a cohesive concept of mind, its nature, causes, and potential, and while there are many books about the anatomy and physiology of the brain, the mind is rarely mentioned.

Nowadays, many people who think about the mind explain it in terms of material phenomena. Neurologists portray it in terms of the actions of neurons, especially those in the brain. Behavioral psychologists describe it by referring to a person's deeds and speech. Cognitive scientists study perception, thinking, and mental processes in terms of external measurable behavior and brain activity. The difficulties with these models is that they do not give us any means to accurately or deeply understand experience. Scientists may tell us about the neural events in the brain, the hormonal reaction that accompanies compassion or anger, and people's behavior when they are angry, but this does not convey what these emotions feel like, what the experience of them is.

Other people speak of the mind as an immaterial, permanent self or spirit. But they, too, are not able to suggest tools to observe consciousness. The Buddha's teachings may be considered a "science of mind" in that they provide a complete study of the mind, setting forth specific means for observing it, delineating the various types of consciousness and mental factors, making known the mind's potential, and describing ways to transform the mind.

The nature of the mind is not material; it lacks the tangible quality of physical objects. While mind and brain are related and affect each other when a person is alive, the mind is distinct from the physical organ of the brain, which is matter and can be investigated with scientific instruments that measure physical events. The mind is what experiences; it is what makes an organism sentient. Those of us who have sat with the body of a deceased loved one know that while his or her brain is still there, something else is missing. What is no longer present is the mind, the agent that experiences what life presents and is the essential differentiating factor between a corpse and a living being.

Buddhism has a 2,600-year history of investigating the mind. Many treatises about the mind were written in ancient India, where the Buddha lived, as well as in the countries to which Buddhism has spread throughout the centuries. In recent years, fruitful dialogue between Buddhists and scientists has begun, and I have great interest in seeing how this dialogue develops and the positive contributions to the well-being of sentient beings that it will produce.

Every topic in this series relates to the mind. We will look at the mind from many perspectives: its nature, causes, potential, functions, levels, and so on. We will investigate what obscures its potential and how to cultivate the antidotes to these obscurations so as to reveal the potential of the mind in its wondrous glory that we call full awakening or buddhahood.

The Sanskrit word translated as “mind” may also be translated as “heart.” From a Buddhist perspective, expressions like “He has a kind heart” or “Her mind is very intelligent” both refer to the same entity, the conscious, experiential part of a living being. Although our mind is right here with us and we use it all the time, we don’t understand it very well. In the Buddhadharmā, the mind is defined as “clarity and cognizance.” *Clarity* indicates that unlike the body, the mind is not material. Clarity also indicates that when the mind meets with certain conditions it is able to reflect objects, like a clear mirror. Due to its quality of *cognizance*, it can engage with or cognize that object.

From our own experience, we know that our mind changes from moment to moment. That quality of changeability indicates that it is under the influence of causes and conditions. Each moment of mind arises due to its own unique cause—the previous moment of mind. The mind is a continuum, a series of “mind moments” that we call a mindstream. Each being has his or her own mindstream; mindstreams or parts of individual mindstreams do not merge. Because the mind is influenced by other factors and changes in each moment, when the appropriate conditions are present, mental transformation occurs. A mind that is flooded with disturbing emotions can become one that is peaceful and joyful.

The mind has two natures: its conventional nature (how it functions and relates to other things) and its ultimate nature (its actual mode of existence). *The conventional nature*—its clarity and cognizance—may be compared to pure water that is free from contaminants. When dirt is mixed into this

water, its pure nature is obscured, although it is still there. Sometimes the dirt is stirred up and the water is more obscured than at other times. But no matter how much dirt is in the water, it is not the nature of the water; the water can be purified and the dirt removed. Similarly, the mind is pure even when it is obscured by afflictions. Sometimes our mind is comparatively calm, and other times it is agitated by anger or attachment. These afflictions are temporary; someone may be upset in the morning but relaxed in the afternoon. While the mindstream endures, anger is not always present in it. This is because anger and other afflictions have not entered the nature of the mind.

The mind may be colored by different emotions at different times. Anger and lovingkindness are opposite; they cannot be manifest in our mind at the same time, although they may arise at different times. Even people such as Hitler or Stalin, who had great hatred, felt love for their family members and children. The fact that the mind can be dominated by anger at one time and by an opposite emotion such as love at another indicates that the emotions are not in the nature of the mind. The mind itself is pure; it is like colorless water that can be colored by a variety of hues or by none at all.

Our body is like a house, and the mind is its inhabitant. As long as the body remains, the mind is a long-term resident. However, various mental factors—which include emotions and attitudes—are like visitors. One day resentment comes, another day compassion comes, but neither remains long. While both are visitors, one visitor is respectful, useful, and pleasant—like someone reliable whom we can trust and want to make a member of the family. We invite that visitor to remain in the house all the time and cultivate the conditions so that she will. Meanwhile, the other visitor is rude and disturbs our own and others' peace. We don't want him to visit let alone move in, so we do not invite him in and evict him if he sneaks in. Similarly, it is possible to banish anger and cultivate compassion limitlessly, making it our constant companion.

The *ultimate nature of the mind* is its emptiness of independent or inherent existence. Inherent existence is a false mode of existence that we superimpose on all phenomena; we believe that they have their own findable essence that makes them what they are, that they exist independently of all other factors such as their causes and parts. In fact, they are empty of all such fabricated ways of existing because they exist dependent on other fac-

tors. In the *Eight-Thousand-Line Perfection of Wisdom Sūtra* (*Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra*), the Buddha says:

The mind is devoid of mind, for the nature of mind is clear light.

“The mind is devoid of mind.” This leads us to investigate what the mind actually is, its ultimate mode of existence, how it really exists. “The mind” refers to the clear and cognizant conventional nature of mind. When we search that clear and cognizant nature, we cannot find something that is the mind. Within the clarity and cognizance, there is nothing we can pinpoint that is inherently the mind. If we were able to find a real mind, then the mind would inherently exist with its own independent essence. However, when we search to find the mind, we do not find the mind in the mind; we do not find an inherently existent mind. That is why it says here that the mind “is devoid of mind.” The final nature of the mind, its ultimate mode of existence, is its emptiness of inherent existence.

Since the mind is devoid of mind, we might think that the mind does not exist at all. But this is not the case. The words “the mind” indicates that the mind exists; it is the basis of our analysis. That the mind exists is shown by the fact that I can explain these statements due to the workings of my mind and you can understand them due to the workings of your mind. Saying that the mind does not abide in the mind means that an inherently existent mind is not the final mode of existence of the mind. It does not mean that the mind does not exist at all.

The mind exists, but it is empty of inherent existence. This is the meaning of “the nature of mind is clear light.” This ultimate nature of the mind is pure in that it is free from inherent existence. But the fact that the mind is empty of inherent existence alone does not mean the afflictions such as ignorance, anger, and attachment can be eliminated from it. These afflictions also lack inherent existence, but we cannot say they are pure by nature.

*Ignorance* is a mental factor that grasps phenomena as inherently existent, with their own independent essences. It is the source of all other disturbing emotions, such as anger, craving, jealousy, and conceit. The fact that the mind, as well as all other phenomena, do not inherently exist means that the ignorance that grasps the mind as inherently existent contradicts reality. If the mind did inherently exist, ignorance would be a correct mind that sees

reality. In that case, it could not be eliminated. However, since ignorance perceives the opposite of reality, it can be eliminated by the wisdom that sees reality correctly, the wisdom that realizes the emptiness of inherent existence.

Because ignorance and other afflictions are erroneous mental factors that lack an inherently existent foundation, they are not embedded in the nature of the mind and can be eliminated forever. Just as clouds temporarily obscure the open sky although they are not the nature of the sky, ignorance and other afflictions temporarily obscure the pure nature of the mind. But unlike clouds, which once gone can reappear, ignorance and afflictions, once they have been eliminated from their root by wisdom, can no longer obscure the mind. Meanwhile, other mental factors, such as love, compassion, and fortitude, do not depend on ignorance to exist and therefore remain as part of our mindstream forever.

## REFLECTION

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1. The conventional nature of the mind is clarity and cognizance, meaning the mind can reflect and cognize objects.
  2. The conventional nature of the mind is pure: the afflictions have not entered into its nature, although they may temporarily color or obscure the mind.
  3. The body is material in nature; it is like a house, and the mind is its immaterial inhabitant.
  4. The ultimate nature of the mind is empty of inherent existence; it lacks any essence that is findable when we search for how the mind ultimately exists.
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### *Body, Mind, Rebirth, and Self*

Our body and mind influence each other while we are alive, although they have different natures and different continua. The body is material and depends on physical causes, such as the sperm and egg of our parents,



to come into existence. The food we eat—also material in nature—is the condition that allows our body to survive and grow. The mind, however, is not matter and cannot be known or measured by scientific instruments designed to measure matter.

According to those who advocate scientific reductionism, the mind is nothing more than the brain. Other scientists, however, assert that the mind is a function of brain processes, and that mental processes and emotional experiences either correlate with or are due to biochemical processes in the brain. However, many aspects of our mind cannot be accounted for by this neuroscientific view. For example, by simply looking at chemical processes in the brain, we cannot determine if a thought is valid—if it is an instance of knowledge or affliction. By examining brain processes we cannot discern whether a mental event is a direct perceiver of a sense object or a conception (a memory or a thought about something).

At the experiential level, there is great difference between the pain we experience due to our own situation and the pain that comes from compassion for others' suffering. The experience of our own pain arises involuntarily and forcefully, and we usually respond to it with fear and anger. The pain that is attendant upon compassion for another's suffering has an element of deliberate sharing and embracing of that pain, and we react to it with courage. However, in terms of the biochemical processes in the brain, these two types of pain are indistinguishable.

Tears can well up in our eyes when we are very joyful or very sad. On the physical level, our eyes do not distinguish the two. But on the mental level, there is a big difference in the cause of the tears and how we experience them. For all these reasons, it is difficult to claim that all aspects of our experiential consciousness can be explained simply through the biological processes of the brain.

All functioning things—things that produce effects—come about due to causes and conditions. To trace back the causes and conditions of our present body, we follow a sequence of material causes and effects that goes to our parents and generations of previous ancestors. Scientists posit the theory of evolution when tracing back the origin of the human body. Before life existed on Earth, the continua of the physical elements that later became our bodies were present, and their continua are traced back to the Big Bang. Since matter—be it gross or subtle—was present at the time of the Big Bang

and even before it, its causes must also have been matter or energy that can transform into matter. Although our body wasn't present when this universe began to form, its previous continuity in the form of material causes and physical elements was.

According to the *Kālacakra Tantra*, the ultimate source of the body is space particles that exist between the disappearance of the previous universe and the production of the subsequent one. They provide the continuum of potential for material during that time. Containing a trace of each of the grosser elemental particles, they are the basic stuff from which all other forms arise when a new universe develops.

It is difficult to identify the essential characteristics of mind. On a daily level, we experience sensory perceptions and the thoughts that chase after objects of the senses. Sense perceivers—our visual, auditory, olfactory, gustatory, and tactile consciousnesses—focus on the external world and assume the aspect of the objects they perceive.<sup>1</sup> The conceptual mind that thinks about these objects also assumes the aspect of these external objects, and even when our mind is directed inward to our own feelings, it assumes the aspect of the feelings. It is difficult for us to separate out the clarity and cognizance of the mind and be aware of the mind alone without also being aware of its objects. However, with meditation it is possible to experience the nature of the mind.

Results are produced from concordant causes—causes that have the ability to produce them; they cannot arise from discordant causes. Since the mind is immaterial, its substantial cause—the principal thing that transforms into a particular moment of mind—must also be immaterial. This is the preceding moment of mind. One moment of mind arises due to the previous moment of mind, which arose due to the moment of mind that preceded it. This can be traced back to the time of conception. The moment of mind at the time of conception arose due to a cause, a previous moment of mind, and in this way the continuum of mind prior to this life is established.

Conception is the coming together of the sperm, egg, and subtle mind. This creates a new life. The material aspect of this new life, the sperm and egg, come from the parents. The immaterial, conscious aspect—the mind—does not come from the parents. It must come from a previous moment of mind, which, at the moment of conception, is the mind of a being in the previous life.

At the time of death, the body and mind separate. Here, too, they have different continua. The body becomes a corpse and is recycled in nature. The mind continues on, one moment of mind producing the next. In the case of ordinary beings, the mind usually takes a new body and another life begins.

Buddhist scriptures describe different levels and types of mind. In terms of levels of mind, there are coarse consciousnesses, such as our five sense consciousnesses; subtler consciousness, such as our mental consciousness that thinks and dreams; and the subtlest mind that becomes manifest in ordinary beings at the time of death. This subtlest mind, which goes from one life to the next, can persist without depending on the coarse physical body, including the brain and nervous system. The subtlest mind is a continuity of ever-changing moments of mind; it is not a permanent self or soul. The terms “subtlest mind” and “fundamental, innate mind of clear light” are merely designated in dependence on a continuum of extremely subtle, transitory moments of clarity and cognizance.

The Buddha explained the continuity of life and rebirth principally on the basis of the continuity of mind. The continuity of mind across lifetimes is not the gross level of mind that is dependent on the physical body. It is the subtlest mind—the fundamental, innate mind of clear light that is the final basis of designation of the person—that connects one life with the next. The detailed explanation of this mind is found only in texts from the highest-yoga class of Buddhist tantras.

Rebirth can also be validated by personal experience. I heard about a Tibetan boy who could read without being taught. Some people may say this is due to his genetic makeup, but to me it makes more sense to say it is due to the continuity of his consciousness from a previous life. I also heard about an Indian girl who had many memories of her previous life. Her parents from her previous life and this life met and confirmed the details. Both now accept her as their daughter, so she has four parents!

Generally speaking, once a mind conjoins with a fertilized egg, a new life has begun. In dependence on that body and mind, we designate “person,” “living being,” “I,” or “self.” Our outlook on life, perceptions, feelings, and emotions are all based on the notion of a self. We say, “I did this. I think that. I feel sad or happy.” Although this is our experience, seldom have we stopped to ask ourselves, “Who is this I upon which everything

is predicated?” The question regarding the identity of the self is important because it is the self, the I, that wants to be happy and to avoid suffering. If the self existed independently from other phenomena, we should be able to isolate and identify it.

The Buddha taught that a person is composed of five psychophysical aggregates—form, feelings, discrimination, miscellaneous factors, and consciousness. The form aggregate is our body, and the other four aggregates constitute our mind. If we search among these five aggregates, we cannot pinpoint a person who is totally separate from them; nor can we identify a person who is identical to his or her body and mind. The collection of the two also is not a person. A person exists in dependence on his mind and body, but is neither totally one with them nor completely separate from them.

The self depends on the body: when our body is ill, we say, “I’m sick.” If the self were a separate entity from the body, we could not say this. The self also depends on the mind. When the mind is happy, we say, “I’m happy.” If the self were separate from the mind, we couldn’t say this. On the basis of the mind seeing a flower, we say that the person possessing that mind sees the flower. Other than this, we cannot find a person who sees something.

In short, “I” is designated in dependence on our body and mind, yet when we search for a findable thing that is “me,” we can’t find it within the body, the mind, the collection of the two, or separate from them. This indicates that the person exists dependently; we lack an inherent, findable, unchanging essence. Since we lack an independent self, we can change, grow, and progress from confusion to awakening.

The person or self creates the causes for happiness and suffering. The person also experiences the pleasurable and painful results of these actions. Although we cannot pinpoint anything that is the self, the existence of a person who creates causes and experiences effects is undeniable.

Countless sentient beings have this feeling of self, although it is difficult to identify what that self is. However, the fact that each and every sentient being wants happiness and not suffering is indisputable; no reason is needed to prove this. Being born, enjoying life, enduring suffering, and dying are conditioned phenomena that are products of previous causes. If there were no person who experiences them, none of these would be tenable. Similarly, we distinguish afflictive saṃsāric existence from the awak-

ened state of *nirvāṇa* based on whether the person has gained realizations. This distinction between *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa* would be irrelevant if no person existed.

The self exists, but from the perspective of the deeper nature of reality, our view of it is mistaken. This incongruity between how the self actually exists and how we apprehend it is the source of all our confusion and suffering. As we cultivate correct views, our mental strength increases; this leads to mental peace, which, in turn, brings joy and a sense of fulfillment. A mental state that sees the world as it is is free from fear and anxiety.

## REFLECTION

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1. The body is material in nature; the mind is immaterial. While the brain and the mind influence each other, they are not the same.
  2. Our body and its substantial cause—the sperm and egg of our parents—are both material. Our mind and its substantial cause—the previous moment of mind—are immaterial; they are mere clarity and cognizance. At the time of conception they meet, forming a new life.
  3. At the time of death, the continuity of the body is a corpse that decomposes to become material elements. The continuity of mind in the form of the very subtle mind continues to the next life.
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### *The Four Truths of the Āryas*

The topics of the first discourse the Buddha gave after attaining awakening, the four truths of the *āryas*, well known as the “four noble truths,” form the foundation and structure of the Buddhist path. He taught these at the beginning for a specific purpose. Each sentient being has the innate wish for stable peace, happiness, and freedom from suffering. The longing for these motivates us to engage in many activities in an attempt to gain them. However, until now everything we have done has not brought about stable peace and joy because we live in cyclic existence (*saṃsāra*)—the state

of having a body and mind under the influence of mental afflictions and karma. Within cyclic existence we encounter only *duḥkha*—unsatisfactory conditions and suffering.<sup>2</sup> Without choice, we take a body that gets old, sick, and dies and have a mind that becomes anxious, fearful, and angry. The I—the person that is merely designated in dependence upon the body and mind—revolves in cyclic existence. Our five aggregates of body and mind are unsatisfactory by nature and constitute the first truth of the āryas, *the truth of duḥkha*. The causes of the five aggregates are mental afflictions—skewed attitudes and disturbing emotions, the chief of which is ignorance—and polluted actions.<sup>3</sup> These constitute the second truth, *the true origins of duḥkha*.

The final *true cessation*—the third truth—is liberation and *nirvāṇa*, the state of peace, joy, and fulfillment that we seek. Here ignorance, afflictions, and polluted actions and the unsatisfactory experiences they cause have been extinguished from the root so that they can no longer arise.

True cessations are attained by depending on a method that eradicates ignorance. This is *true paths*, the fourth truth, which consist primarily of the wisdom realizing the ultimate nature—the emptiness of inherent existence of all persons and phenomena—and the virtuous consciousnesses supported by that wisdom. These paths require time and diligent effort to develop; we cannot hire someone else to accomplish them for us, like employing a mechanic to fix our car. How to cultivate these paths and actualize *nirvāṇa* is the subject of this series.

The process of attaining *nirvāṇa* begins with understanding the first truth, the nature of *duḥkha* and the various types of unsatisfactory circumstances and suffering that afflict sentient beings in cyclic existence. When some people hear this, they fear that reflecting on their suffering may only make it worse, and therefore believe that no benefit would come from learning the Buddha’s teachings. This would be true if it were impossible to free ourselves from the causes of *duḥkha*. However, since the root cause of *duḥkha*, ignorance—a mental factor that misapprehends reality and grasps phenomena as inherently existent—is erroneous, it can be eliminated by the wisdom that sees things as they really are—as empty of inherent existence. By gradually eradicating ignorance and other afflictions, we can bring greater satisfaction and freedom into our lives. After all its causes have been accumulated, we attain the final true cessation of *duḥkha* and its causes,

nirvāṇa. While nirvāṇa may sound like a far-off goal, we can easily see steps going in that direction: the more we cease anger, the greater harmony we experience, and the more our greed diminishes, the greater contentment we have. As we gradually reduce ignorance and afflictions through the application of wisdom, tranquility and fulfillment correspondingly increase, culminating in nirvāṇa.

Hence recognizing and reflecting on our suffering has a special, beneficial purpose: it activates us to discover its root and subsidiary causes and to eradicate them by practicing the path to peace that leads to the true freedom of nirvāṇa.

The Buddha spoke of three types of duḥkha. The first is the duḥkha of pain. This is the physical and mental suffering that all beings see as undesirable. All world religions agree that destructive actions, such as killing, stealing, and lying, bring physical and/or mental pain. To counter this pain and the actions that cause it, all religions teach some form of ethical conduct. Scientists also seek to remedy physical and mental pain; they do this by developing the means to change its external causes that are in our environment or due to the malfunction of our body, our brain and nervous system, or our genes.

The second type of duḥkha is the duḥkha of change, which refers to worldly happiness. Why did the Buddha call what is conventionally considered happiness—such as pleasant sensations—duḥkha? Worldly happiness is unsatisfactory because the activities, people, and things that initially give us pleasure do not continue to do so. Although eating, being with friends, receiving praise, and hearing good music may initially relieve pain or boredom and bring pleasure, if we continue to do them, they will eventually bring discomfort or fatigue.

Most people do not recognize worldly happiness as being unsatisfactory by nature, although many religions do. Some Hindus see the unsatisfactory nature of worldly pleasures and seek deep states of single-pointed concentration that are far more enjoyable. Some Christians abandon worldly pleasures in favor of a state of rapture or grace.

The third type of duḥkha—the pervasive duḥkha of conditioning—is the fact that we have a body and mind that are not under our control. Without choice, we take a body that is born, falls ill, ages, and dies. Between birth and death, we encounter problems even though we try to avoid them. We

cannot obtain everything we want even though we try hard to get it, and even when our desires are fulfilled, that happiness is not stable: we become disillusioned or separated from what we crave.

The description of the third type of *duḥkha*—the pervasive *duḥkha* of conditioning—is unique to Buddhadharma. Neither other religions nor science identify our taking a body and mind under the control of ignorance, afflictions, and polluted karma as problematic. They don't look for the causes of the pervasive *duḥkha* of conditioning, let alone work to eliminate them. Instead, they try to make the situation better by focusing their efforts on eliminating the *duḥkha* of pain.

Having identified the pervasive *duḥkha* of conditioning as the basic unsatisfactory condition we sentient beings suffer from, the Buddha sought out its root cause. He identified it as the ignorance grasping inherent existence and saw that this ignorance can be eliminated completely only by cultivating its opposite, the wisdom perceiving the emptiness of inherent existence. Here the Buddha's teachings on selflessness (*anātman*)<sup>4</sup> become important. He explained that when we search for what ignorance apprehends—the inherent or independent existence of persons and phenomena—we cannot find it. The wisdom that realizes this—the true path—has the ability to gradually eradicate all ignorance from the mind, resulting in nirvana, the final true cessation. Here we see that the Buddha's explanation of the origin of *duḥkha*, the ultimate nature of reality, the wisdom realizing it, and the attainment of *nirvāṇa* are also unique.

In this way, the Dharma—true cessations and true paths—is a unique refuge. The Buddha who taught this Dharma is a unique teacher, and the Saṅgha—those followers who have realized directly the lack of inherent existence—are unique companions on the path. These three objects of refuge as described in Buddhism are unequalled and are not found elsewhere.

The situations described in the four truths were not created by the Buddha. He simply described things as they are. If *duḥkha*, its origin and cessation, and the path did not exist, there would be no need to practice Dharma. Of course it is up to each of us to test the veracity of the four truths for ourselves. By observing our own experience, we will come to know that *duḥkha* and its origins exist. Although we may not directly know true cessations and true paths at this time, they, too, also exist. Through understanding that *duḥkha* and its origins can be eliminated, we understand that true cessation



can be attained. This brings conviction that true paths are the means to bring about peace in our minds.

## REFLECTION

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1. The first two of the four truths of the āryas describe our present experience: we are subject to three main types of unsatisfactory circumstances: pain, change, and pervasive conditioning. These are rooted in ignorance of the ultimate nature of reality.
  2. The last two of the four truths describe possibilities: a state of freedom from ignorance and duḥkha exists, and a path to that state also exists.
  3. It is up to us to learn and reflect on these to gain conviction in them and to cultivate wisdom in order to free ourselves.
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### *Dependent Arising and Emptiness*

In the above explanations of the four truths, several topics repeatedly arose: ignorance, which grasps inherent existence; the emptiness of inherent existence, which is the ultimate nature of all persons and phenomena; the wisdom realizing emptiness that counteracts ignorance; and nirvāṇa, which is the state of peace attained from doing so. Another essential topic—dependent arising—ties all of these together.

The Madhyamaka tenet system as explained by the Indian sage Nāgārjuna speaks of three levels of dependent arising. The first, which is common to all Buddhist tenet systems, is *causal dependence*—the fact that products (conditioned things) depend on causes. A table depends on the wood, which is its substantial cause—what actually turns into the result—and the people who make it, who are the cooperative condition that helps to bring about the result. Similarly, our body, mind, and present rebirth depend on their respective causes and conditions. Such dependency rules out the possibility of things arising haphazardly without any cause. It also precludes things arising due to discordant causes—things that do not have the ability

to cause them. Barley cannot grow from rice seeds, and happiness does not come from destructive actions.

In addition to chemical, biological, and physical causality, karma and its effects is another system of causal dependence. Karma is volitional actions done physically, verbally, or mentally. These causes bring their effects: the rebirths we take, our experiences in our lives, and the environment in which we are born.

The second type of dependency is *dependent designation*, which has two branches: mutual dependence and mere designation by term and concept. *Mutual dependence* refers to things existing in relation to each other: long and short, parent and child, whole and parts, and agent, object, and action. Our body—which is a “whole”—depends on its parts—arms, legs, skin, and internal organs. The organs and limbs only become “parts” in dependence upon the body as a whole.

A hard, spherical object the size of a small apple becomes a baseball only because there is the game of baseball, a pitcher, a batter, and a bat. Apart from this context, this round object would neither be called a baseball nor function as a baseball. A parent is identified only in relation to a child, and someone becomes a child only in relation to a parent. Neither the parent nor the child exists independently of each other.

On a daily basis we use conventions and terms and engage in actions based on language. Doing this does not require there to be a direct, one-to-one objective referent for each term. Rather terms are defined relationally and derive meaning only in the context of mutually dependent relations.

The second type of dependent designation is *mere designation by term and concept*. In dependence on the collection of arms, legs, a torso, head, and so on, the mind conceives and designates “body.” In dependence on the collection of body and mind, the mind conceives and imputes “person.” In this way, all phenomena exist in dependence upon mind. Whatever identity an object has is contingent upon the interaction between a basis of designation and a mind that conceives and designates an object in dependence on that basis.

This interdependent nature is built into phenomena. If phenomena had an independent identity unrelated to others, we should be able to find the true referent of a term when we search for it. However, we do not find an independent essence in any phenomenon. This shows that all existent

objects exist by being merely designated by term and concept. Being dependent, all phenomena are empty of independent existence. This is the subtlest meaning of dependent arising.

### *Dependent Arising and the Three Jewels*

Indicating the importance of realizing dependent arising, the Buddha says in the *Rice Seedling Sūtra* (*Śālistamba Sūtra*):

Monastics, whoever sees dependent arising sees the Dharma.  
Whoever sees the Dharma sees the Tathāgata [the Buddha].

How does seeing dependent arising lead to seeing the Dharma, which leads to seeing the Buddha? A process of progressive understanding is needed. When we realize causal dependence—that everything we perceive and experience arises as a result of its own causes and conditions—our perspective on the world and on our inner experiences shifts. Due to understanding that these exist only because their causes and conditions exist, our world, our experience, and even ourselves no longer seem so fixed and solid. Being dependent, they have no essence of their own.

As our understanding of mutual dependence and mere designation by name and concept deepens, we will appreciate that a disparity exists between the way things appear and the way they exist. While things appear to be autonomous, objective, independent realities “out there,” they do not in fact exist in this way. If we focus repeatedly on branches, trunk, twigs, and leaves arranged in a certain manner and question, “What makes this collection of things a tree?” we will begin to understand that neither the individual parts nor the collection of those parts is a tree and that the tree exists by being merely designated in dependence on its parts. Dependent on the collection of parts of a tree (the basis of designation of a tree) and on the mind that conceives and designates “tree,” a tree exists. Because it is dependent on all these factors, the tree is empty of objective, independent, or inherent existence. It does not exist in isolation—from its own side or under its own power—because it depends on causes, conditions, parts, and the conceiving and designating mind.

While an inherently existent tree cannot be found under analysis, a tree

still exists. How does it exist? It exists dependently. Thus, we see that emptiness and dependent arising are not contradictory and, in fact, are mutually complementary. Everything is empty of inherent existence, and simultaneously everything exists, but not in the independent fashion that it appears to. It exists in dependence on other factors.

Underlying strong emotions such as clinging attachment, anger, and jealousy is an assumption that we are inherently existent, independent persons, that exist in and of ourselves. Similarly, there appears to be an independent reality of objectively existent people and things in the world. By recognizing the disparity between appearance and reality, we come to understand that our perceptions and ideas of things are exaggerated. Investigating how our mind perceives and interprets the things we encounter, we develop insight into the functions of the mind and the different types and levels of consciousness operating within us. We also come to appreciate that although some of our emotional states seem so strong and their objects appear so vividly, they are in fact similar to illusions in that they do not exist in the way they appear to us.

Dependent arising is the foundation for all Dharma practices. The two levels of dependent arising—causal dependence and dependent designation—are the main factors through which spiritual practitioners accomplish their aspirations. By developing a deep understanding of the nature of reality in terms of causal dependence, we come to appreciate the workings of karma and its results: our actions bring results. Pain and suffering arise due to destructive actions, and happiness and desirable experiences are the results of constructive actions. Understanding this, we choose to live with good ethical conduct, which enables us to have a higher rebirth in the future.

Through deep contemplation of dependent designation, we come to realize emptiness, the ultimate mode of existence. This wisdom tackles the fundamental ignorance keeping us bound in cyclic existence, allowing us to fulfill our spiritual goals of liberation and full awakening.

Dependent arising also underlies the four truths. Through such reflection and analysis, we understand that the self-grasping ignorance that misapprehends reality gives rise to our mental afflictions (true origins), and that these, in turn, bring about the suffering we experience (true dukkha). Understanding dependent arising also enables us to realize the lack of independent existence of persons and phenomena—their emptiness.

This wisdom realizing emptiness (true path) has the power to overcome all ignorance, wrong views, and afflictions because they lack a valid basis, while emptiness and dependent arising can be proven by reasoning as well as directly experienced. Through this, we will appreciate that a state exists in which all ignorance and afflictions have been removed. This is *nirvāṇa*, true cessations, the third truth. Thus the Dharma Jewel—true cessation and true paths—exists.

If such a state as *nirvāṇa* exists, individuals must be able to actualize it. This leads us to understand the existence of the *ārya Saṅgha*—those beings who perceive emptiness directly. It also demonstrates the existence of the buddhas—omniscient beings who have perfected this state of cessation. In this way, the understanding of dependent arising leads us to establish the existence of the Three Jewels of refuge: the Buddhas, Dharma, and Saṅgha. For this reason, the Buddha said that those who see dependent arising see the Dharma and those who see the Dharma see the Tathāgata.

I believe this statement of the Buddha could also mean that by seeing dependent arising on the level of conventional appearance, we see causal relationships and understand karma, compassion, *bodhicitta*, and the method aspect of the path. Through accomplishing the method aspect of the path, we come to “see”—that is, actualize—the form body (*rūpakāya*) of a buddha. By understanding dependent arising in relation to the ultimate mode of existence, we experience the meaning of emptiness—the *suchness* (*tathatā*) of all phenomena—and by that, we “see” (actualize) the truth body (*dharmakāya*) of a buddha, a buddha’s mind, specifically an awakened one’s wisdom of ultimate reality. In this way, both the body and mind of a buddha are actualized.

## REFLECTION

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1. All persons and phenomena exist in dependence on other factors. There are three types of dependence: causal dependence (for impermanent things only), mutual dependence, and mere designation by terms and concept.
2. Dependent arising contradicts the possibility of independent or inherent existence. Understanding this can eradicate grasping inherent existence, the root of our *duḥkha* in cyclic existence.

3. The wisdom that eradicates ignorance (the true paths) and the freedom from duḥkha that comes about due to it (true cessations) are the Dharma Jewel.
  4. People who have actualized the Dharma Jewel in their minds are the Saṅgha Jewel and the Buddha Jewel. Thus the Three Jewels of refuge exist.
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### *The Possibility of Ending Duḥkha*

If the possibility to end suffering exists, then pursuing that aim is worthwhile. But if duḥkha is a given, trying to eliminate it is a waste of effort. From the Buddhist viewpoint, two factors make liberation possible: the clear-light nature of the mind and the adventitious nature of the defilements. The *clear-light nature of the mind* refers to the basic capacity of the mind to cognize objects, its clear and cognizant nature.<sup>5</sup> The mind's failure to know objects must then be due to obstructing factors. In some cases, obstructing factors may be physical; if we put our hand over our eyes, we cannot see. But in a deeper sense, our seeing is hindered by two types of obstructions: afflictive obscurations that prevent liberation from cyclic existence and cognitive obscurations that prevent omniscience.

Each Buddhist tenet system has a different way of identifying what constitutes these two obstructions. The description here is based on the writings of Nāgārjuna, the great second-century Indian sage. In *Seventy Stanzas on Emptiness* (*Śūnyatāsaptati*), he notes that the conception that things that arise from causes and conditions exist in their own right is ignorance. The clear-light nature of mind has the ability to cognize all objects, but ignorance and its latencies obstruct this. All faulty states of mind are based on and depend on ignorance, and the twelve links of dependent arising—the process through which cyclic existence arises lifetime after lifetime—follow from ignorance. Āryadeva, Nāgārjuna's chief disciple, states (CS 350):

The consciousness that is the seed of existence has objects as its sphere of activity.

When selflessness is seen in objects, the seed of existence is destroyed.

What is the consciousness that is the seed of cyclic existence? If consciousness in general were the root of cyclic existence, there would be no way to overcome cyclic existence because consciousness has a clear and cognizant nature, and nothing can counteract its nature or sever its continuity. Here Āryadeva is referring not to consciousness in general but to a specific type of consciousness—ignorance. His point is that cyclic existence does not arise without a cause, from a discordant cause, or from a permanent creator. Cyclic existence arises from an undisciplined, ignorant mind.

By saying that consciousness has objects as its sphere of activity, Āryadeva indicates the mind's potential to realize objects. Then he stresses that by realizing selflessness, self-grasping ignorance can be eliminated. Since ignorance grasps inherent existence (self), it can be overcome by the wisdom realizing the opposite—the selflessness or emptiness of inherent existence. By removing the ignorance that obscures our knowledge of phenomena, the ability to perceive all objects is possible.

In *Treatise on the Middle Way* (*Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*, 24.18) Nāgārjuna says, “That which is dependent arising is explained to be empty.” But when objects appear to us, they do not appear to be dependent or related to other factors. They appear as independent, discrete objects that exist under their own power—with their own inherent essence, from their own side. This appearance of objects as existing in their own right is false, and the idea that objects exist in that way is erroneous and can be refuted by reasoning. Using investigation and analysis, we can establish the emptiness of inherent existence for ourselves. Inherent existence—also called existence from its own side—is called the *object of negation*; it is what is refuted or negated by analysis and reasoning. Once the analysis is complete, the consciousness realizing that persons and phenomena do not exist from their own side is generated in our mindstream. This wisdom consciousness damages and eventually completely overcomes the conception and grasping that objects exist inherently.

In his *Commentary on the “Compendium of Reliable Cognition”* (*Pramāṇavārttika*),<sup>6</sup> Dharmakīrti says that mental states influenced by ignorance, like any other wrong conception or erroneous consciousness, lack a valid

foundation, and mental states influenced by wisdom, like any other accurate consciousness, have a valid foundation. Thus the more we become accustomed to correct consciousnesses, the more the faulty ones will diminish. Wisdom's mode of apprehension directly contradicts that of ignorance, so by familiarizing ourselves with wisdom, ignorance decreases and is finally extinguished.

Here we see a unique quality of the Buddhist approach: erroneous mental states can be eradicated by cultivating their opposite—accurate states of mind. They are not removed simply through prayer, requesting blessings from the Buddha or deities, or gaining single-pointed concentration (*samādhi*).

Because ignorance has an antidote, it can be removed. This is the meaning of ignorance being adventitious. Thus because of the two factors mentioned earlier—the mind being the nature of clear light and defilements being adventitious—liberation is an attainable possibility. The *Sublime Continuum* (1.62) says:

This clear and luminous nature of mind is as changeless as space.  
It is not afflicted by desire and so on, the adventitious stains that  
spring from false conceptions.

Each of the various Buddhist tenet systems has its own slightly different explanation of *nirvāṇa* or liberation, but they all agree that it is a quality of the mind, the quality of the mind having separated forever from the defilements that cause cyclic existence through the application of antidotes to those defilements.

When we examine that separation from defilements, we discover it is the ultimate nature of the mind that is free from defilements. This ultimate nature of mind exists from beginningless time; it exists as long as there is mind. In the continua of sentient beings, the ultimate nature of the mind is called *buddha nature* or *buddha potential*. When it becomes endowed with the quality of having separated from defilements, it is called *nirvāṇa*. Therefore, the very basis for *nirvāṇa*, the emptiness of the mind, is always with us. It's not something that is newly created or gained from outside.



## 3 | Mind and Emotions

**W**E ARE EMOTIONAL BEINGS. Our feelings of pleasure or pain provoke different emotions, and our emotions motivate us to act. Some of our emotions are afflictive and unrealistic; others are more realistic and beneficial. As a result, some of our actions bring more pain, while others bring happiness. Learning to differentiate destructive from constructive emotions so we can subdue the former and nourish the latter is a worthy endeavor on a personal as well as societal level.

Buddhas have eliminated all afflictive emotions, but that does not mean that they are emotionally flat, apathetic, and unresponsive to human contact. In fact, it is the opposite: by going through the gradual process of overcoming destructive emotions such as greed and anger, buddhas have built up and expanded constructive emotions such as love and compassion. Due to this inner transformation, their work in the world is wiser and more effective. In this chapter, you'll be introduced to the Buddhist view of emotions, comparing and contrasting that view with Western paradigms. We'll also examine how specific emotions affect our daily life and how to work with difficult emotions and cultivate positive ones.

### *Buddhism, Science, and Emotions*

Buddhists and scientists have some similar and some very different ideas about emotions. In general, scientists describe an emotion as having three components: a physiological component, an experiential component, and a behavioral component. The physiological component includes the chemical and electrical changes in the brain as well as galvanic skin response,

heart rate, and other changes in the body. The experiential component is the subjective experience—the psychological mood or feeling aspect of an emotion. The behavioral aspect includes the words and actions of a person motivated by that emotion.

From the Buddhist perspective, emotions are mental states and subjective experiences. They may be accompanied by changes in the body's physiology, but the brain's activities are not the emotion itself. For example, if we could put some live brain cells in a petri dish in front of us, we would not say their chemical and electrical interactions were anger or affection, because anger and affection are internal mental experiences of a living being. This experience may be correlated with activity in a certain area of the brain, but that neurological activity is not the experience of anger. Similarly, an emotion may lead to an action, but that action is an effect of the emotion, not the emotion itself. Consequently, of the three components mentioned above, Buddhists speak of emotions only in terms of the second—what we experience, feel, and think.

Buddhism does not deny that the mind and body affect and influence each other. When our knee hits the table, our mind experiences pain, and we may become irritated. When our mind is calm, our physical health improves. In *Commentary on Reliable Cognition*, Dharmakīrti says that when the body is healthy, attachment to sexual pleasure increases in the mind, whereas when the body is weak, anger arises more easily.

On a subtler level, certain emotions correlate with specific chemical and electrical changes in the brain. Does this correlation indicate a cause-and-effect relationship? Science has made fascinating discoveries correlating certain cognitive and emotional states with specific areas in the brain and particular neuron activity, but we must be careful not to attribute causality when there is merely correlation. Whereas some scientists believe that physiological events in the brain cause the emotions, Buddhists think that in general, the mental states precede the physiological changes. This is an important area open for research, and in recent years many scientists have begun to explore it. But regardless of whether the subtle changes in the brain cause, are caused by, or simply correlate with emotions, Buddhism emphasizes that emotions and feelings are mental states in living beings. Without mind, there is no experience: a corpse certainly doesn't have love or hatred, and a group of neurons or a cluster of genes does not feel pleasure

or pain. Living beings do. Feelings, emotions, thoughts, views, attitudes, and so forth occur in the mind—they are mental states experienced by living beings.

These mental states motivate our physical and verbal actions. It is unreasonable and even dangerous to say, “My biological makeup makes me harm others.” Such an attitude leads us down the slippery slope of abdicating responsibility for our actions by attributing their causes to physical elements over which we have no control. In addition to creating a sense of powerlessness in us, it could be used to justify eliminating individuals with certain genetic or neurological makeups.

The vast majority of our physical and verbal actions are prompted by intentions in our minds, and these intentions are influenced by our feelings, emotions, and views. Although many of our intentions are very subtle and some seem more like primal urges than conceived plans, they are present nonetheless. The fact that our intentions and emotions are the forces behind what we say and do means that by changing them, we can transform our actions and our lives. We are not doomed to a life circumscribed by the limitations of our genes, neural pathways, and biological processes over which we have very little choice or control. While we still have to deal with the effects of genetic and physiological processes, we need not develop a defeatist attitude regarding them. We have human intelligence and the seeds of love, compassion, wisdom, and other magnificent qualities inside us. These can be consciously developed, and many great sages in a variety of cultures and spiritual traditions have done this.

Many years ago I challenged one of the scientists in our Mind and Life dialogues to research the effects of cultivating well-being and positive emotions on the brain. After investigating for some years, he reported that due to a combination of the brain’s neuroplasticity and people’s meditation practice, there were changes in the brain circuits of people who cultivated four selected qualities: resilience, positive outlook, attention, and generosity. Each of these has corresponding Buddhist practices to develop them. *Resilience* is the speed with which we recover from adversity; a *positive outlook* is seeing the basic goodness in others and letting that influence all that we do; *attention* is the ability to focus on an object and enables us to complete what we begin; and *generosity* is an attitude of giving and sharing. All of these activate brain circuits that are correlated with a sense of well-being.

The researchers' conclusion was that well-being can be learned, so they've been developing programs that teach meditation and mindfulness and using them in schools, hospitals, and so forth with great success.

### *Happiness and Unhappiness, Virtue and Nonvirtue*

While both Buddhism and psychology seek to help people have more happiness and fulfillment and decrease their unhappiness and misery, they differ somewhat in what they consider positive and negative emotions. Some psychologists and scientists I have spoken with say that a negative emotion is one that feels bad and makes the person unhappy at the time it is manifest in the mind. A positive emotion makes the person feel happy at the time it is manifest.

In Buddhism, what differentiates positive and negative emotions is not our immediate feeling of happiness or discomfort but the happiness or suffering that is the long-term result of those emotions. That is because the long-term effects of our actions are considered more important than their short-term effects, which tend to be fleeting in comparison. If, in the long term, an emotion produces unpleasant experiences, it is considered negative; if it brings happiness in the long term, it is positive. Buddhism explains that virtuous (positive, constructive, wholesome) emotions lead to happiness in the long term, while nonvirtuous (negative, destructive, unwholesome) emotions lead to suffering.

The Buddha presented four scenarios in which present happiness/pain and virtue/nonvirtue are at play (MN 70.7):

Here, when someone feels a certain kind of pleasant feeling, nonvirtuous states increase in him and virtuous states diminish; but when someone feels another kind of pleasant feeling, nonvirtuous states diminish in him and virtuous states increase. Here, when someone feels a certain kind of painful feeling, nonvirtuous states increase in him and virtuous states diminish; but when someone feels another kind of painful feeling, nonvirtuous states diminish in him and virtuous states increase.

This thought-provoking citation is worthy of some illustrations. As it says, there are four possible permutations of feelings and ethical value. In the first,

a pleasant feeling accompanies the increase of nonvirtue and the decrease of virtue. An example is feeling happy when we successfully deceive others about a vile action we have committed. Even though it may be accompanied by a pleasant feeling, our action is not virtuous, since it is the cause of future suffering.

In the second, there is a pleasant feeling when a nonvirtuous state decreases and a virtuous one increases. An example is taking delight in making a generous offering to a charity that helps refugees or the poor and hungry. This kind of happiness is win-win: we feel joyful now, and our action creates the cause for future happiness for self and others.

The third occurs when an unpleasant feeling accompanies an increase in nonvirtue and a decrease in virtue. An example is the pain of someone who angrily rejects being sentenced to prison after being convicted of embezzlement. Not taking responsibility for his nonvirtuous action, he angrily blames others, creating more nonvirtue. If he accepted responsibility for his action and regretted it, his virtue would increase, and his pain would lead him to change his ways.

In the fourth situation, we have a painful feeling, but our nonvirtue diminishes and our virtue increases. An example is taking a lower-paying job to avoid having to lie to clients or customers. In this case, creating virtue that will bring happiness in the future and peace of mind right now also brings some unhappiness of a loss in income. But it is undoubtedly worthwhile in the long term.

Making some examples of these from your own experience is useful. Such an exercise helps us to value our ethical integrity more than the fleeting happiness of getting what we want at the moment. Since our self-esteem and feelings of self-worth depend more on our ethical integrity than on sensual pleasure, it is worthwhile to take the time to remind ourselves of these values before an impulse arises, so that when the time comes we will make wise decisions.

## REFLECTION

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1. When you act against your ethical values, how do you feel at the moment of doing the action? How do you feel later, when reflecting on your action?

2. When you give up an immediate pleasure due to your sense of personal integrity or for the sake of long-term happiness, how do you feel at the time? How do you feel later, when reflecting on your action?
  3. How integral is ethical conduct to your happiness? Based on what you conclude here, make some determinations about how you want to live.
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### *Emotions and Kleśas*

Before going deeper with the discussion of emotions, we need to clarify terms. Although everyone in the West understands the meaning of the word *emotion*, there is not a parallel word in Tibetan. When I, Chodron, was reviewing this chapter with His Holiness, he and his translators engaged in a lengthy discussion about the meaning of *emotion* and how it could be translated into Tibetan. Some Tibetans suggest the Tibetan word *myong 'tshor* as a translation, although this word is not widely used. Etymologically, *myong* means “experience” and *'tshor* means “feeling.” Both of these qualities pertain to other mental states that are not emotions. Other Tibetans have proposed the word *gyer bag*, found in Gyaltsab Rinpoche’s commentary to Dharmakīrti’s *Commentary on Reliable Cognition*. However, it is an archaic word and does not include what in English we consider positive emotions.

Our discussion led to the conclusion that at present there is no widely used Tibetan word that directly translates the meaning of the English word *emotion*. However, the Tibetan language contains words for the various emotions spoken of in Western languages. The lack of a term and concept for emotion piqued my interest because those of us in the West continually talk about our emotions. I imagined what it would be like to grow up in a culture that wasn’t focused on “my emotions.”

An English dictionary defines *emotion* as “a strong feeling about somebody or something.” The word *feeling* (*vedanā*) is also vague and is already used in Buddhist translations to indicate the aggregate of pleasant (happy), unpleasant (unhappy, painful), or neutral experiences. This aggregate does not include what we would call *feelings* in English, such as anger or love.

The Sanskrit word *kleśa* is a commonly used word in Buddhist texts that refers to mental factors that afflict the mind and do not allow it to abide peacefully. These disturbing emotions and views enslave the mind, confining it to a narrow perspective and motivate actions that hinder the happiness of both ourselves and others. As such, *kleśa* are obscurations on the path to liberation, and Buddhist texts speak of their disadvantages and the antidotes to them. However, there is no English equivalent to the word *kleśa* that encompasses mental factors as diverse as emotions, attitudes, philosophical views, and innate, unquestioned assumptions about ourselves and the world. For the sake of simplicity in this series, we translate *kleśa* as “afflictions” and sometimes expand it and say “disturbing emotions and wrong views.” Some afflictions, such as the view of a personal identity, are called *views* in English, while others—for example, anger and jealousy—are called *emotions*. Mental states such as not believing that awakening is possible are called *views*.

All people have the same types of emotion and similar attitudes and views about the way they and the world exist—some of which are conducive for long-term happiness and peace, others of which are hindrances. However, the words we use to speak of them and the concepts that influence how we relate to them vary. Similarly, the behaviors motivated by certain emotions will be socially acceptable in some cultures but not to others. For example, sticking out our tongue, which is a sign of friendliness and respect in Tibetan culture, is discouraged in Western cultures, while clapping our hands—a sign of being pleased in Western cultures—indicates aversion in Tibetan culture.

The words used to label emotions have many nuances. In addition, there may not always be an exact correspondence in meaning between the Sanskrit or Tibetan word and the English term used to translate it. When reading Buddhist works in English, we must take care not to impute the ordinary meaning of a word onto a term that has a specific meaning in the Buddhist context.

### *Constructive and Destructive Emotions*

When speaking of positive and negative emotions, Buddhists differentiate multiple meanings of the words for some emotions. For example,

attachment, fear, anger, and disillusionment have multiple meanings depending on the circumstance, and it is important to distinguish the different forms of these emotions in order to avoid confusion.

#### ATTACHMENT

Among the multiple meanings of the word *attachment*, one form of attachment is necessary for our physical and psychological well-being; another is one of what are called the *three poisons*—three afflictions that poison our own and others’ well-being.

The first form of attachment is spoken of in psychology and refers to a feeling of closeness or connection among people. For example, psychologists speak of the attachment a baby has for his or her mother. Such attachment or bonding with the mother or mother figure is necessary for the psychological well-being of the child.

This feeling of closeness or attachment is present in families and enables them to function together as a unit for the benefit of each member. Healthy attachment in a harmonious family has a realistic understanding of the other family members’ capabilities and fosters mutual respect. Similarly, attachment unifies the citizens of a country, facilitating their cooperation for the benefit of their society. This form of attachment produces good results.

Buddhists have a positive use of the term as well. Bodhisattvas are said to be “attached” to sentient beings because they feel a tremendous sense of closeness and responsibility for the welfare of each and every sentient being that spurs them to practice. Their love for sentient beings invigorates them to do whatever they can to alleviate suffering and bring happiness. They do this with greater energy and joy than we ordinary people work to benefit ourselves.

More commonly in Buddhism, however, *attachment* (*trṣṇā* and *rāga*) refers to one of the three poisons and one of the six root afflictions. This attachment is a mental factor that, based on exaggeration or projection of good qualities, clings onto its desired object. With attachment, we hunger after, crave, cling to, and become obsessed with an object, person, idea, place, and so forth. When we succeed in procuring the object of our attachment, we are happy; but when that desire is frustrated, we become angry, resentful, and jealous. These emotions, in turn, motivate destructive actions to procure or protect the cherished object. We can clearly see that the greed



of a CEO for money or the craving of a sports or movie star for fame leads to harmful actions and suffering for himself and others.

When attachment is moderate, society in general considers it to be a positive emotion. There is a feeling of happiness or excitement at meeting someone wonderful, receiving a desired possession, or being praised by the people we value. However, from a Buddhist viewpoint, such attachment is based on exaggeration, and while it may be captivating at the beginning of a new relationship, it will hinder the relationship from being harmonious and mutually beneficial in the long term. This is because attachment leads to unrealistic expectations. Difficulties and disappointments naturally follow when we discover that the object of our attachment doesn't possess all the wonderful qualities we thought it did.

This attachment is sneaky. For example, when family members' affection becomes neediness and possessiveness and generates demands based on unrealistic expectations, it turns into unhealthy attachment. If someone's appreciation for his country makes him suspicious of foreigners on the basis of nationality or ethnicity alone, attachment has set in. This emotion can cause prejudice and discrimination, and the person may go so far as to deny others their human rights.

Once I met a Chilean scientist who spoke of scientists being attached to their field of study. He said that any exaggerated clinging onto one's field of study, political beliefs, or religion is harmful. This man was not a Buddhist, but he understood that it is the mental state of clinging, not the object clung to, that causes problems. In the case of a scientist, such attachment could lead to ignoring contrary evidence or even rigging the result of experiments or misreporting data collected from them. Similar disadvantages accrue to a person attached to their own religion or political views.

Some people ask whether it is possible to be attached to *nirvāṇa* or to the Buddha. Aspiring for *nirvāṇa* or to have the Buddha's qualities is not attachment. The mind is clear, and although it is attracted to its object, there is no exaggeration present because the Buddha and *nirvāṇa* possess magnificent qualities. Still, according to the *Prāsaṅgika* viewpoint, as long as there is subtle self-grasping—in this case, grasping *nirvāṇa* or the Buddha to exist inherently—there is the potential for subtle attachment to arise. If someone then clings to *nirvāṇa* and desperately wants to attain it as if it were an external object, exaggeration is present in the mind. When this

person studies and practices the Dharma, eventually the distorted aspect will be dispelled, and she will have a genuine aspiration for nirvāṇa that is free from attachment.

## REFLECTION

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1. What are some of the common meanings of the English word *attachment*?
  2. What are the disadvantages of the afflictive type of attachment?
  3. Is it easy to tell when attachment in the sense of affection and respect slips into exaggeration and expectations?
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## FEAR

Fear is another emotion that can be spoken of in two ways. In common parlance, fear is usually associated with panic, anxiety, worry, and distress; it is considered a negative emotion because it feels so unpleasant and is often based on unrealistic thinking. From a Buddhist viewpoint, this kind of fear is afflictive because it is based on exaggeration and self-preoccupation, and it leads a person to engage in actions or make decisions that are unwise.

Another kind of fear has an element of wisdom; it is an awareness of possible danger that causes us to exercise caution. While this fear may sometimes feel unpleasant, it is useful and is free from the emotional torment of ordinary fear. For example, awareness that you live in an area that is prone to earthquakes encourages people to make and heed building codes to protect buildings from collapsing. People lay careful plans and take precautions without being immersed in uncontrollable panic. This wisdom-fear is also at work when we merge onto a highway. Aware of the danger of other vehicles driving at high speeds, we drive carefully. Parents instill in young children a respectful fear of matches. In the above examples, fear is useful and is not afflictive. The difference between afflictive fear and wisdom-fear is the presence or absence of exaggeration. When we are attuned to facts of

the situation, fear is not distorted, but when we exaggerate some aspect of the situation, fear is unrealistic and leads to suffering.

Certain meditations in the stages of the path are designed to arouse wisdom-fear in us. When we meditate on the disadvantages of cyclic existence, wisdom-fear motivates us to practice the path to liberate ourselves from saṃsāric suffering. The meditation on death is meant to provoke not an emotional, panicky fear of death, which is of no benefit at all, but a wise awareness of our mortality that leads us to set good priorities in life, abandon harmful actions, and live ethically and kindly.

In Thailand, some monks from the forest tradition meditate in fearful places such as cemeteries, jungles, and forests with ferocious animals. Before 1959, meditators in Tibet did the same. If panicky fear arose in their minds, motivated by the suffering that such fear produces, they would make a strong effort to generate samādhi or the wisdom realizing emptiness in order to overcome it. Ajahn Mun, a famous ascetic Thai monk who lived in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, and his disciples practiced in this way, and there are many stories of them entering deep states of samādhi when encountering a tiger in the jungle. The great Tibetan yogi Milarepa practiced similarly, and meditators in the Chod lineage deliberately invoke spirits and ghosts to spur them to generate deep bodhicitta and wisdom.

If someone meditates on the sufferings of the lower realms, and panicky fear, instead of wisdom-fear arises, what should she do? First she should remind herself that panic is not the desired outcome of the meditation. Then, realizing that she has the ability to avoid the causes for such a rebirth, she should turn her mind to the Three Jewels and take refuge in them. Instead of allowing herself to be overwhelmed by this unrealistic fear, a well-trained practitioner will use it to reaffirm her connection to the Three Jewels.

Some scriptures speak of using the presence or absence of panicky fear as a way to examine whether or not a person is an arhat. When that person is meditating or sitting casually, someone makes a sudden, sharp, loud sound. If the person does not jump or gasp with fear, it is said that he has attained high levels of the path. According to this example, it seems that some level of self-grasping is present when an ordinary person experiences fear but is absent when they are liberated from cyclic existence.

Sometimes it is said that bodhisattvas fear saṃsāra as well as the personal peace of an arhat's nirvāṇa. While the word “fear” is used to indicate their unwillingness to stay in either of these states, it is not the fear that we ordinary people experience. Our fear is usually based on self-grasping and self-centeredness, while bodhisattvas' fear is underlain with compassion and wisdom that wants to attain buddhahood in order to benefit others as soon as they can.

## ANGER

Most of us would agree that in general anger is a destructive emotion. Under its influence, we speak in ways that break the trust in relationships with people we care deeply about. Overwhelmed by anger, we act in ways that are dangerous and destructive to our own and others' well-being. While we often believe that our anger is justified—“any sane person would be angry in this situation”—that doesn't alleviate the downside of anger. When we later calm down, we can see that our mind was exaggerating the negative qualities of a person or situation, or even projecting negative qualities that aren't there.

Some people argue that some forms of anger are constructive. For example, if a student is wasting her time and not actualizing her potential, her teacher may become angry. This anger stems from the teacher's wish that the student succeed and, from that perspective, could be considered a positive form of anger, some people say. Nevertheless, we need to examine each individual situation and check our motivation carefully. It is easy to justify abusive behavior by saying, “I'm doing it for your own good.”

Moral outrage at injustice in the world is another form of anger that some people say is beneficial because it leads to constructive change in society. But here, too, we need to examine if exaggeration is present. Years ago when I, Chodron, was at an anti-war protest, I saw another protester pick up a brick and throw it at the police. His action shocked me into realizing that his mental state had become like the mental state of those who were responsible for the war. There was bias for his own side and animosity toward the other. He was protective of those who agreed with him but sought to harm those who didn't. It is all too easy in a situation of conflict to forget that people on the “other side” are human beings who want happiness and freedom

from suffering just as we do. Painting them as thoroughly evil and never to be trusted is definitely an exaggeration.

Anger is not the only emotion that can motivate us to tackle social injustice. Compassion can be a strong motivating factor as well. Because a compassionate mind is concerned with the well-being of all parties in a conflict, there is a greater chance of reaching an outcome that benefits everyone. We are able to think more clearly when we are free from anger. Ārya bodhisattvas who are liberated from cyclic existence have no anger whatsoever. If they see one person harming another, they have compassion for both people and intercede to avert the harm. Compassion does not mean being passive and ineffective. Rather, it impels us to act assertively when appropriate, but without anger or hatred.

It is difficult to experience the emotions associated with anger—hatred, resentment, vengeance, and so on—without some degree of hostility toward others. When we closely examine such emotions, we find that they are based on self-centeredness. As such, from a Buddhist perspective, emotions falling under the umbrella of anger are distorted and harmful mental states to be abandoned. Having said that, we must be careful not to confuse anger with assertiveness. A person can speak or act firmly and forcefully without being angry, just as an angry person can be passive and withdrawn.

Sūtrayāna—the path based on the sūtras—sees all instances of anger as based on distortion and hence damaging. Tantrayāna—the path based on the tantras—speaks of using anger in the path. In our discussions, His Holiness speculated that when a bodhisattva practicing tantra speaks harshly to someone, the causal motivation—the initial thought to do the action—is compassion, but the immediate motivation at the time of the act is anger. One difference between this anger and ordinary anger is that ordinary anger wants to harm or punish the person, while anger that has been transformed into the path aims to stop the person's harmful actions. A bodhisattva has tremendous concern and compassion for the person and uses fierce actions to stop him from harming others and from creating destructive karma that will later ripen in his own suffering. In addition, the bodhisattva has deep wisdom that realizes the agent, the action, and the object all lack inherent existence.

In speaking of the possibility of using anger in the path, a guideline is

warranted. Since we beginners lack the requisite compassion, wisdom, and skill to transform a destructive emotion into the path, it is better for us to apply the antidotes as taught in the Sūtrayāna path and to practice restraint.

### DISILLUSIONMENT

We commonly speak of disillusionment as a negative emotion because it brings unhappiness. When we feel disillusioned because a person does not turn out to be all we thought he was, we feel uncomfortable, and it may lead to despondency, depression, and in some cases, cynicism. This happens because we previously constructed an unrealistic expectation of the other person, clung to it as true, and now we see the falsehood of it.

But not all disillusionment is bad. When we contemplate the defects of cyclic existence, the shortcomings of saṃsāric rebirth, and the deceptive nature of temporary pleasures, we feel disillusioned with chasing after a type of happiness that we can never secure. From a Buddhist viewpoint, this disillusionment is positive because it will lead us to aspire for liberation and create the causes to attain it. Being disillusioned with cyclic existence, practitioners are happy to relinquish their attachment to it. Although disillusionment makes our mind sober, we need not be despondent or demoralized, because there exists a remedy to the misery of saṃsāra. Such disillusionment makes the mind peaceful and is conducive for cultivating deep states of concentration because it frees our minds from needless worry about the concerns of only this life.

### *Emotions and Survival*

Science tells us that there is a biological basis for our emotions—both afflicted emotions and beneficial ones. We have instincts to draw closer to whatever supports staying alive and to drive away whatever harms us. The need for food, shelter, and companionship motivates us to seek and procure these requirements for human life. According to this theory, certain emotions are conducive to our survival and arise due to biological factors. For example, jealousy and arrogance both encourage competition, which leads to better performance and a greater likelihood of our genes being passed down to offspring. Anger and fear can be useful to avoid or destroy what threatens our life and well-being. Scientists say that from an evolutionary

perspective, those emotions would not be present in us if they didn't serve a useful purpose. When we are angry, blood goes to our arm muscles in case we need to fight, but when fear comes, the blood goes to our legs so we can flee. On a purely biological level, emotions such as attachment, anger, and fear may assist animals and human beings to stay alive, and from that perspective, they may be considered beneficial.

Why, then, does the Buddha call emotions such as attachment, anger, jealousy, arrogance, and fear “afflictions”? Why does he say they cause suffering and recommend counteracting them? The difficulty with these emotions, again, is that they are fueled by exaggeration and grasping and thus do not perform their functions in a reasonable way. They may exaggerate the potential danger of the situation, the primacy of one's own self-interest, or the potential benefit to be gained. When afflictions are manifest, our minds are clouded and we don't think clearly. Instead of responding to a situation intelligently, we react impulsively, following an urge without sufficiently contemplating the likely effects of doing so. The results are often disastrous. In some conflicts, anger exposes us to far greater danger by making us act irrationally, which incites the other party to counter with more violent means. Fear also can endanger our survival, for when we exaggerate danger, we may lash out when the threat is nonexistent or minor. We may freeze when it would be wiser to act, or we may act heedlessly in our panic. It is especially tragic when a government or its citizens collectively fall into these distorted emotions.

Some psychologists say that disturbing emotions are 90 percent exaggeration and projection. While there may be a biological component, exaggeration and projection come from the mind, and we are not generally aware when they step in. A sense of danger that is reasonable in one instance can be later exaggerated and projected onto many other situations, making a person unnecessarily anxious. The anger that produces the rush of adrenalin that helps us to protect ourselves becomes a habit, and we create drama and conflict in our lives because the resulting adrenalin makes us feel alive.

Applying our human intelligence to our emotional lives enables us to discern which emotions lead to well-being and which lead to difficulties. Here we see—and psychological and sociological studies verify this—that children who grow up with kindness are generally more secure and emotionally balanced, while those who live in families with a lot of anger and

physical or verbal violence are more anxious. Angry, resentful, and vindictive thoughts also make us unhappy and tense. These emotions impact our physical health and harm our immune system, while compassion is conducive to better health.

There is a world of difference between constructive and destructive emotions. In ordinary beings, afflictive emotions arise easily; they are impulsive and reactive. Genuinely constructive emotions like compassion and generosity come through investigation and effort. While destructive emotions distort our view of a situation, constructive emotions are conducive to accurate assessment. Destructive emotions cause us to regret our actions, while constructive emotions do not.

By examining the disadvantages and unrealistic perspectives of the afflictions, we will come to a point where we will make a determination to stop letting them run our lives. Seeing the benefits of realistic and beneficial emotions, we will consciously cultivate them. In his teachings, the Buddha described the ways to think and meditate that make positive emotions arise. By familiarizing ourselves with these and with the antidotes to the afflictions again and again, our habitual emotions will change, and in situations where anger once mushroomed, compassion will radiate.

For example, when harmed by another, we can think, “While this person’s action is harmful and I must act to stop it, he has the same wish to be happy as I do.” In this way, we develop a sense of concern for the other person. This will not only alleviate tension and anxiety in our own minds, but will also help us reach out to improve his situation. This, in turn, will result in that person responding to our kindness. This type of kindness and compassion is developed only through reasoning and training; it does not arise instinctively. When we truly care about others’ welfare, we do not want to engage in harmful actions.

While biased compassion and kindness—the kind we might have for our child or parent—may have a biological basis, we must consciously purify them of attachment and greed. Instead of mindlessly following anger, we must assess if it is to our benefit. In many situations, responding with tolerance and kindness protects our own interests and well-being more effectively than hostility. Anger may destroy an aggressor or opponent, but that can have devastating repercussions. Compassion cares for both the perpetrator and victim of harm and thus allows us to intervene in abusive situa-



tions in a balanced, thoughtful way that enables us to remedy the situation with minimal harm to self and others.

There is a progressive development in our reasons for not harming others. People who have not considered the benefits of kindness and the disadvantages of anger and greed may restrain themselves from killing, stealing, unwise sexual behavior, and lying in order to avoid punishment. While such restraint is beneficial, there is not a great deal of virtue in the intention behind it. However, it helps people get along better with others, and that's important.

A step up from this is thinking, "Killing, stealing, and such are nonvirtuous. If I do them, I will have to face the consequences after death, and these results could be dire." While this restraint is self-referenced, there is virtue in the person's motivation, because she is considering the ethical dimension of her action.

The third step is thinking, "This sentient being wants to be happy. His or her life is as sacred as mine." As a consequence, we avoid harming this person. Or we think, "This person will suffer if she loses her possessions. Therefore I will respect and protect her possessions," and in this way we refrain from stealing. The outward action is the same as in the two preceding cases, but our internal motivation is different and is very virtuous because it considers the effects of our actions on the other person.

An even more advanced motivation is restraining ourselves from harming others because it not only causes them pain but also interferes with our ability to attain full awakening and be of the greatest benefit to sentient beings. Here we see the effect of having bodhicitta—the altruistic intention aspiring for full awakening in order to benefit sentient beings. Refraining from nonvirtue with this precious motivation is extremely virtuous and beneficial.

### *Working with Afflictions*

While disturbing emotions may arise naturally in us ordinary beings, they can be eliminated. They are not an intrinsic part of the mind; they haven't penetrated its clear and cognizant nature. Afflictions are rooted in ignorance and other distorted conceptions, and as such they are fragile and can't stand up to the powerful states of mind that understand reality. The

stronger our wisdom grows, the weaker the afflictions become, until eventually they are completely eradicated.

In contrast, constructive states of mind can be developed limitlessly. The fundamental nature of the mind is pure and stable. The innate, subtle mind of clear light, which is the basis of the cultivation of positive states of mind, is stable in that it continues eternally without interruption. While afflictions have powerful antidotes that can destroy them, no such counteracting forces exist that can eliminate constructive emotions and attitudes forever. They are based on accurate perception and thus can be continually enhanced. Furthermore, the nature of the mind is such that once we become thoroughly habituated to these virtuous states, we don't need to make repeated effort to cultivate them. They will continue on limitlessly.

People commonly regard emotions as raw feelings distinct from thought or other cognitive processes; they seem to arise spontaneously, not through conscious effort. We believe that emotions happen to us and that any reasonable person would feel the way we do in the same situation.

However, learning how destructive emotions arise and observing this process with mindfulness enables us to see that they are not givens. We can learn to detect harmful emotions while they are still small and swiftly apply their antidotes. When we ruminate on the harms others have caused us, for example, our resentment increases; when we contemplate the kindness of others, gratitude wells up.

Furthermore, deliberately cultivating accurate perspectives increases the strength of constructive emotions. Due to the force of habituation, these new perspectives gradually become natural, as do the beneficial emotions.

Awareness of our body and physical sensations is especially helpful in becoming aware of disturbing emotions when they begin to arise. Changes in our breathing, heart rate, body temperature, and muscle tension are some of the physical signals that accompany the emergence of a disturbing emotion. Making it a habit to check in with our body regularly can be very helpful.

For some people, observing the mood or texture of their mind enables them to detect a disturbing emotion while it is still small. Regardless of how we do it, the more aware we become of our thoughts and emotions, the quicker we will be able to evaluate them and decide whether to cultivate or counteract them. Engaging in regular meditation practice helps us to

consciously practice cultivating constructive emotions and counteracting destructive ones. Through such training, we can establish new emotional habits, and with time, they will naturally manifest in our daily life.

Intelligence—the ability to precisely discriminate or analyze the characteristics of an object—is another mental factor that can increase or decrease the force of an emotion. When corrupted, intelligence incorrectly understands how things exist and creates more problems for us. When used correctly, our human intelligence and analytical capacity help us to overcome our destructive emotions. This intelligence may be a thought—such as a clear understanding of the disadvantages of anger—or it may directly perceive a deeper characteristic of things, such as their constantly changing nature.

Some afflictions are “corrupted intelligence” (Tib. *shes rab nyon mong chen*). They are called “intelligence” because they involve an analytic process, but because that process is deeply flawed, the conclusion reached is wrong. Consider the two extreme philosophical views: absolutism (grasping at persons and phenomena as inherently existent) and nihilism (believing conventionally existent phenomena are nonexistent). Simply saying to ourselves “This is a wrong view” will not make either of these disappear; nor are prayers and virtuous aspirations sufficient to vanquish them. We have to counteract them directly by developing the wisdom or intelligence (*prajñā*) that understands reality. Absolutism and nihilism arise through thought processes, so they need to be counteracted through correct reasoning that shatters our previous certainty. As our understanding deepens, our wisdom will become the direct, nonconceptual perception of the nature of reality.

It’s helpful to be aware of the mental processes that lie behind emotions. We may have habitual ways of interpreting events that make them appear threatening or desirable when they are not. If so, we can consciously begin to change our interpretations and thus change the emotions that result from them. This is the theory behind the thought-training teachings, such as those describing how to transform adversity into the path to awakening.

For example, a colleague offers to help us with a project, and we think, “Why, all of a sudden, does he want to join in? Does he want some of the credit for himself? Or maybe he wants to slow my work down so that our boss will be upset with me.” Although we are not trained psychologists, we

may even attribute a mental disorder, “This guy is passive-aggressive, and he’s manipulating me because he wants my job.” We are “mind reading”—projecting a motivation to someone’s action with little evidence. Becoming suspicious and hostile, we respond with a snide remark, and a conflict takes off. Unfortunately, many misunderstandings and arguments among people, groups, and nations occur in this way.

In addition to developing our human intelligence and learning to use our logical abilities correctly, we need to make our mind receptive so that the seeds of constructive emotions and attitudes can grow in it. We do this by engaging in spiritual practices that diminish and purify the seeds of harmful deeds in our mindstream. In addition, practices that accumulate merit—seeds of constructive karma—increase the force of our wholesome tendencies. These practices include being generous, living ethically, and cultivating lovingkindness.

Learning how to consciously direct our thoughts in a more positive way is essential for counteracting afflictive mental states. Repeating, “Anger is awful; may it disappear. Compassion is so wonderful; I wish I had it” isn’t sufficient to transform our minds. Praying, “Buddha, please inspire me to be compassionate” or “Buddha, please get rid of my afflictions” without our cultivating the causes won’t work either. To be free of our anger, we must contemplate the kindness of others and train our mind in forgiveness and love by practicing the meditations that evoke these virtuous emotions. While thinking about the value of compassion and requesting inspiration to develop it are useful, the real work is to contemplate the benefits of compassion and then practice the series of meditations to generate it. In our daily lives, too, we must repeatedly bring compassion to mind when we interact with others so that it becomes habitual.

Compassion broadens the scope of our mind and makes it more accepting and inclusive of others. Destructive emotions such as attachment and anger usually focus on one person or one class of people, whereas compassion can be extended to all living beings. The object of our compassion doesn’t need to be someone we have met because we already know that everyone wants to be free from suffering and seeks happiness.

When our mind is unhappy, compassion and love uplift us. The best offering to make to all the buddhas is to abandon harming others physically, verbally, or mentally. Unlike afflictive emotions, virtuous mental

states do not have self-grasping ignorance as a support, so cultivating the wisdom that overcomes ignorance won't harm our virtuous emotions. If anything, it will eliminate obstacles to generating them. If we really care about ourselves, we'll generate an altruistic intention because it gives us encouragement, enthusiasm, resilience, and a good heart. So a wisely selfish person is altruistic!

Habituating ourselves to constructive perspectives is one of the purposes of the *gāthas*, or short phrases used in the mind-training practice. For example, while cleaning the dishes or washing the car, we think, "I am cleansing away my defilements and those of all other sentient beings." When going upstairs, "I will lead all sentient beings to awakening," and when going downstairs, "I am willing to go to suffering abodes to benefit sentient beings." In this way, neutral everyday actions are transformed into the path to awakening.

Some afflictions are destructive emotions that are counteracted by generating opposing emotions. For example, to counteract anger and hatred, we meditate on love. Other afflictions are distorted attitudes and wrong views that are counteracted by seeing that the object they apprehend is false. For example, the ignorance that grasps true existence is counteracted by the wisdom realizing the emptiness of true existence.

Imagination may be used as a skillful means to counteract harmful emotions. For example, as an antidote to lust, the Abhidharma prescribes meditating on the universe being filled with bones. Although the universe isn't actually brimming with bones, by having us contemplate the inside of the body, this technique works to eliminate obsession with sex. In cultivating lovingkindness as an antidote to anger, we may imagine others being happy, and when cultivating compassion, we may reflect on their suffering. Scientists have noticed that when we imagine a situation, the same area of the brain is activated as when we actually experience that situation. This supports the Buddhist view of the usefulness of imagination in developing wholesome and balanced mental states.

Applying an antidote may initially make us feel deflated, but this is not detrimental. For example, when we are arrogant, making the mind more sober is beneficial. However, if we are depressed, deflating our mood is not useful. We must evaluate our mental states, first determining if a destructive emotion is present or not, and if so, then choosing an appropriate antidote.

In short, we learn to become doctors to our own mind, diagnosing our mental ailments, selecting the correct Dharma medicine, and then skillfully applying that medicine.

Working with afflictive emotions requires a two-pronged approach. Managing unwholesome emotions and stopping actions motivated by them are important components, but they don't resolve all problems. We also need to cultivate wholesome emotions. Although we may not initially be able to call upon these positive emotions in the heat of the moment, gradually and diligently cultivating them in our meditation practice affects our temperament and influences our emotional patterns. The more familiar we are with these beneficial emotions, the less susceptible we are to harmful emotions. Developing constructive emotions is similar to bolstering our immune system. Cultivating love strengthens our emotional immunity to anger. Developing compassion prevents cruelty, joy opposes jealousy, and equanimity averts bias due to attachment, anger, and apathy.

Reflecting on the benefits of having a particular wholesome emotion invigorates our efforts to develop it. For instance, if we contemplate the benefits of seeing sentient beings as loveable and imagine the good feeling that will derive from that, we will happily meditate on their kindness. This will cause feelings of gratitude and appreciation for others to arise naturally in our mind. To see the advantages of certain practices, we can ask ourselves, "What is disrupting my inner contentment?" We then see the negative emotions as the culprits and want to oppose them. With this determination, we will seek the methods to counteract those disturbing emotions and diligently practice these methods.

## REFLECTION

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1. How can you differentiate a destructive emotion from a constructive one?
  2. What are the benefits of subduing disturbing emotions and cultivating wholesome ones?
  3. Review the methods to subdue each disturbing emotion and cultivate each wholesome one.
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### *Cultivating Love and Compassion*

To generate beneficial emotions such as lovingkindness and compassion for all sentient beings, we must first have a correct understanding of those emotions. The love and compassion we cultivate in our spiritual practice should not be confused with the ordinary love and compassion we feel for our dear ones, which is usually grounded in self-referential considerations, “This person is my friend, my spouse, my child, my parent,” and so on. While such love may be very strong, it is tainted with attachment because it is partial toward those who please us and biased against those who displease us. As we have seen, once we are attached to someone, the stage is set to later be angry at them when they fail to meet our expectations, fulfill our needs, or do what we want. The love and compassion we seek to cultivate in Dharma practice is based on having an equal-hearted sense of concern for all beings simply because they exist and they want happiness and not suffering, just as we do.

Even if we understand the meaning of genuine constructive emotions, we may doubt that it is possible to develop them. We must remember that the seeds of constructive emotions are naturally in our mindstream and, when cultivated, they will increase. Everything becomes easier with familiarity, and positive emotions are no exception.

When we have the confidence that it is possible to develop positive emotions, we make the effort to do so. At this point we engage in the meditations to cultivate equanimity and to see others as kind that precede the actual cultivation of love and compassion. Meditation on equanimity enables us to go beyond the limitations of our judgmental attitude that classifies people as friends, enemies, and strangers and elicits the emotions of attachment, animosity, and apathy toward them. By seeing that everyone is just like us in wanting happiness and not suffering, equanimity sets the stage for cultivating love and compassion for all beings, no matter what they believe or how they treat us.

We then cultivate the sense that others are loveable, which is done by remembering their kindness to us. Here we reflect not just on the kindness of friends and family, but the kindness of all those who do their various jobs in society that enable us to have what we need. We also reflect on the kindness of those whose disruptive actions challenge us to develop forgiveness, patience, and fortitude.

We now turn our attention to the expansive love we seek to develop in our spiritual practice. This love is the simple wish for others to have happiness and its causes. Visualizing a variety of people, extend this wish to them and imagine them having happiness and its causes. Having done this, cultivate compassion wishing them to be free of suffering and its causes. Do this with a few individuals to begin with, and then generalize it to groups of people and finally to all living beings.

Initially the feelings of impartial love or compassion that arise in the depth of our hearts will last only a short while. At this level, they are still contrived in that we have to make effort to experience them. However, through habituation, the time will come when, as soon as we see even a small insect, feelings of love and compassion for it will arise spontaneously and effortlessly. This new experience manifests as a result of having made an effort over a long period of time. Such mental transformation brings about an enduring change in our moods and emotions.

Scientists and Buddhists agree that habituation is necessary for long-lasting change in our thoughts, emotions, and behaviors to occur. When we practice something repeatedly, it becomes part of our temperament. Buddhists describe this as a process of habituating ourselves with new emotional responses. Scientists explain this as building up new neural pathways in the brain. When a certain pathway associated with an emotion is well lubricated, that emotion arises more easily.

Although Buddhism emphasizes cultivating love and compassion for others, we must not neglect ourselves. The happiness of others is one of our goals, so we must take care of ourselves so that we will have the physical energy and the mental clarity to benefit them. If we ignore our own welfare, not only will we be unable to benefit others, they will have to take care of us!

## REFLECTION

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1. Follow the steps for cultivating love and compassion explained above. Make your contemplation personal.
  2. Enjoy the expansive feeling in your heart as you release anger and judgment and allow unbiased affection to arise.
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## *A Good State of Mind*

The calmer our mind, the easier it will be to deal with problems. Rather than wait for a crisis and then search for a way to handle it, we should practice open-mindedness and kindness on a daily basis. Then when problems or even traumatic events occur, their impact will be less severe, and we'll be able to return to a balanced state of mind more quickly. On the other hand, if we indulge our bad moods, we'll feel overwhelmed when even small, unpleasant events occur.

Tibetans have a motto, "Hope for the best and prepare for the worst." The main preparation is to let go of the self-centered attitude that magnifies our own problems and to cultivate compassion for ourselves and others. When difficulties arise, looking at them from a broad perspective is useful. Concentrating on *my* problems brings more frustration and unhappiness, while recollecting that everyone faces difficulties puts mine in perspective. In addition, if we see difficult circumstances as a challenge to rise to our potential and as an opportunity to call forth our compassion, we'll be more effective in managing a stressful situation and contributing something useful to it. In this way, our life will be worthwhile, and our mind will be relaxed and open.

In the next few sections, we will discuss some mental states and situations that people frequently see as troublesome—fear, depression, acceptance, comparing ourselves with others, and disagreement and conflict—and ways to train our minds to address them effectively.

## *Working with Fear, Developing Courage*

Above we briefly considered the two types of fear, one based on wisdom and the other that succumbs to panic. The first type of fear stems from reason and is healthy. When we light a fire, we are aware of the danger and take care to avoid it. That fear protects us. Similarly, when we correctly analyze the causes of cyclic existence, we have a wise fear of them and that makes us conscientious about our moods and actions. This wisdom-based fear is important in daily life and on the path.

Panicked fear is problematic because it prevents us from seeing the situation clearly. For example, when I was a child and passed through some dark

rooms in the Potala, I feared someone was hiding there. If just a small mouse ran by, I jumped with fright. This kind of fear is due to our imagination; it is mentally created. Getting accurate information and changing our view of the situation can counteract it. For example, when we feel insecure, fearful, and lonely, we can meditate on the kindness we have received from others so that a sense of connection and gratitude arises in our hearts and we know we have support. If we are skeptical and suspicious of someone, it is helpful to consider him as another human being, just like us. In that way, our attitude will be more receptive, and we will be able to assess the situation with greater clarity and wisdom.

Another unrealistic fear may occur when we are threatened with losing our job. Our minds imagine that we will immediately be homeless, sitting on the street with our hungry children. Applying our intelligence, we should investigate whether we are viewing the situation accurately or exaggerating certain aspects. We may find that the situation is unlikely to occur as we imagined it, and even if it did, we have skills to manage it. There are resources in society and in our network of friends and relatives to help us, so we need not paint a dire picture of circumstances that don't exist at this moment.

Some people look at the political, economic, social, and environmental situation of the world and develop a wisdom-fear that inspires them to work to prevent harm to the planet and its living beings. Looking at the same situation, other people develop a despondent fear. Such a discouraged mental state immobilizes them, and their wish to help gets lost amid waves of despair. To counter this, we must constantly maintain our compassion and keep our hearts open, so that no matter what others' responses are, we remain earnest.

Courage comes from the way we regard situations. For example, from one viewpoint the current situation in Tibet is dire; from another there is hope. Focusing on the positive, while being aware of but not discouraged by the negative, enables us to make every effort to improve conditions.

One single practice or method alone cannot develop courage; it requires contemplation of several topics over a period of time. These topics include the preciousness of our human life; the potential of ourselves and all others to become fully awakened buddhas; the compassionate, awakening activities of the buddhas and bodhisattvas; the life stories of great masters; the kind-

ness we have received from all sentient beings; and love, compassion, and taking others' suffering and giving them our happiness. These will uplift and balance the mind so that we then view situations from a broad perspective.

In addition to courage, we need confidence. To develop this, I keep in mind some basic beliefs: Human nature is gentle and compassionate. Each and every one of us does not want suffering, and we have a right to try to overcome it. All beings have the potential to become wise, altruistic buddhas. Reflecting on these gives me inner strength and determination. A compassionate motivation and a clear, beneficial goal give me self-confidence and destroy doubts. In other words, confidence arises not from being successful in our projects but from engaging in them with a wise and kind motivation.

Human beings have remarkable intelligence, which if applied correctly, can solve problems and conflicts. Fatalistic attitudes are useless. We have the capacity to prevent hardships and improve what is good; we must do our best to use our abilities in constructive ways. If we make every effort and still fail, we need not have regrets. We can accept what happens. However, if due to lack of care or hope, negative things happen, that is extremely sad.

### *Hope, Desire, and Acceptance*

Just as fear has two aspects—one to abandon and one to cultivate—so do hope, desire, and acceptance. For example, when we hope for good things for ourselves—a new house, a good job, a wonderful family, money, and material possessions—we become distracted from our spiritual concerns and entrenched in attachment. Dharma texts that speak of abandoning all hopes are referring to these hopes concerning worldly gain that inevitably let us down.

On the other hand, we must have hope for a better future so that we will work to create the causes for it. Here the future we hope for is not a self-centered one based on worldly desires but one that takes others into consideration and wants happiness for many. This latter type of hope will motivate us to practice the Dharma and to engage in projects that directly benefit others.

No matter what situation we are in, we should not lose hope. Losing hope and sinking into a defeatist attitude are the real causes of failure. They are also distorted mental states. We have human lives with our unique human

intelligence, and these give us the capacity to overcome problems. Therefore we should be calm and wisely investigate various alternatives rather than throwing up our hands in despair, which often makes the problem worse.

The negative desire is related to attachment and keeps us bound in cyclic existence. In contrast, desire can also refer to a positive aspiration, such as the desire to meditate on equanimity or the desire to become a buddha. Such desires are not based on self-grasping or self-preoccupation. They have positive goals and increase our joyous effort to attain what is worthwhile.

Acceptance, too, has two sides. The disempowering kind of acceptance is acquiescence—accepting something unpleasant with a disconsolate heart. Such acceptance leads us to despondency and destroys our enthusiasm for life and for Dharma practice.

The good kind of acceptance acknowledges and accepts our own and others' faults and failures and at the same time wants to improve in the future. There is no use in fighting the reality of the present moment, but we know we can change and improve in the future. We accept the present suffering, for the causes for it have been created and are already ripening. Future suffering, however, can still be prevented, so our mind remains optimistic. By accepting the present situation, our time and energy is not consumed in anger or grief, and we can direct ourselves instead to purifying the causes for future suffering, avoiding the creation of more such causes, and creating the causes for future happiness.

### *Comparing Ourselves with Others and Self-Worth*

Although all sentient beings are equal in wanting happiness and not wanting suffering, each of us has different talents and weaknesses. We can acknowledge that others are better than us in terms of education, health, physical appearance, social standing, wealth, and so on, but that need not lead to jealousy. It is a simple acknowledgement of what is.

Problems begin if we begin to think, “Since I am less than, I am hopeless,” and feel inferior. Comparing ourselves with others and feeling hopeless is the result of a narrow outlook, for we see only our weaknesses and ignore our potential. Here, we should remember that although that person is more successful than we are, she is also a human being, just as we are, and that we have the same potential to succeed.

It is also important to remember that each of us has our own unique good qualities and talents. Comparing ourselves to others is like comparing apples and cars. They may both be red, but they are useful in different situations, so it's good to appreciate both. Similarly, it's good that people have different interests, talents, and abilities. By pooling these together, all of us benefit. We can rejoice in the good qualities of others and rejoice in our own, too, even though they may be different.

Some people often make black-and-white distinctions, with no middle ground. If something good happens, they become too happy and excited, and if something bad happens, they become discouraged and depressed. Life is complex: suffering is bound to happen and good things come as well. When good things occur, some people still do not feel content and push themselves to have more and better until they collapse. With this kind of attitude, if they see their neighbor is more successful, they succumb to jealousy and hopelessness. All this is avoidable with a wider perspective on life.

### *Counteracting Depression*

Some types of severe, clinical depression appear to have a chemical component in the brain, but here we will examine the psychological aspect of depression. The psychologists I have spoken with tell me that in large part depression is due to a lack of affection, love, and compassion in the family and the community. I believe that we human beings are by nature social animals. Our basic nature is such that we appreciate the affection of others, and when we receive insufficient affection or are deprived of it altogether, we become unhappy and listless.

The techniques to counter depression depend very much on the individual, whether he or she follows a spiritual tradition and, if so, which tradition. A nonbeliever can reflect that human nature is gentle. We have experienced some form of love and compassion from many people since we were born. We have received much kindness from others throughout our life. Sometimes we are blind to the kindness around us; other times we are dissatisfied with it and wish it were more or better. Here it is good to cultivate contentment with the affection and kindness we have received and to rejoice in it. See its positive effects on our life. From the time we were born until now, all our happiness in one way or another has depended on

the kindness of others. Just the fact that we are alive is due to the kindness we've received from so many other beings.

To counteract depression, Buddhists can think in two ways. First we develop a sense of our own potential by reflecting on buddha nature. No matter how confused or weak we may sometimes be on a superficial level, deep down our buddha nature is there. On the most basic level of having a mind, no difference exists between the Buddha and us. Each person has the *natural buddha nature* (the emptiness of inherent existence of the mind) as well as the *evolving buddha nature* (those factors that can be increased and whose continuity will continue to awakening). Thus everyone has the potential to become fully awakened.

Second, consider the nature of cyclic existence. At present we are under the control of afflictions and karma. As long as that situation exists, some kind of problem will be present. For example, when our body is ill, we experience pain. We must expect that and accept it. Worrying about the pain is useless. If we do not want the pain, we must remove its cause. If it is possible to remove the cause, we should try to do that. If it is not possible, no benefit comes from worrying.

We can think in a similar way about the nature of cyclic existence. As long as we have a body and mind that are under the influence of ignorance, problems will arise. This is reality. It is to be expected in cyclic existence, and we must accept it. If we do not like these problems, we should try to eliminate their causes—afflictions and polluted karma—and attain liberation. This gives us enthusiasm to practice the Dharma and seek nirvāṇa.

Depression also arises by focusing too much on our own situation and problems. Look around at others and see that everyone suffers in one way or another. Reflecting deeply on this, our hearts will open, and the strength of our love and compassion for others will increase.

### *Disagreement and Conflict*

Disagreements always arise among sentient beings. Differences in views and opinions are potentially positive and can be a source of progress. However, when we are attached to our ideas, possessions, and status, these disagreements may lead to violence or oppression. For this reason, it is important to remember that we are all part of the human community. We need each other; we depend on each other.

Every day I have disagreements within myself as an individual. In the morning I believe one thing is right, and after further investigation, by the evening I have discovered that another course of action is better. This does not cause confusion, and I can manage this disagreement within myself. Similarly, if we see ourselves as one human community, one organism, then we can tolerate differing opinions and learn together. We should listen to others' ideas and investigate their reasons as well as share our experience and knowledge.

Some disagreements arise over economic issues because one group is disadvantaged. This group tries to change the situation using reason and negotiation, but when these fail, they feel frustrated and may become violent. If we look at the situation through a narrow lens, that violence may seem useful. But when looking from a wider perspective, we see that violence may solve one problem while creating another. For example, each party in ethnic conflicts has reasons to support their actions, but in the eyes of the rest of the world, their fighting is madness, for it creates more suffering than was there before. Therefore we must avoid any form of violence. Just as ignorance is decreased through education, our human tendency toward violence can be reduced through education in nonviolence, mediation, and conflict resolution. Learning to listen with an open mind and heart is helpful too; often people's anger dies down when they feel that someone hears their concerns and understands them.

Sometimes we may think that a situation is unjust and want to strike out or rebel. But looking from a wider angle, we note that aggression will bring many complications and that other ways to deal with the difficulties exist. These other methods may take longer, but seeing that in the end they are more beneficial, we adopt them and are patient. I consider such patience and tolerance a sign of strength, not weakness. This is the strategy I have adopted in dealing with the unjust occupation of Tibet.

Violence not only creates new problems, it also goes against human nature. One of my fundamental beliefs is that human nature is gentle. From the time we are born, we are unhappy when we see the harsh treatment of one person by another. But when we see expressions of compassion and love, we naturally feel joy. This is the case even with infants. The educational system should teach the value of human life and the disadvantages of violence. We must instruct children in methods to control anger and manage conflict, and most importantly as adults, we must model tolerance,

empathy, and good listening. At present, the educational systems in most countries emphasize the transmission of information and neglect the creation of good human beings with a sense of responsibility for each other. We need to change this.

The Buddha lays out the root of disputes (AN 6.36):

There are, O monastics, these six roots of disputes. What six? Here a monastic is (1) angry and vengeful, or (2) contemptuous and domineering, or (3) envious and miserly, or (4) deceitful and hypocritical, or (5) he has evil desires and wrong views, or (6) he adheres to his own views, holding to them tenaciously and relinquishing them with difficulty.

Because the Buddha was addressing a group of monastics, he used a monastic as an example. But the same could be said about a person in any group, be it a work situation, club, family, sports team, or a group of social or environmental activists. It just takes one person's uncontrolled mind to throw a group into disarray, preventing it from accomplishing its purpose.

In the passage above, the Buddha outlines ways in which our mind may be uncontrolled. First, we are angry and vengeful. We speak badly about other people behind their backs, retaliate for any and all perceived insults, and make distorted and unjust accusations about others. We can surely think of many examples when we have been around such people, but the point here is not what others have or have not done; it is about our own behavior and emotions. We must examine our angry outbursts and vengeful actions and seek their causes within ourselves. How were we viewing the situation? What are our emotional and behavioral patterns? In short, before thinking about what to say or do, it is best to calm our minds and return them to a more balanced state.

Here's a helpful exercise incorporating the above account of the causes of dispute. Contemplate when you have acted in these ways and consider other ways to look at the situation and methods to adjust your motivation so that it benefits, not harms, yourself and others.

The second root of disputes is being contemptuous and domineering. A person seeks to lead a group whether or not she has the skills or has been given the authority. If others lead, she is disdainful and uncooperative, only



participating if things go her way. Leaders and followers must cooperate. Both have specific duties and require different talents and abilities, and neither can function well without the other.

The third root is envy and miserliness. Insecure, a person is jealous and does not like when others are more successful than he is. He is stingy with information, time, and effort and doesn't help others on the team.

The fourth is being deceitful and hypocritical. People who lie and are dishonest are difficult to trust and therefore difficult to work or live with. They say one thing but mean another; their speech is for their own benefit, without consideration of the situations or feelings of others.

The fifth root of discord is having evil desires and wrong views. Holding bad intentions and wrong views, a person propounds a fallacious doctrine and leads others astray. This is especially pernicious because it can inhibit one's own and others' ability to encounter the Buddha's teachings for many lives to come.

Lastly, someone adheres to his own views, holding on to them tenaciously and relinquishing them with difficulty. Such a person is stubborn and argumentative. He jumps to conclusions and stubbornly defends his ideas. Even if he has thought about an issue, once he forms an opinion, his mind is closed to any new information or other perspectives.

What are the results of possessing a root of dispute? The Buddha continues:

Such a monk dwells without respect and deference toward the Teacher, the Dhamma, and the Saṅgha, and he does not fulfill the training. Such a monastic creates a dispute in the Saṅgha that leads to the harm and unhappiness of the multitude, to the ruin, harm, and suffering of devas and humans.

This person lacks respect for the Three Jewels and is unable to practice sincerely or attain the benefits of practice. She generates disharmony in the family, workplace, factory, school, club, or group. This disharmony harms not only herself but disrupts others' relationships, thwarts their activities, diverts energy, and upsets many others. When we notice a root of dispute within ourselves, it is important to reflect on its disadvantages so that we are motivated to change that mental habit or behavior. How can we deal with

situations when we find any or all of these roots of dispute within ourselves? The Buddha continues:

If, monks, you perceive any such root of dispute either in yourselves or in others, you should strive to abandon this evil root of dispute. And if you do not see any such root of dispute either in yourselves or others, you should practice so that this evil root of dispute does not emerge in the future.

When we notice a root of dispute within ourselves, we should first restrain our body and speech from acting it out. Then we should work with our mind, applying the antidote to that afflictive emotion. When we notice a root of dispute in another person, we can remind ourselves, “That is what I am like when afflictions overpower my mind. That is the kind of behavior that my afflictions lead me to impose on others. Since these are not emotions and behaviors that I respect or find beneficial, I must take great care not to let them arise.” In other words, we take the other person’s actions as a warning and make a strong determination not to act in that way.

Once the emotional affliction has decreased and we can again assess the situation in a more balanced way, we can approach the other person and discuss the various points to resolve in a balanced way.<sup>7</sup>

If we do not see any of these roots of discord in ourselves or others, then let’s make sure to treat others well and to be mindful ourselves so that they do not erupt. Expressing our gratitude to our colleagues, family members, friends, associates, or others in the group, telling them how much we appreciate their kind actions and reasonable behavior, is good to do as well. So often people express their feelings and thoughts only when they are unhappy. This is a good opportunity to train ourselves in cultivating and expressing appreciation for others. Praising others for their good qualities gladdens their minds, further strengthens the harmony in the group, and makes us feel good as well.

### *Survival of the Most Cooperative*

“Survival of the fittest” is cited to support and promote competitiveness across many fields of endeavor. Instead, we may want to consider “survival of

the most cooperative” as the axiom for human progress and prosperity. The way bees and ants cooperate and support each other enables the entire hive or hill to stay alive and flourish. Imagine what would happen if the worker ants packed up and left, saying, “We’ve had enough of serving the queen ant!” Imagine the consequence if the queen ant quit, “I’m so tired of these pesky worker ants. They never leave me alone!” These tiny insects instinctively know that their entire community will survive and prosper when they work together harmoniously for a common aim. They know that by following their own individual needs and wants, they will perish as individuals and the entire colony will also suffer.

Historically, the world’s great civilizations have thrived when people helped each other and worked for the common good. Degeneration has occurred when competitive leaders battled for power and fame, selfishly ignored others, and looked out for only their own welfare. We human beings are dependent on each other just to stay alive; this is true now more than any other time in human history. Most of us do not know how to grow our food, make our clothes, build our homes, or make the medicine that cures our illnesses. We depend on others, and each of us contributes to the common good in his or her own way. The global economy means that we influence each other dramatically. If we human beings use the model of survival of the fittest and try to procure more and better resources for ourselves individually or for just our own group, we will sabotage our personal happiness and endanger the existence of human beings on this planet.

Self-centered concern not only harms others but also harms ourselves. We are dependent beings: we exist in dependence on a multiplicity of other factors, most of which we have due to the efforts of others. The exaggerated sense of self-sufficiency is illusory, and it can and should be replaced by the wise acceptance of mutual interdependence.

Love and compassion are based on an understanding of interdependence. Bodhisattvas, who aspire for full awakening, meditate on interdependence to increase their understanding of the nature of reality as well as their altruism. In this way, they cultivate vibrant self-confidence that they can make a positive contribution to the welfare of others. The more genuine self-confidence we have, the less fear and anger will torment our minds. Especially when we pass through difficulties, compassion and altruism will sustain us.

In a world where the actions of one individual can have far-reaching effects on many people, self-centeredness and ignorance can lead to great damage, while altruism spreads great good. When we cultivate care and concern for others coupled with wisdom that can clearly analyze situations, we are more peaceful inside, and our actions to benefit others are more effective. If we human beings adhere to the self-preoccupied philosophy of survival of the fittest, it may result in the survival of no one. Having the attitude of survival of the most cooperative brings more individual well-being as well as the survival of our species.

## REFLECTION

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1. Imagine understanding the perspective of someone who has harmed or threatened you or whom you consider an enemy.
  2. Imagine having compassion—not pity—for the mental and physical difficulties that person has undergone and will undergo in life.
  3. Look at the situation with the eyes of wanting that person to be free from their suffering and to have happiness. After all, if they were happy, they wouldn't be doing the things you find distressful.
  4. Imagine speaking to that person with kindness, clarity, and balance.
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## 4 | The Spread of the Buddhadharmā and Buddhist Canons

NOT ALL PEOPLE THINK ALIKE. They have different needs, interests, and dispositions in almost every area of their lives, including religion. In this light, the Buddha, a skillful teacher, gave multiple teachings to correspond to the variety of sentient beings. As the Buddhadharmā spread across the Indian subcontinent and into other lands, people had access to different sūtras and found certain teachings more suitable for their minds than teachings in other sūtras.

In this way, multiple Buddhist traditions came about. The development of these traditions and their presentation of the teachings were also influenced by the economic and political situations in each land, as well as the climate, social structure, language, and culture of each place. While all Buddhist teachings share the four truths, their selection of texts, imagery, rituals, textual interpretations, points of emphasis, and religious institutions were influenced by the society in which they were produced.

Knowing the history of the Buddhadharmā is important to avoid absorbing sectarian biases that have been passed down for centuries. It also aids us in understanding why Buddhism developed the way it did in different places. This, in turn, stimulates us to discern the actual Buddhadharmā from cultural overlays, so that we can practice the true Dharma without confusing it with cultural traditions.

Learning about the history of Buddhism helps us to see Buddhism as a living tradition that influences various societies and is influenced by them. We come to differentiate the Three Jewels that are perfect objects of refuge from religious institutions established by limited human beings. While the

Dharma Jewel goes beyond space and time, Buddhist institutions are not refuge objects, although they do their best to serve the Dharma.

All Buddhist traditions have their own accounts of Buddhism's history, the place of their own tradition within that, and the authenticity of their own and others' scriptures. These are generally based on oral tradition that was written down in later centuries. Modern academics, employing tools and methods of historical research that are not used in the traditional presentations of Buddhist history, also have their views. While traditional accounts do not change with time, the views of academics change as new discoveries are made.

Speaking of the various Buddhist traditions and teachings can only be done in a general way. As we know, people don't always fit into neat categories with well-defined borders. As in *Buddhism: One Teacher, Many Traditions*, we will speak of two principal Buddhist traditions according to the language they came to be written in—the Pāli and Sanskrit traditions. The Buddha himself taught in some form of Prakrit, a group of languages spoken in India by the common people of his time. After his parinirvāṇa, the discourses were collated into groups and passed on orally for several centuries. The earliest written texts we have date from around the first century BCE, and both Pāli and Sanskrit emerged as primary languages for transmitting the words of the Buddha. The Sanskrit tradition as we describe it here also includes texts in ancient Central Asian languages such as Gāndhārī.

But before exploring the historical development of these traditions, it is helpful to be acquainted with the spiritual vehicles that they teach.

### *Vehicles and Paths*

*Vehicle* and *path* are synonyms. While these terms are frequently used to refer to a progressive set of spiritual practices, they technically refer to exalted “knowers”—wisdom consciousnesses—that are conjoined with the uncontrived determination to be free from saṃsāra. When our Teacher, Śākyamuni Buddha, lived in India, he turned the Dharma wheel (that is, he taught the Dharma) by giving teachings for beings of the three vehicles: the Śrāvaka, Solitary Realizer (Pratyekabuddha), and Bodhisattva vehicles. These are called *vehicles* (*yāna*) because they convey their respective practitioners to distinct spiritual attainments.

According to the Sanskrit tradition, the three vehicles are differentiated in terms of the motivation to attain a specific goal, their principal meditation object, and the accumulation of merit and length of time necessary to attain their goals. Each vehicle leads to its own awakening. Both the Pāli and Sanskrit traditions contain teachings on all three vehicles, although the Pāli tradition places more emphasis on the Śrāvaka Vehicle and the Sanskrit tradition on the Bodhisattva Vehicle.

Sometimes the Śrāvaka and Solitary Realizer vehicles are subsumed under the name Fundamental Vehicle. While both the Pāli and Sanskrit traditions explain the Bodhisattva Vehicle, in the Sanskrit tradition it is called the Universal Vehicle and relies on sūtras that were widely disseminated later.

The Bodhisattva Vehicle is further divided into two according to method: the Perfection Vehicle and the Tantric Vehicle. These are both practiced on the basis of the Fundamental Vehicle, and the Tantric Vehicle is also practiced on the basis of the Perfection Vehicle. The Tantric Vehicle can also be divided in different ways. One way is described in an explanatory tantra, the *Vajra Tent Tantra* (*Vajrapañjara Tantra*), which speaks of four tantric classes: action, performance, yoga, and highest yoga tantra.

## BUDDHIST TRADITIONS

### *Pāli Tradition*

- Śrāvaka Vehicle (P. Sāvakayāna)
- Solitary Realizer Vehicle (P. Paccekabuddhayāna)
- Bodhisattva Vehicle (P. Bodhisattayāna)

### *Sanskrit Tradition*

- Śrāvaka Vehicle (Śrāvakayāna)
- Solitary Realizer Vehicle (Pratyekabuddhayāna)
- Bodhisattva Vehicle (Bodhisattvayāna) or Universal Vehicle (Mahāyāna)
  - Perfection Vehicle (Pāramitāyāna)
  - Tantric Vehicle (Tantrayāna, Vajrayāna, Mantrayāna)

Nowadays the vehicles of the śrāvakas and bodhisattvas are prominent. In their last lives, solitary realizers appear in a time and place where no Buddha has turned the Dharma wheel. Since this is the case, when we speak

of śrāvakas it will include solitary realizers, unless there is a specific reason to delineate their practice separately. While the teachings on the Bodhisattva Vehicle in the Pāli and Sanskrit traditions overlap in several ways, the name “Mahāyāna” refers to the bodhisattva teachings and scriptures in the Sanskrit tradition.

### *The Buddha’s Life*

Buddhism in our world began with Śākyamuni Buddha, who in the view common to all Buddhists, was born Siddhārtha Gautama, a prince from the Śākya clan, most likely in the fifth century BCE near what is today the India-Nepal border.<sup>8</sup> His kind heart and great intelligence were evident from childhood. Despite a sheltered life in the palace, he ventured into the town, where for the first time he saw a sick person, an old person, and a corpse. This prompted him to reflect on the suffering living beings experience, and after seeing a wandering mendicant, he aspired to be free from the cycle of constantly recurring problems called saṃsāra. Disillusioned with the pleasures of palace life and seeking liberation, at the age of twenty-nine he left his family and royal position, shed his elegant clothing, and adopted the lifestyle of a wandering mendicant.

He studied and mastered the meditation techniques of the great teachers of his time, but he saw that they did not bring freedom from cyclic existence. For six years he practiced severe asceticism, but realizing that torturing the body doesn’t tame the mind, he relinquished this for the middle path of keeping the body healthy without indulging in sensual pleasure.

Sitting under the bodhi tree in what is present-day Bodhgaya, India, he determined to arise only after attaining full awakening. On the full moon of the fourth lunar month—the Buddhist holiday of Vesak—he completed the process of cleansing his mind of all obscurations and developing all good qualities and became a buddha, a fully awakened one. Thirty-five years old at that time, he spent the next forty-five years teaching what he had discovered through his own experience to whomever came to hear.

The Buddha taught men and women of all ages, races, and social classes—royalty, beggars, merchants, officials, thieves, farmers, musicians, and prostitutes. Many of his students chose to relinquish the householder’s life and adopt the monastic life, and thus the saṅgha community of ordained beings was born. As his followers attained realizations and became skilled in teach-



ing the Dharma, he asked them to share with others what they had realized “for the welfare of the multitude, for the happiness of the multitude, out of compassion for the world; for the benefit, welfare, and happiness of gods and humans” (AN 1.170). Thus the Buddha’s teachings spread throughout the Indian subcontinent, and in subsequent centuries to present-day Sri Lanka, Southeast Asia, Indonesia, China, Korea, Japan, Central Asia, Tibet, Mongolia, Pakistan, and Afghanistan. In recent years, Dharma centers have opened in locations all around the world.

Personally speaking, I feel a deep connection to Śākyamuni Buddha as well as profound gratitude for his teachings and the example of how he lived his life—abiding in the pure ethical conduct of a monastic and sharing the teachings impartially. The Buddha had insights into the workings of the mind that were previously unknown on the Earth. He taught that our experiences of suffering and happiness are intricately related to our minds and emotions. Suffering is not thrust upon us by other people; it is a product of our ignorant views and beliefs. Happiness is not a gift from the gods; it is a result of our cultivation of wisdom and compassion.

The Buddha’s life is a teaching in itself: he questioned the meaning of worldly life and reached the decision to practice the Dharma while facing pressure from his family and society to inherit the kingship. Despite the hardships he encountered, he practiced diligently and did not give up until he had attained full awakening. He dealt compassionately with the people who berated him or criticized his teachings. Sometimes his followers were uncooperative and belligerent, but he did not give up on them, although he sometimes had to address them sternly. The sūtras show that he engaged with many different kinds of people with great skill and compassion, and he was completely uninterested in fame or praise. Reflecting on the kindness of the Buddha for providing teachings that suit the various dispositions and interests of the variety of sentient beings, I feel deep reverence. I hope that you, too, by learning and practicing the Buddha’s teachings, will develop this sense of personal connection with our Teacher, the Buddha.

### *Early Buddhist Schools*

The historical evolution of Buddhism is a fluid and dynamic process that brought forth various schools, traditions, and tenet systems. We may speak of one school or another as if they were distinct entities with clear

boundaries. However, Buddhism “on the ground” was not so clear. We see this even today with Theravāda monastics who take the bodhisattva precepts, practitioners of Tibetan Buddhism who are ordained in the Dharmaguptaka vinaya lineage followed in Taiwan, Chinese monastics practicing insight meditation as taught in the Pāli tradition, and so on.

It is important to keep in mind when discussing Buddhist history that we can't say for sure what happened in the past. In our present lives, our memory of a specific event differs from that of the person standing next to us. History appears differently according to our perspective; each person selects certain details to focus on, and the interpretation of those details varies from person to person. Despite the subjectivity of history, it is nevertheless useful to have a general knowledge of the historical background of the Dharma we study.

After the Buddha's passing (*parinirvāṇa*), the arhat Mahākāśyapa gathered five hundred arhats together at Rājagṛha to recite the Buddha's discourses at what came to be called the first council. In the early centuries, these sūtras were passed down orally principally by *bhāṇakas*,<sup>9</sup> monastics whose duty it was to memorize and recite the scriptures. Each group of bhāṇakas was assigned a group of scriptures, and for many centuries every successive generation of bhāṇakas memorized the texts and taught them to others. Although the Buddha did not repeat verbatim every talk he gave on a particular topic, passages on certain important themes were standardized for ease in memorization. Thus there are stock phrases and passages—and some almost identical sūtras—in the *nikāyas* of the Pāli canon and in the *āgamas* of the Chinese canon. A famine in the first century BCE threatened the continued existence of the scriptures in present-day Sri Lanka, propelling the monks to preserve them in written form. During this time, other groups of bhāṇakas continued to orally disseminate the Buddha's discourses in many other parts of India.

In the centuries following the second council in 383 BCE,<sup>10</sup> a variety of different Buddhist sects appeared—it is said eighteen in all. There is more than one list of the eighteen, and each list classifies the major schools and their branches differently, but in any case, there was clearly a great profusion of Buddhist lineages in the Indian subcontinent and nearby areas as well. Many factors influenced the development of these different śrāvaka

schools—location, climate, language, culture, and the availability of sūtras and teachings, to mention a few. Since the sūtras were passed down orally and the groups were separated by great distances, each school developed slightly different versions of the Tripiṭaka—the three baskets of Vinaya, Sūtra, and Abhidharma texts—although the majority of the material was shared in common.

Aside from some basic information, little is known about many of these eighteen-plus schools. While they surely debated each other, Buddhist sects and schools by and large maintained friendly relations. The names of some of these eighteen schools are today preserved in the three extant lineages of monastic precepts: the Theravāda (descended from the Sthavira sect and Mahāvihāra Monastery), the Mūlasarvāstivāda (a branch descended from the Sarvāstivāda),<sup>11</sup> and the Dharmaguptaka. In ancient times, the Theravāda flourished in South and Southeast Asia, the Sarvāstivāda was located primarily in northern India and Kashmir, and the Dharmaguptaka was prominent in Gandhāra and Central Asia, from where it was transmitted to China.

Indian and Sri Lankan sages began composing commentaries, unpacking the meaning of what the Buddha said in the suttas. Thus began a commentarial tradition. Some of the differences among the eighteen schools were doctrinal; others were due to people living in different climates and cultures. While the Theravāda, as recorded in ancient Sri Lankan manuscripts, sees the separation into various schools as schisms within the Buddhist community, other Buddhist traditions do not.

Academic scholars previously accepted the material in the Pāli canon as older than that of the schools in northern India. However, they are now revising their view due to recent discoveries of heretofore unknown scriptures in Afghanistan, Pakistan, and China. Fragments of scriptures of some of the early schools have been found and are now being studied by scholars such as Richard Salomon and Collette Cox in the Early Buddhist Manuscripts Project at the University of Washington. Some of these scriptures go back to the first and second centuries CE. Considering the fragile materials used for writing in those days, it is astounding that these manuscripts have survived. Other scholars, such as Bhikkhu K. L. Dhammajoti at the University of Hong Kong, have determined that there are Sarvāstivāda texts

that date within two or three centuries of the Buddha's life. The results of continuing research will give us a clearer idea of the early schools and their scriptures.

Looking back on their forebears, Buddhists in northern India in the medieval period said there were four main śrāvaka schools that subsumed all eighteen: (1) the Sarvāstivāda school, which used Sanskrit, (2) the Mahāsāṃghika, which used a Prakrit dialect, (3) the Saṃmitīya, which used Apabhraṃśa, another Prakrit dialect, and (4) the Sthavira, which used Pāṭī. <sup>12</sup> Interestingly, most of the early scriptures do not self-identify as being from one or another of the eighteen schools, so modern scholars must make intelligent guesses about which school newly found manuscripts are from.

We don't know exactly how long each of the ancient schools existed and why they ceased. The schools in some areas—such as present-day Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Central Asian republics—became extinct first. They may have died out due to economic, political, and social changes, invasions, or natural disasters in their locales. The remnants of some schools may have merged with others. Because Buddhism was heavily concentrated in monasteries and not in village homes, once the monasteries were destroyed in India during the Turkic invasions in the thirteenth century, Buddhism all but vanished in India.

While some Indian masters such as Bhāvaviveka, and most Tibetans, saw the eighteen schools as branches of the Vaibhāṣika philosophical system, <sup>13</sup> there is little agreement about this elsewhere. The Vaibhāṣika school is unknown in South and Southeast Asia, and the Theravāda does not consider itself a branch of Vaibhāṣika.

### *Early Buddhism in Sri Lanka*

Buddhism was transmitted to Sri Lanka by the son and daughter of the Indian king Aśoka in the third century BCE. Some of the Indian commentaries came, too; they were preserved and augmented in the old Sinhala language by Sinhalese monks. In the fifth century CE, the Indian monk Buddhaghosa traveled to Sri Lanka, where he compiled and edited the contents of these ancient commentaries when writing his own numerous commentaries in Pāli. While Buddhaghosa's works have been widely stud-

ied up to the present, the ancient sages' scriptures in Sinhala unfortunately no longer exist. Due to Buddhaghosa's translation work, Pāli became the scriptural language of all Theravāda Buddhists.

Buddhism flourished in Sri Lanka, and three major sects—the Mahāvihāra, Abhayagiri, and Jetavana—evolved, each with its own monastery. Chinese pilgrims recorded that Abhayagiri, the largest and wealthiest monastery, followed both the early scriptures and the Mahāyāna scriptures; some of the Mahāyāna sūtras in the Chinese Tripiṭaka were obtained in Sri Lanka. There were also many bodhisattva statues and Mahāyāna art on the island, and there is evidence that some tantric teachings were present there as well.

When a dispute arose between the Abhayagiri and Jetavana monasteries—both of which had some Mahāyāna elements—and the Mahāvihāra, who said the Mahāyāna sūtras were inauthentic, King Mahāsena (271–301) supported Abhayagiri and Jetavana. After he died, however, the Mahāvihāra sect gained royal support. As the collection of written scriptures grew, the Mahāvihāra gained more legitimacy as the holder of “pure” Buddhism, free from the heterodox ideas and scriptures found in the Abhayagiri and Jetavana.

The *Dīpavaṃsa* (*Island Chronicle*) and *Mahāvāṃsa* (*Great Chronicle*) presented Buddhist history according to the narrative of the Mahāvihāra. The *Dīpavaṃsa* was probably authored by Mahāvihāra monks in the third or fourth century and the *Mahāvāṃsa* in the second half of the fifth century. Their authors claimed to be the true Theravādins, the spiritual descendants of arhats of the first council. The historical chronicles also spoke of the lineage of Sri Lankan kings and events occurring during their reigns, mythology, and legend. They portrayed Sri Lanka as the island where the Buddha prophesized that his teachings would be purely preserved, thus encouraging a nationalist spirit. Claiming that other monasteries followed sūtras that were not from the original transmission of sūtras to Sri Lanka, and thus were not the Buddha's word, the Mahāvihārans emphasized that they held the one true canon with the complete *Buddhavacana* (Buddha's word), free from the degenerations of the Mahāyāna present in the Abhayagiri and Jetavana monasteries.

The Dharma developed in Sri Lanka over several centuries with the appearance of written sūtras and commentaries, the formation of a closed

canon of scriptures, the establishment of authoritative commentaries, and the creation of official histories in the two chronicles. While helping to preserve the Dharma in Sri Lanka, these factors also served to legitimize and reinforce the authority of the Mahāvihāra sect as the one that preserved the true Dharma with authentic scriptures.<sup>14</sup>

While the Mahāvihāra gained momentum, it did not become dominant until the tenth century. By the twelfth century, King Parakkamabāhu “unified” all the monks by suppressing the Abhayagiri and Jetavana monasteries and their texts and called for their monks to either disrobe or join the Mahāvihāra.

It is not clear what the term Theravāda referred to historically or when it came into common use. While it is often presented nowadays as referring to “original Buddhism,” in fact the term Theravāda is rarely found in Pāli literature, and for the first millennium of the Buddha’s dispensation it was used infrequently in inscriptions, historical chronicles, or other ancient texts in Southeast Asia. Interestingly, it seems the term Theravāda first appeared in Nāgārjunakoṇḍa, in southeastern India, where proto-Mahāyāna views were promulgated. Chinese pilgrims called the Sri Lankan monks living there Mahāyāna Theravādins.<sup>15</sup> The term Theravāda does not seem to have indicated a school in India prior to Buddhism having gone to Sri Lanka but a school originating in Sri Lanka.

Historically, Theravāda has not been a monolithic religious or institutional entity in South and Southeast Asia. While people in that area initially received their monastic ordinations from Sri Lanka, the saṅghas that grew up in these locales functioned independently. When the ordination lineage was extinguished in Sri Lanka during the Chola invasion in the early eleventh century, Sri Lankan kings requested monks from Burma to come and restore it. This began a trend in South and Southeast Asia that continues to this day. Whenever a group of monastics is deemed corrupt, the king invites monastics from another Theravāda country who practice well to come and give the ordination again. Still, the Sri Lankan ordination lineage commands great respect, and monks from other countries traveled to Sri Lanka to ordain in later centuries.

In recent years academics have revised their idea that the Theravāda tradition contains the oldest and most authentic scriptures of the eighteen schools. Some say Theravāda is a modern term and a recent school

derived from the Sthaviras but not identical to it. Others say Theravāda is descendant from the Mahāvihāra<sup>16</sup> or was derived from the Indian school, Vibhajyavāda.

Much of the Pāli literature consists of the commentaries and subcommentaries that were compiled or written beginning in the fifth century. The Pāli scriptures were transmitted in different scripts according to the country; the words were pronounced and recited differently, and this is true even today. Different lineages and *nikāyas* (traditions) developed in each country. The monks also were not a unified whole: those who dwelled in the cities and in the forests lived very differently. Nevertheless, most Buddhists in South and Southeast Asia saw themselves as related in many ways, even though a unifying and common identity as Theravādins may not have developed until the twentieth century. For example, previously in Thailand the Buddhism in Sri Lanka was called *Sinhala-śāsana*, the doctrine in Sinhala. Skilling says, “The centering of ‘Theravāda’ in the Pāli canon, above all in the ‘four main *nikāyas*,’ is a child of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. It has grown up to become what we might call a ‘new Theravāda,’ largely Anglophonic but increasingly international in influence and outreach.”<sup>17</sup>

Some scholars<sup>18</sup> state that the standard account of Sri Lankan Buddhist history was made not by Sri Lankans but by British scholars of the early to mid-nineteenth century who misread the historical chronicles and lacked the knowledge of Buddhist and Sri Lankan history that is now available. Reading the commentaries and chronicles, these scholars assumed that they were objective narratives of the facts, not understanding that Mahāvihāran accounts of Buddhist history were disputed by their contemporaries in the Abhayagiri and Jetavana monasteries.

While Sinhalese historical documents have portrayed the Pāli canon as equivalent to early Buddhism and Theravāda Buddhism as the unique upholder of early Buddhism, scholars now question this.<sup>19</sup> The Pāli canon is usually presented by Theravāda Buddhists as a closed collection of texts that present the Buddha’s own words. However, the words *pāli*, *tripiṭaka*, and *buddhavacana* did not originally refer to a closed canon.

Apart from some specific texts mentioned in Aśoka’s inscriptions, we don’t have a clear idea of what texts were recited—and thus affirmed as existing by that group of monastic reciters—during various councils and

communal recitations. The Pāli canon wasn't closed and fixed until the fifth century CE, so for about a millennium after the Buddha, the collection of scriptures was open. While the bhāṅakas had strict standards for what they considered to be the Buddha's teachings, there was some fluidity in the contents of this collection if for no other reason than differences in geographical locale.

In short, some academic scholars now question three “facts” presented in the Mahāvihāra literature: the Theravāda originated at the first council, Sri Lankan Theravāda is and has always been a descendant of only this early Buddhism, and the Mahāvihāra was the original and true upholder of these teachings.<sup>20</sup> Whatever the historical truth may be, the Theravāda is a noble Buddhist tradition that has inspired faith in millions of people, led to their individual betterment and the improvement of society, and produced many highly realized holy beings.

### *Growth of the Mahāyāna*

Mahāyāna sūtras, which emphasized the bodhisattva path, began to appear publicly in India in the first century BCE. Some were transmitted to Central Asia—Buddhism began to spread to Central Asia in the third century BCE and later flourished there for many centuries—and from there to China where they were translated into Chinese by the second half of the second century CE. The Āgamas preserved in the Chinese canon are very early sūtras that are remarkably similar to those in the Pāli Nikāyas. With newly discovered Vinaya texts and other scriptures that date from early on, the Pāli canon is no longer seen as the only literature of early Buddhism, although it is the only canon preserved in an Indic language.

Academic scholars, as well as practitioners of the Pāli tradition, have questioned the authenticity of the Mahāyāna sūtras, asserting that they were not spoken by the Buddha but were written later over a span of several centuries. One of the chief reasons for this claim is that the Pāli suttas were more publicly known and widespread in the early centuries than the Mahāyāna sūtras. The discovery in Pakistan and Afghanistan over the last few decades of many Buddhist manuscripts that date from the end of the first century BCE has changed academic scholars' view of the Mahāyāna. The newly found manuscripts written in Gāndhārī Prakrit are older than any



previously discovered. Many of them are from the Dharmaguptaka school, and some are Mahāyāna sūtras.<sup>21</sup> Although some of these texts are called “early Mahāyāna,” their ideas and presentation of the bodhisattva path are mature. With the revision in the dates of the Buddha’s life to later than previously thought and the discovery of older Mahāyāna texts, modern scholars are reconsidering their ideas concerning the Mahāyāna sūtras.

When previously unknown bodhisattva sūtras first appeared publicly and for several centuries afterward, Mahāyāna was not identified as a separate tradition within Buddhism. Initially the term Mahāyāna referred to the goal of the path—buddhahood—rather than the attainment of arhatship that was prominent in the early sūtras. As time went on, Mahāyāna began to refer to a body of literature, and in the fourth century Asaṅga<sup>22</sup> used it to indicate scriptures explaining the path of a bodhisattva. By the sixth century, people were calling themselves Mahāyānists, indicating that they saw themselves as a distinct Buddhist group. However, due to the great number of Mahāyāna scriptures and the broad distance over which they spread, it seems that their followers did not become a single unified group in India, nor was any Mahāyāna canon ever compiled in India to our knowledge.

Mahāyāna was not a religion and did not have distinct institutions. It had no specific geographical location where its hierarchy was predominant. Monastics following the Śrāvaka Vehicle and Bodhisattva Vehicle lived together and probably recited the *prātimokṣa*, the monastic precepts, together. In the fifth to twelfth centuries, the great Buddhist universities such as Nālandā, Vikramaśīla, and Odantapurī, where Buddhism flourished, were inhabited by monastics and lay practitioners from many different branches, sects, and schools of Buddhism. They studied and debated the Buddha’s teachings, learning from each other.

Mahāyāna scriptures contain many philosophical positions and practices; it has never been a monolithic doctrine, although those who self-identify as Mahāyānist have shared beliefs, such as the bodhisattva path and practices. The early Mahāyāna scriptures were not limited to one language, appearing in Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit, Buddhist Sanskrit, classical Sanskrit, and Gāndhārī. While many Mahāyāna scriptures were in Sanskrit, not all Sanskrit scriptures are Mahāyāna; some teach the Śrāvaka Vehicle.

Mahāyāna did not dismiss the Śrāvaka Vehicle texts or teachings; in fact, it taught that the bodhisattva practice is based on a thorough understanding

of the four truths of the āryas, the thirty-seven aids to awakening, the three higher trainings, the four immeasurables, serenity, and insight. Many ideas are held in common between the Śrāvaka Vehicle and the Mahāyāna, and all Buddhists, no matter what tradition they belong to, take refuge in the Three Jewels.

While most Mahāyāna sūtras publicly appeared after the Pāli suttas, some appeared before some scriptures in the Pāli canon. The Pāli canon contains texts from many time periods, ranging from the Buddha's time until it became a closed canon ten centuries later. The commentaries in the Pāli canon were written later than some Mahāyāna treatises and commentaries, such as those by Nāgārjuna, Vasubandhu, and Buddhapālita. The earliest scriptures recently discovered in Pakistan and Afghanistan were from both the Śrāvaka Vehicle and the Mahāyāna. In short, many Buddhist schools developed over a long period of time. They had both overlapping and distinct tenets and scriptures. Buddhadharmā was, and still is, a living, dynamic tradition.

Mahāyāna is not an ordination order or lineage. There is no such thing as “Mahāyāna Vinaya” or a “Mahāyāna monastic ordination.” From early times until the present, Mahāyāna practitioners have ordained in the Vinaya traditions of the eighteen schools: Aśaṅga in the Sarvāstivādin, Vimuktisena in the Saṃmitīya, Atiśa in the Mahāsāṃghika, and so forth. The Chinese pilgrims spoke of some of the monasteries of their time as Mahāyāna-Sthavira. While we aren't sure about the meaning of that term, it could refer to monastics who ordained in the Sthavira Vinaya—the lineage of today's Theravāda—and practiced Mahāyāna. Mahāyāna monastics live in monasteries, follow the ethical conduct prescribed in the Vinaya, and conduct monastic rites in accordance with the Vinaya. Practicing the Bodhisattva Vehicle does not make one ethically lax; in fact, in addition to the various sets of prātimokṣa precepts such as the five lay precepts and monastic precepts, Mahāyāna practitioners also take bodhisattva precepts.

Calling Theravāda “mainstream Buddhism” is incorrect and confusing. In each location and at each time period, one or another school may be more well established. There were at least eighteen schools that all saw themselves as mainstream Buddhism in their own locales. Mahāyāna was well received and flourished all over India and Central Asia, and spread to

East Asia, Sri Lanka, Southeast Asia, and Indonesia. Contrary to being a minority movement, it was mainstream.

The Mahāyāna and Śrāvaka Vehicle both include rituals, chanting, mantras, and *dhāraṇīs*.<sup>23</sup> Both show reverence in the presence of stūpas, statues, paintings, and relics. While many Mahāyāna sūtras emphasize the importance of copying those sūtras, practitioners of both vehicles engaged in the activity of copying sūtras.

In India and sometimes in Sri Lanka prior to the twelfth century, the Śrāvaka Vehicle and Mahāyāna flourished together. Practitioners of both vehicles often lived in the same monastery, received monastic ordination in the same lineage, and performed the Vinaya rituals together. They shared many common texts and tenets and debated their unique ones. Both developed commentarial traditions, although the interpretations sometimes differed. The two vehicles had some differences as well, in areas such as the principal sūtras they studied, the intention for practice, the view of the ultimate nature, the path, and the result. Most of the Śrāvaka Vehicle lineages in India disappeared over time due to a variety of conditions such as the political rise of the brahmins, changes in governmental structure, the popularity of Hinduism, and the monastics' lack of involvement in the lives of the lay people. Later on, many of these same factors also affected Mahāyāna groups. While Buddhism largely disappeared in India by the early thirteenth century, both the Sanskrit and Pāli traditions have spread widely throughout Asia and beyond.

### *The Development of Tantra*

The teachings of Buddhist Tantrayāna were practiced and passed down in a circumspect and private way until the sixth century, when they became more widespread. By the ninth century, tantric studies were recognized as a scholarly discipline. At Nālandā Monastic University, the Prajñāpāramitā teachings were conjoined with tantric practice, indicating that tantra has a firm basis in the Perfection Vehicle and is not a separate teaching unrelated to other teachings the Buddha gave.

Buddhist tantra flourished in northern India and spread to Sri Lanka, Southeast Asia, and Indonesia, where many tantric artifacts have been

found. It later faded in these areas as Sri Lankan and Thai kings made Therāvāda the dominant tradition and Muslims occupied and converted much of the Malay Peninsula and Indonesia.

Tantra later spread to China and Tibet, and Kukai introduced it in the ninth century into Japan, where it became known as the Shingon school. Since tantra's public dissemination coincided with the time that many Buddhist scriptures were being brought to Tibet, tantra became very popular there. However, Buddhism was already well established in China at that time, so the Chinese tantric school did not become widespread.

Hinduism and Jainism also have tantric adepts, although their tantric systems differ considerably from Buddhist tantra, which is rooted in the four truths, refuge in the Three Jewels, renunciation of saṃsarā, bodhicitta, and the wisdom realizing emptiness.

Unfortunately, misconceptions about tantra exist due to lack of proper information. These misunderstandings will be clarified in a future volume on tantra in this series.

### *Buddhist Canons*

Considering the vast array of Buddhist sūtras and the complexity of establishing their authenticity, we can understand the reasons to form canons and the difficulties involved in doing so. At present three Buddhist canons are extant: Pāli, Chinese, and Tibetan. Each of these has been translated into other languages or written in various scripts throughout the centuries. For example, the Tibetan canon has been translated into Mongolian,<sup>24</sup> the Pāli canon into English, and the Chinese into Japanese and Vietnamese. Each of the canons is divided into three “baskets” (*piṭaka*), or categories of teachings, which are said to correspond to the three higher trainings. The Vinaya Basket deals chiefly with monastic discipline (*śīla*), the Sūtra Basket emphasizes meditative concentration (*samādhi*), and the Abhidharma Basket is concerned with wisdom (*prajñā*).

#### THE PĀLI CANON

The Pāli canon was codified first, but as we saw above, it was not a closed canon until the fifth century. Its Vinaya Piṭaka has three books that contain not only the monastic code but also stories of the Buddha's disciples.

These are (1) the *Suttavibhaṅga*, which contains the pāṭimokkha precepts, (2) the *Khandhaka*, which consists of two parts, the Mahāvagga and Cūlavagga, and (3) the *Parivāra*, which is an appendix. The Sutta Piṭaka has five Nikāyas, or collections of suttas, described below, and the Abhidhamma Piṭaka consists of seven scholastic works that are unique to the Pāli tradition. The Sutta Piṭaka's five collections are:

1. Dīgha Nikāya (Long Discourses) with thirty-four of the most extensive suttas
2. Majjhima Nikāya (Middle-Length Discourses) with 152 diverse suttas of moderate length
3. Saṃyutta Nikāya (Connected Discourses) with fifty-six thematically connected sections of brief suttas
4. Aṅguttara Nikāya (Numerical Discourses) with eleven sections, each collecting suttas with items of the same number
5. Khuddaka Nikāya (Collection of Little Texts), fifteen distinct works. In addition to containing sutta collections like the *Suttanipāta*, the Khuddaka Nikāya also includes the famous collected sayings such as the *Dhammapada* and the *Udāna*, collections of stories of the Buddha's previous lives such as the *Jātaka* tales, verses (*gāthā*) of early monks and nuns, early commentarial works, and histories of previous buddhas like the *Buddhavaṃsa*.<sup>25</sup>

#### THE CHINESE CANON

Buddhism came to China in the first century CE, about seven centuries before it entered Tibet. It entered first from Central Asia via the Silk Road and later by sea from India and Sri Lanka. As noted above, Buddhist texts began to be translated into Chinese by the second century. Many of the early translations employed Taoist terminology, leading to some misunderstanding of Buddhist thought. By the fifth century, translation terms were more standardized, especially with the literary translations of Kumārajīva. The early fifth century also marked the translation of many more Vinaya texts, which furthered the development of the saṅgha.

In 983 the first Chinese canon was published, with other renditions following. Currently, the *Taisho Shinsbu Daizokyo*, published in Tokyo in the 1920s, is the canon commonly used in China, Taiwan, Korea, Japan, and

parts of Vietnam. It consists of four sections: the first three—sūtras, vinaya, and śāstras (treatises)—were translated from Sanskrit and Central Asian languages into Chinese. The fourth, miscellaneous texts, were originally written in Chinese.

The Chinese canon is very inclusive and extensive, containing a vast array of scriptures, including the Āgamas, which correspond to the first four of the five Nikāyas of the Pāli canon. The Āgamas were translated not from Pāli but from Sanskrit sūtras, mainly from the Sarvāstivāda school, although some came from other Indian Buddhist schools. The Chinese canon contains many Fundamental Vehicle sūtras that were popular during this early period and are not found in the Tibetan canon. It also contains a plethora of Mahāyāna sūtras and Indian commentaries as well as some tantras. Many of these are found in the Tibetan canon as well. Initially, most of the Indian sūtras were translated into Mandarin from Gāndhārī, until the fifth and sixth century, when more Sanskrit texts arrived in China. The monk Xuanzang famously traveled to India and Nālandā Monastery by way of Gandhāra in the seventh century and returned home seventeen years later with hundreds of texts, especially from the Yogācāra school. His translations from Sanskrit are now part of the Chinese canon as well.

While the majority of translation into Mandarin occurred in these earlier centuries, there continued to be an active interest in and translation of valuable Buddhist texts into the Song (960–1279) and Ming (1368–1644) dynasties. In the early twentieth century, translations were made of Buddhist scriptures from other countries, including Tibet.

### THE TIBETAN CANON

Tibetans had been collecting Buddhist scriptures from the inception of Buddhism in Tibet in the seventh century, and the Tibetan canon as we know it today took shape in the early fourteenth century through the editorial efforts of Buton Rinpoche (1290–1364) and other scholars. The first full rendition was printed in Beijing in 1411. Later editions were printed in Tibet itself, notably in Narthang in 1731–32 and in Derge in 1733. Although today there are multiple versions of the canon, the contents over all are very similar.

The Tibetan Buddhist canon is composed of the Kangyur—108 volumes of the Buddha’s word—and the Tengyur—225 volumes of Indian commen-

taries. The canon of the Nyingma tradition differs somewhat from that of the other Tibetan traditions in that it contains tantras from the first transmission of Buddhism into Tibet. The Tibetan system for translation customarily involved an Indian translator and a Tibetan translator working in tandem, which greatly improved the quality of the translations. A number of modern scholars working on these texts have observed that translations from Indian sources into Tibetan are, in general, very accurate.

About twenty-four sūtras in the Tibetan canon correspond to the suttas of the Pāli Nikāyas, and a few Śrāvaka Vehicle sūtras absent in the Pāli and Chinese canons are found in the Tibetan canon. About one hundred sūtras in the Tibetan canon do not have the word Mahāyāna in their titles and are probably Śrāvaka Vehicle sūtras, principally of the Sarvāstivāda school.

About ten or twenty sūtras in the Tibetan canon were translated from Chinese.<sup>26</sup> Among these are the *Sūtra of the Golden Light* (*Suvarṇaprabhā-sottama Sūtra*), the *Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra*, and the *Descent into Lanka Sūtra* (*Lankāvatāra Sūtra*), and several sūtras from the Heap of Jewels (Ratnakūṭa) collection, all of which are seminal Mahāyāna sūtras. Some commentaries in the Tibetan canon—notably Kuiji’s commentary on the *Lotus Sūtra* and Wonchuk’s commentary on the *Sūtra Unraveling the Thought* (*Samdhinirmocana Sūtra*)—were also translated from Chinese.

More Prajñāpāramitā sūtras were translated into Chinese than into Tibetan, and many early sūtras in the Pāli canon are not found in Tibetan. To enrich the understanding of Tibetan practitioners, it is important to translate these scriptures into Tibetan.

Texts on the stages of the path authored by Tibetan masters contain much material that is also found in the Pāli suttas and Chinese Āgamas. Considering that not a huge number of these early sūtras were translated into Tibetan, how did this material find its way into treatises authored by Tibetans? Vasubandhu’s *Principles of Exegesis* (*Vyākhyāyukti*), his autocommentary on the *Treasury of Knowledge* (*Abhidharmakośabhāṣya*), and his *One Hundred Extracts from the Sūtras on Principles of Exegesis* (*Vyākhyāyuktisūtrakhaṇḍaśata*) contain quotations from over one hundred early sūtras from different schools, including the Sthavira and Sarvāstivāda. In addition, Śamathadeva’s commentary on the *Treasury of Abhidharma* contains many passages from a variety of early sūtras.<sup>27</sup> One of the biggest sources of sūtra quotations in the stages of the path literature is Śāntideva’s *Compendium*

of *Training* (*Śikṣāsamuccaya*). The *Compendium of Sūtras* (*Sūtrasamuccaya*) attributed to Nāgārjuna also has many.

Furthermore, some Mahāyāna sūtras cover the same material as do the early sūtras. For example, the *Sūtra on the Ten Grounds* (*Daśabhūmika Sūtra*) explains the thirty-seven aids to awakening, and commentaries and treatises by great Indian scholars—Asaṅga, Śāntideva, and others—contain many passages from the early sūtras. Nāgārjuna's *Precious Garland* (*Ratnāvalī*) and *Letter to a Friend* (*Subhillekha*) also share much material with Sarvāstivāda sūtras that are similar to Pāli suttas. In this way, many passages shared with Pāli suttas and Chinese āgamas made their way into Tibet through the commentaries and treatises of the great Indian sages.

A Tibetan monarch issued a decree establishing a convention that enables readers to immediately identify which of the Three Baskets a scripture belonged to. Translators composed a verse of homage placed at the beginning of the text. An homage to the omniscient Buddha indicated texts from the Vinaya Basket that dealt with the higher training of ethical conduct; homage to the buddhas and bodhisattvas showed the text belonged to the Sūtra Basket and concerned the higher training of concentration; homage to Mañjuśrī, the embodiment of wisdom, indicated texts from the Abhidharma Basket, which deals with knowledge and wisdom.

#### VINAYA BASKET

The Chinese canon contains the Vinayas of five early schools: Dharmaguptaka, Mahīśāsaka, Mahāsāṃghika, Sarvāstivāda, and Mūlasarvāstivāda. It also contains Buddhaghosa's commentary on the Vinaya, *Entirely Pleasing* (*Samantapāsādikā*). The Tibetan canon contains the Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya, and the Pāli canon has the Theravāda Vinaya.

#### SŪTRA BASKET

Outside of India, sūtras dealing with the bodhisattva practices were mainly transmitted in the Chinese and Tibetan languages. The Chinese and Tibetan canons contain the Prajñāpāramitā sūtras, the Ratnakūṭa sūtras, the *Flower Ornament Sūtra* (*Avataṃsaka Sūtra*), *Vimalakīrti's Instructions* (*Vimalakīrtinirdeśa*), and many other Mahāyāna sūtras. Both canons have Nāgārjuna's *Treatise on the Middle Way* as well as many of his other texts. Because Buddhism was rooted in China several centuries before its resur-



gence in Tibet in the eleventh century, which brought the translation of many later Indian texts into Tibetan, the Tibetan canon contains the works of Candrakīrti and later Mādhyamikas, as well as Dignāga and Dharmakīrti's works on logic, while the Chinese canon does not. However, many of these texts were translated from Tibetan into Chinese in the twentieth century by the great Chinese translator Fazun, who also translated many of Tsongkhapa's works.

Both canons contain works from the Cittamātra and Madhyamaka perspectives, although in general the Chinese follow different Cittamātrin and Madhyamaka commentaries than the Tibetans do. Maitreya's *Ornament of Clear Realizations* (*Abhisamayālaṅkāra*), which is widely studied in the Tibetan community, is not found in the Chinese canon,<sup>28</sup> although Fazun also translated it in the twentieth century.

Based on the Chinese canon, the Buddhadharma spread to Japan, Korea, and Vietnam. Relying on the Tibetan canon, Buddhism developed in Mongolia, four areas in Russia—Tuva, Aginsky, Buryatia, and Kalmykia—and in the Himalayan region. Today, the Chinese and Tibetan languages are the richest living languages that transmit all the practices and teachings of the bodhisattva vehicle.

#### ABHIDHARMA BASKET

The Pāli, Chinese, and Tibetan canons have different perspectives on the origin of the Abhidharma Piṭaka and the texts contained in it. According to one Theravāda account, the Buddha spent a rainy season—about three months—teaching six of the seven Abhidhamma works in the celestial realm of the Thirty-Three (gods) to thousands of *devas* (celestial beings), including his mother Maya, who had passed away a week after his birth. Each day the Buddha would go back to the human realm and repeat to his disciple Sāriputta what he had taught in the celestial realm that day. Sāriputta then organized the Abhidhamma literature, which was recited at the first council and passed down orally until the third council (circa 250 BCE), when it was included in what became the Pāli canon.

According to this traditional Theravāda account, six of its seven Abhidhamma texts are the Buddha's literal word, and the Buddha himself also outlined the *Points of Controversy* (*Kathāvatthu*), the seventh text, which Moggaliputta Tissa would compose in a future century.

Not all contemporary Theravādins agree that the Pāli Abhidhamma originated as described above. Some say that the seven Abhidhamma works were spoken by arhats; others concur with academic scholars that they developed gradually over several centuries and were later incorporated into the Pāli canon. Most other schools<sup>29</sup> see the Abhidhamma Piṭakas in their canons as the works of later generations of scholars.

The seven Abhidhamma works in the Pāli canon<sup>30</sup> differ from the seven Abhidhamma texts propagated by the Sarvāstivāda school. Almost all of the seven Sarvāstivāda Abhidhamma works are included in the Chinese canon,<sup>31</sup> as are the *Abhidhamma Treatise of Śāriputra* (*Śāriputrābhidhamma Śāstra*),<sup>32</sup> the *Mahāvibhāṣā*, and other early Abhidhamma texts, including those by Saṅghabhadra, and the *Path of Freedom* (*Vimuttimaggā*).

While Tibetans are aware of the seven Sarvāstivāda Abhidhamma works, they do not consider them to be the Buddha's word. Only part of one of the seven is included in the Tengyur section of the Tibetan canon. Passages belonging to the Abhidhamma Basket are interspersed in other sūtras in the Kangyur section of the Tibetan canon. The two main Abhidhamma texts studied by the Tibetans are: *Treasury of Knowledge*<sup>33</sup> by Vasubandhu, which summarizes the *Mahāvibhāṣā*, and the *Compendium of Knowledge* (*Abhidharmasamuccaya*) by Asaṅga, who writes from the Cittamātra perspective.<sup>34</sup> Some Abhidhamma texts by subsequent Indian masters are also present in the Tengyur. The *Treasury of Abhidhamma* is found in both the Chinese and Tibetan canons, but the *Mahāvibhāṣā* is absent from the Tibetan canon. Fazun translated it from Chinese into Tibetan in the twentieth century.

The level of importance given to the Abhidhamma differs among Theravādin practitioners. In Sri Lanka and Myanmar, it is considered very important, whereas in Thailand, it is not emphasized as much.

## TANTRA

Spoken by the Buddha when he assumed the form of Vajradhara or a tantric deity, tantras describe Vajrayāna practice. The Tibetan canon contains the most comprehensive collection of Buddhist tantras and tantric commentaries by Indian adepts. While the Chinese canon contains some yoga tantras such as the *Vairocana Tantra* and *Vajra Peak Tantra* (*Vajrasekhara Tantra*), it does not have any highest yoga tantras. It seems that tantric texts

arrived in China during a period of social turmoil and were not included in the Chinese canon. The Chinese canon contains the sūtras of Amitābha (*Sukhāvativyūha Sūtras*), the *Medicine Buddha Sūtra* (*Bhaiṣajyaguru Sūtra*), and scriptures about other bodhisattvas that have been widely read and practiced in the Chinese community for centuries. While these are considered sūtras in China, in Tibet the practices of these same bodhisattvas are included in the Tantrayāna.<sup>35</sup>

From this summary of the three Buddhist canons, it is clear that no one canon contains everything the Buddha taught or all the great commentaries. Nevertheless, there is more than enough in each canon for us to study, contemplate, and meditate. The teachings necessary to gain realizations are there in the three canons. A respected Thai Theravāda master told me (Chodron), “With both Theravāda and Mahāyāna, the Buddha’s teachings are complete,” and “Mahāyāna is just a name, Theravāda is just a name. When we see emptiness, there’s nothing to cling to.”

The various Buddhist traditions share many scriptures and practices in common. Although each has its unique qualities, we should not think of them as separate and unrelated. All three canons contain the Buddha’s teachings and must be respected as such. They all contain teachings to be practiced.

### *Philosophical Systems*

In the initial centuries after the Buddha’s parinirvāṇa, the Abhidharmikas rose to prominence as they developed intricate taxonomies of phenomena and explored the relationships among phenomena. This included material and cosmological phenomena, but even more so the facets of the mind, such as afflicted mental states and the states of meditation and insight. Their focus was on identifying the building blocks of sentient beings’ experience rather than on constructing cohesive interpretations of Buddhist doctrine.

Philosophical systems came about in later centuries, when questions arose about topics that were not clarified in the scriptures themselves, and sages began to explain the meanings of teachings that were not evident to most people. These commentators did not see their writings as new interpretations of the Buddha’s teachings but as in-depth explanations of what the

Buddha actually meant. They saw themselves as clarifying in an expanded form what the Buddha had expressed in an abbreviated form.

Another factor bringing about different philosophical tenet systems was the challenge presented by non-Buddhist logicians and scholars. Debate was a widespread Indian custom, and the loser was expected to convert to the winner's school. Buddhist sages had to develop logical arguments to prove the validity of Buddhist doctrine and to deflect philosophical attacks by non-Buddhist scholars. The renowned Buddhist debaters were also great practitioners. Not all Buddhist practitioners were interested in this approach; many preferred to study the sūtras or practice meditation in hermitages.

From the viewpoint of philosophy, Tibetans have categorized Buddhist tenets into four general systems: (1) the Vaibhāṣika (Followers of the *Mahāvibhāṣā*), (2) Sautrāntika (Followers of Sūtra), (3) Yogācāra or Cittamātra (Mind Only), and (4) Madhyamaka (Middle Way). These four schools are mentioned in the *Hevajra Tantra*, indicating that all four schools existed in India before coming to Tibet.<sup>36</sup> Each system has further subdivisions.

Even though not all the Indian texts were translated into Tibetan, many were. Among these, we find texts presenting the philosophical views of all four tenet systems, texts presenting the paths of all three vehicles, and texts presenting the practices of both Sūtrayāna and Tantrayāna.

## 5 | The Buddha's Teachings Form a Cohesive Whole

AS SEEN IN the previous chapter, the Buddha provided a wide variety of teachings, depending on the disposition and interests of various audiences. He taught human beings as well as celestial beings, spirits, and other life forms.

There are many ways to systematize these teachings that reveal how they form a cohesive whole and build on each other, leading us to an ever deeper understanding of the Dharma. One is according to the three capacities of practitioners, which will be discussed in chapter 9. Another is the four tenet systems, briefly mentioned in the previous chapter, which will be elaborated in a future volume. The three turnings of the Dharma wheel are yet another way. The first part of this chapter focuses on the three turnings of the Dharma wheel and then turns to the topic of the authenticity of the Mahāyāna scriptures. In the previous chapter, we examined this from an academic approach. Now we will look at it from the perspective of Buddhist practitioners.

### *Three Turnings of the Dharma Wheel*

“Turning the Dharma wheel” refers to the Buddha giving teachings that lead sentient beings to temporary happiness within cyclic existence and to the highest goodness of liberation and full awakening. From the perspective of the Sanskrit tradition, as described in the *Sūtra Unraveling the Thought*, the Buddha turned the Dharma wheel three times, with each turning primarily addressing the needs of a specific group of disciples.

The teachings of the first turning form the foundation of Buddhist

practice for all three vehicles. At the same time, they fulfill the specific needs of śrāvakas, who seek personal liberation. The first turning began with the Buddha's first discourse at Deer Park in Sarnath, India, during which he delineated the main framework for training the mind in the four truths of the āryas. When describing the fourth truth, the truth of the path, he taught the thirty-seven aids to awakening, which establish procedures for putting the four truths into practice. The thirty-seven aids relate to two primary methods of training, the first leading to serenity (single-pointedness of mind), the second bringing forth insight (deep understanding). To put these thirty-seven in the context of the three higher trainings, we begin practicing the higher training in ethical conduct to eliminate coarse negativities of body and speech. On this basis, we cultivate serenity in the higher training in concentration and insight in the higher training of wisdom.

The thirty-seven aids can be divided into seven sets—four establishments of mindfulness, four supreme strivings, four bases of supernormal power, five faculties, five powers, seven awakening factors, and the eightfold noble path—which are the principal practices. Vasubandhu in *Treasury of Knowledge* and Asaṅga in *Compendium of Knowledge* correlate their full-fledged practice with successive levels of the five paths. In that context, they are set out sequentially. The following is Vasubandhu's presentation.

The first set is the *four establishments of mindfulness*—mindfulness of the body, feelings, mind, and phenomena. As we deepen our practice of these four, we will gain greater enthusiasm and vigor to engage in wholesome activities. This leads us to make effort in the *four supreme strivings*—to abandon nonvirtues already generated, prevent destructive actions in the future, enhance virtues that have already been generated, and generate new virtues in the future.

By engaging in ethical conduct such as avoiding destructive actions and enhancing and engaging in constructive ones, we will develop a certain clarity of mind and single-pointedness. This leads us to practice the third set, the *four bases of spiritual power*—aspiration, effort, intention, and investigation—which are methods to enhance our capability to remain focused single-pointedly on a chosen object of meditation.

When we have single-pointed concentration that can last for prolonged periods of time, all our other virtuous spiritual faculties will be enhanced. We will increase the *five powers*—faith, effort, mindfulness, concentration,

and wisdom—and the *five forces*—the strengthening of these same five qualities. When these forces are fully developed, we will progress to practice the *seven awakening factors*—correct mindfulness, discrimination of phenomena, effort, rapture, pliancy, concentration, and equanimity. This leads us to fully follow the core of the Buddhist path, the *eightfold noble path*—right view, intention, speech, action, livelihood, effort, mindfulness, and concentration. Through practicing the thirty-seven aids, our minds will be transformed, and we will attain liberation from cyclic existence.

The second turning of the wheel of Dharma contains the Prajñāpāramitā sūtras, the Buddha's teachings on the perfection of wisdom. Elaborating on the topic of selflessness that the Buddha described briefly in the first turning, here he explains that all phenomena are empty of inherent existence. He also clarifies the meaning of the truth of cessation as the emptiness of a mind from which defilements have been eradicated. Giving an extensive explanation of the six perfections—generosity, ethical conduct, fortitude, joyous effort, meditative stability, and wisdom—the second turning also elaborates on the truth of the path for bodhisattvas. The principal and appropriate audience for the sūtras in the second turning of the Dharma wheel are spiritual aspirants who understand the teachings in the first turning and, in addition, aspire for the full awakening of buddhahood. Although they are not the primary audience, these teachings are also for those who seek personal liberation because a comprehensive explanation of emptiness is indispensable for all practitioners. Many of these sūtras were taught at Vulture's Peak, near Rājagṛha, India.

The third turning of the Dharma wheel contains two categories of sūtras. The first furnishes further explanation of the truth of the path and presents a different interpretation of the Prajñāpāramitā sūtras' statement that all phenomena are empty of inherent existence. These third-turning sūtras were taught primarily to benefit those trainees who, although inclined toward the bodhisattva path, are not yet suitable vessels for the teaching on the absence of inherent existence. If they were to embrace the literal meaning of the Prajñāpāramitā sūtras, they would fall into nihilism by mistakenly thinking that emptiness means the total nonexistence of phenomena. For their benefit, the Buddha spoke of naturelessness (*niḥsvabhāva*) in relation to different natures of phenomena—the dependent, imputed, and consummate natures. Rather than think that all phenomena without exception are

empty of inherent existence, the Buddha taught these trainees that different phenomena are empty of different kinds of natures. This category includes sūtras such as the *Sūtra Unraveling the Thought*.

The second category of sūtras comprising the third turning speaks of our potential to become fully awakened beings. These sūtras present and develop the clear-light nature of mind and buddha nature. This category includes sūtras such as the *Tathāgata Essence Sūtra* (*Tathāgatagarbha Sūtra*), which is the basis for Maitreya's *Sublime Continuum* and Nāgārjuna's *Collection of Praises*. The third turning of the wheel of Dharma was taught at Vaiśālī and other places in India; its main audience was both those seeking liberation and those seeking full awakening.

To summarize, the first turning of the wheel of Dharma laid out the basic framework of the Buddhist path to awakening, the four truths of the āryas. The second turning went into greater depth on the third truth, the truth of cessation, which needs to be understood in the context of the ultimate nature of the mind, its emptiness of inherent existence. In addition to having the correct view of the emptiness of the mind as presented in the second turning, a profound subject—a yogic mind that has ceased defilements—is needed. This leads to further discussion in the third turning of the fourth truth, the truth of the path—the mind that realizes the nature of reality and eradicates defilements. By combining our understanding of the wisdom realizing emptiness as presented in the second turning of the Dharma wheel and an understanding of buddha nature and the nature of mind as presented in the third turning of the Dharma wheel, we can gain genuine conviction in the possibility of attaining true cessation.

Some sūtras in the third turning of the wheel of Dharma speak of buddha nature and the subjective experience of emptiness, thus establishing the basis for the Vajrayāna teachings, which emphasize employing the subtlest mind to realize emptiness. In this way, the earlier teachings of the Buddha lay the foundation for topics that are developed more fully in later teachings, and the sūtras of the three turnings of the Dharma wheel complement each other.

The teachings of the first Dharma wheel, which emphasize the practices of the Fundamental Vehicle, form the core of the Pāli tradition. Based on these teachings, the Buddha taught the second and third Dharma wheels, which form the heart of the Sanskrit tradition. The form of Buddhism that



flourished in Tibet comprises all of these teachings. For these reasons, we Tibetans believe that it is a comprehensive form of the Buddhadharmā because it includes all the essential teachings of the Fundamental Vehicle, Mahāyāna, and Vajrayāna. In the Fundamental Vehicle, selflessness generally refers to the lack of a soul—a self that is permanent, unitary, and independent—or a self-sufficient substantially existent person—a person who is the controller of the body and mind. On the foundation of these teachings, the Mahāyāna describes the development of bodhicitta and the extensive practices of the bodhisattvas. In addition to the selflessness of persons, it teaches the selflessness of phenomena in detail. The special techniques described in the Vajrayāna scriptures enhance these bodhisattva practices.

Without a foundation in the core teachings of the Fundamental Vehicle, proclaiming oneself to be a follower of the Mahāyāna is meaningless. We need a broad, inclusive understanding of the Buddha's teachings to avoid generating mistaken notions. Without doing so, we risk disparaging the teachings of the Buddha by saying either that they are limited in scope or that they are not authentic. It is important to understand that these vehicles and their teachings complement each other. We should embody the essence of all these teachings in our personal practice.

## REFLECTION

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1. The first turning of the Dharma wheel, which focuses on the four truths of the āryas, forms the foundation for Buddhist practice of all three vehicles. Also, it specifically fulfills the needs of śrāvakas, those seeking personal liberation.
2. The second turning, which includes the Prajñāpāramitā sūtras, elaborates on the meaning of true cessations and true paths and gives an extensive explanation of the six perfections. It is directed mainly toward spiritual aspirants who understand the teachings in the first turning and aspire for full awakening.
3. The third turning contains two types of teachings. The first explains the naturelessness of each of three categories of phenomena; it was taught especially for disciples inclined toward the bodhisattva path who are not

yet ready for the teaching on the emptiness of inherent existence. The second explains buddha nature and the clear-light nature of the mind and leads disciples to Vajrayāna.

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### *Authenticity of the Mahāyāna Scriptures*

At the first council, which occurred soon after the Buddha's passing, neither the Mahāyāna sūtras nor the tantras were recited or included in the collection of sūtras. Because the Mahāyāna sūtras and Vajrayāna tantras in the Sanskrit tradition were initially not widely known, doubts were later raised about their authenticity.

Personally speaking, I am fully convinced that the Buddha taught these sūtras. Among the greatest of these sūtras, the Prajñāpāramitā sūtras explicitly teach emptiness and implicitly teach the bodhisattva paths and stages to awakening. According to the traditional account, these sūtras were spoken by the Buddha and then taken for safe custody to the land of the nāgas—dragon-like beings that dwell in lakes or near streams—because the people at that time were not yet suitable vessels to fully understand them. The great Buddhist sage Nāgārjuna then retrieved them from the nāgas and brought them to our world, where they were widely disseminated in India.

According to this account, Nāgārjuna lived over six hundred years. I do not believe that Nāgārjuna lived this long. Being fully awakened, surely Śākyamuni Buddha must have had the ability to extend his lifespan, but he did not do this. Thus it seems strange—not to mention improbable—that Nāgārjuna would live so long. Regarding his going to the nāga land to retrieve the Prajñāpāramitā sūtras, I do not fully believe this, but neither can I deny it. Some people say the Prajñāpāramitā sūtras and other Mahāyāna scriptures were made up later and attributed to the Buddha. To me, both of these explanations are extreme.

Born in South India, Nāgārjuna visited Bodhgaya and lived at a learning center in Magadha, both of which are located in northern India. During his extensive travels, he must have come in contact with the Prajñāpāramitā sūtras and began to gather them together. Nāgārjuna was a Sanskrit scholar as well as an upstanding Buddhist monk. As such, he would never lie. He

knew that some people doubted the authenticity of the Mahāyāna teachings. Using reasoning, he investigated whether they were authentic. Since Nāgārjuna lived only a few centuries after the Buddha, it would have been easier for him to research and establish the validity of the Sanskrit sūtras than it is for us nearly twenty-six centuries later. Having done a thorough examination, he was convinced that they were the Buddha's word.

Nāgārjuna's writings contain many quotations from the Prajñāpāramitā sūtras. Knowing that the controversy was due to a lack of awareness, he quoted extensively from these sūtras when he composed the *Compendium of Sūtras (Sūtrasamuccaya)*, and in *Precious Garland* he made special effort to demonstrate why these scriptures were authentic. If he had doubt about their validity, he never would have done this. Seeing that these remarkable teachings were on the verge of extinction, with great compassion he propagated them because he knew that the people of his own and future generations would benefit tremendously from the wisdom in them.

The Buddha taught the Prajñāpāramitā sūtras to a select group of monastics as well as to bodhisattvas and other beings reported to have been in the audience. These teachings were given at Vulture's Peak, a site that is too small to accommodate the large number of listeners who reportedly attended. Thus we must understand the delivery of those sūtras on a different level, not the ordinary level. While some human disciples were present, many beings who heard those teachings were not visible to the ordinary human eye. Some were great bodhisattvas such as Avalokiteśvara, Mañjuśrī, and Samantabhadra.

Because the contingent of human beings listening to these teachings was comparatively small and these teachings are radical in their presentation of emptiness, they were passed down from teacher to student privately and were not known to the general public for many centuries. While it is generally accepted that the Vinaya and sūtra teachings were passed on orally, I believe the Prajñāpāramitā sūtras may have been written down early on. Although literacy was not widespread, surely some *bhikṣus* (monks) knew how to read and write.<sup>37</sup> Because so few people knew about these teachings, they almost fell into obscurity. Nāgārjuna came in contact with, reproduced, and disseminated the Prajñāpāramitā sūtras.

The later dissemination of previously little-known texts has occurred several times in the history of Buddhism. During the Cultural Revolution,

many texts in Tibet were destroyed. But later someone found one copy of a text and from it made many copies. In that way the teaching was preserved. Similarly, texts and Buddhist artifacts dating from the fourth to the twelfth centuries were hidden in the Dunhuang Caves, only to be discovered in the early twentieth century and taken to the British Museum, where others came to know of them. Scriptures written in Gāndhārī that date to the first century were found in pots and discovered only in recent years. It seems to me that something similar could have happened in ancient India; the Prajñāpāramitā sūtras could have been relatively unknown for several centuries and then revived due to Nāgārjuna's interest in them and his compassion for us.

The Buddha did not teach the Prajñāpāramitā sūtras and other Mahāyāna sūtras publicly because it would not have been suitable to teach certain disciples, namely those focused on their own liberation rather than the liberation of all. Additionally, people who were inclined to meditate on the selflessness of a self-sufficient substantially existent person would not have been interested in teachings on the emptiness of all phenomena. The Buddha would never force either the goal of buddhahood or the Madhyamaka view of emptiness on others. He respected people, and according to their present disposition, he set out the view, path, and result suitable for them so that they would practice the thirty-seven aids to awakening, realize the four truths, and progress on the path to arhatship.

Other people had the ability or the karma to see bodhisattvas such as Avalokiteśvara, Maitreya, Tārā, and Mañjuśrī. To them, as well as to some devas, nonhuman beings, and bodhisattvas, the Buddha taught the Mahāyāna teachings. To an exceptional few beings who were suitable spiritual vessels to receive the tantric teachings, the Buddha taught Tantrayāna by appearing as Vajradhara and the maṇḍala (the purified environment and deities in it).

If we accept that Śākyamuni Buddha achieved full awakening as a result of having accumulated merit and wisdom for three countless great eons, then such wonderful things are possible. However, if the Buddha was born as an unenlightened human being who, although he became wiser and more compassionate, was not omniscient and still had a body produced by afflictions and karma—as the Buddha is depicted in the Pāli scriptures—then I don't think it would have been possible for him to deliver such teachings at these high levels. Aside from the Cārvākas, who had a nihilistic or hedo-

nistic view, all the spiritual practitioners and intellectuals in India at that time believed in a soul or self (*ātman*). The two teachers that the Buddha studied with before he attained awakening accepted a self, and the Buddha did not encounter other, wiser teachers than these. Given this situation, it would have been extremely difficult for an ordinary person by himself to discover selflessness.

Furthermore, in the nearly 2,600 years since the Buddha lived, millions of people have benefited from his teachings. Many have realized emptiness and attained arhatship and buddhahood. I don't think someone who began that lifetime as an unenlightened human being could have had this kind of effect on the world. In the same way, I don't think the founders of the world's other great religions were ordinary people. They, too, could have been manifestations of the Buddha. A manifestation of the Buddha doesn't necessarily teach Buddhism; he or she teaches what is most suitable for the audience at that time. What ordinary human beings do with the teachings after the founder's passing is another matter. Most academic scholars see the wisdom in a religion as human knowledge—something that evolves over time, with each generation adding what it learns to the knowledge of the previous generations. My perspective is different. I think the major spiritual traditions that have been able to benefit humanity for centuries were each begun by someone with extraordinary spiritual wisdom and compassion, who taught others through their own spiritual experience.

The view of selflessness and nirvāṇa as presented in the Sanskrit tradition is very sophisticated. In the Pāli scriptures, the Buddha stated that nirvāṇa exists and that it is attained by overcoming the afflictions and polluted karma that causes rebirth in cyclic existence. He did not give an in-depth analysis of the precise meaning of selflessness—especially the selflessness of phenomena—or the subtle characteristics of the self that is negated. Such an analysis facilitates understanding the precise meaning of true cessation and nirvāṇa. To benefit his disciples, he needed to extensively explain the emptiness of inherent existence, and thus he gave the teachings of the second turning. In addition, because the bodhisattva path was only briefly explained in the first turning of the Dharma wheel, the Buddha set forth the teachings in the second and third turnings of the Dharma wheel.

Someone might wonder, “Perhaps the deeper teachings about selflessness and more extensive teachings of the bodhisattva path and resultant buddhahood were not taught by the Buddha but were composed by his

followers at a later time.” If we say that the Buddha did not teach them, then he must have given a rudimentary teaching, and his followers refined it and deepened its insights. This would mean that his followers were more insightful and wiser than the Buddha himself! For me, this is unacceptable. In my opinion, the Buddha taught all the essential points of the path when he was alive. The Indian and Tibetan commentators in subsequent centuries drew out the meaning and implication of these points, further explicating or systematizing them in order to clarify the meaning for future generations.

If the Mahāyāna sūtras were not the Buddha’s word, it would mean that the complete instructions of the bodhisattva path do not exist in our world. Without these teachings, attaining buddhahood would be impossible, and the efforts of millions of people in last 2,600 years to actualize that path would have been wasted.

However, over the centuries people have generated bodhicitta and realized the emptiness of all phenomena. Many people of high spiritual capacity—some Tibetan and Chinese practitioners as well as Ajahn Mun—have experienced credible visions of bodhisattvas and buddhas. These people are ethical and wise individuals and do not lie.<sup>38</sup> Thus these holy beings must exist, and the scriptures explaining how to attain their realizations must be the Buddha’s word. To say that the path to full awakening exists but the teachings on how to realize it were fabricated by someone other than the Buddha would be very strange indeed!

The Mahāyāna motivation—the aspiration to attain full awakening for the benefit of all sentient beings—the Mahāyāna path of the six perfections, and the Mahāyāna goal of full buddhahood are wonderful and benefit all beings. What is there to criticize in them? What is the point of saying the Buddha did not teach the Mahāyāna?

I do not accept as literal everything found in Tibetan Buddhist literature about the history of Buddhahadharma. Some of it is clearly biased. I appreciate the efforts of Western historians who impartially try to analyze historical events. Nevertheless, I think looking at the history of Buddhism just from the viewpoint of academic scholars—most of whom accept the existence of only this life—is going too far. From their perspective, many things mentioned in Buddhist scriptures would be impossible. However, with a worldview that includes belief in rebirth and the mind’s ability to

be totally purified and become omniscient, the scope of human experience expands greatly, and our view of history changes as well. Personally, I prefer to consider what seems most reasonable given the view I have of who the Buddha was and what his capabilities were.

In summary, because Śākyamuni Buddha was a fully awakened individual, he knew the spiritual dispositions of different audiences and guided them accordingly, teaching them what was suitable. Because the number of spiritual aspirants receptive to the Mahāyāna teachings was so small at the time of the Buddha, he gave these teachings only to a limited group. These teachings remained in very small pockets of people and almost disappeared. Nāgārjuna made a special effort to collect them and teach them, and for that reason, he is known as a trail blazer.

Personally speaking, I (Chodron) approach the issue of authenticity from a different perspective than those presented above. Having graduated with a degree in history, I'm aware that written histories are partial, both in the sense that the information is not complete and that writers interpret it from their own perspective.

Over the years I have had the fortune to study the Mahāyāna sūtras and commentaries. Even though my knowledge and understanding are limited, these teachings make sense to me when I examine them using reason. They also produce beneficial effects when I apply them in my life. If such profound and effective teachings were not given by a fully awakened being, such as the Buddha, who else would have had the ability to do so? Certainly not limited sentient beings. In short, my experience with these sūtras only confirms my conviction that they are the Buddha's word. While I enjoy learning the different perspectives of the history of Buddhism, my faith is not based on it.

### *Nāgārjuna on the Authenticity of the Mahāyāna Sūtras*

Nāgārjuna gave a reasoned analysis to prove the authenticity of the Mahāyāna scriptures.<sup>39</sup> He argued that if the path to full awakening consisted only of the thirty-seven aids to awakening with no mention of bodhicitta and the bodhisattva practices, there would be little difference between the path leading to arhatship of a śrāvaka or solitary realizer and the path leading to the full awakening of a buddha apart from the amount of time

necessary to complete it. A person aspiring for arhatship could accomplish the goal in just a few lifetimes, while following the bodhisattva path to buddhahood would require accumulating merit and wisdom for three countless great eons.

In addition, the early sūtras that comprise the Fundamental Vehicle teachings state that at the time of attaining parinirvāṇa when an arhat dies, that person attains “nirvāṇa without remainder.” At that time, the continuum of the polluted mental and physical aggregates are said to cease. However, if we analyze carefully, there is no reason why the continuum of an arhat’s mind would totally cease at the time of death. There is no agent or antidote that could bring about the cessation of a continuum of consciousness. According to the natural functioning of things, if a powerful antidote to something exists, that antidote can extinguish that thing, just as water can extinguish fire. Since the afflictions do not abide in the continuity of the innate mind of clear light, when the wisdom realizing selflessness extinguishes the afflictions, the continuity of the innate mind of clear light remains.

If the continuum of an arhat’s mind ended at death, then Śākyamuni Buddha, who attained full awakening after having collected merit and wisdom during three countless great eons, would have been able to benefit sentient beings for only a short time. He left the royal life at age twenty-nine, attained full awakening at thirty-five, and passed away at eighty-one. Thus he would have been able to fulfill his vow to work for the benefit of sentient beings for only forty-five years. Considering that he exerted effort on the path for three countless great eons in order to benefit sentient beings, it does not make sense that he had only a few decades to fulfill the purpose for which he attained awakening.

In *Precious Garland* (vv. 386–87), Nāgārjuna explains that the “extinction” mentioned in the Pāli suttas has the same meaning as “nonarising” in the Mahāyāna sūtras. Both are emptiness. *Extinction* refers to the primordial emptiness of inherent existence of duḥkha and the polluted aggregates, and *nonarising* means that phenomena do not arise inherently. The knowledge of extinction and the knowledge of nonarising both refer to the wisdom realizing emptiness, the indispensable cause of liberation for practitioners of all three vehicles. Since this is the case, why would anyone deprecate the scriptures that teach this?



Nāgārjuna wondered why people would doubt the authenticity of the Mahāyāna sūtras (RA 380–82):

The nature of what the Mahāyāna maintains  
is generosity, ethical conduct, fortitude, joyous effort,  
meditative stability, wisdom, and compassion—  
how could it contain a wrong statement?

Others' aims are achieved through generosity and ethical conduct;  
one's own through fortitude and joyous effort;  
meditative stability and wisdom lead to liberation—  
this summarizes the Mahāyāna teachings.

In brief, the teaching of the Buddha includes  
what benefits oneself and others, and [the way to attain] liberation.  
These topics are contained in the six perfections.  
Therefore they are also the Buddha's words.

The six perfections that are central elements of the Mahāyāna path of the bodhisattva are all extensions of practices found in the Fundamental Vehicle, values and practices that benefit the world. Having explained these topics briefly in the early sūtras, the Buddha elaborated on them in the Mahāyāna to give those with the bodhisattva disposition the complete instructions they needed. These people also needed to learn the bodhisattvas' magnificent aspirational prayers, the extensive bodhisattva practices, and the bodhisattvas' dedication of merit. If the Buddha did not teach them, who else could have? Just as an unenlightened being could not possibly have taught the wonderful teachings in the Fundamental Vehicle, neither could such a person fabricate the vast and profound teachings of the Mahāyāna. They must be the Buddha's word.

Nāgārjuna advised people who did not feel comfortable practicing the bodhisattva path due to the long time needed to complete it or who doubted that the Buddha could have the amazing qualities described in the Mahāyāna sūtras to withhold judgment and keep an open mind. Nothing is lost by doing this, and remaining neutral protects one from the negativity that results from disparaging the teachings.

In this way, Nāgārjuna demonstrated the value and authenticity of the Mahāyāna sūtras that show the path to buddhahood. The teachings of the Sanskrit tradition do not contradict the core teachings of the Pāli tradition, and in fact, elaborate on the themes set forth in it. Maitreya in *Ornament of Mahāyāna Sūtras*, Śāntideva in *Engaging in the Bodhisattvas' Deeds* (*Bodhicaryāvatāra*), and Bhāvaviveka in *Heart of the Middle Way* (*Madhyamakahr̥daya*) also affirmed the validity of the Mahāyāna scriptures.

## REFLECTION

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1. Because the Mahāyāna sūtras found in the Sanskrit tradition appeared publicly at a later date than the suttas that formed the Pāli canon, there has been doubt about their authenticity.
  2. Contemplate the reasons His Holiness and Nāgārjuna give for their confidence that these teachings are authentic and will lead to supreme awakening.
  3. As you continue learning the Sanskrit tradition, consider that the only person capable of delivering such vast and profound teachings must have been a fully awakened buddha.
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### *Is the Buddha's Word Always Spoken by the Buddha?*

Arhats and other ārya disciples of the Buddha delivered some of the sutras in the Pāli canon. In some Sanskrit sūtras, too, the main speaker of the teaching is not the Buddha but another buddha or a bodhisattva. It is said that in the *Heart Sūtra* the Buddha inspired Śāriputra to ask a question and Avalokiteśvara to respond. His reply, a stunning synthesis of the Prajñāpāramitā sūtras, is considered the Buddha's word although it was not spoken directly by the Buddha. The same principle could be used to say that the Mahāyāna sūtras are the words of the Buddha, even though they did not appear publicly until a few centuries after the Buddha lived.

The idea of the Buddha's word being spoken at other times or by other

people is also found in the Pāli tradition. In the *Atthasālinī*, Buddhaghosa said that the *Points of Controversy* (*Kathāvatthu*), one of the seven Abhidhamma texts in the Pāli canon, was the Buddha's word although it was composed by Moggaliputta Tissa around 250 BCE. About it, Buddhaghosa said:

Now when [the Buddha] laid down the table of contents, he fore-saw that, 218 years after his death, Tissa, Moggali's son, seated in the midst of 1,000 bhikkhus, would elaborate the *Kathāvatthu* to the extent of [that is, in accord with] the Dīgha Nikāya, bringing together 500 orthodox and 500 heterodox suttas. So Tissa, Moggali's son, expounded the book not by his own knowledge, but according to the table of contents laid down, as well as by the method given, by the Teacher. Hence, the entire book became the word of the Buddha.<sup>40</sup>

Similarly, in the Numerical Discourses (AN 8:8), Bhikkhu Uttara is said to instruct his fellow monks, "Friends, it is good for a bhikkhu from time to time to review his own failings. It is good for a bhikkhu from time to time to review the failings of others. It is good for a bhikkhu from time to time to review his own achievements. It is good for a bhikkhu from time to time to review the achievements of others."

Overhearing this, the deva king Vessavaṇa asks Sakka, the ruler of the devas, about it. Sakka then approaches Bhikkhu Uttara and asks him whether this was his own discernment or whether it was the word of the Buddha. Uttara replies with a simile, "Suppose not far from a village or town there was a great heap of grain, and a large crowd of people were to take away grain with carrying-poles, baskets, hip-sacks, and their cupped hands. If someone were to approach that large crowd of people and ask them, 'Where did you get this grain?' what should they say?"

Sakka replies that they should say, "We got it from that great heap of grain."

Uttara continues, "So, too, ruler of the devas, whatever is well spoken is all the word of the Blessed One, the Arahant, the Perfectly Awakened One. I myself and others derive our good words from him."

The Buddha's disciples who have understood well the Buddha's thought

speak the Buddha's word. From this perspective, the Mahāyāna sūtras spoken by holy beings other than the Buddha can also be considered the Buddha's word. They are certainly in accord with and do not contradict what the Buddha said in the Pāli suttas.

### *Four Authenticities*

The Lamdre (*Path and Result*) teaching of the Sakya tradition speaks of four authentic factors that help us to have confidence in the Buddha's teachings and develop in the Dharma: authentic sūtras of the Buddha, authentic commentaries, authentic teachers, and authentic experience.

In terms of the historical evolution, authentic sūtras taught by the Buddha came into being first. Based on these, many authentic commentaries—treatises written by Nāgārjuna and other great sages who explained the final thought of the Buddha—were composed. Based upon studying these authentic commentaries, authentic teachers who have realized the themes presented in the authentic commentaries have come into being. On the basis of the teachings given by authentic teachers, authentic spiritual realizations or experiences grow in the hearts of practitioners.

In terms of developing a sense of conviction in these four authentic factors, the sequence is reversed. We begin with our own experience and from there infer the authenticity of the teachers, the authenticity of the commentaries, and finally the authenticity of the Buddha's word. In my own case, understanding this has been very useful in developing faith and confidence in the Buddha and his teachings.

My modest experience of the Dharma, which has been valuable in my life and brought me peace of mind, occurred due to hearing teachings from my teachers and in some cases while studying the commentaries, such as those of Nāgārjuna and Asaṅga. If I had received an education that did not mention these teachers and commentaries, these experiences would never have occurred. Thus I naturally admire and venerate these teachers and commentaries and know through my own experience that the teachings of Tsongkhapa and the great practitioners who followed him are indeed wonderful. Tsongkhapa has great respect and admiration for Nāgārjuna and his writings, and this, together with my own studies of Nāgārjuna's works, inspires me to respect Nāgārjuna and his treatises. Nāgārjuna, in turn,

praised the Buddha highly, so ultimately my respect and admiration must go to the Buddha, who is our actual teacher. He is truly a trustworthy guide on the path to awakening. Therefore, when I encounter teachings given by the Buddha about very obscure topics, I trust them.

Although we may not have had any extraordinary spiritual experiences, each of us has had some ordinary experiences. Reflecting deeply on the teachings on bodhicitta strongly affects our heart and mind, and contemplating the teachings on emptiness induces a change in our perspective. Although these are not full realizations, they are spiritual experiences that give us a taste of these realizations.

Based on these preliminary experiences, we have an idea of the spiritual realizations described in the biographies of the great practitioners and, in this way, develop belief in the authenticity of these great teachers. This leads us to develop trust in and admiration for the commentaries written by past sages upon which these teachers have relied. Admiration for the commentaries that explicate these teachings propels us to trust the validity of the Buddha's scriptures themselves. In his *Treatise on the Middle Way*, Nāgārjuna pays homage to the Buddha by praising him as the one who taught the nature of reality of all phenomena—their emptiness of inherent existence—by revealing dependent arising. Toward the end of this text, Nāgārjuna again pays homage to the Buddha as the one who embodies compassion for all sentient beings, and for that reason, reveals the path to help us overcome all erroneous philosophical views. Reflecting on these homages enables us to employ inference by authoritative testimony, a type of inference that enables us to gain confidence in the validity of obscure teachings that are not knowable by other means of reliable cognition. In Buddhist epistemology, inference must eventually be founded upon and traced back to direct experience. In this case, based on our own initial spiritual experiences, we infer the scope and quality of the spiritual experiences of the great masters, the commentaries they relied upon, and finally the Buddha's word.

## REFLECTION

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1. Contemplate the development of the Dharma in time, beginning with the Buddha's delivery of authentic sūtras, which led to the writing of

authentic commentaries by the great Indian masters. This led to the emergence of authentic teachers, who by giving teachings, made possible the authentic spiritual experience of their disciples.

2. To develop conviction in these four factors, reverse the contemplation. Begin with whatever small Dharma experiences you have had and infer that authentic spiritual experiences exist in the mindstreams of the great spiritual mentors. This will lead you to have confidence in the authenticity of the commentaries, which in turn will inspire your faith in the Buddha's sūtras.
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### *Four Buddha Bodies*

If we have had certain spiritual experiences, we will be able to relate to the accounts of spiritual realizations in the biographies of the great practitioners. These accounts give us some sense that high levels of spiritual experience may be possible. This, in turn, leads to an appreciation of the Buddha's qualities. If we think of the Buddha's awakening in purely ordinary terms, understanding his marvelous qualities is difficult. In the common historical view, Siddhārtha Gautama was an unenlightened being at birth. In the six years from the time he began meditating to his awakening under the bodhi tree, he traversed the path to awakening, from the path of preparation to the path of no-more-learning. While seeing the Buddha as an unenlightened being who attained awakening in this life is very inspiring, from another perspective it may seem limited.

Viewing the Buddha's awakening within the framework of the Mahāyāna doctrine of four buddha bodies provides a different perspective. In this context, "body" does not refer to a physical body but a collection of qualities. The four bodies are the emanation body (*nirmāṇakāya*), enjoyment body (*sambhogakāya*), wisdom truth body (*jñāna dharmakāya*), and nature truth body (*svabhāvika dharmakāya*). An *emanation body* is a buddha's physical appearance as an ordinary being, which he assumes according to the spiritual dispositions and needs of particular disciples. An emanation body manifests from a subtler body, an *enjoyment body*, which is the form

a buddha assumes in order to teach ārya bodhisattvas in the pure lands. An enjoyment body, in turn, emerges from the omniscient mind of a buddha, the *wisdom truth body*. The wisdom truth body arises within the underlying nature of reality, a buddha's *nature truth body*. This is the emptiness of a buddha's mind and the final true cessation actualized by that buddha. Both the mind of a buddha and its emptiness are called *truth* bodies because a buddha's wisdom is the ultimate true path and the emptiness of that mind is the ultimate true cessation.

Viewing this in the reverse order gives us a deeper understanding of Śākyamuni Buddha. The nature truth body—which, as emptiness and true cessation, is an ultimate truth—is nondual with the wisdom truth body—the Buddha's omniscient mind that clearly and directly knows all ultimate and conventional phenomena. Motivated by compassion, from this union of the nature and wisdom truth bodies appears a subtle form, an enjoyment body, a person who guides highly realized bodhisattvas. To guide other sentient beings whose minds are more obscured, an emanation body manifests from the enjoyment body. This is the appearance of a buddha as an unenlightened being who can communicate and interact with ordinary beings. Śākyamuni Buddha was such an emanation body. Because he appeared from the enjoyment body and ultimately from the truth body, he did not cease to exist when he passed away. The continuity of his awakened mind remains. That means that if our own inner spiritual experience reaches a certain level, we will be able to see and speak with the Buddha. From the Buddha's side, he is always ready to help, but because of our lack of merit and spiritual experience, we can't see him. For example, microscopic organisms have existed for a long time, but until the microscope was developed, we couldn't see them. When we develop spiritually, we will be able to perceive things that until now have been inexplicable to our limited way of thinking.

At first, experiences described in the biographies of great masters, such as receiving teachings from the Buddha seen in a vision, seem beyond our imagination. Although they are inexplicable to our ordinary rational mind, these exceptional spiritual experiences do occur, some during my lifetime. The great practitioner Taklung Shabdrung Rinpoche (1918–94) once told me that when he was giving the empowerments of practices of the Taklung Kagyu lineage to Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche, he had a direct vision of the

great lineage masters of that particular practice, who appeared vividly on the beams of the room where he was giving the empowerment. Taklung Shabdrung Rinpoche was an old lama when he told me this. Having suffered in Chinese prison for many years, he would have had no ambition to impress me by lying or inflating his experience.

A few years ago I met students and colleagues of Khenpo Acho (1918–98), a practitioner from the Nyarong region of Tibet. He was a Nyingma practitioner who studied at Sera, a Geluk monastery, and later he lived as a hermit. His primary practice was reciting the mantra of Avalokiteśvara, *Oṃ maṇi padme hūm*, although he also practiced Vajrayoginī and Vajrakīlaya. His close students and colleagues told me that before he passed away, he asked them not to touch his body and to keep the room closed after he died. After about a week, when they opened the door, they discovered that his body had dissolved into rainbow light. Only his monastic robes were left behind.

Although great Tibetan masters in India do not display supernatural feats during their lifetime, some do at the time of death. After he passed away in 1983, my teacher, Yongzin Ling Rinpoche, remained in the clear-light state for thirteen days without any trace of bodily decay. Some years later, a Sakya abbot remained in the clear light for seventeen days. These extraordinary experiences are not only recorded in the biographies of the past masters but also occur in the present generation.

Ajahn Mun (1870–1949), a well-respected and highly realized monk and meditator in the Thai forest tradition, had visions of Śākyamuni Buddha and the arhats. Even though many people following the Pāli tradition say that Śākyamuni Buddha ceased to exist at the time of his parinirvāṇa, Ajahn Mun clearly saw him surrounded by many arhats. Such experiences are possible when our mind is purified of defilements.

The varying explanations of the Buddha presented above need not be a point of confusion for us. We do not have to choose one view and abandon the other. Rather, at a particular time one or another view may be particularly helpful. When we feel discouraged and think that buddhahood is too high, the path is too difficult, and we are inadequate, it is helpful to think of the Buddha as someone born an ordinary being who experienced the problems involved in career and family life. He chose to practice the Dharma dil-



igently and attained buddhahood. We see we are the same kind of sentient beings that he was and have the same potential to attain full awakening.

At other times, seeing Śākyamuni Buddha as someone who attained awakening eons ago and appeared in our world as an emanation body is more helpful. This perspective gives us the feeling of being cared for and supported by many buddhas and bodhisattvas who manifest in immeasurable worlds for the benefit of sentient beings. These realized beings have accomplished what we aspire to do and can guide us on that path.

We may also think of the Buddha as the physical embodiment of all excellent qualities. Since we limited beings cannot directly perceive the inconceivable qualities of awakening, they appear in the form of the Buddha to communicate with us.

### *Buddhism in Tibet*

To understand Buddhism in Tibet, we must trace its roots back to the Buddha through the Nālandā masters. When Mahāyāna became increasingly more widespread in India, great monastic universities such as Nālandā were constructed. These monastic universities attracted brilliant scholars from all philosophical systems and esteemed practitioners as well. Although Nāgārjuna and his student Āryadeva may have preceded the establishment of Nālandā Monastery, their teachings were studied and debated there. From them sprang the *profound lineage* that widely explained teachings on the ultimate nature. These included the works of Buddhapālita, Bhāvaviveka, Candrakīrti, Śāntideva, Śāntarakṣita, and Kamalaśīla. The *vast lineage*, which emphasized the bodhisattva practices, also flourished there, including the teachings of Maitreya, Asaṅga, Vimuktisena, and Haribhadra. Dignāga and Dharmakīrti, whose teachings on logic and reasoning enabled Buddhists to refute the wrong views of non-Buddhists, also flourished at Nālandā, as did study of the Vinaya—the monastic code of discipline—as expounded by Guṇaprabha and Śākyaprabha. Vasubandhu and Sthiramati elaborated on the Abhidharma.

Buddhadharma first came to Tibet during the reign of Songtsen Gampo (d. 649). Among his wives, Bhṛkuṭī was a Nepali princess and Wencheng a Chinese princess. Both brought with them statues of the Buddha. Bhṛkuṭī

also brought Buddhist scriptures of the Sanskrit tradition, and Wencheng brought Buddhist scriptures in Chinese.

Buddhism flourished during the time of King Trisong Detsen (r. 775–800). Having a farsighted vision for the development of the Dharma, Trisong Detsen invited the great monk, Madhyamaka philosopher, and logician Śāntarakṣita from Nālandā to come to Tibet. Although he was already in his seventies when he arrived, Śāntarakṣita took full responsibility for establishing the Vinaya and the monastic system in Tibet. He ordained seven Tibetan men to see if they could keep the prātimokṣa precepts well. This experiment was successful, and in 779 Samye Monastery was founded. In addition to teaching Madhyamaka, Śāntarakṣita encouraged the Tibetan king to have Buddhist texts translated from Sanskrit into Tibetan so that people could learn the Dharma in their own language. Trisong Detsen also invited to Tibet the great tantric yogi Padmasambhava, who gave tantric initiations and teachings and subdued interferences to the spread of the Dharma. I feel very moved when I think of the hardships these masters underwent to bring Buddhism to Tibet. We should feel profound gratitude to the past masters who set up our current systems of study.

In the early ninth century, many Buddhist texts were translated into Tibetan, and a commission of Tibetan and Indian scholars standardized many of the technical terms and compiled a Sanskrit-Tibetan glossary. However, Buddhism met with drastic persecution under the reign of King Langdarma (r. 838–42). During this time the monastic institutions, which were the central repositories for Buddhist learning and practice, were almost totally decimated. With monastics no longer able to live together, the continuation of the Dharma from teacher to student was disrupted, scriptures were scattered, and practice became fragmented with a group in one place practicing sūtra teachings and another group in another place practicing tantra. In this way, people no longer knew how to practice all the various teachings in a unified manner free of contradictions.

The king Yeshe Ö invited the great sage Atiśa (982–1054) to Tibet to remedy this difficult situation. Arriving in 1042, he taught extensively, and to rectify the misconception that the sūtra and tantra teachings were contradictory, Atiśa wrote *Lamp of the Path (Bodhipathapradīpa)*, showing how a person could practice both sūtra and tantra in a systematic and noncontradictory fashion. As a result, people came to understand that the

monastic discipline of the Vinaya, the bodhisattva ideals of the Perfection Vehicle, and the transformative practices of the Vajrayāna could be practiced in a mutually complementary way. Monasteries were again built and the Dharma flourished in Tibet.

The Buddhist teachings that were established in Tibet before Atiśa became known as the Nyingma, or Old Translation, school. The new lineages of teachings that came into Tibet beginning in the eleventh century were called the New Translation schools, and these slowly crystallized to form the Kadam (which later evolved into the Geluk), Kagyu, and Sakya traditions.

All four of these traditions go back to Nālandā. The Nyingma lineage stems from both Śāntarakṣita and Padmasambhava. The Kagyu tradition came from Nāropa, a great yogi who was previously an astute scholar at Nālandā. The Tibetan translator Marpa went to India and brought his lineage back to Tibet. The Sakya tradition came to Tibet via Virūpa, who began as a Nālandā scholar specializing in Cittamātra philosophy. He had many mystical experiences, and one evening the disciplinarian heard women's voices in his room. Opening the door, he found a group of female tantric practitioners there. They were actually the sixteen *ḍākinīs* (highly realized female tantric practitioners) of the Hevajra tantra, but because monastic rules had been transgressed, the monk Dharmapāla was expelled and became the yogi Virūpa. Atiśa was from Vikramaśīla Monastery in India, but he is considered part of the Nālandā tradition because the curriculum at the two monasteries was the same.

All four Tibetan traditions present the stages of practice in the Perfection Vehicle in a similar way, as seen in their major Tibetan treatises on this topic. In the Nyingma tradition, Longchenpa's (1308–64) *Mind at Ease* and his commentary *Great Chariot* resemble Atiśa's *Lamp of the Path*, especially in terms of the outlines and structure of the texts. The Nyingma master Dza Patrul Rinpoche (1808–87) wrote *Words of My Perfect Teacher*, the Kagyu master Gampopa (1079–1153) authored the *Ornament of Precious Liberation*, the Sakya master Sakya Paṇḍita (1182–1251) authored *Clarifying the Sage's Intent*, and the Geluk master Tsongkhapa (1357–1419) composed his *Great Treatise on the Stages of the Path*.<sup>41</sup>

There has been a rich tradition of debate among the various branches of Tibetan Buddhism. For example, some people think that Tsongkhapa's

writings about emptiness are his own creative invention. In fact, they are firmly rooted in Nāgārjuna's texts; he relies on Nāgārjuna in his discussion of every important topic. I have found some explanations are slightly different from those of Sakya, Kagyu, and Nyingma masters, but the difference is not of great significance.

The main difference among the Tibetan traditions of Geluk, Sakya, Nyingma, and Kagyu is the principal deities they rely on in tantric practice. The Nyingma principally rely on Vajrakīlaya, the Sakya on Hevajra, the Kagyu on Cakrasaṃvara, the Geluk on Guhyasamāja, and the Jonang on Kālacakra. Their explanations of the teachings preliminary to tantric practice are very similar. All rely on the lineage of Maitreya and Asaṅga for the methods to cultivate love, compassion, bodhicitta, and the six perfections. Their elucidations of emptiness are all rooted in the works of Nāgārjuna and his followers.

As a great scholar and logician, Śāntarakṣita introduced his students to the process of using reasoning to examine the teachings, and from then until now, Tibetans have engaged in rigorous study and debate in addition to meditation. With Tibetan scholar-practitioners studying, contemplating, and meditating on the words of the Buddha as well as the great Indian treatises and commentaries, Tibet came to hold the complete Nālandā tradition.

I have two purposes for calling Tibetan Buddhism the Nālandā tradition. First, this shows that it is not Lamaism, a term early Western visitors to Tibet called our form of Buddhism. Lamaism implies that the teachings were created by lamas who pretended to be the Buddha and that people worshiped their lamas. This term created much misunderstanding. Second, many Tibetans don't know the origins of their own teachings and practices and simply follow their own lama or the texts written by teachers of their own monastery. They lack fuller knowledge and a wider perspective. In Nālandā, in addition to studying various Buddhist tenet systems, they also studied non-Buddhist thought. In this way, they developed their critical thinking and gained real knowledge; reading just one text or learning one system doesn't bring that. Having studied many texts and engaged in serious meditation, the most excellent teachers are able to give extensive explanations.

Due to the social context in India at the time Nālandā and the other

great monastic universities flourished, their scholar-practitioners focused on refuting non-Buddhist misconceptions. However, once the great majority of Tibetans became Buddhist, Tibetan scholar-practitioners took it for granted that their audience was Buddhist. For these reasons, although Indian sages wrote texts employing reasoning to refute wrong views, Atiśa emphasized integrating the knowledge of Buddhist practices into daily life. Nowadays the audience is more diverse than ever, and both reasoning to refute wrong views and practice techniques for subduing the mind need to be emphasized.

Sometimes people mistakenly think that Tibetan practice, especially Vajrayāna, is a practice all to itself, separate from the rest of Buddhism. When I first visited Thailand many years ago, some people seemed to think that Tibetan Buddhism was a different religion. However, when we sat together and discussed the Vinaya, the Abhidharma, and such topics as the four truths of the āryas, the thirty-seven aids to awakening, and the four immeasurables (love, compassion, joy, and equanimity), we saw that our Theravāda and Tibetan Buddhist traditions have many common practices and teachings.

With Chinese, Korean, and many Vietnamese Buddhists, Tibetans share the monastic tradition, the bodhisattva ethical restraints, the Sanskrit scriptures, and the practices of Amitābha, Avalokiteśvara, Samantabhadra, and Medicine Buddha. When Tibetan Buddhists meet Japanese Buddhists, we discuss the bodhisattva ethical restraints, the method to generate serenity, and sūtras such as the *Lotus Sūtra* (*Saddharmapuṇḍarīka Sūtra*). The Japanese Shingon sect practices Tantrayāna, and with them we share the yoga tantra practice of Vajradhātu Maṇḍala and the performance tantra practice of Vairocanābhisambodhi. Here we see that Tibetan Buddhist practitioners share many common points that they can discuss with all other Buddhists. For this reason, we can say that Tibetan Buddhism is a comprehensive form of Buddhism.



## 6 | Investigating the Teachings

**B**EFORE A WISE PERSON buys a needed but costly item, he thoroughly investigates the quality of the product. Similarly, if we are to invest our time and energy in practicing a path, it is important to investigate the teachings that explain this path and how to practice it. In this chapter, we will examine the factors that make a teaching reliable. Being able to trace a teaching back to the Buddha is a key element in this, so we must know the criteria to do that, especially regarding teachings that have appeared many centuries after the Buddha.

Once we have found reliable teachings, our task is to understand them correctly. Some of us may take all the statements and stories we read in scriptures or hear in oral teachings literally and find them confusing. It is important to discern the intended purposes of certain statements and the points of particular stories in order to avoid reaching the wrong conclusion. To do this entails taking cultural factors into consideration.

Since the Buddha's teachings are now spreading in new locations and interacting with unfamiliar cultures, the question arises, "Is it desirable or possible to change the Dharma teachings?" To answer this, it is essential to be able to differentiate the actual Dharma from its cultural forms and expressions. If we change the teachings of the path, we will not reach the goal of the path—*nirvāṇa*. If we do not alter external forms, we may spend a lot of time trying to mimic people from another culture without transforming our minds in any meaningful way.

Once we become clear on the path and the goal, we have to set about creating the causes necessary to attain full awakening by practicing the path. Without creating the causes capable of producing a certain result, that

result will not come about, so we must be practical and realistic. If we wait until every one of our questions has been answered to our satisfaction, we will miss out on engaging in genuine spiritual practice.

### *The Kālāmas' Experience*

The *Kālāma Sutta* in the Pāli canon tells the story of the Kālāma people from Kesaputta, who were confused by the stream of religious teachers visiting their place, each espousing his own doctrine and deprecating those of others. At the outset of the sutta, the Kālāmas are not the Buddha's disciples. Hearing of his qualities, they seek his guidance about how to determine which teachers speak the truth and which are mistaken. The Buddha recommends (AN 3.65):

It is proper for you, Kālāmas, to doubt, to be uncertain; uncertainty has arisen in you about what is doubtful. Come, Kālāmas. Do not go upon what has been acquired by repeated hearing; nor upon tradition; nor upon rumor; nor upon what is in a scripture; nor upon surmise; nor upon an axiom; nor upon specious reasoning; nor upon a bias toward a notion that has been pondered over; nor upon another's seeming ability; nor upon the consideration, "The monk is our teacher." Kālāmas, when you yourselves know: "These things are bad; these things are blamable; these things are censured by the wise; undertaken and observed, these things lead to harm and ill," abandon them... when you yourselves know: "These things are good; these things are not blamable; these things are praised by the wise; undertaken and observed, these things lead to benefit and happiness," enter on and abide in them.

Knowing that the Kālāmas are reasonable and sensible people, the Buddha encourages them to investigate the various teachings they hear and not simply accept them because of the flimsy reasons that people too often give for their beliefs. The Buddha does not recommend that the Kālāmas discard statements because they do not understand them. Rather, he encour-



ages them to test the assertions and see if those assertions affirm what the Kālāmas know is true and beneficial from their own experience.

Accepting a teaching simply because it was spoken a long time ago and is part of a lengthy tradition is not wise. However, rejecting old beliefs simply because they don't agree with our present opinions isn't wise either. Remaining open and continuing to examine is judicious. It is our responsibility to use our intelligence to question and test a teaching before accepting it. Having done that, our knowledge will be firm because it will be based on firsthand experience or correct reasoning.

### *Reliable Teachings*

Whatever Buddhist teaching we listen to, study, or practice should be authentic. For centuries people like us have learned and practiced the Buddha's teachings, thereby transforming their minds and hearts and attaining higher spiritual levels, including buddhahood itself. We can be confident that if we learn and practice these teachings correctly, we too can attain the same results as the past great masters did. To ensure that a teaching is effective and reliable—not a recent, untested invention of an unenlightened person—we should be able to trace its roots to the Buddha himself. Three criteria will help us to evaluate a teaching and gain a clearer idea whether it is authentic.

First, teachings given by the fully awakened Buddha himself can be accepted as reliable. To validate commentaries and teachings given by masters of subsequent generations, we investigate if their meanings accord with what the Buddha taught.

Second, a teaching that has been subjected to and affirmed by the logical scrutiny of the great Buddhist sages can be accepted as authentic. These sages were not intellectuals who simply discussed the teachings without practicing themselves. While great sages such as Āryadeva, Candrakīrti, and Śāntideva are usually depicted as actively debating, they were also accomplished practitioners who sincerely put the teachings into practice and transformed their minds.

Third, a teaching that has been practiced and realized by the great *mahāsiddhas*—highly realized yogis and yoginīs—is authentic. These great

practitioners have sincerely practiced the Buddha's teachings, internalized their meaning, and gained significant spiritual realizations. This demonstrates that the teachings they practiced are reliable.

Some people hold the mistaken assumption that monastics in India and Tibet only studied and debated, while the tantrikas, whose appearance and behavior did not correspond to monastic discipline, did not study and yet were the real practitioners. Before becoming a tantric practitioner, Nāropa was a well-respected, learned practitioner and the abbot of Nālandā. He did not become a tantric practitioner as a newcomer to Buddhism but only after many years of study in which he gained an excellent conceptual understanding of the Dharma. While he saw that this alone was insufficient to accomplish buddhahood, his extensive scriptural knowledge was a necessary foundation for successfully actualizing the tantric path as a yogi.

Many of the seventeen great Nālandā adepts<sup>42</sup> were not only debaters and teachers but were also among the eighty mahāsiddhas. In Tibetan the term *khedrup nyenten*—which applies to both the sage-scholars from the monastic universities and the mahāsiddhas—indicates a practitioner endowed with learning as well as realizations derived through practice. Without study, we do not know how to meditate correctly; without meditation, our studies remain dry. Both are necessary.

We can compare a teaching to the texts that are commonly accepted by everyone in either the Theravāda or the Mahāyāna tradition as authentic, and if their meaning is compatible, they may be accepted as accurate. For example, in the Mahāyāna tradition, texts by Nāgārjuna, Ārya Asaṅga, Śāntideva, Candrakīrti, and Dharmakīrti are commonly accepted as accurate explanations of the Buddha's word. These works of the great masters have already been proven to be reliable because they have been investigated by the sages and the mahāsiddhas have attained realizations by depending upon them.

This analysis cannot be made on the basis of words alone but must include meanings. For example, the terminology in various tantric commentaries may differ considerably from that in the root texts. However, if their meaning accords with the root texts, the commentaries can be accepted as reliable.

We should avoid disparaging teachings that we disagree with or do not fully understand by declaring, "The Buddha didn't teach this." For example,

what is to be gained by saying, “The Buddha didn’t teach rebirth” simply because the idea of rebirth makes us uncomfortable or does not immediately make sense to us? It is best to remain neutral toward such teachings and put them aside for the time being.

Nor should we ignore teachings simply because they may not be of immediate use to us. For instance, some people have deep respect for the Buddha and his teachings and are concerned about becoming a more compassionate person. At this time, they are not very attracted to investigating emptiness by means of logical analysis. It is fine for these people to focus on the teachings that are most relevant to their aims. They do not need to study the complex works that the monastics delve into. However, this does not mean that those more complicated texts are irrelevant, unnecessary, or inauthentic.

The Buddha gave some teachings provisionally to benefit a particular individual or group. The scripture is authentic, but its meaning requires interpretation; it is not definitive. For example, one sūtra says, “Father and mother are to be killed.” This clearly is not to be taken literally, and its meaning must be interpreted. The Buddha said this to console a king who had taken the lives of his father and mother and was overwhelmed with remorse. In the Buddha’s mind, “father and mother” referred to craving and existence, two of the twelve links of dependent origination that describe how we take rebirth in cyclic existence. Once the king had overcome his remorse and his mind was open to hearing more teachings, the Buddha taught him the actual meaning of the Dharma.

In sūtras designed for trainees who would benefit from the Cittamātra presentation, the Buddha taught the three natures, saying the imputed nature does not exist by its own characteristics, but the other-powered nature and the consummate nature both exist by their own characteristics. Although the text is to be understood as expressed above by those with the Cittamātra disposition, the teaching is provisional because it does not present the final mode of existence. The Buddha had another, deeper meaning in mind when he spoke this.

Another example of a provisional teaching is one in which a spiritual mentor instructs a particular disciple, “To meditate on emptiness, simply withdraw your mind from focusing on any object whatsoever.” By hearing this advice and applying it in his meditation, the disciple realizes the correct view of emptiness. This instruction, however, is not entirely correct,

because even emptiness is an object to be focused on. Meditation on emptiness is not simply emptying the mind of all thoughts. If such a teaching were given to a general audience, many people would misunderstand it and do blank-minded meditation, such as the Chinese monk Hashang Mahāyāna taught in Tibet in the eighth century. The understanding of emptiness in the minds of people in general would, in fact, be hampered because they would mistake not focusing on any object whatsoever for meditation on emptiness; the two are quite distinct.

Why, then, was this instruction given to that disciple? Under those particular circumstances, that individual was ripe and able to benefit from hearing it. Instead of generating the wrong view mistaking blank-minded meditation for meditation on emptiness, this person's unique mental state made him an appropriate pupil to hear that explanation and understand the correct view.

Because such a view can be damaging if taught publicly, Kamalaśīla came from India to Samye Monastery in Tibet to debate with Hashang Mahāyāna and to refute his view. I wonder if Hashang Mahāyāna had initially taught this view to a particular disciple for whom it was suitable and later started teaching it to a general audience. Śāntarakṣita, Kamalaśīla's guru, was at Samye at that time, and had Hashang taught that view publicly in Tibet from the beginning, Śāntarakṣita surely would have spoken up and rejected it, especially since Hashang said studying and contemplating the teachings were not necessary.

The great Nyingma master Longchenpa once commented that due to Tibetans' lack of merit, Hashang's view did not become dominant in Tibet. Another lama then said that was tantamount to Longchenpa saying that his view was the same as Hashang's. Personally speaking, I'm a follower of both Kamalaśīla and Longchenpa and have faith in both of them. As explained above, a statement such as "withdraw the mind from focusing on any object" may be suitable for a specific individual with particular karma and a certain mental state. Kamalaśīla refuted it when it was taught publicly due to the damage it could cause if accepted literally. However, Longchenpa accepted it as applicable to specific individuals. Therefore their positions are not contradictory.

Some statements in sūtras or Indian treatises are explained differently in

each of the four philosophical schools, and there are levels of profundity within the sūtra and tantra systems. The Buddha taught certain points with skillful means to benefit a particular type of disciple and gradually lead her to the final, correct view. Thus we accept differing statements in the scriptures and differing interpretations of some statements as indicative of the Buddha's skillful means. However, we should not take this to an extreme and think that the Buddha was so vague that anyone can interpret his statements in any way that she likes! Rather, one statement may have many explicit and implicit meanings that can be drawn out in various ways. In the highest yoga tantra specifically, a phrase may be interpreted in four ways—in accord with its literal meaning, general meaning, hidden meaning, and final meaning. It may also be interpreted in six modes: interpretable and definitive, implied meaning and non-implied (direct) meaning, literal and nonliteral. Here interpretable and definitive do not mean the same as in the sūtra context.

## REFLECTION

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Three criteria can enable us to discern a particular teaching as reliable:

1. It was given by the fully awakened Buddha himself.
  2. It has been subjected to and affirmed by the logical scrutiny of the great Buddhist sages.
  3. It has been practiced and realized by the great mahāsiddhas.
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### *Treasure Teachings and Pure Vision Teachings*

In Tibetan Buddhism, in addition to teachings spoken by the Buddha in sūtras and by the great masters in their writings, there are “treasure” teachings (*terma* or *tercho*) and other teachings that arise from pure visions. How are these traced back to the Buddha, and what is the process for ascertaining their validity?

*Termas* are teachings discovered centuries after their composition either concealed somewhere in the environment or revealed as visionary teachings. These were hidden as *termas* because they were not suitable for the practitioners at the time of the initial guru but would benefit practitioners at the time of the *terton*, the later practitioner who discovers them. When the *terma* is hidden, the guru who hides it often prophesizes where, when, and by whom it will later be discovered.

There are two main kinds of *termas*: earth treasures and mind treasures. *Earth treasures* are objects such as texts and ritual implements that are discovered in nature—in rocks, mountains, or trees—or in a temple or *stūpa*. Earth *termas* are not ordinary books but are often written in another script or language. Sometimes they contain symbols that trigger the *terton* to recall a teaching, which he then writes down. *Mind treasures* are found in space—that is, they appear to the mind of the *terton*. Guru Padmasambhava, the most prolific creator of *termas*, or another guru placed them in the mindstream of the *terton*, who experiences them in meditation and then writes the teaching down from memory. Sometimes the *terton* himself holds the teaching in his mindstream and reveals it in a future life.

A treasure teaching enhances the teachings the Buddha already gave. In content and purpose, it is in line with the teachings of Śākyamuni Buddha contained in the *sūtras* and *tantras*. In this way it is traceable to the Buddha.

In the Tibetan Buddhist community, some treasure discoveries are considered false and others authentic, indicating that some claims may be forged or simply erroneous. There is not an appointed committee or person who is responsible for checking the accuracy of *termas*. Rather, a prominent and authoritative master that is well known in the Tibetan community usually comments on a *terma*. He and others take into consideration three factors: whether the *terton* and/or the *terma* were prophesized by the Buddha or another lineage master, chiefly Padmasambhava; how this treasure teaching compares with those well-known, authentic treasure teachings discovered in the past; and the characteristics of the person who claims to be the treasure discoverer.

In most cases, an authentic treasure discoverer conceals a new treasure teaching for some years while he or she practices it to determine whether it is reliable. That person's teacher also practices and evaluates the teaching. Sometimes an explicit statement in the *terma* says that the *terton* will encounter a specific, reliable student to whom he should first give this

teaching. This student is called the “owner of the teaching,” and the discoverer may wait to see if this student appears. As I understand it, when Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche experienced something akin to intuition in which a teaching appeared in his mind, he explained this to his teacher Khyentse Chokyi Lodro. Then both of them would practice this teaching and, if they both gained some deeper experience, then they considered it authentic.

There are other teachings that derive from a pure vision appearing in the mind of a realized master in deep meditation. Unlike *termas*, they are not transmitted by mind from Padmasambhava. Rather the pure vision of the deity appears directly to the practitioner. Here the deity who appears is in fact a buddha. As with *termas*, the teachings given in a pure vision should accord with original teachings traceable to the Buddha. If the deity in the vision taught that an inherently existent soul existed, that clearly would not be an authentic pure-vision teaching!

The Fifth Dalai Lama had visions of several deities, and thus certain initiation lineages trace back to him. He practiced the teachings from his pure visions and had good results. Later masters also did this, with similar results. The Fifth Dalai Lama was a good monk, an excellent scholar, and an outstanding practitioner. He had no reason to lie.

I received some of the initiations coming from the pure vision of the Fifth Dalai Lama from my teacher Takdrak Rinpoche when I was around ten or eleven years old. At that time, I wasn't very interested in them, although I did have some auspicious dreams during that time. Now when I do retreat on the Fifth Dalai Lama's pure visions here in Dharamsala, some indications of success appear during each retreat. They may not be obvious signs, but still they come, so these plus my experience in practicing these teachings leads me to believe they are authentic. The Second Dalai Lama also had many pure visions, as did the First Dalai Lama, although he kept them concealed.

Each Tibetan Buddhist tradition has guru-yoga meditations centered on prominent lineage holders or founders of that lineage. For Nyingma, it is Padmasambhava; for Kagyu, Milarepa; for Geluk, Tsongkhapa; and for Sakya, the five founders of the Sakya order (Sachen Kunga Nyingpo, Sonam Tsemo, Jetsun Drakpa Gyaltzen, Sakya Paṇḍita, and Chogyal Phakpa). We may wonder: Since these masters were later historical figures, the guru-yoga practices centered on them were written long after the Buddha lived. How do we know that these practices are valid?

Upon examination, we see that these guru-yoga *sadhanas* (ritual texts) contain the important elements of any tantric practice: taking refuge and generating bodhicitta, the seven-limb prayer, requesting inspiration, dissolution of the guru into the meditator, and meditation on emptiness. Although the central figure varies—instead of being a deity it is now a lineage lama—the practice is still authentic because it follows the basic meditation procedures for this type of practice.

### *Exaggerated Statements?*

Sometimes we encounter statements in the sūtras or commentaries that appear exaggerated, and we doubt whether we should take them literally. Using the criteria mentioned above as well as our common sense, we can evaluate whether they are accurate if understood literally.

For example, statements in some scriptures say that by reciting a particular mantra once, one will never be born in an unfortunate realm or one will attain awakening easily. If such statements were literally true, there would have been no need for the Buddha to teach us to avoid destructive actions and create constructive ones. If we could be reborn in a pure land by reciting a few mantras, why would the Buddha spend so much time teaching the importance of counteracting ignorance and afflictions by applying the antidotes to them? If we could gain realizations simply by reciting mantras, the Buddha would not have taught the three higher trainings and the cultivation of method and wisdom. We can see that such statements are not consistent with the Buddha's teachings in other scriptures. Therefore we cannot take these statements literally. Reciting mantras must be conjoined with other virtuous practices to bring the desired results. So why does the scripture say this? In part, the benefits of reciting a mantra were extolled to inspire certain people who are embarking on the practice.

In addition, the results of reciting a mantra differ according to the person doing it and how it is done. A constructive action done by a person adhering to Buddhist precepts is far more powerful than the same action done by one not living within the precepts. The potency of mantra recitation done by a person contemplating the emptiness of the mantra, reciting it with a bodhicitta motivation, or visualizing sending out emanations to benefit sentient beings is much more powerful than the same recitation by someone whose



mind is distracted. The power of the mantra does not operate independent of these other conditions.

On the flip side of these benefits, some scriptures state, for example, that we will be reborn in the hell realm for the same number of eons as the number of moments we are angry with our spiritual master; that one moment of anger destroys the merit of generosity and other practices accumulated over one eon; or that anger toward a bodhisattva leads to experiencing unfortunate rebirths and great suffering for eons.

Some people may think that the Buddha made such statements to instill fear in us so that we will behave ethically. This is not the case. The Buddha had no reason to threaten us with punishment: the law of karma and its effects is not a system of punishment and reward. Rather, with compassion the Buddha was reminding us that a small action can bring a large result, just as in the physical world a tiny seed can grow into a huge tree. Such seemingly exaggerated statements aren't only about the bad effects of small unwholesome actions. They are also found on the positive side; great beneficial results may come about by doing small constructive actions. For example, it is said that if a person shoots a sinister look to a bodhisattva, the karmic impact is like gouging out the eyes of all sentient beings. However, it is also said that if we pay respect to or venerate a bodhisattva for even one moment, we accumulate merit as vast as the universe. One text says that even if an enraged person glances at the image of the Buddha, he accumulates merit by the power of having contact with an image representing awakening. As a result of this, he will be able to see ten million buddhas in the future. But remember, glancing at a Buddha statue alone will not yield the result of seeing ten million buddhas. We also need to purify our minds, create merit, generate bodhicitta, and understand emptiness.

In statements about the effects of our interactions with buddhas, bodhisattvas, and their images, the heaviness of the karma is primarily due to what is called the “power of the object.” That is, buddhas and bodhisattva are remarkable beings who have accumulated merit for countless eons and have continually engaged in benefiting sentient beings. Venerating such beings, making offerings to them, and assisting them in their various works create powerful karma because, being weighty in virtue, holy beings are powerful objects. Similarly, interfering with their good deeds or scorning them leaves heavy harmful latencies in our mind.

Whether our actions regarding holy objects have the potency to bring strong or weak effects also depends on the context of the action. Let's say a person who is not a bodhisattva gets angry at a bodhisattva for whom she usually holds great admiration. Her anger is not rage; rather she lost her temper over a small thing. If she immediately regains mindfulness and regrets her anger, I don't think she will experience suffering for countless eons. However, another person has no regard for bodhisattvas in general and is antagonistic toward one in particular. If he gets very angry toward that bodhisattva, the harsh consequences mentioned above may apply.

Results arise in dependence upon a multiplicity of causes and conditions, so scriptural statements must be understood in that light. The intensity of our intention, whether getting angry or generating compassion, makes a big difference in the strength of the result. Also, if a person performs an action repetitively—be it constructive or destructive—the result will be heavier. Another factor affecting the heaviness is whether a counterforce is present: if we purify destructive actions, their effects will be lighter, whereas generating anger or wrong views hinders the ripening of our constructive karma. The strength of the regret and the strength of the wrong views will also affect the heaviness of the karma.

In short, many factors are involved in the weight of a karma. In *Blaze of Reasoning* (*Tarkajvālā*) by Bhāvaviveka and in the *Great Treatise on the Stages of the Path* by Tsongkhapa, it is said that the intricacies of karma are very profound. How specific actions bring their specific results is a very obscure phenomenon that only omniscient buddhas know with complete accuracy. Nevertheless, we can still evaluate scriptural statements regarding cause and result based on our limited knowledge by comparing quotations on a similar topic to see if they are consistent. In the case of the efficacy of reciting a mantra once, other scriptures present a divergent view and stress the necessity of purifying destructive karma and practicing both wisdom and method for eons. But in the example of a small instance of anger bringing a large result, we find complementary statements that small constructive actions may ripen in significant results. In this case, the claims are consistent with each other.

If we do not feel comfortable believing some of the scriptural statements about karma and its results, we can leave them aside. No one is forcing us

to believe what the Buddha said or to become a Buddhist. In matters of religion, a great diversity of beliefs is natural. While everyone—animals and human beings alike—agrees that drinking water is necessary, we disagree on what food is delicious. Similarly, although the search for meaning in life is shared, we may differ regarding religious beliefs. There is room for a variety of views.

## REFLECTION

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1. Are there scriptural statements that you feel uncomfortable with or doubtful toward? If so, what are they?
  2. Are there other scriptures that either reinforce, contradict, or give another interpretation of the meaning of that statement? How does that change your thought?
  3. Was religion used as a tool of coercion or intimidation when you were a child? If so, could that experience now affect your perspective on Buddhist scripture?
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### *Correctly Understanding the Point*

The meaning of certain stories found in Dharma texts is not always obvious, especially since they were told for a specific purpose and are related to the author's cultural context. A few examples will illustrate this.

There is a story of the Buddha in his previous life giving away his wife and children as an act of generosity. This seems to contradict not only modern values of gender equality but also the ancient principle of caring for one's family.

We may be confused or even incensed by the values and assumptions underlying such a story. It is helpful to step back and ask ourselves what Dharma meaning is being expressed in the story. Most people cherish their family more than anything else. Attachment to our loved ones is often so strong that the thought of being separated from them brings us great

anguish. That someone was willing to offer what they cherish the most testifies to the depth of that person's faith and veneration for the Three Jewels. He is willing to separate from his most cherished objects to create merit. This story also illustrates that when attachment has been conquered, the mind does not cling even to those we cherish the most. The mind is so free that we are not overwhelmed with distress when separated from our dear ones.

We don't need to agree with the social values of an ancient culture in order to learn a valuable point from an ancient story. While in ancient times—and to some extent even today—a wife and children being a man's property was acceptable to Indian sensibilities, clearly it is not acceptable now in other countries. We can maintain our contemporary social values and still appreciate the Dharma meaning of a story.

Aśvaghōṣa, a great Indian sage of the first century, wrote the *Acts of the Buddha* (*Buddhacarita*) in which he related the Buddha's deeds when he was a bodhisattva. One of these was the well-known story about the Buddha offering his body to a starving tigress so she could feed her cubs. After writing this, Aśvaghōṣa had a strong aspiration to practice just as the Buddha did, so when he encountered a starving tigress one day, in a pure act of generosity, not expecting anything in return, he gave the tigress his body. The moment he did this, he composed a prayer of seventy verses about the bodhisattva practice, using his own blood as ink. This prayer is really wonderful, but it seems that no one was there when he did this, so I'm not sure where the oral transmission of the prayer came from.

Some people may initially be horrified by the idea of feeding their body to a tiger and wonder why Buddhists would glorify such a suicidal act. "Isn't it better to stay alive and work for the welfare of human beings rather than feed our body to an animal?" they ask. The purpose of this story is to emphasize the depth of bodhisattvas' compassion: they are willing to give even their body and life without any attachment to benefit others. This illustrates the strength of compassion we want to cultivate as aspiring bodhisattvas. Although having no attachment to our body may seem almost impossible at our current level, by training our mind in non-attachment and compassion we will gradually be able to cultivate the attitude that can give our body and life as easily as giving an apple to someone.

In another story, a nonbeliever asked Āryadeva for one of his eyes, and

Āryadeva happily offered it to him. This person then crushed the eye. We may wonder: “Does the generosity demonstrated by this holy being mean I should give away everything indiscriminately, even to someone who doesn’t value the gift?”

Some background to this story is needed. At that time, non-Buddhist scholars were challenging Buddhist views, and a big debate was about to occur to determine whose views were correct. Āryadeva was to represent the Buddhist view, and in order to train him, his spiritual mentor, Nāgārjuna, took the position of the non-Buddhists and debated with Āryadeva. Nāgārjuna did this so well that Āryadeva began to think, “My teacher is not actually a Buddhist!” and disparaged him during the practice debate. This disrespect toward his mentor was a destructive act, but because Āryadeva had high realizations, the karmic seed of reviling his spiritual master did not fester in his mindstream but ripened quickly. En route to the debate site, he encountered someone who asked for one of his eyes. In an act of consummate generosity, with no expectation of receiving anything in return, Āryadeva happily complied and continued on his journey. However, as he was walking away, he looked back and saw the person crushing his eye and regretted his generosity. For that reason, his sight was not restored, whereas otherwise it would have been.

There are many lessons in this story: the importance of always maintaining a respectful attitude toward our spiritual mentor, the possibility of compassionately giving away our body with no expectation of return, and the disadvantage of regretting an act of generosity.

From this story, we should not draw the conclusion that we must sacrifice our body or material resources indiscriminately without making sure that they will be properly utilized. The perfection of generosity entails giving an appropriate object to a suitable person at the right time; good judgment is indispensable. Giving a bottle of liquor to an alcoholic is not an act of generosity. In his text, *Bodhisattva Grounds (Bodhisattvabhūmi)*, Asaṅga gives a detailed explanation about the practice of generosity describing appropriate and inappropriate times, objects, recipients, places, and motivations for giving.

From another perspective, Nāgārjuna and Āryadeva were highly realized ārya bodhisattvas. Thus this story seems odd, for it appears to ignore Āryadeva’s mastery. Surely someone with his realizations would never have

behaved like that toward his spiritual mentor. Nor would he have given one of his eyes to someone for whom it was of no benefit. Similarly, he would not have regretted his generosity afterward. Because this story makes Āryadeva appear imprudent, I question whether these events should be taken literally.

There is the story of an old woman whose son was making a pilgrimage to a holy site. She asked him to please bring a relic of the Buddha back for her. He remembered this only on his way home, and not wanting to disappoint his mother, he took a tooth from the carcass of a dead dog he found along the way and presented this to her, saying it was the Buddha's relic. She had great faith and worshiped this tooth devoutly. As a result, the tooth produced many relics, and she experienced miraculous occurrences.

It is easy to conclude from this story that blind faith is necessary on the path. This is clearly contrary to the Buddha's emphasis on developing discriminating wisdom. I do not see much point in this story and propose replacing it with the following, more suitable, account to illustrate the benefit of having confidence in the Three Jewels.

Two or three centuries ago, a great teacher and sincere practitioner named Togyen Lama Rinpoche lived in Tibet. He had a small clay image of Tsongkhapa on his carefully tended altar. One day, due to Togyen Lama's genuine practice and heartfelt aspirational prayers, that image of Tsongkhapa actually spoke and gave teachings to him. This came about not from the side of the statue, but mainly due to Togyen Lama's excellent practice. Due to his spiritual experiences and confidence in Tsongkhapa, this clay image became the real Tsongkhapa and spoke to him. However, for ordinary people who lack that kind of spiritual experience and faith, the statue just looked like clay.

These are just a few examples. When we read stories in texts it is helpful to reflect on them in order to discern the meaning the author intended; we can ignore the social values or other elements of the story that don't make sense to people in our day and age or in our culture. It's also good to remember that not all aspects of an analogy apply to the point being established. Many stories or analogies are useful in one area but cannot be generalized to all situations. When doubts remain, it is helpful to discuss the meaning with Dharma friends or ask our teacher so that we will understand teachings, stories, and analogies in the way that they are intended.

## REFLECTION

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1. Recall a story you have heard or read in a Dharma teaching that left you feeling confused, disturbed, or irritated.
  2. Realizing that the story is from another culture that had different social values than you do now, set the details of the story aside and ask yourself, “What is the point of this story?”
  3. Consider how that point relates to your Dharma practice.
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### *Can the Dharma Change?*

Some people ask if the Buddha’s teachings can be changed in order to make them more relevant to our historical period. While they want to make the Dharma more understandable to others, they are concerned that altering the teachings would impact their authenticity and efficacy. This question requires much careful thought.

It’s important to differentiate between the essence of the Buddha’s teachings—the determination to be free, bodhicitta, and the correct view of reality—and the external forms of Buddhism, such as the color and style of monastic robes, the design of the altar, the types of offerings that are made, and the language and melody of chants. External forms have changed each time Buddhism has spread to a different place, and this does not affect the essence of the Buddha’s message. However, changing the teachings of the Buddha that describe duḥkha, its origin, its cessation, and the path to nirvāṇa would alter the fundamental perspective and principles of the Buddhadharmā, making it no longer the teachings of the Buddha.

Regarding the development of Buddhist thought in ancient India and in the classical period in Tibet, many of the debates in the texts center on issues in epistemology, cognitive processes, and the relationship between body and mind that were important to people at that time and place. In ancient India, Buddhist thinkers had to respond to philosophical claims made by non-Buddhist Indian schools. While some of those debates may, upon first glance, not seem important to us, if we look closely we may see

that some versions of those views might exist today. In that case, studying their refutations could help us when speaking with our contemporaries who assert the existence of a universal mind, an absolute creator, predetermination, and so forth. Understanding the reasons disproving the theses of non-Buddhists may also help us dispel similar kinds of beliefs that we may have.

In Tibet, many of the debates center around the two truths: what they are and how they relate to each other. Here Buddhists debate with each other—not with non-Buddhists—in order to distinguish the Middle Way view from views of nihilism and absolutism. Some of the views expressed by earlier Tibetan Buddhists are held by people today, so studying the pros and cons of these various views can be relevant to our practice.

In ancient times, people lacked a sophisticated understanding of the brain and neural processes and of their role in perception, emotions, and other cognitive processes. Since now we have a much better scientific understanding of the brain and its role in our experiences, it would be helpful to bring that knowledge into Buddhist thinking. Buddhist dialogue with science raises a number of other issues that need to be discussed and debated—issues that would not have occurred to people in ancient India or in classical Tibet. Previously people naturally accepted that mind and body were different entities; these days they don't, so Buddhists need to prove the existence of the mind, its difference from the brain, and the relation of the two. The great Buddhist debaters of the past were not concerned with the issue of predetermination and free will, but when Buddhism enters into cultures influenced by theistic religions, those topics become crucial. In these and other such areas, Buddhists need to learn and contemplate the views of scientists and people of other religions and know how to apply Buddhist principles to them and to respond with wisdom. There is much room for us to grow in these areas.

However, with respect to the teachings on afflictions and how they cause suffering, sentient beings today have the same kind of afflictions as they did thousands of years ago. The specific objects of attachment and anger may change in different times: in ancient times human beings weren't attached to their smartphones and didn't become angry when their computers or cars broke down. However, the general objects of attachment and anger are still very much the same—whatever gives us happiness or interferes with



that happiness. Furthermore, the processes of getting angry by exaggerating the negative aspect of someone and of subduing anger by means of applying counterforces are the same now as before. The antidotes to individual afflictions such as anger and clinging attachment remain as relevant today as they were then.

It is feasible that after several hundred thousand years, our brain may change through an evolutionary process to the point where even the shape of our head or the functioning of our nervous system will be radically different. In those cases, it is conceivable that sentient beings' preoccupations and ways of thinking may change. However, as far as the problem of self-grasping is concerned, I don't think it will change. Since this root of our suffering will not change, neither will its antidote—the wisdom realizing emptiness. As far as the view of emptiness is concerned, it remains relevant at the beginning, the middle, and the end of our practice, in all historical periods, in all places, and for all sentient beings.

When adopting new cultural forms, we must ensure that we neither intentionally nor inadvertently discard or change vital teachings. Should that happen, the liberation and awakening of future generations would be rendered impossible. Thoughtfulness, care, and slow change are preferable to a rush to make Buddhism more attractive to the present public.

### *Being Practical*

Researching the teachers and teachings before making a commitment is a good idea. However, sometimes we go too far and think that all of our doubts must be resolved and questions answered before we can engage in practicing the path to freedom. One sūtra (MN 63) tells the story of Bhikkhu Mālunkyāputta, who has a surge of doubt because the Buddha did not respond to his questions: Is the world eternal or not eternal? Is the world finite or infinite? Is the soul the same as the body or are they different? After death, does a Tathāgata exist, not exist, both, or neither? In his confusion, Mālunkyāputta thinks that he cannot continue to practice the Dharma unless those pressing issues are resolved, and so he approaches the Buddha.

To instruct his disciple, the Buddha uses the simile of a man shot by an arrow. Suppose someone is wounded by a poisonous arrow and taken to the doctor. The wounded man arrives at the clinic, in pain and bleeding

profusely, but rather than letting the doctor treat him, he insists on first knowing the social class of the person who shot the arrow, the name and clan of that person, his height and complexion, where he lived, and the type of bow, shaft, feathers, sinews, and arrow that were used. Clearly he would die before all his questions were answered. And even if he were successful in obtaining that information, it would not stop the bleeding nor extend his life. Similarly, if we think, “I will not practice the Dharma until all my questions are answered and doubts resolved,” this life will end and no practice will have been done.

For that reason, the Buddha told Mālunkyāputta that he teaches, “This is dukkha, this is the origin of dukkha, this is the cessation of dukkha, this is the way leading to the cessation of dukkha.” The Buddha teaches the four truths because they are beneficial to learn, they will help people to live the holy life, and they lead to disenchantment with cyclic existence, the giving up of sensual craving, cessation of dukkha, peace in the mind, direct knowledge of the way things are, and nibbāna. He leaves other topics aside because learning them is not necessary or conducive for this purpose. Whether the world is eternal or not has no relevance to the important task of eliminating afflictions and ceasing saṃsāra. The Buddha recommends that Mālunkyāputta leave aside his questions and focus on the path that leads to liberation. In that way, Mālunkyāputta will not waste time on senseless doubts.

Like this, we should focus on what is important and not be distracted by pointless speculation. If we do not instantly understand a Dharma topic, we can temporarily put it aside and focus on those Dharma topics that help us here and now. Later on we can return to those other topics. Not all our questions can or will be answered at once. Let’s be practical and remove that poisonous arrow of the afflictions before it takes our life.

In this chapter, we have learned the criteria to discern reliable teachings. Now we must study those teachings and understand them as they are meant to be understood. This may entail looking beyond cultural overlays and detecting the point of a story or analogy. To attain the goals of liberation and awakening, we must follow the path as the Buddha taught it, without altering it to suit our fancies and predilections. While the outer “packaging” of the teachings—the cultural forms in which they exist—may be changed, we must take care not to change the essential teachings just because they

don't agree with our opinions. The challenge is to differentiate between the packaging and the essence. Great skill is needed to do this.

Having reached the point where we are ready to engage in serious study and practice of the Buddha's teachings, let's not be waylaid by doubts. Instead, let's approach the teachings with curiosity, sincerity, and intelligence.



## 7 | The Importance of Kindness and Compassion

### *A Peaceful Mind*

**S**IMPLY TAKING CARE of our body and tending to its physical comfort but neglecting the state of our mind and heart is not wise. Just as we nourish our body and care for its health each day, we should also invest effort and time into cultivating our mind and ensuring its spiritual health. Doing so will bring us great peace and happiness now as well as in the future.

Whether or not you accept future lives, counteracting disturbing emotions and cultivating our good qualities are still extremely important. We are all subject to frustration, disappointment, and loss in life as well as to aging, sickness, and death. Such conditions plague us simply because we are human. No external method to eliminate them exists; the only way to face these trials gracefully and lessen the suffering that accompanies them is to prepare for them by transforming our mind. Then, when such inevitable sufferings come, we will be able to handle them more easily, with less anxiety and fear, and even with some joy at the special opportunities they provide for our spiritual development.

Medical researchers are taking more interest in studying emotions because they see there is a relationship between positive emotions and good health. Having a positive attitude sustains good health as well as increases our ability to heal after injury and surgery. Destructive emotions, such as anger, fear, and anxiety, can eat away not only at our emotional well-being but also at our health. The link between these emotions and ulcers, high blood pressure, and so forth has long been known. Some scientific studies have found that destructive emotions weaken our immune system while constructive emotions boost it.

Constructive emotions help people better weather the natural process of the body's aging and eventual demise. People with a positive attitude are able to face these events with inner balance and acceptance—this illustrates that although the body may be ill or painful, the mind can remain peaceful and people can still enjoy a sense of purpose in life. My mother was a good example of this. She experienced many hardships, including fleeing her homeland and becoming a refugee, but she maintained a positive and kind attitude throughout. Due to this, she was appreciated and loved by others.

From the time we are born, constructive emotions affect our physical, social, and emotional development. Studies have shown that when infants receive compassionate care from their parents, it facilitates the proper development of their brains. We all know from our own experience that a child who is treated with kindness and compassion has more self-confidence and better relationships with others.

Sometimes we think that animals and insects may be happier than we are: they have no fear of layoffs at work, financial woes, or broken relationships. This may be true, but their lack of anxiety is not due to spiritual practice and mental transformation but to the clouds of ignorance and confusion that obscure their minds. There is nothing to admire about this state; contrary to the popular saying, ignorance is not bliss. Fortunately, we human beings, by using our intelligence and reason, have the ability to consciously cultivate constructive mental states and the path to peace and happiness. We have the ability to actualize our unique potential to its fullest.

From the beginning of the Buddhist path to the end, each practice is aimed at developing virtuous qualities of mind. The qualities we attain through disciplining and cultivating our mind are vast and extensive, as illustrated by sincere practitioners and highly realized beings.

For our spiritual practice to bear good results, kindness, tolerance, and compassion for other sentient beings are essential. Practicing any spiritual path motivated by habitual self-absorption won't do, because that attitude is a principal cause of our unhappiness. Seeking wealth, social status, or fame is hardly a spiritual motivation, nor is arrogance, jealousy, or competition. To progress on the path to awakening, we need to begin with and maintain a sincere attitude that deeply cherishes others and that cares for ourselves in a healthy way, without being either self-indulgent or self-denigrating. Such a mental state is necessary both to live happily in this life and to make our

spiritual practice effective. This is because our motivation is the chief factor determining the long-term results of our actions. In this chapter, we'll learn contemplations that lead to a compassionate attitude and altruistic intentions, and then we'll discuss mind training, a skillful method to help us maintain a compassionate outlook even in the face of adversity.

### *The Importance of Motivation*

The Buddhadharma is a method to train our mind that aims at eliminating afflictions—disturbing emotions and incorrect views. *Nirvāṇa* is true freedom—the elimination or cessation of these afflictions. Our physical, verbal, and mental efforts directed toward this goal are included in Dharma practice.

What is and is not Dharma practice is determined by our motivation. A spiritual motivation must be different from our ordinary wish to seek well-being by way of possessions, money, reputation, and the sweet words of our loved ones. In short, a spiritual motivation must go beyond seeking the happiness of only this life. There are three levels of Dharma motivation that correspond to the three capacities of practitioners: the first seeks a favorable rebirth, the second aims for liberation from cyclic existence, and the third aspires for full awakening in order to benefit all sentient beings.

We may wonder, “What about the happiness of this life? Everyone wants that.” That is true, but we often employ misguided means in our attempts to be happy and wind up creating more causes for misery instead. To get what we want, we may lie or cheat. When our efforts to procure what we desire are frustrated, we become angry and blame the people around us. We talk behind their backs, stir up others against them, and speak harshly to them. In this way wars begin, be they our personal wars against a colleague, acrimony among racial, ethnic, or religious groups, or wars between countries. In short, attachment to the happiness of this life brings about more problems in the present, creates the causes for future problems by transgressing our ethical values, and impedes our spiritual goals.

For these reasons, the demarcation between a Dharma action and non-Dharma action is whether our principal aim is only the happiness of this life. An activity done exclusively with strong grasping for the happiness of this life is limited in its scope. A motivation focused on my happiness now

cannot act as a cause for good rebirths, liberation, or awakening. In fact, it is antithetical to spiritual aims. On the other hand, actions motivated by kindness and compassion, actions done with the thought to abandon harming others, and actions done with the motivation to attain a good rebirth, liberation, or awakening enable us to transform even the simplest actions in our daily life into Dharma practice.

While the happiness of this life is not the principal aim, it comes as a byproduct of Dharma practice. By restraining from harmful actions, we immediately get along better with others. When we act with kindness and compassion, we feel good about ourselves and our self-esteem improves. Others reciprocate our kindness. Interestingly, people who relinquish the preoccupation with the happiness of only this life experience more happiness in this life.

A motivation seeking good rebirth, liberation, or full awakening helps us to overcome clinging attachment, hostility, confusion, jealousy, and arrogance, which are the source of so much unhappiness. We experience a great sense of purpose in our lives, and our minds become more peaceful now, even as we create the causes to actualize our long-term spiritual goals.

We can't evaluate the spiritual value of an action by how it looks on the outside because the same activity can be done with different motivations. Giving millions of dollars to charity with the aim of increasing our fame or wealth in this life is not Dharma practice, no matter how much acclaim we may receive, whereas giving a small donation with a kind heart is. Meditating with the motivation to reduce our stress will bring that result, but it is not Dharma practice because our motivation is focused solely on our own happiness in this life. To ensure that our practice brings the spiritual results we seek in the long term, we consciously generate a Dharma motivation before engaging in any activity, especially prior to meditating and giving or attending teachings.

Before going to work, take time to cultivate the motivation to help others. For example, think, "May the work I do serve the clients or customers and bring happiness in their lives. May I contribute to a feeling of harmony among my colleagues." Changing our motivation changes our actions, and that in turn changes the dynamics in our family and workplace. One person cultivating kindness has a strong effect on a group.

It is important to observe our mind and ensure that our kindness is sin-



cere. When I was a child in Lhasa, I had a parrot that would bite anyone who put his finger in its cage. My calligraphy teacher would give nuts to the parrot, who was always excited to see him. My teacher would put his hand in the cage and pet the parrot, and the parrot would eat nuts from his hand. I was jealous and wanted the parrot to like me just as much as it liked my teacher, so I gave it some nuts. The parrot took them to the other side of the cage and ignored me. It knew I didn't have a good motivation. One day I was so angry when it didn't respond to me that I hit it. Afterward, whenever I came near, it would cry out in fear. Even animals know if we're hypocritical or sincere.

Mindfulness and introspective awareness are indispensable to maintain a compassionate motivation or a motivation that looks beyond our immediate gain. Because we have strong habits underlain with the thought "I want what I want when I want it," we need to continually reinforce mindfulness of our values so we act ethically. With introspective awareness, we monitor our physical, verbal, and mental actions to make sure they correspond with our motivation. In this way, we treasure, protect, and enhance our noble motivations so that they will manifest in constructive actions.

A good intellectual understanding of the Dharma path helps us refine and improve our motivation. Although conceptual knowledge is not the final goal of the path, it gives us the tools to begin to counteract corrupt motivations. When we feel lazy, we will know to meditate on impermanence and the unsatisfactory nature of cyclic existence to instill a sense of urgency to practice. If we are angry and upset, we meditate on love or fortitude to calm and center ourselves.

## REFLECTION

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1. Our motivation is the principal factor determining the value of our actions.
2. For an action to be Dharma, the motivation must be more than seeking our immediate happiness of this life.
3. We are not "bad" for seeking the happiness of this life, but if we seek only this, we often create the causes for misery now and in the future.

4. Expanding our hearts to care for others and training our minds in long-term motivations such as seeking fortunate rebirth, liberation, and full awakening bring a sense of inner fulfillment.
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### *Cultivating a Compassionate Intention*

Developing a genuinely compassionate attitude is based on being aware of others' duḥkha as well as their kindness. To be aware of others' misery, we must first be aware of our own, and to cultivate compassion that wishes ourselves and others to be free from duḥkha, we must identify the causes of duḥkha and know they can be eradicated. Ignorance—a state of unknowing that misapprehends how phenomena exist—is the root cause of duḥkha. “Unknowing” implies the existence of its opposite—a state of knowing or wisdom. This gives us confidence that it is possible to eliminate ignorance and overcome duḥkha. Understanding this, we naturally want to learn the path to bring it about. Once again, we see the Buddha's teachings on the four truths of the āryas, the framework for the Buddhist path. The first two of the four truths pertain to the cause and result of birth in cyclic existence—ignorance and suffering. The last two truths pertain to the cause and effect of freedom from that duḥkha—the path and the attainment of nirvāṇa.

As discussed earlier, there are three levels of duḥkha. The *duḥkha of pain* is the physical and mental pain that all beings abhor. The *duḥkha of change* refers to experiences and sensations that we usually identify as pleasurable. These are harder for ordinary people to identify as unsatisfactory, but when we think about them in greater depth, we see that they do not bring us lasting happiness, ultimate satisfaction, or security. In fact, they often leave us disillusioned or despondent.

The deepest unsatisfactory condition is the *pervasive duḥkha of conditioning*, the fact that our very existence is conditioned by ignorance and polluted karma. When the Buddha spoke about the disadvantages of duḥkha, he was principally referring to this form of duḥkha. When we can recognize the nature of cyclic existence in such terms, we will be able to develop the genuine aspiration to seek freedom from it.

Cultivating the wisdom that counteracts ignorance is the path to free-

dom. This wisdom that knows reality must be cultivated by the subtlest level of consciousness, a state of mind that is beyond our everyday, gross mental processes. Highest yoga tantra refers to eighty conceptions that are indicative of the gross level of mental processes. When these gross levels of mind gradually dissolve, we experience three increasingly subtler levels of consciousness—called the white appearance, red increase, and black near-attainment. When these, too, have dissolved, the innate mind of clear light dawns. It is at this subtlest level of consciousness that the wisdom that is the true antidote to our innate ignorance needs to be cultivated.

Therefore the demarcation between being fully awakened or imprisoned in cyclic existence is a function of this fundamental mind of clear light. If the fundamental innate mind of clear light remains obscured by the afflictions, we are in the state of cyclic existence. When the afflictions as well as their seeds and latencies have been removed from the fundamental mind of clear light, we attain liberation, and when the fundamental mind of clear light is freed from even the latencies of the afflictions, we attain buddhahood. So we can see that liberation and awakening are actually functions or states of the fundamental innate mind of clear light.

At first we understand *saṃsāra* and awakening in terms of our own *duḥkha* and our own minds, which inspires our renunciation of *saṃsāric duḥkha*. When we extend our perspective to see all other sentient beings in this light, compassion arises. Although we are not always aware of it, we are closely connected to all these sentient beings. Since we have been reborn for infinite lifetimes, they have been our parents and raised us with kindness in previous lives. In this life, too, our ability to stay alive depends on them. They grow our food, make our clothing, build our homes, treat our illnesses, and teach us everything we know. When we look deeply, we see that their kindness to us is limitless. Automatically, compassion and a sense of concern for their well-being arise within us.

Just as all of our experiences of mundane happiness—prosperity, security, friendship, or simply having enough to eat—come in relation to other sentient beings, the fruits of spiritual practice also rely on other beings. Cultivating compassion, practicing generosity, living in ethical conduct, and developing fortitude are all done in relation to other sentient beings. When we cultivate single-pointed concentration or wisdom, our underlying motivation has to do with other sentient beings. Likewise, our attainment of

buddhahood depends on sentient beings: it can only occur when we truly dedicate ourselves to their welfare. Without sentient beings serving as the object of our compassion and care, there is no way for us to create the causes for supreme awakening. Therefore we can see that when it comes to our own happiness, be it mundane or transcendental, the presence of other sentient beings is indispensable. Seeing this, Śāntideva wonders in *Engaging in the Bodhisattvas' Deeds* why we revere the buddhas but not sentient beings. Shouldn't we try to forsake our self-preoccupation and cultivate a sense of endearment and compassion toward them?

One line in the *Seven-Point Mind Training* (*Blo sbyong don bdun ma*) of Geshe Chekawa (1101–75) says that emptiness is the supreme protection. The idea is that when we are confronted with an obstacle, we should reflect upon the emptiness of the person who is harming, the act of harm, and ourselves as the recipient of the harm. By contemplating that none of these has any independent self-nature but exists in dependence on the other two, we are able to counter the obstacle. Similarly, meditating on compassion toward the agent of harm is a strong method to cut the intensity of our sense of injury. Instead of harboring malice toward that person, cultivating a sense of concern, caring, and compassion for him is the most powerful kind of protection.

The tremendous benefits of altruism are evident in both our daily lives and our spiritual lives. When we cultivate an altruistic attitude toward colleagues, family members, or even people whose actions are repugnant to us, immediately fear, insecurity, and anxiety decrease. This occurs because underneath fear and insecurity is a suspicious attitude that looks at others as a threat. When we view others as being truly like ourselves—as living beings who naturally aspire for happiness and wish to overcome suffering—and on that basis develop concern for them, it has the immediate effect of releasing us from the grip of tension, mistrust, and jealousy.

Here it is evident that right away altruism creates ease and joy within us. We can mentally relax, sleep more deeply, and the taste of our food even improves. In a sense, as a byproduct of cultivating an altruistic attitude and engaging in altruistic action, our own interests are served, everything from temporary happiness to the long-term joy of full awakening. All of these are a function and result of altruism. If we think and act with compassion now,

eventually, as buddhas, we will be able to benefit other sentient beings in the most effective way possible.

Although the wisdom realizing emptiness is very important on the path, it is bodhicitta that makes this realization a cause for us to attain the fully awakened mind of a buddha. Without great compassion and bodhicitta, the wisdom realizing emptiness alone cannot bring buddhahood.

## REFLECTION

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1. The altruistic intention of bodhicitta encompasses all sentient beings. Generating it uplifts our hearts and gives meaning to our lives.
  2. Generating bodhicitta begins with wanting to free ourselves from the three kinds of duḥkha or unsatisfactory conditions—the duḥkha of pain, the duḥkha of change, and the pervasive duḥkha of conditioning.
  3. Like us, other sentient beings are afflicted by the three types of duḥkha. Like us, they want to be happy and avoid misery. In addition, they have been and will continue to be kind to us. Generate compassion wishing them to be free from all duḥkha.
  4. Based on this compassion, generate the altruistic intention to become fully awakened so that you can bring this about.
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### *Mind Training*

One of the practices I cherish and enjoy the most is mind training. Many texts have been written on this, and I myself often teach them. Mind training presents techniques for transforming adverse circumstances into the path. From a Buddhist perspective, all the misfortune we experience can be traced back to our own destructive actions—negative karma—which were motivated by our self-centered thought and self-grasping ignorance. The self-centered thought believes that our own happiness—including our own liberation—is more important than that of others, and

self-grasping ignorance misapprehends the actual way all people and phenomena exist.

At the moment, our idea of success is that all external events unfold according to our wishes and all people behave in accordance with our ideas. We are happy when our desires and needs are fulfilled, but when we encounter adversity, we crumble and revert to old habits like complaining, sulking, or attacking those who interfere with our desires.

However, if our happiness depends on the behavior of others, we have no recourse and little control when things do not go as we wish. But if our happiness is rooted in our own thoughts and actions, we have the means to determine the nature of our future experiences. Remembering this, we resolve to subdue self-centeredness and self-grasping ignorance and the actions that are motivated by them. In short, not only is it counterproductive and futile to blame others for our problems and unhappiness, it is also unrealistic: they are not the true cause of our misery. By accepting responsibility for our unrealistic expectations and our previous harmful actions, we can transform their undesirable results into factors that help us to progress on the path to awakening. We do not deliberately seek out suffering, but when it comes our way, we can benefit from it by practicing mind training.

One method to transform adversity into the path to awakening is to contemplate cause and effect by understanding that our difficult experience is the result of our own past destructive actions, which were motivated by afflictions. In this meditative technique, we reflect that the karmic seeds created by those actions could have ripened as horrible suffering in an unfortunate rebirth, but now they are ripening as a suffering we can actually manage. That brings a sense of relief: “This is nothing compared to what it could have been.” Then we understand that if we don’t like this suffering, we must stop creating the causes for it. We renew our determination to live ethically and abandon harmful actions, because we know that harming others also brings suffering upon ourselves.

The practice of transforming adversity into the path sees difficulties as opportunities to learn and grow. If someone criticizes us unjustly or if we experience a painful physical injury, we contemplate the benefits of problematic situations. Adversity strengthens our renunciation because we see no lasting happiness is to be found in cyclic existence. Our conviction in the law of karma and its effects becomes stronger because we see that difficul-

ties arise from causes that we ourselves created. Our compassion increases because we can empathize with the suffering of others. Bodhisattvas even look forward to problems because they are focused on the benefit that can be accrued from experiencing them with a virtuous attitude. That this can happen illustrates dependent arising: when we introduce new ways of thinking, our resultant mental state changes from unhappiness to appreciation. We are no longer constrained in our choice of emotional responses to difficult situations to fear, anger, or self-pity.

The mind-training practice instructs us on the development and implementation of the two bodhicittas. *Conventional bodhicitta* is the altruistic intention to attain awakening for the benefit of all sentient beings, and *ultimate bodhicitta* is the wisdom directly realizing the ultimate nature that relies on the extraordinary method of conventional bodhicitta. Practitioners of mind training generate compassion and conventional bodhicitta whether or not things are going well in their lives. They cultivate ultimate bodhicitta by meditating on emptiness. When doing so, in addition to using reason, they emphasize the practice of seeing all phenomena as like illusions as a way to approach the correct view of emptiness and to deal effectively with adversities. When we see a difficult situation as illusory and remember it is only an appearance to the mind—not an inherently existent problem—then our mind is more relaxed. Recalling impermanence also eases the mind. When we remember that everything is in a state of constant flux, we see that even our painful feeling is changing in every moment and will not endure forever.

Since we live in times when anger, wrong views, and violence abound, mind-training techniques are especially valuable. Sometimes we have difficulties procuring material requisites for life—food, shelter, clothing, and medicine. Other times we are beset by abuse and insult from others. Due to political or economic situations, we may find ourselves impacted by conflict or corruption against our wishes. We may face prejudice and oppression, and in extreme situations even war or genocide. Of course, if we can do something to avoid or escape horrible situations without harming others, we should definitely do it. But when we can't change our environment or the people in it, practicing mind training can lessen our misery and help us find inner strength we didn't know we had. If we don't practice mind training and remain stuck in our old views and emotional habits, these situations

torment us. We may even be in danger of giving up Dharma altogether due to discouragement.

Mind training enables us to turn all these situations around so that we can benefit from them. If we change our way of thinking to make it more in tune with reality, most of our mental unhappiness will be dispelled. Fear comes from the self-centered attitude that fabricates a thousand worst-case scenarios. Recognizing the scenarios are fictions of our own mind and are highly unlikely to happen alleviates stress. Even if those scenarios do occur, we will have inner strength to deal with them and know that resources also exist in the community to help us. Of course, if we take sensible precautions to avert harm or disaster, that is wise, but being crippled by unrealistic fears does not help us prepare for the future.

Many Tibetans practiced mind training when they were imprisoned or tortured by the Communist Chinese after 1959, and for this reason, few of them suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder. Cultivating the two bodhicittas through mind training was the chief practice I relied on when I became a refugee in 1959, at age twenty-four, and it is the practice I have relied on since to maintain a peaceful mind despite not being able to return to my homeland and seeing the suffering of my people, the destruction of our culture, and the denigration of Tibet's pristine environment.

Mind training is very useful for dealing with psychological problems as well, for it gives us alternate perspectives on situations, so that we can break out of the rusty mental and emotional patterns that perpetuate unhappiness. To understand these techniques properly, receiving teachings on them and then applying these instructions to our own situation are important.

## REFLECTION

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1. Since problems are inescapable in cyclic existence, transforming adversity into the path to awakening is a skillful and useful technique to make every situation we encounter an asset to our spiritual practice.
2. How do we learn from misfortune? We practice thinking that unpleasant situations result from our own destructive actions and we make a strong determination not to perform those actions again in the future.



3. Consider other benefits we can derive from accepting an unpleasant situation—increasing our determination to be free from saṃsāra, enhancing compassion and bodhicitta, and developing the wisdom realizing reality.
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### *Eight Verses*

I recite the “Eight Verses of Mind Training” by Langri Tangpa (1054–1123) every day and regularly apply it to my life. When I’m delayed at an airport, I reflect on these verses, and before going into potentially difficult situations, I contemplate them as well. I will briefly explain this poem and encourage you to read it daily. Beyond just reading or reciting the eight verses, try to practice what they say by transforming your emotions and thoughts.

1. With the thought of attaining awakening  
for the welfare of all beings,  
who are more precious than a wish-fulfilling jewel,  
I will constantly practice holding them dear.

Imagine looking at sentient beings—friends, enemies, strangers, humans, animals, the sick, the healthy, the young, and the old—and seeing them all as equally precious. Such an attitude takes time to cultivate, but it is both realistic and beneficial because other sentient beings are a major source of our happiness and prosperity. Recall, as we explored above, that all the experiences that we value and seek depend upon cooperation and interaction with others. We depend on their efforts: they grow the food we eat, make the clothes we wear, construct the buildings and roads we use, and remove the trash we no longer want. Our feelings of comfort and security are due to sentient beings’ help and support. Our knowledge comes from those who teach us; our talents depend on those who encourage us and provide us with opportunities. Even our progress on the path and our Dharma realizations depend on others, for without cultivating the aspiration to attain full awakening for their benefit, we cannot progress on the bodhisattva path. At

buddhahood, too, buddhas' compassionate activities occur spontaneously and effortlessly in relation to sentient beings, who are the beneficiaries of their awakening influence. Without sentient beings, there would be no reason for bodhisattvas to work hard to become buddhas.

Our internal well-being depends on others as well. As we train our minds to see others in a more positive way, feelings of closeness and caring arise in us, which allow us to relax. On the other hand, if we dwell on others' faults and despise them, we are unhappy. A sense of goodwill toward others gives us inner strength in our daily lives, even in the face of difficulties.

When we experience pain, we are often weak-minded, feeling angry or overwhelmed because we lack control over a situation we did not choose. However, while we may feel some discomfort when empathizing with or feeling compassion for another's pain, it is accompanied by a certain inner stability and confidence, because we have accepted that pain voluntarily. Intriguingly, if we imagine taking on the suffering of others when we feel wretched, it alleviates our feelings of misery.

Buddhist teachings on compassion and altruism contain instructions such as, "Disregard yourself and cherish others." Understanding this advice properly is crucial, for it is given in the context of training the mind in compassion and used as an antidote to self-obsession. Compassion for others must be cultivated on the basis of self-respect, not out of guilt or feelings of unworthiness. We and others are equal in wanting to be happy and avoid pain. On that basis, it is suitable to care for and benefit everyone.

Self-preoccupation brings us misery: viewing everything—whether large or inconsequential—in terms of ourselves, we become overly sensitive, easily offended, irritable, and difficult to be with. The self-centered thought clouds our judgment and makes us foolish. If people are kind to us—even if they have the motivation to manipulate or deceive us—we like them. But if people who care about us point out one of our faults or try to prevent us from making a bad decision, we get angry. Skewing our interpretations of situations and people, self-centeredness is the cause of many mistakes and bad choices. Expanding our focus to care about others alleviates this unhealthy self-preoccupation and enables us to connect better with others. As social animals, healthy interactions with others gives meaning and purpose to our lives.

To be happy ourselves, we have to care about the welfare of others. We live in relation to others, and if they are distressed or oppressed, we will be surrounded by unhappy people, which is certainly not pleasant for us. If we care for others' well-being, they will be happy, and living among people who are content is more pleasant for us, too! In short, our own happiness comes about as a byproduct of genuinely caring for others. For this reason, caring for others' welfare is a wise way of caring for ourselves.

2. Whenever I am with others,  
     I will practice seeing myself as the lowest of all,  
     and from the very depth of my heart,  
     I will respectfully hold others as supreme.

Building on the instructions in the first verse to see others as precious, the second verse points out that our arrogance is an obstacle to doing this. Love and compassion are based on seeing others as worthwhile and respecting them. These virtues are unbiased and go beyond the ordinary attitudes of cherishing those who help us and feeling pity for those less fortunate. The foundation of impartial love and compassion is knowing that we and others are equal in wanting happiness and not suffering.

To remedy our arrogance and partiality, we practice seeing ourselves as the lowest of all. This must be understood in the proper context. It does not mean denigrating ourselves or succumbing to low self-esteem. Thinking we are worthless certainly can't lead to compassion for others.

Seeing ourselves as lower is done in relative terms. In general, human beings are considered higher than animals because we have the ability to distinguish virtue and nonvirtue and understand the long-term results of our actions, whereas the ability of animals to do this is limited. From another perspective, however, we could say that animals are superior to human beings because they kill only because they are hungry or to protect their life when they are personally threatened, whereas human beings kill for sport and pleasure or when caught up in an ideology or wrong views.

This verse encourages us to cherish others and appreciate their good qualities. When we invite guests to our home, we respectfully regard them as supreme, prepare a delicious meal for them, and serve them first. In our

workplace and family life, we respect those in leadership positions. Similarly, here too we regard others as “supreme” regardless of their or our social status.

When greed, hatred, or arrogance overwhelms us, we usually act without restraint, often in ways that we later regret. However, cultivating the thought that others are valuable and that we are just one among many people enables us to curb this behavior.

3. In all actions I will examine my mind  
and the moment an affliction arises,  
endangering myself and others,  
I will firmly confront and avert it.

The essence of the Dharma is liberation, the state of freedom from *duḥkha* and the afflictions that cause it. Afflictions are the real enemy that destroys our happiness, and the task of a Buddhist practitioner is to defeat this inner enemy. Confronting and averting afflictions does not mean suppressing them or pretending they do not exist, which can be psychologically unhealthy. Rather, we must notice afflictions and apply an antidote so that they cease, like tossing water on a fire to extinguish it.

Cultivating *introspective awareness*, which identifies afflictions the moment they arise, and *mindfulness*, which recalls their faults, helps us to exercise restraint, curtailing the harmful influence of the afflictions. Without applying mindfulness and introspective awareness, we risk giving afflictions free reign to wreak havoc in our lives. They will increase in strength to the point where they overwhelm common sense and reason, and we will find ourselves in dangerous, bewildering, or painful situations.

This verse describes how to apply antidotes to the afflictions at the level of manifest and felt experience. Since only very advanced practitioners are able to cut off afflictions at their root by meditation on emptiness, we must train ourselves in the easier technique of applying the antidote that counteracts a specific affliction. To counteract anger, we contemplate love and compassion; to oppose strong attachment, we reflect on the disgusting aspects or undesirable aspects of the desired object. To dissolve arrogance, we reflect on our shortcomings and all that we don’t know or understand to increase our humility. Whenever I have a little tingling sense of conceit, I

think of computers, about which I know next to nothing. That really calms my conceit!

## REFLECTION

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1. Contemplate the disadvantages of the afflictions.
2. Make a strong determination to notice and counteract them.
3. Spend time familiarizing yourself with the antidote to each affliction so that you will be able to recall and apply it easily whenever that affliction begins to arise.

- 
4. Whenever I meet a person of bad nature  
 who is overwhelmed by negative energy and intense suffering,  
 I will hold such a rare one dear,  
 as if I had found a precious treasure.

Difficult people challenge our ability to maintain compassion and peace of mind. When we encounter such people, the temptation is to react with strong anger or even violence. Some people may simply appear to us as hateful or offensive, and we need to be especially mindful in their presence to counter the afflictions that arise in our mind. Not only should we restrain from disdain, this verse advises us to hold them dear.

We can apply this teaching to larger social issues. We may have prejudices about certain groups of people—for example, people branded as criminals—and not want to include them within the scope of our compassion. In the case of the incarcerated, it is important for us to release our biased antipathy and make an extra effort to give them a second opportunity to become accepted and productive members of society and restore their self-esteem.

Likewise, we may habitually ignore or avoid those with disabilities and the terminally ill. We may be afraid we will contract the illness—even if it is not contagious or the chances of our getting it are slim—or we may feel uncomfortable witnessing their suffering. In these cases, too, we need to

consciously cultivate empathy and compassion, remembering that we could one day find ourselves in similar circumstances and need the kindness of others.

Since we have the opportunity to overcome our deep-seated biases only by meeting people who are oppressed by negative energy and intense suffering, for us they are like precious treasures, giving us the chance to enhance our fortitude, empathy, and compassion. We may even be surprised by how much we can learn if we open our hearts and minds to their experiences.

5. When others, out of jealousy,  
mistreat me with abuse, slander, and so on,  
I will practice accepting defeat  
and offering the victory to them.

From a conventional legal viewpoint, if we are wrongfully accused, we feel justified in reacting with righteous indignation. However, vehement outrage is not in our best interest—it simply stirs up an already contentious situation, forcing people to form factions and making genuine communication impossible.

Accepting defeat does not mean we make ourselves the world’s doormat or accept responsibility for the wrongdoing of others. In some conflicts, capitulating could damage others or ourselves. Here, “offering the victory” to others means we don’t have to have the last word in an argument or continually correct every small error others make. We can become more open and tolerant and less vindictive. When we are calm, we can try to clarify the situation and reach a resolution suitable to all.

Some people like to quarrel and enjoy picking a fight. In such a situation, it is best not to bite the hook. When we refuse to argue, the squabble can’t continue. Giving the victory to others means restraining ourselves when we want to dominate others physically or verbally. Seeking to control or have power over others does not bring happiness to ourselves or others in the long term.

This is not to suggest that practitioners should simply yield to whatever harm or injustice is being inflicted upon them. In fact, according to the bodhisattva precepts, we should respond to injustice with a strong countermeasure, especially if there is danger that the perpetrator will continue act-

ing destructively in the future or if others will be adversely affected. We need to be sensitive to the situation, and know when to let a situation pass and when to confront it. But whether we say something to the person or let it go, it is vital that our own mind harbors no resentment. That is what we are releasing when we offer up the victory.

6. When someone I have benefited  
and in whom I have placed great trust  
hurts me very badly,  
I will see that person as my supreme teacher.

After helping someone, we usually expect at least a “thank you” in return, if not their help later on. Especially when we are close to someone, we tend to expect a lot from them. When, instead of responding to us in the way we would like, the other person is inconsiderate or inflicts harm, we often react with hurt and anger. Our sense of disappointment and betrayal is so deep that we may ruminate on the situation for a long time and plan our retaliation, wanting that person to hurt as much as we do. Such thinking can be all-consuming as we alternate between feeling sorry for ourselves and indignant toward the other person. However, taking revenge does not eliminate our pain; it only masks it temporarily by giving us a false sense of power. The only way to free ourselves from pain and anger is through forgiveness.

Forgiveness does not mean we condone the other person’s action. It simply means that we are tired of being hurt and angry and are releasing those emotions because they’re making us miserable. To do this, we practice seeing the other person as our teacher of fortitude. He is like a rare gem, because people who give us the opportunity to practice fortitude and forgiveness are rare.

Also helpful when we feel pained due to the betrayal of trust is to reflect that in the past we have behaved in such ways toward others. Although it is unpleasant to admit to ourselves, it is true that we have not always been exemplars when it comes to treating others fairly or keeping our promises and commitments. Since we have acted in hurtful ways to others, why are we surprised, incensed, or devastated when such behavior is done to us? It is wiser to accept the situation, forgive the other person, and work on making

ourselves more reliable and trustworthy in the future so that we avoid creating the karmic cause to receive such treatment ourselves.

In the future, instead of throwing a blanket of mistrust over everyone to protect ourselves from being hurt, we should slow down and evaluate which areas and to what extent each individual can bear trust. We trust the pilot of a plane, who is a stranger, with our life when we board the plane, but we may not trust him to do our accounting. We may trust a friend to speak to us honestly but not to fix our car. One reason we experience pain from broken trust is that we mistakenly trusted people in areas where they cannot bear trust, or perhaps we had expectations of them that they could not fulfill or never agreed to fulfill. In the future, it is wiser to get to know others better and not have so many unverified assumptions about how they will think or act. In addition, even when people make promises, circumstances change, and they are unable to keep them or no longer want to. Human beings make mistakes and change their minds. Our expectations have to include space for these possibilities as well.

## REFLECTION

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1. Acknowledge your pain in situations when a betrayal of trust has occurred.
  2. Contemplate that in the past you have acted in ways that others saw as breaking a commitment.
  3. Extend compassion and forgiveness to yourself for such behavior.
  4. Extend gratitude to those who betrayed your trust for the opportunity they gave you to practice fortitude and forgiveness.
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7. In short, I will offer directly and indirectly  
 every benefit and happiness to all beings, my mothers.  
 I will practice in secret taking upon myself  
 all their harmful actions and sufferings.

This verse describes the taking-and-giving meditation, where at the level of thought, we cultivate compassion so strong that we imagine taking upon ourselves the suffering of others as well as the afflictions and destructive karma that caused it. Upon taking these, we think that they destroy our own ignorance and self-centeredness. Then, with a loving heart, we imagine transforming our body, possessions, and merit into whatever others need and giving those to them. This meditation can be practiced in conjunction with our breathing, inhaling the suffering of others with compassion and exhaling with love all that they need to be happy.

To paraphrase the Kashmiri sage Paṇchen Śākyaśrī, “When I’m happy I dedicate this well-being for all sentient beings throughout space to be filled with happiness and its cause, merit. When I am miserable, may my suffering desiccate the suffering of all sentient beings. Through my experiencing difficulties, may all others be free of these.” These are the thoughts of a true mind-training practitioner, someone who is at peace with himself and with others.

Practicing “in secret” may be understood in two ways. It suggests that this practice of love and compassion may not be suitable for beginners and should be taught only when someone has a certain depth of courage and commitment to the mind-training practice.

“In secret” also refers to how we should do this practice—discreetly, with humility and integrity, without drawing attention to ourselves. Geshe Chekawa advises that we radically transform our inner thoughts and emotions but act normally. When a person with little knowledge succumbs to the temptation to show off and assumes an air of importance, it cheapens his or her true experience and deceives others. We should definitely avoid this.

8. Without these practices being defiled by the stains of the  
 eight worldly concerns,  
 by perceiving all phenomena as illusory,

I will practice without grasping to release all beings  
from the bondage of the disturbing, unsubdued mind and karma.

The eight worldly concerns consist of four pairs:

- Delight at receiving money and possessions and dejection at not receiving or losing them
- Delight with receiving praise and approval and dejection when receiving criticism or disapproval
- Delight with fame and a good reputation and dejection when infamous and notorious
- Delight with pleasurable sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and tangible objects and dejection with those that cause unpleasant feelings

These eight worldly concerns pollute our virtuous activities. For example, when I sit on the Dharma throne, if in the back of my mind there is the thought, “Did I give a good Dharma talk? Will people praise or criticize me?” my mind is polluted with the eight worldly concerns.

Perceiving all phenomena as illusory is one method to prevent the eight worldly concerns from contaminating our mind. Before we can see all phenomena as like illusions, we have to realize they are empty of inherent existence. The realization of emptiness does not come about through repeating this verse in our mind or chanting “empty, empty” while imagining nothingness. To develop a genuine insight into emptiness, we must employ reasoning to investigate how phenomena exist.

One of the most effective and convincing ways to understand that everything is empty of inherent existence is to contemplate dependent arising and interdependence. A unique quality of this approach is that it enables us to find the middle way between total nonexistence and independent or inherent existence. By understanding that things are dependent, we know they are not independent. Since independent existence and inherent existence are synonyms, we then know that they lack inherent existence. However, things are not totally nonexistent because they exist dependently. Contemplating in this way, we will not be lost in either absolutism or nihilism and will generate the correct view.

Once we gain insight into emptiness in our meditation, there is a new quality to our interactions with the world and the people in it. This is due to

our awareness of the illusory nature of veil objects we encounter in daily life. With an understanding of both the empty and the illusory natures of persons and phenomena, we can work with compassion to skillfully lead others on the path so they, too, will be free from the unsubdued mind of afflictions and karma and will experience the joy and peace of full awakening.



## 8 | A Systematic Approach

**A**WAKENING REFERS TO the ultimate qualities of the mind; the path to awakening eliminates the impediments and enhances the qualities leading to this state. Tibetans translated *bodhi*, the Sanskrit word for awakening, as *jangchup*. *Jang* means “to cleanse” and in this case refers to true cessation, the cleansing or elimination of afflictions, their seeds, and latencies. *Chup* refers to having cultivated all positive qualities. *Jang* highlights the buddhas’ abandonment of all faults, while *chup* denotes their qualities and realizations. Awakening is not granted by an external being but is attained through the process of cleansing and cultivating our minds. The potential to attain it is already within us: the nature of the mind is clarity and cognizance, so the capacity to perceive all phenomena is already there. We need to eliminate obstacles to doing so by realizing the empty nature of all phenomena.

Newcomers to Buddhism occasionally ask me what it feels like to be awakened. I don’t know, but I think it must be a sense of deep satisfaction and fulfillment due to knowing reality. To use an analogy: When we are ignorant about something, we feel uncomfortable and try to understand it. Once we have understood it and that obstacle has lifted, we feel tremendous relief. We feel pleased because we are fully confident that our understanding is correct. When we become fully awakened, we will directly realize all that exists, so imagine the deep satisfaction we will experience then. This gives us an idea of the mental joy a buddha experiences.

### *Paths for Spiritual Development*

To attain a buddha's qualities, we need to develop many diverse aspects of our body, speech, and mind. Throughout the ages, Buddhist masters have used various paradigms that set out a progressive path to do this, and in this chapter, we will explore some of these. These step-by-step presentations outline a systematic path that allows each person to practice at his or her own level and progress in a comfortable and gradual way.

We'll begin with Āryadeva's presentation of three stages of the path (CS 190):

First prevent the demeritorious;  
 next prevent self;  
 later prevent views of all kinds.  
 Whoever knows of this is wise.

This verse may be understood in two ways. In the first way, "First prevent the demeritorious" indicates the necessity of abandoning the ten paths of nonvirtue and practicing the ten paths of virtue in order to prevent an unfortunate rebirth and gain a fortunate one. "Next prevent self" means to abandon grasping at the coarse self of persons—a self-sufficient substantially existent person. While abandoning this grasping does not bring arhatship or buddhahood, it does stop the coarse afflictions, which is beneficial. "Later prevent views of all kinds" indicates realizing the emptiness of true existence and employing this wisdom to eradicate all afflictions from the root.

The second way to approach this verse is to start with the final goal and work backward. To attain full awakening, all cognitive obscurations must be eradicated, as indicated by "Later prevent views of all kinds." To eliminate these, it is not sufficient to contemplate the *object clear light*—the ultimate nature, emptiness—based on subtle dependent arising. From the viewpoint of highest yoga tantra, we must make manifest the *subject clear light*—the subtlest mind that arises after the eighty conceptions and three appearances have dissolved—and use it to realize suchness. Prior to this, we must realize emptiness and eradicate the afflictive obscurations, as indicated by "next prevent self." In order to do this, we need a continuous series of

good rebirths in which we can practice the Dharma. The way to attain these is to “first prevent the demeritorious,” the ten paths of nonvirtue.

In *Lamp of the Path*, Atiśa sets out three stages of the path according to three levels of practitioners: great, medium, and initial. The path of the person of great spiritual development eliminates the cognitive obscurations so that he or she can become a buddha in order to benefit all sentient beings most effectively. This individual aims for the highest, longest-lasting bliss and peace for self and others—full awakening—and thus wants to extinguish duḥkha and its causes for both self and others. The cognitive obscurations that impede full awakening are the subtle latencies of ignorance and the appearance of inherent existence that they create. To remove these, a person must cultivate bodhicitta, practice the six perfections, and unite serenity and insight on subtle emptiness. This is the path of the practitioner of great capacity.

The path of the person of medium spiritual development eliminates the afflictive obscurations—the afflictions, their seeds, and polluted karma that cause rebirth in cyclic existence. This person seeks liberation—the peace of nirvāṇa that is free from the cycle of uncontrolled rebirth. To do this, he or she practices the three higher trainings motivated by the determination to be free from cyclic existence and attain liberation.

The path of the person of initial spiritual development eliminates coarse negativities, such as the ten paths of nonvirtue—killing, stealing, unwise and unkind sexual conduct, lying, divisive speech, harsh words, idle talk, covetousness, malice, and wrong views. These ten cause unfortunate rebirths in the future as well as constant problems in this life. The beginning practitioner seeks the happiness in cyclic existence that comes from pacifying her gross mistaken thoughts, words, and deeds.

To express this path in a forward sequence, a practitioner must first and most urgently reduce his or her gross afflictions and harmful actions and practice the path of the ten constructive actions. Although his ultimate goal may be nirvāṇa or awakening, he must first deal with the most blatant obstacles to happiness by taking a defensive stand against them. He must especially prevent taking an unfortunate rebirth that would forestall his being able to practice the path for a long time.

The second level is the actual combat, going on the offensive to destroy the afflictions. A practitioner who is victorious over them attains nirvāṇa.

The third step is to remove the latencies or stains left on the mindstream by the afflictions. Having eliminated these, a practitioner becomes a fully awakened buddha.

LEVEL OF PRACTITIONER	THEIR DIRECT AIM	WHAT THEY PRACTICE	WHAT THEY ELIMINATE
Initial	Fortunate rebirth	Pacifying coarse harmful thoughts, words, and deeds and practicing the ten virtues	Ten nonvirtues
Middle	Liberation (arhatship)	The three higher trainings	Afflictive obscurations: afflictions, their seeds, and polluted karma causing rebirth in <i>saṃsāra</i>
Advanced	Full awakening (buddhahood)	The six perfections, four ways of gathering disciples, Vajrayāna	Cognitive obscurations: latencies of afflictions and appearance of inherent existence

These three levels or capacities of practitioners form the basic outline for the presentation of the teachings in this book. Certain meditations are prescribed to cultivate the motivation specific to each level and other meditations to actualize the intended result of that motivation. The meditations on precious human life, death and gross impermanence, and the possibility of taking an unfortunate rebirth help us generate the aspiration to have a fortunate rebirth. We attain such a rebirth by taking refuge in the Three Jewels and observing the law of karma.

Meditations on the first two of the four truths inspire the aspiration for liberation within us. Generating true paths by practicing the three higher trainings will bring about true cessations and liberation.

Meditation on the seven-point cause-and-effect instruction and the meditation on equalizing and exchanging self and others are the methods to generate bodhicitta, the aspiration for full awakening to benefit all sentient beings. The method that leads to awakening is the practice of the six perfections, four ways of gathering disciples,<sup>43</sup> and Vajrayāna.



LEVEL OF PRACTITIONER	MEDITATIONS THAT LEAD TO THE MOTIVATION OF THIS LEVEL	MOTIVATION	PRACTICES DONE TO ACTUALIZE THE RESULT OF THIS MOTIVATION
Initial	Precious human life, death and impermanence, unfortunate rebirth	To have a fortunate rebirth	Take refuge in the Three Jewels, observe the law of karma and its effects
Middle	The first two truths: true <i>duḥkha</i> and true origins	To attain true cessation, <i>nirvāna</i>	True paths: the higher trainings in ethical conduct, concentration, and wisdom
Great	Equanimity, seven-point cause-and-effect instruction, equalizing and exchanging self and others	Bodhicitta	Six perfections, four ways of gathering disciples, Vajrayāna

There are two types of initial-capacity practitioners, one superior and the other inferior. Superior initial-capacity practitioners seek higher rebirth as a human or a celestial being. Although they also seek the betterment of this life, their main focus is to create the causes for fortunate future lives. Lesser individuals think only of the betterment of this life and do not prepare for future lives, although they may still create virtuous karma through being generous, living ethically, and so on.

Those of you who grew up in cultures where the belief in rebirth is not prevalent may initially come to Buddhism with the motivation simply to improve the quality of this life. At the moment, you are ordinary initial-level individuals who would like to experience less stress and anger, better relationships, improved health, and more peace of mind in this life, and you look to the Buddha's teachings as a way to that end. By using the Dharma to become a more balanced person, you will engage in fewer destructive actions and more constructive ones. As time goes on, you will learn about the existence of future lives, cyclic existence, liberation, awakening, and the paths leading to them. As you think about these topics and gain conviction in them, your perspective will expand, and you will want to create the causes to have a peaceful death and a good rebirth. You will become aware of the dangers of cyclic existence and aspire to free yourself from it. As your heart

opens to others more and more, the thought of attaining awakening for the benefit of all beings will grow in your heart. In this way, you will progress on the path in an organic way.

While Buddhism speaks about the importance of preparing for future lives, this does not mean we should disregard this life. If we want to have favorable future lives, properly taking care of this life by being an honest person who refrains from harming or cheating others is important. By keeping good ethical conduct, we will have fewer problems in this life and will create the causes for fortunate future lives.

The paths practiced by these three levels of practitioners are not separate paths. One person passes through all three stages as he or she progresses. To remove the cognitive obscurations preventing full awakening, we first must remove afflictive obscurations and free ourselves from the sufferings of cyclic existence. To attain liberation by severing the afflictions from their root, we must first rein in the attachment to the happiness of this life, which stimulates us to engage in the ten destructive paths of action. In this way, the practitioners of initial, middle, and advanced capacities refer to one person at three different times in their spiritual journey. Such a practitioner gradually and sequentially develops the three different levels, each one indispensable for those that follow.

On the other hand, the practice for each of these three individuals is complete. If, at present, we wish only for a fortunate rebirth, we will find a complete method to actualize our aspiration in the path of the initial-capacity practitioner. On the basis of first practicing the initial level, middle-level practitioners will find a complete path to fulfill their aspiration for liberation in the practice of the middle level. If we seek full awakening, we will proceed through all three stages by first practicing the first two stages, which will lead us to practice the advanced path. For advanced practitioners, the first two paths are said to be “paths *in common with* initial-capacity practitioners and middle-capacity practitioners” because they are not exclusively for the initial- and middle-capacity practitioners.

“In common with” also indicates that advanced practitioners aiming for full awakening do not practice the initial and middle paths exactly the same way as initial and middle-level practitioners do. While initial-level practitioners are satisfied with aspiring to improve the quality of their lives in cyclic existence, practitioners aiming for full awakening have a more exten-

sive aspiration right from the beginning. Although they lack the realization of bodhicitta, they do all the initial and middle-level practices with some degree of bodhicitta.<sup>44</sup>

As a commentary on the *Lamp of the Path*, Tsongkhapa's *Lamrim Chenmo* followed Atiśa's presentation. The Sakya tradition also follows Atiśa's sequence when it presents abandoning four attachments. The first Sakya patriarch, Sachen Kunga Nyingpo, in "Parting from the Four Clingings" says:

If you cling to this life, you are not a Dharma practitioner;  
if you cling to the three realms, that is not renunciation;  
if you cling to self-interest, you are not a bodhisattva;  
if grasping arises, it is not the view.<sup>45</sup>

Here, we begin by freeing ourselves from the eight worldly concerns that focus on the happiness of only our present life. By abandoning them, we will become an actual Dharma practitioner. We then cultivate renunciation of saṃsāra and the determination to be free from birth in all three saṃsāric realms. Contemplating that all other sentient beings suffer in saṃsāra just as we do, we broaden our perspective and generate the altruistic intention of bodhicitta. To fulfill bodhicitta's aim of attaining full awakening, we must gain the correct view of the two truths and abandon all grasping at the two extremes of inherent existence and total nonexistence by realizing emptiness. In this way, this short verse from the Sakyapas reflects the same approach of three ascending levels of motivation for Dharma practice presented by Atiśa.

The fifth-century Theravādin master Buddhaghosa thought along the same lines when he described inferior, medium, and superior levels of ethical conduct (Vism 1.33):

. . . that [ethical conduct] motivated by craving, the purpose of which is to enjoy continued existence, is inferior; that practiced for the purpose of one's own deliverance is medium; the virtue of the perfections practiced for the deliverance of all sentient beings is superior.

Ethical conduct and other Dharma practices motivated by a desire for a good rebirth in cyclic existence, while virtuous, are inferior. Practices done with the wish to liberate ourselves from cyclic existence are excellent but not supreme; the perfections that are done with the wish to liberate all sentient beings are superior. While initially our motivation may be limited, as our wisdom and compassion expand, our motivation will as well.

### *The Four Truths and Three Levels of Practitioners*

Describing the four truths from the perspective of the three levels of practitioners helps us understand the motivation, aim, and practice of each level.

For an initial level person who aspires for a good rebirth and happiness in cyclic existence, true *duḥkha* refers to coarse suffering, especially the misery involved in unfortunate rebirths. The true origins of this *duḥkha* are the ten nonvirtues and the coarse afflictions that motivate them, such as covetousness, malice, and wrong views. True cessation is the temporary freedom from an unfortunate rebirth, and the true path to attain that is abandoning the ten nonvirtues and engaging in the ten virtues.

For a person of middle capacity, who aspires for liberation, true *duḥkha* is the five aggregates of a *saṃsāric* being that are taken under the influence of afflictions and karma. True origins are the afflictive obscurations that cause rebirth in cyclic existence. True cessation is the freedom from all such rebirth, or more precisely the ultimate nature of the mind that has abandoned all afflictive obscurations by applying the true paths. True paths are *āryas'* realizations held by the wisdom that directly realizes emptiness.

For a person of advanced capacity, who aspires for full awakening, true *duḥkha* is one's own lack of omniscience and the *duḥkha* of all sentient beings. True origins are the cognitive obscurations and the self-centered attitude. True cessation is the cessation of cognitive obscurations at buddhahood, or more exactly the ultimate nature of the mind that has abandoned all cognitive obscurations by applying the true path. True paths are *āryas'* realizations held by the wisdom directly realizing emptiness and *bodhicitta*.

### *More Than One Approach*

Our ultimate goal is to attain buddhahood and become the Three Jewels ourselves. The Dharma Jewel consists of the last two of the four truths—

true paths and true cessations. Our mind becomes the Dharma Jewel when we gain true paths and actualize true cessation. At this time we become the Saṅgha Jewel. When, motivated by bodhicitta, we fully actualize all true cessations, we become the Buddha Jewel. Thus, to understand the meaning of refuge in the Three Jewels, we need a deeper understanding of the Dharma Jewel, and this is based on understanding the four truths. Full understanding of the subtle aspects of true cessations depends on understanding the two truths—veil and ultimate—especially the ultimate truth, the emptiness of inherent existence.

While Atiśa's *Lamp of the Path* presents one sequence of steps to become the Three Jewels, the Prajñāpāramitā sūtras present another. Maitreya's *Ornament of Clear Realizations*, a treatise on the Prajñāpāramitā sūtras, presents this sequence by means of eight clear realizations<sup>46</sup> that are characterized by seventy topics. The first clear realization—the exalted knower of all aspects (omniscience)—has ten principal characteristics that define a buddha's mind: bodhicitta, instructions, and so forth.<sup>47</sup> The topic of instructions begins with the two truths, which encompass all phenomena, followed by the four truths, which are the objects of practice. After this, taking refuge in the Three Jewels is discussed, followed by nonclinging, tireless effort, and so forth.

Haribhadra wrote *Clear Elucidations* (*Sphuṭārthā*), the most widely used commentary on the *Ornament of Clear Realizations*. In it he speaks of two kinds of practitioners: those of sharp faculties who are very intelligent and deeply analyze the meaning of the teachings, and those of more modest faculties who follow due to faith in the Buddha and the scriptures. The principal audience for Haribhadra's commentary is sharp-faculty practitioners, and the above sequence is especially useful for them.

The audience for Atiśa's *Lamp of the Path* is different. He wrote this text at the behest of the prince Jangchup Ö, who requested a teaching that was suitable for Tibetans—the vast majority of whom were Buddhists. He wanted instructions they could easily put into practice that would enable Buddhism to flourish once again in Tibet. In response, Atiśa outlined the sequence of the three levels of practitioners.

When I give general instructions on the Buddhadharmā to educated people who are new to Buddhism, I prefer to use the sequence in the *Ornament of Clear Realizations* to present the overall structure of the Buddhist path, starting with the compassionate bodhicitta motivation and moving on to

the instructions. This helps them to understand how various points fit into the framework. While I can't go into depth on these points with beginners, everyone appreciates the notion of compassion, so I speak of that first. I then briefly introduce the two truths so that people will be aware that the way things appear and the way they actually exist differ. From there, I go onto the four truths of the āryas, which establishes the framework for the path to liberation. In this context, turning to the Three Jewels for refuge and guidance makes sense. For this reason, in this series taking refuge in the Three Jewels will be presented in conjunction with the four truths rather than in the context of the initial-level practitioner, as in the lamrim presentation.

I encourage those of you who have completed philosophical studies and appreciate the sequence of instruction in the *Prajñāpāramitā sūtras* and the *Ornament of Clear Realizations* to integrate that sequence into your lamrim teachings. This will benefit your students. I also suggest you teach the tenet systems. Lamrim is more practical, while tenets are more academic. If your students study both, they will develop a clear sense of purpose for Dharma practice and a deeper understanding of emptiness.

A teacher will vary his or her approach depending on the audience. When Nāgārjuna taught *Precious Garland*, his audience was a king—a person who was interested in the Dharma but also had worldly responsibilities. To him, he first presented the method to secure fortunate rebirths followed by the method to attain liberation. On the other hand, when he taught *Commentary on Bodhicitta (Bodhicittavivarāṇa)*, which explains a verse from the *Guhyasamāja Root Tantra*, the audience was of advanced capacity—specifically practitioners of highest yoga tantra—and this approach suited them.

When instructing a large group, spiritual mentors give teachings designed for the public. Here they usually follow a particular text and give a broad presentation of the path to address the needs of many people in general. When teaching a small group or an individual, spiritual mentors give instructions according to the needs of those specific individuals. It is important not to confuse these two situations and think that because our spiritual mentor gave one instruction to a specific individual that everyone should follow it.

The order of presenting topics may differ as well. The *Ornament of Clear Realizations* briefly mentions the wisdom realizing emptiness and then pro-

ceeds to bodhicitta; the *Commentary on Bodhicitta* presents emptiness first, followed by the cultivation of bodhicitta and the bodhisattva practice. This is the approach for intelligent disciples. Although bodhicitta comes later in the lamrim sequence, Śāntideva teaches it at the beginning of *Engaging in the Bodhisattvas' Deeds* so that all subsequent meditations and practices will be directed toward awakening.

No matter which order we learn bodhicitta and emptiness, it is helpful to cultivate an understanding of both even as we emphasize the practices of the initial and middle levels in our personal practice. In this way, our meditation on precious human life, death and impermanence, and so forth will be supported by some degree of bodhicitta and the wisdom understanding emptiness. In addition, our meditations on the topics of the initial and middle levels will increase our appreciation of and urgency to cultivate bodhicitta and practice the six perfections.

### *Teachings for a Contemporary Audience*

Atiśa composed the *Lamp of the Path* with the needs of eleventh century Tibetans in mind. He did not go into detailed philosophical debates or extensive reasonings when writing that text because his audience already believed in the Buddha's teachings. They simply required a concise, straightforward teaching explaining how to practice from the beginning of the path up to awakening.

With Buddhism now spreading internationally, the audience is very different. These people need to hear the rational arguments proving rebirth, liberation, the existence of the Three Jewels, and karma and its effects that are found in the treatises of the great Indian sages. Without a clear understanding of these topics, their comprehension of the path to awakening will not be complete.

I read some lamrim notes written by the respected Geluk master Tseten Shabdrung (1910–85). He commented that when we contemplate a lamrim topic, we should integrate points from the major treatises on the Perfection of Wisdom and the Middle Way into our reflection. In this way our study of the great philosophical treatises and our lamrim practice will complement each other. This is the method used by the Kadam Shungpawa—the Kadam “great text” tradition headed by Geshe Potowa.<sup>48</sup>

An understanding of the principal subjects studied in the great monastic universities—the Perfection of Wisdom, Middle Way, Reasoning and Epistemology, Abhidharma, and Vinaya—is most helpful to facilitate our practice of lamrim. When Tibetans first began teaching Westerners, very few philosophical texts were translated into Western languages. Nowadays, more translations and study guides are available, making the study of these classical texts possible.

Some people may have heard that since lamrim encompasses all the teachings of the Buddha, it is sufficient to rely on it alone. This is true in the sense that the lamrim summarizes the meaning of the great treatises so that someone who has spent years studying them can easily identify the important points for meditation. Those who have not studied these important texts will benefit from learning something about them.

Modest-faculty disciples rely more on faith, seeing the Buddha as a perfect spiritual master and lineage teachers from Nāgārjuna up to their own teacher as reliable spiritual mentors. These people are not as interested in in-depth study, whereas those of sharp faculties are curious and want to learn more. They question the meaning of the teachings they hear and read; they want to know why a particular sage explained the Dharma the way he did. Buddhism encourages us to investigate and explore. People who are curious, with a genuine wish to investigate the Dharma, are real followers of the Buddha. For these students, lamrim alone is not sufficient; they must rely on the great treatises.

If we lack proper understanding of the exact meaning of emptiness, true cessations, nirvāṇa, and awakening, what is the basis of our devotion? If we understand how it is possible to eliminate ignorance and afflictions completely, our conviction in the Buddha and reliance on his teachings will be firm. Without learning and contemplating the Buddha's teachings, it is difficult to clearly distinguish the Buddhist path from paths espoused by other teachers, and as a result our faith in the Three Jewels will not be firm. We see people who change beliefs from one day to the next. Although they may attribute their changeability to open-mindedness, it seems to me that it is due more to confusion. If they learn and contemplate the Buddha's teachings, especially the philosophical treatises that describe emptiness and dependent arising, this confusion will give way to clarity.

The lamrim teaches us how to go for refuge in the Three Jewels by under-



standing their unique qualities that are not possessed by other spiritual guides. When we have such an understanding, we naturally take refuge in the Three Jewels: no one needs to encourage us to do so, and no one can discourage us from taking refuge in them.

We may hear about pith instructions and ear-whispered teachings that are transmitted orally from teacher to disciple.<sup>49</sup> Do not think that these instructions are separate from Nāgārjuna's texts and the other classical treatises. Whatever is in the ear-whispered teachings and the pith instructions is also in these texts. There are no secret teachings apart from what we study in the classical treatises. If we don't know how to integrate the teachings in the great treatises into our practice, the fault is our own, and it is up to us to rectify it.

### *Value of the Stages of the Path*

The lamrim's gradual, systematic approach to the path has many advantages.

*We will see that the Buddha's teachings are not contradictory.* If we compare the Buddha's advice to various disciples, we may think he contradicted himself. In some sūtras the Buddha said there is a self, in others he spoke of selflessness. In some scriptures he spoke of the importance of abandoning alcohol, in others he allowed it in particular, rare circumstances.

These differences occur because the Buddha guided sentient beings with vastly different dispositions and tendencies, at different levels of the path. His motivation was the same in all instances: to benefit the person and to gradually lead him or her to awakening. To fulfill this purpose, he tailored his instructions to suit the current capacity of each disciple. Saying that a self exists was a skillful way to guide people who fear selflessness. Later, when they were more spiritually mature, he clarified that there is no inherently existent self. For the vast majority of people, consuming intoxicants harms their spiritual practice and should be given up. For highly accomplished tantric practitioners who have renunciation, bodhicitta, and the wisdom realizing emptiness, consuming a small amount of alcohol may benefit their meditation in particular circumstances.

This advice is not contradictory because the Buddha's motivation is the same in all cases. If a person walking on a narrow path with precipices on both sides is too close to the left precipice, a skillful guide will call out, "Go

right!” But if she is too close to the right precipice, the guide will direct, “Go left!” Taken separately, these may seem to be contradictory instructions. However, when we understand the context and the long-term purpose, we see there is no contradiction and only benefit.

Not only does the Buddha give different teachings for different individuals, his advice to one person will vary according to the circumstance at different times, depending on the distortions most prominent in that person’s mind. Initially, someone may conceive of the self as a permanent, unitary, independent soul, in which case the Buddha will teach how to refute such a self. If at another time in her practice, she may conceive of the external world as independent from perception, the Buddha will teach the Citta-mātra view that there is no external world distinct from the mind to help her dissolve that false grasping.

*We will comprehend all of the Buddha’s teachings as personal instructions.* Some people mistakenly believe some scriptures are for study and others for meditation and practice. When we understand the step-by-step approach of the lamrim, we see that all teachings relate in one way or another to subduing defilements and cultivating good qualities and thus are relevant to our practice. Our mind is so complex and the afflictions are so powerful that one practice alone cannot eliminate all afflictive mental states at once. The stages of the path is a systematic strategy for gradually overcoming destructive attitudes and emotions by instructing us in a variety of topics and meditation techniques to develop many different aspects of our minds.

Although the realization of emptiness is the ultimate antidote to all afflictions, at the beginning of the path our understanding of emptiness is too weak to be an effective remedy. Applying some of the techniques that are specific to each affliction, such as those found in the mind-training teachings, enables us to subdue our gross anger, attachment, and confusion. This more pacified state of mind, in turn, is more conducive to meditating on emptiness.

The broad layout of the lamrim enables us to understand how all the various teachings fit together in a cohesive whole designed for one person to practice. This helps us to avoid pitfalls and detours, and to know how to integrate all the key points of the path into our practice in a balanced way so that we will be able to fulfill our spiritual aspiration.

*We will discover the intention of the Buddha.* The Buddha’s ultimate intention was to fulfill all beings’ aspirations for fortunate rebirth, liberation, and

full awakening. The structure of the stages of the path clearly illustrates how to actualize these aims.

*We will be deterred from the great error of rejecting the Buddha's teachings.* Since buddhas and bodhisattvas teach all aspects of the path to lead diverse sentient beings to awakening, we should respect all of the Buddha's teachings. Nowadays we unfortunately find people who criticize not only other religions but also other Buddhist traditions. While debate increases our understanding, deprecating teachings that are helpful to others is not beneficial. If we say we respect the Buddha and want what is best for others, how can we disparage teachings meant for disciples whose dispositions and interests differ from our own?

Knowledge of the stages of the path enables us to understand and respect the practices of other Buddhist traditions as well as the people who engage in them. Knowing the three spiritual aims of sentient beings—fortunate rebirth, liberation, and awakening—as well as the meditations to cultivate these aims and the meditations to actualize them, we will know where in this schema a specific teaching belongs.

### *Two Aims and Four Reliances*

In this chapter, we have focused on the broad perspective of the lamrim and how that gradually leads a person to full awakening. Now we will synthesize the path into two aims and then examine the four reliances that are important for fulfilling the lamrim's ultimate purpose, the attainment of full awakening.

Nāgārjuna says (RA 5–6):

Due to having faith, one relies on the practices;  
 due to having wisdom, one truly understands.  
 Of these two, wisdom is foremost,  
 but faith must come first.

One who does not neglect the practices  
 through attachment, anger, fear, or confusion  
 is known as one with faith,  
 a superior vessel for the highest good.

These verses express the two aims of the Buddhadharmā—the attainment of higher rebirth and the highest good (liberation and awakening). Attaining a higher rebirth corresponds to the initial motivation in the lamrim, while attaining the highest good fulfills the middle or advanced motivation. As the means to attain these, the Buddha taught two methods: faith and wisdom respectively. The obstructions to these two goals are two kinds of ignorance: the ignorance of the law of karma and its effects and the ignorance of the ultimate nature of reality. To eliminate these, the Buddha instructed us to cultivate understanding of two types of dependent arising: the understanding of causal dependence and the understanding of dependent designation.

By meditating on causal dependence, we understand that our happiness and suffering arise from virtue and nonvirtue. Faith is required to accept the subtle details of karma and its effects, which is an obscure phenomenon that cannot be known directly by our senses. With trust in karma and its effects, we will rein in gross attachment, anger, fear, and confusion, and thus will cease nonvirtuous actions and engage in virtuous ones. In this way, we will attain a fortunate rebirth in the future.

The understanding of dependent designation leads to the realization of emptiness. That wisdom is the antidote to the ignorance of the ultimate nature and will eradicate all obscurations completely. By cultivating our understanding of the complementary nature of dependent designation and emptiness, we will be able to attain liberation and awakening.

AIM	MEANS	OBSTACLES THAT ARE PACIFIED	MEDITATION ON DEPENDENT ARISING
Higher rebirth	Faith	Ignorance of karma and its effects, gross afflictions	Causal dependence leading to ethical conduct
Highest good	Wisdom	Ignorance of the ultimate nature of reality, all obscurations	Dependent designation, complementing the realization of emptiness

There is a lot to contemplate in these two short verses by Nāgārjuna. When we examine them carefully, we find that they contain the entire path to awakening.

Of the two purposes for engaging in the Buddhist path, the highest good is foremost. To attain it, the wisdom realizing the empty nature of phenomena is essential. This wisdom is not gained through blind belief or through prayer but by reason. The four reliances—found in the *Sūtra on the Four Reliances* (*Catuhpratisaraṇa Sūtra*) and the *Sūtra Unraveling the Thought*—guide us in doing this.

1. Rely principally not on the person but on the teaching.
2. With respect to the teaching, rely not on mere words but on their meaning.
3. With respect to the meaning, rely not on the interpretable meaning but on the definitive meaning.
4. With respect to the definitive meaning, rely neither on sense consciousnesses nor on conceptual consciousnesses but on the nondual wisdom that realizes emptiness directly and nonconceptually.

The four reliances illustrate a gradual progression in a practitioner's development. Here “rely” means to mentally rely on that which is a source of reliable knowledge, nondeceptive and reasonable to trust. Throughout the path, we must rely on a teacher, learning first the words of the teaching and then understanding their meaning. Regarding the meaning, we rely first on the meaning of the interpretable teachings that describe the stages of the path and the coarser views of selflessness, and then the meaning of the definitive teachings that describe the complete view of emptiness. When we meditate on emptiness, our initial understanding is with a conceptual consciousness. Through familiarization with emptiness, we break through the veil of conception and attain direct, nonconceptual, nondualistic perception of emptiness.

To explore these in more depth:

1. *Rely principally not on the person but on the teaching.* Here “person” refers chiefly to ordinary beings who teach many different paths that they have heard from others, misunderstood, or made up. Rather than depend on people whose minds are under the influence of ignorance, it is wiser to depend on scriptures taught by the Buddha that explain nondeceptive methods to attain awakening. Instead of using “The person who taught this is exceptional” as the reason to follow a teaching, we should apply reason to examine the words and meaning of the teaching.

Even with the Buddha, not everything he said should be taken literally. Sometimes he taught a provisional view as a skillful means to lead a particular individual or group to the final path. To some people, he taught the tathāgatagarbha theory, which, taken literally, seems to affirm the existence of a permanent self. However, the meaning in the Buddha’s mind was the ultimate nature of the mind—its emptiness of true existence—which is permanent. Although such teachings are not to be taken literally, they are considered nondeceptive in that the meaning in the Buddha’s mind is true and reliable. Similarly, when the Buddha taught nihilists that there is a self-sufficient substantially existent person, his words are not to be taken literally. He taught this so that they would not deny karma and its effects and would understand that there is a self that carries karma to future lives and experiences its effects.

2. *With respect to the teaching, rely not on mere words but on their meaning.* If we are attentive to only the words of a teaching, we may neglect its meaning. This inhibits its ability to guide us on the right path. Instead of thinking we understand a topic simply because we can use complex academic terminology and language, we should use our intelligence to understand the meaning of the teaching. We should also focus on the meaning in the Buddha’s mind, not on words that can be misunderstood when taken literally.

When we want to understand the nondeceptive mode of existence of all phenomena, rather than rely on teachings about bodhicitta and the Buddha’s qualities, we should rely on teachings on the emptiness of inherent existence, which is the object of exalted wisdom. This wisdom has the ability to cut the root of saṃsāra. Furthermore, we should rely on reason and cultivate reliable cognizers—nondeceptive minds that know their object correctly.

While the four reliances are taught specifically in relation to realizing emptiness, the first two apply to learning any Dharma topic. Instead of being charmed by an ordinary person’s charisma, we must listen to what he or she teaches. In addition, rather than becoming enchanted with lofty sounding words, we must contemplate their meaning and try to understand them.

3. *With respect to the meaning, rely not on the interpretable meaning but on the definitive meaning.* “Interpretable meaning” refers to veil truths—which include all the objects that exist and function in the world. To understand

the liberating teachings on emptiness, we must rely not on texts that speak about veil truths such as the defects of cyclic existence or the benefits of bodhicitta. While these teachings are important and necessary to actualize the path to full awakening, they do not express the ultimate nature. We should also avoid taking veil truths—such as the multifarious objects of the senses—as the true mode of existence but understand that they mistakenly appear inherently existent, although they are not. The meaning to rely on is phenomena’s subtlest mode of existence, their mere absence of inherent existence. Since all phenomena lack inherent existence, their emptiness is called the “one taste” of all phenomena.

4. *With respect to the definitive meaning, rely neither on sense consciousnesses nor on conceptual consciousnesses but on the nondual wisdom that realizes emptiness directly and nonconceptually.* When progressing on the path to liberation in accord with the Buddhadharmā, we should not be satisfied with conceptual understanding of emptiness but continue to meditate until we gain an unpolluted wisdom consciousness that directly and nonconceptually realizes emptiness. From the perspective of this wisdom, there is no dualistic appearance of a cognizing subject (the person or the consciousness) or of a cognized object (in this case emptiness). While gaining the correct conceptual, inferential realization of emptiness is essential, it is not the culmination of the process of realizing the ultimate nature. Ordinary beings as well as āryas can have profound conceptual understanding, but we must seek to gain an ārya’s nonconceptual wisdom that arises in the wake of analytical meditation on emptiness. To do this, we must look beyond the appearances to our sense consciousnesses and our conceptual mental consciousness of the aggregates and so forth that are the substrata of emptiness—that is, the objects whose ultimate nature is the emptiness of inherent existence. Instead we must cultivate a direct, yogic reliable cognizer of emptiness—a mind that perceives emptiness free of conceptual appearances. This mind knows its own ultimate nature. Emptiness directly appears to this mind, and the mind nonconceptually ascertains it. At this time, the appearance of subject and object ceases, and the mind and emptiness become undifferentiable, like water poured into water.

The progression illustrated by the four reliances indicates that we must not be complacent with one level of understanding but continue until we gain direct experience of the path and actually free our mind from defilements.





## 9 | Tools for the Path

TO PRACTICE THE DHARMA successfully, more than information and a meditation cushion are required. We need a proper motivation and good, practical advice that will help to overcome hindrances. This chapter speaks of the mental tools we will need to progress along the path, such as faith and wisdom. We'll also explore the role of prayers and rituals, of purification and the collection of merit, and of memorization and debate in cultivating the three wisdoms: the wisdoms arising from learning, reflecting on the teachings, and meditating on them.

### *General Advice*

Learning the Dharma is different from learning subjects in school. Not only is our motivation different—we seek the method to attain fortunate rebirths, liberation, or awakening—but also the methodology is different. Our spiritual mentors present topics that are comparatively easy to understand as well as those that are more challenging in the same Dharma talk. Sometimes their response to our questions leads to more confusion. Our mentors instruct us to think about the topic and discuss it with others, but we want them to give us the right answer. Unlike academic studies in the West, where we are expected to remember and understand everything our teacher says so that we can pass a test, this is not necessarily the case in Dharma education. While we should try to remember and reflect on the salient points of a lecture, we are not expected to understand all the intricacies of a topic at once. Teachers explain a topic to “plant seeds” in our

mindstreams so that we will become familiar with the vocabulary. Having heard the topic once, the next time we hear it, we will be able to focus on the concepts being presented. By hearing and reflecting on a teaching repeatedly, our understanding and ability to integrate the meaning into our lives will gradually increase.

Understanding the Dharma is not dependent on worldly intelligence. Some people who are brilliant in academic studies or worldly affairs have great difficulty understanding Dharma principles. On the other hand, some people who do not do well in school quickly catch the intent of the Buddha and practice diligently. For this reason, we should not be arrogant because we have worldly intelligence and not put ourselves down if we lack it.

We need to be patient with ourselves and let go of unrealistic expectations of quick attainments. We should also avoid comparing ourselves to others and feeling proud that we are more advanced than our friends or lamenting that we lag behind them. Each person has different predispositions from previous lives, so no two people will progress at the same speed or in the same way. Comparison of this sort only breeds jealousy, arrogance, and competition, qualities that waste time and are not conducive for transforming our mind.

Similarly, due to karmic connections in previous lives, our friends may be drawn to a particular teacher who does not particularly inspire us and vice versa. Rather than be influenced by peer pressure, we must choose our teachers depending on the quality of guidance we receive from them and the depth of connection we feel with them. We should avoid comparing the practices our teachers instruct us to do with those our friends are prescribed. Because no two sentient beings are identical, the Buddha taught a wide variety of practices so people could find those suitable for them. That does not make one practice better and another worse; it simply means that one practice is more suitable for one person and a different practice for another person. At a buffet dinner, one person may like rice and another noodles. Debating which is best, trying to convert our friends to our preference, or feeling out of place because we aren't attracted to the one our friends like are useless. The point is for each person to eat food that nourishes his or her body. We should study with the teachers who inspire us and practice in the way that works best for us.

Strong, continuous, and stable spiritual experiences are more reliable than powerful, fleeting ones. Some beginners have a strong emotional feeling that they must renounce everything and meditate in solitude for the rest of their lives. Instead of immediately searching for an isolated retreat hut, they should keep practicing and see if after a year the feeling still has the same intensity. If it does, they should consult their teacher for guidance.

For most people, meditating in isolated retreat for years is not an option or even a preference. The vast majority of us need to balance Dharma study and sitting meditation with our daily-life activities. Formal, daily sitting practice enables us to deepen and integrate our understanding of the Dharma in a concentrated way, but the actual determining factor of the effectiveness of our practice manifests in our behavior. There's the story of someone who meditated in an isolated cave for years and thought his practice was progressing well. But when he went down to the town to get supplies, someone criticized him; his anger immediately flared, and he began shouting at the other person. Similar incidents in our life show us which disturbing emotions we need to put more energy into taming in our sitting practice.

People often ask how to balance formal Dharma practice with actively engaging in projects that benefit others. If you are a householder, "fifty-fifty" is a good balance. But remember that how this balance manifests in your life will change according to circumstances, so be flexible. Stabilize your compassion through formal practice and express it through active service to others. Work at transforming your motivation, thus making your daily activities part of the Dharma path.

If you feel stressed by your service work for others or become angry at or disappointed in the people whom you are trying to help, step back, rest, and take more time for personal practice. During your meditation practice, focus on developing a compassionate motivation, fortitude, and joyous effort. Learn to accept the limits of the change you can enact in a world under the influence of afflictions and polluted karma.

Sometimes we go too far in the other direction, becoming complacent in our Dharma studies or in a stagnant meditation practice. In these cases, contemplate impermanence and death as well as the suffering of sentient beings to reinvigorate your compassion.

## REFLECTION

1. A balanced life entails sharing our time among many activities: Dharma practice, socially engaged projects that benefit others, work, caring for friends and family, exercise, and other activities.
  2. What is a practical way to prioritize these activities in your life?
  3. Given your talents and limitations, think of a realistic way to apportion your time and energy that will bring you satisfaction, not stress.
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*Wisdom and Faith*

Wisdom and faith complement and reinforce each other on the path. Whereas faith enables us to be inspired and receptive, wisdom gives us a clear mind that understands both conventional existence and ultimate reality.

Wisdom is an analytical mind that deeply understands its object, such as impermanence or selflessness. Analysis is not intellectual gymnastics used to impress others; it involves deep investigation into the nature of objects and leads to understanding and knowledge.

The English word *faith* does not have the same connotation as the Sanskrit word it translates, *śraddhā*. To understand what faith is, we must look beyond our previous associations with the word to its meaning. Faith is confidence and trust in the Three Jewels; it is not blind belief. A virtuous and joyous mental factor, it enriches our spiritual practice and arises when we admire the Three Jewels, aspire to be like them, or deeply understand the teachings. Accordingly, the Mind and Awareness texts speak of three types of faith or trust: admiring faith, aspiring faith, and believing faith.

*Admiring faith* arises when we learn about the excellent qualities of the Three Jewels or witness the good qualities of our spiritual mentors and admire them. It may also arise from reading the biographies of previous practitioners, contemplating their diligence and determination, and reflecting on the difficulties they overcame to practice the Dharma. This faith clears away mental distress and makes the mind joyful. In extreme cases, admiring faith could degenerate into blind faith, which has little value and

may be dangerous. But authentic admiring faith is a vital aid on the path that serves to orient our efforts in a positive direction.

*Aspiring faith* arises when we develop the wish to attain the excellent qualities of the Three Jewels. It arises from reflecting on the possibility of removing defilements and attaining liberation, and it gives purpose and energy to our practice. When we know the benefits of serenity and concentration, we have faith in them and aspire to attain them.

*Believing faith* is of two kinds. The first believes the truth of the Buddha's teachings because they were taught by the Buddha and our spiritual mentors and we trust them. This faith may arise due to reasons that we have only partially verified or without applying reasoning.

The second type of believing faith is based on conviction and arises after having examined and understood a teaching. Because it often involves a reasoning used to verify the topic, this faith is stable. Having contemplated the four truths for a long time, we become convinced that they accurately describe our predicament and how to remedy it. After studying and using reasoning to investigate the ultimate nature of phenomena, we experience a calm conviction that all persons and phenomena are empty of inherent existence. We are confident that by realizing this directly, we will be able to uproot the self-grasping ignorance that is the source of all *duḥkha*. In these examples, believing faith is directed toward the Dharma Jewel—true paths and true cessations. From this, firm confidence in the Buddha and the Saṅgha Jewels easily follow. Such faith borne of conviction stabilizes our practice, enabling us to pursue the Dharma in depth.

Tsongkhapa illustrates this second type of believing faith arising from reason in his “Praise to Dependent Arising”:

Having seen the truth, you taught it.  
Those following you will leave all troubles far behind,  
for they will cut to the root of every fault.

However, those outside your teachings,  
though they practice long and hard,  
are those who beckon back faults,  
for they are welded to views of self.

Ah! When the wise see the difference,  
 how could they not revere you  
 from the very depths of their hearts!<sup>50</sup>

The second type of believing faith arises from deep conviction that is born from clearly knowing and analyzing the distinction between the Buddha's teachings and those of masters who adhere to views of inherent existence. After examining both teachings with discerning wisdom and clearly seeing the truth in the Buddha's teachings, the wise have no choice but to feel great faith, trust, and respect for the Buddha. Tsongkhapa expresses this with these moving words:

Alas! My mind was defeated by ignorance.  
 Though I've sought refuge for a long time  
 in such an embodiment of excellence,  
 I possess not a fraction of his qualities.

Nonetheless, before the stream of this life  
 flowing toward death has come to cease,  
 that I have found slight faith in you—  
 even this I think is fortunate.<sup>51</sup>

In the first verse, "qualities" refers chiefly to insight into emptiness. Tsongkhapa acknowledges that for a long time ignorance has obscured his mind. Yet due to gaining some understanding of emptiness, he experienced faith based on conviction in the doctrine of emptiness taught by the Buddha with great compassion. Considering how few people encounter teachings on emptiness and among those, how few gain even a modest understanding of it, Tsongkhapa felt fortunate to trust the truth of non-inherent existence. Pondering this will increase our aspiring faith and motivate us to practice like the Buddha did and attain the same depth of realization.

Learn the teachings well and use reason to reflect on their meaning. If you do not find any logical fallacies or contradictions, you will have believing faith in the path and the possibility of attaining it. That faith, in turn, will help increase your trust in those topics that cannot be understood completely through factual inference, such as the intricacies of karma and

its effects. Believing that actions bring concordant results is sufficient to help us curb destructive actions and act constructively, thus accumulating merit, which aids the increase of wisdom. In Buddhism, wisdom and faith are not contradictory, and when properly cultivated, they increase each other.

Haribhadra, in a commentary on Maitreya's *Ornament of Clear Realizations*, speaks of having faith not only in the Three Jewels but also in the treatises that take the Three Jewels as their subject matter. While many people have admiring faith in the Three Jewels, not many have faith in the treatises that discuss them. Faith in the treatises and their authors leads us to study the texts, which increases our knowledge of the Three Jewels. This, in turn, promotes contemplating and then meditating on the meaning that we learned, thereby deepening both our wisdom and believing faith. These, in turn, are essential factors for our awakening.

There is no fixed order in which faith and wisdom arise. According to individual tendencies, faith may give rise to wisdom, wisdom may lead to faith, or these two may occur simultaneously.

Stabilizing our faith increases our resilience. Stable faith is not affected by the opinions of others and prevents discouragement when viewing others' wrongdoings. Our faith in the Buddha's teachings will not falter should we find a statement in the scriptures or one said by our teacher with which we initially disagree. Instead, we will continue to investigate.

## REFLECTION

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1. Find examples in your own experience of the three types of faith.
  2. How does each one contribute to your internal happiness?
  3. How can you gently increase your faith and trust in the Buddha, Dharma, and Saṅgha?
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### *Proper Practice*

I am concerned that these days people rely too much on admiring faith and, even then, do not understand or cultivate it properly. Some people have great devotion but minimal interest in study. Many years ago I went to Singapore, and the Buddhists there greeted me with so much devotion. Some of them touched my clothes or my body believing they would receive some blessing, but when I explained the Buddhadharma, few of them were interested. I prefer when people are very attentive at teachings and want to learn. They take notes and record the teachings and refer to them later.

Buddhism is a path of self-reliance not one of propitiating an external god or deity to give us material goods, reputation, or spiritual realizations. Tibetans often have statues of protector deities on their altars and store their valuables in the cabinets below. I joke with them that it appears that they pray to the protectors on top of the cabinet to protect the worldly goods inside the cabinet! This is not Buddhist practice.

Expecting an external holy being to remove our suffering and make us a buddha is a wrong view. Improper understanding of prayers in Tibetan liturgy can lead to this idea; we request to the assembly of holy beings, “Please grant me blessings to generate compassion.” This is a skillful way of focusing our energy and identifying what is important. However, we cannot simply make offerings to the gurus and deities, request them to grant us blessings, and then sit back and have a cup of tea, thinking they will do all the work!

The buddhas have such great compassion for sentient beings that if they could have eliminated our suffering and given us realizations, they would have done so by now. However, our progress along the path depends on our creating the appropriate causes. Our own effort is crucial. Just as another person cannot sleep for us so that we’ll feel well rested, no one else can transform our mind for us. Nevertheless, innumerable holy beings are trying to assist and guide us on the path. But do we pay attention to their guidance—the teachings they give us?

If we call ourselves Buddhists and seek protection from suffering, we should rely on the Buddha’s teachings. The principal way the Buddha protects us is by teaching us the Dharma. By putting the teachings into practice, we abandon harmful actions, purify those done in the past, and engage



in constructive actions—this is the best protection. If we do not observe the law of karma and its effects, we may make extensive offerings to protectors, chant innumerable *pūjās* in deep, melodic voices, beat drums, and ring bells, but misery will still befall us because we have created the cause for it. On the other hand, if we act ethically, even if others try to harm us, they will not succeed because we will have removed the causes that make us vulnerable to it.

The Tibetan word *byin rlabs* that is translated as “blessing” or “inspiration” literally means “to transform into magnificence” or “to transform by magnificence.” We receive a blessing not through an external power causing us to have an extraordinary experience, but through a combination of the holy being’s teachings and our practice. The real sense of “blessing” is a transformation of mind from an unwholesome state to a wholesome one. Indications that our mind has been inspired and transformed are that our fear lessens, our temper calms, and our tolerance and respect for others increase.

As a sincere Buddhist, do not seek magnificent mystical experiences to boast about to your friends but instead try to become a better human being. If you do that, you will automatically benefit others and improve the world.

### *Purification and Collection of Merit*

*Merit* is virtuous karma or goodness created by restraining from harmful actions and cultivating constructive ones. It leads to good results in cyclic existence and enriches our minds with positive energy that facilitates gaining spiritual realizations. Merit cannot be seen with our eyes or measured with scientific instruments, yet it acts as the support for both wisdom and faith to grow in our minds and enables our practice to be successful.

If we lack merit, our efforts to cultivate wisdom may result in a corrupt intelligence that reaches the wrong conclusions. Some people are extremely intelligent, but because they are excessively skeptical and critical, they reflexively criticize reasonable theories and beneficial practices. Nihilistic and cynical, they act in ways that harm themselves and others.

A lack of merit also impedes integrating the Dharma in our lives. Some Buddhists study the scriptures extensively and are excellent debaters and great logicians. They can explain the meaning of many scriptures, but their

knowledge has not transformed their minds, and their everyday conduct lacks discipline. This indicates the corruption of intelligence due to lack of merit and proper faith. To cultivate wisdom that is capable of transforming our mind, we must accumulate merit and generate faith based on understanding the meaning of the teachings.

In ancient India, the great non-Buddhist masters who debated complex issues with the Buddhists must have had well-developed knowledge of the Buddhist view of these topics, otherwise they would not have been able to debate them. However, they had no conviction in the veracity of the Buddhist views; knowledge does not always lead to conviction. Gaining a deep understanding of the Buddha's teachings that goes beyond intellectual comprehension depends on having accumulated merit.

Purifying ourselves of negativities—destructive actions and harmful thoughts—is also important. Done by means of the four opponent powers—regret, taking refuge and generating bodhicitta, resolving not to do the action again, and engaging in remedial behavior—purification cleanses the mind of impediments. The mind is like a field. Just as we must remove debris from a field and add fertilizer so that the seeds we plant can grow, we perform purification and collect merit so that the seeds of Dharma planted in our minds during teachings can grow into a vast harvest of Dharma realizations. To do that, the great masters advise us to do certain preparatory practices, such as the seven-limb prayer, at the beginning of meditation sessions to purify and collect merit. These seven limbs are (1) performing prostrations, (2) making offerings, (3) confessing our misdeeds, (4) rejoicing in our own and others' virtue, (5) requesting our teachers to teach the Dharma, (6) imploring the buddhas to remain in the world, and (7) dedicating our merit for the awakening of all beings. In addition, some practitioners engage in specific preliminary practices prior to doing tantric retreats in order to accumulate merit; for example, some do a hundred thousand maṇḍala offerings or recitations of Vajrasattva's mantra. If we do these devotional practices with awareness that the factors composing them—the agent, object, and action—arise dependently yet are empty of inherent existence, we also cultivate wisdom, which is the ultimate purifying agent.

Sometimes we feel stuck in our studies and practice. The mind is bored, unresponsive, and dull, and we have difficulty understanding Dharma topics and focusing the mind on virtue. At such times, engaging in purification

and the collection of merit is very effective to open the mind and make it receptive to the Dharma.

This is illustrated in the biography of Tsongkhapa. After practicing for many years, he had a meditative vision of Mañjuśrī, the buddha of wisdom, and was able to converse with him. He consulted Mañjuśrī regarding some difficult points about emptiness. Mañjuśrī answered his questions, but Tsongkhapa still did not understand. Mañjuśrī responded, “There is no way for me to explain it to you in an easier fashion. You will be able to understand only if you enhance your meditation with three factors. First, make heartfelt supplication to your guru, whom you regard as inseparable from your meditational deity. Second, engage in purification practices and accumulate merit. Third, study the treatises written by the great Indian masters and then reflect and meditate on them. With the help of these three, you will have a true insight into emptiness before long.”

Tsongkhapa then went to do retreat at a hermitage near Ölka. There he made 3.5 million prostrations—a hundred thousand each to the thirty-five purification buddhas—and many thousands of maṇḍala offerings. In addition, he made requests to his guru, whom he viewed as having the same nature as his meditational deity, and continued to study the great treatises as advised by Mañjuśrī. The obstacles to his understanding of emptiness cleared, and he realized the correct view. Similarly, these three can rejuvenate our Dharma practice whenever our mind feels dry or obscured.

### *Prayers and Rituals*

Many people ask me to pray for them. Thousands of buddhas and gurus already pray for us, but because we do not practice sincerely, nothing happens. Our progress depends on our own effort, and I am always delighted when students sincerely practice to transform their minds. That is the best offering.

Bodhisattvas make a vast variety of aspirations and prayers and then strive to accomplish their aspirations. In contrast, ordinary people pray to have a happy life but ignore Dharma practice, which is the source of happiness. They pray “May I be healthy” but eat junk food; they aspire to have good relationships with others but are careless about their speech. Good relationships will elude us as long as we speak divisively, blame, or criticize

others. We should be like bodhisattvas and think about what causes will accomplish our prayers. If we create those causes, our prayers will bear fruit, and we will be receptive to the inspiration of the Three Jewels.

When we request spiritual mentors or monastics to pray for us, we should from our side refrain from nonvirtuous behavior and act constructively. That way their prayers can be effective. The actualization of virtuous prayers and aspirations is a cooperative effort: prayers are made, we engage in virtuous actions, and the Three Jewels send their inspiration. In Prajñāvarman's commentary on the *Udānavarga*, the Buddha says:

Buddhas do not wash away negativities with water,  
clear away beings' duḥkha with their hands,  
or transfer their realizations to other beings:  
they liberate them by teaching the truth of reality.

Buddhas cannot magically make everything go well in our lives and in the world. The principal way they help us sentient beings is by teaching us how to create the causes for happiness and abandon the causes for suffering. Making our actions accord with their instructions—especially those regarding ethical conduct—is essential to alleviate duḥkha. We may recite thousands of prayers and mantras, but if we do not use the Dharma tools to transform our minds, we are wasting time. As Dza Patrul Rinpoche candidly says (AKC 15):

Ritual sessions four times a day without the generation and  
completion stages,  
pounding drums and clashing cymbals without reminding  
ourselves of pure perception,  
droning mantras without any concentration:  
all that gets us no further on the path to liberation.

The main purpose of rituals involving deity-yoga practice is to generate the union of method and wisdom. It is not to seek blessings, as if *nirvāṇa* were something external to us that our spiritual mentor or meditation deity could transfer into our mindstream. Tantric practices are very profound, but to derive the greatest benefit from them, we must have a good foundation in

general Buddhist teachings and learn how to meditate while performing these rituals. While making offerings to the saṅgha and requesting them to perform pūjās on our behalf create merit due to our sincere motivation, we should not think that we can “hire” someone to create merit, freeing us to continue to deceive customers at work or get drunk with our friends!

People easily believe that the performance of a ritual, not the mental change it is supposed to invoke in the participants, is an end to itself. This is precisely the attitude that the Buddha opposed during his life and that led to his disapproval of rites and rituals done simply for their own sake. Nowadays it seems that some people are going backward into this superstitious way of thinking and not forward to deeper, more genuine practice.

After a large teaching in the West some years ago, the students wanted to offer me a long-life pūjā. Although I appreciated their kind intentions and good wishes, I explained to them that it is their Dharma practice that keeps their gurus alive and ensures the presence of buddhas and bodhisattvas in the world. If they don't practice, there is no need for buddhas and bodhisattvas to appear in the world or for teachers to live long. However, if the students practice even a little of what I teach so that when we meet again they have less anger, jealousy, and attachment, then I will be extremely happy, and the cause for their spiritual mentors to live long will be present.

I was once requested to exorcize a spirit. Not knowing any rituals for this, I meditated on compassion and bodhicitta. Later the people told me the problem stopped, so I felt that perhaps I did something helpful. Another time, customers of a hotel had had bad experiences in a particular room. Not telling me this beforehand, the staff had me stay in that room, where I did my daily practice, which includes meditation on compassion and emptiness. Later they told me that the room had become peaceful and their customers could stay there again. While I haven't realized bodhicitta or emptiness, this attests to the power of meditating on them! Please remember this when you face difficulties.

In the Tibetan community, it is common to ask a spiritual mentor to do a divination when facing an obstacle or beginning a new project. Divination texts often attribute a problem to spirit harm, and usually the diviner will recommend that a particular pūjā be performed to eliminate the obstacles caused by spirits. However, as Buddhists, we should not be attributing our problems to external beings but to our own karma. I prefer that instead of

prescribing pūjās, diviners tell people to meditate on bodhicitta and emptiness, to deepen their refuge in the Three Jewels, or to reflect on the law of karma and its effects and engage in purification practices. These will definitely cure the causes of suffering by transforming people’s minds.

There is no need to consult a horoscope before starting a project or deciding where to place an altar. I don’t have much faith in horoscopes and astrology—my tutor Ling Rinpoche (1903–83) told me he was born on a day of nine bad signs. We don’t wait for a good date for the two most significant activities of our life: our birth and death. However, as an ancient tradition that is a part of Tibetan culture and heritage, it’s important to continue Tibetan astrology.

### *Study, Reflection, and Meditation*

The sūtras speak of the threefold practice of study, critical reflection, and meditation and the understanding or wisdom that is developed by each one. Individually and together these three enable us to practice skillfully, avoid pitfalls and detours, and gain liberating realizations.

*Study.* In ancient times, the Buddha’s teachings were passed down orally, so the first step in learning was to hear teachings. The broader meaning of “hearing” (*śruti*) includes all forms of study, including reading and new forms of learning. Studying the sūtras and tantras, as well as treatises and commentaries by later sages, gives us the necessary information to know how to practice. Without this first, crucial step, we risk making up our own path or practicing incorrectly.

Many people are eager to meditate, which is commendable; but without proper study, they run the risk of going astray. They will not know how to meditate correctly, even if they have a strong aspiration to do so. Studying the teachings on emptiness, we learn the reasonings that prove phenomena are empty of inherent existence. Study reveals different perspectives on a topic, thereby increasing our mental flexibility and acuity. Then when we contemplate and meditate, we can look at the topic from many angles and see connections among diverse points. Knowing the paths and stages on the path to awakening enables us to assess our own progress when we are not able to consult our spiritual mentor. Hearing is not dry, intellectual learning. It is dynamic and sparks transformation in our mind.

One lama said that it is better to study scriptures one month than to do a one-month retreat meditating on and reciting the mantra of Mañjuśrī. This illustrates the importance of study to gain wisdom. The Dharma is vast, and we should continue to learn its various aspects our entire lives. Our bodies may become old, but our minds can still be young and full of enthusiasm for learning. Whenever I have time in my busy schedule, I read one of the great treatises. Even if I have studied it many times before, new aspects are revealed with each reading.

Something to keep in mind when studying the Dharma is that many words have multiple meanings that differ according to the context. The Tibetan word *rig pa*, for example, is translated as “awareness” or “cognizance” in the context of the Mind and Awareness teachings, but in Dzogchen it refers to the subtle mind. *Bliss* has different meanings in the contexts of serenity meditation and highest yoga tantra.

*Reflection.* Having studied, we must think about what we learned. This involves investigation and critical analysis to ascertain the correct meaning, which engenders deep conviction in the veracity of the Dharma. Reflection may be done quietly on our own or together with others, discussing and/or debating the teachings. For this reason, Tibetan monastics engage in rigorous debates that are often entertaining as well as educational. Sometimes we believe we understand a topic well but discover we don’t because when someone asks us a question or challenges our assertion, we don’t know how to respond! The *Sūtra Unraveling the Thought* explains four principles that are useful to understand a phenomenon such as the mind from different perspectives.

The *principle of nature or reality* includes examining realities commonly known in the world, such as water’s wetness; inconceivable realities, such as the Buddha’s abilities; and the abiding reality (emptiness). To understand the mind, we examine its clear and cognizant nature and its impermanent nature. Due to the mind’s nature, two contradictory emotions or thoughts—for example anger and love—cannot be manifest simultaneously.

Investigating the *principle of dependence* entails examining causality, the arising of results from their causes. This enables us to understand that because individual phenomena do not have certain qualities or abilities from their own side, when they interact with other phenomena, new properties emerge. Regarding the mind, afflictions depend on ignorance; they

cease when ignorance ceases. Virtuous mental factors are not rooted in ignorance and do not cease when ignorance ceases. They depend on other causes that can be cultivated limitlessly.

Some results are material while others are consciousnesses or abstract composites—impermanent phenomena that are neither material nor consciousness, such as the person and karmic seeds. The diversity of results is due to the diversity of causes. There are two types of causal processes. One involves karma; the other is causality that is distinct from karma. Karmic causal processes involve sentient beings' experience of happiness and suffering and depend on their intentions. Causal processes that are distinct from karma involve the physical, chemical, and biological laws of nature.

The *principal of function* shows that each phenomenon has its own function. Understanding the mind's function, we see that wisdom eradicates ignorance and afflictions, and contemplating the kindness of others as well as their suffering stimulates compassion. Afflictions disturb the mind, while wisdom pacifies and calms it. Agent, object, and action function together within any event.

The *principle of evidence* or *logical reasoning* involves examining whether something can be apprehended by any of the three reliable cognizers—direct perceivers (for example, reliable sense consciousnesses), inferential consciousnesses that use reasoning to know their object, and reliable authoritative testimony of experts. By understanding the first three principles, we can then apply reasoning, e.g., because *x* exists, *y* must exist or occur. We can establish a conclusion that cannot be contradicted by any of the three reliable cognizers. Based on understanding the above three principles with respect to the mind, we can conclude that liberation is possible and that a path exists that can bring it about.

These four principles are built one on top of the other. We can use evidence and reasoning to cultivate understanding because they presuppose that phenomena have particular functions. We can understand their functions because underlying them are dependently related phenomena. Why is there a relationship between cause and effect? Because it is the nature of effects to follow their causes; this is the way things are. When we ask why matter has the property of obstructiveness and consciousness has the aspect of subjective experience, the only answer is “that is its nature.”

To explain these four in their forward sequence: the principle of nature



allows for dependent relationships to occur, and these dependent relationships among phenomena provide the basis for the specific function of each phenomenon. Based on the dependent nature of phenomena and their functions, we can employ the principle of reasoning to understand things that are not immediately evident. “Because there is smoke, there is fire” involves knowing that the nature of fire is hot and burning, that fire produces smoke, and that smoke functions as evidence of fire.

We apply these same four principles when practicing the four establishments of mindfulness. Many of the meditations on the body, feelings, mind, and phenomena involve understanding their nature, causes, and functions or effects. Through that, we can use them as reasons to know that the body, feelings, mind, and phenomena are impermanent, *duḥkha* by nature, empty, and selfless.

The manner in which scientific investigation proceeds is similar to these four principles. Scientists first endeavor to understand the various properties of their object of study—their nature—and then examine what these objects depend on. Through this, they research emergent properties and their functions and then apply reason to understand characteristics that are not evident.

*Meditation.* Based on learning and critical reflection on the teachings, our meditation will be effective. The purpose of meditation is to integrate the meaning of the teachings into our mindstream by means of repeated practice. Having a correct and stable intellectual understanding due to applying the four principles, we now engage in absorption meditation to familiarize our mind with the topic and transform intellectual understanding into realization. Here our meditation mainly, but not exclusively, involves stabilizing meditation done with access or full concentration, although analytical meditation may be applied at times.<sup>52</sup> This produces the understanding arising from meditation, which has a powerful ability to transform our minds.

Learning, critical reflection, and meditation complement each other. Some people incorrectly think “These three apply to *sūtra* practice, but *tantra* is actualized through devotion and faith, so study and analysis are not necessary.” The Kadam geshes, who practiced both *sūtra* and *tantra*, used to say, “When I hear teachings, I also reflect and meditate. When I reflect, I also hear and meditate. When I meditate, I hear and critically reflect.”

Learning gives us general knowledge of the topic and reduces one level

of confusion and doubt. Thinking about and analyzing the teachings gives us a more nuanced conceptual understanding based on reason. Meditating integrates this understanding with our very being. In the case of realizing the nature of reality, hearing and studying the teachings give us a general knowledge about the object of negation, the rational arguments proving that all phenomena lack inherent existence, and the stages of realizing emptiness. By then contemplating and discussing what we have studied, we come to understand that the I does not exist inherently as it appears but exists dependently. The I is empty of inherent existence because it is dependent on the five psychophysical aggregates and on the mind designating “I.” The emptiness that we have ascertained by reflection now becomes the object of meditation. In meditation we now cultivate a union of serenity and insight on emptiness.

## REFLECTION

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1. Why are study, critical examination, and meditation important to gain realizations?
  2. Pick a particular thing and contemplate the four principles—nature, dependence, function, and evidence or reasoning—in relation to it.
  3. See how the four work together to bring understanding.
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### *Memorization and Debate*

In traditional Tibetan monastic universities, the daily schedule includes specified times for group chanting, teachings, memorization, and debate. Private study and silent meditation are done at monastics’ own convenience. Since the time of the Buddha, memorization has been a principal way of preserving and conveying the teachings from spiritual mentor to disciple. Memorization has many benefits: students already have some familiarity with a text’s contents when they receive teachings on it. After studying a text, they will be able to easily recall its key points. By having quick access to quotations, students can draw attention to these passages when they debate

and contemplate. When teaching, they are able to cite passages related to a specific topic from diverse texts, enhancing the breadth and depth of their explanation. In difficult situations, they can easily remember Dharma advice. Many Tibetan monastics who were imprisoned by the Communist Chinese after 1959 silently recited texts in their prison cells. Not only did they spend their time familiarizing themselves with the Buddha's thought, but they also could easily recall advice on how to practice during difficult times. Someone who holds a wealth of texts in their memory is like a cook who has all the ingredients for a delicious meal at her fingertips.

Memorization is also a way of training the mind. Students must learn to concentrate on the material they are memorizing and recall it instantly. In a Tibetan monastery, this requires special focus, since one is surrounded by many other monastics loudly reciting the passages they are memorizing. They build up the ability to not be distracted by external sounds, which is a great aid when they meditate.

Debate is an animated process that helps students to learn the material, think about it, and remember what they have learned. The structure of a debate is formalized, and both participants—the seated respondent and the standing questioner—must be familiar with the syllogistic structure. This format teaches people how to think clearly. The speaker cannot ramble and hope the debate partner understands what he is trying to say. Both parties must be concise and to the point.

A debate begins with the questioner asking the responder a question. Once the questioner has an idea of the view the responder holds (the thesis), he will ask him what reasons he has to support that. If he sees a flaw in the responder's logic, he will try to refute it either by getting the responder to contradict himself or by establishing the correct view.

In his *Supplement to the Middle Way* (*Madhyamakāvātāra*), Candrakīrti states that the purpose of these philosophical debates is not to generate hostility toward the other person and his view or to arrogantly establish our own view in order to gain a good reputation. The purpose is to eradicate the ignorance that obscures both parties from gaining Dharma realizations, and to establish both self and others on the path to awakening. Bearing this in mind helps debaters maintain a good motivation and also counteracts the supposition that debate is simply intellectual competition.

During the Buddha's time, two monks, Bhaṇḍa and Abhiñjika, were

debating the teachings in order to determine who could speak better and have the final word. When news of their activities reached the Buddha, he called for them, and the following dialogue ensued (SN 16.6):

*The Buddha:* Is it true, bhikkhus, that you have been competing with each other in regard to your learning, as to who can speak more, who can speak better, who can speak longer?

*Monks:* Yes, Venerable Sir.

*The Buddha:* Have you ever known me to teach the Dhamma thus: “Come bhikkhus, compete with each other in regard to your learning, and see who can speak more, who can speak better, who can speak longer?”

*Monks:* No, Venerable Sir.

*The Buddha:* Then, if you have never known me to teach the Dhamma thus, what do you senseless men know and see that, having gone forth in such a well-expounded Dhamma and Vinaya, you compete with each other in regard to your learning, as to who can speak more, who can speak better, who can speak longer?

Seeing their fault, the bhikkhus immediately prostrated to the Buddha, confessed their error, and asked for his pardon. We, too, must be careful to maintain a wholesome motivation so that our Dharma debates and discussions do not become a purely intellectual and ego-driven pursuit.

One time a famous logician approached the great meditator Milarepa, and trying to embarrass him, asked “What are the definitions of a syllogism of pervasion and a syllogism of contradiction?”

To this Milarepa replied, “Your mind being pervaded with afflictions is a syllogism of pervasion, and your mind being contradictory with the Dharma is a syllogism of contradiction.” In this way, he skillfully and compassionately burst the bubble of arrogance of this logician, who pursued debate with a skewed motive. Another time, when a logician asked Milarepa to give the definition of *nonascertaining direct perception*, Milarepa responded, “A person who outwardly assumes the appearance of a Dharma practitioner but inwardly is not ascertained as a Dharma practitioner—that is a nonascertaining direct perception.”

Āryadeva says (CS 185):

While attached to your own position  
and disliking others' positions,  
you will not approach nirvāṇa.  
Neither conduct will bring peace.

Someone who is not really interested in Dharma practice may use debate to enhance his arrogance and animosity. I heard a story about a monk who was unable to establish his own position to the responder during a debate. He became so enraged that he stormed off, picked up a stone, and struck the responder.

In another case, I heard of two knowledgeable students whose debates were deep as well as competitive. The questioner and respondent were always eager to defeat each other. This sense of competition continued even after they attended tantric college, sat for their geshe exams, and received their geshe degrees. It seems that for the rest of their lives, they remained antagonistic, continually debating with each other with the thought, "I want to defeat him."

On the other hand, there are those like the respected master Dondrup Tsonдру, well-known for his skill in debate, which made his students proud to have him as their teacher. Once a Mongolian monk, a learned new geshe, was debating at the Great Prayer Festival, and Dondrup Tsonдру was the questioner. During the debate, nothing remarkable happened; there was no rigorous exchange on any important issue. Afterward his students asked Dondrup Tsonдру, "What happened, Master? You weren't successful in bringing about a powerful debate with this responder."

Dondrup Tsonдру replied, "The responder was very skilled and learned. Whatever he said accorded with reasoning and scripture, so there was nothing to debate." The Mongolian monk had used debate in the way it was intended—to eliminate ignorance. Dondrup Tsonдру honored that and did not try to stir up false debates just to demonstrate his skill and emerge victorious.

Among new students who are learning to debate, there's the saying, "If you can convince the responder that something that is correct is incorrect or that something that is incorrect is correct, then you are learned and

skilled in the topic.” Candrakīrti discourages this attitude, saying that it is wrong to refute someone’s idea simply for the sake of refuting it and being triumphant. Having the reputation of being a good debater does not get one closer to awakening. In the tradition of Nālandā’s learned practitioners, we should be objective, honest, and truthful. One physicist told me that a scientist must be impartial and objective when doing research. Being attached to one’s hypothesis or the outcomes of one’s research is not the correct approach.

Some people have the mistaken impression that Gelukpas only engage in intellectual study and debate, without much meditation, and that Nyingmapas and Kagyupas do not study much but meditate a lot. Such stereotypes are unfortunate, because within each Tibetan tradition we find people who focus on study, others who emphasize meditation, and some who offer service in the monasteries. When I speak at any of the three large Geluk monasteries—Gaden, Sera, and Drepung—I encourage the monks to engage enthusiastically in philosophical studies and debate and then relate what they learn to practice-oriented texts such as those on the lamrim. They should meditate on those teachings, integrating the meaning into their hearts and lives. Similarly, when I teach monastics from Nyingma, Kagyu, or Sakya monasteries, I encourage them to study the great Indian classics as well as the texts from their own tradition, and then reflect and meditate on what they learn.

However, I have witnessed the tendency for some people—teachers and students—to get so accustomed to debating that the way they engage with the Dharma becomes unbalanced. For example, Candrakīrti’s *Supplement to the Middle Way* is a key text studied in the monastic curriculum. The initial praise to compassion and the first five chapters are filled with material for practice—compassion, bodhicitta, generosity, ethical conduct, fortitude, joyous effort, and meditative stability. But since there is not much material for debate in these, some people hurry through them to reach chapter 6, which is about emptiness, where they jump into debate with full force. I don’t know if they meditate on chapter 6 while studying it. Just learning the terms—object of negation, emptiness of inherent existence, two truths, and so forth—doesn’t bring realizations. We need to identify the object of negation within ourselves and then see that it doesn’t exist.

Something similar may happen when people study Nāgārjuna's *Treatise on the Middle Way*. They spend more time on the first few chapters where there is a lot to debate, but neglect chapters 18 and 26, which speak about dependent arising and the means to achieve liberation. I like to teach chapters 18, 24, and 26 of this text because understanding how we are reborn in cyclic existence and how to reverse that and attain liberation are essential topics for practice.

A Western professor once commented to me that monastics debate, but in the end they return to scriptural quotations to “prove” their point. He is right. I have suggested many times that people only use reason when debating topics that are slightly obscure. Scriptural authority should only be used concerning very obscure phenomena, and even then, you must show why the scripture you are citing is reliable. In short, we should try to practice wisely.

It is my sincere wish that people emulate the great learned practitioners of the past and develop all three wisdoms of study, reflection, and meditation. Pointing fingers at others and chiding them to both study and meditate is useless; we should evaluate our own activities and examine whether we incorporate all three into our practice in a balanced way.

To investigate the Buddha's teachings in a beneficial way, it is essential to have the qualities of a receptive student—eagerness to learn, intelligence, open-mindedness, and sincerity. As we increase these qualities, our understanding of the Dharma will deepen, and that will arouse confidence in the teachings. This conviction in the truth of the Dharma leads us to have faith in the Buddha who taught it and the Saṅgha who have correctly realized it. This illustrates the interconnectedness of philosophical studies and faith in the Three Jewels.

### *Role Models*

When engaging in a new activity, we naturally look to role models for guidance and inspiration. Spiritual practice is no exception. In the Tibetan Buddhist tradition, the two types of prominent role models we find are the scholar/commentator (such as Asaṅga and Candrakīrti) and the ascetic meditator (such as Saraha or Milarepa). Occasionally we find examples of

people who are both, such as Nāropa, Dza Patrul Rinpoche, or Tsongkhapa. Because they are usually depicted in one role or the other, we tend to forget that most of the great scholars were also great yogis, and that the great meditators often became so after years of study and debate in either this or previous lives.

Hearing about these historical figures, we may receive the unspoken message that to be successful in the Dharma, we have to become either a great scholar or a great meditator. But where does that leave people who are drawn to neither role? What about the average practitioner who does her best according to her own disposition? Each of us wants to feel that we are successful in our own way.

We must remember that success in Dharma practice is not dependent on societal recognition. The law of karma and its effects is not duped by hypocrisy. Leaving this life with a great collection of merit, fewer negativities, and the imprints from having heard and practiced many teachings are signs of a successful Dharma practice. Fame is not.

In seeking out role models, I (Chodron) look to the Buddha himself. In sūtra passages and in artwork, he is depicted in a variety of situations: sitting and meditating peacefully; speaking fearlessly to a crowd of non-Buddhists; tending to the needs of a sick monk; talking to merchants, courtesans, royalty, and paupers. He addresses one person gently and scolds a monk with wrong views. He instructs that the food remaining from a meal offered to the saṅgha be given to the poor. In one instance, he praises the merit of a beggar who mentally offered the meal with a good motivation over the wealthy patron who actually gave the food but lacked a generous intention. He consoles a woman whose child died and those fearing the loss of their parents. The Buddha sits under forest trees; he walks in towns. He spends time with others and is often alone. He speaks with men and women, monastics and lay. He knows how to address intellectuals, wandering ascetics, nonbelievers, the grieving, the impoverished, and criminals—the Buddha is everyone's person. He fits no stereotype.

The Buddha engaged in so many diverse activities that he can serve as a role model for many different kinds of people with diverse interests. We can let go of the critical self-judgment that may arise if we aren't among the best of the debaters or the most realized yogis. It's important for each of us



to find our own way of living a Dharma life while internally cultivating the same qualities of wisdom, bodhicitta, and so forth.

In thinking of the diversity of Tibetan adepts, the three lineages of Kadam practitioners come to mind. One group practiced mainly lamrim, following Atiśa's *Lamp of the Path* and other texts, without studying philosophy extensively or debating very much. The second group emphasized philosophical studies and debate, integrating this into their lamrim meditation. The third group relied mainly on the personal instructions they received from their spiritual mentors and meditated on those.

Some Kadam practitioners displayed great devotion to their teachers and served them assiduously. Others stayed alone or practiced with a small group of companions. Some were teachers, others were not. Their biographies show that they had very different personalities. They did not squeeze themselves into a predetermined role or persona in order to be successful practitioners.

I often comment on the importance of Buddhists being engaged in social welfare projects, and for some people that is the natural expression of their Dharma practice. Master Cheng Yen, the Chinese bhikṣuṇī who founded the Tzu Chi Foundation, is a good example of this. A Buddhist nun, she practiced in a hut in Taiwan for years, bowing to each syllable of the *Lotus Sūtra*. Villagers recall unusual light emanating from her hut. Later she saw a poor person being turned away from a medical clinic, and she began to construct hospitals for the impoverished. Now she directs an international welfare organization whose volunteers travel around the globe to offer aid when disasters and emergencies occur. Master Cheng Yen remains humble and peaceful in demeanor, yet her firm determination to benefit others has inspired thousands. There is a waiting list to volunteer at her welfare centers in Taiwan!

As Buddhists, we should encourage those who want to live as renounced meditators after completing their studies. We should also support those whose talents lie in study and teaching, compassionate service, or social engagement. Each of us must find a suitable way to combine study, meditation, and service in our own lives.

Dharma practitioners have a variety of personalities. In the early sūtras, we meet Mahākāśyapa, who engaged in ascetic practices allowed by the

Buddha. He appears austere, aloof, and perhaps a bit rigid as well. Ānanda, the Buddha's personal attendant, is sociable and kind and compassionately looks after others. Looking at a wide variety of role models widens our perspective.

Bodhisattvas are depicted in several ways in the scriptures. Some live in society, helping those they encounter. Some are royalty who affect the welfare of others through promulgating fair policies and sharing their wealth. Some are merchants who support the saṅgha and give generously to those in need. Some live with the most neglected people in society, uplifting them materially and with the Dharma. Some bodhisattvas live in pure lands, where they make elaborate offerings and learn from the principal Buddha there. Some bodhisattvas teach the Dharma to multitudes; others teach to a few through their example. All these ways of living bodhicitta apply now as well.

Tantric adepts are often portrayed living eccentric lives and sometimes acting outrageously, transgressing the social mores of their time. While many of us admire someone who is not constrained by conventions, this image of tantric adepts can be misleading, especially if emulating it feeds our craving for attention, contempt for society, or unhealthy psychological states. Nowadays it is better to practice as the mind-training teachings advise: externally appearing simple; internally living with love, compassion, and bodhicitta; and discreetly practicing tantra.

In short, do not become rigid in your notion of a successful Dharma life. Know that, due to karma, people have different mentalities and interests and different opportunities as well. Encourage yourself and encourage others to abandon negativity, create virtue, and cultivate wisdom and compassion. Respect all practitioners and rejoice at whatever virtue anyone creates.

# 10 | Making Progress

All of us want our Dharma practice to bear fruit, but even with good intentions it is easy to deviate from the path. We can get sidetracked in several ways. Being aware of potential pitfalls in advance helps us to avoid them, and knowing the signs of making progress on the path enables us to accurately assess our practice.

## *Realistic Expectations*

We have both a useful and a useless sense of self. The unrealistic sense of self operates without sound reason, just on the grounds of “I want this or that.” This sense of self is the root of our *duḥkha* and is eliminated by the realization of emptiness. The positive sense of self operates on the basis of reason. It is the basis for bodhisattvas’ strong self-confidence, without which they would be unable to confront and subdue the self-centered attitude.

Afflictions are overcome in stages, not all at once. The first time a layer of them is eradicated is upon gaining a direct, nonconceptual perception of emptiness. Before that, when we encounter circumstances that give rise to our afflictions, we must practice ethical conduct and employ the antidotes specific to each affliction in order to prevent harmful behavior. To develop such self-control, two factors are crucial—a sense of personal integrity and consideration for others. Personal integrity enables us to abandon negativities because we respect our values and precepts. Consideration for others does this because we care about the effect of our bad behavior on others.

Some people mistakenly believe that if they do some spiritual practice

for a short time, they will continue to progress even if they do not actively practice. If we practice consistently, progress will definitely occur, but if we do not, our afflictions will arise effortlessly and lead to destructive actions, bringing more misery.

Vajrayāna speaks of awakening in this life. Some traditions or teachers speak of a direct, swift path to awakening. Hearing this, some people develop unrealistic expectations, thinking they will have quick results from doing just a little practice. Personally speaking, all these statements remind me of communist propaganda!

How, then, should we understand the statements in some tantric texts that “one attains awakening in one moment”? If this is the case, why do we need to practice step-by-step, as stated in all other teachings? To understand them correctly, we must know the context within which these statements are made. The meaning of “one moment” and “one short instant” varies in different situations. The duration of a phenomenon is understood in relation to other phenomena. Compared to the beginninglessness of cyclic existence, the age in which we live is like one moment. Likewise, when one attains strong concentration, hundreds of eons may appear to that person as just one moment, and one moment may appear as an eon. If a person has accumulated extensive merit in her previous lives, she may gain realizations or attain awakening in this life. In this case, one lifetime is the meaning of “one moment.”

But this does not mean that this person completed the entire path in only one brief lifetime. That person must have collected extensive merit and wisdom during many lifetimes, such that when she meets a particular external situation in this lifetime, realizations or awakening appear to come swiftly. Eons ago, she began the path as an initial-level practitioner and actualized the steps to awakening gradually, life after life. The swift results in the present life are the product of hard work in previous lives.

Westerners are practical and want immediate results. Their eagerness to see results motivates them to practice. However, if they go on retreat and return home at more or less the same level, they may think Dharma practice does not work and give it up. Tibetans may go to the other extreme. They believe in the five paths and ten bodhisattva grounds<sup>53</sup> but tend to be complacent and think these things can be developed later. They lack a sense of urgency and do not exert a lot of effort.

It seems “hybrid” practitioners are best—those who are motivated, enthusiastic, and practice what they learn but who are also relaxed and patient. These practitioners seek awakening quickly for the benefit of sentient beings but accept that it will take a long time to become buddhas and are willing to practice however long it takes.

To illustrate the necessity of gradual training, the Buddha uses a simile about a thoroughbred colt (MN 65). At first the colt is completely wild, so the trainer must get him used to wearing a bit. Because it is something the colt has never done before, he is obviously uncomfortable, but with constant repetition and gradual practice, he gets used to it and is peaceful when wearing the bit. At that time, the trainer introduces the harness, which is new to the colt. Again the colt tries to throw it off, but with repetition and practice, he eventually becomes used to it and wears it happily. Now the trainer progressively trains the colt to keep in step, run in a circle, prance, gallop, charge, and so forth. The colt initially resists each new step but eventually becomes familiar with each task and masters it. When the colt is thoroughly trained and able to do many things that he could not do before, he is fit for the king.

Similarly, when we train as Dharma practitioners, we will come up against many things that are unfamiliar. We may be incapable of doing them at present, be afraid of them, or lack the confidence to try them. But if we have a wise spiritual mentor and like the colt, allow ourselves to be trained and continue to train even when we initially feel some discomfort, good results will come. Eventually, we will accomplish all the causes and conditions necessary to attain awakening.

At present we are ordinary beings whose minds are completely under the influence of the three poisonous attitudes of ignorance, anger, and attachment. Day in and day out these difficult-to-control, unwelcome disturbing emotions and wrong conceptions arise in our mind. Since this is the case, is it reasonable to think that we will be able to quickly remove the cloud of afflictions once and for all? If we tried, it would be difficult. In fact, it is hard to have a peaceful mind for more than a few minutes!

No matter what field of knowledge we want to master, we cannot learn everything at once. We must study step by step and progress gradually. This also applies to gaining transcendental realizations, which are beyond our ordinary understanding.

Eliminating afflictions depends on generating strong counterforces to them, and this requires time. These counterforces are virtuous qualities, which are cultivated gradually, each successive step depending on its own causes and conditions. It is fruitless to expect an outcome without creating the causes that will produce it.

On the path to awakening, it behooves us to study the teachings well so we'll know how to create the specific causes and conditions for our spiritual goals and the order in which to do the various practices. Then we can practice with delight and enthusiasm, knowing that realizations will come when all the causes and conditions are assembled. Greeting each day with the thought, "Will realizations finally come today?" will only make us agitated. Such impatience is the opposite of the attitude necessary for our practice to be effective.

To grow peas, we first till the ground, fertilize it, plant pea seeds in the springtime, and then water them. When this has been done, we relax and give the seeds time to grow. We don't dig them up every day to see if they have sprouted yet! Instead we remain content knowing that they will grow in their own time.

Once, at a large public teaching, someone asked me what was the quickest and easiest path to awakening. I began to weep because I sensed that the person wanted to attain a lofty goal without engaging in the process of getting there. Thoughts of great practitioners, such as Milarepa, flooded my mind. They practiced joyfully even under difficult conditions because they wanted to attain awakening for the benefit of all sentient beings. They were willing to undergo whatever was necessary to create the causes for awakening, because they were convinced in the depths of their hearts that this was the most worthwhile thing to do. To attain results like these great practitioners did, we must cultivate that same compassionate motivation and enthusiastic effort.

When I cultivate enthusiasm to achieve buddhahood in this lifetime, in the back of my mind I have the idea of numerous lives and many eons. Thus my prayer becomes, "In order to serve sentient beings, may I attain buddhahood—if possible within this lifetime, but more likely after countless lives." If we think of attaining awakening in this life but lack the perspective of many lifetimes, our wish is unrealistic and may lead to despair when we do not progress as quickly as we would like. A view accepting future lives is

critical to maintain a long-term joyful motivation free from both idealism and despair.

Some Westerners have genuine interest in Buddhism but have difficulty accepting multiple lifetimes and eons of existence. Thinking that this one lifetime is all that exists, they want to see immediate progress—fast food and fast awakening! But the latter is not possible. I do not know how to help them maintain a joyful motivation given how difficult it is to attain buddhahood in this lifetime.

Some goal-oriented people think of nirvāṇa and awakening as things to achieve, yet they do not want to do what is necessary to get there. They seek transcendental experiences in meditation but are reluctant to change bad habits such as harsh speech, lying, and taking intoxicants. Here, too, it is difficult to guide them.

Transforming our mind is a process. Awareness of this brings our attention to the present moment, for the time to practice is now. A process-orientated approach also rouses us to examine our daily activities in light of the Dharma and to see that progress is made by transforming our thoughts, emotions, speech, and behavior.

Some of my Western students comment to me that Buddhist scriptures talk about either deluded people who consistently create destructive karma or bodhisattvas whose motivation and conduct are pure. They wonder how to practice when they are in between these two extremes.

Bodhisattvas' wonderful deeds are activities to emulate and inspire us to practice. The scriptures always present the ideal; if they didn't, we wouldn't know what to aim for and would think mediocre attainments were the best. But no one—except maybe ourselves—expects us to master the bodhisattva practices instantly. While I admire the abilities of the great bodhisattvas and spiritual mentors, I do not expect myself to practice as they do, given my present situation. By endeavoring to think and act as they do, I am confident that gradually these abilities will take root and grow within me.

Thinking of the Buddha as having always been awakened creates unnecessary obstacles in our mind. The Buddha is not an inherently existent awakened being. He was once an ordinary, confused being like us, and through gradual, consistent practice, he transformed his mind and attained buddhahood. We are no different from him; if we joyfully persevere in creating the causes, we too will become buddhas.

### *Advanced Practices at the Right Time*

In their enthusiasm for the Dharma, some beginners enter into advanced practices without sufficient preparation. They may make serenity and meditation on emptiness the focus of their practice, receive tantric empowerments, and enter a three-year retreat and later become discouraged by their lack of progress.

While the union of serenity and insight on emptiness is the actual path that liberates us from cyclic existence, we must still practice the initial meditations. Without doing that, trying to gain deep concentration while living in the city will only make us frustrated because our minds are unfamiliar with the antidotes to afflictions and the external situation isn't conducive to progress. Tsongkhapa gave some excellent advice in this regard:

Some say to expend your energy only to stabilize your mind and to understand the view, ignoring all earlier topics, but this makes it very difficult to get the vital points. Therefore, you must develop certainty about the whole course of the path.<sup>54</sup>

In other words, our journey to awakening will be successful if we start at the beginning of the path. When we are ready to cultivate serenity and insight on emptiness, it is imperative to receive instructions on the methods to do so and to practice these correctly. Gaining the correct view is not easy. Emptiness is not nothingness, and meditation on emptiness is not simply resting the mind in a vague nonconceptual state. We must be able to negate all fantasized ways of existence and still establish the conventional functioning of karma and its effects that is the support for ethical conduct. Also, our concentration must be vivid, unclouded by subtle laxity or excitement.

Tantra is an advanced practice that requires lengthy preparation. In their excitement to enter tantra, some people find contemplation of the disadvantages of cyclic existence tedious, meditation on death and impermanence uninteresting, and teachings on ethical conduct inconvenient. They skip over practices to generate renunciation and bodhicitta and take many empowerments, which entail assuming tantric precepts and commitments. After some time, they become confused and find keeping tantric precepts



and commitments burdensome. Not progressing as rapidly as they would like, they become discouraged and either neglect their tantric commitments or abandon Dharma practice altogether.

We may ask why Tibetan masters give highest yoga tantra empowerments to relatively inexperienced practitioners. I too wonder about this! It could be to please the students who request them or to plant seeds in their mind-streams so in future lives they will encounter tantra. Perhaps in the audience there are a few people who are able to practice at this level. However, it is sad when this ends with someone giving up the Dharma.

Accomplishing the entire path to awakening is like building a house. A solid foundation is necessary before erecting the walls, and stable walls must be in place to put on the roof. Similarly, beginners would do well to gain an overall understanding of the path by contemplating the four truths, meditating on the practices in common with the initial- and middle-capacity beings, and practicing the six perfections according to the Sūtra Vehicle. Furthermore, doing a lot of purification and collection of merit will eliminate obstacles. If they then receive an empowerment, their tantric practice will bring the desired results.

Some beginners hear about three-year tantric retreats and are eager to do one. However, because they are not well prepared, at the end of the retreat their major accomplishments are being expert in playing ritual musical instruments, chanting pūjās in Tibetan, and making *tormas* (ritual cakes). Not much internal transformation has occurred, and their disturbing emotions remain almost the same. A few who have done many tantra visualizations and recited millions of mantras may boast that they are accomplished tantric practitioners. Some adopt the title “lama” after the retreat, but personally speaking, I believe doing a three-year retreat is insufficient to earn that title. One time I commented upon people entering Vajrayāna too soon to a close disciple of the previous Karmapa, and he fully agreed. The great nineteenth-century Nyingma lama Dza Patrul Rinpoche said (AKC 12):

Any Dharma that does not benefit one’s own mind  
is just sanctimonious, not meaningful Dharma.  
Unless it makes some difference to your mind,  
even doing retreat for a hundred years would just be a pain.

These relative newcomers to the Dharma who do three-year retreats have tremendous determination and self-discipline. I would find it difficult to sleep sitting up and then meditate the next day. I respect and admire them for that. However, rigorous physical disciplines do not necessarily transform the mind; they may simply be a test of one's willpower. Someone may have physical and verbal discipline but an unruly mind. Dza Patrul Rinpoche said (AKC 14):

Even if we have completed our quota of years and  
months on retreat  
and managed to recite millions and millions of mantras,  
unless attachment, hostility, and ignorance have  
decreased in our minds,  
that Dharma I consider as just pointless.

These people have put the cart before the horse. Building a proper foundation by learning the four truths and practicing the bodhisattva deeds would do them well.

### *Checking Our Meditation Experiences*

Some students talk of having extraordinary meditative experiences, but when something upsetting happens in life, they are unprepared and cannot handle it. This usually occurs because they have overestimated their meditative experiences. Unusual experiences such as visual appearances, special dreams, or feelings of bliss are not necessarily indications of spiritual realizations. They may occur due to an imbalance of the winds (*prāna*) in the body, external interferences, or an overactive imagination. For this reason, it is important to consult our spiritual mentors, who will help us evaluate these experiences.

Some experiences, such as having premonitions of future events, arise due to karma. They are not always accurate, and not everyone will welcome a prediction of future illness when they haven't asked us for advice!

Unusual or exotic forms may appear when we're meditating, or we may experience strange sensations in our body. Most of these are distractions and should be ignored.

Once I met a Westerner who considered himself a tantric practitioner.

In a hopeful voice, he told me of a dream in which he saw many deities and related it to the passage in Candrakīrti's *Supplement to the Middle Way*, "At that time you will see one hundred buddhas," which refers to a bodhisattva on the path of seeing who has a direct perception of emptiness. This person thought that because he dreamed of many deities he must be an ārya bodhisattva and waited for me to confirm that. I replied, "Seeing a hundred buddhas is not the only quality of bodhisattvas on the path of seeing. They have many other qualities as well—they can live one hundred eons and emanate one hundred manifestations. So examine whether you can do these as well."

Remaining humble is an essential quality for genuine spiritual practitioners. A disingenuous person may praise himself or disparage others due to attachment to receiving offerings, fame, or status. We should not be led astray by this. The Buddha described several ways to differentiate a true from an untrue person (MN 113):

But a true person considers thus: "It is not because of one's renown that states of greed, hatred, or confusion are destroyed. Even though someone may not be well known and famous, yet if he has entered upon the way that accords with the Dhamma, entered upon the proper way, and conducts himself according to the Dhamma, he should be honored for that, he should be praised for that." So, putting the practice of the way first, he neither lauds himself nor disparages others because of his renown.

The Buddha spoke similarly regarding true persons who do not laud themselves and disparage others due to their family's socioeconomic status, how many offerings they receive, how ascetic they are, how strictly they keep their precepts, or what levels of samādhi they have attained. The Mahāyāna mind-training texts emphasize the same points: "Do not be boastful" and "Do not turn a god into a devil" by using Dharma practice to increase our self-centered attitude and self-grasping ignorance.<sup>55</sup>

One Tibetan meditator had a vision of Tārā in retreat. His student became very excited upon hearing this, but the meditator remained nonplussed. Puzzled, the student asked why, to which the meditator replied, "Whether or not Tārā actually appeared to me, I need to continue practicing. Realizing emptiness with the subtle mind is what will actually free me."

Dreams are illusory, although sometimes they may indicate future occurrences. I have met Tibetans who dreamed of Dharamsala before they came here, and some people dreamed of being at temples before having gone there. However, attachment to dreams increases grasping at true existence, which leads to obstacles, so it's important to remember that dreams are empty of true existence. When we face obstacles due to sentient beings, meditation on compassion is best; when we encounter other obstacles, meditation on emptiness is the best antidote.

Sometimes we meet people who have practiced for years and seem to have deep meditative experience but act in ways that appear ethically questionable. When a contradiction exists between someone's seemingly high realization and their ethical conduct, that realization may not be as high as it seems. Although the ability to remain in single-pointed concentration or in a nonconceptual state is a realization, it is not a very deep one. It is not a realization of emptiness, and the person is still afflicted by ignorance and karma.

An actual realization should bring about a change in our life. The sign of having gained the wisdom of studying the Dharma is that our outward behavior has become calm. The sign of having experientially realized the teachings of the middle level is that our coarse afflictions have diminished in strength. If we meditate properly on bodhicitta, we become kinder human beings who are courageous in practicing the Dharma. In adversity, yogic meditators remain impartial, open, and compassionate. From such behavior we can infer they have subdued their minds through deep meditative experiences. However, this alone is not an indication that they have realized emptiness directly.

## REFLECTION

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1. Have you inadvertently fallen into any of the above pitfalls?
  2. What were the factors that led to this?
  3. What must you do now to get back on track?
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## *Signs of Progress*

If we devote our lives to familiarizing ourselves with the Dharma, we will definitely see a change in our mind. As a Buddhist saying predicts, “You will be able to see the whole world and everything in it as Dharma instructions.” This occurs when, through daily practice, our mind has become familiar with the Buddha’s teachings and we are able to practice in most of the situations we encounter. When we have gained some experience of impermanence, we are aware of things changing, arising, and ceasing in each moment. With this understanding prominent in our mind, our clinging to people and things that are unable to provide us lasting happiness decreases. Automatically, our mind is more relaxed and at ease.

When doing analytical meditation on the stages of the path, contemplate each point, considering it logically and relating it to your own experience. While thinking about these points, do not let the mind wander to objects of attachment or become sleepy or dull. Try to have a mind that is clear and concentrated that stays on the points you are contemplating and is able to penetrate their meaning.

Certain signposts along the path help us check whether our meditations are progressing in the right direction and bearing fruit. If we meditate consistently on how to rely on a spiritual mentor and come to a point where we do not pick faults in our spiritual teachers and feel genuine respect for their qualities and gratitude for their kindness, we have achieved a good result from this meditation. If we meditate on precious human life and have a stable feeling, “My present life with so much freedom and opportunity to practice the path is difficult to receive and very precious. I do not want to waste it but direct it toward familiarizing my mind with bodhicitta and emptiness,” we are proceeding in the right direction. If we pay less attention to the happiness of this life and prepare for future lives we are experiencing the result of meditation on impermanence. If acting destructively repulses us and we want to avoid it like poison, we have benefited from meditating on the sufferings of unfortunate rebirths. The mark of gaining experience of the meditation on refuge is that we understand the qualities of the Three Jewels and have deep trust in their ability to guide us on the path. Such feelings may arise during a meditation session, but the sign of real progress is when they occur repeatedly.

How do we know we have generated true renunciation of cyclic existence? Tsongkhapa said that when, through habituation, day and night we do not wish for the pleasures of cyclic existence and yearn for liberation, we have developed true determination to be free. Such an attitude has ramifications in our life. We cease being obsessed with the pleasures of cyclic existence, and things that used to irritate us cease to do so. This does not mean, however, that in deep sleep we still aspire for liberation, for that is not possible. Nor is our determination to be free manifest when we are in deep concentration realizing emptiness. Nevertheless, it has not been lost; it is present but latent when our mind is focused on other objects.

We have realized bodhicitta when, through habituation and practice, the great compassion and the aspiration to attain awakening arises spontaneously in our mind whenever we hear, see, or think about any sentient being. As explained in Tsongkhapa's "Three Principal Aspects of the Path" (*Lam gtso rnam gsum*), the measure of having ascertained the correct view of emptiness is seeing that dependent arising and emptiness are not contradictory but are mutually reinforcing, such that the mere reminder of dependent arising brings understanding of emptiness and vice-versa.

Generating virtuous qualities and realizations involves both undistracted focus and analytical discernment. Tsongkhapa says (LC 1: 272):

Therefore, the Buddha says that any achievement of a virtuous quality in the three vehicles requires a state of mind that is both (1) an actual serenity, or a similitude of it, which rests one-pointedly on its virtuous object of meditation without wandering from it; and (2) an actual insight, or a similitude of it, which carefully analyzes a virtuous object of meditation and distinguishes both the real nature and the diversity of phenomena.

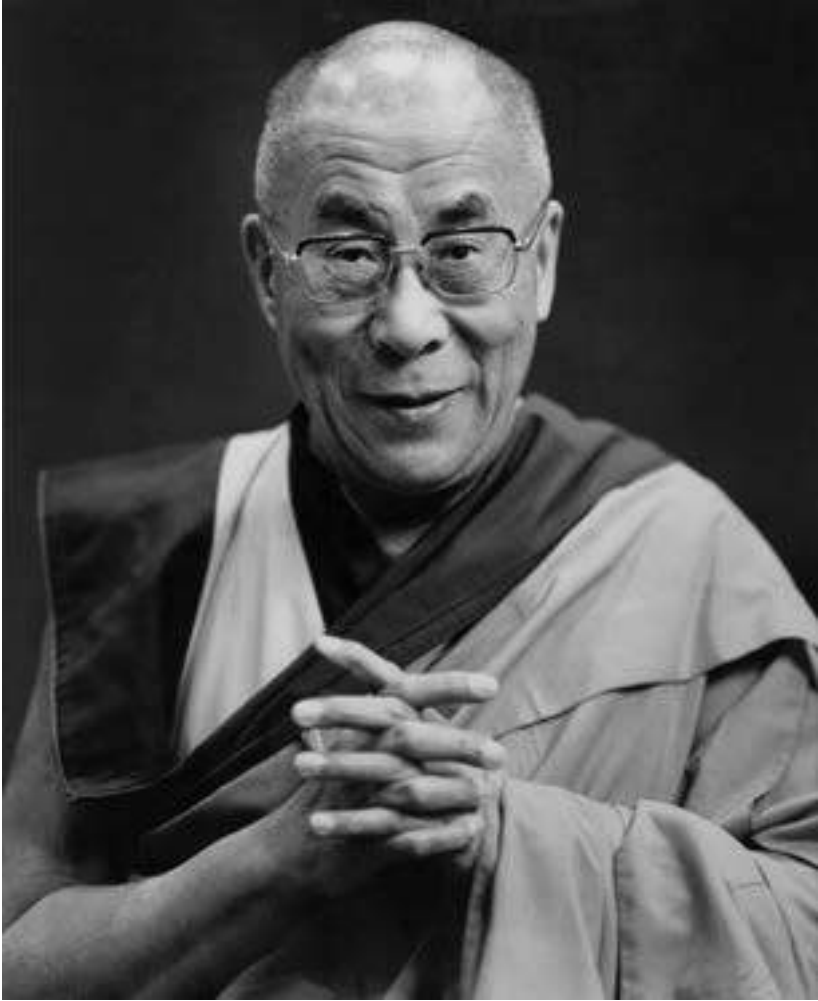
If we take "good qualities" and "realizations" to have similar meanings, serenity and insight or mental states that are similar to them are needed to gain them. This is certainly true for the realization of selflessness, which may be conceptual and inferential (on the path of preparation) or direct and nonconceptual (on the paths of seeing and meditation). For good qualities like renunciation, compassion, or bodhicitta to be definitively achieved, we need serenity or a state of one-pointedness like it. To realize selflessness—be

it the conceptual, inferential realization on the path of preparation or the direct nonconceptual realization on the path of seeing—both full serenity and insight are necessary. To realize selflessness before that, similitudes of serenity and insight are required. For those of us who would like to gain attainments quickly, this may seem like a high bar to reach. However, this description makes it clear that a realization is not a flash of understanding that comes and goes. It is a stable state of mind that can be sustained with undistracted focus. Unlike fleeting flashes that are difficult to replicate, the experiences from gradual cultivation can be generated repeatedly and enhanced through single-pointed concentration.

## REFLECTION

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1. What are realistic expectations for you on the path?
  2. What can you do to accomplish them?
  3. How can you keep a happy mind and cultivate patience while you go about creating the causes?
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# 11 | Personal Reflections on the Path

## *My Day*

PEOPLE OFTEN ASK ME about my daily schedule and Dharma practice. I am a very poor practitioner, but I keep trying because I am convinced that practicing the Dharma is the path to peace and happiness. In Dharamsala, India, where I live, I wake up at 3:30 a.m. and immediately visualize the Buddha and recite a verse of homage written by Nāgārjuna (MMK 27.30):

Enthused by great compassion,  
you taught the exalted Dharma  
to dispel all [wrong] views.  
To you, Gautama, I prostrate.

Sometimes I change the last line of the verse to say, “May I be inspired by Gautama Buddha.” This verse is especially meaningful to me because it points out the Buddha’s compassionate motivation that led him to identify ignorance as the cause of *duḥkha* and then to attain the wisdom realizing the ultimate nature to dispel that ignorance. Ignorance is not a mere lack of knowledge; it is a distorted apprehension that grasps as existing what doesn’t exist—inherent existence. Bodhicitta then spurred him to accumulate merit, purify his mind, and hear, think, and meditate on the Dharma. In that way, he became an awakened teacher with the ability to liberate sentient beings by giving faultless teachings.

Reflecting in this way increases my confidence in the Buddha and in the path I practice to transform my mind. It also helps me to appreciate

my precious human life with many fortunate qualities: I live in a place and time where the Buddha has appeared and his teachings still exist, and I have belief in things worthy of respect such as ethical conduct, concentration, and wisdom. Recalling this daily enables me to maintain a joyful attitude immune to depression and discouragement.

After reciting this verse three times, I visualize Buddha Vajradhara dissolving into me and inspiring my mind. This gives me a feeling of courage and the willingness to persevere in my practice. I then generate bodhicitta and remind myself that I can surely see transformation happening within myself, although it may be small. This encourages me to rejoice in my virtue and continue practicing.

To clear the fogginess of sleep from my mind, I recite Mañjuśrī's mantra, *Oṃ a ra pa ca na dhīḥ*,<sup>56</sup> and then recite *dhīḥ* as many times as possible with one breath, imagining Mañjuśrī's wisdom in the form of the syllable *dhīḥ* absorbing into a *dhīḥ* at the back of my tongue. While meditating on Mañjuśrī like this, I reflect on the four truths of the āryas, especially the liberating power of true paths and the peace that comes with actualizing true cessations.

Then I begin prostrations and daily recitations followed by a glance meditation, in which I recite and contemplate verses sequentially outlining the complete stages of the path to awakening. After that, I do formal meditation, predominantly analytical meditation to increase my understanding of the Buddha's teachings. Here my efforts are mainly directed to meditation on dependent arising and emptiness as well as on compassion and bodhicitta. I also do the tantric practice of deity yoga, which involves imagining transforming death, the intermediate state between one life and the next, and rebirth into the three bodies of a buddha.

I continue meditating, taking a few breaks, including breakfast and exercise, until about 8:30 a.m. If there is no office work, then I study Dharma texts. I take delight in reading the Indian and Tibetan treatises and commentaries repeatedly, each time discovering something new in them. There's a Tibetan saying, "If you read a book nine times, you will have nine understandings." Because this has been my experience, I will continue studying until the end of my life and recommend that others do likewise.

Often my study is interrupted because I am needed in the office. Lunch is just before noon, and after that I go to the office to work. My afternoons

are filled with appointments, one right after the other. As a Buddhist monk, I don't eat dinner, and around 8:30 p.m., I go to sleep. I sleep very soundly, without any sleeping pills, and enjoy very peaceful meditation.

One teaching of the Kadam masters called the “four entrustments” especially touches my heart:

Entrust your mind to Dharma practice;  
 entrust your Dharma practice to a life of poverty;  
 entrust your life of poverty to death;  
 and entrust your death to an empty cave.<sup>57</sup>

These lines speak of completely giving ourselves to the cultivation of the two bodhicittas, conventional and ultimate, making this the most important activity in our lives, so much so that we are willing to give all our life's energies to it, from now until our death. Relinquishing attachment to the eight worldly concerns, our mind experiences so much joy and satisfaction with the freedom the Dharma bestows that money and reputation are of no concern to us. When I reflect on this verse, tears come to my eyes because this is my highest aspiration. It also reflects the greatest challenge in my life—balancing meditative cultivation with directly benefiting others in this life. Both are aspects of Dharma practice and our inner development. The pressing needs of people right now are very important, but meditative practice beckons, and the need to deepen my own practice in order to benefit others more is also essential. Perhaps some of you live with this tension in your lives, too.

Occasionally, I am able to do a retreat. During this time, I practice the visualization of deities and maṇḍalas and the recitation of mantras, but mainly I read and contemplate the great Indian texts. Being able to study and reflect on the meaning of these magnificent texts is a great treat for me.

### *Gradual Progress*

Just as the Buddha was able to gradually transform his mind, we can as well. In my own life, I see progress from the time I was a child until now. Because I grew up in a Buddhist family and in a Buddhist country where everyone repeated, “I take refuge in the Buddha,” I have had faith in the Buddha since

I was young. Although at that time I didn't have much understanding of the Dharma, I knew the Buddha was an extraordinary human being.

I came to the Potala Palace in Lhasa at age five, and my studies began when I was seven. My older brother and I studied together under the direction of our tutor, but as a young child I liked to play. The tutor had a whip, so I studied out of fear. Actually, the tutor had two whips, an ordinary whip and a gold whip that was for beating a holy person. But there was no holy pain!

When I was a little older, I began to study the lamrim, the stages of the path. This caused me to have a deep interest in the Buddhadharmā and increased my confidence in the Three Jewels as authentic refuges. When I was fifteen or sixteen, my enthusiasm to practice the Dharma grew. Occasionally, when I received teachings or meditated, I felt very moved by the Dharma.

My education involved memorizing root texts and listening to my teachers' word-by-word explanations of them. I was tutored by seven debate masters from different monastic colleges. My Mongolian debate master was especially interested in emptiness, so in preparation for my geshe exams in 1958–59, I had to study many texts on that topic. We planned to visit southern Tibet on pilgrimage after my exams in March, 1959, and I would study Tsongkhapa's *Essence of Eloquence* (*Drang nges legs bshad snying po*) then. However, on March 10, everything changed, and we fled Tibet and became refugees in India. I took some texts with me—Śāntideva's *Engaging in the Bodhisattvas' Deeds*, Tsongkhapa's *Great Treatise on the Stages of the Path*, his *Essence of Eloquence*, and others—and studied whenever possible.

In my late twenties in Tibet and my early thirties in Dharamsala, I studied, contemplated, and meditated on emptiness more seriously. I became more convinced of the possibility of attaining nirvāṇa, and my confidence in the Dharma Jewel—true cessations and true paths—deepened. That led me to see the Saṅgha—those beings who have realized this Dharma directly—as magnificent and increased my admiration for them. This in turn helped me develop deeper, genuine faith in the Buddha as our teacher. At that time, the thought arose in my mind that if I could actualize nirvāṇa, I could then have a long, blissful rest!

Whereas I have high regard for bodhicitta and it is not difficult to understand, actually generating it seems challenging. My experience tallies with

what the great masters say: emptiness is difficult to understand; it is especially challenging to maintain the tension between appearance and emptiness and to establish the efficacy of cause and effect in a world that is merely imputed and lacks any existence from its own side. However, when we think about emptiness and dependent arising over time, they become clearer, and we gain some feeling for them and confidence in them. Bodhicitta, on the other hand, is easy to understand but difficult to experience. But there is no other choice. We have to make the effort.

We Tibetans have the tradition of “students offering their realizations to the teacher,” in which we share our understanding of the Dharma with our spiritual mentors. In the late ’70s and early ’80s I had several opportunities to meet with my senior tutor Ling Rinpoche, during which I spoke about my understanding of emptiness in particular. At one point, he listened very carefully and then said, “Soon you will become a yogi of space,” which means someone who has realized emptiness.

Even in my dreams I would often discuss the Dharma with people or meditate on emptiness and bodhicitta. In the last few years, I have had more interest and enthusiasm in understanding emptiness, and that has brought deeper conviction and experience. Once I read in a text, “the person is mere designation,” and a feeling like electricity shook me. I thought that perhaps this was selflessness. When I focused on the self, I could confirm that it was merely designated, but when I focused on the aggregates, the experience was not the same. That indicated that my experience was of the absence of a self-sufficient substantially existent person, not the emptiness of inherent existence.

Today my understanding of selflessness has improved, and that helps greatly to reduce the intensity and frequency of the afflictions, especially attachment and anger. Understanding emptiness has no adverse effect on the practice of authentic love and compassion because these are not driven by ignorance. In fact, understanding emptiness boosts our altruism by enabling us to recognize sentient beings’ suffering more clearly. Contemplation of emptiness and compassion are the backbone of my daily practice.

I do not expect deeper understanding or experience to come within a short period of time. Ten, twenty, thirty, or more years of practice are necessary, but change will definitely occur when we make consistent effort. Some of you may not live another twenty or thirty years, but if you pay serious

attention and make yourself familiar with emptiness and bodhicitta, you will put many positive imprints of these topics on your subtle consciousness. I have seen this in my own experience. Some Buddhist topics are easy for me to understand, but when I discuss these with some senior scholars, these topics sometimes appear difficult for them. This indicates some familiarity with these topics in my previous lives. So even if you are old now, whatever positive imprints you put on your mindstream from studying and contemplating for even a few months or years will carry on to your next life and benefit you.

All the virtuous actions you do now will certainly enable you to have a human rebirth and live in a conducive environment where there is more opportunity to learn and practice the Buddha's teachings. Those who are old like me should not excuse themselves by thinking that now they're very old and nothing can be done. The result of thinking like this will be not achieving anything. So please make as much of an effort as you can while you have this precious life.

Those of you who are young have more time to study and practice. Think seriously about what is important in your life, and put effort into the Dharma. Of course, whether you practice is up to you. If you have genuine interest, practice is very worthwhile. Please give this serious thought.

Some followers of other religions or spiritual traditions may read this book out of curiosity. Please continue with your current practice. The Buddha never imposed his beliefs on anyone. Each individual has complete freedom to follow whatever religion he or she chooses or to follow no faith at all. But whatever you do, be a kind human being.

In Montserrat, Spain, I met a Catholic monk who spent five years as a hermit meditating in the mountains behind the monastery. He told me that his main practice was meditating on love. When I looked into his eyes, there was some special feeling there. I admire and respect him greatly. His life shows that if we meditate for five years, some result will definitely come. Similarly, if we make daily effort to train our mind, the wild monkey of our mind will be subdued.<sup>58</sup>

### *Cultivating Bodhicitta*

In 1959 Khunu Lama Rinpoche<sup>59</sup> came to visit me. At that time, he told me that his practice centered on bodhicitta, especially Śāntideva's *Engaging in*

*the Bodhisattvas' Deeds*. Around that time, I also learned about a short text Khunu Lama Rinpoche authored, *The Jewel Lamp: A Praise of Bodhicitta* (*Byang chub sems kyi bstod pa rin chen sgron ma*), and knowing that my guru Ling Rinpoche had already received teachings from him, in 1967 I requested him to give me the oral transmission of that text. While he was reading *The Jewel Lamp*, I was overwhelmed with tears.

In my twenties, I appreciated bodhicitta, but it seemed far away. In 1967, with Ling Rinpoche's permission, I requested teachings from Khunu Lama Rinpoche on *Engaging in the Bodhisattvas' Deeds*. He accepted and gave the teaching in Bodhgaya. After that, bodhicitta felt closer, and it became obvious that self-centeredness is the basis for fear and distrust. Conversely, if we genuinely care about others, even ghosts and spirits will eventually show appreciation. When our basic attitude is altruistic, then even if anger arises, it leaves quickly. It's like our mind has a strong immune system that protects it from the illness of the afflictions.

Around that time, I also studied another marvelous text, Nāgārjuna's *Precious Garland*, and a few other supplementary books, and every day I thought about and meditated on them. Because I already had strong admiration and faith in Nāgārjuna from contemplating his teachings on emptiness, even reading a short passage from his writings has a profound impact on me.

Of the thirteen great classical texts,<sup>60</sup> I received the oral transmission on Maitreya's *Ornament of Clear Realizations* and Candrakīrti's *Supplement to the Middle Way* from Ling Rinpoche. The oral transmissions of the other eleven treatises I received from Khunu Lama Rinpoche. In addition to being a great, yet humble, practitioner, he was a remarkable scholar and teacher. His teachings were very precise, and he could easily cite many passages from the scriptures. When I asked him how he received his training, he told me that when he was in Kham, Tibet, he thought that texts were to be "left behind" in the sense of not clinging to the physical books, although he was definitely immersed in their meaning and it touched his heart. His translations from both Tibetan and Sanskrit were impeccable. When I received teachings on Śāntideva's work, he often mentioned, "Here the Tibetan translation is wrong. The original Sanskrit says this . . ." I made these corrections in my own copy and incorporate them now when I teach that text.

My teacher Ling Rinpoche was very kind to me. He would encourage me

in my practice, telling me that if I put in effort, I could gain realizations. But if I were to see Ling Rinpoche now, I would have to confess that I still have not attained those realizations, even though many years have passed.

Around 1970, my feeling for bodhicitta became more intimate. After some time, I became convinced that if I had enough time to meditate, I could become a bodhisattva within this life. However, I don't have sufficient time. That is my excuse. But for those with sufficient time, there is no excuse!

I continue receiving teachings on bodhicitta and doing analytical meditation on it. Sometimes when I meditate on bodhicitta in my room, I am so deeply moved that tears come. During one period of my life, I would do lengthy meditation sessions on bodhicitta and emptiness, and almost every day I would have strong experiences and be very touched. At the end of his *Essence of Eloquence*, Tsongkhapa says that when he reflects deeply on what he has learned, his faith in the Buddha increases even more. Sometimes his recollection of the kindness of the Nālandā masters overpowers him with appreciation for the teachings on emptiness, and other times reflecting on the suffering of sentient beings overwhelms him with compassion. He comments that it is almost as if these two feelings were competing with each other. While I do not have Tsongkhapa's realizations, at times I too am affected in the same way as he was when reflecting on emptiness and bodhicitta.

Now when I teach about bodhicitta, I feel very moved. That means my mind is more receptive and has grown closer to bodhicitta. Compared to when I was fifteen, my understanding of these topics has changed considerably. This confirms that the possibility of attaining awakening exists. Due to knowledge, examination, and some experience, my faith in the Three Jewels is firm and deep. The Buddha's marvelous teachings on infinite altruism and the wisdom of reality is indeed a living tradition. However, my experience of Tantrayāna is lacking.

During one period, when meditating on tantric practices such as Guhyasamāja, I focused on the generation stage, which involves dissolving oneself into emptiness and reemerging as the deity. I would try to maintain a stable continuity of this visualization and develop single-pointed concentration on it. When reflecting on the self, I would train to immediately think of myself as the deity, without any thought or appearance of



the ordinary I. This is the practice of cultivating divine appearance and divine identity.

But in the late 1970s, I became very busy with my responsibilities to my students and the Tibetan community. Due to lack of time, I had to discontinue my long meditation sessions, and now I have fallen back to my previous level of experience. Born in 1935, I am becoming old; maybe it is too late to practice much more. The Tibetan community in exile now has an elected government, and I want them to carry out all the governmental and administrative responsibilities. Finally, in 2011, I was able to resign my post in the government in the hope of having more time for practice.

But I still have many visitors and appointments. I can't refuse to meet the Tibetans who have endured so much hardship to come from Tibet to see me. I can't ignore them and say "I am in retreat" when they have risked their lives to come all this way to see me. The purpose of doing retreat is to benefit others. Meeting these people brings some benefit to them, so this is part of my practice. I think the rest of my life will go like this. Although I'm sad not to have the chance to do more retreat, my greatest source of inspiration is Śāntideva's verse (BCA 10.55):

As long as space endures,  
and as long as sentient beings remain,  
so too will I abide  
to dispel the misery of the world.

Whether I attain buddhahood or not in this one simple existence is not important; I must at least benefit others, especially when they have problems. Bodhicitta compels me to do this.

The First Dalai Lama, Gendun Drup, spent a long time in retreat. During this time, he had visions of White Tārā and Green Tārā and wrote very moving and meaningful praises to them. After his retreat, he voluntarily began to do more work, some of it difficult and time-consuming: he gave daily teachings on different texts to his students, and he established Tashi Lhunpo Monastery in Shigatse. By that time, he was already an old monk with white hair and a cane, but he was the architect and foreman who oversaw the construction of the monastery. He also sent people out to collect donations so the monastery could be built. Then, despite his age, as the

manager of the monastery, he gave instructions on the daily operation of the monastery and the monks' discipline.

Naturally, some of his students created trouble. On one occasion, Gendun Drup became exasperated with them and said, "If I had remained in Kangchen Monastery, I would have developed some high spiritual attainments by now. But I sacrificed that to come to this place to help you, to help the larger Buddhist community and a greater number of people." Although this may have sounded boastful, he was cautioning his students to be careful, to look at the big picture, and to appreciate that their opportunity to learn the Dharma depended on others.

One day toward the end of his life, Gendun Drup said, "Now I am very old." He said it just like that.

One of his main disciples then reminded him, "It was prophesized that you would go directly to a pure land. Will you do that?"

Gendun Drup replied, "I have no wish to go to these higher places. My only wish is to go to troubled areas where I can serve." That is very wonderful! That truly inspires me!

The Buddha's tradition is a living tradition. If we practice, we can transform ourselves. This occurs not through merely praying but through meditating, principally doing analytical meditation. Buddhist practices use our human intelligence in the greatest way to develop the maximum potential of a good heart.

### *Willingness to Undergo Hardship*

When we look at the life of our teacher, Śākyamuni Buddha, we notice that he went through a process of spiritual development. Born as a prince, he later gave up the comforts of royal life and became a monastic in order to pursue his spiritual practice. He endured the disapproval of his father and the poor living conditions that his wandering lifestyle entailed. He also did six years of severe, ascetic spiritual practice. After all this, he displayed the act of attaining full awakening.

His life exemplifies the necessity to be able to bear hardship in spiritual pursuit. This is true of the lives of the teachers of many other spiritual traditions as well. The message we receive from the examples of their lives is that we, as the followers of these teachers, must be willing to go through hardship and persevere in order to realize our spiritual aspirations.

Sometimes the thought remains in the back of our minds, “Yes, the Buddha went through so many hardships to attain awakening, but I don’t need to do this. Somehow I’ll be able to attain awakening without having to give up the comforts and luxury that I’m attached to.” Although we may not say it, thinking in this way indicates we believe that we are more fortunate than the Buddha. While he had to go through so many hardships, we feel we can attain the same spiritual realizations without having to live ascetically and endure difficulties as he did. This is mistaken.

The Buddha taught the middle way, a path avoiding the extremes of severe asceticism and heedless indulgence. Nevertheless, we must be willing to give up the pleasures to which we are attached if we are to penetrate the nature of reality and open our hearts with bodhicitta toward all beings. Our priorities must be clear: Which do we value more, our present comfort and security or spiritual liberation? Are we willing to undergo the physical and emotional hardships of relinquishing our attachments in order to practice the spiritual path? These are questions on which we must reflect deeply.

Each of us will face different hardships along the path. For some people, the challenge will not be living a simple lifestyle but enduring the criticism of family and society. Others will face having to practice despite health issues, while some must deal with strong sexual cravings. We must develop the internal fortitude to persevere in our practice no matter what suffering—physical, emotional, or mental—comes our way.

### *Keeping a Happy Mind*

It is important to keep a happy mind when practicing Dharma. Buoyancy, enthusiasm, and joy are needed to maintain our practice; these cannot exist in a mind weighed down by depression. People ask me how I maintain a happy mind and relaxed demeanor even though I have been a refugee for over fifty years. One time a news reporter was interviewing me and asked me why I wasn’t angry given the fact that I have witnessed so much destruction in my native land and to my people. I looked at her and replied, “What good would it do to be angry? I wouldn’t sleep well or be able to digest my food. Plus my anger wouldn’t change the situation at all!” I suppose she assumed I would take the opportunity to tell the world about the sufferings of the Tibetans under the Communist Chinese and was astonished when I didn’t.

While we may sometimes experience happiness when the mind is non-virtuous—for example, the pleasure that arises when our craving is satisfied or when we have exacted revenge on someone who hurt us—that happiness does not help us on the path to awakening and should be abandoned. In any case, deep down, I don't think we are really happy then.

Other experiences of happiness are rooted in virtuous mental states. When I am generous and can relieve the poverty of others, I feel good inside. The ability to live ethically with a nonviolent attitude makes me rejoice and generates a sense of well-being. Having lovingkindness toward others brings pleasure in the mind, and doing my daily meditation practices, which deepens my refuge in the Three Jewels, brings great inner satisfaction. It is also said that gaining meditative stabilization suffuses the mind with bliss.

We are often distracted from the Dharma by sensory stimuli—attractive or repulsive sights, sounds, smells, tastes, or physical sensations. But when our mind of attachment doesn't have enough sense stimuli, we are bored. People who are very involved with the external world of the five senses often find themselves in this predicament and are frequently dissatisfied, whereas those who derive happiness from internal qualities—faith, love, compassion, wisdom, and so forth—experience much joy and contentment. They are not swept away by the goings on of people in the environment around them. Too much sensory input makes us exhausted, and our mental potential declines. For that reason, it is better to watch our mind. I don't watch television or explore the Internet, although I do listen to BBC news on the radio so I know what is going on in the lives of other sentient beings. Listening to the news becomes a kind of meditation on karma and its effects and inspires me to cultivate compassion.

In my own practice, I weed out the unwholesome states that bring some sort of temporary, polluted pleasure and instead put energy into cultivating wholesome mental states. That enables me to keep a happy mind—which is important to continue practicing the Dharma—even in difficult situations.

### *Realized Beings*

Some people have asked me whether I know people who have attained full awakening. The Buddha stipulated that unless there is great purpose

in revealing one's realizations, one should not do so. Speaking of one's own spiritual attainments is an infraction of the monastic precepts, and proclaiming realizations that one does not have is a root downfall, such that one is no longer a monastic. Falsely proclaiming one has realized emptiness is a root downfall of the bodhisattva ethical code. Thus proclaiming one's realization publicly is unheard of among true Buddhist practitioners.

Nevertheless, I have had the opportunity to meet some people who have experienced extraordinary development and may be near buddhahood. Meeting these people demonstrates that the teachings are alive and gives us great inspiration and determination. For this reason, refuge in the Saṅgha—the highly realized beings—strengthens our practice.

In the remainder of this section, I (Chodron) would like to explain further why realized beings do not discuss their attainments, especially nowadays when people make great effort to proclaim their good qualities and accomplishments. First, speaking about attainments has a deleterious effect on our practice. As soon as someone begins to talk about spiritual experiences publicly, words begin to replace experience. The actual feeling of the experience fades in the mind, and we become expert in telling a fascinating story. It is easy to become arrogant and complacent if we attain celebrity as a spiritual luminary. For the sake of our personal practice, remaining humble and modest is best.

Furthermore, spiritually immature people easily confuse an unusual meditation experience for spiritual realization. Even if their intentions are good, if they proclaim their spiritual prowess and begin to instruct others, naive people can easily be led astray and follow an incorrect path. Then, if that teacher's veneer cracks, the followers will be deeply disillusioned and may even abandon following a spiritual path altogether. Teachers who make no special claim to greatness avoid being transformed into false idols by their followers.

Say someone with actual attainments were to announce them publicly, what would come of it? Many people would worship that person instead of listening to their teachings. Imagine if the Buddha appeared in New York with a body of radiant, golden light. People would be so struck by amazement that they would stare at him and wait for him to perform miraculous feats. The media would want to interview him, and soon there would be a new line of apparel named after him.

If someone has genuine and stable realizations, people with merit who are receptive will discern this and have faith in that person. It is not necessary to advertise one's qualities. Someone who is a good cook does not need to proclaim his culinary feats to all. When he cooks a meal, people will know for themselves.

Humble behavior is a sign of spiritual attainment. People with genuine realizations have no need for praise, reputation, and the glamour and perks that they bring. Their main interest is in stabilizing and enhancing their realizations and benefiting others.

In special cases, a teacher with close connections to a few students may reveal his or her spiritual experiences in a confidential manner and in a private setting. This may be to inspire those students who are already dedicated to the path, so that they will put more energy into their practice. These students should be discreet with regards to what they have heard.

While publicly discussing our attainments does not serve a good purpose, consulting with our spiritual mentor when engaging in intense spiritual practice is important. During a meeting, we relate our spiritual insights and experiences to the spiritual mentor, who will help us evaluate and understand them and will give us further guidance and instructions. If a practitioner is in strict retreat and her spiritual master is not nearby, she may discuss her meditation experiences with a trusted and experienced fellow retreatant to clarify and refine her understanding and avoid misinterpreting an experience. As such it is important for spiritual progress.

### *What I Have Learned in Life*

Someone once asked me, “You have lived many decades now. Please sum up the most important things you have learned in life.” I paused to reflect. Of course, I have had many different kinds of experience—as a citizen in my own country and as a refugee, as a young person and now as an older one, as a student and as a leader. In Buddhism we always pray for the welfare of all sentient beings no matter their life form; this has had great impact on me. In all situations and with a wide variety of people, I regard everyone as being fundamentally the same: each of us wishes to be happy and to be free from suffering. Thinking like this, I immediately feel close to others wherever I go; there is no barrier between us.

As a result of meeting many different kinds of people and also due to the experience that age brings, I act in an informal manner with everyone and talk to others as one human being to another. This attitude and behavior eliminate any ground for anxiety. On the other hand, if I thought, “I am the Dalai Lama and a Buddhist monk, so I should act a certain way, and people should treat me in a particular way,” that would foster anxiety and resentment. So I forget about such distinctions and see that I am just a human being who is meeting another human being. On the emotional level, we are the same. On the mental and physical levels, we are also the same. It is helpful for me to think in this way, and it also puts others at ease. Sometimes at the beginning of a meeting or a conversation, people are very reserved and stiff, but within a few minutes that is gone and we feel very close.





## 12 | Working in the World

AS BUDDHISTS, and particularly as practitioners of the Mahāyāna path, we are part of the human community and have the responsibility to benefit that community. We should take a more active role in helping society by employing whatever talents and abilities we possess to help others, whether or not they are Buddhist. If the human community is happy and at peace, all of us automatically benefit.

People's differing temperaments are reflected in two types of compassion. The first wants others to be free of their suffering and problems but still prioritizes happiness for oneself. The second not only wishes others to be free of suffering but is also prepared to act to bring this about. The experience of compassion is similar in the two, but due to focusing more on the well-being of others and the disadvantages of self-centeredness, the second compassion is courageous and actively engages with others.

There are many ways for those who wish to alleviate misery to apply Dharma principles to their interactions with family, society, and the surrounding world. As we actively help others, we must continue to meditate on the two methods to generate bodhicitta, using reason and concrete examples to increase the strength and scope of our compassion and to prevent it from degenerating.

Good health and a positive attitude are assets when we work to benefit others, so we will turn to these topics first. Reflections have not been included in this chapter, so please pause at the end of each section to reflect on its main points and how they relate to your own experience and aspirations.

### *Good Health and Dealing with Illness and Injury*

Everyone desires good health, and for Dharma practitioners, it facilitates our ability to practice. For this reason we should do our best to maintain our health by eating nutritious meals, exercising and sleeping enough (but not too much!), and maintaining good standards of cleanliness. Here our motivation is not attachment to pleasure or fear of pain; it is the opportunity good health provides to use our precious human life for Dharma practice, and specifically to cultivate bodhicitta and wisdom in order to benefit all sentient beings.

Balance is important. One meaning of the “middle way” is to avoid the extremes of self-mortification and self-indulgence. Physical suffering comes naturally, simply because we have a body. Deliberately inflicting pain on our body does not purify our mind. In fact, severe ascetic practices could become another form of self-centeredness if the motive is to gain a good reputation for having the ability to tolerate pain.

Self-indulgence hinders Dharma practice by consuming our time. Instead of practicing the Dharma to go beyond the saṃsāric situation of having a body under the influence of afflictions and karma, we spend inordinate energy and time pampering our body and worrying about its health and comfort. It is wiser to accept that as long as we are human beings in cyclic existence, we will have a body that is prone to illness. Falling ill is not some unusual or unique fate that we alone suffer, nor is it a punishment or indicative of failure on our part. Accepting the limitations of having a saṃsāric body and understanding it is the basis of our precious human life, we must use it wisely without fussing over it.

People often write to me for advice regarding illness. Although my responses vary according to the illness and the person’s disposition, I will share some general advice to help others.

When you are ill, you should consult a doctor and follow his or her advice. Do not abandon conventional medicine in favor of faith healing.

It happens that someone comments to a cancer patient, “Your anger caused the cancer.” Such comments not only lack compassion, they are mistaken. Diseases come about due to many causes and conditions, and blaming someone who is ill for their disease is heartless.

The mind-training practice of seeing our illness as a result of destructive

actions we have done in previous lives or earlier in this life is very different than blaming the victim. Seeing illness in this way does not mean that we deserve to suffer: no one *deserves* to suffer. Rather, we act and experience results that accord with those actions. Daisy seeds grow into daisies; they don't produce chilies. Thinking in this way enables us to release our anger and sense of injustice and accept the situation. Doing this transforms a bad situation into a learning experience, because we understand that if we do not like suffering results, we should abandon creating their causes in the future. This gives us great impetus to let go of destructive actions and negative habits.

Thinking that the karma that caused the illness could have instead ripened in a far worse suffering helps put our misery in perspective. Cancer is not at all pleasant, but if that karma had ripened in an unfortunate rebirth, we would have been in an even worse situation. Reflecting in this way helps us to realize that we can in fact endure our present misery. In addition, because that karma has now ripened, its energy has been consumed and cannot afflict us again.

Distinguishing between physical pain and mental suffering is crucial. Even if your body is ill, your mind can remain peaceful, and a relaxed mind will lessen your suffering and help the body heal. Sit quietly and observe the difference between the actual physical pain of the illness or injury and the mental suffering caused by fear and anxiety. By letting our preconceptions proliferate and imagining all sorts of horrible things that could happen due to our illness or injury, our mind can cause us more misery than our physical condition. Instead of indulging the anxiety, bring your attention to a wholesome way of viewing the situation: contemplate the kindness of those who are taking care of you. By doing so, you will be filled with strong gratitude.

Remembering that tragedy is not unique to ourselves also helps to broaden our view and prevents us from falling into self-pity, which only increases misery. We can contemplate, "At this very moment, many others are experiencing far worse miseries, and many of them have no protector, no refuge, and no friends to help them. I am more fortunate for I can rely on the Three Jewels, and so many friends, relatives, and even strangers—such as the hospital staff—are helping me. For someone who is ill, my situation is quite good." Then send love and compassion to others who are ill, injured, or unjustly imprisoned by wishing them to be free of misery and to have

all happiness. You can combine this with the taking-and-giving meditation described in chapter 7.

Remembering that such problems are characteristic of cyclic existence helps us generate the determination to be free and to attain liberation. This gives our Dharma practice a big boost by helping us to make Dharma, not the eight worldly concerns, our priority in life. In addition, suffering has some benefits: it makes us humbler and helps us to open our heart in compassion for others.

Visualization practices can also be useful. At the place where you experience pain, visualize the syllables of a mantra or a ball of light. Its brilliant yet gentle white light radiates and fills the painful or diseased area, purifying all illness and pain and filling the area with bliss.

Alternatively, imagine the Buddha (or a meditational deity such as Avalokiteśvara or Tārā) in front of you or on the crown of your head. Light and nectar flow from the Buddha or deity into you, purifying and healing your body and restoring the balances of the elements.

Doing purification to cleanse the karma causing the illness is also helpful. Purifying karma that has already ripened or is presently ripening isn't possible, but the karma that perpetuates the illness in the future can be purified. However, when karma is extremely heavy, preventing it from ripening altogether is difficult, although purification can make the result shorter or less severe. It also makes the mind more peaceful and thus better able to handle the illness.

### *Maintaining a Positive Attitude*

Except for a few rare individuals who can devote their full energies to meditation twenty-four hours a day, the majority of Buddhists should remain active in helping their communities. Social engagement is vital, but without meditation our work in society may not become a genuine Dharma activity. On the other hand, without a social component, our practice of benefiting others may not be truly effective. Balance is important.

Whenever you can offer direct help to others, do so. In Tibet, when I saw animals on the way to be slaughtered, I would send someone to buy them, and we gave the animals shelter. In India, seeing animals in cages on trucks pains me a lot. However, I cannot pull over the trucks and buy the animals.

Instead I recite mantras and prayers for them, reflect on karma, and generate compassion.

Countless sentient beings toil in cyclic existence. All of them are caught up in the three types of *duḥkha*: obvious physical and mental suffering, suffering because happy circumstances are fleeting, and suffering by being under the influence of afflictions and karma. Of course we cannot solve all of these problems. Cyclic existence remains; things will never be perfect. But making even a small contribution to one person or to ten people to help them have peace of mind is worthwhile. We have done something. Giving up hope, withdrawing, and doing nothing is senseless. We are all tourists here on Earth; we stay just a short time. So let's not be troublemakers while we are here! Every being wants to be happy and has the right to be. It is our responsibility to make a contribution toward their well-being, and we must do what we can. That is the purpose of our life.

From a Buddhist viewpoint, cyclic existence has been faulty since beginningless time. Because all sentient beings are under the influence of afflictions and karma, trying to create a perfect world by rearranging external conditions is impossible. Because of this worldview, Tibetans do not expect so much from external situations. They accept difficulties more readily and are more easily satisfied. If we cultivate a view that does not expect fantastic happiness and magnificence in cyclic existence, we will be more content with what we have. Rather than leading to apathy or complacency, having modest expectations makes our minds more stable and prevents discouragement.

People ask me how I can bear the suffering in Tibet. When I compare the suffering in Tibet with the suffering of cyclic existence, the latter is much worse. We can't close our eyes to suffering of any kind. Looking at our own suffering, we generate the determination to be free—this is compassion for ourselves. When seeing the suffering of others, we generate great compassion and *bodhicitta* and engage in practices that directly or indirectly contribute to their well-being.

Sometimes we may want to help, but the situation may not allow it. People who do humanitarian work in war zones speak of the danger they face in places where human beings have many disturbing emotions and cannot think clearly. These aid workers have one foot there and one foot ready to run, because there is no value in their getting killed. Even if the Buddha were

to go to some of these places, he could not do much to help. Under these circumstances, we may have to leave the situation physically but can continue to send our compassion and pray for the well-being of those trapped there. We can actively work to educate people in danger of being drawn into the conflict. Although we may not be able to extinguish the fire, we can at least prevent it from spreading. Do not ignore the value of this.

Well-meaning individuals ask me how to develop the courage to keep trying to make a difference in a world that seems so chaotic. No matter how numerous the difficulties and no matter how large the obstacles, if our aim is reasonable and beneficial, we must keep our determination and maintain constant effort. If something is good for the larger community, it doesn't matter whether that goal materializes during our lifetime; we must keep working toward it. The next generation can build upon the good work we have done, and with time things will change.

### *Using Diverse Methods to Benefit Others*

As limited beings, we may find it difficult to know what is beneficial for others. Sometimes our prejudice, attachment, and anger color the situation. We have preconceived ideas about how others should live their lives. The first step in helping others is clearing away the afflictions and self-preoccupation from our own minds.

Second, we actively cultivate love, compassion, and courage in order to have the inner strength to be of assistance.

Third, we develop the wisdom to determine the most skillful way to help. At this point, we may practice the four types of awakening activity: peace, increase, control, and wrath. Initially, we practice these in meditation, first imagining *pacifying* the afflictions of others by encouraging them to purify their negativities, then imagining *increasing* their lifespan, wisdom, and merit by inspiring them to act constructively. Next we imagine being able to influence or *control* their afflictions through the force of our wisdom and compassion. Finally, for those who are intractable, we imagine employing *wrathful* means to destroy their ability to harm others.

To apply these four to an actual situation, let's take the example of someone who is about to perform some act of cruelty. A bodhisattva who lacks clairvoyant powers, and thus doesn't know exactly what is best to do in the

situation, begins with peaceful means. She uses gentle measures to intercede, pacifying that person by giving comfort, verbally addressing his concerns, or using reason to dissuade him from harming someone.

If that doesn't work, she tries increasing his well-being. She may give him medicine or a gift, or teach him a topic that interests him. If this too doesn't work, she will use strong pressure or influence to try to steer him in a good direction. Should that too fail, she may intimidate the person through aggressive means or destroy his ability to harm others. Such forceful action must be motivated by compassion, not by vengeance, and is used only as a last resort.

The basic approach here is to apply whatever techniques are most effective to relieve our own or others' difficulties. This is consistent with the advice that there is nothing a bodhisattva should not learn. We don't use just the Dharma to prevent or solve our own and others' problems but also eat a healthy diet, exercise, and use whatever type of medical treatment is suitable. Complementing Buddhist practice with other methods is fine, although it is wise to remember they are distinct fields. For example, if Buddhists have issues that psychotherapy can help solve, they can and should enter therapy. Dharma centers could have counselors who are also Dharma students. Students would not regard the counselors as spiritual teachers but could discuss psychological issues with them. I am happy to hear that some Buddhists are developing Buddhist-based psychotherapeutic methods.

From one viewpoint, anything can be considered Buddhist if it is motivated by bodhicitta. However, just because a practice is done by a Buddhist does not necessarily make it a Buddhist practice. For example, to attain liberation, a Buddhist must practice serenity meditation. But this in itself is not a Buddhist practice because practitioners of other traditions do it as well. Similarly, except for insight into impermanence and selflessness, insight in itself cannot be called Buddhist because non-Buddhists also practice it. Techniques from disciplines such as psychotherapy can be adopted by Buddhists, but that does not make these techniques Buddhist. From this viewpoint, the only techniques or practices that can specifically be called Buddhist are those directly relating to the goal of liberation from cyclic existence, for example, the meditation on selflessness.

If other disciplines, such as psychology or yoga, do not entail believing

in a permanent soul or a creator, and if they make us a kinder or healthier person, we may use them. If other disciplines teach beliefs that conflict with Buddhist views or create difficulties in our practice, it is wiser to leave them aside. This is the general position, but there may be some exceptions. For instance, to help people with low self-esteem have a better view of themselves, teaching them there is a permanent soul may be helpful. Even the Buddha taught a permanent self in some scriptures as a skillful means to benefit a particular audience.

Any Buddhist teaching, such as mindfulness, compassion, or the taking-and-giving meditation can be taught to others to help them. People doing so should not consider themselves Buddhist teachers, nor should they call secularized versions of Buddhist practices “Buddhism.” They may simply say the technique they teach has its source in Buddhism. Although mindfulness is very popular now and is rooted in Buddhadharma, the way it is taught and practiced in secular society differs from in a Buddhist context. The purpose of secular mindfulness is to help people live better in the present, while Buddhists meditate on the four establishments of mindfulness to attain liberation and awakening. Secular mindfulness simply observes sensation and thoughts as they arise in the body and mind; Buddhist mindfulness has an element of wisdom and leads to insight into impermanence, the nature of *duḥkha*, and selflessness.

If a person has faith in both Christianity and Buddhism, she may view Jesus as a *bodhisattva* and visualize him as a symbol of love and compassion. However, we can’t say this is a Buddhist practice. We can teach Buddhist principles to the general public without using specifically Buddhist language and without calling these concepts Buddhist. However, we should not incorporate non-Buddhist practices or concepts into Buddhism and call them Buddhism. This harms the existence of the pure Dharma.

### *Engaged Buddhism and Political Involvement*

I have some reservations speaking about politics, the business world, and so forth because I don’t want it to appear that I have advice regarding each and every field, especially those in which my knowledge is limited. I also do not want my personal opinions on these topics to be seen as “the Buddhist view” to which all Buddhists must adhere, so I will simply discuss



general points about motivation and so forth and leave their application to the reader.

If someone can make significant spiritual progress, remaining isolated in retreat and spending most of her energy in deep meditation is worthwhile. However, this is difficult for most people, who wish to have a family and a job. In this case, live in a balanced way: maintain a daily meditation practice of whatever length is practical for you, earn your living through right livelihood, and contribute to the benefit of society in general or to specific individuals in it. You will have to determine a good balance of time and energy, given your own situation.

We need education to help others most effectively. The purpose of education is not just to learn more about the world or the living beings in it; it is to build a happier human community and to benefit animals as well. With that motivation, study whatever field interests you and seek employment that does not involve harming others or living unethically. In this way, right from the beginning, your whole life will be involved in benefiting others.

I see three ways the Buddhist community can serve society. First, we can be more active in projects that directly benefit others. Dharma centers and monasteries can either set up their own projects or participate in already existing organizations that help the homeless, provide hospice care for the terminally ill, educate children, reach out to refugees, counsel prisoners, provide healthcare and food to the poor, protect endangered species, care for the environment, and so on. Some centers are already engaged in such works, and I am very pleased with this.

Baba Amte (1914–2008), a follower of Mahatma Gandhi and an Indian social worker, established an ashram for thousands of lepers, who are ordinarily neglected by society, and trained them in various skills. When I saw them working with tools, I was concerned that they would hurt themselves, but the lepers worked diligently and with self-confidence. I offered part of the money from my Nobel Peace Prize to his ashram.

I have also met residents of a slum in a large Indian city. Since they are from a low caste, they feel demoralized. If we treat them with kindness, respecting them as human beings like us, they feel more confident. Once, some laborers were repairing my residence in Dharamsala. At first they were shy and timid, but when I shook their hands and chatted with them, they smiled and laughed. We should not think we are special and look down on

others; we have been in that situation in past lives and may be in future lives if we act recklessly now.

We should also help individuals directly. Often there are many severely disabled beggars outside the monasteries where I teach in India. Some of them drag themselves on the ground. I feel very sad looking at them and encourage people who attend teachings to help them.

Second, we can use Buddhist principles and techniques to promote compassion, altruism, self-confidence, fearlessness, fortitude, and tolerance in society. Many concepts and techniques found in Buddhism for working with the mind can help others, both secular people and those of other faiths. Social activists may want to learn methods to overcome anger. Teachers may want to introduce exercises to cultivate empathy, compassion, and good communication among students. We should explain these methods to others in a secular setting without speaking about Buddhist doctrine or encouraging people to become Buddhists.

Childhood is a crucial time, yet many children grow up in an atmosphere with little compassion. Their parents quarrel and divorce; their teachers do not care for them as individuals. When these children become adults and act without conscience or compassion, who can blame them? They never experienced deeper human affection. The Buddhist community can make significant contributions in schools and families by helping people build families with more warmth and affection, and by showing teachers how to be involved, patient, and compassionate with their students. Parents and teachers—and society in general—need to learn that teaching children to be good human beings is more important than helping them become rich or famous.

Third, we can present Buddhist ideas and practices to help those who are interested. Someone who is terminally ill may want to hear about rebirth. Healthcare professionals may be interested in the stages of dying as described in Buddhist texts. Buddhist teachings may help young people who are spiritually lost, and teaching buddha nature and compassion to the incarcerated can give them a new vision of life.

Representatives from various Buddhist groups could meet to consider taking a united stand on some issues. In that way, Buddhists can participate with concerted effort to preserve the environment and protect the beings in it, including animals. In our world many life forms that do not create

problems are sacrificed to serve the purposes of human beings, who are the troublemakers. We cannot change these things at once, but it is worthwhile to voice our concerns and do whatever is possible.

Some people believe that religious practice and political involvement are contradictory and that a truly spiritual person should not be involved in politics. Several factors must be taken into consideration here. Although politics itself is not inherently corrupt or evil, a person's motivation can make it so. A person using politics to convert people to his religion or impose beliefs unique to his religion on all of society lacks respect for all beings. However, political action taken with a compassionate motivation can be another method to solve human problems, just as engineering, teaching, farming, healthcare, and factory work can benefit humanity.

It is especially important for politicians to behave ethically and develop compassion, and their personal spiritual practice may help them to do so. I sometimes tell Indian politicians that they should be genuinely religious because their actions have a strong effect on society. If a hermit in the mountains lacks proper ethical restraint, few people are harmed; but if a politician does, an entire nation and even the world can be adversely affected. In the *Precious Garland*, which Nāgārjuna wrote for the Śātavāhana king, he penned many verses with instructions on how to govern effectively and fairly. Here are some examples (RA 399, 256, 134):

At that time [as a ruler] you should internalize firmly  
the practices of generosity, ethical conduct, and fortitude  
that were especially taught for householders  
and have as their essence compassion.

Just as you are intent on thinking  
of what could be done to help yourself,  
so you should be intent on thinking  
of what could be done to help others.

Just as by themselves the true words  
of kings generate firm trust,  
so their false words  
are the best means to create distrust.

Nāgārjuna also encouraged the king to tax citizens fairly, fund a system of public education that ensures teachers are well compensated, and construct public roads with rest stops and parks where people can relax and enjoy themselves.

In recent years many people have turned to Buddhist scriptures for guidance on current issues. Other people have sought confirmation of their political or social views in the Buddhadharmā. Quotations to support this or that view may certainly be found in the scriptures. However, we must be open-minded and avoid thinking that everyone who calls himself a Buddhist should agree on all political and social issues. The Buddha principally taught the path to liberation from cyclic existence. When he gave advice on social, family, political, and other issues, he spoke in the context of Indian culture of the fifth century BCE. Some, but not all, of this advice can be applied and adapted to present contexts.

Some people regard the Tibet issue as political, and as Dharma practitioners they do not want to get involved. However, if we want Tibetan Buddhism to flourish and remain in our world, we need freedom in Tibet. Without having autonomy in our country, we Tibetans will have great difficulty in preserving our form of Buddhadharmā. This, in turn, will adversely impact the rest of the world. Although I do not expect all Dharma practitioners to actively work for human rights and freedom in Tibet, your sympathy and moral support does have an effect.

### *Consumerism and the Environment*

Peace and the survival of life on Earth as we know it are threatened by human activities that are bereft of humanitarian values. Destruction of nature and natural resources results from ignorance, greed, and disregard for sentient beings who depend on the earth for survival. Environmental degradation also cheats future generations, who will inherit a vastly degraded planet if the destruction of the natural environment continues at the present rate. Protecting the planet is an ethical issue.

While environmental destruction in the past could be attributed to ignorance, today we have more information. We must learn to work together for something we all care about—the survival and flourishing of our planet and the beings living on it. While science, technology, and industrialization

have brought much benefit, they have also been the source of many current tragedies, including global warming and pollution. When we are able to recognize and forgive ignorant actions of the past, we gain strength to constructively solve problems in the present.

Scientific predictions of environmental change are difficult for ordinary human beings to comprehend fully. We hear about global warming and rising sea levels, increased cancer rates, depletion of resources, extinction of species, and overpopulation. The global economy may grow and with it extreme rates of energy consumption, carbon dioxide production, and deforestation. We must consider the prospects in the near future of global suffering and environmental degradation unlike anything in human history. Then we must do our best to prevent what is preventable and to prepare for what isn't.

Human activity driven by the wish for present pleasure and convenience without care for future living beings and their environment cannot be sustained. Our greed needs to take the backseat to practical methods to care for nature and natural resources. More equal distribution of wealth among nations and among groups of people within each nation is essential, as is education about the importance of caring for the environment and for each other.

Remembering our mutual dependence is a key to counteract harmful practices. Each sentient being wants happiness, not suffering. Developing a genuine, compassionate sense of universal responsibility is crucial. When we are motivated by wisdom and compassion, the results of our actions benefit everyone, not just ourselves.

Consumerism is closely related to the plight of our environment. Although advances in science and technology may be able to offset some deleterious effects of the overconsumption of natural resources, we should not be overly confident and leave it to future generations to resolve the problems we create. We human beings must consider the prospect that one day science and technology may not be able to help us in the face of limited resources. This earth we share is not infinite.

As individuals and as a society, we must practice contentment to counter our greed for more and better. No matter what we do to try to gratify our desires, we will not find total satisfaction; external goods are not capable of providing this. Real fulfillment is found by adopting the inner disciplines

of self-restraint and contentment as well as the joy of love, compassion, and inner freedom.

Every person and each nation wants to improve its standard of living. If the standard of living of poorer countries were raised to that of wealthier countries, natural resources would not be able to meet the demand. Even if we had the resources to provide a car to every person on the planet, would we want to? Could we control the pollution they produce?

Sooner or later the lifestyle of wealthier nations will have to change according to new imperatives. While people expect a successful economy to grow each year, growth has its limits. Rather than being unprepared and colliding with the problems these limitations entail, we should cultivate a sense of contentment and voluntary restraint. Then we may be able to avoid or at least reduce the disastrous results of overconsumption. With a good heart and wisdom, we will be motivated to do what needs to be done to protect each other and the natural environment. This is much easier than having to adapt to the severe environmental conditions projected for the future.

### *The World of Business and Finance*

Every human being has an ethical duty to humanity, a responsibility to consider our common future. In addition, each person has the potential to contribute to the common good. People in the world of business and finance are no exception; they have great potential and great responsibility for global welfare. If they think only of immediate profit, all of us will suffer the consequences. This is already evident in the environmental destruction that has occurred due to the unregulated pursuits of big business.

At the global level, a huge gap exists between wealthy industrialized countries and other nations in which people struggle to fulfill their basic needs for survival. While children in wealthy countries complain when they cannot get the latest technological device, children in impoverished countries face malnutrition. This is very sad. Within each country, too, the rich increase their wealth, while the poor remain poor, and in some cases become even poorer. This is not only ethically wrong, it is a source of practical problems.

Even though governments may theoretically ensure equal rights and opportunities, this great economic disparity places the poor at a disadvan-

tage in terms of obtaining good education and jobs. As a result, they feel discontent and discouraged, which feeds resentment toward the privileged. This, in turn, entices them to become involved in legitimate protest as well as gangs, crime, and terrorism. Social discord affects the happiness of both the wealthy and the poor.

Each person wants to leave the world having made a positive contribution; everyone wants to ensure that their children and grandchildren have good lives. Therefore I ask those involved in business and government to keep future generations in mind as you make decisions in the present.

Human activities in all fields are constructive when done with regard for the interdependence of all beings. An awareness of the profound interconnection among all beings and the planet we share inspires a sense of responsibility and concern for others, a commitment to the welfare of society, awareness of the consequences of our actions, and restraint from harm. When we act with concern for only short-term interests or the welfare of only a select group or when our intention is simply to accrue money or power, our actions inevitably bring unpleasant results for everyone.

Our motivation is pivotal; for any human endeavor to be constructive, we must first check our motivation and purify it of ignorant and self-centered intent as much as possible. The most important element in a healthy and productive motivation is a sense of caring for others, an awareness of the big picture and long-term results. With such a motivation, doing business and making money are fine. These activities are not inherently flawed or corrupt.

Some businesspeople tell me that doing business honestly reduces their profit and bogs them down in bureaucracy. Because increasing their profits also benefits society and their employees, they say that cutting corners to facilitate business is beneficial. I have doubts about this line of reasoning.

Ethical standards and ethical behavior are neither a nuisance nor unrealistic when it comes to business matters. For me, ethics means doing what is right, and that means what is beneficial for self and others. There may be times when what is beneficial in the long-term and short-term conflict, but many other times they coincide. Overemphasis on short-term benefit often harms the long-term good, while wise attention paid to the long-term goals usually pays off.

If a company cheats its clients or customers, these stakeholders will

become aware of the situation and stop doing business with that company. In addition, these customers and clients will tell others about the company's deceitful practices, and consequently, others will avoid doing business with that company. When clients are treated respectfully and charged fair prices, they will do business with that company over a long period and will refer their friends to it as well, thus increasing the company's profits over the long term.

When arrested for illegal business practices, CEOs and their families suffer disgrace and humiliation. Their behavior causes the public to lose faith in the stock market, which in turn harms those corporations and the national economy. Corporations spend an enormous amount on legal fees due to their malpractices, so even if we consider prosperity in this life, dishonest business practices ruin individuals and companies.

Buddhist practitioners have even greater reason to abandon illegal and deceitful business practices, for they understand the destructive karma involved and the three kinds of suffering effects that it produces. They know that truthful business dealings and kind interactions with others are constructive actions that bring prosperity and good relationships in future lives. Aware that happiness comes from having a contented mind, not from greedily grasping for more wealth, true Dharma practitioners conduct their business affairs honestly. Although in the short term they may not make as much profit as dishonest businesspeople, in the long term they have fewer problems and more mental peace.

In the business world compassion translates into cooperation, responsibility, and caring. Some companies now take more care of their employees, clients, and customers. They see that a pleasant working environment in which individuals are valued, respected, and have a voice increases productivity. Although their main motivation for caring for others may be financial gain, they nevertheless know that their success is dependent on others and that, therefore, kindness and fairness are important. In the end, this produces happier employees, a good working environment, and a better reputation for the company. This in turn wins public approval and support, which benefit the company.

Some people assume that compassion in business means being too soft, abandoning competition, and thus not being successful. These assumptions are not correct. There are two types of competition. One is negative; for



example, actively creating obstacles for competitors or cheating customers in our efforts to reach the top. The other is beneficial: we want to improve ourselves and work hard to attain our goal, but not at others' expense. We accept that just like us, others also have the wish and the right to success.

Wanting to attain a goal is not necessarily selfish. In spiritual practice, our desire to become a buddha is not self-centered; it doesn't involve promoting ourselves at others' expense. Rather, to be more capable of benefiting others, we develop our abilities and talents and work toward our goal.

There's nothing wrong with wanting to be the best. That motivation gives us initiative and encourages progress. However, what makes us the best is not always money and status. If a company makes huge profits and earns a bad name, that's not being the best! A business that benefits more people and serves the community better than its competitors has become the best.

Each person in the business and financial world is responsible for his or her own goals and actions. At the end of the day, we have to be able to live with ourselves and feel good about what we have done. Human values are important, no matter our profession. I never heard of anyone who said on their deathbed, "I should have made more money," "I wish I had worked more overtime," or "I should have crushed that competitor."

The transformation of values in the business and financial worlds begins at the individual level. When one individual changes, the effects are felt within that person's sphere of activities. Through the ripple effect, this positive influence will spread to more people.

### *Media and the Arts*

The media plays a vital role in investigating important issues and bringing them to the public's attention, and I appreciate their efforts in this direction. The freedom of press benefits society greatly. At the same time, those working in the media need to have compassion for the entire society and not sensationalize events in order to have larger sales. I find it frightening that people are constantly fed violence on the news as well as for entertainment. No wonder people report depression and despair, and children grow into violent adults.

Balanced reporting is essential. On one day in any large city, a few people

receive great harm, whereas so many people receive help in the form of healthcare, education, friendship, and so on. Yet the headlines about the harmful events dominate. The tremendous amount of help that people give each other every day is overlooked. In this way, citizens get a skewed view of humanity, and their suspicion, fear, and distrust increase. If the media also reported the helpful activities that people do for each other and for the planet each day, people would have a more realistic perspective and would be aware of the great kindness human beings show each other. This in turn would cause the public to be more optimistic about the future, which will prompt them to work harder to create a good future for themselves and others.

The plots of movies and entertainment usually revolve around violence and sex. One of my American students told me that one day she heard a child suggest to his playmates, “Let’s play divorce!” The children then proceeded to quarrel and argue, mimicking those on television programs they had seen. The media has great potential to influence others as well as the responsibility to use this potential wisely. Movies showing people developing skills to resolve their conflicts in a fair and mutually beneficial way can also be entertaining, in addition to teaching good communication skills.

The media, as well as the makers of video and online games, have some responsibility for the tragedies of mass shootings. When violence becomes entertainment, and when it is so normal that children see hundreds of instances of it each week on television or the Internet, it plants seeds in their minds that will affect their behavior. Those working in the media, game design, and advertising must have the well-being of the entire society in mind, not to mention the welfare of their own children. They should use their great creative powers and intelligence to influence youth in a constructive way and to teach them good human values, kindness, and respect for others.

Throughout history, the arts have been a medium for the expression of the highest human values and aspirations as well as of despair and depravity. Many people in the arts—painters, writers, actors, dancers, musicians, and others—ask me about the role of the arts in spiritual practice. As with other occupations, this depends on the artist’s motivation. If art is created simply to make a name for oneself, with no concern for the effect it has on others, it has questionable spiritual value. On the other hand, if artists with

compassion for the welfare of others use their talents to benefit others, their art can be magnificent artistically and spiritually.

### *Science*

In general, the Buddha's teachings fall into three categories: Buddhist science, which involves the Buddha's description of the external world, the physical body, and the nature of consciousness; Buddhist philosophy, which contains the Buddha's theory of reality; and Buddhist religion, the practice of the spiritual path.

Interdependence and causality are central concepts in Buddhist philosophy and are now applied to all fields. Scientists in particular know that changing one thing produces ramifications elsewhere, and a fruitful dialogue between modern science and Buddhist science and philosophy has begun. Buddhists speak about Buddhist science and certain concepts from Buddhist philosophy such as subtle impermanence and interdependence. Some scientists are also interested in Buddhist assertions that ultimate reality lacks independent existence and phenomena exist by mere designation. We Buddhists do not discuss Buddhist religious practice or Buddhist concepts such as past and future lives, karmic causality, and liberation with scientists. Those topics are "our business" as the Buddha's followers.

In this interdisciplinary discussion, we are not trying to use science to validate the Dharma. Buddhists have a long history of realized spiritual practitioners who have validated the efficacy of the path through their personal experience. Buddhism has survived nearly 2,600 years without the support or approval of science; we will continue. However, our dialogue is good for society, as it is an example of the modern and the ancient learning from and complementing each other. Over the years, the dialogue has sparked many projects, for example, teaching mindfulness to help reduce physical pain and mental stress, and developing programs for teachers to instruct their students in compassionate thought and action. In addition, we Tibetans have begun science education in some of our monasteries and nunneries, and a few Tibetan monks are now studying science at Western universities, bringing their knowledge back to the debate ground.

I appreciate the scientific perspective very much. Scientists are looking for truth, for reality. They approach their investigation with an open mind

and are willing to revise their ideas if their findings do not correspond to their original theories. As the Buddha's followers, we too are looking for truth and reality. The Buddha wanted us to test his teachings, not to accept them blindly. This accords with the scientific way. If scientists can disprove points in the Buddhist scriptures, we must accept their findings. Because of the similarity of our approach, I do not think there is any danger in discussion with scientists. Their attitude is objective, they are open to the investigation of new things, and they are intelligent.

Within Buddhist science, as we saw in chapter 8, there are three categories of phenomena: evident, slightly obscure, and very obscure. Up until now, common topics of dialogue with scientists have focused on evident phenomena and a little bit regarding slightly obscure phenomena, such as subtle impermanence and emptiness. Within the category of evident phenomena, we have discussed topics found in physics, neurology, cognitive science, psychology, and so forth.

It is useful for Buddhists to study scientific findings. For example, while Buddhist literature speaks about subtle particles, scientific knowledge of that topic is more advanced. Learning about the brain's role in cognition and emotion is new and interesting for Buddhists. However, regarding perception and psychology, Buddhist literature is much richer, and psychologists and neurologists find Buddhist findings and experiences regarding attention and emotion very helpful.

Both Buddhadharma and science can benefit humanity, and both also have limitations. Science helps us understand the physical basis upon which the mind depends while we are alive. However, because scientific research requires physical measurements of external phenomena, it lacks the tools to investigate things beyond the scope of our physical senses. Although science has contributed greatly to human knowledge about some topics, it lacks the tools necessary to fully understand every aspect of human beings. Scientists can benefit from learning the vast knowledge Buddhism possesses about the mind: for example, distinguishing sensory and mental consciousness, and differentiating between minds that directly perceive their object and conceptual consciousnesses that know their objects via conceptual appearance. Buddhism also describes various levels of consciousness and how they function, as well as the power the mind gains through developing single-pointed concentration. Buddhist psychology describes mental states conducive to human happiness and those that are unrealistic and bring suffering.

I believe that in this century many new ideas and findings will come, enlarging science's field of investigation. Continuing dialogue between Buddhists and scientists is important, so both can expand their knowledge, methodologies, and ways of thinking. Dialogues with scientists have been fruitful, and some of the perspectives I have gained from them are included in this book.

I encourage more Buddhist monasteries to introduce science into their curriculum. Studying scientific findings and dialoguing with scientists help us to cultivate faith based on analysis and investigation. In addition, for Buddhism to be taken seriously in the West and among the young Tibetans in India with a modern education, Buddhist practitioners and teachers must be conversant with scientific assumptions.

Similarly, I encourage scientists to stretch the field of their investigation. The ultimate laboratory is in our own mind and body, and for this meditation is important. Scientists who develop internal awareness of their own cognitive and emotional processes through meditation will bring new vigor to scientific exploration.

My main purpose in dialoguing with scientists is to bring a deeper awareness about the value to society of living an ethical life. So many of our problems are due to people's lack of care for the ethical dimensions of their actions and the effect their behavior has on others. We need to make more effort to promote inner values, but doing that is difficult if they are based only on religious ideas that appeal only to people following a particular religion. Secular ethics that speak of universal values appeal to believers of all religions and to nonbelievers as well.

Scientists have found and continue to find connections between our mental states on the one hand and our physical health and the quality of our social interactions on the other. Scientific findings demonstrate the benefits of compassion, a peaceful mind, and ethical living. Since the results of scientific research are respected internationally, their findings can be used to support the advancement of secular ethics for the benefit of society.

### *Gender Equality*

Women's right to have equal opportunity in all fields must be respected. I don't believe that in the past, society in general or Buddhist institutions in particular deliberately discriminated against women. Rather, they were

negligent and simply assumed that men should lead because larger and stronger bodies made them more fit to lead. But this concept is no longer valid, and it was not even true historically. Napoleon was physically small but very clever, and he became a powerful leader.

In addition, men assumed they were intellectually superior and less dominated by their emotions. However, as the Buddha noted, men and women have the same afflictions, and men and women are equally bound in cyclic existence by these afflictions. For civilized society, intelligence is far more important than physical strength, and in this regard, men and women are equal. Everyone should have a good education and be able to use their talents and abilities to contribute to society. Equal opportunity means equal responsibility, and men and women should share these.

People tend to identify strongly according to their gender. But as Āryadeva points out (CS 226–27), there is no inherently existent “inner self” that is male, female, or other. The body is also not an inherently existent man or woman because none of the elements that compose the body have a gender. Although from the viewpoint of emptiness, no distinction can be made between men and women, that is no excuse to ignore sexual discrimination. The status of men and women in Buddhist institutions is not equal, and this has a deleterious effect on female and male practitioners as well as on the acceptance of Buddhism in Western society. Buddhist institutions, teachers, and practitioners must treat everyone equally. All forms of exclusivity are based on an attitude of “me versus them,” which is not suitable for genuine practitioners. True practitioners are humble and regard everyone as their teacher; they work to benefit all beings.

Women must develop self-confidence and take every opportunity to make themselves equal in all fields. Some women are accomplished practitioners, but they are shy and therefore do not teach or take leadership positions. Especially those practicing the bodhisattva path should develop great self-confidence, inner strength, and courage. They must take the initiative, studying and developing their qualities, and not get discouraged by the defeatist resignation that society is simply sexist. If they encounter prejudice from social and religious institutions, they should speak up, and we must work together to tackle these problems.

In the past, there has been a shortage of well-known female role models in Buddhism. This is due in part to lack of knowledge about great female

practitioners of the past. More books and articles that focus on past and present female practitioners are needed. In India, the Buddha's stepmother was an extraordinary nun praised by the Buddha himself. The Indian nun Bhikṣuṇī Lakṣmī had a vision of Thousand-Armed Avalokiteśvara and is the first lineage holder of this practice. Nāropa's sister Niguma was a great tantric adept, as were Machik Labkyi Dronma and Dorje Pakmo in Tibet. The reincarnation lineage of Dorje Pakmo began very early on, more or less at the same time as that of the Karmapa, and continues today.

The Vinaya records that when the Buddha began the nuns' order, he stated that women were able to attain liberation and become arhats, and many stories of liberated women exist in the scriptures. Sūtrayāna and the three lower tantras state that one has to have a male body in the final life before attaining buddhahood, but in Tibetan Buddhism highest yoga tantra is the final authority, and here females and males are equally capable of attaining full awakening. Highest yoga tantra emphasizes cultivating respect for women, and one of the root tantric precepts forbids disparaging women.

The discriminatory statements against women in the Buddhist scriptures were made due to societal circumstances at the Buddha's time and later, when the scriptures were actually written down. Since this prejudice arose due to cultural bias, it can and must be changed. Other things, for example bhikṣus being the preceptors of bhikṣuṇīs, seem like prejudice but are difficult for one person to change. A council of saṅgha elders from all Buddhist traditions would need to meet and agree in order to change that.

According to the Vinaya, bhikṣus sit and walk in front of bhikṣuṇīs. While bhikṣuṇīs are governed by more precepts, most of them are for their protection. Because women are more prone to being raped or bullied than men, to offset these risks the Buddha established precepts that prevent women from encountering dangerous situations.

However, in terms of rights, both men and women are equal. Just as a man has the right and opportunity to become a monk, so a woman has the right and opportunity to become a nun. The bhikṣuṇī saṅgha of fully ordained nuns is responsible for the screening and training of women who are candidates for novice and full ordination. They are responsible for running their own communities and teaching other nuns. Bhikṣuṇīs are ordained by a process involving both the bhikṣuṇī and the bhikṣu saṅghas,

and the monks must teach the Dharma to the nuns when requested. Since the full ordination lineage for women did not spread to Tibet, it is my hope that it will be established and the bhikṣuṇī ordination given in the Tibetan community. It is also my hope more nuns will become teachers in their own right and abbesses in the nunneries. This has happened to some extent in Tibetan Buddhist monasteries in the West and certainly is the case in the Chinese Buddhist community.

A story in the Pāli canon (SN 15.2) tells of Bhikkhunī Soma, who was meditating one day in the forest. Māra, the embodiment of evil, appears, and with the intention of making her lose her meditative concentration, says:

That state so hard to achieve  
that is to be attained by the seers  
cannot be attained by a woman  
with her two-fingered wisdom.<sup>61</sup>

Bhikkhunī Soma immediately recognized that it was Māra who was trying to make her afraid, lose self-confidence, and fall away from her concentration. She firmly replied:

What does womanhood matter at all  
when the mind is concentrated well,  
when knowledge flows on steadily  
as one sees correctly into the Dhamma?

One to whom it might occur,  
“I’m a woman” or “I’m a man”  
or “I’m anything at all”  
is fit for Māra to address.

In this instance “knowledge” refers to the knowledge of the four truths in the continuum of an arahant. As an arahant Bhikkhunī Soma had eradicated all defilements preventing liberation. Only someone who adheres to craving, conceit, and views—the defilements that lie behind false conceptualizations—is a receptive audience for Māra’s rantings. Those with



knowledge and vision do not grasp onto a self or fabricate identities and will not fall prey to Māra. They continue their practice and virtuous activities undaunted.

### *Interfaith*

Buddhists should try to create friendly and respectful relations with people of other faiths. For me, Buddhism is the best and it suits me perfectly. But it is not necessarily the best for everyone. Therefore I accept and respect all religious traditions.

Jains, Buddhists, and one branch of Hindu Sāṃkhyas do not believe in a creator God, while Jews, Christians, and Muslims do. If we look only at this, we see a big difference among religions. However, the purpose of the religious theories of no-God and of God is the same: to make better human beings. Human minds are so varied and different that one philosophy cannot suit them all. Many philosophies are needed to suit the many kinds of mentality.

All great religious leaders endeavor to lead their followers away from selfishness, anger, and greed. All emphasize relinquishing violence and rampant materialism. By understanding their common function and aim, we will see that the superficial differences in religious theology are due to differences in the spiritual needs of people in a particular place at that time. Knowing this, we can avoid sectarianism, partisanship, and disparaging any authentic religious teaching.

This variety in religions is a blessing, not a difficulty. Just as there is a tremendous variety of food, giving each person the opportunity to eat what suits their taste and constitution, the great variety in religion enables each person to choose the belief system most suitable for them. Trying to make everyone accept the same religion is impossible and would not be beneficial.

Some people find it more comfortable to believe in a creator. Being a God-fearing person, they are disciplined and careful in their actions. This approach benefits these people. Other people may be more conscientious regarding their motivations and behavior when they believe that the responsibility lies with them. Both of these approaches share the same purpose in encouraging people to live ethically and be kind to each other.

My Christian and Muslim friends weep with faith when they pray to

God, and their lives are devoted to service to others. I appreciate my Christian brothers and sisters who make great effort to educate others. Hindus also work in education and healthcare. Their selfless effort to help others is due to devotion to God. People of other religions who practice sincerely create good karma and will have good future lives. Virtuous actions alone will not lead to nirvāṇa, however, because that depends on realizing selflessness.

Although some individuals may misinterpret the teachings of their own religion or use religion to incite hostility, I have never encountered true religious teachings that preach hatred and violence. We should abandon all such actions in the name of religion.

Many centuries ago Buddhists suffered under Muslim invaders in India, but now the Muslims in Bodhgaya help the Buddhist pilgrims there. Each year when I go to Bodhgaya, they invite me and we share food. Sincere Muslim practitioners are very good human beings. It is important that we remember this and not generalize about all people of a certain faith based on the harmful actions of a few who misuse their religion to justify their destructive actions.

Although all religions have a similar purpose and similar values, we must not blur the distinctions. We do not need to say that our beliefs are the same in order to get along. We can note and respect the differences, knowing that due to the diversity of religions everyone will be able to find a faith that suits them.

In our interfaith discussions, investigating the meaning of words and concepts is important. Sometimes we hastily conclude that because the words are the same, their meaning is also. The meaning of “blessing,” for example, is not the same in Buddhism as in theistic religions. Conversely, we may think that because traditions use different vocabulary, their meanings are unrelated, although that may not be the case.

More contact and communication among religious leaders as well as among their followers are needed to promote mutual understanding and harmony. I suggest four activities in this regard. First, religious and theological scholars should meet to discuss points of similarity and difference among faiths. This will promote awareness of the similar purposes of all religions and respect for their doctrinal differences. At an interfaith meeting in Australia, a Christian introduced me and concluded by saying, “The Dalai

Lama is a very good Christian practitioner.” When I spoke, I thanked him for his kind words and commented that he was a good Buddhist.

In addition, practitioners of various faiths should meet to talk, pray, and meditate together. This will bring deeper experiences that lead to seeing the value of other religions. Furthermore, people can go on pilgrimages together, not as tourists but to visit and pray together at the holy places of different religions. In this way, they will experientially realize the value of other religions.

Last, religious leaders should come together to pray and speak about remedying problems in the world and allow the media to cover the event. When citizens of the world see religious leaders working harmoniously together, they will feel more hopeful and will become more tolerant themselves.

Bishop Tutu, whom I admire greatly, suggested a fifth practice: religions should speak in a united voice on issues of global concern such as wealth inequality, human rights, the environment, and disarmament. I support this as well.

An important element in religious harmony is mutual respect, which entails refraining from aggressive attempts at conversion. As mentioned in chapter 1, when I give lectures on Buddhist topics in the West, I tell people that they should follow their family religion unless it does not suit their needs. The same is true in countries that have traditionally been Buddhist: the people there should remain Buddhist unless it does not suit them. In Mongolia, China, Korea, and some other Buddhist countries, Christian missionaries have strongly promoted their religion. I heard that in Mongolia some churches give people fifty dollars when they convert. Some Mongolians are apparently quite savvy and get baptized multiple times!

Sometimes it is necessary to say frankly to others that their attempts to convert others are harmful. It causes friction in families, especially when one family member converts and then pressures others to do the same. On one occasion some missionaries came to see me, and I candidly told them not to try to convert people in traditionally Buddhist countries because it creates discord and confusion in society. Once, some Mormons invited me to their headquarters and arranged for me to give a public talk in Salt Lake City. Here too I frankly said, “Doing missionary work among people who do not follow a religion with a philosophical basis is fine, especially if they perform animal sacrifices or other harmful practices. However, in

places where the population follows their own traditional religion that has an ethical and philosophical basis, it is not good to proselytize. Maintaining harmony in society is far more important.”

### *Incorporating Practices from Other Religions*

Changing religion is a serious matter that should not be taken lightly. Some people prefer to follow the religion of their birth yet find it helpful to incorporate certain methods from other traditions into their own spiritual practice. While remaining deeply committed to their own faith, some of my Christian friends practice techniques for cultivating meditative concentration that they learned from Buddhism. They also use methods such as visualizations that enhance compassion and meditations to strengthen fortitude and forgiveness. This does not interfere with their refuge in God.

Similarly, Buddhists may learn and incorporate some aspects of Christian teachings into their own practice. One clear example is in the area of community work. Christian monastics have a long history of social work, particularly in education and healthcare, areas in which the Buddhist community lags behind. One of my friends, a German Buddhist, told me after he visited Nepal, that over the last forty or fifty years Tibetan lamas have constructed many large monasteries. However, they have built very few hospitals and schools for the public. He observed that if Christians had constructed new monasteries, they would include schools and hospitals for the general population. In response to his observation, we Buddhists can only hang our heads and agree that he is right.

Some of my Christian friends have taken serious interest in the Buddhist philosophy of emptiness. I have told them that since the theory of emptiness is unique to Buddhism, it may not be wise for them to look into it deeply. Doing so may cause difficulties in their Christian practice, because if they pursue the theory of emptiness and dependent arising that underlies the Buddhist worldview, it challenges the worldview founded upon belief in an absolute, independent, eternal creator. Adopting the Buddhist idea of emptiness would harm their deep faith in God, and this would not benefit them.

When we are beginning spiritual practitioners, it is good to develop a

sense of reverence for the teachers of all religious traditions. At the beginning of our spiritual path, we can be both a practicing Buddhist and a practicing Christian or Jew. However, as we go further into spiritual practice, we reach a point where we need to accept one philosophical view and deepen our understanding of that. This is similar to new university students benefiting from studying many subjects but at a later point choosing to major in one.

From the viewpoint of an individual who is going deeper into their spiritual path, practicing one religion is important. However, from the perspective of society at large, it is important to adhere to the principle of many religions and many truths. At first glance, these two concepts—one truth, one religion versus many truths, many religions—seem contradictory. However, if we examine them carefully, we see that each is correct in its own context. From the perspective of an individual spiritual practitioner, the concept of one truth and one religion is valid. From the viewpoint of wider society, the concept of many truths and many religions is cogent. There is no contradiction. Truth must be understood and defined in relation to the context. Even within one religion, such as Buddhism, we speak of two truths, veil and ultimate.

### *A Nonsectarian Approach*

In the past, sectarianism has created many problems and harmed both individuals and the Buddhist community. It arose mainly due to lack of personal contact among practitioners of different Buddhist traditions, leading to lack of correct information about each other's doctrine and practices. Unfortunately, in recent years it has spread to international practitioners and Dharma centers as well. Now, with better means of transportation and communication, practitioners from diverse traditions can learn about each other and meet together easily.

Sectarianism can take many forms. Sometimes it is motivated by jealousy or conceit. Other times it is done with “compassion,” telling students that they will get confused if they go to other teachings or that other traditions are preliminaries to their own, higher tradition. Sometimes sectarianism arises due to ignorance in which someone believes he understands another system but in fact does not comprehend it correctly. Some people are

prejudiced against other traditions or teachers due to a misdirected sense of loyalty to their own teacher or tradition.

Misunderstandings that lead to sectarianism may arise when comments made in relation to a specific individual are generalized for everyone at all times. Milarepa's demeaning remarks about scholars were the former. He was speaking about specific people who lived at that time and did not mean that all scholars did not practice purely or that being a scholar was worthless. If people misunderstand and think that all study of the scriptures is a waste of time, that will create friction between Buddhists who study a lot and those who don't, harm the existence of the Buddhadharma in the world, and inhibit individuals who want to learn.

The only solution to sectarianism is to study and practice other Buddhist traditions in addition to our own and to develop a broad understanding of all of the Buddha's teachings. Instead of identifying with a specific tradition, we should consider ourselves simply Buddhists; after all, when we take refuge it is in the same Three Jewels, not in a specific Buddhist tradition or teacher. You may still principally follow one Buddhist tradition, but when you need clarification in specific areas, learn the details from whichever tradition gives the fullest presentation of that point and incorporate that explanation into your practice.

In the past, especially in the late nineteenth century in Tibet and now in India as well, many Tibetan masters in principle were nonsectarian. Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche, his main teacher Khyentse Chokyi Lodro, and his main disciple Trulshik Rinpoche were all nonsectarian. They belonged to the Nyingma tradition, but from the time they were young, they received teachings from many different spiritual mentors. In the 1940s, a Geluk lama in Amdo invited Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche to his area to give teachings, and Rinpoche also received teachings from this Geluk lama.

The previous Dalai Lamas have practiced in multiple lineages. According to their biographies, the first three Dalai Lamas were basically Geluk but had a nonsectarian approach and received teachings from all traditions. The Fifth Dalai Lama received teachings from Sakya and Nyingma teachers, although not as many from Kagyu masters. The Seventh Dalai Lama did not have much connection with Nyingma or Sakya, and the Thirteenth Dalai Lama was in principle nonsectarian. He received Nyingma teachings as well as Geluk and included in his writings is a text about Vajrakilaya, a deity cen-

tral to the Nyingma tradition. One of my debate teachers, Lodro Chonyi from Mongolia, was a great scholar and good practitioner. His main teacher also practiced Nyingma, principally Hayagrīva. He told Lodro Chonyi that the Thirteenth Dalai Lama mainly practiced two deities: Yamāntaka and Vajrakīlaya.

When I was young, I was a strict Gelukpa but later became nonsectarian. One reason I recommended that people not worship the spirit Shugden is because I value the nonsectarian approach and the freedom to receive teachings from various spiritual mentors, and this spirit is opposed to this. My understanding of clear light has been greatly enhanced by hearing teachings on Dzogchen and Mahāmudrā in addition to Tsongkhapa's explanation of the different levels of mind. Now I read texts of all traditions; studying explanations on the same topic from different perspectives helps me immensely to gain a fuller understanding. In these days when the Buddhadharma is degenerating, nonsectarianism is essential. Quarreling and fighting in the name of religion is foolish and wrong.

According to practitioners, the various explanations of a topic come to one point. For example, in Dzogchen, sometimes you meditate on emptiness as an affirming negative as taught in the text of a great scholar who has actual meditation experience. Although emptiness is a nonaffirming negative, due to this specific way of practice, it may be useful to see it as an affirming negative.<sup>62</sup> Knowing these different perspectives is helpful; one day we'll know for ourselves through our own experience.

Once an elderly monk requested me to teach bodhicitta according to a Kagyu text. I was not familiar with the text. Unable to fulfill his wish, I felt sad. Unfortunately, not many Tibetan lamas can teach all four Tibetan traditions. I hope in the future that both Tibetan and Western practitioners will remedy this. More knowledge about each other's tradition enriches our own practice. Practitioners should have as broad a perspective as possible, without being scattered or confused by the multiplicity.

Furthermore, Tibetan contact with the Zen, Pure Land, and Theravāda traditions has not been adequate. During the years I've lived in exile, my relationship with the Pope and other Christian leaders has seemed closer than that with Theravāda, Zen, and Pure Land masters. On a personal level, I would like to have more contact with other Buddhists, and for the good of Buddhism in the world, I would like all the Buddhist traditions to be closer.

One reason for writing *Buddhism: One Teacher, Many Traditions* was to give Buddhists from all traditions accurate information about one another's doctrine and practices. In doing so, it becomes clear that the foundation for all our traditions is the same. We take refuge in the same Three Jewels, we see the world through the perspective of the four truths of the āryas, and we all practice the three higher trainings and cultivate love, compassion, joy, and equanimity. All Buddhist traditions speak of selflessness and dependent arising. Although we may approach some of these topics from different perspectives, that is no reason to criticize one another.

Within Tibetan Buddhism, we find scholars refuting one another's position. We should examine why they are doing this and the reasons they use to support their positions. If we do not agree, we can respond with reasons backing our understanding. Doing this furthers our own and the other's understanding and is not disrespectful. When debating the view in *Recognizing the Mother*, Changkya Rolpai Dorje says, "I am not disrespecting you. Please pardon me if you are offended." Debating ideas is different from being arrogant regarding our own tradition and denigrating others. While we may disagree with others, it is important to respect them and their traditions.

Coming together as disciples of the same Teacher, we Buddhists will have closer relationships. We could speak with a common voice about difficult social and environmental issues and promote nonviolence and tolerance. This would definitely please the Buddha and benefit all sentient beings.



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## Notes

1. That is, the object is reflected in the mind. It is similar to, but not the same as, the image of an object forming on the retina when the visual consciousness sees it. Seeing the aspect—the representation—is the meaning of seeing the object.
2. *Duḥkha* (P. *dukkha*) is often translated as “suffering,” but this translation is misleading. Its meaning is more nuanced and refers to all unsatisfactory states and experiences, many of which are not explicitly painful. While the Buddha says that life under the influence of afflictions and polluted karma is unsatisfactory, he does not say that life is suffering.
3. The Sanskrit term *āsrava* is translated as “polluted,” “contaminated,” or “tainted,” meaning under the influence of ignorance or its latencies.
4. In this context, “self” does not mean a person but refers to inherent, independent, or true existence. “Selflessness” is the absence of independent existence, not the absence of a person.
5. The term *clear light* has different meanings depending on the context. It may also refer to the emptiness of inherent existence or to the subtlest mind.
6. Hereafter this title is shortened to *Commentary on Reliable Cognition*.
7. See Russell Kolts and Thubten Chodron, *An Open-Hearted Life* (Boston: Shambhala, 2014) for an in-depth explanation of working with disturbing emotions and cultivating beneficial communication skills.
8. Theravāda Buddhists place the Buddha as living 563–483 BCE, while many people following the Sanskrit tradition often date the Buddha as living 448–368 BCE. Having analyzed traditional historical records from a different angle, Richard Gombrich, professor of Sanskrit at Oxford University, has placed the Buddha’s life at 485–404 BCE. “Dating the Buddha: A Red Herring Revealed,” in *The Dating of the Historical Buddha*, vol. 2, ed. Heinz Bechert (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1992), 237–59.
9. This word is the root of the title *bhante*.
10. This date is according to the old way of dating the Buddha’s life. According to the dates Gombrich proposed for the Buddha’s life, this requires revision.
11. Some academic scholars say the Mūlasarvāstivāda school was located in Mathurā

in northern India and may have later moved to Kashmir, and from there to Tibet, where its vinaya became the dominant monastic code.

12. Some say Paisācī is a literary, but not spoken, Prakrit. Others say it was an early name for Pāli.
13. Many modern scholars believe that the Vaibhāṣikas were a branch of the Sarvāstivāda because the Vaibhāṣikas' main text, the *Mahāvibhāṣā* (*Great Detailed Explanation*), is a commentary on the final book of the Sarvāstivāda Abhidharma, the *Foundation of Knowledge* (*Jñānaprasthāna*). For a few versions of the eighteen schools, see Jeffrey Hopkins, *Meditation on Emptiness* (Boston: Wisdom, 1996), 713–19.
14. Steven Collins, "On the Very Idea of the Pāli Canon," *Journal of the Pāli Text Society* 15 (1990): 89–126.
15. Jonathan Walters, "Mahāyāna Theravāda and the Origins of the Mahāvihāra," *The Sri Lankan Journal of the Humanities* 23.1–2 (Sri Lanka: University of Peradeniya, 1997).
16. Correspondence from Bhikkhu Bodhi to Bhikṣuṇī Jampa Tsedroen, February 21, 2010: "Theravāda refers to a modern school of Buddhism which derives from the old Sthaviravāda, but the latter has a much longer history and is the source of many of the old Indian schools that did not survive...it would be misleading to simply assume that Theravāda is identical with Sthaviravāda and the latter simply a Sanskritized form signifying exactly what the former means.  
 "I also don't think it is suitable to identify Theravādins as Mahāvihārāns. The latter term was meaningful during the period in Sri Lanka when the schools of Buddhism were named after the vihāras (monasteries) where they were centered. In that era, Mahāvihārāns referred to those based at the Mahāvihāra in Anurādhapura. They were distinguished by their particular attitude toward Buddhist texts and methods of interpretation, preserved in the Pāli commentaries. But nowadays all that is left of the Mahāvihāra are its ruins...and what we call Theravāda has evolved in more complex ways than the old Mahāvihārāns could ever have foreseen."
17. Peter Skilling, "Theravāda in History," in *Pacific World: Journal of the Institute of Buddhist Studies* 3.11 (Fall 2009): 72.
18. Walters, "Mahāyāna Theravāda and the Origins of the Mahāvihāra."
19. Collins, "On the Very Idea of the Pāli Canon."
20. Walters, "Mahāyāna Theravāda."
21. One is a Mahāyāna sūtra from Pakistan dated to the first or second century CE. There is also a Prajñāpāramitā (Perfection of Wisdom) manuscript from Gandhāra from the first century CE. The content of another Prajñāpāramitā sūtra in Prakrit dating from the first century BCE affirms it was already well-developed literature. Also see the work of Dr. Richard Salomon and the Early Buddhist Manuscript Project. Several Mahāyāna manuscripts written in Gāndhārī date from the first or second century CE.
22. Some historians place Aśoka in the fourth century, while others say his life spanned from the latter fourth century through the first quarter of the fifth century.
23. Peter Skilling, "Vaidalya, Mahāyāna, and Bodhisattva in India," in *The Bodhisattva Ideal: Essays on the Emergence of the Mahāyāna* (Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 2013), 151–178.

24. The Kangyur was translated into Mongolian in the seventeenth century, the Tengyur in the eighteenth century.
25. Three additional scriptures are found only in the Burmese canon, including the *Questions of King Milinda* (Milindapañha), a dialogue between the monk Nāgasena and the Gandhāran king Menander.
26. Nanjio, Bunyiu, *A Catalogue of the Chinese Translation of the Buddhist Tripiṭaka, the Sacred Canon of the Buddhists in China and Japan* (San Francisco, Chinese Materials Central, Inc., 1975). This contains a complete list of contents of the Chinese Tripiṭaka and specifies if each title has a Tibetan version.
27. The information in the above three paragraphs was provided by Dr. Lobsang Dorjee Rabling from the Central University of Tibetan Studies in Sarnath in personal correspondence.
28. The five works attributed to Maitreya in the Chinese canon are: *Treatise on the Stages of Yogic Practice* (*Yogācārabhūmi*), which the Tibetan canon attributes to Asaṅga; the *Ornament of Mahāyāna Sūtras* (*Mahāyānasūtrālaṃkāra*); *Middle Beyond Extremes* (*Madhyāntavibhāga*); a commentary on the *Diamond Sūtra* (*Vajracchedikā Sūtra*); and *Yogavibhāga*, which is reputed to be lost. In the Tibetan canon the five works of Maitreya are *Ornament of Mahāyāna Sūtras*, *Middle Beyond Extremes*, *Distinction Between Phenomena and Their Nature* (*Dharmadharmatāvibhāga*), *Ornament of Clear Realizations*, and *Sublime Continuum* (*Uttaratantra* or *Ratnagotravibhāga*). The last two works appeared in India a few centuries after the death of Asaṅga, and Xuanzang never mentioned them in his collection of Indian Yogācāra texts nor did he attribute them to either Maitreya or Asaṅga. The Chinese say the *Uttaratantra Śāstra* was authored by Sāramati or Sthiramati.
29. The Vaibhāṣikas say the Buddha spoke the Abhidharma in many places and it was later compiled by others.
30. The seven in the Pāli canon are the: (1) *Dhammasaṅgaṇi* (*Enumeration of Factors*), which lists the various factors, or *dhammas*, of existence; (2) *Vibhaṅga* (*Analysis*), which explains the aggregates, sense sources, elements, truths, faculties, dependent arising, establishments of mindfulness, awakening, *jhānas*, four immeasurables, noble eightfold path, types of knowledge, and cosmology, among other topics; (3) *Dhātukathā* (*Discussion of Elements*), which discusses phenomena in relation to the aggregates, sense sources, and constituents; (4) *Puggalapaññatti* (*Descriptions of Individuals*), which describes the various kinds of persons; (5) *Kāthavatthu* (*Points of Controversy*), which is a discussion of differing perspectives; (6) *Yamaka* (*The Pairs*), which resolves misconceptions related to technical terminology; and (7) *Paṭṭhāna* (*Foundational Conditions or Relations*), which speaks of the relationship of all phenomena. The *Kāthavatthu* is said to have been written by Moggaliputta Tissa in the third century BCE.
31. Yaśomitra lists the seven Sanskrit treatises as the *Attainment of Knowledge* (*Jñānaprasthāna*) by Kātyāyanīputra, *Topic Divisions* (*Prakaranaṇapāda*) by Vasu-mitra, *Compendium of Consciousness* (*Vijñānakāya*) by Devaśarman, *Aggregate of Dharma* (*Dharmaskandha*) by Śāriputra, *Treatise on Designation* (*Prajñaptiśāstra*) by Maudgalyāyana, *Combined Recitation* (*Samgītiparyāya*) by Mahākauṣṭhila, and the *Compendium of Elements* (*Dhātukāya*) by Pūrṇa.

32. This is one of the oldest Abhidharma texts, now extant only in Chinese. There are varying opinions regarding which of the eighteen schools it is from.
33. The *Treasury of Knowledge* has eight chapters: examinations of the elements; faculties; world (the cosmos and the sentient beings abiding in it); karma; pollutants; paths and persons; exalted wisdom; and meditative absorptions. Vasubandhu's autocommentary on this text has a ninth chapter, which presents the Sautrāntika viewpoint.
34. Tibetans consider Aśaṅga as being a Mādhyamika but explaining the Dharma according to the Cittamātra view for the benefit of people inclined to that view. His brother, Vasubandhu, held the Cittamātra view but wrote some texts according to the Vaibhāṣika and Sautrāntika tenets to benefit people who appreciated those views.
35. Interestingly, in the Tibetan canon, the *Bhaiṣajyaguru* is in the tantra section of the Kangyur, while the *Sukhāvativyūha* is in the sūtra section.
36. There are divergent opinions among modern scholars regarding the tenet systems, when and where they flourished, the details of their philosophical positions, and to what extent the tenets were systematized in India before arriving in Tibet.
37. Scholars do not know when writing first became popular in India and have diverse theories about this, but by the time of King Aśoka in the third century BCE, writing was widespread. The Indus Valley civilization used writing since 2000 BCE, and some scholars believe that the Brahmi script used in Aśoka's time descended from it. K. R. Norman, *Buddhist Forum Volume V: Philological Approach to Buddhism* (London: School of Oriental and African Studies, 1997), 78. Norman also comments (p. 81) that it would be surprising if monks from the ruling and merchant castes, who were familiar with writing by the time of Aśoka in the third century BCE, did not write down, if not whole texts, then at least notes that would be helpful for their own practice and for teaching others.
38. It is wise to investigate all spiritual claims and not naively accept them. Some people misinterpret experiences they have in meditation.
39. See Khensur Jampa Tegchok, *Practical Ethics and Profound Emptiness* (Boston: Wisdom, 2017), verses 367–93.
40. John Benedict Buescher, *The Buddhist Doctrine of Two Truths in the Vaibhāṣika and Theravāda Schools*, PhD dissertation (University of Virginia, 1982), 44. His footnote on the citation credits a translation published by the Pali Text Society and reads, "P. Maung Tin, *The Expositor*, pp. 5ff. The scriptural precedent that Buddhaghosa gives for this is an incident in the Madhupiṇḍika Sutta."
41. The Tibetan titles of these texts are respectively *Sems nyid ngal gso*, *Shing rta chen po*, *Kun bzang bla ma'i zhal lung*, *Thar pa rin po che'i rgyan*, *Thub pa'i dgongs gsal*, and *Lam rim chen mo*.
42. The seventeen Nālandā adepts are Nāgārjuna, Āryadeva, Buddhapālita, Bhāvaviveka, Candrakīrti, Śāntideva, Śāntarakṣita, Kamalaśīla, Aśaṅga, Vasubandhu, Dignāga, Dharmakīrti, Vimuktisena, Haribhadra, Guṇaprabha, Śākyaprabha, and Atiśa.
43. These are being generous and giving material aid, speaking pleasantly by teaching

- the Dharma to others according to their dispositions, encouraging them to practice, and living the teachings through example.
44. The above outline of the topics pertaining to each level of spiritual development may differ slightly according to the presentation. For example, meditation on the law of karma and its effects is included in the path in common with the initial level of spiritual development in the lamrim, but in the presentation in the three principal aspects of the path, it is subsumed in the practice in common with the person of medium spiritual development.
  45. *Mind Training*, trans. Thupten Jinpa (Boston: Wisdom, 2006), 517.
  46. The eight clear realizations are exalted knower of all aspects (omniscient mind), knower of paths, knower of bases, complete application of all aspects, peak application, serial application, momentary application, and the resultant truth body (dharmakāya).
  47. The ten points that characterize the exalted knower of all aspects are mind generation (bodhicitta), spiritual instructions, four branches of definite discrimination, natural abiding lineage that is the basis of Mahāyāna attainments (buddha potential), the observed object of Mahāyāna attainment, the objective of practice, attainment through the armor-like practice, attainment through engagement, attainment through the collections, and definite emergence.
  48. The Kadam great text tradition (*gzhung*) principally studied six Indian texts: Āryaśūra's *Garland of Jātaka Tales (Jātakamālā)* and the *Collection of Aphorisms (Udānavarga)* to cultivate devotion and take refuge; Asaṅga's *Bodhisattva Grounds (Bodhisattvabhūmi)* and Maitreya's *Ornament of Mahāyāna Sūtras* to learn meditation and the bodhisattva paths and stages; and Śāntideva's *Engaging in the Bodhisattvas' Deeds* and his *Compendium of Instructions (Śikṣāsamuccaya)* to learn the bodhisattva practices. From another perspective, the first two texts are studied in order to learn and observe karma and its effects, the second two to cultivate bodhicitta, and the last two to understand the correct view and realize emptiness. In addition to Potowa's great text tradition, there are two other Kadam traditions: the stages of the path tradition and the pith instructions tradition. The former principally studied lamrim texts, while the latter relied heavily on practice manuals and the oral instructions of their teacher.
  49. Pith instructions (*man ngag*) and "ear-whispered" teachings (*snyan brgyud*) are types of oral instructions (*gdams ngag*) transmitted directly from teacher to student, though this style of advice now forms its own genre of texts. These teachings tend to be concise and practical, pointing to the heart of the practice and the nature of the mind. Such teachings are present in all the Tibetan Buddhist lineages but are more explicitly central to the Nyingma and Kagyu schools.
  50. Gavin Kilty, trans., *Splendor of an Autumn Moon: The Devotional Verse of Tsongkhapa* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2001), 231–33.
  51. Thupten Jinpa, trans., <http://www.tibetanclassics.org/html-assets/In%20Praise%20of%20Dependent%20Origination.pdf>.
  52. Access concentration is the level of concentration attained with serenity; full concentration is deeper.

53. The five paths and ten bodhisattva grounds are stages that demarcate a bodhisattva's step-by-step journey to full awakening. On the first two paths—the paths of accumulation and preparation—one creates the causes to realize emptiness directly on the third path, the path of seeing. The ten grounds commence at the path of seeing and occur concurrently with the next path—the path of meditation—until the attainment of the path of no-more-learning, buddhahood.
54. Guy Newland, *Introduction to Emptiness* (Ithaca NY: Snow Lion, 2008), 112.
55. See the *Seven-Point Mind Training* by Geshe Chekawa and *Mind Training Like Rays of the Sun* by Nam-kha Pel.
56. Tibetans pronounce this *Om ah ra pa tsa na dhi*.
57. Thupten Jinpa, trans., *Wisdom of the Kadam Masters* (Boston: Wisdom, 2013), 5.
58. Thubten Chodron: In 1984 or 85 I visited Montserrat and together with two or three other nuns, I went to visit this monk at his hermitage in the mountain. We arrived unannounced, and he invited us in. On his altar was a long white *khatak* (Tibetan ceremonial scarf) and a picture of Avalokiteśvara that His Holiness had given him. As the sunlight streamed in and lit up his altar, he invited us to meditate with him. We did and after some time quietly departed. That same exceptional look in his eyes that His Holiness had noticed was still there.
59. Khunu Lama Rinpoche Tenzin Gyalsten (1894/95–1977) was born Kinnaur, India, studied in Tibet, and in the late 1950s went to Varanasi, where he was based for the remainder of his life. A story that illustrates the depth of his practice: in the mid-1970s some Westerners went to meet him and asked if he needed anything. He said, “No, I have all I need because I have bodhicitta.” The next day he sent a one-rupee offering to each of the Westerners.
60. These are the *Prātimokṣa Sūtra*, *Vinayasūtra* by Guṇaprabha, *Treasury of Knowledge* by Vasubandhu, *Compendium of Knowledge* by Asaṅga, *Treatise on the Middle Way* by Nāgārjuna, *Four Hundred* by Āryadeva, *Supplement to the Middle Way* by Candrakīrti, *Engaging in the Bodhisattvas' Deeds* by Śāntideva, and Maitreya's five treatises.
61. “Two-fingered” indicates a woman's wisdom, because as the cook in a household, she tests the rice between two fingers to see if it is cooked. She also cuts thread while holding the ball of cotton between two fingers.
62. As a nonaffirming negative, emptiness is the absence of inherent existence; it doesn't establish anything positive. An affirming negative will negate one thing while establishing another. “The emptiness of the mind” negates inherent existence in terms of the mind. “The mind's emptiness” establishes the mind as having the attribute of emptiness.

## Glossary

*Abhayagiri*. An early Buddhist monastery in Sri Lanka that was rooted in the teachings of early Buddhism and influenced by the Mahāyāna and later tantric teachings; a sect with that name.

*Abhidharma*. The branch of the Buddhist teachings dealing with wisdom that contains detailed analysis of phenomena; one of the three collections in the Tripiṭaka.

*absolutism*. Believing that phenomena exist inherently.

*access concentration*. The level of concentration attained with serenity.

*affirming negative*. A negation that implies something else.

*afflictions (kleśa)*. Mental factors such as disturbing emotions and incorrect views that disturb the tranquility of the mind.

*afflictive obscurations (kleśāvaraṇa)*. Obscurations that mainly prevent liberation; afflictions, their seeds, and polluted karma.

*Āgamas*. The anthologies of scriptures in the Chinese canon that correspond to four of the five Nikāyas in the Pāli canon.

*aggregates (skandha)*. (1) The four or five components of a living being: body (except for beings born in the formless realm), feelings, discriminations, miscellaneous factors, and consciousnesses. (2) In general, the aggregates are a way to categorize all impermanent things. Here form includes the five sense objects, their five cognitive faculties, and forms for mental consciousness.



*analytical meditation (vicārabhāvanā, T. dpyad sgom)*. Meditation for comprehending an object.

*arhat*. Someone who has eradicated all afflictive obscurations and is liberated from saṃsāra.

*ārya*. Someone who has directly and nonconceptually realized the emptiness of inherent existence.

*basis of designation*. The collection of parts or factors in dependence on which an object is designated.

*bhāṅakas*. A group of monastics whose duty it was to memorize and recite the scriptures.

*bhikṣu* and *bhikṣuṇī*. Fully ordained monk and nun.

*bodhicitta*. A primary mental consciousness induced by an aspiration to bring about others' welfare and accompanied by an aspiration to attain full awakening oneself. This is conventional bodhicitta. *See also* ultimate bodhicitta.

*bodhisattva*. Someone who has generated the spontaneous wish to attain buddhahood for the benefit of all sentient beings.

*bodhisattva ground (bodhisattvabhūmi)*. A consciousness characterized by wisdom and compassion in the continuum of an ārya bodhisattva. It is the basis of development of good qualities and the basis for the eradication of ignorance and mistaken appearances.

*cessation (nirodha)*. The cessation of afflictions, their seeds, and the polluted karma that produces rebirth in cyclic existence; liberation.

*clear light*. A mind that has always been and will continue to be pure; emptiness.

*cognitive obscurations (jñeyāvaraṇa)*. Obscurations that mainly prevent full awakening; the latencies of ignorance and the subtle dualistic view that they give rise to. *See also* afflictive obscurations.

*collection of merit*. A bodhisattva's practice of the method aspect of the path that accumulates merit.

*compassion (karuṇā)*. The wish for sentient beings to be free from all duḥkha and its causes.

*conceptual appearance.* A mental image of an object that appears to a conceptual consciousness.

*consciousness (jñāna).* That which is clear and cognizant.

*conventional existence.* Existence.

*corrupted intelligence.* An analytical mental factor that reaches an incorrect conclusion.

*cyclic existence.* See saṃsāra.

*ḍākinī.* A highly realized female tantric practitioner.

*definitive teachings (nītārtha).* Teachings that speak about the ultimate nature of reality and can be accepted literally (according to the Prāsaṅgikas). See also interpretable/provisional teachings.

*dependent arising (pratīyasamutpāda).* This is of three types (1) causal dependence—things arising due to causes and conditions, (2) mutual dependence—phenomena existing in relation to other phenomena, and (3) dependent designation—phenomena existing by being merely designated by terms and concepts.

*Dhamma.* The Pāli word for Dharma.

*dhāraṇī.* Mantra, a set of syllables expressing a spiritual meaning.

*Dharmaguptaka.* One of the eighteen early schools, whose Vinaya is practiced today in East Asia.

*duḥkha.* Unsatisfactory experiences of cyclic existence, which are of three types: the duḥkha of pain, the duḥkha of change, and the pervasive duḥkha of conditioning; the first truth of the āryas.

*emanation body (nirmāṇakāya).* The buddha body that appears to ordinary sentient beings in order to benefit others.

*emptiness (śūnyatā).* The lack of inherent existence, lack of independent existence.

*enjoyment body (saṃbhogakāya).* The buddha body that appears in the pure lands to teach ārya bodhisattvas.

*evident phenomena.* Phenomena that ordinary beings can perceive with their five senses.

*exalted knower.* A wisdom consciousness that realizes emptiness.

*feeling (vedanā).* One of the five aggregates; the experience of objects as pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral.

*form body (rūpakāya).* The buddha body in which a buddha appears to sentient beings; it includes the emanation and enjoyment bodies.

*four truths of the āryas.* The truth of duḥkha, its origin, its cessation, and the path to that cessation.

*full awakening.* Buddhahood; the state where all obscurations have been abandoned and all good qualities developed limitlessly.

*functional phenomena.* A thing that is produced by causes and conditions and produces an effect.

*fundamental, innate mind of clear light.* The subtlest level of mind.

*Fundamental Vehicle.* The path leading to the liberation of śrāvakas and solitary realizers.

*gāthas.* Short phrases used in the mind-training practice.

*god (deva).* A celestial being who is still born in saṃsāra.

*highest yoga tantra (anuttarayogatantra).* The most advanced of the four classes of tantra.

*ignorance (avidyā).* A mental factor that is obscured and grasps the opposite of what exists. There are two types: ignorance regarding reality that is the root of saṃsāra, and ignorance regarding karma and its effects.

*inferential cognizer (anumāna).* A conceptual mind that ascertains its object by means of a correct reason.

*inherent existence (svabhāva).* Existence without depending on any other factors; independent existence.

*insight (vipaśyanā).* A discerning wisdom conjoined with special pliancy induced by the power of having analyzed one's object within serenity.

*interpretable/provisional teachings (neyārtha).* Teachings that do not speak about the ultimate nature of phenomena and/or teachings that cannot be taken literally. *See also* definitive teachings.

*Jetavana*. An early Buddhist monastery in Sri Lanka that was rooted in the teachings of early Buddhism and influenced by the Mahāyāna and later tantric teachings; a sect with that name.

*karma*. Intentional action.

*lamrim*. Stages of the path to awakening; a text that teaches these based on the explanation of the three levels of practitioners.

*latencies (vāsanā)*. Predispositions, imprints, or tendencies. There are latencies of karma and latencies of afflictions.

*liberation (mokṣa)*. The state of freedom from cyclic existence. *See also* nirvāṇa.

*Mahāvihāra*. A monastery in Sri Lanka many centuries ago, whose teachings became prominent in Sri Lanka and the Theravāda world; a Buddhist sect in Sri Lanka.

*Mahāyāna*. The path to buddhahood; scriptures that describe this; a movement or type of practice within Buddhism that became prominent in India and spread to Central and East Asia.

*meditational deity*. A Buddhist deity that is a buddha or very high bodhisattva that is visualized in certain kinds of meditation.

*meditative equipoise on emptiness*. An ārya's mind focused single-pointedly on the emptiness of inherent existence.

*mental factor (caitta)*. An aspect of a consciousness that apprehends a particular quality of the object or performs a specific cognitive function.

*merit (puṇya)*. Good karma.

*mind (cittajñāna)*. The clear, immaterial, and aware part of living beings that cognizes, experiences, thinks, feels, and so on.

*mind training*. A method to train the mind in conventional and ultimate bodhicitta. Mind training texts consist of short, pithy instructions.

*mindstream*. The continuity of mind.

*monastic*. Someone who has received monastic ordination; a monk or nun.

*Mūlasarvāstivāda.* An early Buddhist school that is a branch of the Sarvāstivāda school; the Vinaya lineage dominant in Tibet.

*Nālandā tradition.* The Buddhist tradition descendant from Nālandā Monastery and other monastic universities in India that flourished from the sixth to the late twelfth century.

*nature truth body (svābhāvīkadharmakāya).* The buddha body that is the emptiness of a buddha's mind and that buddha's true cessations. *See also* truth body.

*nihilism.* Believing that our actions have no ethical dimension; believing that what exists—such as the Three Jewels, four truths, and the law of cause and effect—does not exist.

*nikāya.* (1) A collection of suttas in the Pāli canon, (2) a tradition within Theravāda Buddhism.

*nirvāṇa.* Liberation; the cessation of afflictive obscurations and the rebirth in saṃsāra that they cause.

*nonaffirming negative.* A negation that does not imply something else.

*nonduality.* The non-appearance of subject and object, inherent existence, veil truths, and conceptual appearances in an arya's meditative equipoise on emptiness

*object of negation.* What is negated or refuted.

*Pāli tradition.* The form of Buddhism based on scriptures written in the Pāli language.

*parinirvāṇa.* The Buddha's passing away.

*permanent, unitary, independent self.* A soul or self (*ātman*) asserted by non-Buddhists.

*permanent.* Unchanging moment to moment, static. It does not necessarily mean eternal.

*person (pudgala).* A living being designated in dependence on the four or five aggregates.

*polluted.* Under the influence of ignorance or the latencies of ignorance.

*Prajñāpāramitā.* The perfection of wisdom, which is the topic of a class of Mahāyāna sūtras by this name.

*prātimokṣa.* The different sets of ethical precepts that assist in attaining liberation.

*pure vision teachings.* The teachings stemming from the pure vision of a meditational deity seen by a realized master in meditation.

*reliable cognizer (pramāṇa).* A nondeceptive awareness that is incontrovertible with respect to its apprehended object and that enables us to accomplish our purpose.

*samādhi.* Single-pointed concentration.

*saṃsāra.* The cycle of rebirth that occurs under the control of afflictions and karma.

*Sanskrit tradition.* The form of Buddhism based on scriptures originally written in Sanskrit as well as other Central Asian languages.

*Sarvāstivāda.* One of the prominent early Buddhist schools in northern India.

*scriptural authority.* The authority of a scripture that has met three criteria that deem it reliable.

*self (ātman).* Depending on the context, (1) a person or (2) inherent existence.

*self-centeredness.* (1) In general, the attitude that believes our own happiness is more important than that of all others, (2) the attitude seeking only our own personal liberation.

*self-grasping (ātmagrāha).* The ignorance grasping inherent existence.

*self-sufficient, substantially existent person.* A self that is the controller of the body and mind. Such a self does not exist.

*sentient being (sattva).* Any being with a mind that is not free from pollutants; i.e., a being who is not a buddha. This includes ordinary beings as well as arhats and bodhisattvas.

*serenity (śamatha).* A concentration arising from meditation and accompanied by the bliss of mental and physical pliancy in which the mind

abides effortlessly, without fluctuation, for as long as we wish, on whichever object it has been placed.

*six perfections (sadbhāramitā)*. The practices of generosity, ethical conduct, fortitude, joyous effort, meditative stability, and wisdom that are motivated by bodhicitta and sealed with the wisdom seeing them as both empty and dependent.

*slightly obscure phenomena*. Phenomena that can initially be known only by an inferential cognizer.

*solitary realizer (pratyekabuddha)*. A person following the Fundamental Vehicle who seeks personal liberation and emphasizes understanding the twelve links of dependent arising.

*śrāvaka*. Someone practicing the Fundamental Vehicle leading to arhatship who emphasizes meditation on the four truths of the āryas.

*stabilizing meditation*. Meditation for developing concentration.

*Sthavira*. An early Buddhist school. The Theravāda is said to have descended from it.

*Sūtrayāna*. The path to awakening based on the sūtras.

*sutta*. The Pāli word for sūtra.

*Tantrayāna*. The path to awakening described in the tantras. To practice it one must have a firm understanding of the teachings in the Fundamental Vehicle and the general Mahāyana.

*tathāgata*. A buddha.

*terma*. Treasure teachings; teachings hidden in the environment or revealed as visionary teachings.

*terton*. A Buddhist teacher who discovers a terma.

*Theravāda*. The predominant form of Buddhism practiced today in Sri Lanka, Thailand, Burma, Laos, Cambodia, and so forth.

*thirty-seven aids to awakening (bodhipakṣya-dharma)*. Seven sets of trainings—four establishments of mindfulness, four supreme strivings, four bases of supernormal power, five faculties, five powers, seven awak-

ening factors, and the eightfold noble path—that together lead to the attainment of serenity and insight.

*three higher trainings.* The trainings in ethical conduct, concentration, and wisdom that are practiced within having taken refuge in the Three Jewels and that form the path to liberation.

*Tripitaka.* The Buddha's teachings in three branches: Vinaya, Sūtra, and Abhidharma.

*true cessation.* The cessation of a portion of afflictions or a portion of cognitive obscurations.

*true existence.* Inherent existence (according to the Prāsaṅgika system).

*truth body (dharmakāya).* The buddha body that includes the nature truth body and the wisdom truth body.

*turning the Dharma wheel.* The Buddha giving teachings.

*ultimate bodhicitta.* The wisdom directly realizing emptiness that is supported by conventional bodhicitta. *See also* bodhicitta.

*ultimate truth (paramārthasatya).* The ultimate mode of existence of all persons and phenomena; emptiness.

*unfortunate rebirth.* Rebirth as a hell being, hungry ghost, or animal.

*veil truth (samvṛtisatya).* That which appears true from the perspective of the mind grasping true existence. Also called conventional truth.

*very obscure phenomena.* Phenomena that can be known only by relying on the testimony of a reliable person or a valid scripture.

*view of a personal identity (satkāyadr̥ṣṭi).* Grasping an inherently existent I or mine (according to the Prāsaṅgika system).

*Vinaya.* Monastic discipline; the scriptures that present the monastic discipline.

*wisdom truth body (jnānadharmakāya).* The buddha body that is a buddha's omniscient mind. *See also* truth body.





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Peter Aronson

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# THE FOUNDATION OF BUDDHIST PRACTICE

.....  
The Dalai Lama and Thubten Chodron

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---

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the Fourteenth Dalai Lama  
*and*  
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## Publisher's Acknowledgment

The publisher gratefully acknowledges the generous help of the Hershey Family Foundation in sponsoring the production of this book.

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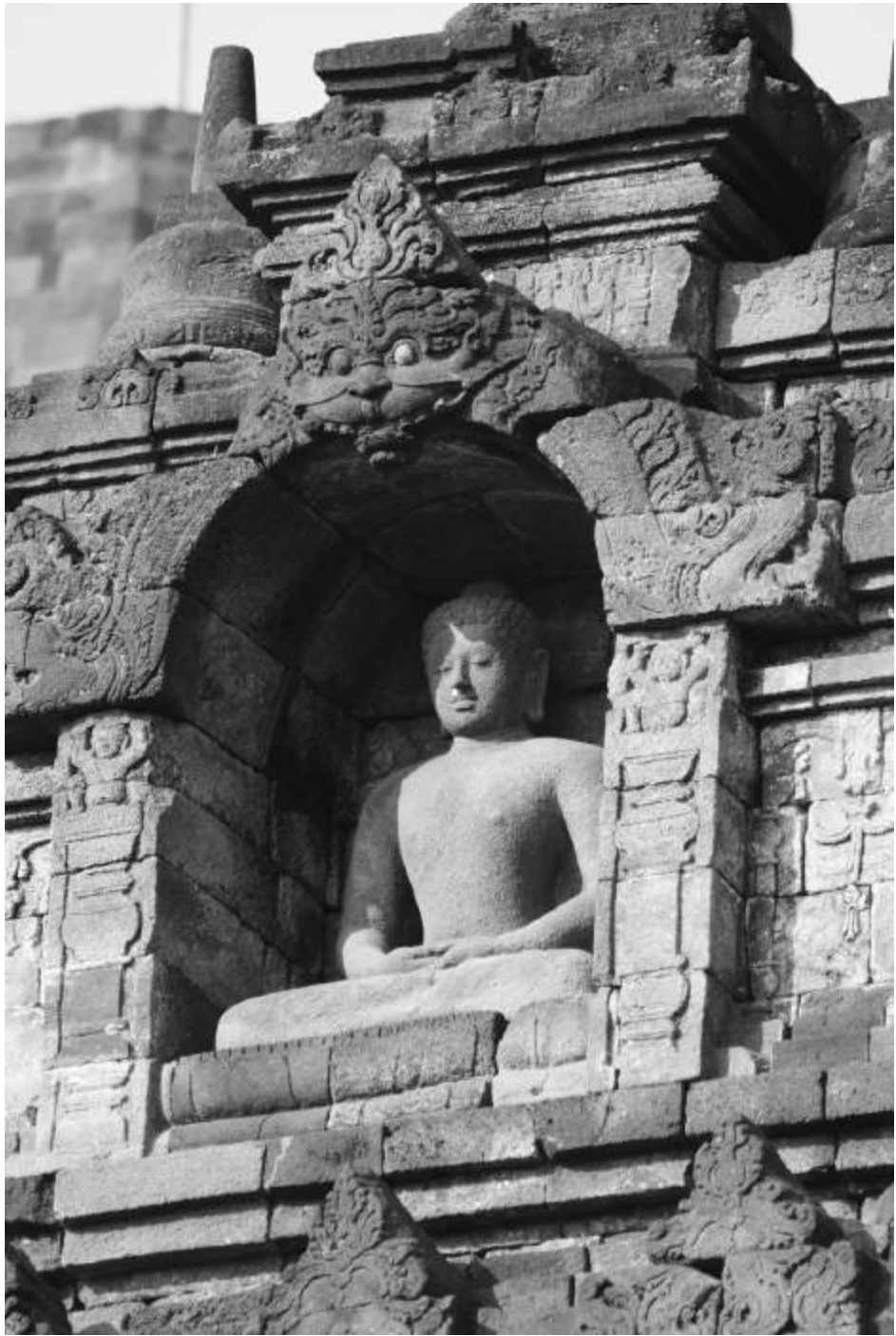
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## Preface

**W**ELCOME TO THE second volume of the Library of Wisdom and Compassion that shares His Holiness the Dalai Lama's compassionate wisdom on how to practice the path to full awakening. The first volume of the Library of Wisdom and Compassion, *Approaching the Buddhist Path*, principally contained introductory material that set the context for Buddhist practice. It gave us a way to approach the Buddha's teachings: to "get our toes wet" without diving in. This volume, which can also be read as an independent book, takes the next step and describes the foundation of Buddhist practice — important topics that will help us to stay focused on what is worthwhile and to build a firm basis on which to establish a healthy Dharma practice.

As an individual who has studied and practiced the Buddhadharma since he was a small child, His Holiness the Dalai Lama is uniquely qualified to share with us what he has learned and how he implements it in his life. Occupying the office of the Dalai Lama, Bhikṣu Tenzin Gyatso is the spiritual leader of the Tibetan people, and until he resigned in 2011 he was also their political leader. From early on, he insisted that Tibetans develop democratic institutions in keeping with modern standards. Once the Central Tibetan Authority was established in Dharamsala, India, with functioning legislative, executive, and judicial branches, he followed his heart's yearning to retire from government service and devote his time to the Buddha's teachings. Looking back on his years as a political leader, he comments that the confluence of spiritual and political power in pre-1959 Tibet was influenced by feudalism. He relinquished the political power of the institution of the Dalai Lama in favor of a democratic government and believes that spiritual and political leadership should be distinct.

His Holiness is nonsectarian in his approach to the Dharma. He is not the leader of the Geluk tradition — that position is held by the Ganden Tripa and is a seven-year appointed position accorded to a former abbot of one of the two Geluk tantric monasteries. His Holiness refers to himself as a

simple Buddhist monk who follows the Nālandā tradition — the teachings of the vibrant Buddhist monastic universities in classical India, one of which was Nālandā.

## *How the Library of Wisdom and Compassion Came About*

As explained more extensively in *Approaching the Buddhist Path*, the first volume in the Library of Wisdom and Compassion, this series grew from the need for a presentation of traditional Buddhist teachings in a new format designed especially for people who did not grow up with knowledge of the Buddha's teachings. This audience — myself included — generally engages with Buddhism using a rational approach. We seek reasoned explanations and examine what we learn to see if it makes sense and is logically consistent. We try it out to see if it works before having faith or calling ourselves Buddhists.

With this in mind, in 1995 I requested His Holiness to write a short text that teachers could use for this purpose. He responded by saying that a larger commentary should be written first and, giving me transcripts of some of his talks, charged me with that task. Since I have been His Holiness's student since 1979, I also had a wealth of notes as well as English translations of many of the texts he has taught. With each new teaching I heard, more was added to the manuscript, and what began as one book quickly turned into a series of volumes. In addition, His Holiness said that he wanted this book to be unique and to include the perspectives of the Pāli and Chinese Buddhist traditions.

Every few years I would meet with His Holiness for a series of interviews to ask him questions that I had accumulated from my own studies and from my friends who were also Western Buddhists. Perhaps because of cultural differences or the way society is now structured, we often have questions and qualms that require in-depth explanations that are not found in the classical Buddhist texts. His Holiness enjoyed these discussions — he would often invite two or three geshe, his brother Ngari Rinpoche (Tenzin Choegyal), and the scholar and former Tibetan prime

minister Samdhong Rinpoche to join us. There were serious philosophical debates and robust laughter during our sessions.

Much of the content of the two chapters on properly relating to a spiritual mentor came from these interviews as well as from gatherings of Western Buddhist teachers with His Holiness in 1993 and 1994, when we spoke frankly with him about difficulties that have arisen as Buddhism spreads in new lands. His Holiness discussed these topics openly and gave practical responses suitable for current issues.

Since the material for this series came from oral teachings, interviews, and written texts, which were translated by various interpreters who had different English translations of technical terms and different speaking and writing styles, one of my tasks as editor was to express the material in a consistent style and standardize the terms. At one point His Holiness insisted that the series be coauthored, although this was not my intent or wish. Although the series follows His Holiness's teachings, I have expanded on certain points that he covered briefly and mentioned some points that were omitted. He has been my spiritual mentor for nearly forty years, so whatever I have written has definitely been shaped by his perspective and guidance. Geshe Dorje Damdul and Geshe Dadul Namgyal also checked the manuscript.

Most of the series is written from the perspective of the Nālandā tradition, which stems from the monastic universities in ancient India, and the Sanskrit tradition in general. There are so many similarities between the Sanskrit tradition and the Pāli tradition of Buddhism that quotations from sūtras and commentaries in the Pāli tradition are freely intertwined in this book. In some places — for example, in the chapters on karma and its effects — some points from the Pāli tradition are added to expand our understanding. This is part of His Holiness's vision of our being twenty-first-century Buddhists with flexible minds who can understand and learn from a variety of perspectives.

His Holiness wants this series to address the spiritual needs of not only Westerners but also people from traditionally Buddhist cultures in Asia and abroad, as well as the younger generations of Tibetans who are English educated.

## *Overview of “The Foundation of Buddhist Practice”*

The “prelude” to the Library of Wisdom and Compassion was *Buddhism: One Teacher, Many Traditions*, which shared the Buddha’s teachings in both the Pāli and Sanskrit traditions, showing the many similarities as well as the different perspectives. In our modern world, it is increasingly important that Buddhists from different traditions and countries learn about one another. In that way we will abandon old misconceptions that divide us and be able to speak as one voice on the Buddha’s principal teachings on nonviolence, love, compassion, ethical conduct, and so forth — values that desperately need to be promulgated to counter the self-centeredness of individuals, groups, and nations.

His Holiness’s teaching style is unique. He respects the intelligence of his audience and is not afraid to introduce profound concepts to beginners. While he does not expect us to understand everything the first time we hear or read it, he urges us to do our best and to come back to the material repeatedly over time and continue to deepen our understanding. He presents the path in a straightforward manner, without exaggerated claims of quick or easy attainments that require minimum effort and commitment, and urges us to exert joyous effort in learning, reflecting on, and meditating on the topics. He earnestly models this effort and commitment in his own life, living simply without any intention to become a celebrity. He also trusts that when we encounter difficult concepts, we will not give up but will persevere, gradually progressing according to our individual ability. By teaching in this way, His Holiness gives us a clear aim and path to get there as he compassionately encourages us to keep going.

The present volume begins with the four seals — basic premises that are accepted by all Buddhist schools — and the two truths, which are the basis of the path. Here we are introduced to key Buddhist ideas such as dependent arising and emptiness according to the view of the Prāsaṅgika Madhyamaka tenet system. We begin to understand that things — especially our own selves — do not exist as they appear. There is an ultimate reality to be discovered that does not negate the existence of the world but gives us a new, liberating way to see it.

Chapter 2 focuses on epistemology, how we know the phenomena that comprise the two truths. How do we discriminate reliable cognizers — awarenesses that accurately know their objects — from wrong consciousnesses that misperceive sensory objects or hold incorrect views? This topic keeps our spiritual exploration grounded in reason and is important to fulfill both our temporary and ultimate aims.

Knowing the qualities of correct and erroneous cognizers, we examine the objects of these cognizers in chapter 3 — external objects that form the environment and internal ones that are the basis of the self, our body and mind. This chapter contains an extensive classification of phenomena that is helpful to keep in mind as we explore other topics on the path.

Chapters 4 and 5 discuss a subject that many people find confusing: how to choose a qualified spiritual mentor and form a healthy relationship with that person. Practicing under the guidance of excellent spiritual mentors is essential; without them we risk wandering in the spiritual marketplace, taking a little of this and a little of that and blending them together in a way that pleases us. Worse yet, an unqualified teacher may lead us on the wrong path. These chapters explain the different kinds of spiritual mentors, their requisite qualities, and how to relate to them in a way that benefits our practice. But for benefit to occur, we need to become receptive students. When difficulties arise in the mentor-student relationship, we need to address them skillfully. His Holiness is very practical in this regard.

Before actually embarking on the path, we also need to know the various types of meditations and how to structure our meditation session. This is covered in chapter 6. The preliminaries, such as proper sitting positions and calming the mind through observing the breath, facilitate meditation. Reciting verses that direct our minds to positive thoughts settles the mind. Doing these recitations while imagining that we are in the presence of the buddhas and bodhisattvas makes them especially heartfelt.

In chapter 7 His Holiness explains the mind, body, and rebirth in more depth, bringing in a scientific perspective while adhering to the Buddhist view that body and mind have different natures and different causes. He also introduces a meditation to help you get a sense of the clear and cognizant nature of the mind.

Chapter 8 begins the path in common with the initial-level practitioner. First we contemplate our precious human life, its meaning, and its rarity. This meditation is a wonderful antidote to depression and discouragement, for it emphasizes the good fortune and remarkable opportunity we have at present.

Chapter 9 asks us to look at what distracts us from practicing the path: our addiction to the pleasure that comes from other people and sense objects and our aversion to any pain or disappointment. The attitude that seeks only our own happiness of this life keeps us busy trying to make other people and the environment correspond with our current wishes and ignores the need to create the causes for fortunate future lives, liberation, and full awakening. Meditation on death helps us clear away our “rat race” mentality and set clear priorities. This chapter also includes advice for how to prepare for death and help someone who is dying.

Understanding the value of our lives and determined to use them to progress on the path to awakening, we want to learn how to create the causes for happiness and abandon the causes of suffering. This is covered in the final three chapters about karma and its effects. Here we find a comprehensive description of how our actions create our experiences. We learn to distinguish virtuous and nonvirtuous actions, giving us power to create the kind of future we want. A section on current ethical issues is a starting point for discussions on how to live an ethical life in a changing society. The four opponent powers set out a psychologically healthy way to remedy our misdeeds and begin anew. We also explore the deeper implications of causality. With this knowledge we can live in a healthy, wholesome, and meaningful way that enables us to accomplish our spiritual goals.

### *Please Note*

Although this series is coauthored, the writings are primarily His Holiness’s instructions. I wrote the parts pertaining to the Pāli tradition and some other paragraphs.

For ease of reading, most honorifics have been omitted, but that does not diminish the great respect we have for these most excellent sages and



practitioners. Foreign terms are given in parentheses at their first usage and in the glossary. Unless otherwise noted with “P” or “T,” indicating Pāli or Tibetan, respectively, the italicized terms are Sanskrit. Sanskrit spelling is used for Sanskrit and Pāli terms used widely (nirvāṇa, Dharma, arhat, and so forth), except in citations from Pāli scriptures and parenthetical technical terms in explanations from the Pāli tradition. For brevity, the term *srāvaka* encompasses solitary realizers (*pratyekabuddha*) as well, unless there is reason to specifically speak of solitary realizers. To maintain the flow of a passage, it is not always possible to gloss all new terms on their first use, so a glossary is included at the end of the book. Unless otherwise noted, the personal pronoun I refers to His Holiness.

## *Acknowledgments and Appreciation*

I bow to Śākyamuni Buddha and all the buddhas, bodhisattvas, and arhats who embody the Dharma and share it with others. I also bow to all the realized lineage masters of all Buddhist traditions through whose kindness the Dharma still exists in our world.

Since this series will appear in consecutive volumes, I will express my appreciation of those involved in that particular volume. This second volume is due to the talent and efforts of His Holiness’s translators — Geshe Lhakdor, Geshe Dorje Damdul, and Mr. Tenzin Tsepak. I appreciate Samdhong Rinpoche, Geshe Palden Dragpa, Geshe Sonam Rinchen, and Geshe Dadul Namgyal for their clarification of important points. I also thank Bhikkhu Bodhi for his clear teachings on the Pāli tradition, Geshe Dadul Namgyal for checking the manuscript, the staff at the Private Office of His Holiness for facilitating the interviews, the communities of Sravasti Abbey and Dharma Friendship Foundation for supporting me while I wrote this series, and David Kittelstrom and Mary Petrusiewicz for their skillful editing. I am grateful to everyone at Wisdom Publications who contributed to the successful production of this series. All errors are my own.

Bhikṣuṇī Thubten Chodron  
Sravasti Abbey

## Abbreviations

TRANSLATIONS USED in this volume, unless noted otherwise, are as cited here. Some terminology has been modified for consistency with the present work.

- ADK      *Treasury of Knowledge (Abhidharmakośa)* by Vasubandhu.
- ADKB     *Treasury of Knowledge Autocommentary (Abhidharmakośabhāṣya)* by Vasubandhu.
- ADS      *Compendium of Knowledge (Abhidharmasamuccaya)*.
- AN        Aṅguttara Nikāya. Translated by Bhikkhu Bodhi in *The Numerical Discourses of the Buddha* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2012).
- BCA       *Engaging in the Bodhisattvas' Deeds (Bodhicaryāvatāra)* by Śāntideva. Translated by Stephen Batchelor in *A Guide to Bodhisattva's Way of Life* (Dharamsala, India: Library of Tibetan Works and Archives, 2007).
- CMA       *Abhidhammattha Saṅgaha* by Anuruddha, in *A Comprehensive Manual of Abhidhamma*, edited by Bhikkhu Bodhi (Seattle: BPS Pariyatti Editions, 2000).
- CS        *The Four Hundred (Catuḥśataka)* by Āryadeva. Translated by Ruth Sonam in *Āryadeva's Four Hundred Stanzas on the Middle Way* (Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion Publications, 2008).
- DN        Dīgha Nikāya. Translated by Maurice Walshe in *The Long*

*Discourses of the Buddha* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 1995).

EPL *Elucidating the Path to Liberation: A Study of the Commentary on the Abhidharmakosa* by the First Dalai Lama. Translated by David Patt (PhD dissertation, University of Wisconsin–Madison, 1993).

LC *The Great Treatise on the Stages of the Path* (T. *Lam rim chen mo*) by Tsongkhapa, 3 vols. Translated by Joshua Cutler et al. (Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion Publications, 2000–2004).

MMA *Supplement to the “Treatise on the Middle Way”* (*Madhyamakāvātāra*) by Candrakīrti. Hereafter *Supplement*.

MN Majjhima Nikāya. Translated by Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi in *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2005).

PDA *Praise to Dependent Arising* (T. *rten ’brel bstod pa*) by Tsongkhapa. Translated by Thubten Jinpa. <http://www.tibetanclassics.org/html-assets/In%20Praise%20of%20Dependent%20Origination.pdf>.

PV *Commentary on the “Compendium of Reliable Cognition”* (*Pramāṇavārttika*) by Dharmakīrti. Hereafter *Commentary on Reliable Cognition*.

RA *Precious Garland* (*Ratnāvalī*) by Nāgārjuna. Translated by John Dunne and Sara McClintock in *The Precious Garland* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 1997).

SN Saṃyutta Nikāya. Translated by Bhikkhu Bodhi in *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2000).

- Sn        *Sutta Collection (Suttanipāta)*. Translated by Bhikkhu Bodhi in *The Suttanipāta: An Ancient Collection of the Buddha's Discourses Together with Its Commentaries* (Somerville, MA: Wisdom Publications, 2017).
- T.        Tibetan.
- Vism     *Path of Purification (Visuddhimagga)* by Buddhaghosa. Translated by Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli in *The Path of Purification* (Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 1991).

# Introduction

## *Three Aspects of Buddhism's Contribution*

OVER THE CENTURIES, Buddhism has made a powerful and valuable contribution to our human culture. When speaking of the contribution of the Nālandā tradition in particular, I place its contents in three categories: Buddhist science, philosophy, and religion. *Buddhist science* includes discussion of the nature of the external world and the subject, the mind, that cognizes it, as well as how the mind engages its objects through sensory and mental cognizers and through conceptual and nonconceptual consciousnesses. Buddhist science also discusses how the mind engages with objects by employing reasoning that helps establish facts about the world.

*Buddhist philosophy* includes discussion about the conventional and ultimate modes of existence of persons and phenomena, the four seals indicating a philosophy is Buddhist, the two truths, and emptiness and dependent arising. *Buddhist religion* describes the basis, path, and result of spiritual practice and emphasizes its liberating aspirations and goals. Buddhist religion relies on understanding Buddhist science and philosophy, in the sense that they provide the foundation and essential elements for the path to fulfill the spiritual aims of liberation and full awakening. Based on the assumption that every living being has the potential to become fully awakened, Buddhist religion stresses the path of mental development and transformation to attain these supramundane states.

Since we live in a multicultural, multireligious world, one of my aims is to present ethical conduct and compassion in a secular way, free of reliance on a specific religious doctrine, so that people of all faiths and of no faith can benefit. I also wish to give society access to the intellectual treasures in India's ancient texts and ensure that they are preserved in the body of world knowledge. In this light, I asked some of my foremost students, who are scholars in their own right, to form compendiums of the important points of

Buddhist science and philosophy and translate them into a variety of languages. The series of these compendiums is entitled *Science and Philosophy in the Indian Buddhist Classics* and is published by Wisdom Publications.

Buddhist science and philosophy can be studied by all. However, Buddhist religion is for Buddhists and those interested in it. We respect each individual's choice regarding religion. The Library of Wisdom and Compassion deals with the spiritual and religious perspective of Buddhism's contribution to the world. It is for those who are interested in learning and practicing the path that frees us from *duḥkha* — the unsatisfactory conditions of cyclic existence (*samsāra*) — and enables us to actualize our full human potential. In this Library, you will find Buddhist science and philosophy presented as the basis and means for practicing the liberating path. You will learn how to engage with this liberating knowledge in a personal, transformative way.

## *A Good Attitude toward Learning the Dharma*

Buddhist texts contain wise advice about how to approach learning the Buddha's teachings and explaining them to others. Since in this volume we will establish the foundation for Buddhist practice, it is especially helpful to touch on this now.

Reflecting on the value of learning the Dharma in my own life, I recall some verses in the *Jātaka Tales* (LC 1.56):

Hearing (learning) is a lamp that dispels the darkness of afflictions,  
the supreme wealth that cannot be carried off by thieves,  
a weapon that vanquishes the foe of confusion.

It is the best of friends, revealing personal instructions, the techniques  
of method.

It is the friend who does not desert you in times of need,  
a soothing medicine for the illness of sorrow,  
the supreme battalion to vanquish the troops of great misdeeds.

It is the best fame, glory, and treasure.

Due to the problems concerning Tibet's sovereignty that occurred during my youth, I had to accept the request of the Tibetan people and assume leadership of the Tibetan government. I was a mere teenager at the time, with little to no experience of my new duties and responsibilities that concerned the well-being of millions of people. Although anxiety was always beckoning, the Buddha's teachings gave me inner strength. They were the lamp that dispels the darkness of afflictions.

When I had to suddenly flee to India in March 1959, and leave almost all possessions behind and go forward to an unknown future, the Dharma was the friend who did not desert me in times of need. All the sūtras and scriptures I had memorized throughout the years came with me to India, providing guidance whenever I needed it. As I lived in exile and watched my homeland and its traditions, culture, and temples be destroyed, the Dharma was a soothing medicine for the illness of sorrow, giving me optimism and courage. In exile, the Buddha's teachings have been the best fame, glory, and treasure because they are always valuable in life and in death.

Seeing the benefits of learning the Buddha's teachings, we want to listen to and study them in an effective manner, without the defects of three faulty vessels. If we don't pay attention while at teachings or when reading Dharma books, we don't learn anything. Like an upside-down pot, nothing can go in. If we don't review what we have heard or read to make our understanding firm, we will forget the teachings, becoming like a leaky pot that can't retain the precious nectar poured into it. If we are closed-minded, opinionated, or have the wrong motivation for learning the Dharma, we become like a filthy pot; pure nectar may be poured inside and stay there, but because it is mixed with the filth in the pot it cannot serve its purpose to nourish us.

With this in mind, please set a wholesome altruistic intention when reading this book. Aspire, "May I read, reflect, and meditate on the Buddha's teachings so that I can become a kind, compassionate, and wise person. Through this, may I be of benefit to all living beings, and in the long term, may I become a fully awakened buddha."

Bhikṣu Tenzin Gyatso, the Fourteenth Dalai Lama

Thekchen Choling



# 1 | The Buddhist Approach

## *Four Seals*

THE ISSUE OF distinguishing Buddhists from non-Buddhists existed in olden times as it does now. In ancient India, this was usually done on the basis of philosophical views regarding the nature of the self and phenomena. A convenient and concise way to delineate Buddhist views is according to the four seals as found in the *King of Concentration Sūtra* (*Samādhirāja Sūtra*). People accepting the four seals are considered Buddhists by view,<sup>1</sup> and those accepting the Three Jewels as their ultimate source of refuge are considered Buddhists by conduct. The four seals are: (1) all conditioned phenomena are transient, (2) all polluted phenomena are *duḥkha* (unsatisfactory) in nature, (3) all phenomena are empty and selfless, and (4) *nirvāṇa* is true peace.

### *1. All conditioned phenomena are transient.*

Conditioned phenomena are products of causes and conditions, and all of them undergo change, disintegrating from what they were and becoming something new. Change occurs in coarse and subtle ways. Coarse change occurs when the continuum of a thing ceases. Subtle change occurs moment by moment — it is a thing's not remaining the same from one instant to the next.

We can observe coarse impermanence with our senses: we see that after coming into being, things later cease. A chair breaks, a person dies, bottles are recycled. Understanding coarse transience is not difficult; we don't need logical arguments to accept this coarse level of change.

However, for something to arise and cease in this obvious way, there must be a subtler process of change occurring moment to moment. Without a seed changing moment by moment, a sprout will not appear. Without the

sprout growing in each moment, the plant won't come into being. Without the plant aging and disintegrating moment by moment, it won't die. Without subtle, momentary change, coarse change could not occur. The fact that things end indicates they change subtly in each instant. They are transient or impermanent. In Buddhism, "impermanent" means changing moment by moment.

All the main Buddhist philosophical tenet schools (except for Vaibhāṣika, which has a slightly different understanding of the process of change and cessation) accept that the moment a thing comes into being, it contains the seed of its own cessation simply by the fact that it is produced by causes and conditions. It is not the case that one cause produces a particular thing, that thing remains unchanged for a period of time, and then another condition suddenly arises that causes its cessation. Rather, the very factor that causes something to arise also causes it to cease. From the very first moment of a thing's existence, it has the nature of coming to an end. The very nature of conditioned phenomena is that they do not last from one moment to the next.

Generally speaking, when we think of something coming into being, we look at it from a positive angle and think of it growing. When we think of something ending, we have the negative feeling that what existed before is ceasing. We see these two as incompatible and contradictory. However, if we reflect on the deeper meaning of impermanence, we see that its very definition — momentary change — applies to both the arising and ceasing of a thing. Nothing, whether it is in the process of arising or the process of ending, lasts into the next moment.

The present is insubstantial. It is an unfindable border between the past — what has already happened — and the future — what is yet to come. While we spend a great deal of time thinking about the past and planning for the future, neither of them is occurring in the present. The only time we ever live is in the present, but it is elusive, changing in each nanosecond. We cannot stop the flow of time to examine the present moment.

Scientists, too, speak of momentary change: subatomic particles are in continuous motion, and cells in our body undergo constant, imperceptible alteration. When we understand impermanence to mean momentariness, we see that arising and ceasing are not contradictory but are two aspects of the

same process. The very fact that something comes into being means it will cease. Change and disintegration occur moment by moment. When we understand impermanence in those terms, we'll recognize the significance of the first seal, that all conditioned phenomena are impermanent.

Understanding impermanence is a powerful antidote to harmful emotions that plague our lives. Emotions such as attachment or anger are based on grasping: we unconsciously hold the view that the people to whom we're attached will not cease and that the problem or mood we're experiencing at present will continue. Contemplating impermanence shows us the opposite: since everyone and everything changes, clinging to people, objects, or situations as being fixed doesn't make much sense. Since our problems and bad moods are transient by nature, we do not need to let them weigh us down. Rather than resist change, we can accept it.

While the direct and complete antidote to attachment is the realization of selflessness, an understanding of impermanence will prepare our mind to gain insight into the meaning of selflessness. But understanding impermanence will not harm beneficial qualities such as love, compassion, and altruism because those emotions are not based on unrealistically grasping impermanent things to be permanent. Contemplating impermanence gives us confidence that our disturbing emotional habits can change and that excellent qualities can grow in us.

## *2. All polluted phenomena are duḥkha — unsatisfactory by nature.*

Polluted phenomena are those produced under the control of ignorance and its latencies. Because all things in cyclic existence — including our body and mind — are polluted in this way, they are said to be *duḥkha*, unsatisfactory by nature. They are not capable of providing the enduring happiness and security that we seek.

How are the unsatisfactory circumstances in our lives related to our minds? In the *Sūtra on the Ten Grounds (Daśabhūmika Sūtra)*, the Buddha said, “The three realms are only mind.” The Cittamātra (Mind Only) school says this means the external physical world that we perceive is nothing but a projection of our mind. The Prāsaṅgika Madhyamaka school understands this statement differently, saying that it indicates there is no absolute, independent creator and that the source of our experiences lies in our minds

— our virtuous, nonvirtuous, and neutral minds — and the actions, or karma, that these mental states motivate.

From the Buddhist viewpoint, many universes exist simultaneously at different stages of development — some are beginning while others are devolving. Before a particular universe begins, the potential for material substances exists in the form of space particles. Changing moment by moment, these space particles are not absolute or independent entities.

How is the physical evolution of a universe related to sentient beings — their mental states and their experiences of pain and pleasure, happiness and unhappiness? This is where karma comes in. Karma is intentional actions done by sentient beings.<sup>2</sup> As the potencies remaining from these actions ripen, they shape the evolution of the external world and condition our experiences in it.

Sentient beings create karma physically, verbally, and mentally. Our motivation is principal, for it fuels our physical and verbal actions. Destructive actions are motivated by afflictions such as attachment, anger, and confusion, which in turn are polluted by and rooted in ignorance, an erroneous belief in inherent existence.<sup>3</sup> Even when sentient beings act with kindness, the karma they create is still polluted by the ignorance grasping inherent existence. So whether the actions are constructive or destructive, they produce rebirth in cyclic existence. Because unawakened cyclic existence is a product of the undisciplined mind, it is said to be *duḥkha*, unsatisfactory by nature. Secure peace and happiness cannot come from ignorance. For this reason, the second seal of Buddhism is that all polluted phenomena are in the nature of *duḥkha*.

The first truth, the truth of *duḥkha*, consists of two factors: those in the external environment, such as our environment, tables, and oceans, and those internal to sentient beings — our bodies and minds. Within the latter, the feeling aggregate, the primary consciousnesses and mental factors that accompany them, and the cognitive faculties that cause these consciousnesses are all unsatisfactory by nature. Both the external and internal objects are true *duḥkha* because they come into being due to the polluted karma and the afflictions of ordinary sentient beings.

Once someone has eliminated afflictions and karma, she becomes an arhat, someone liberated from cyclic existence. Even so, she may continue

to live in the external world, which is true *duḥkha*. In other words, the criterion for being in cyclic existence is not the environment in which a person lives but her state of mind.

The first two seals are related. We can use the transient nature of functioning things as a reason to show that all polluted phenomena are unsatisfactory in nature. Functioning things are products of causes and conditions, thus they are under the control of other factors. Polluted things, such as our ordinary bodies and unenlightened minds, are under the power of polluted causes — the undisciplined mind, at the root of which lies ignorance. As long as our minds remain under the control of ignorance, we live in an unsatisfactory state where the cause of suffering is always present.

*3. All phenomena are empty and selfless.*

*4. Nirvāṇa is true peace.*

The third and fourth seals are closely related. The explanation of the third seal accepted by almost all Buddhist tenet schools glosses the term “empty” as the absence of a permanent, unitary, independent self or soul and “selfless” as the absence of a self-sufficient, substantially existent person. According to the Prāsaṅgika Madhyamaka school, which is considered the most accurate view, “empty” and “selfless” both refer to the absence of inherent, true, or independent existence. Unless otherwise noted in this book, explanations will be according to this school.

The root of our cyclic existence is the ignorance that grasps phenomena as possessing some sort of independent existence, selfhood, or self-existence. The word *ignorance* conjures up the image of something inauspicious or undesirable, and it is indeed so. Just as whatever grows from a poisonous seed will be poisonous, everything that arises from ignorance will be undesirable. As long as we remain under the control of ignorance and erroneous views, there is no possibility for lasting joy.

According to Prāsaṅgikas, ignorance is not simply a state of unknowing. It actively grasps or conceives things to exist in a way that they do not. Superimposing inherent existence on persons and phenomena, it apprehends what is contrary to reality. Whereas persons and phenomena do not exist

inherently, under their own power, ignorance grasps them as existing in that way.

As we investigate how phenomena actually exist, our conviction that ignorance is erroneous increases. By seeing and familiarizing ourselves with the wisdom knowing reality, we gradually erode the force of ignorance and the undisciplined mind. When the cause, ignorance, is completely uprooted by its counterforce, wisdom, its resultant *duḥkha* is likewise extinguished. This state of freedom is *nirvāṇa*, lasting peace and true freedom. Therefore the fourth seal of Buddhism is that *nirvāṇa* is true peace.

Knowing the evolution of afflictions such as attachment and anger helps us understand the necessity of employing analysis to gain the wisdom realizing the selflessness of persons and phenomena that eradicates ignorance. If we examine emotions such as attachment and anger, we see that they are rooted in grasping at inherent existence. The stronger our grasping at an independent I, the stronger our attachment to the concerns of that self. We cling to whatever is seen as important to the self and are hostile toward whatever impedes fulfilling its interests.

For example, we may see a beautiful item that we are very attracted to in a store, and we crave to possess it. After we buy it, we call it mine and become even more attached to it. Behind the label mine is the belief in a self whose happiness is extremely important. If someone else then takes or breaks the article, we become angry because the happiness of this I has been adversely affected. Here we see the relationship between our grasping at an inherently existent I and our attachment to the article and anger at whatever interferes with our enjoying it. Refuting the inherent existence of this I eliminates the basis of our attachment and anger, which subsequently diminish and eventually are totally eradicated.

The distinguishing mark of being in cyclic existence is the mere I being under the control of ignorance and karma; that is, when the aggregates that are the basis of designation of the I are produced by these polluted causes, the person designated in dependence on them is bound in cyclic existence. As soon as that person eliminates ignorance, she no longer creates polluted actions that propel cyclic existence. Her cyclic existence ceases, and that person — that mere I — attains liberation. Gradually, she can also remove

the cognitive obscurations that prevent omniscience, and when this is done, that mere I attains buddhahood, the state of full awakening or nonabiding nirvāṇa, in which the person abides neither in cyclic existence nor in the personal peace of an arhat's nirvāṇa.

The four seals follow each other in a natural sequence. The existence of our body, mind, self, as well as the people and environment around us, is governed by causes and conditions. Thus their very nature is transient and momentary. The very causes and conditions that brought them into existence are the causes for their disintegration. In short, all conditioned phenomena are impermanent, the first of the four seals.

The external environment as well as factors internal to sentient beings — our bodies and minds — came about under the influence of our afflictions and polluted karma. Thus they are unsatisfactory by nature. As the second seal states, all polluted phenomena are duḥkha.

The story does not stop here, because there exists a powerful antidote — the wisdom realizing the emptiness of inherent existence — that is capable of totally eradicating ignorance, afflictions, and karma. All phenomena are empty and selfless, the third seal. When emptiness is realized directly and nonconceptually, and the mind becomes habituated with it through consistent meditation, all afflictions and karma causing rebirth are eradicated. In this way, cyclic existence is ceased and the fourth seal — nirvāṇa is peace — comes about.

The four seals are related to the four truths. The first two seals — all conditioned phenomena are transient and all polluted phenomena are unsatisfactory — describe the first two noble truths: the truths of duḥkha and its origins. But knowing this alone doesn't overcome our suffering. The last two seals — emptiness and selflessness, and nirvāṇa — speak of the third truth, true cessations, and imply the fourth truth, true paths, as the path that realizes them. By realizing the true path — the wisdom realizing emptiness — that knows all phenomena are empty and selfless, we uproot the ignorance that is the root cause of cyclic existence. Its cessation is the fourth seal, nirvāṇa is true peace.

## *Two Truths*

From the perspective of subtle dependent arising, all phenomena are empty of inherent existence and exist by being merely designated by names and concepts. How, then, do we maintain a coherent notion of our everyday world? How can we accept causes producing results and maintain the distinctions among different objects if ultimately everything lacks inherent existence and exists by mere designation? The Buddha’s teaching on the two truths — ultimate and conventional — helps us understand this.

*Ultimate (paramārtha)* truth — the emptiness of inherent existence of all phenomena — is the actual way phenomena exist. Ultimate truths are true in that they exist the way they appear to the nonconceptual wisdom of āryas. *Samvṛti*, the Sanskrit word translated as “convention,” also means “veil,” indicating that the actual truth of an object is obscured or veiled — the veil being ignorance, the mind grasping inherent existence. Due to ignorance, phenomena appear inherently existent, whereas they are not. Veiled truths are not true — they do not exist as they appear — they are true only for ignorance, and as such, are false. Our everyday world of people, things, and experiences are veiled truths.

To give another example, people gave me the title Dalai Lama. If you attend a public teaching that I give, you look at the person in the front of the room who is speaking and think, “This is the Dalai Lama,” as if there were an objective person out there, a person that exists from his own side. But when you search for exactly what that person is, you can’t pinpoint anything. You see the body of a Buddhist monk and hear a voice. Through my body language and speech, you have some idea of what is going on in my mind. But when you look in the body, speech, and mind, you can’t find the Dalai Lama. He is not his body, speech, or mind. The appearance of the Dalai Lama as an inherently existent person is false. Actually he exists because on the basis of the collection of body and mind, your mind forms the conception of a person that you then designate the “Dalai Lama.” The Dalai Lama exists by being merely designated by name and concept. That is his conventional nature. The deeper way he exists — his ultimate nature — is the emptiness of being an inherently existent Dalai Lama.

For each phenomenon, the two truths are present on that one base. For example, the mind has a veiled or conventional nature and a deeper reality or ultimate nature. Its conventional nature is its clarity and cognizance, the



mind that perceives and experiences things. Its ultimate nature is its emptiness of inherent existence. These two truths exist inseparably with respect to the mind, although they are perceived by different cognizers. The conventional mind is perceived by a conventional reliable cognizer, while the ultimate nature of the mind is known by a wisdom mind that realizes emptiness. Although the two truths are different, they exist together and depend on each other. For that reason, the mind and its emptiness are said to be one nature but nominally different. The two truths are not two unrelated levels of being, with ultimate truth being some absolute independent reality separate from the world of interdependent things.

The very meaning of the term *dependent arising* enables us to gain insight into the union of the two truths. Everything exists *dependent* on or in relation to other factors that are not it. Flowers depend on seeds, a human being depends on his or her body and mind, space depends on the lack of obstruction. Being dependent, they are empty of inherent existence. But emptiness doesn't mean total nonexistence. Because flowers, humans, and space *arise*, these veiled truths exist.

Within the context of these appearances being dependent veiled truths, the Buddha taught the method aspect of the path to awakening. Because so many different kinds of forms and appearances exist, they are called “the vast” or “the varieties of phenomena.”

Within the context of phenomena's ultimate nature being emptiness, the Buddha taught the wisdom aspect of the path. The emptiness of phenomena is called “the profound” because it is free from conceptual fabrications and is realized by a profound wisdom consciousness. Method and wisdom together are called “the stages of the vast and profound path.”

By meditating on the two truths and their inseparability and by cultivating the method and wisdom aspects of the path, all faulty states of mind are gradually removed and the excellent attributes of a buddha's truth body and form body are developed. Buddhahood is attained through the unified cultivation of both method and wisdom. The chief wisdom is the wisdom realizing the emptiness of inherent existence, and in the Mahāyāna the chief method is the altruistic intention to become a buddha (*bodhicitta*), induced by great love and great compassion. Although practiced in tandem, method and wisdom each has its own principal result in buddhahood. The

principal result of method is the form bodies of a buddha — the bodies in which a buddha manifests in order to teach sentient beings — and the principal result of wisdom is the truth body of a buddha — a buddha’s omniscient mind and its ultimate nature.

Buddhadharma can also be spoken of in terms of basis, path, and result. The basis is the two truths — conventional and ultimate. The path is the two cultivations — method and wisdom. The result is the two bodies of a buddha — the form body and truth body. Here we see clearly the correlation of conventional truths, the method aspect of the path, and the form body of a buddha, and the correlation of ultimate truths, the wisdom aspect of the path, and the truth body of a buddha.

The topics introduced in this chapter are complex and important. Only when we understand the nature and relationship of the two truths according to the Madhyamaka viewpoint can we fully understand the meaning of the four truths and know the full meaning and purpose of taking refuge in the Three Jewels. This chapter gave you a glimpse of these, and the fuller explanations that follow will elaborate on them.

The four seals — impermanence, duḥkha, selflessness, and nirvāṇa (true cessation) — are among the most important objects for us to know on the path. For that reason, in the following chapter, we will explore the reliable cognizers that enable us to have correct knowledge.

## 2 | Gaining Nondeceptive Knowledge

AS HUMAN BEINGS, we act to accomplish certain goals and purposes. In the area of spirituality and religion, our aim is to attain a state of enduring fulfillment and peace. To determine if full awakening is possible, to know what to practice and abandon in order to attain awakening, and to discern the ultimate nature of all phenomena, we need to be able to test various claims and determine if they are accurate and nondeceptive. In a meditation session, we want to be aware of what type of cognizer is knowing impermanence and emptiness, because a correct assumption of emptiness is very different from a nonconceptual realization of emptiness. The disciplines of logic and epistemology contain the tools for doing so. The objects that we seek to ascertain with reliable cognizers include the two truths and those spoken of in the four seals — impermanence, duḥkha, selflessness, and nirvāṇa. When speaking of cognizers and perceivers, we are referring to minds that know objects. They are agents that perform the function of knowing their objects.

This chapter contains terminology and ideas that will be new to some readers. It takes time and further study to understand everything completely. You will understand some points now and can return to this chapter later as a resource in your future studies.

### *Three Kinds of Objects and Their Cognizers*

As we learn the Buddhadharma, we are exposed to new concepts that may challenge our view of the world and of reality. We may wonder how to go about verifying or disproving them. Śāntarakṣita's *Compendium on Reality* (*Tattvasaṃgraha*) quotes the Buddha as recommending an analytical approach:

Do not accept my Dharma merely out of respect for me,

but analyze and check it  
the way a goldsmith analyzes gold —  
by burning, cutting, and rubbing it.

First a goldsmith checks for external impurities, which can be detected by burning the gold. Then he looks for internal impurities by cutting the gold. Finally he searches for very subtle impurities using a special technique of filing the gold. Similarly, we must test the teachings thoroughly, looking for three types of “impurities”: incorrect explanations regarding evident (*abhimukhī*) phenomena, slightly obscure (*parokṣa*) phenomena, and very obscure (*atyantaparokṣa*) phenomena. If there are none, we can accept the teachings with confidence. Each of the three types of phenomena is known by a specific kind of reliable cognizer.

*Evident phenomena* are those that ordinary beings can easily perceive. These include (1) external objects, such as colors, sounds, odors, tastes, and tangible objects, which are known by *direct reliable cognizers* that correspond to our five physical senses, and (2) internal objects, such as feelings of happiness, pain, hopes, and desires, which are known by the mental consciousness.

*Slightly obscure phenomena* cannot initially be directly perceived. Ordinary beings must initially know them by *factual inferential cognizers* — inferential reliable cognizers based on valid factual reasons. Examples of slightly obscure phenomena are subtle impermanence — the momentary arising and ceasing of conditioned things — and selflessness. The fact that the apple arises in dependence on causes and conditions is part of the conventional nature of the apple. Through understanding that its existence is a result of causes and conditions, we can know that the apple is impermanent.

The sun setting in the west is coarse change that is evident to our visual sense. But to understand the sun’s subtle changeable nature, we must use reasoning. The sun rose in the east and in order to set in the west, it must move continuously, moment by moment, imperceptibly across the sky. This momentary change cannot be detected by our eyes; we need reasoning to know it.

To know a slightly obscure phenomenon such as selflessness — for example, the absence of a permanent, independent soul or self — we may use the reason of “dependence” and contemplate the syllogism *Consider a person, she does not exist as a permanent, partless, under-its-own-power soul or self because she depends on her body and mind.*

*Very obscure phenomena* are known by ordinary sentient beings by relying on *inferential reliable cognizers by authoritative testimony*, the attestation of someone who is authoritative in that field. We know our birthday by asking our mother, and we understand the subtle intricacies of karma by depending on the Buddha’s teachings. While atoms and subatomic particles are slightly obscure phenomena that can be known by inference, most of us rely on the testimony of scientists to know their existence and characteristics.

According to Sautrāntikas, from the viewpoint of direct perceivers, all functioning things are evident phenomena because under the right conditions they can be perceived by our direct perceivers. From the viewpoint of conceptual consciousnesses, all knowable objects — both impermanent and permanent — are obscure phenomena because they can be known by a conceptual consciousness thinking about them. Conceptual consciousnesses are obscured because they know things by means of a conceptual appearance, which obstructs them from seeing functioning things directly.

Prāsaṅgikas describe evident and obscure phenomena differently, saying that evident objects are those that can be known through our own experience, without depending on inference; for example, sense objects. Obscure objects must initially be known by depending on a reason. They are objects of inference — for example, the subtle impermanence of the body and the selflessness of the person.

These categories are described in relation to ordinary sentient beings, not āryas. For an ārya, subtle impermanence and selflessness are evident phenomena, whereas for us they are slightly obscure. There are no obscure objects for buddhas because they are omniscient. Even in terms of ordinary sentient beings, these categories can vary according to our situation. When we are at a campfire, the fire is evident to us; we see it with our eyes and feel the heat on our skin. To people on the other side of a clump of trees, the

campfire is slightly obscure; they must infer, “In the area behind those trees, there is fire because there is smoke.” To our friends in another state, the campfire is very obscure. They know it because we call and tell them we are at a campfire.

Another example is devas — celestial beings such as the god Brahmā. For us human beings who live on Earth, Brahmā is very obscure; we know about him only through the testimony of a reliable authority. Our senses cannot see him and no amount of reasoning can prove his existence. To other living beings born in that realm, Brahmā is evident. Similarly, to people watching a spacecraft land on the moon, that event is evident, but to people who have no idea that such a thing is possible, it is very obscure. They must trust the testimony of those who witnessed it to know it happened.

An object becomes evident, slightly obscure, or very obscure in relation to an individual. For ordinary beings who haven’t entered a path, subtle impermanence and emptiness are slightly obscure, while for āryas they are evident phenomena, known by yogic direct perceivers.

To our mother, our birthday is an evident phenomenon, but for us it is a very obscure phenomenon. Owing to the extremely long distance, the details of various stars and planets in the universe are very obscure to us. But they are evident to whatever life forms inhabit those places.

Various aspects of one thing may be different types of objects. Our friend’s body is an evident phenomenon that we see with our eyes. His heart is a slightly obscure phenomenon that we infer because all human bodies have hearts. The karmic causes for our friend to be born into that body are very obscure phenomena known only by a buddha.

## REFLECTION

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1. Make examples of evident phenomena, slightly obscure phenomena, and very obscure phenomena that you already know. How did you come to understand them? Which type of reliable cognizer was involved?
2. Consider how we know things such as the existence of atoms, the Ice Age, or the qualities of other solar systems. Which of the three types of objects are they and how do we know them?

3. If you have never been to Antarctica, which of the three categories of phenomena is Antarctica in relation to you? Is it very obscure because you have to depend on another person's testimony to know what it looks like? Is it slightly obscure because by seeing photographs or a 3D model you can infer what it looks like? Would it be evident because you could see it through live streaming on the Internet?
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## *Seven Types of Awareness*

Ancient Indian religious practitioners from many traditions discussed the topic of reliable cognizers at length. Dignāga (ca. 480–540 CE) and Dharmakīrti (ca. 600–660 CE) were the two foremost Buddhist sages in India involved in debating this topic with non-Buddhists and in establishing the systems of epistemology and logic studied by Tibetan Buddhists to this day. These topics of epistemology and logical reasoning are learned not for the sake of philosophical speculation or abstract theory, but for the purpose of actualizing human goals, in particular nirvāṇa. Dharmakīrti said in his *Drop of Reasoning (Nyāyabindu)*, “Since correct [i.e., reliable] cognition is a prerequisite for achieving all human purposes, I shall explain it.”

In monastic universities, students are first introduced to the topic of reliable cognizers in the context of the seven types of awareness (T. *blo rig bdun du dbye ba*), which is taught from the Sautrāntika point of view. As we will see, some of these seven are reliable cognizers, others are not.

1. A *direct perceiver (pratyakṣa)* is an awareness that knows its object directly, without a conceptual appearance of its observed object (*ālambana*). Direct perceivers do not involve thinking, imagining, or remembering.
2. An *inferential cognizer (anumāna)* is an awareness that correctly understands its observed object through a conceptual appearance — a mental image of the object — and by means of an inference. An inference must be a correct argument; arguments using spurious logic are not considered inference.
3. A *subsequent cognizer* is an awareness that realizes an existent object that has already been realized. It is the second moment onward following a conceptual or nonconceptual reliable cognizer.

“Moment” has different meanings according to the context. When speaking of cognizing objects, it refers to the period of time needed to ascertain the object; it does not refer to the smallest unit of time because to ascertain an object a series of smallest units of time is required. The second moment onward of a cognizer uninterruptedly follows the first moment; for example, the second moment onward of a sense direct reliable cognizer of blue or the second moment onward of an inferential reliable cognizer realizing the emptiness of the person.

4. A *correct assumption* is a conceptual awareness that correctly apprehends its object as a result of having read or heard an explanation of it, but does not fully or firmly grasp the meaning or conclusively ascertain its object. After learning a new topic, we have a correct general idea about it, but because we don’t ascertain the meaning, our understanding is not firm and we could change our mind later.
5. An *inattentive awareness* is a direct perceiver to which its apprehended object clearly appears but is not ascertained. For example, while engrossed in watching a movie, our auditory consciousness hears the voices of people near us, but later we cannot say with certainty that people were speaking or what they were discussing.
6. *Deluded doubt* is an awareness that vacillates between two or more options and is inclined toward the wrong conclusion.
7. A *wrong awareness* (*viparyayajñāna*) is either a conceptual or nonconceptual consciousness that incorrectly apprehends its observed object. A hallucination hearing voices where there are none is a wrong sensory awareness. Holding the view that impermanent things are permanent or that what is foul is actually delightful are wrong conceptual awarenesses.

## *Reliable Cognizers and Unreliable Awarenesses*



Dharmakīrti, who wrote from the Sautrāntika and Cittamātrin perspective, and Candrakīrti (ca. 600–650 CE), who taught from the Prāsaṅgika Mādhyamaka perspective, defined the Sanskrit term *pramāṇa* differently. According to Dharmakīrti, *pramāṇa* is a prime cognizer — a new and nondeceptive knower. “New” indicates that it is the first moment of a nondeceptive cognizer; the following moments in that continuity knowing the same object are subsequent cognizers and are not prime.

According to Candrakīrti, *pramāṇa* is a knower that is nondeceptive (*avidamvādi*) with regard to its principal or apprehended object (*muṣṭibandhaviṣata*). In his *Commentary on “The Four Hundred,”* he says, “Undeceived consciousness is seen in the world to be reliable cognizer (*pramāṇa*) itself.”<sup>4</sup> “Nondeceptive” means incontrovertible; this knower is trustworthy and knows its object correctly. It does not have to be the first moment of a stream of moments of cognition. It is called a *reliable* cognizer because it can lead us to accomplish our purpose. Prāsaṅgikas say subsequent cognizers are reliable cognizers because they know the same apprehended object as the first moment that preceded it. Candrakīrti’s *Clear Words (Prasannapadā)* lists four types of reliable cognizers according to the objects to be comprehended:<sup>5</sup>

1. *Direct reliable cognizers* know their objects — evident phenomena — directly and nondeceptively, without depending on a reason or logical mark. With an unimpaired eye faculty, we see blue. This is a nonconceptual direct reliable cognizer. A subsequent cognizer can also be a direct reliable cognizer. A consciousness correctly remembering a conversation we had yesterday is a direct reliable cognizer even though it is a conceptual memory of the conversation. Similarly, many, but not all, scholars agree that the second moment onward of an inferential cognizer realizing impermanence is a direct reliable cognizer because unlike the first moment of that inferential cognizer, it does not depend on a reason. Although it is considered a direct reliable cognizer, it does not directly apprehend its object because it is a conceptual consciousness.
2. *Inferential reliable cognizers* know their objects — slightly obscure phenomena — nondeceptively purely in dependence on a reason (a

logical mark). We know a car is impermanent because it is produced by causes.

3. *Reliable cognizers based on an example* are inferential cognizers that realize their object by understanding that it is similar to something else. Here an evident phenomenon such as an example, analogy, or model is used as the reason to understand the meaning, which is slightly obscure. For instance, the Potala is a slightly obscure phenomenon for people who have never been to Lhasa. But if someone shows them a model of the Potala and says, “It looks like this,” they will understand what the Potala is.
4. *Reliable cognizers based on authoritative testimony* are inferential cognizers knowing very obscure phenomena that cannot be established through direct perceivers or other inferential reliable cognizers, but only by depending on the authoritative testimony of a trustworthy source, such as a credible person or scripture. For example, we understand the subtle workings of karma by relying on a credible scripture taught by the Buddha, who is a reliable person.<sup>6</sup>

The number of reliable cognizers differs according to context. In the above classification, reliable cognizers based on authoritative testimony and based on an example are forms of inferential reliable cognizers. They are listed separately due to their specific functions. In this case, an inferential reliable cognizer is one based on factual inference, a specific type of inference. Here the general name “inferential reliable cognizer” is given to a specific instance.

However, when we say the comprehended objects (*prameya*) of reliable cognizers are of two types — evident phenomena and obscure phenomena — then reliable cognizers are also two: direct reliable perceivers and inferential reliable cognizers.<sup>7</sup> In this case, reliable cognizers based on authoritative testimony and based on an example are included in inferential reliable cognizers, with that term now being used to refer to all inferential reliable cognizers. It is not uncommon that terms in a text have more than one meaning depending on their context, so we must take care not to get confused!

While reliable cognizers correctly ascertain their objects and give us reliable knowledge so we can accomplish our aims, other awarenesses — such as correct assumers, inattentive awarenesses, doubt, and wrong awarenesses — do not. These and other unreliable awarenesses cannot be trusted because we will not be able to achieve our purposes by relying on them. If we have bad eyesight and mistake an orange for a grapefruit, we will not purchase the fruit we want. Similarly, if we believe that the self is permanent or that phenomena exist as self-enclosed, independent entities, we will not be able to realize the emptiness of inherent existence or attain nirvāṇa.

Subsequent cognizers are minds that know what has already been known. The first moment of a visual consciousness knows red and the immediately subsequent moments of the visual consciousness also know red. Sautrāntikas say subsequent cognizers are not prime cognizers because, unlike prime cognizers that know the object by their own power, subsequent cognizers know the object by the force of the prime cognizer inducing them. Prāsaṅgikas say subsequent cognizers are direct reliable cognizers. In the case of an inferential cognizer, this is because the second moment onward of an inferential cognizer remembers the object inferred directly — it doesn't rely on a reason or logical mark to know the object. It is a reliable cognizer because it incontrovertibly knows its object. For Sautrāntikas, “direct” in “direct perceiver” means without a conceptual appearance; for Prāsaṅgikas it means not relying on a reason.<sup>8</sup> However, in another context, such as speaking about a direct realization of emptiness, Prāsaṅgikas take “direct” to mean nonconceptual.

Our knowledge about an object may gradually evolve via these various cognizers. For example, a new science student hears about bacteria from his teacher and gains a rough idea of what they are; this is a correct assumption. His knowledge also involves inference by authoritative testimony, for he trusts his science teacher's knowledge even though he cannot yet verify the information for himself. He learns about the structure of bacteria by seeing a model or diagram, which is inference based on an example. If he then looks under a microscope and sees some bacteria, those bacteria become evident phenomena that he knows with a direct reliable cognizer. Through executing various experiments and gaining reliable data, he will be able to

have an inferential reliable cognizer of other properties of bacteria that are slightly obscure phenomena.

However, he may be able to verify that his conclusion is an inferential reliable cognizer only later on. First he needs to make sure that the research data are valid and can be duplicated by others. Even if his data are reliable, they may not be complete, thus skewing a conclusion based on them. New data about other properties of bacteria may cause him to rethink his initial conclusions. For this reason, many scientists consider the initial knowledge from their research to be a correct assumption or even doubt.

In many areas of scientific research, human knowledge rests on assumptions. Even though scientists have supportive reasons for drawing certain conclusions, those conclusions are by no means hard and fast. They will be verified, denied, or revised later on as more data are collected. It may take a while for correct conclusions to be known by inference. Those of us who learn of new discoveries by listening to experts or reading scientific journals will have either a correct assumption or an inferential cognizer by authoritative testimony, depending on how well we understood the explanation.

#### REFLECTION

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1. Consider why having reliable cognizers is important in your daily life and in your spiritual life.
  2. Make examples of times when you have had an inattentive awareness or deluded doubt. How did they inhibit your full knowledge?
  3. Make examples of wrong awarenesses, such as seeing things incorrectly or misunderstanding the meaning of what someone said. Have you ever had a wrong awareness but not known it was incorrect until sometime later?
  4. Make an example of how your understanding of a topic began as a wrong consciousness or doubt and slowly evolved to a correct assumption and then to an inferential cognizer or direct perceiver.
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CHART: RELIABLE COGNIZERS AND UNRELIABLE AWARENESSES ACCORDING TO CANDRAKĪRTI

RELIABLE COGNIZERS	UNRELIABLE AWARENESSES
1. Direct reliable cognizers <sup>9</sup> a. Sense direct reliable cognizers b. Mental direct reliable cognizers c. Yogic direct reliable cognizers	1. Wrong awareness
2. Inferential reliable cognizers	2. Deluded doubt
3. Reliable cognizers based on an example	3. Inattentive awareness
4. Reliable cognizers based on authoritative testimony	4. Correct assumption

## *Direct Reliable Cognizers*

Reliable cognizers have specific characteristics, and not all our cognitions meet those standards. Learning the descriptions of the various types of reliable cognizers helps us to identify them in our own experience, and that lets us know whether to trust what we're seeing and thinking. Wrong awarenesses and correct assumptions are not reliable cognizers, even when we mistakenly think they are. Direct reliable cognizers are of three types: sense, mental, and yogic direct reliable cognizers.

*Sense direct reliable cognizers* know their objects — sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and tangible objects — directly by depending on a physical cognitive faculty. These reliable cognizers enable us to know our surroundings and the things within them.

*Mental direct reliable cognizers* correctly know their objects by depending on a mental cognitive faculty — that is, on another consciousness that induces it. Mental direct reliable cognizers include clairvoyance and consciousnesses that know our own feelings of happiness and pain. They also include conceptual subsequent cognizers induced by inferential valid cognizers, such as the second moment onward of an inferential cognizer of impermanence, and memory consciousnesses, such as the consciousness remembering a person we met last week.

*Yogic direct reliable cognizers* are mental consciousnesses that know their objects — the sixteen attributes of the four truths and subtle and gross

selflessness — by depending on a union of serenity and insight. These direct perceivers are essential to overcome defilements.

An evident phenomenon, such as the sound of leaves rustling in the breeze, is known by a sense direct perceiver, in this case an auditory consciousness. By means of mental direct perceivers we know that we feel happy from hearing that sound, and we can remember the sound of rustling leaves the next day. A highly evolved consciousness, a yogic direct perceiver, realizes the subtle impermanence of both the sound of the leaves and the happy feeling.

### *Inferential Reliable Cognizers*

To be able to benefit sentient beings most effectively, we must gain the direct, nonconceptual cognizers of a buddha so that we will clearly perceive all phenomena, both ultimate truths and conventional truths. Unlike buddhas, at present we ordinary beings are not capable of directly knowing slightly obscure and very obscure phenomena, but must rely on an inferential cognizer, a mind that nondeceptively realizes an obscure object in dependence on a reason.

Inferential cognizers must trace back to direct experiences and shared direct perceptions. Although our initial access to an object may be through reasoning, in time an inferential cognizer can lead to direct experience. We initially know emptiness through an inferential cognizer, but by continuously familiarizing our minds with it in meditation that is a union of serenity and insight, we will be able to dissolve the conceptual appearance and realize emptiness with a yogic direct reliable cognizer. An inferential cognizer not only depends on direct experience but also leads to it.

We use inferential cognizers often in our daily lives and at our jobs. According to classical Indian logic, an inference is generated by means of a syllogism (*prayoga*), a statement with four parts — a subject (*dharmin*), predicate (*sādhya dharma*), reason (*liṅga*), and example. To teach the parts of a syllogism, Buddhist monastics often use the syllogism *Consider sound, it is impermanent because it is produced by causes; for example, like the last moment of a flame*. Although this syllogism may not stir us, it was extremely important for Buddhists in ancient India. This is the argument

they used to refute the assertion of brahmins who believed that the sound of the Vedas was permanent and unchanging.

In this syllogism, “sound” is the subject (A) about which something is to be proven. “Is impermanent” is the predicate (B), the attribute we want to establish about sound. “Because it is produced by causes” is the reason (C) we use to prove the thesis. “For example, like the last moment of a flame” is the example. The thesis (*pratijñā*) is what is to be proven — the combination of the subject and the predicate — in this case, “sound is impermanent.”

To understand this, the person who hears the syllogism needs to understand three criteria of a correct inference: (1) The *reason applies to the subject* (*pakṣadharmā*) corresponds to the major premise. This is the relationship between the subject and the reason, specifically that the reason is a property of the subject. Being produced by causes is a quality of sound. (2) The *pervasion or entailment* (*anvayavyāpti*) corresponds to the minor premise. This is the relationship between the reason and the predicate: If something is the reason, it is necessarily the predicate. If something is produced by causes, it is necessarily impermanent. (3) The *counterpervasion* (*vyatirekavyāpti*) corresponds to the contrapositive of the minor premise. This is the relationship between the opposite of the predicate and the opposite of the reason: If something is not the predicate, it is necessarily not the reason. If something is not impermanent (i.e., if it is permanent), it is definitely not produced by causes.

The reason is the key to establish the three criteria. We must understand that the reason applies to the subject, is present in the predicate, and is not present in the opposite of the predicate. In simplified form:

C applies to A. The reason is a property of the subject.

If it's C, it must be B. There is pervasion.

If it's not B, it cannot be C. There is counterpervasion.

To gain an inferential cognizer, we must establish these three criteria in the syllogism. In general, the first criterion is something obvious; it can be established by means of a direct perceiver. We know that sound is produced by causes; we hear the sound after the bell is struck. Then through

reasoning we try to establish something that is not obvious — that sound is impermanent and momentary.

If a syllogism is not formed correctly, it will not prove its thesis. That may mean that the thesis is wrong or that the person constructing the syllogism did not think well about the topic. *Consider sound, it is impermanent because it exists* is not a correct syllogism. Although the reason is established (sound exists), the pervasion doesn't hold (if something exists, it is not necessarily impermanent; permanent phenomena also exist).

In the syllogism *Consider this person, he will die because he was born*, “this person” is the subject, “will die” is the predicate, and “because he was born” is the reason. The reason applies to the subject because that person was born. The pervasion holds true because if someone is born, he will die. The counterpervasion is established: if there is no death, it is because birth did not precede it. When the full force of this syllogism dawns in our mind, it becomes a powerful motivator for us to practice the Dharma in order to cease the causes of rebirth in cyclic existence and thereby to cease death as well.

We do not necessarily realize the thesis of a correct syllogism immediately after hearing it. To realize the three criteria of a correct syllogism, we must have a certain level of knowledge and be mentally receptive. Three preliminary reliable cognizers are needed in order to ascertain the second criterion, the pervasion. In the syllogism *Consider sound, it is impermanent because it is produced by causes*, these are:

1. *A reliable cognizer ascertaining the reason.* “Being produced by causes” is a reason that can establish that sound is impermanent. It is suitable to be used as a reason in this syllogism.
2. *A reliable cognizer ascertaining that in the opposite of the predicate, the reason does not exist.* The opposite of the predicate is devoid of the reason. Among permanent phenomena, no products exist. Permanent phenomena are devoid of products.
3. *A reliable cognizer ascertaining that the predicate and its opposite are mutually exclusive.* Impermanent and permanent are mutually exclusive.



Sometimes ascertaining the three criteria requires a considerable amount of time and effort: a person may have to learn the meaning of terms or understand other syllogisms first. Many texts contain debates in which a syllogism is presented, followed by other syllogisms that help us understand important points so that we will be able to comprehend the first syllogism. When we encounter difficult topics, we must persevere and continue to contemplate the material. As with most other subjects, it may be difficult at the beginning, but through familiarization it becomes easier.

After presenting a syllogism to a person, three kinds of wisdom arise progressively over time: the wisdom arising from hearing or studying the Dharma; the wisdom arising from contemplating, thinking, and reflecting on it; and the wisdom arising from meditating. When we first learn about subtle impermanence by hearing a teaching or reading a Dharma book, our understanding is the wisdom arising from hearing. At best this is a correct assumption that is a general idea about subtle impermanence. It is not the incontrovertible knowledge of an inferential reliable cognizer. While correct assumptions and factual inferential cognizers both focus on subtle impermanence, the depth and stability of their understandings differ. A correct assumption can easily become vague if we don't repeatedly familiarize ourselves with the topic. Also, if we are presented with the opposite view, a correct assumption may degenerate into doubt.

By continuing to analyze, our correct assumption will become an inferential reliable cognizer that realizes subtle impermanence by means of a conceptual appearance. This is the wisdom arising from contemplation. This inferential understanding will not degenerate unless we allow the intensity of this cognition to deteriorate by ceasing to contemplate the topic. The deterioration of inferential reliable cognizers occurs because the seeds of wrong views haven't been eliminated completely from our mental continua and our familiarity with the correct view is not strong. For this reason, we must make effort to maintain the correct understandings we gain through repeatedly bringing them to mind.

To deepen our understanding, we continue to cultivate concentration and analytical wisdom so that we can attain the union of serenity and insight on subtle impermanence. This is the wisdom arising from meditation. Initially this wisdom is conceptual because the veil of the

conceptual appearance of impermanence is present. With continuous meditation over time, that veil becomes thinner and thinner and will eventually disappear, and we will realize subtle impermanence directly and nonconceptually. This yogic direct perceiver of subtle impermanence is also the wisdom arising from meditation.

From the very beginning of their training in philosophy, when they are still young children, Tibetan monastics are taught that whatever is produced by causes necessarily has the quality of subtle impermanence. At the same time, their teachers caution them, “You have a highly learned mouth (you know all the words), but actual understanding will come through constant reflection after you have passed your geshe exam. Only then will there be the possibility of the actual realization dawning in your mind. Be realistic and patient and continue to work hard.”

There is debate on whether a syllogism needs to be stated for someone to gain an inferential reliable cognizer. Prāsaṅgikas claim it is not necessary; they accept an inferential cognizer through example as a reliable cognizer. They also say that merely stating a consequence (*prasaṅga*) — that is, pointing out the internal contradictions in someone’s argument — is sufficient for sharp-faculty people to gain an inferential reliable cognizer. For example, someone understands that the person is a dependent arising but also believes the person truly exists. By pointing out to him the unwanted consequence of his view by saying, “Consider the person, he isn’t a dependent arising because of being truly existent,” a sharp-faculty disciple will understand that the person is not truly existent. It isn’t necessary to subsequently state the syllogism *Consider a person, she is not truly existent because of being a dependent arising*. For a person of more modest faculties, a follow-up syllogism is needed for him to understand.

To the contrary, the lower schools hold that an inferential reliable cognizer must come about through the power of reasoning, implying that it is always necessary to state a syllogism. In addition, they adhere to autonomous syllogisms in which the subject, predicate, and reason all truly exist, whereas Prāsaṅgikas establish the parts of a syllogism and all phenomena by convention.

1. Identify the parts of the syllogism and the three criteria in the syllogism *Consider smoking, it is a health risk because it is directly responsible for approximately 80 to 90 percent of lung cancers.*
  2. Behind our emotions we often find “syllogisms.” Identify the parts of the following syllogisms and test them with the three criteria to see if they are correct.
    - *Consider me, I am an unlovable person because my friend is mad at me.*
    - *Consider my friend, he is untrustworthy because he didn't do what I wanted him to do.*
    - *Consider my ideas, they are always good because they are the ideas of a smart person.*
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## *Reliable Cognizers Based on an Example*

We often use analogies, models, and examples when learning something new. These evident phenomena — a map, picture, model, and so forth — illustrate a meaning that is obscure because the two have some similar characteristics.

In ancient India, a king was given a painting of the wheel of life, which illustrates the three realms (*tridhātu*) and six classes of saṃsāric beings (*śaṣṡgati*) and the process by which ordinary beings take rebirth. By contemplating the picture, the king understood the causal chain leading to rebirth in cyclic existence. This understanding of dependent arising, in turn, later led him to realize that there is no inherent existence.

A face in a mirror is an evident phenomenon, whereas emptiness is a slightly obscure phenomenon. When an intelligent disciple whose mindstream is fully ripened is told that just as a face in a mirror lacks true existence, so does the person, by the power of this example she will understand the selflessness of persons.

Unlike the lower schools, Prāsaṅgikas accept inference by example as a means to generate a reliable cognizer. Whether someone generates an understanding through this means or through factual inference depends on the mindset and faculties of the individual. Although a few ripened disciples may be able to realize emptiness through inference by example, most people need to rely on factual inference.

## *Reliable Cognizers Based on Authoritative Testimony*

A reliable cognizer based on authoritative testimony is used to gain knowledge about very obscure phenomena that we are unable to know through direct perceivers or other types of inferential cognizers. A reliable cognizer based on authoritative testimony uses as the reason to accept a statement as true the word of someone we have examined and determined to be a reliable authority on the subject. The validity of this inference hinges on the reliability of the person whose testimony we trust. Such a person should know the information, have no cognitive disability, and speak truthfully. For example, someone who wants to enroll in a school trusts the application instructions given by people working at the administrative office. Still it is our responsibility to examine their qualifications and not to believe things blindly.

In spiritual practice, this form of inference is also called “inference by belief” or “by scriptural authority.” Important for spiritual progress, it involves accepting reliable scriptural passages in order to understand very obscure points that cannot be otherwise known. Such topics include the subtle workings of karma and its effects, the twelve sets of qualities bodhisattvas gain on the ten grounds, the causes of the Buddha’s thirty-two signs, the inexpressible qualities of the resultant state of awakening, and the life spans of beings in realms imperceptible by our senses.

To correctly infer that a scriptural passage is accurate and free from fault, we must test it by means of a threefold analysis:

1. There is no reason to reject this statement or scripture in terms of its presentation of evident phenomena. To assess this, we examine if its presentation of evident phenomena can be refuted by direct perception.
2. There is no reason to reject this statement or scripture in terms of its presentation of slightly obscure phenomena. To assess this, we examine if its presentation of slightly obscure phenomena can be refuted by inference.
3. There is no reason to reject this scripture in terms of its presentation of very obscure phenomena. To assess this, we examine two factors:  
(a) The scripture’s explicit and implicit meanings about very obscure phenomena are free from contradiction. The explicit meaning is the evident theme of the scripture; the implicit meaning

is other topics that are the basis. The explicit meaning of the Prajñāpāramitā Sūtras is the doctrine of emptiness and the implicit meaning is the progressive stages of the paths that realize emptiness. (b) The former and latter passages of its presentation of very obscure phenomena are free from contradiction. What the scripture says in one place does not contradict what it says in another.

There is not a recommended number of pages to read in order to determine that a scripture is free from faults by the threefold analysis. Each person must read enough to be satisfied that his or her analysis is thorough. If a scripture meets these three criteria, accepting its statements as true gives us access to knowledge that is useful for our Dharma practice.

Dharmakīrti says that a scripture may also be considered trustworthy if its author is a reliable or credible person. A reliable person is one who is able to fulfill the desires of disciples in a nondeceptive manner. The Buddha is a reliable being because he has freed his mind from all defilements, developed all excellent qualities, and knows all phenomena directly with his omniscient mind. Motivated by compassion, he has the genuine wish to lead all sentient beings from duḥkha to the joy of liberation, and he has no reason to lie. Furthermore, what the Buddha said about the most essential aspects of the path — the four truths and emptiness based on dependent arising — can be validated by an inferential reliable cognizer. As we become convinced regarding these subjects, we begin to appreciate the possibility of attaining awakening and respect the Buddha as the one who taught such a wonderful path. Since the Buddha explained the essential aspects in a nondeceptive manner, we can infer that his statements on auxiliary topics that are very obscure phenomena are also trustworthy.<sup>10</sup> Āryadeva says (CŚ 280):

Whoever doubts what the Buddha said  
about that which is very obscure  
should rely on emptiness  
and gain conviction in him alone.

Dharmakīrti makes a similar point (PV 1.217):

Alternatively, since the true nature (*tattva*) of that which is to be avoided and that which is to be done along with the methods for doing so are well established, the statements of the credible person in question [the Buddha] are nondeceptive with regard to the most important issues [the four truths]. Hence, he is a source of inferential knowledge with regard to other objects.<sup>11</sup>

Tsongkhapa agrees that investigating one teaching of the Buddha — in this case dependent arising — and seeing its veracity gives us confidence in his other teachings. Tsongkhapa says (PDA 30):

Through this very path of dependent arising,  
the rationale for your speech being peerless,  
convictions arise in me  
that your other words are valid too.

Inference by authoritative testimony is not the first choice for gaining knowledge. It cannot be used to prove evident phenomena that can be known by direct perceivers or to prove slightly obscure phenomena that must initially be known through inference. During debates, participants must use inference as much as possible. The quality of a debate deteriorates if students mistakenly believe that quoting a well-respected master is sufficient to prove a point that actually needs to be realized through inference. It is unsuitable to abandon our investigative abilities and blindly quote scripture to prove a point. However, scriptural statements on these topics are useful because they inspire our practice, reinforce our understanding, and suggest new perspectives.

An example of gaining knowledge about the subtle workings of karma by using scriptural inference is the syllogism *Consider the statement “Through generosity comes wealth; through ethical conduct comes upper rebirth.” It is nondeceptive in its subject matter because it is a statement that is free from faults by the threefold analysis.* This statement is from Nāgārjuna’s *Precious Garland* (RA 438), a text written by a great master; its content cannot be invalidated by the threefold analysis.

The sūtras of both the Pāli and Sanskrit traditions contain accounts of the Buddha and his disciples encountering living beings in very peculiar

situations. The Buddha would often describe the karma that person had created in a previous life that brought about that situation. The *Connected Discourses with Lakkhaṇa* (*Lakkhaṇasaṃyutta*, SN 19) is dedicated to such accounts. It is helpful to read and think about these and use them as guidelines for our behavior. The *Sūtra of the Wise and the Foolish* (*Damamūrkha Sūtra*) also describes the subtle workings of karma and gives us much food for thought.

We ordinary people must use inference by authoritative testimony to understand the subtlest clear light mind. According to Nyingma and Kagyu presentations, the clear light mind is not only the subtlest mind that manifests after the dissolution of grosser conceptual levels of mind, but also the clear light mind that is present and pervades all mental states even when the grosser levels of mind are manifest. However, the *Guhyasamāja Tantra* says the clear light mind manifests only after the grosser winds and minds have dissolved. Highly realized practitioners with direct experience of this clear light do not need to prove its existence by inference because for them it is an evident phenomenon. For those of us who have not had this experience, it is very obscure, and neither direct perceivers nor factual inferential cognizers can prove its existence.

The minds of white appearance, red increase, and black near attainment that appear during the dissolution process are probably very obscure phenomena for us as well. We may get some inkling of these increasingly subtle states of mind culminating in the clear light by considering that the eighty indicative conceptions are classified into three levels according to their subtlety. Thus the combination of wind and mind that are their underlying foundation — the vivid white appearance, red increase, and black near attainment — should also be increasingly subtle and culminate in the clear light. For example, we may see three clouds moving at different speeds in the sky — one fast, another slower, and a third barely moving at all. Although we cannot see the winds moving the clouds, we can infer that those winds are moving at three different speeds.

Also, tantric texts that discuss the various levels of mind describe many things that we can verify through direct perceivers — we have experiences of the awake state, dream state, and state of deep sleep, which are increasingly subtle states of mind. This gives us confidence in the accuracy

of other topics presented in these texts. Furthermore, we do not know of any evidence that contradicts the existence of the clear light mind. Therefore, based on the authoritative testimony of the Buddha and those meditators who have direct experience of the subtlest clear light mind, there seems to be more grounds for accepting its existence than disproving it

For us ordinary beings, the level of realizations of those who are more highly realized than we are is very obscure. In his commentary on the *Ornament* entitled *Golden Rosary (Legs bshad gser phreng)*, Tsongkhapa said that no matter how many reasons ordinary beings apply or how much logic they use, they cannot infer the level of realizations of highly realized practitioners. However, for those with higher realizations, the level of realizations of people inferior to them are evident phenomena.

If we are speaking with our teacher in the classroom, and he says that there is a text on the table in another room, we can accept that as true by believing his words. While in general the book is an evident phenomenon, to us at that moment it is very obscure. We cannot see it with our eyes or know it by inference. At that time, the only way we have to know the book is by relying on the testimony of someone who does.

However, simply citing our teacher or a scripture that says, “All phenomena are empty because they are dependent” will not help us to understand emptiness initially. What is the difference between trusting our teacher’s words to know the book and to understand emptiness? In general, a book is an evident phenomenon. We know what it is and have an image of a table with a book and a table without one. His words clarify for us which one it is. However, initially we do not have an idea of what emptiness is — or if we do, it’s the emptiness of our stomach, which is not the kind of emptiness we’re trying to realize! Quoting our spiritual mentor that phenomena are empty does not enhance our understanding of emptiness, even if we have tremendous devotion to our teacher. However, our trust in our teacher will inspire us to contemplate and meditate on emptiness according to the teachings, and through that we will understand the three criteria of the syllogism and in time will gain an inferential reliable cognizer of emptiness.



1. Who do you trust as an authority and in what areas do you take them as authoritative? To what extent is that person fully reliable in terms of knowledge of that topic?
  2. Those of us who are not scientists know the existence of atoms, the healthy range for human blood pressure, and so forth through accepting the word of scientists. Do we investigate their qualifications as authorities on the subject or do we blindly accept their word?
  3. When politicians make various statements, to what extent do we check the reliability of their information and the reliability of their words before believing their statements?
  4. In what other areas of life do you rely on the testimony of others to know something? Do you check the credibility of the person first or do you tend to believe something simply because someone said it or you read it somewhere?
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## *Applying the Threefold Analysis*

If direct reliable cognizers, inferential reliable cognizers, or other reliable scriptures contradict a particular scriptural passage, or if scientists can irrefutably prove that a scriptural statement is incorrect, we should not accept it. Vasubandhu's *Treasury of Knowledge* (*Abhidharmakośa*) describes the structure of the universe as a flat world with Mount Meru at the center, four surrounding continents, heavenly realms above, and hellish states below. The sun and moon are said to be the same distance from the Earth, and the sun is only slightly larger than the moon. I do not believe that we should accept this description as accurate. My reasons for this are based on the guidelines the Buddhist scriptures have set out for evaluating the veracity of a teaching.

In Vasubandhu's time the structure of our solar system was a very obscure phenomenon. Now, due to scientific advancement, some parts of its structure are evident while other parts can be known through factual inference. This new information affects our understanding of Vasubandhu's description. We must apply the threefold analysis necessary for inference by scriptural authority to determine whether to accept his statements regarding our solar system.

The first criterion, that the statement is not contradicted by direct perception of evident phenomena, is not fulfilled. One way of proving the nonexistence of something is to prove the existence of its opposite.

Vasubandhu describes the sun and moon as being almost the same size — 51 yojanas (20,400 km) and 50 yojanas (20,000 km) in diameter, respectively.<sup>12</sup> However, reliable scientific instruments have measured the sun's diameter as 1,392,000 km and the moon's diameter as 3,480 km. It is clear that the sizes of the sun and moon as written in the *Treasury of Knowledge* are inaccurate.

Furthermore, this treatise says that the sun and the moon are the same height above the ocean — 40,000 yojanas (16,000,000 km) — and that they circle Mount Meru. Reliable scientific measurements have calculated that the sun is 150,000,000 km and the moon is 384,400 km from the Earth's oceans. Here too we see that the measurements in the *Treasury of Knowledge* are inaccurate. In addition, there is scientific evidence showing that the sun does not orbit the Earth.

Another criterion for inference by scriptural authority is that the scripture lacks internal contradictions. As a learned practitioner from Nālandā Monastery, Vasubandhu would have based what he wrote on material in Buddhist scriptures. We find various measurements and structures of the solar system presented in Buddhist scriptures. The presentation of the shapes of the worlds in the *Flower Ornament Sūtra* (*Avatamsaka Sūtra*) differs from that in Vasubandhu's treatise. Because there are inconsistencies among Buddhist scriptures, a literal reading of their presentation of the world's structure is not reliable.

I consider myself a student of Vasubandhu and have full respect for his great learning and spiritual attainments. At the same time, the Buddha advised us not to accept teachings merely out of respect, but to investigate them. Having followed the Buddha's instructions and made a thorough investigation, I believe that if Vasubandhu were alive today, he would rewrite chapter 3 of the *Treasury of Knowledge* in light of current scientific knowledge.

The description of the world found in the *Kālacakra Tantra* and the scientific description also differ in several ways. It is possible that the description in the *Kālacakra Tantra* is designed to point out parallels between the external world and our internal human physiology, not as a description for space travel. In that case, it is valuable to use in meditation practice, although I find it difficult to accept literally.

## *Reflections on Scriptural Inference*

Some people grow up in an environment where questioning a scripture's authority is unacceptable and disbelievers are shunned or threatened. These experiences may cause us to mistrust religious authority. In Buddhism no one asks us to have blind belief. Instead we are encouraged and even required to scrutinize a scripture's reliability by means of the threefold analysis and by examining the qualities of its author.

It is easier for serious, learned practitioners to examine a scripture's reliability. Such practitioners have studied Buddhist scriptures for a period of time and have gained an understanding of the four truths and emptiness based on dependent arising, which facilitates their ability to examine scriptural authority.

How do people who are new to Buddhism approach the issue of the reliability of Buddhist scriptures and of the Buddha as a teacher? When you hear a teaching that tallies with what you have experienced — a teaching that touches you deeply and that in your heart you know is true — you will naturally think, “The Buddha accurately described my experience in one area in a way that no one else has. He may have some special knowledge or spiritual realizations.” In addition, when you put a teaching into practice and experience beneficial results, you will easily think, “I followed the Buddha's instructions on how to deal with this disturbing emotion and it worked. Other teachings he has given may be equally valuable.” Like the Kālāmas, your trust in the Buddha and his teachings will increase due to your own experiences, as will your receptivity and interest.<sup>13</sup> In this case, it makes sense to continue learning and practicing the Dharma, using your intelligence to examine the teachings. If you don't find a particular point illogical or contradictory, you can accept it; this is not blind belief. The Buddha does not pressure anyone to follow his teachings and gives us full liberty to examine them. But if you don't fully understand a topic and doubts about it remain, leave it for the time being and focus on the parts that help you. You can come back to these more challenging topics later.

Dharmakīrti instructed that inference by authoritative testimony should be applied only to topics that are important to know in order to make spiritual progress. In general, cosmology, political issues, history, gender

traits and roles, and so forth are not included. As Buddhist practitioners, we must scrutinize scriptural passages about such topics, weigh them against contemporary ideas of human rights, scientific knowledge, and historical analysis, and come to our own conclusions.

After recommending that the Kālāmas examine the various teachings they heard, the Buddha asked them a series of questions about what they observed to be the results of attachment, anger, and confusion. They replied that the results were consistently unpleasant. When questioned about the results of the absence of attachment, anger, and confusion, the Kālāmas replied that they were pleasant. After having them examine evident phenomena by means of their own experience, the Buddha taught them the meditation on the four immeasurables, and they practiced cultivating love, compassion, joy, and equanimity for all sentient beings. Again the Kālāmas experienced for themselves the beneficial results of following the Buddha's instructions. Having ascertained the reliability of some of the Buddha's teachings through their own experience, they came to trust the Buddha and his teachings and took refuge in the Three Jewels. Their confidence in the Buddha, in turn, made them more open to hear more complex teachings on topics that could be ascertained by factual inference and inference through authoritative testimony.

### *The Prāsaṅgikas' Unique View of Reliable Cognizers*

The Prāsaṅgikas' presentation of reliable cognizers has several distinctive features that differentiate it from the presentations of the Svātantrikas and other lower tenet schools. These principally center on the Prāsaṅgikas' rejection of inherent or true existence. The lower tenet schools say that reliable cognizers and their comprehended objects exist inherently, whereas Prāsaṅgikas assert that they are established in dependence on each other. Candrakīrti states in *Clear Words*:

When in that way it is posited that the aims of the world are realized by the four reliable cognizers, those also are established in mutual dependence. When reliable cognizers exist, there are comprehended objects, and when

comprehended objects exist, there are reliable cognizers. The two — reliable cognizers and comprehended objects that are inherently established — do not exist.

The existence of reliable cognizers and reliable objects is established in dependence on each other. There are no objects out there, existing in their own right, waiting to be comprehended. Nor are there reliable cognizers existing from their own side without perceiving a comprehended object.

A second distinctive feature is the Prāsaṅgikas' assertion that a reliable cognizer can be mistaken. Veiled truths appear inherently existent to all consciousnesses of sentient beings except āryas' meditative equipoise on emptiness. When a sentient being looks at a table, that table appears to her eye consciousness as inherently existent even though it isn't. This consciousness is mistaken with respect to the appearance of the table. Still it is reliable with respect to the main object it cognizes — the table. It gives the person the information she needs to put her cup down. That visual consciousness is a reliable cognizer that is nondeceptive with respect to its apprehended object — its main object, in this case the table. At the same time, it is mistaken with respect to its appearing object (*T. snang yul*) — a table that appears to exist inherently although it does not.

Contrary to Sautrāntikas, Prāsaṅgikas assert that a yogic direct perceiver does not necessarily exist only in the mindstreams of āryas. Ordinary beings can have them as well, for example, the yogic direct perceiver apprehending subtle impermanence. This reliable cognizer is mistaken in that subtle impermanence appears truly existent to it, but nevertheless it correctly knows subtle impermanence.

Some people question whether Prāsaṅgikas can accept factual inference at all, saying that the Tibetan word for “fact,” *dngos po*, implies inherent existence. Prāsaṅgikas do not agree that *dngos po* implies inherent existence in this context. They assert that phenomena do not have some “fact” or independent essence that inheres in them. They refute inherent existence on all phenomena and assert that everything exists by being merely designated, dependent on conventions.

Svātantrikas and below say that direct reliable cognizers must be nonconceptual and must be the first moment of knowing the object.

Prāsaṅgikas define a reliable cognizer as a nondeceptive consciousness; it need not be the first moment of that cognizer. Glossing *direct* as meaning *not dependent on a reason*, they accept both conceptual and nonconceptual direct reliable cognizers. An example of a *conceptual direct reliable cognizer* is the second moment of an inferential cognizer realizing selflessness. This consciousness is conceptual and correct; it nondeceptively apprehends its main object selflessness that was ascertained in the first moment of that inferential cognizer. However, unlike the first moment, it apprehends selflessness without depending on a reason. Hence it is a conceptual consciousness that is a direct reliable cognizer. Another example of a conceptual direct reliable cognizer is a consciousness remembering the table after our visual consciousness saw it. It directly remembers the table that was seen without depending on a reason. For Prāsaṅgikas, subsequent cognizers are necessarily direct reliable cognizers.

Unlike Sautrāntikas, Prāsaṅgikas say that all consciousnesses, even erroneous ones, are direct reliable cognizers with respect to their appearing objects. For example, the erroneous conception of a turtle's moustache is a *reliable cognizer with respect to its appearing object*, the appearance of a turtle's moustache, because it knows the conceptual appearance of a turtle's moustache and can induce memory of it. However, it is not a *direct reliable cognizer* in general because it is erroneous; a turtle's moustache does not exist.

## *Knowing When We Have a Correct Reason and a Reliable Cognizer*

We do not necessarily know that a particular reason is correct at the time we state it. This could happen for more than one reason. For example, weather forecasting involves factual inference. When a weatherperson predicts that it will be sunny in three days, he is doing so based on the data available to him at that moment. Since the causes and conditions influencing the weather can change quickly, it is unsure whether his conclusion will be correct and, even if it is, if his current reason will be the correct reason later on.

A similar process may occur with a Buddhist practitioner trying to realize emptiness. She may state many reasons to prove emptiness and reach a certain ascertainment or conclusion. But she is not totally confident in the validity of her reasons. Only later, when she has a profound realization, is she confident that her reasons were correct. This is not because the reasons were unsound, but because the initial understanding in her mind was not deep. It was a correct assumption because she did not incontrovertibly ascertain her conclusion at that time. With continued reflection, a correct assumption can become an inferential cognizer.

Although both of these examples involve factual inference in which the person may not be able to ascertain that the reason is correct when stating it, there is a difference between them. The reasons the weatherperson uses — barometric readings and so forth — could easily change as circumstances change. But the reason the Buddhist practitioner contemplates remains constant; it's just that at her current level she's not able to completely ascertain the reason as correct.

Knowing when we have a reliable cognizer is important. For example, when you drive a car and see an animal out of the corner of your eye, you need to find out if that is a direct reliable perception. If it is, you must brake to avoid hitting the animal. When medical researchers conduct trials for a new medication, they need to know that their interpretation of the data is a correct inference, because many people's lives depend on it. We may have certain experiences in our meditation practice, and we need to know if these are reliable cognizers or wrong awarenesses because that will determine whether we reinforce these minds or counteract them.

Tsongkhapa lays out three criteria for existent phenomena (LC 3:178): (1) The object is known to a conventional consciousness. (2) The existence of that object is not invalidated by another conventional reliable cognizer — another reliable cognizer that accurately knows conventional truths. (3) It is not invalidated by a mind analyzing suchness (emptiness).

While a consciousness is cognizing an object, it is unable to know if it knows the object correctly. For this reason, the second criterion is important: another reliable cognizer — which may be another person's reliable cognizer or a later reliable cognizer in our own mental continuum — does not disprove it. We may apprehend something protruding from a

field and think it is a person. However, another person comes along and ascertains that it is a scarecrow. Third, a mind analyzing emptiness cannot disprove it. We may believe that inherently existent social castes exist, but a probing awareness analyzing emptiness can negate that.

## *Inferential Reliable Cognizers and Meditation*

All Buddhist traditions share two forms of meditation: serenity, which is principally stabilizing meditation, and insight, which is principally analytical meditation. It is helpful to understand how inferential cognizers relate to these two types of meditation lest we mistakenly believe that inference is mere intellectualization unrelated to experience-based insight. In fact, factual inference can have a profound effect on our mind and totally change our outlook.

For us ordinary beings, deep states of concentration such as serenity are not evident phenomena that we have experienced, nor can we know their existence through factual inference. Rather, we depend on the authoritative testimony of the Buddha, arhats, and practitioners who have realized serenity to know that it exists. Based on their authoritative testimony, we develop faith in serenity, which leads us to aspire to actualize it. This, in turn, inspires us to listen to the instructions on the method to develop it and to apply effort to practice accordingly. Serenity is attained primarily through stabilizing meditation that trains the mind to focus on one object; doing this does not involve factual inference.

Factual inference is crucial for analytical meditation and the development of insight. By contemplating the reason of a syllogism, we come to understand it and to determine that it applies to the subject and is present in the predicate. This process occurs even when we do not consciously state a syllogism. When we establish mindfulness on the body, we do not necessarily verbally state the syllogism at the outset of a meditation session: “The body is unattractive because it is composed of unappealing parts.” Rather, by examining the body and its components with strong mindfulness, we naturally come to see that it is unattractive because it is composed of bones, muscles, blood, internal organs, eyeballs, hair, tissue, and so forth. Such an inferential understanding has a strong effect on



how we relate to our own and others' bodies and stimulates our determination to be free from cyclic existence.

We may not begin a meditation on mindfulness of feelings with the syllogism *Consider feelings, they are duḥkha (unsatisfactory) in nature because they are under the control of afflictions and karma.* However, this is the understanding we reach by mindfully exploring our pleasant, unpleasant, and neutral feelings. This, in turn, leads us to understand that there is no purpose in clinging to saṃsāric feelings of pleasure. Such knowledge is very freeing and profoundly affects our lives. Here again we see that deep meditation naturally leads us to understand the thesis of a syllogism, even though we do not consciously state a syllogism at the beginning of our meditation. A similar process occurs when establishing mindfulness on the mind, which brings the understanding that the mind is impermanent because it is produced by causes, and when establishing mindfulness on phenomena, through which we understand that all the various mental states are not I or mine because they are neither identical with nor totally unrelated to the I. In short, although we may not be aware that we are using reasoning to cultivate a correct assumption and then an inferential reliable cognizer, this is in fact what is happening.

It is also interesting to apply our knowledge of the three types of phenomena and the reliable cognizers that know them to the stages of the path. Some examples are helpful.

A human life is an evident phenomenon, but our precious human life is slightly obscure. We need to use the reason that we have the eight freedoms and ten fortunes to infer that we have such a wonderful life with all the conducive circumstances for practicing the path. We need to employ inference of authoritative testimony to know that our precious human life is a product of specific karmic causes.

In general, death and coarse impermanence are evident phenomena; we witness people dying and things breaking. But the fact that those of us who are presently alive will die is slightly obscure. We infer it by thinking that we will die because we were born. The exact time and circumstances of our death, however, are very obscure.

Regarding the meditation on unfortunate rebirths, animals are evident to us. Hell beings and hungry ghosts are very obscure; we know them through

inference by authoritative testimony. Even if we have a correct assumption of the existence of these states, we may wonder, “How is it possible for a human being to take such a rebirth?” Here it is helpful to think about the continuity of mind that goes from one life to the next. Rebirth itself can be known through factual inference, but it may take us a while to gain the understandings preliminary to this. Sometimes contemplating passages in the sūtras where the Buddha directly speaks about rebirth boosts our understanding. For example, discussing the attainment of a vision of the truth, the Buddha says (DN 28.7):

He understands a human’s unbroken stream of mind that is established in both this world and the next.

The Buddha also refers to a future life that follows death (SN 4.9):

This life span of human beings is short. One has to go on to the future life. One should do what is wholesome and lead the holy life; for one who has taken birth, there is no avoiding death.

To wholeheartedly take refuge in the Three Jewels, we must first establish their existence. The best way to do this is to transform our mind into the Dharma Jewel, which depends on having a yogic direct, nonconceptual perceiver of subtle selflessness. This is gained from first having an inferential reliable cognizer of selflessness, which is a slightly obscure phenomenon. In his *Commentary on Reliable Cognition*, Dharmakīrti set out the reasoning proving that it is possible to have a yogic direct perceiver of selflessness. The process begins by having a correct assumption, an understanding derived from hearing. This is deepened by means of the wisdom of reflecting — an inferential cognizer realizing selflessness — which is further enhanced by the wisdom of meditation until it becomes a yogic direct perceiver of selflessness. This wisdom, which is a true path, is then used to progressively eradicate the afflictions from the mindstream and attain true cessations. The true paths and true cessations are the Dharma Jewel. From these we infer the existence of the Saṅgha Jewel, those beings who have attained these realizations. Following this, we can

infer the existence of the Buddha Jewel, someone who has eradicated all obscurations.

At the present moment, our understanding of selflessness and of the process of actualizing true paths and true cessations may be a correct assumption. This is sufficient for us to understand that the Three Jewels have the ability to guide us from the dangers of cyclic existence in general and from unfortunate rebirths in particular. Understanding this has the power to impel us to turn to the Three Jewels for spiritual guidance, which is the purpose of the teaching on refuge.

Regarding the teaching on karma and its results, some of the results of our actions are evident, while others are slightly obscure or very obscure. An evident result is the reciprocal kindness we receive after treating someone else with care. A slightly obscure karmic result is a person's being compassionate from a young age. We can infer that this is due to her having cultivated compassion in previous lives. Barring any inhibiting factors, familiarity with compassion in previous lives will cause compassion to arise easily again in future lives.

A very obscure karmic result is the specific rebirth that is the maturation result of a complete karma we did today. Only an omniscient one, a buddha, can know this. Once an old man asked Śāriputra to ordain him as a monk. Even with his great clairvoyance, Śāriputra could not determine if this man had created the virtuous causes in the past to be able to ordain. It was only after he consulted the Buddha, who saw with his omniscience that indeed this man had created the virtuous karma, that he was able to become a monastic. Even for Śāriputra, the Buddha's disciple most renowned for his wisdom, the exact details of karma and its effects were very obscure.

The measure of understanding the meditation on karma is gaining an understanding of karma and its effects that is sufficient to make us increasingly conscientious of our physical, verbal, and mental actions so that we avoid engaging in harmful actions and are eager to create constructive ones. This is gained by understanding the causes of our experiences and results of our actions through direct perception, factual inference, and inference by authoritative testimony, as described above.

As we've seen in this chapter, reliable cognizers apply to many aspects of our lives and our Dharma practice. By learning about them, we will lay a

foundation for the critical thinking necessary to correctly understand ever more profound subjects.

**REFLECTION** \_\_\_\_\_

1. What kind of reliable cognizers know the duḥkha of cyclic existence?
  2. When you reflect on the kindness of others, what kind of reliable cognizers are at play?
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# 3 | The Basis of the Self: The Body and Mind

THE BUDDHA'S TEACHINGS are studied and lived by those seeking to assuage misery and attain awakening. What is the nature of a person who does this? That person depends on a body and mind and lives in a universe filled with a plethora of other phenomena. In this chapter we will outline the phenomena that comprise the person and the universe as seen by Buddhist sages. The objects we endeavor to understand with reliable cognizers are these phenomena, their impermanence and unsatisfactory nature, the relationships among them, and their ultimate mode of existence.

## *Classifications of Phenomena*

The classification of phenomena was one of the first topics I learned in my studies as a young boy. Although initially I just memorized definitions without understanding them, I later realized that since this terminology was used by the great sages and scholars, it was important in order to gain an understanding of their writings. This gave me impetus to study the terminology. The following presentation of phenomena is common to most Buddhist schools.

We begin with the selfless — that which does not exist inherently. This has two divisions: (1) The *existent (sat)* is that which is perceivable by mind, that which is suitable to be known by an awareness. Existent is synonymous with phenomena (*dharma*), object of knowledge, established base, and object. (2) The *nonexistent (asat)* is that which is not perceivable by mind.

If something exists, a consciousness must be able to perceive it. A table is existent; a rabbit's horn is not.

Existents are divided into: (1) permanent phenomena (*nitya*) and (2) things (*vastu/bhāva*) or impermanent phenomena (*anitya*). A permanent

phenomenon does not change moment by moment, whereas an impermanent one — a functioning thing — does. *Permanent* does not mean eternal or existing forever without end. Something that is eternal may be impermanent or permanent. For example, the emptiness of a cup does not change moment by moment, but it ceases to exist when the cup breaks. This emptiness is permanent, but not eternal. The mind changes moment by moment and is eternal. It is impermanent, yet its continuity never ceases.

### *Permanent phenomena*

Permanent phenomena are not produced by causes and conditions and are not products. They neither produce an effect nor change in the next moment. The number of permanent phenomena is limitless; some examples are unconditioned space — the absence of obstruction — and the emptiness of inherent existence. There are two types of permanent phenomena:

1. *Occasional permanents* may come into existence and go out of existence, although they do not arise or disintegrate momentarily under the influence of causes and conditions. The emptiness of inherent existence of this book is one example. This emptiness is the ultimate nature of the book; it came into existence simultaneous with the book and it will go out of existence when the book ceases. However, it does not change momentarily or disintegrate under the power of causes and conditions.
2. *Nonoccasional permanents* are eternal. Unconditioned space (*ākāśa*) is an example. This space exists everywhere, at all times, not just occasionally.

Analytical cessations (*pratisamkhyā-nirodha*) and nonanalytical cessations (*apratisamkhyā-nirodha*) are also permanent phenomena. The former are true cessations, the absence of obscurations through having applied the antidote — the direct realization of emptiness — so that those obscurations can never reappear. Nonanalytical cessations are temporary absences of afflictions because the conditions for the arising of those afflictions are not present. Our not being angry at this moment is not due to a true cessation by our having ceased the seeds of anger in our mindstream. It is due to not being in contact with a disagreeable object at this moment.

Anger may arise later when the cooperative conditions — such as someone criticizing us — are present.

### *Things: impermanent phenomena*

A thing is something that performs a function — it produces an effect. Things are impermanent; being conditioned phenomena produced by causes and conditions, they are products (*saṃskṛta*). Things are of three types: (1) form (*rūpa*), (2) consciousness (*jñāna*), and (3) abstract composites (*viprayukta-saṃskāra*). These three are mutually exclusive — something cannot be two or all three of them.

*Form* is defined in a general way as that which is suitable to be form. Forms include objects of the sense consciousnesses (colors and shapes, sounds, odors, tastes, and tangibles) as well as subtle forms such as the five cognitive faculties (the subtle material that enables us to see, hear, smell, taste, and touch objects). Tangibles include the four elements — earth (heaviness), water (cohesion), fire (heat), wind (movement) — and smoothness, lightness, cold, hunger, thirst, and so forth. Forms for mental consciousness — such as dream objects and special subtle forms that meditators create by the power of their meditative concentration — are also included among forms.

Gross forms — those apprehended by our senses — can be measured by scientific instruments. Other forms, as well as consciousness and many abstract phenomena, cannot be directly measured by scientific instruments because they are not atomic in nature.

*Consciousness* is defined as that which is clear and cognizant.<sup>14</sup> *Clear* indicates that it is not physical in nature and can reflect objects. *Cognizant* means that it can know and experience objects. It is of two types: mind (*citta*) and mental factors (*caitta*).

*Mind* is of six types: visual, auditory, olfactory, gustatory, tactile, and mental primary consciousnesses (*viññāna*). These apprehend the presence or basic entity of an object: they know the type of object something is, for example, a sight, sound, a mental object, and so forth.

*Mental factors* fill out the cognition, apprehending particular attributes of the object or performing a specific function. Some mental factors, such



as feeling, discrimination, intention, contact, and attention, accompany all consciousnesses. Other mental factors — such as love or anger — are manifest at some times and latent at other times. Some mental factors, such as the six root afflictions, are harmful; others, such as faith and compassion, are beneficial. Some mental factors — such as investigation and analysis — can be either virtuous or nonvirtuous, depending on what other mental factors accompany (are concomitant with) those consciousnesses.

*Abstract composites* are impermanent things that are neither form nor consciousness. Many of them — such as impermanence — enable the coming together of causes and conditions and the arising, abiding, and disintegration of things. To perceive abstract composites, we must perceive something else. For example, we know a person by perceiving his or her body, speech, or mind. We know impermanence by seeing an object change.

There are two types of abstract composites: persons and not persons. The term “person” (*pudgala*) has a wider meaning here than it does in general usage. Examples of a person are any living being: Joe, a woman, an accountant, a monastic, a Spaniard, an animal, and a god. A person is designated in dependence on his or her aggregates — the body and consciousness — but a person is neither of those. Abstract composites that are not persons (*apudgala-viprayukta-saṃskāra*) are such things as time, birth, aging, democracy, life force, area, number, absorption without discrimination, and absorption of cessation.<sup>15</sup>

Contemplating these categories enables us to see that not everything that exists is material in nature. In fact a wide variety of things that arise from causes and produce results exist, although we cannot apprehend them with our senses or measure them with scientific instruments. While we can measure the activities of the brain when a person is experiencing a particular emotion, the brain is form; it is not the emotion, which is consciousness.

Understanding these different types of phenomena is helpful when we explore the four truths, the thirty-seven harmonies with awakening, and emptiness. What may seem to be a dry list of categories comes alive when we ask questions. Is love brain activity or conscious experience? That is, is the brain consciousness? That is not possible because the brain is form and consciousness is clear and cognizant. Nevertheless, the brain and

consciousness often influence each other. Is emptiness form, as the words in the *Heart Sūtra* literally say? Form is an impermanent thing and emptiness is permanent, and nothing can be both. However, emptiness is an inseparable quality of form.

If a truly existent person existed, we should be able to say what it is and we should be able to find it. When meditating on the selflessness of persons, we examine how the I exists: Is it the body, a primary consciousness, a mental factor, the collection of these, or something separate from them?

## *Five Aggregates*

The five aggregates (*skandha*) is a schema for categorizing impermanent phenomena. In general, the five aggregates include all impermanent phenomena, but when they are spoken of in relation to a person, they are the basis of designation of that person. In his *Supplement (Madhyamakāvātāra)*, Candrakīrti defines the five aggregates:

Form has the definition “suitable as form.”

Feeling has the nature of experience.

Discrimination apprehends [entities and] characteristics.

Miscellaneous factors contain [all the others].

“Individually cognizing objects” is the specific definition of primary consciousness.

In general, the form aggregate consists of things that are material in nature. The other four aggregates are predominantly mental.

1. *Form (rūpa)* in general refers to objects apprehended by our sense consciousnesses — colors, shapes, sounds, odors, tastes, and tangibles. As noted above, it also includes forms for mental consciousness. When speaking of the five aggregates that constitute a person, the form aggregate refers to the body.
2. *Feeling (vedanā)* is the mental factor of the experience of pleasure, pain, or neutrality.

3. *Discrimination (saṃjñā)* is the mental factor that apprehends the distinctive characteristics of an object and can distinguish one thing from another.
4. *Miscellaneous factors (saṃskāra)* are mental factors other than feeling and discrimination, such as emotions, attitudes, and views, as well as abstract composites such as karmic seeds and latencies of afflictions.
5. *Primary consciousnesses (vijñāna)* consist of the visual, auditory, olfactory, gustatory, tactile, and mental primary consciousnesses that apprehend the general type of object. Visual primary consciousness apprehends colors and shapes, auditory primary consciousness apprehends sounds, olfactory primary consciousness apprehends smells, gustatory primary consciousness apprehends tastes, tactile primary consciousness apprehends tangibles, and mental primary consciousnesses know mental phenomena.

Unlike other mental factors, feeling and discrimination are distinguished as their own aggregates. This is due to the special roles they play. Pleasant and unpleasant feelings evoke attachment and animosity, respectively. These emotions motivate sentient beings to create karma that ripens in birth in cyclic existence. Discrimination is the source of disputes because sentient beings discriminate one thing as attractive and another as repulsive, one idea as right and another as wrong. Becoming attached to their views, they quarrel with others who hold different views, thus creating karma that propels rebirth in cyclic existence.

## REFLECTION

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1. One by one, identify each of the five aggregates that constitute you as a person. Be aware of your body. Identify feelings of pleasure and happiness, discomfort and suffering, and neutral feelings that are neither. Notice the discriminations you make, the moods and emotions you have, and the types of primary consciousnesses that are present.
2. Identifying each aggregate in your own experience, contemplate their different functions and unique attributes.

- Contemplate the characteristics common to all five aggregates: they change moment by moment (impermanent), they are under the influence of afflictions and karma (duḥkha by nature), they depend on other factors and are not a person (selfless).
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## *Twelve Sources and Eighteen Constituents*

An alternative method of classifying all phenomena is the twelve sources (*āyatana*), so-called because they are sources that give rise to consciousness. Six of the sources are external — the objects known by consciousness; and six are internal — the cognitive faculties of a person that enable an object to be cognized by a consciousness.

### THE TWELVE SOURCES

INTERNAL SOURCE (COGNITIVE FACULTY)	EXTERNAL SOURCE (OBJECT THAT IS COGNIZED)
Eye source	Forms
Ear source	Sounds
Nose source	Odors
Tongue source	Tastes
Body or tactile source	Tangibles
Mental source	Phenomena

The eye source, ear source, and so forth are called internal sources because they belong to the person. The first five — the eye, ear, nose, tongue, and tactile sources — are not the gross organs such as the eyeball and the ear. They are subtle forms within the gross organ that are sensitive and receptive to their corresponding object. The mental source includes all six consciousnesses because they have the power to give rise to a mental consciousness that knows a phenomenon. For example, dependent on the

visual consciousness seeing blue, the mental consciousness remembers blue.

The eighteen constituents (*dhātu*) — which consist of objects and their corresponding mental faculties and consciousnesses — are another way to categorize all phenomena, both permanent and impermanent. The phenomena source and the phenomena constituent include only objects known uniquely by the mental consciousness: permanent phenomena such as emptiness and permanent space, feelings, and forms for mental consciousness. The latter consists of single particles, the appearance of clear space to the mental consciousness, imperceptible forms, dream objects, and forms generated in deep concentration. Although sense objects are also known by the mental consciousness, they are not included in the phenomena source or phenomena constituent.

When we think deeply about these diverse ways of classifying phenomena, we begin to see that the self we consider to be one unique item is actually a collection of diverse factors that function dependent on one another.

## THE EIGHTEEN CONSTITUENTS

COGNITIVE FACULTY	OBSERVED OBJECT	APPREHENDING CONSCIOUSNESS
Eye faculty	Forms	Visual consciousness
Ear faculty	Sounds	Auditory consciousness
Nose faculty	Odors	Olfactory consciousness
Tongue faculty	Tastes	Gustatory consciousness
Body or tactile faculty	Tangibles	Tactile consciousness
Mental faculty	Phenomena	Mental consciousness

REFLECTION \_\_\_\_\_

1. In your own experience, identify each of the twelve sources. Observe the relationship between the internal source, the external source, and consciousness arisen from them for each sense.
  2. Of the six senses, which ones prompt strong attachment in you? Which are the source of the greatest anger or aversion?
  3. Identify the eighteen constituents, especially the ones that compose you as a person.
  4. What is the relationship between you — the person — and the constituents that compose you? Are you one and the same as any of those constituents? Are you completely separate from them? Do you depend on them?
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## *Consciousness: Mind and Mental Factors*

There are many ways to speak about and classify types of consciousness: mind and mental factors, conceptual and nonconceptual consciousnesses, the seven types of awarenesses, and so forth. The Abhidharma makes the division of consciousness into mind and mental factors and describes the components of these categories. Later Indian sages such as Asaṅga and Vasubandhu elaborated on those descriptions in their *Compendium of Knowledge (Abhidharmasamuccaya)* and *Treasury of Knowledge*, respectively. When referred to together, these two texts are called the “Two Knowledges.”

Learning about mind and mental factors enables us to better understand our mind. We will be able to identify in our own experience the mental factors that arise due to pleasant, unpleasant, and neutral feelings and that in turn create the causes of happiness and suffering by motivating the actions (karma) we do. Such introspective awareness of our own mental processes is essential in order to tame and transform our mind. We will also understand that Dharma practice entails subduing the destructive mental factors that lead to misery in cyclic existence and enhancing the constructive ones that lead to happiness in cyclic existence as well as to liberation and awakening. This in turn will positively affect our thoughts, words, and deeds.

The core of the meditation on emptiness is examining how the I or self exists. It appears to be very real and “solid,” but can it be found in the

aggregates individually or in their collection, or separate from the aggregates? It is not too difficult to understand that we are not the body, but the self strongly appears to be associated with the mind. Understanding the various types of mind and how they function will aid in understanding what the I is and is not, and its relationship to the aggregates.

As noted above, all cognizers consist of a primary consciousness and various mental factors that accompany it. Primary consciousnesses are of six types, as mentioned above: visual, auditory, olfactory, gustatory, tactile, and mental primary consciousnesses. Each of these apprehends the fundamental presence of its object. Although a primary consciousness and its accompanying mental factors are different, when they arise together as one mental state, they are the same nature. They are concomitant and share five similarities.

1. They have the same *basis* (*āśraya*): they depend on the same cognitive faculty.
2. They share the same *observed object* (*ālambana*): they apprehend the same object.
3. Both are generated in the same *aspect* (*ākāra*) of the object: they reflect a similar aspect of the object.
4. They occur at the same *time* (*kāla*): they arise, abide, and cease simultaneously.
5. They are the same *entity* (*dravya*): each mental state consists of only one primary consciousness and only one of each of its accompanying mental factors. Furthermore, the primary mind and all its accompanying mental factors are either conceptual or nonconceptual, either mistaken or nonmistaken.

The Pāli scripture *Milindapañha*<sup>16</sup> contains an excellent example of the relationship of a primary consciousness and its accompanying mental factors. King Milinda asked the monk Nāgasena Thera whether mental factors can be separated out such that we can see them as different parts of the puzzle: “This is contact, and this feeling, and this mentation, and this discrimination.” Nāgasena Thera replied by asking if the king would be able to pick out each flavor, separate from all the others, when the royal

cook made a syrup or a sauce with curds, salt, ginger, cumin seed, pepper, and other ingredients.

Clearly this would not be possible. All the various flavors together give the sauce its taste, even though each ingredient adds its own unique flavor. Similarly, the various mental factors accompanying a primary consciousness function together and cannot be separated out since they share the same basis, observed object, aspect, time, and entity. Nevertheless, the primary consciousness and each mental factor perform its unique function and contribute its own “flavor” to the cognizer.

To give another example, the primary consciousness is like the main light in a room, while its accompanying mental factors are like other lights in the same room. While each light is distinct, they blend together to illuminate the room. The fact that an auditory primary consciousness is present means that all its accompanying mental factors also perceive sound. If the mental factor of feeling experiences pleasure, the entire mental state is pleasurable.

The mental factors described below are not an exhaustive list; they are the principal ones that must be abandoned or cultivated in order to attain liberation. Their enumeration and precise definitions may differ according to the specific Abhidharma text. Here the prominent mental factors are counted as fifty-one and divided into six groups in accordance with the *Compendium of Knowledge*: (1) five omnipresent mental factors (*sarvatraga*), (2) five object-ascertaining mental factors (*viniyata*), (3) eleven virtuous mental factors (*kuśala-caitta*), (4) six root afflictions (*mūlakleśa*), (5) twenty secondary afflictions (*upakleśa*), and (6) four variable mental factors (*aniyata*).

## *Five Omnipresent Mental Factors*

The five omnipresent mental factors accompany all minds. Without them complete cognition of an object cannot occur.

1. *Feeling* is an experience of pleasure, pain, or neutrality. Feeling experiences the results of our past actions and can lead to reactions of attachment, anger, confusion, and so forth.



2. *Discrimination* functions to distinguish “it is this and not that” and to apprehend the characteristics of an object. It differentiates and identifies objects.
3. *Intention* (*cetanā*) moves the primary consciousness and its accompanying mental factors to the object. It is the conscious and automatic motivating element that causes the mind to involve itself with and apprehend its object. It is action, karma. Although the mental factor of intention itself is not constructive, destructive, or neutral, it becomes so depending on what other mental factors — such as attachment or anger — accompany that mental state.
4. *Attention* (mental engagement, *manaskāra*) functions to direct the primary consciousness and its concomitant mental factors to the object and to actually apprehend the object. It focuses and holds the mind on an object without allowing it to move elsewhere.
5. *Contact* (*sparśa*) connects the object, cognitive faculty, and primary consciousness, thereby acting as a basis for feelings of pleasure, pain, and indifference. It is the cause of feeling.

The *Compendium of Knowledge* says that the five omnipresent mental factors accompany all primary consciousnesses. The Abhidharma system of the Pāli canon explains that each primary consciousness has seven omnipresent mental factors (P. *cetasika*): contact (P. *phassa*); feeling (P. *vedanā*); discrimination (P. *saññā*), which Pāli translators often render as “perception”; intention or volition (*cetanā*); one-pointedness (P. *ekaggatā*); life faculty or psychic life (P. *jīvitindriya*);<sup>17</sup> and attention (P. *manasikāra*).

## *Five Object-Ascertaining Mental Factors*

The five object-ascertaining mental factors are so-called because they apprehend the individual features of an object. The *Treasury of Knowledge* says that these five accompany all mental states, whereas the *Compendium of Knowledge* asserts that they accompany only virtuous mental states. These five are not themselves virtuous, but become virtuous because of being associated with a virtuous mental state. In this case, the mindfulness accompanying a mental consciousness that apprehends and has aversion

toward a repulsive object would not be the mindfulness of the five object-ascertaining mental factors, but would be another mental factor similar to it.

1. Aspiration (*chanda*) takes a strong interest in an intended object and is the basis for joyous effort.
2. Appreciation (belief, *adhimokṣa*) stabilizes the apprehension of a previously ascertained object and holds it such that it cannot be distracted by another view.
3. Mindfulness (*smṛti*) repeatedly brings to mind a phenomenon of previous acquaintance without forgetting it. It does not allow the mind to be distracted from the object and is the basis for concentration.<sup>18</sup>
4. Concentration (single-pointedness, *samādhi*) dwells one-pointedly for a sustained period of time on a single object. It is the basis for developing serenity and increasing wisdom.
5. Wisdom (understanding, intelligence, *prajñā*) functions to discriminate precisely with analysis the qualities, faults, or characteristics of an object held by mindfulness. It cuts through indecision and doubt with certainty and maintains the root of all constructive qualities in this and future lives. There are various types of intelligence:
  - a. Inborn intelligence is the natural acuity of mind that comes as a result of karma from previous lives.
  - b. Acquired understanding or wisdom is cultivated in this life. A person may generate it with respect to various topics of the stages of the path. It is of three types:
    - i. The understanding or wisdom arising when hearing, learning, or studying a topic. It brings initial knowledge of the topic and lays the foundation for the other two types of understanding.
    - ii. The understanding or wisdom arising from critical reflection or contemplation is generated by thinking about a topic on our own or debating and discussing it with others. Through it, we gain a correct conceptual (inferential) understanding of the topic.

- iii. The understanding or wisdom arising from meditation is derived from deeper personal experience when understanding of the topic arises automatically in our minds because we are very familiar with it.<sup>19</sup>

Our current mental factors of concentration and wisdom are the uncultivated bases for the actual concentration and wisdom that arise due to sustained Dharma practice. The wisdom referred to in the expression “method and wisdom” and the concentration referred to in the phrase “concentration found in the fourth jhāna” are very different in strength, acuity, and effectiveness from the mental factors we have now that bear the same names. Nonetheless, our present mental factors of concentration and wisdom can be nourished and transformed into serenity and insight.

## *Eleven Virtuous Mental Factors*

The eleven virtuous mental factors cause the omnipresent, object-ascertaining, and variable mental factors to take on a virtuous aspect and bring peace to oneself and others. Each of the eleven is an antidote to particular afflictions.

1. *Faith* (confidence, trust, *śraddhā*) is confidence in such things as the law of karma and its effects and the Three Jewels. It produces a joyous state of mind free from the turmoil of the root and auxiliary afflictions and is the basis for generating the aspiration to develop new constructive qualities and enhancing virtuous aspirations already generated. It is of three kinds: *Inspired faith* knows the qualities of the object and rejoices in them. *Aspiring faith* knows the qualities of the object and aspires to attain them. *Convictional faith* (believing faith) knows the qualities of the object and thereby has confidence in it.
2. *Integrity* (*hrī*) avoids negativity for reasons of personal conscience and self-respect. It enables us to restrain from harmful physical, verbal, and mental actions and is the basis for ethical conduct.
3. *Consideration for others* (*apatrāpya*) cares about the effect of our actions on others and avoids negativity for their sake. It enables us

to restrain from harmful physical, verbal, and mental actions, acts as the basis for maintaining pure ethical conduct, prevents others from losing faith in us, and causes joy to arise in the minds of others.

4. *Nonattachment (alobha)* is not the mere absence of attachment, but the opposite of attachment and the direct antidote to it. Referring to an object in cyclic existence, nonattachment prevents and counteracts attachment and subdues obsession with attractive objects and people.
5. *Nonhatred (adveṣa)* is the opposite of animosity — it is love and benevolence, not just the absence of anger and ill will. When referring to someone who harms us, the harm itself, or the cause of the harm, it has the characteristic of love and directly overcomes anger and hatred. It is the basis for the prevention of hostility and the increase of love, benevolence, forgiveness, and fortitude.
6. *Nonconfusion (amoha)* is the opposite of confusion. Arising from an inborn disposition and nurtured by study, reflection, and meditation, it acts as a remedy for confusion and ignorance and accompanies the firm wisdom that thoroughly analyzes the nature and specific characteristics of an object. It prevents confusion, increases the four types of wisdom, and helps to actualize constructive qualities.
7. *Joyous effort (vīrya)* counteracts laziness and joyfully engages in constructive actions. It acts to generate constructive qualities that have not been generated and to bring those that have to completion.
8. *Pliancy (flexibility, praśrabdhi)* enables the mind to apply itself to a constructive object in whatever manner it wishes and dissipates any mental or physical tightness or rigidity.
9. *Conscientiousness (apramāda)* values the accumulation of virtue and guards the mind against that which gives rise to afflictions. It brings to fulfillment and maintains all that is good, protects the mind from pollution, and is the root for attaining all grounds and paths.
10. *Nonharmfulness (noncruelty, ahiṃsā)* is compassion. Lacking any intention to cause harm, it wishes all sentient beings to be free from

suffering. It prevents disrespecting or harming others and increases the wish to benefit and bring them happiness.

11. *Equanimity (upekṣā)* does not allow the mind to be greatly affected by restlessness and laxity without having to exert great effort to prevent them. Important for the development of serenity, it enables the mind to settle and remain on a virtuous object. This equanimity differs from the equanimity of the four immeasurables and the equanimity that is a neutral feeling.

## *Six Root Afflictions*

These six are called root afflictions because they are primary causes of cyclic existence and are the root or cause of the auxiliary afflictions. They are the basis for all distorted conceptions and emotional conflict. Sometimes the last root affliction, afflictive views, is subdivided to make ten afflictions.

1. *Attachment (rāga)* arises based on projecting or exaggerating the attractiveness of an object within cyclic existence (people, things, ideas, places, and so forth). It wishes for, takes a strong interest in, and clings to that object.
2. *Anger (pratigha)* arises based on projecting or exaggerating the unattractive qualities of an object or person. It agitates the mind through being unable to bear or through wanting to harm that object or person. It arises in reference to someone who harms us, the suffering itself, or the cause of the harm.
3. *Arrogance (māna)* is based on the view of a personal identity that apprehends an inherently existent I or mine. It strongly grasps an inflated or superior image of ourselves.
4. *Ignorance (avidyā)* is a state of unknowing brought about by the mind being unclear about the nature of things such as the four truths of the āryas, karma and its results, and the Three Jewels. This definition is held in common by all Buddhist tenet systems, although each system has its own unique way of defining ignorance. This will be discussed in depth later.

5. *Deluded doubt* (*vicikitsā*) is indecisive wavering that tends toward an incorrect conclusion about important points such as karma and its results, the four truths, and the Three Jewels.
6. *Afflictive views* (*dr̥ṣṭi*) are either an afflictive intelligence (corrupt understanding) that regards the aggregates as being inherently I or mine or, in direct dependence on such a view, an afflictive intelligence that develops further mistaken conceptions.
  - a. The view of a personal identity (*satkāyadr̥ṣṭi*) is an afflictive intelligence that, when referring to the conventional I or mine, grasps it to be either inherently I or mine. It is called “intelligence” in the sense that it analyzes something.<sup>20</sup> It is the root of saṃsāra and acts as the basis for all afflictions.
  - b. The view of extremes (*antagrāhadr̥ṣṭi*) is an afflictive intelligence that, when referring to the I or mine grasped by the view of a personal identity, regards them in an absolutist or nihilistic fashion. It prevents us from finding the view of the middle way free from extremes.
  - c. The view holding wrong views as supreme (*dr̥ṣṭiparāmarśa*) is an afflictive intelligence that regards other afflictive views as the best views. It increases our attachment to other afflictive views.
  - d. The view of rules and practices (*śīlavrataparāmarśa*) is an afflictive intelligence that believes purification of mental defilements occurs by engaging in ascetic practices, inferior codes of ethical conduct, and mistaken practices that are inspired by wrong views.<sup>21</sup> It is the basis for wasting time on incorrect modes of practice that do not lead to our spiritual goals.
  - e. Wrong views (*mithyādr̥ṣṭi*) is an afflictive intelligence that denies the existence of something that in fact exists — for example, karma and its effects, past and future lives, and the Three Jewels — or that believes a divine creator or primal substance to be the cause of sentient beings. It functions to prevent us from engaging in virtue and to lead us to create nonvirtue.

## *Twenty Auxiliary Afflictions*

The twenty auxiliary afflictions are branches of the root afflictions and similarly disturb the mind. These will be explained in more depth in the next volume of the Library of Wisdom and Compassion. For now, suffice it to list them: wrath, resentment, spite, jealousy, cruelty, miserliness, haughtiness, restlessness, concealment, lethargy, laziness, lack of faith, forgetfulness, nonintrospective awareness, pretension, deceit, lack of integrity, inconsideration for others, heedlessness, and distraction.

## *Four Variable Mental Factors*

In themselves, the four variable factors are neither virtuous nor nonvirtuous, but become so in dependence on our motivation and the other mental factors that accompany the same mental state.

1. Sleep (*middha*) makes the mind unclear, gathers the sense consciousnesses inward, and renders the mind incapable of apprehending the body. Sleeping out of attachment and laziness is destructive, sleeping because the body is tired is neutral, sleeping with the intention to resume our compassionate activities after resting is virtuous.
2. Regret (*kaukr̥tya*) regards an appropriate or inappropriate action that we have performed of our own accord or under pressure as something we do not wish to repeat. Regretting negativities is virtuous, but regretting our constructive actions is nonvirtuous.
3. Investigation (coarse engagement, *vitarka*) arises depending on intention or wisdom and examines an object in general. Investigating the meaning of impermanence is virtuous, whereas investigating someone's faults with the intention to criticize is nonvirtuous.
4. Analysis (subtle engagement, *vicāra*) arises in dependence on intention or wisdom and analyzes the object in detail. Analyzing the nature of reality with the motivation of bodhicitta is virtuous, but

analyzing how to make more efficient weapons with the intention to kill is destructive.

While there is much that can be said about each of these mental factors, the brief descriptions above give an idea of how our mind operates and the various kinds of thoughts, attitudes, and emotions that arise in it at different times. Such a list of views, emotions, and attitudes provides a structure that helps us to get to know ourselves. We become more aware of our mental states by naming our thoughts and emotions. While meditating or going about our daily activities, it is helpful to practice identifying various mental factors and discerning whether they are conducive to happiness and constructive action or detrimental to them. When an affliction manifests in our mind, we must identify the mental factors that are opposed to it and then activate them.

#### REFLECTION

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1. Read the description of each mental factor, contemplate its meaning, and try to identify it in your own experience.
  2. Look especially at the eleven virtuous mental factors and the six root afflictions. Give examples of when you have experienced each of these mental states.
  3. Outline both the external events and internal causes (thoughts, moods, and so forth) that make each of these virtuous and nonvirtuous mental factors arise.
  4. What effects does each mental factor have on your life, your spiritual practice, and your progress on the path to awakening?
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### *Conceptual and Nonconceptual Consciousnesses*

Another way to classify consciousness is into nonconceptual and conceptual consciousnesses. A nonconceptual consciousness knows its object directly, without the medium of a conceptual appearance (*artha-sāmānya*)<sup>22</sup> appearing to the mind. Sense consciousnesses are always nonconceptual — they are direct perceivers — whereas mental consciousnesses may be either



conceptual or nonconceptual. Examples of nonconceptual mental consciousness are clairvoyance or a yogic direct perceiver of emptiness.

Reliable sense consciousnesses correctly and directly perceive their object; they see color and shape, hear sounds, and so forth. Based on these direct perceivers, we then think about and remember objects. These are conceptual consciousnesses.<sup>23</sup> Thought is conceptual; it does not know its object clearly but only via a conceptual appearance of the object appearing to the mind. Dharmakīrti says (PV), “Whatsoever consciousness has clear appearance is asserted to be nonconceptual.”<sup>24</sup> A direct perceiver sees the building; conceptual consciousnesses plan its construction.

In the *Collected Topics (bsdus grwa)*, a conceptual appearance of a pot is defined as “that factor of superimposition that is the appearance to the conceptual cognizer [of a pot] as a pot despite its not being a pot.” The appearing object of this conceptual consciousness is the conceptual appearance of the pot, not the actual pot.

A conceptual appearance is a representation of the object; it is the appearing object of a conceptual consciousness. It is not the actual object, but it allows us to think about various qualities and aspects of the object. Memories, thoughts, views, plans, imaginings, and afflictions are all conceptual consciousnesses. Conceptuality covers a wide range: from the thought “this is a pot,” to the conception grasping inherent existence, to a correct assumption of the meaning of emptiness, to an inferential cognizer of emptiness on the path of preparation that will soon transform into a nonconceptual, direct perceiver of emptiness on the path of seeing.

Sense consciousnesses directly perceive their objects, while thought apprehends its object in an indirect way by means of negation. When we think about yellow, the opposite of nonyellow appears to our mind. This is the conceptual appearance of yellow.

A conceptual consciousness does not know its object directly, but knows it through a negative process. Its appearing object is a conceptual appearance — an image of the object that comes about by negating everything that is not that object. In other words, what appears to a thought that knows a flower is the elimination of everything that is not a flower. This image expresses the general meaning of flower by combining the

characteristics of many flowers with different characteristics that sense consciousnesses perceived at different times.

Because a conceptual appearance comes about through a process of elimination and negation, it is generally considered a permanent phenomenon, although the mind to which it appears is impermanent. There is debate about this, however.<sup>25</sup>

The *appearing object* to the conception of a flower — the primary object that appears to that conceptual consciousness — is the conceptual appearance of the flower. The *apprehended object* of that mind — what that consciousness apprehends — is the flower. Conflating the actual flower with the appearance of the flower to a conceptual consciousness enables us to think about the flower. Conceptual consciousnesses are useful because through them we understand the broader properties and potentials of things and the relationships among them. Conceptual consciousnesses enable us to learn about things that we cannot perceive directly through sense perceivers. Scientific theories, planning a benefit event to help a charity, and considering measures that will stop global warming all depend on our ability to conceptualize objects, their causes, results, relationships, abilities, and so forth. In fact, most of our education entails learning terms and concepts.

Direct perceivers are immediate: they know objects that exist in the present. Nonconceptual direct perceivers apprehend the color, shape, texture, temperature, taste, and smell of an apple. Thought is able to apprehend objects that do not exist in the present moment, thus giving us the ability to remember our previous experiences and to plan for the future.

A visual direct perceiver sees many things in its field of perception, whereas conceptual consciousnesses are selective and focus on only a few aspects of the object. A thought picks out certain attributes and constructs a conceptual appearance of the object. Our memory of something consists of a few details that we happened to pay attention to when directly perceiving the object.

In forming conceptual appearances, conceptual consciousnesses conflate the time, place, or characteristics of several objects. We think, “This is the same table I saw yesterday,” when in fact yesterday’s table no longer exists and we are seeing today’s table. Here the tables of two

different times — yesterday and today — have been conflated to form the conceptual appearance of that table. The conceptual appearance of the table appearing to our mind is neither yesterday’s table nor today’s table. It is simply the general meaning of that table.

When shopping for a table, we may think, “This is the same table I saw at my friend’s house.” In fact they are different tables, but thought conflates the two tables that are in different places. There are over seven billion human beings on our planet. Each one is different, yet when someone says, “Think about a human being,” the general meaning of a human being appears to our mind. This conceptual appearance obscures all the variations among human beings and emphasizes a few common characteristics.

#### REFLECTION

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1. When eating a meal, pause before each bite and be aware of what you expect the taste and texture of the next bite to be. What appears to your mind is a conceptual appearance based on having eaten similar kinds of food in the past.
  2. Take the next bite and be aware of the taste and texture of the food. This is a direct perceiver of the food.
  3. Was your expectation of the taste and texture accurate? What was the difference between conceptual imagination of the taste of the food and your direct perception of it?
- 

Both nonconceptual and conceptual consciousnesses have their advantages and disadvantages in daily life and in Dharma practice. Perceiving objects directly gives us information about the immediate environment around us. However, these direct perceivers cannot remember these objects, nor can they relate one object to another to invent new items, plan how to use the things, or remember our previous experience with them so that we can apply what we learned to what we will do now. Thought enables us to do all this. However, the price we pay with thought is that the conceptual appearance is a conflation of objects at different times, in different places, or with different characteristics. Conceptual consciousnesses lack the vividness and clarity of direct perceivers.

Hearing the sounds of Dharma teachings on impermanence or seeing the black squiggles in a book about this topic involve nonconceptual, direct perception with our auditory and visual consciousnesses. Understanding and contemplating the meanings of these sounds and squiggles are done by conceptual consciousnesses. After we realize impermanence through inference with a conceptual consciousness, we continue meditating until we break through the conceptual appearance and perceive impermanence directly and nonconceptually. This realization is much more profound.

In my conversations with scientists I asked if they differentiate conceptual and nonconceptual consciousnesses. It seems that at this moment they do not. I wonder if there is a difference in brain activity between these two ways of cognizing objects. This is a new and interesting area to research.

Since a conceptual appearance of a table appears to be a table but isn't, conceptual consciousnesses are mistaken (*bhrānti*) in that they confuse the conceptual appearance with the actual object. However, not all conceptual consciousnesses are erroneous (*viparīta*). Confusion about an object can occur on two levels: the level of appearance and the level of apprehension. Conceptual consciousnesses that misapprehend their object — for example, thinking a scarecrow is a human being or believing that the person is truly existent — are erroneous and are not reliable cognizers. However, conceptions may also know their objects correctly even though they are mistaken. When we think about cooking food in a pot, the conceptual appearance of the pot mistakenly appears to be a pot. The conceptual cognizer of the pot correctly knows the pot and is useful in cooking a meal. It does not *apprehend* the pot and the conceptual appearance of the pot to be one — it does not think the conceptual appearance of the pot *is* this pot. Thus it is not an erroneous mind. However, on the level of appearance, the pot and its conceptual appearance *appear* to be mixed and this mind is mistaken with respect to its appearing object, the conceptual appearance of a pot, although it is not erroneous with respect to its apprehended object, the pot.

Language and thought are related. When we conceive an object, we give it a name, and when someone says that name, a conceptual appearance of the object appears in our mind. If someone says, “monkey,” we think of a

monkey. Can someone who does not know language — such as a baby or an animal — still have conceptions and thoughts? In the *Essence of Eloquence* Tsongkhapa says that although animals such as cows do not know words and terms, they do have thoughts, and these thoughts enable them to identify their calves.

By observing babies and animals, we can see that they identify things by means of conception, even though they don't know language. Although a baby does not know the word "mother," after some time he or she is able to identify a certain person and know this person is helpful. This is due to the conceptual appearance conflating the characteristics of his mother on many different days. He also understands she is very kind, even though he cannot express this understanding in words. A mother dog may smell another animal in the area near her puppies. Although she lacks language, she knows that danger is nearby and responds by protecting her puppies.

Learning to differentiate the way conceptual and nonconceptual consciousnesses apprehend their objects gives us a new and valuable tool to understand how our minds work. It enables us to be more aware of when we are conceptualizing and forming a myriad of opinions and judgments about someone, versus when we are actually experiencing and directly knowing the person. Seeing a person directly is very different from fabricating an image of him and daydreaming about him with our conceptual consciousness. Direct perceivers see the color and shape of food and smell its odor. This is different from imagining its taste and wondering if we will like it. If we think the food will be delicious, attachment will arise. But if the food isn't as good as we had anticipated, we will be discontent. So many emotions can arise in us based on these thoughts.

Differentiating conceptual and nonconceptual consciousnesses brings into vivid relief how we superimpose our past experiences onto the present and develop false expectations. If a child was bitten by a dog and experienced pain, his memory of that unpleasant experience is a conceptual consciousness. Later, when he sees a similar-looking dog, he remembers the previous experience and the conceptual consciousness conflates the present dog with the previous dog, causing him to become afraid of the dog in front of him even if the present dog is friendly. When he brings his attention to the present dog, he stops conflating the past and present dogs and stops

projecting his memory of the previous dog onto his interaction with the present one.

## REFLECTION

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1. To identify conceptual and nonconceptual consciousnesses in your own experience, look at a color and listen to a sound. Minds that know these things are nonconceptual, sense direct perceivers.
  2. Close your eyes. Remember the color, then the sound. These remembering consciousnesses are conceptual mental consciousnesses to which a conceptual appearance appears.
  3. Which way of knowing the color and sound is more vivid and immediate, seeing or hearing it directly or remembering it?
  4. Which is more useful for understanding how a muscle works — a direct perceiver of the color of the muscle or a conceptual consciousness thinking about the way to strengthen the muscle through correct exercise?
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It can be challenging to greet situations and people freshly, without our conceptual consciousnesses superimposing previous pleasant or unpleasant memories or associations on them. Although in some cases our memories may have some truth that gives us useful information, at other times they are overlain with attachment, aversion, and confusion. The Zen expression “beginner’s mind” refers to clearly seeing what is presently in front of us without projecting biased conceptions from the past onto present objects and people.

When we meditate, some of our distractions may be sparked by sense direct perceivers, for example, hearing a sound. If we just notice the sound and return to our object of meditation, the meditation session continues. However, sometimes we start thinking about the sound, “What a loud sound! Who made it? Doesn’t she know I’m trying to meditate?” All these thoughts about the sound and the person making it are conceptual consciousnesses that become a major distraction.

We may think about someone, and an image of her appears to our mental consciousness. This conceptual appearance is not her; it is created by our mind having selected and pieced together a few of her

characteristics. Ruminating on this image and on memories of past interactions with her, we generate judgments and opinions. Pretty soon, we find ourselves angry, even though the other person may be across the country. We may spend an entire meditation session being furious and planning what we're going to say to get revenge, when in fact nothing has happened. All this is due to faulty conceptualization.

## REFLECTION

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1. In the morning when thinking about who you will meet that day, notice your expectation of how an interaction will go with a person with whom you have had difficulty in the past.
  2. Be aware that that person is not here now and today's interaction has not yet occurred.
  3. To what extent will your expectation — which is just a conceptual appearance to your mind — become a self-fulfilling prophesy?
  4. Try to release that expectation and approach the person with a relaxed and open mind. How does the interaction differ from your expectation?
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Conceptions are involved in cultivating wisdom. The process of studying, reflecting, and meditating on the Buddha's teachings requires conceptual consciousnesses that give meaning to sounds and squiggles. Remembering what we have learned, reflecting on it, discussing and debating its meaning with others also involve conceptual consciousnesses. When we meditate, our initial understanding of topics such as emptiness is conceptual and our first realization is by means of an inferential cognizer, a conceptual consciousness. Although conceptual realizations cannot substitute for direct perceivers of emptiness, they are a useful and necessary stepping stone to gain a direct perceiver of this slightly obscure phenomena. By meditating on emptiness further, the veil of the conceptual appearance is gradually removed and emptiness appears directly and vividly to the mental consciousness, which is now a yogic direct perceiver.

In this chapter we have explored the varieties of phenomena that make up persons and our world. These include permanent and impermanent phenomena; among impermanent phenomena there are forms, consciousnesses, and abstract phenomena. We explored various way of

looking at consciousness including differentiating primary consciousnesses and mental factors and discerning nonconceptual and conceptual consciousnesses. Being able to identify these phenomena and being mindful of their functions and relationships is the gist of understanding the external world of form as well as our internal world of mind. When we later investigate the question of what is the self, we will examine all these phenomena to determine if any of them is the person.



## 4 | Choosing Spiritual Mentors and Becoming a Qualified Disciple

**T**HE DHARMA IS the key to having a meaningful and happy life now and in the future. To practice it seriously, two conditions must be present: The external condition is relying on the guidance of a qualified spiritual mentor. The internal condition is a precious human life with the freedom and fortune to practice the Dharma. The stages of the path begin with these two essential topics. This and the next chapter address the relationship between a qualified spiritual mentor and a qualified disciple, as well as the importance of those qualities and the method to cultivate them.

### *Importance of Relying on Spiritual Mentors*

When we are seriously interested in following the path, forming a healthy relationship with a qualified spiritual teacher is essential. If we need teachers for ordinary skills such as driving or typing, we certainly need them for more complex and delicate endeavors such as transforming our mind into that of a buddha. Tsongkhapa tells us (LC 1:70):

Thus the excellent teacher is the source of all temporary happiness and highest goodness, beginning with the production of a single good quality and the reduction of a single fault in a student's mind and eventually encompassing all the knowledge beyond that.

Spiritual teachers play a unique and important role in our lives. Qualified spiritual mentors guide us along the path by giving us teachings, Dharma advice, precepts, oral transmissions, and empowerments. When we experience blocks in our practice, they teach us the antidotes to overcome them. When we have spiritual experiences, they help us determine if the experiences were authentic or deceptive. When our practice is progressing

well, our spiritual mentors encourage us to continue. The *Sutta on Half (of the Holy Life)* (*Upaddha Sutta*, SN 45.2) relates a conversation between the Buddha and his disciple Ānanda about the importance of a spiritual teacher. Thinking that a successful Dharma practice is half due to spiritual teachers and half to one's own effort, Ānanda says to the Buddha, "Venerable Sir, this is half of the holy life, that is, spiritual friendship, spiritual companionship, spiritual comradeship." While our own effort is undoubtedly essential, to emphasize that the spiritual path cannot be actualized without a spiritual mentor, the Buddha replies:

Not so, Ānanda! Not so Ānanda! This is the entire holy life, Ānanda, that is, spiritual friendship, spiritual companionship, spiritual comradeship. When a monastic has a spiritual friend, a spiritual companion, a spiritual comrade, it is to be expected that he will develop and cultivate the noble eightfold path . . . By the following method, too, Ānanda, it may be understood how the entire holy life is spiritual friendship, spiritual companionship, spiritual comradeship: By relying on me as a spiritual friend, Ānanda, beings subject to birth are freed from birth; beings subject to aging are freed from aging; beings subject to death are freed from death; beings subject to sorrow, lamentation, pain, displeasure, and despair are freed from sorrow, lamentation, pain, displeasure, and despair. By this method, Ānanda, it may be understood how the entire holy life is spiritual friendship, spiritual companionship, spiritual comradeship.

This passage has sometimes been taken out of context and interpreted to mean that having ordinary friends who practice the Dharma is the entire spiritual life. While having such friends is a boost to our practice, it is clear in the sūtra that the Buddha is referring to himself as the spiritual teacher whose spiritual friendship is crucial and must not be neglected. By extension, our spiritual mentors become the virtuous friends that guide us when the Buddha is no longer physically present.

In the context of training in samādhi and meditation, Buddhaghosa emphasizes the importance of relying on a spiritual teacher (*Vism* 3.126):

When he dedicates himself to a teacher, he should say, “I relinquish this, my person, to you, Venerable.” For one who has not dedicated his person thus becomes unresponsive to correction, hard to speak to, and not amenable to advice, or he goes where he likes without asking the teacher. Consequently, the teacher does not help him with either material needs or the Dhamma, and does not train him in the scriptures. Failing to get these two kinds of help, he finds no footing in the doctrine, and he soon descends to inappropriate behavior or to the lay state. But if he has dedicated his person, he is not unresponsive to correction, does not go about as he likes, is easy to speak to, and lives in dependence on the teacher. He receives the twofold help from the teacher and attains growth, increase, and fulfillment in the doctrine.

## *Spiritual Mentors*

The Sanskrit name for a spiritual teacher is *guru* — *lama* in Tibetan. Both of these terms have the connotation of someone heavy with good qualities and superior in spiritual qualities. These terms do not have the connotation of someone being a living buddha, for not all gurus are awakened. If we said that all gurus are buddhas, there would be some gurus who became buddhas without working very hard on the path! Mistakenly thinking that all teachers are buddhas and later discovering that a certain person lacks all the qualities of an awakened one not only leaves us disappointed but also puts the lama in a difficult situation. The only thing the lama can do then is just shake his head because he lacks all of a buddha’s qualities. Therefore it makes more sense to follow the real connotation of the terms “lama” and “guru” because genuine spiritual teachers have superior qualities in comparison to their followers.

Being a Dharma teacher depends on other people wanting to take that person as their teacher. In Tibet in the past, a person did not become a teacher by being appointed by some authority. Rather, through diligent training a person became a good practitioner. A small group who saw that person’s qualities asked him to teach. As those students practiced and

developed good qualities, others gained respect for the teacher, and gradually that person became known as a great teacher.

Similarly, nowadays in monasteries the process of becoming a teacher occurs within the monastic structure. Monastics study for their geshe or khenpo degree. Students in the lower classes then ask the new geshes and khenpos who are respected for their learning, understanding, and memorization to teach. When students benefit from the explanations and guidance of the new geshes and khenpos, they become known as good teachers and other monastics are eager to attend their classes.

In the contemporary secular world, “teacher” connotes someone in an academic field who, after completing certain requirements, is certified as a teacher by an organization, whether or not that person has any students. Perhaps in the West that model would be better. That is for Westerners to determine. In that case, Buddhists could form an organization that certifies people as teachers after examining their Dharma understanding as well as their personal conduct. However, an organization cannot certify someone’s spiritual attainments, so issuing certificates attesting to attainment of spiritual realization or level of the path does not make sense. In any case, it is not necessary to be a realized master to teach at a Dharma center. A good education in Buddhism, personal integrity, and genuine care for the students’ well-being are sufficient.

Although we are the ones who choose our spiritual mentors, there are certain conditions under which someone becomes one of our teachers — for example, if they give us refuge and the five precepts, monastic ordination, bodhisattva ethical restraints, or tantric initiation. For this reason, it is necessary that we check the person’s qualifications before attending these ceremonies and not rush blindly into things.

Buddhism is spreading to countries where it has not existed before, and there it encounters different cultural values and ways of doing things. The model of a spiritual mentor-disciple relationship that has existed for centuries in Asia does not easily transplant into a secular modern society. Traditional spiritual mentors and contemporary students raised in secular societies both enter into a teacher-student relationship with expectations that they may not be aware of.

In traditional Tibetan Buddhist monasteries, there are many types of teachers: Some are like parents who look after the physical well-being of the young monastics, teach them the alphabet, and guide them in appropriate behavior in the monastery. More advanced students teach the lower-level debate and philosophy classes. Geshe teach the more advanced classes, while rinpoches — both ordained and lay — and some geshe give initiations and tantric teachings. Tibetan monastics and lay followers relate to these people differently, according to their role in that individual's practice, their standing in the monastery, and their reputation in Tibetan society. When Tibetans go to other countries, people in the Dharma centers do not necessarily know what kind of teacher is coming, and out of respect they treat everyone as though he were a highly esteemed lama. This can create misunderstandings.

The expectations for a secular teacher and a Dharma teacher differ greatly. In a secular educational facility, students trust that the school hires competent teachers. They often do not choose their teachers; if they need to attend a required class, students take it from whoever is teaching it. The teacher's job is to impart information and knowledge; they seldom get involved in a student's personal development as a human being. Students who are experiencing difficulties are usually referred to a school counselor. Students in colleges and universities pay to attend, and they fill out evaluation forms of the classes and teachers at the end of the semester. Teachers are hired employees in a paid position who can be fired if their work or behavior is not up to standard. Teachers and students do not live together, and after the semester is done they go their separate ways.

In the past, children in secular schools were taught to respect their teachers, but depending on the country, that is often not the case nowadays. The advent of online classes has changed the teacher-student relationship even more, so that teachers and students may never meet in person. The teacher's job is to plan the curriculum and assess the student's assimilation of knowledge; the student's job is to learn the material. There is little sense of personal connection to each other, the other person simply being a name or face on the computer screen.

A relationship with a Dharma teacher — here meaning a qualified spiritual mentor who teaches the sūtras and commentaries — is different.

The focus of this relationship is not only the conveyance of knowledge but also character building. The teacher is responsible for guiding students spiritually over time so that they become ethical, kind, and wise human beings with the correct understanding of the Buddha's teachings and the ability to meditate on them.

In the context of the Dharma, disciples and students are expected to investigate a prospective teacher's qualities before taking him or her as one of their spiritual mentors, because a mentor-disciple relationship is expected to be lifelong. This is not the case when studying with a secular teacher in school.

In addition, Dharma teachers traditionally do not charge for teachings and students do not pay their teachers; they support them by making offerings and volunteering their services. Here the motivation is one of gratitude, and the offering is given to create merit; it is not payment due, as in a business relationship. As part of their spiritual development, Dharma students are taught to appreciate and respect their teachers. This helps to reduce the students' arrogance and increases their receptivity to learning the Dharma. There is a natural hierarchy in the spiritual mentor-disciple relationship that is useful for subduing students' self-centered attitude. Students do not seek equal status with their teachers.

In traditional monastic settings, teachers and students may live in the same building, with students caring for some of the teacher's personal needs, such as preparing meals, cleaning, making appointments, running errands, and organizing events.

In entering a relationship with a spiritual mentor, having appropriate expectations is important. Although we may have emotional needs, the role of Dharma teachers is not to fulfill these. Complications arise if we have conscious or unconscious expectations that our spiritual mentors will meet our emotional needs, be our psychotherapist, tell us whom to marry, or choose our career. The role of spiritual mentors is to guide us in learning the Dharma, critically reflecting on its meaning, and correctly meditating on it. This is why it is so important to be under their guidance. However, spiritual mentors do not do the work of gaining realizations for us. We must practice the Dharma ourselves.

In brief, the differences in roles and expectations between a traditional Dharma teacher-disciple relationship and a contemporary, secular teacher-student relationship are great. It is important for everyone to be aware of these as we navigate the uncharted waters of the Dharma as it flows into new countries and cultures.

#### REFLECTION

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1. Why is it important to have spiritual mentors?
  2. How does the relationship with a spiritual mentor differ from one with a schoolteacher or professor?
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### *Three Types of Practice, Three Types of Spiritual Mentors*

Tibetan Buddhism includes three types of practice, each with its own emphasis, method of practice, and ethical restraints: Fundamental Vehicle, Perfection Vehicle, and Vajra Vehicle. In the Fundamental Vehicle, students learn the four truths of āryas and come to seek liberation from cyclic existence. To bring this about, they take refuge in the Three Jewels and practice the three higher trainings. In terms of ethical restraints, they avoid the ten nonvirtues and take prātimokṣa precepts as a lay or monastic follower of the Buddha. The lay precepts consist of the five precepts — to abandon killing, stealing, unwise or unkind sexual behavior, lying, and taking intoxicants. The monastic precepts include those of novice and fully ordained monastics.

On this basis, we go on to practice the Perfection Vehicle, which is one branch of Mahāyāna.<sup>26</sup> Here students learn and meditate on the methods to cultivate bodhicitta and come to seek full awakening in order to benefit others most effectively. To actualize this, they take the bodhisattva precepts and engage in practicing the six perfections of generosity, ethical conduct, fortitude, joyous effort, meditative stability, and wisdom.

The Vajra Vehicle is also a branch of the Mahāyāna, and thus the motivation to practice it is the same. Practitioners enter the Vajra Vehicle because their compassion is exceptionally strong. They want to attain awakening quickly because they cannot endure sentient beings' suffering. To accomplish this, they receive empowerment into the practice of a tantric deity and engage in the practice of deity yoga. All tantric practitioners adopt the bodhisattva ethical code, and those initiated into the yoga tantra and highest yoga tantra also adopt the tantric ethical code.

These three types of practice have three types of teachers. Many similarities exist in the qualifications of each type of teacher and the way students relate to them, but differences also exist. Fundamental Vehicle, Perfection Vehicle, and Vajra Vehicle texts reveal a progression in the way of regarding and relating to teachers. Our Fundamental Vehicle teacher instructs us in the four truths, gives us refuge and lay or monastic precepts, and teaches us the Vinaya, the monastic discipline. As such, he or she acts as a representative of the Buddha. We see our teacher as a teacher, our preceptor as a preceptor, and relate to him or her on a human level. We regard him as a wise elder, a sincere practitioner from whom we can learn.

For monastics, three Vinaya teachers are important for their training. The first is their preceptor or abbot/abbess (*upādhyāya*, *upādhyāyā*), the person heading the saṅgha of monastics that ordains them. Second is the activity instructor (*karma ācārya*), who gives guidance and instruction during the ordination ceremony. Third is the interview instructor (*raho 'nuśāsaka ācārya*), who privately interviews the candidate to see if obstacles to ordination exist. Another important teacher is the resident teacher (T. *gnas kyi bla ma*), the principal teacher of the monastery in which the monastic resides. Vinaya puts great importance on the resident teacher because that is the person who trains the junior monastics on a daily basis.

Perfection Vehicle texts speak of buddhas and bodhisattvas emanating in many forms to benefit others. Since our Perfection Vehicle teacher leads us on the bodhisattva path and gives us the bodhisattva ethical restraints, we view that person as an emanation of the Buddha or a high bodhisattva. Here the teacher is seen as equal to, or like, a buddha in the sense that the karma accumulated in relation to our teacher is similar to that accumulated in relation to the Buddha. By making offerings to or harming our Perfection



Vehicle teacher, we accumulate karma equal to acting in a similar way toward the Buddha himself.

When we have trained in the Fundamental Vehicle and Perfection Vehicle practices and are sufficiently mature in the Dharma, we may request empowerment into practices of various tantric meditational deities. Students imagine the guru giving the empowerment to be the meditational deity and the environment to be the deity's abode or maṇḍala. When doing tantric practice following empowerment, we imagine ourselves and all sentient beings as buddhas and the environment as a pure land. In this case not seeing our tantric master as a buddha would be strange.

Only in tantric practice is it essential to regard the tantric master as a buddha. This view should not be taught to beginners who are not mature in the Dharma, because it is open to misinterpretation and confusion.

I recommend going about the stages of practice in a gradual way. First form a relationship with a Fundamental Vehicle teacher, learn the four truths, and take refuge and some level of prātimokṣa precepts. Later, as your practice progresses, seek out a spiritual mentor who can teach you the bodhisattva path, practice the six perfections, and undertake the bodhisattva ethical restraints. After some time, when you are properly prepared, seek a qualified tantric master, receive empowerment into that practice, and meditate on deity yoga.

Shabkar Tsokdruk Rangdrol, the great Tibetan yogi who did extensive retreat and was a prolific writer, speaks of these three kinds of teachers:

From the teacher who showed the path of deliverance,  
I received the sacred teachings of individual liberation.  
My practice was to shun wrongdoing and cultivate virtue.

From the bodhisattva teacher,  
I received the sacred Mahāyāna teachings on generating bodhicitta.  
My practice was to cherish others more than myself.

From the Vajradhara teacher,  
I received the sacred teachings, empowerments, and instructions of  
the secret Mantrayāna.

My practice was to meditate upon the generation and completion states, and Dzogchen.<sup>27</sup>

## *Investigate a Person's Qualities*

If, like a spiritual mentor, the pilot of a plane is not well trained, traveling with him or her is risky. To help disciples assess the training of a potential spiritual mentor, the Buddha explained the qualities of the various types of spiritual teachers. Students are responsible for evaluating the qualifications of prospective teachers and choosing with whom they wish to form a mentor-disciple relationship. Sakya Paṇḍita commented that people are very careful and diligently test the purity of jewels before purchasing them. Examining spiritual mentors and teachings is even more important than checking the quality of jewels, since we are seeking the truth that will lead us to lasting happiness. We should not run after spiritual mentors like dogs gobbling up meat. Instead of being impressed by titles and elaborate thrones, we must seek spiritual mentors who are learned and practice well.

Some people are naive and easily misled by charismatic teachers who claim to be spiritually realized. In the West this may happen because Buddhism is new and people do not yet know the qualities to look for in good teachers. Difficulties arise in Asia too. Some years ago, a person from mainland China came to see me and said that a false lama from Tibet had gone to China and claimed to be a Dharma king, but was actually seeking money and sex. Blind to his true motivation, some Chinese were devoted to him. Similar things have happened in Mongolia as well.

The Buddha would not have described in detail the qualifications for choosing suitable spiritual guides if simply having great faith in anyone called a “teacher” or “lama” were sufficient. Although we may be attracted to a person who is charismatic, entertaining, or makes us feel good, these are not signs of having Dharma knowledge or spiritual attainments. Our spiritual teachers should be people we can rely on and trust and who have correct knowledge of the Dharma and its practice.

We must investigate and examine a teacher thoroughly before deciding that he or she will be one of our teachers. Immediately accepting someone as our teacher without proper investigation is unwise. I recommend that

people attend Dharma teachings and get to know the person first. At this time, do not regard him or her as your teacher, let alone as a buddha. Consider the person as a Dharma friend who shares information with you. Observe his or her conduct in daily life, and assess his understanding of the teachings as best as you can. Ask other students about the teacher's qualities, and look at the qualities of those students to see if you want to become like them by following the same teacher. Check if the teacher has a good relationship with his or her teachers. In addition, read Dharma books so that you have a general knowledge of Buddhist tenets and can assess if this person's teachings are correct. After some time, if you see that this person teaches in accord with the Buddhadharma, is reliable, knowledgeable, ethical, kind, and a good practitioner, then form a mentor-disciple relationship with him or her.

The Buddha recommends that prospective disciples examine even the Buddha himself (MN 47). But how is an unawakened, ordinary being who "does not know the mind of another as it really is" to investigate this? The Buddha instructs us to first use empirical observation, watching the person's behavior and listening to his or her speech to see if defilements are present or if his speech and deeds are pure. Then examine how he or she handles the role of a teacher: Is he attracted to gaining respect and offerings or does he have genuine compassion for his disciples and a sincere wish to guide them on the path? Third, directly ask the teacher if he has eliminated observable faults and if he is accomplished in the Vinaya and the Dharma. Doing this assumes the person is neither deluded regarding his own practice nor lying. It is rather bold to ask a teacher this question, and most accomplished teachers will be hesitant to discuss their level of attainment. However, if we are satisfied so far by our investigation of the teacher, we then practice what he teaches and see the results for ourselves. If, through diligent and correct practice, we realize the result the teacher described, then we know with certainty through our own experience that he is a reliable spiritual mentor.

Having a hundred or even a thousand qualified spiritual mentors is fine. But if teachers are not qualified, it is better not to have any and to rely on Dharma texts until we meet qualified mentors. However, to receive monastic ordination or tantric empowerment, we must rely on a living

person. We cannot receive these from a text or by ourselves. Since this is the case, in these areas you must wait until you meet a qualified teacher.

## *Qualities of a Spiritual Mentor*

According to the three types of spiritual teachers, there are three sets of qualities to look for. Śākyaprabha's *Three Hundred Verses on the Novice* (*Śrāmaṇeratriśatakakārikā*) describes the qualities of a suitable Vinaya teacher:

1. Keeping pure ethical conduct.
2. Having knowledge of what to practice and abandon on the path as well as of Vinaya rituals and procedures.
3. Having compassion for the sick.
4. Having disciples who are gentle, kind, and wise.
5. Providing their monastic disciples with requisites for living and Dharma teachings.
6. Being able to teach a Dharma topic at the right time to a disciple capable of benefiting from it.

In short, a Fundamental Vehicle teacher should have the following three qualities:

1. This person is worthy of respect because he or she is self-disciplined and has refined behavior as a result of keeping the precepts purely and serious Dharma practice. Also, this person is willing to help the disciple whenever required.
2. He or she has stable ethical conduct. For monastics, this means the person has been fully ordained for at least ten years.
3. He or she is learned and wise, having profound knowledge of the three baskets of scriptures (Tripiṭaka).

Fundamental Vehicle teachers should also be disillusioned with cyclic existence and not seek worldly success or many possessions for themselves. They should also have strength to endure the difficulties involved in teaching and guiding disciples.

In *Ornament of Mahāyāna Sūtras (Mahāyānasūtrālaṃkāra)*, Maitreya described the ten qualities of a fully qualified Perfection Vehicle mentor (17.10):

Rely on a friend who is subdued, calm, and quiet;  
has more virtue, is energetic, learned in scripture;  
has realized suchness, is endowed with eloquence, has a  
compassionate nature, and ignores weariness.

To present these qualities in an expanded way, a fully qualified Perfection Vehicle teacher:

1. Is disciplined and subdued in his or her behavior (higher training in ethical conduct).
2. Has serenity and meditative experience (higher training in concentration).
3. Is pacified through developing wisdom (higher training in wisdom).
4. Has more qualities than the student.
5. Is enthusiastic to practice Dharma and benefit others.
6. Is learned in the scriptures.
7. Has realized the emptiness of all phenomena, not just the emptiness of the person. This refers to having the correct view of selflessness.<sup>28</sup>
8. Is skillful in giving teachings, articulate, and able to explain the Dharma clearly.
9. Is compassionate, always wishing to benefit others.
10. Does not easily become tired or discouraged by expounding the Dharma to others.

It is important for a Mahāyāna spiritual mentor to possess the first three qualities — the three higher trainings — because without having disciplined and subdued one's own body, speech, and mind, subduing those of others will be difficult.

Someone may be able to discipline her own mind, but without other qualities she will not be able to adequately guide others in the methods for transforming their minds. Thus wide knowledge and understanding of the

Mahāyāna teachings as expressed in the fourth, sixth, and seventh qualities are necessary. Such a teacher has discerned the exact meaning of the Buddha's teachings by employing reasoning and scriptural quotations. She also has a broad knowledge and understanding of the path, which is necessary to lead sentient beings with a variety of dispositions and capabilities to awakening.

The remaining qualities — the fifth, eighth, ninth, and tenth — demonstrate that a spiritual teacher wishes to benefit others and has the ability to endure the hardships of guiding them.

The ten qualities of an excellent spiritual mentor may be abbreviated in three: he or she should be learned and wise, disciplined, and have a kind heart. His discipline should not prevent learnedness, and his learnedness should not lead to the neglect of discipline. Even if he has both learning and discipline, if he lacks a kind heart, he will not be able to help others on a vast scale. If he has a kind heart, but lacks learning and discipline, he will likewise be unable to lead others on the path. Thus all three qualities are necessary.

Although finding teachers with all ten qualities fully developed may be difficult, try to find teachers with as many of those qualities as possible. Follow teachers who have at least more good qualities than negative ones, are more interested in future lives than in this life, and consider others more important than themselves.

The qualities of a suitable tantric master are explained in all four classes of tantra. This person should have the qualities of a Perfection Vehicle spiritual mentor and have received empowerment into Vajrayāna. In addition to keeping the tantric precepts and commitments purely, he or she should have studied the practices well, completed the appropriate retreats and concluding fire pūjā, and experienced some deep insight through this path. In the case of a highest yoga tantra guru, the person should optimally have some stability in, if not realization of, the completion stage. Otherwise seek a person who has stability in the generation stage practice; however, if they do not have the correct understanding of emptiness, their practice is lacking. For a tantric guru, the determination to be free from saṃsāra and an understanding of emptiness that is complemented by bodhicitta is presupposed. Clearly not everyone who recites tantric sādhanas is qualified

to give empowerments and tantric instructions! In *Fifty Verses of Relying on a Spiritual Master (Gurupañcāśikā)*, Aśvaghoṣa describes the qualities of a vajra master in detail. These will be explained in a later volume on tantra.

Do not be too quick to regard a person as your spiritual mentor. Rather, for however long it takes — two years, five years, or longer — regard this person as a spiritual friend. In the meantime, examine his or her behavior, attitudes, and ways of teaching until you are confident of his or her integrity and ability to guide you.

In certain situations a Dharma connection is automatically formed, and after that you should regard that person as one of your spiritual mentors. A person who gives you refuge, the five lay precepts, or monastic precepts becomes one of your Vinaya teachers. Those from whom you receive the bodhisattva ethical restraints become your Perfection Vehicle teachers. Someone who gives you an empowerment, tantric transmission, or tantric commentary becomes one of your Vajrayāna masters.

#### REFLECTION

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1. One by one, contemplate qualities for a Fundamental Vehicle, Perfection Vehicle, and Vajrayāna spiritual mentor.
  2. Reflect on the purpose of the three sets of qualities and how each applies to the respective stage of development of the disciple.
  3. Make a determination to examine the qualities of prospective spiritual mentors and to choose wisely.
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### *Seek Internal Qualities, Not Titles or External Appearance*

Some people may believe that the titles a person has indicates whether he or she is a qualified spiritual mentor. However, this is not necessarily the case. Each Buddhist tradition employs an array of titles that can be confusing to newcomers and that are not necessarily used in a systematic fashion.

Nowadays the title *lama* is used in a variety of ways — in some cases it indicates a Dharma teacher, in others it indicates someone who has completed a three-year retreat. Some people are qualified teachers, but out of humility do not want to be called lama, while some people who have not done extensive study and practice are eager to assume that title.

*Geshe* is a degree awarded by the large monasteries after the completion of many years of serious scriptural study and debate. In general, geshe have vast learning in the scriptures and some also have meditative experience and realizations. However, after completing their studies, some geshe are eager to go abroad not just to teach but to receive offerings.

*Khenpo* indicates an abbot of a monastery and *khensur* a former abbot, although in some Tibetan traditions, *khenpo* is an educational degree similar to *geshe*. *Gen-la* is used to address adult monks, our own Dharma teacher, or teachers of secular subjects as well. *Choe-la* is the respectful way to address a nun.

*Tulku* is a title given to someone recognized as the reincarnation of a previous master. *Tulku* literally means an emanation body of a buddha, but not everyone with this title is an emanation of the Buddha or even a bodhisattva. There are different levels of tulkus according to the respect and renown of the previous master.

*Rinpoche*, which means “precious one,” is often used to address tulkus. Some students call their teachers who are not recognized incarnations “Gen Rinpoche” (precious teacher) to indicate their respect. Having the title *rinpoche* does not indicate that one has spiritual realizations. Some may be manifestations of buddhas or of ārya bodhisattvas — those who have directly perceived emptiness and compassionately manifest to benefit sentient beings. Others may be lower-level bodhisattvas who have not yet eradicated afflictions and are not able to control the rebirth process. Still other people are identified as incarnations of great masters due to their accumulation of merit in the past, even though they have not entered even the first of the five bodhisattva paths. We should not assume that everyone who uses the title *rinpoche* is a realized being.

The system of recognizing incarnations of previous spiritual masters is a Tibetan cultural tradition. It is not a practice taught by the Buddha. In the 1960s I discussed limiting the number of tulkus, but one adviser told me



that would be difficult because it is the Tibetans' custom. Nowadays being recognized as a rinpoche has become a position of social status, not one of religious import, and this is not healthy.

We should seek teachers who are well-educated in the Dharma, practice it sincerely, and have compassion for others. In looking at Tibetan society, I often see people ignoring learned geshe and khenpos but showing great respect to rinpoches who are not learned. I tell the young rinpoches that they should not rely on the reputation of their previous lives but should study diligently, practice sincerely, and be humble in this life. If they do, they will be an honor to their predecessor's name. If they do not and merely use their social status to manipulate or deceive others, they are a disgrace, not only to their predecessor but also to the Buddhadharma.

Nowadays, many people look for the incarnations of their deceased teachers, but letting a child speak for him- or herself is better. A child may display obvious characteristics, such as clearly remembering a previous life or reciting texts not memorized in this life. In such cases, we cannot fail to recognize that the child is unusual. Only then could recognition as a tulku possibly be beneficial.

I favor allowing children to grow up naturally and to develop their qualities in this life. Those who have gained spiritual realizations in the past will naturally progress in their own practice and benefit others in this life whether or not they are identified and given a title.

Some people who are unknown in Tibetan society go to the West or Taiwan and suddenly have many titles and are publicized as great teachers. This is completely inappropriate. One lama from Amdo commented to me that in the past lamas' names were short but the list of their realizations was long. But now they have very long and lofty titles, and the list of their realizations is short.

Teachers who are monastics must wear monastic robes, and those who are not monastics should not wear monastic robes or even maroon clothing that resembles monastic robes. The general public as well as Buddhists become very confused when they see a teacher, whom they believe to be a monastic, with a spouse and children. Lay teachers should wear lay clothes, or if they wear a long robe, it should be white and their upper shawl should be predominantly white but with some maroon stripes. For many years I

have recommended this and am happy to see at least some lay teachers follow my advice.

Although the Buddhadharma flourished in Tibet, the general public's level of understanding of the Buddhadharma was low. Many people would look at the height of a teacher's throne or the number of horses in his procession to determine who to respect. They didn't consider that a famous bandit would also have many horses in his caravan!

In Tibet, and now in exile, some people placed great emphasis on external appearance — brocade robes, colorful costumes, and the shape and size of hats. But our Teacher, Śākyamuni Buddha, did not have a hat; nor did he wear special robes. His robes were the same as those of other monastics. Even though some of the Indian masters, such as Asaṅga and Candrakīrti, are depicted with big hats, it is questionable whether such hats were worn in the great Indian monastic universities such as Nālandā.

In Tibet there was perhaps some reason for wearing a hat because the weather was cold. Bald teachers especially found hats helpful! However, Tibetans went to an extreme and made hats in elaborate shapes, sizes, and designs, so much so that some foreigners came to distinguish the different schools of Tibetan Buddhism by the color of their hats. This is very unfortunate. In addition to the yellow, red, and black hats that are so famous, perhaps monastics nowadays could wear green hats, indicating that they care for the environment!

We must try to understand the essence of the Buddha's teachings and the commentaries of the great Indian masters. By doing so, we will see that the true gauge for evaluating the quality of a teacher is his or her understanding and behavior. Faith in spiritual teachers should be well earned. Some great teachers, such as Milarepa, looked like poverty-stricken beggars. The Kadam master Dromtonpa was a humble nomad. The twentieth-century Dzogchen master Dza Patrul Rinpoche looked like an ordinary wanderer. These truly great spiritual masters had no external appearance of grandeur. Our priority should be understanding the meaning of the Dharma, not wearing elegant robes, donning colorful costumes and hats, sitting on expensive seats, or riding in luxurious vehicles. Nowadays we have to add sporting expensive watches and displaying a range of costly

technological gadgets to this list. Of course, every lama says this when teaching, but in their own lives some do not follow it.

Recently the emphasis on elaborate rituals — complete with drums, cymbals, dances, and colorful masks — has increased in the Tibetan tradition, and the emphasis on teaching has diminished. The time has come to change this and to return to the Nālandā tradition of ancient India. Practitioners' philosophical views and conduct must be grounded in the teachings of the Buddha and the great Indian masters. We must simplify ceremonies and rituals, strengthen our philosophical understanding, and implement the teachings in daily life. If we do this, Buddhism will play an important and meaningful role in the upcoming centuries. If we do not, it could degenerate into mere show.

It is important for all of us who consider ourselves to be followers of the Buddha to constantly check our motivation. In my own case, whenever I sit on a high throne to teach, self-importance and pride seldom arise. Even so, I notice that occasionally my thoughts become defiled by the eight worldly concerns. I think how nice it would be if people complimented me on my Dharma talk and how disappointed I would be if they criticized it. Our vulnerability to worldly concerns is real, so we must be extremely careful. To ensure that we are engaging in genuine Dharma practice, we must check that our motivation is not defiled by the eight worldly concerns. Otherwise, self-importance will lead us to have other faults. It then becomes easy to abuse power, greedily seek offerings from the faithful, or manipulate others. We may even envy other teachers and compete with them. All of these corruptions arise once we become proud. However, when we honor the responsibility that comes with sharing the Dharma with others, we will constantly monitor our motivation and repeatedly turn our mind to benefiting others.

## REFLECTION

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1. Why is following the guidance of a spiritual mentor important?
2. What kind of qualities do you want to look for in selecting a spiritual mentor?
3. Are you easily influenced by titles, external appearances, and charisma? If so, what ideas do you have for redirecting your focus to important qualities?

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## *Becoming a Qualified Disciple*

In addition to seeking qualified teachers, we must make ourselves into receptive vessels so that we can benefit from our mentors' instructions. We may receive profound teachings from excellent mentors, but without attempting to develop the qualities of a good disciple, the benefit will be minimal. Āryadeva describes the qualities of a disciple who will realize the meaning of selflessness (CŚ 276):

An unprejudiced, intelligent, and interested listener is called a vessel.

The first quality for suitable Mahāyāna students is being *impartial and open-minded*. We should try to be free from preconceptions and not close-mindedly cling to our own views. If we are biased, we will follow only the teachings that please our ego and accord with our own ideas. Dismissing valuable teachings that challenge our opinions hampers our spiritual progress.

*Intelligence* is the second quality of a disciple. This does not refer to intelligence in academic subjects, but to having the discriminative intelligence that can discern correct and incorrect views as well as what to practice and what to abandon. Without intelligence, our actions, meditation practice, and view will be skewed.

Intelligent and discerning disciples also examine the source of a teaching and are not satisfied unless they know it originated with the Buddha. They investigate if that teaching has been studied and explained by sages, actualized by yogis, and translated by excellent translators. Using reasoning and scriptural citations, they establish a teaching's validity.

Even if students are open-minded and intelligent, if they do not practice, they will not progress. Therefore, *interest*, diligence, eagerness, and commitment to engage in the practice are essential for spiritual transformation.

Two more qualities of a suitable disciple are often added to these three. The first, *respect and veneration* toward the teacher and teaching, makes us

a receptive vessel to receive the Dharma, whereas arrogance and apathy prevent spiritual growth. Appreciating our teachers' wisdom and kindness and respecting the excellent qualities of the teachings moistens our minds, making it receptive to the Buddhadharma.

*Attentively taking the teacher's advice and instructions to heart* by putting them into practice enables us to plumb the depth of the teachings and integrate them into our very being. Do not think that these instructions must be given one-on-one. Even when we are in an audience of a thousand people, our mentor's spiritual instructions remain the key to actualizing the path.

People who sincerely wish to attain liberation or full awakening will cultivate these qualities in order to become receptive disciples and increase the benefit they receive from listening to teachings. In doing so, they become more self-confident and responsible in their Dharma practice. With clear understanding, they will be capable of receiving teachings and empowerments from various spiritual mentors and lineages without becoming either confused or sectarian. Not falling into mistaken ideas of "surrendering everything to the guru," they will not be led astray by teachers with impure motivations. Instead they will derive great benefit from relationships with qualified spiritual mentors. Their clarity of mind and good qualities will increase, and they will become good examples for newcomers on the path.

This book began with an explanation of the two truths, the four truths of the āryas, and the noncontradictory nature of dependent arising and emptiness. These instructions guide a practitioner of middle capacity on the path to liberation and enable a sharp-faculty advanced disciple to ascertain the possibility of attaining full awakening. When you understand these instructions well, you will know the kind of qualities a spiritual mentor must have to guide a disciple on the path to liberation and full awakening. You will also understand the qualities a disciple must have to be a receptive vessel, and the way the disciple should rely on the spiritual mentor.

To illustrate the importance of being an intelligent disciple, the Buddha gives the example of misguided people and intelligent ones who want to get the poison from a water snake in order to use it as medicine. A misguided person grasps the snake's coils or its tail, enabling the snake to turn its head

around and bite him. The poison that this person sought to make into medicine now makes him suffer. Similarly, a person may hear or read the Dharma but not think about it clearly. He thereby injects his own preconceptions into the teaching, twisting the meaning to conform to his ideas, which are based on attachment and animosity. Or, due to ignorance, he misunderstands the actual meaning of the teachings and practices that. This person may also have the wrong motivation, learning the Dharma for the sake of criticizing others or winning a debate. Sadly, a person who incorrectly grasps the teachings often does not realize he is doing so and instead proceeds to share his distorted understanding with others, harming not only himself but others as well. This damage may affect many future lifetimes.

On the other hand, intelligent people grasp the snake's head, and by pressing it in a certain way, extract the poison and make it into medicine. Similarly, wise disciples learn the Dharma and examine the meaning with wisdom. Through wise investigation, they will come to correct conclusions and accept the teachings. Their motivation is to derive spiritual benefit, and they succeed in doing this, thus bringing happiness to themselves and others for a long time to come. The Buddha concludes the simile with this advice (MN 22.12):

When you understand the meaning of my statements, remember it accordingly; and when you do not understand the meaning of my statements, then ask either me or those monastics who are wise about it.

We, too, should ask our teachers and other senior Dharma students when we do not understand a teaching. Even when we think we understand a teaching properly, it is always good to check our understanding with those who are more knowledgeable and skilled in practice than we are. In that way, the Dharma will be wonderful medicine that cures our own and others' suffering.

In case someone misunderstands the simile of the snake and thinks that Dharma is something to grasp onto and identify with, the Buddha continues the sūtra using the simile of the raft. This simile illustrates that, having understood the teachings correctly, we should use them to cross the ocean

of saṃsāra and reach the shore of nirvāṇa, without clinging to the teachings unnecessarily.

A traveler comes across a large body of water. The bank where he stands is dangerous, but the far side is safe. Since there is no ferry, he binds branches together to make a raft and, holding onto the raft correctly, paddles to the other shore. Feeling relieved upon safely reaching the other shore, the traveler should not hoist the raft on his shoulder and carry it around because of attachment to the raft. The sensible thing to do is to set the raft down and go on his way.

Similarly, we are on the frightful, dangerous bank of the ocean of saṃsāra, the other side is nirvāṇa, and the raft to carry us there is the Dharma. When learning the Dharma, we must make sure we hold it correctly. However, once we attain liberation, we will not be attached to the Dharma, cling to an identity of being a Dharma practitioner, or boast of our attainment to others. Just as the purpose of the raft is to cross dangerous water, not to have something to carry around with us, the purpose of the Dharma is to liberate us from cyclic existence, not to give us an identity to grasp with attachment. The Buddha says (MN 22.14):

When you know the Dhamma to be similar to a raft, you should abandon even the Dhamma; how much more so what is contrary to the Dhamma.

The Pāli commentary indicates that here *Dhamma* refers to serenity and insight. Practitioners should not get attached to even the peace of serenity and the sublimity of insight, let alone cling to wrong views such as thinking attachment to sensual pleasure is not an obstruction on the path. While exerting effort to cultivate serenity and insight is essential, we should not cling to the peacefulness that these states bring, but continue to practice until we gain complete liberation.

The Buddha makes a similar point in the *Greater Discourse on the Destruction of Craving (Mahātaṇhāsankhaya Sutta)*, where he questions the monastics regarding their understanding of how the four nutriments perpetuate the five aggregates of saṃsāra. The monastics assure him that they have understood with proper wisdom not only how the aggregates arise

because of the four nutriments but also how they cease when their respective nutriments cease. The Buddha replies (MN 38.14):

Monastics, purified and bright as this view is, if you adhere to it, cherish it, treasure it, and treat it as a possession, would you then understand that the Dhamma has been taught as being similar to a raft, to be used for the purpose of crossing over, not for the purpose of grasping? — “No, venerable sir,” [replied the monastics].

A view may be correct and sublime, but if we treat it as a personal possession, create an identity out of it, or adhere to it with attachment, we have missed the boat. However, going to the other extreme and thinking we can cross the water without a raft is unwise, as is casting the raft aside before we have reached the other side. Open-minded and intelligent disciples will discern the correct view and then contemplate and meditate on it without clinging to it with attachment.

Leaving the raft behind after reaching the other shore does not mean that those who are liberated give up the Buddha’s teachings and do whatever they like. They show their incredible gratitude and reverence for the Dharma by teaching others and guiding them on the path.

By means of the similes of the snake and the raft, we see the importance of making ourselves into suitable vessels to receive and hold the Dharma. While having a fully qualified spiritual master is necessary to progress on the path, it is not sufficient. The more that we put effort into developing correct understanding and good qualities, the more our spiritual mentor will be able to lead us on the path to awakening.

## REFLECTION

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1. What are the five qualities of an excellent disciple? How will developing each one help you on the path?
  2. What ideas do you have to increase the five qualities of a suitable disciple in yourself?
  3. What have you learned from the simile of the snake and the simile of the raft?
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## 5 | Relying on Spiritual Mentors

**A**T PRESENT we have a precious human life complete with access to Dharma teachers and teachings. This fortunate situation came about due to great merit that we created in previous lives. Not wanting to waste the efforts of our previous lives, we should take advantage of this rare opportunity by learning and practicing the Dharma. If we are too busy to attend Dharma teachings while both we and our teachers are alive, we may later regret having lost the chance.

In a Pāli sūtra there is the story of a spirit who had full confidence in Bhikkhunī Sikkhā and lamented that the people of Rājagaha did not take advantage of the teachings she gave. Even though a large assembly was present at a teaching, he was eager for more beings to benefit, and so went around the town of Rājagaha chanting (SN 10.9):

What has happened to these people in Rājagaha?  
They sleep as if they've been drinking mead.  
Why don't they attend on Sikkhā  
as she teaches the deathless state?

But the wise, as it were, drink it up —  
that [Dhamma] irresistible,  
ambrosial, nutritious —  
as travelers do a cloud.

Dharma teachings are more life sustaining than ordinary food and drink. The more we imbibe the Dharma, the more joy fills our minds and hearts. With this in mind, we now turn our attention to how to cultivate a good relationship with our spiritual mentors, the ones who kindly instruct us on the path.

## *The Benefits of Relying on Spiritual Mentors*

Some people translate the term *bshes gnyen bsten pa* as “guru devotion.” This English term may be misleading, evoking the image of blindly surrendering to a holy authority figure, which is certainly not the intended meaning. *Bshes gnyen* means spiritual friend or spiritual mentor. *Bsten pa* means to rely or depend on. For our Dharma practice to be successful, we must properly rely on a wise and compassionate spiritual mentor and guide.

Before engaging in any activity, it’s helpful to know the advantages of doing so and the disadvantages of not doing so or doing it improperly. Many benefits accrue from properly relying on a spiritual mentor or mentors.

- Our thoughts and words will become virtuous because we will follow our spiritual mentor’s wise advice.
- For the same reason, we won’t bring suffering on ourselves or others.
- We will complete the two collections of merit and wisdom and attain full awakening by following reliable teachings.
- We will be able to work for the benefit of sentient beings, including those who have entered wrong paths.
- Because our spiritual mentor teaches us how to purify our negativities, we will exhaust destructive karma that would have ripened in lengthy, unfortunate rebirths. It may instead ripen in this life as comparatively mild discomfort or harm.
- Due to the important role our spiritual mentors play in our lives, we will create great merit, more than is created by making offerings to limitless buddhas.
- By properly relying on our spiritual mentors in this life, we will meet qualified spiritual mentors in future lives.
- Our good qualities will increase, and we will accomplish the welfare of ourselves and others.
- Under our teachers’ compassionate guidance, we will feel supported and inspired in our practice.

All of the benefits come about because we listen with an open mind to teachings from a qualified spiritual mentor and put them into practice. However, if we despise, disdain, or reproach our spiritual mentors, many disadvantages accrue. We will have to endure unfortunate rebirths because of the destructive karma we create from insulting or getting angry at them. We will experience harm and illness in this life. Our good qualities will degenerate and no new good qualities will arise because we won't practice the Dharma. In short, none of the advantages will accrue to us, while their opposites will.

#### REFLECTION

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1. Imagine your spiritual mentors appearing in the space in front of you and looking at you with kindness.
  2. Contemplate each advantage of properly relying on a spiritual mentor.
  3. Contemplate the disadvantages of not relying on a spiritual mentor or of improperly relying on one.
  4. Conclude with a determination to rely on a spiritual mentor with a pure heart and to follow his or her instructions in a systematic way.
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### *Cultivate Trust by Seeing Their Qualities*

We rely on our spiritual mentors in two ways: through our thoughts and our actions. Relying on them through our thoughts entails cultivating two attitudes: trust and faith in our mentors, which are developed by reflecting on their good qualities, and appreciation and respect for them, which arise from reflecting on their kindness to us.

Faith moistens our minds and makes it receptive. It also energizes us to accomplish our goals. The *Ten Teaching Sūtra* (*Daśadharmaka Sūtra*) says (LC 1:80):

Faith is the best of vehicles,  
definitely delivering you into buddhahood.

Therefore, persons of intelligence  
rely on the guidance of faith.

Virtues will not arise  
in those who have no faith,  
just as green sprouts do not grow  
from seeds scorched by fire.

Common faith is faith we have in a particular teacher, although we may not be his or her student at this time. It is called common because it is shared by those who are his disciples and those who are not. Uncommon faith is the faith held by a teacher's students. With such trust and faith, we feel close to our teachers, which enables them to influence us in constructive ways.

Trust is generated by reflecting on our teachers' qualities and the role they play in our lives, which is similar to the role the Buddha would play if he were alive today. Our spiritual teachers play a singular role in our lives, for they are the ones who teach, guide, and encourage us along the path. Through their actions they evince the conduct of realized beings. Without their compassionate assistance, it would be extremely difficult for us to cultivate wisdom and to progress toward awakening. The more we practice, the closer we become to our mentors' minds and the Buddha's mind, strengthening and increasing our faith in the teachings and, by extension, in those who teach and guide us.

An example of this is the young spiritual seeker Sudhana, the main character of the *Array of Stalks Sūtra* (*Gaṇḍavyūha Sūtra*). Sudhana earnestly sought to learn the bodhisattvas' practices. Each spiritual mentor he went to taught him a portion and then referred him to another spiritual mentor to continue his learning. As Sudhana learned and practiced the bodhisattva deeds, his regard for his spiritual mentors increased. Here is the scene in which Sudhana approaches Avalokiteśvara, the twenty-seventh of his fifty-three mentors:

Transported with joy on seeing Avalokiteśvara, his eyes fixed on him, his mind undistracted, full of the energy of faith in the spiritual mentor, thinking of seeing spiritual mentors as at once

seeing buddhas, thinking of the reception of the multitudes of all truths as originating in spiritual mentors, thinking of the attainment of all virtues as deriving from spiritual mentors, thinking of how hard it is to meet spiritual mentors, thinking of spiritual mentors as the source from which the jewels of knowledge of the ten powers are obtained, thinking of spiritual mentors as the source of vision of inexhaustible knowledge, thinking that the growth of the sprouts of goodness depends on spiritual mentors, thinking that the door of omniscience is revealed by spiritual mentors, thinking that the way to enter the ocean of great knowledge is pointed out by spiritual mentors, thinking that the accumulation of the store of omniscience is fostered by spiritual mentors, Sudhana approached Avalokiteśvara.<sup>29</sup>

By reflecting on our teachers' qualities, ethical conduct, kindness, meditative abilities, and so on, we will have a positive view of them. Our trust and inspiration will increase and our minds will be receptive to their teachings. This is not blind faith, because there are reasons to hold this person in high regard and to have confidence in his or her ability to guide us on the path.

However, if we don't use our capacity for critical thinking to contemplate the reasonings proving emptiness and instead employ it to analyze the faults of our spiritual mentor, we put ourselves in the precarious position of possibly angrily cutting off the relationship with our mentor and abandoning Dharma practice. We are the ones who suffer the most, should this happen. The benefit or loss that accrues to us in our relationship with our spiritual mentor depends on which qualities we choose to focus.

We may have more than one spiritual mentor; it is up to us. Atiśa had over 140 mentors, while Dromtonpa had less than five. Since it is important to have a positive regard for our teachers, if we have an extremely critical and judgmental mind, it may be better to have fewer teachers.

Having faith and respect for teachers sitting on high thrones, whom we seldom see, is easy. It is much more challenging to appreciate the teacher who gives us daily or weekly Dharma teachings and to whom we offer

service. We tend to treat that mentor like an old friend and cease to appreciate his or her qualities and kindness. Because we may easily start to criticize his habits or stop listening to his advice, we must take special care in our relationships with the teachers we see often to ensure that our attitude and behavior do not sabotage this most precious relationship.

Since we learn by observing the example of others, reflecting on our teachers' positive qualities will inspire us to make an effort to develop them ourselves. If we have the opportunity to live near our teachers and help them with various projects, we will witness Dharma lived in daily life by observing how our teachers treat people and manage a variety of situations judiciously and compassionately. Learning by observing a wise practitioner is a precious opportunity, one that cannot be gained by reading a book.

Whether or not our teachers are highly realized, we benefit by seeing them in a positive light. If we think someone is an ordinary person, even if he or she teaches us a profound topic, we will not listen or take their words seriously. But if we think an awakened being is teaching us, we will listen carefully and put the teachings into practice. In this way trust and faith in our spiritual mentors supports us in our practice and uplifts us when we feel discouraged.

## *Cultivate Appreciation and Respect by Seeing Their Kindness*

Countless buddhas have appeared in the past, and of these, Śākyamuni Buddha is the kindest to us because he expounded the teachings in our world. Although we did not have the fortune to receive teachings directly from him or from the lineage of sages in India and Tibet that carried his word to the present day, our spiritual mentors act as messengers delivering these priceless teachings to us. Through their kindness we have access to the vast and profound teachings that show us the path to awakening.

Due to our teachers' kindness, we now have the opportunity to gain some Dharma understanding, leave positive imprints on our mindstream, and gain realizations. Although our parents and close friends love us and wish us well, they do not have the ability to lead us out of the morass of

samsāra. The kindness of our spiritual mentors — who alone have the knowledge and skill to guide us — is incomparable. The *Ten Teaching Sūtra* says (LC 1:83):

Develop the following ideas with respect to your teachers: I have wandered for a long time through cyclic existence, and they search for me. I have been asleep, having been obscured by confusion for a long time, and they wake me . . . I have entered a bad path, and they reveal the good path to me. They release me from being bound in the prison of samsāra . . . They are the rain clouds that put out my blazing fire of attachment.

Thinking of the kindness of our teachers in this way, heartfelt gratitude, appreciation, and veneration will naturally arise for them. This joyful attitude removes obstacles and facilitates our practice. The *Array of Stalks Sūtra* expresses the immense kindness of our spiritual mentors (LC 1:83–84):

The teachers are those who protect me from all miserable rebirths; they cause me to know the equality of phenomena; they show me the paths that lead to happiness and those that lead to unhappiness; they instruct me in deeds always auspicious; they reveal to me the path to the city of omniscience . . . they cause me to enter the ocean of the sphere of reality; they show me the sea of past, present, and future phenomena; and they reveal to me the circle of the āryas' assembly. The teachers increase all my virtues. Remembering this, you will weep.

Sudhana reflects:

I, Sudhana, have come here  
thinking one-pointedly, “These are my teachers, instructors in the  
teachings,  
the ones who totally reveal the good qualities of all things  
and then fully teach the bodhisattva way of life . . .

“These bodhisattvas have caused my mind to develop,  
they have produced my awakening as a bodhisattva,  
therefore, these, my teachers, are praised by the buddhas.”  
With such virtuous thoughts, I have come here.

“As they protect the world, they are like heroes;  
they are captains, protectors, and refuge.  
They are an eye providing me with happiness.”  
With such thoughts, I respect and serve my teachers.

## REFLECTION

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1. Had you not met your spiritual mentors, what might your life be like now? What would you be doing? What might the state of your mind be?
  2. Among all those whom you hold dear and who love you, do any of them have the ability to guide you on the path to full awakening?
  3. What do the Dharma teachings mean to you? How valuable are they? Allow yourself to feel gratitude and respect for those who have taught you.
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## *Seeing Spiritual Mentors as Buddhas*

Because of the influence of Vajrayāna in all four Tibetan Buddhist traditions, disciples are instructed to cultivate the perception of their gurus as buddhas. It is important to understand this correctly in order to avoid confusion. In the context of tantra, seeing the guru as the Buddha is important. A guru who is able to give all four empowerments of highest yoga tantra based on his or her own experience is definitely a buddha, and seeing him or her as a buddha is reasonable. Some gurus who give empowerments do not have that experience, but if we see them as buddhas, it increases our concentration and enhances our meditative experience.

When we view our spiritual mentors as the Buddha, buddhahood does not seem so distant. We come to feel close to the Buddha and begin to think that awakening is possible and awakened beings actually exist. Although



not all spiritual mentors are buddhas — some of our mentors are ordinary beings — our practice will progress well from maintaining a positive view of them. For example, in the past the presidents of a country were fully qualified — they were honest, responsible, and cared for the citizens. Later on the quality of the presidents declined. Nevertheless, we see these people as presidents because they have that title, perform that function, and represent our country. We respect them but do not blindly follow them.

The teaching to see the spiritual mentor as the Buddha is borrowed from highest yoga tantra and is often taught earlier on the path to prepare disciples to receive tantric empowerments. However, this teaching is not appropriate for beginners because it is open to misunderstanding. As noted above, the Fundamental Vehicle and Perfection Vehicle do not instruct us to view our teacher as a buddha, although we may personally choose to do so.

We Tibetans say that it's best not to bring the topic of seeing the spiritual mentor as the Buddha to the debate ground because the argument cannot be sustained. In a debate, one monk once asked another, "Some texts say that our spiritual mentors are buddhas. Do you agree?" The second monk replied affirmatively. Then the first monk asked, "You have disciples here in the monastery. Are you also a buddha?" at which point the second monk was chagrined because he knew he was not.

Tsongkhapa's presentation of relying on a spiritual master in the *Lamrim Chenmo* is well balanced, and if we follow that, less confusion will arise. He says (LC 1: 81–82):

Moreover, pay attention to the good qualities that the guru does have — such as ethical conduct, learnedness, and faith — and reflect on these qualities. Once you have become conditioned to this, you may notice that your guru has a small number of faults. However, this does not impede your faith because you are focusing on the good qualities.

Tsongkhapa does not say to see our teacher's faults as good qualities or to see all his actions as perfect. In the *Lamrim Chenmo* he expounds very little on seeing the guru as the Buddha,<sup>30</sup> and when he does, his purpose is to prevent us from damaging our relationship with our guru. He encourages

us to see their good qualities so that we will benefit from their teachings and guidance.

We should avoid fanciful ideas, such as thinking, “Since my mentor is a buddha, he doesn’t get sick,” and not call the doctor when he is ill. We live in the conventional world and must act appropriately. If our teacher makes a mistake while reading a text or explaining its meaning, it is fine to respectfully point it out. We should avoid thinking that since he is an omniscient buddha he should know the way to a distant place, and then become disillusioned when he asks us directions.

Also to be avoided is idealizing our spiritual mentors. There is a Tibetan saying, “A student who is too devoted makes the lama into a hypocrite.” The lama cannot possibly live up to the glowing acclaim the disciple has spread about him or her in the community. Having an idealistic attitude sets us up for disappointment. It is impossible for anyone to continually fulfill our unrealistic expectations.

The measure of gaining proper reliance on the spiritual masters is wholeheartedly appreciating their good qualities and not focusing on their weaknesses. In general, seeing the spiritual mentor as a buddha is a form of useful and constructive imagination; in most cases it is not a reliable cognizer. Even though there are definitely ordinary beings and bodhisattvas among those who teach the Dharma, regarding our teachers as buddhas, listening to their teachings, practicing accordingly, and respectfully serving our mentors enables us to be more receptive to teachings and wise advice and to experience many other positive results.

The meditation to see our spiritual mentors as buddhas is similar to the meditation to imagine the entire Earth covered with skeletons: both involve imagination that is consciously cultivated and will have a beneficial effect on our minds. Ignorance is not the cause of imagining bones covering the ground, so this is not a wrong consciousness. We intentionally meditate in this way to derive benefit; in this case, the reduction of attachment to our body and to saṃsāric existence. Similarly, while our spiritual mentors may or may not be buddhas, we benefit from thinking of them as such because it makes us listen attentively to their teachings and take their Dharma instructions seriously.

If our mind seizes every opportunity to find imperfections in our spiritual mentors, it is helpful to reflect, “Why am I here? It is not to notice my teachers’ shortcomings but to learn from their good qualities.” This brings us back to the reason we are practicing the Dharma.

Should we see flaws in our teachers we can transform them into a learning experience. If our teacher behaves rudely, we think, “This is how I look when I am rude.” This way we will learn from the situation. If we can’t give our spiritual mentors — who have more good qualities than faults — space to be human, it will be difficult to develop tolerance and forgiveness toward sentient beings who have many faults.

Sometimes the “faults” we find in our mentors are actually differences in personal preference. Our teacher likes to wake up early; we like to sleep late. Our mentor loves butter tea; we think it’s unhealthy. Our teacher likes to have a long teaching session with no breaks; we prefer shorter ones with a lot of breaks. None of these are ethical faults on the part of the teacher. Observing how we make differences into faults gives us insight into our habitual way of thinking that needs to be corrected.

We should not force ourselves to see our spiritual mentor as the Buddha out of fear of creating destructive karma or “doing it wrong.” Past masters recommend this practice because they benefited from it. If we try following their advice, we may see a favorable effect. But if this feels uncomfortable, we can turn our minds to topics that inspire us.

## *The Role of Devotion*

The spiritual mentor is often said to be the root of the path, in that this relationship nourishes and stabilizes our practice. But just as a plant also depends on a seed, water, fertilizer, and warmth, we need additional conditions to grow in the Dharma, such as purification and accumulating merit; listening to teachings; cultivating renunciation, bodhicitta, and the correct view; and practicing the three higher trainings and the six perfections. If only respecting and serving our spiritual mentors were adequate for attaining awakening, the Buddha would not have taught a myriad of other practices.

The above is a general explanation applicable to the great majority of people. There are a few cases in which a specific individual, because of his or her very strong devotion and singular karmic connection with a special teacher, is liberated by means of an encounter with that spiritual mentor. Such a situation depends on a highly qualified disciple encountering a highly realized spiritual mentor. In such a case, if the disciple has deep devotion for the spiritual master, it is possible that the grosser levels of mind are neutralized and the subtlest mind becomes active. With this comes the understanding and experience of emptiness. Genuine compassion arises toward sentient beings who are totally immersed in *duḥkha* and ignorant of that fact. Here compassion arises automatically as a byproduct of the subtle mind experiencing emptiness.

There are stories of a few exceptional disciples, and I have met a few individuals who have had profound experiences or have gained realizations through an encounter with their teacher. Their faith in their spiritual mentor was so strong that it was as if they had fallen unconscious. But when they revived from this unconscious state, it was apparent that they had had a deep experience of clear light.

Someone may ask, “Is such a thing possible if the teacher is not highly realized but the disciple has tremendous faith?” Both the spiritual mentor and disciple must be fully qualified for this to occur. If the teacher is not, how could that person spark in a disciple’s mind a realization that is not present in his or her own mind?

Most of the exceptional cases of gaining realizations primarily through faith are found in the Kagyu and Dzogchen lineages, where devotion is emphasized. A quotation from a Kagyu text says there is no doubt about the possibility of being liberated through devotion and veneration. This refers to those few individual cases in whom all the causes and conditions have come together for this to happen. Applying this notion to the general Buddhist population would be a mistake. If everyone could be awakened only through intense devotion, there would be little difference between Buddhism and theistic religions. Furthermore, the Buddha would not have given teachings that constitute more than one hundred volumes in the Tibetan canon. Here we again see that the teachings and modes of practice relevant to specific individuals differ from those given in the general system

of Buddhist teachings and practice. It is important not to confuse these. The teachings of the Nālandā tradition are given from the perspective of the general structure of the path and pertain to practitioners in general, whereas these exceptional cases apply primarily to mahāsiddhas.

## *Relying on Spiritual Mentors in Our Actions*

Having contemplated how to rely on spiritual mentors through our thoughts, we now turn to relying on them through our actions. There are three principal practices.

First, we make material offerings to our spiritual mentors. Because of their qualities, kindness, and the important role they play in our lives, our mentors are potent objects with which we create karma. By making offerings we create great merit, which we dedicate for the awakening of all sentient beings. From the side of spiritual mentors, the quality or quantity of offerings must not influence the diligence with which they guide disciples. Geshe Sharawa, one of the twelfth-century Kadam geshe, said that a spiritual mentor who pays attention to the offerings he or she receives is not a suitable teacher for a disciple aspiring to full awakening.

Second, we respect and serve our mentors, offering our time and energy to assist in their various projects to benefit others. Offering service also includes tending to their personal needs, such as cooking, cleaning, running errands, and caring for them when they are ill.

Third, we offer our practice, meaning that we practice according to our mentors' instructions. This is the best offering, far excelling the first two, because it involves taming our minds by putting the Dharma instructions into practice. Doing this is the offering that most pleases our spiritual mentors.

The Pāli scriptures say that the seven trainees — approachers and abiders who are stream-enterers, once-returners, and nonreturners, and approachers to arhat who have realized impermanence, duḥkha, and selflessness and have some realization of nirvāṇa — serve the Teacher, the Buddha, with acts of love. Arhats, who have eliminated all afflictions and causes for cyclic existence, completely serve the Teacher with acts of love.

When addressing a group of self-indulgent and lax monastics who did not keep the precepts well or make effort in the practice, the Buddha said (MN 70.26):

Even with a [non-Buddhist] teacher who is concerned with material things, an heir to material things, attached to material things, such haggling [by his disciples] would not be proper: “If we get this, we will do it; if we don’t get this, we won’t do it.” So what [should be said when the teacher is] the Tathāgata who is utterly detached from material things?

Even in the case of a non-Buddhist teacher who seeks material gain with attachment, it is not suitable for students to be demanding or rebellious, following the teacher’s instructions only if it pleases their self-centeredness and not following when they don’t feel like it. Needless to say, this should not be the behavior of disciples who have an actual tathāgata as their teacher. We must recall that our teachers instruct us for our benefit, not theirs. Wanting to progress on the path, we should listen well to the teachings and put them into practice so as not to waste either our teachers’ efforts or our own time. The Buddha continues (MN 70.27):

For a faithful disciple who is intent on fathoming the Teacher’s dispensation, it is proper that he conduct himself thus: “The Blessed One is the Teacher, I am a disciple; the Blessed One knows, I do not know.” For a faithful disciple who is intent on fathoming the Teacher’s dispensation, that dispensation is nourishing and refreshing. For a faithful disciple who is intent on fathoming the Teacher’s dispensation, it is proper that he conduct himself thus: “Willingly, let only my skin, sinews, and bones remain, and let the flesh and blood dry up on my body, but my energy shall not be relaxed so long as I have not attained what can be attained by human strength, human energy, and human persistence.” For a faithful disciple who is intent on fathoming the Teacher’s dispensation, one of two fruits may be expected: either final knowledge here and now or, if there is a trace of clinging left, [the state of a] nonreturner.

Our spiritual mentors' kindness in teaching us and caring for us is like that of the Buddha toward his disciples. To benefit from our mentors' guidance, we should abandon all arrogance and competitiveness and be humble and receptive. With sincere aspiration to gain realizations, we should let go of all worldly distractions and focus intently on Dharma study and practice. In that way, we will gain realizations and become bodhisattvas and eventually buddhas.

## *Behavior toward Spiritual Mentors*

Generating faith by reflecting on our teachers' qualities and generating gratitude and respect by reflecting on their kindness are the method to rely on our teachers mentally. As we become habituated to these attitudes, they will be reflected in our actions. When we admire and trust someone, we automatically want to live in a way that pleases him or her. In the Dharma this means training our mind through the systematic approach of the three higher trainings, the six perfections, and tantra.

Some sādhanas — meditation or ritual texts — especially those of guru yoga, say, “May I do only what pleases you [the spiritual mentor].” This phrase improperly understood can generate misconceptions. In some cultures, pleasing someone may be a way to curry a powerful person's favor or to avoid their punishment. A student with such a preconception may seek to please his teacher by offering goods or service with the wish to create merit, but also with the hope to receive recognition or appreciation. If the teacher doesn't reciprocate with sufficient appreciation, the disciple feels offended. It is important that we understand that *pleasing our guru* means to transform our mind into the path.

Some people appear to be devoted, humble disciples in their teachers' presence, but in other situations are obnoxious and rude. Others seek to please the teacher because he is holy, but are inconsiderate to other disciples and sentient beings in general. These behaviors are inappropriate. Assisting sentient beings and treating them well is one aspect of pleasing our guru because it fulfills his or her purpose of benefiting others.

We should avoid being possessive of our teachers or jealously competing with other disciples for their attention. Nor should we use them

to increase our sense of self-importance. Geshe Potowa reflected (LC 1:87):

We present-day followers do not value the teachings at all, but only value the guru's assigning status to us as demonstrated by each cup of tea that the guru gives us. This is a sign of our deep corruption.

Following our teachers' instructions is a skill we must develop. Sometimes we are resistant to advice that does not please our self-centered thought. Other times we take the advice out of context, thinking that an instruction to an individual student should be generalized to everyone. It is important to differentiate general advice that is applicable to everyone and advice meant for a specific individual. If someone walking on a narrow path between two precipices is too close to the left side, we call out, "Go right!" But if the person is too near the right side, we shout, "Go left!" Taken out of context these instructions seem contradictory, although they are not. To avoid confusion, we should inquire about the context in which an instruction was given and to whom it was given.

It is important to respect and to follow the advice of the resident teacher in the place where we live, even though that teacher may not be our principal mentor. The resident teacher heads the community, and for the sake of community harmony as well as for our own spiritual benefit, we should follow her guidance.

When we begin to give Dharma talks, we must avoid competing with our teachers, thinking, "More students come to my Dharma talks" or "I'm a more eloquent speaker than my teacher." Also to be avoided is trying to prove to our spiritual mentors how learned and articulate we are. In all ways, we should be genuinely humble and fully aware that any Dharma we know is due to their kindness and fortitude in teaching unruly disciples like us. Sometimes we may become frustrated or angry and blame our spiritual mentor for our unhappiness. At these times it is especially important to remember that our unhappiness is due to our previous destructive behavior that left karmic latencies on our consciousness, and our anger is due to the seed of anger within ourselves. We are responsible for our emotions, so rather than blame our mentor, it is wise to look inside ourselves and apply Dharma antidotes to our afflictions.



Usually after we calm down, we will feel regret for any harsh words we spoke to our mentors or misleading statements we may have made to cover up our faults. It is wise to go to our teacher and apologize so we can start afresh.

If we have difficulties in our relationships with our spiritual mentors, it could be due to relating to them in an improper way in previous lives. Engaging in purification practices with a strong determination to restrain from such actions in the future will help us clear these obstacles.

## REFLECTION

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1. How would you benefit from having an open and honest relationship with your spiritual mentor?
  2. Contemplate and make examples of specific ways to make offerings to your spiritual mentors of material goods, service, and your practice.
  3. What are appropriate ways to behave with your mentors?
  4. What are inappropriate ways? How can you protect against engaging in them?
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We may encounter situations in which we hold different opinions from our teachers. We may be a vegetarian, but our teacher is not; we may think one political policy would be effective, while our teacher favors another. These are issues of personal preference. Respecting our mentor does not mean we have to agree on every issue. We must remember that we came to our spiritual mentor to learn the path to awakening, not to learn cosmology or debate human rights.

Even the Buddha's disciples didn't always agree with him. For example, one day the Buddha said to his close disciple, "Kassapa, you are getting old now. You've been wearing coarse and uncomfortable robes made of rags. Wear nicer robes offered by lay followers. Instead of eating food gathered only on alms rounds (*pinḍapāta*), accept lay followers' invitations to eat at their homes. Also, dwell in a simple residence, not in the forest." Kassapa replied that he wished to continue these ascetic practices not only because they were conducive for his own practice but also because future

generations would follow his example and derive benefit from them. The Buddha affirmed that this was Kassapa's way of caring for the welfare and happiness of others, his way of demonstrating compassion for the world (SN 16.5). Kassapa respectfully explained to his spiritual master, the Buddha, the reasons for not following his instructions. Seeing the virtue in Kassapa's explanation, the Buddha approved of his actions. There was no contention or resentment, only love between them.

Even advanced disciples may have differing views from their teachers on important issues, such as the correct view of emptiness. Atiśa's respect for his spiritual mentor Serlingpa was incomparable, but he did not follow him in every respect. Serlingpa espoused Cittamātrin tenets, while Atiśa held the Madhyamaka view. This difference did not impinge on the closeness of their mentor-disciple relationship.

Mipham Rinpoche composed a Dharma text and one of his disciples from Amdo wrote a critique of it. Someone questioned the disciple, "How can you critique your guru's work?" to which the disciple responded, "If something unacceptable is said, someone has to counter it." Similarly, even though the *Sūtra Unraveling the Thought* is the Buddha's teaching, Nāgārjuna and other sages critiqued it, saying its meaning is interpretable, not definitive.

In my own case, I had a difference of opinion with my junior tutor, Trijang Rinpoche, concerning the practice of Shugden. I explained to him my reasons for not doing this practice and for discouraging others from doing it. Trijang Rinpoche understood, and there was no damage in our relationship. I still hold him in the highest regard, and my faith in him has not decreased at all.

## *Preventing Difficulties*

All Buddhist traditions have faced difficulties with teachers who do not behave properly or abuse their status to gain offerings, respect, or sex. This is totally against the Dharma and harms not only the other person(s) involved but also the teacher and the existence of the Dharma. Some unfortunate situations have occurred in the West and Taiwan regarding a

few teachers in the Tibetan tradition. This has caused great confusion and feelings of hurt and betrayal in students' minds.

Many of these problems have arisen because the transmission of Tibetan Buddhism abroad is in its early stages. There is no central organization that affirms people's suitability to teach, so it is possible for unqualified people to go abroad and set up a Dharma center. Some people who would never be in a position to give teachings or initiations in the Tibetan community suddenly become "great lamas" in other countries. This is admirable if it is someone who remained humble and did not have the opportunity to show their great qualities in the Tibetan community. But if someone is merely taking advantage of being in another place to promote themselves, it is sad.

Once in another country, these people are separated from the support — and watchful eyes — of their peers and teachers. Isolated and perhaps lonely, they are flattered by the attention and offerings showered on them by devotees. This is no excuse for their poor behavior; everyone is responsible for their own actions. However, having two or three Tibetans of the same sex — or Westerners in the case of Western teachers — living at a Dharma center could help prevent temptation.

Because Buddhism is new in the West, students do not know how to evaluate a teacher's qualities and may rush into a guru-disciple relationship without adequate knowledge. Some students see Tibetans as exotic and mysterious — akin to the Western fascination with Shangri-La. Such an attitude is akin to blind faith and is not conducive for establishing a healthy mentor-disciple relationship. Monastics studying at the monastic universities in India have a much more realistic attitude about their teachers.

Because students are new to Buddhism, they may have blind devotion and obedience to spiritual mentors. Hearing about the great merit gained from making offerings to spiritual mentors, they may give them many donations and gifts — things that someone living in India would not have. The teacher becomes spoiled by the gifts and esteem of the students, and if he is not careful, this could lead to his taking advantage of well-meaning students.

I have received many letters from people in other countries asking me to do something about this, but it is not in my control. Tibetan Buddhism is

not organized like the Catholic Church with a pope and Vatican administration. I cannot make someone return to India or force him to stop wearing robes. When I teach, I give clear instructions about suitable behavior for teachers, both monastic and lay. If people do not listen to me then, it is doubtful that they will heed instructions from my office or the Department of Religious and Cultural Affairs.

As Buddhism becomes rooted in other cultures and people understand it better, they will know the criteria for qualified teachers and will examine potential teachers with care; they will enter into guru-disciple relationships with greater understanding and clarity. In addition, more teachers will live and travel abroad, and people will be able to choose among them.

When looking at damaging situations that have arisen in previous years, I believe both sides have responsibility to prevent such happenings in the future. A spiritual mentor is responsible for his or her behavior. A student is responsible for not going along with any improper behavior on the teacher's part. So education is needed on both sides. Until now, no special training is given to people who become spiritual mentors; their spiritual training is seen as sufficient. Compassion and altruism are the very nature of Buddhist practice. If teachers have cultivated these, they will not abuse their influence on others. I hope Tibetan monasteries will speak more directly to their members about the challenges of living in the West and in Taiwan. Lay Tibetan teachers should seek out ways to prepare themselves to teach in different cultures.

## *Unusual Behavior*

Some past Buddhist siddhas behaved in unconventional ways — they drank alcohol and had consorts. These siddhas were fully realized lay practitioners who could discern what was of long-term benefit to self and others, and their actions were in accord with training on the completion stage of highest yoga tantra. They could demonstrate miraculous abilities, which allayed the public's concerns about their level of realization. For example, they could cause an apple to fall from a tree a distance away and then make the apple go up and reattach to the tree, and Bhikṣuṇī Lakṣmī is said to have cut off her head and then reattached it.

Nowadays there are very few people who are qualified to practice in this way, and because of the difference in society, such conduct is harmful to the Dharma. Nevertheless, some people act in an unconventional manner and proclaim realizations, but do not have any demonstrable exceptional qualities to display in order to confirm their spiritual attainments. Even if they did, I wonder if it would be wise in today's society to show them. The siddhas of old generally displayed their miraculous powers to small, select groups of people who had the karma to benefit from seeing them. Today such an event would be flashed around the world by modern telecommunications. Reporters would want to interview the siddhas and companies would ask them to promote their products. I doubt such attention would be beneficial to either the Buddhadharma, the siddha, or society. Even if our realizations are equal to those of divine beings, our behavior should conform to convention.

Padmasambhava said that as we perfect our realization of emptiness, our respect for karma and its effects and for ethical conduct correspondingly increases. Gaining the correct view is not easy; many misunderstandings about emptiness exist. A prominent one is to claim that since everything is empty, there is no good or bad, and that someone who realizes emptiness is beyond ethical precepts. Some people state this on the basis of faulty reasoning; others because they have had some sort of experience in meditation that is a "wrong realization." They then use this as a rationalization to take advantage of others or to justify enjoying sense pleasures.

Although conventional phenomena do not appear to someone who is in nondual meditative equipoise on emptiness, that does not mean they are nonexistent. Conventionalities exist and the law of cause and effect functions, no matter what our level of realization. If the people who say there is no good and no bad really believe that in their hearts, why do they gravitate toward sense pleasures and self-indulgent behavior? They would not discriminate between attractive and unattractive things at all. If they had genuinely realized nonduality, they would eat poor-quality food, live in the streets and help the poor, do relief work in war zones, and serve others who are suffering. All these situations would be the same to them.

The Buddha was always humble, and he is our Teacher. He worked hard on the path — he lived simply, mixed with everyone, and practiced continuously. Many people nowadays think they are more privileged than the Buddha and do not need to live and practice as he did. In fact no one is above the Buddha; we should follow his example.

Everyone is accountable for his or her behavior, and the practice of tantra is never an excuse for unethical behavior. The *Six-Session Guru Yoga* says, “I shall abandon the four roots, liquor, and unsuitable activities.” The *Kālacakra Tantra* states that the ideal lay tantric practitioner should follow the monastic discipline, except for wearing robes and participating in monastic ceremonies. That means that an ideal lay tantric practitioner would be celibate and abstain from intoxicants.

Although a small amount of alcohol is placed on the altar during some tantric rituals, only a few drops should be consumed after doing the meditation dissolving it into emptiness and transforming it into pure nectar. Recreational drinking by teachers or students at Dharma centers is inappropriate and should be abandoned.

In our present situation of cyclic existence, we are constantly deceived by the false appearances of objects that seem to exist inherently. Our afflictions arise on the basis of these false appearances. Dharma practice is designed to stop false appearances and the grasping at them. What, then, is the purpose of deliberately cultivating more false appearances through taking intoxicants?

Although some highly realized yogis and yoginīs in the past drank and sometimes took on the appearance of being drunk, they were exceptional practitioners with direct nonconceptual realization of emptiness. For them, ingesting feces, urine, and alcohol were all the same. However, I do not think most practitioners nowadays would drink urine or eat feces with the same enthusiasm they have when drinking alcohol!

On a very advanced level of highest yoga tantra, the joining of the male and female organs is a technique for making the subtlest mind manifest and using it to realize emptiness. Here the physical body is used as a mechanical device for furthering insight. Ordinary lust and uncontrolled emission or orgasm are absent. This union is a method for overcoming ordinary desire. It is not free license to indulge in sexual intercourse with everyone. In the

past, in Tibet a practitioner had to demonstrate supernatural powers, such as flying through the sky, to qualify to train in such practice. If the person was a monastic, he or she would disrobe first and then do this practice in a circumspect manner.

Tantric precepts govern this practice and practitioners must adhere to them. Tantra is a higher practice, which implies that a person who takes tantric ethical restraints has sufficient control over his or her body, speech, and mind to keep the Vinaya and bodhisattva ethical restraints, which are comparatively easier to keep. People who find it difficult to observe the five lay precepts are not suitable vessels for tantric practice because they lack the restraint needed to fulfill the tantric precepts and pledges.

It may happen that an unmarried teacher meets an unmarried student. If the relationship develops in a normal way, with mutual agreement and respect, and they decide to marry, it is fine. These two people treat each other equally, so there is no difference in power or status when deciding to have sexual relations. The teacher is not on a throne then! However, if the teacher is with one student one month and another the next, that is not right. Coercing or forcing sexual contact is wrong. Teachers should not manipulate a student into having a sexual relationship by saying she has the signs of being a *ḍākinī* or has great Dharma potential, or that having sex with him is a special blessing. Some people who have been sexually abused by Buddhist teachers give up their faith and respect for the Buddha. This makes me very sad.

Some texts make statements such as, “See all actions of your spiritual mentor as perfect” and “Follow your mentors’ instructions exactly with complete devotion.” These statements are made in the context of highest yoga tantra and apply to exceptional cases in which both the spiritual master and the disciple are highly qualified — for example, Tilopa and his disciple Nāropa, and Marpa and his disciple Milarepa. If we are not the caliber of Nāropa and our mentor does not have the qualities of Tilopa, these statements can be greatly misleading. Hearing stories of Tilopa’s seemingly abusive treatment of Nāropa — instructing him to jump off a cliff and so forth — and Marpa instructing Milarepa to build stone buildings and then tear them down, some people think that following their teachers’ instructions includes allowing themselves to be abused. This is not the case

at all! Marpa told Milarepa, “Do not treat your students like I treated you or the way the great Nāropa treated me. Such practice should not be continued in the future.” This is because it is very rare to find both a teacher and a disciple who have realizations comparable to those great masters.

I have had many teachers whom I value greatly, but I cannot accept seeing all their actions as perfect. When I was in my teens, my two regents fought with each other in a power struggle that involved the Tibetan army. When I sat on my meditation seat, I felt both teachers were extremely kind and had profound respect for them; their disagreements did not matter. But when I had to deal with the difficulties caused by their dissension, I said to them, “What you are doing is wrong!” I did not speak out of hatred or disrespect, but because I love the Buddhadharma, and their actions went against it. I felt no conflict in loyalty by acting in this way. In our practice we may view the guru’s behavior as that of a mahāsiddha, but in the conventional world we follow the general Buddhist approach, and if a certain behavior is harmful, we should say so.

The advice to see all the guru’s actions as perfect is not meant for general practitioners. Because it is open to misunderstanding, it can easily become poison for both mentors and students. Students naively whitewashing a teacher’s bad behavior by thinking anything the guru does must be good gives some teachers a free hand to misbehave. On the teacher’s part, poor behavior is tantamount to drinking the hot molten iron of the hellish states, and it contributes to the degeneration of the Dharma in the world. Only in particular situations and to particular practitioners should it be taught that all the guru’s actions are perfect. Buddhism is based on reasoning and wisdom and must remain so.

Because I frequently give Dharma teachings, many people place great faith in me. But for many years I was also their secular leader. If they saw every action I did as perfect, it would adversely affect the administration. It was important for them to share information and ideas with me and not simply acquiesce to everything I said out of respect.

If you have taken someone as your spiritual mentor and discover he is engaged in some questionable behavior, you may stop attending his teachings. Avoid disrespect or antipathy; anger will only make you miserable. The *Kālacakra Tantra* advises maintaining a neutral attitude and



not pursuing the relationship any further. Keep your distance and cultivate relationships with other teachers, but do not angrily denounce this person. He benefited you in the past, and it is appropriate to acknowledge and appreciate that even though you do not follow him now.

## *Resolving Problems*

Just as there are these three types of spiritual mentors and three ways of relating to them, there are three ways of responding if our mentor asks us to do something outside the general framework of the Buddhadharma — any action that contradicts the Dharma or reasoning. According to Vinaya, we should not follow that advice and should express our reason to our teacher. According to general Mahāyāna, if an instruction conforms to the Buddhist path, follow it; otherwise, do not. According to Vajrayāna, if your guru gives an instruction that does not accord with the Dharma, that is illogical, or that you are incapable of doing, do not follow it. Explain your reasons and discuss the situation with your teacher. This advice comes directly from the Buddha and is found in the scriptures. Tsongkhapa explains (LC 1:86):

*Question:* We must practice in accordance with the gurus' words. Then what if we rely on the gurus and they lead us to an incorrect path or employ us in activities that are contrary to the three ethical restraints? Should we do what they say?

*Reply:* In this regard, Guṇaprabha's *Vinayasūtra* states, "If the abbot instructs you to do what is not in accord with the teachings, refuse." Also the *Cloud of Jewels Sūtra* (*Ratnamegha Sūtra*) says, "With respect to virtue, act in accord with the gurus' words, but do not act in accord with the gurus' words with respect to nonvirtue." Therefore you must not listen to nonvirtuous instructions.

Nevertheless it is improper to take a guru's wrong actions as a reason to misbehave yourself, such as disrespecting or despising your guru. Rather, excuse yourself politely and do not engage in what you were instructed to do. The *Fifty Verses of Relying on a Spiritual Master* says:

If you cannot reasonably do as the guru has instructed,  
excuse yourself with soothing words.

A story in the *Jātaka Tales* tells of Śākyamuni Buddha's previous life as a bodhisattva-disciple of a teacher who told his students that stealing was virtuous. While the other students nodded in agreement and prepared to fulfill their teacher's instruction to rob others, the bodhisattva sat quietly. Asked to explain his silence and lack of enthusiasm, he said that stealing was unethical and contradicted the general conduct explained in the teachings. The teacher, who had been testing the students, then praised him.

If you think the advice of your teacher is unskillful or unwise even though it may be ethical, explain your way of thinking and discuss the issue with the teacher. It is appropriate to ask questions in order to clear your doubts. This leads to better communication, fewer misunderstandings, and may increase your respect for your teachers.

In 1993 at a conference with Western Buddhist teachers in Dharamsala, Western teachers told me of a few Buddhist spiritual mentors whose behavior regarding finances, sexual relationships, and so on deeply disturbed people and gave the wrong impression of Buddhism. I told them that these "teachers" do not follow the Buddha's teachings. I encouraged them to speak frankly with these teachers, and if they do not listen, then they should make their behavior public. Although these teachers do not care about the Buddha's teaching, perhaps they will care about their reputation and change their ways. Some people ask me to speak to these teachers, but that has little effect. If they do not listen when I give teachings and if they do not respect the Buddha's teachings, they will not listen if I give them personal advice.

You may wonder what to do if a friend is a student of a teacher whose ethical conduct is questionable. Tantric teachings speak of the destructive karma created by separating a mentor and student, yet you want to prevent your friend from harm. If you see that your friend's relationship with a teacher is definitely harmful, it is suitable to warn him or her, simply stating facts in a nonjudgmental manner. But if that relationship is not harmful, it is best to leave things alone. The key to whether you create the negative karma of separating a disciple and teacher lies in the motivation. Actions

motivated by an angry, judgmental attitude are to be avoided, whereas those based on compassion and tolerance are encouraged.

When Tibetan teachers ask you to raise money or give donations to their monasteries, use your discriminating wisdom. In some cases a legitimate need exists and the funds will benefit people. In that case, it is good to help support worthwhile projects if you can. But when such funds will be used for other purposes, such as buying unnecessary consumer goods for the teacher's family or sending them on a holiday, there is no need for you to give.

As with most problems, the best approach is to take steps to prevent them. I recommend preparing Tibetan teachers to teach in other countries, establishing support systems so that they are not cut off from their peers while teaching abroad, and ensuring that they have enough time for their own Dharma practice.

Also, I suggest educating Westerners on the qualities of good spiritual mentors, the meaning and purpose of the mentor-disciple relationship, and constructive modes of dealing with uncomfortable requests. Of course, both parties need to learn, reflect, and meditate on the Buddhadharma and to adhere to the basic Buddhist tenets and guidelines for ethical behavior. When they do, spiritual mentors and disciples alike benefit, as will many other living beings.

## *When Our Spiritual Mentors Pass Away*

Because our spiritual mentors are valuable in our lives and dear to us, when a spiritual mentor passes away we will probably feel a great loss. When Dromtonpa was dying, he lay his head in the lap of one of his close disciples, the great scholar Potowa. Saddened by the fact that his teacher was leaving, Potowa was crying, and a tear fell on Dromtonpa. Drom looked up and asked, "Why are you crying?" Potowa responded, "Up to now, I've had you as my guru, so there was always someone I could ask questions and seek counsel and guidance from. But now you are leaving, and I will have no one to clarify points of doubt and guide me on how to practice."

Dromtonpa counseled Potowa, “You do not need many gurus. From now on, seek your guru in the Tripiṭaka, the three baskets of scriptures. The sūtras, tantras, treatises, and commentaries by the great sages will be your teacher and spiritual guide. Rely on them, because I would give you no advice different from that of the Buddha and the great masters.” This advice is important for us to bear in mind.

It is beneficial to repeatedly make aspirational prayers to meet qualified Mahāyāna spiritual mentors in the future and to accumulate merit and wisdom, which are the causes to be cared for by such mentors, until we reach full awakening.

## *Advice to Spiritual Mentors and Disciples*

Years ago I heard about an abbot in Kham, Tibet. Some visitors came to see him. He was not there and his attendant told the visitors, “He has gone to scare the people in the nearby town.” It seems that this lama told people they would go to hell if they didn’t heed his instructions. This is not the Buddhist way.

I would like to speak frankly to both spiritual mentors and Dharma students. From 2012 to 2015 I taught the eighteen lamrim texts. Some of these texts emphasize that the guru is Vajradhara, and if you don’t listen to your guru’s instructions, you will be born as a hell being. What is all this about? The Buddha never said if you don’t listen to his teachings and don’t do as he says you will be reborn in hell! The Buddha said we should not accept teachings with blind faith but through having investigated and analyzed them. This is the true way to follow the Buddha’s teachings.

If something doesn’t hold up to reasoning, we should not accept it unless it can legitimately be interpreted to mean otherwise. For this reason even some Nālandā masters rejected statements in the sūtras. After examination I eschewed the traditional cosmology with Mount Meru at the center. When I said this during teachings in South India, some monks were initially uncomfortable. How can the Dalai Lama reject Mount Meru? But no one could say I was no longer a good Buddhist because I disagreed with Vasubandhu on that topic. Our having freedom to examine the teachings is

wonderful; this is a special quality of Buddhism that the Buddha himself encouraged.

Nowadays we need to introduce people to the Dharma by teaching the two truths and the four truths of āryas so that people will understand the real teachings of the Buddha. Contemplating those topics gives people confidence; they will understand the Dharma and appreciate their precious human lives. With faith based on reasoning and understanding, they can later learn the ten powers of a buddha based on understanding the *tathāgatagarbha*, the potential to become a buddha. Otherwise it seems that the teacher is imposing beliefs on disciples and threatening them with a hellish rebirth should they have doubts. It also appears that some teachers impose the notion that the guru is the Buddha on disciples who do not understand the true Dharma, and in this way manipulate disciples.

If you study well, you will gain confidence in the Dharma based on understanding. A teacher who encourages you to think about the teachings is a good teacher. People who want to teach the Dharma must have knowledge and experience and act with integrity. The more respect a spiritual mentor receives, the humbler he or she should become. Mentors must discipline their body, speech, and mind by practicing the three higher trainings and should not be content with a partial understanding of the Dharma. Since there are false gurus, students must check carefully.

In short, we need to be twenty-first century Buddhists. Following tradition and believing with blind faith is the old way. To be Buddhists now, we must have a fuller knowledge of Buddhism, especially the Nālandā tradition, which presents the Dharma in a systematic fashion. Nālandā masters refute wrong views, establish their own views, and then clarify any remaining questions. We must read, study, and hear teachings on the texts by these great Indian masters and then use our human intelligence to the maximum to investigate their meanings.

For forty years now, I have urged monasteries that principally perform rituals to do more study. I've made sure that the nuns have access to higher studies and have encouraged lay Buddhists to study as well. When you learn the Dharma, don't limit yourself to what is said in the textbooks of your own monastery. Study broadly.



## 6 | How to Structure a Meditation Session

### *Types of Meditation*

OUR HAPPINESS AND SUFFERING is directly related to the objects our mind focuses on and our thoughts and interpretations of them. A mind habituated to focusing on our own or others' faults, exaggerating them, and angrily complaining about them is an unhappy mind. A mind steeped in seeing others' kindness, appreciating it, and wishing them happiness is a peaceful mind. Mental purification is needed to release destructive mental habits and cultivate beneficial ones. Transformation occurs through familiarizing ourselves with wholesome objects and beneficial perspectives.

Familiarization occurs in both formal meditation sessions and in the time between sessions when we go about our daily life activities. Because our unsatisfactory experiences in cyclic existence have no break, neither should our efforts to transform our mind and free it from afflictions. As long as we are under the influence of ignorance and karma, it is necessary to make continuous effort on the path and to discipline and transform our mind in both meditation sessions and break times.

There are several ways of speaking about the various types of meditation. One way is in terms of stabilizing and analytical meditation. *Stabilizing meditation* (T. 'jog sgom) channels the energy of the mind and generates single-pointedness. It enables the mind to remain on a virtuous object, such as the Buddha, or a neutral object, such as the breath, for as long as we wish without distraction or laxity, and it enhances our concentration (*samādhi*). Concentration brings many benefits: it enables us to investigate objects such as impermanence and emptiness intensely and to familiarize ourselves with virtuous emotions such as love and compassion without distraction.

*Analytical meditation* (T. *dpyad sgom*) enables us to penetrate and understand an object. Meditation on emptiness cannot be done unless we understand what emptiness is and can identify it correctly. Reasoning is necessary before we can progress to direct nonconceptual perception. Analytical meditation is also used with other lamrim topics — precious human life, death, the qualities of the Three Jewels, and so forth. Here we contemplate the various points the Buddha and great masters have employed to explain these topics. Reflecting on the points one by one can bring deep, transformative understanding.

Both stabilizing and analytical meditation can be done in one meditation session. For example, we reflect on the qualities of our precious human life with analytical meditation. Understanding the purpose and rarity of our precious human life, we automatically feel extremely fortunate, like a beggar who has found a jewel. We then concentrate on that feeling with stabilizing meditation to integrate the experience with our mind. This enables us to remember the preciousness of our life in the break times and influences the choices we make in life. Similarly, analytical meditation is employed to refute inherent existence and leads to a correct understanding of emptiness. We then focus on this absence of inherent existence with stabilizing meditation to accustom our mind to it.

Another way of discussing meditation is meditation on an object and meditation to transform our subjective experience. In *meditation on an object*,<sup>31</sup> we work to apprehend a particular object — impermanence or emptiness, for example — that we haven't previously apprehended. Investigating that object with wisdom, we cultivate a correct ascertainment of it and then familiarize ourselves with that. The mind meditating on impermanence first focuses on a particular thing, such as the body, and then develops an understanding of its attribute of impermanence — the body's momentarily changing nature — which we haven't previously realized. The meditating mind realizes the body's impermanence, and impermanence becomes that mind's apprehended object.

The meditation on emptiness is similar. Emptiness is an object we haven't perceived previously, and the meditating mind endeavors to understand and then see it more clearly. First we obtain a rough idea of the lack of inherent existence, then we apprehend it with a correct inferential



cognizer. Finally, we remove the veil of the conceptual appearance and cognize emptiness directly.

In *meditation to transform our subjective experience*,<sup>32</sup> we mold the mind into a particular subjective experience. Compassion is not a separate object that we try to ascertain, as in meditation on an object. Rather, we want to transform our mind into the subjective experience of compassion. To do this, we contemplate sentient beings' kindness and their duḥkha. A wish for them to be free from duḥkha and its causes arises in us, whereby our subjective mental experience becomes compassion. Through familiarization with this experience over time, our compassion gains in strength, until eventually it arises naturally whenever we see a sentient being. To cultivate faith, fortitude, and love, we similarly meditate to transform our subjective experience.

When meditating on compassion, the observed object of our meditation is sentient beings who experience any of the three types of duḥkha. The aspect is the wish to free them from this duḥkha. Compassion does not apprehend freedom from suffering. It is an aspiration and a heart-transforming experience.

Another type of meditation involves visualization, for example, imaging a Buddhist deity and its maṇḍala (environment). Imagining being and acting like a buddha encourages us to create the causes to become one.

Meditation sessions enable you to deepen your understanding and intensify your concentration on the meditation object. In the break times when eating, walking, or engaging in daily life activities, do not forget the meditation topics. With a corner of your mind recall what you have meditated on. You may wish to choose one lamrim topic each day, meditate on it in the morning, and view your experiences that day through the lens of that topic. One day dwell on precious human life — investigate it during meditation sessions and be aware of your fortune and the opportunity it provides during the day. The next day focus on death and impermanence, and as you go about your daily activities, recall that you and the people and environment around you are transient. In this way, avoid becoming attached to anything. The following day, focus on refuge, and so on, cycling through the lamrim topics. In this way, integrate the meaning of each lamrim topic into your life day by day.

You may prefer to focus on one lamrim topic for a week or even a month before going on to the next. This enables you to go more deeply into each one. Alternatively, focus on the topic that seems most appropriate to help subdue the afflictions likely to arise that day, tailoring your practice to your needs each day.

Regularly reading texts about your meditation topic and discussing it with Dharma friends are also helpful. This is like keeping a fire's embers glowing overnight so that the fire is easy to start the next morning. Similarly, cultivating mindfulness of a lamrim topic during break times invigorates and intensifies our meditation sessions and aids our mental development.

In this way, gradually develop your mind. I often advise my friends, including those doing long retreats, not to expect spiritual development to occur in only a few years. The key is to make effort daily so that over time gradual change occurs. We progress toward our long-term goal of buddhahood day by day.

#### REFLECTION

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1. Review the meaning of meditation on an object and meditation to transform our subjective experience. Make examples of each.
  2. Review the meaning of stabilizing and analytical meditation. Make examples of how you could employ those in your practice.
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## *Meditation on the Lamrim*

Having a consistent and continuous meditation practice produces stable changes in our mind. I would now like to outline how to do a regular daily meditation practice based on the lamrim — stages of the path — in the hopes that you will implement this for your own and others' benefit. With a strong foundation gained through meditation on the lamrim, your natural perspective on life will be the Buddhist worldview, and your character will be shaped by the aspirations for liberation, bodhicitta, and wisdom.

Some people prefer to read a Dharma book, review notes taken during oral teachings, listen to recordings, or watch videos of Dharma talks before meditating so they can meditate on the meaning of what they just studied. Other people prefer to meditate first and study later. Such time for study, reflection, and meditation is important for your emotional, physical, and spiritual health. Make a place for this quiet time in your life and let it become a habit. You'll experience the benefits.

The best time for meditation is in the early morning as the mind is clearer and sharper than and not yet distracted by the day's activities. Familiarizing yourself with wholesome thoughts and emotions in the morning influences how you live the rest of the day, especially if you generate bodhicitta, which opens your heart to all sentient beings, and remember that people and things are transient and lack an independent nature, which reduces your grasping. If your schedule doesn't permit you to meditate in the morning, meditate at another time in the day when you can relax and will not be interrupted.

Although meditating for an hour is good, if that is not possible, do what is comfortable for you. Conclude before you feel tired so that you will have a positive feeling about meditation. Pushing yourself to meditate for longer than you are comfortably able to will make your mind resistant to future practice. Ten minutes of good-quality meditation is better than sitting for an hour with a distracted or sleepy mind. However, a person who is very busy and has little fortitude will find meditation almost impossible. He should do just a short prayer and then finish. That's best.

To get up early, we may have to sacrifice late-night activities in order to go to bed earlier. This may be easier for me to do because I live in a monastic environment in Dharamsala, an Indian town that is fairly quiet in the evening. In other places, there is entertainment and social life, so sticking to a regular schedule of daily meditation may be more challenging. Just as daily meals and exercise are necessary to keep our body healthy, daily spiritual practice is essential for our mental well-being and progress toward awakening.

Meditation sessions consist of three parts: the preparation, actual practice, and conclusion. The *preparation* involves taking refuge in the Buddhas, Dharma, and Saṅgha; generating the bodhicitta motivation to

attain full awakening for the benefit of all sentient beings; and purifying and creating merit. The *actual practice* is meditating on the lamrim topic for that session. At the *conclusion*, dedicate the merit created to attain buddhahood and lead all sentient beings to awakening as well.

Try to avoid developing bad habits in your meditation. As in other activities, correcting a bad habit in our meditation practice is more difficult than establishing a new habit. Pay attention to the meditation instructions and do your best to follow them; if necessary, you can adjust them slightly to suit your personal needs and situation.

## *The Six Preparatory Practices*

When describing how to structure a meditation session, lamrim texts begin with the six preparatory practices that are done before the actual practice. These are: cleaning the room and arranging the altar, making offerings, sitting in the correct meditation position, taking refuge and generating bodhicitta, contemplating the seven limbs, and requesting inspiration from our root and lineage spiritual mentors

### *Cleaning the room and arranging the altar*

Begin by cleaning the room and arranging the altar to enhance the environment in which you meditate and beautify the place where you will invite the buddhas and bodhisattvas to come. Cleaning the environment is analogous to cleansing your mind and making it more receptive. Meditating in an uncluttered and peaceful room is best, not in the same room as the television, computer, or your children's toys. However, if that is not possible, do your meditation session in whatever space is available. It is not necessary to have a separate room for meditation.

On a table, set up the symbols of the Buddha's body, speech, and mind: a statue, a Dharma text, and a stūpa, respectively. Place the image of Śākyamuni Buddha in the center, as he is the founder and source of the teachings. I am sad to see that nowadays some people place meditational deities and not the Buddha at the center of their altars, as if they value the meditational deities more than the Buddha. Seeing the Buddha's image

reminds you of his qualities, which gladdens and motivates your mind. Avoid buying costly Buddha images with the motivation to show them off to friends, and cultivate an attitude of respect for all Dharma items.

### *Making offerings*

Making offerings enables you to create vast merit and cultivate the mind that delights in giving. Offer items that are pure in two regards. First, they are procured honestly, through right livelihood. Avoid obtaining offerings — or for that matter, daily life requisites — through the five wrong livelihoods of flattery, hinting, giving a small gift in the hopes of receiving a large one, coercion, or hypocrisy. Second, the offerings are given with a pure motivation — a sincere wish to practice the Buddhadharma for the sake of all beings — not simply to receive some benefit for this life alone or to have a beautiful altar.

We may offer things from our own culture and items easily available in the place where we live. It is not necessary to imitate Tibetan-style offerings. In Tibet we made food offerings and tormas (ritual cakes) out of tsampa (barley flour) because it was readily available. But in the West tsampa is hard to come by, and it seems strange to eat one thing and offer something else to the Three Jewels, so offer fruit, cookies, and other foods that you consider delicious instead of tormas made of tsampa. I do this too when traveling in other countries.

Most important, the offerings to the buddhas and bodhisattvas should be the same or better quality than what we eat. Avoid making lavish offerings with the hidden motivation of eating them later. Tibetans know that tsog offerings will later be distributed to the assembly, so they use delicious ingredients to make them. But the tormas that will not be eaten are made of cheap ingredients and sometimes taste so bad that no one would even want to eat them! This is not as it should be.

Arrange the offerings nicely with respect for the Three Jewels and with the motivation that the Buddhadharma long endure and sentient beings benefit from it. Whether we are able to offer a lot or a little, our motivation is most important because it is the purity of our intention that determines the value of our actions. Although Milarepa was impoverished, he gained

high realizations because of his strong faith, correct motivation, and joyous effort.

### *Sitting in the correct meditation position*

If you can, sit in the seven-point position of Buddha Vairocana as outlined in the *Explanatory Tantra Vajramālā*. Sitting in this way enables the body to remain firm and the mind steady. It also aids the flow of the subtle energies in the body.

1. Sit on a cushion of whatever shape and size works best for you with your legs in the vajra position — the left foot on the right thigh and the right foot on the left thigh. If this isn't possible, other cross-legged positions are fine. Some people find sitting on a slanted meditation bench enables their back to be straight and is easier on their knees. You may also sit on a straight-backed chair with your feet flat on the floor.
2. Put your right hand on top of the left, palms up. Touch the thumbs together lightly and put your hands in your lap near your navel.
3. Keep your shoulders level.
4. Straighten your back.
5. Tuck your chin in slightly so that the tip of your nose is aligned with your navel, but do not let your head droop.
6. Keep your lips and teeth natural, with your tongue on the upper palate to prevent thirst as well as excess saliva.
7. Direct your eyes toward the tip of your nose. If this is difficult, direct your gaze downward in front of you without focusing on anything specific. As your mind becomes more concentrated, you will cease to notice what comes into your field of vision.

Keeping your eyes slightly open when you meditate prevents drowsiness. If your eyes are focused on an attractive object, distraction will easily arise, so place them on a neutral object. Although your eye consciousness may see this object, do not focus on it or let the mental consciousness — the meditating consciousness — get involved with it. Do not intentionally close your eyes, but if they naturally close, it is fine. If you

become accustomed to meditating with your eyes slightly open, restraining your senses in break time will be easier because you are already used to ignoring sense data. The position of the eyes may differ according to the practice. When doing the Kālacakra practice, the eyes are open and look up; in Dzogchen, the eyes are open and look straight ahead.

Your physical position should be firm yet relaxed; avoid tensing your muscles. Sitting erect helps the mind to be clear and alert, while lying down often leads to falling asleep. However, this may not be true for people with different habits or cultural backgrounds, so judge this for yourself.

Depending on the layout of the room, facing east is recommended because the sun rises there and light uplifts your mental attitude and dispels mental sluggishness. Sitting in a well-lit room also serves that purpose if you struggle with drowsiness. If your mind is easily excited, you may face the wall, but otherwise it is not necessary to do that.

The Vairocana posture is sometimes said to have eight points. In this case, calming the mind by observing the breath is added to the above seven. This is especially helpful to do if your mind is agitated. Breathe in and out in a natural, even rhythm without undue noise or effort. Do not force your breath. Place your attention on the breath, experiencing and observing each breath, without letting the mind stray to other objects. If you get distracted by a sound, thought, or physical sensation, simply acknowledge it, and then return your attention to the gentle flow of the breath. In this way, let your mind calm down in preparation for taking refuge and generating bodhicitta.

Meditation on the breath may be done in several ways and for different purposes in both Buddhist and non-Buddhist contexts. Here it is done to calm the mind before meditating on the stages of the path. Meditations to develop serenity and insight using the breath as the object of meditation will be discussed later.

After observing the breath for a few minutes, examine your mind to see if any afflictions are present. If they are, reflect that you have experienced so much misery in this and previous lives by following attachment, anger, and confusion. Make a firm determination not to get entangled with them, but to do your practice with focus.

*Taking refuge and generating bodhicitta*

The process of taking refuge and generating bodhicitta begins with visualizing the Buddha, Dharma, and Saṅgha in the space in front. You may do the simple visualization of Śākyamuni Buddha, thinking he is the embodiment of all the Buddhas, Dharma, and Saṅgha, or the complex visualization with the lineage teachers, deities, bodhisattvas, and so on surrounding the central figure of Śākyamuni Buddha. When meditating mainly on the method side of the path — the cultivation of renunciation, bodhicitta, and the like — you may want to visualize Avalokiteśvara and Maitreya near the Buddha, and when developing wisdom, you can imagine Mañjuśrī next to the Buddha. When facing obstacles, such as illness or injury, visualize Tārā seated near the Buddha, and so on.

Visualization is an imaginative process done in our minds. Do not think you should “see” things as you do when your eyes are open; we are generating mental images in our mind’s eye. For beginners these images will be vague, but as we progress and develop familiarity with visualization, they will become more vivid.

You may wonder why Tibetan Buddhism encourages visualization. Imagining the holy beings naturally makes us reflect on their awakened qualities; thinking that we are in their presence creates a feeling of closeness with them. All of this strengthens our faith and confidence in the Three Jewels, which are more important than the clarity of the visualization. To review, there are three types of faith: inspired, aspiring, and believing faith.<sup>33</sup> We cultivate inspired faith by discerning and reflecting on the wonderful qualities of the Three Jewels, making our mind inspired with a vivid reflection of their qualities. To this joyous state of mind, we add understanding of the four truths of āryas, which leads us to be convinced that the Three Jewels — particularly the Dharma Jewel, which consists of the third and fourth truths — are nondeceptive objects of refuge that we can fully rely on to guide us to liberation and awakening. This is believing faith. Strengthening this faith, we gain stronger determination and do not simply admire or believe in the Three Jewels but aspire to become like them. This is aspiring faith, which gives us great enthusiasm to practice.

To engage in the uncommon Mahāyāna practice of taking refuge, in addition to visualizing the Three Jewels in front, imagine all sentient beings surrounding you. Recalling that they are experiencing various types of



duḥkha in cyclic existence, generate strong compassion that wants them to be free from all duḥkha. While chanting the refuge verse, think that you are leading them in turning to the Three Jewels for refuge.

Some people think that generating compassion is useless because it is impossible to eliminate suffering completely. Remembering that all afflictions can be eliminated and that all beings have the potential to become buddhas clears this misconception. Other people fear that thinking about others' suffering will cause them to feel hopeless and fall into despair. Should this happen, our focus has shifted from compassion for others to personal despair that wants to protect ourselves from witnessing anything discomfoting. To renew our compassion, we should return our focus to sentient beings and recall the joyous and skillful ways in which the Three Jewels continuously work to benefit them. This gives us hope and inspires us to work for the welfare of others.

Reflecting in this way, our compassion for sentient beings and faith in the Three Jewels become so strong that we want to express them by reciting “I take refuge in the gurus. I take refuge in the Buddha. I take refuge in the Dharma. I take refuge in the Saṅgha.” These words reflect our inner feelings of faith and determination.

Some people ask why “I take refuge in the gurus” is added, since Buddhists have three objects of refuge, not four. The spiritual master is the one who introduces us to the Three Jewels, and due to his or her kindness, we are able to learn and practice the path and eventually become the Three Jewels. To emphasize the importance and kindness of our spiritual mentors, especially in tantric practice we include them when taking refuge. Here the guru is seen as inseparable with the Buddha.

Recite each line of the refuge several times before going on to the next. This is more effective than reciting all the lines together several times. While reciting each line, focus on light streaming from that refuge object into you, purifying all negativities you have created in relation to that refuge object and bringing its inspiration into you. In this or previous lives, we may have angrily criticized our spiritual teacher or defamed the Buddha. We may have deprecated the Saṅgha with our sarcastic remarks.

Perhaps we criticized subtle points of the Dharma thinking they are just Tibetan culture, or said that the Dharma is not a correct path because it does

not agree with our ideas. Before we can accurately discriminate what is Asian culture and what is the Buddha's teachings, it is unwise to dismiss certain teachings, "This doesn't pertain to me. It is only meant for Tibetans." Similarly, it is not wise to declare, "The Buddha didn't teach this and that" simply because we do not feel comfortable with that teaching. It is wiser to maintain an open mind and think, "I do not understand this point and will continue to learn and think about it until I reach a clear understanding. In the meantime, I will practice the teachings that I understand because doing so benefits me."

Negativities in relation to the Saṅgha are created by criticizing āryas or the monastic community. Since we ordinary beings are not capable of discerning the spiritual levels of others, it is wiser to avoid hostile judgment concerning anyone, as this interferes with our refuge and creates destructive karma. Avoid making sweeping statements about the Saṅgha, for example, saying that monasticism is useless and outdated, that monastics are parasites on society, or that celibacy is unhealthy. Such misconceptions make me sad. Our teacher, Śākyamuni Buddha himself, was a monastic, and he established the monastic community for a good purpose. Due to the kindness of the Saṅgha, the teachings exist in pure forms today and we are able to encounter them. Respecting the precepts that exist in the monastics' mindstreams enables us to benefit from their good example of ethical conduct.

When visualizing white light flowing from each refuge object into you and all sentient beings around you, think that the negativities created in relation to that refuge object are purified. Then imagine golden light streaming from them into you and all sentient beings, inspiring your minds with their good qualities. In this way, form a pure and strong connection to the Three Jewels.

After taking refuge, generate bodhicitta. Cultivating the proper motivation for our meditation is extremely important, because the result of our spiritual practice accords with our motivation for doing it. Although your bodhicitta may at present be contrived and generated only with effort, do not despair. By reflecting on bodhicitta repeatedly, you will gradually become more accustomed to it, until eventually this altruistic intention will arise effortlessly within you.

At this point, pause and be aware of the status of the I who is taking refuge and aspiring to awaken. How does this I exist: Does it have an inherent nature or does it exist dependent on other factors?

Now, with firm aspiration to follow the guidance of the Three Jewels for the benefit of all sentient beings and with a sincere wish to become the Three Jewels, dissolve the refuge objects into you by imagining that they melt into light and dissolve into the Buddha, who, in turn, dissolves into light that absorbs into your midbrow. The dissolving of the refuge objects into you is not like butter melting on a dish, where the butter and dish remain separate. Rather, reflect that we ordinary beings and the Buddha have the same nature. Just as the Buddha's mind is empty of inherent existence, our mind is also free from inherent existence. This is the meaning of the statement, "The buddhas and sentient beings are of equal taste in emptiness." Just as the buddhas were able to attain awakening because they had the natural Buddha nature and the transforming buddha nature, we have the same buddha nature that they have. Just as the buddhas were once ordinary beings who practiced the Dharma diligently, removed their faults, and developed all good qualities, we, too, can do this by putting energy into cultivating the path.

Reflecting on these similarities between the buddhas and sentient beings leads us to contemplate the ultimate nature of all existents — emptiness. This is the real meaning of the Buddha dissolving into us. At this point, do not focus on the qualities of the Three Jewels, but on their emptiness of inherent existence, which is the same as your ultimate nature. When meditating on emptiness, conventional objects such as buddhas and sentient beings do not appear to the mind, so do not see yourself and the refuge objects as separate; you have become nondual in emptiness. At this point, dwell in emptiness according to your present understanding of it.

After a while, within this emptiness of true existence, your wisdom realizing emptiness appears in the form of the Buddha with a body made of golden light. Imagine that, as the Buddha, you radiate light that purifies and inspires sentient beings, transforming them into buddhas and their environments into pure lands — places where all conditions are conducive for Dharma practice. Allow your mind to rest in this vision of all sentient

beings being liberated from cyclic existence due to your having guided them with compassion.

Then reflect that sentient beings still live in conflict because they lack the four immeasurables — equanimity, love, compassion, and joy. Equanimity is the wish for all beings to be free from bias, attachment, and anger. Love is the wish for them to have happiness and its causes. Compassion is the wish that they be free from *duḥkha* and its causes. Joy is the wish that they never be separated from sorrowless bliss.

Meditate on these four immeasurables to reinforce your feeling of connection and involvement with others. This will help you to avoid harming them and to engage in benefiting them in your daily life. Although these practices are done at the level of imagination, they plant seeds in our mindstreams that enable us to act in this way.

### *Contemplating the seven limbs*

Before contemplating the seven limbs, we imagine the merit field (*punya-kṣetra*). A field of merit is so-called because in it we plant the seeds of virtue that will bring good results. Here the field of merit is the assembly of our root spiritual mentors, the lineage spiritual mentors, meditation deities, buddhas, bodhisattvas, solitary realizer and śrāvaka arhats, heroes (*dākas*) and heroines (*dākinīs*), and Dharma protectors. As the details of this visualization and the way to contemplate its meaning have been described extensively in other texts, I will not go into detail about them here.

Having imagined the holy beings in the space in front of us, we then cultivate the seven practices in their presence. These are prostrating, making offerings, confessing our negativities, rejoicing in goodness and virtue, requesting Dharma teachings, requesting the Buddha to remain in our world, and dedicating the merit.

The purpose of these seven limbs is to purify our mindstream and create merit so that our meditation session will be effective and we will gain deeper understanding and experience of the stages of the path. The importance of purification and creation of merit cannot be overestimated.

You may recite a long or short version of the seven limbs while contemplating its meaning. A short version is:

Reverently I prostrate with my body, speech, and mind,  
and present clouds of every type of offering, actual and mentally  
transformed.

I confess all my destructive actions accumulated since beginningless  
time,

and rejoice in the virtues of all holy and ordinary beings.

Please remain until cyclic existence ends,

and turn the wheel of Dharma for sentient beings.

I dedicate all the virtues of myself and others to the great awakening.

*Prostrating* reduces our pride and increases our humility. Making the excellent qualities of the holy beings vivid in our minds, it strengthens our aspiration to practice the path to develop those same qualities ourselves. Prostrations are done mentally by remembering the good qualities of the Three Jewels, verbally by praising these qualities with our speech, and physically by bowing down to show our respect.

*Making offerings* reduces attachment and stinginess and increases our generosity and delight in giving. Offer actual objects on the altar — fruit, flowers, lights, incense, water, perfume, and so on — and mentally offer beautiful objects that we possess or forests, wildflowers, and other places of natural beauty that are possessed by others. When making mental offerings, imagine objects of incomparable beauty that fill the universe, offer them to the Three Jewels, and imagine them experiencing bliss from receiving your offerings.

Offer your Dharma practice — your effort, understanding, and virtue — by imagining them in the form of magnificent objects that you present to the merit field. This is the supreme offering that pleases the buddhas and bodhisattvas because it contributes to their aim of liberating all sentient beings.

As Śāntideva stresses in *Engaging in the Bodhisattvas' Deeds* (*Bodhicaryāvatāra*), making offerings is necessary to accumulate the merit that supports us in generating bodhicitta and attaining full awakening. High bodhisattvas, such as Samantabhadra, emanate a vast display of sumptuous and glorious items that they offer to all the buddhas and bodhisattvas in all the pure lands throughout the universe. While we are currently unable to

emanate these elaborate offerings, visualizing them brings great benefit because they are free from the attachment we may have for our possessions. In addition, since visualized offerings are mentally fabricated and do not exist in the way they appear, it is easier to contemplate that phenomena arise due to designation by name and concept and thus are empty of inherent existence. You may want to meditate using the verses of offering that Śāntideva wrote in chapter 2 of his inspiring book.

*Confessing negativities* is done through the four opponent powers. We have engaged in countless physical, verbal, and mental deeds motivated by ignorance, animosity, and attachment. The seeds of these misdeeds ripen in unpleasant or painful experiences, obscure our minds from gaining realizations, and limit our ability to benefit others. To purify them, first generate a sense of regret for the harm you have inflicted on yourself and others through your destructive behavior. Regret is the main cause to purify destructive actions, and the stronger it is, the stronger will be the second power, the determination to restrain from such actions in the future. This step gives you the inner strength to begin changing your ways and counteracting habitual harmful behavior.

Third, take refuge in the Three Jewels, which purifies destructive actions created in relation to the Three Jewels, and generate bodhicitta, which purifies negativities created in relation to other sentient beings. Taking refuge and generating bodhicitta transforms the harmful or ignorant attitude you previously had toward holy beings and sentient beings into a virtuous mental relationship with them. After confessing your faults, it is helpful to do the taking and giving (*T. tong len*) meditation, which will be described later.

Fourth, apply remedies to those destructive actions by engaging in constructive actions, for example, bowing to the Three Jewels, reciting mantras, making offerings, circumambulating holy objects, meditating on emptiness, generating bodhicitta, doing volunteer service at a charity, Dharma center, or monastery, or helping others in other ways.

*Rejoicing in your own and others' virtue* is the fourth limb. Doing this is an excellent method to fill your mind with hope and joy and overcomes competition and jealousy. Reflect with joy on the virtues you and others have created in this and previous lives and at all the goodness in the world.

Rejoicing in your own virtue invigorates and multiplies it so that it will increase day by day. Also admire and rejoice in the virtues of people you know and those you don't, reflecting repeatedly on their constructive thoughts, feelings, words, and deeds. Rejoicing in the virtues and spiritual attainments of the buddhas, bodhisattvas, solitary realizers, and śrāvakas throughout all time and space creates vast merit. If you and others are of similar levels on the path, by rejoicing at their virtue you accumulate merit equal to theirs. If they are of lesser attainment, your rejoicing creates more merit than their original virtuous action. The practice of rejoicing is praised because through making a small effort, great merit is accumulated.

*Requesting Dharma teachings* counteracts abandoning the Dharma and creates the cause to receive teachings in the future. We must not take our present good fortune of encountering teachers and teachings for granted, but appreciate and take advantage of them; requesting teachings is one way to do this. Requesting the buddhas to turn the wheel of Dharma — to teach us the path to awakening — also creates the cause to receive teachings in the future. Whenever possible attend Dharma discourses given by qualified spiritual mentors. As a beginner, study books that give you a general overview of the path. As you advance, delve into the sūtras, the great Indian commentaries, and commentaries by other Buddhist sages.

*Requesting the buddhas to remain until cyclic existence ends* helps to purify negativities created in relation to our spiritual mentors and the buddhas and increases our understanding of the importance of having excellent spiritual mentors. With heartfelt sincerity, request the emanation bodies of buddhas not to pass into parinirvāṇa, but to remain in the world to guide sentient beings according to their various dispositions and tendencies.

To conclude the seven-limb prayer, *dedicate the merit* accumulated from the above practices for the full awakening of yourself and all others. Imagine your merit transforms into offerings that you present to the Three Jewels and to sentient beings.

### *Requesting inspiration*

Requesting inspiration increases our connection to the lineage of practitioners who have preceded us and who have done what we aspire to do. It also invigorates our confidence and enthusiasm to practice the

Dharma. While reciting the “Supplication for the Three Great Purposes,” visualize light and nectar flowing from the lineage teachers into you and all the sentient beings around you (LC 1:98):

Please inspire me and all mother sentient beings to quickly abandon all flawed states of mind, beginning with not respecting our spiritual mentors up to grasping the true existence of persons and phenomena. Please inspire us to easily generate all flawless states of mind, beginning with respecting our spiritual mentors up to knowing the reality of selflessness. Please inspire us to quell all inner and outer hindrances.

People ask, “If buddhas help sentient beings impartially and their awakening activities are spontaneous, why do we need to request inspiration?” Receiving the inspiration of the buddhas is a dependent process that relies on their ability to help as well as our receptivity. Our turning to them for refuge and making sincere requests opens our mind to receive their awakening influence. A large, shady tree naturally has the ability to protect us from the sun, but we have to go and stand under it. Receiving inspiration and the buddhas’ awakening influence depends on the combination of the tree of their compassion and our sitting under it.

Now imagine that all the figures in the merit field dissolve into the central figure of Śākyamuni Buddha, who then comes on top of your head, facing the same direction as you. Again imagine light flowing from the Buddha into you. This light purifies all negativities and fills you with all the blessings, inspiration, and understanding of the Buddha. Feel Buddha’s compassion for you and his willingness to guide you to awakening. As you meditate like this, recite the Buddha’s name mantra, *om mune mune mahamuneya svāhā*, as much as possible.

After reciting the mantra, do a glance meditation on the stages of the path to awakening by reviewing the principal meditations in a brief form. Reciting a short lamrim text such as the “Foundation of all Good Qualities,” “Parting from the Four Attachments,” “Three Principal Aspects of the Path,” or “Thirty-Seven Practices of Bodhisattvas” enables us to briefly reflect on all the stages of the path and imprint them in our mindstreams.



Then, with the Buddha on the crown of your head, begin the actual meditation session. With lowered eyes, turn your mind inward to reflect on the lamrim topic you have chosen for that session. Make examples from your life in which these teachings apply and could help you.

### *The Actual Session and Dedication at the Conclusion*

The majority of meditations on the stages of the path involve analytical meditation on the topic followed by stabilizing meditation on the conclusion we have reached. Before meditating on a topic, have in mind an outline of the major points and then ponder them in order, one by one. Until you become familiar with a topic, make an outline of its points by referring to this book and add pertinent points from other lamrim books. If you read, listened to, or watched a teaching on the topic before the meditation session, jot down a brief outline of salient points to meditate on. Use reasoning and logic to understand the meaning of each point, and make examples from your life that pertain to the points. In this way, conviction in their veracity will arise. In addition, you will gain familiarity with the topics so that you will be able to remember and apply them during your daily life.

When you reach a conclusion through your reflection or a strong understanding of the topic arises in your mind, cease analytical meditation, and with stabilizing meditation focus your mind one-pointedly on the meaning you discovered or the experience you gained. Employing both analytical and stabilizing meditation to the topics in this way is important for gaining and sustaining an understanding of the path.

For example, to meditate on precious human life, first make an outline of the eight freedoms and ten fortunes and add other pertinent points. Then do the six preparatory practices. Next contemplate the points one by one, thinking about them logically and relating them to your life. When you feel a sense of appreciation for your life and an eagerness to use it for Dharma practice, you have reached the proper conclusion. At that point, stop thinking about the points and let your mind dwell on the fact that you have a precious human life and the feeling of being extremely fortunate.

When you are interested in the lamrim topics, your reflection and analysis will keep your attention on the subject. That helps bring your mind

to a focused state. If you find stabilizing meditation difficult because your mind is easily distracted, put more emphasis on checking meditation.

Near the end of the session, it is helpful to relate the topic to the method and wisdom aspects of the path — bodhicitta and the wisdom realizing emptiness, respectively. For example, if your meditation topic is the ten nonvirtues, first reflect on them in terms of your own life. Then reflect that like you, other sentient beings have engaged in these nonvirtues and will have to experience their results. Generate the wish to become a buddha in order to lead them on the path to liberation so they will be free from experiencing painful results and the afflictions that cause them. Then reflect that all these karmas and their results are empty of true existence. They arise and function dependently, like a dream, and do not exist in the way they appear.

When you have meditated on a particular topic sufficiently, imagine the Buddha on your head dissolves into you, merging with your mind at your heart cakra at the center of your chest. Feel that your mind and the Buddha's mind are inseparable.

As mentioned previously, do not expect instant results or fantastic peak experiences. Instead, be satisfied with gradual growth in your compassion and wisdom and seek stable, steady change. By meditating consistently, your understanding will deepen over the months and years.

At the conclusion of a session, dedicate the merit created from your meditation to attain awakening for the benefit of all sentient beings. The primary purpose of dedicating the merit is to make the results of our virtue inexhaustible, lasting until all sentient beings attain full awakening. While the merit can still bring good results before awakening, it will not be exhausted until awakening is attained. By connecting even small virtue to the wider vision of the awakening of all sentient beings, you bring an extraordinary dimension to this small action. It immerses your mind in bodhicitta, increases your generosity, and expands your rejoicing at virtue.

In addition, seal the dedication by reflecting that you as the agent, the merit you are dedicating, the awakening you are dedicating to attain, and the sentient beings you wish to benefit are all empty of existing from their own side, but exist dependently. As Nāgārjuna says in *Praise to the Supramundane (Lokāṭīstava 9)*:

There exists no agent, no subject too;  
no merit [exists], they arise through dependence.  
“Though dependently arisen, they are unborn,”  
so you have proclaimed, O Master of Words.<sup>34</sup>

While none of the elements of a dedication — the person, merit, and so forth — exist inherently, they exist nominally by being merely designated by name and concept. Their emptiness of inherent existence and their conventional existence are not contradictory. Reflecting in this way increases our understanding of the compatibility of emptiness and dependent arising and prevents us from becoming arrogant.

## *Interrelationship of the Lamrim Topics*

Analytical meditation on these lamrim topics is critical at all levels of the path. It transforms our mind by giving us an overview of the entire path and establishing the Buddhist worldview firmly within us. It engenders great conviction in the path and a correct motivation for spiritual practice. While other forms of meditation may make us feel good in the moment, if they do not increase our understanding of the undesirable nature of cyclic existence and our wish to be free from it, our motivation and enthusiasm for practice will flag. Analytical meditation makes our motivation strong and stable, and with such a motivation our analytical and stabilizing meditation on emptiness will bear fruit. We will be able to enter the Vajrayāna, practice it correctly, and attain awakening.

The order of the topics in the stages of the path are skillfully arranged to gradually lead your mind to deeper understandings, so try to meditate on them in order. Of course, if you face a certain problem and know that a particular meditation will help calm your mind, do that meditation even if it isn't in sequence.

Repeatedly cycle through the sequence of meditations. Grounding yourself in the initial meditations will facilitate understanding the later ones. Going directly to the advanced meditations is not helpful for our overall development. Once you have a heartfelt understanding of one topic, don't just leave it be and go on to the next. Continue to review your

understanding and stabilize your experience, even though your focus has shifted to the next topic.

The meditations of the three levels of practitioners are intertwined and cross-fertilize one another. Our understanding of the earlier topics sets the stage for the later ones, and our understanding of the later ones enriches our experience of the earlier ones. For example, precious human life appears early in the lamrim, but the more we have a feeling for the bodhicitta meditations, the more we will see our human life as precious because it provides us the opportunity to develop bodhicitta. While the perfection of fortitude is explained in the path of the advanced practitioner, we must learn and practice fortitude from the beginning because we must lessen our anger in order to abandon destructive actions.

Some lamrim topics come up repeatedly in the sequence each time we explore them in more depth. Ethical conduct first appears in the topic of karma on the initial level; it appears again as the higher training in ethical conduct on the intermediate level, and again on the advanced level with the bodhisattvas' perfection of ethical conduct. Each time our understanding of what to practice and abandon is refined.

After gaining a firm understanding of the lamrim through study, reflection, and meditation, some practitioners may wish to direct more energy to developing serenity through perfecting their stabilizing meditation. Others may wish to focus more on the meditations regarding the thirty-seven harmonies with awakening, while others may prefer to emphasize insight into emptiness or tantric practice. These decisions are best made in consultation with a spiritual mentor.

## *Breaks between Meditation Sessions*

Our meditation sessions and our daily life activities flow together, one following the other without pause. To indicate this relationship, the great masters call our daily life activities “break times between meditation sessions.” Both play a role in our spiritual life. Meditation sessions give us the opportunity to practice in a more focused way. Daily life activities provide the chance to test how well we have integrated the meditation topics into our lives. We may meditate on fortitude in the morning, but the

real test is when we have to deal with a difficult person. Observing the thoughts and emotions that arise in our minds during the day will give us an idea of the qualities we need to strengthen in order to counteract the afflictions that arise frequently in our minds.

Spiritual practice does not occur only when we recite a text or meditate, but also while we walk down the street, clean our room, and interact with others. Dharma practice involves watching our mind and keeping it in a wholesome state no matter what we are doing. We can practice anywhere and at any time.

What we do during the break times between meditation sessions influences our meditation sessions. For this reason, great practitioners advise moderation in food and sleep, guarding the sense doors, and acting with introspective awareness while engaging in daily life activities.

### *Food*

What we eat influences our mental state. The food should be nutritious and easily digestible. We should eat a moderate amount: eating too much makes the mind drowsy; eating too little makes the body weak. In *Middle Stages of Meditation (Bhāvanākrama II)* Kamalāśīla encourages practitioners to have a vegetarian diet. In general, this is conducive for being clear-minded when meditating, although depending on someone's physical condition, taking meat may be necessary. Drinking alcohol, taking recreational drugs, or misusing prescription drugs are out of the question if we want to concentrate the mind, and smoking is similarly to be abandoned.

If attachment to food arises, as it can easily do when we limit other distractions, think of what the food looks like after it is chewed and after it is digested; think of the excrement that food produces. Contemplate how much of our precious human life is involved in procuring, preparing, and eating food as well as cleaning up afterward. Some people spend hours discussing the foods they like and planning what to eat, yet we often hardly taste the food because we are talking to a friend or reading while eating. The pleasure of eating ends quickly, and sometimes we feel worse from having overeaten.

Offering our food to the Three Jewels before we eat is meritorious and allows us to pause and reflect. In the Chinese tradition, five points are

recited before eating and are contemplated while eating:

1. I contemplate all the causes and conditions and the kindness of others by which I have received this food.
2. I contemplate my own practice, constantly trying to improve it.
3. I contemplate my mind, cautiously guarding it from wrongdoing, greed, and other defilements.
4. I contemplate this food, treating it as wondrous medicine to nourish my body.
5. I contemplate the aim of buddhahood, accepting and consuming this food in order to accomplish it.

In the Tibetan tradition, verses of homage and offering are commonly recited before the main meal.

Great compassionate Protector,  
all-knowing Teacher,  
field of merit and good qualities vast as an ocean —  
to the Tathāgata, I bow.

Through purity, freeing from attachment,  
through virtue, freeing from the unfortunate states,  
unique, supreme ultimate reality —  
to the Dharma that is peace, I bow.

Having freed themselves, showing the path to freedom too,  
well established in the trainings,  
the holy field endowed with good qualities —  
to the Saṅgha, I bow.

To the supreme teacher, the precious Buddha,  
to the supreme refuge, the holy precious Dharma,  
to the supreme guides, the precious Saṅgha —  
to all objects of refuge we make this offering.

May we and all those around us

never be separated from the Three Jewels in any of our lives.  
May we always have the opportunity to make offerings to them,  
and may we continuously receive their blessings and inspiration to  
progress along the path.

By seeing this food as medicine,  
I will consume it without attachment or complaint,  
not to increase my arrogance, strength, or good looks,  
but solely to sustain my life.

At the conclusion of a meal Tibetan monastics make offerings to the hungry ghosts and recite homages to the buddhas. We then dedicate for the welfare of those who offered our food.

May all those who offered me food attain the happiness of total peace. May all those who offered me drink, who served me, who received me, who honored me, or who made offerings to me attain happiness that is total peace.

May all those who scold me, make me unhappy, hit me, attack me with weapons, or do things up to the point of killing me attain the happiness of awakening. May they fully awaken to the unsurpassed, perfectly accomplished state of Buddhahood.

By the merit of offering food, may they have a good complexion, magnificence, and strength. May they find foods having hundreds of tastes and live with the food of samādhi.

By the merit of offering drink, may their afflictions, hunger, and thirst be pacified. May they possess good qualities such as generosity and take a rebirth without any sickness or thirst.

The one who gives, the one who receives, and the generous action are not to be observed as truly existent. By giving with impartiality, may the benefactors attain perfection.

By the power of being generous, may they become buddhas for the benefit of sentient beings, and through generosity may all the beings who have not been liberated by previous conquerors be liberated.

By the merit of this generosity, may the nāga kings, gods having faith in the Dharma, leaders who support religious freedom, benefactors, and others living in the area live long, enjoy good health and prosperity, and attain lasting happiness.

Due to this virtue, may all beings complete the collections of merit and wisdom. May they attain the two buddha bodies resulting from merit and wisdom.

### *Sleep*

Sleep allows the body to rest, which makes it more serviceable for engaging in virtuous activities. Sleeping in moderation produces good results. Too much sleep makes the mind dull, and too little is also not good. Sleeping during the middle part of the night is advised, as is rising early. It is best to sleep in the “lion position,” on your right side, with the left leg on the right, and your right hand under your right cheek. This helps to maintain mindfulness during sleep and to prevent nightmares and nonvirtuous dreams.

Sleep is a changeable mental factor; it becomes virtuous when we fall asleep with a positive thought or intention. Meditating, reading a Dharma book, or contemplating a wholesome topic before going to sleep helps us do that, as does thinking, “I will sleep to rest my body and mind so that I can wake up refreshed and continue practicing the Dharma.”

If an affliction arises as you are falling asleep or when you are dreaming, notice it and let it go. Do not indulge in thoughts of attachment or anger while falling asleep. If you do, those thoughts and images will occupy your mind for many hours while you sleep, making your sleep nonvirtuous. In addition, your mind will be restless or in a bad mood when you awake.

When you lie down, imagine the Buddha sitting on your pillow and lay your head in his lap. Visualize very gentle, peaceful light flowing from the Buddha into you as you fall asleep. This will prevent your sleep from being too heavy and enable you to awake without grogginess. Make a determination to arise when you are rested, without oversleeping. Also generate the intention to maintain a wholesome mental state the next day.



The *Flower Ornament Sūtra* contains verses that bodhisattvas contemplate as they fall asleep, dream, and wake up:

“May all sentient beings attain the dimension of reality of a Buddha.”  
This is the aspiration of a bodhisattva when going to sleep.

“May all sentient beings realize the dreamlike nature of things.”  
This is the aspiration of a bodhisattva while dreaming.

“May all beings awake from the sleep of ignorance.”  
This is the aspiration of a bodhisattva when waking up.

“May all beings attain the buddha’s form bodies.”  
This is the aspiration of a bodhisattva when getting up.

If you have received empowerment and instructions in highest yoga tantra, do the practice of transforming sleep into the truth body, dreaming into the enjoyment body, and waking up into the emanation body. Training in this practice now is of great benefit at the time of death.

### *Activities*

During your daily activities, continue to contemplate the lamrim topics. Some people go through the lamrim topics sequentially, seeing everything they encounter in a day in terms of the topic of meditation that morning. Doing this makes it easier to return to the experience of these topics in meditation sessions. In break times, be mindful of your precepts and ethical values — remembering them throughout the day — and apply introspective awareness to monitor if you are living according to them. In this way your mind will be in a wholesome state when you next meditate. However, if break times are passed in distraction — gossiping, singing, reading magazines, or watching violent films — these images and memories will plague your meditation. Please observe your own experiences to see if this is true.

## *Making Requests, Receiving Blessings, and Gaining Realizations*

The topic of requesting and receiving inspiration from the buddhas is not easy to understand, so I would like to explain it further. To gain realizations of the path, we need to create the causes — both the principal causes and the cooperative conditions that support the principal causes. The principal causes to progress on the path are receiving teachings from a qualified teacher, reflecting and meditating on them, and putting them into practice in daily life. Creating these main causes is essential. Without our sincere and consistent practice, our mind won't be transformed even if all the buddhas came before us.

The cooperative conditions that help the principal causes to ripen into the resultant realizations of the path may be external or internal. External cooperative conditions include being in the presence of our spiritual mentor, staying at a holy place such as a monastery or temple, living with other sincere Dharma practitioners, and meditating in front of an image of the Buddha.

An analogy is helpful to understand how an external condition can help to deepen our Dharma understanding. If we know nothing about ecology, we won't understand much by hearing an expert respond to questions about it. But if we already have some background yet lack clarity on this subject, the words of an expert will dispel our doubts and clarify our understanding.

Similarly, we may have some knowledge about a Dharma topic, but don't understand it well. If someone who has meditated deeply on the topic discusses it, the combination of our knowledge and the words of a compassionate and wise person will give rise to an understanding that we did not have before. The basic cause is our own knowledge; the other person's words lift our understanding to another level.

Our daily Dharma studies and practices establish the groundwork so that being in holy sites or in the presence of our spiritual mentors will effect experiences and realizations in our minds. We may recite the verses to generate bodhicitta every day, but not feel much when we do, even though we have admiration for bodhicitta. Then one day, while repeating the same verses in the presence of our spiritual mentor, the words have a totally new

effect on our mind and deep feelings of compassion and altruism blossom in us. Similarly, we may study and reflect on emptiness often but reach a mental roadblock that we cannot seem to get beyond. When we meditate on emptiness under the bodhi tree in Bodhgaya, that obstacle disappears and our understanding of emptiness becomes clearer. The inspiration of our spiritual mentor and the blessing of the site of the Buddha's awakening are cooperative conditions; the indispensable principal cause is our effort to practice sincerely. Without this, such experiences do not magically happen.

If we have knowledge of the Buddha's qualities as well as strong confidence that awakening is possible, our mind is more receptive to the Buddha's awakening influence at pilgrimage sites. We cannot force ourselves to have faith in the Three Jewels; stable faith is gained through learning and reflection. If a person has little interest in the Dharma or minimal faith in the Buddha, although a good imprint is left on her mindstream by going to Bodhgaya, very little else will happen. She may spend a lot of time drinking tea and visiting tourist shops!

Internal cooperative conditions include purification and collection of merit, as explained above in the seven-limb prayer, as well as requesting our spiritual mentors, buddhas, meditation deities, and bodhisattvas to bless and inspire our minds. Several factors, such as the qualities of the person(s) we request and how we make the request, play a role.

Realized beings possess marvelous qualities that enable them to influence others in a positive way. In contrast, ordinary people and worldly gods cannot inspire our mind very much. If you visualize President Franklin Roosevelt and make a strong request to realize great compassion, what happens? Maybe psychologically someone could be helped a little, but aside from that, nothing else occurs because the person you request for spiritual inspiration is an ordinary being. Contrariwise, due to their great accumulation of merit and the force of their boundless compassion, buddhas and bodhisattvas have a certain power or energy that can affect our minds in a positive way.

People who accept the Mahāyāna doctrine of the four buddha bodies have a sense of the abilities the awakened ones possess to guide and inspire us. Even if we see the Buddha as a historical person who lived on this earth, it is clear that he was an extraordinary human being who accumulated great

merit and had profound realizations. The depth of the Buddha's compassion and the extent of his skillful means and wisdom are evident in his life story. A person of such magnificent qualities must have abilities to benefit others that the rest of us lack.

In our daily practice, we request all holy beings in the merit field to come to the place where we meditate. From their side, invitations are unnecessary. These requests are done to benefit us, so that we turn our attention to them and feel their presence. But beings who lack spiritual realizations cannot come even if we invite them, unless we send a car to pick them up! We may sincerely pray for President Roosevelt to come to our meditation place, but he cannot do so. If we invite worldly gods and spirits to come, they will not know an invitation has been extended, and even if they know, there is not a lot they can do to help us gain Dharma realizations.

How does someone gain the ability to bless another's mind? On the mundane level, we see that some people have unusual abilities, such as the ability to hypnotize others. From the Buddhist viewpoint, this is due to karma they created in previous lives. If some ordinary people have the ability to influence the minds of others in an unusual way, then surely those with great spiritual realizations and compassion must be able to do so. By means of their awakening activities, buddhas spontaneously and effortlessly act to benefit all beings according to their level of receptivity.

The power of the buddhas' realizations, compassion, and awakening activity alone is not enough to effect change in us. If the conditions are not ripe within us, very little occurs. Just as the sun shines everywhere, but only upturned vessels are filled with sunlight, the buddhas' awakening influence is always present, regardless of whether we believe it exists, practice the teachings, or visualize the buddhas and request their inspiration. From our side, doing these activities makes our minds more receptive to receive their awakening influence. Receiving inspiration is a dependent arising; it depends on the state of our mind as well as on the wisdom, compassion, and power of the awakened ones.

How we make the requests is also important. The more focused and clear our visualization of the Buddha is, the more we feel that we are in his

presence. This facilitates our experiencing the Buddha's inspiration and blessing.

The Buddhist concept of "blessing and inspiration" cannot be understood with sensory direct perception. It depends in part on our conviction in the possibility of awakening, and thus the possibility of developing the effortless, spontaneous awakening activities that can spark realizations in receptive beings. If we have confidence that we can awaken, it is not difficult to know that others have awakened before us and have gained these special abilities. In short, the deeper our refuge in the Three Jewels, the more we will make effort to transform our minds and the greater our receptivity to the buddhas' awakening activities will be.

Requesting the Buddha for inspiration to generate bodhicitta or realize emptiness is different than requesting an external creator for blessings. Buddhists with a proper understanding see the Buddha as our Teacher. We know that the Buddha is not omnipotent, that our past actions condition our present experiences, and that we are responsible for our actions. Those petitioning an external creator believe that everything is in his hands and depends on his will. Although both Buddhists and those of other faiths may request inspiration or blessing from holy beings to become more loving, their way of requesting, their notion of to whom they pray, and their understanding of the process of prayer differ.

## 7 | Mind, Body, and Rebirth

**B**ECAUSE OUR MIND is the ultimate source of our happiness and suffering and by transforming the mind we attain awakening, understanding the mind is essential. The topic of the mind and its potential was introduced in *Approaching the Buddhist Path*, the first volume of the Library of Wisdom and Compassion, and in this chapter we will explore the nature of the mind, its relationship with the brain, and rebirth more deeply.

### *Sentience, Mind, and Brain*

The mind's nature is clarity and cognizance. *Clarity* refers to the immateriality of the mind, the fact that it cannot be apprehended by our physical senses and is not made of atoms. Clarity also indicates the mirror-like quality of the mind, the fact that it can reflect objects. Dharmakīrti says (PV):

Therefore my own mind is clear  
by virtue of its own nature of clarity;  
by virtue of other (objects) being transferred and illuminated in it,  
this makes it clear too.<sup>35</sup>

In addition, clarity means the fundamental nature of the mind is not affected by defilement (PV 2.208a–b):

The nature of mind is clear light.  
The defilements are adventitious.<sup>36</sup>

*Cognizance* refers to the mind's ability to engage with its object. Together clarity and cognizance allow for the appearance of objects to arise and for objects to be known and experienced. The presence of a mind is the difference between a living being and a corpse. In his struggle to clarify

how we know anything exists, Descartes said, “I can doubt the existence of the body, but I know I exist because I am conscious.” In short, the nature of consciousness is to be aware and to know objects (PV):

Consciousness apprehends objects,  
apprehending them as they exist;  
it arises in the nature of the objects,  
it is generated by them as well.

A sentient being (*sattva*) is any being with a mind who is not a buddha. Everything that is biologically alive is not necessarily sentient. Bacteria and viruses are biologically alive, but we do not know whether they have mind, the presence of which is indicated by the ability to experience pain and pleasure. Most Buddhist thinkers believe they do not. Animals and insects, however, do. Computers may have artificial intelligence that enables them to respond like a human being, but they do not experience pain and pleasure and are not sentient beings. However, if one day computers become capable of being a physical support for consciousness and a sentient being creates the karma to be born in one, a computer could be a sentient being!

Some material substances, such as plants, may appear to have consciousness although they do not. A Venus flytrap — a flower that catches and ingests insects — is able to detect the presence of flies and moves to trap them. However, movement is not a sufficient indicator for the presence of mind. Some plants may grow better when people talk to them, but that too isn't proof that they cognize phenomena and experience pleasure and pain as sentient beings do. Their growth could be due simply to biological functions, just as a sunflower turning toward the sun is explained through biological functions.

Some sūtras mention that in a few cases spirits are born in trees, rocks, or wood. These are the spirits' homes, not their bodies. Still, those sentient beings may be disturbed if their home is damaged.

While the brain is material in nature, the mind is not. The mind lacks shape and color and cannot be perceived by scientific instruments. Like other produced phenomena, the mind is impermanent in that it changes moment by moment, although it is eternal in that it has no end. When it is

obscured by afflictions and other defilements, it is said to be the mind of a sentient being; when all obscurations have been removed, it becomes the mind of a buddha.

Just as our body has many parts — arms, legs, internal organs — and diverse characteristics — hardness, fluidity, mobility, heat, and space — so too there are many types of mind: gross and subtle levels of mind, primary consciousnesses and the mental factors that accompany them, sense consciousnesses and the mental consciousness, and so forth. In the case of human beings, many of these types of mind depend on the body and brain, but some do not seem to. Our sense consciousnesses depend on the sense faculties, nervous system, and brain as well as on an external object. Due to the contact of a flower with a healthy eye faculty, a visual consciousness that sees its color and shape arises. If the eye faculty malfunctions or is absent, the visual consciousness cannot arise. Likewise, if the area of the brain that is related to visual consciousness is damaged, we cannot see. Here I speak generally, for as far as I know, scientists have not determined whether just one part of the brain facilitates sight or if other parts of the brain can assume that function if the first part is damaged. Buddhist science adds that the arising of visual consciousness also depends on a preceding moment of mind; physical elements alone cannot cause or constitute cognition.

Other mental states seem to arise through a different process. Memories of the past or imagination of the future often seem to pop into our mind without an external object stimulating them. Once we remember or imagine something, the brain responds. Here the mental function appears to come first and the effects on the brain and the body follow. The scientists I have spoken with affirm this sequence, but according to current scientific belief that the mind is an emergent property of the brain, it should not occur. Scientists are also baffled by the case of a forty-four-year-old French civil servant who is missing 90 percent of his brain but functions normally.<sup>37</sup> This does not accord with their theory that consciousness is an emergent property of the brain.

In one study neuroscientists observed people's brains before and after they were taught a certain meditation practice. They detected noticeable changes in their brains after doing the meditation practice for some time.



Scientific studies have also shown that some aspects of the brains of experienced meditators differ from those of ordinary people. These findings demonstrate that just as changes in the brain may affect the mind, training the mind can effect changes in the brain. Causation can go both ways.

Distinctions between mental states cannot be made at the level of brain functions only. Experiments have demonstrated that the same area of the brain is activated when a person sees an object and when he mentally thinks about that object. Similarly, the pain centers in the brain are activated both when we actually experience pain and when we see someone else in pain. Clearly there is a real experiential difference between seeing something with our eyes and thinking about it, although the brain does not seem to distinguish the two. This indicates that brain functions alone are not responsible for everything about human experience and perception.

When a meditator practices one-pointed concentration and attains serenity (*śamatha*), she develops physical and mental pliancy and experiences a particular type of physical and mental bliss. Through this, she attains deep levels of meditative absorption, such that she does not hear a loud sound nearby. Although she did not make a special effort to change her brain, because her brain plays a role in the development of serenity, some changes may have taken place in its function and structure owing to the development of physical and mental pliancy and bliss. Using scientific instruments to investigate this would be intriguing.

Along this line, genes received from our parents may have some influence on our mental disposition. However, I do not believe that the diversity of human dispositions, interests, and attitudes is due principally to our genetic composition. The habitual thoughts, emotions, and actions of a person's mind earlier in this life and in previous lives, as well as the imprints left on his mindstream, play a role. The vast majority of parents tell me that each of their children has a different personality and habits from birth. They say that babies are not blank slates conditioned only by their genes and the events of this lifetime.

Events at the time of death also make us question if the mind always depends on the brain. Within a few minutes of the breath stopping, brain functions also cease, and the person is pronounced clinically dead. However, I know of many cases in which consciousness is still present. In

2001 someone who appeared to be an ordinary monk died at Delek Hospital, just down the road from where I live in Dharamsala. After his breath stopped, there was no rigor mortis and seven days passed before his body began to decay. Only then did they realize that he was meditating during this time.

Tibetans have observed that experienced meditators may remain in meditation for several days without their body decaying. My senior tutor, Kyabje Ling Rinpoche, remained sitting upright in meditation for thirteen days after his breath, heart, and brain functions stopped. Once he had completed his meditation, his body slumped over and death occurred. I also saw a picture of an elderly Mongolian monk who stayed in meditation (*T. thug dam*) for twenty-five days after his breath ceased.

Buddhists attribute this to the existence of the subtlest mind, the mind of clear light, which can function separate from the brain and may remain in the body for some time after physical death. If the subtlest mind did not exist, it would be difficult to account for the fact that when one person's vital signs cease, the body decays immediately and when another's cease, it does not. It would be good for scientists to investigate this.

Some years ago, some scientists brought an instrument to Delek Hospital to observe the brain functioning of proficient meditators while they were dying and after their vital signs ceased. But as often happens, things do not turn out as planned, and no meditators died during the time the scientists were there!

However, one time they were successful. After some scientists set up equipment in a Tibetan hospital in India, a previous Ganden Tripa (head of the Geluk tradition) died. His body remained fresh without decaying for three weeks. During this time, scientists put electrodes on his head and recorded data about his brain functions. This made them think that a subtle "energy" that does not depend on the body might exist.

A few people have clear memories of previous lives and on occasion some have prescience of future events. These extraordinary events are beyond current scientific theories, but they support the Buddhist explanation that different types and levels of mind exist. Some are related to and dependent on the body, while some can function independently of the

body and physical sense organs. This is because the mind and body have different continua: the body is material, whereas the mind is not.

Although science and Buddhism share many similarities, such as the investigative approach, some of their underlying premises differ. First, the source or foundation of cognitive processes is seen differently. Science believes that all mental processes derive from the physical organ of the brain, whereas highest yoga tantra asserts that all mental processes — sense perceptions, emotions, intellect, coarse as well as subtle mental functions — derive from the primordial mind of clear light, the subtlest mind that is independent of the brain.

This leads to a second difference. Buddhism doesn't see the mind as limited to the body and accepts past and future lives. It believes that our actions (karma) in one life can affect our future circumstances, perceptions and emotions, and can influence which body, with its unique genetic makeup, we take in future lives. Science currently states that either the mind is the brain or it is an emergent property of the brain. Since the brain exists only in this life, most scientists have not considered investigating the possibility of the influence of past and future lives and focus only on what is noticeable in this life.<sup>38</sup> If their basic assumptions were different, scientists might make unexpected discoveries.

The differences between Buddhism and science should not be points of contention, but rather areas in which we come together to do further research and investigation. Both Buddhism and science have the common aim to know the truth about how things exist and to conduct research that can be verified by experience. Both seek to benefit people, and neither follows blind belief.

Due to recent scientific discoveries of correlations between the body — especially our genes and brain — and the mind, there is a trend in society to think of mental and emotional difficulties as caused by these physical components. Although alcoholism and certain mental illnesses may correlate with particular genes or certain neurological functions, I (Chodron) believe that it could be damaging to assume that these are causal factors and minimize the social, mental, and emotional factors involved. An alcoholic could easily come to think, “It is hopeless to try to quit drinking because my alcoholism is due to my genetic makeup, which cannot be

changed.” Someone who loses his temper and behaves violently could believe, “My brain is wired this way. There’s not much I can do to change until medical scientists make a pill that will alter my brain chemistry.”

Physical and mental disorders and their causes are multifaceted. The more we remain open to this, the more we will be successful in treating them. Genetic factors, biochemical processes, brain structure and functioning, as well as social, economic, dietary, mental, and emotional factors must all be factored in. Remedies, too, can be multifaceted. Such an approach, I believe, leads to more social and personal reflection and responsibility.

## *The Nature of Mind*

While we may easily say the words, “the mind is mere clarity and cognizance,” it is difficult to actually have a notion of what the mind is — let alone to perceive its clear and cognizant nature. Although the clarity and cognizance of the mind are present in every moment of mental activity, we are not aware of them. What prevents this? A consciousness is usually identified in relation to its object — the visual consciousness perceiving blue or the mental consciousness thinking about a table. When a consciousness engages with its object, it appears in the aspect of that object.<sup>39</sup> Because of the mind’s involvement with that object, it is obscured from perceiving the actual nature of the mind.

The mind is usually invaded by a host of constructive and destructive thoughts that concern external objects and people we have perceived or experienced. These cloud the clear and cognizant nature of the mind, preventing us from perceiving it. When the flow of thoughts slows down, it is possible to see into the depths of the mind — its clear and cognizant nature that is like a still pool of water. One technique for discovering the conventional nature of mind is to prevent the mind from arising in the aspect of those objects and to stop all conceptual thoughts regarding past and future events. To do this, first generate a strong determination not to let your mind be disturbed by sense perceptions such as sounds or thoughts. Let your mind rest without being overrun by sensory perceptions or ideas. At first it may seem that more thoughts than usual arise, but this is not the

case. It is simply that in your daily life you do not pay much attention to how many thoughts there are!

Continuing to meditate in this way, you will gradually be able to keep the mind at a distance from sense objects, and the barrage of thoughts will diminish and eventually cease. By the mind not arising in the aspect of those objects, the clear nature of mind will become apparent. When you experience your mind in the absence of thoughts about the past and the future, you will have a sense of vacuity, which is the gap between the mind and those objects. This vacuity is not the ultimate nature of mind — the mind's emptiness of inherent existence — nor is it nothingness as in blank-mind meditation.

Once you experience that vacuous state of mind, try to meditate or remain in it. Eventually you will have a feeling that the mind is something like a mirror with infinite dimensions. At that time, the nature of the mind itself is clear. Yet whenever the mind contacts an object, a reflection immediately arises. In this way, understand the mirror-like clarity of the mind. The mind remains clear by nature even though reflections of phenomena may appear in it.

In addition, practice being aware of the moment when you are just beginning to sleep and the moment just after waking up. At both these times, the cognitive faculties are not fully engaged. In the moment just after waking, sleep has ceased. Your mind is in a neutral state, not crowded with thoughts and emotions. If your physical condition is normal and fresh, you may have some feeling of the clarity of mind at that time. Try to remain in that state, although it is not easy. Experiment with this and see what happens. Some experience of the mind should come, perhaps even an experience of the grosser level of clear light.

Having some experience of the conventional nature of mind is valuable for knowing that mind exists, which helps you to understand the continuity of mind from one life to the next. It also gives you a better idea of what is meant when we say that Dharma practice is about working with our mind. Although meditating on the clear nature of the mind is not a unique Buddhist practice — it is common with Hindus and perhaps some other religious traditions as well — it is useful for showing us another aspect of our experience.

Some years back I did a one-month retreat in Ladakh, India. When I meditate, I usually have a statue of the Buddha in front of me. The Buddha is my “boss,” a very loving and gentle boss. This particular statue was painted gold, and while colorful areas in general are attractive and can stir up the mind, the gold had come off of one part of the statue. Initially I focused my attention at this more neutral area. Then I lowered my eyes, let go of memories of the past, and stopped imagining and planning the future. Eventually, a little experience of the clarity and cognizance of the mind came. This is an experience; we are not saying to ourselves in words, “The mind is clear and cognizant.” With that little glimpse, I was then able to be aware of when my mind began following a sound or chasing a thought. I could recognize where the mind was going and what was distracting it, as well as when it was at rest — clear and concentrated. But after that one-month retreat, I resumed my usual busy duties and came back to my original state! Nevertheless, this experience was valuable.

## *Rebirth: Past and Future Lives*

The mind of each individual forms its own continuum with one moment of mind producing the next moment of mind. As an impermanent phenomenon, it is produced by causes that precede it. The substantial cause of one moment of mind — the main cause that actually transforms into the resultant next moment of mind — is the previous moment of mind in the same continuum. Although the gross body and gross mind influence each other, they cannot be the substantial cause of each other because they do not share the same nature. The body is material in nature, the mind is not. Dharmakīrti tells us (PV 2.165):

That which is not a consciousness itself  
cannot be the substantial cause for another consciousness.

This can be understood by three principles of causality from Asaṅga’s *Compendium of Knowledge*:

1. An effect cannot arise without a cause, and every effect is preceded by its own cause. There is no absolute creator that is the original

source of all existents because such a creator would not have a cause and would have arisen causelessly, which is impossible. This refutes causeless production.

2. An effect cannot arise from a permanent cause. Permanent phenomena do not change, and to produce an effect, change is necessary. The cause must cease for the effect to arise.
3. A cause must have the potential to produce a particular effect; an effect cannot arise from a discordant cause. Daisies cannot grow from tomato seeds. The substantial cause of form is previous moments of matter or energy, and the substantial cause of mind is previous moments of mind. These last two principles refute cases of impossible production: a permanent cause cannot produce a result, and a discordant cause — something that does not have the ability to produce a particular result — cannot produce that result.<sup>40</sup>

Applying these principles to the arising of consciousness, we find that the sperm and egg, which are the substantial cause of the body, are unsuitable to be the substantial cause of the mind, which is not form. The substantial cause of the sperm and egg can be traced back to the Big Bang (or to space particles if we use the Buddhist paradigm), in which case the Big Bang would also be the ultimate substantial cause of our mind. In this case, consciousness would have been present in the dense matter preceding the Big Bang. Since it was the ultimate cause of the entire physical universe, everything — rocks, water, fire, and so forth — should be conscious and would experience pleasure and pain. But we would feel quite strange accepting that each and every rock, water molecule, or carbon atom has consciousness and is a living being.

If we said instead that consciousness emerged from matter after a period of time, then did consciousness appear in all material particles? If not, what would make consciousness emerge from some particles but not others? Along this line, if scientists could construct a brain, would that brain be conscious? Would it be a person who experiences happiness and suffering?

If our mind came from our parents' minds or if our mind were a collection of different parts of the minds of people who died before our birth, many logical inconsistencies would arise. Because each individual

has his or her own mindstream or mental continuum, we can remember events from our past and will experience the results of our own actions, not those of another person. These would be impossible if our mind were composed of fragments of our parents' or other peoples' minds. Instead we should be able to remember their past. We should also have the knowledge they have accumulated thus far in their lives and our emotional makeup would closely resemble theirs. But we see that this is not the case.

If an external creator or prior intelligence created the universe, that creator would not have a cause because it would have preceded all existence. Without a cause, how could such a creator arise? If it did not arise due to a cause, it would be permanent and could not create effects, such as the universe and the beings in it. A permanent creator cannot change, and creation involves change. If we said the creator was both permanent and impermanent, that too is contradictory, for one thing cannot simultaneously possess opposite traits. If we said the creator or prior intelligence alternated being permanent and impermanent, that too would present problems: a permanent phenomenon would need a cause to become impermanent, and no such cause exists. Further questions also arise: why would a creator or prior intelligence create suffering?

Someone once asked me if neural pathways could be the means by which karma was imprinted on the mindstream, such that the deeds of one life would influence events in another life. This is not possible because brain activity ceases at death. The brain does not come with us into the next life.

Applying these principles of causality to matter and consciousness, rebirth can be established without having to resort to blind faith or reliance on scriptural authority. The only possible cause of our mind is a previous moment of mind, the mind of the person we were in our previous life.

## REFLECTION

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1. Everything that functions arises from a cause. Just as our body arose from a cause, so did our mind.
2. Consider the three principles of causality. The only cause that could produce a moment of mind is a previous moment of mind.



3. The mind that joined with the fertilized egg to create a living being must have been a mind from a living being who had lived before and had recently died.
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Human beings have long discussed the beginning of the universe and of mind in particular. From a Buddhist perspective, there is no beginning to either of these because all functioning things arise from their causes. Those causes arise from their causes, and so on, back ad infinitum. Positing a first moment of consciousness is logically untenable. If there were a first moment, it would either arise without a cause or arise from a discordant cause. Neither of these is possible.

If we assert a beginning point before which nothing existed, we must say that sentient beings were born without cause. That is difficult to accept, for without causes producing effects, nothing could operate. Farmers would not have to plant seeds to grow a crop, children would not need to be educated, and we would not take medicine to cure our illnesses. Although we may not know all the causes and conditions of a particular thing or event, it definitely arose due to them.

Some people reject past and future lives, for the reason that they do not see them. However, not perceiving something does not negate its existence. Cats and birds see things and dogs smell odors that we do not. On the other hand, evidence exists for future lives. If we investigate the nature of mind, we understand that it is a continuity. Like all things, the mind exists because its causes exist. The continuity of a thing ceases only when its causes are exhausted or when a strong counteractive agent that can stop it is applied. In the case of a mindstream, neither of these is the case. No agent exists that can cease the continuity of mind. When it separates from this body, its continuity goes on to the next life. At the time of death, the coarser levels of mind, which depend on the physical body, dissolve. An extremely subtle consciousness — the primordial clear light mind — which can function apart from the coarse body, manifests, and this acts as the substantial cause for the mind of the next life. In the end, the only plausible explanation is the beginningless and endless continuity of moments of mind.

Another factor that supports the existence of rebirth is that people remember past lives. Although I have no clear memories of my previous lives, according to my mother and members of the search party who

identified the Fourteenth Dalai Lama, when I was very young I spoke quite clearly about my past life. Sometimes I have had the same dreams; they are vague recollections of some previous lives — as a Tibetan, Indian, and on one occasion Egyptian. But then the memory faded.

Our not remembering previous lives does not refute their existence. I don't think any of us remembers our experience in the mother's womb, yet we were undoubtedly there. It is difficult to recall experiences from previous lives because memory is formed with the gross levels of consciousness, which are dependent on the body and brain. The latencies of memories going with our mental consciousness may not be very strong, and upon taking a new rebirth, our attention is directed toward the present life, not the previous one.

Nevertheless, the accounts of many people who remember their previous lives have been verified. I heard of an Indian girl who described her previous life. She was a young girl in that previous life and died suddenly, so the natural process of dissolution of the levels of consciousness did not take place, which may be a factor in her being able to remember her previous life. Being very young, her memory was clearer, whereas older children may not remember their previous life because their grosser-level mind is fully developed and their subtle mind has become inactive.

It is possible through meditation to make grosser-level minds inactive and to activate subtler levels of mind. I met a Kagyu lama who was a very nice monk. Although he was not learned, he was very sincere and jovial and we became close friends. One time he was very serious and told me stories about studying with his tutor as a child. Even though he would deceive his tutor and play tricks on him, after his tutor passed away he remembered him with gratitude. One time, he had such a strong experience when recalling his tutor's tremendous kindness that he almost fainted. At the time of fainting, the coarser level of mind became inactive and a subtler mind arose. This mind then remembered his previous life.

We don't need to prove the existence of previous lives to someone who is able to recollect past lives; for her they are evident phenomena. However, for people who do not have such recollection, the existence of previous lives is a slightly obscure phenomenon, which can be proven with

reasoning. Dharmakīrti does this in chapter 2 of his *Commentary on Reliable Cognition*, based on the continuity of consciousness. This is the argument I made above.

For something to exist, it is not necessary that the majority of people know about it and agree on it. There may be certain species of plants and animals that only very few people on the planet know, but they exist. Similarly, not everyone needs to agree that rebirth exists in order for it to exist.

Even if you cannot ascertain the existence of future lives, you can tentatively accept it without any harm. Wishing to create the causes for fortunate future lives, you will endeavor to subdue your afflictions and cultivate your good qualities. This, in turn, will help you to be happier in the present because you will experience things freshly, without the confusion of attachment and anger. If you find it difficult to accept past and future lives, set the topic aside and focus on being a good person in this life. Do not create trouble for others, and use your life to bring calm and peace in your own mind and in the world. This is more important. If, at the time of death, you find there is no future life, nothing has been lost. But if you find there is, at least you have prepared for it by living a good life now. This is better than someone who accepts future lives but does not behave properly in his daily life and thus makes problems for himself and others.

The Kālāmas were a people confused by the claims of various teachers and unsure what to believe. The Buddha taught them meditation on the four immeasurables — love, compassion, joy, and equanimity. Once they experienced for themselves the immediate benefits of these, they were joyous. The Buddha then pointed out the benefits they accrue by cultivating positive states of mind, whether or not rebirth exists (AN 3.65):

This noble disciple, Kālāmas, whose mind is in this way without enmity, without ill will, undefiled and pure, has won four assurances in this very life . . . (1) If there is another world, and if there is the fruit and result of good and bad deeds, it is possible that with the breakup of the body, after death, I will be reborn in a good destination, in a heavenly world . . . (2) If there is no other world, and there is no fruit and result of

good and bad deeds, still right here, in this very life, I maintain myself in happiness, without enmity and ill will, free of trouble . . . (3) Suppose evil [results] befall one who does evil. Then, when I have no evil intentions toward anyone, how can suffering afflict me, since I do no evil deed? . . . (4) Suppose evil [results] do not befall one who does evil. Then right here I see myself purified in both respects.

In essence, if there turns out to be no future lives, we do not have to worry that we have wasted our time cultivating beneficial mental states through practicing the Buddha's teachings, because we have already experienced benefits in this life. Furthermore, if future lives exist, we have made good preparation for them and need not fear at the time of death.

#### REFLECTION

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1. Tentatively accept the existence of past and future lives.
  2. Do you see any disadvantages to doing this?
  3. Does it help you to understand certain events, memories, or thoughts in your life?
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### *The Buddha Responds to Questions about Rebirth*

In the *Sūtra Responding to a Query about What Happens after Death* (*Āyusṣatti-yathākāra-paripṛcchā Sūtra*), the Buddha responds to questions that his father, King Śuddhodana, poses about death, dying, and rebirth. The following is a summary of their exchange.<sup>41</sup>

*After death, do we cease to exist like a fire that has burned out?*

No, one life follows the next, just as the sun rises again after it has set and new plants grow in an area after a natural disaster. If there were no rebirth, all living beings would have been completely extinguished by now.

*Will sentient beings be born in similar forms in their future lives, or can they be born in other forms that are different from their present ones?*

Sentient beings are born according to the force of their virtuous and nonvirtuous actions. Depending on which karmic seeds ripen at the time of death, their next rebirth may be in any realm. Human beings whose virtuous karma ripens may be born as devas, while those whose nonvirtuous karma ripens at the time of death may be born as animals.

*In their future lives, do sentient beings have the same family members as in this life?*

No, we consider ourselves relatives and recognize each other based on our present bodies. When we pass away, we relinquish these bodies and take new ones. We will be unable to recognize each other and have no basis on which to consider ourselves relatives then.

*Are people born in the same economic class with the same wealth or lack thereof as in this life?*

Even within this one life, we see affluent people become poor and the poor become wealthy; our socioeconomic status is temporary and impermanent. Generosity is the cause of wealth, whereas miserliness and theft are the causes of poverty. Some people, both the rich and the poor, practice generosity continuously. Those whose financial status vacillates considerably may practice generosity sporadically or may regret their previous acts of giving. Persistent miserliness and stealing — including embezzling money, cheating others in business deals, and so forth — can result in poverty over many lifetimes. However, if someone regrets and purifies these actions, the results will not be experienced.

*Sometimes people dream about their deceased relatives and friends. Are their relatives actually appearing and communicating with them in these dreams?*

When we dream of deceased loved ones, it is just a case of past latencies being activated. The person we dream about is not present. He or she is not having the same dream, and even when alive, we don't experience each other's dreams. If someone dreams about us, we are not in his dream doing what he dreams we are doing. The dream is due to the ripening of latencies on his mindstream.

Suppose someone lives in a very luxurious house and later moves to another place. Her previous house is torn down to build another building. She may have a very clear dream of the house, so clear that she feels that she is actually in it. Yet this is just her dream; it is a product of activated latencies. Dreaming of the deceased is similar. That dear one no longer has his previous body; he has already taken rebirth in accordance with his karma. Our dream of him is simply the maturation of latencies on our mind.

*Sometimes people offer and dedicate food and drink to their dead relatives so they will have these to consume for a long time. Does this help the deceased relatives?*

It is not possible for the deceased to consume these things gradually over time for centuries and eons, since there is no cause that can make these things last that long. We may put food out in our home for people in distant lands who are hungry, but they do not receive it. It is even less likely for someone who is separated from their previous body to partake of the food and drink their living relatives dedicate to them.

*Does that mean that all acts of dedicating useful items such as food, vehicles, clothes, and ornaments to the deceased are meaningless?*

The best way to benefit deceased loved ones is to do virtuous activities and dedicate the merit for their good rebirth and progress on the path to awakening.

*Sentient beings who commit nonvirtuous actions such as killing their parents are certain to experience horrible consequences of*

*their actions. Is there a way for them to attain a happy rebirth?*

If they genuinely believe in the law of karma and its effects and sincerely purify their wrongdoings, those nonvirtuous actions will be purified. At the time of death, if they regret their past unwholesome actions and generate genuine admiration and take refuge in the buddhas and bodhisattvas, the unwholesome actions will be purified and they could take rebirth in the higher realms.

Do not think that there are no future lives. Do not cling to worldly pleasures or anything in cyclic existence. When we transmigrate from one life to the next, there is nothing permanent that goes on to the next life. Nor does everything discontinue, becoming nonexistent. Our future rebirth is not the work of an external creator, it is not a whim of the self, and it does not occur without any cause. Rebirth takes place due to the coming together of causes and conditions, such as afflictions and the karma created by them.

*How rebirth occurs without a permanent self or soul and without the work of an external creator is difficult to understand. It is also hard to comprehend that everything does not cease at death and that rebirth isn't simply random and causeless. Please give some examples to help us understand.*

Having some basic information about the rebirth process first will help you understand the examples:

- Everything about this life does not discontinue and cease altogether in order for rebirth to exist.
- No permanent entity transmigrates to the next life.
- Transmigration to another life occurs in dependence on this life.
- We are not born in this life because we wished for it.
- We are not born in this life because of having prayed to an external creator.
- We are not born due to wishing to be born wherever we like.
- We are not reborn due to wishing that causes and conditions don't affect our rebirth.

- It is not the case that nothing remains after death when the physical and mental aggregates disintegrate.
- There is no “kingdom of death” in which people reside forever after death without taking rebirth.
- The consciousness of the next life is connected to the consciousness of the present life in that it is a continuation of that mind.
- The body of the present life and of the future life do not exist simultaneously. Neither do the mental aggregates of the two lives.
- We are not reborn with similar physical characteristics in one life after the next; someone who is beautiful in one life will not necessarily be beautiful in the next.
- We are not necessarily born in the same realm in the next life; a human being will not necessarily be reborn as a human being. The future life depends on the karma created in this life and the karma that ripens at the time of death.
- A virtuous action cannot propel an unfortunate rebirth, and a nonvirtuous action cannot propel a fortunate one.
- Many consciousnesses do not arise from a single consciousness.
- Someone cannot be born in a fortunate realm without having engaged in virtuous actions and cannot be born in an unfortunate state without having created nonvirtuous actions.
- A birth is not the handiwork of an independent, external creator.

Eight examples seen together will convey an idea of how rebirth occurs:

1. A student learning from her teacher’s lectures represents the next life being affected by the present one.
2. A lamp being lit from another lamp indicates that while a new life begins, nothing permanent is transmitted and that the next life depends on a cause.
3. A reflection in a mirror illustrates that the next life comes about due to the existence of the previous one. Although nothing is transferred from one life to the next, the next rebirth is assured.
4. Embossed impressions and designs emerging from stamps indicates that we are reborn according to the actions we have done.



5. Fire produced by a magnifying glass demonstrates that the next life could be in a realm different from this life, just as the fire is different from the magnifying glass.
6. Sprouts growing from seeds shows that one doesn't disintegrate and cease to exist at death.
7. Salivating from the mention of something that tastes sour indicates taking rebirth by the force of our previous actions, not by choice, wish, or whim.
8. An echo illustrates that we take rebirth when conditions are ripe and no obstacles are present. Also, the future life is neither identical with nor completely different from the present one.

Although each example illustrates an important point about rebirth, there is the possibility that we misunderstand it. Therefore, one example acts to correct the possible misinterpretation of another:

1. From the example of a student learning from the lectures of a teacher, we may think that a being takes rebirth into the next life without its previous consciousness having ceased. To counteract this, the example of the seed shows that the cause must change to produce its result. Similarly, a permanent self or soul does not transmigrate from one life to the next. Rather the last moment of consciousness in this life must cease for the first moment of consciousness in the next life to arise.
2. From the example of both lamps being present when one is lit from the other, we may think that the same body and mind exist in both this and the next life. The example of the echo prevents this misunderstanding because an echo is neither produced without someone making a noise nor simultaneous with the noise. The initial noise is not the same as the echo of it.
3. From the example of a reflection in a mirror, we may think that we have the same physical characteristics in previous and subsequent lives. The fire being produced by the magnifying glass corrects this because the fire and the magnifying glass look quite different.
4. From the example of embossing stamps, we may think that we are born in the same realm after death. The example of the student

learning from the lectures of a teacher remedies this because the teacher, who represents this life, and the student, who represents the next life, are not the same.

5. From the example of the magnifying glass, we may believe that a virtuous action could lead to birth in an unfortunate state and a nonvirtuous action to rebirth in a fortunate state. The example of one lamp being lit from another remedies this by showing that the result is concordant with the cause. Just as one light gives rise to another, virtuous and nonvirtuous actions propel results concordant with them, a fortunate or unfortunate rebirth, respectively.
6. From the example of the seed, we could infer that one consciousness could give rise to numerous consciousnesses. The example of an embossing stamp prevents this misinterpretation by showing that regardless of the design of a stamp, it impresses that very same design, not many other signs on the clay.
7. From the example of sour taste, we may think that someone could have a good rebirth even if he had not acted virtuously and someone could have an unfortunate rebirth without having acted nonvirtuously. The example of the mirror counteracts this by illustrating that the image in the mirror exactly reflects the object.
8. From the example of an echo, we may think that no one is born unless the creator wished it, just as an echo is not heard unless a person has made a noise. The example of the sour taste counteracts this because only someone who has eaten something sour before would salivate at the mention of sour food. Likewise, only someone who has earlier indulged in afflictions and created polluted karma would be subject to a conditioned birth, not others.

Having a basic understanding of rebirth, we see our present life as one among many — it is a product of our previous lives, and during it we create causes for our future lives, liberation, and awakening. We will now look at the great opportunity this present life presents us for spiritual practice.

Contemplate each of these examples to get an accurate idea of how rebirth occurs, remembering that since they are examples, they do not correspond in all aspects with what they are exemplifying.

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## 8 | The Essence of a Meaningful Life

**V**ISUALIZING THE BUDDHA during the preparatory practices prompts us to reflect on his ultimate attainment — full awakening with its magnificent physical, verbal, and mental qualities. This, in turn, causes us to contemplate the path leading to that state, a path that Śākyamuni Buddha taught from his own experience. Since attaining the awakened state is our ultimate purpose, we want to learn and practice the same path the Buddha did. Cultivating bodhicitta is an essential element of this process.

Within the three levels of being — initial, intermediate, and advanced — the method to cultivate bodhicitta and the bodhisattva's deeds is contained in the advanced level. To make ourselves capable of engaging in these more advanced practices, we must first train in the preceding practices. Of these, the most important center around ceasing our obsession with the pleasures of cyclic existence and aspiring for liberation, which are contained in the intermediate level. But to relinquish attachment to all of cyclic existence, we must first stop attachment to the pleasures of this present life and aspire to have a good rebirth in the future. To do this, we engage in the initial-level practices.

Although liberation and awakening are our ultimate purposes, attaining them in one life is extremely difficult, although not impossible. Certain tantric practices, when done by well-prepared and qualified practitioners, can bring awakening in this life. But generally speaking, completing the path requires many lifetimes. For our spiritual development to proceed smoothly, we need to ensure that we have a series of successive precious human lives in order to practice the Dharma continuously over many lifetimes. For this to occur, we must create the causes, which are included in the practices of the initial practitioner. For this reason, too, the initial practices are extremely important to obtain our ultimate goal.

*Precious Human Life*

Whatever activity — mundane or spiritual — we do in life, self-confidence is a crucial internal factor to accomplish it. We must have conviction and trust ourselves, believing that we can successfully complete that work. Developing self-confidence and appreciation of our potential are the chief purposes of contemplating our precious human life. As we do this meditation, the conviction that we can definitely transform our mind and gain spiritual realizations will grow.

Recognizing the potential of our precious human life is essential; without it we may spend a lot of time complaining about upsetting events around us, from personal problems to environmental destruction and war. Consistently focusing on misfortune prevents us from seeing the good in the world, and this narrow and unrealistic vision hinders our well-being as well as our enthusiasm for Dharma practice.

Not every human life is a precious human life. A variety of conditions must be present in order to have a precious human life that can be used in a meaningful way. When the Buddha was alive in India, people had access to an awakened teacher, but not everyone was interested in hearing his teachings, and among those who were, some had previous commitments or health conditions that impeded them from doing so. Sadly, these people had human lives, but not precious human lives.

A precious human life is free from eight impediments and endowed with ten fortunes.<sup>42</sup> Of the eight unfavorable states, four are rebirth in nonhuman states. Although these rebirths are temporary, the person is impeded from practicing for their duration.

1. Facing intense physical torment, hell beings (*nāraka*) are unable to direct their minds to spiritual practice.
2. Hungry ghosts (*preta*) are distracted from spiritual practice by extreme hunger and thirst, as well as by their constant search for food and drink and the frustration of not being able to procure them.
3. Animals are eaten by other animals higher on the food chain, often mistreated by humans, and are mentally incapable of understanding Dharma teachings.
4. Those born as discriminationless (*asaṃjñika*) gods — a type of god in the fourth dhyāna of the form realm — have almost no mental activity during that life. Born there because of having cultivated the

meditative absorption without discrimination in the previous life, their only moments of clear discrimination occur at the time of their birth and death.<sup>43</sup>

A precious human life is also free from four disadvantageous human conditions:

1. Living in a barbaric, uncivilized society or in a country where religion is outlawed.
2. Living where the Buddha's teachings are not available or during a time when the Dharma has not been taught.
3. Being severely mentally or physically impaired, so that our ability to learn and practice the teachings is extremely restricted.
4. Instinctively holding wrong views, making our mind unreceptive to examining new explanations of *duḥkha*, its causes, cessation, and the path leading to that cessation.

When meditating on the eight unfavorable conditions, do not simply think of other people born in those states, but imagine living in those circumstances yourself. Then recall your current freedom from those limitations and appreciate the excellent conditions you now have.

Then reflect on the ten fortunes you presently have. Five of these are personal and five come from society. The five personal fortunes are:

1. Being a human being with human intelligence that enables you to learn, reflect, and meditate on the Buddhadharma.
2. Living in a central Buddhist region, one where the four types of Buddhist disciples are found — male and female fully ordained monastics and male and female lay followers with the five precepts. In terms of Vinaya, a central country is one where a saṅgha of four or more fully ordained monks or nuns lives and performs the three major Vinaya ceremonies: fortnightly confession, rains retreat, and the invitation for feedback at the conclusion of the retreat.
3. Having a healthy body and mind.
4. Not having committed five actions of immediate retribution (*ānantaryakarma*): killing one's father, mother, or an arhat, drawing blood from a buddha, or causing a schism in the saṅgha.

5. Having belief in things worthy of respect, such as the Vinaya as the basis of Dharma practice, and the Three Baskets of teachings on ethical conduct, concentration, and wisdom.

The five fortunate factors coming from society are living at a place and time when:

6. A buddha is present in the world.
7. The Buddha has taught and is still teaching the Dharma. Although these two conditions are not strictly fulfilled now, there are presently qualified spiritual mentors who give the teachings of Śākyamuni Buddha, and this suffices for fulfilling these two conditions.
8. Those teachings still exist and are flourishing. The transmitted Dharma of the Three Baskets exists and is propagated, and the realized Dharma of true cessation and true paths exists in the mindstreams of living practitioners. There is a living tradition of spiritual mentors who can impart the teachings orally and through their example.
9. There are spiritual mentors, monastics, and other like-minded people who follow the Buddha's teachings and inspire us by showing that the Buddhadharma is a living tradition.
10. There are benefactors who offer the four requisites for life: food, shelter, clothing, and medicine.

Reflect individually on each of these points and see that you have an advantageous situation and all the necessary conditions for serious practice. Allow this to gladden your mind and give you great enthusiasm and self-confidence.

People who have not thought about rebirth very much may not be able to clearly ascertain the freedoms and fortunes of a precious human life. Nevertheless, there are common points on which everyone can agree. We know that Śākyamuni Buddha lived and taught in ancient India and that many Buddhist sages such as Nāgārjuna, Asaṅga, and Śāntideva gained extraordinary qualities by following in his footsteps. Their pure ethical conduct, meditative experience, wisdom, and great humility are evident in



their life stories and the treatises they authored. These and many other Buddhist sages did not become renowned by becoming war heroes or financial tycoons. Rather, they observed a life of restraint and humility and benefited others. Through this, without seeking fame, they became well-known role models for subsequent generations of practitioners.

If we reflect on the nature of their precious human lives and our own, we do not find much difference. Everyone has the same human potential. As human beings, we have unique intelligence compared with other life forms, regardless of our nationality, gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, social class, religion, and so on. Everyone has the same Buddha nature. Siddhārtha Gautama was an ordinary person just like us. By tapping into and using his human potential in the right way, he became a buddha and was able to greatly benefit sentient beings living at that time as well as those in many centuries to come. Even today, we hear of and encounter people who offer great service and benefit to humankind. We have the ability to do the same.

I have found in my discussions with people that many suffer from low self-esteem and self-hatred. When we reflect on our spectacular good fortune in having a precious human life, these distorted conceptions vanish. We have all eighteen factors of a precious human life, so obviously we are a worthwhile and adequate person. We created tremendous constructive karma in previous lives to have our present opportunity, so we are capable of Dharma practice. We have all necessary conditions to progress on the path and accomplish our spiritual aims in this life, so seeing the future as bleak is unrealistic. Consistent meditation on precious human life prevents us from such self-defeating and inaccurate ways of viewing ourselves. To the contrary, it generates great enthusiasm for Dharma practice.

### *Rare and Difficult to Attain*

The Buddha did not exaggerate when he said that receiving all the conditions necessary for a precious human life is not easy. Looking at the current world population, we may think a human life is easy to come by. However, not all human beings have the eighteen qualities of a precious human life that give them the best opportunity to practice the Dharma.

Some people lack interest in spiritual matters, others cannot meet qualified teachers and teachings. Some people live without religious freedom, others face hindrances, such as starvation, war, illness, and injury, that make practice extremely difficult. Contemplating that lacking even one of the eighteen conditions interferes with all others bearing fruit helps us to see that we are extremely fortunate and must not take this opportunity for granted, but use it to create the causes for full awakening. *Array of Stalks Sūtra* speaks of the difficulties of attaining each condition of a precious human life.

It is hard to avoid unfavorable conditions. It is hard to find a human birth. It is hard to remove error and doubt about the right opportunity. It is hard also to find a buddha in the world. It is hard also to have all our sense faculties in order. It is hard also to hear the Dharma teaching of a buddha. It is hard also to meet people of truth (holy beings). It is hard also to find authentic spiritual masters. It is hard also to receive genuine guidance and instruction. It is hard also to live right in the human world (have right livelihood). It is hard also to carry out the Dharma in all respects.<sup>44</sup>

We must look inside and ask ourselves, “Do we have all the factors that guarantee having a similar precious human life in the future?” Firm ethical conduct, training in the six perfections, and sincere dedication prayers are needed, as are cultivation of stable faith and correct wisdom. Ethical conduct is the cause for a human rebirth. Training in the six perfections results in having the conducive circumstances to practice the Dharma — generosity in this life results in receiving food, shelter, clothing, and medicine in future lives, and joyous effort in this life enables us to accomplish our goals in future lives. Sincere dedication prayers to have a series of precious human lives so that we can attain full awakening direct our merit so that it will ripen accordingly.

In this context, living in pure ethical conduct refers chiefly to abandoning the ten destructive pathways of actions — killing, stealing, unwise sexual behavior, lying, creating disharmony, harsh words, idle talk, coveting, maliciousness, and wrong views. It also involves taking and

keeping any of the prātimokṣa ethical codes — those for monastics or lay followers. Doing this requires some conviction in the infallibility of the law of karma and its results.

We know that every conditioned phenomenon arises due to its preceding causes and conditions. This is the general interdependent nature of causes and effects. Within that exists one type of cause and effect — karma and its results. Karma — sentient beings' volitional physical, verbal, and mental actions — depends on our virtuous and nonvirtuous motivations and produces our experience of happiness and suffering.

All sentient beings — except those in the formless realm — have a body. While the body itself is produced by external causes, such as the sperm and egg of our parents, which body our mindstream is born into depends on the quality of our mind and the kinds of karmic seeds left on our mindstream in the past. By acting constructively in this life, we create beneficial mental habits and leave many seeds of virtuous actions on our mindstream. When we die, some of these will ripen, enabling us to take a precious human life for many lifetimes to come, enabling us to continue our spiritual development with minimum interruption. For this reason, spiritual practice, which concerns working with our mind and its intentions, is important. We are responsible for accumulating sufficient causes to produce future precious human lives like the one we have now.

Reflecting in detail on the specific causes for a specific rebirth leads us to the very subtle and profound functioning of karma and its effects — the specific action an individual did in a certain lifetime that is now ripening in a particular event. This is an extremely obscure topic, one only omniscient buddhas know clearly and perfectly. At present, we must depend on scriptural authority to understand it.

Nevertheless, we can understand the general functioning of karma and its results. We know that constructive acts bring happy results and destructive acts bring suffering results. Reflecting on the actions we've done throughout our lives and the various intentions that motivated them, can we say with conviction, "I definitely have created all the causes and conditions for a precious human life and have purified all opposing ones?" Most of us find it difficult to say this with complete conviction because we have done actions we now regret. Transforming our mind by practicing the

Dharma affords us the opportunity to change this situation by accumulating merit, purifying negativities, and gaining realizations. Understanding the potential and preciousness of human life to do this and the difficulty of receiving this opportunity in the future, we should avoid wasting our life in frivolous pursuits and engage in Dharma practice now.

## *Taking the Essence of Our Precious Human Life*

If something is true but does not have much to do with our daily experience, knowing it is not important, and our lack of understanding does not bring great problems. But knowing the great value of our precious human life is crucial to this and future lives. Unaware of this fact, we will not see our present lives as significant and filled with opportunity, and risk wasting the chance to create the cause of happiness for a long time to come. Instead, we will mindlessly follow our self-centered thoughts, which will lead us to unfortunate rebirths. But once aware of the rarity of a precious human life, the difficulty of attaining it, and the amazing things we can do with it, we will no longer think our lives are meaningless.

All living beings seek happiness and peace, and I believe attaining this is the purpose of human life. Happiness and peace depend on hope. People lose hope when their lives do not go smoothly or they fail to actualize their expectations. Some people become depressed and some look to suicide for relief, which doesn't stop their pain. But when we understand that creating the causes for peace and happiness are within our ability, despondency cannot take root.

There are two types of happiness: temporary and long-lasting. Experienced while we are in cyclic existence, temporary happiness includes the attainment of higher rebirth as a human being or god. Long-lasting happiness is liberation and awakening, which are attained through spiritual practice. The way to make our life meaningful and to attain these two kinds of happiness is by engaging in sincere spiritual practice, specifically the practices of beings of initial, middle, and advanced levels; that is to say, we must aspire to attain liberation, generate bodhicitta, and ascertain the correct view of emptiness. If we have learned the Dharma and are skillful,

no matter our situation in life, where we are, or what time it is, the potential to enrich ourselves through Dharma practice is always present.

Spiritual practice involves some form of renunciation. Misidentifying what to renounce, some people think they must give up happiness and undergo hardship and suffering by accepting extra problems and miseries that they did not have before. If this were so, no sensible person would want to practice the Dharma.

The Buddha does not direct us toward suffering; rather, he shows us the path to be free from misery. He does this by explaining that the roots of suffering — ignorance, animosity, and attachment — are to be renounced, and the causes of happiness — generosity, fortitude, compassion, and so on — are to be adopted. He teaches a gradual path so that we can practice according to our capability at any particular moment. In this way, his followers embrace a way of life in which they eliminate all suffering and its causes step by step, beginning with gross ones and proceeding to subtle ones. In addition, they cultivate happiness, starting with temporary happiness and progressing up to the ultimate happiness of buddhahood.

From this, we see that the purpose of spiritual practice is to bring a sense of internal peace, well-being, and fulfillment. Although our ultimate goal is full awakening, the most urgent and immediate happiness to work for is that of future lives, and for that reason practitioners endeavor to create the causes and conditions to have precious human lives and abandon causes that create the contrary.

## *Eight Worldly Concerns*

Although we have such precious potential, we often fail to recognize it, or even if we do, we are often distracted and do not utilize it. Our tendency to pay more attention to gaining immediate happiness and avoiding unpleasant situations is often stronger than a clear awareness that sees the value of creating the causes for a fortunate rebirth, liberation, and awakening. Our chief obstacles at present are subsumed in the eight worldly concerns — four pairs of delight and dejection that produce attachment and anger. The Buddha said (AN 8.6).<sup>45</sup>

Gain and loss, disrepute and fame, blame and praise, pleasure and pain. These eight worldly concerns revolve around the world, and the world revolves around these eight worldly concerns.

Attachment arises toward one part of each pair: material or financial gain, good reputation or image, praise and approval, and pleasure, especially from sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and tactile sensations. Aversion arises toward the other part of each pair: lack of money and possessions, a notorious reputation, blame and criticism, discomfort or pain.

Illustrations of these eight abound in our daily lives. We try to arrange our lives to come in contact with attractive objects and people, tantalizing sense experiences, sweet ego-pleasing words, money, possessions, and so forth. We complain when these do not meet our standard or when we encounter their opposite. Being preoccupied with these eight — which center on our own happiness in only this life — we become very reactive to our environment and the people in it. This emotional reactivity — clinging to what we like, pushing away what we don't — brings difficulties in this life and impedes actualizing our long-term Dharma goals.

### *Financial and material gain and loss*

The first pair of delights and dejections involves our relationship with money and possessions. We are elated when we have a lot of money, nice clothes, a comfortable house, a new car, and good sports equipment, and we become upset when we are unable to procure the things we desire, when they are destroyed, or when they are taken away from us. Sadly, many people measure their success in life by their material wealth. No matter how much they have, they are never satisfied and never feel fully successful.

Of course we need to take care of the practical aspects of our lives, but if we pay undue attention to material possessions and finances, we become a slave to them. Once we are entrapped by their lure, contentment evades us; quarrels ensue as we try to procure more and better and protect what we already have. We become arrogant toward those who have less, jealous of those who have more, and compete with equals, trying to prove our worth by having more than them.

Attached to financial and material gain, we work long hours and plan big projects to make us rich. Unless we are able to use the money wisely to benefit others, the process of gaining wealth consumes our time and energy so that we have little left for practicing Dharma. In the process of accumulating wealth, our ethical discipline is easily corrupted. Those who are greedy become involved in activities that harm individuals and society and that result in scandals and prison terms.

Unfortunately, some lamas and geshees initially live a simple life, studying and practicing diligently. They are very humble and not at all arrogant. Later, when they have many disciples, especially wealthy ones, they become ostentatious. They forget the many years of sacrifice they went through for the Dharma and are corrupted by seeking wealth and fame. We must be attentive not to do this ourselves.

### *Good and bad reputation and image*

We feel elated when we are well-known and have a good reputation and dejected when our image is damaged. Continually preoccupied by what others think of us leads to self-preoccupation and emotional instability. We pay a lot of attention to appearances, and lacking sincerity, we use others for our own advantage. Many people succeed in achieving a good reputation or a high rank, but lack internal peace and true friendships.

People are attracted to a famous person because of his or her reputation. Whether or not that person has something valuable to contribute to society is another question. Without being impressed with titles, honors, or power, we are better off looking at each person as another human being who has the Buddha nature and seeks happiness and not suffering, just like us.

As a monastic, I am not so concerned about gain and loss of wealth. However, as the Dalai Lama, I sit on a high throne when I teach, and sometimes in a corner of my mind the thought arises, "I hope people respect me." When explaining the Dharma, I sometimes wonder, "Does the audience like this talk?" Sometimes our minds are invaded by defiled thoughts: "What a great practitioner I have become! I hope others notice!" It is important to free our minds from expectations of receiving offerings, respect, and appreciation when we share the Dharma. We should talk about our faults and let others speak of our good qualities.

Of course we must prepare before giving a Dharma talk, but if we are too concerned with our delivery or how the audience receives the teaching, there is danger that our talk is for show. Instead of being apprehensive about what others will say about us, we should generate a sincere motivation at the beginning: “Although I do not know much, I will explain what I understand.” Then we will not be nervous and will speak truthfully. If people ask questions that we cannot answer, we simply say that we do not know and use it as an opportunity to learn more.

A member of my staff chided me, saying that I don’t prepare my speeches well enough. Perhaps he would like me to make more astute comments about complex topics. However, I feel more genuine when I talk about what I practice and live myself. When I do that, I’m not worried about whether or not others like my talk.

One time a reporter from an important paper in New York interviewed me and asked how I would like to be remembered in history. I told her, “This is not my concern. I am a Buddhist practitioner and am not interested in such things.” But she kept asking me until I got impatient and said, “I don’t think about that!”

Being concerned with present reputation or our name in history is foolish. We will not be alive to enjoy our reputation in history, so why worry about it? A good reputation doesn’t get us any closer to awakening. Our image is not important, but our motivation is. If our motivation is insincere, then even if everyone praises us, the glory will not last long. But if we are sincere and straightforward, we will communicate well with others. Eventually they will accept and appreciate our intentions, and that respect will last over time.

Buddha Śākyamuni was never concerned about his name or fame, but after nearly twenty-six centuries, people still love and respect him. Even non-Buddhists appreciate his message of nonviolence and compassion. Great masters such as Nāgārjuna remained simple Buddhist monks, however learned they became. Of course, when they debated the meaning of the teachings, they became animated and spoke forcefully; but this was not done out of arrogance or desire. Some present geshees are like that. In their ordinary life, they are so humble that we may even doubt whether they



can walk properly. But when they go into the debating courtyard, they suddenly become active and assertive.

Look at the great Indian sage Śāntideva. From his writings we know that he was an intelligent, realized practitioner. But in his daily life, he was so humble that people thought he only ate, slept, and defecated. However, we see in the ninth chapter of *Engaging in the Bodhisattvas' Deeds* that in debate he could be relentless and fierce in counteracting wrong conceptions. Once when he taught emptiness, he floated upward in space until he finally disappeared and only his voice could be heard, displaying a superpower that flabbergasted the audience!

### *Praise/approval and criticism/disapproval*

We love when people we like comment on our good qualities or competent work and we become depressed when they point out our faults, criticize us, or blame us for things we may or may not have done. Due to this delight and dejection, our emotions vacillate drastically, as does our self-image.

In an effort to win the approval of others and avoid their disapproval, we may sacrifice our ethical standards to win their favor, succumb to peer pressure to fit in, and make unwise decisions that have long-term consequences. In the hopes of winning someone's approval, we try to become what we think they think we should be. In the process of doing so, we lose touch with what we really think and feel, and live in fear of accidentally doing something that would annoy the other person and garner their criticism.

When meeting new people, we usually present our good side and may exaggerate our qualities to win their approval and affection, often not realizing the extent of our deceit and pretension until later. Once they like us, we may take their friendship for granted and stop being so considerate of them. As a result, they criticize us, we feel hurt and resentful, and difficulties in the relationship ensue. Our self-confidence plummets because it was based on the praise of others and not on our honest self-assessment. Sometimes we become confused and don't know what to believe about ourselves because one person praises us and another criticizes us for the same action, in quick succession.

I have found that it is better for everyone involved to be sincere, frank, and natural with others. I show what I am and do not pretend to be otherwise, no matter what others think or say about me. Being free of attachment to praise and reputation gives us the ability to relate as one human being to another.

When I was in China in 1954, I met with some members of the Communist Party. They spoke to the point, our discussions were very frank, and I liked some of them, at least for a while. But other officials were too polite. They were trying to impress me, and that made me suspicious of their purpose.

The eight worldly concerns are sneaky, even when we try to create virtue. Excellent practitioners will sometimes notice in the back of their minds the thought wishing to receive praise, respect, or offerings. Worse yet are those who try to impress others with their knowledge or ability to perform rituals. Some get enamored with their own charisma. In fact praise doesn't benefit us in a substantial way: it doesn't increase our longevity, intelligence, or good health, nor does criticism impede these. The law of karma and its effects is our true witness: others may sing our praises, but we still have to experience the results of the destructive actions we created. Other people may criticize us, but they cannot destroy our merit or cause us to be reborn in an unfortunate rebirth. Our infatuation with praise and accolades is like thinking a rainbow has some substance. The great Nyingma practitioner, Longchen Rabjam, said:

See the equality of praise and blame, approval and disapproval, good  
and bad reputation,  
for they are just like illusions or dreams and have no true existence.  
Learn to bear them patiently, as if they were mere echoes,  
and sever at its root the mind that clings to an I or a self.<sup>46</sup>

### *Pleasure and pain*

So many of our actions are fueled by attachment to pleasurable sights, sounds, odors, tastes, and tactile sensations, such as feeling warm on a cold day and cool on a hot day, and aversion for their opposites — grating noises, disgusting food, sleeping on a bed that is too hard or too soft, and

witnessing alarming sights. Securing the former and avoiding the latter becomes the purpose of most of our daily life activities. Yet as hard as we try, we are never able to make our lives entirely comfortable, which leaves us feeling grouchy and complaining. Our unhappiness does not come from inability to control the environment so that we have only pleasant sensory experiences, but from internal emotions of strong craving and aversion. Minus the craving and aversion, we may still have preferences, but are able to accept what life brings us. Our frustration and worry decrease, giving way to enjoying what is instead of pining for what isn't.

This pair may also be described as attachment to success and aversion to failure. Rather than allow our mind and self-esteem to vacillate according to these, we can maintain a balanced attitude by contemplating interdependence. Success does not depend on us alone; the efforts of many people are involved, so arrogance is uncalled for. Failure may be due to mistakes or to external circumstances that we cannot control. Learning from our mistakes is useful and accepting that we cannot control the world is practical. Both of these will calm our mind.

## *Disadvantages of the Eight Worldly Concerns*

When we speak of Dharma as distinct from non-Dharma, the line of demarcation is the presence or absence of the eight worldly concerns. If our action is motivated by attachment to only the happiness of this life, it is considered non-Dharma. Actions motivated by the aspiration to have a fortunate rebirth, to attain liberation, or to attain buddhahood are Dharma actions. This does not mean that secular people or those of other religions do not create virtue. Anyone can refrain from harming others, cultivate a kind heart, and create merit through generosity, forgiveness, and compassion.

In the Pāli canon (AN 8.6) the Buddha explains that the eight worldly concerns are encountered by both uninstructed worldly people and by knowledgeable āryas, but there is a big difference between how these two groups respond. When ordinary people receive gain, fame, praise, and pleasure, they do not reflect on these as being impermanent and subject to change; they do not know them as they are in reality. Instead ordinary

beings are delighted and their common sense is swept away by elation. When they meet with the opposite of these four — loss, disrepute, blame, and unpleasant sensations, they become dejected. Obsessed with their likes and dislikes, they continue to revolve in cyclic existence, with its birth, ageing, sickness, and death, and to be tormented by pain, grief, and despair. Their minds are never peaceful, as they desperately try to procure everything that appears to bring them happiness and vehemently reject the reality of painful situations.

When instructed āryas come upon these concerns, however, they understand the four pleasant ones to be transient and changing. Understanding them as they really are — impermanent, unable to provide lasting happiness, and lacking their own independent essence — their minds remain balanced. They do not become upset when loss, blame, disrepute, and unpleasant sensations come their way. Giving up attachment to likes and aversion to dislikes, they seek a higher happiness — that of liberation — and create the causes to be free from cyclic existence. Speaking of the eight worldly concerns, the Buddha observes (AN 8.5):

The wise and mindful person knows them  
and sees that they are subject to change.  
Desirable conditions don't excite his mind,  
nor is he repelled by undesirable conditions.

He has dispelled attraction and repulsion;  
they are gone and no longer present.  
Having known the dustless, sorrowless state,  
he understands rightly and has transcended [cyclic] existence.

The eight worldly concerns center around attachment to the pleasures of just this life. While this life is important, clinging to its pleasures is problematic. The Buddha does not say that pleasure is bad or evil. Pleasure is what it is — a nice experience that lasts a short while. It is fine to enjoy the good things we encounter. But becoming attached to them is another matter, because the attachment — and the aversion that arises when we cannot get what we like — causes problems in this and future lives and

distracts us from fulfilling our spiritual yearnings. For this reason, the Seventh Dalai Lama said:<sup>47</sup>

Fantasies about material objects and the winds of [tendencies toward] the eight worldly concerns are completely misleading. Because of clinging to things that give only temporary fulfilment, at death one is weighed down with the pain of a mind empty [of virtue].

The Fourth Pañchen Lama, Losang Chokyi Gyaltsen, said true practitioners of Mahāmudrā see that the eight worldly concerns are like dramas of madness and prefer solitude — “solitude” meaning separating the mind from ignorance, animosity, and attachment.

In our attempts to obtain the four factors that superficially seem to bring happiness in only this life and to distance ourselves from the four undesirable ones, we create a great deal of negative karma. To protect our reputation, we talk behind others’ backs; to get more money, we cheat others or get involved in illegal business dealings; to win someone’s approval or praise, we lie, hiding our mistakes and making up successes that we lack. In the long run, due to the functioning of karma and its effects, these actions bring suffering on us. Although seeking the eight worldly concerns seems to bring us happiness superficially, in the long term it brings more misery. The eight worldly concerns make our viewpoint very narrow and self-centered. We become blind to karma and its effects and ignore the need to create the causes for well-being in future lives. Aspiring to liberation or awakening is far from our mind.

The eight worldly concerns obstruct us from genuine Dharma practice. Most of our distractions in meditation involve the eight worldly concerns. When our mind wanders while listening to teachings, our attention has strayed to one of these eight. We postpone positive deeds, such as generosity or helping others, because our time is occupied with these eight. For these reasons, Dharma practitioners are warned about seeking the temporary happiness of *only* this life, not because it is bad or “sinful” but because it impedes us from actualizing the spiritual realizations that will bring long-term happiness.

Attachment to the pleasures of only this life breeds dissatisfaction. However much we have, it is not enough. Even wealthy people don't feel satisfied with what they have. No matter how much our loved ones praise us, we still want more. We long for another reward, trophy, or public acknowledgement of what we have accomplished. True satisfaction eludes us.

When we have worldly success, we easily become arrogant and haughty, flaunting our success and ignoring the needs of others. Therefore mind training texts say that it is better to meet difficulties, for they make us humble and more compassionate. Difficulties flatten our haughtiness, and we learn to respect the concerns and feelings of others. Difficulties also deepen our refuge in the Three Jewels and spur us to be mindful of karma and its effects.

Giving up attachment to the pleasures of only this life and the eight worldly concerns does not mean that we neglect ourselves and become a pauper. Some people make a big display of having renounced the world, but remain attached to their reputation as a renunciant! We need a certain amount of possessions and financial support to function in society. Having wise friends and maintaining our health facilitate Dharma practice. Problems arise when we are attached to these and seek them to the exclusion of all else.

Relinquishing attachment and aversion does not entail having a dull and boring life. Rather, our life becomes fuller because being free from the push and pull of delight and dejection, we are able to appreciate whatever comes our way. Instead of thinking, "I can only be happy when I'm near this one special person," we become more open and enjoy the company of many others.

In brief, the problem does not rest in the experience of pleasure or the objects that seem to bring pleasure. It is clinging to the pleasure that is the troublemaker. The Buddha says (AN 6.63):

They are not sensual pleasures, the pretty things in the world;  
a person's sensual pleasure is lustful intention;  
the pretty things remain just as they are in the world,  
but the wise remove the desire for them.

In the *Inquiry of Ugra Sūtra (Ugrapariṣcchā)* the Buddha gives excellent guidance on how to deal with our addiction to the eight worldly concerns:

Being free of attachment and aversion [the bodhisattva] should attain equanimity with respect to the eight worldly concerns. If he succeeds in obtaining wealth, or a spouse, or children, or valuables, or produce, he should not become arrogant or overjoyed. If he fails to obtain all these things, he should not be downcast or distressed. Rather he should reflect as follows: “All conditioned things are illusory and are marked by involvement in fabrication. Thus my father and mother, children, spouse, employees . . . friends, companions, kinsfolk, and relatives — all are the result of the ripening of actions. Thus they are not mine, and I am not theirs.

“And why? Because my father, mother, and so on are not my protector, refuge, resort, place of rest, island, self, or what belongs to the self. If even my own perishable aggregates, sense sources, cognitive faculties and their objects are not me or mine, how much less are my father, mother, and so on me or mine, or I theirs? And why? Because I am subject to my actions and heir to my actions, I will inherit [the results of] whatever I have done, whether good deeds or bad. I will taste the fruit of every one of them and will experience the ripening of each one. Because these people are also subject to their actions and heir to their actions, they too will inherit [the results of] whatever they have done, whether good deeds or bad. They will experience the ripening of every one of them and will taste the fruit of each one.

It is not my business to accumulate nonvirtuous deeds for their sake. All of them are a source of pleasure now, but they will not be a source of pleasure later on. Instead, I should devote myself to what is really mine — to the virtues of generosity, discipline, self-restraint, fortitude, good character, exertion, vigilance, and the accumulation and production of the [seven] awakening factors. That is what is actually mine. Wherever I may go, these qualities will go with me.”<sup>48</sup>

Using our human intelligence to accomplish long-term benefit for ourselves is valuable, whereas focusing on just our own short-term interests is limited. Even businesspersons who are nonbelievers know that being

short-sighted and impatient is a disadvantage to achieving their goals. If this is true for obtaining good results in this life, it is even truer for actualizing our spiritual goals. Thus when we experience suffering and are deprived of sensory pleasures, wealth, praise, and fame, we should maintain a long-term perspective and practice fortitude so that we can tolerate these temporary situations in cyclic existence. Such fortitude maintains our spiritual resolve without feeling defeated or upset, no matter what we encounter. But when we are focused on only our immediate happiness and benefit, we are perpetually dissatisfied and create much destructive karma.

Our precious human life presents us with great opportunities. If we use our energy only to get delicious food, attractive clothing, a good income, a great reputation, and popularity, we waste our human potential. Using our human intelligence to improve only our external situation but not the state of our mind and heart does not do justice to our extraordinary intelligence. Simply helping our friends and harming our enemies wastes our human potential and does nothing to distinguish us from animals who also care for their dear ones and harm those who threaten them. We must not limit our human life to just these activities. Spending our lives striving only for the eight worldly concerns leaves us regretful at the end of our lives, for none of these is of any use to us at the time of death or afterward. We regret wasting a little money, but we should regret even more wasting our lives seeking only comfort, prestige, romantic love, and so forth.

What, then, can human beings do that animals and insects cannot do? We can transform, discipline, and train our minds and hearts. We can understand teachings on ethical conduct and the method to cultivate love and compassion. We can realize the nature of reality, which will liberate us from all *duḥkha*. Channeling our energy into actualizing our peerless potential is truly worthwhile.

Each sentient being wants happiness. A worldly perspective leads us to believe that it is found by possessing certain things, being close to specific people, and gaining acceptance and reputation. A Dharma perspective proposes seeking happiness in transforming our mind and heart and cultivating our wisdom and good heart. Dharma practitioners seek happiness in a more reliable way by expanding our motivation to include the long-term welfare of all sentient beings. The Buddha speaks of the joy a



sincere practitioner derives from Dharma practice (MN 27.14–15): by living ethically, “he experiences within himself a bliss that is blameless.” Living an ethical life enables us to be free from guilt and remorse and to feel good about our actions. By restraining the sense faculties so that the mind is not continuously running here and there in search of temporary pleasure, “he experiences within himself a bliss that is unsullied,” that arises from acting with mindfulness and introspective awareness.

By cultivating contentment, we experience the internal peace of accepting ourselves. The practice of bodhicitta opens our hearts with love and compassion toward all beings, producing great joy in the mind. By acting for the benefit of others, we gain the satisfaction of making a positive contribution to the welfare of others. The practice of stabilizing meditation leads to the attainment of higher states of concentration. The joy and bliss that arise in them are free from attachment to the desire realm and invigorate the mind. Realizing the true nature of all phenomena and integrating it in our lives brings a peace that cannot be destroyed. The union of clear light mind and illusory body in tantric practice produces the magnificent bliss of full awakening. The Buddha spoke of giving up attachment to the pleasures of this life in order to lead us on the path to more stable and profound states of fulfillment that can be actualized only by Dharma practice. Sentient beings naturally seek happiness and there is nothing wrong with having it. We want to free ourselves from attachment to inferior states of happiness that are in the nature of *duḥkha*. Rather than seek situations and things that at first appear wonderful but eventually become troublesome, it is wiser to generate spiritual happiness that is based on more stable, realistic, and beneficial states of mind.

## 9 | Looking beyond This Life

**T**O ATTAIN a fortunate rebirth, liberation, and full awakening, we must have heartfelt aspirations and a firm commitment to engage in the practices that bring these about. Understanding the benefits of attaining those aims and the disadvantages of not attaining them fosters a pure motivation. Contemplating the drawbacks of being born as one of the three unfortunate classes of beings and the opportunities for spiritual progress with a fortunate rebirth will motivate us to keep good ethical conduct, practice the six perfections, and dedicate the merit for a precious human life. Reflecting on the faults of cyclic existence and the difficulties of being under the power of afflictions and karma motivates us to counteract these. Contemplating the kindness of sentient beings and their *duḥkha* generates the aspiration for awakening.

As described above, the biggest obstacle to attaining our spiritual aims is our obsessive preoccupation with the eight worldly concerns, which lead us to engage in destructive actions and distract us from creating virtue. The most effective way to initially subdue the eight worldly concerns is to reflect on impermanence and death. The *Dhammapada* counsels (168–74):

This world is blind! There are so few who see things as they truly are. Come, take a good look at this world, pretty like a king's chariot. Though fools become immersed in it, for the wise there is no attachment. See how it is like a bubble! See how it is like a mirage! The king of death does not see one who regards the world in this way. Rouse yourself and don't be lazy! Follow the good ways of Dhamma.

*Gross and Subtle Impermanence*

As the first of the sixteen aspects or key points of the four truths and the first of the four seals that mark a teaching as Buddhadharma, impermanence is an essential point to contemplate on the path. Impermanence has two levels: subtle and gross. Subtle impermanence refers to the fact that every conditioned phenomenon changes and does not endure to the next moment. Its very nature is transient: the subtle particles composing an atom are in constant motion; each moment of mind ceases and gives way to the next.

Gross impermanence refers to the ceasing of the continuity of an object: a chair breaks, a human being dies. Initial-level practitioners meditate on gross impermanence to help them to evaluate their priorities in life by seeing the impermanent nature of the happiness of just this life and the eight worldly concerns. Not thinking that we will die one day, we think, “I need this and that because I’m going to live.” Focusing on the pursuit of money, fame, praise, success, and comfortable experiences — all of which do not last long — we neglect to prepare to depart this life and go on to the next. Awareness of the fleeting nature of life spurs us to engage in what is beneficial for this life as well as what is meaningful for lives to come. A lamrim text encourages us to think of impermanence in five ways.

1. The *impermanence of destruction* refers to the annihilation of something that existed. For example, the twin towers in New York were decimated, and death is the cessation of a person’s life force.
2. The *impermanence of cultural trends and attitudes* points to the changes occurring in society. One hundred years ago, women had few options in life outside of marriage and family. Now more opportunities are available to them and society benefits from their contribution. Centuries ago democracy was virtually unheard of. Now it is a value in many cultures.
3. The *impermanence of separation* indicates that whatever comes together must separate; it is impossible to always remain together. Relationships transform over time, and people who were close at one time later go their own ways. Organizations and companies form and dissolve, their employees going in many different directions.
4. *Sudden impermanence* is the fact that circumstances can change quickly and unexpectedly. We get up in the morning expecting to

have certain experiences and meet particular people, but plans change on short notice. While we can easily adapt to some sudden changes, others, such as a mass shooting or the death of a dear one in a car accident, are difficult to adapt to.

5. The *nature of impermanence* refers to the fact that everything that arises due to causes and conditions is transitory in nature. Whether we want it to be stable and predictable or wish it to change quickly, change is its very nature.

## REFLECTION

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1. Review the five points above one by one and make examples of them from your life.
  2. Notice the effect this has on your mind.
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## *Learning from Our Own Mortality*

Contemplating death is neither morbid nor unrealistic. To the contrary, it helps us prepare for death and live with more wisdom and kindness. This meditation has three points: death is definite, its time is uncertain, and at the time of death only the Dharma can help us. Each point has three subpoints and a conclusion; together these lead us to a realistic and beneficial perspective on what is important in life.

### *Death is definite.*

Death is the cutting off of the life faculty; it occurs at the time that the continuities of body and mind are disjoined. The continuity of the body is a lifeless corpse; in general, the continuity of the mind enters an intermediate state, and then ordinary beings take rebirth in another coarse body. The only exceptions are meditators who have deep concentration and are reborn in the form or formless realms, a person who will be born in a pure land, a tantric practitioner who gains spiritual realizations at the time of death, or an ārya who has control over the rebirth process. Death occurs owing to

four situations: (1) Exhaustion of the life span. The karma that brought about that life is exhausted, and that lifetime ceases. (2) Exhaustion of merit. Merit is required to stay alive once we are born, and when it runs out, death occurs. The karma that maintains the life span may still be intact, but the person lacks the merit to receive food, shelter, clothing, or medicine, and death occurs. (3) Both of the above occur simultaneously. (4) Ripening of destructive karma. Even though the life span and merit may not be exhausted, the seed of a strong destructive karma ripens and cuts short the life span, bringing an untimely death due to an accident or unexpected illness.

The three subpoints that help us understand the certainty of our death are:

1. Everyone who is born dies; death is a natural result of birth. Death is common to all beings; it is the great equalizing factor, for no one can avoid it. Wealth, fame, intelligence, love, or power — none of these can prevent death — and even holy beings and great leaders die.
2. When the time of death arrives, our life span cannot be extended. There is nowhere to go to avoid death; beings in every realm of cyclic existence die. Moving to another place, finding another doctor, and changing our medicine may prolong our life awhile, but cannot prevent death.
3. We will die even if we have not had the time to practice the Dharma. As each moment passes, we approach the end of our life, and the time available for Dharma practice is brief and consumed with other activities. When we're young we go to school and play, in our adult years we have a family and work, in our senior years we spend time caring for our health.

While most of us intellectually know that we will die, our inner feeling is that death will not come to us: "Others will die, but not me." How wrong that is! Śāntideva cautions us (BCA 2.39):

Remaining neither day nor night,  
this life is always slipping by

and never lengthening.

Why will death not come to one like me?

Given that there is no way to avoid death, wouldn't it be beneficial to prepare for death so that we will not be caught unawares when it happens? The best way to prepare for death is to practice the Dharma — to transform our mind by pacifying afflictions and cultivating good qualities. Doing this, we will be more peaceful at the time of death and our future rebirth will be better.

The conclusion to reach from this meditation is: Since death is definite and practicing the Dharma will benefit us in this life, at the time of death, and in future lives, we resolve to definitely transform our minds through putting the Buddha's teachings into practice.

### *The time of death is uncertain.*

Although we feel we will not die anytime soon, in fact we do not know when death will come. Although we plan for our old age, we may not live that long; there is no guarantee that we will be alive tomorrow. Contemplate:

1. The life span of human beings in our world is indefinite, and people die at all ages. We may believe that death will come only after we have accomplished certain career goals or after we've enjoyed watching our children grow up or traveling to faraway places, but in fact we don't know when we will die. Whenever it is, we will surely be in the middle of doing something that will be left unfinished. Some people die on the way to work, others while eating, some simply between one breath and the next.
2. Many circumstances lead to death and fewer lead to survival. Great effort is required to stay alive: we must feed our body and protect it from heat, cold, disease, and injury. It takes a lot of planning and effort to keep this body alive, whereas if we did nothing, our body would simply die of dehydration or starvation.
3. Even things meant to protect life, such as medicine, food, shelter, and transportation, can inadvertently cause death. Microscopic viruses and bacteria may cause death, small pieces of metal can kill

us. Our physiological systems are delicate and easily become unbalanced, leading to illness and death. While medical science has made tremendous advancements, it has not been able to stop death, and sometimes the treatment we take for illness has side effects that hasten death.

It is to our advantage to prepare ourselves for death, whenever it will come. The way to do this is by developing a stable spiritual practice now so that we will accumulate as much virtue and Dharma understanding as possible while alive. This also makes it more likely that we will have a virtuous mental state should death come suddenly. Āryaśūra warns us:

Between the two — tomorrow and the next life —  
which will come first is uncertain.

Therefore, do not make effort in the means for tomorrow;  
it is right to make effort for the welfare of the next life.<sup>49</sup>

Conclusion: Seeing that the time of death is uncertain let's start transforming our minds today. Since death may come at any time, we cannot afford to postpone our Dharma practice until conditions are more suitable. The only time we will ever have for practice is now.

### *Only Dharma helps at the time of death.*

At the time of death, our wealth, fame, friends, relatives, social status, awards, and even our body cannot help us. None of them can come with us into our future lives; they are all left behind as we separate from everything that is familiar. However, the karmic seeds of destructive actions that we have done to procure and protect our wealth, dear ones, and body follow the mindstream (*cittasaṃtāna*) as it goes on to the next life. Only the positive mental qualities we have built up during our lives and the karmic seeds of constructive actions are able to ease our mind at the time of death and ensure fortunate future lives. To understand this, reflect:

1. Money and possessions are of no help at the time of death. We may work very hard while alive to amass money and material goods, but all of them remain behind. We may have created great destructive

karma to procure and protect our money and possessions, but our wealth in this life is useless in the next. We go to the next life with only the karmic seeds and habitual tendencies we have built up while alive.

2. Friends and relatives cannot prevent our death no matter how much they love and respect us. We may have been constant companions for decades, but separation is guaranteed because everything that comes together must separate. Separation at the time of death can be excruciating when we are very attached to others.
3. Not even our body is of benefit. We have spent so much of our lives taking care of this body, but at the time of death it abandons us, becoming a corpse that remains here while the mindstream goes on alone to future lives. All the pleasures this body enjoyed are last night's dream, but the karma we created to secure them goes with us.

Śri Jagan-mitrananda's *Letter to King Moon (Candrarājalekha)* says (LC 1:158):

Divine one, no matter what fortunes you have gained,  
when you depart to another rebirth,  
as though conquered by an enemy in the desert,  
you are alone without children or queen,  
without clothing, without servants,  
without kingdom, and without palace.

Though you have limitless power and armies,  
you will not see or hear them.  
Eventually not even one being or thing  
will follow you in an everlasting way.  
In brief, if you lack even a name at that time,  
what need is there to speak about anything else?

Śāntideva counsels (BCA 2.33, 34, 36, 38):



The untrustworthy lord of death without waiting  
whether or not something has been done;<sup>50</sup>  
whether one is sick or otherwise, suddenly comes;  
do not be complacent about life.

Leaving all behind, I must depart alone.  
Through not having understood this  
I committed various kinds of negativities  
for the sake of my friends and foes . . .

Just like an experience in a dream,  
whatever things I enjoy  
will become a memory.  
Whatever has passed will not be seen [again].

Thereby, through not having realized  
that I will suddenly vanish,  
I committed many negativities  
through ignorance, attachment, and hatred.

Our worldly actions are like ripples in water, one leading to the next. Our mind distracted by the endless worldly activities in our lives, we have little time for Dharma practice before death arrives. At that time regret overwhelms us as we realize that time could have been spent cultivating wisdom and cutting the root of saṃsāra.

In addition, many of our constructive actions are polluted by the eight worldly concerns; creating the image of being an excellent practitioner, we hunger for praise, offerings, and reputation. Unaware, we miss the chance to prepare for death. There is a story about a man who slipped while walking on the edge of a cliff. He broke his fall by catching hold of a root. Looking up, he saw a strawberry, and yearning for the pleasure of its taste overwhelmed him. Meanwhile a rat was busy gnawing the root. Distracted by desire for the strawberry, he did not protect himself and fell to his death as the root broke.

Oblivious of the effects our actions have on others and ourselves, we often act impulsively and grasp whatever will fulfill our needs and wants in the present moment. But when we arrive at the end of our lives and look back — or even if we look back now at what we did for the last ten years — which of our actions were really valuable? I have never heard of a dying person regretting that they did not work more overtime. Remembering this, let's be mindful and make wise decisions now, steering our energy toward Dharma practice, an activity that will bring ourselves and others benefit for a long time to come.

Although many great masters may recite prayers for our good rebirth, perform *powa* (transference of consciousness) after our death, or give us instructions to recognize the bardo (intermediate state between one life and the next) after the breath has stopped, it is far more effective to have studied and practiced the Dharma we learned while alive. If we don't pay attention to these masters' instructions while we are alive, what makes us think that we will listen to them when we're dying?

We can pay people to do many things for us — to mow the lawn or to prepare a report. But we cannot hire someone who will eat for us so that we feel nourished. As with eating and sleeping, creating virtue and abandoning nonvirtue are activities we must do ourselves. Knowing that only the Dharma benefits us at death, generate the determination to practice it purely, free from the influence of the eight worldly concerns.

Whereas death arrives effortlessly, spiritual development requires effort. We cannot wait and hope that with the passage of time we become more disciplined, loving, and compassionate. Only through careful training can we develop these qualities. Although our body may get old, weak, and eventually stop functioning, our afflictions will not decline and disappear with time. In fact sometimes they grow stronger, and some people become more bitter, angry, or emotionally dependent as they age. The afflictions remain fresh and energetic unless we make an effort to counteract them.

Years ago I visited Thailand, where many monasteries have a skeleton near the meditation hall. One monastery had a display with photographs of the stages of a rotting corpse. Seeing these reminded me that I too will die, and keeping that vividly in mind spurs me to transform my mind.

## *Other Life Forms*

After death, the continuity of our consciousness does not stop. Although the coarse sense consciousnesses cease as we go through the death process, the extremely subtle mind continues to the next life. What kind of life will we have in our next rebirth? We don't need to ask a fortune teller; the Buddha explained that according to the law of karma and its effects, virtuous actions bring fortunate rebirths as human or celestial beings (*devas*), whereas nonvirtuous ones lead to unfortunate ones as an animal, hungry ghost, or hell being. Since none of us wants an unfortunate rebirth, it behooves us to create the causes for a good rebirth now.

We may wonder: We know that humans and animals exist, but do the other classes of beings actually exist? Is the description of the unfortunate states to be taken literally? Neither reasoning nor direct experience is able to establish the nonexistence of these realms. Using reasoning to establish their existence is difficult, and we ordinary beings do not have the clairvoyance to determine whether such rebirths exist. In this case, we can rely on reliable scriptural quotations.

Sūtras in all three Buddhist canons — Pāli, Chinese, and Tibetan — speak of other life forms in the universe: in the *Jewel Sutta* (*Ratana Sutta* Sn 2.1), one of the most well-known sūtras in the Pāli canon, the Buddha addresses spirits who are making trouble for the Licchavi clan. The *Sutta of Fools and Wise Men* (*Bālapaṇḍita Sutta* MN 129) speaks of rebirth as hell, animal, and deva or celestial beings, and the *Sutta of the Divine Messengers* (*Devadūta Sutta* MN 130) describes the hell beings in detail.

If you have difficulty accepting scriptural quotations, I recommend remaining undecided yet open-minded. Continue to study and practice the Buddha's teachings, implementing what is useful in your life and leaving the rest aside for the time being. However, if you say, "I don't believe that other realms exist," consider the I that states this. Is that I omniscient? Is whatever that I thinks always accurate?

Personally speaking, although I do not take the descriptions of the hellish states in the *Treasury of Knowledge* literally, I believe the possibility that such states exist is real. From my own experience, I know that when the mind is disciplined and its positive qualities enhanced, having special

experiences is possible. Similarly, when the mind is undisciplined and obscured by negative tendencies, suffering and problems occur. By seeing the interrelationship of the mind and our experiences, I have an inkling that other life forms — those in both pure lands and hellish states — exist.

In some cultures, people accept the existence of spirits and hungry ghosts, and some people even report seeing them. Although this is not generally the case in the West, some Westerners talk about UFOs and report being visited by beings from outer space. In other cultures, people who have similar experiences describe them as encountering spirits or hungry ghosts. In Tibet some people had a special capacity to see some of these spirits that are not normally seen by people. One of my childhood bodyguards could do this.

We may not believe in the existence of other classes of beings because we do not see them; but once we see them, we will have already been born there and it will be too late. Therefore, although we may not be convinced that hell beings and hungry ghosts exist, I recommend provisionally accepting their existence because doing so will make us more mindful of the consequences of our actions before doing them. Should such rebirths exist, we do not want to create the causes leading to them. On the other hand, if such rebirths do not exist, we have not lost anything by refraining from destructive actions!

We know the animals exist and can observe animals' lives. They are clouded by ignorance, and many are exploited by human beings or killed for food or hides. Domestic pets may have comfortable lives, but they are incapable of studying, thinking about, and meditating on the Dharma. If we try to teach our pet cats the value of abandoning killing, they cannot understand at all!

We also see people and events right now that resemble life in these other states. Some human beings act worse than animals, inflicting harm and suffering on others far beyond what any animal could do. Consider those who ran concentration camps during World War II, those behind the Cultural Revolution, and those conducting terrorist activities internationally. That human beings inflict such harm on other human beings leaves us stunned; we cannot find any suitable explanation for such horror. Yet we know that it is a reality. Likewise, we may not easily believe in the

existence of unfortunate states and the suffering experienced in them, but these exist. Since powerful destructive actions produce strong suffering in future lives, it makes sense that human beings who inflict great pain on others would be born in unfortunate states.

In the *Sutta to the Dog-Duty Ascetic* (*Kukkuravatika Sutta* MN 57), the Buddha speaks in a compassionate yet matter-of-fact way about the possibility of rebirth in unfortunate states as a result of our destructive actions and shows that this can be prevented. As did many others, two ascetics in ancient India acted like animals, thinking that it would bring them fortunate rebirths. Approaching the Buddha, Seniya, acting like a dog, and Puṇṇa, behaving like an ox, asked him what their future lives would be. The Buddha did not want to answer, but when pressed he explained (MN 57.5):

Here, someone develops the ox-duty . . . the ox-habit . . . the ox-mind . . . the ox-behavior fully and uninterruptedly. Having done so, on the dissolution of the body, after death, he reappears in the company of oxen. But if he has such a view as this: “By this virtue or observance or asceticism or holy life I shall become a [great] god or some [lesser] god,” that is a wrong view in his case. Now there are two destinations for one with wrong view, I say: hell or the animal state. So if his ox-duty succeeds, it will lead him to the company of oxen; if it fails, it will lead him to the hellish state.

These ascetics had faith in karma and its results, and by hearing that their practice was based on wrong views that would lead them to horrible rebirths, they sobbed and had deep regret for their actions. The Buddha then taught them about karma and concluded, “Thus I say beings are the heirs of their actions.” Both of them became the Buddha’s disciples, and by meditating with strong determination Seniya became an arhat in that life.

The purpose of contemplating the suffering of these migrations and the possibility of being reborn there is not to fill us with irrational panic, emotional fear, and immobilizing dread. Rather, it impels us to practice so that we will not create the causes for such births and will direct our energy in a positive direction instead.

If we are reborn as a hell being, hungry ghost, or animal, will we be able to endure the sufferings? Unpleasant as it may be, contemplating such topics is essential because we can act to prevent these types of rebirth. If we do not think about them and consequently do nothing to prevent them, once we are born in those unfortunate states very little can be done to ease the suffering.

Thinking that unfortunate migrations are in some faraway place and have nothing to do with us is unwise. None of us knows when we will die, and as ordinary beings without spiritual realizations, we have no guarantee that we will not take birth in one of these unfortunate states. Looking carefully at the actions we have done throughout our lives, we see there is a real possibility that we will face an unfortunate rebirth, one where there is not only great misery but also no opportunity to meet the Dharma. We have the opportunity now with our precious human lives to engage in abundant constructive actions that will lead to future happiness in cyclic existence and the ultimate happiness of liberation and awakening. Please keep this in mind and let it motivate you to live with wisdom and compassion now. Reflect on impermanence and death and make a strong determination to overcome the eight worldly concerns that could impede you from doing this.

The Buddha once asked his disciples, “Which is greater, the little bit of soil under my fingernail or the great earth?” They responded that the soil under his fingernail is trifling, whereas the earth is huge. The Buddha then advised them (SN 20.2):

So too, those beings who are reborn among human beings are few. But those beings who are reborn elsewhere than among human beings are more numerous. Therefore you should train yourselves thus: “We shall dwell diligently.”

## *Fear or Hope at Death?*

If our lives have centered primarily around the eight worldly concerns, our mind becomes familiar with nonvirtue. While dying, attachment to self arises, and wanting security and not suffering, we cling to what is familiar

— our body, mind, and so forth. Then fearing that we will cease to exist at death, we crave another body.

In contrast to this panicked fear, if while we are alive we generate a “wise fear” of death, we will be able to set our priorities wisely and make our lives meaningful. The wise fear is aware of the danger of destructive karma ripening at the time of death and propelling us to an unfortunate rebirth. It sharpens our mindfulness, motivates us to practice virtue, and enables us to prevent that danger. This “fear” is similar to the mental state when we merge our car into highway traffic: aware of the possibility of having an accident, we are cautious, which prevents an accident. Wise fear inspires us to set clear priorities, so that we make our life meaningful and do not waste it on unimportant activities. Our life becomes very vibrant and vital as we live each moment fully, aware that the only time we can practice the Dharma is now. Due to practicing diligently, we will be free of fear and regret at the time of death. As the great yogi Milarepa said:

In horror of death, I took to the mountains —  
again and again I meditated on the uncertainty of the hour of death.  
Capturing the fortress of the deathless unending nature of mind;  
now all fear of death is over and done.

Upon seeing a stray horse and an empty chariot, the Buddha’s disciple Mahānāma noted that his mindfulness of the Three Jewels became muddled. He remembered that he too would die, and although he was a stream-enterer and had no reason to fear death, he became concerned about his future rebirth. The Buddha assuaged his fear by reminding him that the virtue he had created will propel his mind upward on the path (SN 55.21):

Don’t be afraid, Mahānāma! Your death will not be a bad one, your demise will not be a bad one. When a person’s mind has been fortified over a long time by faith, ethical conduct, learning, generosity, and wisdom, right here . . . [his body may be destroyed]. But his mind, which has been fortified over a long time by faith, ethical conduct, learning, generosity, and wisdom — that goes upward, goes to distinction.

Death is a normal part of life, something that we must face as long as we are in cyclic existence. To me, leaving this body and going to the next life resembles shedding old clothes and putting on new ones. For practitioners who have trained their minds well while alive, the experience of death can be profound and transformative. Our present body feels solid, heavy, and burdensome. In addition, our gross consciousnesses are dependent on the brain, which limits our mental functions. When our mind separates from the body, it is freer and can be utilized more effectively if we are well trained. Practitioners with very deep meditative experience can control their death and the process of rebirth. Although these people are rare, they show us the potential of the mind. As mentioned before, my teacher, Kyabje Ling Rinpoche, meditated sitting upright for thirteen days after his bodily functions had ceased. Death was joyful and spiritually satisfying for him.

Highest yoga tantra includes a meditation in which death, bardo, and rebirth are taken as the path to the truth body, enjoyment body, and emanation body of a buddha. In the generation stage this is done by imagination; by working with the subtlest wind and mind during the completion stage, these three buddha bodies can be actualized. In my daily practice, I do this meditation at least six times a day to prepare for death, making my mind very familiar with the natural process of death. However, if I was in an airplane that is going down, I don't know how I would feel! I am curious to discover how much of what I am currently practicing I will be able to implement at the time of death. I have no doubt that the force of serious training during life, complemented by pure ethical conduct, bodhicitta, and some understanding of emptiness, will be beneficial at that time.

## *The Death Process*

Highest yoga tantra explains the death process in great detail. Eight steps occur as the body gradually loses its ability to support coarse levels of consciousness and as the mind becomes increasingly subtler until the subtlest mind, the fundamental, innate clear light mind, dawns. That is the



actual moment of death. In the next moment, the mind leaves the body and enters the bardo; at that time, the person is dead.

As each element dissolves — that is, as it loses its ability to support consciousness — our aggregates weaken and we have an inner appearance to the mind.

1. When the earth element dissolves into the water element, the body becomes thinner, the form aggregate — the body — weakens, and the person has an inner shimmering appearance like a mirage.
2. When the water element dissolves into fire, the mouth becomes dry and the skin puckers. The feeling aggregate loses the ability to experience pleasant, unpleasant, and neutral feelings, and the person has an inner appearance of smoke.
3. When the fire element dissolves into the wind element, the heat in the body diminishes. Sometimes the heat leaves beginning with the feet and going upward, other times from the head down. The aggregate of discrimination subsides, and the inner appearance is of sparks of light, like fireflies.
4. When the wind element dissolves into space or consciousness, the external breath stops. The aggregate of miscellaneous factors loses power, and there is an appearance of a small, dim candle flame about to go out. At this point, breathing has stopped completely, the body grows cold, and the coarse consciousness has been absorbed. Doctors pronounce the person dead, but from a Buddhist viewpoint, the consciousness has not yet left the body.
- 5–7. Now the coarser winds — inner energies that serve as the mount of consciousness — begin to dissolve. As with the previous stages of dissolution, the time it takes to pass through the next three phases varies with the person, the cause of death, and the person's spiritual training. These three phases are inner appearances to the mind, named: (5) the vivid white appearance, which resembles the bright light of the full moon; (6) the red increase appearance, like the orange-red color of the sky at sunset; (7) the black near attainment of complete darkness.
8. Now the subtlest mind, the fundamental, innate clear light mind, manifests — this is the actual moment of death, although the

subtlest wind-mind is still present in the body — and a well-trained practitioner will meditate on emptiness. There is no rigor mortis and there may be a slight sense of heat if we hold our hand above the person's heart cakra at the center of her chest. During this time, the relationship between the body and mind has not been severed, and the body does not decay. It is better to avoid touching or moving the body at this time.

Most sentient beings do not recognize the clear light of death and this phase passes quickly. When the mind leaves the body, small traces of a white or red substance at the nostrils or sexual organ may be seen. The body begins to decay and can safely be moved. For ordinary beings, this usually occurs within three days after the breath has stopped. If a person dies in an accident, the consciousness generally leaves the body quickly.

Some practitioners, especially those who have practiced highest yoga tantra, may meditate in the clear light for several days. I heard of some Tibetans monks who, after being tortured in Chinese prisons, sat cross-legged in their cells and remained meditating in the clear light of death for some time. Thinking that Buddhism was just blind faith and superstition, the Chinese Communist guards were surprised and speechless. For people who practice the Dharma sincerely and continuously, dying is not a frightening event but a joyful experience and an optimal time for meditation.

After separating from the body, the eight signs occur in the reverse order as a slightly coarser mind arises in the bardo. If we will be born in a fortunate birth, it will seem like we are walking on a luminous path surrounded by beauty. If we are headed toward an unfortunate birth, we will have the vision of walking in a gloomy place with fearful images and will experience fear and suffering. It is said that butchers who have not purified their acts of killing will see the images of animals they have slaughtered running toward them.

Bardo beings can travel uninterruptedly from one place to another. Those who will be born in similar realms can see one another, and people with clairvoyant powers can also see bardo beings. For ignorant sentient beings, the bardo can be a frightening and confusing time.

## *Helping Ourselves and Others at the Time of Death*

Our attitudes shape our experiences. Some people avoid thinking about difficulties such as illness, aging, and death. But these are bound to happen, and accepting and preparing for them in advance enables our mind to be calmer when they occur.

There are different levels of preparation for death. While some rare and exceptional practitioners with deep meditative experience can control the process of death and rebirth, ordinary people like me prepare for death as part of our daily meditation practice. If death comes in the next few months or years, I am not afraid and even have some confidence. According to reasoning and some unusual experiences I've had, I have a 95 percent belief in future lives. But there's still a little doubt about the various experiences at the time of death.

As creatures of habit, we tend to die in the way we live. If we are not in the habit of acting kindly during our life, it will be unlikely that we will think to hold virtuous thoughts in mind or engage in virtuous actions as we are approaching death. For that reason, leading a good life by not harming others and helping them as much as possible is the best preparation for our death and future lives and enables us to die without regrets. In our daily life, and especially as we approach death, we should forgive people who have harmed us, engage in purification practice, recollect the Buddha, and meditate on love, compassion, and wisdom.

The best way to help friends and family prepare for death is to encourage them while they are alive to abandon nonvirtue and engage in purification to avoid unfortunate rebirths, and to create virtue to ensure that they have causes for a good rebirth. Encourage them to be generous and kind to others and to forgive others and not hold grudges. Avoid involving them in divisive speech, harsh speech, or idle talk. In this way, they will create merit and will have no regrets when they die.

The most prominent thought while we are actively dying yet still conscious stimulates the ripening of a karmic seed that will project us into a specific rebirth. If we die with strong attachment for our loved ones, possessions, or reputation, or with great anger toward our enemies, seeds of destructive karma will ripen. If our mind is virtuous owing to having trust

in the Three Jewels, cultivating compassion for sentient beings, or contemplating the nature of reality, constructive karma is activated, and we will take a fortunate rebirth. Once the dying person has passed through the first four stages of the death process, the mind is in a neutral state and the karma projecting the next life is already beginning to ripen.

Vasubandhu said that consciousness can be virtuous, nonvirtuous, or neutral at the moment of death, depending on the person's thought at that time. His half-brother Asaṅga explained that whereas the coarser states of mind can be virtuous, nonvirtuous, or neutral, the subtle consciousness present at the time of death is neutral. In tantric texts, the Buddha explains that whereas the coarse consciousnesses can be virtuous, nonvirtuous, or neutral, the subtlest consciousness can never be nonvirtuous. This is because the eighty conceptual thoughts — most of which are nonvirtuous — function only in coarse states of mind, which cease before the subtlest mind arises at the actual moment of death. Through profound yogic methods, the subtlest consciousness, also called the fundamental, innate mind of clear light, which is ordinarily neutral, can be transformed into a virtuous state.

The best procedure to follow at the time of death depends on the person. In general, as someone approaches death, avoid disturbing her mind with unnecessary emotional outpourings, spiritual ideas that will confuse her, or idle talk. Help her to recall something virtuous — the Three Jewels, compassion, generosity, and so on — with which she is already familiar. Encourage her to rejoice in her own and others' virtues. If she has no religion, gently speak to her about forgiveness, love, compassion, and hope — qualities that everyone appreciates and that will make her mind virtuous.

No matter what religion a dying person follows, encourage her to do the practices with which she is familiar. Encourage a Christian to forgive others, develop a kind heart, pray to God, and think of Jesus's benevolent qualities. Speak to a Jew, Hindu, or Muslim according to the beliefs and concepts of his religion. These are more familiar and comforting to the dying person, and will facilitate his leaving this life peacefully. Never try to convert another person on his deathbed.

Some people have heard of the *Tibetan Book of the Dead* (*Bar do thos grol chen mo*), which describes a specific meditation done in the Nyingma

tradition for those who have received empowerment into that practice and practiced it while alive. It is not the case that the visions of peaceful and wrathful deities and maṇḍalas described in this text occur to everyone at the time of death or in the intermediate state. Practitioners familiar with the practice described in the *Tibetan Book of the Dead* may have those appearances after death and use them in meditation. Hearing this text could possibly confuse a dying person who is unfamiliar with that practice. Therefore I recommend encouraging dying people to think of the religious figures and the qualities of the holy beings that inspire them personally and to develop a kind heart toward all sentient beings. It is not appropriate to introduce a complex meditation with unfamiliar and often fierce-looking figures to a dying person.

Buddhists can do a variety of practices, depending on their level of practice. Remind a dying Dharma friend of a practice she has trained in and guide her through it if she wishes. When it is our turn to die, we should likewise focus on a familiar practice. Since our mental power and alertness decrease at the time of death, forcing ourselves or others to do a new practice at that time will be confusing. Beneficial practices for Buddhists to do while dying include taking refuge in the Three Jewels, which enables our mind to relax and rest in a virtuous state, which is conducive for the ripening of constructive karma, which in turn will propel our mindstream to take a good rebirth. Developing a kind heart, generating bodhicitta, and doing the taking and giving meditation at the time of death also places our mind in a positive and fearless state. Reflecting on emptiness calms grasping and fear, enabling us to peacefully let go of this life.

We may also think of the Buddha or our meditational deity and imagine light and nectar flowing from that Buddha into us, purifying our destructive karma and inspiring our mind with realizations. Advanced practitioners, who have the proper empowerments and have practiced tantra during their lifetimes, should reaffirm the bodhisattva and tantric ethical codes and then do deity yoga, meditate with the wisdom of inseparable bliss and emptiness, or meditate to take death, bardo, and rebirth into the path to the three buddha bodies.

We should dedicate all the merit we have created during our lifetime for the awakening of ourselves and all sentient beings. We should pray to be

born in a body and environment where we can meet and properly rely on fully qualified Fundamental Vehicle, Mahāyāna, and Vajrayāna spiritual mentors, learn under their guidance, and practice without obstacles. In short, we must do what is suitable to our level of mind and to the circumstances we are in. Whatever we do, we should be content and focus on that practice as best as we can without having doubts that perhaps we should be doing another, more effective practice.

In the *Sutta on Reappearance by Aspiration (Sankhārupapatti Sutta)*, the Buddha offers advice on how to direct the mind toward the type of rebirth we seek (MN 120.2–3). He begins:

Monastics, I shall teach you reappearance in accordance with your aspiration . . . A monastic possesses faith, virtue, learning, generosity, and wisdom. He thinks, “Oh, that on the dissolution of the body, after death, I might reappear in the company of well-to-do nobles!” He fixes his mind on that, establishes it, develops it. These aspirations and this abiding of his, thus developed and cultivated, lead to his reappearance there.

This is an example for someone who wishes to be born in an upper socioeconomic class as a human being. The Buddha says the same for those who want to be reborn as various gods in the desire realm. In all these cases, to intentionally direct our mind toward a specific rebirth, it is necessary to cultivate five qualities — faith, virtue, learning, generosity, and wisdom — during our life. Faith is confidence in the Three Jewels and the law of actions and their result. Virtue is the collection of merit created by keeping precepts, making offerings, sharing our wealth, cultivating fortitude, and so forth. Learning is gained by listening to teachings, reading Dharma books, reflecting on their meaning, and discussing the Dharma with others. Generosity is based on lack of attachment to material goods and distancing ourselves from the eight worldly concerns. Wisdom is the wisdom understanding karma and its effects and the emptiness of inherent existence. Having cultivated these qualities and become familiar with them when alive, at the time of death we generate a strong aspiration for a particular type of rebirth.

To be reborn in any of the four dhyānas or four formless absorptions, we must attain that specific level of dhyāna or meditative absorption as a human being. If we wish to be born in one of the pure abodes where nonreturners dwell, we must develop the union of serenity and insight on selflessness and attain the fruit of a nonreturner before death. If we complete the path to arhatship, we will attain the elimination of all pollutants at the time of death. Those wishing to be reborn in the pure land of Amitābha or another buddha will generate that aspiration at the time of death, thus directing their minds to that rebirth. Lower-level bodhisattvas will direct their aspirations toward whatever rebirth seems most conducive for accomplishing the bodhisattva path, while ārya bodhisattvas will be able to voluntarily choose their reappearance for the benefit of sentient beings.

Having these precious instructions, we should do our best to implement them now in order to prepare for death. Since death is certain, but its time uncertain, let's be prepared.

During the death process and for seven weeks afterward, meditations and prayers done for the deceased can positively influence their consciousness so that the virtuous karma the person had previously created will ripen. This is most effective when the people have a good karmic connection — for example, spiritual mentor and disciple, parent and child, relatives or friends. It is also helpful to donate the person's belongings to his or her spiritual mentors, charities, monasteries, or Dharma centers, and dedicate the merit of this generosity for the person to take a fortunate rebirth with all conducive circumstances to practice the Dharma.

## *Powa, Transference of Consciousness*

Powa is a practice for transferring the consciousness at the time of death so that it will take a precious human life or be reborn in the pure lands. Pure lands are places created by the unshakable resolve and merit of buddhas where all external conditions are conducive for Dharma practice. There are two forms of powa, one found in the mind-training teachings, the other in tantra.

In the *Seven-Point Thought Transformation*, the fourth point, “elucidating a lifetime's practice,” describes a practice of transference of

consciousness based on bodhicitta called the five forces. Familiarizing ourselves with the five forces while alive will make practicing them at the time of death much easier and give us a sense of joy at the time we die. Bodhicitta gives us courage to work for sentient beings; it makes our life meaningful and dispels all despair. Who wouldn't want to have this mental state when dying?

The first of the five forces, the white seed, is done before actively dying when the mind is clear and can make decisions. Create merit and free your mind from attachment to possessions by giving them away. Forgive all those who have harmed you intentionally or unintentionally and apologize to all those whom you have harmed. If it is not possible to apologize directly to a person, reconciling with them in your mind is more important. Also recall that there is no sense worrying about what happens to your body after death; it is simply a lump of organic matter. Accept death as a natural part of life.

Second is the force of aspiration. Do the seven limbs: visualize prostrating and making offerings to your spiritual mentors and the Three Jewels, confess and restore all broken precepts and degenerated ethical restraints, and dedicate all your merit by aspiring, "During death, bardo, and rebirth, may I never be separated from the practice of bodhicitta. May I always be guided by qualified spiritual mentors who lead me to cultivate bodhicitta."

Third is the force of destruction. Seeing that grasping the self, possessions, friends, and relatives as inherently existent is the chief cause of cyclic existence, try to eradicate it by contemplating impermanence and emptiness. Make a strong determination not to let your mind fall under the influence of ignorance, animosity, and attachment.

Fourth is the force of motivation. This is a strong intention to practice bodhicitta during death, bardo, and rebirth. Develop a strong motivation to practice the two bodhicittas: conventional bodhicitta (the altruistic intention), and ultimate bodhicitta (the wisdom realizing emptiness). Aspire never to be separated from the mind-training practice and the two bodhicittas in any of your lives.

Fifth is the force of acquaintance or familiarity. At the time of death, do the taking and giving practice to increase your love and compassion.



Especially think of taking on the pain of others who are dying and transforming your body and merit into whatever others need and giving it to them. Meditate on emptiness, especially the absence of an inherently existent person who is dying. Meditation on the empty nature of mind is also helpful, so recognize all that appears as simply appearance to the mind, not as things to react to or grasp onto.

The *King of Concentration Sūtra* says:

Migrators in cyclic existence are like dreams;  
no one is [inherently] born here and no one [inherently] dies;  
no [inherently existent] sentient being, human, or living being is  
found.

These things are like bubbles, plantain trees,  
illusions, flashes of lightning,  
[reflections of] the moon in water, and mirages.  
In this world, no one [inherently] dies and passes,  
or transmigrates to another life.

If possible, lie in the lion position — the position the Buddha rested in when he passed away: Lie on your right side with your right hand under your cheek. Extend your legs and place your left hand on your left thigh. Then relax the mind and practice as outlined above.

The tantric powa practice involves a practitioner ejecting his or her consciousness out of the body through the top of the head and transferring it to a pure land. Among the different levels of powa, the supreme is when a realized yogi on the completion stage of tantra actualizes the clear light and then arises in the impure illusory body instead of the bardo. This is a rare occurrence.

Powa enables a skilled practitioner to take a rebirth with excellent conditions for Dharma practice. After 1959, some Tibetans who were to be imprisoned by the Chinese communists made their consciousnesses leave their body through powa rather than be subjected to imprisonment. By means of meditation and visualization techniques, they severed the connection between their body and subtlest mind and projected the subtlest mind into a pure land where they could continue practicing the path.

As taught in the tantric texts, powa is to be done by the practitioner himself when he is about to die. To be able to meditate in this way at the time of death, one must receive empowerment and train in powa while one is healthy and alive. While training in powa, it is also essential to do the practice of a long-life deity. A person who has not practiced powa consistently while alive will not be able to perform it when dying.

When a practitioner, through meditation, has attained some control over the wind-energy in the body and mastery over his mind and feels that death is imminent and cannot be avoided, he transfers his consciousness to a pure land. He does this while he still has enough physical energy and mental concentration to properly perform the practice. If he waits until the body is weak, transferring the consciousness could be difficult. But doing it too soon resembles suicide, so great skill is required to perform powa at the proper time. If the powa practice is done irresponsibly or without the proper motivation, there is danger of inadvertently shortening one's life. Although the person does not go through the eight dissolutions in a prolonged manner, they do occur in the proper sequence.

Powa is not a substitute for practicing the Dharma daily. Tantric practitioners should continue practicing taking death, bardo, and rebirth into the three buddha bodies. If, at the time of death, they are not able to actualize the path itself, they do powa in order to carry on Dharma practice continuously in their future life. Powa is specifically for those who have engaged in serious tantric practice during their lives. If you neglect to purify negativities, accumulate merit, and meditate on renunciation, bodhicitta, and emptiness while alive, and at the time of death ask a lama to do powa for you, it is difficult. Without your own effort to practice the Dharma, if you want someone to miraculously transfer your consciousness to a pure land when you die, you will be disappointed. You should be very careful.

Many Tibetan families, and now some non-Tibetan ones, ask a practitioner to perform this ritual at the time of their loved one's death. Although it is customary to do this in the Tibetan community, realistically speaking it has little value if the dying person lacks familiarity with the powa practice and the person doing it lacks a deeper experience of it. Under these circumstances, doing powa becomes a dry ritual. Of course it still has some value because people repeat mantras and recite holy scriptures, which

creates a peaceful feeling in the room of the dying person and can help him or her let go of this life more easily.

Although powa is principally meant for a practitioner to transfer his own mind at the time of death, an experienced powa practitioner may be able to help a dying person transfer his consciousness. Powa is done just before the person dies or at the time he is dying. As a result of the expert powa practitioner's influence, the dying person may develop some determination or inspiration, or may have a new spiritual experience. If the dying person has trained in powa when he was alive and healthy, it is easier for the expert powa practitioner to help him at the time of death. This is a proper way to practice powa.

Some people become excited at the prospect of powa, especially because the physical signs such as fluid or swelling at the crown can appear when they practice. This is due to the impact of the winds in the body. It is not indicative of high realization. The real determination of our future rebirth is the karma we create. Observing proper ethical discipline, applying the antidotes to the afflictions, purifying destructive karma, and practicing the six perfections are guaranteed methods for having a good rebirth. If we do not do these, even if a very high lama does powa at our bedside as we die, he can do very little to help us. He can say *hic* and *phey* to transfer our mind to a pure land many times during the ritual, but if we have not created merit and purified destructive karma while alive, these just become the cries of a miserable dying person.

In short, depending on the person, different meditations could be practiced at the time of death. People who are more familiar with the five forces will do that. Others who have trained well in taking death, intermediate state, and rebirth into the path to the three buddha bodies will practice that. Those who are well-trained in powa can rely on that method. The main point is that whatever practice we do should be done with bodhicitta. It should transform our mind and place it in a virtuous state at the time of death.



## 10 | Karma and Its Effects

HAVING FOUND a precious human life, we now have a choice: Will we create the causes for suffering or will we create the causes for happiness? If we decide to do the latter, the most urgent thing to do is abandon the ten nonvirtues and engage in the ten virtues — to observe karma and its effects. Doing so will bring happiness in this life and fortunate rebirths in future lives, and will establish the foundation of liberation and full awakening.

Since karma and its effects is a very obscure topic, traditional lamrim texts speak of refuge at this point because knowing the qualities of the Three Jewels generates faith in the teachings. This, in turn, helps people to accept the teachings on karma. However, many people nowadays find the qualities of the Three Jewels to be subtle and difficult to understand and the cause-and-effect approach of teachings on karma to be practical. For this reason, we will discuss karma and its effects now, and the qualities of the Three Jewels when we discuss true paths and true cessations.

There are many types of causality — biological, chemical, psychological, and so forth — of which the law of karma and its effects is one. *Karma* literally means action and refers to sentient beings' intentional physical, verbal, and mental actions. Our actions matter: they not only influence others in this life but also result in our own experiences in this and future lives. The results of our actions depend on our intentions, in that actions done with a virtuous intention bring happy results and those motivated by nonvirtuous intentions bring unpleasant results.

Human intelligence makes us particularly qualified to discriminate between constructive and destructive, beneficial and harmful, what to practice and what to abandon. Animals do not have such discriminative wisdom. As human beings, simply surviving or seeking a healthy, happy life is not fully making use of our potential. We must look deeper and ask, “How did this human being — me — come into existence? How can I make my life meaningful? What happens after I die?” This leads us to investigate

causality — both the external systems of cause and effect detailed in science and the internal system of cause and effect — the law of karma and its effects. These two systems are harmonious, and I do not find any contradiction between the laws of nature, scientific findings on Darwinian evolution, and the law of karma and its effects.<sup>51</sup>

## *The Law of Karma and Its Effects*

It is helpful to review the three characteristics of all systems of causality mentioned in chapter 7: (1) Effects arise from causes and cannot arise without causes. A tree grows from a seed and cannot grow without a seed. (2) Causes are impermanent because the arising of an effect necessitates the cessation of the cause. The seed ceases and changes into a sprout and then a tree. (3) Effects must be concordant with their causes; only a specific cause can produce a specific result. Pine trees grow from pine seeds, not from daisy seeds. Furthermore, one cause alone cannot produce an effect; cooperative conditions are needed. The seed grows into a tree only when there is sufficient water, fertilizer, and heat.

We can see the specific causes of many external things. However, if we search for the causes of those causes, and the causes of those causes, going back to the origin of this universe, we will not be able to pinpoint precisely each and every cause and condition. Although the details of all the causes of the Big Bang are too vast and complex for us to understand, we would not feel right saying that the universe arose without causes. We know that its development follows particular laws of nature — certain systematic ways of growth and decay — even though we may not be able to discern each unique cause and condition.

Similarly, on the internal level sentient beings' experiences of happiness and suffering arise from preceding causes and conditions. Secular society usually traces these to genetic or environmental factors and does not consider the law of karma and its effects. Bringing in the ethical dimension of our mental intentions gives us a fuller picture of both sentient beings' experiences and the environment they inhabit.

As a natural process that functions whether or not a person believes in it, the law of karma and its effects was not created by the Buddha. Nor does

the Buddha judge people according to their actions and punish or reward them. When someone suffers from illness in which his unwholesome karma plays a causal role along with other factors, it does not mean that he deserves to suffer or that he made himself sick. Nor should we ignore those who are injured or oppressed by unjust social structures, thinking that helping them would interfere with their karma. This is a poor excuse for our lack of compassion. Needless to say, those holding such attitudes create destructive karma themselves.

It is important to avoid superimposing concepts from theistic religions on the Buddhadharmā. The Buddha is not a creator. Karma and its effects are not a system of reward and punishment. It is simply a natural law: happiness is a result of virtue; suffering is the result of nonvirtue.

Nowadays we may hear the word “karma” used in a flippant way. For example, when asked, “Why did my business fail when it seemed to have everything required for success?” someone may dismiss it by replying, “It’s karma,” meaning, “I don’t know. It was fated and nothing can be done about it.” These are inappropriate usages of the word “karma.”

The principal meaning of karma is volitional action — a physical, verbal, or mental action done with intention. The Buddha says (AN 6.63):

It is intention, bhikkhus, that I call kamma. For having willed,  
one acts by body, speech, or mind.

All karmic paths originate with the mind (*Dhammapada* 1.1–2):

Mind is the forerunner of all [miserable] states.

It is mind that leads the way.

Just as the wheel of the oxcart follows

the hoof of the ox,

so suffering will surely follow

when we speak or act impulsively

from an impure state of mind.

Mind is the forerunner of all [happy] states.

It is mind that leads the way.

Just as our shadow never leaves us,  
so well-being will surely follow  
when we speak or act  
from a pure state of mind.

Not every instance of the mental factor of intention (*cetanā*) creates karma, but intention (volition) is always necessary for the creation of karma. Mental factors such as anger, attachment, and love also play a role in the creation of karma. While karma may be physical, verbal, or mental, all actions can be traced back to an intention in our mind. Our body and mouth do not move on their own, they act spurred by an intention in our mind. The mind is the root of all our actions and the source of the happiness and suffering that result from them. When we carefully observe our own experience, we will see how true this is. For example, with a particular intention we adopt a certain behavior in the early part of our life. While some of its effects may manifest immediately, some may ripen only decades in the future. Likewise, our motivation in the morning sets the stage for what we experience and how we act later in the day. When we're in a bad mood, we meet more obnoxious people (funny that they all show up that day!) and we act rudely. These examples illustrate causality within this life. When we talk about karma and its effects, it primarily concerns causes created in one life bringing results in future lives. In both cases, we see that our happiness and suffering are not the effect of an external creator, nor are they causeless. They come about because of our intentions and actions. Our experience of happiness and suffering is in our own hands.

An understanding of karma and its effects will have a direct effect on our choices, decisions, and actions in daily life. We will become more conscientious and mindful. Instead of putting energy into overcoming adversaries and competing with rivals, we will choose to cultivate cooperation, tolerance, and forgiveness.

The Buddha has vast knowledge and understanding of the functioning of karma. While we limited sentient beings do not have the capacity to specify the exact interplay of karmic forces and other causes and conditions at work in a specific event, we can gain a general understanding by studying and reflecting on the teachings. This topic is very practical and



directly applicable to our lives. The Buddha emphasized the importance of understanding karma (MN 135.20):

Beings are the owners of their kamma, heirs of their kamma; they originate from their kamma, are bound to their kamma, have their kamma as their refuge. It is kamma that distinguishes beings as inferior and superior.

With compassion, the Buddha shared his understanding of karma with us by recommending we abandon certain actions and engage in others. When we put his advice into practice, we become empowered to stop the causes of suffering and create the causes of happiness.

## *General Characteristics of Karma*

Karma has four general characteristics. Understanding these provides us the basic framework to understand karma and its effects.

1. *Karma is definite* in that happiness comes from previously created constructive actions and suffering comes from previously created destructive ones. It never occurs the other way around. An action is not inherently good or bad, but is designated as virtuous (*kuśala*), nonvirtuous (*akuśala*), or neutral in relation to the result it brings. Abhidharma (ELP 597) says:

Karma that yields happiness is virtuous karma. Karma that yields the unhappiness of suffering is nonvirtuous karma. The other karma, which creates a neutral feeling, is the other, neutral karma.

Pāli commentaries explain nuances of the terms *virtue* and *nonvirtue*. From a psychological and spiritual viewpoint, nonvirtue (*akuśala*) indicates something that is psychologically or spiritually unhealthy. From an ethical perspective, it is to be censured and shown disapproval. From the standpoint of its cause, it is produced by defilements, and from the viewpoint of its result, it produces suffering. Contrarily, virtue is spiritually

and psychologically healthy and beneficial, ethically commendable, not produced under the influence of gross defilements, and leads to fortunate results. The Buddha explains (SN 22.2):

If, friends, one who enters and dwells amid unwholesome states could dwell happily in this very life, without vexation, despair, and fever, and if, with the breakup of the body, after death, he could expect a good destination, then the Blessed One would not praise the abandoning of unwholesome states. But because one who enters and dwells amid unwholesome states dwells in suffering in this very life, with vexation, despair, and fever, and because he can expect a bad destination with the breakup of the body, after death, the Blessed One praises the abandoning of unwholesome states.

If, friends, one who enters and dwells amid wholesome states would dwell in suffering in this very life, with vexation, despair, and fever, and if, with the breakup of the body, after death, he could expect a bad destination, then the Blessed one would not praise the acquisition of wholesome states. But because one who enters and dwells amid wholesome states dwells happily in this very life, without vexation, despair, and fever, and because he can expect a good destination with the breakup of the body, after death, the Blessed One praises the acquisition of wholesome states.

The *Questions of the Bodhisattva Suratā Sūtra* (*Suratāparipṛcchā Sūtra*) says:

As in planting, happiness and misery  
are effects from the deeds performed.  
How can a bitter seed  
yield a sweet fruit?

Seeing this universal truth,  
the wise should think:  
evildoing brings painful effects,  
while good deeds always lead  
to peace and happiness.<sup>52</sup>

It may seem that some people experience satisfaction after engaging in destructive actions such as taking revenge on another person. The immediate pleasure they experience is due to their distorted way of thinking while the result of their present action will be suffering in the future. Similarly, someone may go through physical difficulties doing prostrations but the long-term result of this action will be happiness.

2. *Karma is expandable* in that a small action can bring a large effect in the same way that a small seed can produce a large tree. Understanding this protects us from being complacent, thinking, “This is only a tiny action. I don’t need to bother with it.” Instead, we will take care to avoid small destructive actions and engage in small constructive ones. The *Groups of Utterances (Udānavarga)* counsels (LC 1:211):

Like a poison that has been ingested,  
the commission of even a small negativity  
creates in your lives hereafter  
great fear and a terrible downfall.

As when grain ripens into a bounty,  
even the creation of small merit  
leads in lives hereafter to great happiness  
and will be immensely meaningful as well.

3. *We will not experience the effect of an action we have not done.* If we have not created the cause to experience a contagious disease, we will not contract it, even though others around us may. If we do not create the causes to attain awakening, we will not, even though we make many prayers to the Buddha to gain realizations. Udbhaṭṭasiddhasvāmin’s *Praise of the Exalted One (Viśeṣastava)* says (LC 1:214):

The brahmins say that virtue and negativity  
may transfer to others, like giving and receiving a gift.  
You [Buddha] taught that what one has done does not perish  
and that one does not meet with the effects of what one has not done.

4. *Karmic seeds do not get lost or magically vanish.* The effect of an action will be experienced unless it is counteracted. *Bases of Discipline (Vinayavastu)* says (LC 1:214):

Even in one hundred eons  
karma does not perish.  
When the circumstances and the time arrive  
beings surely feel its effects.

Unless a karmic seed is counteracted, it will one day bring its result. Seeds from destructive actions are inhibited from ripening by the four opponent powers explained below. Seeds from constructive actions are thwarted by anger and wrong views.

Although karmic seeds do not get lost, events are not predetermined. The ripening of karma is an interdependent occurrence, with many contributing factors and variables. We do not know what the future will be until it happens.

## *Specific Characteristics of Karma*

The main focus of initial-level practitioners is to bring about a series of precious human lives in the future so that our Dharma practice can continue without interruption. This entails understanding the specific characteristics of karma: harmful karmic paths that cause unfortunate rebirths or otherwise hinder our ability to practice, and constructive karmic paths that bring fortunate rebirths and circumstances conducive for Dharma practice. In this light, the Buddha outlined ten nonvirtues to abandon and ten virtues to practice. These ten subsume the significant karmic paths to pay attention to, although they do not encompass all physical, verbal, and mental actions. The Buddha set these out (AN 10.178):

What is the bad? The destruction of life, taking what is not given, unwise sexual conduct, false speech, divisive speech, harsh speech, idle talk, covetousness, maliciousness, and wrong views . . . And what is the good? Abstinence from the

destruction of life, from taking what is not given, from unwise sexual conduct, from false speech, from divisive speech, from harsh speech, from idle talk, noncovetousness, goodwill, and right views.

The Buddha continues, describing these two sets of karmic paths respectively as ignoble and noble, harmful and beneficial, non-Dharma and Dharma, polluted and unpolluted, blameworthy and blameless, tormenting and untormenting, leading to suffering and to happiness, building up the round of rebirth and diminishing it, to be abandoned and to be cultivated.

Of the ten nonvirtues, three are done physically: killing, stealing, and unwise and unkind sexual behavior. The Buddha describes them (AN 10.211):

There is a person who destroys life; he is cruel and his hands are blood-stained. He is bent on slaying and murdering, having no compassion for any living being.

He takes what is not given to him, appropriates with thievish intent the property of others, be it in the village or the forest.

He conducts himself wrongly in matters of sex: he has intercourse with those under the protection of father, mother, brother, sister, relatives, or clan, or of their religious community, or with those engaged to a fiancé, protected by law, and even with those betrothed with a garland.

Four nonvirtues are done verbally: lying, divisive speech, harsh speech, and idle talk. The Buddha expounds on these (AN 10.211):

There is one who tells lies. When he is in the council of his community or in another assembly, or among his relatives, his guild, in the royal court, or when he has been summoned as a witness and is asked to tell what he knows, then, though he does not know, he says, “I know”; though he does know, he says, “I do not know”; though he has not seen, he says, “I have seen”; and though he has seen, he says, “I have not seen.” In that way he utters deliberate lies, be it for his own sake, for the sake of others, or for some material advantage.

He utters divisive words: what he hears he reports elsewhere to foment conflict there; and what he hears elsewhere he reports here to foment conflict here. Thus he creates discord among those united, and he incites still more those who are in discord. He is fond of dissension, he delights and rejoices in it, and he utters words that cause dissension.

He speaks harshly, using speech that is coarse, rough, bitter, and abusive, that makes others angry and causes distraction of mind.

He indulges in idle chatter: he speaks what is untimely, unreasonable, and unbeneficial, having no connection with Dhamma or Vinaya. His talk is not worth treasuring, it is inopportune, inadvisable, unrestrained, and harmful.

When these four are done by writing, signaling, typing, or nodding the head, they are considered nonvirtues of speech because they involve communication.

Three nonvirtues are done mentally: covetousness, malice, and wrong views. The Buddha describes these (AN 10.211):

There is a person who is covetous; he covets the wealth and property of others, thinking, “Oh, that what he owns might belong to me!”

There is also one who has malice in his heart. He has depraved thoughts such as, “Let these beings be slain! Let them be killed and destroyed! May they perish and cease to exist!”

He has wrong views and perverted ideas, such as, “There is no ethical value in a gift, offering, or sacrifice; there is no result or recompense from constructive or destructive deeds; there is neither this world nor another world (i.e., no rebirth); there are no duties toward mother and father; there are no spontaneously reborn beings; and there are no ascetics and brahmins in this world, living and conducting themselves rightly, who can explain this world and the world beyond, having realized them by their own direct knowledge.

While covetousness, malice, and wrong views are associated with attachment, animosity, and confusion, respectively, they are more specific and intense forms of those afflictions. The mental factor of attachment becomes the karmic path of covetousness when it has the wish to take

possession of property belonging to others. Covetousness is not a random thought of attachment, but the greedy desire to possess something that belongs to someone else. This desire has been cultivated and increased by repeatedly thinking how nice it would be to have that object and planning how to obtain it. This thought now has the power to generate a rebirth. It may also instigate someone to steal or lie to obtain the object coveted.

The mental factor of anger becomes the karmic path of malice when it wishes to inflict harm on another living being or wishes that person to suffer by another means. The milder anger that simply wants to avoid someone we just quarreled with is not the karmic path of malice.

The mental factor of wrong views becomes the karmic path of wrong views when it strongly holds an incorrect view, such as believing the Three Jewels, the four truths, and the law of karma and its effects do not exist. Here someone defiantly thinks, “It doesn’t matter if I exploit the other person. I won’t suffer any consequences,” “Killing heretics is virtuous,” or “Neither rebirth nor liberation exists.” Such ignorant views lead to unfortunate rebirths in future lives.

The first six nonvirtues directly harm others. Although idle talk does not directly harm others, it provokes people to act in ways that do. The harmful effects of the ten nonvirtues are evident, even to animals. If someone takes away an animal’s food — an act that resembles stealing — the animal is miserable. If someone shouts at an animal, it is unhappy. Once someone begins to covet the possessions of others, even his or her close friends are wary and keep a distance. Someone who uses their sexuality unwisely or unkindly loses the trust of others. This is the experience of sentient beings in general; it doesn’t matter if they are religious practitioners or not. To stop engaging in the nonvirtuous actions that no one likes, we have to counteract the three poisons that motivate them. Since doing that takes time, we begin by restraining our physical and verbal actions that directly harm others.

Four branches must be present for a complete destructive karmic path to be committed: (1) the *basis* is the object or sentient being acted on, (2) the *attitude* has three parts: correct discernment of the object, the presence of an affliction, and the motivation to do the action, (3) the *performance* of the action, and (4) the *completion* of the action, which entails our accomplishing our purpose and being satisfied with the outcome.

## *Killing*

1. Basis: A sentient being other than yourself who is alive. A sentient being is any being who has a mind — excluding a fully awakened buddha — who feels happiness and pain.
2. Attitude: (a) Discerning a living being as a living being and correctly identifying the living being to be killed. (b) Any of the three poisons of attachment, animosity, and confusion, such as attachment to eating that being's flesh, hatred toward an enemy, or confusion, thinking that animal sacrifice is virtuous. (c) The desire to kill.
3. Action: Taking the life of a living being or causing or asking someone else to kill by weapons, poisons, or other forms of violence. This includes most cases of abortion, euthanasia, and assisted suicide.
4. Completion: That being dies before we do. Suicide is not a complete action.

## *Stealing: Taking what hasn't been freely given*

1. Basis: Object belonging to another person.
2. Attitude: (a) Correctly identifying the object to be stolen. (b) Any of the three poisons, such as attachment to the object; animosity wishing to destroy the wealth of an enemy; ignorantly thinking that overcharging a customer, taking things from our employer, or cheating the government is fine. (c) The desire to take that object although it has not been freely given.
3. Action: Taking or asking someone else to take the object through force, stealth, or deception; includes not paying taxes, fees, tolls, and fares, and not returning objects we borrowed.
4. Completion: Moving the object and/or thinking that it is now ours.

## *Unwise and unkind sexual behavior*

1. Basis: The partner of another person, someone who does not consent, is celibate, is a close relative, or a child. If you are in a



relationship, going outside that relationship. Having intercourse in a temple or monastery or near your teacher or the saṅgha.

2. Attitude: (a) Correctly identifying the person with whom you wish to have intercourse. (b) Any of the three poisons: with attachment, using others for your own sexual pleasure without caring for their feelings; angrily raping the partners or children of an enemy; ignorantly thinking sex is a high spiritual practice, that it's chic to have extramarital affairs, or that having protected sex isn't necessary when there is the possibility of sexually transmitted diseases.
3. Action: Meeting of the two organs.
4. Completion: Pleasure is experienced; climax is not necessary.

### *Lying*

1. Basis: What is seen, heard, distinguished, and cognized, and what is not seen, heard, distinguished, and cognized. The person lied to is a human being other than oneself who is capable of understanding. Heaviest is lying to our spiritual teachers and parents.
2. Attitude: (a) Misrepresenting what we have seen, heard, distinguished, or cognized, or their opposites. (b) Any of the three poisons: with attachment, gaining something from that person or protecting our own reputation, angrily wanting to deceive, ignorantly thinking there is nothing wrong with lying. (c) The desire to make the other person believe what is false.
3. Action: Speaking, writing, or gesturing what we know to be untrue for personal gain, knowingly misleading others; heaviest is lying about our spiritual attainments. All four verbal actions are paths of actions whether we do them ourselves or tell others to do them.
4. Completion: The other person understands what we have said. If the other person doesn't understand, it is idle talk.

### *Divisive speech*

1. Basis: People who are friendly or who are disharmonious.

2. Attitude: (a) Correctly identifying the people to be separated. (b) Any of the three poisons: with attachment, wanting a couple to split so you can be with one member or criticizing a competitor so you will get the promotion or close a deal; with animosity or jealousy, wanting to stir up trouble; ignorantly causing disunity among those of another religion in order to convert them. (c) The desire to separate or cause friction between others.
3. Action: Causing disunity among friends or preventing those who are not harmonious from reconciling — it doesn't matter whether what we say is true or not. Worst is causing disunity in the saṅgha.
4. Completion: The other person understands what you have said; if they don't it is idle talk.

### *Harsh words*

1. Basis: A sentient being who will be hurt by your words. Heaviest is abusing your spiritual teacher. Swearing at a machine is not included.
2. Attitude: (a) Correctly identifying the person you want to hurt. (b) Any of the three poisons: with attachment, criticizing others in order to be accepted by a group of people; angrily denigrating the enemy so that others will side with us or to rouse troops to fight; ignorantly thinking we are clever or witty. (c) The desire to speak harshly and make someone feel bad.
3. Action: Criticizing, insulting, ridiculing, maliciously teasing, verbally abusing, angrily blaming, humiliating someone privately or in front of others.
4. Completion: The other person understands what was said.

### *Idle talk*

1. Basis: A topic without meaning or importance.
2. Attitude: (a) Knowing the topic we wish to speak about. (b) Any of the three poisons: with attachment, flattering and hinting to get something; angrily wanting to disturb someone; ignorantly wanting to pass the time. (c) The desire to speak this way.

3. Action: Gossiping, telling stories, joking without a good purpose, praying for terrible things to happen, wailing, teaching the Dharma to someone lacking interest or respect, reciting liturgies of other religions for no good reason, repeating jingles and slogans, grumbling, bickering over meaningless things, talking about entertainment, sports, politics, crime, and so forth without a good reason.
4. Completion: Saying the words out loud. It is not necessary that anyone hears or understands.

### *Covetousness*

1. Basis: Possessions or wealth of another person. Worst is desiring offerings made to holy beings and the saṅgha.
2. Attitude: (a) Correctly identifying the object, (b) any of the three poisons, (c) the desire to make that object your own.
3. Action: Thinking “I will obtain this,” and planning how to obtain it.
4. Completion: The determination to obtain the object. To be complete, five factors are necessary: being very attached to your possessions, wanting to accumulate more, longing to examine and experience the possessions of others, thinking that what another person has should be yours, and lacking integrity and not wanting to be free from the faults of covetousness.

### *Malice*

1. Basis: A sentient being. Worst is malice toward holy beings and the saṅgha.
2. Attitude: (a) Correctly identifying the person you want to hurt, (b) any of the three poisons, (c) the wish that someone else suffer and experience problems.
3. Action: Thinking “I will make them suffer.”
4. Completion: Deciding to inflict harm and planning how to do it. To be complete, five factors are required: animosity supported by the strong projection of negative qualities on the cause of the harm, impatience with the one harming you, resentment based on distorted

attention on the cause of your anger, thinking “How wonderful if this person were harmed or suffered,” and lacking integrity and not wanting to be free from the faults of malice.

### *Wrong views*

1. Basis: Something pertaining to the Dharma that is true and exists.
2. Attitude: (a) Perceiving something that exists to be nonexistent, (b) any of the three poisons, (c) the desire to deny the existence of the Three Jewels, four truths, karma and its effects, and so forth.
3. Action: Adopting a wrong view. This has four types: (a) disparaging causes: thinking virtuous and nonvirtuous behavior don't exist, (b) disparaging effects: the results of this behavior don't exist, (c) disparaging activities concerning karmic seeds, rebirth, and taking spontaneous birth, and (d) disparaging existent phenomena: thinking buddhas, bodhisattvas, arhats, and so forth do not exist.
4. Completion: Deciding your wrong view is definitely correct. It must have five factors: confusion that doesn't understand phenomena, an argumentative attitude delighting in disparagement, a stubborn attitude due to reflecting on incorrect teachings, denying that the Three Jewels or karma and its effects exist, and lacking integrity and not wanting to be free from the faults of wrong views.

There are many other wrong views, but these are the worst because they undermine our roots of virtue and encourage us to do whatever we like without considering the destructive effects.

Although each of the ten can be initiated with any of the three poisons, killing, harsh words, and malice are completed exclusively with animosity. Stealing, unwise and unkind sexual behavior, and coveting are completed with attachment. Wrong views are completed with confusion. Lying, divisive words, and idle talk may be completed with any of the three afflictions.

According to the *Treasury of Knowledge*, some of the ten nonvirtues are karma (actions), some are karmic paths, some are afflictions, and some are more than one of these.<sup>53</sup> The mental factor of intention is *karma*. The

intention to take life is the karma of killing and the intention to vent our anger through harsh speech is the karma of harsh speech. The three mental nonvirtues — covetousness, malice, and wrong views — are not karma; they are strong forms of the *afflictions* of attachment, animosity, and confusion, respectively. Karma (mental factor of intention) and afflictions are mutually exclusive. Afflictions are the cause of karma; they are forerunners that give rise to intentions. Strong attachment sparks the intention for unwise or unkind sexual behavior. Strong animosity provokes the intention to create disharmony between people through speaking divisively. Strong ignorant wrong views may instigate intentions to engage in any of the ten nonvirtues.

When the ten nonvirtues are done with all branches intact, they become *karmic paths* (*karmapatha*), indicating that they are conduits leading to future rebirths. They are also called karmic paths because they are either the cause of an intention or the path that intention travels to perform an action. The three mental nonvirtues are karmic paths because they cause an intention and because they lead to unfortunate rebirths. The seven nonvirtues of body and speech are karmic paths because they are the path that intention travels to carry out the intention and they are also the paths to unfortunate rebirths. These seven are also karma. The First Dalai Lama instructs (ELP 617):

If one asks: Why are these ten called karmic paths? From the three of mind, the intention embarks on its path, so they are paths. The seven of body and speech are also karma, and because they are the paths on which the intention embarks, they are called karmic paths.

	KARMA	KARMIC PATH	AFFLICTION
<i>Mental factor of intention</i>	yes	no	no
<i>Seven physical and verbal nonvirtues</i>	yes	yes	no
<i>Three mental nonvirtues</i>	no	yes	yes

We commonly speak of the ten destructive actions and the ten constructive actions. However, technically, although all ten are karmic paths, not all of them are karma or action. The *Treasury of Knowledge* says, “Three are [only] paths, seven are [not only paths, but are] also actions.” It also says, “Covetousness and so forth are not actions.”

Encouraging or asking others to act destructively also creates destructive karma. If other factors are equal, the karma is heavier when we do the action ourselves because it requires more energy to overcome whatever hesitancy we may have had to do the action. Nevertheless, we create a complete karma when we ask someone to do the action and he or she does it. Leaders of companies, organizations, and governments need to be aware of this when they give instructions and set policies. Likewise, when we ask a family member or friend to lie on our behalf and that person does so, both of us create the destructive karma of lying. The same holds true for virtuous actions. Encouraging others to act constructively creates constructive karma for ourselves as well as for them. However, the virtue is heavier if we make an offering than if we ask someone else to do it for us.

Rejoicing at the harmful actions of others is tantamount to doing them ourselves. We can accumulate a great deal of destructive karma rejoicing in others’ harmful deeds when we listen to the news, and great stores of merit are generated by rejoicing in the virtues of the buddhas, bodhisattvas, arhats, āryas, and all ordinary beings.

A person can accumulate the karma from eight of the ten nonvirtues simultaneously: at the same time he is coveting another’s partner and having sex with her, the people whom he asked to kill, steal, lie, speak divisively, speak harshly, and talk idly are doing what he asked.

Because the motivation plays such an important role in the ethical dimension of an action, it is not always possible to distinguish a constructive or destructive action on the basis of the action alone. We may chat with colleagues at work for the purpose of establishing pleasant relationships with them. This is different from chatting with them in order to make ourselves look good, denigrate others, or waste time.

Instead of following every urge that enters our mind, it behooves us to be aware of what motivates us to act. We may be so charmed with a person or an object that we are oblivious to our intentions as we interact with them. Meanwhile attachment is rising in our mind and before we know it, we are coveting the object or the person's company. Similarly, while a colleague is giving us feedback about our work, we become defensive. Unaware that we've become angry, we do not notice our intention to speak harshly and soon we are astonished to find ourselves in a nasty argument with that person. Lacking mindfulness and introspective awareness of our intentions and afflictions, we find ourselves in difficult situations now and create destructive karma that will cause suffering in future lives. However, by repeatedly renewing our mindfulness of constructive actions and activating the introspective awareness that monitors what we are thinking, saying, and doing, we will be able to direct our body, speech, and mind with wisdom and kindness.

Taking and keeping precepts helps us to abandon nonvirtue by making us more mindful of how we would like to behave and how we are actually behaving. Holding precepts increases our conscientiousness and respect for ethical conduct. It also stops confusion in challenging situations because we reflect that previously, with a clear mind, we saw the disadvantages of this action and took a precept to abandon it.

Some actions have both constructive and destructive elements and bring mixed effects. For example, someone gives a donation to build a hospital for the poor with the thought that his name will appear on a plaque that lists donors. Although his motivation is nonvirtuous, the action benefits others. Alternatively, the thought could be virtuous but the action nonvirtuous: a teacher is motivated by affection and care for a student, but speaks harshly in order to motivate him to overcome his laziness. Some actions, such as

sweeping the floor, that are done with an intention that is neither constructive nor destructive, bring neutral results.

The question also arises whether not helping someone can create negative karma. Here we must take into consideration the person's motivation as well as the situation. For example, two people are quarreling. One onlooker thinks, "My intervention could aggravate the situation," while another thinks, "Getting involved is very inconvenient for me." Neither of these people intervenes, but they create different karma.

Sometimes other people may become angry at us while, from our side, we had no intention of harming them. This even happened to the Buddha: Some villagers, upon seeing the Buddha and saṅgha enter their village to gather alms, were furious because they mistakenly thought the Buddha was simply living off their hard work. Although the Buddha was the object of their hostility, his action was not destructive. He had no intention to harm those people or to make them angry.

On the other hand, if someone deliberately antagonizes another person with the thought to upset him or willfully tries to make someone overly dependent and attached to him, his actions are destructive because a harmful intention was present.

There is much to ponder regarding the ten nonvirtues, and doing a review of our lives will enable us to identify habitual destructive actions that we need to purify and to prevent doing in the future.

#### REFLECTION

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1. At this very moment you are creating the causes for what you will become and the events you will experience. What kind of future do you want to create for yourself?
  2. Which actions do you need to engage in to bring about that future?
  3. Which actions must you abandon?
  4. Make a determination to set healthy and meaningful goals and to act in an ethical and kind manner in order to attain them.
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## *Constructive Actions*

The Buddha emphasized the disadvantages of poor ethical conduct and the benefits of good ethical conduct (DN 16.1.23–24):

Householders, there are these five perils to someone of poor ethical conduct, of failure in ethical conduct. What are they? First, he suffers great loss of property through neglecting his affairs. Second, he gets a bad reputation for immorality and misconduct. Third, whatever assembly he approaches . . . he does so diffidently and shyly. Fourth, he dies confused. Fifth, after death, at the breaking up of the body, he arises in an unfortunate state, a bad fate, in suffering and hell. These are the five perils to someone of poor ethical conduct.

Householders, there are these five advantages to someone of good ethical conduct and of success in ethical conduct. What are they? First, through careful attention to his affairs he gains much wealth. Second, he has a good reputation for morality and good conduct. Third, whatever assembly he approaches . . . he does so with confidence and assurance. Fourth, he dies unconfused. Fifth, after death, at the breaking up of the body, he arises in a good place, a heavenly world. These are the five advantages to someone of good ethical conduct and of success in ethical conduct.

We restrain ourselves from acting harmfully to benefit ourselves and others, not by thinking that the Buddha commanded us to do so. For example, our doctor may advise us to have a low-fat diet. Even though we like food with a lot of fat, we follow his advice not out of duty but because we know it is for our long-term benefit. Abandoning destructive actions because we know their harm is like a clever animal who sees some food but does not eat it because he senses it may be a trap that will bring him suffering.

When a mosquito lands on your arm, instead of swatting it, shoo it away. This action of refraining from killing is constructive karma and is the cause for attaining a precious human life. I must admit, however, that sometimes mosquitoes really irritate me, and I'm tempted to slap them!

Nevertheless, I restrain myself and later am happy that I did. Then I ask my attendant to please put better screens on the windows!

The ten paths of constructive actions are consciously restraining ourselves from engaging in the ten destructive ones. When faced with a situation in which we could lie, we remember its disadvantages and decide not to do it. Abstaining from a nonvirtuous action itself is virtuous karma. The Pāli tradition delineates three types of abstention that apply to the seven physical and verbal nonvirtues:

1. *Natural abstention* is restraining ourselves from nonvirtuous actions because we have learned as children to avoid them. Our parents taught us not to lie, and knowing that lying is not good, we developed the habit of speaking truthfully. While virtuous, this restraint is not necessarily stable. If we face strong peer pressure or lose mindfulness, we may act destructively.
2. *Abstention by adopting precepts* occurs by consciously and deliberately taking precepts to abstain from harmful actions. These precepts include the five lay precepts, monastic precepts, and the eight one-day precepts. Alternatively, we may make a strong determination to restrain from the seven physical and verbal nonvirtues. Taking precepts reinforces natural abstention because when we are tempted to act harmfully, remembering the precepts and our preceptor strengthens our resolve to act virtuously.
3. *Abstention through eradication* is accomplished by attaining the ārya path — stream-enterer and above — and eradicating particular defilements. As we eliminate levels of defilement from our mind, they no longer cause us to transgress precepts.

The three mental paths of virtue are three virtuous mental factors when they are strongly developed. Noncovetousness is the mental factor of strong nonattachment. It is not just the absence of attachment but a mind that actively does not seek more and better. It temporarily frees the mind from greed and leads to generosity and the relinquishment of sensual desire. Nonmalice is the mental factor of strong nonhatred. This is not just the absence of hatred, but loving-kindness. Nonconfusion prevents and counteracts confusion. It is related to right view and wisdom and

understands that our actions have an ethical dimension and bring results that we ourselves will experience.

The Buddha also describes the ten virtues as doing constructive actions (AN 10.211). Someone who abstains from killing “dwells compassionately toward all living beings.” Abandoning divisive speech means “he unites those who are divided and encourages those who are in harmony.” Someone who relinquishes harsh speech speaks words that are “gentle, pleasant to hear, endearing, heartwarming, courteous, agreeable to many folk, pleasing to many folk.” Abandoning idle chatter, a person “speaks at the right time, in accordance with facts, and of matters that are beneficial . . . His talk is opportune, helpful, moderate, and meaningful.” Someone who abandons maliciousness “has pure thoughts and intentions such as, ‘May these beings be free from enmity, free from anxiety! May they be untroubled and live happily!’” In short, doing the opposite of the ten paths of destructive actions also constitutes practicing the ten paths of constructive actions. We mindfully save life, protect others’ property, and promote fidelity in relationships. We speak truthfully, harmoniously, kindly, and at appropriate times. Our thoughts are generous, friendly, and wise.

The Pāli tradition further lists ten bases of meritorious deeds (*dasapuñṇakiriyavatthu*) to practice (CMA 209): generosity, ethical conduct, meditation, reverence, service, dedicating merit, rejoicing in others’ virtue, listening to Dharma teachings, teaching the Dharma, and straightening out our views (developing correct views).

Contemplating the various harmful and wholesome actions enables us to develop wisdom that knows what to abandon and what to practice. This wisdom enables us to make wise decisions in our lives and eliminates the confusion of not knowing what is best to do. In doing so, it prevents problems and remorse.

Soon after the Buddha’s son Rāhula became a monk, the Buddha explained to him that there are three phases to any action — the time before doing the action, the time of doing it, and the time after completing it — and counseled Rāhula to act only after repeated reflection, rather than impulsively (MN 61). Before beginning the action, the Buddha advised asking ourselves two questions that would enable us to decide wisely whether to do this action or not: (1) Will this action that I wish to do bring

harm to myself, to others, or to both? What will be the most likely immediate result and long-term results of this action? Even if the action seems insignificant and won't adversely affect someone else, will it corrupt my mind in a way that will later lead my ethical conduct to degenerate? (2) Is this a nonvirtuous action that will bring painful results? Here the quality of our motivation is a crucial factor, so we should examine as honestly as we can what our actual intention is.

While doing the action, we should continue to hold these questions in our mind. If we see that the action will bring harm to ourselves or others or if we determine that it is nonvirtuous, we should stop immediately. It may seem strange to stop what we are saying in midsentence, but it is better than finishing the comment and having to deal with the painful consequences afterward.

After we have completed an action, we should review it with the two questions as our guide. If we realize in hindsight that it was nonvirtuous, we should reveal and confess it in our evening purification practice or tell a wise Dharma friend or our Dharma teacher. Then we should make a strong determination not to do that action again and undertake restraint. But if we realize that the action was constructive, we should rejoice, dwell happily, and continue training in that way.

## *The Weight of Karma*

Not all constructive and destructive actions are equal in terms of the weight of the latencies they leave on our mindstream or the strength of the experiences they bring. Tsongkhapa cites five criteria that make destructive actions heavy:

1. *The strength of our attitude* — for example, lying with a strong wish to cause another harm — is heavier than acting with a weak intention.
2. *The method of doing the action* includes doing the action repeatedly, doing it ourselves, encouraging others to do it, delighting in it, planning it for a long time, and relishing having

done it. An example is killing someone by first humiliating and torturing him.

3. *The lack of an antidote* makes a destructive action heavier. Examples include when the person does little if any constructive actions at other times, repeatedly engages in harmful actions, is not interested in avoiding harmful actions or purifying them once they have been committed, and has little sense of their own moral integrity or consideration for others. However, the destructive action of someone who tries to live ethically, is respectful to those worthy of respect, has knowledge of the Dharma, or has attained realization will be lighter because that person also has accumulated merit or will purify the nonvirtue.
4. *Holding wrong views* makes the action heavier than doing it with ordinary ignorance or confusion. Euthanizing an animal with the thought to put it out of its misery is not as heavy as doing it with the strong view that rebirth and karma and its effects do not exist. In the latter case, the person is philosophically convinced that a harmful action is without fault.
5. *The object of the action* is important. Criticizing our parents, spiritual teachers, those with Dharma realizations, and the poor or needy is much heavier than criticizing others. Our parents are strong objects for the creation of karma owing to their kindness in giving us life. Spiritual teachers are powerful objects because they lead us on the path, and the poor and sick are strong objects because of their need. However, owing to the power of holy objects, any action done in relation to high bodhisattvas or images of buddhas and bodhisattvas has one aspect that can be the condition for attaining liberation. Killing a human being, a large animal, a fetus, relatives, or holy beings is heavier than killing others.

Generally speaking, of the seven physical and verbal nonvirtues, killing is the heaviest, with each successive nonvirtue being lighter than the previous one. This order is dependent on the amount of suffering the other sentient being experiences. Everyone cherishes his or her life more than anything else and suffers most when it is taken from them, while the

suffering we experience from idle talk is minor. Of the three mental nonvirtues, wrong views are heaviest, then malice, and finally covetousness.

Although idle talk is the lightest of the three verbal nonvirtues, it is dangerous because it gives rise to so many other afflictions. When someone relates a story of either romance or war, both the storyteller and the listener generate attachment or anger, which in turn could provoke them to act with harm verbally and physically. For this reason, spiritual masters recommend that when with others, we should guard our speech, and when alone, we should guard our mind.

Other factors may make both constructive and destructive actions more powerful.

- *Frequency* — such as losing our temper often — creates heavy destructive karma, while repeatedly being patient with others creates strong virtue.
- *Regretting* harmful actions leads us to do purification, which lessens the power of the karmic seeds. However, regretting constructive actions decreases the power of the seeds of those actions.
- *Rejoicing* at both our harmful and helpful actions makes them more powerful.
- *A strong motivation* increases the strength of our actions. For this reason, acting when our mind is overwhelmed by jealousy, anger, or resentment is not wise. However, cultivating a strong motivation of compassion and bodhicitta each morning will positively affect all the virtuous actions we do that day.
- Constructive actions done by *those holding precepts* are more powerful than those done by people without the precepts. The more precepts we hold, the stronger the results of our virtuous actions. A fully ordained monastic's generosity creates more powerful constructive karma than that of someone without precepts. The constructive actions of those holding bodhisattva's precepts are stronger, while virtuous actions done by those with all three ethical codes — prātimokṣa, bodhisattva, and tantra — are even greater.
- *Acting out of ignorance* is lighter than doing the action with awareness of the karmic consequences of our actions. Young

children swatting insects without understanding that killing is harmful is not as heavy as the same action done by someone who knows that killing is nonvirtuous and either doesn't care or is overwhelmed by mental afflictions.

- *Mental illness* that obscures the mind lessens the strength of destructive actions. The Vinaya takes this into consideration when determining whether someone commits a full transgression of a root downfall such as killing a human being. A monastic who intentionally engages in and completes a root downfall is no longer a monastic and is expelled from the saṅgha. However, if a monastic suffering from severe mental illness does such an action, it is not considered a full transgression.
- The *general mental constitution* of a person influences the weight of an action as well as its results. If we put a lump of salt in a small cup of water, the water will be very salty and undrinkable, whereas if we put it in the river Ganges, it won't influence the water much. Similarly, when a person who is “undeveloped in body, virtuous behavior, mind, and wisdom . . . creates a trifling bad kamma, it leads him to hell,” whereas when a person who “is developed in body, virtuous behavior, mind, and wisdom . . . creates exactly the same trifling bad kamma, it is to be experienced in this very life, without even a slight [residue] being seen, much less an abundant [residue]” (AN 3.100). Because of the great virtue in the latter person's mindstream, the destructive action does not grossly affect his character. He will experience an unpleasant result of the action in this life and there will be no further suffering residue to be experienced in future lives. The opposite occurs with a person of little virtue.

The question of the weight of naturally negative actions — such as killing and stealing — created by those with precepts can be looked at from different perspectives. Tsongkhapa said (LC 1:233):

Therefore, the Buddha said that nonvirtues are light for the knowledgeable who regret their former nonvirtuous actions, restrain themselves from future nonvirtuous actions, do not

conceal their negativities, and do virtuous actions as remedies for those nonvirtuous actions. However, nonvirtues are weighty for those who make a pretense of being knowledgeable and do not do these actions but belittle them and engage consciously in nonvirtuous actions.

Those living in precepts of any kind are continuously creating constructive karma as long as they are not transgressing a precept. Two people may be sitting in a room talking, one holding the precept to abandon killing, the other not. Neither of them is killing. The person with the precept is continuously creating the constructive karma of not killing because she is acting in accord with her virtuous intention to abandon killing, while the other person is not creating such karma. This is one advantage of living in precepts. However, if a person with precepts consciously engages in nonvirtuous actions and does not purify or have regret, the karma is heavier.

Understanding the factors that make an action more potent enables us to maximize the power of our virtue and inhibit the strength of our nonvirtue. Mindfulness of these factors induces deeper introspective awareness that monitors our thoughts, words, and deeds. Together this mindfulness and introspective awareness make our lives more vibrant and meaningful.

Without confidence in the law of karmic causality, it is extremely difficult to gain higher realizations on the path. Nāgārjuna told us (RV 5):

Due to having faith [in karma and its effects], one relies on the  
practices;  
due to having wisdom, one truly understands.  
Of these two, wisdom is foremost,  
but faith must come first.

While the wisdom realizing emptiness is foremost in that it overcomes the ignorance that is the root of saṃsāra, we need to create the cause for a series of fortunate births in saṃsāra during which we can practice the path. Without belief in karma and its effects, we do not evaluate our actions and motivations and carelessly engage in many destructive actions that lead to unfortunate rebirths. In such births, we will be unable to meet the Dharma, let alone cultivate liberating wisdom. It will also be difficult to create virtue



that will bring fortunate rebirths in the future. However, having even a general understanding and confidence in the functioning of karma and its effects gives us the ability to control our future by practicing virtue and abandoning nonvirtue.

## *Discerning Virtuous from Nonvirtuous Actions*

Discerning virtue from nonvirtue can initially be difficult. Applying the above four criteria of the ten paths of nonvirtue to the ten paths of virtue is very helpful. Nāgārjuna's guideline regarding our motivation is also pertinent (RA 20):

Attachment, animosity, confusion,  
and the karma that arises from them are nonvirtuous.  
Nonattachment, nonanger, nonconfusion,  
and the karmas that arise from them are virtuous.

Attachment has a specific meaning in Buddhist texts, where it is defined as a mental factor that, when referring to a polluted object, exaggerates its attractiveness and then wishes for and clings to it. "Polluted" means associated with ignorance and associated with cyclic existence. This includes our five psychophysical aggregates and the large majority of things around us. Attachment is afflictive, biased, and unrealistic, and actions done under the influence of sensual attachment are destructive. They lead to unhappiness in future lives and prevent our gaining spiritual realizations.

Sometimes it is difficult for us to distinguish attachment from genuine love and appreciation. One clue that attachment is present is when we initially think something is very wonderful and later find it boring or even disgusting. This indicates that initially we were exaggerating the attractiveness of the person, object, place, idea, and so forth. For example, when we see a new car in the showroom, it appears wonderful and we proudly show it off to our friends after we buy it. But after some time the car becomes uninteresting and we seek something new and exciting. This indicates we had an unrealistic view of the car and had exaggerated its ability to provide us continuous pleasure.

Anger is easier to recognize when it surges in our mind, but sometimes we are resistant to seeing that it is afflictive and motivates destructive karma. Instead we justify our anger as necessary to protect our own interests.

Confusion — ignorance about what is virtue and what is not — is also difficult to recognize. We easily believe our own or others' incorrect ideas about what to practice and what to abandon, and in the process engage in many damaging actions, thinking that they are virtuous. Only later do we see our lack of clarity involving ethical conduct.

Nonattachment, nonanger, and nonconfusion are not the lack of the three poisons, but mental factors that are their opposites. Nonattachment is a balanced, open attitude; nonanger is love; nonconfusion is wisdom. The three “nons” are virtuous mental factors and the actions motivated by them are also virtuous.

Observing our mind closely with mindfulness and introspective awareness, both in meditation and in daily life, helps us to recognize these mental states in our own experience. This takes time, but is very worthwhile because discerning virtue from nonvirtue in our own mind is essential to abandoning destructive karma and creating constructive karma.

## *Karma and Current Ethical Issues*

Many ethical issues pertinent in the modern world have surfaced during my discussions with Dharma students and scientists, and people are interested in the Buddhist perspective on these. While some of these issues did not exist at the time of the Buddha due to lack of scientific knowledge, others did. Of those that did, some were of concern to ancient Indian society, others were not. Because Buddha and the great Indian sages did not tackle some of these ethical concerns directly, I will share my perspectives on them based on Buddhist principles.

Although several of these issues have become politicized, here I am regarding them solely as ethical issues. My intention is not to cause controversy but to encourage compassion for everyone involved in difficult

situations. Only by listening and working together — not by hostile rhetoric or aggressive actions — can sensitive issues and difficulties be resolved.

As a human community we must think carefully and choose wisely what scientific and technological research to engage in for the betterment of sentient beings. We must reflect on the possible long-term consequences of medical and chemical research, knowing that the threats of biological and chemical warfare are real. What follows are some thoughts about specific issues.

*Scientific research.* Distinguishing the ethical status of an action simply by looking at the action itself is difficult because the actor's motivation is a key factor. A seemingly "beneficial" act done with a harmful intention produces suffering in the long term for the one who did it and usually harms others in the present. On the other hand, a forceful action may appear harmful, but if carried out with an altruistic motivation, it will be constructive. In the case of scientific research, not only the action but also the motivation must be taken into consideration.

Scientists must consider the long-term effects of their research on sentient beings and their environment. Pursuing scientific research simply out of curiosity to see how something operates or to invent interesting new devices is too simplistic a motivation. I do not know if scientists who researched atomic power sufficiently considered how governments could use the results of their work. Although scientists may expect good to come from their research, the actual outcome of their scientific investigation is not always clear. Scientists with a sincerely compassionate motivation and a sense of responsibility for the long-term implications of their research will make careful decisions about what to research.

Almost everything has advantages and disadvantages. Our concern should always be what will bring the greatest good to the greatest number of living beings. We should take the time to assess a situation as best as we can given our present knowledge and follow what is most beneficial, even if in the short term there are a few difficulties.

People often assume what is best for the economy, earns more income for their company, secures more political power, results in fame, or increases military might is most beneficial. These are not valid criteria for determining benefit; they are short-sighted and biased, and adhering to them

could easily bring us — as individuals and as members of the human species — more suffering. We must consider that each and every sentient being wants happiness and freedom from suffering.

*Genetic engineering.* In one sense genetic engineering resembles already accepted procedures. Kidney, heart, and liver transplants are now common practice, and patients benefit tremendously from these. By extension, scientists could conceivably alter certain genetic components that are instrumental in causing diseases.

Much caution and forethought of all the implications are required, however. Just as a high degree of knowledge about possible outcomes of an organ transplant and ways to counteract damaging side effects is necessary before transplanting an organ, such forethought regarding the benefits and the byproducts of genetic engineering is necessary before proceeding with this research. This forethought involves not just a few people — such as a governmental commission or a committee of scientists — but all of us because genetic manipulation can potentially have an enormous effect on living beings. What could be the long-term effect on our bodies of eating genetically altered food? What could be the political, economic, social, and ethical ramifications of creating genetically designed children? As a human community we must discuss these questions and make wise decisions together.

*Embryos from in-vitro fertilization.* How to handle extra embryos after in-vitro fertilization has to do with how we define life. From a Buddhist viewpoint, sentient life — as distinct from mere biological life — involves the presence of consciousness. But when does consciousness enter the body? Most Buddhist texts agree that consciousness joins with the fertilized egg, but they don't specify if that occurs before or after the fertilized egg is implanted in the womb. However, once the sperm, egg, and consciousness are together and the cells start to multiply in the womb, a sentient being exists. We do not know if consciousness joins with an egg during in-vitro fertilization before it has been put in the womb.

Much discussion revolves around what to do with the excess fertilized eggs after in-vitro fertilization that enables a childless couple to have a child. Should they be used for stem cell research? Should they be discarded? Given to another couple who wants to have a child? Kept

indefinitely at a very low temperature? If those eggs have consciousness, do those sentient beings then suffer from cold? These questions are difficult to answer. I encourage doctors as well as couples to contemplate these issues before having in-vitro fertilization so that they do not suffer from confusion if faced with this situation.

*Stem cell research.* Research on stem cells harvested from human embryos could potentially bring cures for diseases and new ways to heal injuries. Genetic research could include tests to see if embryos had genetic defects that could later lead to debilitating diseases. But what is the effect of such research on the beings who inhabit those embryos? What kind of karma is created by doing this research? Will the knowledge derived from it bring happiness or may it create more misery and confusion? We need to investigate these issues and make wise decisions.

Some people accept that insects and animals have some form of sentience, but believe that since human beings have greater intellectual capabilities, they are superior. Others say that all sentient beings are similar in wanting happiness and not wanting suffering, and thus it is unsuitable for human beings to use animals for scientific research. Is it beneficial to harm some beings in order to devise ways of helping others? Unfortunately, we cannot ask the beings in the embryos or in the animal bodies if they agree to offer their lives for the potential benefit of others.

*Cloning.* Similar considerations about the presence of consciousness affect the issue of therapeutic cloning, in which scientists create a new human being with the same genes as another person, such that the clone's organs could be harvested and transplanted into the cloner. But Dolly, the cloned sheep, was a different sentient being with a different mindstream than her cloner. In the case of human beings, I don't think the clone would agree to donate his or her organs to the cloner or vice-versa. Unless we consider various ramifications and make wise, thoughtful decisions, we may become so enamored with science and technology that in the pursuit of happiness we create more problems.

*Birth control and abortion.* The presence of consciousness in a zygote also affects decisions regarding birth control and abortion. Birth control that inhibits the fertilization of the egg is fine. But once the egg is fertilized and a consciousness has entered, deliberately stopping the pregnancy is

considered the destructive action of taking life. Situations such as the child being born severely disabled or the mother's life being at stake need special consideration. Although abortion in such cases still entails the taking of life, the motivation is different and usually involves regret and sadness, making the karma lighter.

Overpopulation is a genuine concern in our world. As a society and as individuals, we must be responsible for the future of our planet. Birth control that prevents conception rather than terminates pregnancy is best. Giving a child up for adoption is another worthy option. My hope is that we can inculcate a sense of responsibility in young people (and adults too), so that they will use their sexuality wisely. Overestimating the value of romantic love and rushing into sexual relationships often leave people emotionally hurt or facing an unwanted pregnancy. In general, we need to bring compassion to cases of unwanted pregnancy. Rather than judge and blame the people involved, we need to help them resolve the situation as best as possible.

*Assisted suicide.* It may happen that a family member has a terminal illness and, experiencing great pain, asks for help in terminating his or her life. Assisted suicide is difficult and complicated; interestingly, a somewhat similar situation arose during the Buddha's lifetime. A monk was meditating on the unattractiveness of the body. Misunderstanding the purpose of the meditation, which is to reduce lust, he grew so disgusted with his body that he was miserable day and night. He asked another monk to kill him to free him from his body. The other monk did, and when the Buddha heard about this, he established the precept to abandon taking life and encouraging death.

Making a decision to put someone out of their suffering is difficult when we do not know where he or she will be reborn. When we take rebirth into account, we see that assisted suicide does not stop all suffering.

I would encourage someone with a terminal illness to see herself as more than just her disease. She is still a whole person with great human potential. Spiritual practice can still go forward even when one is terminally ill. At the times her mind is clear, she can direct it toward cultivating love and compassion, even if she is suffering physically. Friends and relatives

can encourage her to see that her life still has meaning and purpose even when her body is incapacitated or in pain.

On the other hand, someone may be in a coma with brain damage and no hope of recovery. Because he lacks proper mental functions, even if he is reminded of positive thoughts, the benefit is minimal or none. In addition, the family experiences great distress and society expends resources to keep the person alive. Such situations may be an exception, and it is understandable if the family allows the person to die naturally.

*Suicide.* Like other forms of taking life, suicide is considered killing. It is not a full karmic path, because the object of the action must be a person other than ourselves and the completion of the act means the victim dies first. Buddhism does not say a person who attempts suicide is evil and will be punished. However, it is a self-centered action that does not take into account the feelings of friends and family and how much they will suffer if one commits suicide.

Someone once told me that he longed for the peace of death because our world, with all its problems, is so difficult to bear. If we could be assured that in death we would find lasting happiness and peace, his wish might have some reason. However, we lack that guarantee. Death is not a cure for pain.

Meanwhile, because we are alive now, we can do something to resolve our difficulties and to contribute to the betterment of the world. The more we recognize the purpose and value of our precious human life, the more we will find meaning in our life and the more we will appreciate our good fortune to have this wonderful human brain and human heart. With these, we can practice the path to awakening, eliminating all problems. We need to cultivate a long-range perspective, patience, and confidence. With these, we can abandon despair, see the goodness around us, and know that we can make our life worthwhile.

*The death penalty.* Criminal actions that harm others create destructive karma. Using methods that are both wise and compassionate, as a society we must do our utmost to prevent it and to offer sympathy and support to families who grieve the loss of their loved ones or property. However, we must ask if executing the perpetrator dissipates the grief of the victims and their families.

Death is something that none of us wants. When it takes place naturally, it is beyond our control, but when death is willfully and deliberately inflicted, it is tragic. Whether death is caused illegally or legally — as in the case of the death penalty — negative karma is created. Even if we don't consider the karmic consequences in future lives, many disadvantages of the death penalty are evident now. A society may allow the death penalty in order to punish offenders, prevent them from reoffending, and deter other possible offenders. Research has shown, however, that executing offenders does not accomplish these aims.

I believe that human beings are not violent by nature. Unlike tigers, we are not naturally equipped with sharp teeth and claws for killing. The basic nature of each sentient being is pure. Human beings become violent owing to their afflictions, which exist in all of us. From this viewpoint, each of us has the potential to commit a crime as long as ignorance, hostility, attachment, and jealousy are within us. How, then, can we self-righteously condemn others as evil? Our own disturbing attitudes and emotions won't be overcome by executing others.

What is deemed criminal varies greatly from country to country. To use the death penalty as a punishment for such diverse actions is subjective and unreasonable. Furthermore, if we wish to deter criminal activity and prevent harmful activities, society must take care of children and ensure they receive a good education.

Executing human beings is an especially severe punishment because it is so final. A human life is terminated, and the executed person is deprived of the opportunity to change and to compensate for the harm he caused. However deplorable the act a person may have committed, everyone has the potential to improve and correct himself. I am a great admirer of Mahatma Gandhi's policy of *ahimsā*, or nonviolence. I appeal to those countries that employ the death penalty to observe an unconditional moratorium. At the same time, I encourage citizens and governments to give more support to education and to encourage a greater sense of universal responsibility for all beings in children and adults.

*Vegetarianism.* Eating meat involves the destructive action of killing even if we are not the butcher or fisherman. Being vegetarian is best,



although it depends on our health. The Buddha specifically forbade his followers to eat meat in three circumstances (MN 55.5):

Jivaka, I say that there are three instances in which meat should not be eaten: when it is seen, heard, or suspected [that the living being was slaughtered for one's consumption]. . . [I] say that there are three instances in which meat may be eaten: when it is not seen, not heard, and not suspected [that the living being was slaughtered for one's consumption].

Mahāyāna scriptures prohibit eating meat irrespective of those three situations, although there are a few exceptions.

In previous years, I would drive by poultry farms on the way to visit Tibetan settlements in South India. Hearing the chickens squawk in fear and seeing the horrible conditions in which they lived upset me greatly. When I heard that Tibetans ran these enterprises, I asked them to close them down and seek other employment. I am very happy that they have complied.

When I grew up in Tibet, the custom was to serve great amounts of meat during feasts and ceremonies. Thinking of so many animals being killed distressed me. In addition, it is unfitting for Buddhist practitioners who say they are practicing compassion to eat other beings' flesh. In Tibet and now in India I repeatedly said that this must stop, and now most monasteries do not serve meat during public gatherings. Similarly, only vegetarian food should be served at gatherings at Dharma centers. Otherwise, it is strange for people to hear teachings on compassion and then eat meat during the breaks between teachings!

Many people can be vegetarians without adverse consequences to their health. They take care of their diet and live in a place where they can procure healthy food. I would prefer to be a vegetarian. However, after some time of not eating meat, I fell ill with jaundice and traces of it remained as a chronic health problem. My doctors advised that, due to my strenuous schedule, I should eat meat. Although I aspire and would prefer to be totally vegetarian, now I must accept being a part-time vegetarian.

If those with health problems find it difficult to avoid eating meat, eating the flesh of large animals will prevent fewer living beings from

dying. Eating small animals, such as shellfish and chicken, causes many beings to be killed for just one meal.

*Neutering pets.* From one perspective, spaying and neutering animals is seen as cruel. But from a broader perspective, when there are so many dogs and cats that they all suffer, don't have enough to eat, and spread disease to one another, then there may be a good reason to spay and neuter animals. This is now done in Dharamsala, where I live.

*Sexual ethics.* Sexual ethics falls within the general rubric of nonharmfulness, which is the fundamental principle in defining ethical conduct. The fundamental activity to abandon is adultery because it causes confusion and jealousy for the two people involved and for their families. The specific details of unwise and unkind sexual behavior are related to the culture and values of a particular society at a particular time.

In ancient times going to a prostitute was not considered sexual misconduct if the customer paid her properly. However, present societal values by and large consider prostitution exploitation of vulnerable people. Young girls are sold into prostitution and runaway teenagers are manipulated into it. Single mothers living in poverty turn to sex work to put food on the table for their children. It is not the women and children who are at fault here, but the pimps and johns who keep the system going with the excuse of helping them by providing income. If men's intention were to help women and children, then they would give them a safe place to live, an education, and job training. Prostitution is also a social issue rooted in poverty and lack of respect for other human beings.

If a person voluntarily chooses to earn their livelihood through sexual services and these services do not damage oneself or others in the short term or long term, the situation would not be considered sexual misconduct.

Gays and lesbians are widely accepted in Western societies, and there is increasing support of their equal rights in housing, employment, marriage, military service, participation in religion, and so on. In these societies, homosexuality would not be considered unwise and unkind sexual behavior when practiced in a respectful relationship and with protection against sexually transmitted disease. The main point, whether one is straight or gay, is not to hurt others either emotionally or physically through one's sexuality. Everyone is advised to avoid sexual relations that are

manipulative, inconsiderate, or that could be emotionally or physically damaging to one or both parties. Safe sex with the use of condoms is a priority in upholding the Buddhist principle of nonharming.

Nowadays pornography is widespread, especially via the Internet. Material that reduces human beings to sexual objects harms both the viewer and the viewed. It stimulates undue lust that easily leads to inappropriate sexual behavior, especially in the case of child pornography. Instead of receiving love and support from adults, these young people are objectified and seen as the sexual playthings of lustful adults. Their self-esteem is severely damaged and they lose trust in adults. Spouses may be offended and lose respect for their beloved life partner who looks at pornography.

The state of mind that objectifies others and makes them into sexual objects for one's own pleasure is the opposite of the love and compassion we are trying to cultivate on the spiritual path. It inhibits opening our hearts toward others and destroys our happiness now and in the future.

# 11 | Results of Karma

**T**HROUGH OUR INTENTIONS and our actions, we create our experiences. Each of us experiences the results of intentional actions we have done. The Buddha explains (AN 3.34):

Whatever kamma an ignorant person [has done]  
born of attachment, anger, and confusion,  
whether what was fashioned by him be little or much,  
it is to be experienced right here:  
there exists no other site [for it].

*Right here* means in ourselves. We cannot transfer our karma to others so they experience the result, nor do we experience the result of others' actions. The results of our actions are concordant with their causes: if we create the cause for happiness, we experience happiness; if we create the causes for pain, that is what we will experience. The Buddha says (MN 136.6):

Having done an intentional action by way of the body, speech, or mind [whose result is] to be felt as pleasant, one feels pleasure. Having done an intentional action by way of body, speech, or mind [whose result is] to be felt as painful, one feels pain. Having done an intentional action by way of body, speech, or mind [whose result is] to be felt as neutral, one feels neutral.

Experiencing the long-term results of our actions does not contradict the fact that our actions influence others here and now. Giving another person food, we temporarily cure his hunger as well as create the cause to have resources in our future lives. Dedicating virtuous actions for a dear one who is deceased may affect that person's rebirth in a positive way. Similarly, the

Buddha's awakening was a result of his own efforts, but we also share the good fruits of his accumulation of merit over three countless great eons. In all these examples, one person's karma has not been transferred so that another person experiences its result. Rather, as sentient beings we are interdependent, and the actions of one person may activate the ripening of another person's karma.

The karmic result corresponds to the ethical nature of the action, which is primarily determined by the intention that motivated it. Actions done with a good motivation bring agreeable results for the person who does them, and actions done with destructive motivations bring miserable results in the long term. Actions may have immediate results that do not correspond with the ethical quality of the intention; these immediate results are not karmic results. For example, with the intention to help, Jeff gives some money to a friend. The next day someone steals the money, buys alcohol, and then injures someone in a car accident. Jeff's action was still a virtuous one, although it had an immediate, unintended suffering result.

### *Three Results of Karma*

Our actions bring several results: some are immediate results, others are karmic results that ripen later. When we are angry and speak harshly to someone, we immediately feel uneasy and experience an unpleasant reaction from the other person. In addition, the mental action of malice and the verbal action of harsh speech leave karmic seeds (latencies) on our mindstream. After a few years, lifetimes, or even eons, those seeds will ripen in our experiencing unpleasant events.

The scriptures speak of three results that come about due to actions done with all four branches (basis, attitude, performance, completion) accomplished: the ripening result (*vipākaphala*), causally concordant result (*niṣyandaphala*), and environmental result (*adhipatiphala*).

To be a *ripening result* four factors are required: (1) The cause is either virtuous or nonvirtuous. (2) The result is connected with the continuum of sentient beings. (3) The result comes after the cause. (4) The result itself is neutral, neither virtuous nor nonvirtuous.<sup>54</sup>

An example of a ripening result is the human psychophysical aggregates — form, feeling, discriminations, miscellaneous factors, and consciousnesses — we appropriated in our present life. Their cause was virtuous karma and they are connected with the continuum of a sentient being. Our rebirth came after its karmic cause, and our body itself is neutral, neither virtuous nor nonvirtuous. Āryadeva says (CŚ 297):

Suffering is a ripening  
and thus is not virtuous.  
Similarly, birth too is not virtuous,  
being a ripening [result] of actions.

Suffering arises due to nonvirtuous causes, but itself is neutral. Similarly, the body of a new life is a result of virtuous or nonvirtuous karma, but itself is ethically neutral. In general, a heavy destructive action brings rebirth as a hell being, a middle one brings rebirth as a hungry ghost, and a minor one results in rebirth as an animal.<sup>55</sup>

With the exception of the causally concordant behavioral result, all other results are neutral. How we respond to suffering and happiness and to the different situations in which they occur creates the causes for more future results. As causes, these actions may be virtuous, nonvirtuous, or neutral; they leave karmic seeds on our mindstream and these produce more rebirths and the experiences we encounter in them.

The *causally concordant result* is usually experienced when we are again born as a human. It is of two types: (1) The *causally concordant experiential result* is our experiencing circumstances similar to what we caused others to experience. Killing results in experiencing injury, illness, or a short life. Generosity brings resources. (2) The *causally concordant behavioral result* is the tendency to behave in the same way in the future. Someone who lies in this life will have the tendency to lie and deceive others in future lives, whereas someone who trains in truthful speech will readily speak truthfully in future lives.

Each nonvirtue also gives an *environmental result*, affecting the ambiance in which we live. The chart will help you see the results of the ten

nonvirtues at a glance. The causally concordant behavioral result is not listed because it is the tendency to do that same action again.

ACTION	CAUSALLY CONCORDANT EXPERIENTIAL RESULT	ENVIRONMENTAL RESULT
Killing	Short life, poor health.	Place with strife and war. Food and drink aren't healthy, medicine is not potent.
Stealing	Poverty, our things are stolen or we don't have the power to use them.	Poor place with many dangers, droughts, or floods, poor harvests, natural disasters.
Unwise and unkind sexual conduct	Disagreeable or unfaithful spouse, marital disharmony.	Life in a dirty place with poor sanitation, a foul odor, and misery.
Lying	Others slander and deceive us, don't believe or trust us, accuse us of lying when we are telling the truth.	Place with disharmony in the workplace, deceitful people, corruption in society, and you feel afraid.
Divisive speech	Lack of friends, people don't like to be with us, we are separated from spiritual masters and Dharma friends, have a bad reputation.	Rocky, uneven land with cliffs, place where travel is difficult, dangerous.
Harsh words	We are insulted, blamed, and criticized even when we speak with a good intention; others misunderstand us.	Barren, dry place that is inhabited by uncooperative people and has thorns, sharp stones, scorpions, and dangerous animals.
Idle talk	People do not listen to our words or value what we say, others laugh at us.	Drab place with an unbalanced climate where fruit does not ripen at the proper time, wells go dry, flowers and trees don't blossom.
Covetousness	We have intense desires and cravings, can't complete projects or fulfill	Small crops; our property, belongings, and the environment constantly deteriorate; isolated and poor place.

	our wishes and hopes, our ventures fail.	
Malice	We feel great hatred, fear, suspicion, guilt, paranoia, and fright for no obvious reason.	Place with epidemics, disputes, dangerous animals, and poisonous snakes; wars and calamities, unpleasant food.
Wrong views	We are very ignorant and dull mentally, have difficulty understanding the Dharma, take a long time to gain realizations.	Few crops, lack of a home and protector; natural resources are exhausted, springs go dry, polluted environment, chaotic society.

Nāgārjuna outlines the effects that will occur in future lives by engaging in harmful actions now. Some of these results may also occur in this life (RA 14–19).

Due to killing one is born with a short life span;  
 due to violence one encounters much torment;  
 due to stealing one becomes impoverished;  
 due to adultery one has enemies.

By lying one becomes reviled;  
 through speaking divisively, one loses friends;  
 due to speaking harshly, one hears unpleasant sounds;  
 from engaging in idle talk, one's words will be disregarded.

Covetousness destroys one's desired objects;  
 malice is said to bestow fear;  
 wrong views lead to evil worldviews;  
 consuming intoxicants brings mental confusion.

Through not giving gifts one is poor;  
 wrong livelihood results in getting tricked;  
 arrogance leads to a lowly station;  
 jealousy brings about unattractive appearance.

From anger comes a bad complexion;



stupidity from not questioning the wise.  
These are the effects when one is [reborn as] a human,  
but prior to all of them is a bad rebirth.

Such are widely known to be the ripening results  
of these [actions] that are called the nonvirtues.  
For all of the virtuous actions  
there are the opposite effects.

## REFLECTION

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1. Reflect on your life, noting your habitual actions and any strong karmas you may have done.
  2. One by one, consider what their ripening result, causally concordant results, and environmental result will be.
  3. Be aware that through your choices and actions, you are creating the causes for your future.
  4. Have the sense of your life being a conditioned event, and you are the one creating the conditions.
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Sūtras and texts all agree on which actions are virtuous and which are not, although they may have slightly different presentations of their specific results. Also, some texts describe karma in a simplistic manner, as if only one action produced a complex situation. It is helpful to remember that the purpose of these statements is to give ethical direction to average people in ancient times and that the precise functioning of karma is a complex matter.

An action with all three parts complete — preparation (the branches of the basis and attitude), performance, and culmination — can produce all three results over a period of lives. The First Dalai Lama explains (EPL 623):

If one asks: What is the reason that all the karmas yield the three [results]?

In the case of killing, for example: by the preparation one causes another to suffer [which yields the ripening result], in the actual act one kills [which yields the causally concordant result], and subsequently one

has extinguished [the victim's] vitality [which yields the environmental result]; therefore [each action] yields three types of fruit.

This does not mean that the preparation alone produces the ripening result and so forth, for a karma has to have all these branches complete to give rise to all these results. Linking parts of the action to specific results is a matter of emphasis.

One destructive action may bring many effects, and some effects may last for a long time. The same is true regarding constructive actions. In other cases, many karmas come together to make one effect.

Although karma and its effects have been presented primarily in terms of nonvirtuous actions, the same four branches are necessary to complete constructive actions and the same factors apply to make a constructive action heavy. The results of virtuous karma are the opposites of those for nonvirtuous actions. It is important for us to contemplate the ten virtues, the branches that make them complete, the factors that increase their strength, and the various results that come from them.

The *Shorter Exposition of Action* (*Cūḷakammavibhanga Sutta*, MN 135) speaks of pairs of opposite actions and their contrasting results. In each pair, the destructive action leads to an unfortunate rebirth and the constructive one to a fortunate rebirth. When we later are born human again, we will experience the causally concordant and environmental results of the action. Injuring sentient beings brings poor health and illness; refraining from causing injury brings good health. An angry and resentful character leads to being ugly; refraining from anger, hostility, and resentment — especially when criticized — results in being attractive. Envy and begrudging the achievements and honors of others lead to having little influence and people not listening to or paying attention to our words. Refraining from envy leads to gaining influence and respect. Stinginess leads to poverty; generosity brings wealth. Being obstinate and arrogant and not showing respect to those worthy of respect results in a lack of social status and educational and employment opportunities. Being free from obstinacy and arrogance and showing respect to those worthy of respect brings high status and many valuable opportunities. Being uninterested in discerning virtue from nonvirtue and what to practice from what to abandon on the path leads

to being dull and stupid. Being interested in these, inquiring, and learning about them brings wisdom.

Is whatever we experience — pleasant, painful, or neutral — caused by previously created karma? Although karma is not always the direct cause of our experience, it is involved. The Buddha elucidates (SN 36.21):

Bile, phlegm, and also wind,  
imbalance [of the three] and climate too,  
carelessness and assault,  
with kamma as the eighth.

Some painful feelings occur from imbalance in the three humors — bile, phlegm, wind, or all three together — while others have to do with change in climate, reckless behavior, or assault. We know this from our own experience, and it is considered true in the world. In saying this, the Buddha does not dismiss the role of karma in producing painful feelings. Rather, he rejects the claim that karma is the one and only direct cause for all painful feelings and affirms that karma plays a role in the feelings directly caused by the humors and external circumstances. Karma is given as the eighth cause of painful feelings, possibly indicating its dominant role when no physical disease or injury can be found as the immediate cause of a person's pain. The Abhidharma explains that all painful physical feelings are due to karma, although they are not necessarily produced only by karma.

Our motivation influences the result of our actions. Even fabricated bodhicitta is a powerful motivation for engaging in the ten constructive karmic paths. Tsongkhapa explains (LC 1:239):

The *Sūtra on the Ten Grounds* says that those who have cultivated these ten [virtues] through fear of [the dangers of] cyclic existence and without [great] compassion, but following the words of others, will achieve the fruit of a śrāvaka. There are those who are without [great] compassion or dependency on others, and who wish to become buddhas themselves. When they have practiced the ten virtuous [paths of] actions through understanding dependent arising, they will achieve the state of a solitary realizer. When those with an expansive attitude

cultivate these ten through [great] compassion, skillful means, great aspirational prayers, in no way abandoning any living being, and focusing on the extremely vast and sublime wisdom of a buddha, they will achieve the ground of a bodhisattva and all the perfections. Through practicing these activities a great deal on all occasions, they will achieve all the qualities of a buddha.

## *The Ripening of Karmic Seeds*

Our mindstream is home to countless karmic seeds. Our future rebirth is not due to the sum total of all these seeds, but to whichever seed or seeds ripen just prior to our death. Cooperative conditions — such as our present thoughts and emotions and the events around us — influence which karmic seeds ripen in the present. Just as a daisy seed will not grow into a daisy without proper fertilizer, heat, and water, karmic seeds will not ripen without certain conditions being present in our lives. A virtuous mental state enables seeds of constructive actions to bear results, while nonvirtuous thoughts and emotions fertilize the seeds of nonvirtuous karma. Drinking and taking recreational drugs establishes conditions in life that facilitate the ripening of the seeds of destructive actions.

Vasubandhu commented on which karmic seed is most likely to ripen at the time of death (ADKB):

Actions cause fruition  
in cyclic existence — first the heavy,  
then the proximate, then the habituated,  
then what was done earlier.

In general, heavy karma will ripen before lighter karma. If two heavy karmas are equal in weight, the one whose potential was reinforced nearer to the time of death will ripen first. If the potentials are equal, the action that is more habitual will ripen first. If the person is equally habituated to both actions, the one that was done first (earlier) will ripen.

The Pāli commentator Buddhaghosa describes the order in which karma producing rebirth ripens at the time of death in a slightly different order (Vism 19.15). Heavy karma, be it virtuous or nonvirtuous, will ripen first. The heaviest virtuous karma is the attainment of one of the dhyānas; the heaviest nonvirtuous karmas are the five actions of immediate retribution: killing one's mother, father, or an arhat, wounding a buddha, and causing a schism in the saṅgha.

If there is not an exceptionally heavy karma, an action done very habitually will ripen. Paying attention to our habitual behaviors is important. Having a regular daily meditation practice, making offerings, praising others, and reflecting on the four immeasurables are good habits to develop. Habitually lying to others, losing our temper, and cheating others become strong karmic forces that will propel us into an unfortunate rebirth if they ripen at death.

In the absence of a habitual karma, a death-proximate karma — an action that is vividly remembered just before death — will ripen. The memory is so strong that it pushes the mind in that direction.

Reserve karma is any other karma not included above that is strong enough to bring a rebirth. In the absence of any of the above three, a karma that has been done often will ripen at the time of death and project the next rebirth.

The ripening of one karmic seed temporarily prevents the ripening of another. The ripening of the seed of a heavy karma means the seed of a lighter karma cannot ripen at that time. When a karma to be reborn in the formless realm ripens, all karmic seeds that could bring painful results are temporarily unable to ripen because beings in the formless realm do not experience feelings of pain. Those seeds remain on the person's mindstream until suitable conditions manifest for them to ripen. Similarly, when a karmic seed to be reborn as a hungry ghost bears its result, karmic seeds to receive wealth are temporarily blocked from ripening. These seeds are not destroyed or lost, but will ripen later when appropriate conditions are present.

Our karma will definitely bring results unless the seeds are inhibited from ripening. When the four opponent powers are applied to nonvirtues sincerely and diligently, those seeds will become unable to bear a result or

will ripen in minor suffering. Similarly, when strong anger or wrong views manifest in our mind, they impair the ability of seeds of virtue to ripen: these seeds will either not be able to ripen or will bring only a minor result. In both these cases, the karmic seeds have not been totally eradicated: they are still present, but like damaged seeds, they are unable to bring their full results. If the purification or the anger is very strong, the potency of the karmic seed is so damaged that even when appropriate conditions are present, it will not bear any result, just as a burned seed cannot grow even when water, fertilizer, and sunshine are present. However, only direct, nonconceptual realization of emptiness fully removes seeds of destructive karma.

When cooperative conditions are not present, karmic seeds may exist in someone's mindstream but be impeded from ripening. For example, someone on the fortitude stage of the path of preparation has not yet abandoned the seeds for unfortunate rebirths, but these seeds cannot ripen into such rebirths because of the power of this person's inferential realization of emptiness.

The *Questions of Upāli Sūtra* (*Upālipariṣcchā Sūtra*) speaks of a case in which a monastic with pure behavior holds malice toward another monastic with pure conduct. It says his "great roots of virtue are diminished, thoroughly reduced, and completely consumed." *Diminish* means that the result of great virtue becomes less and the duration of its happy result is shorter, but not all the good effects are stopped. *Reduce* means it can bring only a small pleasant result, and *consume* indicates that a result cannot ripen at all.

On the other hand, the *Teaching of Akṣayamati Sūtra* (*Akṣayamatinirdeśa Sūtra*) says that one of the benefits of dedicating merit for awakening is that the merit will not be consumed until awakening is attained, just as a drop of water that has flowed into the ocean will not be consumed. The *Array of Stalks Sūtra* (*Gaṇḍavyūha*) states that bodhicitta and virtues associated with it cannot be extinguished by afflictions or polluted actions.

How are we to understand these seemingly inconsistent passages? Saying that merit dedicated for awakening will not be consumed until awakening is attained means that this merit will not finish bearing its effects

until then. However, that does not mean that anger and wrong views cannot damage it. Although they cannot destroy the merit completely, they can interfere with when, how, and for how long it ripens. Nevertheless, the results of that merit, although impeded, will not finish until awakening has been attained. Anger can render merit that has not been dedicated for awakening incapable of bearing any result. For this reason, dedicating our merit for full awakening is extremely important.

Saying that bodhicitta and the virtues associated with it cannot be extinguished by afflictions or polluted actions means that afflictions and karma cannot harm bodhicitta to the same extent that bodhicitta can harm them. It does not mean that afflictions and destructive karma cannot damage our bodhicitta and the virtues associated with it at all. Anger can harm our bodhicitta in two ways: we will not be able to generate new paths quickly but will have to again accumulate the merit that produces them, and we will experience the undesirable effects of nonvirtue.

In addition to anger and wrong views, in the *Compendium of Training* (*Śikṣāsamuccaya*) Śāntideva points out other actions that damage the virtues of one following the bodhisattva path: staying with householders who have strong attachment to material possessions and entertainment, boasting about spiritual attainments we do not have, and abandoning the Dharma by neglecting the Buddhadharma and making up our own version of the Buddha's teachings. These actions also impede our progress along the path, even if we do virtuous practices. Studying this text as well as Nāgārjuna's *Compendium of Sūtras* (*Sūtrasamuccaya*), which also discusses the bodhisattva path, is very helpful.

Contemplating how the ripening of karma can be affected by counteracting forces makes us more conscientious. This, in turn, strengthens our mindfulness and introspective awareness in daily life. We become aware that getting angry is completely counterproductive. This increases our inner strength to set anger aside, just like a person seeing a delicious-looking sweet quickly puts it down upon hearing that it is laced with poison.

Since karma influences our experience of happiness and suffering, its ripening strongly influences our feeling aggregate. Although we often discuss karma ripening as the four effects discussed above, the reason we

find some results desirable and others not is because of the experiences of happiness or misery they bring us. The situations we encounter in life as well as the pleasant, unpleasant, and neutral feelings we experience in them are related to our previous actions.

While encountering people who criticize us is due to our destructive karma of harsh speech, sometimes we hear criticism where there is none. In this case our feeling of being hurt is due to our misinterpretation of the event. As we become more familiar with the practice of mind training, which encourages us to view situations from more positive perspectives, the experience of mental pain declines. In fact, if we practice well, even if people wish to hurt our feelings we won't feel hurt.

We may find that certain emotions or intentions easily and frequently arise in our minds. This is a result of habits in previous lives. Someone who angers easily has a strong habit with this emotion. Should the anger grow to become physical violence, the physical deed may be related to previous karma, since the causally concordant behavioral result of violence is the tendency to do the action again.

Some children like to kill insects or torment animals. This is another instance of a causally concordant behavioral effect of killing. Other children naturally help others from a young age, even though their parents did not explicitly teach them. This behavior, too, is a causally concordant behavioral result. In addition, these children were habituated with certain emotions — anger or compassion — in previous lives.

We can apply our understanding of karma when watching the news or hearing of the good and bad experiences of others. Here we reflect on the types of actions people have done that created the causes for their present pleasurable and miserable experiences. In a natural disaster, many people lose their lives and property. What kind of actions could have caused this? Many first-responders and neighbors come to their aid and there is an outpouring of donations to help them resettle. What actions caused them to receive this help? What will be the long-term results for the people who offered aid? This is a very practical way to contemplate karma and apply our understanding to our lives.

When doing this, as noted above, do not fall into a wrong understanding of karma and its effects by thinking that others deserve to suffer or are



morally inferior because they are suffering. Suffering comes as a result of our actions, not as a reward or punishment for them. Since all of us have created destructive karma in this and previous lives, judging others as morally inferior and ourselves as superior is absurd. A person and his actions are different. The action may be harmful, but the person is not evil — each of us has the potential to become a fully awakened buddha.

Some people question, “Is helping suffering people interfering with their karma?” Such thinking is foolish. Compassion is the appropriate response to misery, and we should always reach out to aid those who are suffering. The notion of karma must never be used to justify oppression or apathy in the face of problems that can and must be corrected. If we remain idle, we create the karma to not receive help when we are in misery.

#### REFLECTION

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1. Think of some of the good circumstances you have in your life, for example, health, sufficient wealth, family, education, friends, hobbies, satisfying work, opportunities to hear Dharma teachings, connection with the monastic saṅgha, and so on.
  2. Think of the types of actions you must have engaged in during previous lives to create the causes for these excellent circumstances.
  3. Rejoice at the virtue you created and make a strong determination to engage in virtuous activities in this life to make preparation for good future lives where you will be able to continue your Dharma studies and practices.
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### *Definite and Indefinite Karma*

Some actions are definite (*niyata karma*) to produce a result unless that karmic seed is impeded from ripening; others are indefinite (*aniyata karma*) in that their producing a result is not certain. *Levels of Yogic Deeds* (*Yogācārabhūmi-śāstra*) explains (LC 1:240):

Karma whose results are definite to be experienced are actions that are consciously done and accumulated. Karma whose

results are not definite to be experienced are actions that are consciously done but not accumulated.

Definite karma are actions that have been done (*krta*) and accumulated (*upacita*); their results are certain to be experienced unless they are purified in the case of destructive actions or impeded by anger or wrong views in the case of constructive actions. *Done* means we consciously thought about or set something into motion physically or verbally. *Accumulated* means that we had an intention to act. All virtuous and nonvirtuous mental actions are accumulated. No one can force us to engage in mental actions.

It is not certain that results will be experienced from actions that have not been both done and accumulated. The four possibilities between done and accumulated are given below, together with examples.

*Karma done but not accumulated* are the ten following actions. They are not certain to bring results; their motivation is weak or has changed since the time the action was done. Almost all other actions aside from these ten are accumulated karma. Here we can see the great impact motivation has on our actions and their results.

1. *Actions done in dreams.* We dream of making offerings to the Buddha or of killing an enemy. If, upon waking, we rejoice at virtuous actions in a dream, we create virtuous mental karma; if we regret them, the karma is nonvirtuous. Rejoicing at destructive actions in a dream creates nonvirtuous mental karma; regretting those actions and making a strong determination not to do them in waking life is virtuous mental karma.
2. *Actions done unknowingly.* Believing the art supplies on the table are for everyone to use, we take them without knowing that they in fact belong to a particular person.
3. *Actions done unconsciously.* We accidentally step on an insect without any conscious intention.
4. *Actions done without intensity or continuity.* We off-handedly utter a few words of idle talk or chit-chat for a short time.
5. *Actions done mistakenly.* Someone wishes to steal a book, but steals a box instead; someone intends to praise one person, but mistakenly praises another.

6. *Actions done forgetfully.* We tell a friend that we will not share his comments with others, but forgetting that we said this, we tell others.
7. *Actions done unwillingly.* Someone has no wish to kill another person but is forced at gunpoint to do so.
8. *Actions that are ethically neutral.* Walking, sweeping, reading, driving, cycling, eating, sleeping.
9. *Actions eradicated through regret.* Although in general we speak truthfully, we lie to someone and later have strong regret.
10. *Actions eradicated with a remedy.* Seeing the disadvantages of killing, we no longer wish to go fishing, hunting, or take the life of any living being and take a precept to abandon killing. Alternatively, we weaken worldly attachments by attaining dhyānas or eradicate the seeds of those destructive actions by direct perception of emptiness.

*Karma that is both done and accumulated* are the main causes producing a rebirth and are not included in the ten above. In general, their four branches are complete and their result is certain to be experienced. These karmas have six characteristics (EPL 652):

1. The action is done deliberately, not impulsively or coercively against our will.
2. All parts of the action are complete. This eliminates situations such as trying to kill someone, but only injuring them, or thinking to attend Dharma teachings, but not going.
3. We do not regret the action afterward.
4. No antidote is applied to purify the karma.
5. We rejoice at having done the action.
6. The result is certain to be experienced.

Although actions with all four branches complete are definite karmas, they may not be strong enough to propel a rebirth. For example, the motivation is very weak or the action insignificant. *Karma that is not done but accumulated* is, for example, plotting for a long time to rob someone and then deciding against it, or dreaming of helping others and rejoicing

when we wake up. *Karma that is neither done nor accumulated* is having no intention to cause an accident, but almost hitting another vehicle when driving.

Definite actions are certain to bring results unless we apply counterforces to them. *Definite* does not mean that events are predetermined or fated and therefore there is no purpose exerting energy to oppose them. Purifying destructive karmas by means of the four opponent powers is effective in lessening or stopping the result.

## *When Karma Ripens*

In terms of when karma ripens, definite karma may bear results in this life (*dr̥ṣṭa dharma karma*), the very next life (*upapadya*), or lives subsequent to that (*aparaparyāya*). Karma that is the second of the twelve links will ripen in the next life or one after that. Actions that ripen in this life are those that are very strong owing to the special qualities of the field — for example, holy beings — or the strength of our intention. *Levels of Yogic Deeds* lists four pairs of actions that may ripen in the same life as they are created:

1. Nonvirtuous actions done with strong attachment to our body and virtuous actions done with strong disinterest in our body.
2. Nonvirtuous actions done with great malice toward others and virtuous actions done with heartfelt compassion for them.
3. Nonvirtuous actions done with deep malice and lack of respect for the Three Jewels or our spiritual mentors and virtuous actions done with deep confidence and regard for them.
4. Nonvirtuous actions done with intense animosity toward those who have been kind to us, such as parents and teachers, and virtuous actions done with an intense wish to repay their kindness.

In general, the results of heavy constructive and destructive karmas may be experienced in the same life in which they are created, whereas karmas that are slightly less heavy are likely to be experienced in the very next life. Karmas that are not as heavy as those are experienced in lives after that.

The Pāli Abhidharma also discusses karma that ripens in this life, in the next life, and in lives subsequent to that, and adds another option, karma that becomes defunct.<sup>56</sup> *Karma that ripens in this life* brings its result in the same life in which it was created. If such karma fails to encounter cooperative conditions for its ripening, it becomes defunct and does not ripen at all. *Karma that ripens in the very next rebirth* must produce its result in the next life. If it does not meet the conditions to ripen then, it becomes defunct. *Karma that ripens in subsequent lives* is karma that ripens whenever suitable conditions come together in any life subsequent to the next one. This karma becomes defunct only with the attainment of final nirvāṇa, when an arhat passes away. Contrary to the description in the Sanskrit tradition, the Pāli Abhidharma says that in order of its strength, karma that ripens in subsequent lives is the strongest, followed by karma that ripens in the next life, with karma that ripens in this life being the weakest.

*Defunct karma* is not a specific class of karma but describes karma that could have ripened but does not owing to a lack of appropriate conditions. For example, karmic seeds remaining on the mindstreams of arhats become defunct when they die and enter nirvāṇa without remainder.

How is the idea of “defunct” karma reconciled with the Buddha’s explanation that the results of our actions will definitely be experienced? The Buddha says (AN 10.217):

I declare, monastics, that actions willed, performed, and accumulated will not become extinct as long as their results have not been experienced, be it in this life, in the next life, or in subsequent future lives. As long as these results of actions willed, performed, and accumulated have not been experienced, there will be no making an end to suffering, I declare.

This statement applies to karmas that are capable of yielding results (*vipakarahakamma*). Within the certainty that destructive actions will produce misery, never happiness, and constructive actions will lead to happiness, never suffering, there is some flexibility as to how, when, and if a karma ripens. Just as undamaged seeds that have the capability to grow

will sprout when planted in fertile soil with sufficient water, so too will seeds of constructive and destructive karmas bring their results when planted in the mindstream of an ordinary being.

Nevertheless, as a conditioned phenomenon, the ripening of karma can be affected by other forces. If this were not the case and karmic seeds could never be modified, we could never reach the end of *duḥkha* because the karma to be experienced would be endless. The Buddha elaborates (AN 3.34):

[However,] once greed, hatred, and confusion have vanished, that action is thus abandoned, cut off at the root, made barren like a palm-tree stump, obliterated so that it is no more subject to arise in the future.

It is like seeds that are undamaged, not rotten, unspoiled by wind and sun, capable of sprouting and well-embedded: if a person were to burn them in fire and reduce them to ashes, then winnow the ashes in a strong wind or let them be carried away by a swiftly flowing stream, those seeds would be radically destroyed, fully eliminated, made unable to sprout, and would not be liable to arise in the future.

When ordinary beings later become arhats, their polluted karma — be it virtuous or nonvirtuous — may still ripen as pleasant or unpleasant experiences when they are alive. When they pass away and attain *nirvāṇa* without remainder, all polluted karma becomes defunct.

Other circumstances can also render karma defunct. The *Book of Analysis (Vibhaṅga)* explains that there are certain cases in which a constructive or destructive karma will not bring a result. Four factors may prevent this.

1. The *realm of rebirth*. A destructive karma is due to ripen in the next existence as an unfortunate rebirth, but the person creates a powerful constructive karma that causes her next life to be in a fortunate rebirth. Blocked from ripening, that destructive karma “dries up” and does not ripen.
2. The *person’s physical body or possessions*. A constructive karma in the person’s mindstream has the tendency to ripen in a particular rebirth, but the person has a weak body or lacks the requisites to

sustain his life. The situation of his body and possessions inhibits the constructive karma from ripening.

3. *The time.* A constructive karma has the tendency to ripen in a certain rebirth but the person is born in a time of war, drought, or economic depression. Since the cooperative conditions for the ripening of this constructive karma are not present at that time, the karma loses its effectiveness and does not ripen.
4. *Personal effort.* Someone may have a destructive karma on her mindstream that is due to ripen in premature death, but she makes wise choices, behaves ethically, puts herself in good situations, and cultivates friendships with ethical people. As a result, the destructive karma lacks the conducive circumstances to ripen. However, if she drinks and drives, she provides ample opportunity for that destructive karma to ripen. Although we do not have much control over the first three factors, by living wisely here and now we can influence which karmic seeds in our mindstreams will ripen.

## *How Karma Functions*

With respect to how karma functions, the Pāli Abhidharma describes four types (CMA 200): productive, supportive, obstructive, and supplanting karmas. *Productive karmas* are the virtuous or nonvirtuous intentions that produce the aggregates of a rebirth. This includes the body and mind at the first moment of the new life as well as mental states and aspects of the body, such as the sense faculties, that develop later on.

*Supportive karma* does not produce its own result but supports the production or duration of the result of another karma by creating conducive circumstances for the other karma to ripen. After a virtuous karma results in our having a fortunate rebirth, supporting karma could extend our life span, prolong a disease caused by a nonvirtuous karma, or lengthen the time that we experience happiness or misery.

*Obstructive karma* also does not produce its own result but interferes with the ripening of another karma, making its result weak or shorter in duration. If we had created the constructive karma to receive an inheritance,

obstructive karma would prevent us from claiming it. If we had created the destructive karma to have a severe illness, obstructive karma could mitigate the effect so that we have a mild stomachache instead.

*Supplanting karma* is virtuous or nonvirtuous karma that cuts off the ripening of a weaker karma and ripens in its place. Unlike obstructive karma, supplanting karma does not simply interfere with the ripening of another karma but actually ripens instead of it. A destructive karma may be about to ripen at the time of death, but through a change of circumstances a stronger supplanting constructive karma ripens instead. A particular karma may perform any of these four functions at different times.

## *The Benefits of Contemplating Karma and Its Effects*

Contemplating karma and its effects helps us to see ourselves, our experiences, and our lives as dependent on a variety of factors: they arise and cease due to causes and conditions. They are neither random nor predetermined — both of those positions contradict conditionality. This awareness of conditionality prepares us to later study the twelve links of dependent origination that describe how we are born into saṃsāra and how to free ourselves from it. It also prevents us from slipping into nihilism when we study and meditate on the emptiness of inherent existence: the fact that people and things arise and change due to causes and conditions assures us that they exist.

When we experience adversity, life seems unfair and we ask, “Why me?” When we have knowledge of how the law of karma and its effects operates we understand that we created the causes for our experiences. The mind-training teachings suggest that we reflect on the karmic causes of our problems because it helps us to accept responsibility for our actions and stop blaming others for our unhappiness. Recalling that we have acted destructively humbles our arrogance and leads us to change our attitudes and behavior.

Our mindstream resembles a garden with a variety of seeds planted in it. Depending on which seeds are watered, particular plants will grow at that time. The other seeds are still in the ground; they will ripen whenever the proper amount of water, fertilizer, and heat are present. Similarly, karmic



seeds from numerous actions we have done in previous lives and this life are on our mindstream. Our present thoughts and actions act like water and heat causing specific seeds to ripen. Gambling waters the seeds of destructive karma, making it easier for us to have financial problems. Speaking with kindness will water seeds of virtuous karma, making it easier for them to bear their results.

The maturation of karma is not fatalistic; we have some ability to influence which seeds ripen. We also see that our lives are not the sum total of all actions we have ever done, but depending on which karmic seeds ripen we can go from a good situation to an unpleasant one and back again quickly. We also get a sense of the incredible swirl of countless causes created in previous lives that come together to bring about just one event in our lives. The intricacy and complexity of the functioning of karma and its effects is far more than we can currently grasp. Nevertheless, learning the general and specific characteristics of karma and its results aids us in making wise decisions.

Once we break our leg, we cannot unbreak it, although we can work skillfully with the situation to minimize the pain. Similarly, once karmic seeds have ripened, we cannot undo their results. Understanding this, we will accept unpleasant events in our lives rather than rail against them and make effort to create constructive karma when dealing with difficult situations. If we give way to anger and the wish to retaliate against the driver of a car that rear-ended us, we compound our misery in the present and create more destructive karma, the result of which we will have to experience in the future. However, if we remain calm and speak respectfully to the person, we avoid creating more causes for suffering.

In short, Buddhaghosa indicates the strong role karma plays in our lives (Vism 19.18):

Kamma-result proceeds from kamma,  
result has kamma for its source,  
future becoming springs from kamma,  
and this is how the world goes around.

# 12 | The Workings of Karma

OUR ACTIONS CAN BE classified in several different ways. Learning these enriches our understanding of karma and its effects, which, in turn, helps us to be more mindful of thoughts, words, and deeds.

## *Projecting and Completing Karma*

Projecting and completing karma are differentiated by the types of results they bring. *Projecting karma* ripens in rebirth in a saṃsāric realm with the five aggregates of a desire-realm or form-realm being or the four aggregates of a formless-realm deva. It is the second of the twelve links of dependent origination. *Completing karma* determines the specific attributes or experiences in that life. The projecting karma of ethical conduct leads the mind to be born with human aggregates, and the completing karma of speaking kindly to others makes the body attractive.

All four branches must be complete for an action to become projecting karma, but this is not necessary for a completing karma. In births resulting from either virtuous or nonvirtuous projecting karma, we can experience the results of either virtuous or nonvirtuous completing karma. The chart gives some examples of possible results.

	VIRTUOUS PROJECTING KARMA	NONVIRTUOUS PROJECTING KARMA
<i>Virtuous completing karma</i>	Human life with eight freedoms and ten fortunes	Pampered pet
<i>Nonvirtuous completing karma</i>	Human life lived in poverty	Beasts of labor

While projecting karma determines the type of body we appropriate — human, animal, and so forth — completing karma affects such factors as the genetic predispositions of the body and whether those predispositions are activated.

Vasubandhu says that a projecting karma produces only one rebirth and only one rebirth arises from a projecting karma, whereas Asaṅga states that one projecting karma can produce one or many rebirths and many karmas can produce one or many rebirths.

The results of many completing karmas are experienced in one life. Someone may be born in a war-torn country because of one nonvirtuous completing karma, but receive shipments of food, medicine, and clothing resulting from virtuous completing karma. Circumstances in our lives may frequently change depending on the completing karma that ripens at any particular time.

## *Collective and Individual Karma*

Sentient beings are social and often act together. We belong to various groups and work, play, practice Dharma, and raise the next generation together. As such, we experience common results together. Asaṅga's *Compendium of Knowledge* discusses various possibilities of how this occurs.

Some actions are done collectively by a large group; they result in experiences shared by everyone in that group, such as living in the same country or experiencing a natural disaster. Collective karma is also created in small groups: The people attending Dharma teachings or a soccer game create collective karma. All the participants will experience a similar result in a future group situation.

We also create individual karma when we are part of a group; this results in experiences that are not shared by others. Everyone at a Dharma teaching creates virtuous group karma because the purpose of the gathering is virtuous. Within that group, one person listens attentively and thinks, “These teachings are important and I want to practice them.” Another person with a wandering mind thinks, “I wonder what’s for lunch?” In the

future, these two people will find themselves in a similar agreeable situation but will experience it differently because of the individual karma they created. Similarly, as the result of collective karma they created together, many people may be in a place plagued by an epidemic, but owing to individual karma, some will fall ill while others won't.

It is important to be heedful of the groups that we choose to join and the purposes for which they are established because we reap the result of the collective actions of that group that correspond to the purpose of the group. The First Dalai Lama says (EPL 614):

If one asks: In the course of a war and so forth, if one person kills another, does the karmic path arise only for that single person?

No. In a war and so forth, since they are all there with the same purpose of killing, they all have the karmic path in the same way as the killer.

While sitting in a crowd of thousands who have gathered to hear His Holiness teach, I (Chodron) marvel at the opportunity to be part of a group that has formed for the purpose of developing compassion and attaining awakening. The collective karma created by this group is very different from a group whose purpose is to increase the value of a company's stock.

Sometimes without choice we find ourselves part of a group whose purpose or activities we do not agree with. For example, we may be the citizen of a state that employs capital punishment. If we do not endorse this activity, we do not create this particular collective karma. Being clear and aware of our intentions in such situations is extremely important so that we can skillfully guide our creation of karma.

## *Naturally Nonvirtuous Actions and Proscribed Actions*

Karma is also divided into naturally nonvirtuous (*prakṛti-sāvadya*) actions and actions proscribed by the Buddha (*prajñaty-avadya*). Those that are naturally nonvirtuous — such as the ten nonvirtues — are so-called because they are done with a nonvirtuous motivation, their nature is nonvirtuous,

and they have the potential to produce suffering results. Whoever does them — whether that person is monastic or lay — creates nonvirtue (*akuśala*) and negativity (*pāpa*) and will experience unpleasant results.<sup>57</sup>

Actions proscribed by the Buddha are those regulated by precepts, such as the *prātimokṣa* precepts of monastics. Some of these actions are not naturally nonvirtuous and do not necessarily involve an afflictive motivation; they may also be done with a neutral or constructive motivation. Examples are singing, dancing, watching entertainment, wearing perfumes, ornaments, and cosmetics, eating after midday, and handling money.

When those who hold monastic precepts transgress a precept, they commit an offense or downfall (*āpatti*) by engaging in an action proscribed by the Buddha. To purify this, they must confess and apply the appropriate method as prescribed in the *vinaya*. For this reason, it is very important for monastics to attend a *poṣadha* rite with four or more fully ordained monastics. Depending on the gravity of the offense, the way of making amends differs. Someone committing a remainder offense must enter a period of penance in which he or she temporarily relinquishes monastic privileges. A monastic who obtains an article by wrong livelihood must relinquish the article. Minor offenses are purified by confessing them to another monastic who is free from that transgression.

If the transgressed precept regulates an action that is naturally nonvirtuous, such as killing an animal or telling small lies, the monastic creates negativity and needs to apply the four opponent powers to purify this karma in addition to amending the offense by confessing to the *saṅgha*.

Even if the action itself is not naturally negative, people engaging in it — whether they hold precepts or not — may still create negativity if they have a nonvirtuous intention while doing the action. A monastic who handles money with contempt for the precepts creates negativity as well as an offense that must be confessed to the *saṅgha*. Similarly, when monastics motivated by attachment or anger eat in the evening, they must rectify both the negativity as well as the offense. If they eat after noon under circumstances in which the Buddha allowed them to eat — for example, the monastic is ill, working for the *saṅgha*, or traveling — there is no offense or negativity. If none of those extenuating circumstances apply and the

monastic eats because she sees the food as medicine to keep her body healthy so she can practice the Dharma, there is an offense but no negativity.

In brief, in a case where the offense also creates negativity — such as a monastic lying — the negativity and the offense are one nature but nominally different. As such, they are purified by different methods. When offenses have been confessed to the saṅgha with the prescribed ritual, they are said to have been purified. However, the negativity can only be purified through sincere application of the four opponent powers. On the other hand, if the person purifies the negativity by engaging in the four opponent powers, but does not confess the offense and make amends to the saṅgha and attend poṣadha, the offense remains and obscures the mind. Until the person confesses and makes amends, he is not fit to carry out certain monastic activities such as giving ordination. If the person is not conscientious, these offenses may later lead him to engage in negativities or create further offenses.

## *Intention Karma, Intended Karma, and Mental Karma*

Karma is of two types, intention karma (*cetanā-karma*) and intended karma (*cetayitvā karma*). Vasubandhu explains (ADK):

Karma gives rise to the diversity of the world.

It is [of two kinds], intention [karma] and what it produces [intended karma].

Intention is mental karma:

[the intended karma] it produces is physical and verbal karma.

These [physical and verbal karmas] consist of perceptible and imperceptible [karma].

*Intention karma* is mental karma, specifically the mental factor of intention. Once a strong intention has arisen in the mind, physical and verbal actions — intended karma — follow. Physical and verbal actions

may be either perceptible karma (*vijñapti*) that reveals the person's intention or imperceptible karma (*avijñapti*) that does not. For example, when strong malice is present in our mind, the mental factor of intention that accompanies it is mental karma. That intention to harm another person leads us to speak spitefully to him; our voice uttering the snide comment is perceptible verbal karma. The harsh tone of our voice reveals our intention to hurt him.

Asaṅga says (ADS):

What is mental karma? It is a mental action that conditions the mind; it consists of meritorious, demeritorious, and immutable [actions].

Mental karma (*manas karma*) is the mental factor of intention, which accompanies a primary mind and is included in the fourth aggregate (miscellaneous factors). When the mental factor of intention accompanies a primary mental consciousness that is also accompanied by a virtuous mental factor, such as faith or love, it becomes constructive karma. That intention is mental karma and intention karma.

Similarly, the intention that accompanies a primary mental consciousness that is also accompanied by a nonvirtuous mental factor, such as attachment, resentment, or discouragement (which is a form of laziness), is destructive karma. The intention is mental karma and intention karma, and the nonvirtuous mental factor is an affliction.

Intentions — intention karmas — produce intended karmas (*cetayitvā karma*), which are physical and verbal actions. Motivated by the intention that shares the same primary mental consciousness as attachment, someone engages in the verbal intended karma of lying in order to get what he wants. Motivated by the intention that shares the same primary mental consciousness as vengeance, someone may kill another person who speaks divisively about her to ruin her reputation.

A strong mental intention that instigates lying and a strong mental intention that abandons lying are both the mental factor of intention and intention karma. The former is accompanied by a nonvirtuous mental factor such as anger, the latter by a virtuous one such as integrity. When either intention is accompanied by the other branches that form a complete karmic

path, it becomes the second link of dependent origination and has the power to propel a rebirth in cyclic existence. The physical or verbal actions that are brought about by these mental karmas are intended actions.

## *Physical and Verbal Karma, Perceptible and Imperceptible Forms*

All Buddhist schools agree that karma is connected to our intentions. Sautrāntikas, Cittamātrins, and Svātantrikas say that all karma of body, speech, and mind is the mental factor of intention. The mental factor of intention that motivates an action is intention karma, and the mental factor of intention at the time of doing the physical or verbal action is intended karma. For them both intention karma (mental karma) and intended karma (physical and verbal actions) are intentions.

Vaibhāṣikas say that karma can be of two kinds: intention karma, which is the mental factor of intention, and intended karma, which is karma of body and speech. The karmas of body and speech are of two types: perceptible forms (*vijñapti*) and imperceptible forms (*avijñapti*). *Perceptible physical karma* is “the shape of the body when it is motivated by an intention and is moving, for example, when prostrating or killing . . . perceptible verbal karma is the sound of the voice,” for example, when lying or speaking kindly. The shape of the body and the sound of our voice are forms, and they “are perceptible forms in that they enable others to understand our motivation” for doing the action (EPL 558–59). Perceptible forms may be virtuous, nonvirtuous, or neutral.

Imperceptible forms are subtle forms that are not perceivable by the sense faculties and that arise only when a person has a strong intention. They are either virtuous or nonvirtuous. Neutral actions lack the powerful intention necessary to bring forth an imperceptible form. Imperceptible forms continue to exist no matter if the person is conscious, sleeping, or engaged in other actions. An example is monastic precepts.

Imperceptible forms are obscure phenomena, established by reliable cognizers depending on authoritative scripture. Chim Jampelyang in



*Ornament of Abhidharma (mngon pa'i rgyan)* quotes a sūtra that establishes their existence:

All forms are subsumed in three types of form: (1) forms that are visible and obstructive, (2) forms that are invisible but obstructive, and (3) forms that are invisible and nonobstructive.

An example of *visible and obstructive forms* is a table. It can be perceived by the eye consciousness and obstructs the space it occupies so that other things cannot occupy that space at the same time. Examples of *invisible but obstructive forms* are sounds, tastes, and odors; they cannot be seen by the eye but are obstructive. The sound of people laughing is obstructive because it prevents our hearing someone who is whispering. An example of *invisible and nonobstructive forms* is imperceptible forms. Vaibhāṣikas assert that only imperceptible forms are examples of the third type of forms, whereas Prāsaṅgikas include other phenomena such as dream objects.<sup>58</sup>

The *Treasury of Knowledge* speaks of three types of imperceptible forms: ethical restraints, antirestraints, and other imperceptible forms.

1. Ethical restraints (*saṃvara*) constrain us from afflictive activity. They are of three types: prātimokṣa restraints, concentration restraints, and unpolluted restraints. (a) Prātimokṣa restraints are of eight types: the precepts of male and female fully ordained monastics, training nuns, male and female novices, male and female lay followers with the five precepts, and lay followers with the eight one-day precepts. When we take the precept not to kill, steal, and so forth, an imperceptible form arises in us that acts like a dam that helps us restrain from doing that destructive action. These ethical restraints remain until they are completely broken, voluntarily relinquished, or we die. (b) The concentration restraint is possessed by beings who have meditative stability arising from concentration. (c) The unpolluted restraint is possessed by āryas in meditative equipoise. When āryas are in meditative equipoise, their right speech and right action — two factors of an ārya's eightfold path — are imperceptible forms that are unpolluted by ignorance.

2. Antirestraints (*asaṃvara*) are the opposite of restraining from destructive actions. They arise due to someone's strong intention to act destructively and remain until that person gives up that profession and its motivation or until he dies. Examples are the antirestraints of a butcher or exterminator.
3. Other imperceptible forms arise by depending on holy objects, making firm promises, and acting with strong reverence or other positive motivations. The *Scripture on Discernment (Vinayavibhaṅga)* describes seven virtues derived in relation to substances (*aupadhika puṇya kriyā vastu*) that are meritorious imperceptible forms: offering a residence to the saṅgha, offering a prayer hall to the saṅgha, offering cushions or seats for the prayer hall, offering food regularly to the saṅgha, offering food to travelers and guests, offerings useful items to the sick and to medical professionals, and offering food to the saṅgha at the monastery if it is difficult for the monastics to go on alms round because of inclement weather. The Buddha praised these virtues as being "of great fruit, highly beneficial, splendid, and enormous in nature." The merit of those who offer these will "unceasingly increase at all times, whether they are walking, sitting, sleeping, or waking."

Our intention in making these seven offerings is that others will use them to create merit. Whenever they do so, we accumulate a virtuous imperceptible form. This imperceptible form continues until we die, unless it vanishes because we have strong afflictions or the prayer hall and so forth is destroyed. At our death the imperceptible form is lost, but its having-ceased (*naṣṭa*) goes on to future lives.<sup>59</sup> When suitable conditions arise, it will ripen and bring its happy result.

Another example of the third type of restraint is the imperceptible form that arises when we ask someone to perform a constructive or destructive physical or verbal action. For example, a military commander accumulates the karma of killing by ordering his soldiers to kill the enemy. Although he does not kill with his own hands, he accumulates the nonvirtuous imperceptible form of killing each time one of his soldiers kills. The military commander will experience the suffering result of these actions of

killing, as will the soldiers. When we tell friends and relatives to give donations to those in need, charities, and temples, we accumulate virtuous imperceptible forms when they make the offerings.

Vasubandhu cites the above two situations — creating merit through certain material objects and accumulating karma when we order or ask others to perform an action — as reasons to prove the existence of imperceptible forms. Without imperceptible forms, our merit from offering the seven substances could not increase if later our mind were in a nonvirtuous or neutral state. Without the existence of imperceptible forms, we could not accumulate nonvirtue if our mind were in a virtuous state at the time someone we told to steal goes out and robs. This is because we cannot accumulate destructive karma when our mind is in a virtuous state and cannot accumulate merit when our mind is in a nonvirtuous state.

Furthermore, while in meditative equipoise on emptiness on the path of seeing, āryas possess all branches of the eightfold path. If there were no imperceptible forms, they could not possess right speech, right action, and right livelihood at that time. Also, the fact that precepts and ethical restraints are imperceptible forms enables them to act as a dam that impedes transgressions.

While the explanation of imperceptible forms is found in the *Treasury of Knowledge*, a text expressing Vaibhāṣika and Sautrāntika tenets, many Tibetan scholars say it is also accepted by Prāsaṅgikas. To support this, they point to a passage in the *Discrimination of the Five Aggregates*, a text attributed to Candrakīrti that describes imperceptible forms as “any form that is a phenomena source that is neither visible nor obstructive and can only be perceived by the mental consciousness, such as ethical restraints, antirestraints . . .”<sup>60</sup>

By saying that physical and verbal karmas are the mental factor of intention, Sautrāntikas, Cittamātrins, and Svātantrikas have difficulty explaining what physical actions are and how physical movement of the body is karma. The Prāsaṅgika presentation is more aligned with conventions. They say that in the action of prostrating, there is the physical karma that is a perceptible form — the form of the body moving. In addition, there is an intention that motivates that action, and that intention is the mental karma of prostrating. All tenet schools agree that the second link

of dependent origination is the mental factor of intention (when the other branches of a karmic path are complete). The karma of harsh words or the karma of saving someone's life is the mental factor of intention that motivates those actions; this intention leaves the karmic potential that brings forth a new rebirth.

According to Vaibhāṣikas and Prāsaṅgikas, imperceptible forms belong to the aggregate of form but are forms for mental consciousness (*dharmāyatanarūpa*). As such, they are included in the phenomena source (*dharmāyatana*), not the form source (*rūpāyatana*).

I have a theory to explain why Vaibhāṣikas and Prāsaṅgikas agree that physical and verbal actions are form, whereas the other schools say they are intention. Vaibhāṣikas are not very analytical; they understand things according to worldly conventions and the perceptions of ordinary people. In worldly conventions, we say, “I heard her speak the truth. We saw him beat the dog.” On the basis of these ordinary conventions, we speak of physical and verbal actions as things that we see and hear — as forms.

Sautrāntikas, Cittamātrins, and Svātantrikas posit things on the basis of their being objective phenomena that exist from their own side. The originator of the Svātantrika school, Bhāvaviveka, said in the *Blaze of Reasoning*:

We also actually impute the term “self” to [the mental] consciousness conventionally . . . because [the mental] consciousness takes rebirth, it is said that it is the self.<sup>61</sup>

All schools who accept rebirth say that the self transmigrates. People who are unable to posit phenomena as existing by mere designation usually posit the mind — specifically the mental consciousness — to be the self, since it, and not the body, is what transmigrates. Within the mental consciousness, only the mental factor of intention can be pointed to as being karma. Why? When these people analyze actions while considering them to be objectively existent, they see that unless an intention is involved, an action cannot be karma. A boulder rolling downhill is action, but not karma. Thus they point to the mental factor of intention as the karma and not the physical and verbal actions per se.

According to Prāsaṅgikas, if we analytically search for something that objectively exists beyond the conventional norm, we cannot find anything. They thus accept things as existing merely by convention, and conventionally we say we perceive physical and verbal actions through our senses. For this reason, Prāsaṅgikas accept physical and verbal karmas to be form.

## *Gloomy and Bright Karmas and Their Effects*

The Buddha spoke of four kinds of karma (MN 57.7):<sup>62</sup>

There are these four kinds of karma declared by me after I had realized them for myself by direct knowledge. What four? There is gloomy karma with gloomy results; there is bright karma with bright results; there is karma that is gloomy and bright with gloomy and bright results; there is karma that is neither gloomy nor bright, with neither gloomy nor bright results, which leads to the destruction of karma.

1. Nonvirtue is *gloomy karma with gloomy fruition*. It is afflictive by nature and produces disagreeable results in one of the three unfortunate states. Born there, afflictive contact arises, leading to afflictive painful feelings such as feelings experienced in the hell states.
2. *Bright karma and bright fruition* is virtue included in the form realm. The mental states of beings in this realm are either virtuous or neutral; their nonvirtuous mental factors have been temporarily suppressed, so their actions do not produce the *duḥkha* of pain.<sup>63</sup> Form-realm beings do not experience unpleasant feelings. Bright karma is created in a mindstream that is not mixed with negative thoughts; it brings a pleasant result that is unmixed with suffering in that being's mindstream.
3. *Gloomy-bright karma with gloomy-bright fruition* is the virtue of the desire realm. While this karma is bright in that it is virtuous, it arises in a mindstream that also has nonvirtuous thoughts, making it

gloomy-bright virtue. It yields pleasant results, but the mindstream in which it ripens also experiences painful feelings, making its result gloomy-bright. Human beings, some beings in the unfortunate states, such as pet animals, and some devas experience this.

4. *Unpolluted karma* is neither gloomy nor bright. Cyclic existence is perpetuated by polluted karma. Wise ones, who have realized emptiness directly, do not create polluted karma and free themselves from uncontrolled rebirth. Vasubandhu says (EPL 675, n 118):

Unpolluted karma causes the termination and the elimination of those three [types of] karma . . . Since it is contrary to entering into [the process of cyclic existence, unpolluted karma] is not included within the [three] realms; therefore it has no fruition [in saṃsāra].

In the consciousness that is an ārya's true path realizing emptiness nondually, the mental factor of intention is unpolluted karma. Arhats and pure-ground bodhisattvas also create unpolluted karma when they engage in other activities in post-meditation time. Such karma is unpolluted in that it is not created under the influence of ignorance; it is never nonvirtuous and does not generate causes for rebirth. It is the remedy to the above three types of karma, leads out of cyclic existence, and gives rise to true cessations and nirvāṇa. Until arhats leave their body, they will experience the results of previous karma, some of which may be painful. However, they do not react to pain by generating more afflictions, and thus do not accrue new karma.

Unpolluted karma also refers to the subtle intention that arhats and bodhisattvas on the pure grounds must generate for their physical, verbal, and mental actions owing to the presence of cognitive obscurations in their mindstreams. Unpolluted karma and the latencies of ignorance give rise to the mental body of arhats and bodhisattvas on the pure grounds. Buddhas do not have unpolluted karma because they have eliminated the cognitive obscurations. Being effortless and spontaneous, their actions are called awakening activities (T. *'phrin las*). These compassionate actions are a special type of activity that is effective because of buddhas' great virtue. Their ability to successfully use awakening activities to benefit sentient

beings depends on the accumulation of merit by those sentient beings and their karmic connection with the buddhas.

In terms of highest yoga tantra, the mind of someone experiencing the fourth-stage actual clear light has the mental factor of intention, which could be considered unpolluted mental karma. When this person emerges from the actual clear light, he or she immediately manifests a pure illusory body, which is unpolluted in the sense that the mind associated with it is free from afflictive obscurations. This illusory body is considered a physical phenomenon, so perhaps its actions could be considered unpolluted karma of the body and speech.

## *Purifying Destructive Karma*

With only a superficial glance, we may believe our actions are basically virtuous, but if we closely observe our physical, verbal, and mental activities we may find that our motivations for constructive action are often weak, the actions are done hurriedly or distractedly, and we forget to dedicate the merit. Constructive actions require much effort on our part, like a tired donkey carrying a heavy load uphill. On the other hand, when faced with circumstances in which acting negatively could bring immediate benefit to our selfish aims, we easily engage in destructive actions, like water flowing downhill. We have strong habits with such behavior from previous lives. Understanding this, mindful observance of our ethical standards and purification of past misdeeds becomes imperative to avoid pain and to secure happiness.

The *Sūtra Showing the Four Dharmas (Caturdharmanirdeśa Sūtra)* reveals an excellent practice for purifying all destructive actions — the four opponent powers — which were described briefly in chapter 6 (LC 1:252):

Maitreya, when a bodhisattva mahāsattva possesses these four powers, they will overcome any negativities they have done and accumulated. What are they? They are the power of regret, the power of the antidote, the power of resolve, and the power of reliance.

First learn to accurately assess your actions, accept responsibility for your misdeeds, admit them, and regret them. Strong regret is the key to purification, for without it there is no motivation to counteract negativities. Regret is not guilt, so do not despise yourself thinking that the more you berate yourself the more you atone for your misdeeds.

Make an effort to understand how you became involved in these negativities by reflecting, “Was my interpretation of the situation accurate or was it skewed by my self-centeredness? What was my motivation? How were my body, speech, and mind involved in this action? Do I engage in this action often? Did I rejoice afterward?” Then contemplate, using your Dharma knowledge, how you could think about and deal with a similar situation should it happen in the future. Such in-depth reflection will help you to uncover destructive emotional, verbal, and physical behaviors, and by understanding these, you can begin to change them.

In chapter 2 of *Engaging in the Bodhisattvas’ Deeds*, Śāntideva proposes many points to reflect on that evoke our regret. If we were to die at this moment, the seeds of these harmful actions would be on our mindstream, so alarmed at the prospect of experiencing an unfortunate rebirth, we should regret our nonvirtues and turn to the Three Jewels for guidance. Engaging in destructive actions out of attachment for friends and family is futile, considering that we will have to separate from them, and our destructive karma will continue with us into our next life. Misdeeds bring frightening results in this and future lives, so this is no time to be complacent. In this way, express regret (BCA 2.28–29):

Since beginningless cyclic existence,  
in this life and in others,  
unknowingly I committed negativities  
and caused them to be done [by others].

Overwhelmed by the mistakes of ignorance,  
I rejoiced in what was committed,  
but now, seeing these mistakes,  
from my heart I confess them to the Protectors.



Second, perform virtuous actions as an antidote to your misdeeds. Although all virtuous actions fulfill this, six practices in particular are recommended:

1. Recite, study, or contemplate sūtras, especially the Perfection of Wisdom Sūtras (Prajñāpāramitā Sūtras) and the *Sūtra of the Golden Light* (*Suvarṇaprabhā Sūtra*).
2. Meditate on emptiness by contemplating Nāgārjuna’s teachings or the *Heart Sūtra*.
3. Recite mantras containing the names of the buddhas, such as the Vajrasattva mantra.
4. Make buddha images and statues, create altars and shrines, and build stūpas or monasteries.
5. Make offerings to the buddhas and bodhisattvas.
6. Recite the names of buddhas, for example, the names of the thirty-five buddhas.

Prostrating to these buddhas with reverence for their excellent qualities while reciting their names is especially powerful. Meditation on bodhicitta — even for a few minutes — and engaging in actions motivated by bodhicitta have the power to purify the seeds of destructive karma created over eons. Other remedial actions are making donations to charities, monasteries, or spiritual practitioners; doing volunteer work in a hospital, Dharma center, or other health facility; and printing Dharma books for free distribution.

Third, make a strong determination to abandon such actions in the future. This fortifies your inner strength to oppose habitual destructive ways of thinking and acting and to change your ways; it is like making New Year’s resolutions, only you should keep these! If you cannot resolve to abandon certain actions forever, resolve to avoid them for a certain period of time. During that time, be very conscientious to avoid the action. This will give you confidence, and then you can extend the time some more.

Fourth, reestablish good relationships with the objects of our destructive actions — holy objects such as the Buddha, Dharma, and Saṅgha, or our spiritual mentors, or sentient beings. By taking refuge, we reaffirm our connection with the Three Jewels and our spiritual mentors. By generating

bodhicitta, we replace the negative intentions that caused us to harm others with positive feelings toward them.

The order of the four opponent powers may vary according to the specific purification practice you do. In Prostrations to the Thirty-Five Buddhas, first you take refuge and generate bodhicitta, then prostrate as the remedial action, followed by generating regret and resolve to avoid repeating the actions. In the Vajrasattva practice the order is taking refuge and generating bodhicitta, regret, reciting Vajrasattva's mantra as the remedial action, and resolving not to do the action again.

As ordinary beings we don't know where we will be reborn, and the time between this life and an unfortunate rebirth is one breath. If we don't purify our misdeeds and work hard to prevent an unfortunate rebirth before we die, it may be a long time before we have the opportunity to practice the Dharma again.

It's important to do purification before the seeds of harmful actions ripen; once a cup is broken, we cannot unbreak it. Similarly, doing pūjās after a suffering result has occurred cannot undo the present suffering, although it will create virtue that could reduce future suffering. The efficacy of the pūjā depends on a variety of factors, including the potency of the karmic seeds that are about to ripen.

Making specific predictions about the extent to which negativities have been reduced or eliminated is difficult and depends on many factors, such as the intensity of the regret, the sincerity of our resolve to refrain from repeating the action, the concentration with which we did the remedial behavior, and the sincerity of our refuge and bodhicitta. It also depends on whether we did the four opponent powers over a long or short period of time and whether all four opponent powers were applied or only some.

Although purification done by ordinary beings does not remove karmic seeds from the mindstream, it weakens them so that their results will be less intense or will last for a shorter period of time. Instead of experiencing a car accident, we may trip and stub our toe. Rather than suffering from domestic disharmony for years, we may endure it for only some weeks or months. Instead of being born in an unfortunate state, we may fall ill in this life. Understanding this, we will not become upset when we fall ill or encounter unpleasant situations. Instead we will think, "How fortunate that a powerful

destructive karma is now ripening. Compared to the intense suffering I would have experienced for a long time had it ripened in an unfortunate rebirth, I can manage the current misery.” Seeing the situation in this way protects our mind from creating more negative karma by angrily reacting to problems. It enables our mind to remain unperturbed by this comparatively small suffering that will soon end.

Purification can also prevent the coming together of the cooperative conditions for a karma to ripen. Purification may “burn” the karmic seeds so that they do not bring a result, but only by realizing emptiness directly is the potency to produce unfortunate rebirths completely eliminated. It is good to seal purification practices, as well as all our virtuous practices, by contemplating emptiness and dependent arising. We do this by reflecting that the I who created the destructive action, the action itself, its karmic seed, and so forth arise dependently and yet are empty of inherent existence. Similarly, the person doing the purification practice, the action of purifying, and the karmic seeds that are purified lack inherent existence but exist dependently. Although all the factors involved in creating nonvirtue and in purifying negativities lack inherent existence, they still exist and function on the conventional level, and so purification is important.

Doing the four opponent powers repeatedly may bring certain signs of purification or the reduction of the strength of the seeds of destructive actions. We may repeatedly dream of being with our spiritual mentor or the saṅgha, or in a temple. Dreaming that we walk on a mountain or see the rising of the sun or moon may also indicate purification. This does not mean that every dream involving these is a sign of purification; dreams are due to a variety of factors. Changes in daily life occurrences also indicate purification. Whereas previously our mind was often unclear and heavy, now we are more attentive when listening to Dharma teachings or studying. We understand the meaning more easily and have deeper meditation experiences. Our mind is less resistant to the Dharma and integrating the Dharma in our lives becomes much easier.

While purification is always possible and advisable, avoiding destructive actions is better. We may glue a cup back together, but it’s better not to have broken it to start with. However, when strong negative emotions, mental obscuration, lack of mindfulness or conscientiousness, or

carelessness overpower us and we act negatively, it's important not to despair but to remember that we can purify these actions, and then put energy into doing so. This not only aids our spiritual practice but also helps us psychologically by reducing guilt and making us more honest with ourselves.

Being indolent in purifying our nonvirtue only harms us. I find it amusing, yet sad, that although some people call themselves Buddhists, they heed the advice of fortune tellers more than the teachings of the omniscient Buddha. The Buddha warned us that suffering will come from our harmful actions, yet we ignore this and think there is no need to exert so much energy to purify our karma by doing the four opponent powers. But if a fortune teller tells us that we will fall ill unless we do a particular antidotal activity, we are eager to follow his instructions. It should not be like this!

## *Creating Our Future*

Contemplating karma and its effects makes us question if doing something simply because it feels good in the moment or brings us temporary benefit is wise. Drinking liquor may make us temporarily feel good, but we also say and do many foolish things. Initially certain actions may benefit our self-centered aims, but their karmic consequences in the long run will bring suffering. On the other hand, waking up early in the morning to do our meditation practice may be uncomfortable now, but it brings so many beneficial results later. Being honest in business may initially bring less profit, but it will result in greater security and wealth later.

The Buddha suggested that we consider the long-term karmic effects of our actions in order to evaluate if we are creating the causes for the kind of future we want to have. Reflecting deeply and in detail about the effects of karma will increase our motivation to become more mindful and conscientious regarding our behavior, speech, and thoughts. Such reflection also gives us a more expansive view of how things operate. Instead of simply considering the immediate effects of our actions, strong as they may be, we begin to care about even more potent effects that can ripen years or even lifetimes in the future.

The Buddha outlined excellent advice for how to make a decision or tackle a difficult situation: if an action brings both long- and short-term benefits, do it. If it brings long-term benefit, but temporary discomfort, doing it is still worthwhile. But if it brings immediate happiness yet causes suffering as the long-term karmic effect, then avoid it. If it brings misery now and in the future, definitely avoid it.

These teachings on karma are not theoretical; they relate to our daily life activities when we continually engage in actions that become the causes for pain or for happiness and awakening. Although understanding the detailed workings of karma and explaining them by reasoning alone is difficult, accepting the natural law of karma and its results is supported by more valid reasons and fewer logical inconsistencies than other explanations. Knowing this, be confident in thinking, “Having attained a precious human life, I have the potential and the responsibility to create the causes for happiness, and I will do this.”

## *Who Creates Constructive Karma?*

Scriptures say that the demarcation between Dharma and non-Dharma actions is the presence or absence of the eight worldly concerns. They further say that Dharma motivations begin with the aspiration for a good rebirth, followed by the determination to be free from cyclic existence and attain liberation, and culminate in bodhicitta.

However, people can create constructive karma without believing in rebirth or having a Dharma motivation. For example, at the time of the Buddha, an old man wanted to become a monk, but Śāriputra could not determine if he had created enough merit to receive ordination. The Buddha, with his supernatural power that sees the karma of all sentient beings, observed that in a previous life, the old man had been a fly on a piece of cow dung that floated in water around a stūpa. Although this tiny insect did not have the motivation to take a human rebirth and become a monk, through contact with this holy object he accumulated the merit that enabled him to be ordained. Such merit is called the “root of virtue concordant with liberation,” which arises when sentient beings have contact with powerful holy objects.<sup>64</sup> This is a unique kind of dependent arising

wherein the object becomes powerful owing to the buddhas' and ārya bodhisattvas' inconceivable collection of merit and to their altruistic aspiration that anyone who even sees, hears, thinks about, or contacts them receives benefits that will ripen in awakening.

Non-Buddhist practitioners who develop very high states of meditative concentration also create constructive karma that brings fortunate rebirth in the form and formless realms in their next lives, where they experience the bliss that arises from deep states of samādhi.

Many human beings act with kindness. They may know nothing about karma or future lives yet feel compassion for those who are suffering and help them motivated by genuine care. They work hard without getting angry or complaining; they are honest and respect those worthy of respect. Some care for the ill and elderly, others teach children or work to prevent global warming. Some seek protection for wildlife and endangered species, others strive for human rights. Such actions create merit leading to a good rebirth.

Mother Teresa was not Buddhist; she did not necessarily accept rebirth, although she probably aspired to be born in heaven. Her dedication to the welfare of the poor was extraordinary, and the actions she did to care for them were certainly virtuous. She created much merit that will certainly bring happy results.

The law of karma and its results functions whether someone believes in it or not. Similarly, whether someone believes that gravity exists or not, she still walks on the ground because of its power. Someone who does not know what constitutes nonvirtue may still engage in destructive actions and experience their painful results even if he does not consider his actions unethical.

Secular ethics is a useful guideline for those who do not adhere to any spiritual path and want their daily actions to be beneficial. Their main aim is their own interests in this life, but they consciously focus on not harming others when fulfilling this aim. In this way, even if not all of their daily actions are virtuous, at least they will be neutral and some will be virtuous. Animals, too, create constructive and destructive karma. Their ignorance, however, hinders them from deliberately refraining from harmful acts and engaging constructive ones.

Needless to say, someone who gives a gift to bribe another person is not practicing generosity. Similarly, harming one living being in order to give to another is not the practice of generosity, nor is giving weapons the practice of generosity.

In the early years of the Communist Party in China, some of its members had a real sense of altruism and dedicated their entire lives to improving the welfare of the peasants and the poor. This was virtuous. Unfortunately, they were biased, and with hatred destroyed the lives and possessions of the educated and the wealthy. These Communist officials had two contradictory emotions: compassion for the poor and animosity toward the rich. These mutually opposed emotional states constitute two separate mental states; one motivates virtuous activities, the other nonvirtuous actions. They create different karma depending on which mental state motivates them to act at a particular time and what act they do. Such situations are not unique to Communist officials. We see this happens quite often in our own lives as well.

## *The Complexity of Karma*

Some accounts of karmic events are puzzling. For example, Śāntideva relates the story of Śāriputra relinquishing bodhicitta. Śāriputra was a bodhisattva on the path of accumulation, whose bodhicitta was not stable. Once, another person returned Śāriputra's generosity with ingratitude, provoking Śāriputra to give up bodhicitta. Scriptures say that after generating bodhicitta, if someone relinquishes it, he is reborn as a hell being. Yet Śāriputra achieved arhatship in that life.<sup>65</sup> How can this be explained? Śāntideva responds by saying that the complex workings of karma are beyond our understanding; only the buddhas' wisdom comprehends it fully.

Another story says that Nāgārjuna died from decapitation as a result of karma he created in a previous life when he accidentally cut off the head of an ant with a scythe. Explaining this story in the context of the general Buddhist understanding of karma is difficult, considering that one sūtra says that Nāgārjuna was a highly realized bodhisattva. He was renowned as a great practitioner and teacher of *Guhyasamāja Tantra*, and in *Ocean of*

*Reasoning*, Tsongkhapa spoke of him having fully developed bodhicitta and wisdom realizing emptiness. If such an outstanding person as Nāgārjuna with these magnificent qualities was unable to achieve buddhahood in a single lifetime, then the teaching in the *Guhyasamāja Tantra* that attaining awakening in a single lifetime is possible must be a fairy tale. In this light, we see that the story about him being decapitated because of having inadvertently killed an ant cannot be taken in a literal or ordinary way.<sup>66</sup>

In the *Sublime Continuum*, Maitreya said that the Buddha, while not wavering from absorption in emptiness, appears in diverse emanations. From this perspective, Śākyamuni Buddha was an emanation body. Emanation bodies come from the enjoyment body, and this, in turn, is a manifestation of the truth body. Therefore, the Buddha was awakened before he appeared in our world in the form of the prince from Kapilavastu. All the activities and events in his life were in fact demonstrations done intentionally to teach us. From this perspective, it could be that Nāgārjuna was already a buddha and the story of his death was a demonstration done to teach us.

The law of karma and its effects is very subtle, and its intricacies are beyond our understanding; only an omniscient buddha is able to know these fully. Since the Buddha is not present here and now, we cannot ask him for clarification regarding the subtle aspects of karma. Buddhaghosa says (Vism 19.17):

The succession of kamma and its result . . . is clear in its true nature only to the Buddha's knowledge of kamma and its result, which knowledge is not shared by disciples.

Vasubandhu agrees (ADKB):

Nobody but the Buddha understands in its entirety karma, its infusion, its activity, and the fruit that is obtained.<sup>67</sup>

When discussing karma and how it ripens, the number of complications is enormous. Unfortunately, my head is too small for this vast expanse of knowledge. Now I see the truth in Milarepa's statement, "I don't know about the complex issues of *Parchin* (lit. "crossing to the other shore"); it



explains the bodhisattvas' paths and practices), but if you can move from saṃsāra to nirvāṇa, then you have indeed gone to the other shore. I don't know about the complications of Vinaya (lit. "taming," and refers to monastic precepts and rites), but if this very crude mind of yours is tamed, then this is Vinaya."

## *Creating the Causes for Higher Rebirth, Liberation, and Awakening*

Nāgārjuna sets out the aims of the spiritual path (RA 3–4):

That [disciple] first [practices] the Dharma of higher rebirth;  
afterward comes the highest good,  
because, having obtained higher rebirth,  
one proceeds in stages to the highest good.

Here, [we] maintain that higher rebirth is happiness,  
and highest good is liberation.  
In brief, the method for attaining them  
is summarized as faith and wisdom.

Can people who are not Buddhist create constructive karma for higher rebirth and the highest good of liberation and awakening? For an action to become the cause for upper rebirth, it is not necessary that the person doing it have the motivation to attain that state, but for an action to become the cause for the ultimate spiritual aims of liberation and awakening, the person must have the intention to attain those states.

Candrakīrti says that ethical conduct is a cause for higher rebirth, liberation, and full awakening (MMA 24):

For common beings, those born from the word [śrāvakas],  
those set toward solitary awakening, and  
those conqueror's heirs [bodhisattvas], a cause of the highest good  
and higher rebirth is none other than proper ethical conduct.

Tsongkhapa comments in *Illuminating the Thought*, a commentary to Candrakīrti's *Supplement*, that this does not exclude other virtuous actions from being causes of higher rebirth and highest good.

There are, however, many other causes that are not ethical conduct. Thus this means that to achieve special higher states and the highest good, a definite relation with ethical conduct is necessary. If ethical conduct is forsaken, there is no way that these can be accomplished.<sup>68</sup>

There are three causes for a precious human life: (1) *Observance of pure ethical conduct* entails, at the least, avoiding the ten destructive paths of actions and practicing the ten constructive ones. It is the projecting cause that makes us take rebirth as a human being. (2) *The cultivation of other virtuous qualities* is the practice of generosity, fortitude, meditation, and so on. It brings conducive circumstances for Dharma practice: done with proper motivation, generosity is the cause for wealth; ethical conduct brings good health, long life, and good relationships; fortitude produces an attractive appearance; joyous effort enables us to be able to attain our goals. Concentration maintains our positive motivation, and wisdom enables us to choose qualified spiritual mentors and understand the Dharma correctly. (3) *Powerful dedication prayers* direct our constructive karma to ripen in a precious human life. Having these good circumstances in future lives will enable us to continue on the path to awakening with ease. Planting the karmic seeds to have them is done in this life.

Without living ethically and observing karma and its effects, a fortunate rebirth is not possible. The First Dalai Lama says (EPL 655):

As it says in (Āryadeva's) *The Four Hundred*: "By ethical conduct one goes to a high rebirth; by the view one goes to the supreme state." For the purpose of obtaining higher rebirths, ethical conduct is foremost.

To attain liberation, in addition to renunciation of saṃsāra and the determination to attain nirvāṇa, we must have the wisdom realizing emptiness. Renunciation and the aspiration for nirvāṇa give us the

motivation to practice the path of cleansing the mind of ignorance, which is the root of saṃsāra. The wisdom realizing emptiness is the actual realization that overcomes ignorance. The Buddha’s teachings describe how to cultivate renunciation and wisdom realizing emptiness; we should examine if other paths contain these teachings.

To attain buddhahood, two critical factors are required: bodhicitta and the wisdom realizing emptiness. As above, the wisdom realizing emptiness is necessary to cleanse the mind of all ignorance, which keeps us bound in cyclic existence, and its latencies, which inhibit the mind from knowing all existents. Bodhicitta gives us the aspiration and energy to create the vast merit necessary to attain full awakening. Here, too, the Buddhadharma teaches us how to cultivate these two factors, and we need to examine if other paths also contain these teachings.

When we speak of higher spiritual goals such as liberation and awakening, the meaning of “Dharma” becomes more specific. It must be the teachings and the path that lead to nirvāṇa and awakening. In this context, actions motivated by attachment to rebirth in cyclic existence and actions done without the correct understanding of emptiness are not suitable.

The attainment of full awakening requires the bodhicitta motivation. After all, how could there be a buddha who lacks compassion and the altruistic intention? In *Bodhisattva Grounds (Bodhisattva Bhūmi)*, Asaṅga says that someone who has fully dedicated his or her body, speech, and mind for the welfare of sentient beings continuously holds the thought to do all actions totally for the benefit of all sentient beings. With such an intention, she has no fault or infraction in the bodhisattva training and she creates great virtue. Śāntideva says (BCA 1.18–19):

And for those who have perfectly seized this mind,  
with the thought never to turn away  
from totally liberating  
the infinite forms of life,

from that time hence,  
even while asleep or unconcerned,

a force of merit equal to the sky  
will perpetually ensue.

Kedrup, one of Tsongkhapa's foremost disciples, once praised Tsongkhapa, saying, "Your simple act of breathing accumulates enormous virtue." I don't think this means that Tsongkhapa has bodhicitta manifest in his mind each time he breathes, thinking, "I inhale to become a buddha for the benefit of sentient beings." Rather, all of his actions — including eating, sleeping, and so on — are motivated by or associated with powerful bodhicitta. Nāgārjuna says (RA 483):

Like the earth, water, wind, and fire,  
medicinal herbs, and the trees in the wilderness,  
may I always freely be an object of enjoyment  
by all beings as they wish.

If someone conjoins bodhicitta with the wisdom directly realizing reality, he or she is on the path to fulfilling the collections of merit and wisdom and becoming a buddha.

## *A Deeper Perspective on Causality*

Karma and its effects is sometimes taught in simple terms to new audiences in order to communicate the importance of ethical conduct. As a result, some people may think about karma and its effects in a very simplistic way, as in "I hit you this life and you will hit me in the next life." As we've seen, the effect of an action is dependent on many conditions and factors. In this light, it is important to view karma and its effects within the broader perspective of dependent arising and emptiness.

Dependent arising is the innermost treasure of the Buddha's teaching. By understanding it, practitioners are able to gradually accomplish their temporary and ultimate aims. Happiness in saṃsāra — including higher rebirth — comes about by understanding the dependent arising of karma and its effects. This understanding forms the basis for adopting the ethical

conduct of restraining from destructive actions and engaging in constructive ones.

However, understanding dependent arising in terms of karma and its effects — or causal dependence in general — is not the complete understanding of dependent arising. Animals also understand cause and effect to some extent. If we investigate the meaning of causal dependence further, how do we account for the fact that a cause produces an effect? Why is one event dependent on certain other specific events and not on others? This points to a deeper way to understand cause and effect. If cause and effect existed inherently, they would have a fixed essence; they would be self-enclosed entities that could not interact with other things. For cause and effect to function, things must be interrelated, and thus the very nature of things must be dependent. Having the nature of dependence, one thing can produce another, and a cause and its effect are related.

Causes do not depend on their effects in a temporal sense — we know that causes precede the effects that depend on them — but they do depend on effects in terms of their identity. Without there being a potential effect, something cannot be identified as a cause. The very identity of something as a cause depends on its effect; cause and effect are defined in terms of each other. Because they are mutually dependent, they do not possess an inherent essence. They exist in dependence on term and concept; they exist by dependent designation. If they had any findable nature, they could not be related as cause and effect. Nor could their identity be mutually defined in terms of each other.

In this way, understanding dependent arising in terms of cause and effect leads to the deeper understanding of phenomena as empty of inherent existence and to the understanding that phenomena are mutually dependent and exist by dependent designation. Comprehending this will enable us to counteract ignorance and attain liberation.

## *The Path of the Initial-Level Practitioner: A Conclusion*

This completes the topics of the path in common with the initial-level practitioner. As a preliminary to the path in common with the middle-level practitioner and the path of the advanced practitioner, it cannot be omitted or ignored. This practice is said to be “in common with” the initial-level practitioner in that we do not seek good rebirths as an end in themselves. Our final aim is full awakening; we keep this bodhicitta motivation in mind from the first step on the path until the last.

Cherish your precious human life and the possibilities it grants you, and be aware that it is hard to obtain and does not last long. Train yourself to catch your proclivities for the eight worldly concerns and use awareness of your mortality to make wise choices about how to use your time and resources. Contemplate karmic causality to encourage yourself to create the causes for happiness and abandon the causes for suffering. By properly meditating on these topics and integrating them into your life, you will create a strong foundation for the practices to come and make your life meaningful.

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# Notes

1. In the Pāli tradition, the four seals are not mentioned in the context of distinguishing a teaching as Buddhist. However, there is overlap between the first three seals and three characteristics of saṃsāric phenomena found in the Pāli suttas, and the peaceful state of nirvāṇa is certainly spoken of in the Pāli suttas.
2. *Treasury of Knowledge* and *Lamrim Chenmo* consider unintentional actions such as accidentally stepping on an insect to be a type of karma whose result is not definite to be experienced.
3. In some cases ignorance (*avidya*) and confusion (*moha*) are synonymous, both referring to not understanding or misapprehending the ultimate nature of reality. In other cases, as is the situation here, confusion refers to not understanding or misunderstanding karma and its effects, and ignorance refers to not understanding or misapprehending the ultimate nature of reality.
4. Jeffrey Hopkins, *Maps of the Profound* (Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion Publications, 2003), 948. For more on the Prāsaṅgika view of reliable cognizers, see 947–55.
5. Candrakīrti's list of four reliable cognizers differs from the list that Dharmakīrti set forth, which is commonly taught in Mind and Awareness (*Lorig*) courses in Tibetan monastic universities. What constitutes each type of reliable cognizer differs as well. Usually people first learn the seven types of awarenesses according to Dharmakīrti's presentation, where reliable cognizers are of two types: direct and inferential. Inferential reliable cognizers are of three types: factual inferential cognizers, inferential cognizers based on renown, and inferential cognizers based on belief. Dharmakīrti also asserts a fourth direct cognizer — apperception. In this book we are following Candrakīrti's presentation.
6. These four reliable cognizers were commonly accepted in ancient India by both Buddhist and non-Buddhist schools. In addition to direct perceivers and inferential cognizers, which the Vaiśeṣika school accepted, the Sāṃkhya school added reliable cognizers depending on scripture and the Nyāya school added reliable cognizers using an example or analogy.
7. Comprehended objects are objects cognized or known by a reliable cognizer.
8. Chokyi Gyaltzen, *Presentation of Tenets* (*Grub mtha'i rnam bzhag*), [http://www.glensvensson.org/uploads/7/5/6/1/7561348/presentation\\_of\\_tenets.pdf](http://www.glensvensson.org/uploads/7/5/6/1/7561348/presentation_of_tenets.pdf).
9. This is according to Jamyang Shepa's *Great Exposition of Buddhist and Non-Buddhist Views on the Nature of Reality*. Chokyi Gyaltzen says there are two divisions of direct reliable cognizers: nonconceptual and conceptual. The two presentations come to the same point.
10. Some people may initially have difficulty accepting the Buddha being a credible person as a valid reason for accepting a scriptural statement. Dharmakīrti agrees that this is not an indisputable reason. While we can prove the possibility of awakening by inference, we ordinary beings do not have the ability to know incontrovertibly that a specific individual is indeed awakened. Still, examining the Buddha's qualities enables us to make an informed decision to give credence to his statements.
11. Translated by John Dunne.
12. Yojana is a Vedic measurement.
13. See the story of the Kālāmas in *Approaching the Buddhist Path*, 126.



14. In philosophical texts, consciousness is equivalent to knower (T. *rig pa*) and awareness (T. *blo*). The meaning of *rigpa* in Dzogchen is different, and both *rig pa* and *blo* can be translated into English in several ways.
15. Absorption without discrimination (*asaṃjñāsamāpatti*) and absorption of cessation (*nirodhasamāpatti*) are not minds but are designations for states where consciousness does not function because something temporarily inhibits its arising. According to Vasubandhu, the mental consciousness is not present at this time.
16. T. W. Rhys-Davids, *The Questions of King Milinda* (New York: Dover Publications, 1963).
17. In the Sanskrit tradition, life faculty (*jīvitendriya*) is classified as an abstract composite. As the state of living, it is the basis for consciousness and warmth.
18. According to the Pāli Abhidhamma, mindfulness accompanies only a virtuous mind.
19. These three understandings are also called the “three wisdoms.” Many scholars say that serenity is necessary for the understanding arising from meditation to be present. For example, the wisdom arising from meditation on emptiness arises together with the union of serenity and insight on emptiness, not before.
20. “View of a personal identity” is also translated as “view of the transitory collection” or “view of the perishing aggregates,” which are more literal translations of the Tibetan term. Here “aggregates” and “collection” refer to the five psychophysical aggregates. They are perishing and transitory because they change in each moment. According to the lower schools, the aggregates are the observed object of the view of a personal identity, whereas according to the Prāsaṅgikas, the aggregates are the basis of designation of the I, and the mere I is the observed object of the view of a personal identity. The lower schools say the view of a personal identity grasps the person to be self-sufficient and substantially existent.
21. Translators from Pāli often translate this term as “view of rules and rites” and explain it as meaning dogmatic clinging to ethical precepts and religious observances.
22. This term has also been translated as “meaning generality” and “mental image.”
23. There are three types of conceptuality — a conceptual consciousness apprehending: (1) A sound generality. The reverberation of the sound “pot” is in our mind, although we don’t know what it refers to. (2) A conceptual appearance (meaning generality). An image of the pot appears to our mind, although we don’t know the term “pot.” (3) The sound generality and conceptual appearance suitable to be mixed. We associate the conceptual appearance of pot and the term “pot.” We may think by using the sound of words, pictures, or both. Correct conceptual consciousnesses are determinative knowers — they think, “This is such and such.”
24. Elizabeth Napper, *Traversing the Spiritual Path*, ed. Jeffrey Hopkins (UMA Institute for Tibetan Studies, <http://uma-tibet.org>, January 2016), 204.
25. According to Dr. Jeffrey Hopkins, his teacher Geshe Gedun Lodro said that from the viewpoint of a conceptual appearance being the opposite of what is not the object, it is permanent. However, from the perspective of a conceptual appearance being a mental creation, it is a functioning thing; for example, when we visualize a meditational deity, the conceptual appearance of the deity has an effect on our mind.
26. All Mahāyāna practitioners practice the Perfection Vehicle, including those who also practice the Vajra Vehicle. Here the Perfection Vehicle and the Vajra Vehicle are considered to be separate branches of the Mahāyāna in order to illustrate some of their differences.
27. Matthieu Ricard, *On the Path to Enlightenment* (Boston: Shambhala Publications, 2013), 150.
28. Maitreya’s text is written from the Yogācāra-Svātantrika Madhyamaka viewpoint. Here the higher training in wisdom realizes the selflessness of persons — the lack of a self-sufficient,

substantially existent person. The seventh quality refers to realizing the two types of selflessness of phenomena as asserted by the Cittamātrins. According to the Prāsaṅgikas, both the third and seventh qualities refer to realizing the emptiness of inherent existence of persons and phenomena.

29. Thomas Cleary, trans., *Entry into the Realm of Reality* (Boston: Shambhala Publications, 1989), 151.
30. The English translation of the section on “Relying on the Teacher” is twenty-three pages long. Only half of one page is dedicated to the topic of seeing our spiritual mentors as the Buddha.
31. T. *dmigs pa'i yul du byas nas bsgom pa*. Its object is a “content object.”
32. T. *ngo bor skyes nas bsgom pa*. Its object is an “aspect object.”
33. Tenzin Gyatso and Thubten Chodron, *Approaching the Buddhist Path* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2017), chap. 11.
34. Thupten Jinpa, trans. <http://www.tibetanclassics.org/html-assets/WorldTranscendentHym.pdf>.
35. Translated by Geshe Dadul Namgyal.
36. Translated by Geshe Dorje Damdul.
37. Olivia Goldhill, “A Civil Servant Missing Most of His Brain Challenges Our Most Basic Theories of Consciousness,” Quartz Media, <http://qz.com/722614/a-civil-servant-missing-most-of-his-brain-challenges-our-most-basic-theories-of-consciousness/>.
38. Dr. Ian Stevenson is a noted exception. See his book *Cases of the Reincarnation Type* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1975).
39. In the case of visual perception, scientists also speak of the aspect of the object appearing on the retina.
40. Also see Sara Boin-Webb, trans., *Abhidharmasamuccaya: The Compendium of the Higher Teaching (Philosophy) by Asaṅga* (Fremont, CA: Asian Humanities Press, 2001), 85.
41. Damdul Namgyal, “Sutra in Response to a Query over What Happens after Death: A Review,” <http://thubtenchodron.org/2008/08/dialog-regarding-rebirth/>.
42. The eight freedoms are found in Nāgārjuna’s *Letter to a Friend (Suhṛllekha)*, and the ten fortunes are from Asaṅga’s *Śrāvaka Grounds (Śrāvaka Bhūmi)*.
43. Tsongkhapa notes that ordinary beings born in the formless realm, and desire-realm gods who are always distracted by sense pleasures, are in unfree states because they lack the opportunity to create virtue.
44. Thomas Cleary, trans., *The Flower Ornament Scripture* (Boston: Shambhala Publications, 1993), 1218.
45. The eight worldly concerns are also mentioned in the *Mañjuśrī-buddhakṣetra-guṇavyūha Sūtra*.
46. H. H. the Dalai Lama, *Mind in Comfort and Ease* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2007), 114, 116–17.
47. Glenn Mullin, trans., *Gems of Wisdom from the Seventh Dalai Lama* (Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion Publications, 1999), 43.
48. Jan Nattier, *A Few Good Men: The Bodhisattva Path According to The Inquiry of Ugra (Ugraparipṛcchā)* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2003), 246–47.
49. Andrew Olendzki, trans., “Dhammapada,” [Wikiquote.org](https://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Dhammapada), <https://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Dhammapada>.
50. *Lord of death* is anthropomorphizing mortality.
51. For a more detailed explanation of His Holiness’s views on the interface of evolution and karma, see *The Universe in a Single Atom: The Convergence of Science and Spirituality* (New York: Morgan Road Books, 2005).

52. Garma C. C. Chang, ed., *A Treasury of Mahāyāna Sūtras: Selections from the Mahāratnakūta* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1983), 244.
53. LC 1:227.
54. Cittamātrins and below say that the cause of a ripening result must be either polluted virtue or nonvirtue, whereas Mādhyamikas assert that the causes of a ripening result and that result itself may also be unpolluted virtue accumulated by ārya bodhisattvas. They cite a buddha's signs and marks as an example; they are the virtuous ripening results of the unpolluted uninterrupted paths of the ten grounds. (Causes for a buddha's signs and marks may also be created while we are ordinary beings, as explained in the *Precious Garland* and the *Ornament*.) Similarly, Mādhyamikas say that the unpolluted ripening results of ārya bodhisattvas — their being born wheel-turning monarchs and lords of certain realms — come from unpolluted causes created on the bodhisattva path.
55. The *Sūtra on the Ten Grounds* reverses the last two results.
56. Defunct karma corresponds with indefinite karma — karma that is not certain to ripen or whose time of ripening is uncertain — in the Sanskrit tradition.
57. Negativity includes the ten nonvirtues, other destructive actions, and nonvirtuous mental states. Negativity and nonvirtuous karma are not synonyms. For example, anger is a negativity but is not a nonvirtuous action because it is an affliction.
58. Only Vaibhāṣikas and Prāsaṅgikas accept imperceptible forms, but the way they assert them differs. Vaibhāṣikas say they are substantially established, whereas the Prāsaṅgikas do not. The other tenet schools do not accept imperceptible forms.
59. A having-ceased is the potential that brings the result of that action. It will be explained in a later volume.
60. Not all scholars agree that Candrakīrti is the author of this text. Also, not all Tibetan scholars agree that Prāsaṅgikas accept imperceptible forms.
61. Jeffrey Hopkins, *Tsong-kha-pa's Final Exposition of Wisdom* (Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion Publications, 2008), 41.
62. These four are also mentioned in the First Dalai Lama's Abhidharma commentary (EPL 607–8).
63. Even Brahmā's arrogance — due to his mistakenly thinking that he created the universe — is neutral.
64. This special root of virtue is described in the scriptures in the context of differentiating virtue concordant with liberation, which is a synonym for the path of accumulation, and the root of virtue concordant with liberation, which is created owing to the power of the holy object and becomes a cause for liberation. Whereas virtue concordant with liberation requires that the person has the aspiration for liberation, the root of virtue concordant with liberation does not.
65. The great twentieth-century Theravāda meditator Ajahn Mun in Thailand had taken the bodhisattva ethical restraints in a previous life and relinquished them in this life. Yet he is said to have attained arhatship in this life.
66. Karma is defined as intention. Some stories — such as this story about the cause of Nāgārjuna's death — suggest that karma may be accrued even when no intention is present. We cannot say with complete conviction that these stories are false, because the subtle workings of karma are beyond our comprehension. In some cultures, such startling stories play an important role in helping people to understand the importance of conscientiously observing karma and its effects.
67. William S. Waldron, “How Innovative Is the Ālayavijñāna?” [n.d.], [http://www.middlebury.edu/media/view/440169/original/waldron\\_how\\_innovative\\_is\\_alayavijna0.pdf](http://www.middlebury.edu/media/view/440169/original/waldron_how_innovative_is_alayavijna0.pdf).

68. Jeffrey Hopkins, trans., *Compassion in Tibetan Buddhism* (Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion Publications, 1985), 200.

# Glossary

*abstract composites (viprayukta-saṃskāra)*. Impermanent phenomena that are neither forms nor consciousnesses.

*actual clear light (of the fourth stage)*. A stage on the completion stage of highest yoga tantra in which all winds have been dissolved in the indestructible drop at the heart and the fundamental, innate clear light mind directly perceives emptiness.

*afflictions (kleśa)*. Mental factors that disturb the tranquility of the mind. These include disturbing emotions and wrong views.

*afflictive obscurations (kleśāvaraṇa)*. Obscurations that mainly prevent liberation; afflictions and their seeds.

*aggregates (skandha)*. The four or five components that make up a living being: form (except for beings born in the formless realm), feelings, discriminations, miscellaneous factors, and consciousnesses.

*analytical meditation (vicārabhāvanā, T. dpyad sgom)*. Meditation done to understand an object.

*appearing object (T. snang yul)*. The object that actually appears to a consciousness. The appearing object of a conceptual consciousness is a conceptual appearance of something.

*apprehended object (muṣṭibandhaviṣata, T. 'dzin btangs kyi yul)*. The main object with which the mind is concerned, that is, the object that the mind is getting at or understands. Synonymous with engaged object.

*arhat*. Someone who has eliminated all afflictive obscurations and attained liberation.

*ārya*. Someone who has directly and nonconceptually realized the emptiness of inherent existence.

*bardo (antarābhava)*. The intermediate state between one life and the next.

*basis of designation*. The collection of parts or factors in dependence on which an object is designated.

*bodhicitta*. A main mental consciousness induced by an aspiration to bring about the welfare of others and accompanied by an aspiration to attain full awakening oneself.

*bodhisattva*. Someone who has spontaneous bodhicitta.

*causally concordant behavioral result*. Karmic result in which our action is similar to an action we did in a previous life.

*causally concordant experiential result*. Karmic result in which we experience circumstances similar to what we caused others to experience.

*causally concordant result*. The karmic result that corresponds to its cause. It is of two types: the result similar to the cause in terms of our experience and the result similar to the cause in terms of our habitual behavior.

*cognitive faculty (indriya)*. The subtle material in the gross sense organ that enables perception of sense objects; for the mental consciousness, it is previous moments of any of the six consciousnesses.

*cognitive obscurations (jñeyāvaraṇa)*. Obscurations that mainly prevent full awakening; the latencies of ignorance and the subtle dualistic view that they give rise to.

*collection of merit (puṇyasambhāra)*. A bodhisattva's practice of the method aspect of the path that accumulates merit.

*comprehended object (prameya, T. gzhal bya)*. That which is the object known or cognized by a reliable cognizer.

*conceived object (T. zhen yul)*. The object conceived by a conceptual consciousness; synonymous with the apprehended or engaged object of a conceptual consciousness.

*conceptual appearance (artha-sāmānya)*. A mental image of an object that appears to a conceptual consciousness.

*conceptual consciousness (kalpanā)*. A consciousness knowing its object by means of a conceptual appearance.

*conceptual fabrications*. False modes of existence and false ideas imputed by the mind.

*consciousness (jñāna)*. That which is clear and cognizant.

*consequence (prasaṅga)*. A statement used in debate to show the other person the contradiction present in his or her belief.

*conventional existence (saṃvṛtisat)*. Existence.

*conventional truths (saṃvṛtisatya)*. That which is true from the perspective of grasping true existence.

*cyclic existence (saṃsāra)*. The cycle of rebirth that occurs under the control of afflictions and karma.

*death (maraṇabhava)*. The last moment of a lifetime when the subtlest clear light mind manifests.

*definite karma*. Actions that are consciously done and accumulated (there was an intention to act) whose results are definite to be experienced.

*definitive sūtra (nītārtha sūtra)*. Sūtras that mainly and explicitly teach ultimate truths.

*dependent arising (pratītyasamutpāda)*. This is of three types: (1) causal dependence — things arising due to causes and conditions, (2) mutual dependence — phenomena existing in relation to other phenomena, and (3) dependent designation — phenomena existing by being merely designated by terms and concepts.

*desire realm (kāmadhātu)*. One of the three realms of cyclic existence; the realm where sentient beings are overwhelmed by attraction to and desire for sense objects.

*deva*. A being born as a heavenly being in the desire realm or in one of the meditative absorptions of the form or formless realms.

*dhyāna*. A meditative stabilization in the form realm.

*direct reliable cognizer (pratyakṣa-pramāṇa)*. A nondeceptive awareness that knows its object — an evident phenomenon — directly, without depending on a reason.

*duḥkha*. Unsatisfactory experiences of cyclic existence.

*Dzogchen*. A tantric practice emphasizing meditation on the nature of mind, practiced primarily in the Nyingma tradition.

*eight worldly concerns (aṣṭalokadharmā)*. Material gain and loss, disrepute and fame, blame and praise, pleasure and pain.

*emanation body (nirmāṇakāya)*. The buddha body that appears as an ordinary sentient being to benefit others.

*emptiness (śūnyatā)*. The lack of inherent existence and true existence.

*enjoyment body (saṃbhogakāya)*. The buddha body that appears in the pure lands to teach ārya bodhisattvas.

*environmental result*. The result of karma that influences what environment we live in.

*evident phenomena (abhimukhī)*. Phenomena that ordinary beings can perceive with their five senses.

*existent (sat)*. That which is perceivable by mind.

*extreme of absolutism (śāśvatānta)*. The extreme of eternalism; believing that phenomena inherently exist.

*extreme of nihilism (ucchedānta)*. The extreme of nonexistence; believing that our actions have no ethical dimension; believing that nothing exists.

*five actions of immediate retribution (ānantaryakarma)*. Killing one's mother, father, or an arhat, wounding a buddha, and causing a schism in the saṅgha.

*form body (rūpakāya)*. The buddha body in which a buddha appears to sentient beings; it includes the emanation and enjoyment bodies.

*form realm (rūpadhātu)*. The saṃsāric realm in which beings have bodies made of subtle material; they are born there due to having attained various states of concentration.

*formless realm (ārūpyadhātu)*. The saṃsāric realm in which sentient beings do not have a material body.

*four seals (caturmudrā)*. Four views that make a philosophy Buddhist: all conditioned phenomena are transient, all polluted phenomena are duḥkha, all phenomena are empty and selfless, nirvāṇa alone is true peace.

*four truths of the āryas (catvāry āryasatyāni)*. The truth of duḥkha, its origin, its cessation, and the path to that cessation.

*full awakening (samyaksambodhi)*. Buddhahood; the state in which all obscurations have been abandoned and all good qualities developed limitlessly.

*Fundamental Vehicle*. The path leading to the liberation of hearers and solitary realizers.

*grasping inherent existence*. Grasping persons and phenomena to exist truly or inherently. Synonymous with grasping true existence.

*grasping true existence (true grasping, satyagrāha)*. Grasping persons and phenomena to exist truly or inherently.

*hell being (nāraka)*. A being born in one of the unfortunate classes of beings who suffer intense physical pain as a result of their strong destructive karma.

*highest yoga tantra (anuttarayogatantra)*. The most advanced of the four classes of tantra.

*hungry ghost (preta)*. A being born in one of the unfortunate classes of beings, who suffers from intense hunger and thirst.

*ignorance (avidyā)*. A mental factor that is obscured and grasps the opposite of what exists. There are two types: ignorance regarding ultimate truth and ignorance regarding karma and its effects.

*impermanence (anitya)*. The transient quality of all compositional phenomena and functioning things. Coarse impermanence can be known by our senses; subtle impermanence is something not remaining the same in the very next moment.

*inattentive awareness*. A consciousness that doesn't ascertain its object, even though that object is appearing to it.

*inferential reliable cognizer (anumāna-pramāṇa)*. An awareness that knows its object — slightly obscure phenomena — nondeceptively, purely in dependence on a reason.

*inherent existence (svabhāva)*. Existence without depending on any other factors; independent existence.

*interpretable sūtra (neyārtha sūtra)*. A sūtra that speaks about the variety of phenomena and/or cannot be taken literally.

*karma*. Intentional action; it includes intention karma (mental action) and intended karma (physical and verbal actions motivated by intention).

*karmic seeds*. The potency from previously created actions that will bring their results.

*latencies (vāsanā)*. Predispositions, imprints, or tendencies.

*liberation (mokṣa)*. The state of freedom from cyclic existence.

*Mahāmudrā*. A type of meditation that focuses on the conventional and ultimate natures of the mind.

*meditative equipoise on emptiness*. An ārya's mind focused single-pointedly on the emptiness of inherent existence.



*mental direct reliable cognizers.* Nondeceptive mental awarenesses that know their objects by depending on another consciousness that induces them.

*mental factor (caitta).* An aspect of mind that accompanies a primary consciousness and fills out the cognition, apprehending particular attributes of the object or performing a specific function.

*mind (citta).* The part of living beings that cognizes, experiences, thinks, feels, and so on. In some contexts it is equivalent to primary consciousness.

*mindstream (cittasaṃtāna).* The continuity of mind.

*mistaken awareness.* An awareness that is mistaken in terms of its appearing object.

*monastic.* Someone who has received monastic ordination; a monk or nun.

*Mount Meru.* A huge mountain at the center of our world system, according to ancient Indian cosmology.

*nirvāṇa.* The state of liberation of an arhat; the emptiness of a mind that has been totally cleansed of afflictive obscurations.

*nonabiding nirvāṇa.* A buddha's nirvāṇa that does not abide in either cyclic existence or personal liberation.

*nonconceptual consciousness.* A consciousness that knows its object directly, not by means of a conceptual appearance.

*nonduality.* The nonappearance of subject and object, inherent existence, conventional truths, and conceptual appearances in an ārya's meditative equipoise on emptiness.

*nonexistent (asat).* That which is not perceivable by mind.

*observed object (ālambana, T. dmigs yul).* The basic object that the mind refers to or focuses on while apprehending certain aspects of that object.

*permanent (nitya).* Unchanging, static. It does not mean eternal.

*permanent, unitary, independent self.* A soul or self (*ātman*) asserted by non-Buddhists.

*person (pudgala).* A living being designated in dependence on the four or five aggregates.

*polluted (āśava).* Under the influence of ignorance and its latencies.

*powa.* A practice for transferring the consciousness at the time of death so that it will take a precious human life or be reborn in a pure land.

*Prāsaṅgika Madhyamaka.* The Buddhist philosophical tenet system whose views are most accurate.

*prātimokṣa.* The different sets of ethical precepts for monastics and lay followers that assist in attaining liberation.

*primary consciousness (vijñāna).* A consciousness that apprehends the presence or basic entity of an object; they are of six types: visual, auditory, olfactory, gustatory, tactile, and mental.

*pure land*. Places created by the unshakable resolve and merit of buddhas where all external conditions are conducive for Dharma practice.

*reliable cognizer (pramāṇa)*. A nondeceptive awareness that is incontrovertible with respect to its apprehended object and that enables us to accomplish our purpose.

*reliable cognizer based on an example*. Inferential cognizers that realize their object by understanding that it is similar to something else.

*reliable cognizer based on authoritative testimony*. An inferential cognizer knowing very obscure phenomena that cannot be established through direct perceivers or other inferential reliable cognizers, but only by depending on the authoritative testimony of a trustworthy source, such as a credible person or scripture.

*ripening result (vipākaphala)*. The karmic result that is a rebirth; the five aggregates a being takes.

*Sautrāntika*. A Buddhist tenet school that espouses Fundamental Vehicle tenets. It is considered higher than the Vaibhāṣika school.

*scriptural authority*. Relying on a scripture that has met three criteria that deem it reliable.

*self (ātman)*. Refers to (1) a person, or (2) inherent existence.

*self-grasping (ātmagrāha)*. Grasping inherent existence.

*self-sufficient substantially existent person (T. gang zag rang rkya thub pa'i rdzas yod)*. A self that is the controller of the body and mind. Such a self does not exist.

*sense direct reliable cognizers*. Incontrovertible awarenesses that know their objects — sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and tangible objects — directly by depending on a physical cognitive faculty.

*sentient being (sattva)*. Any being with a mind, except for a buddha.

*six perfections (ṣaḍpāramitā)*. The practices of generosity, ethical conduct, fortitude, joyous effort, meditative stability, and wisdom that are motivated by bodhicitta.

*slightly obscure phenomena (parokṣa)*. Phenomena that can initially be known only by using factual inference.

*solitary realizer (pratyekabuddha)*. A person following the Fundamental Vehicle who seeks liberation and who emphasizes understanding the twelve links of dependent arising.

*śrāvaka (hearer)*. Someone practicing the Fundamental Vehicle path leading to arhatship who emphasizes meditation on the four truths of the āryas.

*stabilizing meditation (T. 'jog sgom)*. Meditation to focus and concentrate the mind on an object.

*superknowledge (abhijñā)*. Special powers gained through having deep states of concentration.

*Svātantrika Madhyamaka*. A philosophical tenet system that is not as accurate as the other branch of Madhyamaka, the Prāsaṅgika.

*syllogism (prayoga)*. A statement consisting of a subject, predicate, and reason, and in many cases, an example.

*taking and giving (T. tong len)*. A meditation practice for cultivating love and compassion that involves visualizing taking on the suffering of others, using it to destroy our self-centered attitude, and giving our body, possessions, and merit to others.

*tathāgata*. A buddha.

*thesis (pratijñā)*. What is to be proven — the combination of the subject and the predicate — in a syllogism.

*thing (bhāva)*. Something that performs a function.

*three criteria for existent phenomena*. It is known to a conventional consciousness; its existence is not invalidated by another conventional reliable cognizer; it is not invalidated by a mind analyzing emptiness.

*three criteria of a correct inference or syllogism*. Presence of the reason in the subject, pervasion or entailment, and counterpervasion.

*true cessation (nirodhasatya)*. The cessation of a portion of afflictions or a portion of cognitive obscurations.

*true existence (satyasat)*. Existence having its own mode of being; existence having its own reality.

*true grasping*. See “grasping true existence.”

*truth body (dharmakāya)*. The buddha body that includes the nature truth body and the wisdom truth body.

*twelve links of dependent arising*. A system of twelve factors that explains how we take rebirth in saṃsāra and how we can be liberated from it.

*two truths (satyadvaya)*. Ultimate truths and veil (conventional) truths.

*ultimate bodhicitta (paramārthabodhicitta)*. Direct nonconceptual realization of emptiness in the continuum of an ārya bodhisattva.

*ultimate truth (paramārthasatya)*. The ultimate mode of existence of all persons and phenomena; emptiness; objects that are true and appear true to their main cognizer.

*unfortunate states (apāya)*. Unfortunate states of rebirth as a hell being, hungry ghost, or animal.

*unpolluted (anāsrava)*. Not under the influence of ignorance.

*unreliable awareness*. An awareness that does not correctly apprehend its object and cannot help us accomplish our purpose. These include correct assumers, inattentive perceivers, doubt, and wrong awarenesses.

*Vaibhāṣika*. A Buddhist tenet school that espouses Fundamental Vehicle tenets. It is considered the lowest tenet school.

*veiled truths (samvrtisatya)*. Objects that appear true to ignorance; objects that appear to exist inherently to their main cognizer, although they do not; synonymous with conventional truths.

*very obscure phenomena (atyantaparokṣa)*. Phenomena that can be known only by relying on the testimony of a reliable person or a valid scripture.

*view of a personal identity* (view of the transitory collection, *satkāyadrṣṭi*). Grasping an inherently existent I or mine (according to the Prāsaṅgika system).

*Vinaya*. Monastic discipline.

*white appearance, red increase, and black near attainment*. Three subtle minds that manifest after coarser minds have been absorbed and before the subtlest clear light mind arises.

*wrong or erroneous awareness (viparyaya jñāna)*. A mind that is erroneous with respect to its apprehended object, and in the case of conceptual cognizers with respect to its conceived object.

*yogic direct reliable cognizers*. Nondeceptive mental consciousnesses that know their objects by depending on a union of serenity and insight.

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Peter Aronson

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# SAMŚĀRA, NIRVĀṆA, AND BUDDHA NATURE

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Bhikṣu Tenzin Gyatso,  
the Fourteenth Dalai Lama

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Bhikṣuṇī Thubten Chodron



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“This book is a veritable tour de force in its explanation of the role of the mind in saṃsāra and the realization of nirvāṇa, which is the mind's own ultimate nature. In its examination of buddha nature—spanning early discussions of the mind's potential in the Pāli canon through to the teachings of Dzogchen, the Great Perfection—it casts a bright light to dispel the darkness of materialism, which deludedly reduces the mind to a mere epiphenomenon or emergent property of the brain. Books such as this are urgently needed to trigger a true revolution in the mind sciences.”

—B. Alan Wallace, founder and president,  
Santa Barbara Institute for Consciousness Studies

**HIS HOLINESS THE DALAI LAMA** is the spiritual leader of the Tibetan people, a Nobel Peace Prize recipient, and a beacon of inspiration for Buddhists and non-Buddhists alike. He has persistently reached out across religious and political lines and has engaged in dialogue with scientists in his mission to advance peace and understanding in the world. In doing so, he embodies his motto, “My religion is kindness.”

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## Preface

THE FIRST VOLUME of *The Library of Wisdom and Compassion, Approaching the Buddhist Path*, explored the Buddhist view of life, mind, and emotions. It provided historical background, introduced us to a systematic approach to the spiritual path, and discussed how Buddhist ideas could pertain to contemporary issues. The second volume, *The Foundation of Buddhist Practice*, discussed gaining nondeceptive knowledge, rebirth, spiritual mentors, and how to structure a meditation session. From there we considered the essence of a meaningful life and karma — the ethical dimension of our actions. If we use our lives wisely and make good ethical decisions, our deaths will be free from regret and fear. Having fortunate rebirths in the future, we will have conducive circumstances to continue our spiritual practice.

A fortunate rebirth is definitely desirable, but it is still within cyclic existence (*saṃsāra*), bound by ignorance, afflictions, and polluted karma. The unsatisfactory circumstances (*duḥkha*) of *saṃsāra* are immense and, knowing that, we seek to free ourselves from it. To do so, we must know its causes and whether those causes can be ceased. When convinced the causes can be stopped, we learn the path to eradicate them. Knowledge of guideposts along the way is helpful, as is continuously keeping our goal — the genuine peace and freedom of *nirvāṇa* for all living beings — in mind. Self-confidence and joyous effort are good friends on our journey to buddhahood.

While ostensibly this volume is about *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa*, it is actually about our minds — our minds that are sometimes tumultuous and at other times peaceful. Although our minds are always with us and are the basis of designation of the person, I, our minds remain a mystery to us. How can it be both the basis for the extreme *duḥkha* of *saṃsāra* and the incredible bliss and fulfillment of *nirvāṇa*?

Knowledge of the two types of buddha nature answers this question. One is the naturally abiding buddha nature — the emptiness of inherent existence of our minds — which has always been and will always be the ultimate nature of our minds. The second is the transforming buddha nature — the mind whose continuity goes on to awakening but at present is not yet freed from defilement.



This mind serves as the basis for the emptiness that is the naturally abiding buddha nature. These two types of buddha nature are already present within us. The afflictions are not embedded in our minds; our minds are obscured by defilements but are not the nature of defilement. These obscuring factors can be forever eliminated by applying suitable antidotes.

This buddha nature is an indelible part of us. Each sentient being has it, so no matter how low we or others may fall as a result of our afflictions, afflictions and suffering are not our nature. We are worthwhile beings who deserve happiness. Our buddha nature can never be lost and we do not need to prove ourselves to anyone. The unpurified mind is saṃsāra; the purified mind is the basis of nirvāṇa. All that is needed is our confidence and sincere effort to follow the path, purify our buddha nature, and cultivate awakened qualities. These are the topics of the present volume.

## *How This Book Came About*

The prefaces of volumes 1 and 2 — *Approaching the Buddhist Path* and *The Foundation of Buddhist Practice* — contain longer explanations of the origin of the Library of Wisdom and Compassion. To give a brief account, it began with my requesting His Holiness in 1995 to write a short text on the stages of the path (*lamrim*) that lamas could use when teaching serious students new to Buddhism. Much to my surprise, His Holiness responded by saying that a larger book needed to be compiled first. Because the existing lamrim texts are excellent, there was no need to repeat them. This book needed to be different: It must contain material from the philosophical treatises so that readers will gain a deeper and more detailed explanation of the important points. It must contain material from the Pāli Buddhist tradition so that Tibetan Buddhists will have a more expanded view of the Buddha's teachings that will lessen sectarianism and help students to appreciate the Buddha's remarkable skill and versatility in instructing people with diverse interests, aptitudes, and dispositions.

Using material from His Holiness's teachings in Asia and the West, I began writing. I also compiled questions from his non-Tibetan disciples to ask during the series of interviews that occurred over the years. These questions dealt with topics that the authors of lamrim texts either assumed readers already knew or didn't discuss because they weren't pertinent at that time or in that culture. The book was also designed to clarify misunderstandings that arise when the meaning from another faith is superimposed onto Buddhism — for example, when people mistakenly understood karma and its effects to be a system of reward and punishment, as in theistic religions.

His Holiness often invited two, three, or four geshes to join the interviews, and engaged them in intriguing discussions about the topics I raised. The section on karmic seeds and having-ceaseds in chapter 5 of this volume came from such an interview. I asked about the similarities and differences between karmic seeds and having-ceaseds and a lengthy energetic discussion, punctuated with much laughter, followed. The discussion and debate continued after the session with His Holiness as I asked the geshes more questions over tea. At the end, we concluded that there were many more questions and points of debate to explore.

While writing, it sometimes seemed that I was “translating from English into

English.” The philosophical texts are lengthy, filled with debates, and often have sentences that are one page long. We had to extract the important points and express them in easy-to-understand English, including background material when necessary and examples to help the reader understand. As the manuscript increased in length, we realized that instead of being a book it would become a series.

In oral teachings, His Holiness weaves various topics together in a way that we listeners may not have considered before, opening up new meanings and perspectives. He also goes from simple to complex topics and back again in a matter of minutes, making one talk pertinent for both beginners and advanced practitioners. He doesn’t expect us to understand everything at the first explanation and knows that our understanding will grow slowly as new layers of meaning are revealed to our minds as a result of our purification, collection of merit, study, and reflection. For this reason, the volumes in this series are meant to be read again and again, so that each time you will discover new gems. The books may also be read individually if you are interested in a particular topic, or be used as a resource when you need to look up specific points.

## *Overview of Saṃsāra, Nirvāṇa, and Buddha Nature*

This book will lead us through a fascinating journey regarding our present situation and the possibility of attaining unsurpassed awakening where all *duḥkha* and its causes have been forever ceased and all excellent qualities have been developed limitlessly. Underlying both our *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa* is the fundamental innate clear light mind that by nature is empty of inherent existence. When obscured by defilements, it is buddha nature; when purified of defilements, it is the truth body (*dharmakāya*) of a buddha.

The book begins with an examination of the self: Is there a self? Does it have a beginning and an end? This leads into a discussion of the four truths — *duḥkha* (unsatisfactory circumstances), its origin, its cessation, and the path to that cessation — in both its coarse and subtle forms. We then delve into each truth, examining its four attributes, which reveals misunderstandings we may have about them and how to remedy those misconceptions.

With a clearer understanding of the four truths, in chapter 2 we look closely at true *duḥkha* — the realms of *saṃsāric* existence and our experiences in them.

This exposes the many repugnant faults of saṃsāra and gives us a lens through which to see our present situation as it is. Chapter 3 identifies the chief causes of duḥkha — the six root afflictions. Investigating more closely, we find many other defilements obscuring our mindstreams. These bring psychological disturbances and have physical ramifications. This chapter provides a mirror for us to identify disturbing emotions and afflictive views that may otherwise go unnoticed.

In chapters 4 and 5 we examine the origins of duḥkha more thoroughly: the factors causing the arising of afflictions, feelings accompanying various afflictions, and temporary antidotes to subdue afflictions. We also learn about seeds of afflictions that provide continuity between one instance of an affliction and the next, latencies of afflictions that obscure the mind even after the afflictions have been eradicated, and karmic seeds and having-ceaseds that connect an action with its result. Chapter 6 deals with the way karma affects the evolution of the universe and our bodies.

The twelve links of dependent origination — which describe how rebirth in saṃsāra occurs and how the chain of events leading to it can be cut — is an important teaching in both the Pāli and Sanskrit traditions. With it comes the question, “Who revolves in cyclic existence and who is liberated?” which leads us to investigate the nature of the person. Chapters 7 and 8 explore the afflictive side of dependent origination and encourage us to renounce duḥkha and aspire for liberation, as explained in chapter 9. Chapters 10 and 11 describe the purified side of dependent origination, focusing especially on nirvāṇa, the ultimate true cessation. True path will be explained extensively in volume 4.

In order to aspire to liberation, we must know that liberation is possible. Elaborated on in chapter 12, this depends on understanding both the conventional and ultimate natures of our minds. If defilements were embedded in the nature of the mind, liberation would be impossible. Similarly, if the mind existed inherently, it could never change, and trying to attain liberation and awakening would be fruitless. But thankfully none of these is the case. Since ignorance is a faulty mind, it can be removed by correct wisdom.

Chapters 13 and 14 come from some of the most vibrant interviews with His Holiness, where he traced the explanation of true cessation from the first turning of the Dharma wheel to its more elaborate form in the second turning. He also traced the explanation of true path — the mind that realizes emptiness — from the Sūtra to the Tantra perspective, as hinted at in the third turning of the Dharma wheel. Listening to this was confusing and enlightening at the same

time; there is a lot of profound meaning in these chapters that opens the way to gaining conviction that awakening is indeed possible.

## *Please Note*

Although this series is coauthored, the vast majority of the material is His Holiness's instruction. I researched and wrote the parts pertaining to the Pāli tradition, wrote some other passages, and composed the reflections. For ease of reading, most honorifics have been omitted, but that does not diminish the great respect we have for these most excellent sages and practitioners. Foreign terms are given in parentheses at their first usage. Unless otherwise noted with "P" or "T," indicating Pāli or Tibetan, respectively, italicized terms are Sanskrit. When two italicized terms are listed, the first is Sanskrit, the second Pāli. For consistency, Sanskrit spelling is used for Sanskrit and Pāli terms used in common language (nirvāṇa, Dharma, arhat, and so forth), except in citations from Pāli scriptures. *Śrāvaka* encompasses solitary realizers, unless there is reason to specifically speak of them. To maintain the flow of a passage, it is not always possible to gloss all new terms on their first use; a glossary is provided for you at the end of the book. "Sūtra" often refers to Sūtrayāna and "Tantra" to Tantrayāna. When these two words are not capitalized, they refer to two types of discourses: sūtras and tantras. Unless otherwise noted, the personal pronoun "I" refers to His Holiness.

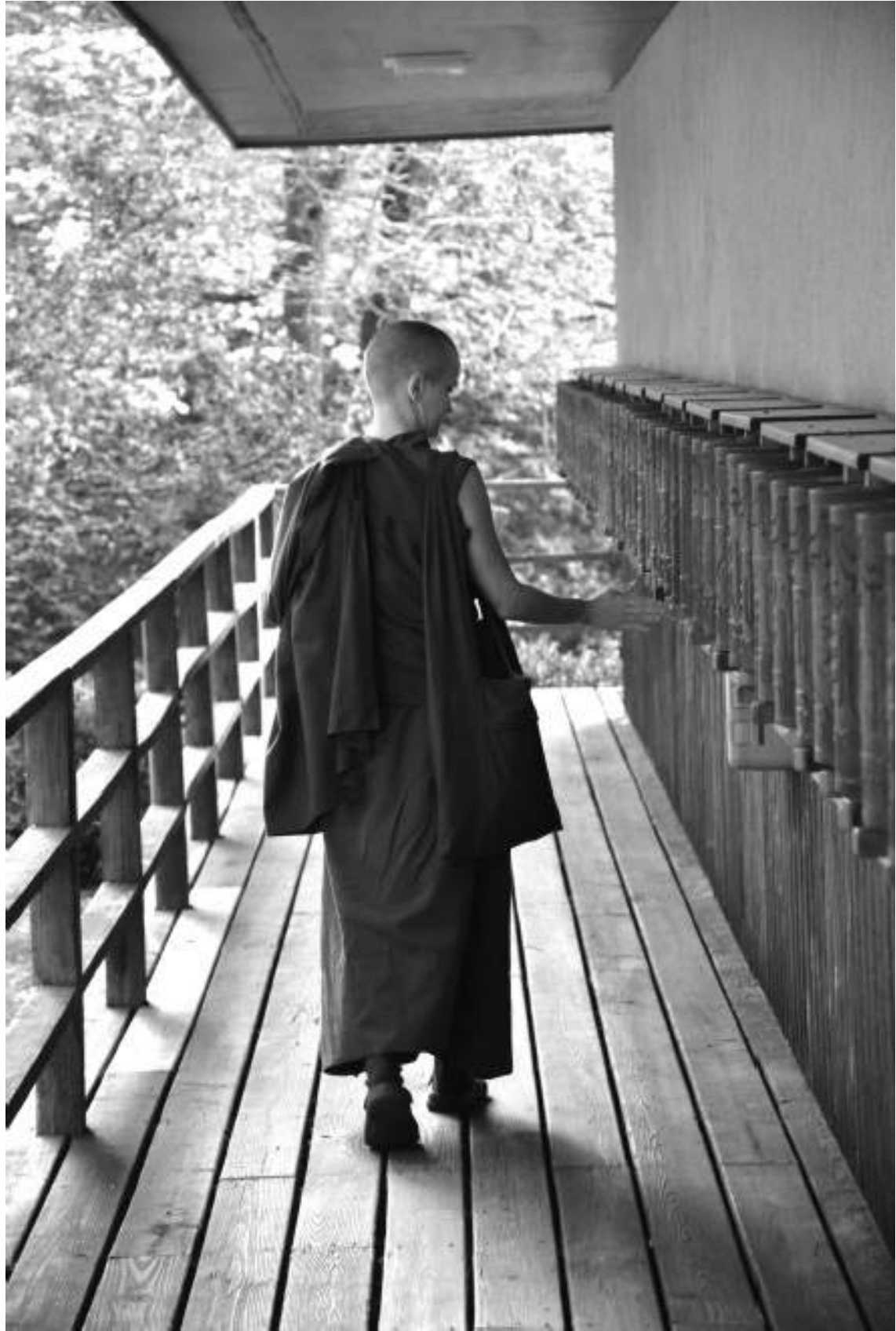
## *Appreciation*

I bow to Śākyamuni Buddha and all the buddhas, bodhisattvas, and arhats who embody the Dharma and with compassion teach it to us unawakened beings. I also bow to all the realized lineage masters of all Buddhist traditions through whose kindness the Dharma still exists in our world.

Since this series will appear in consecutive volumes, I will express my appreciation of those involved in each particular volume. This volume, the third in *The Library of Wisdom and Compassion*, is due to the talents and efforts of His Holiness's translators — Geshe Lhakdor, Geshe Dorji Damdul, and Mr. Tenzin Tsepak. I am grateful to Geshe Dorji Damdul, Geshe Dadul Namgyal,

and Ven. Sangye Khadro for checking the manuscript, and to Samdhong Rinpoche, Geshe Sonam Rinchen, and Geshe Thubten Palsang for clarifying important points. I also thank Bhikkhu Bodhi for his clear teachings on the Pāli tradition and for generously answering my many questions. The staff at the Private Office of His Holiness facilitated the interviews, and Sravasti Abbey and Dharma Friendship Foundation kindly supported me while I worked on this series. Mary Petruszewicz skillfully edited this book, and Traci Thrasher was a tremendous help in gathering the photographs. I thank everyone at Wisdom Publications who contributed to the successful production of this series. All errors are my own.

Bhikṣuṇī Thubten Chodron  
Sravasti Abbey



## Abbreviations

Translations used in this volume, unless noted otherwise, are as cited here. Some terminology has been modified for consistency with the present work.

- ADK *Treasury of Knowledge (Abhidharmakośa)* by Vasubandhu.
- ADS *Compendium of Knowledge (Abhidharmasamuccaya)*.
- AN *Aṅguttara Nikāya*. Translated by Bhikkhu Bodhi in *The Numerical Discourses of the Buddha* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2012).
- BCA *Engaging in the Bodhisattvas' Deeds (Bodhicaryāvatāra)* by Śāntideva.
- CMA *Abhidhammattha Saṅgaha* by Anuruddha. In *A Comprehensive Manual of Abhidhamma*, edited by Bhikkhu Bodhi (Seattle: BPS Pariyatti Editions, 2000).
- CŚ *The Four Hundred (Catuḥśataka)* by Āryadeva. Translated by Ruth Sonam in *Āryadeva's Four Hundred Stanzas on the Middle Way* (Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion Publications, 2008).
- DN *Dīgha Nikāya*. Translated by Maurice Walshe in *The Long Discourses of the Buddha* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 1995).
- DS *Praise to the Sphere of Reality (Dharmadhātu-stava)* by Nāgārjuna.
- EPL *Elucidating the Path to Liberation: A Study of the Commentary on the Abhidharmakośa* by the First Dalai Lama. Translated by David Patt (PhD dissertation, University of Wisconsin–Madison, 1993).
- LC *The Great Treatise on the Stages of the Path (T. Lam rim chen mo)* by Tsongkhapa, 3 vols. Translated by Joshua Cutler et al. (Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion Publications, 2000–2004).



- LS *Praise to the Supramundane (Lokātītastava)* by Nāgārjuna.
- MMK *Treatise on the Middle Way (Mūlamadhyamakakārikā)* by Nāgārjuna.
- MN Majjhima Nikāya. Translated by Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi in *The Middle-Length Discourses of the Buddha* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2005).
- OR *Ocean of Reasoning* by rJe Tsong Khapa. Translated by Geshe Ngawang Samten and Jay L. Garfield (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).
- P Pāli.
- PV *Commentary on the “Compendium of Reliable Cognition” (Pramāṇavārttika)* by Dharmakīrti. Hereafter *Commentary on Reliable Cognition*.
- RA *Precious Garland (Ratnāvalī)* by Nāgārjuna. Translated by John Dunne and Sara McClintock in *The Precious Garland: An Epistle to a King* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 1997).
- RGV *Sublime Continuum (Ratnagotravibhāga, Uttaratantra)* by Maitreya.
- SN Saṃyutta Nikāya. Translated by Bhikkhu Bodhi in *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2000).
- T Tibetan.
- Vism *Path of Purification (Visuddhimagga)* by Buddhaghosa. Translated by Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli in *The Path of Purification* (Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 1991).

## Introduction

### *How to Study the Teachings*

**A**S WITH ALL activities, our attitude and motivation for learning and practicing the Buddhadharma affect the value of our action. Keeping six factors in mind will enable you to have a beneficial motivation. First, see yourself as a sick person who wants to recover. Our illness is cyclic existence and the duḥkha — unsatisfactory circumstances — that permeate it. Duḥkha includes being subject to birth, aging, sickness, and death under the influence of afflictions and karma, as well as not getting what we want, being separated from what we love, and encountering problems we don't want. Seeing ourselves as ill, we will approach the teachings with sincerity and receptivity.

Second, regard the teacher as a kind doctor who correctly diagnoses our illness and prescribes the medicine to cure it. Our saṃsāra is rooted in mental afflictions, the chief of which is ignorance that misapprehends the ultimate nature of phenomena. Although we want happiness, our minds are continually overwhelmed by attachment, anger, and confusion that cause us misery here and now and create the karma for future duḥkha.

Third, see teachings as medicine to cure our illness. The Buddha prescribes the medicine of the three higher trainings in ethical conduct, concentration, and wisdom, and the medicine of bodhicitta and the six perfections — generosity, ethical conduct, fortitude, joyous effort, meditative stability, and wisdom. Fourth, understand that practicing the teachings is the method to heal.

When we are ill, we naturally respect the doctor, trust the medicine, and want to take it, even if it doesn't taste so good. If we second-guess the doctor or complain about the medicine, we won't take it. Similarly, if we don't respect the Buddha and the Dharma, we won't practice. Likewise, if we have a prescription but don't fill it, or fill it but don't take the medicine, we won't recover. We must make an effort to learn and practice the Dharma and not simply collect statues, texts, and prayer beads. Curing the illness is a collaborative process between doctor and patient; we must both do our parts. The *King of Concentration Sūtra*

says (LC 1:60–61):

Some people are ill, their bodies tormented;  
for many years there is not even temporary relief.  
Afflicted with illness for a very long time,  
they seek a doctor, in search of a cure.

Searching again and again,  
they at last find a physician with skill and knowledge.  
Treating the patients with compassion,  
the doctor gives medicine, saying, “Here, take this.”

This medicine is plentiful, good, and valuable.  
It will cure the illness, but the patients do not take it.  
This is not a shortcoming of the doctor, nor the fault of the medicine.  
It is just the negligence of those who are ill.

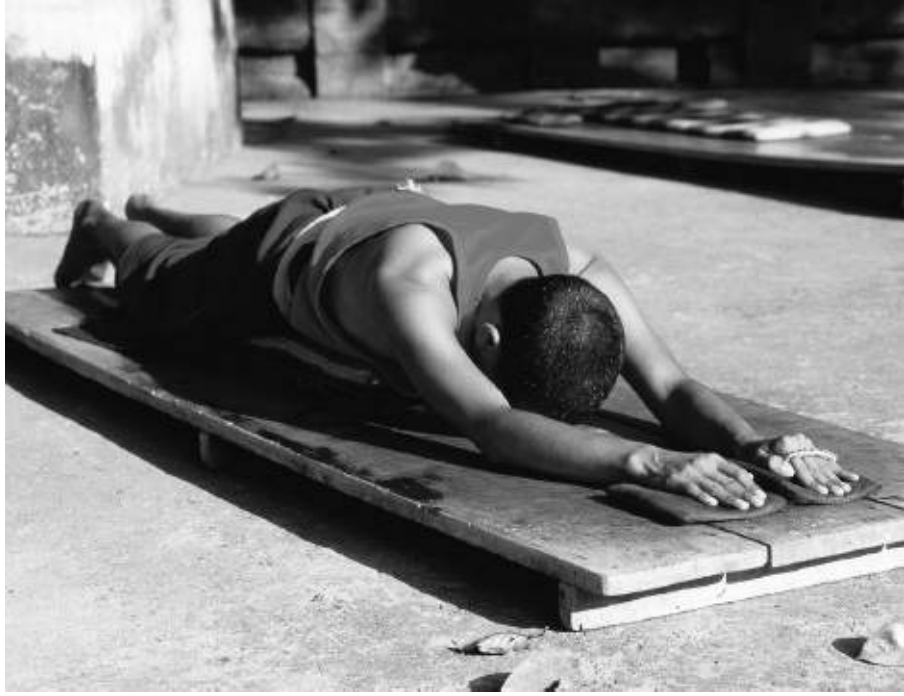
I have explained this very good teaching.  
Yet if you, having heard it, do not practice correctly,  
then just like a sick person holding a bag of medicine,  
your illness cannot be cured.

Taking the medicine entails looking beyond the words we hear and trying to understand their deeper meaning. When that is clear in our minds, we must then consistently put it into practice. Then, and only then, will our disease of *duḥkha* and afflictions be cured. When taking ordinary medicine, we must follow the instructions properly and take the whole cycle. If we take the medicine for a few days and then stop, we won’t get well. Similarly, if we don’t like the taste of the medicine and so mix in all sorts of better-tasting things, we won’t recover. Our commitment to practicing the teachings as we are able to is a crucial element in our awakening.

Fifth, regard the buddhas as excellent, wise, and compassionate beings, and sixth, pray that the teachings will exist for a very long time so that many sentient beings can benefit from them.

Then cultivate an altruistic motivation, thinking, “I want to be free from the *duḥkha* of *samsāra* and will seek the Buddha’s medicine that, when practiced properly, will lead me to good health. But I am not the only sick person; countless sentient beings also wander in *samsāra* and suffer from the afflictions.

May I become a skillful and compassionate doctor like the Buddha, so that I can help all other sentient beings to be free from the duḥkha of saṃsāra.”



# 1 | The Self, the Four Truths, and Their Sixteen Attributes

**T**HE FOUR TRUTHS of the āryas are four facts that āryas — beings who directly see the ultimate nature of all persons and phenomena — know as true. These four truths establish the fundamental framework of the Buddhadharma, so a good understanding of them is essential. In this chapter we will look at the four truths in general, and in subsequent chapters will examine each one in detail.

The four truths describe the unawakened and awakened experiences of this merely designated self, so to begin with I would like to share some reflections on the self — the person who is reborn in cyclic existence, practices the path, and attains awakening.

## *Three Questions about the Self*

I enjoy interfaith gatherings and appreciate the genuine in-depth dialogue and cooperation that result from them. At one such gathering in Amritsar, India, each participant was asked three questions: Is there a self? Is there a beginning to the self? Is there an end to the self? Here are my thoughts.

### *Is There a Self?*

Most non-Buddhists assert an independent self — an *ātman* or soul — that takes rebirth. What leads them to say this? Although we know that our adult bodies did not exist at the time of our births, when we say, “At the time I was born . . .” we feel there was a self that was born and that this same self exists today. We also say, “Today my mind is calm,” indicating that our mind is different today than yesterday when it was disturbed. But we feel the I is the same as yesterday. When we see a flower, we think, “I see,” and it feels that there is a real person who sees it.

In all these cases, although we know that the body and mind change, we still

have the sense of an enduring I that is the owner of the body and mind. This is the basis for believing there is a permanent, unitary, independent self that goes to heaven or hell or is reborn in another body after death. From this comes the conclusion that there must be an unchanging, independent I that is present throughout our lives and remains the same although the mental and physical aggregates change. This I is the agent of all actions such as walking and thinking.

While both Buddhists and non-Buddhists accept the existence of the self, our ideas of what the self is differ radically: most non-Buddhists accept the existence of a permanent, unchanging soul or independent self, while Buddhists refute it. Although no Buddhist philosophical school asserts a permanent, unitary, independent self, these schools have various ideas of what the self is: the mental consciousness, the continuum of consciousness, the collection of aggregates, or the mere I that is merely designated. The Prāsaṅgika Madhyamaka, which is generally accepted as the most refined system of tenets, says the self is merely designated in dependence on the body and mind. Because the self is merely imputed, we can say, “I am young or old” and “I think and feel.” If the person were a completely different entity from the body and mind, it would not change when either the body or mind changes.

### *Is There a Beginning to the Self?*

Those who believe in an external creator assert an autonomous intelligence that does not depend on causes and conditions. This being, they say, created the world and the sentient beings in it. For many people the notion that God created life fosters the feeling of being close to God and willingness to follow God’s advice to be kind and refrain from harming others. Their belief in a creator spurs them to live ethically and to help others.

Some faiths such as Jainism and Sāṃkhya do not assert a creator, but I do not know if they believe the ātman has a beginning.

A repeated theme in Buddhism is dependent arising, one aspect of which is that functioning things arise due to causes and conditions. When explaining the twelve links of dependent origination, the Buddha said, “Because of this, that exists. Because this has arisen, that arises.” *Because of this, that exists* points out that things come into existence due to causes and conditions; they do not appear without a cause. If something has no causes, what makes it arise? If things do not depend on causes and conditions, why does a seed grow into a plant in the

spring but not in the winter? If our lunch came into being without a cause, it would arise without groceries, pots, or cooks! Therefore everything — the body, the mind, and the external universe — depends on causes and conditions.

*Because this has arisen, that arises* illustrates that causes, like their results, are impermanent. If causes did not change, they would continue to exist even after producing their results. However, for a result to arise, its cause must cease; for an apple tree to grow, the apple seed must cease. It is not possible for a permanent creator or prior intelligence to create the universe and beings in it without itself changing. Each person, thing, and event arises due to its own causes, which in turn have come about in dependence on their causes. There is no discernable beginning.

Furthermore, things are produced by their own unique causes, not by discordant causes — things that do not have the capability to produce them. It is not the case that anything can produce anything. A daisy grows from daisy seeds, not from metal. Our bodies and minds each have their own unique causes.

Causes depend on conditions to produce their results. If conditions were unnecessary, a sprout could grow in the dead of winter or in parched soil; it would not depend on warmth and moisture to grow. Multiple causes and conditions are necessary to bring a result.

Each cause not only produces its own results but also arose due to the causes that produced it. The sprout is the cause of the tree that grows from it as well as the result of the seed from which it grew. If an external creator were the cause of the universe, he or she would also have to be the result of a previous cause. He would be a caused phenomenon and could not exist independent of causes.

If Buddhists do not accept a self, who takes rebirth? Although the Buddha refutes a self that exists independent of all other factors, he accepts a conventional self that is dependent on causes, conditions, and parts. This self is designated in dependence on the body and mind, so the question of whether the self has a beginning depends on if the body and mind have beginnings. The body is material in nature. Scientists currently say that all matter can be traced back to the Big Bang. How did the Big Bang occur? There must have been some material substances, energy, or potential for matter that existed before the Big Bang, and conditions must have been such that it exploded. Here, too, we see that things must have causes that are affected by other conditions and therefore change and give rise to something new.

Our minds change moment by moment; the mind is impermanent and arises due to causes that have the ability to produce each moment of mind. The first



moment of mind in this life has a cause, because without a cause it could not exist. The cause of our minds was not our parents' minds, because both of our parents have their own individual continuity of consciousness, as do we. The substantial cause (*upādānakāraṇa*) of our minds — the cause that turns into the mind — cannot be our bodies or the sperm and egg of our parents, because the mind and body have different natures: the mind is formless and has the nature of clarity and cognizance, while the body has physical and material characteristics. The only thing we can point to as the cause of the first moment of mind in this life is the previous moment of that mind in the previous life. This continuity can be traced back infinitely, with one moment of mind producing the next moment of mind; there is no beginning.

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## REFLECTION

Consider:

1. Everything that is produced arises from causes; nothing can arise causelessly.
2. Causes are impermanent; they must cease in order for their result to arise.
3. There is concordance between a cause and its result. A specific result can only arise from the causes and conditions that are capable of producing it.
4. Apply this understanding to the existence of the physical universe and of your mind.

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### *Is There an End to the Self?*

Within Buddhism there are two positions regarding this question. Some Vaibhāṣikas say that when an arhat (someone who has attained liberation from saṃsāra) passes away (attains nirvāṇa without remainder of the polluted aggregates), the continuum of the person ceases to exist, like the flame of a lamp

going out due to lack of fuel. Because the polluted aggregates are produced by afflictions and karma, when arhats pass away there is no continuity of their aggregates, since their causes — afflictions and polluted karma — have been ceased. Because the aggregates are necessary for the existence of a person, they say that the person no longer exists.

There are difficulties with this assertion: when the person is alive, there is no nirvāṇa without remainder of the polluted aggregates, and when this nirvāṇa has been attained, there is no person who attained it. In that case, how could we say, “This person attained this nirvāṇa?”

Furthermore, there is nothing that can eradicate the mindstream — the continuity of mind. The wisdom realizing selflessness eradicates afflictive obscurations, but it cannot destroy the clear and cognizant nature of the mind. For this reason Mādhyamikas and most Cittamātrins assert that after a person attains parinirvāṇa — the nirvāṇa after death — the continuum of the purified aggregates exists. These purified aggregates are the basis of designation of that arhat; thus the person does not cease to exist when he or she attains parinirvāṇa. Motivated by compassion, bodhisattvas who have overcome afflictive obscurations continue to take rebirth in cyclic existence. The continuity of buddhas’ mindstreams also remain forever.

From the viewpoint of Tantrayāna, after an arhat passes away the subtlest mind-wind continues to exist and a person is posited in dependence on this. That self is called an *arhat*. Someone who has attained full awakening obtains the four bodies (here “body” means collection) of a buddha. Since the mind’s ultimate nature is emptiness, the emptiness of the awakened mind becomes the nature truth body — the final true cessation of a buddha and the emptiness of that buddha’s mind. The subtlest mind becomes the wisdom truth body — the omniscient mind of a buddha. The subtlest wind becomes the form bodies of a buddha — the enjoyment body and the emanation bodies. An *ārya* buddha — a person who is a buddha — exists by being merely designated in dependence on these four bodies.

## *The Four Truths*

In classical India, many spiritual traditions spoke about the unawakened state of saṃsāra and the awakened state of nirvāṇa, each tradition having its own

description of duḥkha, its origins, cessation, and the path leading to cessation. Saṃsāra means to be reborn with karmically conditioned aggregates. Specifically, it is our five aggregates, subject to clinging (*upādāna*) and appropriated due to afflictions and karma.<sup>1</sup>

Liberation is freedom from the bondage of rebirth with polluted aggregates, impelled by afflictions and karma. *Polluted* means under the influence of ignorance. Liberation comes about by ceasing the ignorance and karma that cause cyclic existence. The mind renouncing duḥkha and intent on liberation is a precious mind that needs to be cultivated with care. Renunciation does not mean relinquishing happiness; it is the aspiration for liberation, the determination to seek a higher and more enduring happiness than saṃsāra can offer.

The first teaching the compassionate Buddha gave was the four truths: true duḥkha, true origins, true cessations, and true paths. These four truths cover our present state, one that is replete with unsatisfactory conditions (*duḥkha*) and their origins, and presents an alternative: nirvāṇa (true cessations) and the path leading to that. The Buddha did not create the four truths; he simply described the truth about saṃsāra and its origins as well as the truth that a path exists to cease those and bring about nirvāṇa.

We may wonder why these truths are sometimes called the *four noble truths*. After all, what is noble about suffering? *Noble* indicates (1) they were directly realized and taught by noble ones — āryas, those who have realized the ultimate nature directly, and (2) knowing these truths ennobles us by enabling us to become āryas. They are called *truths* because it is true that duḥkha and its origins are to be abandoned and it is true that cessations and paths are to be adopted. These four are true according to the perception of the āryas, and they are true in the sense that they form a nondeceptive explanation that will lead us beyond suffering.

The Buddha spoke of the four truths in many sūtras. In the first turning of the Dharma wheel, the Buddha presented the four truths by means of three cycles: first he identified the *nature* of each truth, then he spoke of *how to engage* with each one, and finally he described the *result* of realizing each truth.

### *The Nature of Each Truth*

In terms of their nature, *true sufferings* (*duḥkha*) are the polluted aggregates that are principally caused by afflictions and polluted karma. More broadly, true duḥkha consists of polluted bodies, minds, environments, and the things we use

and enjoy. In *Compendium of Knowledge* Asaṅga says, “If one asks what is true duḥkha, it is to be understood both in terms of the sentient beings who are born as well as the habitats in which they are born.” The body and mind are internal true duḥkha because they are in the continuum of a person; the environment and the things around us are external true duḥkha, which are not part of a person’s continuum. All true origins are also true duḥkha, although not all true duḥkha is true origins. All afflictions are unsatisfactory, but our bodies and our habitats, which are unsatisfactory, are not causes of saṃsāra.

What propels this process of uncontrollably and repeatedly taking the psychophysical aggregates of a being of one of the three realms? It is the *true origins* of duḥkha — afflictions and polluted karma (actions). The chief affliction that is the root of saṃsāra is the ignorance grasping inherent existence — a mental factor that apprehends phenomena as existing in the opposite way than they actually exist. Whereas all phenomena exist dependently, ignorance apprehends them as existing independently. The Tibetan term for ignorance — *ma rig pa* — means not knowing. Even its name implies something undesirable that disturbs the mind and interferes with happiness and fulfillment. Since the cause of cyclic existence is inauspicious, its effect — our bodies, habitats, and experiences in cyclic existence — will not bring stable joy.

Ignorance narrows the mind, obscuring it from seeing the multifarious factors involved in existence. From ignorance stems various distorted conceptualizations that foster the arising of all other afflictions — especially the “three poisons” of confusion, attachment, and animosity. Afflictions in turn create karma that propels saṃsāric rebirth. In the context of the four truths, the Buddha identified craving as the principal example of the origin of duḥkha to highlight its prominent role.

*True cessations* are the exhaustion of true duḥkha and true origins. From the Prāsaṅgika viewpoint, they are the emptiness of an ārya’s mind, specifically the purified aspect of the ultimate nature of a mind that has abandoned some portion of obscurations through the force of a true path.

*True paths* are āryas’ realizations informed by the wisdom directly realizing selflessness. With the exception of ethical restraints that are imperceptible forms, true paths are consciousnesses. Pāli sūtras emphasize the eightfold path, which is subsumed into the three higher trainings, as the true path. Of the eight, right view — the wisdom realizing selflessness — is what actually cuts the root of cyclic existence.

The four truths comprise two pairs, each pair having a cause-and-effect

relation. True origins cause true duḥkha, and true paths bring about true cessations. Technically speaking, true cessation — nirvāṇa — is not an effect, because it is unconditioned and permanent.<sup>2</sup> However, attaining nirvāṇa is due to a cause, which is the true path. The Buddha goes into more depth about the nature of each truth in the *Establishment of Mindfulness Sutta* (DN 22:18–21):

And what, monastics, is the ārya truth of duḥkha? Birth is duḥkha, aging is duḥkha, death is duḥkha, sorrow, lamentation, pain, dejection, and despair are duḥkha. Encountering the undesired is duḥkha, being separated from the desired is duḥkha, not getting what one wants is duḥkha. In short, the five aggregates subject to clinging are duḥkha . . .

And what, monastics, is the ārya truth of the origin of duḥkha? It is that craving that gives rise to rebirth, bound up with delight and attachment, seeking fresh delight now here, now there: that is to say, sensual craving, craving for existence, and craving for nonexistence.

And what, monastics, is the ārya truth of the cessation of duḥkha? It is the remainderless fading away and ceasing, the giving up, abandoning, letting go, and detachment from it [craving].

And what, monastics, is the ārya truth of the way leading to the cessation of duḥkha? It is just this ārya eightfold path — namely, right view, right intention, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration.

To look more closely at the Buddha’s description of *true duḥkha*: We are already aware of the suffering involved in birth, sickness, aging, and death. *Sorrow* is our response to misfortune and disagreeable situations. When sorrow intensifies so that it becomes unbearable, we cry out or weep. This is *lamentation*. *Pain* refers to physical pain of whatever sort; *dejection* is mental pain, unhappiness, and depression. Due to pain or dejection, suffering becomes overwhelming and we *despair*, giving up hope because we see no recourse to solve our difficulties.

*Encountering the undesired* is meeting with what is disagreeable. However much we try to avoid difficulties, they keep coming in one form or another. We encounter relationship and financial problems as well as prejudice, injustice, and climate change.

*Being separated from the desired* occurs when we have what we like and

then are separated from it. Once we have friends, relatives, a job and income, a good reputation, and so forth, we do not want to lose them. Although we cling to these, it is impossible to hold on to them forever because they are transient by their very nature. The greater our attachment, the more painful our eventual separation from them will be. For this reason the Buddha said that worldly things are unsatisfactory and lack the ability to bring lasting happiness.

*Not getting what we want* is the situation of having unfulfilled wishes and needs. We seek good health, financial security, and stable relationships; we wish to stay young forever and have an excellent reputation. However much we want these, we cannot achieve them to a degree that fulfills us, and fall prey to frustration, moodiness, and despondency. This experience is common to the rich and the poor, the popular and the lonely, the healthy and the ill.

The above circumstances are fairly easy to discern in our lives. In them we find three types of *duḥkha*. There are (1) evident pain — the *duḥkha of pain* — and (2) the unsatisfactory situation of not being able to hold on to the pleasant — the *duḥkha of change*. (3) The basis upon which these arise is the body and mind — the five aggregates subject to clinging. Because we have these five aggregates, all the other unsatisfactory situations arise. This is the *pervasive duḥkha of conditionality*, which is intrinsic to the five aggregates that are clung to with ignorance.

The five aggregates are momentary processes, bound together in relationships of mutual conditionality. We believe ourselves to be independent persons, existing above and beyond the body and mind or existing within the body and mind and having control over them. This idea of being an independent self is delusion. Until now we have never examined how we grasp the self and simply assume there is a self in control of the aggregates.

When we look deeply into the nature of the five aggregates, we see that they are simply momentarily changing processes that are in a constant flux. They arise and pass away without interruption, giving rise to the next moment in the same continuum. What we consider to be the person consists of only momentary material and mental aggregates.

Our bodies and minds are transient by nature. There is no further cause or external condition for their changing and passing away other than their having arisen. The Buddha said, “Whatever has the nature of arising, all of it has the nature of ceasing.” This is subtle impermanence, and to realize it clearly through direct experience requires great mindfulness and concentration. This realization is very valuable because, when coupled with the understanding that our

aggregates will never be something secure that we can take comfort in, it leads us to seek the *origin of duḥkha* and to investigate if it can be eradicated and, if so, how.

Repeatedly taking the five aggregates occurs due to ignorance, craving, and karma. Not only are our present aggregates the product of past ignorance, craving, and karma, but they also become the basis in this life for the arising of more ignorance, craving, and karma, which lead to taking another set of five aggregates subject to clinging in the future, which are under the control of ignorance, craving, and karma.

In pointing to craving as the prime example of the origin of duḥkha in the above passage, the Buddha was not disregarding the role of ignorance, other afflictions, and karma. Ignorance obscures the mind from knowing things as they are, and within that unclarity, craving is an active force that creates duḥkha. It does this in several ways: First, craving arises toward whatever is pleasurable. It seeks out objects, cognitive faculties, consciousnesses, contacts, feelings, intentions, thoughts, and images that are agreeable. In short, craving makes us into addicts who perpetually seek more and better physical and mental pleasures. Causing us to cling to the objects that appear to give us pleasures, craving breeds dissatisfaction and a sense of lacking. Thinking that gratifying all our desires will bring us happiness, we find ourselves immersed in cheating, lying, backbiting, and other harmful behaviors. In sum, craving lies behind much of the karma that projects rebirth in cyclic existence.

In addition to motivating many of the destructive actions we engage in during our lives, craving arises forcefully at the time of death, ripening the karmic seeds that project the next rebirth. As death approaches, craving seeks to preserve our sense of being an independent person; we do not want to separate from the body and mind of this life that are the basis for fabricating an independent self. However, during the death process, the body's ability to act as the support for consciousness ebbs, and craving gives rise to clinging, which propels the mind to seek rebirth in another body. According to the karmic seeds fertilized by craving and clinging, the mind connects to another body at the moment of rebirth. For human rebirths, this is the moment of conception. When consciousness joins the fertilized egg, all five aggregates of the next rebirth come into existence together. The fertilized egg is the body; and along with consciousness come feeling, discrimination, and miscellaneous factors, thus forming the basis of the person of the new life.

The *true cessation of duḥkha* is the relinquishment of the afflictive

obscurations, especially craving. In our daily lives, we may experience facsimiles of cessation — for example, the peace and relief we feel when we let go of having our way or of insisting on being right and having the last word in an argument. While the final true cessation is nirvāṇa, āryas attain several partial cessations while on the path each time they abandon a certain portion of afflictions and their seeds.

The Pāli tradition speaks of four types of cessation; not all of these are nirvāṇa:

(1) *Cessation by factor substitution* (P. *tat anga nirodha*) occurs after we have cultivated the antidote to a particular affliction and temporarily eliminated it. When angry, we meditate on fortitude, and when filled with sensual craving, we contemplate the unattractiveness of the body. By substituting a virtuous state of mind for a nonvirtuous one, there is a cessation by factor substitution.

(2) *Cessation through suppression* (P. *vikambana nirodha*) is the result of attaining the meditative absorptions. Strong samādhi temporarily overcomes the manifest forms of the five hindrances and other defilements (P. *saṃkleśa, saṃkilesa*), bringing the peace and bliss of concentration. Since the defilements are not active during meditative absorption, it seems that they have been eradicated. However, they have only been suppressed and their seeds remain in the mindstream.

(3) *Cessation through eradication* (P. *samucheda nirodha*) is the cessation attained through penetrative wisdom that cuts off the defilements so that they can never arise again. This cessation is attained beginning at the stage of stream-enterer (path of seeing), progresses through the stages of once-returner and nonreturner (path of meditation), and culminates in arhatship (path of no more learning).

(4) The *ultimate cessation of defilement* (P. *achanta nirodha*) as explained in the Pāli tradition is the reality that is the ultimate absence of all defilements. Cutting off defilements completely depends on a reality that is completely free from defilements, a reality that is ever-existing, unconditioned, and unborn. It is the existence of this unborn state — the reality of nirvāṇa — that makes the eradication of all defilements possible.<sup>3</sup> This nirvāṇa is the object of penetrating wisdom. When wisdom sees the truth of nirvāṇa and actualizes true cessation, defilements are eradicated.

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## REFLECTION

1. Remember a time when you applied an antidote to an affliction such as greed or the wish for revenge, and that affliction temporarily subsided.
2. Consider that it is possible for afflictions to subside for a longer period of time due to the force of having strong concentration that makes the mind extremely tranquil and peaceful.
3. Consider that it is possible to perceive reality directly and, by this, eradicate some level of defilement.
4. Consider that it is possible to deepen and stabilize that perception of reality so that all afflictive obscurations are eradicated such that they can never return.
5. Make a strong determination to do this.

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True cessation is attained not by wishing or praying for it but by means of training the mind. The principal *true path* that trains the mind is the right view — the wisdom realizing selflessness. We must put energy into understanding the four truths, first intellectually, then experientially, and finally with penetrative wisdom. When a person on the śrāvaka path penetrates the four truths with direct realization, she becomes a stream-enterer and has entered the stream leading to nirvāṇa. She becomes an ārya who will proceed to nirvāṇa and never again be an ordinary being. When those following the bodhisattva path gain this realization, they become ārya bodhisattvas and will irreversibly proceed to full awakening.

### *How to Engage with Each Truth*

How do we engage with or practice the four truths? True duḥkha is to be fully known or understood, true origins is to be abandoned, true cessations is to be actualized, and true paths is to be cultivated. Maitreya's *Sublime Continuum* (*Ratnagoṭravibhāga, Uttaratantra*) says (RGV 4.57):

In the case of disease, we need to diagnose it, remove its causes, attain the happy state [of health], and rely on suitable medicine.

Similarly, we need to recognize our duḥkha, remove its causes, actualize its cessation, and rely on the suitable path.

### *The Result of Each Truth*

In terms of the resultant understanding of the four truths, true duḥkha is to be fully understood, but there is no duḥkha to understand; true origins are to be abandoned, but there are no origins to abandon; true cessation is to be actualized, but there is no cessation to actualize; and true paths are to be cultivated, but there are no paths to cultivate.

This may be understood in two ways. The first is common to all Buddhist schools: once we have completely understood duḥkha, there is no more duḥkha to understand; once we have totally overcome its origins, there are no more causes of suffering to overcome; once we have perfectly actualized cessation, our liberation is complete and there are no more cessations to actualize; and once we have fully cultivated the path, there is nothing more to cultivate.

According to the uncommon Madhyamaka approach, the Buddha is referring to the ultimate nature of the four truths, their emptiness. His thought is that it is possible for us to overcome true duḥkha and its origins and to actualize true cessations and true paths because their very nature is empty of inherent existence. Since they are primordially empty and have never existed inherently, duḥkha and its origins can be eliminated, and true cessations and true paths can be actualized. Their ultimate nature, emptiness, is also called *natural nirvāṇa*, and this allows for us to attain the three other types of nirvāṇa: nirvāṇa without remainder, nirvāṇa with remainder, and nonabiding nirvāṇa.<sup>4</sup>

According to the Madhyamaka approach, true duḥkha is to be fully understood on the conventional level, but on the ultimate level there is no true duḥkha. That is, true duḥkha exists on the conventional level by being merely designated by concept and term, but on the ultimate level there has never been inherently existent true duḥkha; true duḥkha is naturally empty of inherent existence. It is similar for the other three of the four truths: they exist conventionally, but ultimately cannot be found by ultimate analysis.

### *The Coarse and Subtle Four Truths*

According to the Prāsaṅgikas' unique presentation, the four truths have both a

coarse and a subtle form. Vasubandhu's *Treasury of Knowledge* (*Abhidharmakośa*) and Asaṅga's *Compendium of Knowledge* (*Abhidharmasamuccaya*) described the coarse four truths: True duḥkha is all unsatisfactory circumstances arising from grasping a self-sufficient substantially existent person. True origins are grasping a self-sufficient substantially existent person and the afflictions and polluted karma arising from this grasping. True cessations are the abandonment of the duḥkha and origins that arise from grasping a self-sufficient substantially existent person. True path is the wisdom that sees the absence of a self-sufficient substantially existent person. This is the view held by the lower philosophical tenet systems.

The subtle four truths are described by the Prāsaṅgikas: True duḥkha is the unsatisfactory circumstances that are rooted in grasping inherent existence and karma. True origins are grasping inherent existence of persons and phenomena and the afflictions and polluted karma that arise from this grasping. True cessations are the complete eradication of these, and true path is the wisdom realizing the emptiness of inherent existence. As true origin, grasping inherent existence is much subtler and more tenacious than grasping a self-sufficient substantially existent person. It is also more difficult to identify when meditating on selflessness.

Ordinary beings can directly realize coarse selflessness — the lack of a self-sufficient substantially existent person. But this realization alone cannot remove the root of cyclic existence, the ignorance grasping inherent existence. At best, it can temporarily abandon coarse self-grasping and the afflictions that depend on it. Therefore the wisdom realizing the lack of a self-sufficient substantially existent person is not an actual true path capable of cutting the root of cyclic existence, and the cessation of this grasping is not an actual true cessation. Here we see the far-reaching implications of the Prāsaṅgikas' way of positing the object of negation and the importance of identifying it correctly in order to cultivate the wisdom that sees it as nonexistent.

## *The Sixteen Attributes of the Four Truths of Āryas*

The sixteen attributes of the four truths are found in the *Treasury of Knowledge*, Asaṅga's *Śrāvaka Grounds* (*Śrāvakabhūmi*), and Dharmakīrti's *Commentary on Reliable Cognition*. They are taught to protect sentient beings from duḥkha by helping them to develop wisdom and insight (*vipaśyanā*). Each truth has four

attributes, which counteract four distorted conceptions about each truth. In addition to eliminating these sixteen misconceptions, which are obstacles to attaining liberation, the sixteen attributes establish the existence of liberation and the method to attain it. Each attribute is a quality of that truth and reveals a specific function of that truth.

If you have doubts regarding the possibility of eradicating duḥkha forever and if you wonder if nirvāṇa exists and if it is possible to attain it, contemplation on the sixteen attributes of the four truths will be very helpful. As we reflect on them, we may discover that we hold some of the misconceptions that are refuted. Making effort to understand the sixteen attributes will help us to dispel these, clearing the way for wisdom to arise.

Unless otherwise noted, the sixteen attributes are presented according to the common view acceptable to all Buddhist tenet systems. The unique Prāsaṅgika meaning is also presented when it differs from this.<sup>5</sup> Please note that while each truth is often stated in the singular (e.g., true origin), it has many components, so sometimes it is expressed in the plural (true origins).

### *Four Attributes of True Duḥkha*

True duḥkha (*duḥkha-satya*) is the polluted aggregates principally caused by afflictions and karma. They include internal true duḥkha, such as our polluted bodies and minds, and external true duḥkha, such as our habitats and the things in it.

The four attributes of true duḥkha — impermanent, duḥkha (unsatisfactory), empty, and selfless — counteract four distorted conceptions (*ayoniśo manaskāra*) or conceptualizations (*vikalpa viparyāsa*) — believing impermanent things to be permanent, things that are by nature unsatisfactory to be pleasurable, the unattractive to be attractive, and what lacks a self to have one.<sup>6</sup> The Buddha said in *Distortions of the Mind* (AN 4.49):

Perceiving permanence in the impermanent,  
perceiving pleasure in what is duḥkha,  
perceiving a self in what is not-self,  
and perceiving beauty in what is foul,  
beings resort to wrong views,  
their minds deranged, their perception twisted.

Such people are bound by the yoke of Māra<sup>7</sup>  
and do not reach security from bondage.  
Beings continue in saṃsāra,  
going repeatedly from birth to death.

But when the buddhas arise in the world  
and send forth a brilliant light,  
they reveal this teaching that leads  
to the stilling of duḥkha.

Hearing it, wise people regain their sanity.  
They see the impermanent as impermanent,  
and what is duḥkha as duḥkha.  
They see what is not-self as not-self,  
and the unattractive as unattractive.  
By acquiring the right view,  
they overcome all duḥkha.

The four attributes of true duḥkha counteract the four distorted conceptions.<sup>8</sup> Understanding the first two attributes prepares us to realize the last two, which are the main antidotes that bring true cessations. While our physical and mental aggregates are pinpointed as an example of true duḥkha because they are the basis of designation of the self, the explanation pertains to everything conditioned by afflictions and karma.

1. The physical and mental aggregates are *impermanent* (*anitya*) because they undergo continuous, momentary arising and disintegrating.

Overwhelmed by ignorance, we apprehend transient things — such as our bodies, relationships, and possessions — as unchanging, stable, and enduring, and expect them to remain the same and always be there. We do not feel that we are going to die — at least not any time soon. Believing that we are the same person we were yesterday, we expect our lives to be constant and predictable. We are surprised by a car accident or a sudden change in our conditions at work. As a result of holding what is impermanent to be permanent, we don't prepare for death or future lives by avoiding harmful actions and engaging in constructive ones. Telling ourselves we will practice Dharma later when we have more time, we waste our precious human lives.

Coarse impermanence is perceptible by our senses: the sun sets, a building is

constructed and later decays, babies become adults and then die. All of these coarse changes happen due to subtle impermanence — changes occurring in each moment. These subtle changes are built into the nature of conditioned things; no other external factor is necessary to make things arise and cease in each moment.

Arising is something new coming into existence, abiding is the continuation of something similar, and ceasing is the disintegration of what was. These three occur simultaneously in each moment. From the moment something arises, it is changing and ceasing. There is no way to halt this process or take a time-out. Because everything changes in each moment, there is no stability or security to be found in saṃsāra. Understanding this gives us a more realistic view of life. This, in turn, helps us to release attachment to saṃsāric enjoyments and birth in saṃsāra in general, and frees our mind to seek a more reliable happiness that comes from Dharma practice.

2. The aggregates are *unsatisfactory by nature* (*duḥkhatā*) because they are under the control of afflictions and karma.

Believing that what is unsatisfactory by nature — food, possessions, reputation, friends, relatives, our bodies, and so forth — is actual pleasure and happiness, we jump into the world of transitory pleasures expecting lasting joy. Viewing our bodies to be a source of great pleasure, we expend great effort to secure and experience sensual delights. In doing so we consume more than our fair share of the Earth's resources and spend a lot of time chasing illusions. In actuality, our bodies have constant aches and pains and are seldom comfortable for long. If we saw them more realistically, we would keep them healthy in order to use them to practice the Dharma, but we would not expect true happiness from them.

Contemplating that the objects, people, and activities we see as enjoyable are actually unsatisfactory in nature because they are under the influence of afflictions and karma remedies the distorted belief that they are a source of secure happiness. What we commonly call pleasure is actually a state where one discomfort has decreased and a newer discomfort is just beginning. For example, when we've been standing a long time, sitting brings a feeling of relief and pleasure. But slowly, the discomfort of sitting increases, and after a while we want to stand up and walk around.

Our aggregates are subject to the three types of duḥkha mentioned above — the duḥkha of pain, which is physical and mental pain; the duḥkha of change, in

which pleasurable circumstances do not last; and the pervasive duḥkha of conditioning, a body and mind conditioned by afflictions and karma. This last one is the source of the first two. Afflictions and karma condition our experiences, and without choice, our bodies fall ill, age, and die. Our minds are overwhelmed by disturbing emotions such as despair and rage. Understanding that whatever is under the power of afflictions and karma cannot be a source of lasting joy, we release unrealistic expectations and distance ourselves from the useless pursuit of clinging to saṃsāric pleasures. Instead we direct our energy toward actualizing true cessations.

The attributes of impermanence and duḥkha are linked. Āryadeva says (CS 50):

The impermanent is definitely harmed.  
What is harmed is not pleasurable.  
Therefore all that is impermanent  
is said to be duḥkha.

Gyaltsab explains:

Whatever is impermanent, such as the body, which is a maturation of polluted past karma and afflictions, is definitely damaged by factors causing disintegration and therefore produces aversion. Anything affected by causes of harm, whose character is to produce aversion, is not pleasurable. Therefore all that is impermanent and polluted is said to be duḥkha, just as anything that falls into a salt pit become salty.

Impermanent and polluted things, such as our bodies, are under the influence of afflictions and karma that cause them to disintegrate. An aged or dead body is considered undesirable and unclean, just as beautiful flowers are ugly when they decay and rot. Anything that disintegrates under the influence of afflictions and karma and produces aversion and distaste in us is by nature duḥkha. It lacks a findable essence; it is empty. Seeing this leads to disenchantment with saṃsāra and inspires us to turn our attention to liberation.

3. The aggregates are *empty* (*śūnya*) because they lack a permanent, unitary, and independent self.

The third distorted conception holds what is foul — specifically our bodies

— as beautiful. Our own and others’ bodies are filled with ugly substances — blood, bones, muscles, organs, tissue, excrement, and so on. Because of ignorance, we preen our own bodies and see others’ bodies as desirable and lust after them. Needless to say, our infatuation with the body is misplaced and leads to disappointment and misery.

There are two aspects to seeing the aggregates as unattractive. The first focuses on the body and sees that its organs, fluids, and so forth are foul. No one finds the inside of the body gorgeous, and we clean away everything that the body excretes. The second understands that since the aggregates are impermanent and are unsatisfactory by nature, the body is unattractive and our afflictive thoughts are undesirable. As such, our saṃsāric aggregates are not worth craving and clinging to, for they lack the capacity to bring us enduring well-being. This inspires us to turn our attention to creating the causes for liberation.

The aggregates being empty refutes the permanent, unitary, independent self or ātman as conceived by the non-Buddhists. *Permanent* here means the self is eternal and does not change from one life to the next. *Unitary* means not made of parts, and *independent* in this context means not depending on causes and conditions. Such a self or soul has a nature that is entirely different from that of the aggregates: it is forever unchanged, monolithic, all-pervasive, and completely separate from conditioned phenomena. The aggregates, in contrast, change, consist of parts, and are influenced by causes and conditions. The aggregates cannot possibly be such a self. The attribute of empty also refutes the existence of an independent creator who is unchanging, monolithic, and not affected by causes and conditions.

How does the third attribute — empty — counteract the notion of the body as attractive? Our mistaken belief that the foul body is attractive and pure involves holding the person and the aggregates to be separate when in fact they are the same nature. During the Buddha’s time, people adhered strongly to the caste system and the brahmins prided themselves on being pure because they were born from Brahmā’s mouth, while those of lower castes were born from lower parts of Brahmā’s body and thus were considered impure. Brahmins maintained strict rules of cleanliness to the extent that they did not touch the bodies of lower-caste people, eat with them, or use the same utensils. The Buddha opposed the caste system and the notion of a “pure self” that was its basis. By teaching that there is no pure, eternal, monolithic self that is separate from the aggregates, he pointed out that all saṃsāric bodies — no matter what



caste people belonged to — were unattractive and impure.

Although Prāsaṅgikas agree with the above, their unique viewpoint of the third attribute is expressed in the following syllogism: The aggregates are *empty* because of arising dependently. This expresses the emptiness of inherent existence of phenomena. If the subject were the person, it would express the emptiness of the person. The reason — dependent arising — proves the emptiness of both the person and the aggregates because in both cases inherent existence is being negated. The reason in this syllogism could also be “because of depending on causes and conditions” or “because they depend on parts.”

4. The aggregates are *selfless* (*nairātmya*) because they lack a self-sufficient substantially existent person.

If a self-sufficient substantially existent person existed, it would be the same nature as the aggregates. When we say “I” or “my body and mind,” we have the impression that there is a self who is the owner and controller of the body and mind. This I instructs the mind to think and the body to move. Whereas we usually identify a person by seeing his body, hearing her voice, or thinking of her mind, a self-sufficient substantially existent person could be identified without cognizing any of the aggregates. The fourth attribute negates the existence of such a self.

According to Prāsaṅgikas’ unique view, a self-sufficient substantially existent self is a coarse object of negation, one that can be refuted by a conventional reliable cognizer. They assert that the fourth distorted conception is grasping all phenomena whatsoever as inherently existent, meaning they have their own intrinsic essence and exist under their own power, independent of all other factors. For Prāsaṅgikas emptiness and selflessness come to the same point.

The ignorance that grasps inherent existence is a big troublemaker. Based on it, we incorrectly consider ourselves to be self-enclosed entities, become attached to our individual well-being, and see everything in relationship to ourselves. Grasping inherent existence stimulates distorted conceptualization, which projects attractiveness and ugliness on people and things that don’t have them. As a result, we become indignant when criticized and arrogant when praised. This leads to manipulative behavior, personal anguish, societal discord, and vicious wars. It is important to understand this by examining our own experiences.

Because all phenomena are baseless — they lack an inherent nature — it is

possible for the wisdom realizing the emptiness of inherent existence to overcome and dispel self-grasping ignorance, which holds phenomena to exist inherently. Seeing with wisdom that all persons and phenomena are selfless — that they lack inherent existence — is the path freeing us from saṃsāra.

In conclusion, based on not knowing the four attributes of true duḥkha, the four distorted conceptions arise in our minds one after the other. They give rise to afflictions, which instigate disturbing mental, verbal, and physical actions, which in turn leave karmic seeds on our mindstreams. Some of these karmic seeds ripen at the time of death and cause our next rebirth; others ripen in our future lives, affecting our environments, habits, and the experiences we undergo. This is the meaning of being under the control of afflictions and polluted actions, and it clearly illustrates that we are not free to experience the joy and fulfillment we seek. We must understand the four distorted conceptions well in order to overcome them, just as in ordinary warfare one has to learn about one's enemies in order to defeat them.

The four attributes of true duḥkha build on one another. Our bodies and minds change moment by moment. This is their nature; once they arise, no further cause is needed to make them change. Knowing this contradicts the belief that they are static and unchanging.

Impermanent things are produced by causes and conditions; our aggregates are controlled by their causes — afflictions and karma — which are ultimately rooted in ignorance. Anything caused by or rooted in ignorance is unsatisfactory; this is the pervasive duḥkha of conditioning. Once we understand this, no matter how beautiful, pleasurable, and enticing things may appear, we know they are not worthy of our clinging to them.

The first two attributes center on the aggregates being dependent on causes and conditions. They lead to understanding the last two attributes that deny the existence of any kind of independent self or person. We aren't free from these aggregates, so how could there be a permanent, unitary, independent self that is a different entity from the aggregates? We cannot prevent our bodies and minds from aging and dying, so how could there be a self-sufficient substantially existent person that controls the aggregates?

Whether we initially approach the four attributes from the viewpoint of reasoning or meditation, we must later combine the knowledge gained from both to attain a yogic direct reliable cognizer that realizes impermanence, duḥkha, emptiness, and selflessness. This mind is a mental consciousness that is a union

of serenity and insight that directly realizes these four attributes.

Reflecting on the four attributes of true duḥkha makes us yearn to be free from our polluted aggregates and to attain nirvāṇa, a state of true freedom. The practice of the four establishments of mindfulness is one way to realize the four attributes of true duḥkha and to overcome the four distorted conceptions. Mindfulness of the body overcomes holding it as attractive; mindfulness of feelings overcomes seeing the aggregates as pleasurable and desirable; mindfulness of the mind counteracts grasping a permanent, unitary, independent self; and mindfulness of phenomena leads us to understand selflessness. The realization of subtle emptiness and subtle selflessness frees us from the bonds of cyclic existence.

DISTORTED CONCEPTIONS OF TRUE DUḤKHA		ATTRIBUTES OF TRUE DUḤKHA <i>The polluted aggregates are</i>
1.	Believing impermanent things to be permanent	Impermanent, because they undergo continuous, momentary arising and disintegrating
2.	Believing unsatisfactory things to be pleasurable	Duḥkhatā, because they are under the control of afflictions and karma
3.	Believing the unattractive to be attractive	Empty, because they lack a permanent, unitary, and independent self
4.	Believing what lacks a self to have a self	Selfless, because they lack a self-sufficient substantially existent self

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## REFLECTION

1. Remember a situation in which you had strong animosity toward someone. Observe how you believed that person to be fixed and unchanging. It seems as if all he has ever been or done is condensed as that horrible person who harmed you.
2. Ask yourself if this is true. Is the person frozen in time like this? Or does he change depending on causes and conditions? Is there an independent person who always has been and always will be the image you currently have of him?
3. Seeing that the person is neither permanent nor independent, allow your

anger to dissipate. Enjoy the feeling of being free from hurt and anger.

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### *Four Attributes of True Origins*

True origins (*samudaya-satya*) — afflictions and karma — are the principal causes of true duḥkha. Actions come from afflictions, especially craving and ignorance, the root of all afflictions. Buddhist tenet systems have various ideas of what ignorance is and how it relates to the view of a personal identity. These will be explained later.

A prominent example of afflictions is craving (*trṣṇā*), a strong liking for an object and unwillingness to let it go. Looking closely at our life experiences, we see that much of our suffering is due to craving — holding on to something or someone outside of ourselves as the source of happiness, security, and success. Craving creates feelings of dissatisfaction and inadequacy, so that no matter what we accomplish or possess, or who loves and appreciates us, we still feel discontent, pervaded by the longing for more and better.

The four attributes of true origins are cause, origin, strong producers, and conditions.

1. Craving and karma are the *causes (hetu)* of duḥkha because they are the chief causes of duḥkha.

Our suffering is not haphazard but has causes — craving and karma. Under the control of ignorance, we crave to experience pleasant feelings and crave to not experience painful ones. This leads us to act, creating karma. Craving also spurs different karmas to ripen into their results, especially during the dying process. This attribute refutes the idea that duḥkha is random or causeless, as asserted by the Materialists (Cārvāka), a philosophical school in ancient India. By rejecting the law of karma and its effects, many Materialists denied ethical responsibility and lived hedonistic lifestyles, indulging in sense pleasures with little thought of the long-term effects of their actions on themselves or others.

2. Craving and karma are *origins (samudaya)* of duḥkha because they repeatedly produce all of the diverse forms of duḥkha.

Afflictions and karma create not just a portion of our mental and physical misery but all of it in the past, present, and future. Understanding this dispels the idea that duḥkha comes from only one cause, such as an external deity or a

primal cosmic matter. If duḥkha rested on only one cause, cooperative conditions would be unnecessary, in which case either that cause would never produce a result or it would never stop producing a result. If a sprout depended only on a seed and nothing else, the seed would continually grow because the change of seasons would not affect it at all; or it would not grow at all because the presence of warm weather, water, and fertilizer would not affect it. Duḥkha depends on the coming together of many changeable factors. It is not predestined or fated.

Seeing the diverse forms of duḥkha that sentient beings repeatedly experience under the control of afflictions and karma can be shocking at first. However, since they are conditioned phenomena, when conditions change or cease, duḥkha will similarly change or cease.

3. Craving and karma are *strong producers (prabhava)* because they act forcefully to produce strong duḥkha.

We tend to think that our problems come from causes outside of ourselves — an external creator or another person. When some people experience illness or accidents, they attribute it to God, who willed that event. On a more mundane level, we blame our unhappiness on other people or external circumstances. This way of thinking locks us into a victim mentality where we believe we are unable to change our experiences because they are caused by someone outside of ourselves. Understanding the third attribute dispels the notion that duḥkha arises from discordant causes — for example, the motivation of an external creator.

Afflictions and karma bring intense duḥkha in both lower and higher realms, and they forcefully keep us bound in saṃsāra. When we understand that afflictions and karma are the actual origins of our problems, we accept responsibility for our actions and our lives. We become empowered, knowing that we have the ability to change our situation and create the causes for the happiness we want. Having correctly identified the origins of our misery, we learn, reflect on, and meditate on the Dharma to counteract afflictions and purify karma. Understanding this stimulates us to dispel these origins of duḥkha.

4. Craving and karma are *conditions (pratyaya)* because they also act as the cooperative conditions that give rise to duḥkha.

Craving and karma are not only the primary causes of duḥkha but also the cooperative conditions that enable karma to ripen. When craving manifests in our minds, it acts like fertilizer enabling karmic seeds to ripen. Understanding

that duḥkha depends on causes and conditions dispels the notion that it is fixed and unalterable and counteracts the idea that duḥkha is fundamentally permanent but temporarily fleeting — that is, thinking our unsatisfactory state cannot be overcome even though there are temporary times of reprieve. When the causes and conditions are eliminated, the resultant unsatisfactory and suffering experiences will also cease. Knowing this brings resilience to our Dharma practice.

Contemplating these four attributes strengthens our determination to abandon true origins.

<b>DISTORTED CONCEPTIONS OF TRUE ORIGINS</b>		<b>ATTRIBUTES OF TRUE ORIGINS</b> <i>Afflictions (especially craving) and karma are</i>
1.	Believing that duḥkha is random or causeless (Cārvāka)	Causes of duḥkha, because they are the chief causes of duḥkha
2.	Believing that duḥkha comes from only one cause	Origins, because they repeatedly produce all the diverse forms of duḥkha
3.	Believing that duḥkha arises from discordant causes, such as an external creator (Vaiśeṣika)	Strong producers, because they act forcefully to produce strong duḥkha
4.	Believing that duḥkha is fundamentally permanent but temporarily fleeting (Nirgrantha)	Conditions, because they act as cooperative conditions that give rise to duḥkha

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## REFLECTION

1. Examine the role of craving in your life. What do you crave? Do these things actually satisfy you when you get them?
2. Does craving come from outside yourself? Is it from a creator, another person, the object you crave? How is craving related to ignorance?
3. What do you do under the influence of craving? What are the results of these actions?
4. Make a strong determination to overcome ignorance and craving by practicing the path.

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## *Four Attributes of True Cessations*

True cessations (*nirodha-satya*) include the cessations of various levels of afflictions that are actualized as we progress through the paths to arhatship and full awakening. Prāsaṅgikas add to this that a true cessation is the purified ultimate nature of the mind that has removed that level of afflictions.

An arhat's true cessation of all afflictions and karma causing saṃsāric rebirth is taken as the example. This true cessation in the continuum of an arhat is the cessation of innate (*sahaja*) afflictions that have existed since beginningless time and acquired (*parikalpita*) afflictions that were learned from incorrect philosophies.

Prāsaṅgikas assert that the true cessations of the coarse four truths are not actual true cessations because eliminating the ignorance grasping a self-sufficient substantially existent person does not eradicate true duḥkha and its origins, although it will temporarily stop the manifest coarse afflictions explained in the two *Knowledges*. They also assert that a buddha's true cessation is also the cessation of the cognitive obscurations that prevent full awakening.

The four attributes of true cessation address concerns that you may have. If you believe that afflictions exist inherently in sentient beings, so that a state of final peace is impossible, reflect on the first attribute. If you wonder if heaven is better than nirvāṇa, contemplate the second attribute. If you think that nirvāṇa isn't total freedom, reflect on the third attribute. And if you wonder if it's possible for nirvāṇa to deteriorate, contemplate the fourth attribute.

The four attributes of true cessation are cessation, peace, magnificence, and definite emergence (freedom).

1. Nirvāṇa is the *cessation* of duḥkha (*nirodha*) because it is a state in which the origins of duḥkha have been abandoned, and it thus ensures that duḥkha will no longer arise.

Thinking that afflictions are an inherent part of sentient beings, some people believe that trying to eliminate them is futile. They do not try to remedy their situation and consequently continue to be reborn in cyclic existence. Understanding that attaining true cessations is possible by eliminating afflictions and karma dispels the misconception that liberation does not exist, immediately freeing us from a defeatist, and often cynical, attitude.

2. Nirvāṇa is *peace (śānta)* because it is a separation in which afflictions have been eliminated.

Unable to correctly identify the qualities of liberation, some people mistake other polluted states, such as meditative absorptions in the form and formless realms, as liberation. Although these meditative absorptions are much more tranquil than our human existence, they have only suppressed manifest afflictions and have not eliminated subtle afflictions and their seeds from the root. Not understanding that nirvāṇa is ultimate peace, people do not try to attain it and are satisfied with a temporary, superior saṃsāric state. This attribute counteracts the belief that states polluted by ignorance are nirvāṇa. People who are convinced of the harm of afflictions and karma know that their cessation is a state of peace and joy that will not vanish.

3. Nirvāṇa is *magnificence (praṇīta)* because it is the superior source of benefit and bliss.

Because nirvāṇa is completely nondeceptive and no other state of liberation supersedes it, it is supreme and magnificent. Nirvāṇa is total freedom from all three types of duḥkha. Knowing this prevents mistaking certain states of temporary or partial cessation as nirvāṇa. It also prevents thinking that there is some state superior to the cessation of duḥkha and its origins. Someone who mistakes a saṃsāric state as liberation will follow a detour that does not lead to their destination. For example, someone who enjoys the tranquility of suppressing the conceptual mind in blank-minded meditation does himself a disservice, because nirvāṇa will elude him.

4. Nirvāṇa is *freedom or definite emergence (niḥsaraṇa)* because it is total, irreversible release from saṃsāra.

Nirvāṇa is a definite abandonment because it is an irrevocable release from saṃsāra's duḥkha. This counters the mistaken notion that nirvāṇa can degenerate. Because nirvāṇa is the elimination of all afflictions and karma causing saṃsāric rebirth, there no longer exists any cause for such rebirth or for the suffering it entails.

Contemplating these four attributes encourages us not to stop partway but to continue practicing until we actualize full nirvāṇa.

**DISTORTED CONCEPTIONS OF TRUE  
CESSATIONS**

**ATTRIBUTES OF TRUE CESSATIONS**  
*Nirvāṇa — an arhat's true cessation of all  
afflictions and karma that cause saṃsāric*



		<i>rebirth through the force of antidotes — is</i>
1.	Believing that liberation does not exist	Cessation of duḥkha, because it is a state in which the origins of duḥkha have been abandoned
2.	Believing that other polluted states (such as meditative absorptions in the form and formless realms) are liberation	Peace, because it is a separation in which afflictions have been eliminated
3.	Believing that a state of temporary or partial cessation is nirvāṇa/liberation	Magnificence, because it is the superior source of benefit and bliss
4.	Believing that nirvāṇa can degenerate, that it is reversible	Freedom, because it is total, irreversible release from saṃsāra

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## REFLECTION

1. To get a small taste of what nirvāṇa could be like, imagine that an affliction such as anger is totally absent from your mind. No matter what someone says or does, no matter what happens, you will never get angry again.
  2. Nirvāṇa is the complete absence of all afflictions forever. Aspire to attain it.
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### *Four Attributes of True Paths*

The true path (*mārgasatyā*) is the wisdom realizing the sixteen attributes of the four truths, especially true cessation. Existing in the mindstreams of āryas of all three vehicles, true paths eradicate ignorance and other afflictions. When afflictions cease, polluted karma is no longer created and that which has already been created cannot ripen into a saṃsāric rebirth; liberation is attained.

The Pāli tradition says that the āryas' eightfold path constitutes true paths, while Prāsaṅgikas say it is an ārya's realization informed by the wisdom directly realizing the emptiness of inherent existence. The wisdom realizing emptiness is the principal true path because it views phenomena's mode of existence opposite to the way ignorance does. While ignorance grasps inherent existence, the

wisdom directly realizing emptiness realizes the absence of inherent existence. In this way, it is able to completely counteract ignorance and all afflictions rooted in it.

As above, these four attributes assuage doubts that we may have about the true path. If you fear that there is no path to peace, reflect on the first attribute. If you think that the wisdom realizing emptiness cannot counteract the afflictions, reflect on the second attribute. If you wonder if the wisdom realizing emptiness will actually eliminate all afflictions, ponder the third attribute. If you wonder if meditating with the wisdom realizing emptiness will bring nirvāṇa and not some other state, reflect on the fourth attribute.

The four attributes of true paths are path, suitable, accomplishment, and deliverance. These are explained according to the Prāsaṅgika viewpoint.<sup>9</sup>

1. The wisdom directly realizing selflessness is the *path (mārga)* because it is the unmistakable path to liberation.

This wisdom leads to liberation. Knowing this counters the misconception that there is no path to liberation from saṃsāra. People who believe no path exists will not venture to cultivate it and will remain endlessly trapped in cyclic existence.

2. The wisdom directly realizing selflessness is *suitable (nyāya)* because it acts as the direct counterforce to the afflictions.

The wisdom realizing selflessness is the suitable path leading to nirvāṇa because it is the powerful antidote that directly counteracts self-grasping ignorance and eliminates duḥkha. Understanding this eliminates the misconception that this wisdom is not a path to liberation. Having confidence that it is the correct path to nirvāṇa, we will be eager to cultivate the wisdom that knows the nature of bondage in and release from saṃsāra just as they are. This wisdom also knows the faults of the afflictions and the meaning of selflessness.

3. The wisdom directly realizing selflessness is *accomplishment (pratipatti)* because it unmistakably realizes the nature of the mind.

Unlike worldly paths that cannot accomplish our ultimate goals, the precious wisdom directly realizing emptiness leads to unmistakable spiritual attainments because it is an exalted wisdom that directly realizes the final mode of existence of the mind, its emptiness of inherent existence. In this way, it accomplishes the eradication of afflictions and attainment of liberation.

Understanding this counteracts the misconception that worldly paths eliminate duḥkha. Worldly paths are of many types, such as meditative absorptions that are mistaken for liberation. Blissful as they may be, they do not secure a true state of liberation. Some people practice the worldly path of extreme asceticism, mistakenly believing that harsh treatment of the body will eliminate craving for pleasure. This method does not bring the desired result, as the Buddha attested to by practicing — and then relinquishing — torturous asceticism for six years.

4. The wisdom directly realizing selflessness is the *way of deliverance (nairyāṇika)* because it overcomes afflictions and duḥkha from their root and brings irreversible liberation.

Inherent existence and noninherent existence are contradictory. By realizing the lack of inherent existence, the ignorance that grasps inherent existence can be conclusively removed. This wisdom is able to overpower ignorance because it knows things as they are, whereas ignorance relies on faulty fabrications. Because it definitely abandons all duḥkha and obscurations, this wisdom does not stop partway, but definitively delivers us from cyclic existence. This attribute counteracts the misconception that afflictions can regenerate and cannot be removed completely. It also counteracts the mistaken notion that while some paths may partially cease duḥkha, no path can cease it completely.

Contemplating these four attributes encourages us to meditate on true paths in order to destroy duḥkha and its origins and to actualize nirvāṇa.

<b>DISTORTED CONCEPTIONS OF TRUE PATHS</b>		<b>ATTRIBUTES OF TRUE PATHS</b> <i>The wisdom directly realizing selflessness is</i>
1.	Believing that there is no path to liberation	Path, because it is an unmistaken path to liberation
2.	Believing that this wisdom is not a path to liberation	Suitable, because it acts as the direct counterforce to the afflictions
3.	Believing that worldly paths (e.g., meditative absorptions) can eliminate duḥkha and are liberation	Accomplishment, because it unmistakably realizes the nature of the mind
4.	Believing that afflictions and duḥkha cannot be removed completely, or that once removed, they can reappear	Way of deliverance, because it overcomes afflictions and duḥkha from their root and brings irreversible liberation

## REFLECTION

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1. Contemplate that true duḥkha — everything produced by afflictions and polluted karma — lacks any inherent essence.
2. Contemplate that all duḥkha as well as the origins of duḥkha depend on causes. Because they are dependent and do not exist under their own power, true duḥkha and true origins lack independent essence.
3. Contemplate the four attributes of true cessation. Abide in the certainty that nirvāṇa — a lasting state of peace and joy — can be attained, and let your mind be imbued with the optimism that brings.
4. Contemplate that true paths are also conditioned phenomena that depend on other factors. They too do not exist from their own side and thus are empty of inherent existence.

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In conclusion, according to the Prāsaṅgika perspective, the entire complex of all sufferings and unsatisfactory circumstances of cyclic existence is rooted in self-grasping ignorance. This grasping at objective existence underpins our emotional reactions, such as craving, anger, jealousy, arrogance, guilt, and so forth. Cultivating the view of emptiness undermines this grasping and overcomes the four distorted conceptions. So there is a direct connection between the understanding of emptiness and our day-to-day engagement with the world.

While I have not realized emptiness directly, I can assure you that as a result of cultivating and deepening an understanding of emptiness and familiarizing myself with this understanding over time, I can see a progressive reduction of the influence of the afflictions that usually dominate our ordinary minds. There is a real impact and transformative power in this practice. If you make sincere effort to study, contemplate, and meditate on emptiness, the four distorted conceptions will no longer be able to nourish afflictions in your mind. When your afflictions have been eliminated, engaging in polluted actions ceases, and without these, rebirth due to afflictions and karma comes to an end.



## 2 | Revolving in Cyclic Existence: The Truth of Duḥkha

THE FOUR TRUTHS directly apply to our lives: they lay out the framework for understanding our situation and our potential. Having a general understanding of them, we will now go into more depth regarding each truth, beginning with the truth of duḥkha, the unsatisfactory circumstances in which we are bound. These include the three realms of saṃsāric existence into which we are born, the disadvantages of being born there, and the value of our human lives to reverse this situation.

### *Knowing Duḥkha for What It Is*

The Buddha said that true duḥkha is to be known, true origins are to be eliminated, true cessations are to be actualized, and true paths are to be cultivated. In specifying that true duḥkha is to be known, the Buddha was giving us an important message: unless we identify the unsatisfactory circumstances that afflict us, we will never attempt to free ourselves from them. If we don't know we are ill or deny the fact that we are, we will not go to the doctor or take the prescribed medicine. Meanwhile, an insidious disease will fester inside us.

In spiritual practice, the first step is to identify true duḥkha, the unsatisfactory situation in which we live. Once we know this, we will search out its causes, eliminate them by cultivating true paths, and actualize true cessations, the state of lasting peace and happiness that we want. When reflecting on the various types of duḥkha, keep in mind that the purpose is to generate the determination to be free from saṃsāra and attain liberation. Seeing others' duḥkha, with compassion we will want to help them attain liberation as well. Otherwise there is no purpose to reflecting on suffering.

Having properly identified our duḥkha, it is essential to cultivate the proper attitude toward it. Many of us, when confronted with pain or injustice, respond with anger or self-pity. We try to blame someone else for our misery. Meditating

on true duḥkha involves taking responsibility for our situation and our problems and dealing with them wisely.

We may think that we're already aware of our misery, so there's no need to contemplate it. Although we may be aware of our gross duḥkha, we probably are not aware of duḥkha's subtler levels. Until we recognize these, we won't seek to be free from them.

Initial-level practitioners identify the obviously painful suffering of unfortunate migrations and its causes — destructive actions. They wish to attain a good rebirth (the cessation of that suffering), and observe karma and its effects as the path to accomplish this. Nevertheless, these people do not yet understand the full meaning of duḥkha, nor can they actualize the full cessation of all duḥkha.

We may know the various divisions of duḥkha into three, six, and eight types and have intellectual knowledge of them, but real understanding comes from observing our own experiences — our bodies and minds, our lives and deaths. It involves facing the disparity between the belief that we are in control of our lives and the reality of what actually is.

When reflecting on duḥkha, keep in mind that understanding duḥkha and its origins is just the beginning. The Buddha also taught the last two truths, directing us to the state of genuine peace and showing us the method to attain it. With those, we will have a complete picture. As Buddhaghosa said (Vism 16.97):

The truth of duḥkha should be regarded as a burden, the truth of origin as the taking up of the burden, the truth of cessation as the putting down of the burden, the truth of the path as the means to put down the burden. The truth of duḥkha is like a disease, the truth of origin is like the cause of the disease, the truth of cessation is like the cure of the disease, and the truth of the path is like the medicine.

## *Realms of Existence*

As beings in cyclic existence, we are reborn in different realms (*dhātu*) of existence. A realm is primarily the five aggregates projected by our karma, although it also includes the environment. All of these are considered true duḥkha. One way of expressing the realms of saṃsāra is the schema of the three

realms (*tridhātu* or *trailokya*). Beings in the *desire realm* are completely immersed in objects that are attractive to the six senses. They are obsessed with fulfilling their desires by possessing these objects. This is the realm in which we presently live. The *form realm* comprises beings who have attained the four levels of single-pointed concentration or meditative stabilization (*dhyāna*, *jhāna*). The *formless realm* consists of beings in even deeper states of meditative absorption (*samāpatti*),<sup>10</sup> such that they do not have bodies. While these realms are manifestations of our karma, they are not merely projections of mind or metaphors for states we experience as human beings. When we are born in a realm, it appears as real to us as our present human life and environment appear to us now.

Sentient beings in saṃsāra can be subdivided into six classes (*ṣaḍgati*). From the highest to the lowest, they are devas (gods or celestial beings in the desire, form, and formless realms), asuras (anti-gods), human beings, hungry ghosts, animals, and hell beings. Sometimes the devas and asuras are considered as one, in which case there are five classes.

The three realms can be expanded into thirty-three classes of beings or planes of existence, which are listed from the highest to the lowest.<sup>11</sup>

#### (1) Formless Realm (*Ārūpyadhātu*)

33. Peak of Saṃsāra (Neither-discrimination-nor-nondiscrimination, *Naivasamjñānā-samjñāyatana* or *Bhavāgra*)
32. Nothingness (*Ākiñcanyāyatana*)
31. Infinite Consciousness (*Vijñānānantyāyatana*)
30. Infinite Space (*Ākāśānantyāyatana*)

Ordinary beings are born in these four realms due to invariable karma — that is, in the immediately preceding life, they attained the corresponding level of meditative absorption. Lacking a coarse body, these beings have only the four mental aggregates. They remain in deep states of meditative absorption for eons, experiencing no coarse suffering at all. These four meditative absorptions are distinguished based on the mental factor of discrimination that accompanies them, which becomes increasingly subtle, culminating in the peak of saṃsāra. These states are so subtle and blissful that some meditators confuse them with liberation. However, when the karma for these rebirths is exhausted, those beings take rebirth in the desire realm again, usually as hell beings, hungry ghosts, or animals.



(2) Form Realm (*Rūpadhātu*)

*Fourth Dhyāna (Caturthadhyāna)*

29. Highest Pure Abode (*Akaniṣṭha*)
28. Clear-Sighted (*Sudarśana*)
27. Beautiful (*Sudṛśa*)
26. Untroubled (*Atapa*)
25. Not Great (Free from Afflictions, *Avṛha*)<sup>12</sup>
24. Unconscious Beings without Discrimination (*Asamjñasattva*). Ordinary beings who have attained the fourth dhyāna and cultivate meditative absorption without discrimination are born here, where the beings are nonpercipient and have no mental activity except at the moments of birth and death.<sup>13</sup>
23. Great Fruit (*Bṛhatphala*)
22. Increasing Merit (*Puṇyaprasava*)<sup>14</sup>
21. Cloudless (*Anabhraka*)

Ordinary beings are born in these three dhyānas by the invariable karma of having previously attained that state of concentration.

*Third Dhyāna (Tṛtīyadhyāna)*

20. Devas of Refulgent Glory (*Śubhakṛtsna*)<sup>15</sup>
19. Devas of Measureless Glory (*Apramāṇaśubha*)
18. Devas of Limited Glory (*Parītaśubha*)

Ordinary beings are born in the third dhyāna by the invariable karma of having previously attained that state of concentration.

*Second Dhyāna (Dvītyadhyāna)*

17. Devas of Total Radiance (*Ābhāsvara*)
16. Devas of Limitless Radiance (*Apramāṇābha*)
15. Devas of Limited Radiance (*Parīttābha*)

These beings are born in the second dhyāna by the invariable karma of having previously attained that state of concentration.

*First Dhyāna (Prathamadhyāna)*

14. Great Brahmā (*Mahābrahmā*). Great Brahmā, who mistakenly considers himself the creator of the universe, dwells here.
13. Ministers of Brahmā (In Front of Brahmā, *Brahmapurohita*)
12. Retinue of Brahmā (Brahmā Type, *Brahmakāyika*)

These beings are born in the first dhyāna by the invariable karma of having previously attained that state of concentration.

The four dhyānas of the form realm differ in terms of the mental factors that accompany them.<sup>16</sup> The four formless absorptions differ in terms of their object. The depth of concentration increases as one ascends these eight meditative absorptions.

Only āryas who are not yet free from saṃsāra are born in the five pure abodes in the fourth dhyāna, although after nonreturners become arhats they dwell there until attaining final nirvāṇa. The cause for rebirth there is the cultivation of alternating concentrations. This is a practice done by āryas, which involves first entering an unpolluted fourth dhyāna, then a polluted dhyāna, followed by another unpolluted dhyāna. This is extremely difficult to do, and the number of times a yogi can go back and forth between unpolluted and polluted dhyānas determines which pure abode he or she will be born in. Āryas who have attained liberation do these meditations to distance themselves from afflictions even more and to experience bliss in this life.

Śrāvakas who are nonreturners take rebirth in the five pure abodes to experience the specific bliss of the pure abodes. Ārya solitary realizers are not born there because they pray in their last life to be born where there is no buddha. Ārya bodhisattvas are born in the pure abodes to benefit the śrāvaka arhats there by encouraging them to enter the bodhisattva path after they arise from their blissful meditation in nirvāṇa.

The five pure abodes are saṃsāric realms. These differ from both *nirmāṇakāya* (emanation body) pure lands — such as Amitābha Buddha's pure land Sukhāvātī and Akṣobhya Buddha's pure land Abhirati — and enjoyment body (*saṃbhogakāya*) pure lands, which are not saṃsāric realms. Several places have the name Akaniṣṭha. The Akaniṣṭha that is one of the five pure abodes is a saṃsāric abode, whereas the Densely Arrayed Akaniṣṭha is not: there a buddha's enjoyment body teaches ārya bodhisattvas.

According to the Pāli tradition, only arhats and nonreturners dwell in the five pure abodes. Those who become nonreturners in other realms are reborn in these pure abodes, where they attain arhatship. New arhats remain here until the end of

their natural lifespans and then attain parinirvāṇa.

According to the *Treasury of Knowledge*, the beings in the form realm lack the sense of smell and taste.<sup>17</sup> While they have some sensual desire for sights and sounds, it is weak — beings with strong desire are born in the desire realm. They do not sleep or eat, nor do they have sexual desire, because they do not have sexual organs in that realm. Their bodies are subtle forms made of the four elements. Their basic state of consciousness is samādhi, although they do emerge from it and interact with one another.

The form and formless realms are collectively known as the higher realms owing to the refined states of mind of the beings born in them. Beings are born in these realms by attaining various degrees of meditative absorption — for example, when they were human meditators. All of these meditative absorptions can be attained by human beings as well, in which case it is said that the person is in the desire realm because of being a human being, but has a form-realm sphere of consciousness (*vacaracitta*) because of the level of concentration they have attained.

### (3) Desire Realm (*Kāmadhātu*)

#### *Desire-Realm Devas (Kāmadhātudeva)*

11. Controllers of Others' Emanations Devas (*Paranirmitavaśavartin*) enjoy sense pleasures others create for them. Māra, the personification of delusion and desire, dwells here.
10. Devas Delighting in Emanations (*Nirmāṇarati*) enjoy the sense pleasures they created themselves.
9. Joyful Devas (*Tuṣita*) experience pure delight. According to the Pāli tradition, Maitreya (Metteya), the bodhisattva who will become the next wheel-turning buddha, dwells here, as do other bodhisattvas in the life prior to their becoming buddhas. The Sanskrit tradition says that Maitreya lives in the pure land Tuṣita, which is on the outskirts of the deva realm with the same name.
8. Suyāma Devas (*Suyāma*) live in the air and are free from all problems.
7. The Thirty-Three Devas (*Trāyastriṃśa*) is so-called because thirty-three young people were born there as a result of their meritorious actions. The leader of this group of youths became

the deva Śakra, who presides over this realm and is a devotee of the Buddha. Many devas dwelling here live in mansions in the air.<sup>18</sup> During one rains retreat, the Buddha went here to teach his mother, who had been reborn in this realm.

6. Devas of the Four Great Kings (*Cāturmahārājika*). The four great kings, who are Dharma protectors, rule this land. Their images are often near the door of Mahāyāna temples. The causes for rebirth here are ethical conduct and generosity.

#### *Other Desire-Realm Beings*

5. *Anti-gods* (asuras). Asaṅga includes the asuras in the deva realm and says that they experience great sense pleasure, even though they suffer from jealousy and constant battles with higher devas. The *Smṛtyupasthāna Sūtra* puts them with the hungry ghosts and animals.<sup>19</sup>
4. *Human beings* (*manuṣya*) have the necessary balance of happiness and suffering that is conducive for Dharma practice. The primary cause for rebirth here is ethical conduct.
3. *Animals* (*tiryāṅc*) suffer from hunger and thirst, being enslaved by human beings, and being eaten by others.
2. *Hungry ghosts* (*preta*) suffer from constant hunger and thirst that is never satisfied.<sup>20</sup>
1. *Hell beings* (*nāraka*) experience great physical pain due to heat, cold, and torture.

Unethical actions and wrong views are the primary cause for rebirth as a hungry ghost, animal, or hell being. Stinginess is especially affiliated with rebirth as a hungry ghost, while violent activities are associated with rebirth in the hells.

Rebirth in any of the six realms is not eternal. When the karma causing that rebirth is exhausted, the being is born in another realm. None of the realms are rewards or punishments. They are all simply results of our actions, our karma.

According to the Pāli tradition, *nāgas* (snake-like beings who live in or near water), *gandharvas* (celestial musicians), and *yakṣas* (tree spirits of varying degrees of ethical purity, who resemble goblins, trolls, and fairies) live in the Realm of the Four Great Kings. The *Treasury of Knowledge* says some yakṣas are in the deva realm and some are in the hungry ghost realm. Gandharvas are

included with the devas because they are the musicians of the devas. *Garuḍas* (large birds), *kiṃnaras* (beings who are half human and half horse), and *nāgas* are included among animals. *Piśāca* (a class of demons), *unmada* (crazy makers), *apasmāra* (forgetful makers), and *mātrka* (a type of wicked demon) are included with hungry ghosts.

These realms are actual realms of rebirth. We can get an idea of life in them by comparing them to some experiences that occur in the human realm. The Indian sage Kamalaśīla says:

Humans also experience the sufferings of hell beings and so forth. Those who are afflicted here by having their limbs cut off, being impaled, hanged, and so forth by thieves and the like, suffer like hell beings. Those who are poor and deprived and are pained by hunger and thirst suffer like hungry ghosts. Those in servitude and so forth, whose bodies are controlled by others and who are oppressed, suffer from being struck, bound, and so forth, like animals.<sup>21</sup>

The magnificent pleasures of the deva realms can be understood by comparing them to some of the greatest pleasures we human beings experience. However, these are simply analogies; they are not the actual experience. The actual bliss of the deva realms is beyond our imagination, as is the misery of the unfortunate realms.

Seeing the various realms as psychological states can be helpful for recognizing mental characteristics we may have. For example, the mental state of a hungry ghost is similar to that of a person who goes here and there looking for someone to love them, but is perpetually dissatisfied with every relationship. The mental state of a hell being resembles the mind of someone overwhelmed by fear, animosity, and violence. These human mental states could motivate actions that cause rebirth in those realms, but the actual realms are not simply psychological states of human beings.

In the *Treasury of Knowledge*, Vasubandhu states that the world with its realms and its sentient beings is created by karma and he describes the location of some realms in relation to our human realm. Although his account is contradicted by modern knowledge, that does not disprove the general existence of these realms. We know the animal realm exists. People with the paranormal power of the divine eye can see some of the other realms.

## *Three Types of Duḥkha*

When *duḥkha* is translated as suffering, people easily have the wrong idea that it refers only to pain. But unsatisfactory experiences are more than that. In a previous chapter, I briefly outlined the three types of *duḥkha* and now would like to explain them in more depth.

(1) The *duḥkha of pain* is the manifest physical and mental pain that all beings recognize as suffering. It includes suffering from heat, cold, hunger, thirst, stress, anxiety, depression, loneliness, and so forth.

(2) The *duḥkha of change* is subtler and more difficult to identify; it includes what worldly beings usually call happiness. Why is the happiness we experience when eating a good meal, hearing the music we like, or experiencing other sensual pleasures unsatisfactory? If they were truly pleasurable, the more we did them, the happier we would be. However, that is not the case. If we keep eating, we feel ill. Jogging after a long day sitting at work initially feels wonderful, but after a while we are tired and want to sit down. When we are lonely, seeing a friend initially alleviates the feeling of isolation and makes us happy. But if we stay with that person hour after hour, we get tired, bored, and want to be alone. When we don't have a high-status job, we want one. After we are promoted, we are initially happy but later resent having to work longer hours. Āryadeva comments (CS 37):

Pleasure, when it increases,  
is seen to change into pain.  
Pain, when it increases,  
does not likewise change into pleasure.

Examining the experiences we call happiness, we see that they are not true happiness. They feel good for a short while and then turn into overt discomfort or even pain. For this reason they are unsatisfactory in nature, and the Buddha with compassion directs us toward a more satisfying joy — the peace of liberation and awakening.

(3) The *pervasive duḥkha of conditioning* is even subtler and more difficult to identify. It refers to our five psychophysical aggregates — our bodies, feelings, discriminations, miscellaneous factors, and consciousnesses — that are unsatisfactory because they are produced by afflictions and karma. The result of our previous *samsāric* rebirths, our aggregates are the basis for our present

duḥkha when our destructive karma ripens as the physical and mental pain we experience in this life.

Although our bodies and minds may not experience pain at this very moment, with the slightest change in circumstances, they easily will. They have the potential to experience horrible pain. Also, our five aggregates propel us to create the causes for more duḥkha in the future. By reacting to the pain and pleasure of this life with afflictions such as attachment, anger, and confusion, we again create more karmic causes to take another saṃsāric rebirth where we will again experience all three types of duḥkha. Dharmakīrti says (PV):

Because they are the basis of faults [i.e., duḥkha] and also because they are under the power of [polluted] causes, they are duḥkha.

At present, we are under the illusion that happiness can be attained with this body. We cling to the hope that scientists will discover and root out the causes for depression, unhappiness, disease, substance abuse, aging, and death. While scientific endeavors have remedied much suffering, they cannot stop the basic causes of suffering because our body itself is unsatisfactory by nature. No matter how much a cook tries to slow the disintegration of rotten vegetables or covers them with delicious sauce, making a tasty dish out of them is impossible. Similarly, once we have taken a body and mind under the control of afflictions and karma, we are set up to experience duḥkha. For this reason our aggregates are considered unsatisfactory by nature. Āryadeva tell us (CŚ 32–33):

The body, however long one spends,  
will not in itself become pleasurable.  
To say its nature can be overruled  
by other factors is improper.

The high have mental suffering;  
for the common it comes from the body.  
Day by day, both kinds of duḥkha  
overwhelm people in the world.

When contemplating the three types of duḥkha and the disadvantages of cyclic existence, reflect that you have experienced these since beginningless time. These meditations on duḥkha are not idle speculation; being repeatedly subjected to the miseries of cyclic existence is serious. In the *Tears Sutta*, the

Buddha gave a series of vivid examples illustrating the length of time afflictions and karma have bound us in saṃsāra (SN 15.3).

The stream of tears that you have shed as you roamed and wandered through this long course [of saṃsāra], weeping and wailing because of being united with the disagreeable and separated from the agreeable — this alone is more than the water in the four great oceans. For a long time, monastics, you have experienced the death of a mother . . . father . . . brother . . . sister . . . son . . . daughter . . . the loss of relatives . . . the loss of wealth . . . loss through illness. As you have experienced this, weeping and wailing because of being united with the disagreeable and separated from the agreeable, the stream of tears that you have shed is more than the water in the four great oceans. For what reasons? Because, monastics, this saṃsāra is without discoverable beginning. A first point is not discerned of beings roaming and migrating hindered by ignorance and fettered by craving. For such a long time, monastics, you have experienced suffering, anguish, and disaster, and swelled the cemetery. It is enough to experience revulsion toward all formations, enough to become dispassionate toward them, enough to be liberated from them.

While such a message may initially be unpleasant to hear, the Buddha says it with compassion so that we can act now while we have the opportunity to remedy the situation and free ourselves from such misery.

### *Feelings, Afflictions, and Duḥkha*

Each of the three types of duḥkha is associated with a specific feeling: the duḥkha of pain with painful feelings; the duḥkha of change with pleasant feelings, because when we initially engage in certain activities or have particular possessions we feel happy; and the pervasive duḥkha of conditioning with neutral feelings, because all beings in cyclic existence experience this duḥkha even when they are not actively feeling pain or pleasure. We will explore this more in the practice of the four establishments of mindfulness in a future volume.



These feelings in turn prompt afflictions. Anger easily arises toward painful physical and mental feelings. Attachment manifests when pleasurable feelings are experienced; we crave these feelings, do not want them to cease, and cling to the objects that seem to cause them. Ignorance increases when neutral feelings are present because we hold the aggregates as permanent when in fact they are momentary.

Under the influence of these afflictions, we create karma. While attachment may fuel actions that lead to rebirth in any of the six classes of beings, anger makes us miserable in this life and creates the causes for unfortunate rebirths. Ignorance keeps us bound in cyclic existence, unable to help ourselves, let alone others.

Recognizing pleasant feelings as *duḥkha* enables us to release craving and clinging to them, and as a result, attachment subsides. Accepting that by nature our bodies are unsatisfactory makes it easier to avoid anger or anxiety with respect to painful feelings. Seeing that neutral feelings are transient in nature diminishes ignorance. In this way, although the three feelings may arise, we stop responding to them with attachment, anger, and ignorance, thus reducing the karma created by afflictions.

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## REFLECTION

1. Think of a situation in which you felt happy. Observe how attachment arises for the pleasant feeling as well as for the people, objects, or situations that seem to cause it.
2. Observe the actions you do motivated by attachment. How do they cause problems in this life? How do they create karma for suffering in future lives? Think of the kinds of rebirth those actions could propel.
3. Contemplate that pleasant feelings are unsatisfactory in nature because they do not last and degenerate into pain if we keep doing the action over time. After contemplating the disadvantages of the *duḥkha* of change, observe your attachment subside. As your mind becomes more balanced, enjoy that peace.
4. While this peace is not the tranquility of *nirvāṇa*, it does give us the

knowledge that relinquishing attachment at any level makes the mind more peaceful.

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## *Six Disadvantages of Cyclic Existence*

Not only is saṃsāra unsatisfactory in nature, it is also bereft of advantages. Nāgārjuna's *Letter to a Friend (Suhṛi-lekha)* speaks of six disadvantages of saṃsāra:

(1) There is no security or certainty. We may work hard for a certain goal, but unexpected hindrances block our attaining it. We may live in a pleasant environment and suddenly be forced to leave. Our situation can change dramatically in a short period of time. Our relatives and friends change from one life to the next; saṃsāra lacks consistency and predictability.

(2) We are never satisfied with what we are, do, or have. We always want more and better of whatever we find desirable. No matter what we have accomplished or how much we excel, we never feel good enough about ourselves.

(3) We die repeatedly, each time leaving behind everything and everyone we know. Everything we worked so hard for during our life cannot come with us to the next life. Death naturally follows birth, and when we die nothing from this life except our karmic seeds and mental habits accompany us.

(4) We are reborn in cyclic existence repeatedly with all the problems and struggles that exist in each life. Our saṃsāra is beginningless, and unless we exert effort to attain liberation, it will be endless.

(5) We repeatedly change status from superior to inferior and vice versa. In one life we may change social position, health, financial status, relationships, and so on. From one life to the next we may go from the deva realm to a hell realm to birth as a human or an animal.

(6) We experience suffering alone; others cannot experience it for us no matter how much they love us. We are born alone and die alone. Our feelings are felt by ourselves alone. While we may be inseparable from certain people during our lives, at death separation is guaranteed.

The Buddha did not point these disadvantages out so that we would become depressed. Rather, with compassion, he asked us to look closely at our

experiences in cyclic existence and see them for what they are. Knowing that we have the potential to be free from them, he then described their causes, the path to counteract them, and the state of liberation.

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## REFLECTION

1. Contemplate each of the six disadvantages of cyclic existence, making examples of them from your life.
2. Contemplate that they originate in ignorance and that it is possible to eliminate ignorance through cultivating the wisdom realizing the emptiness of inherent existence.
3. Knowing you have the potential to attain nirvāṇa, generate a strong determination to be free from saṃsāra and attain liberation or full awakening.
4. Use this firm and clear aspiration to inspire your Dharma practice and clarify your priorities in life.
5. Observe that the eight worldly concerns become uninteresting when your sights are focused on higher aims such as the true freedom of nirvāṇa or full awakening.

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### *Eight Unsatisfactory Conditions*

In describing true duḥkha in his first teaching, the Buddha said (SN 56.11):

Now this, monastics, is the ārya truth of duḥkha: (1) birth is duḥkha, (2) aging is duḥkha, (3) illness is duḥkha, (4) death is duḥkha, (5) union with what is displeasing is duḥkha, (6) separation from what is pleasing is duḥkha, (7) to not get what one wants is duḥkha, in brief (8) the five aggregates subject to clinging are duḥkha.

It is not difficult to make examples of these eight in our lives, for they describe much of what we experience on a daily basis. For many people, being able to acknowledge the presence of these unsatisfactory conditions in their lives is a relief. They no longer feel “something is wrong with me,” but know that all ordinary beings have these experiences. They see these events as part of life, not as punishments or personal failures.

At the beginning of our lives we are born. Coming out of the womb into a new environment is physically painful for the child as well as the mother. At the end of our lives we die, experiencing suffering mentally if not physically. Between these two are aging and illness, which are also undesirable experiences. On top of these, problems, which we don’t want, come uninvited. We exert great effort to have conditions that bring happiness, but our efforts are not always successful. Even when we do find good circumstances they change and we have to separate from what we like, or we are disappointed because they don’t bring the enduring happiness we expected. Clearly this situation is unsatisfactory. Our human potential must involve more than experiencing just this.

Our five aggregates subject to clinging are in the nature of *duḥkha*. They are a container in which past karma ripens, and the body in particular is the basis for aging, sickness, and death. Clinging to our present aggregates, our mind generates more afflictions, which create more karma, which causes future rebirths as well as pain and dissatisfaction during those lives. For example, being angry at our present problems, we may steal, lie, or criticize others, creating the karma to have more misery in the future. Clinging to worldly success in this life habituates us with this mental state, setting the stage for it to increase in future lives. In short, the aggregates are the basis in which the three, six, and eight types of *duḥkha* run rampant. Contemplating this deeply leads to the arising of a clear and powerful intention to renounce the bondage of *samsāra* and seek freedom.

## *Examining True Duḥkha via Ten Points*

In the *Śrāvakaḥūmi*, Asaṅga speaks of the four attributes of true *duḥkha* by way of ten points. Points 1–5 pertain to impermanence, points 6–8 to *duḥkha*, point 9 to emptiness, and point 10 to selflessness.<sup>22</sup>

1. To understand the *impermanence of change* — that is, coarse

impermanence — we examine changes that are easy to observe: our bodies are born and die; our health, appearance, and physiques may change suddenly as a result of injury or illness. Everything in our environment — trees, buildings, cities — and all the objects we use — food, transportation, buildings, medicine, and clothing — likewise are consumed or destroyed. The fleeting character of our happy, suffering, and neutral feelings and the swiftness by which our thoughts change from one moment to the next are also examples of coarse change. The objects we see, hear, smell, taste, touch, and think about all change, as do the cognitive faculties that enable us to apprehend them. Meditating on this in depth leads us to understand that all conditioned things are unstable and unreliable and therefore cannot bring us true satisfaction.

2. Reflecting on the *impermanence of perishability* leads to an inferential cognizer that knows subtle impermanence. Here we contemplate that the coarse change we see could not occur without imperceptibly subtle moment-to-moment change. Nothing can stop functioning things from changing. They need no cause other than their arising to bring their disintegration; perishing is in their very nature. We may think that a volcano erupts suddenly, when in fact the pressure inside it has been building imperceptibly for a long time. We see the sun rise and set, but it goes across the sky moment-by-moment. As Candrakīrti says:

Just as consciousness is momentary, all [other] conditioned things have the same momentary nature as the mind, because nothing obstructs the perishing of all conditioned things as soon as they appear and because the impermanence [of things] depends only upon [their] arising.<sup>23</sup>

The impermanence of perishability also points to the multiplicity of situations in which we sentient beings find ourselves and to the diversity of our physical beauty, intelligence, wealth, fame, lifespans, contentment, and so forth. The vastness of these alternatives are conditioned by the countless and complex virtuous and nonvirtuous karma we create, not by chance and not by the will of an external creator. By meditating on this, we develop the conviction that conditioned factors in one lifetime — specifically our physical, verbal, and mental actions — bring about our experiences in future lives.

3. To understand the *impermanence of separation*, we reflect on the changeability of our personal situation and the separation from desirable circumstances that we experience without choice. We are healthy and then fall

ill, we have freedom and then fall under the control of others, we have a happy family life but then circumstances change and it evaporates.

4. To reflect on the *impermanence of the dharmatā* or nature of things, we consider that while we may not be experiencing the impermanence of change or the impermanence of separation in this moment, we will in the future. There is no way to continue whatever good circumstances we presently have, for change is the nature of everything in saṃsāra.

5. The *impermanence of the present* is the perishability and separation that we presently undergo. Contemplating this reinforces the above contemplations, for we see that perishability and separation are occurring in this very instant.

These reflections on impermanence bring home the fact that every facet of our being and every aspect of our lives and our world is transitory and unstable. This leads to a sense of unease regarding life in cyclic existence. Contemplating the next three points — the three forms of duḥkha — will increase our discomfort with remaining in saṃsāra.

6. The *duḥkha of pain* is called “the aspect of being undesirable” because painful physical and mental experiences are unwanted. Still, they keep coming, counter to our wish for happiness.

7. The *duḥkha of change* is called “the aspect of fetters and bondage” because even when our bodies and minds experience pleasure, that pleasure leads to the fetter of craving, which in turn gives rise to the bondage of birth, aging, sickness, death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, and despair.

8. *The pervasive duḥkha of conditioning* is called “the factor of our welfare not being secure” because even though we may experience a neutral feeling now, our aggregates are under the control of afflictions and karma. They possess the potential to experience the first two types of duḥkha with the slightest change of circumstances.

Understanding impermanence leads to understanding duḥkha. Birth in cyclic existence is unsatisfactory because it is permeated with unwanted change: aging, sickness, death, meeting with the disagreeable, separating from the desirable, and not getting what we want. Contemplating duḥkha on the basis of understanding subtle impermanence jars our complacency. A deep sense of vulnerability arises because happiness and suffering are entirely at the whim of afflictions and karma. In our ignorant state, we have so little control over these.

9. The *aspect of unobservability* refers to not being able to observe or discern a real self that exists separate from the aggregates. Here we contemplate that

there is no self over and above all the instances of each of the aggregates. For example, when we say “I see,” there is merely a visual object, the eye faculty, and an immediately preceding consciousness. Together they cause a visual consciousness that perceives the object. I and mine are mere names, mere figures of speech; the aggregates are not possessed by a real self. Nor can a person be found among the aggregates. There is no observable self that creates karma and experiences its results. There is no findable self that circles in saṃsāra or attains liberation. These conditioned aggregates are completely empty of a self.

10. The *aspect of a lack of independence* refers to the aggregates not being under the control of a self. The aggregates are dependent arisings that lack self-determination; they lack a controlling self.

The understandings of impermanence, duḥkha, emptiness, and selflessness evolve in that order. Subtle impermanence means the aggregates arise due to causes and conditions: specifically afflictions and karma. Those causes and conditions bring about the three types of duḥkha, which give rise to craving and thus renewed cyclic existence. Understanding the pervasive duḥkha of conditioning in particular leads us to examine the relationship between the aggregates and self, and therefore to understand emptiness and selflessness. As Dharmakīrti points out (PV 2:254cd):

For this very reason, the [Buddha] taught duḥkha through impermanence, and selflessness through duḥkha.

Why does true duḥkha receive so much attention? It would be so much more pleasant to think of light, love, and bliss. However, encouraging us to contemplate duḥkha is the best way for the Buddha to rouse us from our complacency so that we will take advantage of our amazing opportunity to practice the Dharma. Just as a person won't seek freedom if he is unaware that he is imprisoned or if he thinks prison is a comfortable environment, we will not seek liberation from cyclic existence without a clear awareness of what it is and why it is unsatisfactory. Deeply meditating on the above topics will energize us to turn away from the prison of saṃsāra and pursue the path to nirvāṇa.

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## REFLECTION

1. Reflect on Asaṅga's ten points, one by one, making examples of each in



your life.

2. Focus on the conclusion that everything in cyclic existence is transient, unsatisfactory in nature, empty, and selfless.
  3. Aspire to attain liberation.
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## *Our Human Value*

Reflecting on the above descriptions of true duḥkha by applying them to our own lives and by observing the experiences of others is crucial for making this teaching come alive. By doing that, a sincere aspiration to be free from saṃsāra and attain liberation or awakening will arise in our minds. Those aspirations are the fuel for our Dharma practice. As our understanding of duḥkha gradually increases, so will our faith in the Three Jewels as qualified guides.

Slowly we awaken to the fact that money, social status, popularity, power, praise, and appreciation — while useful in this life — do not bring lasting happiness and instead bring more worries and difficulties. We begin to see that chasing them is like riding a roller-coaster or merry-go-round — it may temporarily seem thrilling, but at the end we are back where we started. Enduring peace still eludes us, and deep inside we still lack a stable sense of self-worth. No matter how much luxury surrounds us, how exciting our jobs are, how famous we are, or how many people love us, we still are not beyond aging, sickness, and death.

In response to this predicament, in their confusion some people self-medicate with any number of addictions — drugs, alcohol, work, sex, digital games, TV, gambling, shopping, and so on — but those only serve as short-term distractions that bring more suffering. Other people think life is meaningless and consider ending their lives. This is very foolish, for we all have great potential — the potential to become fully awakened buddhas, the potential to experience reliable joy and fulfillment.

When we analyze how suffering and happiness arise in our minds, we see that they come about from our actions, which are motivated by our disturbing emotions and distorted views. Without even considering past lives, we can see that the more subdued our minds are, the more peaceful and happy we are. Even



if our external environment is tumultuous, with inner mental peace we can transform external difficulties into the path to awakening by practicing mind-training teachings. But when our minds are upset, agitated, or obscured, we are miserable even when the external environment is fantastic. This clearly shows that happiness and suffering are related to our mental attitudes. Therefore training our minds is worthwhile.

By reflecting on *duḥkha* in this way, we become less infatuated with *samsāra* and turn our natural aspiration for well-being to *nirvāṇa*. Gyelsay Togme Zangpo's poem *The Thirty-Seven Practices of Bodhisattvas* (9) sums it up:

Like dew on the tip of a blade of grass,  
pleasures of the three worlds last only a while and then vanish.  
Aspire to the never-changing supreme state of liberation —  
this is the practice of bodhisattvas.

In describing his own spiritual journey before attaining awakening, the Buddha said (MN 26.13):

Before my awakening, while I was still only an unawakened bodhisatta, I too, being myself subject to birth, sought what was also subject to birth. Being myself subject to aging, sickness, death, sorrow, and defilement, I sought what was also subject to aging, sickness, death, sorrow, and defilement. Then I considered, thus: “Why, being myself subject to birth, do I seek what is also subject to birth? Why, being myself subject to aging, sickness, death, sorrow, and defilement, do I seek what is also subject to aging, sickness, death, sorrow, and defilement? Suppose . . . I seek the unborn supreme security from bondage, *nibbāna*. Suppose . . . I seek the unaging, unailing, deathless, sorrowless, and undefiled supreme security from bondage, *nibbāna*.”

While subject to the unsatisfactory circumstances of *samsāra*, we ignorant beings take refuge in people and things that are also subject to the vagaries of *samsāra*. What if we were to turn to the Three Jewels for refuge and seek *nirvāṇa* instead? Practitioners with this aspiration are not distracted by the appeal of *samsāra*'s pleasures, riches, power, and fame, and they easily stay focused on their spiritual aims. This leads to mental peace in this life as well as to liberation. Bodhisattvas expand on this aspiration for freedom to include all sentient beings

and generate bodhicitta, the aspiration for full awakening.

Lessening our attachment to saṃsāric pleasures does not mean having aversion toward our bodies, relationships, good food, praise, reputation, and other sense objects. These things, in and of themselves, are neither virtuous nor nonvirtuous; it is our craving for them that is the source of difficulties. The purpose of seeing the things of saṃsāra as unsatisfactory is to eliminate our craving for and clinging to them, because these emotions keep us bound in saṃsāra. To live in society, money and possessions are necessary. We can use them without attachment and share them with others to create merit. We human beings are social creatures and our lives depend on the kindness of others. We can appreciate the people in our lives and be compassionate toward them without being attached to them.

Relinquishing attachment to our bodies doesn't mean we ignore our health and neglect to go to the doctor and dentist. Our bodies are the physical support of our precious human lives that we use to practice the Dharma, so we must care for the body and keep it healthy. Caring for our bodies in a practical way is very different from indulging in sensual pleasures with attachment.

With all of this talk about duḥkha, we may mistakenly believe that Dharma practitioners must relinquish all of the usual activities that bring them happiness and instead practice extreme asceticism and self-denial. We may fear that there is no happiness to be experienced until we reach nirvāṇa. This is not the case at all. In fact, it is important to have a happy mind while practicing the Dharma. As we go deeper into practice, we realize that there are many types and levels of happiness and pleasure. Having food, shelter, clothing, medicine, and friends bring us some well-being — enough that we can practice the Dharma without being in dire suffering, which would make practice difficult. As we practice more, we discover the internal peace arising from living ethically and the pleasant, relaxed feeling that comes from improving our concentration. As we lessen our attachment and open our hearts to others, the joy derived from connecting with others on a heart level and acting with kindness toward them brings us a sense of fulfillment that is greatly superior to any sense pleasure that money and possessions can afford.

Although most people in the world have intimate emotional and sexual relationships, some people choose not to have them. This is a valid lifestyle choice, whether people are Buddhist or not, whether they are monastics or lay practitioners. They are not avoiding intimacy; they prefer to use their life energy doing other things that are more important to them. In short, giving up our

addiction to pleasure derived from external objects and people opens the door to experience other types of happiness.

Some people wonder if it's possible to become attached to the Dharma and crave liberation. Attachment is based on projecting or exaggerating qualities and then clinging to an object. In general it is not possible to exaggerate the excellent qualities of the Three Jewels, liberation, and full awakening. Furthermore, appreciation of the Dharma's excellent qualities and the aspiration to attain liberation are very different from being attached to them with obsessive longing or possessiveness.

If someone perchance builds an ego-identity, thinking, "*I* am a Buddhist and *my* religion is the best," he has not understood Buddhism very well. His attitude is not one of attachment to Buddhism; rather his mind is afflicted with self-grasping and arrogance.

### 3 | True Origins of Duḥkha

**W**E LIVE AMIDST true duḥkha day in and day out. It is our close companion, never letting us be peaceful in our own hearts or with others. Since we do not like duḥkha and want to be free from it, we must seek out its causes, examine whether they can be eliminated, and if so, learn the path to do so. The Buddha identified afflictions and karma as the true origins of duḥkha. Karma arises from afflictions, the chief of which is ignorance. In this chapter we will examine the defilements that are the origins of duḥkha. These mental factors keep us bound in cyclic existence and prevent our attainment of nirvāṇa and awakening.

Buddhist psychology is profound and reveals parts of our minds that we may have been oblivious to. Virtuous and variable mental factors were described in chapter 3 of the previous volume, *The Foundation of Buddhist Practice*. The following afflictive mental factors are explained in the context of factors that produce duḥkha and interfere with attaining liberation and full awakening.

It's important to approach the topic of afflictions with the correct attitude. Avoid using the various lists of defilements to criticize yourself, thinking, "I have so much anger. I'm also so jealous. What a bad person I am!" Remember that gaining knowledge about mental defilements gives us the power to free ourselves from them and arrive at a state of true peace. We have the potential to do this. Chapters 12–14 will discuss the possibility to attain liberation and our buddha nature that makes that possible.

Describing afflictions is similar to identifying the thieves in our house who have been masquerading as our friends while all the time stealing our happiness. When we know their characteristics, we can catch them, evict them, and lock the door behind them so they can never return. But unlike living thieves who can regroup later, once evicted, afflictions vanish completely.

Like all other phenomena, mental defilements are empty of inherent existence. They are transient like bubbles that quickly burst; they have no essence like the trunk of a plantain tree. Rather than think of anger, or any other affliction, as a solid emotion that is always lurking under the surface of your mind, ready to explode, spewing its vitriol, recognize that it exists by being

merely designated: in dependence on some moments of mind that share some common characteristics, we designate “anger.” That’s all anger is. It’s not a monster that is an inherent part of us; it is not who we are. We need to view our afflictions from two perspectives: on the one hand they are the source of our misery; on the other they lack essence and can be completely eradicated from our mindstreams. There are many ways of classifying mental defilements; we will begin with the six root afflictions, the most prominent group in the Sanskrit tradition.

## *The Six Root Afflictions*

Studying the laboratory that is our own mind, we notice that we can have radically different emotions at different times. We can be loving one moment and irritated the next. Some emotions arise more easily or are more habitual than others: our anger surges in a moment; fortitude is difficult to cultivate. Some emotions bring peace, others disturb our mental tranquility. The later are called *afflictions*. Asaṅga identifies these in his *Compendium of Knowledge* (LC 1:298):

An affliction is defined as a phenomenon that, when it arises, is disturbing in character and that, through arising, disturbs the mindstream.

Afflictions are distinct mental factors that, when they arise in our minds, cause our minds to be unpeaceful and unsubdued. Afflictions may be emotions, attitudes, or views, and they usually arise without our choice. The three principal afflictions are ignorance, anger, and attachment. Although compassion may disturb our minds, it isn’t an affliction. Genuine compassion — as opposed to pity, or personal distress when seeing others suffer — is deliberately cultivated for a good purpose and is supported by reasoning. Unable to ignore sentient beings’ *duḥkha*, compassion wishes them to be free of it. Our minds may be temporarily disturbed because our apathy has been challenged, but this type of mental disturbance spurs us to be more tolerant and kind; it makes our minds strong and determined to aid others and brings benefit to ourselves and others.

Afflictions, on the other hand, arise without good reasons and lack foundation in reality. Because we are habituated with afflictions, they arise

easily when we encounter certain conditions. They disturb the tranquility of the mind and have the long-term effect of increasing our problems and unhappiness. Unlike virtuous mental states such as integrity and compassion, afflictions lack mental clarity, and we often find ourselves justifying their presence: “I have a right to be angry because he criticized me unfairly.” But think about it: Why must we be angry when someone criticizes us? Is anger the only possible response to this situation? Does anger increase our ability to communicate well or destroy it? Questioning ourselves in this way clears away confusion and enables us to see the faulty “logic” behind the afflictions and thus to dispel them.

Afflictions give rise to actions that are considered destructive in all cultures — such as killing, stealing, and lying. These actions perpetuate the cycle of misery. Because they bring our ruin, we need to be aware of their nature, causes, functions, and disadvantages. If a country has an enemy that is destroying its well-being, it tries to learn everything it can about that enemy in order to combat it and prevent it from devastating the country. Similarly, we need to know everything we can about the enemy — the afflictions that destroy our own and others’ happiness. But simply learning about the afflictions is not sufficient; we must also combat them by hearing, thinking, and meditating on their counterforces as described in the Buddha’s teachings. Doing this is the crux of Dharma practice.

The Buddha listed eighty-four thousand afflictions, the most prominent of which are the root afflictions (*mūlakleśa*) and auxiliary afflictions (*upakleśa*). In the *Treasury of Knowledge*, Vasubandhu spoke of six root afflictions, the last one being afflictive views, which in turn is subdivided into five. In the *Compendium of Knowledge*, his older brother Asaṅga listed ten root afflictions — the first five that Vasubandhu listed plus the five afflictive views. Although the two lists come to the same point, there are some differences in how a few of the afflictions are described because the *Treasury of Knowledge* was written from the Vaibhāṣika viewpoint while the *Compendium of Knowledge* is from the Cittamātra viewpoint. In general we will follow the latter, except when the Prāsaṅgika presentation differs. This occurs mainly in the descriptions of ignorance and the view of a personal identity. The six root afflictions are attachment (*rāga*), anger (*pratigha*), arrogance (*māna*), ignorance (*avidyā*), deluded doubt (*vicikitsā*), and afflictive views (*kliṣṭadrṣṭi*).

## *Attachment*

Attachment is a mental factor that, based on distorted attention that exaggerates the attractiveness of a polluted object (an object under the influence of ignorance), wishes for and takes a strong interest in it. The object could be a material object, a person or a place, or it could be praise or an idea. Attachment functions to produce discontent and to perpetuate the cycle of existence. Looking at our own experiences, we can see how true this is.

This is a general description of attachment; there are many degrees and variations of attachment. Some instances of attachment that arise in daily life are greed that wants more than our fair share, attachment to our ideas that leads to stubborn insistence on being right, attachment to reputation, praise, pleasing sensory experiences, and so on. We also become attached to people, which leads to having unrealistic expectations of them or of our relationships with them. This in turn leads to disappointment and friction in those relationships, and feelings of bitterness or betrayal when the relationships don't continue as expected.

Covetousness is a coarse form of attachment. As one of the ten nonvirtues, covetousness easily leads to actions that directly harm others, such as stealing or unwise sexual relationships. Other afflictions derived from attachment are miserliness that doesn't want to share our possessions, haughtiness that is attached to our good fortune, and restlessness that distracts the mind to desirable objects during meditation.

Attachment and aspiration are distinct mental factors with different functions. Although both are attracted to their object, attachment is based on distorted attention that exaggerates its attractiveness or projects good qualities that are not there. Seeing the object inaccurately, attachment clings to it and does not want to be separated from it. We become attached to people, money and possessions, love and approval, good food and other pleasurable sensory experiences, and so on, and are certain that the good qualities we see inhere in that person or thing. If our perception were accurate, everyone should see the person or thing as attractive as we do and desire it as much as we do. Clearly that is not the case.

Aspiration focuses on its intended object and takes a strong interest in it, but it is not necessarily based on exaggerating or projecting the object's good qualities. The aspirations seeking a good rebirth, liberation, and full awakening are based on realistically seeing beneficial qualities that are present. In his *Abhidharma* text, the Tibetan scholar Chim Jampelyang (ca. 1245–1325) clarified that the aspirations for a fortunate rebirth, liberation, or awakening are virtuous; they are not attachment.

Furthermore, Vasubandhu said that objects giving rise to afflictions are polluted. Since buddhahood and the Three Jewels are unpolluted, they cannot induce afflictions in others' minds. If someone thinks, "When I'm a buddha, everyone will respect me," he suffers from attachment to reputation, not attachment to buddhahood.

Craving is a form of attachment and is usually seen as nonvirtuous. However, "craving" can refer to other forms of attachment that may be temporarily useful. For example, in the case of someone who is miserly and doesn't want to part with his possessions, the craving to be wealthy in a future life can motivate him to counteract his stinginess and become generous in this life. Even though this craving seeks happiness in saṃsāra, it is a step up from craving the happiness of only this life and thus is considered virtuous. For someone who lives an ethically corrupt life, desire to be reborn as a deva can induce him to relinquish harmful behaviors and keep precepts. Craving for the bliss of samādhi in the form and formless realms can inspire someone to cultivate concentration in order to be reborn in those realms. These types of attachment are useful in those specific situations. However, for someone intent on liberation, those same cravings are hindrances because they are enamored with saṃsāric pleasures.

Ānanda says that based on the craving for liberation — our highest spiritual aspiration, which is certainly virtuous — the unwanted forms of craving can be eliminated (AN 4.159, AN 2.145). The postcanonical Pāli text *Nettipakaraṇa* speaks of virtuous and nonvirtuous forms of craving and confirms that virtuous craving leads to the end of craving. For example, one monastic learns that another has become an arhat, and with the desire to attain arhatship too, she practices diligently and becomes an arhat, one who has abandoned craving. Similarly, a monastic motivated by arrogance thinks, "I am as capable as that person who attained arhatship." This propels him to make effort and he becomes an arhat, someone who has abandoned arrogance. This is similar to the idea of taking attachment on the path in Tantrayāna. Here attachment is employed to make manifest the subtlest mind and use it to realize emptiness and destroy all obscurations, including attachment.

How do we reconcile these examples with a statement of Nāgārjuna, the great second-century Indian sage who spread the Madhyamaka (Middle Way) view (RA 20ab)?

Attachment, anger, confusion,  
and the haves that arise from them are nonvirtuous



and the karma that arises from them are nonvirtuous.

“Attachment” here refers to selfish desire for material possessions, praise, good reputation, and pleasant sensory experiences. Such attachment often leads to nonvirtuous actions, while aspiration for the happiness of future lives can lead to virtuous actions. Anger and hatred, however, can never be the motivating factors for virtue; they always lead to nonvirtue. Here confusion refers not to the self-grasping ignorance that is the root of saṃsāra, but to the ignorance that does not understand karma and its effects. While self-grasping ignorance can also precede virtuous actions, the ignorance that has a skewed view of ethical conduct will lead to mental, verbal, and physical nonvirtuous paths of action.

Similarly, there are different ways to be “attached” to a beautiful statue of the Buddha. One person wants a beautiful statue to inspire his daily meditation practice. Another person wants the same statue to show off to his friends or to sell for a profit. These different motivations will bring different results in the present life and in future lives.

In short, “attachment” may have diverse meanings in different contexts. This is illustrated by the four types of clinging mentioned in the teaching *Parting from the Four Clings* that Mañjuśrī gave to the great Sakya lama Sachen Kunga Nyingpo:

If you cling to this life, you are not a true spiritual practitioner.

If you cling to saṃsāra, you do not have renunciation.

If you cling to your own self-interest, you have no bodhicitta.

If there is grasping, you do not have the view.

The first line indicates clinging to the happiness of this life, which is invariably an obstacle for Dharma practice. The presence or absence of this type of attachment is the demarcation between an action that is Dharma and one that is not. The second, clinging to cyclic existence, prevents us from embarking on the path to liberation, although it could lead to happiness within saṃsāra, as exemplified by the person who is attached to the bliss of samādhi and is born in the form or formless realms.

Clinging to our self-interest prevents us from entering the bodhisattva path, although it could support the attainment of arhatship — for example, by a person who clings to be free of saṃsāra and seeks his own liberation alone. The most deeply ingrained attachment is grasping inherent existence, which prevents the attainment of both liberation and full awakening.

The Tibetan term *chags pa* may also be translated as “attachment” and is sometimes used to indicate strong affection and care. In this sense, buddhas are “attached” to sentient beings, indicating that because of their strong compassion, they will never abandon sentient beings and will continuously work to lead them to temporal and ultimate happiness. This feeling of closeness and care that buddhas have for sentient beings is very different from attachment in the minds of sentient beings.

## *Anger*

Anger is a mental factor that, referring to one of three objects, agitates the mind by being unable to bear or through wanting to harm the object or person. The three objects can be expanded to nine: (1–3) he harmed me in the past, he is harming me now, he will harm me in the future; (4–6) she harmed my dear friend or relative, is harming them, will harm them; (7–9) he helped my enemies, is helping them now, will help them in the future. Here *enemy* includes people we don’t like or disagree with as well as those who harm us or interfere with our happiness. Anger functions to disturb our minds. As the basis for harming ourselves and others, it involves us in destructive actions and increases suffering in the world.

Anger is based on distorted attention that exaggerates or projects defects onto people and things. Our minds create many reasons to validate our anger and give us a false sense of power in situations where we feel afraid or hurt. Anger has many forms, and several other afflictions are derived from it, including irritation, annoyance, frustration, hatred, rebelliousness, belligerence, resentment, vengeance, spite, cruelty, violence, and jealousy.

Behind each episode of anger are many stories — conceptualizations proliferated by our minds — in which we impute motivations to people that they do not have, interpret actions from our own standpoint, and favor our own concerns while ignoring or demeaning the concerns of others. Although we may try to justify, rationalize, or deny our anger, the truth is that we are unhappy when our minds are overcome by anger. Sometimes we vent our anger to friends, hoping that they will take our side. (If they didn’t, how could they be our friends?) Other times we speak or act in ways that harm others. Here we can see the relationship of attachment and anger: the more distorted attention has exaggerated someone’s good qualities, increasing the strength of our attachment, the more distorted attention exaggerates that person’s bad qualities when he or

she doesn't meet our expectations. We become discontent, and this mental unhappiness inflames our anger, resulting in aggressive behavior that breaks the trust of the people we care about the most. Anger is a mental state, it is not the behavior. While some of us may not think of ourselves as angry because we don't throw things or scream at others, inside our anger rages. In these cases, ignoring the other person or refusing to have anything to do with them may be considered harmful behavior. We should not be fooled into thinking that passive behavior like withdrawing from a situation and refusing to communicate indicates a lack of anger.

Anger may also be a reaction to fear. When fearful we usually feel powerless, whereas anger gives us a false sense of power by sending adrenaline coursing through our body. Although anger may sometimes seem to make us courageous, our behavior when angry seldom remedies the problem and usually makes it worse.

### *Arrogance*

Arrogance is a mental factor that, based on the view of a personal identity that misapprehends how the I or mine exists, strongly grasps an inflated image of ourselves. It functions to prevent us from learning and increasing our virtue and causes us to disrespect or denigrate others. Vasubandhu mentions seven types of arrogance:

1. Arrogance thinking, "I am superior" in relation to someone who is "inferior." In this and the next two forms of arrogance, we compare ourselves with others in terms of wealth, looks, knowledge, social standing, athletic ability, fame, and other factors.
2. Arrogance thinking, "I am superior" in relation to someone who is our equal.
3. Arrogance thinking, "I am superior" in relation to someone who is better than us.
4. Arrogance that regards our aggregates and thinks, "I." This is also called the *conceit of I am (asmimāna)*. Based on self-grasping, we believe ourselves to be inherently existent and very important.
5. Arrogance that thinks we have good qualities that we don't have.
6. Arrogance thinking we are just a little bit inferior to someone who is

really wonderful. We may think, “In this group of esteemed people, I am the least qualified,” implying that although we are less than those who are experts, we are definitely better than the majority of other people. It also claims status by being associated with someone who is better than us: “I am the disciple of a truly great spiritual master.”

7. Arrogance thinking our faults are virtues; for example, an ethically degenerate person thinks he is upstanding and righteous.

In the *Precious Garland* Nāgārjuna (RA 407–12) delineates seven types of arrogance in a slightly different way, although the meaning is generally the same as above. The one exception is the arrogance of inferiority. Here Nāgārjuna describes it as the arrogance of disparaging ourselves and thinking that we are useless and incapable. The Pāli tradition agrees with Nāgārjuna’s gloss.

- (1) Concerning these, the [first] is called *arrogance*;  
it is where one thinks of oneself  
as even inferior to the inferior, equal to the equal,  
or greater than or equal to the inferior.
- (2) It is *presumptive arrogance* for one to presume  
that one is equal to someone who is better.
- (3) If one presumes oneself to be  
even better than one’s betters,  
this is *arrogance beyond arrogance*;  
thinking oneself to be even loftier than the lofty.  
It is excessively bad,  
like developing sores on top of one’s boils.
- (4) The five empty aggregates  
are called the [*aggregates*] *subject to clinging*.  
When one apprehends them as I,  
this is called the *conceit of thinking “I am.”*
- (5) To presume that one has attained a result  
that one has not attained is to have *conceited arrogance*.
- (6) The wise know that boasting

about one's negative deeds is *erroneous arrogance*.

- (7) Deriding oneself, thinking,  
“I cannot manage,”  
is the *arrogance of inferiority*.

Such are the seven forms of arrogance, in brief.

Arrogance blocks us from gaining new qualities; when we believe we are already top-notch, we are not receptive to learning. Instead we remain complacent, or even smug, without endeavoring to cultivate virtuous qualities. Arrogance due to our Dharma knowledge or accomplishments does not plague beginners; at that time we are aware of how little we know and how much we need to learn and practice. But after we have studied and practiced for a while, arrogance can easily set in and arrest our spiritual growth.

It is important to discriminate between arrogance and self-confidence. Arrogance is often a cover for insecurity, whereas self-confidence acknowledges our abilities without inflating them. Self-confident people have no need to boast of their achievements. Self-confidence, an essential factor on the spiritual path, should be nurtured. Having the thought “As I progressively practice the path, I’ll be able to accomplish all the bodhisattva activities” is a helpful and necessary attitude; it is not arrogance. Awareness of our potential boosts our enthusiasm to engage in Dharma study and practice. Similarly, rejoicing at our virtue with a sense of satisfaction, thinking, “I feel good because I kept my precepts in a challenging situation,” is not arrogance, it’s a way of reinforcing our virtue.

## *Ignorance*

Ignorance is an afflictive state of unknowing brought about by the mind’s lack of clarity regarding the nature of things such as the four truths, Three Jewels, and karma and its effects. It functions as the basis and root of all other afflictions and the afflictive actions and rebirths they produce. This is a general definition of ignorance accepted by all Buddhist tenet systems. However, each system has its own unique definition as well. Furthermore, the meaning of ignorance differs according to the context; some of these meanings are explained below. Unless otherwise noted, they accord with the Prāsaṅgikas’ view, which may or may not be shared by other systems. As we delve into the correct view of emptiness later in the series, the meanings of ignorance in the various schools will be clarified.

Ignorance (*avidyā*) is often, but not always, synonymous with confusion (*moha*).<sup>24</sup>

1. *Ignorance that is a mental factor* is ignorance as defined above.

2. *Ignorance of selflessness*, in the meaning common to all Buddhist tenet schools, does not understand the selflessness of persons.

3. *Ignorance of the ultimate truth* does not know the mode of existence of all persons and phenomena. This meaning is accepted by the Cittamātra and Madhyamaka schools. When this ignorance gives rise to afflictions that produce karma, which in turn projects rebirths in saṃsāra, it is ignorance that is the first link of dependent origination (see #6).

4. *Ignorance of karma and its effects* underlies all destructive actions, especially those that lead to unfortunate rebirths. It is not simply not knowing about karma and its effects, but either strong disbelief in it or temporary disregard for it. This ignorance cannot discern virtuous from nonvirtuous actions, does not accept that happiness comes from virtuous actions and unhappiness from nonvirtuous actions, or does not fully believe this. For example, under the influence of this ignorance we don't see the faults of engaging in business deals that deprive others of what is rightly theirs. We may generally believe in karma and its effects, but when given the opportunity for personal gain, we justify lying to obtain what we like (see #5).

5. *Ignorance that is one of the three poisons* of ignorance, attachment, and animosity is one of the three basic factors spurring the creation of destructive karma. This is ignorance of karma and its effects. Often translated as “confusion,” it accompanies all nonvirtuous mental states and is a cause of unfortunate rebirths.

6. *Ignorance that is the first link of dependent origination* starts a new set of twelve links that leads to rebirth in saṃsāra. Tenet systems have different assertions about this ignorance. According to the Prāsaṅgikas, it grasps our own I and mine as inherently existent, which is based on grasping our aggregates as inherently existent.

7. *Self-grasping ignorance* grasps persons and phenomena as inherently existent. It first grasps the aggregates as inherently existent, and on that basis grasps the person to be inherently existent. Self-grasping ignorance is synonymous with ignorance grasping inherent existence, ignorance grasping true existence, ignorance grasping things to exist from their own side, and so on. Sometimes when used loosely, “self-grasping ignorance” may refer to grasping a

self-sufficient substantially existent person.

8. *Ignorance of the four distorted conceptions* grasps the impermanent as permanent, that which is duḥkha by nature as pleasurable, the unattractive as beautiful, and that which lacks a self as having one. This description is accepted by all tenet systems.

9. In the Pāli tradition ignorance is explained as not knowing the four truths — the aggregates, their origin, cessation, and the way to that cessation (SN 22.135) — past and future lives, and dependent origination. In specific contexts, it is described as not knowing the impermanent nature of the aggregates (SN 22.126); not understanding the gratification, danger, and escape with respect to the five aggregates (SN 22.129); and so forth.<sup>25</sup> In all these cases, true knowledge — the mind that understands these clearly, as they are — is the opposite.

Vasubandhu states that ignorance (see #1) accompanies all afflictions.<sup>26</sup> Prāsaṅgikas assert that self-grasping ignorance provokes coarse afflictions but does not accompany them because the two have different functions. Self-grasping ignorance grasps its object as inherently existent, while attachment craves an object seen as attractive and desirable. Self-grasping ignorance arises first and attachment follows. Because they perform different functions and do not occur at the same time, Prāsaṅgikas say self-grasping ignorance and attachment do not share the same primary mind and do not accompany each other.

However, they say that self-grasping ignorance can accompany subtle afflictions because subtle attachment and anger have an element of grasping phenomena as inherently existent. Subtle attachment grasps its object as inherently desirable and craves to possess it. Subtle anger grasps its object as inherently undesirable and craves to be separated from it. These subtle afflictions are obstacles to attaining nirvāṇa, but do not necessarily hinder having a good rebirth. The lower schools do not consider subtle afflictions to prevent liberation because they assert inherent existence.

According to Prāsaṅgikas, ignorance (see #3, 7) grasps persons and phenomena as inherently existent. Grasping the self as self-sufficient and substantially existent is also a form of ignorance, but is not the ignorance that is the root of saṃsāra. The ignorance grasping inherent existence arises first, followed by the ignorance grasping the self as self-sufficient substantially existent. The former does not accompany the latter, because they grasp their object differently and do not occur simultaneously: the former grasps the self to

be inherently existent, the latter grasps the self to be self-sufficient substantially existent. Similarly, in cases when grasping a self-sufficient substantially existent person causes anger to arise, it does not accompany anger due to the different ways these mental factors grasp their object.

Technically speaking, self-grasping ignorance and self-grasping are not the same. *Self-grasping ignorance* refers to the mental factor of ignorance that grasps inherent existence, while *self-grasping* refers to the entire mental state — the primary consciousness and its accompanying mental factors that include self-grasping ignorance. In other words, when ignorance grasping inherent existence accompanies a mental state, all aspects of that mental state grasp inherent existence.

However, sometimes *self-grasping* and *self-grasping ignorance* are used interchangeably. In this case, the speaker's purpose is not to distinguish the mental factor from the entire mental state, but to identify inherent existence and how we grasp objects and people to exist in this way.

As you can see, the topic of ignorance is complex and we need a lot of wisdom to understand it!

### *Deluded Doubt*

Deluded doubt is a mental factor that is indecisive and wavers toward an incorrect conclusion concerning important spiritual topics such as the ultimate nature of phenomena, the four truths, Three Jewels, and karma and its effects. Keeping us in a constant state of uncertainty about what we believe, which path to follow, and what to practice, deluded doubt immobilizes and prevents us from going forward spiritually. Doubting ourselves, the path, and the result, we spin in circles and spend days, months, and years stuck in indecision. Deluded doubt is compared to trying to sew with a two-pointed needle: we accomplish nothing. It has only an acquired, not an innate, form.

Deluded doubt differs from doubt inclined toward the correct conclusion or doubt wavering in the middle. It differs from curiosity, which propels us to ask questions and learn more until we come to a sound conclusion.

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## REFLECTION



1. Review each of the five afflictions above, one by one. Think of at least three instances when each affliction has arisen in your mind.
  2. What were the bare facts of the situation that sparked it? What did distorted attention add on to these bare facts, for example, by imputing qualities onto the object or person?
  3. What effect did that affliction have on your mind? How did it influence your deeds and words?
  4. Which Dharma points or teachings would help you to subdue that affliction?
- 

### *Afflictive Views*

The above five root afflictions are non-views, whereas the sixth, afflictive views, includes five erroneous views. These five erroneous views are forms of corrupt intelligence that either grasp the I to exist inherently or, based on that, develop further mistaken conceptions. They act as the basis for all problems caused by afflictions and all other mistaken outlooks and create turmoil in our lives. Wisdom is their antidote.

Saying these views are “corrupt intelligence” (T. *shes rab nyon mong chan*) means they are incorrect speculations or conclusions reached by incorrect analysis. They are unreliable minds that lack a realistic foundation. They are called intelligence (*prajñā*) because they distinguish their object and know its qualities; they are corrupt (*kleśa*) because they misapprehend their object. Although afflictive views are numerous, these five are prominent: view of a personal identity (*satkāyadr̥ṣṭi*), view of extremes (*antagrāhadr̥ṣṭi*), view holding erroneous views as supreme (*dr̥ṣṭi-parāmarśa*), view of bad rules and practices (*śīlavrata-parāmarśa*<sup>27</sup>), and wrong views (*mithyādr̥ṣṭi*).

### **View of a personal identity**

According to all Buddhist schools except the Prāsaṅgikas, the view of a personal identity is a corrupt intelligence that, referring to the mental and physical aggregates, grasps them to be either a self-sufficient substantially existent I or mine. According to the Prāsaṅgikas, it is a corrupt intelligence that, observing

the nominally existent I or mine, grasps it to exist inherently. Of the two self-graspings — of persons and of phenomena — view of a personal identity is included in self-grasping of persons. However, self-grasping of persons includes grasping all persons as inherently existent, whereas the view of a personal identity grasps our own I and mine as inherently existent.

The aggregates are collections of many moments or many parts; they are transitory, perishing in each moment. Translated literally, the Tibetan term for *satkāyadr̥ṣṭi* — *'jig tshogs la lta ba* — is “view of the transitory collection” or “view of the perishing aggregates.” Specifying that they are transitory or perishing shows they are not permanent; saying “aggregates” indicates they are plural, not unitary. The term itself eliminates the possibility of a permanent, unitary person based on the aggregates.

Whereas the I is imputed in dependence on the collection of aggregates, view of a personal identity holds it to exist as an independent entity. All Buddhist schools refute the belief in a permanent soul or self that is asserted by non-Buddhists. According to the lower Buddhist schools, view of a personal identity observes the aggregates and mistakenly believes them to be a self-sufficient substantially existent I and mine — a person that controls the aggregates and a person that owns the aggregates. Here the observed object (*ālambana*, T. *dmigs pa*) is the aggregates, and the apprehended object (*muṣṭibandhaviṣaya*, T. *'dzin stangs kyi yul*) and conceived object (T. *zhen yul*) are a self-sufficient substantially existent person. The view of a personal identity is mistaken with respect to its apprehended and conceived objects because it believes the aggregates to be a self-sufficient substantially existent person, although they are not.

According to the view unique to the Prāsaṅgikas, view of a personal identity observes the mere I and mine — the I and mine that exist by being merely designated in dependence on the aggregates — and erroneously grasps them to be inherently existent. Here the observed object is the mere I and mine, and the apprehended and conceived objects are an inherently existent I and mine. This view is erroneous with respect to its apprehended and conceived objects because it mistakenly grasps the mere I and mine to exist inherently, as an independent entity unrelated to any other factors. To Prāsaṅgikas, grasping a self-sufficient substantially existent I and mine is a coarse grasping. It is not an actual view of a personal identity, but is only imputed as such. The subtle view of a personal identity that grasps the I and mine to be inherently existent is the actual view of a personal identity. This has ramifications for the meditation on selflessness,

because realizing the selflessness that is the absence of only a self-sufficient substantially existent I and mine will not free us from saṃsāra.

Prāsaṅgikas assert that the view of a personal identity is a form of the ignorance that is the root of cyclic existence; it is an innate affliction that is present in all sentient beings, including babies and animals, as an instinctive sense of an inherently existent I and mine. Its artificial form is expounded and justified by incorrect philosophies.

The view of a personal identity has two facets, one grasping *I* as inherently existent (*ahaṃkāra*, T. *ngar 'dzin pa*) and the other grasping *mine* as inherently existent (*mamakāra*, T. *nga yir 'dzin pa*). *I* refers to the person, while *mine* refers to what makes things mine. Based on grasping *I*, grasping at *mine* or *my* arises. The *I* and *mine* are one nature but different isolates; they cannot be separated but are nominally distinct.

Our aggregates are examples of *mine* — conventionally the five aggregates are said to be mine; they belong to the I. However, grasping them to be inherently existent is self-grasping of phenomena. The view of a personal identity grasps the mere I to be inherently existent and views the aggregates as being under the control of this person who makes things mine.

Once we designate something as mine — be it our bodies, minds, material objects, ideas, or relationships — we relate to it in a very different way. If a new car on the showroom floor is dented, we aren't disturbed, but once we see this car as mine, we become incensed when a small scratch appears on it. *My* body being attractive or unhealthy invokes strong feelings of delight or worry; *my* ideas being accepted is a source of great pride.

Holding the strong notion of an inherently existent I, we cherish our selves more than anything else. Everything that gives us pleasure is seen as good; we cling to it and want more. All that interferes with our happiness or harms us is considered bad; we become hostile toward it and seek to destroy or avoid it. To obtain and protect our objects of attachment and to defend them against any harm, we engage in many destructive actions that harm others and plant seeds of destructive karma on our mindstreams that will ripen as future painful experiences.

Because the view of a personal identity is an erroneous consciousness that misapprehends the I, it can be eradicated through realizing the wisdom that knows how the I actually exists. Identifying the disadvantages of the view of a personal identity motivates us to cultivate this liberating wisdom.

Both the Pāli and Sanskrit traditions speak of twenty false views of a real self that stem from the view of a personal identity. *The Shorter Series of Questions and Answers (Cūlavedalla Sutta, MN 44)* records a lay follower questioning Bhikkhunī Dhammadinnā about how the view of a personal identity comes to be. She responds:

An untaught ordinary person who has no regard for āryas and is unskilled and undisciplined in their Dhamma . . . regards (1) the body as the self, or (2) the self as possessing the body, or (3) the body as [contained] in the self, or (4) the self as [contained] in the body. He regards feelings as the self, or the self as possessing feelings, or feelings as [contained] in the self, or self as [contained] in feelings. He regards discrimination as the self, or the self as possessing discrimination, or discrimination as [contained] in the self, or self as [contained] in discrimination. He regards miscellaneous factors as the self, or the self as possessing miscellaneous factors, or miscellaneous factors as [contained] in the self, or the self as [contained] in miscellaneous factors. He regards consciousness as the self, or the self as possessing consciousness, or consciousness as [contained] in the self, or the self as [contained] in consciousness.

Pāli commentaries explain these four positions for each aggregate using the example of the relationship between the self and the body:

1. Regarding the body as self is like regarding the flame of an oil lamp as identical to the color of that flame.

2. Regarding the self as possessing the body is like regarding a tree as possessing its shadow.

3. Regarding the body as being in the self or being part of the self or dependent on the self is like regarding the scent as being in the flower. In the Sanskrit tradition, the analogy is a bag (I) with many items (aggregates) in it.

4. Regarding the self as being in the body or part of the body or dependent on the body is like regarding a jewel in a box. In the Sanskrit tradition, the analogy is the self being like a lion in a forest.

Regarding the first three, we may think, “The flame is not identical to its color, a tree does not really possess a shadow, and the scent is not in the flower, but a jewel can be in a box. Since this last analogy is true, perhaps the self is in

the body.” To understand the analogy, we must ask ourselves if the relationship between the self and the body is like the relationship between a jewel and the box it is in. A jewel is a distinct phenomenon from the box and can be removed from the box and looked at alone without seeing the box. However, removing the self as an entity totally distinct from the body and looking at it in its own right, divorced from the body, is not possible because the self is dependent on the body. It is designated in dependence on the aggregates. Similarly, the lion is a distinct entity from the forest, whereas the I depends on the aggregates.

These twenty false views are not the view of a personal identity itself: the observed objects of the first and third are one of the aggregates and the observed objects of the second and fourth are the I. These false views are not innately grasping because, according to Prāsaṅgikas, view of a personal identity does not innately grasp the I as either inherently one with or entirely separate from the aggregates. Because the twenty false views present only these two possibilities and neither of them is how the view of a personal identity innately grasps the I, they are acquired false views. However, if the I inherently existed it would have to be one of four positions. Thus to refute the view of a personal identity, we must also refute these twenty.

### **View of extremes**

The view of extremes is a corrupt intelligence that, referring to the I and mine apprehended by the view of a personal identity, regards them in either an absolutist or nihilistic manner. Based on grasping the I as inherently existent, view of the extremes holds either (1) an absolutist perspective that the I exists as an eternal, immutable soul or self that continues in future lives, or (2) a nihilistic outlook that the I becomes totally nonexistent after death, there being no continuum of the mere I in future lives. View of the extremes prevents us from finding the middle way view, free from the two extremes of absolutism and nihilism. It also causes us to neglect creating the virtuous causes for higher rebirth and liberation.

The absolutist view is also called the view of existence, eternalism,<sup>28</sup> superimposition, or permanence because it projects a false mode of existence on the person. The nihilistic view is called the view of nonexistence, annihilation, or deprecation because it denies the continuity of the self that actually exists. In doing so, it negates future rebirth as well as the possibility of liberation and awakening. The Buddha spoke of this view, saying its holders think (SN 24.4),

“I may not be, it may not be for me, I shall not be, it will not be for me.”

By identifying the view of extremes as erroneous, the Buddha clarified that although there is no inherently existent person, a conventionally existent person — the mere I — that is reborn and can attain liberation exists.

### **View holding erroneous views as supreme**

The view holding wrong views as supreme is a corrupt intelligence that regards view of a personal identity, view of extremes, or wrong views as correct and supreme views, there being no higher views. It also views our own five aggregates as supreme, thinking there is no better body, feelings, and so forth. We ordinary beings easily become attached to our views, and the view holding wrong views as supreme functions to increase our attachment to erroneous views so that we arrogantly tout our wrong views as right ones. Holding erroneous views as supreme strongly holds to wrong views and serves as the basis for generating wrong views in this and future lives. It makes our minds very narrow and decreases our intelligence. While wrong views can be abandoned comparatively easily, when we hold them as supreme, they become deeply entrenched in our minds and thus more difficult to overcome.

The four distorted conceptions regarding true *duḥkha* correspond with the first three afflictive views: Viewing that which lacks a self as having one is view of a personal identity. Viewing the impermanent as permanent is the eternalistic extreme view. Viewing the foul body as clean and viewing what is in nature unsatisfactory as pleasurable are the view holding erroneous views as supreme.

### **View of rules and practices**

The view holding bad rules and practices as supreme is a corrupt intelligence that believes purification of mental defilements is possible by ascetic practice and inferior ethical codes that are inspired by erroneous views. It causes us to engage in useless actions that make us exhausted but bring no spiritual benefit.

View of rules and practices thinks that what are not causes for higher rebirth and liberation are causes for them and what is not the path to liberation is the path. Under its influence people engage in nonvirtue, believing it to be virtue, and follow a path they believe will lead to liberation that leads instead to unfortunate rebirths. Examples of this erroneous view include thinking that killing in the name of one’s religion will bring rebirth in a heavenly realm and that animal sacrifice pleases the gods and brings good fortune. Other instances

are believing that the perfect performance of a ritual alone, without any mental transformation, is the path to liberation; that negativities can be purified by bathing in or drinking holy water; and that attachment is abandoned by extreme asceticism, such as fasting for days on end, walking through fire, or lying on a bed of nails. Although these people aspire for liberation, their aspiration remains unfulfilled.

## **Wrong views**

Wrong views are a corrupt intelligence that denies the existence of something necessary to attain awakening that exists. This includes the denial of causes, saying that constructive and destructive actions don't exist; denial of effects, believing that the results of constructive and destructive actions don't exist; denial of functionality, believing that past and future lives are nonexistent; and denial of phenomena, asserting liberation, awakening, or the Three Jewels are nonexistent. These views are so damaging because when people hold them, they easily deny ethical responsibility for their actions and justify engaging in many destructive actions. Wrong views function to harm us because they serve as a basis for engaging in nonvirtue, cause us not to engage in virtue, and sever our roots of virtue. Adhering to wrong views cuts our opportunity to attain awakening.

In the *Supreme Net Sutta (Brahmajāla Sutta)* the Buddha spoke of sixty-two examples of wrong views advanced by various groups (DN 1.3.45–57):<sup>29</sup>

The Eternalists proclaim the eternity of the self and the world . . . those who are partly Eternalists and partly Non-Eternalists proclaim the partial eternity and the partial non-eternity of the self and the world . . . the Finitists and Infinitists proclaim the finitude or infinitude of the world . . . the Eel-wriggles resort to evasive statements . . . the Chance Originationists proclaim the chance origin of the self and the world . . . those who speculate about the past, having fixed views about the past . . . those who claim a doctrine of conscious postmortem survival . . . those who proclaim a doctrine of unconscious postmortem survival . . . those who proclaim a doctrine of neither-conscious-nor-unconscious postmortem survival . . . Nihilists proclaim the annihilation, destruction, and nonexistence of beings . . . (and) there are proclaimers [of a self that realizes] nibbāna here and now . . .

speculators about the future . . . speculators about the past, the future, or both . . .

As we can see, just as in modern times, at the Buddha's time too there were a plethora of views, each claiming to be the one correct truth.

The Buddha pinpointed three types of nihilistic views as views shunned by the wise because they do not bring liberation (MN 60, MN 76).

1. *Nihilistic view denying the continuation of the person after death* is often the result of a materialist outlook on life. In a modern context, it is thinking the mind is an emergent property of the brain, and since the brain ceases to function at death, so do the mind and the person. Since no one will experience the consequences of our actions in a future rebirth, as long as we avoid the authorities in this life, we won't experience any adverse repercussions from our nonvirtuous actions and therefore can do as we please.

2. *Nihilistic view denying the existence of constructive and destructive actions* negates ethical distinctions among actions. Killing and torturing others is not destructive, so no unpleasant results of engaging in such actions will follow. Generosity and kindness are not constructive, so there is no use engaging in them.

3. *Nihilistic view denying causation* holds that there are no causes or conditions for either the defilement or purification of sentient beings — sentient beings are defiled and purified by either chance or fate, and there is nothing we can do to prevent suffering or attain liberation. Some people may believe in the randomness of happiness and pain because they cannot see the link between causes created in one life bringing effects in another life. Alternatively, they are fatalistic and believe that everything is controlled by destiny or by the will of the creator.

The Buddha did not say these views are wrong because they contradicted his ideas but because they are based on misunderstanding, limited knowledge, or distorted thinking and will lead those who hold them to create the causes for their own future suffering.

Wrong views may be spoken of in two ways. In general, they include all five afflictive views. More precisely, they differ from other views because of their object: they negate the existence of past and future lives, the Three Jewels, and the law of karma and its effects. Denying cause and effect is a serious wrong view, one that cuts the root of virtue.

Wrong views in the context of the ten paths of nonvirtue and in the context



of the root afflictions differ slightly. The latter is more pervasive in that it includes not only negating what does exist — such as the Three Jewels and so forth — but also holding what does not exist — such as a creator god, or a metaphysical primal substance or universal mind — as the ultimate source of the world and the beings in it.

Wrong views cut the root of virtue gradually, not all at once. The roots of virtue decrease while the wrong views grow stronger. For example, although Sally practices generosity, her career does not advance. Meanwhile, she sees people who lie get promoted. The wrong view arises in her mind that it's useless to create virtue. Slowly this idea grows stronger, so that even if her teacher tries to explain that her hindrances are due to destructive karma from the past and her present constructive actions will bring agreeable results in the future, she doesn't listen. She completely dismisses the law of karma and its effects. Such an entrenched wrong view severs the root of virtue in her mind, destroying the seeds of virtue.

It is easy to glaze over wrong views in our own minds, believing them to be correct. Observing our views, assumptions, and beliefs and questioning their veracity helps us to become aware of wrong views we haven't yet recognized. People who were raised in another religion may find that deep in their minds they still hold beliefs they were taught as children — beliefs in a creator, a soul, reward and punishment for ethical and unethical behavior, and so on. These may distort our understanding of Buddhist concepts that sound similar, and they hinder our understanding the teachings correctly. Examining them closely and using reason to decide what we believe is important to resolve the confusion wrong views cause.

Wrong views are based on ignorance and arise due to incorrect logic. They are especially difficult to abandon because the mistaken reasons and beliefs that are their basis must be dismantled. Due to strong attachment, some people are reluctant to reexamine their cherished beliefs and are thus resistant to hearing reasons that refute the assumptions at their basis. But when we are open and someone points out to us the absurd consequences that result from our wrong views, we begin to reevaluate our beliefs. Once we doubt an incorrect view, we can use reasoning to generate a correct assumption and then an inferential understanding. As we do so, our minds become clearer and more peaceful.

Wrong views easily support unethical conduct. People who dismiss the law of karma and its effects and hold that there is no connection between our actions and our experiences may wave away any sense of responsibility for their actions.

They believe that they can do anything they wish — including extortion, rape, and brutality — because their actions will not adversely affect themselves, the only possible consequence being arrest by the police, which they try to avoid.

Wrong views prevent people from attaining realizations of the path, liberation, and awakening. Someone with strong belief in an external creator will find the doctrine of emptiness uninteresting and make no attempt to learn or understand it. Someone who believes that sentient beings are inherently selfish does not think training our minds in compassion is worthwhile and considers the cultivation of bodhicitta a useless pursuit.

All Buddhist tenet systems agree that these five views are afflictive in that they disturb the mind; view of a personal identity and view of the extremes are ethically neutral, but the remaining three are nonvirtuous. The tenet systems also agree that all five afflictive views are rooted in ignorance and have an element of not knowing the object. Prāsaṅgikas take it a step further and say that all afflictive views are forms of ignorance.

According to the *Treasury of Knowledge*, wrong views are a kind of corrupt intelligence. According to the *Compendium of Knowledge*, they are called *corrupt intelligence* but are not actually intelligence because intelligence must necessarily be virtuous and afflictive views are nonvirtuous. However, both texts agree that the mental factor of wrong views and the mental factor of ignorance do not have a common locus. According to the *Compendium of Knowledge*, the path of action of wrong views (the tenth nonvirtue) is the mental factor of wrong views and is not ignorance. Asaṅga says this because wrong views are corrupt intelligence, and ignorance, being obscuration and unknowing, is not.

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## REFLECTION

1. Make examples from your own experience of times each of the five afflictive views have manifested in your mind.
2. Are these views easier or more difficult to notice than the first five afflictions?
3. What effect do afflictive views have on your Dharma practice?
4. What will help you to subdue them?

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## *More Types of Defilements*

To broaden our perspective on true origins, we will now look at other ways the sūtras and Abhidharma texts of both the Pāli and Sanskrit traditions describe the afflictive mental factors that propel saṃsāra.

There are many classification systems, each one looking at the defilements from a slightly different perspective that emphasizes particular points. The auxiliary afflictions emphasize the relationship of secondary afflictions and root afflictions. Abandonment or reduction in the ten fetters delineate attainment of the stages of stream-enterer (*srotāpanna*), once-returner (*sakṛdāgāmin*), nonreturner (*anāgāmi*), and arhat. The pollutants are discussed in the context of their being the basic mental contaminants that keep sentient beings revolving in cyclic existence because they are so well-entrenched in the mind.

Sometimes the description of a defilement varies from one text or tradition to another. This gives us more information about that defilement and its functions, making it easier for us to identify it when it arises in our minds.

What follows are not simply lists of defilements but mirrors to our minds that help us to identify the various attitudes, emotions, and views that disturb our minds. These defilements cause us to experience unhappiness here and now and instigate the creation of destructive karma that brings unpleasant results in future lives. As you read the descriptions of the various defilements, pause after each one and make an example of it in your own experience. This will bring these lists alive for you and reveal them as an excellent tool for identifying factors that hinder your happiness and the fulfillment of your spiritual aims.

## *Afflictions*

In the Pāli sūtras the afflictions (P. *kilesa*) are mentioned often but are not itemized. Their enumeration is found in the *Vibhaṅga* and explained in the *Dhammasaṅgani*, both canonical Abhidhamma texts. The *Path of Purification* also discusses them, saying they are called *afflictions* because they themselves are afflicted and because they afflict their associated mental states (Vism 22.49).

They are ten in number:

(1–3) Greed (attachment, P. *lobha*), animosity (hatred, P. *dosa*), and confusion (P. *moha*) are called *roots* (P. *mūla*) because their presence determines the ethical quality of a mental state as well as the verbal and physical actions it motivates. Their opposites — liberality, loving-kindness, and wisdom — are the three roots of virtue. (4) Arrogance (P. *māna*) is one of the higher fetters, abandoned only at arhatship. On the basis of any of the five aggregates, which are impermanent, duḥkha, and not self, arrogance thinks, “I am superior, equal, or inferior.” (5) Afflictive views (P. *diṭṭhi*) are numerous but can be condensed into eternalism and nihilism. (6–8) Deluded doubt (P. *vicikicchā*), restlessness (P. *uddhacca*), and lethargy (P. *thina*) are three of the five hindrances (P. *nīvaraṇa*), which will be explained later. (9–10) Lack of integrity (P. *ahirika*) and lack of consideration for others (P. *anottappa*) are instrumental in creating destructive karma. Lack of integrity is directed inward. Under its influence, we do not respect our principles and precepts and thus do not abandon nonvirtuous thoughts and behavior.<sup>30</sup> Lack of consideration for others is directed outward and does not abandon nonvirtuous thoughts and behavior even though they adversely affect others and their faith. Some of the above correspond to root afflictions in the Sanskrit tradition, whereas others are considered auxiliary afflictions.

## *Underlying Tendencies*

The six root afflictions in the Sanskrit tradition are called underlying tendencies (*anusāya*, *anusaya*) in the Pāli sūtras (MN 18.8) and Abhidharma.<sup>31</sup> They are the same six, except attachment has been separated into two, making seven: attachment to sensuality (*kamaragā*), anger (P. *paṭigha*), views, deluded doubt, arrogance, existence (*bhavarāga*), and ignorance (P. *avijjā*). Vasubandhu lists the underlying tendencies in the same way.

Here *attachment to sensuality* is the attachment of the desire realm that hungers after sensory objects of the desire realm — sights, sounds, and so forth. *Attachment to existence* is attachment to birth in the form and formless realms; it is possessed by beings in all three realms who cling to the bliss of concentration. A human may abandon attachment for sensual objects in the desire realm but have strong attachment for meditative states in the form or formless realms. Beings born in the form realm are attached to existence in that realm or to

existence in the formless realm and will strive to actualize that level of meditative absorption. Beings born in the formless realm are attached to existence there, although not to existence in the desire or form realms. Because they still hanker for saṃsāric existence, they lack the aspiration for liberation and cannot attain nirvāṇa unless they relinquish that attachment.

Although the main afflictive mental factors are listed as both underlying tendencies and root afflictions, they are seen differently in the Pāli Abhidhamma than in the *Compendium of Knowledge*. In the Pāli tradition, *anusaya* literally means “to lie down or to sleep along with.” Firmly established in the mind, underlying tendencies “sleep alongside” the mental continuum, acting as the causes for manifest afflictions. They are latent dispositions present even in newborn infants that enable manifest afflictions to arise when the appropriate causes and conditions are present.

Although seven underlying tendencies are listed, all defilements have a dormant form that is also called an underlying tendency. These may be stronger or weaker depending on the person’s actions and thoughts. When a certain view or emotion repeatedly arises in our minds — and especially when we act on it — its underlying tendency increases in strength. Saying someone has a hot temper means that his underlying tendency for anger is strong.

When afflictions arise and we counteract them by applying the antidotes, their underlying tendencies weaken. Training our minds in correct ways of thinking increases the strength of the antidotal mental factors, transforming someone who has a hot temper into someone who is kind and patient. Underlying tendencies begin to be eradicated from our mindstreams when we attain the supramundane path and become stream-enterers. This corresponds to the path of seeing in the Sanskrit tradition.

Vaibhāṣikas consider the underlying tendencies and the afflictions to be the same, whereas Sautrāntikas say that latent attachment is an underlying tendency and manifest attachment is a full entanglement. This difference in interpretation arose as the Abhidharmikas tried to explain how an affliction could be manifest now, disappear in fifteen minutes, and manifest again tomorrow. Without a permanent self, what connects the previous instance of an affliction to a later one? Sautrāntikas say that the underlying tendencies are latent forces, like seeds that produce manifest afflictions when the right conditions are present. Since the afflictions, like consciousnesses, are impermanent, the underlying tendency of anger connects one instance of anger to another instance of anger the next day.

Vaibhāṣikas do not agree, saying that if these dormant potentials were

always alongside the consciousness, there could never be a virtuous mental state, because virtuous mental states and dormant potentials are incompatible. Thus they say the underlying tendencies and the afflictions are the same.

Another Abhidharma school (Yaśomitra says it is the Vātsīputrīya) asserts that the underlying tendencies are abstract composites (*viprayukta-samskāra*) — impermanent things that are neither form nor consciousness. Here the underlying tendencies are neutral — neither virtuous nor nonvirtuous — and could abide alongside any mental state.<sup>32</sup> This is similar to Tibetan thought on this topic: afflictions are mental factors. When a manifest affliction fades, a seed of that affliction remains. The seed is a neutral abstract composite. When the correct conditions come together, the seed turns into the manifest affliction, in this way connecting one instance of an affliction with a later instance. The same mechanism works for virtuous mental factors.

The Buddha noted three underlying tendencies as being particularly dangerous (MN 148.28):

When one is touched by a pleasant feeling, if one delights in it, welcomes it, and remains holding to it, the underlying tendency to attachment lies within one. When one is touched by a painful feeling, if one sorrows, grieves, laments, weeps, beating one's breast, and becomes distraught, the underlying tendency to anger lies within one. When one is touched by a neutral feeling, if one does not understand as it actually is the origination, disappearance, gratification, danger, and escape<sup>33</sup> in regard to that feeling, the underlying tendency to ignorance lies within one. Monastics, that one shall here and now make an end to duḥkha without abandoning the underlying tendency to attachment for pleasant feeling, without abolishing the underlying tendency to anger for painful feeling, without extirpating the underlying tendency to ignorance in regard to neutral feeling, without abandoning the ignorance [that is the root of saṃsāra] and arousing true knowledge — this is impossible.

Observing our lives, we clearly see that attachment immediately arises in response to pleasant feelings — for example, eating some tasty food; aversion arises in response to an unpleasant feeling, such as having a stomachache; ignorance arises in response to a neutral feeling. What is needed is wisdom, insight, and true knowledge to free our minds from these underlying tendencies.

However, these three underlying tendencies must not be abandoned in regard to all pleasant, unpleasant, and neutral feelings (MN 44.25–28). In fact, the joy (*prīti*) and bliss (*sukkhā*) experienced in the first dhyāna overpower the underlying tendency to sensual attachment. The unpleasant feeling from thinking about duḥkha overcomes the underlying tendency to anger by inspiring us to become a nonreturner. The neutral feeling in the fourth dhyāna leads to equanimity and employing that dhyāna to realize the four truths leads to arhatship.

Even before attaining insight and wisdom, we can temporarily lessen the underlying tendencies. When a pleasant feeling arises, be mindful of it but do not delight in it. Instead of clinging to and wanting more of that experience, simply let it be. In that way the underlying tendency to sensual attachment isn't activated. Similarly, practice observing unpleasant feelings, and by recalling their transience, don't arouse anger. Restraining our senses is also helpful because by decreasing contact with sensual objects, we experience fewer pleasant and unpleasant feelings and thus fewer instances of sensual attachment and anger.

## *Auxiliary Afflictions*

In the Sanskrit tradition, the *Compendium of Knowledge* presents twenty auxiliary afflictions (*upakleśa*) that disturb the mind. They are called *auxiliary* because they are close to or related to the root afflictions and are classified according to the root afflictions with which they are associated.<sup>34</sup>

### *Afflictions derived from anger*

1. Wrath (belligerence, *krodha*) is a mental factor that, due to an increase of anger, is a thoroughly malicious state of mind wishing to cause immediate harm.

2. Resentment (grudge holding, vengeance, *upanāha*) is a mental factor that firmly holds on to the fact that in the past we were harmed by a particular person and wishes to retaliate.

3. Spite (*pradāsa*) is a mental factor that is preceded by wrath or resentment, is an outcome of malice, and motivates us to speak harsh words in response to unpleasant words said by others.

4. Jealousy (*īrṣyā*) is a mental factor that, out of attachment to respect and material gain, is unable to bear the good qualities, possessions, opportunities, or virtue of others.

5. Cruelty (*vihimsā*) is a mental factor that, with a malicious intention that lacks any compassion or kindness, desires to harm, belittle, or disregard others. It is usually directed toward those we consider inferior to ourselves.

### *Afflictions derived from attachment*

6. Miserliness (*mātsarya*) is a mental factor that, out of attachment to respect and material gain, firmly holds on to our possessions with no wish to give them away.

7. Haughtiness (*mada*) is a mental factor that, being attentive to the good fortune we possess, produces a false sense of confidence or security that leads to complacency.

8. Restlessness (agitation, excitement, *auddhatya*) is a mental factor that, through the force of attachment, does not allow the mind to rest solely on a virtuous object but scatters it here and there to many other objects.

### *Afflictions derived from ignorance*

9. Concealment (*mraṅśa*) is a mental factor that wishes to hide our faults whenever another person with a benevolent intention free of attachment, confusion, hatred, or fear talks about such faults.

10. Lethargy (dullness, *styāna*) is a mental factor that, having caused the mind to become dull and thereby insensitive, does not comprehend its object clearly.

11. Laziness (*kausīdya*) is a mental factor that, having firmly grasped an object offering temporary happiness, either does not wish to do anything constructive or, although wishing to, is weak-minded. Laziness leads to excessive sleep, involvement with meaningless activities, and discouragement.

12. Lack of faith (lack of confidence or trust, *āśraddhya*) is a mental factor that, causing us to have no belief in or respect for that which is worthy of confidence — such as karma and its results and the Three Jewels — is the complete opposite of faith. It acts as the basis for laziness and disrespect.

13. Forgetfulness (*muṣitasmṛtitā*) is a mental factor that, having caused the



apprehension of a virtuous object to be lost, induces memory of and distraction to an object of affliction.

14. Non-introspective awareness (non-clear comprehension, *asamprajanya*) is a mental factor that, being an afflictive intelligence, has made no, or only a rough, analysis and is not fully alert to the conduct of our body, speech, and mind, and thus causes us to become carelessly indifferent.

### *Afflictions derived from both attachment and ignorance*

15. Pretension (*māyā*) is a mental factor that, being overtly attached to respect or material gain, fabricates a particularly excellent quality about ourselves and wishes to make it known to others with the thought to deceive them.

16. Deceit (dishonesty, *śāṭhya*) is a mental factor that, being overtly attached to respect or material gain, wishes to deceive others by hiding our faults or preventing others from knowing our faults.

### *Afflictions derived from ignorance, anger, and attachment*

17. Lack of integrity (*āhrīkyā*) is a mental factor that does not avoid destructive actions for reasons of personal conscience or for the sake of our Dharma practice. It is a supportive condition for all afflictions and the basis for not protecting our precepts.

18. Inconsideration for others (*anapatrāpya*) is a mental factor that, without taking others or their spiritual traditions into account, does not restrain from destructive behavior. It causes others to lose faith in us.

19. Heedlessness (negligence, *pramāda*) is a mental factor that, when we are affected by laziness, wishes to act in an unrestrained manner without cultivating virtue or guarding the mind from objects or people that spark afflictions.

20. Distraction (*vikṣepa*) is a mental factor that, arising from any of the three poisons, is unable to direct the mind toward a constructive object and disperses it to a variety of other objects.

The Pāli tradition lists sixteen auxiliary afflictions (P. *upakkilesa*) that are offshoots of the three root afflictions (MN 7.3). Many of these overlap with the twenty in the Sanskrit tradition.

1. Covetousness and greed (P. *abhijjhāvisamālobha*) are aspects of craving.

One commentary says covetousness is desire for and attachment to our own belongings, and greed is desire for and attachment to the belongings of others. Another commentary states that covetousness is attachment to an object that is suitable and has been obtained (e.g., coveting a new shirt that you need and obtain legally), while greed is attachment to an object that is unsuitable and has not been obtained (e.g., greedily desiring illegal drugs).

2. Malice (P. *vyāpāda*, *byāpāda*) is aversion that arises in nine cases when thinking, “He harmed me, is harming me, will harm me. He harmed, is harming, will harm those who are dear to me. He helped, is helping, will help my enemies.”

3. Wrath (P. *kodha*) is hatefulness and opposition that seeks to harm someone.

4. Resentment (P. *upanāha*) is accumulated anger and hostility. At first there is anger toward a person or situation. This anger persists and turns into resentment, which is continued animosity toward someone. Weighing us down emotionally and obscuring our mind spiritually, resentment grows when we insist on being right, make ourselves into a victim, or refuse to forgive.

5. Contempt (P. *makkha*) is ingratitude that denigrates those who have been kind to us. A spiritual mentor may help her student for many years, training and teaching him. But when the student becomes well-known and respected, he disregards his teacher and thinks, “She did nothing for me.”

6. Insolence (P. *paḷāsa*) is a sense of competitiveness that puts the other person down. We arrogantly consider ourselves to be above others who are more qualified.

7. Jealousy (P. *issā*) is resentment of the gain, honor, respect, esteem, veneration, and reverence shown to others.

8. Miserliness (P. *macchariya*) is stinginess and avarice. We cling to what we have and are unwilling to share our possessions, dwelling, food, reputation, praise, and so forth with others. We don’t want the people who praise us to meet others because they may praise them. We don’t want others to learn the Dharma because they may become as well respected as we are.

9. Pretension (P. *māyā*) craftily hides our faults and misdeeds. We do a nonvirtuous action and, not wanting others to know about it, pretend to be innocent.

10. Deceit (P. *sāṭheyya*) fraudulently claims excellent qualities, achievements, or status that are not so.<sup>35</sup> We pretend to be a loyal and dear

friend who will never let others down.

11. Obstinacy (P. *thambha*) is rigidity and inflexibility. Such stubbornness often arises when, being insecure, we seek to control a situation or insist that we are right.

12. Competition (P. *sārambha*) seeks to rival and outshine others. We see someone dressed nicely and want to get better clothes to show off; we hear someone is learned and want to demonstrate our knowledge in order to receive more praise and a better reputation. Although such competition is defiled, it is possible to “compete” in a positive way. We see someone who is generous, and with a giving heart we wish to match or surpass her gift; we meet someone who is learned in the Dharma, and with a sincere desire to learn ourselves, we aspire to learn the Dharma as well as she has.

13. Arrogance (P. *māna*) is being puffed up on account of our social class, education, possessions, and so forth. There are three types of arrogance: thinking (1) I am better than others, (2) I am just as good as they are, and (3) I am worse than them. In the Pāli tradition, arrogance is listed both as an underlying tendency and an auxiliary affliction.<sup>36</sup>

14. Conceit (P. *atimāna*) is extreme elevation of the mind. Haughty and dismissive of others, we are so wrapped up in our own greatness that others seem insignificant in comparison.

15. Haughtiness (P. *mada*). According to one commentary, it is similar to arrogance and conceit in that it concerns social class, clan, and so forth. The sūtras describe haughtiness as vanity in relationship to youth, health, and life. Young people are infatuated with their youth and think they will never get old, the healthy believe they will not become ill, and those who are alive think they will not die.

16. Heedlessness (P. *pamāda*) is the opposite of conscientiousness and allows the mind to roam among objects of sensual pleasure. Letting the mind be overwhelmed with afflictions without making any effort to restrain the mind, it leads to self-indulgent actions and ethical downfalls.

Of the sixteen auxiliary afflictions in the Pāli tradition, eight (wrath, resentment, jealousy, miserliness, deceit, pretention, haughtiness, and heedlessness) are auxiliary afflictions and one (arrogance) is a root affliction in the *Compendium of Knowledge*. Two (covetousness and malice) are two of the ten nonvirtues.

## REFLECTION

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1. Some people have difficulty identifying emotions because when they were children their parents did not name emotions or discuss them very much.
  2. Some ways to learn to identify your emotions are to become aware of (a) sensations in your body, (b) the flow or “texture” of your breath, and (c) the “tone” or mood in your mind.
  3. Using the above techniques, try to identify instances of each of the auxiliary afflictions in your life.
  4. Examine the triggers that make the auxiliary afflictions arise. Examine the short- and long-term results of manifest auxiliary afflictions in your life.
  5. Develop a strong determination to counteract the auxiliary afflictions by cultivating mental states that see the object in the opposite way.
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## *Fetters*

The ten fetters (*saṃyojana*) are spoken about extensively in the Pāli tradition and in the *Treasury of Knowledge*. They are called *fetters* because they keep us bound to cyclic existence and impede the attainment of liberation. The first five are *lower fetters* because they bind us to rebirth in the desire realm. The last five are *higher fetters* that prevent a nonreturner from becoming an arhat.

(1) View of a personal identity grasps a true self with respect to the aggregates — for example, thinking one of the aggregates is the self, the self is separate from the aggregates, the self is vast and the aggregates exist within it, or the self exists within the aggregates.

(2) Deluded doubt is a vacillating mind that equivocates about issues important for liberation, such as doubting that the Buddha is awakened, that the Dharma is the ultimate truth and the path out of saṃsāra, and that the Ārya

Saṅgha has realized the Dharma.

(3) View of rules and practices clings to mistaken codes of ethics and mistaken practices as virtuous and as the path to awakening — for example, holding extreme ascetic practices of self-mortification, such as fasting for weeks or sitting in fire to be virtuous, or holding perfectly performed brahminic rituals to be the path.

(4) Sensual desire (*kāmacchanda*) is attachment to objects in the desire realm.

(5) Malice is the wish to harm another living being.

(6–7) Desire for existence in the form realm (*rūparāga*) and desire for existence in the formless realm (P. *arūparāga*) are attached to their respective realms and wish to continue to abide there. These correspond to the pollutant of craving for continued existence.

(8) Arrogance is the subtle, fundamental arrogance, the conceit of “I am” (*asmimāna*). This differs from view of a personal identity, which is a conceptual view holding a permanent, true self. After this view is eliminated, the thoughts “I am this” or “I am that” no longer arise, but the thought “I am” is still present. Even though a nonreturner knows this to be mistaken and does not hold on to the idea “I am,” the thought “I am” still arises spontaneously.

(9) Restlessness is present in any mind that is not liberated. This hindrance may still arise in nonreturners if they are not mindful and diligent, but they are able to overcome it quickly.

(10) Ignorance is the primordial ignorance that is the root of saṃsāra. It is blindness of the true nature, an obscuration that prevents us from seeing how things actually exist. Unlike the Prāsaṅgika, according to the Pāli tradition ignorance does not apprehend the opposite of how things exist.

The *Compendium of Knowledge* lists the fetters differently: attachment, anger, arrogance, ignorance, deluded doubt, afflictive views (view of a personal identity, view of extremes, and wrong views), holding wrong views as supreme, which includes the view of rules and practices, jealousy, and miserliness.

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## REFLECTION

1. Choose one of the fetters that is obvious in your experience. Be aware of it in its latent, manifest, and motivating forms.

2. While eliminating its latent form requires insight into selflessness, what ideas do you have to inhibit it manifesting, or once it has manifested, from motivating your deeds and speech?
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## *Pollutants*

Pollutants (*āsrava*, *āsava*) perpetuate saṃsāra. Most Pāli sūtras mention three pollutants, although a late addition to the *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta* and the Pāli Abhidhamma literature speak of four.

(1) The *pollutant of sensuality* (P. *kāmāsava*) is a deeply rooted tendency for sensual desire that causes us to get tangled up with sensual objects. It corresponds to the fetter of sensual desire.

(2) The *pollutant of existence* (P. *bhavāsava*) is a deep, fundamental craving to exist in some form. This pollutant is particularly insidious because it propels the mind to take rebirth repeatedly in cyclic existence. It encapsulates the fetters of desire for existence in the form and formless realms.

(3) The *pollutant of ignorance* (P. *avijjāsava*) is a lack of knowing and understanding. Always present in saṃsāric beings, it sometimes surges and becomes very intense, inhibiting the mind from seeing reality clearly. The fetter of ignorance and the underlying tendency of ignorance are included in this pollutant.

(4) The *pollutant of views* (P. *diṭṭhāsava*) includes the fetters of view of a personal identity and view of rules and practices, and the underlying tendency to views. This pollutant is not included in the enumeration of pollutants in the early sūtras.

Pollutants are deeply rooted, primordial defilements that have kept us bound in saṃsāra without respite. Existing deep in the mind, they flow into conscious experience when provoked by contact with certain objects. For example, contact with pleasant sensory objects stimulates the pollutant of sensuality.

*Āsrava* was a word used by brahmins and ascetics before the Buddha. The Buddha gave the term a new meaning and delineated the first three pollutants. These are also forms of craving, each focused on its own object and functioning in its own way to keep us trapped in saṃsāra.

The *Treasury of Knowledge* lists three pollutants: (1) The *pollutant of desire*

*or attachment* includes the afflictions and full entanglements of the desire realm, except for ignorance. These are nonvirtuous. (2) The *pollutant of existence* is directed inward and is interested in birth in the form or formless realm. It is ethically neutral and includes the underlying tendencies and afflictions of the form and formless realms, except for ignorance. (3) The *pollutant of ignorance* is the ignorance of the desire, form, and formless realms. It is listed as a separate pollutant to emphasize that it is the root of saṃsāra and that when it is eliminated, the other pollutants also cease. These are called *pollutants* because they establish us in cyclic existence; they are called *outflows* because they flow out of the mind through the six sense sources.<sup>37</sup>

## *Hindrances*

Another group of obscurations explained in both the Pāli and Sanskrit traditions are the five hindrances: (1) sensual desire, (2) malice, (3) lethargy and sleepiness, (4) restlessness and regret, and (5) deluded doubt. They are called *hindrances* because they impede attaining the form- and formless-realm absorptions. These five are nonvirtuous and are found only in desire-realm beings. The five hindrances have been briefly discussed above in other classifications of defilements and will be explained in more depth when the method to gain serenity is presented.

In the above classifications of defilements, some defilements are found in multiple categories, others are present only once. Various forms of attachment, anger, and ignorance appear repeatedly, sometimes given different names or slightly different definitions. However, they still point to three strong tendencies of our minds that it behooves us to pay attention to.

When studying the defilements and observing how they function in our minds and the influence they have on our lives, it is important to remember that they are not embedded in the nature of our minds. Just as clouds in the sky obscure the clear nature of the sky but are not part of it, defilements obscure the clear light nature of the mind but are not embedded in that pure nature. Like the clouds, defilements can be removed. But unlike clouds, which can always reappear, when defilements are thoroughly cleansed from the mind, they can never return and the pure sky-like nature of the mind radiates forever unobscured.



## 4 | Afflictions, Their Arising, and Their Antidotes

AS WE'VE SEEN, when we delve into the categories and definitions of defilements according to various Buddhist traditions and tenet schools, the discussion becomes lengthy and complex. On the other hand, when we focus on the questions “What motivates me to act in ways that harm myself and others? What keeps me and others bound in cyclic existence?” the answer is succinct — afflictions rooted in ignorance. In this chapter we will learn more about how the afflictions operate.

### *Eighty-Four Thousand Afflictions*

We may wonder why certain disturbing emotions — such as fear, anxiety, frustration, insecurity, and depression — are not mentioned in the classifications of defilements, although they disturb our minds and interfere with Dharma practice. It could be that because of the structure of contemporary society and world events, these afflictions have become more pronounced. However, they did not go unnoticed by the Buddha, who spoke of eighty-four thousand afflictions. The groups in the previous chapter contain the most prominent afflictions that keep us revolving in cyclic existence. These other afflictions are among the eighty-four thousand and are subtypes of the prominent ones.

For example, fear, insecurity, and anxiety are related to attachment. Based on distorted conceptions that see what is impermanent as permanent and what is unsatisfactory in nature as happiness, we become attached to certain people or things. Fear arises over the possibility of being separated from the people, situations, and things we are attached to. Anxiety and insecurity manifest when we consider unknown future events, such as possibly losing our job, our marriage dissolving, or receiving an unwanted medical diagnosis. Although these events have not happened yet and may never happen, distorted conceptions and afflictions run rampant in our minds, making us miserable.

Another type of anxiety is related to doubt, but unlike the doubt that is a root affliction, this doubt does not contemplate issues important to spiritual practice.



Rather, we agonize over making decisions, wishing we could follow all the options simultaneously before choosing the best one. Plagued by doubt, we avoid making a decision and spin with anxiety. This, too, is related to attachment: our world has become narrowly focused on our own happiness and what benefits ourselves and the people we cherish. Our problem is that we don't know what will bring us the most happiness.

Depression that is not based on chemical activity in the brain or traumatic brain injury seems to be related to attachment. We want events to happen in ways that accord with our expectations and dreams, and we become despondent when they do not. That can lead to anger at ourselves and self-recrimination, both of which can contribute to depression.

Emotions such as depression, rage, and anxiety that manifests as hypervigilance may have multiple contributing factors — physical, sexual, or emotional abuse; combat trauma; poverty; prejudice and oppression; and irregularities in brain chemistry or traumatic brain injury, to name a few — so healing may require a multipronged approach. Within this, the Buddhist approach of analyzing the thoughts, mental habits, and so forth that lie behind disturbing emotions can be very helpful. If we attribute our problems only to external factors, healing can be difficult because we cannot undo past experiences. They happened and are over. Our present problems stem from unbeneficial ways of interpreting and responding to past events and present memories of them. By understanding the mistaken way in which disturbing emotions function and learning more realistic and beneficial ways of regarding situations, we can subdue these disturbing emotions and prevent the damaging behavior they can provoke.

When hearing our emotions analyzed in the above manner, we may feel piqued, thinking that the seriousness of our emotions is not being respected. As individuals we are very attached to what we term *my* emotions. Based on adhering to them as *mine*, we consider our emotions to be extremely serious, so much so that we feel hurt if others aren't as concerned with them as we are. While our emotions are important, it may not be for the reason we think. These emotions motivate our physical, verbal, and mental actions that not only affect us spiritually but also influence others around us. Our actions also influence our future lives. For these reasons, learning how to manage them effectively is important.

Some people are attached to predictability, even though *samsāra* is unpredictable in that previously created karma is continuously ripening. They

wish to control other people and situations and become frustrated when they cannot. However, we cannot make others do what we think is best, nor can we control the aging of our bodies or make the body immune to illness or injury. Our wish to control and the belief that we should be able to is associated with the view of a personal identity, especially the form that grasps at a self-sufficient substantially existent person. Tsongkhapa uses the analogy of a master and servant to illustrate this grasping: the self is like a master who controls and gives orders, and the body and mind, like servants, should obey. However, such a self-sufficient substantially existent person does not exist, so thinking that we should be able to control everything around us is definitely unrealistic.

When we look from a global perspective, it is evident that all these defilements are in one way or another dependent on the obscuring and misleading force of ignorance and view of a personal identity. These are the root of saṃsāra. Seeing their disadvantages, we become determined to cultivate the wisdom that will eradicate them. Knowing that all ordinary beings suffer from them, our hearts open in compassion for ourselves and others.

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## REFLECTION

1. When afflictions that are not specifically named in the previous chapter arise in your mind, name them and observe how they function. See which of the root afflictions they are most closely related to.
2. Identify the distorted conceptions that lie behind that emotion.
3. Observe the other afflictions that arise either before or after it.
4. Question whether these afflictive emotions serve to promote your own and others' well-being. Think of which Dharma teachings you could contemplate that would help counteract these afflictive emotions.

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*The Order in Which Afflictions Arise*

The way the order in which afflictions arise is presented depends on whether ignorance and view of a personal identity are regarded as separate. Seeing them as different mental factors, the two *Knowledges* say that ignorance is mental obscuration that cannot see things clearly. On the basis of ignorance, view of a personal identity mistakenly believes the aggregates to be a self-sufficient substantially existent person. All other afflictions follow from this. This is analogous to not being able to see clearly in a dark room (ignorance) and mistaking a rope to be a snake (view of a personal identity). Attachment, anger, and other afflictions swiftly follow. Vasubandhu lays out their sequential development in the *Treasury of Knowledge*: ignorance, doubt, wrong views, view of a personal identity, view of extremes, view of rules and practices, view holding wrong views as supreme, arrogance, attachment, hatred.

Initially from *ignorance* regarding the meaning of the [four] truths, *doubt* arises, wondering whether there is or is not duḥkha.

From that, by relying on an inferior spiritual friend, one engages in erroneous teachings and learning, which produce the *wrong view* that duḥkha does not exist.

From that arises the *view of a personal identity* that grasps the aggregates as I and mine.

From that arises the *view of extremes* that grasps the permanence or annihilation of the aggregates [that is, that the I exists as an eternal, immutable soul or that it ceases to exist after death].

From that arises the *view of rules and practices* that grasps the belief that there is purification from holding those extreme [views].

From that arises the *view holding wrong views as supreme*, because what was believed to provide purification [is held as a supreme view].

From that arise *arrogance* and *attachment* for one's own views and *hatred* that despises the views of others.

Sages such as Dharmakīrti and Candrakīrti and their followers, who assert that view of a personal identity is ignorance, present another sequence as outlined by Dharmakīrti in his *Commentary on Reliable Cognition* (LC 1:300).

Once there is a self, there is an idea of an other.

Discriminating self and other, attachment and animosity arise.

All of the faults come about

ALL OF THE FAULTS COME ABOUT  
in association with these.

Tsongkhapa expands on this (LC 1:300):

When the *view of a personal identity* [which is *ignorance*] apprehends the self, discrimination arises between self and other.

Once you have made that distinction, you become *attached* to what is associated with yourself and *hostile* toward that which pertains to others.

As you observe the self, your mind becomes inflated [with *arrogance*].

You develop a belief that this very self is either eternal or subject to annihilation [*view of extremes*].

You come to believe in the supremacy of a view of the self and the like [*view holding wrong views as supreme*], and you also come to believe in the supremacy of the detrimental practices associated with such views [*view of rules and practices*]. Similarly, you develop the *wrong view* that denies the existence of things such as the Teacher [Buddha], who taught selflessness and that which he taught — karma and its effects, the truths of the āryas, the Three Jewels, and so forth; or else you become *doubtful* as to whether such things exist or are real.

It is interesting to note that the Vaibhāṣika version of Vasubandhu places doubt and the various afflictive views before the disturbing emotions of attachment, anger, and arrogance, whereas in Dharmakīrti's version the disturbing emotions arise before the afflictive views and doubt.

## *Factors Causing Afflictions to Arise*

Some people assert that afflictions are an inherent part of human nature and, as such, are hardwired in our nervous system or genes. Although we may be able to modify their effects, we can never be free of them. From a Buddhist viewpoint, this is a narrow view of human potential that offers little hope for the improvement of humanity. As described in volumes 1 and 2 of the Library of

Wisdom and Compassion, the Buddhist view is that although coarse levels of consciousness and the brain are interdependent, they are not the same nature. Thus the subtlest minds are not bound by the physical limitations of our bodies and brains. In addition, as conscious phenomena, afflictions can be eliminated from the mindstream by applying their counterforces. They are not our inherent nature and liberation from afflictions is possible, as demonstrated by many highly realized practitioners throughout history.

The arising of afflictions in ordinary beings is to some extent related to our bodies. When we are physically weak or deprived of physical necessities, we are more susceptible to anger. We are more inclined toward attachment, especially sexual desire, when we are healthy and our bodies are comfortable. When we get angry, when we are hungry, or when we are depressed as a result of chemical imbalance in the brain, two factors are at work: one is our present physical situation, the other is the seed of afflictions in our mindstreams. Some people believe that scientists may one day be able to stop all disturbing emotions through medicines that regulate body chemistry and techniques that alter genetic makeup. However, as long as the seeds of afflictions are still present, afflictions will arise when suitable conditions come together. Afflictions can only be fully overcome through spiritual practice.

What are the principal factors that cause manifest afflictions to arise in our minds? Six conditions or a combination of them play a role.

(1) The *seeds of afflictions* are a prominent cause. Because they remain on our mindstreams and go from one life to the next, we are not free from afflictions. An external or internal factor can stimulate these seeds to give rise to manifest afflictions.

(2) *Contact with certain objects* can stimulate afflictions to erupt. Attachment arises when good food or an attractive person is in front of us; anger springs up when we are around people who disagree with our ideas or challenge our opinions.

(3) *Detrimental influences* such as bad friends have a strong influence on our way of thinking and behaving. Adults recognize the strong influence of peer pressure on children, but they seldom take stock of the extent to which their own emotions and behavior are affected by the wish to be part of a group and the desire not to be seen as strange or different from others. Seeking the approval or praise of people we care about or respect can make us compromise our ethical values if we are not mindful. If a close friend is upset with someone, we tend to get angry at that person as well. If a family member is strongly attached to a

particular political view, our attachment — or anger — toward it will easily arise.

(4) *Verbal stimuli* — news, books, TV, Internet, radio, magazines, films, social media, and so forth — impact our thoughts and emotions. In recent years the media has become a prominent conditioning force in our lives as we are exposed to hundreds, if not thousands, of advertisements each day. The daily news influences our thoughts and can easily provoke strong emotions. With the constant display of sexual images and violent pictures that we are exposed to from childhood, it is no wonder that attachment and hostility flare up so easily and frequently that we stop noticing them.

(5) *Habitual ways of thinking and habitual emotions* self-replicate in the future. The more familiar we are with certain afflictions and wrong views, the more we see them as true and reinforce them. Someone accustomed to concealing his or her faults and misdeeds will continue this mindset, making it more difficult to change. Resentment and belligerence arise easily in someone who is familiar with anger and has never applied counterforces to it. For this reason, it's advisable to learn and apply antidotes to our habitual afflictions and behaviors, because they are the most troublesome.

(6) *Distorted attention (ayoniśo manaskāra)* or distorted conceptions misinterpret events, superimpose attractive and unattractive qualities onto people and objects, and project motivations and meanings on other people's words and activities. This establishes the perfect setting for afflictions that haven't arisen to arise and for those that have arisen to increase. However, when we train our minds to observe sense objects with mindfulness and wisdom, afflictions that haven't arisen do not arise, and the ones that have arisen subside.

For example, based on seeing a car as inherently existent, we see its marvelous qualities as existing in the car itself. In fact, distorted attention has exaggerated the car's good qualities and ignored its faults, making the car appear 100 percent desirable in our eyes. Our attachment for it explodes and we *must* buy it. By pausing to do some analysis, we will begin to see that distorted attention is fabricating the car's qualities and desirability and our life will be fine without buying that car.

The surroundings in which we live may contain many of the objects, detrimental social influences, and verbal stimuli that trigger our afflictions. For this reason, the great masters advise avoiding environments that trigger our afflictions. This is done not because those objects or people are bad, but because our afflictions are as yet uncontrolled. Living in an environment where

distractions and commotion are minimal enables us to focus on developing counterforces to afflictions. Once these are strong, our external surroundings will not affect us as much.

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## REFLECTION

1. What kind of media are you exposed to throughout your day — Internet, TV, news, movies, smartphone, computer, advertising, billboards, magazines, and so forth.
2. How does each of these influence your thoughts and the decisions you make? Do they have a deleterious effect? For example, how do the sex and violence in movies influence your mind? Do you compare your body with the pictures in magazines and other media and feel that you're not attractive? Does watching people fighting in movies rev up your adrenaline and provoke hostility in your mind?
3. What would a healthy relationship with the media look like in your life? What do you need to do to bring that about?

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### *Feelings That Accompany Afflictions*

Previously we discussed one way in which feelings and afflictions are related: polluted feelings easily provoke afflictions to arise; when we are unhappy, anger and malice may soon follow. Here feelings are causes for afflictions. For this reason, we are advised to maintain a happy mind. In the second way, they are simultaneous — that is, feelings accompany afflictive mental states. Attachment in the desire realm is accompanied by pleasant feeling; anger and animosity are accompanied by unpleasant feeling. This may be one reason why we are less willing to apply the antidotes to attachment. Any of the three feelings — pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral — may accompany ignorance.

Mental happiness or unhappiness may accompany wrong views. If someone believes nonvirtuous actions have no result, he is happy; but if he thinks virtuous

actions bring no result, he is unhappy. Mental unhappiness accompanies doubt; being indecisive is unpleasant. A happy feeling accompanies arrogance and the other four afflictive views. However, if the mind of a person in the desire realm is unclear, all ten root afflictions are accompanied by a neutral feeling.

The Pāli Abhidhamma says that all consciousnesses rooted in anger are accompanied by mental unhappiness. That means that whenever our minds are unhappy, anger is present even at a subtle level, and this mental state is nonvirtuous.

To the contrary, virtuous mental states are accompanied by either a happy feeling or equanimity. Consciously steering our thoughts so that they are constructive brings not only happiness or equanimity but also creates virtuous karma. When we act with genuine generosity or ethical restraint, our mind is happy here and now and we create the cause for happiness in the future. Of course when training in these practices we may not be continually happy because afflictions sometimes interfere, but as we continue to practice, afflictions will wane and virtue and joy will increase.

Of the auxiliary afflictions and variable mental factors that become nonvirtuous, regret, jealousy, belligerence, harmfulness, resentment, and spite are accompanied by mental unhappiness. Miserliness, being an aspect of attachment, is accompanied by a pleasant feeling. Either mental happiness or unhappiness may accompany deceit, pretension, concealment, and sleep because when those four mental factors do not accomplish the purpose that is their object, the mind becomes unhappy.

Haughtiness is usually accompanied by happiness, although above the third dhyāna (P. *jhāna*), neutral feeling is present. Lack of integrity, inconsideration for others, lethargy, and restlessness may be accompanied by any of the five feelings — physical and mental happiness, physical and mental unhappiness, and neutral feeling. Neutral feeling may accompany any of the afflictions.

There is no physical or mental unhappiness in the form and formless realms, and their afflictions are ethically neutral because they are weak. Of the dhyānas, the first three are accompanied by the feeling of bliss (a type of happy feeling) and the fourth by a neutral feeling. Formless realm absorptions are accompanied by only neutral feeling.

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## REFLECTION



1. Practice identifying the various virtuous and nonvirtuous mental factors as they arise in your mind.
  2. Observe the feeling that accompanies each one.
  3. How does the feeling of happiness that arises with attachment to sensual objects differ from the happiness that accompanies generosity or genuine affection?
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## *The Ethical Dimension of Afflictions*

Not all afflictions are nonvirtuous; by themselves, ignorance, view of a personal identity, and view of extremes are neutral. They are not nonvirtuous because by themselves they lack the capacity to produce pain. In addition, these three do not always give rise to nonvirtuous mental states.<sup>38</sup>

The *Treasury of Knowledge* speaks of mixed and unmixed ignorance. *Mixed ignorance* assists and accompanies the other five root afflictions and shares five similarities with them: they depend on the same cognitive faculty, have the same object, are generated in the same aspect, occur at the same time, and have the same entity.<sup>39</sup> Ignorance shares the same primary consciousness with all of the root and auxiliary afflictions. An example is the ignorance that shares a primary consciousness with attachment. This ignorance, as well as the primary consciousness and other mental factors accompanying it, become nonvirtuous by the power of attachment being nonvirtuous.

*Unmixed ignorance* doesn't share five similarities with any of the nonvirtuous afflictions and is ethically neutral. Examples of unmixed ignorance are the ignorance accompanying the view of a personal identity and the view of extremes, and the ignorance mistaking a pen for a stick.

The ignorance that is the first of the twelve links of dependent origination is unmixed ignorance. When it gives rise to anger, greed, or any other nonvirtuous mental factors, this new mental state is no longer the first link. This new mental state is accompanied by ignorance and is nonvirtuous due to the power of the other affliction that accompanies it. It leads to a nonvirtuous formative action that is the actual second link.

All afflictions of the desire realm are nonvirtuous, except unmixed ignorance, view of a personal identity, and view of extremes, which are neutral. All afflictions of the upper realms — the form and formless realms — are neutral. A degree of intensity is needed for an affliction to be nonvirtuous. Since the afflictions of beings in the upper realms are refined, they lack the intensity required to create nonvirtuous karma that ripens into painful experiences.

To apply this to the Prāsaṅgika view, the first-link ignorance that precedes a virtuous formative karma such as generosity is unmixed ignorance that grasps the agent, object, and action as inherently existent. It is ethically neutral. This ignorance gives rise to a virtuous mental state, such as compassion, that motivates the constructive karma of generosity, which is the second link. During the time of giving the gift, grasping inherent existence may continue, or we may simply apprehend ourselves, the offering, and the recipient without grasping them as either inherently existent or non-inherently existent. In the former case, the mental state grasping inherent existence is neutral and is a different mental state than the one that is generous, which is virtuous. Although the two mental states are closely related in time, they do not occur simultaneously.

## *Counterforces to the Afflictions*

Whether we follow a religion or not, we can see that afflictions interfere with our personal happiness as well as the well-being of society in general. Most harmful events among individuals, groups, or nations are rooted in ignorance and motivated by hatred, greed, arrogance, jealousy, and so forth. These afflictions are the causes of killing, robbery, sexual abuse, political and financial scandals, prejudice, injustice, and inequality. Problems in society — including in our institutional structures — are rooted in people's afflictive mental states. Although this is the case, when we face personal or societal problems, we seldom look in our minds for the source of the problem. It is time that we do.

The law of the land punishes people engaged in harmful actions in an effort to stop such behavior. Although punishment may make someone so uncomfortable or fearful that they temporarily stop a certain behavior, it does not bring about lasting change. That comes only from changing our mental attitude. Unless the deeper source of harmful activities is eliminated, they will continue in one form or another. We need to identify the source of problems — which lies in the unsubdued mind — and employ preventative and remedial measures to tame

our minds. This involves learning about the faults of afflictions and techniques to counteract them, applying these to our own minds, and sharing them with others. This can be done without using Buddhist vocabulary or religious concepts; it is common sense.

The first step in counteracting the afflictions is to notice when they manifest in our minds. While we may believe that we know ourselves well, our thoughts and emotions often go unnoticed. One factor contributing to this is the lack of mindfulness and introspective awareness — we neglect to focus our minds on what is beneficial and to monitor our minds' activities with wisdom. Sometimes we are distracted by sense objects and do not pay attention to our inner thoughts and emotions. Some people grew up in families where emotions and thoughts were not labeled or discussed, so they did not learn the vocabulary necessary to discuss the workings of their minds.

Here are some tips to help you identify thoughts and afflictions. First check in with your body; our physical sensations often tell us a lot about what is happening in our minds. When our hearts are racing, our faces flush, and our stomachs tight, chances are anger — which is often based on fear — is present. When our palms are sweaty and our breaths short, we are usually agitated or nervous.

Also check in with the mood in your mind. When thoughts about desirable objects are swirling in your mind, attachment is manifest. When you can't stand that someone else is better than you in a certain activity, that is jealousy. When you don't feel like doing anything but lounge around, that is the laziness of procrastination. When you put yourself down, that is the laziness of discouragement.

Also observe your behavior patterns; they can tell you if an affliction has arisen in your mind. If you find yourself going to the refrigerator repeatedly even though you aren't hungry, what affliction is present in your mind? If you continually check social media, what affliction is propelling this action? What are you really seeking when you engage in that behavior?

The next step is to differentiate constructive and neutral thoughts from afflictions. Some virtuous states of mind have “near enemies” — afflictions that are similar to them. Love and attachment are easily confused: both want another person to be happy. Love freely extends goodwill broadly to many people whereas attachment focuses on a small group of people and has expectations and strings attached. Righteous anger can be confused with compassion because they both seek to eliminate injustice and others' suffering. However, compassion

seeks the best outcome for all those concerned in a conflict whereas righteous anger wants to harm those whom we see as perpetrating harm.

Sometimes we must tease apart different facets of a mental state to identify an affliction. For example, a friend deliberately runs a red light when there are no extenuating circumstances. Some people become angry at the driver — the agent who did the action. Other people disagree with the action — heedlessly endangering others. The first is anger, the second is not. The more we can separate the person from his action, the more we can avoid anger at the person. This change in attitude enables us to have a reasonable discussion with him about the possible effects of running a red light.

Then reflect on the disadvantages of whatever affliction is plaguing you. That will give you determination to apply its counterforce.

When working to subdue our afflictions, it is best to choose the one that causes the biggest problems for us. Beginners in meditation often recognize that they have attachment to food, but that may not be the affliction that is most problematic for them. Anger may be a bigger problem because it interferes with our relationships at work and at home and fuels destructive behavior. Possessiveness regarding other people, lusting for sexual pleasure, or greed for money or social status may cause more difficulties in our lives and prompt more destructive karma than attachment to food. On the other hand, if you are overweight and in poor health and your doctor advises you to eat more healthily, attachment to food may be the affliction to work with first. If you work on the most problematic affliction at the outset of your practice, you'll see the positive effects Dharma practice has on your life.

One of the connotations of the word *dharma* is to hold back or to prevent. In the case of the Buddhadharmas, if we properly practice, it holds us back from saṃsāric duḥkha by subduing or destroying afflictions. The Dharma does this by providing the antidotes to these harmful mental factors. Everything taught in this book is meant to be a counterforce to the afflictions, their seeds, and latencies.

There are two types of counterforces. One is the all-encompassing counterforce that counteracts all afflictions. The other consists of counterforces that are specific to each affliction. The wisdom realizing emptiness is the all-encompassing counterforce that eradicates all afflictions. It directly opposes the ignorance grasping inherent existence, which is the root of afflictions. While ignorance grasps all phenomena, including the I, to exist inherently, the wisdom directly realizing emptiness apprehends the emptiness of inherent existence of all persons and phenomena. Because ignorance and wisdom are diametrically

opposed in the way they apprehend phenomena and because ignorance is an erroneous consciousness, wisdom can overcome ignorance. When ignorance is uprooted, all the afflictions that depend on it also cease.

Other counterforces do not have the ability to eliminate ignorance but are applied to individual afflictions. Since cultivating the wisdom realizing emptiness requires much time, we must learn and apply these more limited antidotes in the meantime to prevent our afflictions from getting out of hand. Some antidotes to cultivate:

- To counteract attachment, craving, clinging, and greed, reflect on the impermanence of whatever person or object you are attached to. Contemplating the unattractive aspects of the person or object also works well.
- When you crave for existence in saṃsāra, contemplate the disadvantages of saṃsāra. This powerful antidote will redirect our aspiration to liberation.
- To pacify anger and vengeance, cultivate fortitude.
- To remedy hatred, hostility, resentment, and so forth, meditate on loving-kindness.
- To counteract conceit, contemplate the detailed divisions of phenomena, such as the eighteen elements, the twelve sources, and the twelve links of dependent origination. Seeing the enormity of what there is to understand, self-importance is deflated. In addition, by examining all the components of the self, attachment to a real self will diminish.
- To counteract arrogance, reflect on the kindness of others. Seeing that our abilities, talents, and knowledge are due to the kindness of others deflates puffed-up pride.
- To reverse jealousy, rejoice at others' happiness, good qualities, good opportunities, and merit.
- To remedy anxiety and deluded doubt, observe the breath. Focus your attention on the gentle flow of your breath without allowing the mind to spin with fabricated, self-centered stories.
- When you are confused and cannot discern virtue from nonvirtue or what to practice from what to abandon on the path, study the sūtras and scriptures. They will provide excellent guidance.
- To lessen disturbing emotions in general, remember that they are not

you; they are not who you are and are not embedded in the nature of your mind.

At the initial stages of practice, lessening our afflictions is difficult. They seem to arise out of nowhere because we are so habituated to them. Our counterforces are weak, and time and continuous effort are needed to strengthen the antidotes and to develop positive qualities. Being patient with ourselves and going ahead with a determined, optimistic attitude are important to train our minds in new mental habits.

The above counterforces are temporarily effective for the specific affliction they counteract. To gain proficiency in them we must practice them regularly, especially when we are not in the heat of an affliction. Having a regular daily meditation practice, where you can imagine applying these techniques to situations you may encounter or have already encountered, is very effective in this regard.

The antidotes must be applied skillfully so that we don't go too far in the other direction. For example, the antidote to lust is reflecting on the foulness of the body. However, if done unskillfully, this could lead to hating our bodies or disparaging the person whose body we are attracted to. Similarly, if cultivated unskillfully, loving-kindness could lead to attachment.

While using these antidotes to temporarily reduce the force of coarse afflictions, we should also reflect on emptiness to cultivate the wisdom that will eliminate all afflictions forever. By combining single-pointed concentration with a correct understanding of emptiness, our wisdom will eventually become strong enough to uproot the afflictions and obscurations from the mind so that they never return.

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## REFLECTION

1. Which affliction is the strongest and most frequent in your mind?
2. Contemplate its disadvantages in this life and for your spiritual path.
3. What is the temporary antidote to that affliction? Remember situations when that affliction was strong and contemplate its antidote. See if the force of the affliction subsides even a little. When it does, rejoice.

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I came across an interesting passage written by the Kadampa master Togme Zangpo that called the view of a personal identity “the spear of the buddhas.” This is unusual because afflictions are typically said to lack any redeeming qualities. Here Togme Zangpo described a skillful way of using the view of a personal identity as a weapon to destroy the duḥkha caused by the view of a personal identity. Initially as beginners with strong self-grasping, we think, “I want to be free from saṃsāra.” Although this aspiration is afflicted by the view of a personal identity, it motivates us to learn, think, and meditate on emptiness, which will eventually destroy the view of a personal identity. Here we see that for some people at a certain point in their practice, grasping at a truly existent self could spur them to practice.

A similar idea is found in a Pāli sūtra. Explaining the Dharma to a bhikṣuṇī, Ānanda said (AN 4.159):

It has been said, “Bhikkhunī, this body has come into being through craving, yet based on craving, craving can be abandoned.” With reference to what was this said? In this case, a monastic hears it said, “They say that a monastic named so-and-so, by the destruction of the pollutants, in this very life enters and dwells in the unpolluted liberation of mind, liberation by wisdom, having realized it for himself by direct knowledge.” He thinks, “Oh, when shall I too realize the unpolluted liberation of mind, liberation by wisdom?” Sometime later, based on that craving, he abandons craving. It is on account of this that it was said, “This body has come into being through craving, yet based on craving, craving can be abandoned.”

Characterized by this body, which is in the nature of duḥkha, saṃsāra comes about through craving, yet when a monastic hears that another monastic has attained liberation, he craves to attain this too. Motivated by this new craving, he practices well and attains nirvāṇa, the destruction of all craving. In the passage following this, Ānanda says the same regarding arrogance. Here a monastic hears that another monastic has attained nirvāṇa and his pride is wounded because the other monastic attained it first. Arrogance arises in him, and not wanting to be outshone, he is energized to prove that he can attain nirvāṇa as well. This motivation of arrogance instigates him to practice in such a way that

all his arrogance is eradicated forever. Some teachers use a similar technique to energize lazy students on the debate ground. These are skillful ways to use afflictions to destroy afflictions.

When we first learn the Dharma, living without attachment seems impossible. We fear relinquishing attachment will turn us into uncaring, self-absorbed individuals. Thankfully, this is not the case. Some examples of how liberated beings respond to real human situations will give us a glimpse of what living with a transformed mind will be like.

Śāriputra, the Buddha's foremost disciple in wisdom, commented to some monastic friends that he wondered if there were anything in the world whose change or loss would cause him sorrow, lamentation, pain, or despair. Examining himself, he did not see anything that would destabilize his emotional balance. Ānanda, the Buddha's attendant, then asked him, "What would happen if our Teacher, the Buddha, were to undergo change and pass away? Wouldn't that cause you pain?" Śāriputra responded with all sincerity (SN 21.2):

Friend, even if the Teacher himself were to undergo change and alteration, still sorrow, lamentation, pain, displeasure, and despair would not arise in me. However, it would occur to me, "The Teacher, so influential, so powerful and mighty, has passed away. If the Blessed One had lived for a long time, that would have been for the welfare and happiness of the multitude, out of compassion for the world, for the good, welfare, and happiness of devas and humans."

Stunned with admiration, Ānanda responded that Śāriputra's emotional balance and compassion even at the time of losing the most important person in his life were due to the depth of his Dharma practice:

It must be because I-making, mine-making, and the underlying tendency to arrogance have been thoroughly uprooted in the Venerable Śāriputta for a long time that even if the Teacher himself were to undergo change and alteration, still sorrow, lamentation, pain, displeasure, and despair would not arise in him.

Śāriputra's equanimity in the face of his own personal loss was not due to repressing his emotions. The attainment of arhatship did not make him a cold person. He was certainly concerned and deeply moved by the prospect of the



Buddha's passing, but it was not out of self-interest, for he had forsaken all grasping to I and mine as well as relinquished the deeply rooted conceit thinking, "I exist." He was moved because he saw the benefit of the Buddha's presence in the world and the loss of his passing for all beings who need the Dharma. His sorrow was for others, not himself.

Interestingly, when Śāriputra heard that the Buddha would soon attain parinirvāṇa, he told the Tathāgata that he could not bear to witness the event and chose to attain parinirvāṇa himself before the Buddha.

## *Afflictions, Our Real Enemy*

When we face difficulties in life, we tend to attribute their causes to external factors: a friend's behavior, our employer's speech, governmental policies, and so forth. The Buddha questioned our assumption that the chief cause of our problems lies outside of ourselves; he pointed us back to our own minds, asking us to examine our thoughts and emotions to see how they create both internal unhappiness as well as disharmony in our relationships and in society. The disadvantages of distorted conceptions and disturbing emotions extend beyond this lifetime, adversely influencing all our lives. Śāntideva likened afflictions to vicious enemies whom, in our confusion, we treat as friends (BCA 4.28–30, 32–34).

Enemies such as craving and hatred  
are without arms, legs, and so on.  
They are neither courageous nor wise.  
How is it that they have enslaved me?

Dwelling in my mind, they ruin me;  
at their pleasure, they cause me harm.  
And yet I patiently endure them and do not get angry  
at my tolerance with this shameful and improper situation.

If all devas and humans were my enemies,  
even they would be unable to bring me to the fire of Avīci Hell.  
When encountered, it consumes even the ashes of Mount Meru.  
Afflictions, the mighty enemies, instantly throw me there.

All other enemies are incapable  
of remaining for such a length of time  
as can my afflictions, the enduring enemy  
that has neither beginning nor end [if left unopposed].

While in cyclic existence, how can I be joyful and unafraid  
if, in my heart, I readily prepare a place  
for this incessant enemy of long duration,  
the sole cause for the increase of all that harms me?

And how shall I ever have happiness  
if, in a net of attachment within my mind,  
there dwell the guardians of the prison of cyclic existence,  
these afflictions that are my butchers and tormentors in hell?

The afflictions don't have arms and legs; they cannot assault our bodies. Yet the harm they inflict on us is far worse than any external assailant or murderer. The worst thing other sentient beings can do is to take our lives, which indeed is horrible. But they cannot propel us into an unfortunate rebirth the way the afflictions can by motivating us to act nonvirtuously and to create the karma that propels us into rebirths of intense suffering.

Furthermore, harmful sentient beings will eventually die, while the afflictions have resided in our minds beginninglessly and will not depart of their own accord. They may even grow stronger. Seen this way, our patient acceptance of afflictions sabotages our own happiness. We will never have happiness as long as this enemy dwells cozily in our minds, constantly inflicting pain on us. We should be totally fed up with this situation and fight back. Śāntideva continues (BCA 4.39, 44, 46–48):

If even scars inflicted by meaningless enemies  
are worn upon the body like ornaments,  
then why is suffering a cause of harm to me  
while impeccably striving to fulfill the great purpose?

It would be better for me to be burned,  
to have my head cut off and be killed,  
rather than ever bowing down  
to those ever-present disturbing conceptions.

Deluded afflictions! When overcome by the eye of wisdom  
and dispelled from my mind, where will you go?  
Where will you dwell to be able to injure me again later?  
Weak-minded, I have been reduced to making no effort.

If these afflictions do not exist within the objects, the cognitive  
faculties, between the two or elsewhere,  
then where do they exist and how do they harm the world?  
They are like an illusion — thus I should dispel the fear within my  
heart and strive resolutely for wisdom.  
For no real reason, why should I suffer so much in hell?

Therefore, having thought about this well,  
I should try to put these precepts into practice just as they have been  
explained.  
If the doctor's instructions are ignored,  
how will a patient in need of a cure be healed by the medicine?

Proud of their combat, warriors wear their battle scars like medals. While combating this most insidious enemy, our afflictions, we must not shirk from any harm that may come about. We will never bow down to this enemy or accept defeat. For the benefit of all sentient beings, we will generate the wisdom realizing emptiness that will obliterate the afflictions such that they can never return.

Afflictions do not exist in external objects or in our cognitive faculties. Inherently existent afflictions are impossible to find; they are like illusions that lack a real essence and can be overcome. Therefore we must put the Buddha's teachings into practice, for they are the medicine that will heal all the injuries of cyclic existence.

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## REFLECTION

1. Read and contemplate the above verses from *Engaging in the Bodhisattvas' Deeds* one by one, speaking to yourself just as Śāntideva speaks to himself.

2. Remember the afflictions are not who you are; they are not in the very nature of your mind and can be eliminated.
  3. Cultivate antipathy toward the afflictions and generate strong determination to become familiar with the antidotes to them through having a daily Dharma practice.
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Compassion acts like preventative medicine for many of our afflictions. The greater our compassion, the more peace we will experience. My personal experience is that meditating on the suffering of sentient beings and generating compassion for them helps me to develop inner strength. When inner strength and self-confidence increase, fear and doubt diminish. That makes us naturally more open to others. Others then reciprocate by being friendly, and this nourishes better communication and more positive interactions with them.

To the contrary, if we are full of partiality, fear, hatred, and doubt, the door to our heart is closed, and everyone we encounter appears suspicious to us. The sad thing is that we then believe that others are just as suspicious of us as we are of them. That creates distance between us, and this spiral fosters loneliness and frustration.

All of us, but especially the younger generation, has the responsibility to make sure that the world is a peaceful place for everyone. This can become reality if we all make an effort to cultivate compassion. Our educational system should focus not only on training the intellect but also on training the heart. Let's help future generations learn to be good citizens of the planet by modeling compassion and tolerance ourselves.

## 5 | Afflictions and Karma, Their Seeds and Latencies

**T**RUE ORIGINS of duḥkha are those phenomena that give rise to cyclic existence and are in the nature of duḥkha. True origins consist of afflictions — which are rooted in ignorance — and polluted karma — actions created under the influence of ignorance that produce the three types of duḥkha. Of afflictions and karma, afflictions are chief because they give rise to karma and also act as conditions for karma to ripen. Without the presence of afflictions, polluted karma cannot be created, and even if seeds of previously created karma remain in our mindstreams, they cannot ripen into duḥkha without the presence of afflictions.

In the context of the twelve links of dependent origination that describe how we cycle in saṃsāra, karma refers to volitional actions done under the force of afflictions that bring rebirth in cyclic existence. This is a more specific meaning of karma than used in volume 2, where we spoke of many kinds of actions, not all of which propel rebirth. To attain liberation — the stoppage of uncontrolled rebirth in saṃsāra — we need to eliminate the afflictive obscurations that cause it. These are ignorance, all the other afflictions that it produces, and the seeds of these afflictions.<sup>40</sup>

In this chapter we will investigate different types of afflictions and karma: acquired and innate afflictions, coarse and subtle afflictions, underlying and manifest afflictions, seeds and latencies of afflictions, seeds of karma, and having-ceased. Knowing these expands our understanding of the workings of our minds, the evolution of saṃsāra, and the path to liberation.

### *Acquired and Innate Afflictions*

Afflictions are of two kinds: innate and acquired. *Innate afflictions* have been with our mindstreams since beginningless time. We did not learn them from anyone and they continue from one rebirth to the next. Innate afflictions are

present in babies, animals, insects, and beings born in other saṃsāric realms. At no time in our wandering in saṃsāra have we been free from them.

*Acquired afflictions* are those learned in this lifetime through adopting the flawed reasoning of mistaken philosophies and ideologies. For example, we may study a philosophy that asserts a permanent soul or an inherently existent creator and come to believe the arguments presented for their existence. Innate and acquired self-grasping ignorance do not differ in terms of how they grasp the object — both grasp it as inherently existent. They differ in that innate self-grasping ignorance is deeply ingrained and arises frequently and spontaneously. Acquired self-grasping is learned in this life through reflecting on fallacious reasonings. Although innate self-grasping ignorance is the root of cyclic existence, the acquired version is especially insidious because it is based on thinking about how things exist in an incorrect manner and reaching erroneous conclusions. It may cause someone to cling to wrong views and be unreceptive to teachings on emptiness.

Strong clinging to identities of this life — our nationality, religion, ethnicity, race, class, educational level, gender, sexual orientation, and so forth — is an acquired affliction. We learned these identities in this lifetime and were taught to be attached to them. We then think, “I am a this-and-that and you should treat me in such-and-such a way.” While the specific identity is acquired, the mind that clings to “I am” is innate.

Acquired afflictions cannot come about without their innate forms. Acquired afflictions abound and cause horrible suffering. For example, innate anger exists in our mindstreams. If someone teaches us false reasons why a particular racial or ethnic group is inferior or violent, we may believe these and have strong prejudice and anger regarding anyone in that group. Holding the belief, “This land is mine because a religious scripture said so” is acquired attachment. Thinking, “Killing the enemies of my people is justified by this political theory or religious belief” is acquired hostility. “My racial or ethnic group is morally superior” is an example of acquired arrogance. Thinking, “The mind is the brain” is an acquired wrong view.

Although these particular manifestations of afflictions were not present in us at birth, they still can be extremely dangerous and harmful. When people are taught by friends, family, or society to adhere to acquired afflictions, wars, oppression, and environmental destruction easily follow.

Sages and tenet schools have differing views regarding when afflictions are abandoned on the path. According to the *Treasury of Knowledge*, all five

afflictive views and deluded doubt are abandoned on the path of seeing, while the other four root afflictions — attachment, anger, ignorance, and arrogance — are abandoned on the path of meditation as well.

According to the *Ornament of Clear Realizations* (*Abhisamayālaṅkāra*) and the Prāsaṅgika school, deluded doubt, wrong views, holding wrong views as supreme, and view of rules and practices are abandoned on the path of seeing, whereas the acquired forms of view of a personal identity and view of extremes are abandoned on the path of seeing and their innate forms are abandoned on the path of meditation. The acquired forms of all other afflictions are abandoned on the path of seeing and their innate forms are abandoned on the path of meditation. All afflictions have been eradicated at the time of becoming an arhat or an eighth-ground bodhisattva. Since direct realization of emptiness is needed to eliminate acquired afflictions, we should not underestimate their power to cause harm in this life and to create the causes to experience unfortunate rebirths.

The Pāli tradition does not have an explicit division into acquired and innate afflictions. However, some afflictions are said to be easier to eradicate than others: some are abandoned by seeing while others are abandoned later by meditation.<sup>41</sup> The former are overcome by stream-enterers, the latter by nonreturners and arhats. Since stream-enterers' realization of the unconditioned — nirvāṇa — is not as strong as that of nonreturners and arhats, the fetters they abandon through this first seeing of nirvāṇa — view of a personal identity, deluded doubt, and view of rules and practices — are not as ingrained as the rest of the fetters that are abandoned by meditation on the higher paths.

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## REFLECTION

1. What is the difference between innate and acquired afflictions?
2. Make examples in your life of acquired afflictions — certain biases, prejudices, fears, resentments, or jealousies — that you learned from faulty philosophies or from listening to others who have those ideas.
3. Consider the many reasons why those beliefs are false. Try to view those people or places from a different perspective so that your mind can be clearer and free from anxiety, bias, and incorrect conceptions.

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## *Coarse and Subtle Afflictions*

Coarse and subtle afflictions are spoken of primarily in the Prāsaṅgika school because its definitions of ignorance and the object of negation when meditating on selflessness are unique. Lower Buddhist schools say that the ignorance that is the root of saṃsāra grasps a self-sufficient substantially existent person, whereas Prāsaṅgikas assert it grasps inherent existence. For them, grasping a self-sufficient substantially existent person is a coarse affliction, as are the anger, attachment, and other afflictions based on it, whereas the ignorance grasping inherent existence as well as the afflictions based on it are subtle afflictions. Because the lower schools accept the inherent existence of persons and phenomena, they do not negate the afflictions based on it.

Most of the afflictions ordinary beings experience on a daily basis are coarse ones. There is nothing subtle about a person who is exploding with anger or one overwhelmed by greed. It is possible to notice the subtle afflictions only after realizing the lack of a self-sufficient substantially existent person.

## *Seeds, Latencies, and Having-Ceased*

In contemplating the Buddha’s teachings, ancient Indian sages discussed many topics. One concerned continuity: How does a karmic action created in one life bring a result in another life? How can a mental factor such as anger or compassion be present in our mindstreams one day, fade away, and then manifest again the next day? This is where latencies, seeds, and having-ceased come in.

In his autocommentary to the *Supplement*, Candrakīrti says “that which pollutes the mindstream and also leaves imprints and causes the continuation of something” is called a *latency*. Other English synonyms for *latency* are predisposition, habitual tendency, imprint, and propensity. Of the three types of impermanent phenomena — forms, minds, and abstract composites — seeds and latencies are abstract composites.

In *Illumination of the Thought*, Tsongkhapa said:



Of the two latencies — one that is a seed and the other that is non-seed — cognitive obscurations are the latter.

We can speak of latencies (*vāsanā*) in two forms: latencies in the form of seeds (*bīja*) and latencies in the form of potencies (*samartha*); the latter are called *non-seed latencies*. When the word *latency* is used in general, it refers to both seed and non-seed latencies. A seed is necessarily a latency, but a latency is not necessarily a seed; it could be a non-seed latency.

For the sake of ease, in English, we'll call non-seed latencies “latencies” to differentiate them from seeds.<sup>42</sup> *Seed* has the connotation of being the cause of something. *Latency* implies retaining the potential or energy of something. Although the mind that gives rise to seeds and latencies may be virtuous or nonvirtuous, seeds and latencies themselves are neutral.

### *Afflictions and Their Seeds*

Afflictions arise in our minds in a manifest and active form — we become angry, jealous, greedy, or lazy — and we act motivated by these manifest afflictions. However, even though we haven't eliminated anger from our mindstreams completely, we aren't always angry. We may be sitting calmly but when someone criticizes us, our anger is triggered and becomes manifest. What connects the prior and later instances of anger? This is the function of the seed of anger. When manifest anger subsides, the seed of anger remains on our mindstreams. The seed provides for the continuity of anger in our mindstreams even when anger itself isn't manifest. The seed of anger is not anger; it is not an affliction, although it is the substantial cause for anger to arise again. Both anger and the seed of anger are afflictive obscurations and are not fully abandoned until we attain liberation or the eighth bodhisattva ground.

We cannot simultaneously experience two manifest mental states that are contradictory — we cannot be angry and loving at exactly the same moment. When we are loving, anger is not manifest in our minds, but we haven't totally eliminated anger from our mindstreams either. The seed of anger remains on our mindstreams when love is manifest, and it connects one instance of anger to the next.

Both innate and acquired afflictions have an aspect that is manifest and an aspect that is a seed. Manifest innate attachment arises in our minds from seeing an attractive object; it is a consciousness, whereas its seed — the potential set on

the mindstream from a previous moment of attachment that can produce a future moment of attachment — is an abstract composite, an impermanent phenomenon that is neither form nor consciousness.

Manifest acquired afflictive obscurations are afflictions that are manifest in the mind due to learning incorrect ideas. If we read about a cosmic mind from which our minds originate at birth and dissolve back into at death, and then believe that exists, that wrong view is a manifest acquired affliction. The seed of that is a potential that can produce another moment of this incorrect belief in the future.

The seed of anger is not what psychologists call repressed anger. Having the seed of anger does not mean that there is low-grade anger in our minds all the time. Rather, it simply means that the potential to become angry again exists in our mindstreams, even though we are not angry now.

Similarly self-grasping isn't always manifest in our minds, but its continuity hasn't been eliminated; it is present in the form of a seed. When we encounter certain conditions — for example, someone falsely accuses us of bad behavior — this seed causes self-grasping to arise as a manifest mental state. In the same way, during the white appearance, red increase, black near attainment, and clear light of death of samsāric beings, self-grasping is not manifest although it is present as a seed. Because it has not yet been abandoned, self-grasping will reemerge in manifest form in our future lives.

There are also seeds for virtuous consciousness. These enable us to experience manifest faith, wisdom, concentration, and compassion today and again tomorrow, even though they were in seed form while we were asleep.

Reflection on the existence of the seeds of afflictions keeps us humble. After working hard to subdue a particular affliction, we may think, “That one is taken care of. I don't need to continue working on it.” But my (Chodron's) experience is that when we think like that and become a little smug, the affliction will once again surge up strongly when we least expect it. Because seeds of afflictions remain on our mindstream, complacency is ill advised, whereas humility brings the heedfulness necessary to stay on track in our practice.

The Pāli tradition speaks of underlying tendencies as connecting one instance of a root affliction with a later instance. It also explains that fetters and other defilements exist on three levels: (1) As underlying tendencies (P. *anusaya*), they are latent potencies in the mind. (2) As manifest fetters (P. *pariyuṭṭāna*), they actively enslave the mind. (3) As motivating forces (P. *vītikkaṃa*), they motivate nonvirtuous actions of body and speech.

When we ordinary beings are not resentful, the underlying tendency of resentment still exists in our mindstreams. Someone criticizing us triggers this seed or underlying tendency and we become resentful; this is manifest resentment. If we leave our resentment unchecked and neglect to apply an antidote, it will increase and motivate us to say cruel words or plot how to harm someone. This is the motivating level of resentment.

A monk at the Buddha's time believed that fetters existed in a person's continuum only when they were manifest and active. If that were the case, the Buddha replied, then a newborn infant would not have the view of a personal identity because she doesn't even have the notion of a personal identity. But the underlying tendencies to the view of a personal identity are present in her mindstream. Similarly, a newborn does not have the notion of "teachings," yet the underlying tendency to doubt the teachings is in him. Infants and all other beings who have not attained stream-entry have the five lower fetters because they have the underlying tendencies for them. The commentary says that the underlying tendencies and the fetters are not distinct; a defilement is called an underlying tendency in the sense that it has yet to be abandoned and still resides in the mindstream; it is called a fetter in the sense that it binds us to cyclic existence (MN 64).

The higher training in ethical conduct helps us to restrain defilements before they can motivate destructive physical and verbal actions. The higher training in concentration suppresses the manifest level of defilements, although it alone cannot eradicate them because they still exist as underlying tendencies in the mind. Only an ārya's higher training in wisdom can eradicate the underlying tendencies completely.

### *Latencies of Afflictions*

Latencies of afflictions are predispositions, imprints, or tendencies on the mindstream. Subtler than the seeds of afflictions, the latencies of afflictions do not give rise to manifest afflictions. They are cognitive obscurations that are possessed by all sentient beings, including arhats and pure-ground bodhisattvas (bodhisattvas of the eighth, ninth, and tenth grounds who have purified their continuums of afflictive obscurations). The latencies of self-grasping ignorance give rise to the appearance and "perception"<sup>43</sup> of inherent existence. Latencies of ignorance and of afflictions also obscure the mind from directly seeing the two truths simultaneously. The latencies of attachment and other afflictions cause

arhats to behave in peculiar ways sometimes: they may spontaneously jump, speak harshly, or have unclear clairvoyance, even though they lack any afflictive motivation. This latency is more like habit. At buddhahood all cognitive obscurations as well as all latencies of afflictions have been eliminated forever, so that a buddha's body, speech, and mind are completely free from impediments and endowed with all excellent qualities.

### *Karmic Seeds and Latencies and Their Purification*

Although the seeds and latencies of afflictions are different things with different functions, the seeds and latencies of karma are the same: they are the legacies of nonvirtuous actions and polluted virtuous actions that have the capacity to give rise to suffering and happiness in saṃsāra. Their fruits are ripening results, causally concordant behavioral and experiential results, and environmental results. Karmic seeds that cause rebirth in saṃsāra are true origins but are not afflictive obscurations. While they are not eliminated at arhatship, these seeds can no longer ripen because craving and clinging, the factors that stimulate their ripening, have been eradicated.

In the context of the ten paths of nonvirtue, the three that are done by mind — covetousness, malice, and wrong views — are afflictions, so when they cease they leave seeds of afflictions on the mind. The mental factor of intention that shares the same primary consciousness with those afflictions is karma, and that intention leaves seeds of destructive karma on the mindstream. The mental paths of virtue — noncovetousness, nonmalice, and correct views, which are not just the absence of covetousness and so forth, but mental factors that are the opposite of them — leave the seeds of those virtuous mental factors when they cease, and the intentions that accompanied them leave seeds of constructive karma.

In the chapter on fortitude in the *Supplement*, Candrakīrti speaks of the great adverse results that arise from one bodhisattva becoming angry at another. These range from the destruction of virtue created over thousands of eons, to suffering experiences, to obstructions preventing advancement to higher paths. Even when neither the angry person nor the person he is angry with are bodhisattvas, anger can destroy the roots of virtue. The *Questions of Upāli Sūtra* (*Upāliparipṛcchā Sūtra*) speaks of three levels: the roots of virtue being “diminished, thoroughly reduced, and completely consumed.” “Diminish” means the increase of roots of great virtue dwindles, but the pleasant results are not destroyed. “Reduced” means that the pleasant results are minimal, and “completely consumed”

indicates that the virtuous karma cannot ripen. With the last, the potency of the seed to bring pleasant results is destroyed, not the seed itself. These seeds of virtue are those from the collection of merit — created by generosity, ethical conduct, fortitude, and other compassionate actions. They are not seeds of virtue from the collection of wisdom, which are created by meditating on selflessness and emptiness, and by arranging for texts on these topics to be taught.

The *Ākāśagarbha Sūtra* says that transgressing the root bodhisattva precepts destroys previously created roots of virtue, and Śāntideva's *Compendium of Instructions* warns that spending time with benefactors with the motivation to receive gifts from them, bragging that we possess spiritual attainments that we lack, and abandoning the Dharma by giving incorrect teachings but saying they are the Buddhadharma also destroy our roots of virtue and impede our progress on the path.

The question arises: The *Teachings of Akṣhayamati Sūtra* (*Akṣayamatīnirdeśa Sūtra*) says that just as a drop of water that falls in the huge ocean is not consumed until the ocean dries up, so too merit derived from actions motivated by bodhicitta and dedicated for awakening are not exhausted until awakening. If this is so, how can anger destroy this virtue?

The analogy of the drop of water in the ocean indicates that the merit of those actions is not exhausted when its effects arise; that merit will continue to bear fruit until awakening. Nevertheless, these roots of virtue may still be harmed by anger.

In the case of purifying nonvirtue, when we ordinary beings apply the four opponent powers, we impede the ripening of seeds of destructive karma by diminishing, reducing, or completely consuming their potency, as described above. Depending on the strength of the four opponent powers, the potency of the seed may decrease or the coming together of the cooperative conditions for the seed's ripening may be delayed. If purification is strong, the potency of the seeds — their negativity (*pāpa*) — is disabled, although those deactivated seeds remain on the mindstream, like burnt rice seeds that remain in the ground. The seed is there but it cannot bear a result even if suitable conditions occur. Purification by means of the wisdom directly realizing emptiness, which begins with the path of seeing, is the most powerful purification. It thoroughly destroys those seeds of nonvirtue.

Vaibhāṣikas and Sautrāntikas say that it is not possible to purify seeds of destructive karma completely; some result must be experienced. As proof, they recount a sūtra passage attesting that the Buddha experienced pain after stepping

on a thorn due to a subtle remaining karmic seed. Similarly, they say that Maudgalyāyana's tragic death in which he was beaten by robbers was due to previous destructive karma, the seeds of which remained on his mindstream even after he attained arhatship. Cittamātrins and Mādhyamikas, however, assert that all seeds of destructive karma can be completely purified so that no suffering ever results from them.

Seeds and latencies are abstract composites; they are neither form nor consciousness. Of the five aggregates that are the basis of designation of a person, they are included in the fourth aggregate, the aggregate of miscellaneous factors. While the actions and afflictions that create seeds and latencies may be virtuous or nonvirtuous, the seeds and latencies themselves are neutral.

### *Having-Ceased*

Most Buddhist schools explain the process by which karma gives rise to its results in terms of karmic seeds: affirmative phenomena that have been placed on the mindstream. They do this because they consider the *having-ceased* (*naṣṭa*) of an action to be a permanent phenomenon and, as such, unable to produce a result. Prāsaṅgikas, however, assert that it is the having-ceased of an action that connects the action with its results.

What is a having-ceased? During the time an action exists, it disintegrates in each moment. All Buddhist schools accept that the disintegration or ceasing (*vyaya*) of a thing is a function of the causes that gave rise to that thing. An action ceases or is ceasing, and when its ceasing is complete, it has ceased. At that time, the action is no longer happening in the present; it is past. For example, we have the intention to speak and our voice continues for a while; during that time the intention and our voice are ceasing. But when they both stop, they have ceased and are now past phenomena. Most Buddhist schools say that the having-ceased that follows the disintegration of a thing is permanent, uncaused, and therefore unable to produce an effect.<sup>44</sup> Nāgārjuna, however, says that just as the disintegration of an action — its act of ceasing — is a function of causes and conditions, so too is its having-ceased. The having-ceased of an action is a state of destruction that remains — the state of the action's having ended. This having-ceased has the potential to bring a result in the future. According to Prāsaṅgikas, a having-ceased is an impermanent phenomenon, which regenerates in each moment until it produces its result in the future.

In his commentary to Nāgārjuna's *Sixty Stanzas of Reasoning*, Candrakīrti

explains why the having-ceased of an action is a conditioned phenomenon and a functioning thing. Just as the process of arising (*jati*) — the arising or production of a thing from its cause — is a conditioned phenomenon, in the same way, the arisen (T. *skyes pa*), which is the accomplished act of arising, is also a conditioned phenomenon. Therefore since the disintegration of a thing is a conditioned thing, the having-ceased, which is the complete act of disintegration, should also be a conditioned phenomenon. Being a conditioned phenomenon that arises due to an action, the having-ceased of that karma is able to connect that action to its result, which will occur in the future.

Both a karmic seed and a having-ceased remain when an action is completed. Since the action is impermanent, it ceases and is followed by a having-ceased. The action also itself gives rise to a seed, which has potency. Both the having-ceased and the karmic seed contribute to the arising of the karmic result.

Thus the potential of the physical karma of prostrating is passed on in two ways: as a latency or seed that is left by the mental factor of intention that motivated that physical action, and as a having-ceased of the perceptible form that is the physical action of prostrating. The second link of dependent origination, formative action, for the action of prostrating consists of both of those.

After an action has finished, its karmic seed is placed on the mental continuum. The having-ceased of a karmic action is present with the mental consciousness. However, we don't say it was *placed on* the mental consciousness. Both having-ceasings of karmas and karmic seeds bear their results when the proper conditions have assembled.

What happens to the karmic seeds and having-ceasings when an ārya is in meditative equipoise that directly realizes emptiness? At this time, her mental consciousness is unpolluted because it is totally absorbed in emptiness with no conceptual elaborations at all. An unpolluted mind cannot be the carrier of polluted karmic seeds and having-ceasings. Buddhist tenet schools have different explanations, but Candrakīrti's is the most coherent. He distinguishes between the temporary and the long-term bases of seeds and latencies. The temporary basis is the mental consciousness. After the action has ceased, the seed is placed on the mental consciousness. The continual or long-term basis is the mere I — the conventional self that exists by being merely designated. This self is a mere convention; it carries the karmic seeds and so forth when an ārya is in meditative equipoise directly realizing emptiness. Although the mere I is not findable when searched for with ultimate analysis seeking its ultimate mode of existence, it still

exists nominally. It goes from life to life, carrying with it karmic seeds as well as the seeds and latencies of afflictions. Just as the mere I, which is the basis of the seeds and latencies, cannot be found by ultimate analysis, neither can the latencies, seeds, and having-ceaseds. They, too, are empty of inherent existence yet exist nominally and dependently.

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## REFLECTION

1. What are karmic seeds and how do they function?
  2. What are seeds of afflictions and what are latencies of afflictions? How do they differ?
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### *Other Types of Latencies*

Other types of latencies influence our experience as well. One type involves dreams, memories and mental objects. For example, we see a person during the day, and the latency of seeing him is placed on our mindstreams. Then at night we dream about that person. Similarly, memory is influenced by latencies; we see a flower and later remember it. In this case, the visual consciousness has placed a latency on our mindstreams. When we do meditation retreat, we may notice that as our minds become quieter, memories of people and events that we have not thought about in years surface. These are due to latencies.

Sense faculties also leave latencies on the mindstream that make it possible for new sense sources to arise in future lives. Beings born in the formless realm do not have physical forms and thus lack sense faculties. However, after they die from that realm and are born again in the desire realm, the latencies of the sense faculties that have been on their mindstreams become the substantial cause for their five sense faculties in the desire realm.

### *Latencies and Ideas in Other Religions and in Psychology*



Those of us exposed to ideas in non-Buddhist faiths and in modern psychology often ask if latencies are comparable with notions in these other disciplines. What follows are some general thoughts on two ideas: original sin and the unconscious.

### *Original Sin*

Some newcomers to Buddhism ask if our discussion of afflictions and karma being carried from one life to the next resembles the doctrine of original sin taught in other faiths. These teachings are very different. Original Sin is taught within a theistic framework. In brief, according to Augustine, God created the world and the first humans. Adam and Eve were disobedient, and subsequent generations of human beings inherited this sin through the act of procreation. Jesus was born to overcome human beings' innate tendency for evil and sin and to reconcile them with God. Cessation of sin depends on the great sacrifice Jesus made.

In contrast, in Buddhism there is no notion of a creator or an initial act of disobedience. Ignorance, afflictions, and saṃsāric rebirth have existed beginninglessly. They continue in the mindstream of an individual and are not inherited by his or her biological offspring. The Buddha held that sentient beings' basic nature is neutral and pure; it is not inherently defiled and sentient beings have the potential to become fully awakened. Afflictions and karmic seeds are adventitious and can be completely removed by the internal method of meditating with the wisdom realizing emptiness. Each of us must cultivate this wisdom ourselves; it is not something another being, however divine, can do for us.

In theistic religions, sentient beings can approach God but not become God. The Buddha said that by following the correct path, sentient beings can thoroughly cleanse all seeds and latencies of afflictions and karma from their mindstreams. Each of us has the potential to become a fully awakened buddha.

### *The Unconscious*

Spoken about by Sigmund Freud just before the turn of the twentieth century, the unconscious is thought to be an area of the mind composed of feelings, ideas, animal-like instincts, fears, and hopes that are not allowed expression in conscious awareness. These things may manifest and express themselves in

other ways, such as dreams, anxiety, psychosomatic illnesses, and phobias. Some unconscious material is inhibited or modified by the superego in the process of socialization, enabling us to live with others more harmoniously.

Carl Jung hypothesized the existence of a collective unconscious that consists of thoughts and feelings common to humanity. This unconscious material is often expressed in myths, legends, fairy tales, archetypes, and religious stories that contain common themes. The collective unconscious is sometimes seen as a storehouse of ancient wisdom passed on from generation to generation.

The preconscious is the area of the mind having thoughts and feelings that are below the level of immediate conscious awareness but that can come into conscious awareness through the focusing of attention. Do any of these psychological theories compare to the Buddhist notion of consciousness and the seeds and latencies on it?

The Buddhist explanation of mind does not contain an exact equivalent to the Western notion of the unconscious. In an attempt to draw some possible parallels, we may speak of the Buddhist view of different levels of consciousness — coarse and subtle. The Buddhist descriptions of underlying afflictions and latencies of afflictions may also have some resemblance to the Jungian idea of the unconscious. However, none of these precisely match either the psychoanalytic meaning of the unconscious or the more common use of the word *unconscious* to mean lack of conscious awareness, thought, or intention.

According to the Buddha, all phenomena are potentially knowable by our minds. Much of what psychology views as unconscious or preconscious material becomes fully conscious as our minds become clearer through meditation. As our mindfulness and introspective alertness increase, we see aspects of our minds — such as preconceptions, fears, assumptions, feelings, and emotions — that have been present but not previously perceived or acknowledged. Furthermore, advanced practitioners gain certain superknowledges (psychic powers) through cultivating single-pointed concentration and can directly perceive previous lives and other events not consciously known before. In this sense Buddhism might say that everything in our experience of this and previous lives is preconscious in that by focusing our attention and concentration in specific ways, it may be consciously known.

## *Virtue, Nonvirtue, Merit, and Roots of Virtue*

The principal cause of happiness is virtue and the chief cause of suffering is nonvirtue. Being able to discern the difference between these two so that we can practice the former and abandon the latter is essential for making wise choices in life and for accomplishing the path to liberation and awakening. In general, virtue is that which brings an agreeable result and nonvirtue is that which brings a disagreeable result. Here virtue includes constructive intentions and actions. These leave seeds of virtue on the mindstream, and these seeds bring agreeable results.

While mental states and actions may be virtuous or nonvirtuous, the seeds of karma and latencies of afflictions are neutral. This is because virtue and nonvirtue are linked to our intention; an action becomes virtuous or nonvirtuous primarily due to our intention. Seeds and latencies, however, do not have that strong active intentional element and are therefore neutral. Thus we speak of the seeds of virtuous karma, for example, not the virtuous seeds of karma; we talk about the latencies of nonvirtuous afflictions, not the nonvirtuous latencies of afflictions.

Similarly, the pleasant or unpleasant ripening results of virtue and nonvirtue are neither virtuous nor nonvirtuous. Being born in a healthy human body is a result of virtue, but the body itself is ethically neutral. Possessing wealth is an agreeable result of the virtuous action of generosity but being wealthy itself is neither virtuous nor nonvirtuous.

What does virtue refer to? Asaṅga's *Compendium of Knowledge* speaks of five types of virtue:

(1) *Natural virtues* include the eleven virtuous mental factors — faith, integrity, consideration for others, nonattachment, nonhatred, nonconfusion, joyous effort, pliancy, conscientiousness, nonharmfulness, and equanimity. These are called natural virtues because their nature is virtuous; they naturally bring pleasing results.

(2) *Related virtues* are primary consciousnesses and mental factors that become virtuous because they are accompanied by virtuous mental factors. When compassion is present, the mental primary consciousness and the mental factors of intention, feeling, and so forth that accompany it become virtuous.

(3) *Subsequently related virtues* are seeds and latencies of virtue established by virtuous consciousnesses and mental factors, and virtuous actions; for

example, the karmic seed created by the mind of generosity. Seeds and latencies are not actual virtues; this is an example of the name of the cause (the virtuous path of action) being given to the effect (the seeds and latencies of virtue).

(4) *Virtues due to motivation* are physical and verbal actions motivated by the naturally virtuous mental factors. The action of making a donation to a charity is a physical virtue when done with a generous motivation.

Vaibhāṣikas and Prāsaṅgikas assert that virtue includes both minds and forms. They consider virtues due to motivation — physical and verbal actions motivated by virtuous mental states — to be virtues. Since prātimokṣa precepts are form according to these two schools, the precepts are virtuous forms. According to Sautrāntikas, Cittamātrins, and Svātantrikas, only minds can be virtues.

(5) *Ultimate virtue* is emptiness because realizing it eradicates all obscurations and enables virtue to flourish. Emptiness, however, is not an actual virtue because it is permanent and itself does not produce results.

This list of virtues is not exhaustive. Other virtues include, but are not limited to, a buddha's speech and the thirty-two signs and eighty marks of a buddha.

Even a moment of a natural virtue can have far-reaching results. When the mental factor of conscientiousness arises in the mind, the primary consciousness and mental factors associated with it all become virtuous. The physical and verbal actions done with that motivation are also virtuous. While the karmic seeds of those actions are neutral, they carry the potency for agreeable results to arise, and for that reason they are subsequently related virtues although they are not actual virtues.

Commensurate with the five virtues, there are five nonvirtues:

(1) Natural nonvirtues are mental factors such as attachment, anger, jealousy, and resentment that are nonvirtuous by nature.

(2) Related nonvirtues are the mental primary consciousness and mental factors that accompany a naturally nonvirtuous mental factor.

(3) Subsequently related nonvirtues are latencies left on the mind by nonvirtuous minds and mental factors. They are not actual nonvirtues but are ethically neutral.

(4) Nonvirtues due to motivation are physical and verbal actions done with a nonvirtuous motivation.

(5) Ultimate nonvirtue is, for example, saṃsāra, which breeds nonvirtue

although it is not an actual nonvirtue.

In general, virtuous karma and merit are synonymous. In the context of saṃsāra, they are actions that have the ability to bring favorable results. Calling an action virtuous or meritorious emphasizes that it is psychologically healthy and ethically irreproachable. In terms of spiritual progress, virtuous actions enrich the mind, establishing the foundation for generating the realizations and excellent qualities of arhats, bodhisattvas, and buddhas. In the context of the two collections of merit and wisdom, merit is that which has the capacity to give rise to the form body of a buddha.

In general, the expression *root of virtue* refers to a virtuous mental factor, although it also seems to indicate seeds of virtuous karma. Śāntideva's *Engaging in the Bodhisattvas' Deeds* and Candrakīrti's *Supplement* contain extensive discussion about anger destroying the roots of virtue. When anger destroys the roots of virtue, or when wrong views or other heavy nonvirtuous actions cut the root of virtue, it prevents future agreeable results from coming about even when suitable circumstances are present.

When human beings cut the root of virtue, it affects only the root of virtue related to the human realm; the root of virtue of the higher realms remains. They may still encounter fortunate conditions in the future and regain their root of virtue.

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## REFLECTION

1. Review the different types of virtue. Which are actual virtue and which are just called virtue? Make examples of each in your life.
  2. Review the different types of nonvirtue. Which are actual nonvirtue and which are simply called nonvirtue? Make examples of each in your life.
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## 6 | Karma, the Universe, and Evolution

**T**RUE DUḤKHA includes sentient beings and our environment. In preceding chapters we discussed our unsatisfactory state as sentient beings and our life experiences as well as the true origins of these: ignorance, afflictions, and polluted karma. In this chapter we'll look more closely at how the true origins of duḥkha bring forth the environments in which we sentient beings dwell.

### *The Origin of the Universe*

Similar to today, a vibrant topic of discussion among both religious and secular people in the Buddha's time centered on the origin and destruction of the universe. As recorded in the sūtras (MN 63), they asked: Was the universe eternal or not eternal, transient or permanent, finite or infinite? Did the universe have a beginning or was it beginningless? The Buddha refused to answer these questions because the people who asked them were thinking in terms of an inherently existent universe. No matter how the Buddha could have responded, they would have thought that either the universe existed inherently or did not exist at all. Because holding either of these views would have harmed them, the Buddha chose not to respond. At other times the Buddha refused to comment on the origin of the universe because it was not relevant to the alleviation of duḥkha and attainment of liberation. Abhidharma texts and the *Kālacakra Tantra*, however, commented on the evolution of the universe in conventional terms. Nowadays scientists research these same topics, leading to fascinating dialogues between Buddhists and scientists, some of which I have attended.



There are several approaches that could be taken regarding the origin of the universe: first we must investigate if it was created by a cause or if it arose causelessly. Most people find causeless or random production unacceptable because in our everyday lives we witness effects arising from causes. Furthermore, it would be difficult for anything to function and change if it lacked causes and conditions; permanent phenomena cannot interact with other things to produce something new.

Among those who accept that the universe arose due to causes, there are different assertions. Theistic religions such as Judaism, Christianity, Islam, and some branches of Hinduism speak of an external creator. Most scientists attribute the origin of the universe to the Big Bang, some asserting that one Big Bang began all existence, others saying there may have been several Big Bangs as different universes began. Non-theistic Sāṃkhya (a Hindu philosophical school) and some other traditions speak of a primal substance out of which

everything was created. Buddhists speak of the interplay between the laws of nature and the law of karma and its effects.

Difficulties arise when we posit one original cause or event as the source of the universe with its mass, space, and time. If there were a single, initial cause for all existence — be it a cosmic substance, dense matter, or preceding Intelligence — what triggered that one cause to give rise to the universe with all of its complexity and diversity? Change — such as the production of a universe — involves a complex interplay of many factors that influence one another. Since even the existence of something small like a flower involves multiple causes and conditions, needless to say, this is the case with more complex entities such as the universe.

Because things depend on causes and conditions they change; whatever arises necessarily depends on the causes and conditions that produce it. This is the law of causality, a natural law of the universe that describes how things arise and produce results. Within this general law of causality, Buddhaghosa's commentary on the Dīgha Nikāya, *Sumaṅgala-vilāsinī*, speaks of five specific types of causality:<sup>45</sup>

1. *Inorganic causality* (P. *utu niyāma*) is the causality occurring with inorganic matter as described by physics, astronomy, and inorganic chemistry. It includes the causal functioning of subatomic particles as well as the causality involved with grosser matter such as the weather and aerodynamics.

2. *Biological causality* (P. *bīja niyāma*) involves organic forms — for example, the causality involved with genes, chromosomes, and biological processes in the plant and animal worlds.

3. *Psychological causality* (P. *citta niyāma*) deals with the complex interactions among various types of consciousnesses and mental factors — for example, how sensory cognizers occur, how mental consciousness arises in reaction to them, and how memory comes about.

4. *Karmic causality* (P. *kamma niyāma*) concerns volitional actions done by sentient beings and their karmic effects. Our actions have an ethical dimension that naturally influences the rebirth we take as well as our experiences, habitual actions, and environment.

5. *Natural phenomenal causality* (P. *dhamma niyāma*) concerns certain natural phenomena such as the wondrous events that occur when a bodhisattva descends into his mother's womb in his last rebirth, attains awakening, turns the wheel of Dharma, and passes away (attains parinirvāṇa). These include events



such as the earth quaking and a great light appearing in the world system. Such things occur *dhammatā*, or naturally.<sup>46</sup> The causality of the twelve links of dependent origination is natural phenomenal causality epitomized by the Buddha's words, "When that exists, this comes to be. From the arising of that, this arises. When that does not exist, this does not come to be. When that ceases, this ceases."

This causality is the natural order of things in the universe. Although the other four types of causality are actually types of natural phenomenal causality, only those causal relations that do not fall within those four are included in natural phenomenal causality.<sup>47</sup>

These five types of causality are explained to show that there is no external creator of the universe or of sentient beings. Rather, all things arise and cease continuously in dependence on their causes and conditions. While each of the five has its own sphere of operation, they are interconnected and influence one another.

## *Mind and the External World*

Abhidharma texts speak of countless world systems, but I'm unsure if a world system is equivalent to a solar system, galaxy, or universe. In any case, Mahāyāna sūtras and the *Kālacakra Tantra* speak of vast world systems throughout infinite space. At any particular time, some world systems are arising, some abiding, some disintegrating, and others remaining dormant. In this view, there is no absolute beginning. There is simply the beginningless interplay of various factors that make world systems arise, abide, disintegrate, and remain dormant.

Buddhist thinkers speak of conditioned phenomena — things that are impermanent, composed of parts, and conditioned by other factors — as being of three types: form, mind, and abstract composites such as time. What is the relationship between form — the material building blocks and resultant compounded things in the external universe — and mind, with its thoughts, feelings, and intentions? When we speak of the development of a world system and the evolution of life in particular, what is the relationship between mind and form?

I will share my thoughts about this. These are by no means definitive

conclusions but hopefully they will spark some curiosity among both those with scientific inclinations and those with spiritual dispositions.

The general Buddhist view is expressed by the First Dalai Lama in his commentary on the *Treasury of Knowledge* (EPL 556):

If one asks: This manifold world which has been explained — the environment and the sentient beings living in it — where does it come from?

It does not arise without cause or from a discordant cause because it arises occasionally. And it does not arise from [the creator god] Īśvara and so forth because it arises gradually. As it says this, if one asks, from what does it arise? The manifold world of the environment and the sentient beings living in it arise from karma.

The manifold world is comprised of the environment and the sentient beings living in it. The world did not arise without a cause because everything that functions must arise from causes. It did not arise from a discordant cause because a specific effect can arise only from the causes and conditions that have the ability to produce it. If causality were arbitrary, then anything could produce anything, and by studying Italian, we could learn to speak Chinese. The fact that something arises only at some times (occasionally) means that it arises only when all of its causes and conditions have come together. The world is not created from a creator such as Īśvara because if it were, it would arise all at once, whereas the world and the sentient beings in it evolved gradually. The source of the world and the sentient beings who inhabit it is karma — volitional actions originating in the minds of sentient beings.

Although Vasubandhu stated in the *Treasury of Knowledge*, “The manifold world arises from karma,” he and other Abhidharma authors did not detail the exact process through which this occurs. The broad concept is that through the interdependence of material substances and sentient beings’ karma, the world evolved in such a way that it could support the various life forms that live in it.

In a Sūtrayāna context, Candrakīrti noted in his *Supplement*, “From the mind the world of sentience arises. So too from the mind the diverse habitats of beings arise.” The Cittamātra school understands this literally and developed a philosophical system that denies the existence of external objects and instead asserts that both the perceiving consciousness and perceived object arise from

the same latency on the foundational consciousness. The Madhyamaka school disagrees. Although it refutes an objectively existent world “out there” that is unrelated to sentient beings’ minds, it asserts external objects, saying that sentient beings’ intentions create karma, which influences their resulting body-mind complex and their external habitat.

In Vajrayāna, the *Guhyasamāja Tantra* speaks about the inseparability of the subtlest mind and the subtlest wind (*prāṇa*). The subtlest wind is not the gross wind that blows leaves, nor is it the subtler energy, or *qi*, in our body. It is an extremely subtle wind or energy that is inseparable from the subtlest mind. The wind is the aspect of movement, the mind is the aspect of cognizance. This subtlest mind-wind is not within the range of what scientific instruments can measure. In general it is dormant throughout the lives of ordinary beings and becomes manifest only at the time of death or as a result of yogic practices that involve absorbing the coarser levels of wind and mind. From the perspective of highest yoga tantra, although the coarse mind and coarse form (the body) are different substances with different continuums, at the subtlest level of mind and form they are one nature — the subtlest mind-wind.

The *Kālacakra Tantra* speaks of the connection between the elements in our bodies and those in the external world and the analogous relationship between the movement of celestial bodies and changes within our bodies. Since our body and mind are related, these changes in the external and internal elements affect the mind. Conversely, the mind, especially its intentions (karma), influences our bodily elements and by extension the elements in the larger universe.

The *Kālacakra Tantra* explains that when a world system is dormant only space particles, which bear traces of the other four elements, are present. These elemental particles are more like attributes than distinct material substances. The material things in our environment are composed of these elements in varying degrees. As part of composite objects such as our bodies or a table, the earth element provides solidity, the water element fluidity and cohesion. The fire element gives heat and the wind element enables movement. The elements develop progressively in both the universe and our bodies: first space, then wind, fire, water, and earth sequentially. At the time of a human being’s death, the elements absorb — they lose the power to support consciousness — in the reverse sequence.

Similarly, when a world system collapses and comes to an end the elements composing it absorb into each other in this reverse sequence — earth absorbs into water, water into fire, fire into wind, and wind into space. Unobservable by

our physical senses and lacking mass, space particles are the fundamental source of all matter, persisting during the dormant stage between one world system and the next and acting as the substantial cause for the coarser elements that arise during the evolution of the next world system.

Space particles are not like the partless particles asserted by non-Buddhist schools that assert ultimate, partless, unchanging building blocks out of which everything is constructed. Nor are they inherently existent particles. They exist by being merely designated in dependence on the potency for the other four elements.

The external five elements are related to the corresponding inner five elements that constitute the body. These, in turn, are related to the subtlest wind that is one nature with the subtlest mind. The subtlest mind-wind is endowed with a five-colored radiance that is the nature of the five dhyāni buddhas and the five wisdoms. In this way, there is correspondence between the external world and the innermost subtlest minds of sentient beings. The five subtle elements in the body evolve primarily from the subtlest wind (one that is part of the subtlest mind-wind) of that sentient being. The five subtle elements in turn bring forth the coarse five elements in the body and in the external universe.

Thus from a tantric perspective, all things evolve from and dissolve back into this inseparable union of the subtlest mind-wind. The subtlest mind-wind of each individual is not a soul, nor does it abide independent of all other factors. The relationship between the mind, the inner five elements, and the five elements in the external universe is complex; only highly realized tantric yogis are privy to a full understanding of this.

The karma of the sentient beings who will be born in that universe are the cooperative conditions for that universe. When their karmic latencies begin to ripen, the space particles are activated, and they give rise to the wind element, the motion of pure energy. Fire, water, and earth elements sequentially and gradually arise after that.

I believe that the evolution from space particles into the manifold phenomena of a universe and those phenomena's devolution into space particles at the end of a universe could be related to the Big Bang theory. However, I don't think that there was one space particle in the center that exploded to produce everything. With further investigation, perhaps a correlation could be made between space particles and some theories of physics and astronomy.

The elements of an individual's body are related to his or her personal karma and subtlest mind-wind. The larger external universe is the environmental effect

of the collective karma of the sentient beings who enjoy it. The collective karma of the sentient beings who dwell in a universe influence the way the coarse elements evolve to form that universe. In other words, the universe and sentient beings exist in dependence on each other. Sentient beings cannot exist without the environment in which they live and that environment cannot exist without the sentient beings whose karma played a role in its creation.

The relationship between the mind and the subtle elements is the domain of highly realized meditators with single-pointed concentration. According to scriptural sources and the experience of highly realized yogis, someone who has subdued his or her mind and developed a certain level of control over his or her inner elements can also control the external elements. This accounts for the stories we hear of people who can walk on water, fly in the sky (without boarding a plane!), and travel beneath the earth.

### *The Laws of Nature and the Law of Karma and Its Effects*

The laws of nature and the law of karma and its effects operate in their own domain, although they intersect at key times. Not everything in sentient beings' lives and environments can be reduced to the functioning of either natural laws or karma. Natural laws function such that once particular processes are set in motion, they will produce certain effects. Karma enters the picture when sentient beings' intentions and their happiness and suffering are involved.

For the most part the natural laws of physics, chemistry, and biology that guide the interactions of external elements are involved in the development of our world system. However, sentient beings' minds, through the ripening of their karma, seem to exert influence at two points. The first is when the karma of the sentient beings who have the potential to live in a particular world system sparks the initial development of that world system. From the perspective of the scientific model, the collective karma of a huge number of sentient beings could influence the occurrence of the Big Bang. From the perspective of the model presented in the *Kālacakra Tantra*, the collective karma of all those sentient beings would stimulate the potencies of solidity, fluidity, heat, and motility existing in the space particles in between world systems so that coarse elements appear.

The second point at which karma could come into play is when the elements

of a universe have evolved to the point where they can support sentient life. Here, karma could act as the instigating factor for previous inanimate forms to become the bodies of sentient beings — that is, mindstreams could enter these forms to produce sentient beings with bodies and minds. The evolution of various species would subsequently occur.

Another way to describe this process is in terms of substantial causes and cooperative conditions. Both are necessary whether we speak of natural laws or karmic law. A substantial cause is what actually transforms into the result; cooperative conditions are the causes that assist this process. For example, wood is the substantial cause of a table, and the people who built it as well as the nails that hold it together are cooperative conditions. Because everything that is produced must have previous causes that are concordant with it, I believe that the continuum of material existed before the Big Bang. This material was the substantial cause of the world system that developed after the Big Bang. Similarly, in the *Kālacakra Tantra* space particles existed before the formation of our world system; they were the substantial cause for all the material in this world system. Regardless of which model we accept, the karma of the sentient beings who will be born in that world system acts as a cooperative condition for these material elements to appear, coalesce, and form a world system. Karma could similarly enable them to become the bases for sentient life.

## *Karma and Our Present Environment*

To review, there is a connection between the formation and evolution of the external world and the karma of sentient beings who will inhabit it. There is also a connection between the elements of the external world and those constituting our physical body. These, in turn, are related to subtler elements and subtler winds that themselves can be traced to the subtlest mind-wind. Karma — which primarily refers to sentient beings' intentions and the paths of action they motivate — may be the link between sentient beings' minds and the external world. Karma is related to the subtle winds in sentient beings' bodies, which in turn are related to the five inner elements. These correspond to the five external elements in the environment. Understanding the subtle winds spoken of in the tantric texts will help us understand this relationship. This is my opinion; more research is necessary.

As mentioned before, only a buddha can know the intricacies of karma,

which include how karma affects the evolution of a world system and the sentient life in it. For us limited beings, it is hard to know where natural laws stop and the law of karma takes over, where the law of karma stops and natural laws take over, and where the two influence each other. For that reason, we should avoid making hard and fast distinctions regarding the interface of these two. Nevertheless, some general guidelines can be discerned.

In terms of the origin and development of a particular world system, there are two times when sentient beings' karma may exert an influence: at the very beginning of that world system when the coarse elements are arising, and later when the combinations of those elements are suitable to act as the bodies for sentient beings. In terms of the development of specific environments and climates in which sentient beings now live, karma could play a role in two ways. First, the karma of the people presently living in and experiencing a place — for example, Dharamsala, where I live — contributed to its development millions of years ago when it was forming. Only nowadays, in this lifetime, do they experience the effect. We may wonder: How could their karma have ripened so long ago before they were born here? An analogy is helpful. Before moving into a house, the future occupants design the floor plan and begin constructing it. Later, when the house is ready, they occupy it and experience that environment. Similarly, when this planet was forming, no sentient beings lived on it. But since there were sentient beings who would take birth here, their karma influenced the way the planet would evolve.

Second, a particular environment is influenced by the karma of the people who live in that place now but were not among the initial karmic contributors to the development of that climate and environment a long time ago. These sentient beings later accumulated karma similar to that of the initial karmic contributors and thus came to live in that place and experience that climate at this time. For example, after Dharamsala's specific climate had already come into existence, another group of people accumulated the karma that could produce this sort of climate. This group did not have a direct connection to the development of Dharamsala's climate thousands of years ago, but due to their actions, which were similar to the karma of the previous group of people, they came to live in this place. The karma of the first group actually contributed to the development of Dharamsala's climate and environment. The karma of the second group did not contribute directly but participated in it, since they live there. Both groups of people created the causes to experience that environment, but in different ways.

To use an analogy, many people start a business in Europe. Another person

in the same field intends to seek employment in the United States. However, she happens to be in Europe and takes a job in the company established by the other people. Although she joins it later, she still contributes to the company's work.

Karma was not the only cause for Dharamsala's climate to develop the way it did; the laws of inorganic, physical causality were definitely involved. Nature has a certain autonomy that does not depend on karma. The tree we see over there grew from its seed. I doubt anyone's karma was involved in that. Similarly, the growth of some leaves today and others next week is due to the functioning of biological systems, not karma.

But this tree is in front of me and I can use and enjoy it. As soon as the tree is related to a sentient being and his or her happiness or suffering, the karma of that particular sentient being enters the picture.

Beautiful plants and colorful flowers grow in the garden where I live. They certainly are related to the karma of the sentient beings who use and enjoy them and who experience pleasure and pain in relationship to them. Human beings enjoy their beautiful colors and smell, bees imbibe nectar from the flowers, birds use the trees as their shelter, insects munch on the plants. The collective karma of all these beings contributed to the existence of these plants. This karma was created by the minds of the sentient beings involved. Nevertheless, since the plants consist of material substances, their growth depends on nature's biological laws. Karma does not transform into the water and fertilizer that make the plants grow.

Natural disasters such as earthquakes, hurricanes, and tsunamis are produced by the functioning of the laws of nature. Our karma does not make them happen. However, the fact that certain people are there when such events happen is due to their karma. A volcano explodes due to physical factors such as the build-up of pressure under the Earth's surface; this is not the result of karma. But the fact that some sentient beings are near that volcano and are injured or even die as a result of its explosion is related to the karma of those sentient beings. Other sentient beings, who did not create the karma to be harmed in that way, are not near the volcanic explosion.

Similarly, droughts and floods can be understood in terms of external causes, but insofar as they affect sentient beings, those beings' karma is involved. For example, a community of people that has intense and pervasive hatred may, in this or future lives, inhabit a place during a severe drought and famine. Their being present and experiencing suffering from this are effects of their karma. Similarly, people who consciously pollute the environment now create the



karmic cause to suffer from living in a polluted environment in future lives.

Although we often speak of karma as actions created in previous lives, it also refers to the actions we do today. Our present motivations and choices directly affect the external world. We must not think that everything is due to our actions in previous lives and ignore the effects of our present actions. When we dump toxic wastes into our environment, we experience the result in this lifetime. When we do not share resources, the world becomes turbulent now. Our intentions and actions during this lifetime are causing global warming.

### *Karma, Instinctual Behavior, and Our Bodies*

Both science and Buddhadharma agree that sentient beings have certain instinctual behaviors, but how they account for them varies. Science looks to genetic makeup for answers, while the Buddhist sage Bhāvaviveka said that calves instinctually look to their mother for milk because of latencies on their mindstreams from previous lives when they had acted in a similar way. One effect of karma is the tendency to do the action again, which accounts for many instinctual behaviors.

Nevertheless, certain instincts are related to the type of body a sentient being has. We are in the desire realm, where the bodily constituents of beings are such that desire is dominant. Thus we have many biological needs and desires, and our minds crave these.

Some animal species are vegetarian, others eat meat. This is not primarily due to karma, but to the physical conditions of their bodies — their genetic makeup and biological functions. However, the existence of these types of animal bodies on this planet is related to the general, collective karma of the sentient beings on this planet. The fact that a particular sentient being is born in a carnivore's body is a ripening result of that person's individual karma.

The functioning of the biological systems of an individual's body relates more to natural biological laws than to karma, although karma is involved when that person experiences pain or pleasure from his or her body. Our discomfort when we have a cold is due to our karma. Our catching a cold depends on the presence of the virus near us, sanitation in the area, the state of our immune system, and to some extent our karma. However, our hand being the nature of matter and our minds being the nature of clarity and cognizance are not due to

karma. These are simply the nature of those phenomena.

The possibility of having a specific combination of genes in a fertilized egg is one in seventy trillion. Why a particular sentient being's mindstream is attracted to that particular zygote and is born in it is a result of his or her karma. My being born in this body is an effect of my karma, but my body itself is due to the sperm and egg of my parents. My height is due to my genes and diet, but my being born in a body with these genetic predispositions was influenced by my karma.

It is important to distinguish the role of karma vis-à-vis the general characteristics of a species and the experiences of an individual in that species. For example, it is doubtful that human beings having hair and fish having scales is related to karma. Human beings having hair is due to natural biological forces. However, my being born in a body with genes causing baldness is a result of my individual karma. Still, that the evolution of human bodies in general occurred the way it did — with the potential to be bald — was in part a function of the collective karma of the sentient beings who had created the causes to be born in these bodies, which includes me. As you can see, this is a complex topic! The extent to which the various systems of cause and effect — physical, biological, psychological, karmic, and so forth — are interrelated and influence one another is not easy to delineate.

Although Darwin's theory of evolution does not address the issue of what sentience is or how beings' mindstreams came to be associated with the various physical structures that are their bodies, it can explain the general physical evolution of the various forms of life on our planet. Buddhists would add that the karma of the sentient beings who will be born in those bodies influenced the types of sense organs and some of the features of the bodies in the various realms.

Some Buddhist scriptures and cultural legends describe other versions of evolution. According to the *Treasury of Knowledge*, the first human beings, whose minds were less afflictive than ours, had bodies made of light. But as their thoughts degenerated and they became greedy, their bodies became coarser and eventually were composed of material as they are now. Yet another view is the Tibetan legend that the Tibetan race came into being through the union of an ogress and a monkey. This is a compromise between the Darwinian theory that humans descended from apes and the scriptural view that the first humans had bodies of light!

More research is needed. I hope the above discussion will stimulate you to

do further investigation and to understand the complexity of interdependence.

## 7 | Revolving in Cyclic Existence: The Twelve Links of Dependent Origination

**T**HE PROCESS OF REBIRTH in saṃsāra is illustrated by the Wheel of Life. This painting of the samsaric cycle of existence has its origins in the time of the Buddha when the king of Vatsā, Udāyana, presented a jeweled robe to the king of Magadha, Bimbisāra. Bimbisāra consulted the Buddha about an appropriate gift to send in return, and the Buddha recommended a painting of the Wheel of Life that has the verses below written on it. Upon contemplating the Wheel of Life, King Udāyana attained realizations.

Practicing this and abandoning that,  
enter into the teaching of the Buddha.  
Like an elephant in a thatch house,  
destroy the forces of the lord of death.

Those who with thorough conscientiousness  
practice this disciplinary doctrine  
will forsake the wheel of birth,  
bringing duḥkha to an end.

The wheel consists of a series of concentric circles held in the mouth of the anthropomorphized lord of death, who symbolizes our impermanent nature. The center circle contains a pig, snake, and rooster, signifying the three poisons of ignorance, animosity, and attachment, respectively. Each animal has the tail of another in its mouth, indicating that they mutually reinforce each other, although in some paintings the tails of the snake and rooster are in the pig's mouth, showing that ignorance is the root of all afflictions.

The next circle has two halves: the left half (as we look at the painting) is light with happy beings ascending to fortunate rebirths; the right is dark with suffering beings descending to unfortunate rebirths. The imagery indicates that dependent on ignorance we create virtuous and nonvirtuous karma that lead to agreeable and disagreeable births.

These births are the five classes of being — devas (including asuras), humans, animals, hungry ghosts, and hell beings. They are shown in the next circle, which is divided into five sections. The outermost circle has twelve sections, each one illustrating one of the twelve links of dependent origination.

Above and outside the wheel clutched by the lord of death is the Buddha pointing to the radiant full moon: he shows us the path to nirvāṇa. The two verses cited above encourage us to follow this path to free ourselves from all duḥkha forever.

## *Dependent Arising*

Dependent arising<sup>48</sup> is one of the most essential teachings of the Buddha. He expressed its overriding principle (MN 79:8):

When this exists, that comes to be; with the arising of this, that arises. When this does not exist, that does not come to be; with the cessation of this, that ceases.

When the causes and conditions for something are assembled, that thing will arise. The Buddha employs this principle in a variety of circumstances, including his discussion of social turmoil and social benefit. However, since the Buddha's main concern was with sentient beings' bondage in saṃsāra and liberation from it, one of his main teachings on conditionality is the twelve links of dependent origination (*dvādaśāṅga-pratītyasamutpāda*). These twelve describe the causal process for rebirth in saṃsāra and the unsatisfactory experiences that ensue. They also show the way to attain liberation from this vicious cycle.

The twelve links are prominent topics for study and contemplation in both the Pāli and Sanskrit traditions. The Buddha spoke of them extensively in Pāli sūtras, especially in the *Connected Discourses on Causation* (*Nidānasamyutta*, SN 12), and in Sanskrit sūtras, particularly in the *Rice Seedling Sūtra* (*Śālistamba Sūtra*). An extensive explanation of dependent origination according to the Pāli tradition is found in chapter 17 of *The Path of Purification* as well as in Abhidharma texts. In the Sanskrit tradition extensive commentary can be found in Asaṅga's *Compendium of Knowledge* (*Abhidharmasamuccaya*). Chapter 5 of Maitreya's *Ornament of Clear Realizations* explains how to meditate on the twelve links in forward and reverse order, and chapter 3 of

Vasubandhu's *Treasury of Knowledge* contains the Vaibhāṣikas' explanation of the twelve links. Chapters 24 and 26 of Nāgārjuna's *Treatise on the Middle Way* (*Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*) establish the conventional existence of the twelve links while refuting their inherent existence.

The Buddha presented dependent origination in a variety of ways. Sometimes he began with the twelfth link, aging or death, and worked backward (SN 12.2). This perspective begins with our present experience of aging and leads us to inquire as to how we arrived at it. Other times he began with ignorance and explained the links in forward order, culminating with aging or death (SN 12.1). In yet other sūtras, the Buddha began in the middle of the sequence and went either forward to aging or death or backward to ignorance (MN 11).

Although the Buddha did not explicitly teach emptiness when he taught the twelve links, he set out the basis on which we can understand it: everything that exists dependent on other factors is empty of having its own inherent nature, and everything that is empty exists dependent on other factors. Contemplating the first level of dependent arising — causal dependence — helps us to create the causes for higher rebirth by abandoning nonvirtue and practicing virtue. Contemplating a deeper level of dependent arising — dependent designation — leads us to realize emptiness and to attain liberation and awakening. Whether we seek a higher rebirth or highest goodness, understanding dependent arising is important and the teachings on it are precious.

Although the realization of the emptiness of inherent existence will free us from saṃsāra, we cannot dive into meditation on emptiness immediately. We must first eliminate coarse wrong conceptions, such as believing that our lives and our duḥkha are just random occurrences or that they arise from an external creator or from another incompatible cause. Contemplating causal dependence through the twelve links helps us to counteract these misnomers and to become familiar with dependent arising, the principal reason proving the emptiness of true existence. In the *Rice Seedling Sūtra*, the Buddha said:

Monastics, he who understands this rice stalk can understand the meaning of dependent arising. Those who know dependent arising know the Dharma. Those who know the Dharma know the Buddha.

*Dependent arising* is an abbreviation for “dependent and related arising.” In the context of the twelve links, *dependent* means that the arising of each link

depends on the previous one. *Related* indicates that if one link does not exist, the next cannot arise; there is a relationship between the two links. Each set of twelve links contains the causes and results associated with one birth, although a complete set of twelve links may occur over two or three lifetimes. The twelve links are ignorance, formative actions, consciousness, name and form, six sources, contact, feeling, craving, clinging, renewed existence, birth, and aging or death. To fully understand each link, we need to understand its relation to both the link that precedes it and the link that follows it. The Buddha calls on us to contemplate: What is the origin of each link? What is its cessation? What is the path leading to that cessation?

In explaining the forward and reverse series of causation for both saṃsāra and liberation, the Buddha does not imply that any one link arises as a result of only the preceding link. Rather, a momentum builds up as the various factors augment and reinforce one another. In short, both saṃsāra and liberation depend on many interconnected causes and conditions.

## *How Cyclic Existence Occurs*

When speaking of the twelve links, terminology is used in a specific way. For example, the link of ignorance refers to a specific instance of ignorance, not to all ignorance. The links of formative karma and consciousness refer to specific instances of these, not to all karma or all consciousnesses. Not all the types of craving and clinging described under the links of craving and clinging are instances of those two links.

The following explanation is from the Sanskrit tradition. A brief explanation of the Pāli tradition's perspective on a link is mentioned in cases where it differs or adds a unique perspective.

### *1. Ignorance (avidyā)*

The ignorance that is the root of saṃsāra is beginningless. The Buddha said (AN 10.61–2):

A first beginning of ignorance, monastics, cannot be discerned, of which it can be said, “Before that, there was no ignorance and it came to be after that.” Though this is so, monastics, yet a specific

condition of ignorance is discerned.

Although ignorance and cyclic existence are beginningless, in the evolution of a particular lifetime, ignorance is its initial cause. There are various explanations of what this ignorance is. Some say it is obscuration; others say it actively misapprehends how the person exists. Some say it observes the aggregates and conceives them to be a self-sufficient substantially existent person; others assert that it observes the mere I and grasps it to be an inherently existent person. Some associate the view of a personal identity with ignorance; others say they are unrelated mental factors.

According to the view held in common by all tenet schools and the Pāli tradition, first-link ignorance is the lack of understanding of the four truths of the āryas and of the three characteristics of conditioned phenomena — impermanence, duḥkha, and not-self — that leads to rebirth in saṃsāra. According to the Prāsaṅgikas, it is a moment of the innate ignorance grasping the person as inherently existent that leads to rebirth in saṃsāra.<sup>49</sup>

Vasubandhu, Asaṅga, and Dharmakīrti assert that the false conception of the self regards the aggregates and believes them to be a self-sufficient substantially existent person, whereas Prāsaṅgikas assert that the view of a personal identity observes the nominally existent I — the mere I — and grasps it to be inherently existent. Owing to the difference in their assertions about first-link ignorance, these masters have different assertions regarding what the wisdom realizing selflessness apprehends.

Vasubandhu and Asaṅga agree that first-link ignorance is an unknowing, a lack of clarity. However, Vasubandhu says that ignorance grasps the opposite of proper knowledge — in this case it grasps a self-sufficient substantially existent I — whereas Asaṅga asserts that ignorance does not grasp things as existing in a way opposite to how they exist. According to Vasubandhu, ignorance is similar to seeing a coiled rope at twilight: unable to see it clearly, we misconstrue it to be a snake. In the same way, due to the obscuring force of ignorance, how the aggregates exist is not clear and we suppose them to be a self-sufficient substantially existent person.

Vasubandhu's *Treasury of Knowledge* says, "Ignorance is like an enemy or a falsehood." An enemy is not just the lack of a friend, nor is it an unrelated object like a peach. It is the very opposite of a friend. Similarly, ignorance is not simply the lack of wisdom, nor is it an unrelated object. It is antithetical to wisdom.

Vasubandhu says that because the view of a personal identity is a form of



intelligence — albeit an afflictive one — it cannot be ignorance. Ignorance accompanies the view of a personal identity, but the two are distinct mental factors. An innate affliction, ignorance is overcome only on the path of meditation, while the view of a personal identity is eliminated on the path of seeing. The primary mental consciousness that is accompanied by both ignorance and view of a personal identity has one facet that does not know the object accurately (ignorance), while simultaneously another facet apprehends the aggregates in a distorted manner and grasps them to be a self-sufficient substantially existent person (the view of a personal identity).

Asaṅga says that ignorance is like darkness that obscures seeing reality. It does not grasp the aggregates as existing in a contrary way, whereas view of a personal identity does. For this reason, he says view of a personal identity is not ignorance. He agrees that the view of a personal identity is a form of afflictive intelligence, but does not accept it as the mental factor of intelligence, because intelligence must necessarily be virtuous and the view of a personal identity is neutral.

Dharmakīrti says that the opposite of the wisdom realizing selflessness is the view of a personal identity, which he identifies with ignorance (PV). Ignorance observes the five aggregates and grasps them to be a self-sufficient substantially existent person.

Here, the antidote, wisdom, is understanding the truth, the meaning of the selflessness of persons. Its opposite is the view of a personal identity, which grasps a self of persons.<sup>50</sup>

All faults without exception arise from the afflictive view of self. That is ignorance.<sup>51</sup>

According to Prāsaṅgikas, the view of a personal identity and ignorance both grasp their object as existing inherently, and for that reason the view of a personal identity is a form of ignorance. First-link ignorance is the view of a personal identity; it is an innate self-grasping that has been present since beginningless time and gives rise to formative karma that projects a rebirth in cyclic existence. It is not acquired self-grasping that is due to familiarity with incorrect philosophies, nor is it the mental factor of ignorance, which is much broader and includes ignorance regarding karma and its effects. Ignorance grasps the inherent existence of persons and phenomena, whereas the view of a

personal identity grasps the inherent existence of only our own I and mine. All beings except arhats, bodhisattvas on the eighth ground or higher, and buddhas have ignorance, but only ordinary beings — those below the path of seeing — have first-link ignorance. Āryas of the three vehicles who have not eradicated all afflictive obscurations have ignorance; however, it is not strong enough to produce karma that projects a saṃsāric rebirth and thus it is not first-link ignorance.

First-link ignorance is the specific moments of ignorance grasping inherent existence and the view of a personal identity that lie behind the motivation, performance, and completion of a virtuous or nonvirtuous karma powerful enough to project a rebirth in saṃsāra. It is not other moments of ignorance or other types of ignorance that occur in our lives. In short, first-link ignorance is the view of a personal identity that newly motivates its (that set of twelve links') second branch, formative action. This ignorance actively grasps the self as existing in a way it does not. It is the root of saṃsāra, the principal cause of rebirth in cyclic existence.

The notion of grasping inherent existence may seem abstract to us at first, but it is our frequent experience. When intense craving arises in us, the I appears to be independent of all other factors and we apprehend it as existing in this way. “I must have this!” When anger rules our minds, the self appears very solid, as if it existed under its own power. “That disturbs *me!*” The I seems to be somewhere within our bodies and minds, but also separate from them. This grasping is a troublemaker; it instigates and empowers afflictions that create karma, which ripen in lower rebirths. It also instigates polluted virtuous motivations, which bring higher rebirths, but still keep us bound in saṃsāra. It is a false view because when we examine how the I exists, we see it is not our minds, our bodies, the collection of body and mind, or something apart from them. The I exists by mere designation.

Vaibhāṣikas, Sautrāntikas, Cittamātrins, and Svātantrikas say first-link ignorance grasps a self-sufficient substantially existent person. This is the *root of saṃsāra* that must be eliminated to attain liberation. Cittamātrins and Svātantrikas also assert self-grasping of phenomena that must be eliminated to attain full awakening. They consider this to be the *ultimate root of saṃsāra*. For Cittamātrins the ignorance grasping a self of phenomena that is the final root of saṃsāra holds subjects and objects to be different entities and holds phenomena to exist by their own characteristics as the referents of their names. For Svātantrikas, the final root of saṃsāra is the ignorance grasping the true

existence of all phenomena.

Prāsaṅgikas identify a subtler ignorance as the root of saṃsāra — the ignorance that grasps persons and phenomena to exist inherently. The view of a personal identity that grasps the I and mine is preceded by and dependent on the ignorance grasping the aggregates as inherently existent. Nāgārjuna says (RA 35):

As long as the aggregates are grasped [as inherently existent],  
so long thereby does the grasping of I exist.  
Further, when the grasping of an [inherently existent] I exists,  
there is [formative] action, and from it there also is birth.

Grasping the aggregates as inherently existent gives rise to grasping the I that is merely designated in dependence on them to exist inherently. Based on the view of a personal identity that grasps our I as inherently existent, we create karma that projects rebirth in saṃsāra. Ignorance afflicts transmigrating beings because it obscures seeing the right view that directly perceives the emptiness of inherent existence.

### *How Ignorance Leads to the Creation of Karma*

The *Treasury of Knowledge* speaks of two motivations for an action: (1) The *causal* or *initial motivation* (*hetu-samutthāna*) is the first motivation to act. It may occur a long time before the action is done. (2) The *immediate motivation* (*tatkṣaṇa-samutthāna*) occurs at the time of the action. Ignorance of the ultimate nature (ignorance grasping inherent existence) is the causal motivation for all polluted karma in general and for all formative actions that project rebirth in saṃsāra in particular.

When the immediate motivation, which occurs subsequent to the causal motivation, is an affliction such as attachment, anger, jealousy, or arrogance, the formative karma will be nonvirtuous. When the immediate motivation is virtuous — such as faith, integrity, or compassion — the formative karma will be virtuous. In short, first-link ignorance and the view of a personal identity are always neutral; the virtuous or nonvirtuous mental factors that arise after them determine the ethical value of the actions that follow.

As the initial motivation, first-link ignorance is the principal driving force that leads to formative karma. Distorted conceptions may arise after it —

grasping the impermanent as permanent, what is duḥkha by nature as happiness, the unattractive as attractive, and the selfless as having a coarse self. Distorted attention that exaggerates the good or bad qualities of an object may also arise. Due to these distorted conceptions, the immediate motivation such as ignorance of karma and its effects coupled with other afflictions arise. With attachment we plan, connive, and manipulate to get the objects of our desire; we then lie or steal to make them ours. When our desires are thwarted, anger arises and develops into malice. We plan and act out retaliatory actions, mistakenly believing that anger protects us. Attachment and anger in the above examples are not a distinct link; some sages consider them part of the first link, others say they are the second link.

The causal motivation of first-link ignorance does not necessarily lead to nonvirtuous karma. When the immediate motivation is free from the ignorance of karma and its effects and is a virtuous mental state, the subsequent action will be virtuous. Examples are making offerings with faith, protecting life with compassion, and restraining from the ten nonvirtues.

The above is the technical description of causal and immediate motivations. Another way of using these terms is broader. Here *causal motivation* refers to the initial virtuous, nonvirtuous, or neutral thought to do an action sometime in the future, and *immediate motivation* is the intention at the time of doing the action.

In this case, both the causal and immediate motivations for an action are usually virtuous, nonvirtuous, or neutral, although sometimes they may differ. As part of our practice of training in bodhicitta, upon awakening each morning we generate contrived bodhicitta: “Today I will do all actions with the aspiration to attain full awakening to benefit all sentient beings.” This is the causal motivation for all our actions that day. However, we often forget our altruistic intention, and the immediate motivation for many of our actions is attachment, animosity, jealousy, and so on. In this case, the immediate motivation determines the ethical value of the action, which is nonvirtuous. Nevertheless, generating bodhicitta in the morning is worthwhile because it lessens the strength of our destructive actions and reminds us to purify afterward. In addition, it plants seeds on our mindstreams so that one day we will have uncontrived, spontaneous bodhicitta. Sometimes the force of our compassionate motivation in the morning stays with us during the day, transforming many of our actions into virtue. High bodhisattvas’ causal and immediate motivations for all actions are the same.

One action or mental state cannot be the cause of both saṃsāra and nirvāṇa. In general, any action that is instigated by ignorance is the cause of saṃsāra, even though the motivation may be virtuous, such as a similitude of the determination to be free from saṃsāra or the compassionate wish to help someone. Actions sustained by the power of the basis — referring to actions involving holy objects — are exceptions to this. Actions done with faith in the Three Jewels — such as making offerings, bowing, and meditating on their excellent qualities — are virtue concordant with liberation.

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## REFLECTION

1. Observe your thoughts during the day and identify the causal and immediate motivations for your actions.
2. Try to identify the ignorance of the ultimate nature. Then observe if misconceptions and instances of distorted attention arise.
3. Periodically during the day stop and examine your mental state: Is it virtuous, nonvirtuous, or neutral? Is it creating the cause for happiness, suffering, or neither?

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### 2. *Formative Action (saṃskāra karman)*

Formative actions afflict transmigrating beings because they plant polluted karmic seeds on the consciousness. Formative action is the intention (mental karma) or the physical or verbal action that is newly formed by first-link ignorance. It produces the mental and physical aggregates of a future birth in cyclic existence. In the context of the twelve links, formative action or karma refers specifically to volitional actions that bring rebirth as their result, not to all actions in general. These polluted virtuous and nonvirtuous intentions are expressed through the three doors of our bodies, speech, and minds in our deeds, words, and thoughts.

Formative actions are either virtuous or nonvirtuous; neutral mental states do not have the force to produce a rebirth because they lack a clear intention. The completion of the action produces a karmic seed that has the potency to bring a

rebirth. This karmic seed is placed on the third link, causal consciousness. When nurtured by the eighth and ninth links — craving and clinging — the karmic seed will blossom into the tenth link, renewed existence, which in turn gives rise to the next birth. Both the seed and the resultant aggregates are ethically neutral.

Prāsaṅgikas say that in addition to the seed, the action also produces a having-ceased, a functioning thing that indicates the action happened and has stopped. Like karmic seeds, having-ceaseds are neutral. The having-ceased of an action and the karmic seed are activated by craving and clinging and lead to renewed existence.

Second-link formative action — our mental intentions and physical and verbal actions — is the direct cause of a future rebirth; it is a path of action with all four branches complete, which projects a fortunate or unfortunate rebirth. Other karmas that do not have all four branches or that are weaker complete that rebirth by influencing other conditions and events, such as our experiences, the environment we inhabit, and our habitual physical, verbal, and mental tendencies.

The term “formative action” may also be translated as “conditioning action,” implying that it creates or composes something else, in this case a future rebirth. *Conditioning action* excludes unpolluted actions and neutral actions that are incapable of projecting a new birth with polluted aggregates.

Formative actions are of three types: demeritorious, meritorious, and invariable.

(1) *Demeritorious karma* is created under the influence of ignorance of ultimate truth and ignorance of karma and its effects; the motivation is one directed toward our own selfish happiness in this life. Created only in the desire realm, demeritorious karma leads to an unfortunate rebirth as a hell being, hungry ghost, or animal. Here the disadvantages of the eight worldly concerns become obvious. While it may be difficult to overcome our habituation to them, it is possible. By gradually steering our minds to more virtuous intentions, we will definitely decrease our misery now and in future lives.

(2) *Meritorious karma* is the virtuous karma created in the desire realm that leads to a fortunate rebirth in the desire realm. Such karma, created under the influence of first-link ignorance and virtuous mental factors, is created by Buddhists and non-Buddhists alike.

To create this meritorious karma, our motivation must be free from the eight worldly concerns that seek our selfish happiness of only this life. Our motive

may be to live ethically and with kindness because those are our values. Someone who believes in rebirth may be motivated to take a higher rebirth with wealth and power. Although this is a worldly aspiration, it is free from attachment to the happiness of only this life and is a Dharma action and meritorious karma. Dharma practitioners who seek liberation or buddhahood want to have a series of higher rebirths in order to have a good basis to accumulate all the causes to fulfill their spiritual aims. Their actions done with that motivation are also meritorious.

(3) *Invariable karma* brings rebirth as a deva in the form or formless realms. These actions are created under the influence of first-link ignorance by a mind that has attained a form or formless realm meditative absorption that has not degenerated before the person dies.

Invariable karma leading to rebirth in the first three dhyānas where the feeling of happiness is present is motivated by a thought that is disinterested in lovely sense objects and primarily seeks the pleasurable feelings born from concentration. Someone who has reversed attachment for sense pleasure and grown tired of the bliss of the first three dhyānas seeks the feeling of equanimity. With this motivation she creates invariable karma that brings rebirth in the fourth dhyāna and the four formless realms. In these meditative states, the roughness of meditative bliss has been suppressed and the far-superior feeling of equanimity is experienced.

Invariable karma is so-called because it creates the cause to be born in that specific meditative absorption and no other. It may be the first, second, third, or fourth dhyāna of the form realm or a meditative absorption of infinite space, infinite consciousness, nothingness, or peak of saṃsāra (neither-discrimination-nor-nondiscrimination) in the formless realm. For example, a human being lacking Dharma realizations who develops the absorption of the second dhyāna and whose concentration has not degenerated before she dies will experience the craving and clinging of the second dhyāna at death. These will ripen that karmic seed, and she will be reborn in that very dhyāna, not in any other. In this sense that karma is invariable.

Each time we engage in an action supported by ignorance that has a clear intention and is either virtuous or nonvirtuous, we create the beginnings of a new set of twelve links. Which karmic seed and having-ceased ripen to bring the next rebirth depends on other factors such as the strength of the karma and our state of mind at the time of death. A new rebirth is not the sum total of all the karma we have ever created. Only one karma — or in some instances a few karma —

determine the realm of our next rebirth.

How karma created to be reborn in the desire realm ripens may vary. The ripening of karma in the desire realm can be affected by the person's thoughts just before death, prayers of spiritual mentors, the circumstances of prospective parents, and occurrences in the *bardo* (the intermediate stage between death and the next life). If conditions change, upon a mini-death<sup>52</sup> in the bardo the karma that would bring rebirth as a dog may become inactive, and another karma that brings rebirth as a human being may ripen instead. Karma to be reborn as a human could ripen as rebirth in Amitābha's pure land if at the moment of death the person, either by her own power or by the influence of a spiritual friend, directs her mind toward Amitābha and his pure land.

Contemplating the first two links increases our renunciation of saṃsāra and motivates us to live ethically. We become more interested in learning about emptiness because the wisdom realizing the ultimate truth can eliminate the ignorance that is the root of saṃsāra and bring liberation.

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## REFLECTION

1. What are the different types of formative actions?
  2. Trace the process of their arising from ignorance to afflictions to action. Make examples from your life.
  3. As you go through the day, be aware that your actions that are complete with all four branches are creating causes for your future lives.
  4. How does this awareness change how you think and what you do?
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### 3. *Consciousness (vijñāna)*

Third-link consciousness is primarily to the polluted mental consciousness that has just joined to the next birth under the control of afflictions and karma. Third-link consciousness does not refer to all consciousnesses. It is not a sense consciousness, nor is it the consciousness of a buddha, pure-ground bodhisattva, or arhat, because they are no longer reborn under the power of afflictions and



karma. Third-link consciousness afflicts transmigrating beings because it leads to the next rebirth.

The third link refers only to the mental consciousness of two specific moments:

(1) The *causal consciousness* is the moment of consciousness on which the karmic seed created by a formative action is placed. This consciousness is neutral and the seed of a virtuous or nonvirtuous karma infuses or “perfumes” it. The continuum of the causal consciousness carries the seed until the time it ripens as the new rebirth; at that time, it becomes the resultant consciousness.

(2) The *resultant consciousness* is the first, brief moment of mental consciousness at the beginning of a new life. In the next moment the fourth link, name and form, arises. In terms of most human lives, the resultant consciousness occurs at the moment of conception. We don’t know if conception occurs before the fertilized ovum implants in the uterus or at the time it does. It is also hard to say when the resultant consciousness occurs in cases of in vitro fertilization. However, it is clear that without the presence of a mental consciousness, the mere physical joining of a sperm and ovum will not become a human being.

What carries the karmic seeds until they bring their results is a widely discussed topic among Buddhist schools. In the context of the twelve links, the causal consciousness plays this role. The Vaibhāṣika, Sautrāntika, and Svātantrika schools assert the continuity of the mental consciousness to be the third-link consciousness. Unlike other Buddhist schools that assert six consciousnesses — visual, auditory, olfactory, gustatory, tactile, and mental — Cittamātra Scriptural Proponents assert eight consciousnesses, the previous six plus the afflictive consciousness and foundation consciousness (*ālayavijñāna*). The foundation consciousness, or storehouse consciousness, is the repository of all karmic seeds and assumes the role of the third-link consciousness. These Cittamātrins assert such a foundation consciousness because they say there must be a stable mind that carries karmic seeds from one life to the next. Also, there must be something that the word *I* refers to, something that is the person.

Prāsaṅgikas disagree, saying that in the long term the mere I carries the karmic seeds. They assert this because a nominally existent person exists when the action is created and when the action bears its result, so this mere I must be the basis for infusion of the karmic seed. The mere I is impermanent and cannot be found under ultimate analysis; there is nothing to point to and say “this is the person” other than the person that exists by mere imputation. Although the mere I carries the karmic seeds over a long period of time, the mental consciousness

carries them temporarily. The mental consciousness cannot be the constant carrier because at the time a person directly realizes emptiness the mind is unpolluted, and polluted seeds cannot be associated with this unpolluted mind. Therefore the mere I carries the karmic latencies during this time.

### *Consciousness according to the Pāli Tradition*

According to the sūtra explanation, third-link consciousness refers specifically to the consciousness that initiates the new life, the rebirth-linking consciousness (P. *paṭisandhicitta*) that follows the death consciousness and connects the mindstream from the previous life to the new life. This consciousness is illusory, like an echo, a light, a seal impression, or a shadow; it does not come here from the previous life yet it arises due to causes in previous lives.<sup>53</sup> The consciousness of the next life is not the same as the previous life's consciousness, nor it is totally unrelated. If they were identical, one could not cause the other. If they were totally unrelated, there would not be a continuum.

In the new life, consciousness simultaneously gives rise to the mental aspect of existence, which is called *name*, and animates the new physical *form*. In scientific terms, for a human rebirth, consciousness links with the fertilized ovum, making it become the body of a living being. Name consists of the five omnipresent mental factors of feeling, discrimination, intention, contact, and attention.<sup>54</sup>

In addition to this developmental perspective, consciousness conditions name and form whenever we cognize an object. The five factors of name depend on consciousness and cannot occur without it. Even in deep sleep, fainting, coma, or meditative absorption, consciousness is present, although it is a subtle type of consciousness that is not aware of the external world.

The Pāli Abhidharma explains that consciousness and name and form are *co-nascent*, meaning that they arise simultaneously like fire and its heat. In addition, consciousness and name and form are *mutual conditions* in that each conditions and supports the other, like two sticks leaning on each other to stand upright.

While the sūtras speak of six types of consciousness, emphasizing that each type of consciousness is responsible for cognizing its own corresponding object, consciousness also performs another role: it maintains the continuity of an individual's existence within any given life from birth until death and then beyond. It carries with it memories, karmic seeds, habits, and latencies, connecting different lives and making them a series such that future lives relate

to previous ones.

#### *4. Name and Form (nāma-rūpa)*

Name and form afflict transmigrating beings because they hold the object of clinging, the body. *Name* refers to the four mental aggregates — feeling, discrimination, miscellaneous factors, and primary consciousnesses — and *form* is the body. The link of name and form exists during the time after the link of resultant consciousness and before the link of the six sources. Third-link consciousness is a condition for form because this body becomes a living body only when consciousness is present. When the “name” or mental aspect of this life ceases, the person’s rebirth ends and the body remains a lifeless corpse. While the cognitive faculties remain after death, they cannot connect an object and preceding moment of consciousness to produce cognition because consciousness is no longer associated with the body.

The mental and physical aggregates — our minds and bodies — of this life are the polluted ripening result of karma. As such, they are produced by afflictions and karma. They are the basis of the duḥkha we experience in the present life, and because of attachment to them, afflictions arise, creating more karma that results in further rebirths.

In the case of human birth, fourth-link name and form refer to the five aggregates from the time just after conception until the time the five sense organs begin to develop. *Form* is the embryo that begins to grow in the womb. It consists of the four great elements — earth, water, fire, and air — and forms derived from them, such as color, smell, and so forth. The four great elements are metaphorical designations for the different qualities of matter. Earth is the solid aspect, the property of resistance and hardness. Water is the fluid and cohesive aspect that enables things to stay together. Fire is the quality of heat and energy, and air represents mobility, contraction, and expansion. Beings in the formless realm lack a body and have only the seed of form.<sup>55</sup>

*Name* refers to the four mental aggregates because they engage with objects with the help of names and terms. Just after conception only the mental and tactile consciousnesses arise because in the embryo only the mental and tactile faculties are present.<sup>56</sup>

#### *Name and Form in the Pāli Tradition*

Name (mentality) and form (materiality) are major aspects of our experience. *Form* is the four great elements forming the body. *Name* is a collective term for the other three mental aggregates (feeling, discrimination, and miscellaneous factors) and the five mental factors (contact, feeling, discrimination, intention, and attention) that accompany consciousness and are indispensable to making sense of and naming things in the world around us. When the object, cognitive faculty, and corresponding consciousness come together, *contact* is essential for any cognition. Once contact has occurred, *attention* functions to bring the mind to the object. Then *feeling, discrimination, and intention* arise as ways of experiencing and relating to the object. Although all five mental factors are present, the strength of each one will vary according to the mental state. When strong pain or pleasure is foremost, feeling is more prominent; when we are examining something and noting its characteristics, discrimination is stronger. When we are making plans and deciding what to do, intention is foremost.

Why are contact and feeling included in name when name is earlier in the causal sequence than the links of contact and feeling? Why are feeling, discrimination, and miscellaneous factors part of name as well as objects known by the mental source, which is part of the next link, the six sources? Different instances of these mental factors are spoken of in each link. While one instance of contact and feeling occur simultaneously with the link of name, another instance of contact follows name and form, and another instance of feeling follows that instance of contact. Similarly, one instance of the three mental aggregates may be included in name and form, while another instance is the object known by the mental source.

### 5. *Six Sources (ṣaḍāyatana)*

The fifth-link six sources are the six cognitive faculties that exist in the nature of the polluted ripening result (the five aggregates) during the time after the link of name and form has occurred and before the link of contact has come about. In the case of a human rebirth, the six internal sources — eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mental cognitive faculties — develop in the womb. They enable us to cognize the six external sources — visible forms, sounds, odors, tastes, tactile objects, and phenomena. The phenomena source (*dharmāyatana*) is objects of mental consciousness that are perceptible by mind but are not included in the first five external sources. It includes the aggregates of feeling, discrimination, and miscellaneous factors, and various subtle forms — such as dream objects

and prātimokṣa ethical restraints — that cannot be known through the five physical senses.

The cognitive faculties are subtle sensitive forms located in the larger organs listed above, such as the eyeball. They function to connect an object and consciousness so that cognition of the object occurs. The six are called *sources* because they are the sources for the arising of the six consciousnesses. If a sense faculty is injured and unable to function, the corresponding sensory function is also impaired. The body source is on the skin and inside certain areas of the body. It enables us to experience smooth and rough, hard and soft, and hot and cold, as well as hunger and thirst. The mental faculty is not form; it consists of the six consciousnesses that enable a later moment of mental consciousness to know objects.

The tactile and mental faculties are present from conception onward. The remaining four cognitive faculties come into being as the embryo develops. When the six cognitive faculties have formed this link is complete, and the new being has the potential to experience objects through the coming together of the object, cognitive faculty, and preceding moment of consciousness.

Sentient beings are born in four ways: by womb, egg, heat and moisture, and spontaneously. When beings such as devas and hell beings are born spontaneously, all cognitive faculties are complete, and they are fully equipped to interact with their environment.

A question arises: Do all twelve links pertain to rebirth in the three realms — desire, form, and formless? Vasubandhu's *Treasury of Knowledge* says that since beings in the form realm are spontaneously born and do not go through development in the womb, they lack the link of name and form because all their cognitive faculties are present at the time of conception. He also says that there is no occasion for the link of name and form or for five of the six sources for beings in the formless realm because they do not have bodies. Because they have only the mental source, they experience only ten links.

Asaṅga differs, saying all twelve links are present in births in all three realms. Name and form are partially present in the form realm, and in the formless realm, the link of name and form consists of only the mental consciousness. The link of six sources is partially present because the mental source exists although the sense sources do not.

The six sources afflict transmigrating beings because they complete name and form, thereby creating the potential for awareness of objects to arise.

## *The Six Sources according to the Pāli Tradition*

The fifth-link six sources are the six internal cognitive faculties that join the object and the consciousness to produce contact, the sixth link. The way that the six sources arise from name and form can be understood in two ways: the development immediately after conception and the conditioning that occurs in any cognition.

Using the example of a human being, in *the developmental model* name and form refer to the psychophysical organism that was conceived in the mother's womb and is beginning to evolve. At the moment of conception the consciousness from the previous life enters the fertilized ovum. That is called "name and form taking place in the womb."

At this time, the consciousness from the previous life becomes the mental source, and with it arise the other three mental aggregates and the five omnipresent mental factors that constitute name. In this way, name becomes the condition for the mental sense source. The mental functioning of this newly conceived being is rudimentary.

After conception, the fertilized ovum becomes the body, which is made up of the four elements and form derived from the elements. As a tiny embryo, it has the tactile sense source (tactile faculty) and is capable of experiencing hardness, softness, smoothness, roughness, hot, cold, and so on. As the embryo develops, certain cells begin to specialize and the eye, ear, nose, and tongue sense sources arise. These are not the coarse physical organs but rather subtle sensitive material within them that is able to connect the object and consciousness to produce contact and cognition. In this way, form is the support of the six sense sources. If name and form are cut off — for example, in a miscarriage — the new human being ceases and the six sources do not develop.

Regarding the *conditioning that occurs in any cognition* in our daily lives, there is a complex interconnected web of factors that must come together as name and form for a particular sense source to exist and produce contact. In a visual cognition, the visual consciousness and the mental factors that make up name arise dependent on the eye source. That requires the existence of our eyeballs, which are made of the four elements and their derivatives. The eye source could not function if the body were not alive, and that requires the presence of consciousness and its accompanying mental factors. It is in that way that name and form condition the six sense sources.

Name — the mental aspect of living beings — depends on form — the body.

The functioning of the body as a living organism depends on the presence of consciousness and the five omnipresent mental factors. Buddhaghōṣa says (Vism 18.36):

They cannot come to be by their own strength,  
or yet maintain themselves by their own strength.  
Relying for support on other states,  
weak in themselves, and formed, they come to be.  
They come to be with others as condition;  
they are aroused by others as their objects;  
they are produced by object and condition,  
and each by something other than itself.

And just as people depend upon  
a boat for traversing the sea,  
so does the mental “body” need  
the physical body for occurrence.  
And as the boat depends upon  
the people for traversing the sea,  
so does the physical body need  
the mental “body” for occurrence.  
Depending each upon the other,  
the boat and people go on the sea.  
And so do mind and body both  
depend the one upon the other.

Included in the mental source is the *bhavaṅga*, or subliminal consciousness. Spoken of in the commentaries and the *Abhidhamma*, but not the *sūtras*, the *bhavaṅga* is a passive, underlying stream of consciousness from which active consciousness arises. It occurs in the absence of any cognitive process and serves to connect all the active states of consciousness; however, it is not a permanent consciousness or self. It is included in the mental source because due to it, active mental consciousness arises. At the microscopic level of individual mind moments in the waking state, the mind could be going in and out of the *bhavaṅga* so quickly that we do not notice it. During sleep, the mind is in *bhavaṅga* for a longer time, emerging to dream and then returning to dreamless sleep with the *bhavaṅga*. The *bhavaṅga* is also present when fainting.

## 6. Contact (*sparśa*)

Contact is the polluted mental factor that, due to the convening of the three — the object, cognitive faculty, and consciousness — causes the object to be experienced as pleasant, painful, or neutral through its own capability and that exists after the link of six sources has occurred and before the link of feeling has come about. Contact afflicts transmigrating beings because it connects the object, cognitive faculty, and the consciousness, so that beings dualistically discriminate.

In general, a consciousness comes about because of three conditions: (1) The *observed object condition* (*ālambana-pratyaya*) is the object that causes a consciousness to be generated in its aspect — for example, in the aspect of blue or of a sound. (2) The *dominant condition* (*adhipati-pratyaya*) is the cognitive faculty that causes its corresponding consciousness to apprehend its corresponding object and no other. The dominant condition for sight — the eye faculty — enables a visual consciousness to apprehend color and shape, but not smell or taste. (3) The *immediately preceding condition* (*samanantara-pratyaya*) is the previous moment of consciousness that allows the next moment of consciousness to arise as something that cognizes objects.

When these three come together, contact arises. Because there are six objects (form, sound, smell, taste, touch, and phenomena), six cognitive faculties (eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind), and six consciousnesses (visual, auditory, olfactory, gustatory, tactile, and mental), there are six types of contact. Contact acts as the basis for and leads to the feeling that exists in the next moment.

## 7. Feeling (*vedanā*)

Feeling is the polluted mental factor that experiences the object as pleasurable (happy), painful (suffering), or neutral through its own capability, by depending on its cause, the link of contact. *Feeling* here does not mean emotion; rather, it is the pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral experience that comes about just after any of our cognitive faculties contact an object and produce a consciousness cognizing that object. Feeling afflicts transmigrating beings because it experiences the polluted feelings of pleasure and pain.

While feeling is usually categorized as of three types — pleasure, pain, and neutral — or of five types — physical pleasure, mental happiness, physical pain, mental pain, and neutral — here in the explanation of dependent origination it is



of six types: the feelings arising from eye, ear, nose, tongue, tactile, and mental contact. While many other mental factors, such as discrimination and intention, also arise in response to contact, the Buddha singled out feeling because it leads most directly to craving. This is evident in our lives: experiencing pleasure leads to craving for more pleasant feelings, experiencing pain sparks craving to be separated from such undesirable feelings, and experiencing neutral feeling prompts craving for it not to diminish. The latter especially applies to beings in the fourth dhyāna and above who have only neutral feeling and do not wish the peace it brings to cease.

Ignorance, karma, and causal consciousness project a rebirth that begins with the resultant consciousness and continues as the body develops during the links of name and form and the six sources, so that contact and feeling occur. Feeling is one of the chief ways that karma ripens: virtuous actions produce pleasant physical and mental feelings and nonvirtuous actions produce painful physical and mental feelings. On the one hand, feelings are the result of an evolutionary process beginning with ignorance and karma. On the other hand, they initiate a new chain of events because they instigate craving. Craving, which is also reflected in emotions such as attachment and anger, creates more karma. In this way, saṃsāra perpetuates itself.

If we observe our experience closely, we will notice how many feelings we experience, one after the other, during the day. We will also notice how reactive we are to those feelings. Our craving to have pleasure and to avoid pain is strong, affecting our moods and motivating most of our actions. The idea of experiencing pleasure from our morning cup of coffee or tea gets us out of bed in the morning. Seeking the happiness that comes from having money and possessions, we go to work. Craving to be free of pain, we defend ourselves against criticism and lash out at anything that hurts or even inconveniences us.

The space between feeling and craving is one of the places where the forward motion of dependent origination can be broken. Feelings naturally arise when contact with external objects or internal objects such as memories, ideas, and plans occurs. By being aware of feelings and noting them with introspective awareness, it is possible to prevent craving from arising in response to them. We practice observing feelings without reacting to them, observing where they come from, where they abide, and where they go. We study the seemingly instantaneous reactions we have to different feelings and how our craving for unpleasant feelings and craving to be free from unpleasant feelings control our lives.

Only feelings accompanied by ignorance cause craving. When ignorance has been eliminated, feelings are present but craving does not arise. Arhats, pure ground bodhisattvas, and buddhas also experience feelings, but since their feelings are not the result of a process initiated by ignorance, they are blissful.

The feelings experienced by an awakened one are inconceivable for us ordinary beings. During the Buddha's lifetime, a great drought and famine afflicted the land. The saṅgha received no alms, until one man who owned horses gave the monks some fodder to eat. The fodder tasted disgusting to the monks, but the Buddha ate it contentedly. One monk, overcome with sadness that the Buddha had to endure such foul food, said, "What a desperate situation that the Blessed One has only this vile fodder to eat!" The Buddha lovingly responded, "Please don't worry," and taking a small part of the fodder from his mouth, gave it to the monk to eat. Chewing it, the monk was astonished to taste what had become delicious divine food owing to its contact with the Buddha's senses.

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## REFLECTION

1. Observe your feelings with mindfulness and introspective awareness and identify pleasant, unpleasant, and neutral feelings.
2. Be aware that they arise after contact with an object.
3. Watch how instantly craving arises for pleasant feelings to continue and for unpleasant feelings to cease.
4. How do all these feelings, as well as the craving they provoke, affect your life? How do you respond to them?
5. Are there certain objects that it would be helpful for you to avoid temporarily so that you can work on reducing the craving that results from contact with them?

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### 8. *Craving (tṛṣṇā)*

Craving is a mental factor that, by depending on the link of feeling, does not wish to separate from its object. Eighth-link craving occurs specifically while we are actively dying and is a form of attachment that arises strongly while the body weakens and the coarse consciousnesses still function. This craving does not wish to separate from our possessions, our dear ones, our body, and the ego-identity we have constructed during this life. Craving afflicts transmigrating beings by making the next rebirth closer.

In general three types of craving arise during the course of our lifetimes:

(1) *Craving for pleasant feeling* arises through the contact of our cognitive faculties with particular sense objects and does not want to separate from pleasurable feelings and the attractive objects and people that stimulate them. The Buddha compares giving in to craving to a person who drinks an exquisitely delicious drink knowing it contains poison. We become like laboratory rats who exhaust themselves tapping on a lever although they very rarely get a grain of rice for their effort.

(2) *Craving for existence* arises while dying because of terror that the continuity of the self will cease. Fearing that we will no longer exist, craving for saṃsāric aggregates surges.

(3) *Craving for nonexistence* desperately seeks separation from painful feelings. When the mind contacts an undesirable object, pain arises. This gives rise to craving for the pain to become nonexistent; we want to be released from the painful feeling and the object or person that triggered it. An extreme instance of this craving yearns for the self to become totally nonexistent at the time of death — a mistaken, nihilistic notion that could lead to suicide and bring devastating results.

The three types of craving are also described in relation to the three feelings: (1) craving not to be separated from pleasurable feelings, (2) craving to be separated from painful feelings, and (3) craving for neutral feeling not to diminish — that is, for neutral feelings not to degenerate into painful feelings.

In our daily lives, we can witness feeling giving rise to craving. We crave the pleasant feelings and the possessions, people, situations, talents, and opportunities that appear to generate them. We crave to be separated from anything that disturbs our peace, including ideas and policies we disagree with. Craving clearly demonstrates the unsatisfactory nature of cyclic existence — we always want something, are fearful of losing what we like, and are impatient to be free of what we don't like.

Once craving arises with respect to any of the three feelings, it swiftly leads to clinging to that feeling and to the object that seems to bring it. This, too, is easy to observe in our lives. We experience pleasure from being praised. Enjoying it, we crave more. When craving increases, clinging arises as we wish to hear more ego-pleasing words and to be with the people who say them.

From another perspective, craving is of six types: craving for visible objects, sounds, smells, tastes, tangibles, and phenomena. The latter are objects of mental consciousness and include conceptual appearances of the objects perceived by the five senses, thoughts, images, fantasies, ideas, feelings, and emotions. Craving is described in terms of its six objects because it arises from feeling, feeling from contact, and contact from the sense sources; each of those links is delineated as six in dependence on the six objects.

Developing mindfulness and wisdom to identify and counteract the different types of craving is essential. To do this, contemplate the various things you encounter and think about. Consider that they are merely fleeting conventions. They have no inherent essence. There is no “me,” no “them.” In this way, practice viewing all mental states and objects as transient. Let them go without attaching to them.

Beings who are free from craving experience whatever feelings arise in their minds with equanimity rather than with dissatisfied or fearful reactivity. Freedom from craving does not mean our lives become boring. Rather, there is now mental space for constructive aspirations — to develop wisdom, love, and compassion, and to benefit sentient beings — that are not influenced by ignorance.

### *Craving according to the Pāli Tradition*

*Craving for sense pleasure* is described the same as in the Sanskrit tradition. *Craving for existence* seeks rebirth in any of the three realms. It accompanies the view of permanence (eternalism), which adheres to the notion of a permanent, unitary, independent self or soul that continues on, unchanged, after death. Most societies and religions throughout history have held an eternalistic view of one kind or another, and such a view is deeply ingrained in people who were taught as children that there is a permanent soul.

*Craving for nonexistence* accompanies the nihilistic view, which believes that when the body ceases to function after death, the self or person is totally annihilated. This view may arise in someone who falls into despair or cynicism

and concludes that since death is inevitable and everything ceases at death, it is pointless to prepare for future lives or seek liberation. This view may also arise in someone who adheres to a materialistic doctrine that negates any existence after death. Thinking that total obliteration of existence is peaceful, such a person craves to cease completely at death.

All these forms of craving are manifestations of ignorance. A monk once asked the Buddha, “Who craves?” The Buddha replied that this question was not suitable. Rather than try to isolate a self that craves, it is appropriate to investigate, “What is the condition for craving?” Since craving arises dependent on feeling, we need to apply mindfulness, introspective awareness, and wisdom to our feelings, observing them as they are and doing our best not to react to them with any of the three types of craving.

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## REFLECTION

1. The space between feeling and craving is a weak spot in the twelve links. If we can learn to experience pleasant and painful feelings without reacting to them with craving, we can cease the production of formative karma.
2. Observe how easily and habitually each type of craving arises in response to a particular feeling.
3. Practice simply experiencing the feeling without craving for it to last longer or to cease immediately. Cultivate wise equanimity, not ignorant indifference, to feelings.

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### 9. *Clinging (upādāna)*

Clinging is attachment that is the strong increase of craving. As it becomes increasingly evident that the aggregates of this life will be forfeited, craving gives rise to clinging — strong attachment for new polluted aggregates.

While a person is dying, he may have an illusory appearance of his next life and where he will be reborn. Even if someone will be born in an unfortunate

realm, the illusory appearance of that place will be agreeable; he craves birth there, which leads to clinging to be born there. This nourishes the karmic seed previously placed on the causal consciousness, so that the karma is transformed into the link of renewed existence. Similarly, in terms of taking a fortunate rebirth, the dying person is attracted, for example, to an appearance of a precious human life. Craving and clinging arise for that, causing the seed of a virtuous karma to ripen and bringing the link of renewed existence for this fortunate rebirth.

This process occurs while a person is actively dying, while the mind still has coarse recognition and the person can recall things. From the perspective of the death process described in highest yoga tantra, craving and clinging occur prior to the white appearance, while the coarse mind is still functioning. When the coarse mental aggregates absorb, the mind is unable to remember virtue and nonvirtue, and the link of renewed existence has come about. In this way, clinging afflicts transmigrating beings because it prepares for the next life in saṃsāra.

Arhats have many karmic seeds that have the potential to bring a rebirth, but these cannot ripen because arhats have eliminated craving and clinging.

In the bardo someone who will be reborn as a human being sees the sperm and ovum of her parents, mistakenly believes the parents are in union, and craves and clings to be there. Clinging to the fertilized ovum, the person wants to be in that body and not to lose it. The consciousness enters the fertilized ovum, creating a mass that is conducive for the arising of the cognitive faculties.<sup>57</sup>

Clinging can nourish a karmic potency at other times of our lives. Frequently generating the aspiration to be reborn with a precious human life helps to nourish the karmic seeds on our mindstreams that will bring this about. Karmic seeds may be nourished by other means as well. If we have created the karma for a precious human life, all the other virtuous activities we do in life — making prostrations and offerings, studying and practicing the Dharma — help to nourish that potency. The craving and clinging that arise while we are actively dying are not a manifest thought, “I want this in the future,” that is formed with effort. Craving and clinging are innate; ordinary beings experience them while they are dying whether or not they believe in rebirth.

In general, four types of clinging may arise during our lifetimes (MN 11.9):

(1) *Clinging to sense pleasures and desirable objects* arises easily for us beings in the desire realm and dominates our lives. One of our cognitive faculties contacts an object that sparks the experience of pleasure or happiness.

Attachment arises followed by clinging to the pleasant feeling and the object that triggered it. Beings in the form and formless realms have suppressed clinging to sense pleasure, yet clinging to the intense bliss or peace of meditative absorption still arises in them.

Clinging to sensual pleasure lies behind most of the karma we human beings create. It motivates us to lie, cheat, backbite, and speak harshly to procure and protect the things we desire. It lies behind most of the scandals we read about. Besides harming ourselves and leading to unfortunate rebirths, it adversely affects others, even leading people to lose faith in those who occupy positions of authority and respect.

Some people who have the correct view of karma and its results want to enjoy sensual pleasures in future lives. They asked the Buddha how to attain heavenly rebirths or how to meet their spouse again in a future life. The Buddha taught ethical conduct, generosity, and kindness, which they happily practiced to attain their goal.

(2) *Clinging to views* clings to the view of extremes, the view holding wrong views as supreme, and wrong views, especially the wrong view disparaging karma and its effect, the existence of past and future lives, and so forth. Clinging to views easily leads to dogmatism, attachment to one's own religion, and denigration of other religions to the extent that one forces one's religious views on others either by verbal coercion or threats of violence.

(3) *Clinging to a doctrine of self* is the view of a personal identity that grasps the I and mine to exist inherently. Clinging to the self is the force behind our afflictions and lies behind most of our self-centered actions that create destructive karma. It arises throughout our lives and is especially powerful as we are dying. This clinging may also adhere to a permanent self or soul or to a self-sufficient substantially existent I and mine. It may also motivate virtuous actions; some people keep ethical conduct because they want their eternal self to be born in a heavenly realm.

(4) *Clinging to rules and practices* arises as a result of holding wrong views about *duḥkha* and its causes. It causes us to have distorted notions of ethical conduct or the path to liberation. These include advocating extreme self-mortification by fasting for a long time, sitting in fire, and going naked in the cold. It may also lead to unethical actions such as sacrificing animals to have good fortune, thinking that the flawless performance of rituals causes liberation, or conflating meditative absorption with liberation.

These four types of clinging focus predominantly on distorted ideas and do

not include all types of clinging.

### *Clinging according to the Pāli Tradition*

Craving can also mean to thirst for something we do not yet have, and clinging can also imply holding on to what we already have. The three types of craving — for sensual pleasures, existence, and nonexistence — are generally directed toward what we do not yet have, while the four types of clinging — for sensual pleasure, views, doctrines of self, and view of rules and practices — are usually directed toward what we already hold.

The three types of craving and four types of clinging are related. Craving for sensual pleasure produces clinging to sensual pleasure. Craving for sensual pleasure may influence us to cling to certain views. Thinking that the purpose of life is simply to enjoy sensual pleasures could lead us to breach ethical conduct by stealing, lying, or having an affair. Craving for sensual pleasure in future lives could lead to holding the view of rules and practices, for example, believing that killing infidels will bring a heavenly rebirth with many sensual pleasures.

Craving for existence, which accompanies the eternalistic view, easily leads to clinging to a doctrine of self as well as clinging to views. Craving for nonexistence, which often accompanies the nihilistic view, could lead to clinging to views and to the view of rules and practices. For example, thinking that nothing exists after death, someone could think that it doesn't matter how they act as long as the authorities do not find out.

Clinging to wrong views, views of rules and practices, and view of a personal identity are abandoned at stream-entry when the fetters of doubt, view of rules and practices, and view of a personal identity are eliminated. Clinging to sense pleasure decreases when one becomes a once-returner and is abandoned when one becomes a nonreturner. Only arhats have abandoned all clinging.

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## REFLECTION

1. Identify moments of each of the four types of clinging in your experience.



2. How do they affect your life?
  3. What ideas do you have for counteracting them?
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### *10. Renewed Existence (bhava)*

Renewed existence is the factor existing in the nature of the ripening aggregates (the body and mind of the future life) bound by afflictions, which is the potential of karma made stronger by craving and clinging. As a cause of birth, it refers not to the state a being will be born into but to the karmic force that leads to rebirth in that state. Renewed existence occurs the moment that all the causes for the future life have been completed in this life; it is the ripening of the karmic seed that is just about to produce the next life. The karma that projects the rebirth was the second link. It ceased and its continuation exists as a having-ceased and a karmic seed. Renewed existence is the fully nourished karmic seed and that karma's having-ceased that have the potential to produce a new birth in cyclic existence.

The link of renewed existence occurs in two stages. The *entering stage* is the fully nourished potency that is directed toward the next life. It occurs in the present life before death. The *entered stage* is the fully nourished potency during the bardo between two lives. There are three kinds of renewed existence corresponding to the three realms of saṃsāric existence: desire realm, form realm, and formless realm renewed existence.

Renewed existence is a case of giving the name of the result to the cause. For example, after planting a sprout, we say, "I planted a tree," giving the name of the resultant tree to the sprout that was its cause. Renewed existence is analogous to a seed (link 2) planted in a field (link 3) that is nourished by water and sunshine (links 8 and 9). The potential of the seed is now ready (link 10) to become a sprout (link 11).

Formative action and renewed existence are the same karma at different times. They differ in that formative action has not been activated by craving and clinging and is not immediately able to project another birth.

In terms of rebirth in the form and formless realms, a meditator must gradually prepare to attain the next higher meditative absorption of those realms. Each of the four dhyānas and the four formless absorptions have seven preparations (*manaskāra*)<sup>58</sup> — stages of contemplation that aid in attaining the

next level of meditative absorption. Form realm renewed existence is the dhyāna that a meditator has attained in this life that will bring rebirth in that specific dhyāna in the next life. Formless realm renewed existence is the level of formless realm meditative absorption that a meditator has reached in this life that will propel her to be reborn in that specific formless realm in the next life.

While tenth-link renewed existence occurs while actively dying, in general there are four types of renewed existence, each of them occurring under the control of afflictions and karma: (1) *Renewed existence of birth* leads to the consciousness joining to the next birth under the control of afflictions and karma. (2) *Renewed existence of death* is the last moment of this life. (3) *Renewed existence of the bardo* occurs when the consciousness joins to the intermediate state under the control of afflictions and karma. At this time one has a subtle body similar to the body of the next birth. The bardo lasts the maximum of seven weeks and is considered part of the next life. (4) *Renewed existence of the previous time* begins the moment after the link of birth, lasts during the lifetime, and ends at death. Here *previous* means prior to death of that life.

Not only do ignorance and formative action bind us to saṃsāra, so do the craving, clinging, and renewed existence that occur while actively dying. These last three force the consciousness to join to the next body. In this way, afflictions and karma tie the merely designated self to cyclic existence. Wherever consciousness goes, the self goes, because consciousness is the principal basis of designation of the self.

Renewed existence afflicts transmigrating beings because it makes the resultant rebirth definitely occur.

### *Renewed Existence according to the Pāli Tradition*

In the Pāli tradition also, renewed existence is the name of the result being given to the cause. *The Path of Purification* distinguishes two aspects of renewed existence. These are the same karma in different stages of ripening.

(1) *Karmically active renewed existence* is intention and the mental factors of covetousness and so forth conjoined with those intentions. The formative karma of meritorious, demeritorious, and invariable karma (link 2) is a condition giving rise to karmically active renewed existence, which is the karma that, as a condition for the next life, is ready to bring that new rebirth. It is of three types, corresponding to the three realms.

Nonvirtuous actions are desire realm renewed existence and lead to

unfortunate rebirths as hell beings, hungry ghosts, and animals. Mundane virtuous actions such as the ten virtues are also desire realm renewed existence, but they bring rebirth as human beings and devas. Form realm renewed existence is any of the dhyānas that people have attained, mastered, and continued until the time of death. Formless realm renewed existence is any of the formless realm absorptions that are attained, mastered, and preserved until death. Form and formless realm rebirths last for eons, but when that karma is exhausted those beings take birth in less favorable circumstances.

(2) *Resultant rebirth renewed existence* is the four or five aggregates subject to clinging and projected by karma. This is the moment of rebirth as well as the entire existence in which we experience the many diverse results of our previous actions. Birth is the beginning of the resultant rebirth existence, aging is the continuation of that existence, and death is the end of that particular resultant rebirth existence.

During the time of the resultant rebirth existence, we sentient beings, through our choices and decisions and the actions that express them, create many new karmas that will lead to future rebirths in saṃsāra. Although these choices and decisions are influenced by our previous actions, they are not completely determined by them. We have the freedom to make responsible choices and to either nourish or counteract our tendencies toward various intentions.

In short, karmically active renewed existence is the causal karmic energy that projects a rebirth, and resultant rebirth existence is the resultant rebirth that is attained.

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## REFLECTION

1. Imagine your death and the dying process.
2. Based on how you have lived and on your habitual tendencies, what types of craving and clinging are likely to arise in your mind at this time?
3. What kind of thoughts and aspirations would you like to have while you are dying? Recall that these will influence which karmic seeds are nourished and become renewed existence.

4. How can you train in these thoughts and aspirations now so that your mind will be in a virtuous state then?
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### *11. Birth (jāti)*

Birth is the aggregates that exist in the nature of the ripening result bound by afflictions and joined to a new life in saṃsāra under the control of afflictions and karma. Ordinarily we think of birth as a baby coming out of the mother's womb, breathing on her own, and beginning her life. From a Buddhist perspective, birth is the first moment of the new life. For mammals this occurs when the consciousness joins with the fertilized ovum. The resultant consciousness — the second part of link 3 — is the continuation of the mindstream of a being who has left its former body. This consciousness brings with it all the karmic seeds and latencies of afflictions that were present in the previous life. These will condition many aspects of the new being: which body with its specific genetic makeup he will take rebirth in, his upbringing and experiences, and his tendencies in the new life.

The link of birth lasts only a moment; from the second moment onward, aging or death occurs. Birth is the cause of aging and death. The Buddha makes the point that without being born, we would not age and die (DN 15.4):

If, Ānanda, there were no birth at all, anywhere, of anybody or anything: of devas in the deva-state, of gandhabbas . . . , of yakkhas . . . , of hungry ghosts . . . , of humans . . . , of quadrupeds . . . , of birds . . . , of reptiles to the reptile state, if there were absolutely no birth at all of all these beings, then with the absence of all birth, the cessation of birth, could aging and death appear? — “No, venerable sir.” Therefore, Ānanda, just this is the root, the cause, the origin, the condition of aging and death — namely, birth.

In society birth is usually seen as auspicious and people joyously welcome the birth of a child. We are blind to the inevitable result of birth — aging and death. When we train our minds to see the complete picture of life — birth, aging, sickness, and death — our aspiration will turn toward liberation.

As noted above, birth may occur in four ways: from the womb, egg, heat and moisture, and spontaneously. Hell beings, devas, and bardo beings are born

spontaneously without having to go through a developmental process. Some hungry ghosts are born from the womb, others are born spontaneously. Animals are born from the womb, egg, and, as in the case of insects, from heat and moisture. There are instances of human beings being born in all four ways.

Rebirth afflicts transmigrating beings because it brings aging and death, which are the essential *duḥkha* of transmigrating beings.

### *Birth according to the Pāli Tradition*

There is a debate, beginning with the early Buddhist schools and continuing to this day, about whether there is a period of time between the death of one life and the following rebirth. Although no clear statement is found in the Pāli sūtras, some passages suggest this. It makes sense that in some cases, time is necessary for the suitable immediate conditions to come together for a birth that accords with the ripening karma of renewed existence. If the parents of the next life are in different places at the moment someone dies, a period of time is needed for them to come together again.

Birth, aging, and death have different meanings according to the context. In the *Vibhaṅga*, the second book of the Pāli Abhidhamma, *birth* refers not to birth in one of the three realms but to the arising of a mind-moment. *Aging* refers to the impermanence intrinsic in all conditioned phenomena, not to gray hair, aches, and pains. Death is that mind-moment's cessation, not the upcoming separation of body and mind. Each presentation is valid and useful, but they should not be confused with each other or used to invalidate the other.

### *12. Aging or Death (jarāmaraṇa)*

Aging and death are the result of birth. Aging is the body and mind that decay under the control of afflictions and karma. Death is the cessation of a similar type of mental and physical aggregates; it is the mind's separation from the body under the control of afflictions and karma. This link is called aging *or* death because some beings die before becoming aged. The Buddha says (SN 12.2):

The aging of beings in the various orders of beings, their growing old, brokenness of teeth, grayness of hair, wrinkling of skin, decline of vitality, degeneration of faculties — this is called aging. The passing of beings from the various orders of beings, their perishing,

breakup, disappearance, dying, completion of time, breakup of the aggregates, laying down of the carcass — this is called death.

Being under the influence of afflictions and karma, our bodies become ill, age, and die without choice. Contemplating this enables strong renunciation of saṃsāra's duḥkha to grow in our minds.

Aging can be spoken of in two ways: (1) *Progressive aging* occurs each moment of life, beginning the moment after conception. It is not the case that we grow up and aging starts at an amorphous future date. Rather, from the moment after conception onward, we are aging and nearing death. (2) *Deterioration* is aging with the discomfort and fear that accompany old age.

The *Sūtra on the Ten Grounds (Daśabhūmika Sūtra)* says:

Death has two functions: (1) it causes a conditioned phenomenon to disintegrate, and (2) it brings about the cause of the continuation of ignorance.<sup>59</sup>

Death itself is a conditioned phenomenon, a result of birth. It causes a life to cease and, for ordinary beings, it enables ignorance and saṃsāric rebirth to continue.

Between aging and death is lamentation, sorrow, not getting what we seek, being separated from what is dear, encountering and being forced to endure what we do not like, being disillusioned when events do not occur as wished, and being unable to control the experiences and events we encounter in life. Reflecting on this closely, we begin to see cyclic existence for what it is: unreliable and repugnant.

The link of aging or death includes all our experiences of the duḥkha of pain and the duḥkha of change, which result from the preceding link, birth. This points to a deeper level of duḥkha — the pervasive duḥkha of conditioning, which is the underlying basis for all other duḥkha. Here, the eleventh link, taking birth under the control of ignorance and karma that entails assuming new polluted aggregates that are the basis for more duḥkha, is the primary meaning of pervasive, conditioned duḥkha.

Where does birth come from? From the preceding link, renewed existence. This comes from its preceding link, clinging. Clinging is the mind that seeks a new set of aggregates; it arises from craving, which does not want to separate from its object. Craving arises in response to pleasant, unpleasant, and neutral

feelings that are experienced owing to contact — the coming together of the cognitive faculty, the object, and the consciousness. Contact comes from the sensory six sources — eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mental — and these arise from name and form, the five aggregates. Name and form arise from consciousness, which appropriates the new form. Third-link consciousness is the consciousness on which a karmic seed has been placed. It arises from formative action, which is produced by ignorance. The entire unsatisfactory sequence of the twelve links of dependent origination is rooted in ignorance. To be liberated from this cycle, we must generate the wisdom realizing emptiness that uproots this ignorance.<sup>60</sup>

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## REFLECTION

Beginning with ignorance, slowly contemplate each link and investigate:

1. What is the nature or meaning of this link?
  2. What is its function?
  3. What is its cause? How is it related to the preceding link?
  4. What is its result? How is it related to the subsequent link?
  5. What is the antidote that will stop this link?
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## 8 | Dependent Origination: Cycling in Saṃsāra

HAVING LEARNED the meaning of each of the twelve links individually, we will now look at various descriptions of how they function together to produce rebirth in saṃsāra. This will help us to understand clearly our situation in cyclic existence and inspire us to be conscientious and mindful of our thoughts, words, and deeds so as to avoid creating causes for unfortunate rebirths. It will also energize us to engage in purification practices to prevent the seeds of destructive karma from ripening as unfortunate rebirths. Furthermore, it will arouse our enthusiasm to learn about, contemplate, and meditate on emptiness in order to free ourselves from cyclic existence. Then, when we think of sentient beings bound in the cycle of innumerable sets of twelve links, compassion and bodhicitta will grow in our hearts.

### *How the Twelve Links Produce a Life*

In verse 2 of the *Heart of Dependent Origination* (*Pratītya samutpāda hṛdaya kārikā*), Nāgārjuna says (LC 1:322):

The first, eighth, and ninth are afflictions.

The second and tenth are karma.

The remaining seven are duḥkha.

Of the twelve links, three — ignorance, craving, and clinging — are afflictions. Two — formative action and renewed existence — are karma. Seven — consciousness, name and form, six sources, contact, feeling, birth, aging or death — are suffering results. The three afflictions and the two actions are true origins of duḥkha and the seven results are true duḥkha.

Looked at from the broad perspective of continual rebirth in saṃsāra, each of these three groups causes the others, with no fixed order. Afflictions cause karma, which bring about duḥkha, unsatisfactory results. Included in these results are the mental aggregates, among which afflictions and karmic seeds are

found. As Nāgārjuna says (RA 36):

With these three paths mutually causing each other  
without a beginning, middle, or end,  
this wheel of cyclic existence  
turns like the wheel of a firebrand.

The twelve links of dependent origination are called links because they are connected and intertwined with each other. They follow one right after the other so quickly that, like a twirling firebrand, it is hard to tell where one set of twelve links stops and another begins. In fact, as we shall see, there are several descriptions of how a complete set of twelve links operates.

The links may be divided into projecting causes and effects and actualizing causes and effects: *Projecting causes* are links 1, 2, and 3a — ignorance, formative actions, and causal consciousness. *Projected effects* are links 3b through 7 — resultant consciousness, name and form, six sources, contact, and feeling. *Actualizing causes* are links 8 through 10 — craving, clinging, and renewed existence. *Actualized effects* are links 11 and 12 — birth and aging or death.

According to the explicit teaching in the *Rice Seedling Sūtra*, the projecting causes and effects and actualizing causes and effects occur over three lifetimes. Let's call our present life, life B. In a preceding life, life A, the projecting causes — ignorance, formative action, and causal consciousness — created the potency on the consciousness that projected a new birth, called life B. In the present life, life B, the projected effects — resultant consciousness, name and form, six sources, contact, and feeling — occur. At the time of dying in life B, the actualizing causes — craving, clinging, and renewed existence — actualize the potency of another karmic seed on the mind. This results in life C, the actualized effects of our future life — birth, aging, and death.

### EXPLICIT PRESENTATION

LINKS	RELATING TO WHICH LIFE	LIFE THEY OCCUR IN
Projecting causes 1–3a	B	A
Projected effects 3b–7	B	B
Actualizing causes 8–10	C	B

There is no fixed time between lives A and B. Lives B and C are consecutive.

In the explicit presentation, the links from two different sets of twelve links are presented together. That is, two distinct sets of causality of two different lives are intertwined, with links 1–7 describing the evolution of life B and links 8–12 pertaining to the evolution of life C. For the production of life B, only links 1–3a are explicitly presented, and for the production of life C, only links 8–10 are explicitly presented. In actuality, both lives B and C have three projecting causes and three actualizing causes; the ones not explicitly mentioned are inferred. Similarly, only some of the resultant links for life B are explicitly mentioned (links 3b–7) and only some of the resultant links for life C are explicit (links 11–12). Here, too, the other resultant links are to be inferred for each life.

An example will help. An American man named John (life A) creates the projecting causes (links 1–3a) to be born as an Italian woman, Maria. In her life as Maria (life B), she experiences the projected effects of that karma (links 3b–7). As Maria is dying, the actualizing causes (links 8–10) to be reborn as a deva named Rooni ripen, and the deva Rooni (life C) is born and experiences their actualizing effects (links 11–12). One set of twelve links concerns the life as Maria, the other set has to do with rebirth as Rooni. Even though only links 1–7 are explicitly mentioned for Maria’s life, links 8–12 in that set of twelve links is implied. Similarly, although only the actualizing causes and effects are mentioned for the set of twelve links of Rooni’s life, the others are implied.

The Buddha explained the twelve links in this way to emphasize that the process of rebirth is continuous. While experiencing the effects of one life, the causes for another life are being created.

This presentation also emphasizes the unique functions of projecting causes and actualizing causes. *Projecting* means that those (projecting) causes are suitable to bring duḥkha after the actualizing causes come together and nourish them. *Actualizing* means that those (actualizing) causes make the potency of the karmic seed powerful enough to bring the result immediately.

In addition to the explicit presentation, Asaṅga set forth implicit presentations. In these, the order in which the four groups — projecting causes, projected effects, actualizing causes, and actualized effects — occur is not necessarily the order in which the twelve links are listed.

In the first implicit presentation, the cause of the new life (B) is begun in a

previous life (A) with its projecting causes: ignorance prompted the creation of formative karma that has the power to bring rebirth, and that karmic seed was laid upon the causal consciousness. At the time of death of life A, the actualizing causes of craving and clinging nourished that seed and it transformed into renewed existence. In the very next life, all of the results — resultant consciousness, name and form, six sources, contact, feeling (projected effects), birth, and aging or death (actualized effects) — are experienced. Here the resultant consciousness and birth occur simultaneously, and in the very next moment, while name and form, six sources, contact, and feeling unfold, the link of aging or death is in process. In this way, a set of twelve links is completed in two consecutive lives.

### IMPLICIT PRESENTATION 1

LINKS	RELATING TO WHICH LIFE	LIFE THEY OCCUR IN
Projecting causes 1– 3a	B	A
Projected effects 3b–7	B	B
Actualizing causes 8–10	B	A
Actualized effects 11–12	B	B

Lives A and B are consecutive.

In the second implicit presentation, the projecting causes created in life A ripen as life C, with life B occurring just prior to life C. Any amount of time may pass — one lifetime or eons of other lives — between lives A and C. At the end of one of these lives (B), craving, clinging, and renewed existence occur, and the karmic seed infused on the consciousness long ago is now about to bring a new birth. The projected effects and actualized effects occur together in the very next life (C).

### IMPLICIT PRESENTATION 2

LINKS	RELATING TO WHICH LIFE	LIFE THEY OCCUR IN
Projecting causes 1–3a	C	A
Projected effects 3b–7	C	C
Actualizing causes 8–10	C	B

Actualized effects 11–12	C	C
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There is no fixed time between lives A and B. Lives B and C are consecutive.

## *An Example*

The teaching on the twelve links of dependent origination is complex and requires a great deal of contemplation. An example concerning the two implicit presentations will aid your understanding.

Pat arrives home from work and sees that her children left a mess in the kitchen. Tired from her job, she loses her temper and shouts at her children. This is the beginning of a set of twelve links. After Pat sees the mess, self-grasping ignorance/the view of a personal identity arises in her mind (link 1). This ignorance does not understand that the I is empty of inherent existence and instead grasps the I as inherently existent. In addition, self-grasping ignorance grasps her body and mind, her children, the mess in the kitchen, the chore of cleaning it up, and her unhappiness to exist inherently. Based on this, distorted attention that exaggerates the horribleness of the situation arises. This is immediately followed by anger and the intention to speak harsh words. Ignorance that does not understand the functioning of karma and its effects is also present, and because she is tired she does not consider either the long- or short-term effects of harsh words and does not apply the antidote to calm her mind. Harsh words fly out of her mouth, creating formative action (link 2), and a seed of destructive karma is laid on her mindstream. A having-ceased of the action of harsh words is also created (link 3a). This completes the projecting causes. The children scramble to clean the kitchen, and satisfied that shouting accomplished her purpose, Pat doesn't think to purify the paths of karma of malice and harsh words.

At the end of her life, as she is dying, Pat becomes angry and upset because the people around her are arguing and creating commotion. That mental state prompts craving and clinging (links 8 and 9) to nourish the seed of destructive karma created when she shouted at her children, priming it to bring a new rebirth (link 10). These are the actualizing causes. Her consciousness is drawn to the body of a screech owl and takes birth there (links 3b and 11). Aging or death (link 12) begins, as do the sequential links of name and form, six sources, contact, and feeling (links 4–7). These are the projected and actualized results of

that set of links. Although like all sentient beings, Pat seeks only happiness, not suffering, owing to ignorance she created the cause for suffering. Since links 8–10 occurred at the end of Pat’s life, that set of twelve links was completed in two lives as in implicit presentation 1.

Let’s change the scenario slightly. Motivated by compassion Pat regularly volunteers at a hospital where she gladdens the hearts of people needing support and hope. This begins another set of twelve links and leaves the seed of virtuous karma on her consciousness. At the time of her death, she rejoices in her own and others’ kind hearts and good deeds, and this virtuous mental state activates links 8–10 of the set of twelve links that began with her volunteer work. Her consciousness is attracted to take birth in the body of a human being and the projected and actualized results of that set of links occur.

Meanwhile, the karmic seed from harsh speech remains on her mindstream until in some future life its links 8–10 are activated and lead to an unfortunate birth. In that case, the set of twelve links associated with harsh speech occurs over three lifetimes, as in implicit presentation 2.

Many sets of twelve links can be in the works at one time, overlapping each other. While experiencing the resultant links of one set, the causal links of another set are being created. In Pat’s case she was experiencing the link of aging from a set of twelve links that began in a previous life. When she became angry and shouted at her children, the links of ignorance, formative action, and consciousness of a new set of links began. Her volunteer work at the hospital started yet another set of twelve links. During her life many sets of twelve links begin depending on actions done with virtuous or nonvirtuous motivations. Each set has the potential to lead to a new rebirth, unless the karmic seed and having-ceased are impeded from ripening or she eradicates the afflictive obscurations that cause rebirth in *samsāra*. Here we get an inkling of what “bound in *samsāra* by afflictions and karma” means.

Do we choose our next rebirth? For us ordinary beings, the choice exists as we do each action in our daily lives and create new karmic seeds. It is not the case that in the bardo we calmly look down on Earth or other habitats and pick our future parents in order to learn certain lessons or repay karmic debts. Rather, just prior to death karmic appearances manifest in our minds. Due to emotional reactivity to these appearances, craving and clinging arise and nourish a karmic seed, and the mind seeks new aggregates in which to take birth. The bardo is a confusing time; anger, attachment, jealousy, fear, and self-grasping ignorance arise just like during life.

No one creates lessons for us to learn in our lives. Whether we learn from our experiences is up to us. Do we insist on blaming others for our difficulties or do we examine our own distorted conceptions, afflictions, and behavior, and apply the Dharma counterforces to transform them?

Ārya bodhisattvas, as well as some śrāvaka āryas, can guide their own minds at the time of death and determine where they will be reborn. The rebirths of ordinary people, however, are projected by their afflictions and karma, just as during life they are under the influence of afflictions and karma. Under these circumstances, we are not free to experience the happiness and peace that we seek.

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## REFLECTION

1. Review the process of how the twelve links produce a new rebirth according to the explicit and the two implicit presentations.
  2. Make an example, using a formative action created under the influence of ignorance in your present life, of how a set of twelve links could unfold in the future.
  3. How does this reflection affect your attitude toward life?
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## *Flexibility*

In all of the above situations, different elements of many sets of twelve links may occur during the present life. While we are experiencing the results of one set of twelve links, many new sets of twelve links are initiated with the creation of links 1–3a. While sometimes the projected and actualized effects occur soon after the projecting causes, in other situations a long interval may ensue. Cyclic existence is terrifying, for as we live out each saṃsāric existence, we ignorantly create the causes for many more.

Vasubandhu says that once the links of craving, clinging, and renewed existence occur, the bardo follows. There is no reversal of the process; it is not

possible to accumulate new projecting karma in the bardo, and the links of birth and aging or death from that set of the twelve links will definitely occur (ADK):

Once the intermediate state of a particular birth is actualized, it [the rebirth of that set of twelve links] will not waver.

Asaṅga has a different view (ADS):

There is the possibility of the set [of twelve links] to waver because in the intermediate state there is the possibility of accumulating karma.

### *Pāli Tradition: How We Cycle*

The Pāli commentaries, including the *Path of Purification*, explain the twelve links in terms of four groups, each with five links to illustrate the relationships of the twelve links with the different lifetimes in which they occur.

To explain the column “links”: From our present life, life B, we look back and ask ourselves what factors were responsible for our present rebirth. Ignorance and formative actions occurred in a preceding life, life A. Through the maturation of formative actions conditioned by ignorance come the five resultant factors in this life (life B): consciousness, name and form, six sources, contact, and feeling.

#### **THE PĀLI TRADITION’S PRESENTATION**

<b>LIFE</b>	<b>LINKS</b>	<b>20 MODES AND 4 GROUPS OF 5</b>
A	Ignorance (1) Formative actions (2)	Five past causes 1, 2, 8, 9, 10
B	Consciousness (3) Name and form (4) Six sources (5) Contact (6) Feeling (7)	Five present results 3, 4, 5, 6, 7
B	Craving (8) Clinging (9) Renewed existence (10)	Five present causes 8, 9, 10, 1, 2



C	Birth (11) Aging or death (12)	Five future results 3, 4, 5, 6, 7
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In this life, when feeling occurs craving arises. That leads to clinging, which generates karmically active renewed existence. These three occurring in this life are the force that generates another rebirth — life C — in which birth, aging, and death are experienced. This corresponds to the explicit presentation in the *Rice Seedling Sūtra* explained above.

However, in any given life all these factors intermesh. So to understand how the twelve factors function in this life, we look to the last column with its twenty modes, which fall into four groups of five each.

(1) The group of the *five past causes*. In the previous life, life A, ignorance and formative actions were not the only causes for the present life; craving, clinging, and karmically active renewed existence were also present. These five are considered the five past causes that brought about the present life.

(2) The group of the *five present results*. The five past causes brought about the five present effects, links 3–7.

(3) The group of the *five present causes*. In this life, life B, there are five causes that will bring forth yet another rebirth — links 8, 9, 10, as well as 1 and 2. These same five factors that were five past causes of the present life become five present causes that will lead to a future rebirth, life C.

(4) The group of the *five future results*. Birth, aging, and death arise in the future life due to the five present causes. Links 3–7 are an expanded way of speaking of birth and aging or death.

In the above explanation, there are three connecting points: (1) Past causes connect with present results. This occurs between formative actions and consciousness. (2) Present results connect with present causes. This happens between feeling and craving. (3) Present causes connect with future results. This transition occurs between renewed existence and birth.

Of the twelve links, two are said to be roots of *saṃsāra*: Ignorance is the root extending from the previous life to the present one; craving is the root extending from the present life to the future life. As the basic unknowing that obscures the mind, ignorance is more fundamental than craving, but craving thrives on ignorance. Since identifying ignorance is more difficult than recognizing craving, we begin by subduing craving through restraining our senses and cultivating concentration. Then wisdom can arise and uproot ignorance.

As with many categories, the above distinctions serve explanatory purposes

and are not fixed. Ignorance exists in all three lives, as does craving.

## *An Example from a Pāli Sūtra*

In the *Greater Discourse on the Destruction of Craving* (MN 38), the Buddha gives an example of the twelve factors playing out in the life of an uninformed ordinary human being who is unaware that he is in saṃsāra and ignorant of the four truths. The Buddha then discusses the way to cut the cycle.

Conception in the womb requires three conditions, and if any one of them is missing, it does not occur. These are the sexual union of the mother and father, the woman being in the fertile time of her cycle, and the presence of a *gandharva* (P. *gandhabba*), a being who is ready to take rebirth and has a karmic affinity with these parents.<sup>61</sup> This karmic affinity is due to the first two links, (1) ignorance and (2) formative actions. The *gandharva* entering the newly fertilized ovum is called the “descent of consciousness.” This consciousness (3) brings with it ignorance, afflictions, and the entire store of karmic seeds from previous lives.

At the time of conception, name and form (4) arise. Only the tactile and mental sources are present at that time, but gradually as the zygote becomes an embryo and then a fetus, all six sources come into being (5). After the baby is born, the six sources become active, contacting (6) and engaging with sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and tactile objects. Babies have rudimentary conceptual thought, which develops as the child learns language and is socialized and educated. As the child plays with toys and participates in games, his six cognitive faculties lead to contact with more agreeable, disagreeable, and neutral objects. This produces pleasant, painful, or neutral feelings (7), and the child craves (8) and clings (9) to have what brings him happiness and to be free of what brings suffering.

As the child becomes an adult and his toys are exchanged for more sophisticated means of entertainment, the six sources continue to contact the six objects, leading to many occasions of pleasant, painful, and neutral feelings. As a senior citizen, the objects of entertainment change again, but the process of the six sources leading to contact that produces feelings continues.

In all these occasions, pleasant and painful feelings lead to craving and clinging to have or to be separated from objects of the six senses. Attachment,

anger, and other emotions arise one after the other in response to whatever he contacts. When he feels neither pleasure nor pain, he is bored and craves some excitement as an escape. Thus it is said “he delights in that feeling, welcomes it, and remains holding to it.” Lacking mindfulness and introspective awareness regarding his own experience, he does not see any alternative and remains ignorant of the potential of his mind.

What does it mean to delight in a painful feeling? This indicates a person clings to the feeling with the thought “I” and “mine.” His sense of I gets a boost through feeling uncomfortable. He may put himself in stressful or even dangerous situations to reinforce his sense that I exist. He may even create an identity out of his pain: “I am the person who was unfairly criticized.”

Triggered by craving and clinging (8 and 9), he speaks, acts, or ruminates about the situation. This karmically active side of renewed existence (10) ripens in a new birth (11). Aging or death (12) begins immediately and “sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, and despair come to be. Such is the origin of this whole mass of *duḥkha*.” The process from contact onward to aging or death occurs repeatedly as a result of the six sources contacting objects of the six senses.

Seeing that this is our situation, a wise sense of danger arises, and we come to appreciate our precious human life and the opportunity it provides to counteract our situation in *saṃsāra*. We are grateful that the Buddha appeared in the world and taught the Dharma, which is “good in the beginning, good in the middle, and good in the end.” Seeing the disadvantages of *saṃsāra*, we take refuge in the Three Jewels and choose to go forth into a life of Dharma. Abandoning the ten nonvirtues and practicing the ten virtues, we cultivate mindfulness and introspective awareness with respect to sense objects. Now, whenever our cognitive faculties contact their objects, we pause. While the arising of feeling is a natural result of previous conditions, we now see that a weakness in the process exists between feeling and craving. We have a choice regarding our response to pleasurable, painful, and neutral feelings. Instead of immediately letting the mind jump into craving, we remain mindful and equanimous.

Some practitioners who have attained serenity may use their concentration to temporarily suppress craving for sense objects. However, *samādhi* is not the final solution to *saṃsāra*, and subtle attachment to the blissful or equanimous feelings experienced in deep concentration may still exist. Seeing this, they cultivate insight. As the power of their unified serenity and insight increases, they employ wisdom to penetrate *nirvāṇa* and gradually eradicate defilements.

Other practitioners have a stronger aptitude for wisdom and rely on the power of reflection and examination to understand the unsatisfactory nature of sensual pleasures. Through this, they draw their minds back from entanglement with sense objects and with understanding they temporarily stop their minds from reacting to feelings with craving. On their own, reflection and examination do not go deep enough to uproot saṃsāra, but they calm the mind, allowing for the cultivation of serenity. These practitioners, like the previous ones, then unify serenity with insight and use wisdom to realize nirvāṇa and overcome all defilements.

## *Who Revolves in Cyclic Existence?*

When outlining the twelve links in the *Rice Seedling Sūtra*, the Buddha said from ignorance arises formative action and from birth arises aging or death. He expressed the interconnection of the twelve links in this way to emphasize that there is no inherently existent person who experiences the twelve links. The links occur naturally as part of a causal process. The *Rice Seedling Sūtra* says:

Nothing whatsoever goes from this world to the beyond. Nevertheless, from causes and conditions the effect of karma is manifested. It is just as in a clean mirror one sees the image of a face, but the image does not transfer into the mirror. Because the causes and conditions are complete, a face appears. Accordingly, there is not anyone who transfers from this lifetime at death; no one is born in another lifetime as well. Because the causes and conditions are complete, the effect of karma is actualized.

To this Nāgārjuna adds in the *Versed Commentary on the Rice Seedling Sūtra (Śālistamba Sūtra Kārikā)*:

Just as the distant moon appears in a small vessel of water,  
but is not transferred there, karma and its function exist.  
Likewise, at death nothing transfers from this life, but a being is born.  
If the causes and conditions are not complete, a fire does not burn;  
once they are complete the fire burns.  
So, from complete causes and conditions the aggregates [of a new] life  
arise.

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Just like the moon reflected in water, there is nothing that transfers  
from here at death,  
but a being is reborn.<sup>62</sup>

These moving passages point out that the person who transmigrates from one life to another is nothing more than a merely designated I. The rebirth process happens without a permanent, substantial self that is reborn. In fact, it would be impossible for rebirth to occur if there were an inherently existent self, because such a self would exist independent of all other factors and thus could not be influenced by causes and conditions and could not change. Since rebirth entails change, a permanent independent person could not be reborn. It is possible for rebirth to occur only if the I exists nominally, as a convention.

One moment of an oil lamp's flame doesn't transfer into the next moment, but a mere continuum goes on without interruption. Likewise, due to the coming together of causes and conditions, the mental continuum takes birth without a findable self that is reborn. When masters teach their disciples prayers by asking them to repeat the lines after them, the prayers are not transferred to the disciples, but they know the prayers just as the masters do. Just as a seal makes a clear impression on wax without anything transferring from the seal to the wax, so too does consciousness continue without a self that transfers from one life to the next.

Although we speak of a person revolving in cyclic existence — someone who creates karma, experiences its effects, and is the appropriator of the aggregates — this is a nominally existent self, not an inherently existent self. When the Buddha said that what arises through causes and conditions has no birth, he was referring to this uninterrupted process of causes and conditions that lacks any fixed beginning. No inherently existent aggregates or person goes from one life to the next. There are simply resultant factors that arise from causal factors. Both causes and results exist by mere designation; likewise the moment that a cause ceases and its result arises is merely designated by conception. As one impermanent, merely designated link ceases, another transient, merely designated link arises. In dependence upon this process, we say a person cycles in saṃsāra, but there is no soul or truly existent person who cycles in saṃsāra. There is simply the continuum of a merely designated person. Likewise the person who creates karma and attains nirvāṇa is like an illusion in that it cannot be pinpointed.

Not only can no inherently existent person who is reborn, practices the path,

and attains liberation be found, but the aggregates and the twelve links themselves also lack inherent existence. Nāgārjuna tells us in his *Commentary on the Awakening Mind* (59, 60, 63):

Starting with ignorance and ending with aging [or death],  
all processes that arise from  
the twelve links of dependent origination —  
we accept them to be like a dream and an illusion.

This wheel with twelve links  
rolls along the road of cyclic existence;  
outside this there cannot be sentient beings  
experiencing the fruits of their deed . . .

In brief from empty phenomena  
empty phenomena arise.  
Agent, karma, effects, and their enjoyer —  
the conqueror taught these to be [merely] conventional.

Although they are empty of inherent existence, the person, aggregates, and twelve links individually appear to be inherently existent to our minds that are polluted by ignorance. They resemble a dream and an illusion in that they appear falsely; they appear to have their own essence and exist from their own side, although they do not. These mistaken appearances come about due to the coming together of causes and conditions, just like a mirage appears on the road as a result of causes and conditions. The mirage exists and functions, although the water that appears to be there is a false appearance. Similarly, the person, aggregates, and links function although their appearance as inherently existent is false.

Just as inherently existent sentient beings bound in inherently cyclic existence do not exist, there are no inherently existent beings practicing the path and no inherently existent nirvāṇa to attain. Here, too, the agent, action, and object — the person practicing the path, the path itself, and nirvāṇa — lack any independent nature. The *Āryaratnakara Sūtra* says (OR 96):

The Tathāgata has said of those who go toward pacification [nirvāṇa]  
that no goer can be found.  
They are proclaimed to be free from going.

Through their liberation, many sentient beings are liberated.

If we search for inherently existent āryas progressing toward nirvāṇa, we cannot find any. Their going on the path — their activity of practicing — also cannot bear ultimate analysis. Inherently existent liberation too cannot be found. Nevertheless, āryas practice the path, realize emptiness, purify their minds, and become free from the six realms of rebirth. When they have generated bodhicitta and attained full awakening, they are replete with the perfect qualities to lead others to nirvāṇa as well. While all these agents and actions do not exist from their own side, they exist and function on the conventional level. Although ultimate analysis refutes their inherent existence, it cannot destroy their nominal, illusion-like, veiled existence or their ability to function on the conventional level.

The Pāli tradition expresses the same thought. In speaking of the four truths, Buddhaghōṣa said (Vism 16.90):

In the ultimate sense all the truths should be understood as void because of the absence of any experiencer, any doer, anyone who is extinguished, and any goer. Hence this is said:

For there is suffering, but no one who suffers;  
doing exists although there is no doer;  
extinction [of saṃsāra] exists but no extinguished person;  
although there is a path, there is no goer.

Once a monk asked the Buddha, “Venerable Sir, what now is aging and death, and for whom is there this aging and death?” The Buddha responded that this is not a valid question because the monk presupposed a substantial self (SN 12.35). The commentary likens such a question to “a dish of delicious food served on a golden platter, on top of which a small lump of excrement is placed.” While the question about aging and death is legitimate, asking it in terms of a substantial self contaminates the whole issue.

Someone who thinks the self and the body are the same falls to the extreme of nihilism by believing that both become nonexistent at death. If that were the case, there would be no need to practice the path because saṃsāra would end with death. Someone who thinks the self is one thing and the body is another falls to the extreme of absolutism by thinking that at death the self is released from the body and abides eternally. If the I were permanent and eternal, the path

could not put an end to saṃsāra because something that is changeless cannot cease.

Not only did the Buddha refute a substantial self that is born, ages, and dies, he also denied that the body — and by extension the other aggregates — belong to such a person (SN 12.37):

Monastics, this body is not yours, nor does it belong to others. It is old kamma, to be seen as generated and fashioned by intention, as something to be felt. Therein, monastics, the instructed ārya disciple attends carefully and closely to dependent arising itself thus: When this exists, that comes to be; with the arising of this, that arises. When this does not exist, that does not come to be; with the cessation of this, that ceases.

This body is not ours because there is not an independent person who possesses it. It does not belong to others either, because others also lack an independent self. Although the body is not literally karma, it is called *old karma* because previously created karma was its condition. This karma is intention; our volitional mental, verbal, and physical actions generated this body and life. When we contemplate dependent origination as ārya disciples do, we will understand the mere conditionality by which these things come into being and cease.

Buddhaghoṣa answers the question, “Who experiences the result of karma?” by first quoting an ancient Pāli verse and then explaining it (Vism 17.171–72):

“Experiencer” is a convention  
for mere arising of the fruit [result].  
They say “it fruits” as a convention,  
when on a tree appears its fruit.

It is simply owing to the arising of tree fruits, which are one part of the phenomenon called a tree, that it is said “the tree fruits” or “the tree has fruited.” Likewise, it is simply owing to the arising of the fruit consisting of the pleasure and pain called experience, which is one part of the aggregates called *devas* and *human beings*, that it is said, “A deva or a human being experiences or feels pleasure or pain.” There is therefore no need at all for a substantial experiencer.

A substantial experiencer cannot be found: *experiencer* and *agent* are mere



conventions. Thinking they are anything more than that is superfluous. We say “a human being experiences pleasure or pain” simply because that feeling has arisen in the feeling aggregate.

Āryas of the three vehicles who wisely understand dependent origination are free from doubt about the past, present, and future. They do not dwell on who they were in previous lives, or worry about whether they will exist in the future, and if so, as what. They do not fret about who they are, where they came from, and what will happen to them in the future. All these worries center on the idea of an independent self that persists in the past, present, and future. Those who understand dependent origination and how it functions in the past, present, and future know there is no need to posit a self that moves through these three time periods. They know that whatever occurs in the three times is simply due to conditionality — the fact that causes produce their effects and things come into being due to their respective causes and conditions. Factors in the past condition factors in the present. Causal factors are not the same as present factors, but they are not completely disconnected either. Through the transformation and ceasing of past factors, the present ones come into being. Through the present ones changing and ceasing, future factors will arise. All this occurs without a findable self who controls the process or who experiences it. There is no need for a persisting self to hold the stream of causes and effects together so that karmic seeds are carried to the next life.

If the description of the twelve links initially seems unfamiliar, that is because we have never seriously regarded our lives as conditioned events or thought of ourselves as conditioned phenomena that exist only because the causes for them exist. As we become familiar with the idea of dependent origination, this will become clearer. Although there is no substantial person to practice the path or attain nirvāṇa, a strong determination will arise in us to be free from cyclic existence, and this will propel us to cultivate the path of the āryas as the means to attain liberation.

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## REFLECTION

1. Review the explanation and quotations that refute the existence of an inherently existent person, self, or soul that is reborn.

2. Do you get a sense that there is not a permanent, fixed person that is you who goes from life to life?
  3. Despite your not existing in that way, you still exist and function. The absence of an inherently existent person and the conventional existence of a dependent person are complementary.
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## *The Ultimate Nature of the Twelve Links*

The Buddha spoke not only about the conventional functioning of the twelve links but also about their ultimate nature. The conventional twelve links describe the way that we are born repeatedly in cyclic existence and the way to reverse this process. The ultimate nature of the links and of the cycle of saṃsāric rebirth is empty of inherent existence. If the twelve links existed inherently, they could not form a causal chain where one link produces the next. The *Āryaratnakara Sūtra* says:

How could something with inherent existence arise from another?

Thus the Tathāgata has presented causation.

The links' causal dependence is the reason establishing the emptiness of inherent existence of saṃsāra and of a person who cycles in it. Speaking of causal dependence in the *Sūtra of the Enumeration of Phenomena That Is Called "Discerning the Divisions of Existence, and So Forth,"* the Buddha said:

There are three defining characteristics of dependent arising: (1) no arising from a divine creator's thoughts, (2) arising from [multiple] impermanent cause(s), and (3) arising from a cause that has the capacity to give rise to that effect.<sup>63</sup>

Asaṅga echoed the Buddha's explanation of these three principles of causal dependence, saying: (1) The world did not come into being as a result of prior intelligence or an external creator. (2) It did not arise from a permanent cause. (3) It did not arise from a discordant cause. The *Rice Seedling Sūtra* adds two more characteristics: (4) it arises from existing causes, and (5) it arises from

selfless causes. Nāgārjuna said in *Versed Commentary on the Rice Seedling Sūtra*:

External dependent arisings arise  
neither from self, nor from other,  
nor from both, nor from time as a [permanent] agent.  
Similarly, they are not created by Īśvara or another deity.  
They are neither products of a principal nature, nor are they causeless.  
They come from a succession of causes and conditions  
that stem from beginningless time.<sup>64</sup>

The twelve links produce one rebirth after another without the intercession of an external force, such as a creator deity, a universal mind, or a cosmic substance from which everything is derived. Ju Mipham says in *Sword of Wisdom for Thoroughly Ascertaining Reality (Shes rab ral gri don rnam nges)*:

These appearances around us are generated  
through the process of dependent arising.  
Just as a lotus never appears in the sky,  
so we will never see anything independent.

The completion of a collection of causes  
carries out the function of inducing an effect.  
The entire identity of each diverse effect  
depends upon its particular causes.

Therefore, by knowing what is and is not the case  
for causes and effects  
we can avoid one thing and pursue another.

If the twelve links existed inherently — independent of all other factors — they would not be dependent on one another, because independent and dependent are mutually contradictory. Something must be one or the other, it cannot be both. Because things exist dependently, we can attain the peace we seek by avoiding the causes of suffering and creating the causes of happiness.

Nāgārjuna examined the relationship between causes and their results. How does an effect arise from a cause? Are the two independent of each other or related? His seminal work, *Treatise on the Middle Way*, begins with an analysis

of arising:

Neither from itself nor from another,  
nor from both,  
nor without cause  
does anything anywhere ever arise.

We will fully unpack this verse and its implications in a later volume, but for now we can begin to question how arising — the production of an effect by a cause — occurs. If it occurs independently, according to Nāgārjuna there are four alternatives:

(1) The effect already exists in the cause in a manifest or unmanifest way. One version of *arising from self* is that one cosmic substance contains all of creation in an unmanifest form such that the arising of various phenomena is simply the appearance or manifestation of what is already there. In that case, a fully formed sprout would already exist in a seed.

(2) The effect arises from causes that are inherently *other* than it. While the seed and the sprout are different, they are not inherently different; they are related as cause and effect. Asserting that the cause and effect both exist inherently is problematic because a dependent relationship between the two would be impossible. If cause and effect were unrelated, roses could grow from daisy seeds.

(3) Things arise from *both* self and other. This combines elements of both the above and contains the faults of both.

(4) Things arise *causelessly* means that all things and events arise randomly, there being no relationship between what existed previously and what exists later. Holding such a view is tantamount to saying that a sprout grows without a cause.

The texts unpacking the reasoning that refutes these four erroneous views and establishes the emptiness of true existence of all phenomena often use seeds and sprouts as examples. However, the important issue is, how does *duḥkha* arise and how is it ceased? When we wake up in a bad mood, where did our bad mood come from? Did it appear without any cause? Is it someone else's fault? Was it already present in our minds in an unmanifest form? Is it God's will? Or did it arise dependent on its own causes and conditions, in which case it does not exist independently, with its own self-enclosed essence.

When we initially begin studying these reasonings, we may wonder why the

great masters go into such great depth analyzing how sprouts grow when that is perfectly obvious to anyone who has a garden. But when we start to examine this process, what initially seems obvious begins to blur as we recognize our misconceptions and see that they are based on ignorance. Although we feel and believe that everything, ourselves included, has an independent essence that makes it what it is, it is impossible for things to exist this way. They are empty of an independent essence; they do not exist from their own side, nor are they self-powered.

Nevertheless, things arise and function dependent on other things. Sprouts grow from seeds; formative action arises due to ignorance. All these things and events exist conventionally when we don't analyze, but when we research for an independent essence in them, we cannot find it. So it is with the twelve links. Their being empty of inherent existence does not interfere with their dependent functioning on the conventional level. Each link arises from its preceding link and in turn gives rise to its subsequent link. The five causal links produce the seven resultant links. A person cycles in saṃsāra but cannot be found when we ask, "Who is the person who cycles in saṃsāra, really?" Tsongkhapa says (OR 70):

Therefore, conventionally the nonexistence of the four extremes with respect to arising and the existence of arising are not contradictory.

As a dependent phenomenon, our duḥkha exists only because its causes and conditions exist. Cyclic existence and its unsatisfactory circumstances are not predestined; they are not due to fate or to the will of a creator deity. They are malleable and can be overcome by ceasing their causes. In *Praise to the Supramundane (Lokātītastava 19)* Nāgārjuna praises the Buddha:

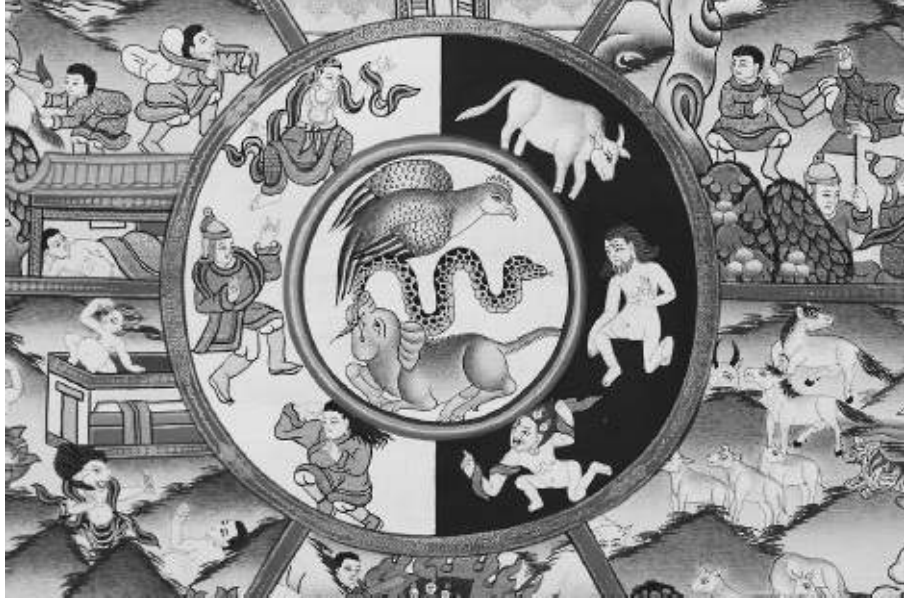
Sophists maintain that duḥkha is self-created,  
that it is created by another, and both,  
and that it arises causelessly.

You have taught that it is dependently arisen.

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## REFLECTION

1. Review the three characteristics of dependent arising the Buddha described.
  2. Consider how those three characteristics apply to the existence of a material object, such as your residence.
  3. Consider how they apply to the existence of people — yourself, your friends, and your relatives.
  4. Review how nothing can arise from a cause that is itself, from something inherently different from it, from both, and without a cause.
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## 9 | The Determination to Be Free

**A**NY PRISON INMATE can quickly and easily list the faults of being incarcerated: the physical dangers they face in prison, the confinement in their cells, the boredom, the ill treatment from guards and other inmates, and so on. Those with a strong determination to be free will be in contact with their attorney, make use of the law library, attend vocational courses and classes on anger management, and draw up a release plan so they can succeed after being released. Similarly, when those of us in saṃsāra clearly know the faults of rebirth by the twelve links, we will have a strong determination to be free. Seeking liberation, we will learn its characteristics and the causes to attain it. Then we will go about creating those causes and persevere until we attain genuine freedom and peace.

### *The Benefits of Meditating on the Twelve Links*

The Buddha taught the twelve links not only to show the evolution of saṃsāric rebirth but also to lead us to a deep understanding of causal dependence and emptiness, and their compatibility.

Meditating on dependent origination — that each link is produced dependent on the preceding one — is meditation on causal dependence, which helps us to avoid the two extremes of absolutism and nihilism. None of the links arises independent of other factors or due to a permanent cause; each link is dependent on the specific causes and conditions that brought it about. Understanding this counteracts the extreme of absolutism, thinking that the links exist inherently or that saṃsāra arises due to a permanent creator. Furthermore, when each link ceases, it does not become totally nonexistent; it gives rise to subsequent links. Understanding this eliminates the view of nihilism, thinking that there is no continuity of saṃsāra or that saṃsāra can occur without a cause.

Reflection on dependent origination clears away a host of wrong views. Identifying that ignorance and actions in this life create the causes for future lives eliminates the wrong view that there are no previous or future lives. Seeing



the variety of realms we may be born into ceases the incorrect idea that aside from the types of living beings we already know about, no others reside in the universe. The fact that formative actions bring fortunate or unfortunate rebirths dispels misguided notions that our actions have no effects or that virtue produces suffering and nonvirtue leads to happiness. Furthermore, because results arise from their concordant causes, not randomly, there is no purpose to justify, rationalize, or deny our harmful actions. They will always lead to suffering. Knowing this inspires us to be more mindful of our motivations and actions and to purify misdeeds.

In addition, we see that the causes of *duḥkha* exist within us, so relief from *duḥkha* must also be accomplished within our own mind. No miraculous drug can stop the cycle of rebirth, nor can cryonics conquer death. The only way to the deathless state — *nirvāṇa* — is by eliminating the causes of *saṃsāric* rebirth.

Contemplating each link individually accentuates its unsatisfactory nature. Cyclic existence is beginningless, and unless we make effort to cease it, its continuity will be endless. Now while we have the opportunity, we must develop a strong aspiration for liberation and live our lives according to this deep, heartfelt aspiration. What sense is there in seeking worldly pleasure when attachment to it simply leads to endless rebirth? As Togme Zangpo asks us in *Thirty-Seven Practices of Bodhisattvas*, “When your mothers who’ve loved you since time without beginning are suffering, what use is your own happiness?” There has to be more to life; there has to be a way to realize reality, arrive at a state of lasting peace, and benefit all beings as well. This accords with Togme Zangpo’s response: “Therefore to free limitless living beings develop the altruistic intention [*bodhicitta*].” Inspired to make our lives meaningful, we put energy into generating *bodhicitta* and realizing the ultimate nature of reality.

Thinking about the beginninglessness of *saṃsāra* pulls us out of fixation on our own, often petty, problems — the molehills we make into mountains that preoccupy so much of our mental energy. Considering the larger perspective of many lives, the vast variety of life forms in this universe, and the numerous sufferings we and other sentient beings endure instigates compassion for all sentient beings. Our obsession with our happiness of only this life fades, and the aspiration for full awakening gives our lives greater meaning.

It is said that each of us has been born in every life form and done every activity in cyclic existence infinite times. What, then, is truly important to do in this very moment? Since *saṃsāric* pleasures arise due to causes and vanish when the causal energy is consumed, clinging to them does not make sense. Seeing

that I and mine are dependent phenomena releases the tightness of having to prove or defend ourselves. We can relax and let go of trying to control everything and everyone around us. Instead, we will derive inner satisfaction from creating the causes for well-being, liberation, and full awakening. Such are the benefits of contemplating dependent origination.

## *Invigorating a Dry Dharma Practice*

Some practitioners lament that they do not progress in their practice as rapidly as they would like. Many factors may be at play: having unrealistic expectations of quick attainments, being very self-critical, lacking sufficient study so we do not know how to practice properly, or living far away from a teacher and supportive Dharma community. The remedy for these hindrances is to approach the Dharma with a relaxed, cheerful attitude, rely on spiritual teachers, and study the teachings.

Other factors may also be at play, such as the three types of laziness: (1) postponing study and practice in favor of sleeping and lounging around, (2) being distracted from Dharma activities by involvement with meaningless works aimed only at the happiness of this life, or (3) feeling discouraged due to a self-defeating attitude or lack of self-confidence.

The first two types of laziness stem from attachment to the happiness of only this life. To overcome these, meditation on impermanence and death is recommended so that we appreciate our precious human life and use it wisely. Meditation on the defects of saṃsāra is also helpful in this regard. Without seeing these defects clearly, we may want to use the Dharma to make our saṃsāra more comfortable — for example, by employing Dharma methods to lessen our anger. Although this is helpful and reduces the destructive karma we create owing to anger, it alone will not lead to liberation. Looking into our minds, we may find that at some level, we see cyclic existence as a rather pleasant and familiar situation. Although we may intellectually know the six disadvantages of cyclic existence, three types of duḥkha, and eight unsatisfactory conditions, in our hearts we still think happiness can be found in cyclic existence — especially in beautiful objects, attractive people, social status, good looks, praise, and money and possessions. We remain attached to that type of happiness and forget that superior states of fulfillment and bliss are available if we make the effort to attain them.

To overcome distorted views and attachment to the joys of cyclic existence, we must meditate deeply and consistently on the disadvantages of saṃsāra as explained in the first truth and on the origins of duḥkha as detailed in the second truth. Some people are not eager to do analytic meditation on these topics. They prefer to visualize deities, engage in breathing meditation to develop concentration, recite mantras, or meditate on love. Of course these meditations are worthwhile, but without a genuine aspiration to be free from cyclic existence and attain liberation, these meditations lack energy and long-term effects. There is the danger that we do them simply to feel good, relieve stress, improve our relationships — all goals that are worthwhile but are limited in scope because they don't look beyond this life.

We need to make our minds strong and courageous. While looking at the defects of cyclic existence may initially be startling or unpleasant, the sobering effect it has on our minds enables us to make wise choices and propels us toward sincere and continuous practice. By seeing that nothing of lasting purpose, pleasure, or worth exists in cyclic existence, our interest will naturally turn to the Dharma and we will be eager to transform our minds.

Sustained reflection on the opposite of four distorted conceptions helps us to generate the aspiration for liberation. Contemplating the impermanent nature of all saṃsāric pleasure, we understand that things such as financial security, relationships, and reputation are not fixed and stable as we had assumed. Seeing them as transient, we will accept them for what they are, use and enjoy them, but will not be sidetracked from Dharma practice by attachment to them.

Contemplation on the unattractive nature of our own and others' bodies will relieve anxiety about our physical appearance and the effects aging will have on it. It also helps to release the fear we have about separating from this body at the time of death and dampens unrealistic notions about sexual relations. We'll learn to relate to our bodies in a more practical way, keeping them clean and healthy — eating nourishing food, taking medicine when necessary, and avoiding substances that harm them — so that we can continue practicing the Dharma.

Meditation on the fact that whatever is produced by afflictions and karma cannot provide genuine happiness and peace helps us to relate to people and things in our environment in a more down-to-earth manner. Our unrealistic expectations will be waylaid, and we will be able to accept things for what they are rather than lament that they aren't completely satisfying. When we recognize that saṃsāric happiness is deceptive and inferior, our craving for it will relax and our minds will turn to liberation, true peace, and bliss.

Reflecting that all the people and phenomena that seem so real do not exist as independent, self-enclosed units with semipermanent personalities expands our view. We'll understand that the way things appear to exist from their own side is deceptive. They are dependent on other factors and empty of all the false modes of existence that our ignorance projects on them. Since there are no inherently evil people, we won't be so upset and angry and will maintain an optimistic attitude knowing that people can and will change. Aggravating situations in our daily lives will seem less dire, and our minds will be more peaceful. Dharma practice will become much easier, and with joyous effort we will be able to transform our minds without labored difficulty.

The third type of laziness is discouragement, which comes from thinking that we are incompetent, the path is too difficult, or the resultant awareness is too high to attain. I (Chodron) believe that this a big hindrance to people in contemporary Western society. Rooted in the view of a personal identity and the self-centered attitude, it makes us give up on ourselves before we even make any effort. Whether it comes from being taught original sin, being pressured to excel, or constantly comparing ourselves to others and never measuring up to our own satisfaction, this discouragement poisons our approach to the path. Examining and shedding our erroneous thoughts about the meaning of success, learning about buddha nature, and developing deep self-acceptance are antidotes to discouragement.

How can we accept ourselves when we are full of faults and have created so much destructive karma? First, we have to ease up on self-criticism and extend some kindness and compassion to ourselves. This enables us to accept ourselves for who we are at present, knowing that we can improve in the future. We recognize that in previous lives we created a tremendous amount of merit because we now have precious human lives with all the conducive conditions to progress on the path. In addition, we have the potential to become buddhas — a potential that can never be taken away or destroyed — and each of us has our own unique talents and gifts that we can contribute to the world.

### *Can a Leper Find Happiness?*

Māgandiya was a wanderer who believed that experiencing a rich variety of sensual pleasures was the source of growth and should be pursued with great enthusiasm (MN 75). To help him assess if his view was correct, the Buddha

described his own sensual, luxurious life in the palace during his youth and then explained that he came to understand the origin, disappearance, gratification, danger, and escape of sensual pleasures and relinquished craving for them.

The *origin* and *disappearance* of sensual pleasures refers to their transient nature — they are continuously arising and disintegrating, never remaining the same for even one moment and are thus unable to give long-term happiness. To explain gratification, danger, and escape, the Buddha gave the example of an attractive person (MN 13). *Gratification* is the pleasure we experience by looking at, hearing, smelling, touching, and thinking about the person. But this gratification cannot be sustained, and the *danger* is that the person will age and become frail, with broken teeth, white hair, age spots, and wrinkles. Eventually that person will fall gravely ill and die, the corpse being assigned to the charnel ground. Disappointment in sensual objects is assured. *Escape* is giving up desire and lust for them, wisely disentangling ourselves from those afflictions and objects that bind us to misery.

Having seen the origin, disappearance, gratification, danger, and escape with respect to sensual pleasures, the Buddha explained to Māgandiya that he chose to leave the palace, become a monastic, and adopt a simple lifestyle of sensual restraint. He did not envy those delighting in sensual pleasures, “because there is a delight apart from sensual pleasures, apart from nonvirtuous states, which surpasses divine bliss.” He thereby cultivated concentration based on the fourth dhyāna and attained arhatship with its inner peace and bliss. The joy he then experienced in no way compared with the insufficient pleasure derived from sensual objects.

The Buddha then spoke of a leper seeking happiness and relief from the unpleasant physical feelings of his disease. He gave some analogies that, ghastly as they are, accurately describe the leper’s situation as well as the situation of those of us addicted to wonderful sights, sounds, smells, tastes, tangibles, and thoughts (MN 75.13):

Suppose there is a leper with sores and blisters on his limbs, being devoured by worms, scratching the scabs off the openings of his wounds with his nails, cauterizing his body over a burning charcoal pit. Then his friends and companions, his kinsmen and relatives bring a physician to treat him. The physician prepares medicine for him, and by means of that medicine the man is cured of his leprosy and becomes well and happy, independent, master of himself, able

to go where he likes. Then he might see another leper with sores and blisters on his limbs, being devoured by worms, scratching the scabs off the openings of his wounds with his nails, cauterizing his body over a burning charcoal pit. What do you think, Māgandiya? Would that man envy that leper for his burning charcoal pit or his use of medicine?

The lesions on a leper's body are home for worms. Their crawling in his flesh irritates him, and the itching is so terrible that he scratches the scabs off his wounds, giving more area for the worm infestation. In another attempt at relief, he cauterizes the wounds on his body. Scratching and burning his flesh provide some satisfaction, but it lasts only a short while and then the painful itching arises again, more intensely than before.

Similarly, we beings in the desire realm — overcome by the dissatisfaction of unfulfilled craving, tormented by and seeking relief from the itching brought on by craving to get more and better of whatever we find attractive — try to satisfy our desires. But like the leper, this worsens our situation because everything we get serves to increase the craving. It's like drinking salt water: at first our thirst decreases, but then it returns more voracious and unbearable than before.

Just as someone cured from leprosy would not envy the happiness a leper gets from scratching his scabs and burning his wounds, arhats never envy the pleasure of beings in the desire realm.

The Buddha then related that after the leper was cured, two strong people dragged him to a charcoal pit as he wailed in fear and pain. "Is it only now that the fire is painful to touch, hot, and scorching, or previously too, when he was a leper, was the fire like that?" the Buddha asked Māgandiya. Māgandiya replied that it was hot, scorching, and painful before, only due to his illness the leper's senses were impaired and he experienced the fire that was painful to touch as pleasurable. The Buddha explained that so too, beings who are devoured by craving for sensual pleasures, who burn with the fever of craving for more and better sensual experiences, have impaired faculties that cause them to believe that sensual pleasures, which are in fact painful, bring the highest delight. In fact, they would be much happier and less tormented by disappointment and dissatisfaction if they could see the origin, disappearance, gratification, danger, and escape of sensual pleasures and release craving for them.

This corroborates recent studies that found that money does not equal

happiness. The Inuit of Greenland and the Maasai in Kenya report being just as happy as those on the Forbes 500 list of richest Americans. To conclude, the Buddha counseled Māgandiya:

The greatest of all gains is health,  
nibbāna is the greatest bliss,  
the eightfold path is the best of paths,  
for it leads safely to the deathless [nibbāna].

At first Māgandiya misunderstood the meaning of health to be physical health. But once the Buddha explained that nirvāṇa, the cessation of craving and clinging, is the highest health, Māgandiya was overjoyed and requested monastic ordination. Practicing sincerely, he soon became an arhat.

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## REFLECTION

1. Contemplate the example of a leper seeking happiness. Then reflect that uninstructed worldly people live in a similar manner.
2. Apply this example to yourself.
3. Generate the determination to be free from cyclic existence and cultivate compassion for all other sentient beings.

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## *Compassion for Ourselves and Others*

Courage and clear-mindedness are necessary to see cyclic existence for what it is — a deceptive cycle of misery. The aspiration for liberation from saṃsāra is a reflection of the compassion we have for ourselves. When we recognize that all other sentient beings are in the same predicament, compassion for them will also arise. Compassion gives us inner strength as we practice diligently to cease the causes of saṃsāra.

Puchungwa (1031–1106), a Kadampa geshe in Tibet, cultivated this compassion by contemplating duḥkha, its origin, its cessation, and the path to

that cessation according to the perspectives of the three levels of practitioners. *Initial practitioners*, who focus on avoiding an unfortunate rebirth and attaining a fortunate one, reflect that under the influence of the ignorance of karma and its effects, they create nonvirtuous formative karma. When nourished by craving and clinging, the karmic seed matures into renewed existence and the seven resultant links of an unfortunate rebirth ensue. Seeing this process, initial-level practitioners will work to abandon the ignorance of karma and its effects, create virtuous karma, and purify previously created nonvirtue.

*Middle-level practitioners* contemplate the twelve links in terms of all saṃsāric rebirths. They focus on the process that brings fortunate rebirths — ignorance giving rise to polluted virtuous formative karma, and so on. But they go a step further and understand that staying in cyclic existence — even if they have peaceful rebirths in the form and formless realms — is unsatisfactory. They want to eliminate the root of saṃsāra, first-link ignorance. Aware of another weak spot in the chain, that between feeling and craving, they practice experiencing pleasant, painful, or neutral feelings — even the feeling of bliss and equanimity in the form and formless realms — without reacting with craving for pleasure to continue or for pain to stop. Generating the aspiration for liberation from all of saṃsāra, they practice the three higher trainings of ethical conduct, concentration, and wisdom.

*Advanced-level practitioners* — and Geshe Puchungwa was one of these — contemplate the twelve links from the perspective of other sentient beings revolving uncontrollably in cyclic existence. With compassion for all the diverse sentient beings, they generate bodhicitta, engage in the bodhisattvas' deeds, and cultivate the wisdom realizing emptiness in order to become a buddha, one who has full wisdom, compassion, and power to lead others to awakening.

Cultivating compassion by considering that other sentient beings cycle in saṃsāra by means of the twelve links is a powerful way to subdue anger and resentment. When we reflect that others are trapped by their ignorance and subjected to the three types of duḥkha, hating them seems ludicrous. How can we possibly wish suffering on people who are already bound in the tortuous cycle of saṃsāra?

Sentient beings are conditioned phenomena; they are not fixed, inherently existent personalities. There is no “solid” person to feel malice toward and no benefit from wishing someone ill. Rather, with compassion and wisdom, let's do what we can to help them attain true freedom. As verses chanted daily in Tibetan monasteries after the midday meal say:



May all those who offered me food attain happiness of total peace.  
May all those who offered me drink, who served me,  
who received me, who honored me,  
or who made offerings to me attain happiness that is total peace.

May all those who scold me, make me unhappy, hit me,  
attack me with weapons, or do things up to the point of killing me  
attain the happiness of awakening.  
May they fully awaken to the unsurpassed,  
perfectly accomplished state of buddhahood.

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## REFLECTION

1. Think of someone whom you care about deeply and reflect that they cycle in saṃsāra under the control of afflictions and karma. Let compassion arise.
  2. Think of someone whom you do not like or who has harmed you. Recognize that this person too cycles in saṃsāra under the control of afflictions and karma. Let compassion arise for them.
  3. Recall that if they were free from duḥkha, their ways of thinking and behaving would be entirely different than they are now.
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## *The Demarcation of Generating the Determination to Be Free*

How do we know our antipathy toward saṃsāra is a genuine determination to be free? Tsongkhapa says in *The Three Principal Aspects of the Path*:

By contemplating in this way, when you do not generate even for an instant the wish for the pleasures of cyclic existence, and when you have day and night unceasingly, the mind aspiring for liberation,

you have generated the determination to be free.

When generated, the aspiration for liberation brings an enduring shift in perspective that alters how we see and relate to our lives and to the world around us. This determination to be free from saṃsāra involves relinquishing our obsessive attachment for saṃsāric pleasures and the duḥkha it brings and focuses our attention on attaining nirvāṇa, the state beyond sorrow, and making that the aim of our lives.

Generating the determination to attain liberation from saṃsāra is essential to cultivate compassion. After seeing the defects of our own saṃsāra, we shift our focus to others, contemplating that they face the same undesirable situation. Compassion — the wish for someone to be free from duḥkha and its causes — arises as a result.

Bodhisattvas fear rebirth in saṃsāra under the control of afflictions and karma and seek to be free from it. But, having firm compassion for others and strong resolve to benefit them, they willingly take rebirth in saṃsāra. Sūtra statements such as “bodhisattvas should not become disenchanted with saṃsāra” do not mean that bodhisattvas should indulge in saṃsāric pleasures. Rather, they urge bodhisattvas to have such strong joyous effort that they will never give up benefiting sentient beings trapped in saṃsāra. Even if bodhisattvas experience overwhelming difficulties when benefiting others, they persevere without succumbing to fear of duḥkha or disenchantment with sentient beings. Taking on the misery of others, bodhisattvas do not dread physical or mental pain. Knowing that their actions to benefit others enable them to fulfill the collection of merit — an essential factor to attain full awakening — bodhisattvas joyfully take many rebirths in saṃsāra. This is the meaning of the passage in the *Sūtra of the Tathāgata’s Inconceivable Secret* (*Tathāgatācintya-guhya-nirdeśa Sūtra*, LC 1:328):

Bodhisattvas, thinking of the maturation of living beings, view cyclic existence as beneficial. Accordingly, they do not view great nirvāṇa as beneficial to the maturation of beings.

If bodhisattvas do not renounce their own saṃsāra and continue to take rebirth under the control of afflictions and karma, their ability to benefit others will be extremely limited. Unable to accomplish their own goal of full awakening, they cannot help other sentient beings accomplish their spiritual

goals. To fulfill both the purpose of themselves and others, bodhisattvas seek nonabiding nirvāṇa, in which they will be free from saṃsāra as well as their own personal peace of nirvāṇa. Bhāvaviveka says in *Heart of the Middle Way* (*Madhyamaka-hṛdaya-kārikā*, LC 1:330):

Since bodhisattvas see the faults of cyclic existence, they do not remain here.

Because they care for others, they do not remain in nirvāṇa.

In order to fulfill the needs of others, they resolve to remain in cyclic existence.

Inspired by bodhisattvas' compassion and courage, may we do the same.



## 10 | Seeking Genuine Peace

**E**ACH OF US wants happiness and not duḥkha. But among the various types of happiness, which is best? The Buddha answered (AN 2.65, 67, 68):

Monastics, there are these two kinds of happiness. What two? Sensual happiness and the happiness of renunciation . . . Of these two kinds of happiness, the happiness of renunciation is foremost.

Monastics, there are these two kinds of happiness. What two? The happiness with defilements and the happiness without defilements . . . Of these two kinds of happiness, the happiness without defilements is foremost.

Monastics, there are these two kinds of happiness. What two? Worldly happiness and spiritual happiness . . . Of these two kinds of happiness, spiritual happiness is foremost.

Here “renunciation,” “happiness without defilements,” and “spiritual happiness” refer to liberation. The Buddha steers us to a higher and more commendable type of happiness, the peace that goes beyond saṃsāra, the joy of nirvāṇa and full awakening. While we may experience many kinds of happiness in our present human rebirth, all of these pale in comparison to the joy and peace of nirvāṇa. Because the pleasures of this life are immediate and appeal strongly to our senses, some people have difficulty gaining confidence in the peace of nirvāṇa. To give up craving for sense pleasures requires an understanding of their defects and of the benefits of nirvāṇa. The more we understand these, the more our minds will naturally turn away from cyclic existence to liberation.

But we don’t have to wait until we attain liberation or awakening to experience Dharma happiness. Each time we release attachment, anger, and other afflictions in our daily lives, Dharma happiness, peace, and confidence take their place. Experiencing this Dharma happiness here and now gives us a small glimpse of the peace of nirvāṇa.

We began the section on the twelve links of dependent origination with the Buddha’s succinct statement on causality and conditionality:

When this exists, that comes to be;  
with the arising of this, that arises.  
When this does not exist, that does not come to be;  
with the cessation of this, that ceases.

The first two lines tell us that saṃsāra comes about due to a causal process, which we have explored in the previous two chapters. The last two lines inform us that nirvāṇa — the cessation of saṃsāra and its origins — can be attained through eliminating ignorance, the fundamental cause of saṃsāra. When the causes and conditions of saṃsāra do not exist, the resultant state of duḥkha will not arise. With the “remainderless fading away and cessation of ignorance,” the new creation of all the other links will cease, just as when the first domino in a row is hit, the others tumble down as well. What brings the cessation of ignorance? According to the common Buddhist view, it is the eightfold path, especially the wisdom or true knowledge that understands the four truths and nirvāṇa. According to the Prāsaṅgikas’ unique view, it also entails the direct, nonconceptual realization of the emptiness of inherent existence of all persons and phenomena. The process of gaining this wisdom is a gradual one, which itself depends on many causes and conditions.

### *The “Ye Dharmā” Dhāraṇī*

A *dhāraṇī* — an intelligible phrase that encapsulates the essence of a teaching — that is frequently recited by followers of both the Pāli and Sanskrit traditions is the “Essence of Dependent Arising Dhāraṇī.” In Sanskrit it reads:

*Ye dharmā hetu prabhavā hetun, teṣāṃ tathāgato hyavadat, teṣāṃ  
ca yo nirodha, evaṃ vādī mahāśramaṇa.*

All phenomena arise from causes. Those causes have been taught by the Tathāgata. And their cessation too has been proclaimed by the great renunciant.

Before becoming a follower of the Buddha, Śāriputra encountered the arhat Aśvajit and asked him to explain the essence of the Tathāgata’s teaching to him. Aśvajit recited these words, and fully understanding their meaning, Śāriputra

immediately became a stream-enterer. He later recited them to his friend Maudgalyāyana, who attained the same realization. They and five hundred of their followers then approached the Buddha and requested to become his disciples.

Fearlessly, and with complete self-confidence, the Buddha did not hesitate to proclaim four statements: He is fully awakened. He has destroyed all pollutants. He has correctly identified all obscurations. He knows that the Dharma, when practiced correctly, leads to the destruction of duḥkha. The Buddha taught the *ye dharmā dhāraṇī* by means of these four self-confidences or fearlessnesses.

*All phenomena arise from causes* indicates that each link of dependent origination comes into being dependent on the preceding ones. This emphasizes that true duḥkha — the seven resultant links — arises from true origins — the three links that are afflictions and the two that are karma. Here the Buddha instructs everyone who seeks liberation to abandon true origins; he says this by means of the third self-confidence, by which he has correctly identified the obscurations to liberation.

*Those causes have been taught by the Tathāgata* indicates that the Buddha has taught the counterforce to saṃsāra — the true path, a consciousness that directly perceives the selflessness of persons and phenomena. He states this in reliance on the fourth self-confidence, that he knows the way leading to the complete destruction of duḥkha.

*And their cessation too* indicates that by practicing true paths we will attain the final true cessation that is the eradication of true duḥkha and true origins. The Buddha states this by means of the second self-confidence, knowing that he has eradicated all pollutants.

*Has been proclaimed by the great renunciant* means that the Buddha has actualized true paths and true cessations and thus has completely perfected what to practice and what to abandon. He does this by means of the first self-confidence, being able to state with complete assurance that he is awakened with respect to all phenomena.

This short dhāraṇī contains great meaning because it incorporates the four truths, the eightfold path, a buddha's truth body that is the perfection of abandonment and realization, and a buddha's form body that acts to benefit all beings with the four self-confidences. A profound understanding of this dhāraṇī will enable us to attain the four bodies of a buddha.

PHRASE IN DHĀRAṆĪ	TRUTHS	SELF-CONFIDENCE
All phenomena arise from causes.	True duḥkha arises from true origins.	Third: The Buddha correctly identified the obscurations to liberation.
Those causes have been taught by the Tathāgata.	True path.	Fourth: The Buddha knows the way leading to the complete destruction of duḥkha.
And their cessation too . . .	True cessation.	Second: The Buddha knows that he has eradicated all pollutants.
has been proclaimed by the great renunciant.	True paths and true cessations have been actualized.	First: The Buddha knows that he is awakened with respect to all phenomena.

## *Forward and Reverse Orders of the Afflictive and Purified Sides of the Twelve Links*

The twelve links of dependent origination can be spoken of in terms of affliction — how cyclic existence continues — and purification — how cyclic existence ceases. Both the afflictive and purified presentations have a forward and a reverse order. The *forward order of the afflictive side* emphasizes the origins of duḥkha: with ignorance as condition, formative action arises; with formative action as condition, consciousness arises; and so forth, up to with birth as condition, aging and death arise. The *reverse order of the afflictive side* emphasizes the resultant true duḥkha: aging and death are produced in dependence on birth; birth is produced in dependence on renewed existence, and so on, up to formative action is produced in dependence on ignorance.

The purified forward and reverse sequence indicates the method for quelling saṃsāra and attaining liberation. The *forward order of the purified side* says: by ceasing ignorance, formative action ceases. By ceasing formative action, consciousness ceases, and so on until aging or death ceases. This sequence emphasizes the true paths that cease ignorance, thus stopping the other links from arising.

The *reverse order of the purified side* begins with the last link, aging or death, and investigates how to cease it. That is done by ceasing birth. Birth is



ceased by ceasing renewed existence and so on back to ceasing ignorance. Looking at the twelve links in this way emphasizes true cessation: that all the links can be ceased and nirvāṇa attained.

<b>ORDER OF TWELVE LINKS OF DEPENDENT ORIGIN</b>	<b>NOBLE TRUTH THAT IS SHOWN</b>	<b>UNDERSTANDING AND ASPIRATION ARISING FROM MEDITATION</b>
Reverse order of afflictive dependent origination: aging or death arise due to birth . . .	True duḥkha.	Understanding the nature of duḥkha, we desire to be free from it.
Forward order of afflictive dependent origination: with ignorance as condition, formative action arises . . .	True origin.	Understanding the origins of duḥkha, we aspire to abandon them.
Reverse order of purified dependent origination: aging or death are ceased by ceasing birth . . .	True cessation.	Understanding that duḥkha can be ceased, we want to actualize that cessation.
Forward order of purified dependent origination: by ceasing ignorance formative actions cease . . .	True path.	Understanding that true paths cease ignorance, we desire to cultivate them.

The question then arises: How do we cease the ignorance that is the origin of cyclic existence? We beginners must first develop a robust understanding of karma and its effects and bring that into our lives so that it influences our daily choices and actions. Then with a motivation aspiring for either liberation or full awakening, we seek the antidote that will demolish saṃsāra's root, first-link ignorance. Nāgārjuna says (MMK 26.10):

The root of cyclic existence is [formative] action;  
 therefore the wise one does not act.  
 Therefore the unwise is the agent.  
 The wise one is not, because he sees reality.

The first line points to formative actions, the second link, as the root of saṃsāra. Usually the fundamental root of saṃsāra is identified as ignorance, but here the root is said to be formative action because it is the source of consciousness entering into a new body. The distinction between the wise and the unwise lies in whether or not someone has realized the emptiness of true existence. Wise

ones — āryas of all three vehicles — do not create formative actions because they have realized emptiness directly. Not having yet gained the direct realization of emptiness, unwise ordinary beings accumulate karma that propels new rebirth in cyclic existence.

In saying “the wise one does not act,” Nāgārjuna does not mean they do nothing at all. If that were the case, they would never complete the path. Rather, the wise do not engage in activities motivated by their own self-centered, saṃsāric desires. But in terms of creating the causes and conditions for liberation or awakening, they do as much as possible.

This leads to further investigation of the last two of the four truths, true cessations and true paths. Nāgārjuna says (MMK 26.11–12):

With the cessation of ignorance  
[formative] action will not arise.  
The cessation of ignorance occurs through  
exercising wisdom in meditating on suchness [emptiness].

Through the cessation of this and that,  
this and that will not manifest.  
That which is only a mass of duḥkha  
will thus completely cease.

The wisdom realizing emptiness is the true path that ceases first-link ignorance. In the second verse, “this and that” refer to first-link ignorance and second-link formative action. By ceasing ignorance, there is no fuel for formative action to arise. In this way, the entire chain of twelve links that is a mass of constantly recurring misery ceases, and nirvāṇa, true freedom, is obtained.

The key that ceases first-link ignorance is the wisdom realizing the emptiness of inherent existence. The Buddha and great sages taught many reasonings to refute inherent existence and establish emptiness. A famous one is refuting the four extremes of arising. Nāgārjuna introduces it (RA 37):

Because this wheel [of saṃsāra] is not obtained from self, other,  
or from both, in the past, present, or future,  
[one who knows this] overcomes the grasping of I  
and thereby karma and rebirth.

Cyclic existence — our five polluted aggregates — does not arise from itself in the sense that it does not exist already inside its causes waiting to manifest. Saṃsāra also does not arise from causes that are inherently different from it. Nor does it arise from both self and other together, or without a cause. Because there is no inherently existent origin of saṃsāra, an absolute beginning to a set of twelve links cannot be found in the past, present, or future. Those who realize the dependent nature of saṃsāra and the person who cycles in it can overcome the ignorance grasping inherent existence. By overcoming the root cause of saṃsāra, the entire cycle of rebirth discontinues and nirvāṇa is attained. As Nāgārjuna says (RA 365):

Having properly realized that in this way  
beings are actually unreal, having no basis [for rebirth],  
or any appropriation [of new aggregates],  
one attains nirvāṇa like a fire whose causes have ceased.

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## REFLECTION

1. Review the forward and reverse orders of afflictive dependent origination. Generate the aspiration to be free from saṃsāra.
  2. Review the forward and reverse orders of purified dependent origination. Have conviction that it is possible to free yourself from saṃsāra.
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### *Transcendental Dependent Origination (Pāli Tradition)*

Dependent arising, the lack of independent existence, and impermanence go hand in hand. The present is different from but related to the past. Impermanent things do not exist under their own power; they arise due to causes that preceded them. The present is the continuation of the past and is conditioned by the past. Present things and events have their own unique functions, and in the next moment they give way to a new moment that becomes the present.

We often think of impermanence as something negative: we are separated from what we like. However, because things are impermanent and conditioned, they can also change for the better. Transcendental dependent origination clarifies this and, in doing so, encourages us to practice the path leading to liberation and to knowledge of the destruction of all pollutants (*āsravakṣaya*, *āsavakkhaya*).

This theme is expressed in the forward and reverse orders of purified dependent origination. In addition, a few sūtras in the *Numerical Discourses* as well as the *Proximate Cause Sutta* (*Upanisā Sutta*, SN 12.23) present dependent origination in a dynamic way where one virtuous factor produces another, culminating in knowledge of the destruction of all pollutants. This emphasizes that spiritual evolution involves not just eradicating problematic factors but also enhancing constructive ones.

The presentation of transcendental dependent origination according to the Pāli tradition is expounded in the *Proximate Cause Sutta*. This presentation highlights the goal: knowledge of the destruction of all pollutants. The steps for arriving at that goal are then traced backward. Knowledge of the destruction of all pollutants has a proximate cause: liberation. Liberation has a proximate cause: dispassion. Dispassion's proximate cause is disenchantment. Disenchantment's is knowledge and vision of things as they really are. The proximate cause of knowledge and vision of things as they really are is concentration. Concentration's proximate cause is bliss, bliss's is pliancy, pliancy's is joy, joy's is delight, and delight's is faith.

At this juncture, the Buddha makes an interesting turn and cites duḥkha as the chief condition for faith: without duḥkha, we would not turn to the Buddhadharma for relief and would not generate faith in it. This is the point where we cross from mundane to transcendental dependent origination. The Buddha then says birth is the proximate cause for duḥkha and traces the sequential series of causes back to first-link ignorance. He goes forward again from ignorance to birth, then to suffering, and then crosses to the transcendental links beginning with faith and going through to the destruction of all pollutants. Meditating back and forth from ignorance to knowledge of the destruction of all pollutants has a powerful effect on our minds and shows us that we saṃsāric beings can attain liberation.

<b>TRANSCENDENTAL DEPENDENT ORIGINATION (FORWARD ORDER):</b>	
1.	Faith (P. <i>saddhā</i> )

2.	Delight (P. <i>pāmojja</i> )
3.	Joy (P. <i>pīti</i> )
4.	Pliancy (tranquility, P. <i>passaddhi</i> )
5.	Bliss (P. <i>sukha</i> )
6.	Concentration (P. <i>samādhi</i> )
7.	Knowledge and vision of things as they are (P. <i>yathābhūta-ñāṇadassana</i> )
8.	Disenchantment (P. <i>nibbidā</i> )
9.	Dispassion or fading away (P. <i>virāga</i> )
10.	Liberation (P. <i>vimutti</i> )
11.	Knowledge of the destruction of all pollutants (P. <i>āsavakkhayañāṇa</i> )

### *1. Duḥkha is the proximate cause for faith.*

Our lives are fraught with frustration and duḥkha. Not knowing a healthy way to deal with our stress, misery, and confusion, we usually seek to distract ourselves from it, spawning a culture of addiction to sense objects: drugs and alcohol, food, sex, entertainment, shopping, sports, news, and so on. Alternatively, we react to duḥkha with self-pity, digging ourselves deeper into despair. Although we sometimes deal with our pain in a healthy way by building up fortitude, resoluteness, and using our talents and intelligence, ignorance still obscures us from seeing that duḥkha permeates our lives. No matter how much we succeed in changing the external world to make it what we want it to be, we cannot bring our bodies, minds, or the external world completely under our control. Deep inside, a spiritual malaise remains and a small voice within us says, “There must be another way.”

Acknowledging this malaise spurs us to seek answers beyond what we already know. Here we have to thank the illness, injury, breakup of a treasured relationship, loss of a job, or internal dissatisfaction and anxiety for spurring us to look more deeply at the human situation.

Duḥkha alone will not cause faith to arise. We must encounter a reliable and true teaching that shows us the way out of our situation. We must investigate the teaching, teacher, and followers using our intelligence and reasoning. When we conclude they are reliable and trustworthy, we take refuge in the Three Jewels. Our faith is not blind or coerced. Based on inferential reliable cognizers and

reliable cognizers based on authoritative testimony, our faith and confidence will be stable.<sup>65</sup>

### *2. Faith is the proximate cause for delight.*

Through learning and contemplating the Dharma, we come to adopt the Buddhist worldview. This worldview does not demand submission to an external creator, nor does it justify suffering as something that is good for us. The worldview of the four truths looks squarely at our situation so that we know *duḥkha*, abandon its origin, realize its cessation, and cultivate the path. Relief arises because at last we have found a reliable path. Delight, which is a weak kind of joy, arises because we have met the *ārya*'s eightfold path, which now lies in front of us. Our hearts swell with virtuous aspirations and we dive into practice, commencing with the higher training in ethical conduct. Living ethically and purifying our past misdeeds, we experience freedom from guilt and self-recrimination. The low self-esteem that plagued us due to our mistaken actions evaporates, and our self-confidence increases because we now make wise decisions rooted in compassion and restraint from self-indulgence.

### *3. Delight is the proximate cause for joy.*

On the basis of following ethical conduct, we now engage in meditation. While some people prefer to begin with insight meditation, in general it is recommended to tame the coarse afflictions first by generating serenity. In the eleven factors of transcendental dependent origination, joy, pliancy, bliss, and concentration are part of the higher training in concentration. Knowledge and vision of things as they are, dispassion, and disenchantment pertain to insight meditation and the higher training in wisdom.

Cultivating serenity requires effort, fortitude, and perseverance. As the mind becomes more concentrated, joy arises, uplifting and refreshing the mind and bringing strong interest and delight in the object of meditation. The commentaries talk of five degrees of joy that develop as the mind approaches single-pointedness: (1) minor joy can make the hair on our bodies stand on end, (2) momentary joy flashes through the body with an intensity likened to lightning, (3) showering joy is like waves of ecstasy breaking over the body<sup>66</sup> or flowing through the mind, (4) uplifting joy gives the body a feeling of lightness, and in some cases can make the body levitate, and (5) pervading joy fills the entire body. The first four precede the attainment of the first *dhyāna*, and the fifth occurs in the first *dhyāna*.<sup>67</sup>

*4. Joy is the proximate cause for pliancy.*

Although joy brings great pleasure, it agitates the mind. It may also bring subtle fear of losing the ecstasy and cause the meditator to cling to the experience of ecstasy. The restlessness, anxiety, and clinging interfere with deep concentration, so as meditators progress they come to regard the ecstasy as a hindrance to be pacified. As joy calms down and becomes less exuberant, pliancy — the subsiding of distress and unserviceability — becomes more prominent. Pliancy is of two types: mental pliancy applies to the consciousness aggregate, and physical pliancy applies not to the body but to the mental factors in the aggregates of feeling, discrimination, and miscellaneous factors that accompany the consciousness. Pliancy subdues the excited disturbance caused by joy, eliminates rigidity and sluggishness, makes the mind more flexible so that it can be used to actualize higher stages of the path, and brings incredible stillness in the mind.

*5. Pliancy is the proximate cause for bliss.*

Due to the stillness brought by pliancy, bliss, which was present before, now becomes prominent. Joy is a mental factor belonging to the fourth aggregate, whereas bliss is a type of pleasant feeling. Joy is comparatively coarse; bliss is more subtle. Joy is compared to the gladness a weary, thirsty traveler feels upon hearing of an oasis nearby, and bliss to the happiness he experiences after he has bathed, satisfied his thirst, and lies down to rest in the shade of trees. In the present stage, joy is present, but due to pliancy it has been toned down and bliss is dominant.

Bliss here refers to the bliss experienced with access concentration, which is prior to the first dhyāna. Access concentration arises when the five hindrances have been suppressed and the counterpart sign — the radiant inner object of meditation — arises. Although subduing the hindrances began with faith and delight, now they have been suppressed more firmly so that the mind can remain concentrated and free from constant disruption. The meditator has much greater control of his or her mind. The bliss of being released from the hindrances, even temporarily during access concentration, is compared to the relief and joy someone feels upon being freed from slavery.

*6. Bliss is the proximate cause for concentration.*

As the bliss of access concentration expands, it permeates the mind and the hindrances to the unification of the mind vanish. At this point the mind enters

into absorption or full concentration, dhyāna. In general, concentration is a mental factor present in many mental states, including both access and absorption. It functions to unite the mind on a single object and to enable the consciousness and its accompanying mental factors to operate in harmony, making them steadier and more focused. While concentration has been increasing all along while cultivating serenity, in the dhyānas it becomes especially strong. The mind becomes very still, like a still lake on a cloudless night that clearly reflects the trees and moon. No discursive thought disturbs the mind's stillness.

During access concentration the dhyānic factors — investigation, analysis, joy, bliss, and one-pointedness — are strong enough to suppress the five hindrances, but not to place the mind in full meditative absorption. With the attainment of the first dhyāna, the dhyānic factors are strong enough to do this. Now the mind is so concentrated that any feeling of separation from the meditation object vanishes. From the first dhyāna, a meditator can proceed sequentially to attain the second, third, and fourth dhyānas, and then to the four formless absorptions, which are very refined states of mind in meditative absorption.

*7. Concentration is the proximate cause for knowledge and vision of things as they really are.*

Although it is an important precursor for wisdom, concentration alone is not sufficient to free us from cyclic existence. Despite its bliss and tranquility, concentration has only suppressed the coarse defilements. Other defilements still remain in the mind, dormant and ready to spring up whenever conditions allow. The ignorance of the four truths that is the root of saṃsāra as well as the other pollutants and fetters that depend on it must still be abandoned. To do this, insight and wisdom are essential, so now concentration is used to generate knowledge and vision of things as they really are, which is a form of insight that knows and sees the five aggregates as they actually are — their nature, arising, and passing away.

A mind in which the hindrances have been suppressed through concentration is needed to be able to see reality clearly. Just as a woodcutter needs not only a sharp ax but also clear eyesight so he can strike the same point repeatedly and fell the tree, similarly meditators require the steadiness and clarity that concentration provides to direct their wisdom to the analysis of conditioned phenomena.



The knowledge and vision of things as they really are liberates us. The Buddha said (SN 12.23), “The destruction of the pollutants is for one who knows and sees, I say, not for one who does not know and does not see.” Knowledge and vision are not intellectual but are a knowing and seeing that are so vivid that it is as if we were perceiving something with our eyes. Its initial cultivation may depend on conceptual knowledge, which helps to dispel mistaken notions. However, once the coarse misconceptions are dispelled and right view is established, we must go beyond conceptual knowledge to effect the very deep changes that lead to liberation.

Since all our experiences consist of a combination of the five aggregates, essential to the cultivation of wisdom are mindfulness and introspective awareness placed on the five aggregates. Although every experience and cognition can be broken down into the five aggregates, our ignorant, nonanalytical mind takes the aggregates as a uniform whole. This leads to the view that there is a permanent, substantial self. This view of a personal identity as being a self is the outer shell surrounding ignorance, and to eliminate it we must continually break our experience down into the five aggregates, see their nature, their arising, and their passing away.

A very peaceful and concentrated mind has difficulty engaging in the intense analysis that is now required. Thus the meditator emerges from the deep concentration of a dhyāna and studies each factor of that dhyānic state, identifying it as one of the five aggregates. She then examines the causes and conditions giving rise to each factor and each aggregate. This brings awareness that there is simply an ever-changing flow of physical and mental events that is devoid of a controlling self. She understands conditionality because each event arises when its causes and conditions exist and ceases when its causes and conditions cease. None of the factors or aggregates exist on their own, independently, and none of them require a supervisory self to function.

This awareness of conditionality leads to the examination of the arising and passing away of each physical and mental event. Noticing the coming into existence and the vanishing from existence of form, feelings, discriminations, miscellaneous factors, and consciousnesses reveals their impermanence. They not only arise and cease due to conditions, but conditions cause them to arise and cease in each nanosecond.

Changing in every brief moment, the five aggregates are unsatisfactory because they are incapable of bringing us stable happiness. The five aggregates cannot be the core of a real self because they are impermanent and unsatisfactory

both individually and as a collection. The clear seeing of the three characteristics of conditioned phenomena — impermanence, *duḥkha*, and no self — is the knowledge and vision of things as they really are.

*8. Knowledge and vision of things as they really are is the proximate cause for disenchantment.*

Knowledge and vision of things as they really are is weak insight; disenchantment is strong insight. To progress from the former to the latter, a meditator now focuses his attention on the momentary passing away of the aggregates — their disintegration and cessation. Repeated mindfulness on the vanishing of what he thinks is the source of happiness and security sparks disenchantment and disappointment. The things that he believed would protect him and bring him joy are now seen as they are — farces and deceptions — and the mind wisely turns away from them. This process of disenchantment is similar to that of a child who realizes without a doubt that Santa Claus does not exist and stops waiting for Santa to come on Christmas Eve. Disenchantment is not depressing; it is simply losing interest in the transient, unsatisfactory, and selfless external world with its kaleidoscope of illusory sensual delights that leave us exhausted. We now turn inward to wisdom.

He realizes that until now he has filtered and evaluated every experience through the distorted lens of mine, I, and my self. Whereas he previously believed this was truth, he now sees mine, I, and my self are conceptual fabrications imputed by ignorance and knows without a doubt that believing them to be true is the source of *duḥkha*. He knows the aggregates are not mine, these I am not, these are not my self, and he begins to mentally set down the burden that was never his to begin with. The Buddha says (SN 22.59):

Therefore, monastics, any kind of form whatsoever, any kind of feeling . . . discrimination . . . miscellaneous factor . . . consciousness whatsoever, whether past, future, or present, internal or external, coarse or subtle, inferior or superior, far or near should be seen as it really is with correct wisdom thus: This is not mine, this I am not, this is not my self.

Seeing thus, monastics, the instructed *ārya* disciple experiences disenchantment toward form, feeling, discrimination, miscellaneous factors, and consciousness. Experiencing disenchantment, he becomes dispassionate. Through dispassion [his mind] is liberated.

When it is liberated, there comes the knowledge: “It is liberated.” He understands, “Birth is destroyed, the holy life has been lived, what had to be done has been done, there is no more coming to any state of being.”

Here we see the progression that outlines the upcoming steps of dispassion, liberation, and knowledge of destruction.

*9. Disenchantment is the proximate cause for dispassion.*

Disenchantment with conditioned phenomena results from understanding their nature. It is based on accurate knowledge and insight and is not emotional rejection, fear, or escapism. Understanding the conditioned prepares us to realize the unconditioned. With disenchantment, a meditator detaches herself from conditioned phenomena. With knowledge that there is an actual state of lasting happiness that can be attained, she is determined to attain it. She continues relinquishing craving and clinging to conditioned things and does not take up any new attachments. This process of mental “spring cleaning” sees the gratification and danger of conditioned things and now seeks an escape — a path to freedom — from them.

Insight becomes deeper and more penetrative until a breakthrough is reached and she sees nirvāṇa. This is dispassion, path wisdom that is the first supramundane (*lokottara, lokuttara*) factor in transcendental dependent arising. While the eight previous factors are called members of transcendental dependent arising, they are in fact still mundane (*laukika, lokiya*) because their objects are conditioned phenomena, in particular the five aggregates. While these factors are indispensable steps to arrive at the supramundane path, they themselves are not supramundane.

*10. Dispassion is the proximate cause for liberation.*

The commentary on the Saṃyutta Nikāya explains:

Seeing with correct wisdom (P. *sammappaññāya*) is path wisdom together with insight. The mind becomes dispassionate at the moment of the path and is liberated at the moment of the fruit.

The mind becomes dispassionate when it sees nirvāṇa with correct wisdom and insight. This marks entrance into the supramundane path of stream-enterer. When the first three fetters — view of a personal identity, doubt, and view of

rules and practices — have been abandoned, the fruit of stream-enterer is attained. In this way, dispassion as the path is the condition for liberation as the fruit. The path and fruit sequence begins with stream-entry, continues with once-returned and nonreturner, and culminates in arhatship. Each path is a time of reducing or eliminating fetters, and each fruit is a time of knowing and enjoying the reduction or abandonment of those fetters. The mind is peaceful and delights in its newfound freedom.

There are two aspects to full liberation. One is freedom from the ignorance and defilements experienced during this lifetime. The mind is now immune to attachment, animosity, and confusion, and any last traces of these poisons have been eliminated so that they can never arise again. This nirvāṇa is visible here and now; it is nirvāṇa with remainder. The Buddha says (AN 3.55):

When a person is impassioned with sensual desire . . . depraved through animosity . . . bewildered by confusion, overwhelmed and infatuated by [sensual desire, animosity, and] confusion, then he plans for his own harm, for the harm of others, for the harm of both; and he experiences in this mind suffering and grief. But when sensual desire, animosity, and confusion have been abandoned, he neither plans for his own harm, nor for the harm of others, nor for the harm of both; and he does not experience in his mind suffering and grief. In this way, nibbāna is directly visible, immediate, inviting one to come and see, leading onward, to be personally experienced by the wise.

The other aspect of liberation is freedom from rebirth after the breakup of the present body. At arhatship, the peace in the mind is immense, for the mind is no longer controlled by defilements. Arhats rest with the security that comes from knowing that all future existence in saṃsāra has ceased.

Liberation — the fruit of arhatship — is the freedom from all pollutants that comes at the end of this chain of four paths and four fruitions. The path has been completed; there is nothing more to be abandoned or added.

*11. Liberation is the proximate cause for knowledge of the destruction of all pollutants.*

Each path, which reduces or abandons certain fetters, is immediately followed by its own fruit, which enjoys the reduction or abandonment of those fetters.

That is followed by a reviewing knowledge (P. *paccavekkhaṇa ñāṇa*) that ascertains what has just occurred. It reviews the fetters that have been abandoned by that path and those that still remain. The reviewing knowledge after attaining the fruit of arhatship certifies that all fetters, pollutants, and defilements as well as any underlying tendencies toward them have been eradicated and that none remains.

At the time of the path of arhatship, the four truths are known as they actually are. This knowing eradicates any remaining defilements. At the time of the fruit of arhatship, the remaining defilements have been eradicated and the mind is freed. Following this, the reviewing knowledge arises that understands that this has occurred and that the mind is liberated from defilements. The Buddha describes the sequence (MN 39.21):

He understands as it actually is: “This is duḥkha” . . . “This is the origin of duḥkha” . . . “This is the cessation of duḥkha” . . . “This is the way leading to the cessation of duḥkha” . . . “These are the pollutants” . . . “This is the origin of the pollutants” . . . “This is the cessation of the pollutants” . . . “This is the way leading to the cessation of the pollutants.”

When he knows and sees thus, his mind is liberated from the pollutant of sensual desire, the pollutant of existence, and the pollutant of ignorance. When it is liberated, there comes the knowledge: “It is liberated.” He understands: “Birth is destroyed, the holy life has been lived, what had to be done has been done, there is no more coming to any state of being.”

An arhat sees the final cessation of duḥkha and defilements very clearly and there is no doubt in his or her mind that this has occurred.

Two ascertainments are involved in this retrospective cognition. The *knowledge of destruction* knows that all the fetters have been uprooted and no longer remain. The *knowledge of nonarising* knows that they can never arise again. Together these are called the knowledge and vision of liberation (P. *vimutti ñāṇadassana*). Arhats experience freedom from defilements and enjoy the certitude that defilements can never arise again. This brings an incredible confidence and ease in the mind; arhats never experience anxiety or uncertainty. Having fully understood that there is no self or anything belonging to a self anywhere at all, they are the masters of their minds.

While the knowledge and vision of liberation is not always manifest in an arhat's mind, it remains there under the surface and can manifest as soon as she looks at the state of her mind. The Buddha analogized this to someone whose hands and feet have been amputated. Whatever he is doing, his limbs have been cut off, and the instant he turns his mind to it, he knows this is the case. Similarly, someone who has destroyed all pollutants is always free from them, and the instant he looks at his mind, he knows that this is the case.

## *Karma in Saṃsāra and Beyond*

Karma is of many varieties; discerning them is helpful to our practice. Of the *polluted karma* of saṃsāra, there is virtuous, nonvirtuous, and neutral karma.

*Virtuous polluted karma* is created by ordinary beings — everyone who is not an ārya. It ripens as happiness in saṃsāra and does not directly lead to liberation. It is of two kinds as mentioned above: (1) *Meritorious karma* is created by beings in the desire realm and brings a good rebirth or other happy circumstances in the desire realm. (2) *Invariable karma* is created by beings in the desire, form, or formless realms; it causes rebirth in the form or formless realms.

*Nonvirtuous or nonmeritorious karma*, when created by ordinary beings, propels unfortunate rebirths and other undesirable events in saṃsāra. When created by stream-enterers and once-returners, it does not propel a rebirth. Śrāvaka āryas who are not arhats may still experience suffering in their lives due to seeds of previously created nonvirtuous karma on their mindstreams. Ārya bodhisattvas, owing to the power of their wisdom and compassion, do not experience physical or mental suffering.

*Neutral karma* brings neither happy nor suffering results. Created by beings in all three realms, it is not powerful enough to propel rebirth in cyclic existence.

*Unpolluted karma* is created by āryas who are not buddhas. It does not propel rebirth in saṃsāra. Together with the latencies of ignorance, it produces the mental bodies of ārya bodhisattvas and arhats and leads to liberation and buddhahood. Buddhas do not create karma but engage in spontaneous awakened activities that benefit sentient beings.

When we closely examine our intentions, we may be surprised to find that many of them seek the happiness of only this life. The appearances of this life

are so vivid to our senses that naturally the minds of us ordinary beings gravitate toward them. Even if we believe in future lives, in our daily lives we often are not mindful that our actions create the causes for our future rebirths and our experiences in them. This limited perspective obscures the great opportunity our precious human lives provide to gain spiritual realizations. Although we may still create virtuous karma that will result in a fortunate rebirth with a motivation focused on this life, such a motivation impedes us from attaining liberation or full awakening. To expand the intentions behind our daily actions, it is important to enlarge our worldview to include future lives, liberation, and awakening.

All ordinary beings — including those from the supreme dharma stage of the path of preparation of all three vehicles downward — accumulate karma that propels rebirth in saṃsāra under the influence of ignorance and view of a personal identity.<sup>68</sup> Their motivations that see the disadvantages of saṃsāra and genuinely aspire for liberation, and virtuous karma similar to the wisdom analyzing selflessness, are contrary to first-link ignorance and are remedies for the craving for rebirth. They lead to the eradication of craving and the attainment of the ārya path, and in this sense they are not actual true origins. However, since they are similar to true origins in that they are not free from grasping true existence, this karma is included under true origins. The *Compendium of Determinations (Viniścaya-samgrahaṇī)* says (LC 1:305):

By nature they are not directed toward rebirth in saṃsāra. However, they approximate the physical, mental, and verbal good conduct that leads to rebirth. Consequently, you should understand that on this account they are included under the truth of the origin.

Antipathy toward all forms of duḥkha, sincere aspiration to attain liberation, bodhicitta, and the mind similar to the correct view are excellent steps along the path. But to create unpolluted karma that leads directly to liberation and awakening we must generate the ārya path by realizing emptiness directly. Only then do our actions become unpolluted and direct causes for liberation.

For us ordinary beings, the only karma we create that is not typical true origins of duḥkha are actions depending on the power of the field — that is, by interaction with holy objects, places, and people. Tsongkhapa says (LC 1:305–6):

You might not have acquired, through extensive meditative analysis

of the faults of cyclic existence, the remedy that eradicates the craving for the wonders of cyclic existence. You might also not have used discerning wisdom to properly analyze the meaning of selflessness, and might not have become habituated to the two bodhicittas [conventional and ultimate], in which case your virtuous activities — with some exceptions on account of the field's power — would constitute typical origins [of duḥkha], and hence would fuel the process of cyclic existence.

Nevertheless, contact with holy objects creates seeds of powerful virtuous karma. In *Letter to a Friend (Suhṛllekha)* Nāgārjuna says that even if someone sees the form of the Tathāgata in a mural and reacts to it with an afflictive attitude, he still creates karma to have visions of buddhas and buddha lands in the future. Buddhas and bodhisattvas are such powerful fields for accumulating merit because they have dedicated their lives to benefiting sentient beings for as long as saṃsāra endures. Due to the incredible virtue of their aspirations, any contact with them becomes virtuous in the long term. When we make offerings or prostrations to them, bodhisattvas rejoice in our virtue and dedicate their merit to be able to benefit us. Even when people harm them, bodhisattvas pray to be able to teach them the Dharma and lead them to awakening.

Although creating merit with holy objects is important, it is not sufficient for the attainment of spiritual realizations. We must cultivate all the steps on the path — the three higher trainings, the three principal aspects of the path, and the path of Tantrayāna — to gain full awakening.





## 11 | Freedom from Cyclic Existence

THE SIXTEEN ATTRIBUTES of the four truths spoken of in chapter 1 tell us that true cessation, as exemplified by nirvāṇa, has four aspects: (1) It is the *cessation* of the continuum of afflictions, their seeds, and the karma that causes rebirth. (2) It is true *peace*, the state of total tranquility that is completely free from all afflictive obscurations. (3) It is *magnificent* because we have reached ultimate satisfaction. (4) It is *freedom* because we have definitely emerged from cyclic existence.

Nirvāṇa is our goal, and the true path to attain it that is held in common by all Buddhist traditions constitutes the Dharma Jewel. The word *Dharma* has many meanings, depending on the context. In *Dharma Jewel*, it means to hold or prevent us from falling into duḥkha. From this perspective, even the path of the initial practitioner is the Dharma in that it prevents us from falling into the suffering of unfortunate rebirths. More broadly, Dharma holds or prevents us from experiencing all kinds of duḥkha; this is the role of true paths and true cessations, which together constitute the Dharma Jewel.

In general true paths consist of the three higher trainings in ethical conduct, concentration, and wisdom, which include the eightfold path. More specifically, the wisdom directly realizing emptiness is the counterforce that eliminates first-link ignorance and directly brings liberation. One moment of this wisdom is not sufficient to remove all deeply entrenched afflictions that have disturbed the mind from beginningless time. Because continual habituation with this wisdom is necessary, we need to cultivate single-pointed concentration (*samādhi*) and serenity (*śamatha*) that can focus on emptiness in a sustained manner free from distraction.

This concentration must be free of two principal faults: laxity and restlessness, which prevent us from focusing with stability and clarity on the object of meditation for long periods of time. The mental factors of mindfulness and introspective awareness are crucial to overcome laxity and restlessness, and these two mental factors are initially cultivated in the training of ethical conduct. To abide in pure conduct, we must hold our precepts with mindfulness and closely monitor the actions of our body, speech, and mind with introspective

awareness. Having developed some degree of mindfulness and introspective awareness by observing ethical conduct, we can then employ these two to identify and suppress laxity and restlessness and to deepen concentration. With strong concentration, wisdom becomes a stable and powerful counterforce to eradicate ignorance. In short, all three higher trainings assist one another and all three are necessary to attain liberation.

## *Stages Leading to Liberation and Full Awakening*

Attaining spiritual realizations occurs over time. Learning the stages leading to liberation and full awakening gives us an idea of the process of spiritual transformation we will undergo and the practices that will bring about the desired spiritual progress. There are many similarities in the paths and fruits of śrāvakas, solitary realizers, and bodhisattvas; there are many differences in them as well.

Before even entering one of the three vehicles — śrāvaka, solitary realizer, and bodhisattva — we must have a correct and stable understanding of the Buddhist worldview, purify our minds, and create much merit. Each vehicle has five paths: the paths of accumulation, preparation, seeing, meditation, and no more learning. Practitioners enter the śrāvaka path of accumulation when their aspiration to attain liberation remains stable day and night. Practitioners enter the bodhisattva path of accumulation when bodhicitta spontaneously arises in relation to any and all sentient beings.

In all three vehicles, practitioners go from the path of accumulation to the path of preparation when they have attained the union of serenity and insight on emptiness. This is still a conceptual realization, but through repeated practice they remove the veil of conceptuality and realize emptiness directly. At this point they attain the path of seeing and become āryas.

Stream-enterers, the first level of śrāvaka āryas, are on the path of seeing and have eliminated acquired afflictions. Afflictions may arise in their minds and they may create destructive karma. However, this karma is not strong enough to project rebirth in saṃsāra, so they no longer begin new sets of twelve links. They still have the seeds of projecting karma of many other sets of twelve links on their mindstreams, and when these are activated by craving and clinging, they take rebirth. Although they are not liberated from cyclic existence, they are not

fully under its sway in the way ordinary beings are. Stream-enterers can no longer be reborn in unfortunate realms, although they still experience suffering and sickness when born as humans.

Continuing to practice, stream-enterers gradually reduce layers of afflictions. When sensual attachment and malice have been subdued to a certain degree, they become once-returners, so-called because they will take only one more rebirth in the desire realm. Once-returners may still create destructive karma, although it is weak.

Ordinary beings are attached to the self, and while dying the fear that they will no longer exist arises, followed by craving for saṃsāric aggregates. This precipitates the bardo state. Attachment to self may arise in stream-enterers and once-returners, but investigating it with wisdom, they cast it out. It does not arise in nonreturners.

Once-returners continue their practice, and when the five lower fetters — view of a personal identity, doubt, view of rules and practices, sensual desire, and malice — are eliminated, they become nonreturners, so-called because they are never again born in the desire realm. Since destructive karma is created only in the desire realm, nonreturners no longer create it. Like stream-enterers and once-returners, nonreturners are still reborn under the power of afflictions and karma. When they abandon all afflictive obscurations completely, they attain the śrāvaka path of no more learning and become arhats — those who have attained liberation and are totally free from cyclic existence.

Although arhats no longer create new karma to be born in saṃsāra, the potency of previously created karmic seeds that could bring a saṃsāric rebirth remains intact. However, because they have eliminated all afflictions, those seeds are not nourished by craving and clinging and do not produce new rebirths.

Karmic seeds of completing karma remain on arhats' mindstreams and these may ripen. The most famous example of this occurred to Maudgalyāyana, one of the Buddha's chief disciples. Many lifetimes ago, he had killed his parents. Although he had been born in the hell realm as a ripening result of that deed, the fruit of that karma had not yet been exhausted. Some non-Buddhists knew that Maudgalyāyana was foremost among the Buddha's disciples in terms of his supernormal powers and would use those powers to bring people to the Buddhadharma. Jealous of the Buddha and his followers, they directed some thugs to kill Maudgalyāyana. Maudgalyāyana wished to spare them the nonvirtuous karma of killing an arhat and so tried to use his supernormal powers to escape. Due to the karmic seeds remaining from having killed his parents, his

supernormal powers failed; the thugs beat him severely and left him for dead. Maudgalyāyana crawled to the Buddha, paid final homage to him, and passed away. Although he experienced physical pain from the beating, he was not upset or angry.

While arhats are alive, intentions arise in their minds, but they do not leave any traces. The *Dhammapada* compares the action of arhats to the flight of birds across the sky (92–93):

Those who do not hoard [anything] and are wise regarding food,  
whose object is emptiness, the unconditioned, freedom —  
their track cannot be traced,  
like the path of birds in the sky.

Those whose pollutants are destroyed and who are unattached to food,  
whose object is emptiness, the unconditioned, freedom —  
their path cannot be traced,  
like the path of birds in the sky.

While alive, arhats are free from saṃsāra although they still have the saṃsāric aggregates — especially the bodies they took at birth, which are ripening results of polluted karma. Their bodies are true duḥkha, so their nirvāṇa is called “nirvāṇa with remainder (of the polluted aggregates).” When they die, all karmic seeds vanish on their own without a remedy being applied, although the latencies of afflictions still remain on their mindstreams. Leaving the five polluted aggregates and taking mental bodies (T. *yid lus*) that are not made of atoms, arhats now have a nirvāṇa without remainder. They remain meditating in peaceful nirvāṇa for eons, until the Buddha wakes them and encourages them to become fully awakened buddhas. They then generate bodhicitta, take birth by the power of prayers and aspirations, and enter the bodhisattva path.

Bodhisattvas on the paths of accumulation and preparation are born in saṃsāra owing to ignorance. From the path of seeing onward they are āryas and take birth according to their compassionate wishes and intentions and no longer experience birth, aging, sickness, or death under the power of afflictions and karma. By the force of their fervent compassionate intentions and stainless altruistic prayers, they may choose to take birth in a particular family or country to benefit the beings there. When doing so, they appear to experience everything ordinary beings do, yet their experience is very different from ours because of

the intensity of their realization of emptiness supported by bodhicitta. Because they have not yet eradicated all afflictive obscurations, these ārya bodhisattvas are said to be *in saṃsāra*, but not *of saṃsāra*.

When sharp faculty bodhisattvas attain the path of seeing, due to the force of their great resolve and bodhicitta, their bodhicitta transforms into the bodhicitta that is the purity of the extraordinary great resolve. From the path of seeing onward, bodhisattvas also gain a mental body that arises from unpolluted karma — the intention to assume such a body — and the subtle latencies of ignorance. This body is not one entity with the mind, but it is said to be in the nature of mind, because like the mind, it is not made of atoms and lacks physical impediment. It is unpolluted and free of physical pain, although until bodhisattvas attain the eighth ground it is not free from the pervasive duḥkha of conditioning.

To benefit us ordinary beings, these ārya bodhisattvas take or emanate a form similar to ours and show the aspect of sickness, aging, death, and so forth. These bodies are not true duḥkha.

If they manifest in the animal, hungry ghost, or hell realms to benefit sentient beings there, they are not beings of that realm; they are merely assuming that appearance. Bodhisattvas who practice Tantra actualize an impure illusory body and then a pure illusory body, even when they still have a polluted human body. The actual or ultimate unpolluted body is attained at buddhahood.

Ārya bodhisattvas progress through the ten bodhisattva grounds that occur on the paths of seeing and meditation. Until they reach the eighth ground, afflictions may still manifest in their minds, but they don't remain long and do not function as afflictions usually do in that they do not disturb the mind. Ārya bodhisattvas create only unpolluted karma.

Unless they had previously become śrāvaka arhats, ārya bodhisattvas are not liberated from saṃsāra until the beginning of the eighth bodhisattva ground. At this time, they have purified all afflictive obscurations and become pure ground bodhisattvas. Since cognitive obscurations still remain on their mindstreams, they must exert subtle effort to motivate their physical and verbal actions done to benefit of others. During the three pure grounds, they gradually abandon cognitive obscurations, and at the Mahāyāna path of no more learning when the cognitive obscurations have been fully pacified, they become buddhas who spontaneously and effortlessly act for others' welfare until saṃsāra ends.

Some ordinary beings are born in pure lands such as Sukhāvātī, Amitābha Buddha's pure land, as a result of special virtuous karma and sincere virtuous

aspirations and prayers to take rebirth there. Birth in Amitābha's and Akṣobhya's pure lands is not taken under the power of afflictions and karma and is not in the twelve links. The bodies of ordinary beings born there are not true duḥkha. Although many beings born in those pure lands still have self-grasping and other afflictions, these do not arise in manifest form, so they do not create karma for rebirth in unfortunate realms. Because they practice the path diligently, they no longer create karma for rebirth in saṃsāra and attain full awakening in the pure land.

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## REFLECTION

1. Review the stages of the path to liberation for those following the Śrāvaka Vehicle.
  2. Review the stages of the path to full awakening followed by those in the Bodhisattva Vehicle.
  3. Get a sense of your potential. Realize that you can progress through these paths and stages and attain the peaceful results.
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## *The Two Obscurations*

The minds of ordinary sentient beings are veiled by two types of obscurations: afflictive obscurations and cognitive obscurations. The former principally prevent liberation from saṃsāra; the latter are mainly obstacles to full awakening. The state of having eliminated afflictive obscurations is nirvāṇa, or liberation. The state of having additionally removed cognitive obscurations is full awakening, nonabiding nirvāṇa, and buddhahood.

*Afflictive obscurations (kleśāvaraṇa)* are coarse and subtle self-grasping ignorance and its seeds and the three poisons of confusion, attachment, and animosity and their seeds. In short, afflictions and their seeds constitute afflictive obscurations.

*Cognitive obscurations (jñeyāvaraṇa)* are more subtle and difficult to

remove from the mindstream. Compared with afflictive obscurations, which are like onions in a pot, cognitive obscurations are like the smell that remains after the onions have been removed. Cognitive obscurations are the latencies of self-grasping ignorance, the latencies of the three poisons, the mistaken dualistic appearances that arise from them, and the defilement (*āvaraṇa*) of apprehending the two truths as different entities. All of these are abstract composites, not consciousnesses (although some contest this point).

The word *appearance* does not adequately indicate the meaning of the Tibetan word *snang ba*, which can refer to either appearance or perception. By saying “appearance of inherent existence,” we may mistakenly think that the obscuration is external to our minds — that phenomena from their side appear inherently existent — whereas the obscuration is associated with our minds — we “perceive” inherent existence, which does not exist at all. Please keep this in mind when we talk about the appearance of inherent existence.

The aspect of the mind that continues to have the mistaken appearance of inherent existence is called “manifest cognitive obscuration,” while the latencies left from the afflictions that cause these appearances are called “factors of a seed.” The latencies are subtle tendencies (T. *bag la nyal*). By their power, the mind continues to have the appearance of inherent existence.

*Mistaken dualistic appearances* are the aspect of the mind that continues to have the mistaken appearances of all internal and external phenomena as existing inherently. This aspect of the mind obscures all six consciousnesses — the five sense consciousnesses and the mental consciousness. Both ordinary beings and āryas who are not in meditative equipoise on emptiness have these mistaken dualistic appearances. The only consciousness in sentient beings’ continuums that lacks them is āryas’ exalted wisdom in meditative equipoise on emptiness.

Within the appearance/perception of inherently existent objects, one part exists and one part does not. A flower exists, but its being inherently existent does not. The flower is not a cognitive obscuration, but its appearing to be inherently existent is. When the mind is freed from this mistaken appearance, conventionally existent things do not cease to exist; rather, they no longer appear inherently existent.

The *defilement of apprehending the two truths as different entities* prevents seeing all phenomena — veiled truths and their emptiness — simultaneously. Since arhats and pure ground bodhisattvas have this defilement, they cannot simultaneously cognize the two truths. They must alternate consciousnesses:



their meditative equipoise on emptiness sees only emptiness; veiled truths, which are the substrata — that is, they are the objects that are empty — do not appear to that mind focused on emptiness. When they arise from their meditative equipoise on emptiness in the time of subsequent attainment, they know conventionalities but cannot perceive their emptiness directly. Because this defilement has been eradicated in buddhahood, buddhas can directly and simultaneously know the two truths.

Latencies of attachment and other afflictions also cause arhats to have dysfunctional behaviors of body and speech (*dauṣṭhulya*) that are breaches of discipline. Arhats may inadvertently jump around owing to the latency of attachment. They may spontaneously call someone a name owing to the latency of anger. Their clairvoyance may be unclear owing to the latency of ignorance. These infrequent occurrences are not due to any negative intention or ignorance on arhats' part, for they have eliminated all afflictions. Candrakīrti's *Autocommentary to the "Supplement"* says:

Although arhats have abandoned afflictions, they have the latencies, due to which they will jump as they did when formerly they were monkeys . . . Those latencies are overcome only in omniscience and buddhahood, not in others.<sup>69</sup>

The same idea is also found in later Pāli commentaries. They explain that although arhats have eliminated all obscurations due to afflictions, they still have latencies of afflictions, which can induce conduct that is a breach of decorum. This is because unlike the Buddha, arhats have not eliminated the obstruction to all-knowing and thus do not know all existents. The commentary to the *Udāna* says:

A *vāsanā* [latency] is a mere capacity to behave in certain ways similar to the behavior of those who still have defilements; it is engendered by the defilements that have been harbored in the mind from beginningless time, and remain in the mental continuum of the arhat even after the defilements have been abandoned, as a mere habitual tendency. The *vāsanās* are not found in the mental continuum of a buddha, who removes the defilements by abandoning the obstruction to all-knowing, but they are found in the minds of hearers and solitary realizers.<sup>70</sup>

An example is the bhikkhu Pilindavaccha. Although he was an arhat and had eradicated conceit and contempt, he continued to address fellow bhikṣus as outcastes. This occurred owing to the force of predispositions (latencies) established by his habitual behavior as a brahmin during five hundred previous lives.

Some schools speak of non-afflictive ignorance. To Vaibhāṣikas, this mainly impedes attaining all-knowing and consists of the four causes of non-knowingness: (1) non-afflictive ignorance of the profound and subtle qualities of a buddha, (2–3) ignorance due to the distant place or time of the object, and (4) ignorance of the nature of the object, such as the subtle details of karma and its effects. According to Prāsaṅgikas, non-afflictive ignorance refers to the latencies of ignorance and is not a consciousness.

## *Nirvāṇa*

All Buddhists seek nirvāṇa, but what is it? In general, nirvāṇa is a state or quality of mind. It is not an external place, nor is it something reserved for a select few. Nirvāṇa is attainable by each and every sentient being.

Nirvāṇa is the ultimate nature of our minds — the emptiness of the mind that has been totally cleansed of obscurations. Wisdom directly realizes the emptiness of all phenomena, including the emptiness of the mind itself. This wisdom gradually purifies the mind of defilements. As it does so, the emptiness of that mind, which is one nature with that mind, is also purified. The purified state of the emptiness of the mind that is free from afflictive obscurations is an arhat's nirvāṇa; the purified state of the emptiness of the mind that is free from both afflictive and cognitive obscurations is the nonabiding nirvāṇa of a buddha.

All produced things naturally cease because momentary disintegration is part of their nature; their cessation doesn't depend on some other cause or condition that is a counterforce. However, the true cessation that is the severance of afflictions does not occur in that way; it is not the natural disintegration of a thing when its causal energy ceases. True cessations come into existence due to wisdom, a counterforce that has been deliberately cultivated. Wisdom destroys ignorance such that it can never arise again; it severs the continuity of ignorance completely. By meditating on the reasonings that refute inherent existence and establish the lack of inherent existence, we generate the ārya path, the wisdom

that directly realizes emptiness. This wisdom apprehends the opposite of ignorance. Whereas ignorance apprehends phenomena as inherently existent, wisdom apprehends them as empty of inherent existence. In this way, wisdom uproots ignorance and its seeds. By the cessation and nonarising of ignorance, all other afflictions cease as well. Formative actions also cease, as do the remaining links.

There is debate whether nirvāṇa is a nonaffirming negative — a simple negation that doesn't imply anything — or an affirming negative — a statement that negates one thing while implying a positive phenomenon. An example of the former is “The I is empty,” where nothing positive is implied. An example of the latter is “The I that is empty,” which asserts a positive phenomenon — the I — while negating it being inherently existent.

Some people say nirvāṇa is an emptiness, the lack of inherent existence that never existed. This is a nonaffirming negative, a permanent phenomenon, and an ultimate truth. Others say nirvāṇa is the extinguishment of the afflictions, which did exist. It is an ultimate truth but not an emptiness. Here is how I see it. Nāgārjuna said (RA 42cd):

Nirvāṇa is said to be the cessation of the notions of things and non-things.

*Nirvāṇa is the extinction of afflictions* means not only that afflictions (things) have been extinguished but also that there are no inherently existent afflictions (non-things) in nirvāṇa. This beginningless absence of inherently existent afflictions is emptiness, an ultimate truth.

The absence of afflictions that is nirvāṇa, a true cessation, is a non-affirming negative. The afflictions can never again arise because their causes have been completely eradicated. If nirvāṇa were an affirming negative, a having-ceased of the afflictions rather than their total extinguishment, then the afflictions could arise once again. This is because the having-ceased of impermanent phenomena such as the afflictions can produce a result. However, in nirvāṇa, the afflictions and their causes can never again reappear. Nirvāṇa is the emptiness of the mind that is totally purified of afflictions. Nothing else is being affirmed.

Nirvāṇa is the state beyond sorrow, *sorrow* referring to saṃsāra, its duḥkha, and origins. Alternatively, *sorrow* alludes to inherent existence, and nirvāṇa being beyond sorrow indicates that it is the emptiness of inherent existence.

Four types of nirvāṇa are spoken of: natural nirvāṇa (*prakṛti-nirvṛta*),

nirvāṇa with remainder (*sopadhiśeṣanirvāṇa*), nirvāṇa without remainder (*nirupadhiśeṣanirvāṇa*), and nonabiding nirvāṇa (*apratiṣṭha-nirvāṇa*).

### *Natural Nirvāṇa*

Natural nirvāṇa is the ultimate nature of a mind that is primordially pure and devoid of inherent existence; it is the mind's emptiness of inherent existence. Candrakīrti says in *Clear Words*:

Since only emptiness has the character of stopping all elaborations,  
it is called *nirvāṇa*.

Emptiness itself is free from the elaborations of inherent existence. It appears in the way it exists to the main consciousness perceiving it; that is, to the wisdom directly realizing emptiness, emptiness appears without any elaboration of inherent existence at all. The mind has always been empty of inherent existence; this emptiness is called *natural nirvāṇa*, and by repeatedly realizing it we can attain the nirvāṇa that is the cessation of all duḥkha and its origins.

Natural nirvāṇa is not actual nirvāṇa — nirvāṇa that is the passing beyond the sorrow of saṃsāra. However, as emptiness, natural nirvāṇa acts as the basis that allows for the attainment of actual nirvāṇa. As the primordial nature of the mind, it is a quality of the mind, so attaining nirvāṇa does not entail procuring an external quality. Rather it involves recognizing a quality of the mind that is already present. When the mind is polluted, it is unawakened, and when it is purified it is awakened. Its empty nature is present in both instances. Because the mind lacks inherent existence, it can be freed from all pollutants that are based on grasping inherent existence.

In a more general way, natural nirvāṇa refers to emptiness. Everything around us — as well as the four truths and the basis, path, and result — are empty of inherent existence. In this way, all phenomena can be said to possess natural nirvāṇa or emptiness. However, only sentient beings can attain the nirvāṇa that is free from obscurations, because that nirvāṇa is the emptiness of the purified mind.

### *Nirvāṇa with and without Remainder*

According to the Svātantrikas and below, *remainder* in the terms *nirvāṇa with*

and *without remainder* refers to the ordinary aggregates, which are true duḥkha because they arise under the control of ignorance and polluted karma. Śrāvaka arhats first attain nirvāṇa with remainder, because at the time they eliminate all afflictive obscurations and attain liberation, they still have their ordinary bodies.<sup>71</sup> When they die and shed those bodies, there is nirvāṇa without remainder because the continuity of the polluted aggregates has ceased.

Vaibhāṣikas and Sautrāntikas, who do not accept one final vehicle — that is, they do not believe that all sentient beings can attain buddhahood — assert that at the time of nirvāṇa without remainder, when an arhat passes away, his or her continuum of consciousness ceases although the nirvāṇa without remainder exists.<sup>72</sup> Prāsaṅgikas, Svātantrikas, and Cittamātra Reasoning Proponents who assert one final vehicle — that all sentient beings will eventually attain buddhahood — say that the continuum of consciousness exists even after arhats leave their polluted bodies. At this time they are born in the Sukhāvātī pure land; there they have nirvāṇa without remainder because no suffering aggregates remain and they instead have a mental body. While these arhats still have the five aggregates, they are not polluted aggregates because they were not taken under the control of afflictions and polluted karma.

In Sukhāvātī, these arhats stay in meditative equipoise on emptiness for eons. In time, the buddhas will wake them from their meditative equipoise, teach them the Mahāyāna doctrine, and cause them to follow the bodhisattva path to full awakening. These arhats then generate bodhicitta and enter the bodhisattva path of accumulation. Unlike bodhisattvas who initially enter the bodhisattva path of accumulation and practice for three countless great eons to attain awakening, these arhats who later become bodhisattvas require a much longer time to attain awakening because the habituation of seeking only their own liberation is very strong. In the process of practicing the bodhisattva path, they often spend long periods of time in meditative equipoise on emptiness because they are captivated by the bliss of personal peace. It is difficult for them to generate great compassion and the great resolve that takes the responsibility for the welfare of all sentient beings.

Prāsaṅgikas have a unique meaning for nirvāṇa with and without remainder. *Remainder* refers to the appearance of inherent existence and the dualistic appearance of subject and object. Nirvāṇa without remainder is the final true cessation when arhats have completely overcome the afflictive obscurations and attain nirvāṇa, the passing beyond sorrow, where sorrow indicates the afflictive obscurations. This occurs during meditative equipoise on emptiness. This

nirvāṇa is free from the remainder of dualistic appearance and the appearance of inherent existence. Later, upon arising from meditative equipoise on emptiness, arhats again experience the false appearance of inherent existence due to cognitive obscurations. This is nirvāṇa with remainder of the appearances of inherent existence and of subject-object duality.

### *Nonabiding Nirvāṇa*

Nonabiding nirvāṇa is the purified aspect of the ultimate nature of a mind that is forever free of both afflictive and cognitive obscurations. It is called *nonabiding* because a buddha does not abide in either saṃsāra or in the personal nirvāṇa of a śrāvaka arhat. All Buddhist practitioners agree that saṃsāra is clearly undesirable and want to be free from it. For bodhisattvas, who wish to attain full awakening to best work for the welfare of sentient beings, the personal nirvāṇa of an arhat is limited because arhats spend eons in blissful meditative equipoise on emptiness while sentient beings continue to suffer in saṃsāra. Bodhisattvas seek the nirvāṇa of a buddha, a nirvāṇa that lacks the impediments of both saṃsāra and personal nirvāṇa. Nonabiding nirvāṇa, possessed only by buddhas, is free from the two extremes of saṃsāra and personal nirvāṇa.

Nonabiding nirvāṇa is also the nature dharmakāya of a buddha. It is the emptiness of a buddha's mind, the purified state of the natural buddha nature. Nonabiding nirvāṇa possesses two purities: natural purity and purity from adventitious defilements. Its natural purity is its primordial emptiness of inherent existence; its purity from adventitious defilements is the aspect of true cessation.

### *Pāli Tradition: Nirvāṇa*

In the Nālandā tradition, there is debate whether nirvāṇa is the cessation of something that once existed (the afflictions) or a state in which nothing existent was removed — an emptiness that is naturally free from inherent existence — and we now realize that emptiness. Most sages agree it is the latter. Pāli sūtras and commentators also speak of nirvāṇa in a variety of ways. In some cases, nirvāṇa refers to the elimination of the five aggregates subject to clinging; nirvāṇa is the state of cessation in which true duḥkha and the true origin of duḥkha have been eradicated. In other situations, nirvāṇa is spoken of as reality, the object of meditation of āryas' meditative equipoise.

## *Nirvāṇa as the Cessation of Duḥkha and Its Origin*

In the Buddha's description of his own awakening, he says (MN 26.18–19):

Then, monastics, being myself subject to birth, having understood the danger in what is subject to birth, seeking the unborn supreme security from bondage, nibbāna, I attained the unborn supreme security from bondage, nibbāna; being myself subject to aging, having understood the danger in what is subject to aging, seeking the unaging supreme security from bondage, nibbāna, I attained the unaging supreme security from bondage . . . [the passage continues with sickness, death, sorrow, defilement, in place of birth] . . . the knowledge and vision arose in me: “My deliverance is unshakeable; this is my last birth; now there is no renewal of being.”

I considered: “This Dhamma that I have attained is profound, hard to see and hard to understand, peaceful and sublime, unattainable by mere reasoning, subtle, to be experienced by the wise.” But this generation delights in worldliness, takes delight in worldliness, rejoices in worldliness. It is hard for such a generation to see this truth, namely, specific conditionality, dependent arising. And it is hard to see this truth, namely, the stilling of all formations [aggregates], the relinquishing of all attachments, the destruction of craving, dispassion, cessation, nibbāna . . .”

“This Dhamma” refers to the four truths. “Specific conditionality, dependent arising” refers to the true origins of duḥkha, and “the stilling of all formations, the relinquishing of all attachments, the destruction of craving, dispassion, cessation, nibbāna” is the standard expression of nirvāṇa in the sūtras. It is the extinguishment of the aggregates (formations), which are true duḥkha, and of all attachment and craving, which are true origins of duḥkha. The reference to true origins implies the truth of duḥkha and the reference to true cessation implies the true path. In nirvāṇa all four truths have been realized.

In some sūtras, nirvāṇa is said to be the eradication of attachment, anger, and ignorance (SN 38:1):

Friend Sāriputta, it is said, “Nibbāna, nibbāna.” What now is nibbāna?”

[Sāriputta]: “The destruction of sensual desire, the destruction of

animosity, the destruction of confusion: this, friend, is called nibbāna.”

This meaning fits in well with the etymological explanation of nirvāṇa. Literally, *nibbāna* indicates extinguishment. In Pāli, the word is formed from the negative particle *ni* and *vana*, which refers to craving. Thus nibbāna is the destruction or absence of the craving that propels repeated rebirths in cyclic existence. In Sanskrit, *nir* means “out” and *va* means “to blow.” Here *nirvāṇa* indicates that ignorance, the root of cyclic existence, and craving, the affliction that links one life to the next, have been blown out and extinguished. In this sense, nirvāṇa is the absence of something that once existed.

### *Nirvāṇa as the Object of Meditation*

Some sūtras in the Pāli tradition present nirvāṇa as the object of meditation of a supramundane path, where it refers more to a negation or lack of something that never existed. The Buddha says (AN 3.47):

There are, O monastics, these three characteristics that define the unconditioned [nibbāna]. What three? No arising is seen, no vanishing is seen, no changing while it persists is seen.

Unlike conditioned phenomena that arise and pass away, nirvāṇa — the unconditioned — is free from such fluctuation. Having no arising, nirvāṇa is not produced from causes and conditions. It never vanishes or ceases because of causes and conditions, and while it exists, it does not change or transform into something else. Here nirvāṇa is presented as a simple negation of attributes that never existed in it. The Buddha describes nirvāṇa (Udāna 8.4):<sup>73</sup>

One that is dependent [on craving and views] has wavering. One that is not dependent has no wavering. There being no wavering, there is calm. There being calm, there is no yearning. There being no yearning, there is no coming or going [birth and death]. There being no coming or going, there is no passing away or arising [succession of deaths and rebirths]. There being no passing away or arising, there is neither a here nor a there [this world or another world] nor an in-between-the-two. This, just this, is the end of duḥkha.



In another sūtra, the Buddha says (Ud 8.1):

There is, monastics, that base where there is neither earth, nor water, nor heat, nor air; neither the base of the infinity of space, nor the base of the infinity of consciousness, nor the base of nothingness, nor the base of neither-discrimination-nor-nondiscrimination; neither this world nor another world, neither sun nor moon. Here, monastics, I say there is no coming, no going, no standing still, no passing away, and no being reborn. It is not established, not moving, without support. Just this is the end of duḥkha.

And in another sūtra from the Udāna, he says (Ud 8.3):

There is, monastics, an unborn, unbecome, unmade, unfabricated. If, monastics, there were no unborn, unbecome, unmade, unconditioned, no escape would be discerned from what is born, become, made, fabricated. But because there is an unborn, unbecome, unmade, unfabricated, therefore an escape is discerned from what is born, become, made, fabricated.

Here nirvāṇa is a distinct phenomenon that has nothing to do with matter or with even the deepest samādhis in saṃsāra. Nirvāṇa is a negation — no coming, no going, not made, and so forth — without anything being posited in their stead. Because nirvāṇa exists, saṃsāra can be overcome; nirvāṇa is not total nonexistence. The language the Buddha uses in the above two passages reminds us of Nāgārjuna's homage in his *Treatise on the Middle Way*:

I prostrate to the perfect Buddha,  
the best of all teachers, who taught that  
that which is dependent arising is  
without cessation, without arising,  
without annihilation, without absolutism,  
without coming, without going,  
without distinction, without identity,  
and peaceful — free from fabrication.

The *Abhidhammattha Saṅgaha* explains nirvāṇa (CMA 258):

Nibbāna is termed supramundane and is to be realized by the knowledge of the four paths. It becomes an object of the paths and fruits, and is called nibbāna because it is a departure from craving, which is an entanglement.

Nirvāṇa is the object of only a supramundane path — the supreme, ultimate mind cognizing the supreme, ultimate object. Nirvāṇa is spoken of as having three aspects (CMA 260): (1) Because nirvāṇa is empty of ignorance, animosity, and attachment and because it is empty of the conditioned, it is *emptiness* (P. *suññata*). (2) Because it is free from the signs of ignorance, animosity, and attachment and is free from the signs of conditioned things, it is signless (P. *animitta*). (3) Because nirvāṇa is free from the hankering of ignorance, anger, and attachment and because it is not wished for by craving, it is wishless (P. *appaṇihita*).

Ānanda once asked Śāriputra if a monk could attain a samādhi in which he does not perceive any mundane phenomenon such as the four elements, the formless absorptions, this world and the world beyond, yet still be percipient. Śāriputra points to his experience of a state of samādhi in which this occurs (AN 10.7):

“Nibbāna is cessation of becoming, nibbāna is cessation of becoming” — one such perception arose in me and another such perception ceased. Just as when a fire of twigs is burning, one flame arises and another flame ceases, even so, “Nibbāna is cessation of becoming, nibbāna is cessation of becoming” — one such perception arose in me and another such perception ceased. On that occasion, friend, I perceived that nibbāna is the cessation of becoming.

Śāriputra indicates that nirvāṇa is the object of his perception. The commentary explains that he entered a samādhi of the fruition attainment of an arhat, which is an attainment in which the mind of the arhat is absorbed on nirvāṇa as an object. It is not cessation of discrimination and feeling or the attainment of cessation in which there is no discrimination or feeling, because Śāriputra is conscious. In this samādhi an arhat may focus on one aspect of nirvāṇa — for example, peaceful. It seems that Śāriputra is focusing on nirvāṇa and the cessation of becoming — that is, the absence of any active karma that

could bring rebirth.

Buddhaghosa refutes a number of misconceptions about nirvāṇa (Vism 16:67–74). The first is that nirvāṇa is nonexistent. Nirvāṇa exists because it is apprehended by the supramundane path. The fact that the limited minds of ordinary beings cannot perceive it does not render it nonexistent. If nirvāṇa were nonexistent, practicing the path would be futile and attempting to realize nirvāṇa would be useless.

Buddhaghosa also refutes the assertion that nirvāṇa is simply the disintegration of defilements and the ceasing of existence. If nirvāṇa were the destruction of craving, it would not be the unconditioned, because the destruction of craving is a conditioned event. Nirvāṇa is called the destruction of craving because realizing it brings the destruction of craving. However, it is not the destruction of craving because the destruction of craving is produced by causes; it has a beginning and an end, whereas nirvāṇa has no beginning or end and is definitely unconditioned. “It is uncreated because it has no first beginning,” Buddhaghosa says. There is no cause that brings about its arising; it is not made of matter.

The commentaries engage in many debates such as these, so there must have been a variety of viewpoints and a lot of discussion in India and Sri Lanka about what characterized nirvāṇa. We see the sūtras give two senses of nirvāṇa: It is the *goal* — a blissful state free from duḥkha and its origins — that can be experienced in this life. It is also the *object to be meditated on* — the unconditioned, the unborn, the unmoving that transcends all conditioned things.

Pāli commentators propose several ways to bring these two together and show that they are compatible. One is that nirvāṇa is metaphorically said to be the destruction of attachment, animosity, and confusion, but in actuality it is the unconditioned element that is seen by the attainment of the supramundane path and fruit. The realization of this unconditioned element has the effect of cutting away and finally eliminating attachment, animosity, and confusion. Because those defilements are destroyed in dependence upon seeing nirvāṇa, nirvāṇa is called the destruction of attachment, animosity, and confusion, although it is not the destruction of those three poisons.

While nirvāṇa is realized in time by a person, it does not come into existence through the act of being realized. As the unconditioned element, nirvāṇa always exists; it is the unborn, unoriginated, unchanging, deathless. Because nirvāṇa exists, the eradication of defilements is possible. The cultivation of the ārya path brings realization of the unconditioned, and this realization cuts off the

defilements. The meditator who has reached the extinction of defilements gains access to a special meditative attainment in which he or she can abide directly experiencing the bliss of nirvāṇa in this very life.<sup>74</sup> The object that is seen by that meditative attainment is the unborn, unceasing, unconditioned.

The experience of nirvāṇa is beyond our ordinary cognitive processes. To give us a rough idea of nirvāṇa, the Buddha sometimes presents analogies and synonyms. For example, the Buddha referred to nirvāṇa as the truth, the far shore, the subtle, the very difficult to see, the unaging, the stable, the undisintegrating, the unmanifest, the unproliferated, the peaceful, the deathless, the sublime, the auspicious, the secure, the destruction of craving, the wonderful, the amazing, the unailing, the unailing state, the unafflicted, dispassion, purity, freedom, nonattachment, the island, the shelter, the asylum, the refuge, the destination, and the path leading to the destination (SN 43:13–44).

The consciousness of an arhat realizing nirvāṇa is described (DN 11.85):

Where consciousness is signless, boundless, all-luminous,  
that's where earth, water, fire, and air find no footing.

There both long and short, small and great, fair and foul —  
there name and form are wholly destroyed.

With the cessation of consciousness this is all destroyed.

This consciousness is one where worldly phenomena such as the four elements and concepts such as “long” and “short” find no footing: they do not become totally nonexistent, but they do not appear to this mind of meditative equipoise focused on nirvāṇa. The ordinary mind of name and form that perceives sense phenomena is cut off.

Some people understand the last line to indicate that at arhatship, consciousness is totally ceased. However, it can also mean that with the temporary cessation of this dualistic mind, all appearances of veiled phenomena cease in the face of (in the experience of) profound meditative equipoise.

There are similarities as well as differences in the description of nirvāṇa in the Pāli and Sanskrit traditions. In the Pāli tradition, nirvāṇa is the unconditioned, in contrast to saṃsāra, which is conditioned. Nirvāṇa is completely separate and doesn't have anything to do with the saṃsāric world governed by dependent arising. Nirvāṇa, which is reality, is also distinct from selflessness, which is a characteristic of saṃsāric phenomena.

In the Sanskrit tradition, nirvāṇa is an emptiness, and emptiness is equivalent

to selflessness and ultimate reality. Emptiness is also compatible with dependent arising, which includes dependent designation. Being empty and existing by mere designation are characteristics of both saṃsāra and nirvāṇa. In addition, because phenomena arise dependently, they are empty of inherent existence.

### *Nirvāṇa and Liberation*

Although liberation and an arhat's nirvāṇa often seem to be the same, in some contexts they may be somewhat different. In the Sanskrit tradition, *liberation* (*vimukti*, T. *rnam par grol ba*) may refer to liberation itself or to the path leading to liberation. Liberation itself is true cessation — nirvāṇa — and is unconditioned. The path to liberation is a conditioned phenomenon. It is spoken of in the context of five heaps — ethical conduct, concentration, wisdom, liberation, and liberating wisdom. Here liberation is in the nature of the aspiration for liberation, and liberating wisdom is in the nature of the wisdom that liberates. Both are elements of the liberating path that leads to cessation. *Mokṣa* (T. *thar pa*) is a true cessation that is the abandonment of afflictive obscurations. It is also translated as “liberation” and refers to nirvāṇa.

In the Pāli tradition, liberation (P. *vimutti*) and nirvāṇa differ in that nirvāṇa is what is realized in the experience of liberation. Nirvāṇa is unconditioned, whereas liberation is a conditioned event. In transcendental dependent origination, liberation has the proximate cause of dispassion and is the proximate cause of knowledge of the destruction of all pollutants. In contrast, nirvāṇa is “unborn, unconstructed, unmade, unconditioned.” It is ever-existent and does not arise through causes and conditions. Liberation is the release of the mind from the defilements, especially the three pollutants. To give an analogy: nirvāṇa is like a building and liberation is the act of entering it; or nirvāṇa is like the area beyond the finish line and liberation is the act of crossing that line.<sup>75</sup>

### *Bodhi*

*Bodhi* is generally translated as “awakening” or “enlightenment,” the final goal of our spiritual practice. A buddha's awakening is a state in which all defilements of the mind have been abandoned and all excellent qualities and realizations have been completed. The basis for attaining awakening is the essentially pure nature of mind — the natural purity of the mind — which is

present in all of us. When the pure nature of the mind is obscured by afflictions, we are not awakened; when afflictions, their seeds, and their latencies have been completely purified, we are awakened. Thus awakening has to do with the nature of our minds.

In the Perfection of Wisdom sūtras, the essential pure nature of the mind is called *natural nirvāṇa*. These sūtras also say, “The mind is devoid of mind because the nature of the mind is clear light.” Both of these passages indicate that the nature of the mind does not exist inherently. The emptiness of ordinary beings’ minds has not been cleansed of obscurations; āryas have attained a certain degree of purity; the nature of buddhas’ minds is completely pure. In *Praise to the Sphere of Reality (Dharmadhātu-stava)*, Nāgārjuna says (DS 2):

When that which forms the cause for all saṃsāra  
is purified along the stages of the path,  
this purity itself is nirvāṇa;  
precisely this, the dharmakāya, too.

Here *the cause for all saṃsāra* could be understood as the unpurified aspect of the emptiness of inherent existence of the mind, according to Sūtrayāna, or as the unpurified subtlest clear light mind, according to Tantrayāna. Through cleansing that “cause,” nirvāṇa is attained. That nirvāṇa can be characterized as the truth body, specifically the nature truth body of a buddha, which is the final true cessation and the emptiness of the perfectly purified mind. The nature truth body is one nature with the wisdom truth body, the omniscient mind of a buddha. Here, the nature truth body is the meaning of *bodhi*.



## 12 | The Mind and Its Potential

ONCE WE HAVE recognized the unsatisfactory nature of saṃsāra and identified its causes, the questions arise: Is liberation possible? If so, how do we attain it? To answer these, we must understand our mind, which is the basis for saṃsāra and nirvāṇa.

### *The Mind's Potential*

As sentient beings — beings with minds that are still obscured — we have great potential, our greatest potential being to become fully awakened buddhas, omniscient beings who have the wisdom, compassion, power, and skillful means to be of the greatest benefit to all.

A natural quality of mind is its ability to cognize objects. This capacity to be aware of and to know objects is already present; it does not have to be newly cultivated. Nevertheless, various obstructions can inhibit the mind from cognizing objects. When these are eliminated, the mind will have no difficulty knowing all phenomena.

One type of obstruction is physical matter; a wall obstructs us from seeing what is beyond it. When the wall is removed, our visual consciousness can see what is there. A second obstruction is distance and size: the object is too far away or too small for our cognitive faculties to come in contact with it. To some extent telescopes and microscopes have helped alleviate this difficulty. In these cases, we can know the object not because the mind has become clearer and better able to apprehend the object but because the object is brought within the range of our operable cognitive faculties.

A third difficulty concerns the cognitive faculties that are the bases of consciousness. The visual consciousness is able to perceive only visible forms, not sounds or other sense phenomena, because it is dependent on the eye faculty. If a healthy eye faculty is absent, the visual consciousness cannot perceive visible forms.



The type of brain a being has also influences what that being can perceive. A mental faculty dependent on an animal brain and one dependent on a human brain have different ranges of objects they can know. Due to the complexity of the brains of these two beings, the mental faculties and consciousnesses depending on them differ in what they can perceive and understand.

Furthermore, a mind proliferating with wrong views and overwhelmed with disturbing emotions is too distracted and preoccupied to turn its attention to other objects. The range of what such afflictive mental states can know becomes very limited. A calm mind can be more astute.

A further difficulty in knowing objects is that some objects are so subtle, profound, or vast that the ordinary mind is unable to cognize them. To know these objects, single-pointed concentration and/or wisdom that is freed from wrong conceptions is needed.

Another type of obstruction is subtle defilements on the mind that produce false appearances. These prevent us from attaining buddhahood, the state of omniscient mind. When these subtle defilements are removed, the mind will naturally perceive all phenomena. The main obstructions to omniscience are the latencies of afflictions, the subtle appearance of inherent existence that they produce, and the defilement preventing seeing the two truths simultaneously. After the wisdom realizing ultimate reality eliminates the afflictive obscurations, it must cleanse the cognitive obscurations from the mind. When every last defilement is removed, the mind is totally purified and its excellent qualities are fully developed. This is the state of buddhahood in which the capabilities of the mind have no limits. The effectiveness of a buddha's activities depend not on the abilities of that buddha but on the receptivity of sentient beings.

*Bhagawan*, or “endowed victor,” is one epithet of the Buddha. The Buddha is endowed with all excellent qualities and is victorious in overcoming the four *māras* — the polluted aggregates, afflictions, death, and distraction to external objects. Since the mind has the natural capacity to be aware and to understand, when all obscurations have been removed, it will be able to directly perceive all phenomena. A buddha's omniscient mind is able to realize simultaneously both veiled and ultimate truths with a single consciousness.

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## REFLECTION

1. Review the various factors that obstruct the mind's knowing phenomena.
  2. Contemplate that all of these can be eliminated.
  3. Rest in the awareness of the potential of your mind to become omniscient.
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## *Is Liberation Possible?*

To review, disturbing emotions and wrong views are called afflictions because when they arise in the mind they afflict us and disturb our mental peace. In addition, they motivate us to do actions that disturb and afflict the peace of others. Fortunately, these afflictions can be removed, enabling us to attain liberation, a true state of peace that does not fluctuate according to external circumstances. Several factors make liberation possible.

(1) *The basic or true nature of the mind is pure.* The basic nature of the mind is clear like water. Dirt in a glass of water isn't the nature of the water and can be removed. No matter how murky the water may be, its essential quality of clarity is never lost. This basic conventional nature (*svabhāva*) of the mind is clear and cognizant. It is the basis upon which awakening can be attained, and as such it is the ultimate source of our confidence that awakening is possible. Inanimate objects such as stones and trees cannot attain awakening because they lack the qualities of clarity and cognizance that only a mind possesses.

(2) *The afflictions are adventitious;* they are not part of the nature of the mind. Dharmakīrti says (PV 2.208ab):

The nature of the mind is clear light;  
the defilements are adventitious.

Afflictions have not penetrated into the basic nature of the mind. The fact that afflictions are not always present in the mind indicates that every instance of the mind's clarity and cognizance is not associated with afflictions. Sometimes our minds are peaceful and calm. Afflictions may arise and after a while pass away. If they were inherently part of the true nature of the mind, they would

always be present and it would be impossible to eliminate them. But this is not the case.

The purest form of mind is the fundamental innate clear light mind. In ordinary beings this subtle clear light mind is neutral; it has never been and can never become nonvirtuous. However, by engaging in special yogic practices, it can be transformed into a virtuous state. From this perspective, too, we see that defilements are not inherent in the nature of the mind.

(3) *It is possible to cultivate powerful antidotes* — realistic and beneficial mental states — that eradicate the afflictions. Saying that defilements are adventitious means that when suitable conditions are present, the defilements can be removed from the basic nature of the mind. It does not mean that at one time afflictions did not exist and later came into existence. Rather, afflictions are beginningless and have continuously obscured our minds until now. They can be ceased completely when the proper antidote is applied. In *Praise to the Sphere of Reality* (DS 20–21), Nāgārjuna compares the mind to asbestos cloth that is filled with dirt. When put into fire, the dirt will burn, but not the cloth. Similarly, the fire of the wisdom realizing emptiness will destroy defilements, but the clear light mind will remain unscathed.

Afflictions are rooted in the ignorance that misapprehends reality. Ignorance grasps phenomena as inherently existent, whereas reasoning proves that in reality phenomena are empty of inherent existence. Since ignorance does not rest on a valid foundation, it can be overcome by the wisdom realizing emptiness. When ignorance is severed from its root, the afflictions that depend on it are also eradicated and can never return. Excellent qualities such as compassion cannot be undermined by wisdom because they rest on a valid foundation. Dharmakīrti affirms (PV1.220–21):

All flaws, being susceptible to decrease and increase, have counterforces (*vipakṣa*); hence due to having inculcated the counterforces through habituating oneself to them, at some point the pollutants should be eliminated.

The nature of the mind is such that it is free of pollutants and by nature it [a mind that has realized emptiness] has a real [undistorted] object. As such, it cannot be counteracted by what is opposite to it because, even if one were to attempt to do so, the mind is naturally inclined toward its nature.

## REFLECTION

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1. Reflect that the basic or true nature of the mind is pure and untainted.
  2. Consider that the afflictions that plague your mind and cause so many disturbances in your life are adventitious; they are not embedded in the nature of the mind.
  3. Reflect that it is possible to cultivate powerful antidotes to each and every affliction and obscuration.
  4. Conclude that the possibility to attain liberation exists within you and that, given your precious human life with all conducive factors for practicing the path, you have the ability to attain liberation and full awakening.
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### *Excellent Qualities Can Be Cultivated Limitlessly*

In *Commentary on Reliable Cognition*, Dharmakīrti explains why it is possible to cultivate the mind's excellent qualities limitlessly and to transform our ordinary mind into a buddha's fully awakened mind. Three factors make this possible.

(1) *The clear and cognizant nature of the mind is a stable basis for the cultivation of excellent qualities.* It is firm and continual; there is nothing that can cease it. For example, if we continuously boil water, it will dry up and nothing will remain. There is no basis for limitlessly boiling water. Excellent qualities cannot be cultivated limitlessly on an unstable basis such as the physical body because it falls ill, ages, and eventually dies. However, the clear light mind is a stable and continuous basis for cultivating excellent qualities. The more we train in excellent qualities, the more those qualities will be enhanced limitlessly until they are fully perfected in the state of buddhahood.

(2) *The mind can become habituated to excellent qualities that can be built up cumulatively.* Excellent mental qualities can be built up gradually without

having to begin anew each time we focus on developing them. A high jumper cannot develop his or her ability limitlessly. Each time the bar is raised, he or she must cover the same distance he jumped before, plus some more. The mind's nature is different. The energy from cultivating a quality one day remains, so that if that same quality is cultivated the next day, it builds on what was previously accomplished without having to reestablish it. We do not need to exert the same degree of energy to get to the same level on the second day, and that same effort will serve to increase that excellent quality. Of course this requires consistent training on our part, otherwise our spiritual "muscles" will atrophy. But if we practice regularly, our energy can be directed to enhancing the excellent qualities continuously until the point where they become so familiar that they are natural and spontaneous.

(3) *Excellent qualities can be enhanced, but never diminished, by reasoning and wisdom.* Constructive attitudes and emotions have a valid support in reasoning and wisdom. They can never be harmed by the wisdom realizing reality. Compassion, faith, integrity, generosity, concentration and all other excellent qualities can be cultivated together with wisdom and are enhanced by wisdom. For this reason, too, they can be cultivated limitlessly.

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## REFLECTION

1. Reflect that the clear and cognizant nature of the mind is a stable basis for the cultivation of excellent qualities.
  2. Remember that the mind can become habituated to excellent qualities, which can be built up cumulatively.
  3. Contemplate that excellent qualities can be enhanced, but never diminished, by reasoning and wisdom.
  4. Understanding these points, feel confidence arise in yourself that, with effort and training, your mind can be transformed into the mind of a buddha.
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## *Afflictive Mental States and the Nature of the Mind*

One moment of an affliction such as anger has two facets: the clarity and cognizance of the primary consciousness, and the mental factor of anger that pollutes it. When a mind of anger is manifest, these two cannot be separated. Does that mean that the clear and cognizant nature of the mind is defiled at that time?

According to Sūtrayāna, from the viewpoint that the primary consciousness and the mental factor of anger are concomitant in that single mental event, it is said both are defiled. However, this is not the whole picture, because anger can be extracted. When it is counteracted, the clear and cognizant consciousness remains. This consciousness is not defiled and its continuity can go on to awakening, since clarity and cognizance are also the nature of the awakened mind. The consciousness that is clear and cognizant is said to be pure, while the mental state of anger, which cannot continue on to awakening, is afflictive and adventitious.

Within Tantrayāna, both Dzogchen and the New Translation schools speak of the subtlest mind, which may be called *rigpa* or the primordial clear light mind. In the Dzogchen system, *rigpa* is said to pervade all states of mind, whether they are coarse — such as the consciousnesses manifest during our everyday lives — or subtle — such as the subtlest clear light mind that arises after the coarse consciousnesses have absorbed, for example, while dying or during special tantric meditations. *Rigpa* is undefiled, and because it pervades all mental states, the clear and cognizant aspect of those consciousnesses is undefiled.

Both sentient beings and buddhas possess the primordially pure awareness of *rigpa*, and from that perspective there is no difference between them. However, there is a great difference between having and not having the two obscurations, so sentient beings must still practice the path because defilements do not vanish by themselves.

From the Dzogchen perspective, when an afflictive mental state such as hatred or jealousy is manifest, the *rigpa* or clear light mind that pervades that coarse mind is not defiled. There is still the potential for *rigpa* to shine forth. This is the source of statements in the Dzogchen literature that resemble Nāgārjuna's assertion in *Praise to the Sphere of Reality*: "Within afflictions, wisdom abides." Here "wisdom" refers to the cognitive component of that mind

— its clarity and cognizance — not to actual wisdom. That cognitive component is called wisdom because it is the cause for wisdom to arise in the future.<sup>76</sup> The meaning is that amidst the afflictions, this undefiled, clear, cognitive component, or rigpa, exists.

In the New Translation schools of Tantrayāna, this primordially pure mind is called the clear light mind. Similar to rigpa, it continues from our present unawakened state to full awakening. But unlike rigpa, which is manifest while the coarse consciousnesses are functioning, the innate clear light mind is said to manifest only when the coarse consciousnesses — which include the afflictions — have absorbed at the time of death or due to special tantric meditative practices.

Dzogchen and the New Translation systems agree that when the coarser levels of mind are manifest, the subtlest mind is also present. As long as there is a being, a person, it is present. They differ on the issue of whether it is active or dormant while the coarse minds are functioning. Dzogchen says that rigpa is active and manifest at that time, and the New Translation schools say that the subtlest clear light mind is dormant.<sup>77</sup> Dzogchen teaches a method whereby one can experience rigpa even while the coarse consciousnesses are functioning. The New Translation schools rely on dissolving the coarse consciousnesses and the winds that are their mount by means of special tantric meditation exercises to make manifest the subtlest clear light mind. Both agree on the necessity of accessing this subtlest mind because, when used to realize emptiness, it swiftly eradicates obscurations.

## *The Equality of Saṃsāra and Nirvāṇa*

From the perspective of their ultimate nature, all the afflictive phenomena of saṃsāra and all the purified phenomena of nirvāṇa are equally empty. This is the context of the expressions the “equality of saṃsāra and nirvāṇa,” “unity of saṃsāra and nirvāṇa,” “one taste of all phenomena,” and similar phrases found in sūtras and tantras. Nāgārjuna mentioned this in *Treatise on the Middle Way*, Haribhadra spoke of it in his commentary to *Ornament of Clear Realizations*, and Tsongkhapa explained it in his *Elucidation of the Five Stages of Guhyasamāja*.

From the perspective that the emptiness of the mind is called natural nirvāṇa

and that this emptiness of the mind exists while we are in saṃsāra, it is said that saṃsāra and nirvāṇa are not different. The ultimate nature of saṃsāra and nirvāṇa is the same; it is the “one taste” of emptiness. In this context, it is said that if one realizes the nature of saṃsāra, one actualizes nirvāṇa.

Since saṃsāra and nirvāṇa are different entities conventionally, they may be called “the manifold.” In that their ultimate nature is the same taste — emptiness — it is said that the one taste is manifold and the manifold has one taste. This means that emptiness is the nature of all the manifold phenomena of saṃsāra and nirvāṇa, and all these manifold phenomena have the same ultimate nature, the emptiness of inherent existence. In other words, from the perspective of the substratum — the objects that have this empty nature — phenomena are many and varied. But from the perspective of their final nature, they share the one taste of emptiness.

Understanding that saṃsāra and nirvāṇa are equal in being empty of true existence is important for ordinary unawakened people who grasp both saṃsāra and nirvāṇa as truly existent. When such people view saṃsāra and nirvāṇa, they don't just see them as bad and good on the conventional level but also grasp them as inherently so. Such grasping diminishes our confidence in being able to free ourselves from saṃsāra and actualize nirvāṇa. This is because our minds not only highlight the faults of saṃsāra but also see them as fixed and unchangeable, as if they could never be abandoned. Similarly, we see nirvāṇa as independently good and thus too exalted for us to actualize.

Understanding that saṃsāra and nirvāṇa are of one taste counteracts the grasping that binds us to saṃsāra. Seeing both of them as empty of true existence, we become confident that however many faults saṃsāra has, they can all be eliminated, and that all the excellent qualities of nirvāṇa can be actualized. It is a matter of stopping the causes for saṃsāra and creating the causes to attain nirvāṇa.

Saying “saṃsāra and nirvāṇa are equal” does not mean that being in saṃsāra is the same as being in nirvāṇa or that we need not try to cease saṃsāra and attain nirvāṇa. Conventionally, saṃsāra and nirvāṇa are different; the bases of their emptiness are different. A mind in saṃsāra is one trapped in duḥkha by afflictions and karma; a mind in nirvāṇa is one that has generated the true path and actualized the final true cessation. Although saṃsāra and nirvāṇa are said to be equal from the viewpoint of their ultimate nature, emptiness, on the conventional level each has its own distinctive features. Saṃsāra is to be abandoned and nirvāṇa is to be actualized.



Some people may glibly say, “Saṃsāra and nirvāṇa are the same. Good and bad don’t exist; awakening is beyond such dualistic distinctions,” and on that basis, they ignore ethical conduct. This may sound well and good, but the moment their stomach hurts or they are criticized, these people scream, “This is bad! Stop it!” To avoid such dilemmas, it is important to study and correctly understand the meaning of some of the enticing phrases in the scriptures.

## *Levels of Mind*

Both Sūtrayāna and Tantrayāna speak of different levels of mind. In Sūtrayāna, the principal factor distinguishing various levels of mind is the depth of single-pointed concentration. Beings in the desire realm have coarse states of mind; those in the four form realms and four formless realms have progressively subtler and more refined states of mind corresponding to their progressively deeper states of concentration. The subtlest mind is that of the peak of saṃsāra (neither-discrimination-nor-nondiscrimination). This mind is considered coarse compared with the subtlest mind presented in Tantra.

In highest yoga tantra, the levels of mind are differentiated by the physical condition of the body. When the sense faculties are active, the sense consciousnesses function; they are the coarsest level of mind. The dream state is a little subtler because at that time the sense faculties do not function, although the brain is still active and the eyes move during REM sleep. Deep sleep and fainting are even subtler. The subtlest level of mind, which can function apart from the physical body, manifests at the time of death. This fundamental innate clear light mind (T. *gnyug ma lhan cig skyes pa'i 'od gsal gyi sems*) is accompanied by a very subtle wind, which is its mount. This subtlest mind and subtlest wind are one entity but nominally different; that is, one cannot exist without the other although they can be spoken of separately.

The term *clear light* (*prabhāsvara*) has various meanings, depending on the context. In the Sūtra Vehicle, it refers to (1) the clear and cognizant nature of the conventional mind, which is the *subject clear light* (here, saying the mind is clear light implies that the afflictive obscurations and cognitive obscurations are adventitious and do not exist in the nature of the mind), and (2) the emptiness of the mind, which is the *object clear light*, the ultimate nature of the mind.

In both Sūtra and Tantra, the subject clear light is the awareness that

cognizes the object clear light. However, the subject clear light mind spoken of in Tantra is far subtler. This innate clear light mind (*lhan cig skyes pa'i 'od gsal gyi sems*) is a special mind because it is the source or basis of all phenomena of saṃsāra and nirvāṇa. This subtlest mind continues from one life to the next. It is not a soul or self; it changes moment by moment and is empty of inherent existence. At death the coarser levels of mind absorb into the innate clear light mind, and after rebirth, the coarser consciousnesses reemerge from the basis of the innate clear light mind. When these coarser levels of consciousness exist, constructive and destructive thoughts and emotions arise and karma is created. The result of afflictive thoughts and actions is saṃsāra; the result of thoughts and actions purified by the realization of emptiness is nirvāṇa. The presence of ignorance or wisdom determines whether this mind is in saṃsāra or nirvāṇa.

It is said that the innate clear light mind is the creator in that it is the source or basis of saṃsāra and nirvāṇa. This indicates that phenomena do not arise causelessly nor are they created by an external creator. To make an analogy: Owing to the climate in a particular place, plants and animals come to exist there. From that perspective, we say the climate of a place creates the living things there because it acts as their basis. Similarly, because the innate clear light mind exists, all the phenomena of saṃsāra and nirvāṇa become possible.

Saying that the clear light mind is the source of all phenomena in saṃsāra and nirvāṇa is a general statement; it does not mean that the subtlest mind-wind is the substantial cause for phenomena in saṃsāra and nirvāṇa. Nor does it mean that all phenomena arise from my clear light mind or your clear light mind. Furthermore, it is not the same as the Cittamātrin assertion that all phenomena are the nature of the mind, which refers to their unique tenet that an object and the consciousness perceiving it arise from the same substantial cause, a latency on the foundation consciousness.

Saying that the clear light mind is the source of all phenomena in saṃsāra and nirvāṇa means that all phenomena exist in relation to the mind. All phenomena exist by being merely designated by mind. This conclusion is arrived at because all other possibilities — such as objective existence and existence from its own side — are untenable.

The *Kālacakra Tantra* explains that the ultimate goal, buddhahood, is based on the subtlest clear light mind. The coarse levels of mind cannot be transformed into the omniscient mind of a buddha. Only the subtlest mind-wind, which is beginningless and endless, can continue to buddhahood. By employing the special practices of highest yoga tantra to neutralize the coarser levels of mind,

the defilements present with the coarser levels of mind dissolve, and subtler states of mind arise. When accompanied by wisdom, these progressively subtler levels of mind have more power to effect change and purify the mind. When the subtlest mind-wind is activated, made blissful, and used to realize emptiness directly, it is extremely effective in rooting out the deepest and most entrenched obscurations. When all obscurations have been removed, this innate clear light mind becomes a buddha's omniscient mind, the wisdom truth body of a buddha. Its emptiness becomes the nature truth body, and the subtlest wind transforms into a buddha's form bodies — the enjoyment and emanation bodies by which a buddha benefits sentient beings. The key to the tantric path is learning how to make manifest the subtlest mind-wind and use it to accumulate merit and wisdom and attain full awakening.

This begins with gaining a comprehensive understanding of the entire Buddhist path from beginning to end, and then generating the three principal aspects of the path: the aspiration for liberation, bodhicitta, and the correct view of emptiness. When properly prepared in this way, we then receive empowerment into highest yoga tantra, abide with the tantric ethical restraints, and meditate on the generation and completion stages. This causes the winds to enter, remain, and dissolve in the central channel, at which time all coarser levels of mind cease and the subtlest mind-wind is activated. This is made blissful and used to realize emptiness. The stage of *example clear light* (T. *dpe'i 'od gsal*) is attained when this subtle blissful mind-wind realizes the object clear light — emptiness — via a conceptual appearance. When it cognizes emptiness directly, the stage of *actual clear light* (T. *don gyi 'od gsal*) is attained. Someone who has this attainment will become a buddha in that very life.

The discussion of clear light relates to the topic of buddha nature — the potential of each and every sentient being to become a fully awakened buddha — to which we now turn.



## 13 | Buddha Nature

**A**LL BUDDHIST TRADITIONS accept that excellent qualities can be cultivated and that defilements can be forever eliminated from the mind. What is the basis upon which this occurs? Each tradition describes it somewhat differently.

### *The Mind's Potential according to the Pāli Tradition*

Although the term *buddha nature* is not used in the Pāli scriptures to describe the mind's potential to attain liberation, the Buddha identified certain characteristics that reveal spiritual practitioners' inclinations toward liberation. Characteristics such as having modest desire and a sense of contentment signify that a person is a genuine spiritual practitioner aiming for liberation. Practitioners endeavor daily to cultivate these virtuous characteristics that indicate their potential to gain realizations.

In the sūtra *Luminous*, the Buddha spoke of the clear nature of the mind that is tainted by adventitious defilements that can be removed (AN 1.51–52):

This mind, O monastics, is luminous, but it is defiled by adventitious defilements. The uninstructed worldling does not understand this as it really is; therefore for him there is no mental development.

This mind, O monastics, is luminous, and it is freed from adventitious defilements. The instructed ārya disciple understands this as it really is; therefore for him there is mental development.

### *Ārya Disposition according to the Vaibhāṣikas and Sautrāntikas*

The tenet schools put forth assertions about the disposition (trait, lineage, T.

*rigs*) that accord with their general presentation of the basis, path, and result of practice. For Vaibhāṣikas, the ārya disposition (T. *'phags pa'i rigs*) is the mental factor of nonattachment that acts as a cause for its own resultant ārya path. Since Vaibhāṣikas emphasize craving as a formidable cause of cyclic existence, it makes sense that they assert nonattachment as both the antidote to craving and the disposition in sentient beings that has the potential to bring the realizations of the ārya path and liberation.

Contentment with what we have and lack of greed for what we do not have are the source of āryas' pristine wisdom. While nonattachment in the mindstream of an ordinary person is polluted in that it is associated with ignorance, when it is associated with an ārya's pristine wisdom, it is unpolluted. Guṇaprabha's *Sūtra on the Code of Ethical Conduct (Vinayasūtra)* explains that āryas with the disposition have four qualities: (1–3) They are satisfied with whatever food and drink, shelter, and robes they have. (4) They take joy in meditation and in overcoming what is to be abandoned.

The first three qualities are the means to actualize the ārya path, and the last is the actual cause to generate the realizations of the ārya path that bring true cessation. The first three are also the means to exhaust the sense of I and mine, while the last is the means to exhaust ignorance. Everyone seeking liberation or full awakening cultivates these four qualities in order to attain their goal.

According to Sautrāntikas, the disposition is the potential or seed for the arising of the unpolluted mind (T. *zag med sems kyi nus pa*), the pristine wisdom of the āryas. All sentient beings have this potential because all of them at one time or another have experienced happiness. Since happiness is the result of virtue, everyone has virtue and thus has the potential for the unpolluted mind. This potential is nourished through learning, reflecting, and meditating on the Dharma in the present life. However, if someone's roots of virtue are cut by his engagement in extremely destructive actions, this seed cannot grow and may even be destroyed.

In general, Vaibhāṣikas and Sautrāntikas assert that only sentient beings who will become wheel-turning buddhas — buddhas that initially teach the Dharma in a time and place where it is absent — will attain full awakening. All other sentient beings will attain arhatship. At the time they have completely abandoned all afflictive obscurations, arhats attain nirvāṇa with remainder — the remainder being their polluted bodies produced by afflictions and karma. When they pass away from that life and shed their polluted bodies, they attain nirvāṇa without remainder. At this time, the polluted aggregates no longer remain and

the continuity of the mental consciousness is severed, which precludes their entering the Bodhisattva Vehicle.

## *Buddha Nature according to the Cittamātra School*

In Mahāyāna literature, buddha nature, or buddha disposition (*buddhagotra*),<sup>78</sup> is discussed from three perspectives: the Cittamātra, Madhyamaka, and Vajrayāna. All three speak of the naturally abiding buddha disposition and the transforming buddha disposition.

According to Cittamātrins, as explained by Asaṅga in the *Compendium of the Mahāyāna (Mahāyānasamgraha)*, buddha disposition is the latency, seed, or potency that has existed since beginningless time and has the potential to give rise to the three bodies of a buddha. A conditioned phenomenon, the buddha disposition is the seed of unpolluted pristine wisdom (T. *zag med ye shes kyi sa bon*). Saying the buddha disposition is a latency fits in well with the Cittamātra school's assertion that everything arises as a result of latencies on either the foundation consciousness or the mental consciousness. When this latency of the unpolluted pristine wisdom has not yet been nourished by learning, reflecting, and meditating, it is called the naturally abiding buddha disposition, because it is beginningless. When the same latency has been nourished by learning, reflecting, and meditating on the Dharma, it is called the transforming buddha disposition. It is the same latency, the difference being whether or not it has been activated by means of Dharma practice.

Initially, as the *naturally abiding buddha disposition*, it is a simple latency that has three characteristics: (1) It has existed since beginningless time and continues from one life to the next uninterruptedly. (2) It is not newly created but is naturally present. (3) It is carried by the foundation consciousness according to the Cittamātra Scriptural Proponents and by the mental consciousness (the sixth consciousness) according to the Cittamātra Reasoning Proponents. This is so because sensory consciousnesses are unstable and only intermittently present.

When the naturally abiding buddha disposition is awakened and transformed by means of learning, reflecting, and meditating, it brings the realization of the ārya path and, at that time, it is called the *transforming buddha disposition*. In particular, when meditation on great compassion has progressed to the point

where the great resolve that takes responsibility to work for the welfare of all sentient beings arises, the Mahāyāna disposition has been awakened.

Citing the *Sūtra Unravelling the Thought* (*Samdhanirmocana Sūtra*), Cittamātra Scriptural Proponents assert three final vehicles — the Śrāvaka and Solitary Realizer Vehicles that culminate in arhatship and the Bodhisattva Vehicle that brings full awakening. The doctrine of three final vehicles states that once śrāvaka and solitary realizer practitioners attain arhatship, they will abide in meditative equipoise on emptiness forever and will not later enter the Mahāyāna and attain the full awakening of buddhahood. The Cittamātra Scriptural Proponents base this on their belief that there are five types of disposition (lineage) — śrāvaka, solitary realizer, bodhisattva, indefinite, and severed. Here “disposition” connotes a source of excellent qualities, and each sentient being has the latency for one of the five dispositions. This latency is an internal predisposition that exists naturally in each sentient being’s foundation consciousness that inclines him or her toward a particular spiritual path.

People display certain signs that are indicative of their buddha disposition. Those with the śrāvaka disposition have strong determination to be free from saṃsāra; they avoid nonvirtue and purify destructive karma, are moved by teachings on the four truths, and live ethically. They take prātimokṣa precepts with the aspiration for their own liberation and dedicate all the merit from their practice for this goal.

Those having the solitary realizer disposition have few afflictions and weak compassion, so they dislike busyness and prefer solitude. Teachings on the twelve links of dependent origination touch them deeply and they meditate primarily on this. Like śrāvakas, they purify destructive karma, create constructive karma, and have strong determination to be free from saṃsāra. Their motivation and dedication are directed toward the liberation of a solitary realizer arhat.

Those with the bodhisattva or Mahāyāna disposition are naturally empathetic and compassionate. They purify and abandon nonvirtue, create virtue, and take prātimokṣa and bodhisattva precepts with the aspiration to attain the full awakening of a buddha. Seeking to work for the welfare of sentient beings, they practice the six perfections and have fortitude to engage in the bodhisattvas’ deeds. Their motivation and dedication is for the attainment of buddhahood.

Persons of these three dispositions are definite in their path. They will not change vehicles but will proceed to the attainment of their own vehicle.

At present, it is uncertain which vehicle those of indefinite disposition will



enter. Depending on the spiritual mentor they meet and the Buddhist teachings they learn in the future, they will develop an inclination toward one vehicle or another.

Those whose lineage is severed (*icchāntika*) have engaged in extremely destructive actions or strongly adhere to pernicious wrong views. They have little merit, great negativity, and lack integrity and consideration for how their actions affect others. Not wishing to abandon nonvirtue and lacking insight into the unsatisfactory nature of saṃsāra, they have no interest in liberating themselves or others. Even if they dabble in the Dharma, their motivation is one seeking the pleasures of saṃsāra. Having cut their roots of virtue, they are in a state where, either temporarily or perpetually, they cannot attain liberation or awakening.<sup>79</sup>

This perspective on the buddha disposition and on three final vehicles is supported by Cittamātra tenets: Because a being's disposition is truly existent, it cannot change into the disposition of another vehicle. Since it can bring only the result of its respective vehicle, there must be three final vehicles.

Our buddha disposition may be impeded from manifesting when great attachment or strong afflictions overwhelm our minds and when we are too busy to be interested in spiritual practice or don't see the faults of the afflictions. Thinking our actions lack an ethical dimension and experiencing hindrances such as illness, poverty, or strong karmic obstructions also prevent our disposition from developing.

Certain activities can stimulate our buddha disposition: Learning and reflecting on teachings, living in an environment that is conducive to practice, and abiding near our spiritual mentor or sincere practitioners. Generating the aspiration for virtuous qualities, restraining our senses, abandoning nonvirtue, receiving monastic ordination, purifying obscurations, and so on also invigorate our buddha disposition.

Relying on the *Lotus Sūtra* (*Saddharma Puṇḍarīka Sūtra*) and the *Tathāgatagarbha Sūtra*, Cittamātra Reasoning Proponents and all Mādhyamikas assert one final vehicle: all sentient beings can enter the Bodhisattva Vehicle and attain buddhahood. The *Sublime Continuum* by Maitreya and Asaṅga's commentary on it speak of four types of people whose buddha nature is defiled in that they are not yet ready to enter the Bodhisattva Vehicle, engage in the two collections, and progress on the path to full awakening: worldly people who are infatuated with saṃsāric pleasures, non-Buddhists who hold wrong views, śrāvakas, and solitary realizers. They also discuss the specific obscurations that

block these sentient beings and explain their antidotes. Here Asaṅga writes from a Madhyamaka viewpoint that holds that all sentient beings have the buddha nature.

## *Buddha Nature according to the Madhyamaka School*

The topic of buddha nature (*gotra*) is found in the Perfection of Wisdom sūtras, *Ornament of Clear Realizations*, *Sublime Continuum* (*Ratnagotravibhāga, Uttaratantra*) by Maitreya and its commentary by his disciple Asaṅga, *Bodhisattva Grounds* (*Bodhisattva Bhūmi*), and other Mahāyāna texts. The *Tathāgatagarbha Sūtra* and *Nirvāṇa Sūtra* speak of buddha essence (*garbha*), using a more essentialist language. As a Mādhyamika, I prefer presentations that lack the essentialist meaning. Like Ngok Lotsawa, who translated the *Sublime Continuum* into Tibetan, in the Sūtrayāna context I believe buddha essence primarily refers to the emptiness of the mind.

The *Sublime Continuum* defines buddha nature as phenomena that have the possibility to transform into any of the buddha bodies. It is of two types — the naturally abiding buddha nature (*prakṛtisthagoṭra*, T. *rang bzhin gnas rigs*) and the transforming buddha nature (*samudānītagoṭra*, T. *rgyas 'gyur gi rigs*). Both exist in all sentient beings whether or not they are on a path.

The *naturally abiding buddha nature* is the emptiness of the mind that is yet to abandon defilements and that is able to transform into the nature dharmakāya of a buddha. Sakya Paṇḍita described it as the unchanging nature of the mind. In *Treatise on the Middle Way* Nāgārjuna notes that whatever is the nature of a tathāgata is the nature of sentient beings (22.16).

Whatever is the essence of the Tathāgata,  
that is the essence of the transmigrator.  
The Tathāgata has no essence.  
The transmigrator has no essence.

This empty nature of the mind is beyond the three times (past, present, and future), beyond the realms of cyclic existence, and beyond constructive and destructive karma. Neither virtuous nor nonvirtuous, it can act as the basis for both saṃsāra and nirvāṇa. The *Eight-Thousand-Line Perfection of Wisdom Sūtra* (*Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra*) says:

Thus that which is the reality of all things  
is not past nor future nor present.  
Whatever is neither past, future, nor present  
is utterly free from threefold time,  
cannot be transferred nor objectified  
nor conceptualized nor cognized.

The existence of the naturally abiding buddha nature — the emptiness of inherent existence of ordinary beings' minds — means that mental defilements can be eliminated. Why? If phenomena existed inherently, they would be independent of everything else and thus would be unable to function, influence one another, or change. The fact that the ultimate nature of the mind is empty of inherent existence indicates that the mind can change.

In addition, all defilements are rooted in fundamental ignorance, the erroneous mental factor that grasps all phenomena as possessing an inherent reality. This erroneous grasping gives rise to attachment, anger, and all other afflictions and supports virtuous polluted mental states as well. From these spring our actions or karma, which cause us to take continual rebirth in cyclic existence. Cultivating insight into the true nature of reality, emptiness, initiates the process of undoing this causal chain. With the development of the wisdom that directly perceives reality — emptiness or suchness — this ignorance can be overpowered and completely eradicated from the mind. The defilements are not embedded in the ultimate nature of the mind. They too lack inherent existence, so when the antidote of the wisdom directly realizing emptiness is applied to them, they can be removed from the mind.

On the basis of recognizing the naturally abiding buddha nature — natural nirvāṇa, or the emptiness of the mind — we can attain the nirvāṇa that is the total pacification of mental defilements. A buddha's nirvāṇa is nonabiding nirvāṇa, the full purification of the naturally abiding buddha nature.

In some texts the emptiness of the mind is called a cause of buddhahood in the sense that meditation on emptiness purifies the mind of defilements and leads to buddhahood. However, emptiness is not an actual cause because it is a permanent phenomenon that does not change or bring results.

The *transforming buddha nature* is the seed for the unpolluted mind. It consists of conditioned phenomena that can transform into a buddha's wisdom truth body. The transforming buddha nature includes neutral mental consciousnesses<sup>80</sup> as well as virtuous mental factors, such as love, compassion,

wisdom, and faith, and other virtuous mental states, such as bodhicitta, that are progressively developed as a bodhisattva progresses through the ten bodhisattva grounds. The transforming buddha nature also includes consciousnesses that form the collection of wisdom — the principal cause of the wisdom truth body — and the mind visualizing ourselves as a deity, which is a cause for a buddha's form body. It is possible to increase these virtuous qualities and mental states limitlessly because their base, the clear light mind, is stable and because no antidote exists that can eliminate them. At the time we become buddhas, our naturally abiding buddha nature will become the nature truth body of a buddha, and our transforming buddha nature will become the wisdom truth body of a buddha.

Which of the seven types of awareness can be included in transforming buddha nature? Wrong awarenesses, such as resentment, self-grasping ignorance, and the mind that fantasizes being a star athlete without creating the causes, are not buddha nature. Inattentive awarenesses are not buddha nature because they don't correctly know their object. Correct assumptions, doubt inclined to the correct conclusion, inferential cognizers, correct mental direct perceivers, and subsequent reliable cognizers are transforming buddha nature. The five paths of the śrāvakas, solitary realizers, and bodhisattvas are transforming buddha nature, as are the ten bodhisattva grounds.<sup>81</sup> The emptiness of inherent existence of all these minds is the natural buddha nature.

In short, any neutral or virtuous mind that is not free from defilement and can transform into a buddha's wisdom dharmakāya is part of the transforming buddha nature. Mental consciousnesses accompanied by manifest afflictions cannot be transforming buddha nature because they are eliminated on the path.

As neutral or virtuous states of mind, the transforming buddha nature consists of impermanent phenomena. As the emptiness of the mind, the naturally abiding buddha nature is permanent. These two buddha natures are one nature. Although they are not exactly the same, one cannot exist without the other. Only the emptiness of neutral and virtuous consciousnesses can be the naturally abiding buddha nature because only the neutral or virtuous consciousnesses that are their bases are the transforming buddha nature.

Because the afflictions are empty of inherent existence, awakening is possible. However, the emptiness of the afflictions is not buddha nature. Since the afflictions are eliminated on the path and cannot be transformed into any of a buddha's bodies, their emptinesses will similarly cease and cannot become the nature truth body.

Some people speak of inanimate phenomena — rocks, trees, and so forth — as having buddha nature. I believe that they are referring to the fact that these phenomena are empty of inherent existence. Only sentient beings have buddha nature. That we can generate the determination to be free from saṃsāra, bodhicitta, and wisdom indicates that the buddha nature is within us. Because inanimate phenomena lack mind, they cannot generate these virtuous mental states and do not possess buddha nature.

Someone may wonder: Since the emptiness of the mind of a sentient being and the emptiness of the mind of a buddha are the same in being the emptiness of inherent existence, does that mean that sentient beings already have the qualities of buddhas or that they are already buddhas? No, it does not, because the minds that possess that emptiness differ. Tsongkhapa explains in *Illumination of the Thought*:

It is said, “The buddha nature is that which serves as the cause of āryas’ qualities when observed; thus, here the absurd consequence [that all sentient beings would have the qualities of āryas] is not entailed.” The mere presence of the nature of phenomena (*dharmadhātu*) does not mean that one abides in the buddha nature in terms of the path. When one observes and meditates on the nature of phenomena through the path, it comes to serve as the special cause of āryas’ qualities. At that time one’s buddha nature is regarded as special.<sup>82</sup>

Emptiness is the “cause” of the wonderful qualities of āryas when we perceive it directly and use that realization to cleanse our minds of defilements. The fact that we have the naturally abiding buddha nature — the empty nature of the mind — does not mean that we have already realized it with a true path — a reliable cognizer that realizes emptiness directly. Only a direct realization of the empty nature of the mind will bring about an ārya’s qualities. When this realization arises in our mind, the emptiness of our minds — our buddha nature — will be regarded as special.

The emptiness of inherent existence of our minds is a permanent phenomenon. It does not change moment by moment, as do conditioned phenomena. While emptiness in general is eternal, when we speak about the emptiness of a specific thing, that emptiness may not always exist. For example, the emptiness of a glass ceases when that glass shatters. An emptiness is posited

in relation to an object that is empty; it is one nature with that object — the emptiness of the mind exists in dependence on the mind. The emptiness of an ordinary being's mind exists as long as that ordinary being does. Because that mind has defilements, its emptiness is together with defilement. When portions of the mind's defilements have been removed by the true path, the mind becomes an ārya's mind and its emptiness is the emptiness of an ārya's mind. When ordinary beings realize emptiness directly and become āryas, the emptiness of the ordinary being's mind no longer exists; now there is the emptiness of an ārya's mind. These two emptinesses are both the absence of inherent existence, and to an ārya's mind in meditative equipoise on emptiness, they are undifferentiable.

While it is true that sentient beings' minds are empty of inherent existence and that defilements are adventitious, we cannot say that sentient beings' buddha nature is the same as a buddha's nature truth body that has the twofold purity — being naturally pure of inherent existence and being newly purified of all adventitious defilements. That is because sentient beings' minds are still together with defilements.<sup>83</sup>

No matter in which realm a sentient being abides, the naturally abiding buddha nature is always there. It does not decrease or increase. Gold may be buried in the ground for centuries, but it is still gold and it is always possible to access it. The gold may be covered with dirt, but it doesn't become the dirt. If dirt were its nature, it could never become clean. But because the dirt only obscures it, the gold can be cleansed so that its natural radiance can be seen. Similarly, the emptiness of our defiled mind is always there; when we realize emptiness, that wisdom cleanses the defilements from our minds, and in doing so, the emptiness of our minds will also be cleansed. Even though our minds have always been naturally pure of inherent existence, at that time we will have the additional purity of being free from all adventitious defilements.

Without the two kinds of buddha nature, there would be no way for the awakened activities of the Buddha to enter into us. Our minds would not be receptive to the Buddha's influence or to the teachings; nothing in our minds could germinate by coming into contact with these. Buddha nature is the basis of cultivation of the Mahāyāna; it is what enables our minds to be affected and transformed by the teachings. The fact that the Buddha taught the Dharma indicates that sentient beings have the potential to become Buddhas. If we didn't, it would have been useless for the Buddha to deliver 84,000 teachings.

## *Buddha Nature according to Tantra*

Highest yoga tantra points to buddha nature in a unique way: it is the subtlest mind-wind that is empty of inherent existence and whose continuity goes on to awakening. All sentient beings have this subtlest mind-wind. In ordinary beings, it becomes manifest only at the time of the clear light of death and goes unnoticed.

While the subtlest mind-wind is neutral in the case of ordinary beings, through special yogic practices it can be brought into the path and transformed into a virtuous state, a yogic state. Sentient beings' subtlest mind serves as the substantial cause for the wisdom dharmakāya — the omniscient mind of a buddha — and the true cessation and emptiness of a buddha's mind is the nature dharmakāya. The subtlest wind that is its mount is the substantial cause for the form bodies of a buddha — the enjoyment and emanation bodies. The *Hevajra Tantra* says:

Sentient beings are just buddhas,  
but they are defiled by adventitious stains.  
When these are removed, they are buddhas.

The first line indicates that sentient beings have the substantial cause for buddhahood, the subtlest mind-wind. It does not mean that sentient beings are buddhas, because someone cannot be both a sentient being and a buddha simultaneously. Through the practice of special techniques in highest yoga tantra, the continuum of this subtlest mind-wind can be purified and transformed into the three bodies of a buddha.

## *Nine Similes for Tathāgatagarbha*

By using nine similes, the *Tathāgatagarbha Sūtra* gives us an inkling of the buddha nature that has always been and will continue to be within us. Maitreya's *Sublime Continuum* and its commentary by Asaṅga explain these similes that point to a hidden richness inside of us — a potential that we are usually unaware of. Contemplating the meaning of these similes generates great inspiration and confidence to practice the path.

All afflictive and cognitive obscurations are condensed into nine

obscurations spoken of in the nine similes. By applying the appropriate antidotes, all of these can be removed and full awakening attained.

From beginningless time, the basic nature of the mind has been immaculate and has never been mixed with stains or afflictions. But it has been covered by these nine obscurations. As we progress on the path, the transforming buddha nature develops, the mind becomes purer, and the obscurations are gradually eliminated. When all obscurations have been removed such that they can never return, the purified mind becomes the wisdom dharmakāya and its emptiness becomes the nature dharmakāya. Maitreya says (RGV 1:80–81):

This [tathāgatagarbha] abides within the shroud of the afflictions,  
as should be understood through [the following nine] examples:

Just like a buddha in a decaying lotus, honey amidst bees,  
a grain in its husk, gold in filth, a treasure underground,  
a shoot and so on sprouting from a little fruit,  
a statue of the Victorious One in a tattered rag,  
a ruler of humankind in a destitute woman's womb,  
and a precious image under clay,  
this [buddha] element abides within all sentient beings,  
obscured by the defilement of the adventitious poisons.

*1. The buddha essence is like a beautiful buddha image in an old, ugly lotus.*

When the petals close around a buddha image, we see only the old lotus and not the beautiful buddha image. Not knowing the image is there, we never think to open the petals and take it out. Similarly, the seeds of attachment obscure our buddha essence. While all beings who are not arhats are obscured by the seeds of attachment, this simile applies particularly to ordinary sentient beings in the form and formless realms. Although they have temporarily suppressed the coarse manifest afflictions of the desire realm by entering into deep states of meditative absorption, the seeds of afflictions still remain in their mindstreams. Ordinary beings in the form and formless realms are specified because āryas may also take rebirth in these realms. However, they have already eliminated some portion of the seeds of afflictions.

We beings in the desire realm, too, have the seed of attachment. When it



explodes and becomes full blown, we have no awareness of our buddha essence, which is the source of all hope and confidence. Instead we become totally engrossed in the objects of our attachment. Just as the beautiful and fragrant lotus withers and becomes decrepit after a few days, the people and things we cling to age and decay. While they initially bring us happiness, later we become bored and cast them aside, as we would a withered flower.

A person with clairvoyance can see the buddha image inside the lotus and will open the flower and remove the buddha image. Similarly, the Buddha sees the buddha essence in each sentient being, even those in the hells, and thinks, “Who will liberate these beings from their obscurations, especially their attachment?” Because the Buddha has great compassion and is free from all defilements, he will guide us to discover the beautiful buddha image — the wisdom dharmakāya — hidden by our attachment.

## *2. The buddha essence is like honey with a swarm of bees surrounding it.*

The honey is like the ultimate truth — the emptiness of inherent existence. Just as all honey has the same taste, the ultimate nature of all phenomena is the same. Bees not only conceal the honey but also angrily sting someone who tries to take it, harming themselves as well as their enemy. Similarly, we cannot see our honey-like buddha essence because it is obscured by the seeds of hatred, anger, resentment, and vengeance. This obscuration pertains specifically to ordinary beings in the form and formless realms who do not experience manifest anger, but still have the seeds of anger in their mental continuums. We beings in the desire realm have the seeds of anger as well as coarse manifest anger. These seeds not only prevent us from seeing our buddha essence but also enable the destructive emotions related to anger and animosity to manifest in our minds, mercilessly stinging ourselves and those around us.

An insightful person knows that despite the bees around it, the honey itself is pure and delicious. She devises a skillful way to separate the bees from the honey, and then enjoys the honey as she wishes. Tasting honey, like realizing the emptiness of the mind, always brings joy. Similarly, the Buddha sees the buddha essence in each sentient being and with skillful methods, such as the teachings of the three turnings of the Dharma wheel, frees it from defilements.

### *3. The buddha essence resembles a kernel of grain in its husk.*

The husk obscures the grain. For the grain to become edible food, the husk must be removed. In the same way, the seed of ignorance obscures our minds so that we cannot realize the ultimate truth. As above, this obscuration applies particularly to ordinary beings in the form and formless realms, but those of us in the desire realm have it as well. The seed of ignorance makes self-grasping ignorance and the ignorance of karma and its effects manifest in our minds. By means of the above three seeds of the three poisons, sentient beings create karma that brings rebirth in saṃsāra.

Just as the grain cannot be eaten when inside the husk, the deeds of a buddha cannot be displayed while the buddha essence is in the husk of defilements. A wise person knows how to remove the husk and prepare the grain so that it becomes nourishing food. In the same way, the Buddha guides sentient beings to remove their defilements, and the buddhas they will become will provide spiritual sustenance for others.

### *4. The buddha essence resembles gold buried in filth.*

If someone accidentally drops some gold in a pile of filthy refuse at the side of the road, we don't know it is there let alone think to take it out, clean it, and use it. Similarly, while our gold-like buddha essence is not mixed with defilements, the filth of the manifest coarse three poisons prevents us from seeing it. Manifest coarse afflictions are the chief obscuration hindering beings in the desire realm. They provide the condition through which we are reborn especially in the desire realm. Led here and there by powerful emotions that arise suddenly and dominate our minds and by strong wrong views that we stubbornly cling to, we do not even consider the buddha essence that has always been there. Like the filth, manifest coarse attachment, animosity, and ignorance are repugnant. We dislike ourselves when they rule our minds, and others are likewise repulsed by our behavior.

The gold is pure — it can never become impure — but we cannot see it or use it as long as it is sunk in the filth. Similarly, the emptiness of the mind can never be infiltrated by the afflictions, but it cannot shine forth when obscured by the troublesome manifest afflictions.

A deva who possesses the clairvoyant power of the divine eye sees the gold, tells a person where to find it, and instructs him to make the gold into something

worthy of being gold. Similarly, the Buddha sees the empty nature of our minds, teaches us how to purify it, and instructs us how to transform our minds into the minds of buddhas. These first four similes pertain specifically to ordinary beings who have not yet realized emptiness.

*5. The buddha essence is like a treasure under the earth.*

Like a magnificent treasure buried under the earth in a poor person's yard, the buddha essence is obscured by the latencies of the afflictions. This obscuration pertains especially to śrāvaka and solitary realizer arhats, who have eliminated the coarse manifest afflictions and their seeds, but whose minds are still obscured by the latencies of afflictions, especially the latency of ignorance, that prevent them from becoming fully awakened buddhas. While these arhats have realized emptiness and overcome afflictions, the ground of the latencies of afflictions are the condition through which arhats obtain a mental body and abide in the pacification of saṃsāra that is an arhat's nirvāṇa. After these arhats generate bodhicitta, they follow the bodhisattva paths and grounds. In doing so, when the ground of these latencies is removed, they will attain the ultimate true cessation, nonabiding nirvāṇa.

A treasure buried under the house of a poor family can free them from poverty, but they do not know it is there, even though it is right under them. The treasure does not say, "I'm here. Come and get me." Our naturally abiding buddha essence is like a treasure that has existed in our minds beginninglessly. This emptiness of the mind does not decrease or increase, it does not call out to us saying, "I'm here." But when the Buddha tells us about it, we learn how to uncover it, freeing it from even the ground of the latencies of ignorance that prevent full awakening.

*6. The buddha essence resembles a tiny sprout hidden within the peel of a fruit.*

Beans have tiny sprouts inside but we cannot see them until the fruit and its peel have been shed. Similarly, for the path of seeing to be actualized, the objects of abandonment by the path of seeing must be destroyed. This simile applies particularly to ordinary beings on the paths of learning as well as Fundamental Vehicle āryas who are not yet arhats. Until they attain the path of seeing, the acquired afflictions, which are the objects to be abandoned by that path, obscure

their buddha essence. While on the path of seeing, these learners have overcome the acquired afflictions but still have the innate afflictions and their seeds.

The transforming buddha essence is like a sprout that has the potential to grow into a huge tree that will offer shade for many people on a hot day. Just as the sprout needs good conditions to grow, we rely on the conditions of the collections of merit and wisdom to nourish the transforming buddha essence. Great compassion, wisdom, reverence for the Mahāyāna teachings and their goal, a great collection of merit, and samādhi are nourishing conditions that assist the transforming buddha essence to become the wisdom dharmakāya.

*7. The buddha essence is like a buddha statue covered by a tattered rag.*

The innate afflictions and their seeds — the objects to be abandoned on the path of meditation — resemble a buddha image wrapped in a tattered rag. The dismantling of the afflictions began on the path of seeing, and now, on the path of meditation, they are in tatters and ready to be discarded completely. Similarly, ordinary beings and āryas on the learning paths (āryas who are not yet arhats) are still obscured by the innate afflictions and their seeds, but they are weak and will soon be overcome. Nevertheless, while present, they obscure the buddha essence.

A deva sees a buddha statue under a dirty cloth and explains to a person who wants to have a buddha statue that it is there and she should retrieve it. In the same way, the Buddha sees that the ultimate nature of his own mind — emptiness — is the same as the emptiness of the minds of all sentient beings, even animals, hungry ghosts, and hell beings. This beautiful nature is covered by the remnants of the eighty-four thousand afflictions. To free it from these, the Buddha teaches the Dharma. The nature dharmakāya is like a precious statue. Just as the whole statue comes out at once when the rag is removed, the nature dharmakāya appears in its entirety when the mind is freed from all defilements.

*8. The buddha essence resembles a baby who will become a great leader in the womb of a poor, miserable, forlorn woman.*

In her womb a woman bears a baby who will be a great leader and do much good in the world. Not knowing that her child will one day be able to protect her, she knows only her present suffering. Similarly, ārya bodhisattvas on the impure

grounds — grounds one through seven — have amazing potential that they are as yet unaware of owing to the womb-like confines of the afflictive obscurations. When they emerge from these on the eighth ground, their pristine wisdom becomes even more powerful, like the baby who has grown into a great leader.

Cyclic existence is like the homeless shelter in which this poor, miserable woman lives. There she is reviled by others and sinks into despair because she has no refuge or protector. Her child, as a great ruler, will soon be able to care for her, but she does not know this. Similarly, we do not realize that our ultimate protector is inside of us. But when the emptiness of our minds is revealed and becomes the nature dharmakāya, our problems are forever pacified. When we later actualize the enjoyment body, we will be like a wealthy monarch who can protect all beings in the land.<sup>84</sup>

*9. The buddha essence is like a golden buddha statue covered by a fine layer of dust.*

The buddha essence of the pure-ground bodhisattvas — grounds eight through ten — is still covered by a thin layer of cognitive obscurations that impedes their full awakening — the latencies of the defilements that bring about the appearance of inherent existence and prevent directly seeing the two truths simultaneously. Like a magnificent, golden buddha statue that was cast in a mold and now is covered by only a layer of fine clay dust remaining from the mold, their buddha essence will soon be fully revealed when the vajra-like concentration at the end of the continuum of a sentient being removes the last remaining obscurations from the mindstream, allowing the buddha essence to be fully revealed.

**NINE SIMILES FOR THE TATHĀGATAGARBHA**

	SIMILE FOR THE OBSCURING FACTOR	OBSCURING FACTOR	SIMILE FOR THE OBSCURED	OBSCURED PHENOMENON	PERSON SPECIFICALLY OBSCURED BY THIS OBSCURING FACTOR
1.	Lotus	Seeds of attachment that brings rebirth in the form and formless realms	Buddha image	The buddha nature that can become the truth body	Ordinary beings in the form and formless realms
2.	Bees	Seeds of anger	Honey	The ultimate truth, the emptiness of inherent existence of the mind	Ordinary beings in the form and formless realms
3.	Mud	Seeds of ignorance that brings rebirth in the form and formless realms	Kernel of grain	Naturally pure buddha essence	Ordinary beings in the form and formless realms
4.	Filth	Manifest afflictions of attachment, animosity, and confusion that bring rebirth in the desire realm	Gold	The emptiness of the mind	Ordinary beings in the desire realm
5.	Earth	Ground of the latencies of ignorance that create unpolluted karma <sup>26</sup>	Treasure	Naturally abiding buddha essence that can become nonabiding nirvana, the nature dharmakaya	Śrāvaka and solitary-realizer arhats
6.	Skin of fruit	Acquired afflictions, objects to be abandoned on the path of seeing	Sprout	Transforming buddha essence that can become the wisdom dharmakaya	Ordinary beings who have entered a path, śrāvaka and solitary realizers, āryas who are not arhats
7.	Tattered rag	Innate afflictions and their seeds, objects to be abandoned on the path of meditation	Buddha statue	Naturally pure buddha essence that will become the nature dharmakaya	Ordinary beings who have entered a path, learning āryas
8.	Womb of a destitute woman	Afflictive obscurations	Baby who will become a universal monarch	Buddha essence that will bring forth the enjoyment body of a buddha	Bodhisattvas on the 7 impure grounds (1-7)
9.	Fine layer of clay dust	Cognitive obscurations	Golden buddha statue	The buddha essence that will bring forth the emanation bodies of a buddha	Bodhisattvas on the pure grounds (8-10)

Note: Each simile is correlated with an obscuration and the particular sentient beings who possess it. While other sentient beings may also possess that obscuration, it is the outstanding obscuration — the immediate hindrance — that those particular sentient beings must overcome to progress on the path. The particular sentient beings pointed out in one simile may also possess the obscurations mentioned in another.

An expert statue maker recognizes the preciousness of the gold statue covered by clay dust and cleanses it to reveal its pure beauty for everyone to enjoy. Similarly, the Buddha sees our buddha essence and guides us on the path to reveal it, so that we will be able to manifest emanation bodies. These emanation bodies will appear in various forms according to the karma of the sentient beings who can benefit from them. By these means, the buddha we will become will compassionately instruct and guide sentient beings according to their disposition.

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## REFLECTION

1. Contemplate each simile one by one.
2. Consider how it applies to you, the people you know, and all beings around you.

3. Seeing that each sentient being is impeded by obscurations that limit happiness and cause misery, let compassion arise for each and every sentient being.
  4. With strong compassion, cultivate bodhicitta and determine to become a buddha in order to lead all beings to actualize their buddha essence.
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### *Three Aspects of the Tathāgatagarbha*

Maitreya asserts that each sentient being has the buddha essence and can attain buddhahood (RGV 1.27).

Because a perfect buddha's body is pervasive,  
because suchness is without differentiation,  
and because a [buddha] lineage exists, all embodied [beings]  
are always in possession of a buddha essence.

He gives three reasons for stating that all sentient beings have the buddha essence and can attain full awakening: (1) *The buddhas' bodies are pervasive* so sentient beings can engage with the awakening activities of the buddhas. (2) *The suchness (natural purity) of the buddhas' minds and of sentient beings' minds cannot be differentiated* because both are the emptiness of inherent existence. (3) *Sentient beings possess the transforming buddha nature* that can develop all of a buddha's excellent qualities and transform into the three buddha bodies. These reasons, confirmed by the nine similes, indicate the following three aspects of the tathāgatagarbha.

#### *1. The tathāgatagarbha has the nature of the dharmakāya of self-arisen pristine wisdom.*

The tathāgatagarbha possessing the nature of the dharmakāya refers to the clear light nature of the tathāgatagarbha being called the dharmakāya. This is another case of giving the name of the result (dharmakāya) to the cause (tathāgatagarbha). Although the emptiness of the mind is permanent and is not an actual cause, it is called a cause because it is the foundation on which the

dharmakāya is attained. The first three similes describe this.

The tathāgatagarbha is pervaded by the awakening activities of the dharmakāya. This means that sentient beings have the potential to be engaged with and influenced by the buddhas' awakening activities that will guide them to awakening.

Within this first aspect of the buddha essence, the dharmakāya, there are two parts: (1) The *dharmakāya of realizations* is the undefiled empty nature of a buddha's mind that is realized by that buddha's wisdom dharmakāya. This emptiness is the actual dharmakāya and refers specifically to the dharmadhātu that is totally free from defilements and has the nature of clear light. It is what is perceived and experienced by the wisdom dharmakāya of a buddha. (2) The *dharmakāya of the teachings* leads to the realization of this empty nature. These teachings consist of the profound teachings of the definitive sūtras that explain the ultimate truth, and the interpretable teachings of the provisional sūtras that explain various veiled truths — such as the person, aggregates, grounds and paths — that are taught in accordance with the dispositions and interests of various disciples. The dharmakāya of the teachings is called the dharmakāya although it is not the actual dharmakāya. The actual dharmakāya is experienced by a buddha. The teachings are the conditions to attain this dharmakāya.

Just as the buddha image hidden in the closed lotus in the first simile cannot be seen, the wisdom dharmakāya — the ultimate, supreme meditative equipoise on emptiness — is not perceivable in the world. The honey (simile 2) resembles the profound teachings on the ultimate truth. Just as all honey shares the same taste of sweetness, all phenomena have the same “taste” of being empty of inherent existence. The grain (simile 3) corresponds to the vast teachings on the method side of the path. Just as the grain needs to be removed from its husk and cooked to become edible food, the vast teachings are provisional and require interpretation.

The definitive and interpretable teachings and the profound and vast teachings are given to disciples of all three dispositions — śrāvakas, solitary realizers, and bodhisattvas — as well as to sentient beings who are temporarily of uncertain disposition. This latter group consists of individuals who will later become disciples with one of the three dispositions, depending on the teachers they meet and the teachings they receive. By hearing, reflecting, and meditating on both the vast and profound teachings, sentient beings will attain the actual wisdom dharmakāya.

The chief way in which buddhas' awakening activities engage with and



influence sentient beings is by means of the buddhas' speech — the teachings they give. This ability of the buddhas' awakening activities to influence sentient beings is always present, and in this sense sentient beings are pervaded by the awakening activities of the dharmakāya.

## *2. The tathāgatagarbha has the nature of emptiness, suchness.*

The tathāgatagarbha — the emptiness of sentient beings' minds — cannot be differentiated from the aspect of the natural purity of the dharmakāya. The gold buried in filth (simile 4) illustrates the emptiness of the mind. Just as pure gold does not change into a base metal, the emptiness of the mind does not change into something else. Like pure gold, the tathāgatagarbha is pure and faultless. The ultimate nature of sentient beings' minds and the ultimate nature or natural purity of the tathāgatas' minds cannot be differentiated in that both are emptiness. They appear the same and cannot be distinguished to the face of the meditative equipoise directly perceiving emptiness. In this sense it is said that the suchness of the Tathāgata is the essence of sentient beings.

## *3. The tathāgatagarbha has the nature of the buddha lineage or disposition.*

This disposition culminates as the three bodies of a buddha, thus accomplishing buddhahood. Encompassing the remaining five similes, this disposition has two parts: (1) The *buddha disposition that has existed beginninglessly* resembles a treasure under the ground (simile 5). Just as no one put the treasure there and its beginning is unknown, the naturally abiding buddha nature has existed beginninglessly. (2) The *transforming buddha disposition that has the potential* resembles a sprout (simile 6). Just as a tiny sprout, upon meeting the conditions that nourish it, will gradually grow into a tree, the transforming buddha disposition has the potential to accomplish buddhahood and the three buddha bodies when it encounters the right conditions, such as learning, reflecting, and meditating on the Dharma.

The buddha statue covered by tattered rags (simile 7) represents the beginningless, naturally abiding buddha disposition. Just as a beautiful, precious statue shines forth when the impediment of the tattered rags is removed, the beginningless purity of the mind — its emptiness of true existence — is revealed when all adventitious defilements have been forever banished owing to the

collection of wisdom. At this point the naturally abiding buddha disposition is called the nature dharmakāya of a buddha.

The transforming buddha disposition blossoms owing to the accumulation of merit. When it is fully evolved, it becomes the enjoyment and emanation bodies of a buddha. Just as a future great leader who is now in his mother's womb (simile 8) will come to enjoy majesty, the enjoyment body enjoys the majesty and wealth of the Mahāyāna Dharma. Similar to a golden buddha statue emerging from the dust that surrounds it (simile 9), emanation bodies, which represent the actual dharmakāya, appear in whatever forms are most conducive to subduing the minds of sentient beings.

In our practice, our buddha disposition is initially awakened through listening to and reflecting on the Dharma, especially teachings on the value and purpose of bodhicitta and the two methods of generating it. Upon generating bodhicitta, we have the strong aspiration to attain the three buddha bodies. To accomplish this, we engage in the bodhisattva deeds — the six perfections and the four ways of maturing disciples — and fulfill the collections of merit and wisdom. Cultivating the collection of wisdom leads to gaining the pristine wisdom directly perceiving the ultimate nature of all phenomena. When this wisdom is developed further and used to fully cleanse all obscurations from our mindstreams, our naturally pure buddha nature becomes the nature dharmakāya — the suchness of the mind that has the two purities: the natural purity of inherent existence and the purity from adventitious defilements. The cultivation of the collection of merit, done through practicing the method aspect of the path, leads to our transforming buddha nature becoming the two form bodies — the enjoyment body and the emanation body. In this way, the three bodies of a buddha are actualized and our pristine wisdom perceives all existents throughout the universe.

### *Three Aspects of the Buddha Disposition*

1. The clear light nature of the tathāgatagarbha that will become a buddha's dharmakāya in the future.
  - The dharmakāya of realizations: the undefiled empty nature of a buddha's mind that is realized by that buddha's wisdom dharmakāya; buddha image (1).

- The dharmakāya of the teachings that are the conditions to attain it.
  - Profound teachings of the definitive sūtras on the ultimate truth; honey (2).
  - Interpretable teachings of the provisional sūtras on veiled truths; grain (3).
2. The tathāgatagarbha's empty nature (suchness) that cannot be differentiated from the emptiness of a buddha's mind; gold (4).
  3. The tathāgatagarbha that has the buddha lineage and accomplishes the state of a buddha.
    - Beginningless buddha nature; treasure (5).
    - Transforming buddha nature that has the potential to accomplish buddhahood; sprout (6).
    - When purified, the beginningless, naturally abiding buddha disposition becomes the nature dharmakāya of a buddha; statue (7).
    - When the transforming buddha disposition is fully evolved, it becomes the enjoyment body of a buddha; the future great leader in his mother's womb (8).
    - The emanation bodies of a buddha; golden statue (9).

In summary, in his commentary to the *Sublime Continuum*, Asaṅga says:

The similes taught in the *Tathāgatagarbha Sūtra* explain that the mind, which has existed without beginning in all realms of sentient beings, is empty by nature and therefore the afflictions are adventitious. Being empty by nature, this beginningless mind is inseparable from the innate development of the qualities of awakening.<sup>85</sup>

## *A Puzzle*

Maitreya admits that some aspects of buddha nature are difficult for ordinary beings to understand (RGV 1.25).

[The buddha nature] is pure and yet has affliction.  
 [Awakening] is not afflictive and yet is purified.  
 Qualities are totally indivisible [and yet not manifest].

[Awakening activity] is spontaneous and yet without any thought.

Here are several puzzling points.

- From beginningless time buddha nature has been pure and free from defilements, yet it still has afflictions and defilements.
- The awakened mind is pure, yet it needs to be purified.
- The emptiness of buddhas' minds and sentient beings' minds are indistinguishable in that both are pure and empty of inherent existence, yet one belongs to buddhas and the other to sentient beings.
- Buddhas' awakening activity is spontaneous, yet it occurs without conscious motivation.

Initially these four statements may seem contradictory, but seen from the proper perspective, they cease to be paradoxical. The explanations below clarify their meaning. We must think carefully to understand the explanations correctly; doing so will bring important and essential insights.

- Buddha nature is completely pure; the defilements are adventitious. They obscure the buddha nature but are not its essential nature.
- The awakened mind has no defilements, but prior to becoming a buddha, the mind's nature is covered by defilements. It is like gold hidden by stains. The gold is still gold, but its luster and beauty cannot be seen. Similarly, when the mind is immersed in defilements, the potential to develop a buddha's qualities remains; it is part of the mind's nature. However, this potential is covered and cannot yet function as the actual qualities of a buddha. Love and compassion are present in the unawakened mind; they cannot be forever extricated from the mind. But when anger overwhelms the mind, the seed of love is not apparent, although it is still there.
- In terms of their ultimate nature, both buddhas' minds and sentient beings' minds are empty of inherent existence, and any difference in these emptinesses cannot be discerned by the wisdom directly realizing emptiness. However, on the conventional level, the two minds are different: one is a mind with obscurations, the other is a mind that is completely free from obscurations.
- Buddhas' awakening activities are effortless; they occur spontaneously,

without purposefully cultivating a motivation. A buddha is free from conception and has become so habituated with compassion over many eons that no motivation or thought is needed for that buddha's awakened activities to radiate out in the most flawless and suitable way according to the disposition of each sentient being. This is inconceivable to us unawakened beings because our virtuous deeds require deliberate effort.

As we practice the path, sometimes discouragement fills our minds. If we observe closely, we will see that discouragement is simply a mass of distorted conceptions that we believe to be true. Instead of following these proliferating perverted thoughts, if we challenged their validity we would easily see they are false. One distorted conception is particularly pernicious; it believes that buddha nature does not exist and thus eliminating duḥkha and attaining awakening is not possible. Maitreya banishes this noxious thought (RGV 1.34):

If the buddha nature were not present,  
there would be no remorse over suffering.  
There would be no longing for nirvāṇa,  
or striving and devotion toward this aim.

If sentient beings truly lacked the possibility to be awakened and were doomed to irreversible saṃsāric suffering, no one would ever regret being in saṃsāra or long to be free from duḥkha and attain nirvāṇa. No one would aspire for full awakening or make effort toward that goal. This clearly is not true; the life stories of the Buddha and other realized beings disprove this. We see within ourselves the wish to be free from saṃsāra's duḥkha, the yearning for freedom from the grip of afflictions and karma. While we may not make as much effort as we would like toward this aim, we do take steps in this direction. This is based on trust that there is an alternative to saṃsāra and that an awakened state exists.

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## REFLECTION

1. Contemplate the four puzzling points above and then reflect on the explanations that resolve them.
2. Feel your own yearning for spiritual awakening and your aspiration to

free yourself from the obscurations that bind you. Realize that these indicate the existence of the buddha nature. Respect that aspect of yourself and determine to nourish it.

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## 14 | Going Deeper into Buddha Nature

VOLUME 1 of this series, *Approaching the Buddhist Path*, introduced the three turnings of the Dharma wheel and briefly described the presentation of true cessation and true path in each. I would now like to review and then expand on this topic and its relationship to buddha nature.

### *The Three Turnings of the Dharma Wheel and Buddha Nature*

The first turning of the Dharma wheel presents the overall structure of the Buddhist worldview based on the four truths. The second turning of the Dharma wheel contains a more detailed explanation of the third and fourth truths and presents the emptiness of inherent existence and the bodhisattva path. The essence of the third truth — true cessation — is understood in the context of the emptiness of the mind. The fourth truth — true path — is the wisdom realizing that emptiness.

We can see a progression. The first turning of the Dharma wheel discusses selflessness (*anātman*) in a general way. Having described the nature or identity of each truth and the way to engage with it, the Buddha explained the resultant understanding of each truth. Here he said that true cessation is to be actualized but there is nothing to actualize. This statement has deep implications. The Buddha wants us to understand emptiness, true cessation, and the unborn nature of phenomena.

In the second turning, the Buddha clarified that the precise meaning of selflessness is the emptiness of inherent existence (*śūnyatā*), the unborn nature. He also described the wisdom realizing this unborn nature. Here he called it “objectless” or “nonobjectifying” wisdom because it has ceased the apprehension of any objectifiable basis or inherent existence in persons and phenomena.

The Perfection of Wisdom sūtras — which were taught in the second turning



— and the *Ornament of Clear Realizations*, a commentary by Maitreya on those sūtras, explain *tathāgatagarbha* — buddha essence — from the perspective of it being the ultimate nature of the mind, the emptiness of the mind.

The third turning of the Dharma wheel delves deeper: The purified aspect of the emptiness of the mind is true cessation, but what mind is the basis of that emptiness? The ordinary mind we have at present, which is the basis of all our afflictions, is not that mind. Our sense consciousnesses also cannot be that basis, because they are not stable and continuous. Nor can afflictive minds such as ignorance be that basis because the continuity of ignorance is not present at buddhahood and thus the emptiness of ignorance is also absent then.

The mind that is the basis for true cessation must be a pure mind — pure in that afflictions have not entered into its nature. That mind must be beginningless and endless because its continuum must go without interruption to buddhahood and become a buddha's mind. This mind is the clear light mind that can become a liberating path — the subject clear light realizing the object clear light, the emptiness of the mind. This is the *tathāgatagarbha* presented in the third turning. While the second turning speaks of *tathāgatagarbha* primarily as the object, emptiness, the third turning presents it as the subject, the clear light mind that can realize emptiness, which is also the basis of that emptiness.

In this way, the second turning of the Dharma wheel gives a thorough account of emptiness — the third truth, true cessation — while the third turning presents a thorough explanation of the fourth truth, true path. Here the Buddha introduces the clear light mind, a mind that has always been and will continue to be pure. However, he does not explain how to access and realize that mind. Where can we find a deeper explanation of the clear light mind and the method to actualize it? This is the key that opens the door to Tantra. A disciple who wants to learn about this mind in more depth cannot find the explanation in Sūtra, so she is automatically drawn to Tantra.

Of the four classes of tantra, the first three are preparations for the fourth, the highest yoga tantra (*mahānuttarayoga tantra*), which contains the real meaning of Tantra. The highest yoga tantra provides a clear explanation about how to access the fundamental innate clear light mind, utilize it, and transform it into a virtuous mental state, a true path that realizes emptiness. The development of this wisdom mind culminates in the state of union, the state of full awakening described in Tantra.

From this perspective Nāgārjuna's *Commentary on Bodhicitta* can be seen as a commentary on the third turning because it unpacks the meaning of a verse

from the *Guhyasamāja Root Tantra*:

Devoid of all real entities;  
utterly discarding all objects and subjects  
such as aggregates, elements, and sense sources;  
due to sameness of selflessness of all phenomena,  
one's mind is primordially unborn;  
it is in the nature of emptiness.<sup>86</sup>

Similarly, Nāgārjuna's *Praise to the Sphere of Reality* comments primarily on the subject matter of the third turning, the subject clear light mind, but hints at the meaning of clear light mind as explained in Tantra. It says (DS 20–21):

Just as asbestos cloth<sup>87</sup>  
that is filthy with all kinds of dirt,  
when put into fire,  
the filth is burnt but not the cloth.

Similarly, it is the case with the clear light mind,  
which has defilements produced by attachment;  
the fire of pristine wisdom burns the defilements  
but not that clear light [mind].

When fireproof asbestos cloth is put in fire, the stains on it burn until they disappear completely, but the cloth remains untouched. Likewise, when the ordinary mind of sentient beings, the clear light mind, is exposed to the realization of emptiness, the stains on the mind — attachment and so forth — are removed but the clear light mind remains.

True cessation ultimately refers to the emptiness of the subtlest clear light mind that has become an awakened mind. Although this is not explicitly stated in the third turning, the clear light mind mentioned in the third turning ultimately refers to the clear light mind of highest yoga tantra. Here we see that the three turnings of the Dharma wheel are not disconnected teachings on different topics. Each turning is closely linked to the previous one; it builds on and unpacks the meaning of the previous turning in more depth and detail. In this way, the Buddha, a skillful and wise teacher, gradually leads us to deeper understandings. Similarly, each turning hints at deeper explanations found in the future turnings.

To summarize, in the context of the three turnings, from the Sūtra

perspective buddha nature is of two types: (1) The emptiness of the mind — the object that is perceived — as explained in the Perfection of Wisdom sūtras in the second turning. (2) The mind that is the basis of that emptiness. This undefiled mind has existed beginninglessly and will transform into the liberating paths that perceive this emptiness. Saying this mind is clear light means that the defilements are not an inherent property of this mind.

As the third turning leads us to understand, the emptiness of the mind is the natural buddha nature, and the basis of this emptiness is the transforming buddha nature. Both are buddha nature according to the Sūtra explanation. Furthermore, there is an extremely subtle mind that is the clear light mind and the seed of wisdom. It, too, is buddha nature. The full explanation of this mind and how to access it is presented in Tantra, specifically in highest yoga tantra.

## *A Link between Sūtra and Tantra*

This way of describing the buddha nature as both the object, emptiness, and the subject, mind, is confirmed by the Seventh Dalai Lama in his *Commentary on the “Pristine Wisdom on the Verge of Transcendence Sūtra”* (*Atyayajñāna Sūtra*). He explains that the pristine wisdom on the verge of transcendence refers to both the pristine wisdom realizing the ultimate nature as one approaches nirvāṇa and the pristine wisdom realizing suchness that is at the heart of the practice that one must engage in at all times, including at the point of death. In his commentary, the Seventh Dalai Lama quotes the sūtra:

If you realize the nature of your mind, it is wisdom. Therefore cultivate thorough discrimination not to seek buddhahood elsewhere.

What is the nature of that mind? He says it has three characteristics: (1) The nature of that mind is such that it is devoid of all conceptual elaborations (it is empty of inherent existence). (2) Since the ultimate nature of all phenomena is undifferentiable, the nature of that mind is all-pervading. (3) The nature is not polluted by any adventitious conceptualizations (afflictions).

He then turns to the tathāgatagarbha, saying that it exists in the mental continuum of each sentient being. Tathāgatagarbha refers to three factors:

(1) *The factor that allows for the buddhas’ awakening activity to interact*

with sentient beings (T. *nges legs kyi 'phrin las 'jug tu yod pa'i chha*). This factor is called the “essence or seed (*garbha*) of buddhahood” because it allows for sentient beings to enjoy and benefit from the buddhas’ awakening activities, which are fruits of their awakening. It is the aspect of the mind that is receptive and has the capacity to receive the buddhas’ various awakening activities and influence. This is the potency that exists in sentient beings that allows for the buddhas’ awakening activity to interact with sentient beings and stimulate their progress on the path.

(2) The *factor of the sphere of reality* — namely, the mind’s emptiness of inherent existence (T. *sems rang 'zhin gyis stong pa'i chhos nyid gyi chha*). This factor is the emptiness of the mind that is not free from defilements. It is called “the essence of buddhahood” because the nature of the Buddha’s dharmakāya and the nature of sentient beings’ mind are the same in terms of not being inherently polluted by afflictions. In terms of the mind being empty of existing from its own side, there is no difference between a buddha and a sentient being. In that way, sentient beings share the buddhas’ nature.

(3) The *factor that is the seed that serves as the basis for the actualization of the three buddha bodies* (T. *sku gsum 'grub byed kyi nyer len sa bon gyi chha*). This factor is called the “essence of buddhahood” because from this cause the resultant three buddha bodies emerge. This is the subject clear light mind described in the third turning, which transforms into the three buddha bodies. Usually a seed is an abstract composite, but in this case it refers to a mind. Here the tathāgatagarbha is a conditioned phenomenon, the clear light mind that will become a buddha’s mind. This clear light mind has existed beginninglessly, will continue endlessly, and is the basis of the emptiness of the mind. Why is it called clear light? Clear light implies that the actual nature of the mind is undefiled. The stains that presently cover the mind are adventitious; they have not entered into the nature of the mind and are not an inherent part of the clear light mind. As Maitreya said (RGV 1.62):

This clear and luminous nature of mind  
is as immutable as space. It is not afflicted  
by desire and so on, the adventitious defilements  
that spring from false conceptions.

The clear light mind is not permanent, but the fact that the afflictions are adventitious does not change. In the sense of the clear light mind being a

continuity, nothing new is created at awakening; the obscurations and defilements have simply been eradicated. At this point, this mind, which has existed since beginningless time and whose nature is undefiled, becomes the omniscient mind.

Because the Seventh Dalai Lama is ostensibly speaking in terms of Sūtra, the buddha nature he speaks of is the clear light mind described in Sūtrayāna. Looking deeper, I believe that he is actually referring to the fundamental innate clear light mind that has been present in sentient beings since beginningless time and goes on endlessly. The continuity of this mind will attain awakening. Because a clear exposition of the fundamental innate clear light mind that acts as the seed of the three buddha bodies is not found in Sūtra, a practitioner must seek it in Tantra, especially in highest yoga tantra, which contains an extensive explanation of the fundamental innate clear light mind that has existed beginninglessly and continues on until awakening. Without saying it directly, the Seventh Dalai Lama is directing us to the tantric explanation of the innate clear light mind. In this way, the sequence of the three turnings of the Dharma wheel leads us from the basic teaching of the four truths, to in-depth explanations of the third and the fourth truths, and then eventually to the highest yoga tantra.

Dzogchen and Mahāmudrā usually refer to a subtle mind, rigpa or the clear light mind, as the buddha nature. Among Gelukpas, in Sūtrayāna buddha nature is usually discussed from the perspective of the *Ornament of Clear Realizations*, where it refers to the emptiness of the mind, not to the subtlest clear light mind itself, as Tantra speaks of it. However, here, commenting on a sūtra, the Seventh Dalai Lama, who is a traditional Gelukpa, also describes the buddha nature in a way similar to that of Dzogchen and Mahāmudrā.

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## REFLECTION

1. When the sūtra says, “If you realize the nature of your mind, it is wisdom. Therefore cultivate thorough discrimination not to seek buddhahood elsewhere,” what does it mean?
2. What are the three characteristics the Seventh Dalai Lama points to as the characteristics of that wisdom mind?
3. What is the sequence of teachings in the three turnings of the Dharma

wheel that lead us to the tantric explanation of the fundamental innate clear light mind?

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## *Nothing Is to Be Removed*

A verse is found in the *Ornament of Clear Realizations* and the *Sublime Continuum*, both written by Maitreya. The *Ornament* is a commentary on the Perfection of Wisdom sūtras from the second turning; the *Sublime Continuum* is a commentary on the *Tathāgatagarbha Sūtra* from the third turning. Speaking of buddha nature, this verse says (RGV 1.155):

Nothing whatsoever is to be removed;  
not the slightest thing is to be added.  
Perfectly view the perfect [truth];  
seeing the perfect will liberate completely.

If the meaning of this verse were the same in both texts, there would be unnecessary repetition. To avoid that complication, the verse should be interpreted differently in each text. According to Abhayākaragupta (d. 1125), one of the great Indian commentators on the *Ornament*, from the viewpoint of the Perfection of Wisdom sūtras, the verse refers to the tathāgatagarbha from the perspective of the object, the empty nature of the mind. In this context, the element within sentient beings from which nothing needs to be removed and nothing needs to be added — something the discovery of which will lead us to nirvāṇa — is the emptiness of the mind. There is nothing to remove from the mind's emptiness because inherent existence has never existed. There is nothing to add to it because it is the ultimate nature of the mind. It is perfect, and seeing it perfectly — seeing it directly without any conceptual overlay — will cleanse the mind of obscurations and bring awakening. The object, emptiness, is flawless and perfect, and the way of perceiving it is also flawless and perfect. When one actually perceives emptiness in this way with an uninterrupted path, in the very next moment one will attain a liberated path. Nāgārjuna echoes this. Referring to the Buddha, he says (LS 23):

There is nothing that you have brought forth;  
there is nothing that you have negated

there is nothing that you have negated.  
You have comprehended that suchness,  
as it was before, so it is afterward.

The wisdom realizing emptiness does not remove something from the emptiness of the mind that was previously present. Nor does it bring a new reality to the mind. As the *Descent into Lanka Sūtra* (*Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra*) says, “Whether the Tathāgata appears in the world or not, reality forever abides.” Buddha nature — understood as the emptiness of the mind — is always present and does not change. The only difference is that wisdom now realizes this ultimate nature of the mind.

According to the *Sublime Continuum*, the verse refers to the clear light mind being the buddha nature. The clear light mind is the basis that has many attributes, such as its being pure from the beginning and not newly created. Its being pure from the beginning is described in the first line: because afflictions are not an inherent part of the clear light mind, there is nothing whatsoever to remove from it. Its not being newly created is explained in the second line: it is not the case that once the clear light mind was absent and then it was freshly created. Thus there is nothing to add to it because the clear light mind is eternal. But what does viewing this clear light mind perfectly mean? According to Sūtra, how can nonconceptual experience of the clear light mind liberate us?

The *Sublime Continuum* says that the ultimate nature is to be self-revealed: there is no need to use reasoning to understand it; one’s own experience will reveal it. Gyaltsab maintains that this ultimate nature refers to the emptiness of the mind, as it does in the *Ornament*. If that is the case, what does saying it is self-revealed mean? How can ultimate reality reveal itself? Interpreting the ultimate nature mentioned here to be the clear light mind connects to the Dzogchen and Mahāmudrā meditations on the mind. By stopping memories of the past and plans for the future, the clear and cognizant nature of the mind can be directly perceived. If one abides in this state and has a prior correct realization of emptiness, then the coarse levels of mind dissolve and the subtlest innate clear light mind — rigpa in Dzogchen — manifests; it reveals itself. Combining this mind with our previous familiarity with emptiness liberates us from afflictions and defilements.

*The Capacity Giving Rise to the Three Kāyas*

What is the relationship between the transforming buddha nature and the third factor of the tathāgatagarbha as set forth by the Seventh Dalai Lama — the factor that is the seed that serves as the basis for the actualization of the three buddha bodies? Take the example of a rosary and the beads that form it. When we think of a rosary, we think of one thing that is a continuum. That is similar to buddha nature as presented by the Seventh Dalai Lama. When we think of the individual beads, we focus on the particular components of the rosary. The beads are analogous to the various consciousnesses that can be the buddha nature. At one time it is bodhicitta, at another time it is the mind realizing emptiness, at yet another time it is the mind restraining from nonvirtue, and so on. The Seventh Dalai Lama is not referring to these specific mental states; he is emphasizing the continuum, the common feature shared by all of them. This common feature is the mental primary consciousness; this is the tathāgatagarbha. Some of the instances of this continuum may grasp true existence, and from that perspective they are not buddha nature. But from the perspective of that mind still being clear light — that which is clear and cognizant, whose obscurations are adventitious — it is the buddha nature.

Looking deeper, this third factor of tathāgatagarbha cannot refer to the transforming buddha nature. Why not? According to Sūtra, the transforming buddha nature is any mind that is not freed from defilements, whose continuity goes on to awakening and that serves as the basis for the emptiness that is the naturally abiding buddha nature. The naturally abiding buddha nature is the emptiness of the mind that is not yet freed from defilements. The seed having the capacity to give rise to the three kāyas must be a pure state of mind that is not defiled. This can only be a very subtle mind that has existed since beginningless time and will go on endlessly. The explanation of this primordial clear light mind is found in great depth only in highest yoga tantra, not in the Sūtra teachings that speak of the transforming buddha nature.

### *A Buddha's Nature Dharmakāya*

To review, in Tantra the fundamental innate clear light mind of sentient beings has never been mixed with defilements. This innate, ever-present mind has two qualities — it is the subtlest mind, and it has existed beginninglessly, exists endlessly, and will go on to awakening. When coarser levels of mind appear out of this subtlest mind, afflictions manifest. But when the coarser levels of mind



— including the white appearance, red increase, and black near attainment — absorb and cease, only the beginningless and endless clear light mind remains. At that time it is not possible for afflictions to arise. This indicates that the coarse minds are adventitious — they are not stable and enduring — while the innate clear light mind is eternal. This primordial clear light mind is the basis from which an individual’s saṃsāra evolves and it is also the basis from which the qualities of nirvāṇa come about.

The primordial clear light mind differs from the clear light mind described in Sūtra, which is together with afflictions in that afflictions manifest in it even though those afflictions are not an inherent part of that mind. However, afflictions are never able to manifest in the primordial clear light mind presented in Tantra because this mind manifests only after the coarser levels of mind and wind have ceased, at the time of death or by means of special yogic techniques.

In the Perfection of Wisdom sūtras, the nature body of a buddha (*svābhāvikakāya*) is said to be an unconditioned, permanent phenomenon — the emptiness of inherent existence of the awakened mind. The wisdom dharmakāya of a buddha is a conditioned, impermanent phenomenon that is the continuation of the clear light mind described in Sūtra. In Tantra, the primordial clear light mind is called the “composite nature body of a buddha.” Although the emptiness of the awakened mind — the nature body in common to Sūtra and Tantra — is a permanent phenomenon, the existence of a composite nature body is unique to Tantra because only Tantra speaks of the primordial clear light mind. Calling the primordial clear light mind at buddhahood the composite nature body emphasizes that nothing is newly created at buddhahood. This mind has been there all along, but now all the defilements, which were never an inherent part of it, are completely gone.

From the perspective of it cognizing all veiled and ultimate truths simultaneously, the purified primordial clear light mind of a buddha is called the omniscient mind, the wisdom dharmakāya. From the perspective of its existing from beginningless time and now becoming the purified basis of the emptiness that is the unconditioned nature body, it is called the composite nature body. The Seventh Dalai Lama refers to it as the “seed that has the capacity to give rise to the three kāyas of a buddha.” Although “seed” usually refers to an abstract composite, here it is a mind that serves as the basis for the three buddha bodies. This innate, primordial, ever-present mind also transforms into the wisdom dharmakāya. Thus in Tantra, the composite nature body and the wisdom dharmakāya of a buddha are the same mind seen from different perspectives.

In summary, Sūtra speaks of two buddha natures. One is the naturally abiding buddha nature; the other is the transforming buddha nature. The naturally abiding buddha nature is the emptiness of the mind that is not free from defilements. The transforming buddha nature is the mind that is the basis of that emptiness as well as any other neutral or virtuous qualities of mind that continue on to buddhahood.

If an intelligent person who is inclined toward Tantra hears of the third factor of tathāgatagarbha as explained by the Seventh Dalai Lama — the seed having the capacity to give rise to the three kāyas — she will understand that there is some aspect of her own mind that is a composite phenomenon and the buddha nature. What is that? It cannot be the defiled coarse mind because that mind does not continue to awakening. It must be a subtle mind that is hinted at but not explained extensively in Sūtra. She turns to Tantra, where there is a lengthy and explicit presentation of this mind. In this way, she enters Tantrayāna.

### *Pristine Wisdom Abiding in the Afflictions*

There is an area of potential confusion about tathāgatagarbha that we must take care to avoid. It stems from such statements as “Within afflictions, wisdom (*jñāna*) abides,” found in Nāgārjuna’s *Praise to the Sphere of Reality*. *Jñāna* usually refers to āryas’ pristine wisdom that directly realizes emptiness. Does this mean that afflictions are in fact wisdom? If so, are we already buddhas?

Statements such as this need to be understood correctly. Here *jñāna* refers not to āryas’ wisdom realizing emptiness but to the clear light nature that can transform into the wisdom of the resultant state. *Jñāna* is the aspect of the mind — found even in an afflictive mind — that can become the wisdom realizing emptiness. The cause — the clear light mind of sentient beings — will eventually become the result — a buddha’s pristine wisdom — and for this reason the clear light mind of sentient beings is called *wisdom* even though it has yet to become that wisdom. How is that aspect of the mind transformed into the nonconceptual wisdom directly realizing emptiness? By means of learning, reflecting, and meditating on the Dharma. This wisdom is generated in dependence on or in relation to the clear light mind.

Giving the cause the name of the result is reminiscent of Nāgārjuna’s discussion of the three kāyas (buddha bodies) in the ordinary state, on the path,

and at the resultant level. The expression “three kāyas in the ordinary state” does not mean that the three resultant kāyas are already present in us in our ordinary state. Rather, in the ordinary state we possess the basis upon which we can actualize the three kāyas. This basis is given the name of the result.

Similar ways of speaking are found in other scriptures. In *Treasury of Dharmadhātu* (T. *chos dbyings mdzod*), Longchenpa says that what is primordially awakened becomes reawakened. Some people take such passages literally, thinking that we are already buddhas. But if that is the case, then we are very strange and disgraceful buddhas! Longchenpa’s statement echoes the notion of natural nirvāṇa found in Madhyamaka texts. Natural nirvāṇa refers to the mind’s emptiness of inherent existence. This ultimate nature of the mind is pure and clear light; the defilements have not penetrated into it. Because this nature is naturally untainted, it is possible to remove the defilements that obscure it. While natural nirvāṇa is not the nirvāṇa of liberated beings, it serves as the basis upon which actual nirvāṇa can be attained. This is similar to the meaning of Longchenpa’s statement that what is the primordially awakened becomes reawakened.

Nāgārjuna’s statement that wisdom exists in the afflictions is made from the Sūtra point of view where wisdom refers to the continuity of the mental consciousness. According to Dzogchen and Mahāmudrā, the wisdom that is present in the afflictions is much subtler and refers to the innate clear light mind. They say this wisdom is a noncomposite phenomenon. Dodrubchen Jigme Tenpai Nyima (1865–1926), the Third Dordrup Rinpoche, explains that *noncomposite* in this context does not have its usual meaning of permanent and unconditioned. Rather, wisdom is said to be noncomposite because it has existed beginninglessly and is not newly created by causes and conditions. In the same way, the *Sublime Continuum* refers to the buddhas’ activities as permanent because they have existed beginninglessly and will exist eternally. Here “permanent” means eternal and unending; it doesn’t mean unchanging or unconditioned.

Gyaltsab Darma Rinchen has another view. He says that the term “wisdom” in this statement is not to be understood literally. Rather it refers to the emptiness of the mind, which is noncomposite, permanent, and always present.

I believe the Dzogchen and Mahāmudrā interpretations are more applicable when trying to understand the presentation in the *Sublime Continuum*. There is not much difference between the Seventh Dalai Lama’s view of buddha nature and that of Dzogchen and Mahāmudrā. However, Dzogchen and Mahāmudrā

speak from the viewpoint of highest yoga tantra and thus they identify the innate ever-present clear light mind as buddha nature, whereas the Seventh Dalai Lama speaks from the Sūtra viewpoint that points to Tantra.

## *Causal Clear Light Mind*

The causal clear light mind can be spoken of from the perspective of both Sūtra and Tantra. Sūtra speaks of the continuity of the mental consciousness, which is present at all times. The jñāna that abides in the afflictions refers to the continuum of this mental consciousness. While the continuum of the mental consciousness is not actual pristine wisdom, it will become this wisdom as we progress through the paths and grounds to buddhahood.

Highest yoga tantra differentiates two types of mind — the temporary, adventitious consciousnesses and the innate ever-present clear light mind. When all the coarser levels of mind — including the white appearance, red increase, and black near attainment — have dissolved, the subtlest innate clear light mind becomes manifest. Only this mind remains. The fact that all the other minds have dissolved indicates that they are adventitious, while the subtlest innate clear light mind, which has existed since beginningless time and continues on endlessly to awakening, persists.

From the viewpoint of highest yoga tantra, the clear and cognizant nature of the mind that is the fundamental innate clear light mind underlies all consciousnesses. But we should not equate clarity and cognizance in general with the fundamental innate clear light mind. All consciousnesses are clear and cognizant because that is the definition of consciousness. The fundamental innate clear light mind is the subtlest mind. The coarser minds of the waking state are derivatives of this everlasting mind. Although they have a clear and cognizant nature, they are not this subtlest innate mind.

Neither the continuum of the mental consciousness spoken of in Sūtra nor the fundamental innate clear light mind spoken of in Tantra is a soul or inherently existent self. Both are empty of inherent existence.

## *What Continues to Awakening?*

Who is the person that goes from being an ordinary being to an ārya to a buddha? To answer this, we speak of the *general I* — the continuity of the merely designated I from one life to another — and the *specific I* of each lifetime that constitutes that continuity. The specific I of each lifetime is designated in dependence on the aggregates of that life. Since our physical and mental aggregates change from one lifetime to the next, the I designated in dependence on them also changes. In one lifetime we may be Susan, in the next John. In one lifetime we may be a monkey, in another a human being, and in yet another a deva. These are the specific Is of those three lifetimes.

The general I or person that goes from one life to the next is designated in dependence on the series of specific Is. The Buddha spoke of the general I when he said, “In my previous life I was a king, in the present life I am Śākyamuni Buddha.” The person or I that exists continuously in the past, present, and future without interruption is the general I. That general I encompasses the monkey of one life, the human in the next, and the deva in the life after that. The monkey, human being, and deva are the specific persons of those individual lives. They are born and die; the general I goes from saṃsāra to full awakening.

When speaking of the self that exists in the three times, we are not referring to a subtle self or a coarse self — no distinction like that is made. It is simply the general I. Likewise, without making any distinction in terms of subtle or coarse, we say there is a general mental consciousness that exists in the three times.

Although the general mental consciousness goes from one life to the next and on to awakening, the specific mental consciousnesses of the sentient beings in that continuum do not. The consciousness aggregate of the monkey is not the substantial cause of the consciousness aggregate of the human being in the next rebirth. However, the last moment of the consciousness of one life is the substantial cause for the first moment of the consciousness of the next life. In this way, it is said that the continuity of the mental consciousness goes on to awakening. However, this mental consciousness is not a truly existent self or soul.

As discussed above, because afflictions such as ignorance are eradicated on the path and do not go on to awakening, they cannot be considered buddha nature. Although afflictions do not continue on to awakening, the clear and cognizant characteristic of the afflictions does. Here it is helpful to understand two kinds of continuities: (1) a *continuity of type* in which the cause and the result share similar characteristics, and (2) a *continuity of substance* in which one thing is the substance that transforms into another thing.

For example, a log burns and becomes ashes. The ashes are the substantial continuity of the log because the material of the log turned into the ashes. The ashes are not the continuity of type of the log because the log and the ashes do not have similar characteristics. Applying this to the question of afflictions continuing to awakening: the awakened mind is not the continuity of type of afflictions. Afflictions are polluted, they are the true origin of duḥkha. The awakened mind is unpolluted and is not the true origin. The two do not share the same characteristics. However, the clear and cognizant nature of the awakened mind is in the substantial continuity of the clear and cognizant nature of the afflictions.

From one perspective, it seems that if the mind grasping inherent existence changed objects and apprehended emptiness, it would be a virtuous mind. In that case, from the viewpoint of substance — clarity and cognizance — ignorance and wisdom would be in the same substantial continuity. But from the viewpoint of their characteristics, ignorance and the wisdom realizing emptiness are total opposites. The ignorance grasping true existence does not go to awakening; it is a totally distorted consciousness that cannot improve or become virtuous. In fact, when the antidote of wisdom realizing emptiness is applied, ignorance degenerates and becomes nonexistent. But when we look just at the clear and cognizant nature of ignorance, we can say that it can be purified and its purified continuum goes on to awakening.

## *Dzogchen and Mahāmudrā*

According to Sūtra, meditation on the clear and cognizant nature of the mind or on the transforming buddha nature alone will not eradicate afflictions. However, it does lead us to have more confidence that afflictions are not an inherent part of the mind and therefore that becoming a buddha is possible. This, in turn, leads us to question: What defiles the mind and what can eliminate these defilements completely? Seeking the method to purify the transforming buddha nature, we will cultivate the wisdom realizing the emptiness of inherent existence and eradicate ignorance.

According to Dzogchen and Mahāmudrā, meditation on the clear and cognizant nature of the mind could lead the coarse winds to dissolve and the subtlest clear light mind to become manifest. When this happens, practitioners who have previously cultivated a correct understanding of emptiness then

incorporate that understanding in their meditation and use the innate clear light mind to realize emptiness and abolish afflictions.

It is important to understand the *Sublime Continuum* correctly from a Dzogchen and Mahāmudrā point of view. Some people take it literally, leading them to incorrectly believe that primordial wisdom is permanent, inherently existent, independent of any other factors, and does not rely on causes and conditions. They then make statements such as, “If you unravel this secret, you will be liberated.” Dodrup Jigme Tenpai Nyima (1865–1926) and his disciple Tsultrim Zangpo (1884–c.1957), who were great Dzogchen scholars and practitioners, said that the mere presence of this primordial wisdom within us alone cannot liberate us. Why not? At the time of death, all other minds have dissolved, and only the primordial mind remains. Even though it has manifested in all the infinite number of deaths we have experienced in saṃsāra, that has not helped us attain buddhahood. These two sages say that in order to attain buddhahood, it is necessary to utilize the primordial wisdom to realize emptiness; only that will liberate us. This is consistent with Tsongkhapa’s view.

Some commentaries on Dzogchen and Mahāmudrā say: This wisdom that abides in the afflictions is the true wisdom, and on this basis every sentient being is already a buddha. Although we have been buddhas from beginningless time, we have to be awakened again. The wisdom that we have now is the omniscient mind of a buddha, and the three bodies of a buddha exist innately in each sentient being. Sentient beings have a basis of essential purity that is not merely emptiness but is endowed with three aspects. Its entity is the dharmakāya — the mode of abiding of pristine wisdom; its nature is the enjoyment body — the appearance aspect of that mind; and compassion is the emanation bodies — its radiance or expression. In short, they say that all three buddha bodies are present, fully formed in our ordinary state, but since they are obscured we are not aware of their presence.

Such statements taken literally are fraught with problems. While some people are partial and unfair in their criticism and refute misconceptions in only some traditions, Changkya Rolpai Dorje (1717–86) was unbiased and pointed out incorrect interpretations in all four Tibetan traditions, including his own Geluk tradition. In his *Song of the Experience of the View*, he says, “I say this not out of disrespect to these masters, but perhaps they have had less exposure to rigorous philosophical investigation of the great treatises and were unable to use certain terminology appropriately.” That is, the difficulty in their assertions lies in a broad use of terminology that is not grounded in the authority of the great

treatises. Of course, Changkya's comments do not apply to Dzogchen and Mahāmudrā masters such as Dodrup Jigme Tenpai Nyima and his teacher Awa Pangchu, who have done serious philosophical study and examination of the great treatises and who ground their understanding of Dzogchen in them. Their interpretations and writings are excellent.

All four Tibetan traditions teach practices that search for the mind — where it came from, where it goes, what its shape and color are, and so forth. Speaking of this shared practice, Changkya said that after searching in this manner, we find that the mind is not tangible, lacks color and shape, and does not come from one place or go to another. Discovering this, meditators experience a sensation of voidness. However, this voidness is not the emptiness of inherent existence that is the ultimate reality of the mind; it is the mere absence of the mind being a tangible object. Although someone may think this voidness is ultimate reality and meditate in that state for a long time, this is not meditation on the ultimate nature of the mind.

There are two ways to meditate on the mind. The first is as above, examining whether the mind has color, shape, location, tangibility, and so forth. This leads to the sense that the conventional nature of the mind lacks these qualities. The second is meditation on the ultimate nature of the mind, in which we examine the mind's ultimate mode of existence and discover its emptiness of inherent existence. People who confuse these two ways of meditating on the mind and think that the mind's absence of tangibility, color, and so forth is the mind's ultimate nature may criticize masters such as Dignāga and Dharmakīrti for their precise expositions on debate, logic, and reasoning, saying these only increase preconceptions. Gungtang Konchog Tenpai Dronme (1762–1823), another master who was impartial in his critical analysis of Tibetan Buddhist traditions, said he found this amazing.

Some people believe there is no need for reasoning or investigation on the path, that simply by having faith and receiving the blessing of a guru primordial wisdom will arise. In this light, I have been very happy to see the establishment of more shedras — academic institutes — that teach the classical philosophical texts from India and Tibet.

Some Westerners similarly do not value Dharma study and investigation, perhaps because Buddhadharma is relatively new in the West. Without a comprehensive understanding of the Buddhadharma, people tend to seek the easiest and shortest path to awakening, a path that does not require giving up their attachments. Such an attitude exists among Tibetans as well. Tsongkhapa



said that many people think that the Buddha's qualities are wonderful, but when a spiritual mentor explains through reasoning and scriptural citations how to attain them, they become discouraged and say, "Who can actually achieve such realizations?"

## *Are We Already Buddhas?*

In the *Tathāgatagarbha Sūtra*, the Buddha explained that each sentient being possesses a permanent, stable, and enduring tathāgatagarbha that is a fully developed buddha body (*kāya*) replete with the thirty-two signs of a buddha. Questions arise: If an already realized buddha existed within us, wouldn't we be ignorant buddhas? If we were actual buddhas now, what would be the purpose of practicing the path? If we were already buddhas and yet still needed to purify defilements, wouldn't a buddha have defilements? If we had a permanent, stable, and enduring essence, wouldn't that contradict the teachings on selflessness and instead resemble the self or soul asserted by non-Buddhists? Mahāmati expressed these same doubts to the Buddha in the *Descent into Lanka Sūtra*:

The tathāgatagarbha taught [by the Buddha in some sūtras] is said to be clear light in nature, completely pure from the beginning, and to exist possessing the thirty-two signs in the bodies of all sentient beings. If, like a precious gem wrapped in a dirty cloth, [the Buddha] expressed that [tathāgatagarbha] — wrapped in and dirtied by the cloth of the aggregates, constituents, and sources; overwhelmed by the force of attachment, animosity, and ignorance; dirtied with the defilements of conceptualizations; and permanent, stable, and enduring — how is this propounded as tathāgatagarbha different from the non-Buddhists propounding a self?<sup>88</sup>

Some Tibetan scholars accept the teaching on a permanent, stable, and enduring buddha nature literally, saying it is a definitive teaching. Sharing the doubts expressed above by Mahāmati, Prāsaṅgikas say this is an interpretable teaching. They say this, not on a whim, but by examining three points.

(1) *What was the Buddha's final intended meaning when he made this statement?* When speaking of a permanent, stable, and enduring essence in each sentient being, the Buddha's intended meaning was the emptiness of the mind,

the naturally abiding buddha nature, which is permanent, stable, and enduring. Because the mind is empty of inherent existence and the defilements are adventitious, buddhahood is possible.

(2) *What was the Buddha's purpose for teaching this?* The Buddha taught a permanent, stable, enduring essence complete with the thirty-two signs, in order to calm some people's fear of selflessness and to gradually lead non-Buddhists to the full realization of suchness. At present, these people, who are spiritually immature, feel comfortable with the idea of a permanent essence. The idea of the emptiness of inherent existence frightens them; they mistakenly think it means that nothing whatsoever exists. They fear that by realizing emptiness, they will disappear and cease to exist. To calm this fear, the Buddha spoke in a way that corresponds with their current ideas. Later, when they are more receptive, he will teach them the actual meaning. This is similar to the way skillful parents simplify complex ideas to make them comprehensible to young children.

(3) *What logical inconsistencies arise from taking this statement literally?* Accepting this teaching on a permanent, stable, and enduring buddha nature at face value contradicts the definitive meaning of emptiness and selflessness explained by the Buddha in the Perfection of Wisdom sūtras. In those sūtras, the Buddha set forth many reasonings that refute this view. Furthermore, if this statement were accepted literally, the Buddha's teachings would be no different from those of non-Buddhists who assert a permanent self.

The emptiness of inherent existence — which is the ultimate reality and the natural purity of the mind — exists in all sentient beings without distinction. Based on this, it is said that a buddha is present. But the ultimate reality of a buddha does not exist in sentient beings. While buddhas and sentient beings are the same in that the ultimate nature of their minds is emptiness, that ultimate reality is not the same because one is the ultimate reality of a buddha's mind — the nature dharmakāya — and the other is the ultimate reality of a defiled mind. If we said that the nature dharmakāya existed in sentient beings, we would have to also say that the wisdom dharmakāya, which is one nature with it, existed in sentient beings. That would mean that sentient beings were omniscient, which certainly is not the case! Similarly, if the abandonment of all defilements existed in ordinary sentient beings, there would be nothing to prevent them from directly perceiving the natural purity of their minds. They would directly realize emptiness. This, too, is not the case.

Some people say the dharmakāya with the two purities — the natural purity and the purity of the abandonment of all defilements — exists in the

mindstreams of sentient beings, but because sentient beings are obscured, they don't perceive it. If that were the case, then whose mind is purified and who attains the freedom that is the purity of all defilements? If sentient beings already possess the dharmakāya, there is no need for them to practice the path and purify their minds, because from beginningless time their minds have been free of adventitious defilements.

The assertion that a buddha complete with the thirty-two signs exists within the continuums of all sentient beings echoes the theistic theory of an eternally pure, unchanging self. If the thirty-two signs were already present in us, it would be contradictory to say that we still need to practice the path to create the causes for them. If someone says that they are already in us in an unmanifest form and they just need to be made manifest, that resembles the Sāṃkhya notion of arising from self, because even though existing, this buddha would need to be produced again in order to be made manifest. Nāgārjuna and his followers soundly refuted production from self.

The sūtra continues with the Buddha's response:

Mahāmati, my teaching of the tathāgatagarbha is not similar to the propounding of a self by non-Buddhists. Mahāmati, the tathāgatas, arhats, the perfectly completed buddhas indicated the tathāgatagarbha with the meaning of the words *emptiness, limit of complete purity, nirvāṇa, unborn, signless, wishless*, and so forth. [They do this] so that the immature might completely relinquish a state of fear regarding the selfless, [and to] teach the nonconceptual state, the sphere without appearance.<sup>89</sup>

Here we see that the Buddha skillfully taught different ideas to different people, according to what was necessary at the moment and beneficial in the long term to further them on the path. We also learn that we must think deeply about the teachings, exploring them from various viewpoints and bring knowledge gained from reasoning and from reading other scriptures to discern their definitive meaning.

The purpose of learning about buddha nature is to understand that the mind is not intrinsically flawed and that, on the contrary, it can be perfected. It is not just that the mind can be transformed; there is already part of the mind that allows it to be purified and perfected. Understanding this gives us great confidence and energy to practice the methods to purify and perfect this mind of

ours so that it will become the mind of a fully awakened buddha.

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## REFLECTION

1. What does it mean to say that pristine wisdom abides in the afflictions?
  2. Are we already wise buddhas but just don't know it? Do buddhas have afflictions?
  3. The Buddha said there is a permanent, stable, and enduring buddha nature in each of us. What was his final intended meaning in saying this?
  4. What was his purpose for teaching this?
  5. What logical inconsistencies arise from taking this statement literally?
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### *Awareness of Our Buddha Nature Eliminates Hindrances*

Maitreya said (RGV 1.158):

[The sūtras of the second turning of the Dharma wheel] state in numerous places that all knowable [phenomena] are in all ways empty like a cloud, a dream, or an illusion. Why is it then, that in [the sūtras of the third turning of the Dharma wheel] the Buddha, having said this, declared that the buddha nature is present within beings?

Maitreya tells us that although the sūtras of the second turning characterize the buddha nature by giving the examples of an illusion and so forth to illustrate the emptiness of the mind, he will explain buddha nature slightly differently in the *Sublime Continuum*. This is a clue implying that he will emphasize the clear light mind being the buddha nature. This may cause some people to doubt: “The Buddha taught emptiness extensively in the second turning, saying that was the buddha nature. Why in the third turning would he speak about buddha nature

being the clear light mind that has beginninglessly been completely pure in sentient beings? Is there a contradiction between the second and third turnings?”

Maitreya explains that the Buddha spoke of buddha nature being the clear light mind in order to help us sentient beings overcome five factors that hinder us from developing bodhicitta, realizing emptiness, and attaining buddhahood.

(1) *Discouragement* makes us believe that awakening cannot be attained. Because we don't know that the buddha nature exists in us, cynicism and a lack of confidence prevent us from generating bodhicitta. Even before beginning, we give up and don't make an effort.

(2) Having *arrogant contempt for those we consider inferior* comes from not knowing that the buddha nature exists in others. With derision we judge and disparage others, abandon love and compassion, and abstain from engaging in the bodhisattva practices.

(3) *Distorted conceptions* incorrectly hold that adventitious defilements are truly existent, exist in the nature of the mind, and are impossible to eradicate. These wrong views superimpose true existence on things that are empty of true existence. They arise from not knowing the existence of the buddha nature in all sentient beings and interfere with our cultivation of the wisdom correctly realizing reality.

(4) *Denigrating the true nature* is to deny the existence of buddha nature or to think the buddha nature has not been present beginninglessly. This misconstrued deprecation repudiates the potential that exists within each sentient being and inhibits realizing the excellent qualities that are inseparable in nature from the buddha nature.

(5) *Self-centeredness* makes us biased toward the self, quenching the equanimity that sees self and others as equally valuable. Egocentrism obliterates the thought that buddha nature exists equally in ourselves and others. Pre-occupied with our own concerns, we are unable to generate the love and compassion that regard ourselves and others as equal. This, in turn, interferes with generating bodhicitta.

Understanding buddha nature counteracts these five faults. When we sentient beings hear about buddha nature, (1) joy, not discouragement, arises in our minds because we know duḥkha can be overcome; (2) in place of contempt arises respect for the Buddha and sentient beings who have this great potential; (3–4) analytical wisdom that correctly views reality abolishes superimpositions and denigration of the actual nature, replacing it with liberating wisdom; and (5)

great love for all sentient beings overcomes confining self-preoccupation by opening our hearts to others. In short, eliminating these faults clears the way to generating bodhicitta and engaging in the six perfections, especially meditative stability and wisdom, which are essential to overcome the two obscurations.

In this way, Maitreya clarifies that the description of buddha nature in the *Sublime Continuum* does not contradict that of the second turning but speaks of it from a different perspective. He also elucidates the purpose for teaching the tathāgatagarbha in the third turning: it is to help sentient beings overcome the five faults and have enthusiasm and determination to practice the path and attain full awakening.

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## Notes

1. *Upādāna* means clinging, the aggregates being *subject to clinging*. This connotes that the aggregates are objects of our clinging and are brought about by clinging. *Upādāna* may also be translated as *appropriated*, connoting that the aggregates have been “taken” by the person.
2. In Buddhism *permanent* means unchanging. Permanent phenomena are not dependent on causes and conditions. *Impermanent* means changing from one moment to the next.
3. The way *nirvāṇa* is described here in the Pāli tradition — as a permanent, unconditioned, and unborn reality that allows for the eradication of defilements — sounds similar to the Madhyamaka description of emptiness in the Sanskrit tradition.
4. This refers to the fourfold classification of *nirvāṇa*. See chapter 11. According to the Prāsaṅgikas, *natural nirvāṇa* is emptiness. *Nirvāṇa without remainder* is true cessation in the continuums of arhats of the three vehicles that is qualified by the vanishing of the manifest appearance of true existence. *Nirvāṇa with remainder* is true cessation in the continuums of arhats of the three vehicles that is together with the manifest appearance of true existence. This occurs in the postmeditation time of arhats who are not buddhas. *Nonabiding nirvāṇa* is true cessation in which the two obscurations have been extinguished, and it is possessed only by buddhas. The lower tenet systems explain *nirvāṇa* with and without remainder differently.
5. See His Holiness the Dalai Lama and Thubten Chodron, *Buddhism: One Teacher, Many Traditions* for an explanation of the sixteen attributes according to the Pāli tradition.
6. *Self* has two distinct meanings, depending on the context: (1) the person, someone who is a sentient being or a buddha, and (2) inherent existence, as in self-grasping ignorance.
7. *Māra* is the personification of hindrances and obscurations.
8. See the first four chapters of Āryadeva’s *The Four Hundred* for a thorough description of the four distorted conceptions and their antidotes.
9. In both the Pāli and Sanskrit traditions, the three higher trainings of ethical conduct, concentration, and wisdom — which include the eightfold path — are generally specified as the path to liberation. Alex Wayman notes that the four distorted conceptions and four attributes of true cessations correspond to the four distorted conceptions and four attributes of true paths. These, in turn, relate to the three higher trainings. (1) True paths lead to true cessations, which together counteract the distorted conception that *nirvāṇa* does not exist because true paths do not exist. (2) The higher training of concentration is a *suitable* path that leads to *peace* because it calms and focuses the mind. (3) The higher training in ethical conduct is the *accomplishment* leading to *magnificence* because realizing the nature of the mind promotes nonharmfulness. (4) The higher training in wisdom is the *way to deliverance* because it leads to *irreversible freedom*. See Alex Wayman, “The Sixteen Aspects of the Four Noble Truths and Their Opposites,” *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 3, no. 2 (1980), 73.
10. In general, when the meditative concentrations of both the form and formless realms are referred to together, they are called meditative absorptions. However, technically, *dhyāna* refers specifically to the levels of concentration in the form realm and *samāpatti* to those in the formless realm.
11. For a more detailed explanation, see Lati Rinpoche, Denma Locho Rinpoche, Leah Zahler, and Jeffrey Hopkins, *Meditative States in Tibetan Buddhism* (Somerville, MA: Wisdom Publications, 1983), 23–47.
12. Classes 29 to 25 are the Five Pure Abodes (*Śuddhāvāsa*).
13. Some say this is a separate division of the fourth *dhyāna*, making eighteen *dhyānas*; others say it is



within the Great Fruit Land.

14. The Pāli tradition does not include the Increasing Merit or Cloudless in the fourth dhyāna; it does include the Unconscious Beings. Some Sanskrit versions include the Unconscious Beings, making eighteen form realm gods; others do not.
15. *Śubha* can also be translated as “pure” or “auspicious.”
16. See AN 4.123 for a fuller description of the form realm.
17. The Pāli Abhidhamma says they also lack the sense of touch.
18. The *Treasury of Knowledge* explains why the Realm of Thirty-Three Devas is so-called: “There are eight wealth gods, eleven wrathful gods, twelve sun gods, and the two young sons of Ashvini. Due to there being these thirty-three principal [gods,] it is called so, or, alternatively, due to there being thirty-three residences of the gods, such as Excellent Dharma (*Sudharma*), the meeting place of the gods, and so forth, it is called so.”
19. Pāli sūtras do not speak of asuras as a separate realm, but consider them as having an unfortunate rebirth. They mention asuras who are neighbors of the devas in the Land of the Thirty-Three, but often fight with them. Some Pāli commentators say asuras are in the hungry ghost realm.
20. In some texts, the order of hungry ghosts and animals is reversed.
21. The Dalai Lama, *The Meaning of Life from a Buddhist Perspective*, trans. and ed. Jeffrey Hopkins (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 1993), 7.
22. See also Artemus Engle, *Inner Science of Buddhist Practice* (Boston: Snow Lion Publications, 2009), 125–34.
23. Candrakīrti’s *Commentary on Āryadeva’s “Four Hundred” (Catuḥśatakaṭīka)*.
24. The following list shows different contexts in which the term “ignorance” is used; it is not a standard textual enumeration.
25. *Gratification* is the pleasure experienced by contact with the aggregates. *Danger* is the decay of the aggregates that leaves us disappointed. *Escape* is giving up desire for the aggregates, wisely freeing ourselves from the afflictions that bind us to duḥkha.
26. A primary consciousness has several mental factors that *accompany* or are *concomitant* with it, meaning that they share five similarities: they have the same basis, observed object, aspect, time, and entity. In this case, ignorance is a mental factor accompanying the primary mental consciousness and thus shares these five similarities with it. See *The Foundation of Buddhist Practice*, chapter 3.
27. P. *silabbata-parāmāsa*. The term has several different translations. In Pāli *parāmāsa* means “misapprehension.” It seems the corresponding Sanskrit term may be spelled similarly to the term meaning “supreme,” and thus the Tibetan term is often translated as “holding bad rules and practices as supreme.”
28. “Eternalism” in Buddhist philosophy is not the same as the eternalism that is a philosophy of time.
29. Tibetan Buddhism calls these sixty-two “bad views,” but does not speak of them in the context of the mental factor of wrong views. Tsongkhapa discusses these in *Illumination of the Thought (Dgongs pa rab gsal)*.
30. This is sometimes translated as “shamelessness,” referring to the lack of the good kind of shame that feels badly about our poor behavior.
31. MN 148.28 speaks of three underlying tendencies: attachment to sensuality, anger, and ignorance. MN 64.3–6 speaks of five underlying tendencies: view of a personal identity, doubt, view holding bad rules and practices, sensual desire, and malice. These five are also the five lower fetters. The *Jñānaprasthāna* — the last text in the Sarvāstivādin Abhidharma — explains ten underlying tendencies that are the same as the ten root afflictions in the Sanskrit tradition.
32. See Padmanabh S. Jaini, “*Smṛti* in the Abhidharma Literature and Development of Buddhist Accounts of Memory of the Past,” in *In the Mirror of Memory: Reflections on Mindfulness and Remembrance in Indian and Tibetan Buddhism*, ed. Janet Gyatso (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), 47–60. Also see Collett Cox, “The Sarvāstivādin Path of Removing Defilements,” in *Paths to Liberation: The Marga and Its Transformations in Buddhist Thought*, ed. Robert E. Buswell Jr. and

Robert M. Gimello (Honolulu: Kuroda Institute / University of Hawaii Press, 1992), 70–72.

33. Origin and disappearance refer to their transient nature. Gratification is the attraction or enjoyment we have, danger is the unpleasant consequences that come from afflictive involvement, and escape is the freedom we wish to attain.
34. The *Treasury of Knowledge* contains two other categories of defilements that overlap with these twenty. The *ten full entanglements* (*pāryavasthāna*) are: (1–2) Lack of integrity and inconsideration for others interfere with ethical conduct. (3–4) Jealousy (being mentally upset by another’s success) and miserliness (possessiveness that opposes giving Dharma, possessions, and skills) are inconsistent with benefiting others. (5) Restlessness is agitation. (6–7) Regret and lethargy are inconsistent with concentration. (8) Sleep is the gathering in of the mind that leaves one incapable of controlling the body. Sleep and regret are full entanglements only when they are afflictive. In the *Compendium of Knowledge* regret and sleep are listed as variable mental factors because they may accompany virtuous mental states. (9) Wrath includes all types of anger directed at sentient beings and inanimate objects (except malice and harmfulness). (10) Concealment is hiding disgraceful behavior.  
The *six stains* (*mala*) are: (1–2) Pretension (misleading others) and deceit (crookedness of mind that leads to acting in a distorted manner) are forms of dishonesty. (3) Haughtiness is smug complacency. (4) Spite is holding firmly to disgraceful behavior and not accepting good advice. (5) Resentment is continued animosity. (6) Harmfulness is cruelty that injures others with weapons or harsh words.
35. According to Asaṅga, the definitions of pretention and deceit are reversed.
36. Bhikkhu Bodhi differentiates these two, saying that the auxiliary affliction of arrogance is a manifest affliction, whereas the underlying tendency of arrogance is an unmanifest potential or seed that will become a manifest affliction when provocative circumstances are encountered. Personal correspondence.
37. After speaking of the pollutants, Vasubandhu addresses the floods (*ogha*) and yokes (*yoga*), saying they are four in number: attachment, existence, ignorance, and views. They are called *floods* because they carry us away to rebirth in saṃsāra. They are called *yokes* because they tie us to rebirth in saṃsāra. He does not include views as a pollutant because the pollutants establish us in saṃsāra, whereas views alone, without being associated with other afflictions, are not sufficient to do this.
38. View of extremes holds the aggregates to be either eternal or nonexistent. According to the Vaibhāṣika and Sautrāntika schools, when one attains nirvāṇa without remainder, the aggregates cease to exist, so there is no person who actually possesses this type of nirvāṇa because without the aggregates, a person cannot exist. Since one part of view of extremes holds the aggregates to be nonexistent and accords with the above way of defining nirvāṇa without remainder, this view is neutral, not nonvirtuous.
39. See *The Foundation of Buddhist Practice*, chapter 3.
40. Here we note a difference between true origins, which include karma, and afflictive obscurations, which do not. True origins are the source of all types of duḥkha; afflictive obscurations are what must be overcome to attain liberation. Once afflictions are overcome, the karma causing rebirth can no longer ripen.
41. The Pāli tradition does not set out five paths, as does the Sanskrit tradition. It speaks of seeing and meditation, but not the path of seeing or the path of meditation.
42. Cittamātrins have a complex presentation of seeds and latencies and how they produce both the object and the consciousness cognizing it. This explanation will be saved for a later volume in the series.
43. The Tibetan word *nang wa* can be translated as either “appearance” or “perception.” “Appearance of inherent existence” makes it seem that the problem is on the object’s side — that phenomena appear inherently existent. However, the problem is actually on the subject’s side — the mind is obscured and perceives things as if they were inherently existent. But “perceive” is not exactly the right word either, because it implies direct perception, and inherent existence also appears to conceptual consciousnesses.
44. Vaibhāṣikas are an exception to this. Their position differs from that of the Prāsaṅgikas with whom we are now concerned.

45. These were described while commenting on the meaning of *dhammatā*, the nature of things, in DN 14.
46. This and other examples from DN 14 are commonly given in the ancient commentaries. More research needs to be done on the meaning of dharma causality. Bhikkhu Bodhi speculates that it may include the causality of progressing on the path, with one realization being the cause of the next.
47. See Leti Sayadaw, *The Niyama-dipani: The Manual of Cosmic Order*, [http://mahajana.net/texts/kopia\\_lokalna/MANUAL04.html](http://mahajana.net/texts/kopia_lokalna/MANUAL04.html).
48. *Pratītyasamutpāda* is translated as “dependent origination” when speaking about the twelve links and as “dependent arising” when speaking of the broader sense in which all phenomena are dependent and therefore empty of true existence.
49. The length of a moment varies according to the context from the tiniest nanosecond to the length of time to complete something to a lifetime. Here it refers to the length of time it takes for first-link ignorance to cause second-link formative action.
50. Geshe Lhundrup Sopa, with David Patt, *Steps on the Path to Enlightenment: A Commentary on Tsongkhapa’s Lamrim Chenmo*, vol. 2, *Karma* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2005), 326.
51. Chim Jampalyang, *Ornament of Abhidharma: A Commentary on Vasubandhu’s Abhidharmako’sa*, trans. Ian James Coghlan (Somerville, MA: Wisdom Publications, 2019), 411.
52. The bardo may last up to forty-nine days. If a new rebirth has not been found, at the end of each week there is a mini-death at which time it is possible for a new karma to ripen.
53. Pāli Abhidhamma commentaries say that in the moment just after the cessation of the rebirth-linking consciousness, the same type of consciousness apprehending the same object continues uninterruptedly when there is no cognitive process, until the arising of death consciousness. This consciousness is called the life-continuum. According to a more detailed explanation, the bhavaṅga follows immediately after the rebirth-linking consciousness and is a product of the same karma that produced the rebirth-linking consciousness. The bhavaṅga is a deep, underlying consciousness that accounts for the continuity of mind coming from the living being in the previous life. It is not a continuous consciousness, an independent consciousness, or a permanent self; it arises and passes away in each micro-moment. During the lifetime, the bhavaṅga arises whenever there isn’t a cognitive process, maintaining the continuity of mind. At the end of life, the life-continuum becomes the death consciousness. After death, the rebirth-linking consciousness and so forth of another set of twelve links occur. In this way, the mindstream (P. *cittasantāna*) flows on from conception until death and from death to the new birth, revolving like the wheel of a cart (CMA 228).
54. In other contexts “name” includes consciousness and refers to the mind as a whole.
55. This is from the Sūtra viewpoint. From the Tantric perspective, beings in the formless realm still have a very subtle body — the subtlest wind that is one nature with the subtlest mind.
56. This is according to Chim Jampalyang’s commentary on the *Treasury of Knowledge*.
57. See LC 1:311–12.
58. These seven are the mental contemplations of a mere beginner, individual knowledge of the character, belief, thorough isolation, withdrawal or joy, analysis, and final training. Sometimes an eighth contemplation, the mental contemplation of the result of final training, is listed. This is the actual dhyāna or meditative absorption.
59. Daniel Cozort, *Unique Tenets of the Middle Way Consequence School* (Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion Publications, 1998), 182.
60. The Pāli tradition prescribes the eightfold path as the remedy to cyclic existence.
61. Among the eighteen early schools the Sarvāstivāda, which later became influential in Tibet, asserted an intermediate state between one life and the next. The Theravāda commentarial tradition rejected this, saying that the consciousness separates from one body and in the very next moment the rebirth consciousness takes place in the new existence. Nevertheless, there is mention in the Pāli sūtras of the “being to be reborn,” or *gandhabba* (MN 38.26 and MN 93.18). The Pāli sūtras do not explain the meaning of *gandhabba*, but treat it as if the listeners already understood its meaning. Buddhaghosa explained a *gandhabba* as a being who is going to be reborn — that is, the consciousness of a being

who has passed away that is in a condition suitable for taking rebirth. In the case of a human birth, the gandhabba will be born as the child of two parents with whom it has a karmic connection.

In other contexts, gandhabba refers to semi-divine spirits inhabiting forests and plants or to a type of celestial musician.

62. Geshe Yeshe Tabkhye, “Dependent Arising, the King of Reasons Used to Distinguish the Ontological Status of All Things,” trans. Geshe Damdul Namgyal and Joshua W. C. Cutler, unpublished manuscript. This essay on dependent arising acts as an introduction to Kamalāśīla’s commentary on the *Rice Seedling Sūtra*, which Geshe Thabkhe translated into Hindi.
63. The sūtra’s Tibetan title is *Yod pa nyid la sogs pa’i bye brag rnam par ‘byad pa zhes bya ba’i chos kyi rnam grangs kyi mdo*. The sūtra passage is cited in *Vasubandhu’s Explanation of the Divisions of the First Factor of Dependent Arising* (DK, vol. *chi*, 5a, 4.xz; the citation is from Geshe Thabkhe’s unpublished manuscript, “Dependent Arising”).
64. Excerpt from Geshe Thabkhe’s unpublished manuscript, “Dependent Arising.”
65. See *The Foundation of Buddhist Practice*, chapter 2, for an explanation of reliable and unreliable awarenesses.
66. There is discussion regarding to what extent this joy is physical, because input from the five senses is subdued as concentration deepens.
67. Usually joy is said to accompany the first dhyāna, although here it arises before the attainment of access concentration, which is prior to the first dhyāna.
68. An exception is someone who followed the śrāvaka or solitary realizer path to arhatship, later entered the Mahāyāna, and is on the bodhisattva path of accumulation or preparation.
69. Jeffrey Hopkins, *Maps of the Profound* (Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion Publications, 2003), 692.
70. John Ireland, *The Udāna and the Itivuttaka* (Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 2007), 200.
71. A difficulty arises in speaking of nirvāṇa with remainder in this way. In the lifetime that they attain liberation, arhats may be beings in the desire, form, or formless realm. Clearly those in the desire and form realms have polluted bodies. Arhats in the formless realm have only four mental aggregates, so we cannot say their bodies are polluted. Saying their mental aggregates are polluted is awkward because their mindstreams are temporarily free from afflictions owing to their deep concentration. Thus it is a bit difficult to posit an illustration or an example of the polluted aggregates of formless-realm arhats. On the other hand, it is difficult to say that they have *no* polluted aggregates, because they have nirvāṇa with remainder in their continuums.
72. Espousing three final vehicles, Cittamātra Scriptural Proponents do not assert that arhats directed exclusively to their own personal peace enter the Mahāyāna. However, they say that an arhat whose liberation is transformed can enter the Mahāyāna and attain buddhahood. He makes this transition from nirvāṇa with remainder; it cannot occur from nirvāṇa without remainder because the continuity of mind has ceased at that time.
73. This and the two citations below from the Udāna were translated by Thanissaro Bhikkhu.
74. Pāli commentaries say that all āryas from stream-enterers on up can gain access to this state. However, some people say that there doesn’t seem to be evidence for this position in the sūtras: according to the sūtras, arhats alone can enter this samādhi.
75. Bhikkhu Bodhi, personal correspondence, August 6, 2017.
76. This is another case of the name of the result being given to the cause. His Holiness gave another example: A commentary to the *Ornament* refers to great compassion as the Bhagawati — the one who is completely subdued — indicating the Buddha. In fact, great compassion is neither full awakening nor the one who is completely subdued. Rather, the name of the result — Bhagawati — is being given to the cause — compassion — because great compassion is an essential cause of buddhahood.
77. Questions that spark much debate arise: What does it mean for a consciousness to exist or be present? If the clear light mind exists but is not active while the coarse consciousnesses are manifest, is it present? There are two main views. According to one view, if a consciousness is present, it needs to be manifest. In this case, the clear light mind is present only when the coarse consciousnesses have

subsided and it is manifest. But in that case, the clear light mind would not exist continuously, so how could it be the basis for saṃsāra and nirvāṇa?

According to the other view, a consciousness need not be manifest in order to be present. It may also be present in a dormant form. In this case, the clear light mind is present even when someone is going about their daily life and the coarse consciousnesses are active.

This brings up a further question: For a consciousness to exist, it must have an object, so if the innate clear light mind exists and is present while the coarse consciousnesses are manifest, what is its apprehended object? When the coarse levels of mind are active, they are dominant and are cognizing their apprehended objects. In that case, the subtler mind would be inactive and not apprehend anything. Lacking an apprehended object, how can we say that consciousness exists? On the other hand, that consciousness is the basis for saṃsāra and nirvāṇa, so how can it not exist continuously? This is a thorny topic!

Everyone agrees that when the coarse levels of mind have been absorbed, the innate clear light mind is manifest. In ordinary beings, this occurs primarily at the time of death. This subtlest clear light mind is free from afflictions because they were absorbed when the coarse minds and winds ceased functioning during the dying process. As such, unlike the coarse states of mind, this clear light mind can never be nonvirtuous or afflictive, and through tantric practice it may be transformed into virtue. This is one reason why Tantra is said to be profound.

78. Several other terms are also used in the discussion of buddha nature. In some circumstances they are used interchangeably, in others they have a slightly different meaning. In addition to the above terms, other terms include *buddha essence* (*tathāgatagarbha*, T. *bde bzhin gsegs pa'i snying po*) and *element of sentient beings* (*sattvadhātu*, T. *sems can gyi khams*), or simply *element*. *Gotra* (T. *rigs*), which is translated as *nature* or *disposition*, as in *buddha nature* or *buddha disposition*, may also be translated as *lineage*, *trait*, or *family*.
79. The Cittamātra Scriptural Proponents is the only Mahāyāna tenet school asserting that not all sentient beings can attain full awakening. Some people postulate that speaking of icchantikas is done to warn practitioners not to become lax or negligent.
80. There are different views about whether the five sense consciousnesses are included in the transforming buddha nature. Some sages say they are not, because alone the sense consciousnesses do not have the ability to accomplish the path — they are neither stable nor continuous. Only the mental consciousness can practice and realize the path. The mental consciousness leads the sense consciousnesses, which alone are blind with respect to emptiness. Others say that because the sense consciousnesses go with the mental consciousness to awakening they are part of buddha nature. The mental consciousness generates bodhicitta and realizes emptiness, so the sense consciousnesses also attain awakening.
81. These are the stages that spiritual practitioners actualize as they progress toward their spiritual goal.
82. Tsong-kha-pa Lo-sang-drak-pa, “Extensive Explanation of (Chandrakīrti’s) ‘Supplement to (Nāgārjuna’s) ‘Treatise on the Middle’’: Illumination of the Thought,” trans. Jeffrey Hopkins, unpublished manuscript.
83. Both Cittamātrins and Mādhyamikas agree that afflictions are adventitious, but they differ in explaining how they are adventitious. This affects their explanations of the clear light mind. Cittamātrins say the clarity and cognizance that are hallmarks of the conventional nature of the mind constitute the buddha nature. Because mental factors come and go while the nature of the mind remains clear and cognizant, they say the afflictions are not an inherent property of the mind. Nāgārjuna and the Prāsaṅgikas assert that because the mind is primordially pure of inherent existence, the afflictions derived from self-grasping ignorance are not an inherent property of mind. In short, whereas the Cittamātrins explain the undefiled nature of the clear light mind from the viewpoint of its conventional nature, Nāgārjuna does so from the viewpoint of its ultimate nature.
84. The ground of the latencies of ignorance is subtle motivational effort that instigates physical, verbal, and mental actions and is the cause of unpolluted karma. Created only by āryas, unpolluted karma

produces the mental bodies of śrāvaka and solitary realizer arhats and of ārya bodhisattvas.

85. Gyalsap Darma Rinchen, “The Tathāgata Essence,” trans. Gavin Kilty, unpublished manuscript, 170.
86. Unnumbered introductory verse, translated by Geshe Thupten Jinpa, 2007.
87. This cloth, also called “stone wool,” is woven asbestos. It is cleaned by placing it in fire, which burns the dirt, leaving a sparkling clean cloth.
88. William Magee, “A Tree in the West: Competing Tathāgatagarbha Theories in Tibet,” *Chung-Hwa Buddhist Journal* 19 (2006), 482.
89. Magee, “A Tree in the West,” 482.



# Glossary

*abstract composites* (*viprayukta-saṃskāra*). Impermanent phenomena that are neither forms nor consciousnesses.

*access concentration*. Serenity, which arises when the five hindrances have been suppressed.

*affirmative phenomenon*. A phenomenon realized by means of not eliminating an object of negation.

*affirming negative* (*paryudāsapratīṣedha*, T. *ma yin dgag*). A negative where, upon an awareness eliminating a negated object, another phenomenon is suggested or established.

*afflictions* (*kleśa*). Mental factors that disturb the tranquility of the mind; these include disturbing emotions and wrong views.

*afflictive obscurations* (*kleśāvaraṇa*). Obscurations that mainly prevent liberation; afflictions and their seeds.

*aggregates* (*skandha*). The four or five components that make up a living being: form (except for beings born in the formless realm), feelings, discriminations, miscellaneous factors, and consciousnesses.

*apprehended object* (*muṣṭibandhaviṣaya*, T. *'dzin stangs kyi yul*). The main object with which the mind is concerned — that is, the object that the mind is getting at or understands. Synonymous with *engaged object*.

*arhat*. Someone who has eliminated all afflictive obscurations and attained liberation.

*ārya*. Someone who has directly and nonconceptually realized the emptiness of inherent existence.

*ātman*. A permanent, unitary, independent self, as asserted by non-Buddhists.

*awakening* (*samyaksaṃbodhi*). Buddhahood; the state in which all obscurations have been abandoned and all excellent qualities developed limitlessly.

*bardo* (*antarābhava*). The intermediate state between one life and the next.

*basis of designation*. The collection of parts or factors in dependence on which an object is designated.

*bodhicitta*. A main mental consciousness induced by an aspiration to bring about the welfare of others and accompanied by an aspiration to attain full awakening oneself.

*bodhisattva*. Someone who has spontaneous bodhicitta.

*buddha nature* (buddha disposition, T. *sangs rgyas kyi rigs*). A phenomenon that is suitable to transform into a buddha's exalted body; sentient beings' potential to become fully awakened.

*causal or initial motivation* (*hetu-samutthāna*). The first motivation to do an action.

*causally concordant behavioral result.* Karmic result in which our action is similar to an action we did in a previous life.

*causally concordant experiential result.* Karmic result in which we experience circumstances similar to what we caused others to experience.

*causally concordant result.* The karmic result that corresponds to its cause. It is of two types: the result similar to the cause in terms of our experience and the result similar to the cause in terms of our habitual behavior.

*Cittamātra (Yogācāra).* A Buddhist tenet system that asserts the true existence of dependent natures but does not assert external objects.

*clear light (prabhāsvara).* The clear and cognizant nature of the conventional mind is the subject clear light. The emptiness of the mind is the object clear light.

*cognitive faculty (indriya).* The subtle material in the gross sense organ that enables perception of sense objects; for the mental consciousness, it is previous moments of any of the six consciousnesses.

*cognitive obscurations (jñeyāvaraṇa).* Obscurations that mainly prevent full awakening; the latencies of ignorance and the subtle dualistic view that they give rise to.

*collection of merit (puṇyasambhāra).* The practices of generosity and so forth — the method aspect of the path — motivated by bodhicitta and informed by the wisdom realizing emptiness that bears the result of buddhahood.

*conceived object (T. zhen yul).* The object conceived by a conceptual consciousness; synonymous with the *apprehended* or *engaged object* of a conceptual consciousness.

*conceptual appearance (artha-sāmānya).* A mental image of an object that appears to a conceptual consciousness.

*conceptual consciousness (kalpanā).* A consciousness knowing its object by means of a conceptual appearance.

*conceptual fabrications.* False modes of existence and false ideas imputed by the mind.

*conceptualizations (vikalpa viparyāsa).* Distorted concepts such as thinking impermanent things are permanent.

*consciousness (jñāna).* That which is clear and cognizant.

*continuity of substance.* A continuity in which one thing is the substance that transforms into another thing.

*continuity of type.* A continuity in which the cause and the result share similar characteristics.

*conventional existence (saṃvṛtisat).* Existence.

*conventional reliable cognizer (T. tha snyad pa'i tshad ma).* A reliable cognizer of conventionalities. It does not have the ability to perceive ultimate truths.

*conventional truths (saṃvṛtisatya).* That which is true only from the perspective of ignorance grasping true existence. They are not seen as true by an arya's meditative equipoise on emptiness. Synonymous with



*veiled truths.*

*cyclic existence (saṃsāra).* The cycle of rebirth that occurs under the control of afflictions and karma.

*death (maraṇabhava).* The last moment of a lifetime when the subtlest clear light mind manifests. The moment after the consciousness leaves the body is the bardo.

*definitive sūtra (nītārtha sūtra).* Sūtras that mainly and explicitly teach ultimate truths.

*demeritorious karma.* Second-link nonvirtuous formative actions that create the cause for unfortunate rebirths.

*dependent arising (pratīyasamutpāda).* This is of three types: (1) causal dependence — things arising due to causes and conditions, (2) mutual dependence — phenomena existing in relation to other phenomena, and (3) dependent designation — phenomena existing by being merely designated by terms and concepts.

*desire realm (kāmadhātu).* One of the three realms of cyclic existence; the realm where sentient beings are overwhelmed by attraction to and desire for sense objects.

*deva.* A being born as a heavenly being in the desire realm or in one of the meditative absorptions of the form or formless realms.

*dhāraṇī.* An intelligible phrase that encapsulates the essence of a teaching.

*dharmakāya.* See *truth body*.

*dhyāna.* Meditative stabilization in the form realm; full concentration where not only are the five hindrances suppressed but also the mind is in full meditative absorption.

*direct reliable cognizer (pratyakṣa-pramāṇa).* A nondeceptive awareness that knows its object — an evident phenomenon — directly, without depending on a reason.

*disenchantment (P. nibbidā).* Lack of interest in and detachment from phenomena conditioned by ignorance, which frees the mind from attachment.

*dispassion (fading away, P. virāga).* The path wisdom that first directly sees nirvāṇa.

*distorted attention (distorted conceptions, ayoniśo manaskāra, T. tshul min yid byed).* Attention that exaggerates or deprecates the characteristics of an object so that it is not known correctly. It induces conceptual proliferation (*prapañca, papañca*).

*duḥkha.* Unsatisfactory experiences of cyclic existence.

*Dzogchen.* A tantric practice emphasizing meditation on the nature of mind, practiced primarily in the Nyingma tradition.

*eight worldly concerns (aṣṭalokadharmā).* Material gain and loss, disrepute and fame, blame and praise, pleasure and pain.

*emanation body (nirmāṇakāya).* The buddha body that appears as an ordinary sentient being to benefit others.

*emptiness (śūnyatā)*. The lack of inherent existence and true existence.

*enjoyment body (saṃbhogakāya)*. The buddha body that appears in the pure lands to teach ārya bodhisattvas.

*environmental result (adhipatiphala)*. The result of karma that influences what environment we live in.

*existent (sat)*. That which is perceivable by mind.

*extreme of absolutism (eternalism, permanence, existence, śāśvatānta)*. Believing that a permanent, unitary, independent self exists or that phenomena exist inherently.

*extreme of nihilism (ucchedānta)*. Believing that our actions have no ethical dimension; believing that nothing exists.

*five actions of immediate retribution (ānantaryakarman)*. Killing one's mother, father, or an arhat; wounding a buddha; and causing a schism in the saṅgha.

*five lower fetters*. View of a personal identity, doubt, view of rules and practices, sensual desire, and malice.

*form body (rūpakāya)*. The buddha body in which a buddha appears to sentient beings; it includes the emanation and enjoyment bodies.

*form realm (rūpadhātu)*. The saṃsāric realm in which beings have bodies made of subtle material. Attainment of various states of concentration without the determination to be free from saṃsāra causes rebirth there.

*formless realm (ārūpyadhātu)*. The saṃsāric realm in which sentient beings do not have a material body. Deep meditative absorption without the aspiration for liberation from saṃsāra causes rebirth there.

*four distorted conceptions* (distorted attention, *ayoniśa manaskāra*, T. *tshul min yid byed*). Thinking (1) what is impermanent is permanent, (2) what is duḥkha by nature is happiness, (3) the unattractive and foul are attractive, and (4) what lacks a self has one.

*four māras*. Polluted aggregates, afflictions, death, and distraction to external objects.

*four seals (caturmudrā)*. Four views that make a philosophy Buddhist: all conditioned phenomena are transient, all polluted phenomena are duḥkha, all phenomena are empty and selfless, nirvāṇa alone is true peace.

*four truths of the āryas (catvāry āryasatyāni)*. The truth of duḥkha, its origin, its cessation, and the path to that cessation.

*fundamental innate clear light mind* (T. *gnyug ma lhan cig skyes pa'i 'od gsal gyi sems*). The subtlest consciousness that has existed beginninglessly, will exist endlessly, and will go on to awakening.

*Fundamental Vehicle*. The path leading to the liberation of śrāvakas and solitary realizers.

*gandharva* (P. *gandhabba*). (1) A being (in the bardo) to be born, (2) a celestial musician.

*grasping inherent existence (svabhāvagraha)*. Grasping persons and phenomena to exist truly or inherently. Synonymous with *grasping true existence*.

*grasping true existence* (true grasping, *satyagrāha*). Grasping persons and phenomena to exist truly or inherently.

*gratification, danger, and escape*. Gratification is the pleasure experienced by contact with the aggregates. Danger is the decay of the aggregates that leaves us disappointed. Escape is the freedom we wish to attain.

*having-ceased* (*naṣṭa*). An impermanent phenomenon that is an affirming negative and follows the ceasing or disintegration of a thing that is the past of that thing. The having-ceased of a karma has the potency to bring forth the results of that action.

*hell being* (*nāraka*). A being born in one of the unfortunate classes of beings who suffer intense physical pain as a result of their strong destructive karma.

*highest yoga tantra* (*anuttarayogatantra*). The most advanced of the four classes of tantra.

*hungry ghost* (*preta*). A being born in one of the unfortunate classes of beings who suffers from intense hunger and thirst.

*I-grasping* (*ahaṃkāra*). Conceiving and grasping the I (one's own self) as inherently existent.

*ignorance* (*avidyā*). A mental factor that is obscured and grasps the opposite of what exists. There are two types: ignorance regarding ultimate truth and ignorance regarding karma and its effects.

*immediate motivation* (*tatkṣaṇa-samutthāna*). The motivation that occurs at the time of the action.

*imperceptible form* (*avijñapti-rūpa*). A subtle form that is not perceivable by the sense faculties and arises only when a person has a strong intention.

*impermanence* (*anitya*). The transient quality of all compositional phenomena and functioning things. Coarse impermanence can be known by our senses; subtle impermanence is something not remaining the same in the very next moment.

*inattentive awareness* (T. *snang la ma nges*). A consciousness that doesn't ascertain its object, even though that object appears to it.

*inferential reliable cognizer* (*anumāna-pramāṇa*). An awareness that knows its object — slightly obscure phenomena — nondeceptively, purely in dependence on a reason.

*inherent existence* (*svabhāva*). Existence without depending on any other factors; independent existence. According to the Prāsaṅgika Mādhyamikas, inherent existence does not exist.

*interpretable sūtra* (*neyārtha sūtra*). A sūtra that speaks about the variety of phenomena and/or cannot be taken literally.

*invariable karma*. Second-link formative karma that is the cause for rebirth in a specific meditative absorption and no other.

*karma*. Intentional action; it includes intention karma (mental action) and intended karma (physical and verbal actions motivated by intention).

*karmic seeds*. The potency from previously created actions that will bring their results.

*latencies (vāsanā)*. Predispositions, imprints, or tendencies.

*liberation (mokṣa, T. thar pa)*. A true cessation that is the abandonment of afflictive obscurations; nirvāṇa.

*liberation (vimokṣa, vimokkha, T. rnam thar)*. In both the Pāli and Sanskrit traditions, this refers to the eight liberations, the mind's temporary release from defilements that is brought about by mastering certain meditative skills.

*liberation (vimukti, T. rnam grol)*. In the Pāli tradition, nirvāṇa is what is realized in the experience of liberation (*vimutti*); liberation is a conditioned event, whereas nirvāṇa is not.

*Mādhyamika*. A proponent of Buddhist tenets who asserts there are no truly existent phenomena.

*Mahāmudrā*. A type of meditation that focuses on the conventional and ultimate natures of the mind.

*meditative equipoise on emptiness*. An ārya's mind focused single-pointedly on the emptiness of inherent existence.

*mental direct reliable cognizer*. A nondeceptive mental awareness that knows its object by depending on another consciousness that induces it.

*mental factor (caitta)*. An aspect of mind that accompanies a primary consciousness and fills out the cognition, apprehending particular attributes of the object or performing a specific function.

*meritorious karma*. Second-link virtuous actions that create the cause for a fortunate rebirth in the desire realm.

*mind (citta)*. The part of living beings that cognizes, experiences, thinks, feels, and so on. In some contexts it is equivalent to primary consciousness.

*mindstream (cittasaṃtāna)*. The continuity of mind.

*mine-grasping (mamakāra)*. Conceiving and grasping mine — what makes something mine — as inherently existent.

*monastic*. Someone who has received monastic ordination; a monk or nun.

*Mount Meru*. A huge mountain at the center of our world system, according to ancient Indian cosmology.

*natural nirvāṇa (prakṛti-nirvṛta)*. The primordial emptiness of inherent existence of the mind.

*naturally abiding buddha nature (prakṛtisthagotra, T. rang bzhin gnas rigs)*. The emptiness of the mind that is not yet freed from defilements.

*nature truth body (svabhāvika dharmakāya)*. The buddha body that is the emptiness of a buddha's mind and the true cessations of that buddha.

*New Translation schools*. The Kagyu, Sakya, and Geluk traditions that formed in Tibet beginning in the eleventh century, after the decimation of the Dharma during the reign of King Langdarma (r. 838–41).

*nirvāṇa (P. nibbāna)*. The state of liberation of an arhat; the purified aspect of a mind that is free from afflictions.

*nirvāṇa with remainder (sopadhiśeṣanirvāṇa)*. (1) An arhat's nirvāṇa with the remainder of the polluted body while an arhat is still alive. (2) Prāsaṅgikas: an arhat's nirvāṇa in postmeditation time when the appearance of inherent existence still remains.

*nirvāṇa without remainder (nirupadhiśeṣanirvāṇa)*. (1) An arhat's nirvāṇa without the remainder of the polluted body, attained after an arhat passes away. (2) Prāsaṅgikas: an arhat's nirvāṇa while in meditative equipoise on emptiness where no appearance of inherent existence remains.

*nonabiding nirvāṇa (apratiṣṭha-nirvāṇa)*. A buddha's nirvāṇa that does not abide in either cyclic existence or personal liberation.

*nonaffirming negative (prasajyapratishedha, T. med dgag)*. A negative phenomenon in which, upon the explicit elimination of the negated object by an awareness, another phenomenon is not suggested or established.

*nonreturner (anāgāmi)*. The third level of a Fundamental Vehicle ārya who will no longer be born in the desire realm.

*object of negation (pratishedhya, T. dgag bya)*. What is to be refuted — for example, a self-sufficient substantially existent I or inherent existence.

*observed object (ālambana, T. dmig yul)*. The basic object that the mind refers to or focuses on while apprehending certain aspects of that object.

*once-returner (sakṛdāgāmin)*. The second level of a Fundamental Vehicle ārya who, in addition to eliminating three of the five lower fetters, has subdued sensual attachment and malice to a certain degree and will only be born in the desire realm one more time before attaining arhatship.

*ordinary beings (pṛthagjana, puthujjana)*. Sentient beings who have not realized emptiness directly and are not āryas.

*parinirvāṇa*. The nirvāṇa after death attained when an arhat or buddha dies.

*perceptible form (vijñapti-rūpa)*. Forms that can be perceived by the sense faculties.

*permanent (nitya)*. Unchanging, static. It does not mean eternal. Permanent phenomena do not depend on causes and conditions.

*permanent, unitary, independent self*. A soul or self (*ātman*) asserted by non-Buddhists.

*person (pudgala)*. A living being designated in dependence on the four or five aggregates.

*polluted (āśava)*. Under the influence of ignorance and its latencies.

*Prāsaṅgika*. The Buddhist philosophical tenet system whose views are most accurate.

*prātimokṣa*. The different sets of ethical precepts for monastics and lay followers that assist in attaining liberation.

*primary consciousness (vijñāna)*. A consciousness that apprehends the presence or basic entity of an object, which are of six types: visual, auditory, olfactory, gustatory, tactile, and mental.

*pure grounds*. The eighth, ninth, and tenth bodhisattva grounds. These bodhisattvas have eliminated all

afflictive obscurations.

*pure land*. Places created by the unshakable resolve and merit of buddhas where all external conditions are conducive for Dharma practice.

*reliable cognizer (pramāṇa)*. A nondeceptive awareness that is incontrovertible with respect to its apprehended object and that enables us to accomplish our purpose.

*reliable cognizer based on authoritative testimony*. An inferential cognizer knowing very obscure phenomena that cannot be established through direct perceivers or other inferential reliable cognizers but only by depending on the authoritative testimony of a trustworthy source, such as a credible person or scripture.

*rigpa*. According to Dzogchen, an undefiled, subtle consciousness that pervades all mental states. It is comparable to the fundamental innate mind of clear light in the New Translation schools.

*ripening result of karma*. The karmic result that is a rebirth; the five aggregates a being takes.

*Sautrāntika*. A Buddhist tenet school that espouses Fundamental Vehicle tenets and asserts both external objects and apperception to be truly existent. It is considered higher than the Vaibhāṣika school.

*self (ātman)*. Refers to a person or to inherent existence.

*self-grasping (ātmagrāha)*. Grasping inherent existence.

*self-sufficient substantially existent person (T. gang zag rang rkya thub pa'i rdzas yod)*. A self that is the controller of the body and mind. Such a self does not exist.

*sense faculty*. The subtle material in the gross sense organ (eye, ear, nose, tongue, and body) that enables perception of sense objects.

*sentient being (sattva)*. Any being with a mind, except for a buddha.

*serenity (śamatha)*. A concentration arising from meditation and accompanied by the bliss of mental and physical pliancy in which the mind abides effortlessly without fluctuation for as long as we wish on whichever virtuous object it has been placed.

*six perfections (ṣaḍpāramitā)*. The practices of generosity, ethical conduct, fortitude, joyous effort, meditative stability, and wisdom that are motivated by bodhicitta.

*solitary realizer (pratyekabuddha)*. A person following the Fundamental Vehicle who seeks liberation and who emphasizes understanding the twelve links of dependent arising.

*space particle*. Subtle particles that bear traces of the other four elements and are the source of all matter. They persist during the dormant stage between one world system and the next and act as the substantial cause for the coarser elements that arise during the evolution of the next world system.

*śrāvaka (hearer)*. Someone practicing the Fundamental Vehicle path leading to arhatship who emphasizes meditation on the four truths of the āryas.

*stream-enterer (srotāpanna)*. The first level of a Fundamental Vehicle ārya who has eliminated three of the five lower fetters.

*substantial cause*. Whatever is the main thing that turns into a result. For example, wood is the substantial cause of a table; the carpenter is a cooperative condition.

*subtlest mind-wind*. The indivisible subtlest mind and subtlest wind that is its mount.

*suchness*. Emptiness.

*superknowledge (abhijñā)*. Special powers gained through having deep states of concentration.

*supreme dharma stage of the path of preparation*. The fourth and last stage of the path of preparation. At this time, one is an ordinary being. After this, one becomes an ārya.

*syllogism (prayoga)*. A statement consisting of a subject, predicate, and reason, and in many cases an example.

*tathāgata*. A buddha.

*tathāgatagarbha* (buddha essence). Its general meaning is buddha nature; sentient beings' potential to become fully awakened.

*transforming buddha nature (samudānītagotra, T. rgyas 'gyur gi rigs)*. Any mind that is not freed from defilements, whose continuity goes on to awakening, and that serves as the basis for the emptiness that is the naturally abiding buddha nature.

*true cessation (nirodhasatya)*. The cessation of a portion of afflictions or a portion of cognitive obscurations.

*true existence (satyasat)*. Existence having its own mode of being; existence having its own reality. According to the Mādhyamikas, true existence does not exist.

*truth body (dharmakāya)*. The buddha body that includes the nature truth body (the emptiness of a buddha's mind) and the wisdom truth body (omniscient mind).

*twelve links of dependent arising*. A system of twelve factors that explains how we take rebirth in saṃsāra and how we can be liberated from it.

*ultimate analysis*. A probing awareness seeking an object's ultimate mode of existence.

*ultimate truth (paramārthasatya)*. The ultimate mode of existence of all persons and phenomena; emptiness; objects that are true and appear true to their main cognizer.

*unfortunate states (apāya)*. Unfortunate states of rebirth as a hell being, hungry ghost, or animal.

*union of serenity and insight on emptiness*. A meditative concentration on emptiness in which analytical meditation has induced special pliancy and serenity.

*unpolluted (anāsrava)*. Not under the influence of ignorance.

*unreliable awareness*. An awareness that does not correctly apprehend its object and cannot help us accomplish our purpose. These include correct assumers, inattentive perceivers, doubt, and wrong awarenesses.

*Vaibhāṣika*. A Buddhist tenet school that espouses Fundamental Vehicle tenets, does not accept

apperception, and asserts external objects to be truly established. It is considered the lowest tenet school.

*veiled truths (saṃvṛtisatya)*. Objects that appear true to ignorance; objects that appear to exist inherently to their main cognizer, although they do not. Synonymous with *conventional truths*.

*view of a personal identity* (view of the transitory collection, *satkāyadr̥ṣṭi*). Grasping an inherently existent I or mine (according to the Prāsaṅgika system).

*white appearance, red increase, and black near attainment*. Three subtle minds that manifest after coarser minds have absorbed and before the subtlest clear light mind arises.

*wisdom truth body (jñāna dharmakāya)*. The buddha body that is a buddha's omniscient mind.

*wrong or erroneous consciousness (viparyaya-jñāna)*. An awareness that is erroneous with respect to its apprehended object and, in the case of conceptual cognizers, with respect to its conceived object; a consciousness that cannot certify its object.

*yogic direct reliable cognizers*. Nondeceptive mental consciousnesses that know their objects by depending on a union of serenity and insight.



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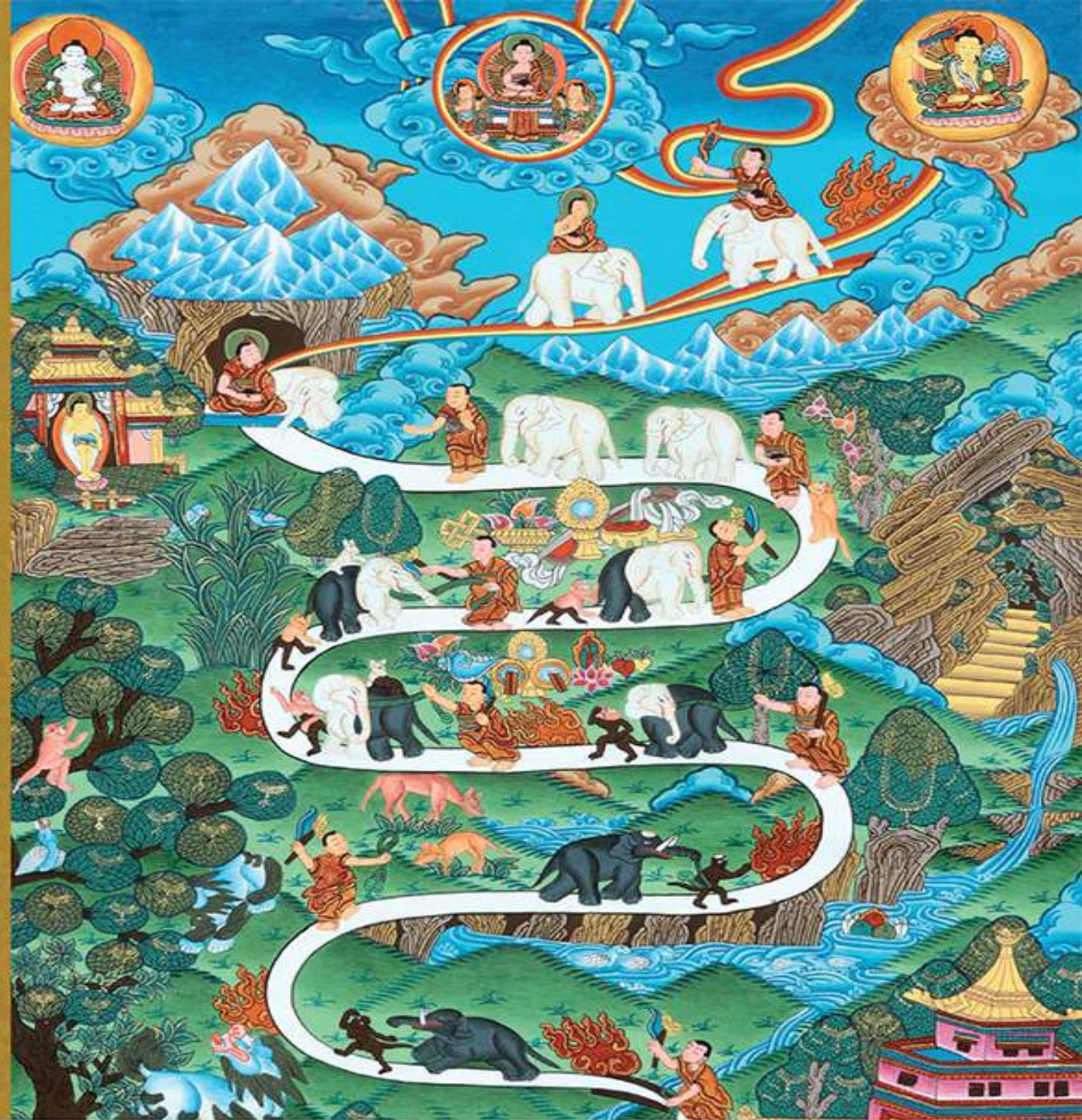
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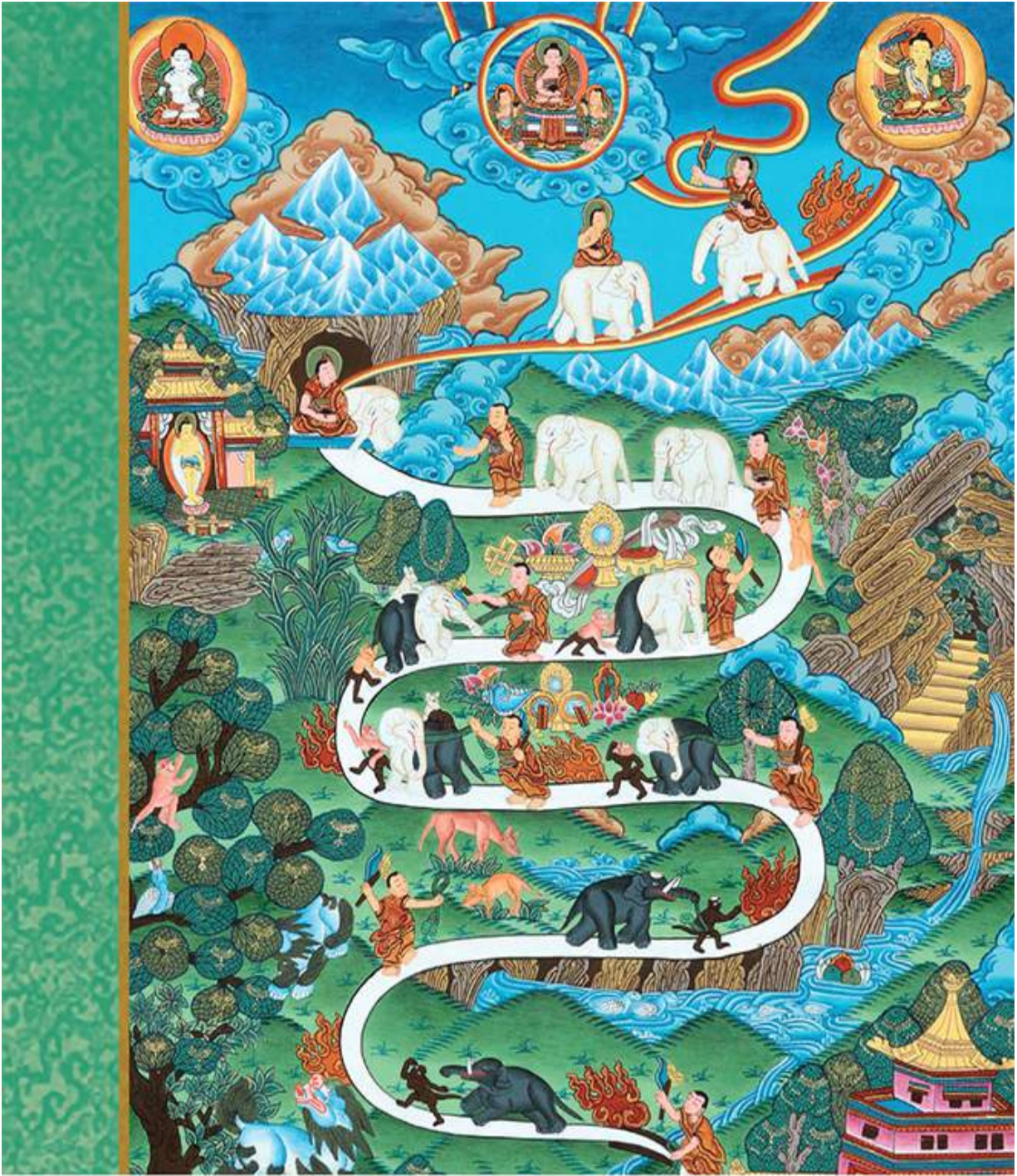
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## Preface

ALTHOUGH EACH VOLUME of the *Library of Wisdom and Compassion* can be read separately, the topics in them are arranged in a particular sequence so that each subsequent volume builds on the preceding one. The first volume, *Approaching the Buddhist Path*, and part of the second volume, *The Foundation of Buddhist Practice*, contain introductory topics that are helpful to know before engaging in further study. Calling them introductory doesn't mean they are elementary or easy; rather they are the basis of what will follow.

The second volume then continues, speaking about precious human life, its rarity and value, and urging us to take advantage of the opportunity it affords, since our lives are comparatively short and we will be reborn. Because effects arise from their causes, our future lives will depend on the causes we create now — our karma or actions. An extensive explanation of karma and its effects concludes this volume.

Volume 3, *Samsāra, Nirvāṇa, and Buddha Nature*, contains an in-depth discussion of the cycle of constantly recurring rebirth in which we are bound under the control of ignorance, afflictions, and polluted karma. It investigates buddha nature — the nature of our minds that provides the potential to become fully awakened buddhas.

That brings us to this fourth volume, *Following in the Buddha's Footsteps*, which begins with the topic of turning to the Three Jewels — the Buddha, Dharma, and Saṅgha — for spiritual guidance. Taking refuge in the Three Jewels is the mark of becoming a Buddhist, and the guidance the Buddha gives us is to practice the three higher trainings in ethical conduct, concentration, and wisdom.

In most presentations of the lamrim (stages of the path), which were written for Tibetans who were already Buddhists, the topic of refuge comes earlier — after considering our possible future rebirths. This occurs for two reasons. First, refuge is the initial protective measure enabling us to avoid unfortunate rebirths. Second, increasing our faith and trust in the Buddha facilitates our

understanding and practice of the law of karma and its effects. This is because we depend on the Buddha's word to understand the subtle and obscure aspects of karma and its effects.

My observation — and that of many fellow Western Dharma students — is that people who did not grow up Buddhist are eager to learn about karma and its results but need more time to understand the meaning of taking refuge in the Three Jewels. We want to understand clearly what are the Three Jewels and what are the advantages and meaning of taking refuge in them. For this reason, the explanation of refuge in this volume is fuller than in most lamrim texts. It includes Dharmakīrti's argument on why the Buddha is a reliable teacher and Maitreya's explanation of how the Buddha, Dharma, and Saṅgha individually and together guide us on the path to liberation and full awakening.

In volume 3, we discussed the āryas' four truths. The last two, true cessations and true paths, are the Dharma Jewel. The Dharma Jewel is the actual refuge, for when generated in our mindstream, awakening dawns. By actualizing a portion of true cessations and true paths, we become the Saṅgha Jewel, and by realizing them fully, we are transformed into the Buddha Jewel. This is possible because the buddha nature is an inalienable quality of our mind. Our actualizing the Three Jewels is the fulfillment of our buddha nature, which has been completely purified and brought to perfection.

With this background, the present volume elaborates on the true cessations and true paths spoken of in volume 3 by beginning with a more in-depth explanation of the Three Jewels of refuge. The Dharma Jewel of true paths includes the āryas' three higher trainings in ethical conduct, concentration, and wisdom, which are also revealed in this volume. Ethical conduct as practiced by monastics and lay followers comes first. Here we hear His Holiness's love and respect for the Vinaya — monastic discipline — and for the monastic community and its role in preserving the Dharma. This is followed by instructions on how to cultivate meditative concentration, explained from the perspective of both the Sanskrit and Pāli traditions. While the lamrim usually discusses this in the context of the perfection of meditative stability, it makes sense to include it in the higher training in concentration so practitioners can begin to improve their concentration now. The higher training in wisdom comes next. Here we delve into the thirty-seven harmonies with awakening, practices found in both the

Sanskrit and Pāli traditions. This volume is rich in teachings to practice that will definitely transform our minds.

## *How This Volume Came About*

*The Library of Wisdom and Compassion* came about when I requested His Holiness to write a brief root text for Tibetan geshe and khenpos to use when teaching in the West. His Holiness said we should write the elaborate explanation first and gave me transcripts of his teachings to work from. Several series of interviews happened over the years. In 2006 His Holiness said that this series must be unique — it should not be a rewording of previous lamrim texts — and insisted that material from the Pāli and Chinese Buddhist traditions be added.

Why would someone who has spent his life studying and practicing the Sanskrit tradition as presented in Tibet want to encourage his students and those interested in Buddhism to learn the Pāli tradition and Chinese Buddhism? His Holiness is open-minded and sees all these teachings as coming from the same Teacher, the Buddha. He knows a fair bit about other Buddhist traditions and is strongly opposed to sectarianism. His wish is for all Buddhist traditions to cooperate, have fruitful exchanges, and work together for the betterment of the world. Since all Buddhist traditions are present in the West, this is especially important. While not ignoring the differences in presentation and emphasis, His Holiness wants us to enhance our Dharma practices by learning from one another.

Charging me with adding teachings from the Pāli tradition and Chinese Buddhism, he also insisted, contrary to my wishes, that the book be coauthored and gave me permission to alter the usual order of the topics to suit this audience: people who were not brought up Buddhist, as well as Asians — especially young Tibetans — with a modern education.

Having received bhikṣuṇī ordination in Taiwan, lived with Chinese Buddhists in Singapore, and gone on pilgrimage in Tibet, Mainland China, and Taiwan, I was familiar with Chinese Buddhists and knew scholars and practitioners who could teach me more. Fortunately I also knew many Theravāda Buddhists from my time in Singapore and from the annual Western Buddhist Monastic Gatherings in the United States. I spent some time studying and

meditating at a wat in Thailand and diligently studied Bhikkhu Bodhi's talks on the Majjhima Nikāya, reading portions of the Vinaya and the other nikāyas in the Pāli canon as well as supplementary material.

The journey into other Buddhist traditions enriched my practice tremendously. I came to have a deep appreciation for the Buddha's skill as a teacher and the many ways he made the Dharma available so that living beings with different inclinations and interests could find what they needed in his teachings.

In 2018 I had another series of interviews with His Holiness, and I'd like to share a touching story that illustrates His Holiness's compassion in teaching us. We were completing a long discussion on how bodhisattvas generate the meditative absorptions of the form and formless realms, when His Holiness said, "I don't give a lot of thought to the meditative absorptions, though I would like to develop the capable preparation and use that to enter the path of preparation. I'm not expecting to attain buddhahood soon. Does that seem lazy? However, there are numerous buddhas in the ten directions, but do they come to help? As long as I have a polluted body, my wish is to serve sentient beings, and practically speaking, I can do that. I often contemplate Śāntideva's verses (BCA 3.21, 10:55):

Just like the earth and space itself,  
and all the other mighty elements,  
for boundless multitudes of beings,  
may I always be the ground of life, the source of varied sustenance.

For as long as space endures  
and as long as living beings remain,  
until then may I too abide  
to dispel the misery of the world."

### *How to Approach These Teachings*

His Holiness's teaching style is unique: he weaves easy-to-understand advice that relates to our daily life together with complex teachings that pertain to practitioners who have studied and practiced for many years (and lifetimes). In



addition, Buddhist teachers in general don't expect us to remember and understand everything the first or even second time we hear or read it. Rather, each time we study the same material new understandings are revealed because our mind has matured. So if some of the material seems difficult to understand or too advanced for your present level, keep going. Remember that you are “planting seeds” in your mindstream that will yield deeper and more precise understanding in the future.

### *Please Note*

Although this series is coauthored, the vast majority of the material is His Holiness's teachings. I researched and wrote the parts about the Pāli tradition, wrote some other passages, and composed the reflections. For ease of reading, most honorifics have been omitted, but that does not diminish the great respect we have for these most excellent sages and practitioners. Foreign terms are given in italics parenthetically at their first usage. Unless otherwise noted with “P” or “T,” indicating Pāli or Tibetan, respectively, italicized terms are Sanskrit. When two italicized terms are listed, the first is Sanskrit, the second Pāli. For consistency, Sanskrit spelling is used for Sanskrit and Pāli terms used in common language (nirvāṇa, Dharma, arhat, and so forth), except in citations from Pāli scriptures. The term *śrāvaka* encompasses solitary realizers, unless there is reason to specifically differentiate them. To maintain the flow of a passage, it is not always possible to gloss all new terms on their first use; a glossary is provided at the end of the book. “Sūtra” often refers to Sūtrayāna and “Tantra” to Tantrayāna — the Sūtra Vehicle and Tantra Vehicle, respectively. When these two words are not capitalized, they refer to two types of discourses: sūtras and tantras. Mahāyāna here refers principally to the bodhisattva path as explained in the Sanskrit tradition. Unless otherwise noted, all explanations and the meaning of all terms accord with the Prāsaṅgika Madhyamaka presentation. Unless otherwise noted, the personal pronoun “I” refers to His Holiness.

### *Appreciation*

My deepest respect goes to Śākyamuni Buddha and all the buddhas, bodhisattvas, and arhats who embody the Dharma and with compassion teach us unawakened beings. I also bow to all the realized lineage masters of all Buddhist traditions through whose kindness the Dharma still exists in our world.

This series appears in many volumes, so I will express appreciation to those involved in each individual volume. This volume, the fourth in the *Library of Wisdom and Compassion*, is due to the talents and efforts of His Holiness's translators — Geshe Lhakdor, Geshe Dorji Damdul, and Mr. Tenzin Tsepak. I am grateful to Geshe Dorji Damdul, Geshe Dadul Namgyal, and Ven. Sangye Khadro for checking the manuscript, and to Samdhong Rinpoche, Geshe Sonam Rinchen, Geshe Loyang, and Geshe Ngawang Sangye for clarifying important points. I also thank Bhikkhu Bodhi for his clear teachings on the Pāli tradition and for generously answering my many questions. He also kindly looked over the sections of the book on the Pāli tradition before publication. The staff at the Private Office of His Holiness facilitated the interviews, and Sravasti Abbey kindly supported me while I worked on this volume. Mary Petruszewicz skillfully edited this book. I thank everyone at Wisdom Publications who contributed to the successful production of this series. All errors are my own.

Bhikṣuṇī Thubten Chodron  
Sravasti Abbey

## Abbreviations

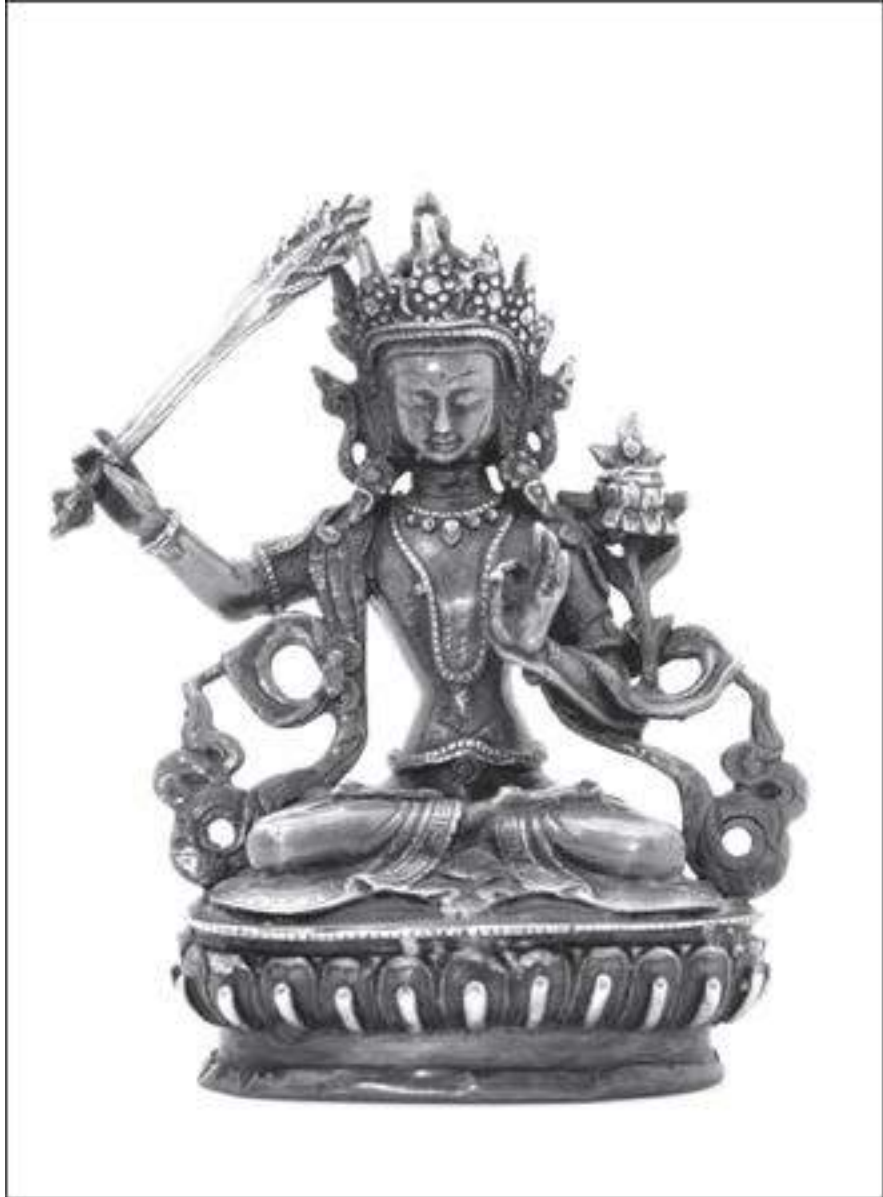
Translations used in this volume, unless noted otherwise, are as cited here. Some terminology has been modified for consistency with the present work.

- ADK     *Treasury of Knowledge (Abhidharmakośa)*, by Vasubandhu
- AN     Aṅguttara Nikāya. Translated by Bhikkhu Bodhi in *The Numerical Discourses of the Buddha* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2012).
- BCA     *Engaging in the Bodhisattvas' Deeds (Bodhicaryāvatāra)*, by Śāntideva.
- C.     Chinese
- DN     Dīgha Nikāya. Translated by Maurice Walshe in *The Long Discourses of the Buddha* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 1995).
- DV     *Dharmaguptaka Vinaya: Bhikṣuṇī Poṣadha and Rites to Establish the Territory* (Newport, WA: Sravasti Abbey, 2017).
- EBM     *The Essentials of Buddhist Meditation*, by Zhiyi. Translated by Bhikṣu Dharmamitra (Seattle, WA: Kalavinka Press, 2008).
- EPL     *Elucidating the Path to Liberation: A Study of the Commentary on the Abhidharmakosa*, by the First Dalai Lama. Translated by David Patt. PhD dissertation, University of Wisconsin–Madison, 1993.
- ISBP     *The Inner Science of Buddhist Practice*, by Artemus B. Engle (Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion Publications, 2009).
- LC     *The Great Treatise on the Stages of the Path (T. Lam rim chen mo)*, by Tsongkhapa, 3 vols. Translated by Joshua Cutler et al. (Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion Publications, 2000–4).

- LS *Praise to the Supramundane (Lokātītastava)*, by Nāgārjuna.
- MMA *Supplement to the “Middle Way” (Madhyamakāvatāra)*. Translated by George Churinoff and Thubten Jampa. Unpublished manuscript reprinted by ILTK Masters Program, Pomaia, Italy, 2013.
- MMAB Candrakīrti. *Explanation of the “Supplement to the ‘Middle Way’” (Madhyamakāvatārabhāṣya)*. Translated by George Churinoff and Thubten Jampa. Unpublished manuscript reprinted by ILTK Masters Program, Pomaia, Italy, 2013.
- MMK *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*, by Nāgārjuna.
- MN Majjhima Nikāya. Translated by Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi in *The Middle-Length Discourses of the Buddha* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 1995).
- NSP *Nāgārjuna on the Six Perfections*. Translated by Bhikṣu Dharmamitra (Seattle, WA: Kalavinka Press, 2009).
- P. Pāli
- PDA *Praise to Dependent Arising (T. rten ’brel bstod pa)*, by Tsongkhapa. Translated by Thubten Jinpa. <http://www.tibetanclassics.org/html-assets/In%20Praise%20of%20Dependent%20Origination.pdf>.
- PV *Commentary on the “Compendium of Reliable Cognition” (Pramāṇavārttika)*, by Dharmakīrti.
- PVS *The Twenty-Five-Thousand-Verse Perfection of Wisdom Sūtra (T. Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā-prajñā-pāramitā Sūtra)*.
- RA *Ratnāvalī (Precious Garland)* by Nāgārjuna.
- RGV *Sublime Continuum (Ratnagoṭravibhāga, Uttaratantra)*, by Maitreya.
- Sn Suttanipāta. Translated by Bhikkhu Bodhi in *The Suttanipāta*

(Somerville, MA: Wisdom Publications, 2017).

- SN      Saṃyutta Nikāya. Translated by Bhikkhu Bodhi in *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2000).
- ŚS      *Śikṣasamuccaya*, by Śāntideva. Translated by B. Alan Wallace. Wisdom Academy, 2018.
- STG     *Sūtra on the Ten Grounds* in The Tog Palace Manuscript of the Tibetan Kangyur.
- T.       Tibetan
- Vism    *Visuddhimagga*, by Buddhaghosa. Translated by Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli in *The Path of Purification* (Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 1991).



# 1 | Trustworthy Spiritual Guidance

WHAT MAKES our spiritual practice Buddhist? It is not merely doing practices taught in Buddhist scriptures, for some of those practices — such as refraining from harming others, cultivating love and compassion, and developing concentration — are also found in other religions. Doing these and other practices with a mind that has taken refuge in the Three Jewels is the key that makes these practices Buddhist. Taking refuge means we entrust ourselves for spiritual guidance to the Buddha, Dharma, and Saṅgha. Based on knowledge of their qualities, we choose to follow their guidance.

## *The Entrance to the Buddhist Path*

Our ultimate goal is to become the Three Jewels ourselves. To do this, we need to rely on the guidance of the Three Jewels that already exist. To actualize the Dharma Jewel — which as true cessation and true path is the ultimate refuge — in our own mindstream, we take refuge in the Buddha as the one who taught the Dharma and in the Saṅgha as the ones who have actualized some true cessations and true paths in their mindstream.

Taking refuge is not simply reciting “I take refuge in the Buddha, Dharma, and Saṅgha” with our mouths. It involves an internal commitment to our spiritual practice that motivates us to humbly seek spiritual guidance. Refuge is to be lived each moment, so that all the practices we do are directed toward actualizing the Dharma Jewel in our mindstream. When we have done this, we will have genuine, lasting joy and fulfillment, and our lives will have become highly meaningful. To attain nirvāṇa, we must start practicing now.

Based on his own experience, the Buddha taught a path in accord with reality. He did not teach anything illogical or contradictory to the laws of nature or the way things are. Through his teachings and his living example, he demonstrated the ability to eliminate unrealistic and harmful mental states — such as

ignorance, animosity, and attachment — from their root and to develop good qualities limitlessly. All of this accords with the way things function, and by practicing the Buddha's instructions we can verify the path to awakening and its resultant awakening through our own experience.

Some people read the biographies of the Buddha or other Buddhist sages and, inspired by their sublime lives, follow their teachings. That is wonderful. But the most important reason for following the Buddha's teachings is that we have studied and investigated them and have found them to be reliable and effective. In this way, we confirm for ourselves that the Buddha's philosophical teachings are the result of deep contemplation, sincere practice, and genuine meditation. They were not made up quickly to impress others. The faith that arises from understanding the teachings is stable and reliable, whereas the faith that derives from admiration of the Buddha's life or amazement at his supernatural abilities can easily change.

It is said that taking refuge in the Three Jewels is the excellent door for entering the Buddha's doctrine, renunciation of *duḥkha* is the door for entering a path, and *bodhicitta* is the door for entering the *Mahāyāna*. Taking refuge establishes the spiritual direction we will take in life and leads us to learn and contemplate the Buddha's teachings. Through this, we will realize that no enduring happiness is to be found in cyclic existence and we will renounce this suffering state and generate the aspiration to attain liberation. The stability of this understanding in our mind marks our entrance to a path. Stable *bodhicitta* is the door to enter the *bodhisattva* path that leads to full awakening because only this altruistic intention to attain awakening for the benefit of all sentient beings will give us the strength of mind to fulfill the collections of merit and wisdom necessary to attain full awakening.

To view this sequence in the reverse order: To attain full awakening, *bodhicitta* is indispensable. *Bodhicitta* is based on great compassion, but to feel great compassion for others, we must first have compassion for ourselves. Renunciation — wanting ourselves to be free from *samsāra* and to attain *nirvāṇa* — is the true meaning of self-compassion. To reach this understanding, we must be clear about our spiritual direction and the guides we rely on to lead us. Thus, taking refuge is the first step; it is the door to the Buddha's teachings.

To take refuge properly, correctly identifying and gaining a clear understanding of the Three Jewels is crucial. To do that, understanding the four



truths is important, and this is based on comprehending the two truths: veiled and ultimate truths. Without comprehending the two truths, our understanding of the four truths will be hazy, and without understanding the four truths, our refuge in the Three Jewels will not be stable.

We may wonder how we can take refuge without understanding profound and advanced topics such as the two truths, the four truths of āryas, emptiness, and dependent arising. Conversely, we may wonder how we can understand such topics without having deep refuge in the Three Jewels. By beginning with the topics of the two truths, the four truths, emptiness, and dependent arising, as we did in *Approaching the Buddhist Path*, we gain an initial understanding that forms a good foundation for taking refuge in the Three Jewels. Based on taking refuge, we then learn, contemplate, and meditate on the Buddha's teachings, and the understanding we gain from that deepens our refuge. That deeper refuge will inspire us to learn, contemplate, and meditate more, bringing even deeper understanding; and so it goes — with taking refuge and understanding the teachings aiding each other.

## REFLECTION

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1. Contemplate the forward sequence: taking refuge is the door to enter the Buddha's doctrine by making us receptive and giving direction to our spiritual yearnings.
  2. Refuge opens our minds to contemplate duḥkha, the unsatisfactory conditions of saṃsāra. Seeing there is no final happiness to be had in saṃsāra, we renounce duḥkha and aspire for liberation. This is the door to enter the paths of the śrāvaka, solitary realizer, and bodhisattva.
  3. Seeing that all sentient beings, who have been kind to us in our beginningless lifetimes, are trapped in saṃsāra, we cultivate great compassion and aspire for full awakening in order to help them escape from saṃsāra. This bodhicitta motivation is the door to the Mahāyāna. Motivated and informed by bodhicitta, we generate the wisdom realizing the emptiness of inherent existence, which removes all obscurations and enables us to attain buddhahood.
  4. Contemplate the reverse sequence, seeing that realization of emptiness on the Mahāyāna path is fueled by bodhicitta, which is generated through having great compassion for all living beings. This, in turn, depends on having the aspiration for ourselves to be free from saṃsāra, which relies on having taken refuge in the Three Jewels.
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## *Reasons for Taking Refuge in the Three Jewels*

As with any produced phenomenon, taking refuge occurs due to the coming together of its own causes and conditions. The first cause is being alarmed by the possibility of our misdeeds ripening in unfortunate rebirths in future lives. This is the basic, most immediate reason that leads us to seek spiritual protection and guidance. As we progress and our understanding of the Buddha's teachings increases, we become alarmed at being subject to the various kinds of *duḥkha* of cyclic existence in general and seek refuge from those.

The second cause is having faith and confidence in the ability of the Three Jewels to guide us from these dangers. Such confidence is based on understanding the qualities and abilities of the Three Jewels and how they are able to guide and protect us from these dangers.

Those inclined to the Bodhisattva Vehicle cultivate a third cause: great compassion for sentient beings and the wish to alleviate their *duḥkha*. Since the main audience in this series is disciples with sharp faculties who aspire for buddhahood, we must seek refuge with the aspiration to become a buddha in order to have all the necessary qualities to most effectively benefit all sentient beings. Even if this bodhicitta motivation is fabricated at present, by continued cultivation it will eventually become spontaneous. We seek refuge in the Three Jewels that embody the spiritual aims we aspire for and that we regard as reliable guides to show us the path.

In the first three volumes of this series, the first cause — alarm at the prospect of experiencing unfortunate rebirths and the *duḥkha* of *saṃsāra* — has been described in depth. We will now look at the way the Fundamental Vehicle, Perfection Vehicle, and Vajra Vehicle delineate the Three Jewels, and then we will examine the qualities of the Buddha in particular and the reason the Buddha is an excellent guide. The readers of this series are intelligent, and I am confident that by analyzing and contemplating the Three Jewels you will come to well-formed conclusions.

### **REFLECTION**

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Contemplate the causes to take refuge in the Three Jewels:

1. Reflect on the faults of rebirth in unfortunate realms and in cyclic existence in general, as explained in volumes 1 and 2.
  2. Reflect on the excellent qualities of the Three Jewels that make them trustworthy objects of refuge (you can read ahead to learn these).
  3. With compassion for others who are bound to saṃsāra by afflictions and karma, generate the aspiration for full awakening.
  4. With relief and confidence, turn to the Three Jewels as reliable guides to actualize your spiritual aims.
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## *The Mind's Potential and the Existence of the Three Jewels*

Before discussing the qualities of the Three Jewels, it is helpful to know the mind's potential and how mental purification occurs. These points were covered in chapter 12 of *The Foundation of Buddhist Practice*, and we will briefly review them now.

The greatest potential each sentient being has is to become a fully awakened buddha who has the wisdom, compassion, and power to be of the greatest benefit to all sentient beings. A key quality of a buddha is omniscience. How is attaining omniscience possible given our current state of ignorance? The mind has the natural capacity to cognize objects, but various obstructions prevent it from knowing phenomena. (1) An intervening object, like a wall, prevents us from seeing what is on the other side. (2) The object is very far away or very small and is not within the purview of our sense faculties. (3) Our cognitive faculties are defective or limited in their scope — for example, our visual consciousness cannot hear sounds; if we have severe cataracts, we can barely see; an animal brain is not equipped to comprehend philosophy. (4) A mind obscured by wrong views or one that is unable to concentrate because of an abundance of disturbing emotions cannot understand certain points. (5) Some objects are so subtle, vast, or profound that unless we have meditative concentration or superknowledges, we cannot know them. (6) The latencies of ignorance and the mistaken appearances that they cause prevent the mind from knowing both veiled truths and ultimate truths simultaneously by one consciousness.

From their side, buddhas are not limited by the above obscurations, and having perfected their virtuous qualities, they have the ability to effortlessly and spontaneously manifest in limitless ways to benefit sentient beings. However, their power is not omnipotent in the sense of being able to unilaterally control events. Our ability to be benefited by the buddhas depends on our receptivity.

Just as the sun's light radiates everywhere equally, so do buddhas' awakening activities. Nevertheless, however brilliant the sun may be, its radiance cannot enter an upside-down vessel. Similarly, our karmic obscurations or lack of merit curtail the buddhas' ability to help us. But when the vessel is turned upright, the sun naturally flows in. Similarly, when we purify our minds and accumulate merit, our minds become receptive to the buddhas' awakening activities.

As our understanding of the mind increases, we will gain conviction in three points. First, the basic nature of the mind is pure and clear. Second, afflictions are based on ignorance that apprehends phenomena as existing in the opposite way than they actually exist. Thus ignorance and the afflictions born from it are adventitious and do not inhere in the nature of the mind. Third, it is possible to cultivate powerful antidotes — realistic and beneficial mental states — that root out ignorance, afflictions, and other obscurations.

In chapter 24 of his *Treatise on the Middle Way*, Nāgārjuna explains that together, the doctrines of dependent arising and emptiness of inherent existence establish the existence of the Three Jewels. Because all phenomena arise dependently, they lack inherent existence. Ignorance, however, grasps them to exist in the opposite way, as inherently existent. Because phenomena exist dependent on other factors — sprouts depend on seeds, children depend on their parents — they do not exist independently or inherently. When wisdom realizes their emptiness, it has the power to gradually eradicate ignorance and its latencies from our minds, and thus stop our duḥkha. This wisdom is true paths, and the cessations of the afflictions and duḥkha are true cessations. More specifically, a true cessation is the purified aspect of the emptiness of a mind that has removed a portion of afflictions by means of its antidote, the true path. True paths and true cessations constitute the Dharma Jewel, and in this way the existence of the Dharma Jewel, which is the actual refuge, is established.

True paths are first generated and true cessations are first actualized on the path of seeing of all three vehicles — the Śrāvaka, Solitary Realizer, and Bodhisattva Vehicles — and they exist in the mindstreams of āryas on the paths

of seeing, meditation, and no more learning. Those that have directly perceived emptiness and actualized true cessations are āryas and become the Saṅgha Jewel. When bodhisattvas overcome all obscurations, they become buddhas, the Buddha Jewel. In this way, the existence of the Three Jewels is established and the possibility of our becoming the Three Jewels is demonstrated.

When we deeply contemplate Nāgārjuna's explanation, our faith in the Three Jewels grows, not because someone told us about them or because we admire them, but because we understand the possibility of mental development that can lead to actualizing the Three Jewels ourselves. The ideal way to take refuge in the Three Jewels entails some degree of understanding of emptiness and dependent arising. Of course, we may initially take refuge for more elementary reasons, but our refuge will deepen as our understanding of the Three Jewels increases.

Another way of speaking of the Dharma is in terms of the transmitted or scriptural Dharma and the realized Dharma. The teachings given by the Buddha are the transmitted Dharma; the realizations that arise in the minds of practitioners who practice the transmitted Dharma are the realized Dharma. Currently both the transmitted and realized Dharma are present in our world. To preserve the transmitted Dharma, we must study the Dharma by listening to oral teachings and reading scriptures, treatises, and commentaries. To preserve the realized Dharma, we must meditate and actualize these teachings in our own minds. We should not take the existence of the Dharma for granted, but make a personal contribution to preserving it.

## REFLECTION

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According to your present understanding, reflect that liberation is possible:

1. The basic nature of the mind is pure and clear.
2. Afflictions are based on ignorance that apprehends phenomena as existing in the opposite way than they actually exist. Thus ignorance and the afflictions born from it are adventitious and do not inhere in the nature of the mind.
3. It is possible to cultivate powerful antidotes — realistic and beneficial mental states such as the wisdom realizing emptiness — which root out ignorance, afflictions, and other obscurations.
4. Remember these three points, and as your understanding of the mind expands, come back and reflect on them again.

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## *The Three Jewels according to the Fundamental Vehicle*

According to the Fundamental Vehicle, the Buddha Jewel is the historical Buddha, Śākyamuni Buddha, who lived approximately 2,500 years ago. The Dharma is the true paths — the eightfold path of right view, intention, speech, action, livelihood, effort, mindfulness, and concentration — and true cessations in the mental continuum of an ārya. The Saṅgha refers principally to the four pairs of realized beings — the approacher and abider for stream-enterer (*srotāpanna*, *sotāpanna*), the approacher and abider for once-returner (*sakṛtāgāmi*, *sakadagāmi*) the approacher and abider for nonreturner (*anāgāmi*), and the approacher and abider for arhatship. Bodhisattvas are also included in the Saṅgha Jewel. A commonly recited verse from the Pāli tradition expresses some of the magnificent qualities of the Three Jewels:

The Buddha, the Pure One, with ocean-deep compassion,  
who possesses the eye of wonderful stainless insight,  
the destroyer of worldly evil and defilement —  
with devoted heart, I honor that Awakened One.

The Dhamma taught by the Master,  
like a lamp that illuminates the path, fruit, and deathless nibbāna,  
untouched by the conditioned world and pointing the way beyond —  
with devoted heart, I honor that natural truth.

The Saṅgha, the most fertile ground for cultivation,  
seers of true peace, awakened through the Sugata,  
all wavering subdued, ariyas with subtle wisdom —  
with devoted heart, I honor that ariya community.

The qualities of the Three Jewels are also described in the *Jewel Sutta* (*Ratana Sutta*, Sn 2.1). The Buddha delivered this sūtra when the city of Vaiśālī was subject to the triple disaster of famine, evil spirits, and plague. The citizens invited the Buddha and Saṅgha to visit to remedy the difficulties. The protective

blessing arising from the Buddha teaching this sūtra and from the citizens reflecting on the qualities of the Three Jewels spread throughout the city. The triple disaster ceased and the citizens lived in peace. Verses 3–6 below encapsulate the qualities of the Three Jewels:

Whatever treasure exists here or beyond,  
or whatever precious jewel is in the heavenly world,  
there is none comparable to the Tathāgata.  
This precious jewel is in the Buddha.  
By this truth may there be safety.

The Buddha often uses the term “Tathāgata” to refer to himself. Tathāgata may be translated as the One Thus Gone, indicating that the Buddha has gone to nirvāṇa, the unconditioned state. Tathāgata can also be translated as the One Thus Come, in that the Buddha has come to nirvāṇa in the same way all the previous buddhas have: by perfecting the thirty-seven harmonies with awakening, completing the ten perfections, and acting for the welfare of the world.

The Tathāgata has fully awakened to the nature of this world, its origin, its cessation, and the path to its cessation — that is, he fully comprehends the four truths. The Tathāgata has fully understood and can directly perceive all things that can be seen, heard, sensed, known, cognized, and thought about; he knows them just as they are. Everything he speaks, from the time he attained awakening until his parinirvāṇa, is true and correct, and his actions are consistent with his words. He has conquered the foes of the afflictions and is not conquered by them. Thereby he possesses great power to benefit the world.

The Tathāgata has realized two great principles: dependent origination and nirvāṇa. Dependent origination applies to the conditioned world and pertains particularly to true origins and true duḥkha. Nirvāṇa applies particularly to the last two truths: it is the unconditioned, true cessation that is realized by true paths. Together dependent origination and nirvāṇa include all existents.

Although there may be great wealth, treasures, and jewels in the world, none of them even come near the qualities and benefit of the Tathāgata. The Buddha is even more precious, rare, and difficult to encounter than a wish-fulfilling gem. He has the capacity to fulfill all our wishes for enduring peace and happiness through leading us on the path to nirvāṇa.

The destruction, dispassion, deathless, and sublime  
discovered by the Sage of the Śākya in samādhi —  
there is nothing equal to that Dhamma.

This precious jewel is in the Dhamma.

By this truth may there be safety.

The Dharma Jewel that is an object of refuge consists of true cessations and true paths. This verse speaks of true cessations, nirvāṇa, which is the ultimate aim of spiritual practice. Unlike the conditioned, impermanent phenomena of saṃsāra, nirvāṇa is not created by causes and conditions and does not change in each moment. Nirvāṇa has four synonyms, each describing it from a different angle: (1) it is *destruction* of craving, or of ignorance, attachment, and animosity; (2) it is *dispassion* because it is the absence of attachment, desire, greed, and lust; (3) it is *deathless* because it is free from repeated birth, aging, sickness, and death in saṃsāra; (4) it is *sublime* — supreme, never-ending, and inexhaustible. Nirvāṇa is often said to be cooling because the heat of lust and mental afflictions has been extinguished, and experiencing nirvāṇa is like diving into a pool of cool water during India's hot season.

The supreme Buddha praised that purity  
that is called the “uninterrupted concentration” —  
there exists no equal to that concentration.

This precious jewel is in the Dhamma.

By this truth may there be safety.

The “uninterrupted concentration” refers to the supramundane eightfold path that leads to nirvāṇa. It is called “uninterrupted” because it brings immediate results. No other path or samādhi (a state of single-pointed concentration) can equal it. To develop the supramundane eightfold path, we must first cultivate the ordinary eightfold path by practicing the four establishments of mindfulness (of body, feelings, mind, and phenomena) and developing mundane right concentration. Through these, we will gain insight, which examines the nature of the body, feelings, mind, and phenomena in a deeper way. This leads to the wisdom of clear realization (P. *abhisamaya*), which breaks through and realizes the unconditioned. Wisdom of clear realization occurs in a samādhi that is a supramundane (*lokottara*) *dhyāna*. The supramundane dhyānas may be of four



levels, corresponding to the four mundane dhyānas. They are used as the basis for insight that brings the path and fruit of one of the four stages of stream-enterer and so forth. For example, if a practitioner has attained the second dhyāna and uses that to develop insight that brings the path and fruit of stream-enterer, it becomes a supramundane dhyāna, and the path and fruit are the second dhyāna supramundane path and fruit of stream-entry.

While the mind dwells in the uninterrupted concentration, wisdom actively penetrates the truth, bringing the immediate result of extinguishing certain defilements.<sup>1</sup> When one emerges from that concentration, one is a stream-enterer, an ārya. Unlike worldly samādhis that lead to rebirth in the form and formless realms, this samādhi leads to liberation.

The supramundane Dharma consists of the four ārya paths, their fruits, and nirvāṇa. These true cessations and true paths in the mind of the Tathāgata are his *dharmakāya*: his Dharma body or truth body. Buddhaghosa's commentary on the Middle Length Discourses explains:

Here the Blessed One shows [himself as] the Dhamma-body (*dharmakāya*), as stated in the passage, “The Tathāgata, great king, is the Dhamma-body.” For the ninefold supramundane Dhamma is called the Tathāgata's body.<sup>2</sup>

To return to the *Jewel Sutta*:

The eight persons — the four pairs — praised by the good,  
disciples of the Tathāgata, are worthy of offerings.

What is given to them bears great fruit.

This precious jewel is in the Saṅgha.

By this truth may there be safety.

The ārya Saṅgha and Saṅgha Jewel refers to the eight āryas, who may be monastics or lay practitioners.<sup>3</sup> The conventional Saṅgha is the monastic order of fully ordained ones. The eight classes of ārya Saṅgha are subsumed in four pairs — stream-enterers, once-returners, nonreturners, and arhats. *Stream-enterers* have a clear realization of nirvāṇa; they have understood the four truths directly, made the initial breakthrough to nirvāṇa, and abandoned three of the five lower fetters

(*samyojana, samyojana*) — view of a personal identity, doubt about the Three Jewels, and view of rules and practices.

This breakthrough or clear realization is called “the arising of the Eye of Dharma” — one now sees the Dharma and the truth of the Buddha’s teaching. Because of the power of this realization, it is impossible for a stream-enterer to do any of the five heinous actions: killing his mother, killing his father, killing an arhat, causing a schism in the Saṅgha, or drawing blood from a buddha. Stream-enterers are endowed with virtue and observe ethical conduct well. Lay stream-enterers keep the five precepts and monastic stream-enterers keep monastic precepts. While they may still commit transgressions — such as angrily speaking harshly — they never conceal their transgressions and confess and make amends as soon as possible.

Because stream-enterers’ faith in the Three Jewels is unshakable, they are firmly planted on the path to liberation. Some may attain arhatship in that very life, as did Sāriputta and Moggallāna, Ānanda, and many others. If not, they will be reborn in cyclic existence, but only as humans or devas, never in unfortunate realms. Stream-enterers with sharp faculties will take only one more rebirth, those of middle faculties will take two to six rebirths, and those of dull faculties will take at most seven more rebirths before attaining nirvāṇa. Stream-enterers with dull and modest faculties are not immune to the eight worldly concerns, and sometimes their behavior may resemble that of ordinary beings. Stream-enterers who are householders may marry and be attached to their families; they may enjoy praise, compete in business deals, and become angry when criticized. Nevertheless their afflictions are weaker than those of people who are not āryas.

*Once-returners* have significantly reduced, though not totally eliminated, their ignorance, attachment, and animosity and will be reborn in the desire realm only once more. *Nonreturners* have abandoned the fetters of desire and malice and will never again take rebirth in the desire realm. If they don’t attain nirvāṇa in that life, they will be reborn in a pure abode in the form realm and attain nirvāṇa there. *Arhats* have eliminated the remaining fetters of desire for existence in the form and formless realms, conceit, restlessness, and ignorance.

Each of these four pairs has two phases: the path and the fruit. The phase of the path is the time one practices to attain the fruit that is certain to be attained in that very life. The phase of the fruit is the time of breaking through and attaining that result. All four pairs are called *śrāvaka* (P. *sāvaka*), or disciples of

the Sugata. This term literally means “hearer” because, as Buddhaghosa explains (Vism 7.90), “they hear attentively the Blessed One’s instructions.” However, during the Buddha’s time *śrāvaka* was a more general term indicating a disciple, and the teacher of each sect had his own circle of *śrāvakas*, or disciples. These four pairs are the Buddha’s *ārya śrāvakas* who, because of their spiritual realizations, are worthy of offerings and respect. As visible representatives of the *ārya Saṅgha*, the monastic Saṅgha are also objects of respect and offerings. Those who make offerings to them accumulate great merit that leads to fortunate rebirths and conducive circumstances for Dharma practice.

### *The Three Jewels according to the Perfection Vehicle*

The Buddha, Dharma, and Saṅgha are called “jewels” because they are rare and precious — rare because they appear in the world infrequently, precious because they have the ability to lead us out of *saṃsāra* to liberation and full awakening. All sentient beings’ virtuous attitudes, words, and deeds can be traced to the Three Jewels that continually instruct and encourage sentient beings in virtue. The Three Jewels are more valuable than the mythical wish-fulfilling jewel because they fulfill our yearning for complete peace and freedom. They differ vastly from ordinary jewels that may temporarily improve the conditions of this life but cannot prevent or remedy all of our *duḥkha*. Each of the Three Jewels has an ultimate and a conventional aspect, which are presented below.

Perfection Vehicle practitioners take refuge in all buddhas throughout the universe — those living on our Earth, in other realms, and in the pure lands. In our world system Śākyamuni Buddha is the wheel-turning buddha who taught the Dharma (turned the Dharma wheel) when it was not previously present. Others have become buddhas by following his teachings. Each buddha has four buddha bodies. Here “body” means collection, as in a body of knowledge or a body of representatives. Buddha bodies may be enumerated as two, three, four, or five. These divisions involve different ways of classification but come to the same points.

There are several ways to posit the ultimate and conventional Three Jewels. The following is one way.<sup>4</sup>

## *Buddha Jewel*

The *ultimate Buddha Jewel* is the truth body (*dharmakāya*), which has the nature of the perfect abandonment of all defilements and the perfect realization of all excellent qualities. It is of two types:

- The *wisdom truth body* (*jñāna dharmakāya*) is the omniscient mind of a buddha, which has three principal qualities. With *knowledge* (*jñāna*), buddhas know all phenomena; with *compassion* (*anukampā*), they seek to benefit sentient beings without hesitation; and with *power* or *ability* (*T. nus pa*), from their own side they lack all impediments to exercising their skillful means.
- The *nature truth body* (*svabhāvika dharmakāya*) is of two types:
  - The *natural stainless purity* is the emptiness of inherent existence of a buddha's mind.
  - The *purity from adventitious defilements* is a buddha's true cessations of afflictive obscurations (*klesāvaraṇa*) that bind sentient beings to saṃsāra, and cognitive obscurations (*jñeyāvaraṇa*) that prevent them from knowing ultimate and veiled truths simultaneously with one consciousness.

The *conventional Buddha Jewel* consists of the *form bodies* (*rūpakāya*) in which a buddha appears in order to enact the welfare of sentient beings. These are of two types:

- An *enjoyment body* (*saṃbhogakāya*) is the form that a buddha manifests in his or her Akaniṣṭha pureland to teach ārya bodhisattvas.
- *Emanation bodies* (*nirmāṇakāya*) are the forms a buddha manifests that are perceivable by ordinary beings. These are of three types:
  - A *supreme emanation body* — for example, Śākyamuni Buddha — turns the Dharma wheel.
  - An *ordinary emanation body* manifests in diverse appearances of various people or things.
  - An *artisan emanation body* subdues sentient beings' minds through showing certain worldly skills.

The truth body is so-called because the wisdom truth body is the supreme *true* path and the nature truth body is the supreme *true* cessation. The dharmakāya is the fulfillment of our own purpose, in the sense that it is the total perfection of our mind. Form bodies are the fulfillment of others' purpose because through manifesting in these various forms, buddhas lead sentient beings to awakening. The truth bodies and form bodies are one inseparable entity. They are attained simultaneously at the first moment of buddhahood.

Contemplating the four buddha bodies gives us a profound understanding of Buddha Śākyamuni. His physical appearance as the human being Gautama Buddha is an emanation body, a form he assumed to suit the spiritual dispositions and interests of ordinary beings in our world. An emanation body derives from a subtler body, an enjoyment body, which emerges from the wisdom dharmakāya, a buddha's omniscient mind. A wisdom dharmakāya arises within the underlying nature of reality, a buddha's nature dharmakāya.

### *Dharma Jewel*

The *ultimate Dharma Jewel* is the true cessations and true paths in the mindstreams of āryas.

The *generally accepted Dharma Jewel* consists of the transmitted Dharma — the Buddha's word (the 84,000 teachings and twelve branches of scriptures) taught with compassion and skill from the Buddha's personal experience.

### *Saṅgha Jewel*

The *ultimate Saṅgha Jewel* is an individual ārya — someone who has some true cessations and true paths in their mindstream — or a group of āryas.

The *symbolic representation of the Saṅgha Jewel* is a group of four or more fully ordained monks or nuns. They have received the ethical restraints set forth by the Buddha.

The Buddha spoke of the importance of the fourfold assembly: fully ordained men and women and male and female lay practitioners who keep the five lay precepts. A group of four or more fully ordained monks (*bhikṣu*, *bhikkhu*) or four fully ordained nuns (*bhikṣuṇī*, *bhikkhuni*) is a Saṅgha, and this Saṅgha represents

the Saṅgha Jewel. “Saṅgha” does not refer to a group of people who attend a Dharma center.

The description of the Three Jewels emphasizes the inner, experiential aspect of religion and spirituality. The Three Jewels that we trust to lead us to liberation and awakening are distinct from religious institutions. Although realized beings may be members of religious institutions, these institutions are often operated by ordinary beings. Our refuge must always remain purely with the Three Jewels. If it does, we will not be confused by the actions of ordinary beings. It’s important to remember that not all Buddhists are buddhas.

### *Eight Excellent Qualities of the Buddha Jewel*

Maitreya’s *Sublime Continuum* (*Ratnagotravibhāga* or *Uttaratantra Śāstra*) discusses the excellent qualities of the Three Jewels according to the unique Mahāyāna perspective that is not shared by the Fundamental Vehicle. Learning and contemplating these qualities inspires our confidence and faith that they are superb, trustworthy guides on the path. Contemplating their qualities shows us the direction to take in our spiritual practice in order to actualize the Three Jewels ourselves. Giving us a vision of our potential, this overcomes the despair that lacks clear spiritual direction and dispels the thought that we have only limited purpose and potential in life.

The Buddha Jewel is a final object of refuge that possesses eight excellent qualities, such as being unconditioned and so forth. As described in the *Sublime Continuum* (RGV 1.5):

Unconditioned and spontaneous,  
not realized by other [extraneous] conditions,  
possessing knowledge, compassionate love, and ability,  
only the buddhas possess [the qualities of] the two benefits [of self and  
others].

The first three qualities indicate that buddhas have accomplished their own aim or purpose.

1. The excellent quality of being *unconditioned* indicates the truth body is free from arising and disintegrating. It possesses natural purity in that it has never and will never exist inherently. Buddhas have completely and directly realized this emptiness, which is naturally free from the elaborations of true existence; in the view of this pristine wisdom, there is no true existence. If true existence existed, this pristine wisdom would see it. Instead it has seen the ultimate truth, emptiness, in which all dualistic appearances have vanished, and the actual mode of existence of all phenomena is seen directly. Dualistic appearances are usually described as being of three kinds: (1) the appearance of subject and object being separate and distinct, as in, “I am realizing emptiness,” (2) the appearance of inherent existence, even though this appearance is false and nothing exists inherently, and (3) the appearance of veiled phenomena — tables, trees, people, and so forth — which are not ultimate truths.

A buddha’s pristine wisdom directly knowing emptiness differs from that of other āryas in that it can simultaneously perceive veiled truths and ultimate truths with one consciousness. A buddha’s *pristine wisdom knowing things as they are* — that is, knowing their emptiness — is free from duality, yet veiled truths appear to it. It is free from duality with respect to its direct realization of emptiness, but it is not a pristine wisdom free from all duality, in that it also knows conventionalities.

Every consciousness of a buddha is omniscient and knows both truths simultaneously. One aspect of omniscient mind knows ultimate truths within the vanishing of all dualistic appearances, and the other aspect knows conventional truths within dualistic appearance.

2. The excellent quality of being *spontaneous* indicates that in addition to natural purity, the truth body is pure of every coarse and subtle adventitious defilement. All elaborations and conceptualizations have been pacified. Cognitive obscurations<sup>5</sup> hinder other āryas from effortlessly working for the welfare of sentient beings. When these are pacified, they attain a buddha’s truth body and are able to spontaneously and effortlessly accomplish all that is needed to benefit sentient beings.

3. The excellent quality of *not being realized by extraneous conditions* means a buddha’s realizations cannot be completely understood by words and concepts and cannot be fathomed by sentient beings, even other āryas. Buddhas experience reality for themselves. The actual experience of knowing the ultimate truth nondually cannot be communicated to others in words, although the instructions

on how to actualize this experience for oneself can. This quality that is the buddhas' pristine wisdom that knows things as they are — as empty of inherent existence — knows phenomena from the perspective of seeing the nonaffirming negative that is phenomena's ultimate truth. The emptiness of inherent existence of all persons and phenomena is this nonaffirming negative — a negation that doesn't imply anything positive in the wake of having negated the object of negation.

The next three qualities indicate that the buddhas have accomplished the purpose of others — that is, they are fully capable of benefitting others most effectively.

4. The excellent quality of *knowledge* or *intuitive wisdom* knows the variety and diversity of phenomena as well as their ultimate nature. This wisdom is experiential and effortless; it knows the veiled appearances and functions of all conventionalities everywhere and simultaneously realizes all phenomena as they actually are — their emptiness of true existence.<sup>6</sup>

5. The excellent quality of *compassionate love* for each and every sentient being wants all sentient beings to attain liberating insight that bestows omniscience. With wisdom and compassion buddhas show the path to those who are currently blind to it.

6. The excellent quality of *power* is a buddha's power of intuitive wisdom and compassion that liberates others. This indicates that buddhas possess the complete range of abilities to clear away sentient beings' obscurations that force them to be repeatedly reborn in saṃsāra under the control of afflictions and karma. Like a sword, a buddha's wisdom and compassion have the power to cut the root of saṃsāra; like a thunderbolt, they destroy that root and have the power to show others how to do that as well.

7. The excellent quality of *one's own benefit* fulfills a buddha's own aims in the most meaningful way. This quality subsumes the first three qualities and ensures that buddhas have eliminated everything to be abandoned and actualized everything to be realized, making their minds entirely pure. By accomplishing their own aim — the truth body with the first three qualities — buddhas have the knowledge, compassionate love, and ability to manifest in form bodies in order to teach the Dharma to those who are suitable to be trained.

8. The excellent quality of *others' welfare* or purpose refers to a buddha's form bodies that benefit others in the most meaningful way. This quality subsumes the



three qualities of knowledge, compassionate love, and power. With their omniscient knowledge, buddhas perfectly understand the dispositions, aspirations, and capabilities of each sentient being to be trained. With compassionate love, they seek to benefit others. With their power of wisdom and compassion, and without any hesitation or self-doubt, they teach paths that are appropriate for sentient beings with different inclinations. To those inclined toward the Śrāvaka Vehicle, buddhas teach the four truths. For those inclined toward the Solitary Realizer Vehicle, buddhas teach the twelve links — the forward and reverse sequences of the afflictive and purified sides. To those inclined toward the Bodhisattva Vehicle, they also teach great love, great compassion, and bodhicitta, as well as the way to actualize the pristine wisdom knowing things as they are and the pristine wisdom knowing the variety of phenomena.

The two purities of a buddha's mind — the first two qualities — are aspects of the nature truth body and are unconditioned. Other aspects of a buddha's mind are awarenesses that are aspects of the wisdom truth body and include conditioned phenomena.

### *Eight Excellent Qualities of the Dharma Jewel*

The Dharma Jewel is a truth of the completely pure class (that is, the true cessations and true paths) in an ārya's continuum that possesses any of the eight excellent qualities, such as being inconceivable and so forth. True paths are consciousnesses informed by the wisdom directly realizing the subtle selflessness of persons and phenomena. They are first generated on the path of seeing, which marks a bodhisattva's transition from an ordinary being to an ārya.

Among an ārya's true paths are uninterrupted paths and liberated paths. An *uninterrupted path* is a wisdom directly realizing emptiness that is in the process of eliminating some portion of defilements. Those defilements do not exist in the mind at the time of the uninterrupted path, but they have not yet been completely abandoned. When they have been completely and forever abandoned and their true cessation actualized, this wisdom directly realizing emptiness is known as a *liberated path*. Through each successive true path and its corresponding true cessation, bodhisattvas gradually abandon all afflictive and

cognitive obscurations on the bodhisattva paths of seeing and meditation. Bodhisattvas become buddhas on the path of no-more-learning.

A true cessation is the purified aspect of the emptiness of a mind that has abandoned a certain portion of obscurations. True cessations have two factors: natural purity and the purity of adventitious defilements. *Natural purity* is the emptiness of inherent existence of all phenomena, here referring specifically to the emptiness of inherent existence of the mind. It is not an actual cessation because inherent existence has never existed and so cannot be ceased. The *purity of adventitious defilements* is the cessation of a portion of obscurations that is gained by cultivating the antidote, true paths. The Buddha Jewel fully possesses both purities. Other āryas possess natural purity and a portion of the purity of adventitious defilements. True cessations are genuine freedom; they are peaceful in that conceptual elaborations and dualistic appearances have been pacified.

The mere temporary absence of a defilement in the mind is not a true cessation. Even non-Buddhists can temporarily stop coarse manifest afflictions by attaining the first dhyāna, which suppresses but does not eliminate them. This is not a true cessation because these afflictions can again arise in their minds.

True paths free us from all duḥkha, its causes, and the latencies of its causes, and in that way they protect us. True cessations are the state of freedom. With the attainment of the liberated path of the path of seeing, ārya bodhisattvas have completely ceased all acquired afflictions. In addition, they no longer have any doubt regarding the Three Jewels as their objects of refuge and can never fall under the influence of misleading teachers. Having overcome wrong views, their conviction in the law of karma and its effects is unmoving. As their wisdom realizing emptiness becomes more powerful and they attain higher levels of the path, their innate obscurations are gradually eradicated, bringing great inner freedom. For this reason, true paths and true cessations are said to be the actual refuge that protect us from saṃsāra and personal nirvāṇa. The *Sublime Continuum* details the eight qualities (RGV 1.10):

That which is inconceivable, without the two, without conception,  
pure, clear, and of the antidotal class,  
that which is free from attachment and frees from attachment —  
that bearer of the character of the [last] two truths is the Dharma.

Let's look at each of the excellent qualities in turn.

1. The excellent quality of *being inconceivable* consists of three ways true cessations are inconceivable.

First, they cannot be conceived exactly as they are by logicians with respect to the four possibilities of existence, nonexistence, both, and neither. Logicians are those who use reasonings that create mistaken conceptual superimpositions regarding the way things exist. The ultimate truth — which is both true cessation and the Dharma Jewel — is not (a) truly existent, (b) truly nonexistent, (c) truly both existent and nonexistent, and (d) truly neither existent nor nonexistent.

Second, true cessations cannot be adequately known by relying on others' assertions and must be known experientially by oneself. Third, as ultimate truths, true cessations are not realized by a dualistic mind. They are known only by pristine wisdom that is free from duality.

2. The excellent quality of *being without the two* indicates that true cessations are free from a portion of the two: afflictions and polluted karma. This is the purity from adventitious defilements, which cannot be experientially understood through words and concepts. The Dharma Jewel is present on the paths of seeing, meditation, and no-more-learning and is free from some portion of afflictions and polluted karma.

3. The excellent quality of *being without conceptualization* means that the Dharma Jewel is free from all conceptualizations grasping true existence and free from distorted conceptions that give rise to afflictions. True cessations are known by our own wisdom in meditative equipoise on emptiness in which all dualistic appearances have vanished. This wisdom is called “individual self-knowledge” (T. *so so rang rig*).<sup>7</sup>

4. The excellent quality of *purity* means that the Dharma Jewel is not mixed with any obscurations. As wisdom paths of āryas, the Dharma Jewel is the pristine wisdom directly realizing emptiness. As such, it is free from all defilements that prevent the direct perception of ultimate reality.

5. The excellent quality of *clarity* indicates that the Dharma Jewel clearly knows the ultimate mode of existence — emptiness — of all phenomena. It is free from the bias embedded in attachment, anger, and confusion.

6. The excellent quality of the *antidotal class* refers to true paths being able to counteract some portion of the afflicted obscurations or cognitive obscurations. They dispel the darkness of ignorance and its latencies from the minds of sentient beings.

7. The excellent quality of *true cessations* subsumes the first three excellent qualities and refers to the true cessations of all three vehicles. Free from all craving, they are ultimate truths.

8. The excellent quality of *true paths* acts to eradicate defilements and subsumes the second three excellent qualities. As consciousnesses, true paths are conventional truths. Like the sun that eliminates the darkness of ignorance, the true paths of all three vehicles function to free the mind from craving and other defilements.

A Dharma Jewel must have at least some of the eight qualities. It is not necessary to have all eight of them. For example, the uninterrupted path of the path of seeing is a true path but not a true cessation.

## *Eight Excellent Qualities of the Saṅgha Jewel*

The Saṅgha Jewel consists of āryas from all three vehicles who possess any of the eight excellent qualities of knowledge and liberation. It is not necessary that this person possesses all eight qualities. For example, an ārya on the uninterrupted path of the path of seeing has the qualities of knowledge but not the qualities of liberation. Describing the qualities of the Mahāyāna Saṅgha Jewel, the *Sublime Continuum* says (RGV 1.14):

Because of pure inner pristine wisdoms  
seeing the mode and varieties,  
the assembly of intelligent irreversible ones  
is endowed with unsurpassable excellent qualities.

The eight excellent qualities of the Saṅgha Jewel are:

1. The excellent quality of *knowing the mode of existence* — the emptiness of inherent existence of all phenomena. The Saṅgha Jewel has inner wisdom knowing that truly existent identities do not exist. The analytical minds that arise from learning, reflection, and meditation gradually come to ascertain the correct view of emptiness. The wisdoms arising from learning and reflection are conceptual, and the wisdom arising from meditation may be either conceptual or nonconceptual. The perspective of probing awareness (T. *rigs shes*) that is

conceptual (on the path of preparation) is very different from that of nonconceptual probing awareness (on the path of seeing and above), which has ascertained emptiness just as it is and realizes it directly. The former investigates and conceptually analyzes how things exist; it is an essential step in realizing emptiness, although its understanding is not complete or direct. The latter is completely free from dualistic appearances and is possessed only by the Saṅgha Jewel.

2. The excellent quality of *knowing the varieties* indicates that the Saṅgha Jewel knows some portion of the diversity of phenomena.

3. The excellent quality of *inner pristine wisdom* is āryas' wisdom that specifically knows the buddha essence (*tathāgatagarbha*). Āryas, who comprise the Saṅgha Jewel, have direct knowledge of the buddha nature as it exists in all sentient beings. This is unlike ordinary beings, who possess the buddha nature but do not know it directly. Inner pristine wisdom also refers to the above two knowledges.

4. The excellent quality of being *pure from the obscurations of attachment* is freedom from some portion of afflictive obscurations, especially freedom from the ignorance grasping true existence.

5. The excellent quality of being *pure from impeding obstructions* is freedom from some portions of the cognitive obscurations.

6. The excellent quality of *being pure of the inferior obscurations* is freedom from some portion of the self-centered wish to attain liberation for oneself alone. This refers to irreversible bodhisattvas on the pure grounds — the eighth, ninth, and tenth grounds — whose qualities are close to those of buddhas. They are “irreversible” in that they will never again take rebirth in saṃsāra under the control of afflictions and polluted karma and they have eradicated all self-centered thought that strives for only their own liberation. This is a powerful attainment, and such a person is bound directly for buddhahood and cannot reverse from this course. If bodhisattvas have not attained the signs of irreversibility by the eighth ground, they will attain them then.

“Inferior obscurations” may also refer to obscurations to meditative absorption (*snyoms 'jug gi sgrub pa*), certain obstructions that prevent the easy movement between different meditative absorptions and thus impede the gaining of realizations.

7. The excellent quality of *knowledge* (true paths) includes the first three excellent qualities. The true paths in the continuums of ārya bodhisattvas are free from grasping true existence, but the true paths of the eighth-, ninth-, and tenth-ground bodhisattvas are so pure that they are close to the unsurpassable wisdom of a Buddha. They are objects of refuge that are free from any taint of seeking liberation for themselves alone.

8. The excellent quality of *liberation* refers to true cessations and subsumes the second three excellent qualities.

Describing the knowledge of the Saṅgha Jewel, the *Sublime Continuum* says (RGV 1.15):

By realizing the quiescent nature of beings,  
they perceive the very mode [of existence of phenomena].  
This is due to the natural, thorough purity  
and because afflictions are extinguished from the start.

“Realizing the quiescent nature of beings” refers to understanding the selflessness of persons and of phenomena. The wisdom directly realizing emptiness perceives the two selflessnesses — the ultimate nature of all persons and of all phenomena other than persons. This true path realizes these two emptinesses without differentiation; it simultaneously and directly perceives the emptiness of all existents. Such realization is possible because the nature of the mind is clear light — it is empty of true existence. This is its natural purity. In addition, the afflictions are not embedded in the nature of the mind, and in this respect they are primordially extinguished.

Enumerating the excellent qualities of the Three Jewels demonstrates why they are trustworthy and complete sources of refuge. Since we have the fortune to encounter such reliable objects of refuge, it is important that we take refuge in them fully, from the depth of our hearts, and to take refuge repeatedly in order to deepen and strengthen our connection with them. Doing this will enable us to call on their guidance no matter what situations we face in life or when we are dying.

The Perfection and Tantric Vehicles also include śrāvaka āryas and arhats as the Saṅgha Jewel. The *Sublime Continuum* explicitly mentions only ārya bodhisattvas and buddhas as the Saṅgha Jewel, because this text emphasizes

buddha nature and one final vehicle — that is, everyone will eventually enter the Bodhisattva Vehicle and become a buddha.

Bodhisattvas respect the śrāvaka Saṅgha, as they are fellow practitioners who follow the Buddha and attain liberation. However, there are some differences between the two. Bodhisattvas are motivated by bodhicitta and aim to become buddhas. By fulfilling the collections of merit and wisdom, they attain buddhahood where all obscurations have been abandoned and all realizations and excellent qualities brought to fulfillment. Śrāvakas are motivated to attain personal nirvāṇa and aim to become arhats who have eradicated afflictive obscurations, but not cognitive obscurations. Ārya bodhisattvas are endowed with both wisdom and the great compassion that wants all sentient beings to be free from the duḥkha of saṃsāra, and they are committed to bringing that about. They dispel the ignorance of countless sentient beings by their altruistic deeds that lead others on the path.

## *Final and Provisional Refuges*

The *Sublime Continuum* speaks of the objects of refuge or just refuges (T. *skyabs gnas*, *skyabs yul*), which are sometimes used in different contexts than the Three Jewels (T. *dkon mchog gsum*). Clarifying in our mind the differences and similarities between the Three Jewels and the three objects of refuge can be challenging because there are many permutations that can be made between them. And when we add in the symbolic jewels — the objects or people that represent the Three Jewels — there are even more! Exerting effort to understand these helps us to understand the Three Jewels and the three objects of refuge more deeply and to avoid confusing them with the symbolic jewels. Although charts are provided below to summarize the descriptions of each, thinking about the explanations of the classifications is what brings understanding.

The *Sublime Continuum* teaches the final and provisional objects of refuge to direct all sentient beings to the ultimate or final refuge. Those who are definite in the śrāvaka lineage regard arhatship as their final goal; they don't seek buddhahood or believe it is necessary to attain it. The division into final and provisional objects of refuge is made to guide and encourage them to seek the

final goal. This emphasizes that there is one final vehicle and that all beings will eventually enter the Mahāyāna and attain buddhahood.

The three objects of refuge are spoken of as final (ultimate) and provisional (conventional) refuges. A *final object of refuge* is a refuge that has completely traversed the path, and a *provisional object of refuge* is a refuge that has not completely traversed the path. The final refuge is the final destination we aim to attain by following the path, whereas the provisional refuge helps us to arrive there.

In this light, the final refuge is a buddha having the four buddha bodies. To review, these are: (1) the nature truth body — the emptiness and true cessation in the mindstream of a buddha, (2) the wisdom truth body — the Buddha’s omniscient mind, (3) the enjoyment body — the form a buddha appears in to guide ārya bodhisattvas in the pure lands, and (4) the emanation bodies — the forms a buddha appears in that we ordinary beings can perceive and relate to. The nature truth body and the wisdom truth body together are called “the truth body of a buddha.” The enjoyment body and emanation bodies together are called “the form body of a buddha.” A buddha with these four bodies is our final refuge, the final destination that we want to actualize on the path; there is nothing higher than this. So a buddha is both the actual Buddha Jewel as well as a final refuge, whereas an image of a buddha is not an actual Buddha Jewel, a final refuge, or even a conventional refuge; it is a symbolic Buddha Jewel (T. *brdar btags pa’i sangs rgyas dkon mchog*).

The realized Dharma has two aspects: true paths and true cessations. These exist only in the mindstreams of āryas who have realized emptiness directly. New bodhisattvas as well as śrāvakas and solitary realizers on the paths of accumulation and preparation of their respective vehicles have not realized emptiness directly and are not āryas. The true paths in the mindstreams of ārya learners (āryas who are not buddhas) are not final objects of refuge; they are a provisional refuge. This is because the pristine wisdom in the mindstreams of ārya learners still has a deceptive nature (T. *slu wa*) in the sense that it appears to them to be completely free of defilements, although it is not.<sup>8</sup> This pristine wisdom directly realizing emptiness is currently free from the influence of pollutants of ignorance and its seeds because only emptiness appears to this mind and the dualistic appearances of true existence, veiled truths, and subject and object have vanished. However, this pristine wisdom is not *completely* free from the pollutants



of the latencies of ignorance and still possesses defilement. There is a difference between the pristine wisdom being free of the influence of the pollutants of ignorance and its latencies, and the person being free of them. Here the pristine wisdom is free from the influence of the pollutants of ignorance and its latencies, but the person is not. After ārya learners' meditative equipoise on emptiness, in post-meditation time the appearance of true existence arises in their minds again. For this reason, ārya learners' pristine wisdom is not *completely* free from pollutants of ignorance and its latencies. It is in this sense that the true paths of ārya learners are said to be deceptive and are therefore a provisional refuge. However, the true cessations and true paths in the mindstreams of ārya buddhas are a final refuge.

Similarly, the true cessations in the mindstreams of bodhisattva āryas and śrāvaka and solitary realizer āryas (including arhats) are not the final refuge. This is because these āryas still have cognitive obscurations, even though their true cessations are the pacification of their true duḥkha and true origins. However, since buddhas are completely free from both afflictive obscurations and cognitive obscurations, the true paths and true cessations in their mindstreams are the final refuge.

The transmitted or scriptural Dharma that is made of letters, words, phrases, and sentences explains how to actualize the realized Dharma in our mindstreams. With the exception of the transmitted Dharma in the mindstream of a buddha, the rest of the transmitted Dharma is not a final or conventional refuge, nor is it an actual Dharma Jewel. It is a symbolic Dharma Jewel (T. *brdar btags pa'i chos dkon mchog*). The meaning of the subject matter of the scriptures in learners' mindstreams is like a raft that takes them across the ocean of saṃsāra. Once they are on the other side and have attained awakening, the raft is no longer necessary and can be left behind. However, just because the transmitted Dharma Jewel in the mindstreams of learners is not the final refuge, that doesn't mean that the Buddha's word is no longer necessary or important at buddhahood. To the contrary, this is how the Buddha teaches sentient beings and guides us to liberation and awakening. The transmitted Dharma in the continuum of a buddha isn't to be left behind.

Speaking of the final and provisional objects of refuge, the *Sublime Continuum* says (RGV 1.20):

Because it will be abandoned, because it bears the quality of being  
deceptive,  
because of absence and because it is together with fear,  
the two types of Dharma and the assembly of āryas  
are not supreme, everlasting refuges.

“Because it will be abandoned” refers to the twelve branches of scriptures within the continuums of learners. As mentioned above, the teachings are like a raft that takes us to the other shore where we will be free from cyclic existence. After crossing, we no longer need the raft, and for this reason the teachings are not final, ultimate, or everlasting refuge. “Because it bears the quality of being deceptive” explains that the true path directly realizing emptiness in the mindstreams of ārya learners is not a final refuge because those āryas are not yet free of all obscurations. These true paths must go beyond being together with a mindstream with defilements and be in the continuum of a buddha in order to be considered nondeceptive.

“Because of absence” describes why nirvāṇa without remainder (the nirvāṇa of an arhat who has passed away from his polluted body) is a refuge, but not a final refuge: it is the absence of duḥkha and its origins, but not an absence of both obscurations. “Together with fear” indicates that all ārya learners — even the tenth-ground bodhisattvas who are so amazing — are not final refuges because they still have a fear of the cognitive obscurations. Thus all the ārya learners are a provisional refuge, not a final refuge, but they are included in the Saṅgha Jewel. An ārya buddha is a final refuge as well as a Saṅgha Jewel. The assembly of ordinary Saṅgha members is not a final or a conventional refuge, nor is it the actual Saṅgha Jewel; they are a symbolic Saṅgha Jewel (T. *brdar btags pa'i dge 'dun dkon mchog*).

Speaking of the Three Jewels and of the final and provisional refuges in such detail emphasizes the unique qualities of the buddhas — the total purity and clarity of their minds, the full abandonments and realizations possessed only by the fully awakened ones. Seeing this, our faith in the Buddha increases as does our determination to become a buddha ourselves.

The chart below clarifies the final and provisional objects of refuge for the Buddha, Dharma, and Saṅgha. When we compare the ultimate and conventional refuges to the definitions of the Three Jewels, we see that the Dharma Jewel in the

continuum of a buddha is the final refuge, whereas the Dharma Jewel in the continuums of ārya learners of all vehicles is the provisional refuge. All these true paths and true cessations in the continuums of both ārya learners as well as buddhas are the actual Dharma Jewel that possess any of the eight excellent qualities, such as being inconceivable and so forth, but not all of them qualify as the final refuge.

The Saṅgha Jewel includes the buddhas, arhats, and ārya learners of all three vehicles. Among these, only the buddhas qualify as a final refuge, not any the others. The ārya learners, as beings who possess any of the eight excellent qualities of knowledge and liberation, are included in the Saṅgha Jewel, but they are conventional objects of refuge. Although ordinary monastics and a monastic community composed of ordinary beings are called “Saṅgha,” they are symbolic of Saṅgha Jewel and are not the final or provisional refuge.

### THE FINAL AND PROVISIONAL OBJECTS OF REFUGE AND SYMBOLIC JEWELS

	BUDDHA	DHARMA	SAṄGHA
Final object of refuge	The four buddha bodies: nature and wisdom truth bodies and enjoyment and emanation form bodies	True cessations and true paths (realized Dharma) in the mindstreams of ārya buddhas are a final refuge.	Ārya buddhas
Provisional object of refuge		True paths and true cessations (realized Dharma) in the mindstreams of ārya learners; nirvāna without remainder	Ārya learners
Symbolic jewel	Images of the Buddha	Transmitted Dharma except the transmitted Dharma in a buddha's mindstream	The assembly of ordinary Saṅgha members

The chart below reviews the ultimate and conventional refuges.

## THE FINAL AND PROVISIONAL REFUGES

THREE JEWELS	FINAL REFUGE OBJECTS	PROVISIONAL REFUGE OBJECTS
Buddha Jewel	Truth bodies, Form bodies	
Dharma Jewel	Realized Dharma (true paths and true cessations) in the continuum of a buddha	Realized Dharma (true paths and true cessations) in the continuums of the ārya learners of any vehicle
Saṅgha Jewel	Buddhas	An ārya learner of any vehicle

The next chart combines the discussions of the Three Jewels and the objects of refuge.<sup>9</sup>

## THREE JEWELS, ACTUAL AND SYMBOLIC JEWELS, AND FINAL AND PROVISIONAL REFUGES<sup>10</sup>

JEWELS OR BEARERS OF THE NAME OF JEWEL	ACTUAL JEWEL	SYMBOLIC JEWEL	FINAL OBJECT OF REFUGE	PROVISIONAL OBJECT OF REFUGE
Buddha Jewel (two truth bodies and two form bodies)	Yes		Yes	
Buddha images		Yes		
Dharma Jewel (realized Dharma of true cessations and true paths)	Yes		Yes: those in the continuums of ārya buddhas	Yes: those in the continuums of ārya learners
Transmitted or scriptural Dharma		Yes		
Saṅgha Jewel (ārya beings)	Yes		Yes: an ārya buddha	Yes: an ārya learner
Ordinary Saṅgha members		Yes		

As noted, it's important to take refuge in the Three Jewels every day. If you have a regular daily meditation practice, do this at the beginning of your meditation session. Visualize Śākyamuni Buddha, his body made of golden light, in the space in front of you. He is surrounded by your spiritual mentors, teachers of the lineage, buddhas, meditational deities, bodhisattvas, arhats, śrāvaka and solitary-realizer āryas, ḍākas and ḍākinīs, and transcendental Dharma protectors. Visualize all sentient beings surrounding you, with everyone facing the merit field. To overcome antipathy toward people you don't get along with or feel unsafe around, visualize them in front of you, between you and the Buddha. Feeling that you are in the presence of holy beings who are looking at you with complete acceptance and great compassion, take refuge. A verse that is commonly recited is:

I take refuge until I am awakened in the Buddhas, the Dharma, and the Saṅgha.

By the merit I create by generosity and the other perfections, may I  
attain buddhahood in order to benefit all sentient beings.

In Chinese Buddhism, a refuge verse that is often chanted to dedicate the  
merit at the conclusion of a meditation session is:

I take refuge in the Buddha; may each and every sentient being  
understand the Great Way [Mahāyāna] profoundly and bring forth  
the bodhi mind.

I take refuge in the Dharma; may each and every sentient being deeply  
enter the sūtra treasury and have wisdom vast as the sea.

I take refuge in the Saṅgha; may each and every sentient being form  
together a great assembly, one and all in harmony.

### *The Three Jewels according to the Vajra Vehicle*

The actual meaning of “refuge” is found in highest yoga tantra with its  
description of how to actualize the four bodies of a buddha. This class of tantra  
speaks of the fundamental innate mind of clear light, the subtlest consciousness  
of each and every sentient being. This innate clear light mind is beginningless and  
endless. It came from our past lives to the present life and will continue on to  
buddhahood. Our coarse consciousnesses — the five sensory consciousnesses and  
our coarse mental consciousness beset by its profusion of thoughts — do not  
continue to awakening.<sup>11</sup>

When the fundamental innate mind of clear light is purified of all  
obscurations, it becomes the wisdom dharmakāya, and its emptiness and true  
cessations are the nature dharmakāya. The medium through which the wisdom  
dharmakāya appears to sentient beings in order to benefit them is the enjoyment  
body that benefits āryas in the pure land. From the enjoyment body arise the  
emanation bodies that interact with ordinary sentient beings.

The substantial cause for these four bodies of a buddha exists in us now — it  
is the fundamental innate mind of clear light and the subtlest wind that  
accompanies it, which by nature are empty of inherent existence. Thus the  
potential for full awakening exists in us now. The Sūtrayāna explanation of the

substantial causes and conditions of the truth bodies and the form bodies is incomplete; it does not fully explain how the two collections of merit and wisdom become the causes for the body and mind of a buddha. Highest yoga tantra, on the other hand, contains the full explanation of this process. However, we cannot jump to the practice of highest yoga tantra immediately; we must create a firm foundation by practicing the Sūtrayāna.

In Vajrayāna, the Buddha Jewel includes all buddhas throughout the universe and all the awakened meditational deities, such as Avalokiteśvara, Mañjuśrī, Vajrapāṇi, Yamāntaka, Cakrasaṃvara, and Guhyasamāja. The Dharma Jewel includes the true cessations and true paths in the mindstreams of all āryas. Here the emphasis is on the true path being the fundamental innate clear light mind that has been transformed into the union of bliss and emptiness at that stage of actual clear light. The Saṅgha Jewel includes ārya bodhisattvas, supramundane heroes (*ḍākas*) and heroines (*ḍākinīs*), supramundane Dharma protectors such as Palden Lhamo, as well as ārya śrāvakas. Supramundane ḍākas and ḍākinīs are highly realized practitioners on the tantric path who assist practitioners by overcoming obstacles and gathering necessary conditions for their practice. Supramundane Dharma protectors are ārya bodhisattvas who appear in fierce forms in order to protect the Dharma. Worldly Dharma protectors are not included in the Three Jewels because they are saṃsāric beings.

Tantric practitioners also take refuge in the guru. It is important to understand this properly in order to avoid confusion. The guru is not a fourth object of refuge; rather, the ultimate guru is the four buddha bodies, with the emphasis being on the omniscient mind of bliss and emptiness. The ultimate guru encapsulates all three refuges. The ultimate guru's body is the Saṅgha, speech is the Dharma, and mind is the Buddhas. The ultimate guru is not a human being, but the omniscient minds of all buddhas; it is the union of bliss and emptiness that, motivated by great compassion, is able to effortlessly and spontaneously manifest in a variety of forms to benefit sentient beings who are receptive to their influence. The ultimate guru is our actual object of refuge.

Conventional gurus are the spiritual masters who bestow tantric initiations, teachings, and instructions. We view them as embodiments of the ultimate guru, which helps make our refuge objects appear more immediate and accessible. Our Dharma practice becomes more alive when we feel that we are near the buddhas. The tantras instruct us to see our conventional gurus as buddhas, just as we



practice seeing our environment as the deity's maṇḍala and the sentient beings around us as deities.

Some practitioners make the mistake of confusing refuge in the guru with refuge in the personalities of our beloved tantric spiritual masters who are human beings. In this case, when the conventional guru passes away, these disciples feel bereft of refuge, and over time many of them may drift away from the Dharma. This is sad because their ultimate object of refuge, the ultimate guru, is always present, but they don't recognize this. Their feelings of loss can be alleviated by continually bringing their attention back to the ultimate guru and imagining the ultimate guru manifesting as the central figure in their daily practice of guru yoga.

In tantric practice, we take refuge at the beginning of each meditation session. To do this, we visualize in the space in front of us the Buddhas, Dharma, and Saṅgha surrounding the principal deity whose practice we will do. Seeing all of them as the manifestations of the ultimate guru — the omniscient minds of all the buddhas — we take refuge.<sup>12</sup>

Below are the refuge verses from some tantric practices. The Heruka Cakrasaṃvara practice begins:

At all times I take refuge in the Buddhas, Dharma, and Saṅgha of all three vehicles, in the ḍākinīs of secret mantra yoga, in the heroes, heroines, and powerful goddesses,<sup>13</sup> in the great beings (mahāsattvas), in bodhisattvas, and above all, at all times, I take refuge in my spiritual master.

In the Guhyasamāja practice the refuge verse is:

I take refuge continually in the sugata buddhas in whose minds abides a mental play [realization of emptiness] actualized in stages like the waxing of the stainless moon and infinite methods of pure compassion. I go for refuge continually to the holy Dharma, which, as the truth of the path, is the basis for total freedom from all misconceptions and the foundation for the excellence of the holy beings [buddhas, meditational deities, and āryas], and which, as the truth of cessation, is the very nature of emptiness, the single taste of all phenomena. I go for refuge to the host of āryas who are masters of discipline, abide on the bodhisattva stages such as the Joyous



One, are endowed with the glory of bodhicitta, are incited by supreme compassion, and have become purely freed from the fetters abandoned on each stage as they progress.



## 2 | Qualities of the Buddha, Dharma, and Saṅgha

IN THE PREVIOUS chapter, we learned how the Fundamental Vehicle, Perfection Vehicle, and Vajra Vehicle describe the Three Jewels. In this chapter, we will discuss their excellent qualities — the attributes possessed only by trustworthy and fully qualified objects of refuge. The scriptures describe many groups of qualities of the Buddha, including four kinds of self-confidence, ten powers, eighteen unique qualities, and the qualities of the Buddha’s body, speech, and mind. The Indian sages Dignāga and Dharmakīrti composed a logical argument that verifies the Buddha as a reliable spiritual guide. Although it is short, its meaning is deep.

We will then move into the Recollections of the Buddha, Dharma, and Saṅgha, a practice found in the early sūtras and in both the Pāli and Sanskrit traditions. Although it may be seen as a practice to attain serenity, it also has the result of connecting to the Three Jewels in a profound way that we can rely on in times of duress and difficulty.

From there, we will examine the distinguishing features of each jewel and the causal and resultant refuges.

### *The Four Kinds of Self-Confidence*

In his autocommentary to the *Supplement* (*Madhyamakāvatārabhāṣya*, 6.210cd), Candrakīrti quotes a passage describing the four kinds of self-confidence (four fearlessnesses) of the Tathāgata. Gyaltzab explains these in his commentary to Maitreya’s *Sublime Continuum*. This passage is also present in *The Greater Discourse on the Lion’s Roar* (*Mahāsīhanāda Sutta*, MN 12.22–26) in the Pāli canon.

Sāriputta, the Tathāgata has these four kinds of self-confidence, possessing which he claims the herd-leader's place, roars his lion's roar in the assemblies, and sets rolling the Wheel of Brahmā.<sup>14</sup> What are the four?

(1) Here, I see no ground on which any renunciate, brahmin, god, Māra, Brahmā or anyone else at all in the world could, in accordance with the Dhamma, accuse me thus: "While you claim full awakening, you are not fully awakened in regard to certain things." Seeing no ground for that, I abide in safety, fearlessness, and self-confidence.

(2) I see no ground on which any renunciate . . . or anyone at all could accuse me thus: "While you claim to have destroyed the pollutants, these pollutants are not destroyed by you." Seeing no ground for that, I abide in safety, fearlessness, and self-confidence.

(3) I see no ground on which any renunciate . . . or anyone at all could accuse me thus: "Those things you called obstructions are not able to obstruct one who engages in them." Seeing no ground for that, I abide in safety, fearlessness, and self-confidence.

(4) I see no ground on which any renunciate . . . or anyone at all could accuse me thus: "When you teach the Dhamma to someone, it does not lead him when he practices it to the complete destruction of duḥkha." Seeing no ground for that, I abide in safety, fearlessness, and self-confidence.

Being fearless in these four ways, the Tathāgata teaches the Dharma with perfect intrepidity and self-confidence, free from all self-doubt. First, no one can justifiably say that the Buddha knows some things but not everything. With full confidence, the Buddha is able to state that he has complete and perfect knowledge of all phenomena. This quality is attained through being generous in teaching the Dharma.

Second, no one can rightly say that while the Buddha claims to have destroyed all pollutants, he in fact has not. By means of his perfect realization of reality, he has cleansed his mind of all gross and subtle pollutants, as well as their potencies, enabling his mind to accurately reflect all that exists. This quality ensures that the Buddha's motivation for speaking, acting, and teaching is free

from greed, competition, conceit, and jealousy. This quality is attained through having abandoned conceit and arrogance.

Third, no one can with good reason say that what the Buddha states is an obstruction to awakening is not one. As related in a Pāli sūtra (MN 22), Bhikkhu Ariṭṭha believed that activities the Buddha said are obstructions — such as hedonistically indulging in sensual pleasures — do not obstruct someone who engages in them. With this mistaken thought, he encouraged people to indulge in these activities to be happy. Other monks and then the Buddha himself admonished Ariṭṭha, saying that the Buddha has repeatedly explained why sensual desire is an obstruction and that this can be verified by observing one's own experience. The Sanskrit tradition explains this fearlessness as the Buddha's confidence in saying that the afflictive obscurations prevent liberation and the cognitive obscurations obstruct full awakening. This quality of fearlessness comes about through not having followed wrong doctrines in the past.

Fourth, no one can correctly state that the path the Tathāgata teaches does not lead to liberation and the total elimination of duḥkha. Many of the Buddha's disciples during his life and afterward have followed the path the Buddha taught and attained its results: liberation and awakening.

The *Ornament of Clear Realizations* explains that of these four proclamations, two are related to one's own welfare (in this case, the Buddha's welfare) and two to others' welfare. Stating with complete self-confidence that he is fully awakened regarding all phenomena and that he has destroyed all pollutants is related to fulfilling his own welfare because these are results that the Buddha himself experiences. His fearless proclamations that he correctly identifies obstructions on the path and that the Dharma he teaches definitely leads to nirvāṇa when practiced correctly are qualities by which the Buddha benefits others and thus are known as fulfilling others' welfare.

## *The Ten Powers of the Tathāgata*

The ten powers (*daśa bala, dasa bala*) are exceptional knowledges unique to the Buddha that enable him to perform the special functions of a buddha, such as to “roar his lion's roar” of full awakening and to establish the Buddha's teaching in the world, teach sentient beings skillfully, and lead them to awakening. These ten

are pristine wisdoms that have abandoned all obscurations and know the infinite knowable objects. The ten are found in the Sanskrit *Sūtra on the Ten Grounds* (*Daśabhūmika Sūtra*) and are explained in the *Sublime Continuum*. They are also found in the Pāli sūtra *The Greater Discourse on the Lion's Roar* (*Mahāsīhanāda Sutta*, MN 12) and are explained in the Pāli Abhidharma *Book of Analysis* (*Vibhaṅga*). The numbered extracts below are from the Pāli sūtra. In general, unless otherwise noted, the explanations accord with both the Sanskrit and Pāli traditions.

(1) The Tathāgata understands as it actually is the possible as possible and the impossible as impossible.

The Buddha knows with direct, unmistakable perception the appropriate and inappropriate relations between actions and their results. For example, he knows that happiness arises only from constructive actions, never from destructive ones, and that harmful actions lead to duḥkha, never happiness. This quality is a result of the Buddha's having generated bodhicitta and purely kept the bodhisattva ethical code in his previous lives.

The *Book of Analysis* in the Pāli canon gives more examples of what the Buddha knows through this power, such as: It is impossible for someone with right view to consider the conditioned phenomena of saṃsāra as permanent, pleasurable, and self, although it is possible for someone who lacks right view to consider them in this way. It is impossible for someone with definite right view — an ārya — to commit any of the five heinous actions of killing one's mother, father, an arhat, causing the Tathāgata to bleed, or causing a schism in the Saṅgha. However, it is possible for someone without right view to do these actions. It is impossible for an ārya to relinquish his or her refuge in the Buddha and follow a non-Buddhist teacher. Although disciples can understand these depending on guidance given by the Buddha, it is the Buddha who discovered these truths and knows them directly. Because he understands these natural laws, he is the perfectly Awakened One.

(2) The Tathāgata understands as it actually is the results of actions undertaken, past, future, and present, with possibilities and with causes.

Only the Buddha fully and accurately knows the intricacies of karma and its results. Having penetrated the law of karma and its effects with wisdom, he knows that each sentient being must experience the results of their actions. The Buddha understands the various types of karma — virtuous, nonvirtuous, neutral, propelling, completing, polluted, unpolluted, and so forth — and sees each and every coarse and subtle cause leading to a particular event in the beginningless lives of each sentient being.

(3) The Tathāgata understands as it actually is the ways leading to all destinations (*gati*).

“Destination” refers to the various types of rebirth sentient beings may take — as hell beings, hungry ghosts, animals, human beings, and devas<sup>15</sup> — and to the destination of nirvāṇa for the liberated ones. The Buddha also knows the paths leading to each type of rebirth — some are polluted virtuous paths that lead to fortunate rebirths; others are nonvirtuous and ripen in rebirth in unfortunate realms. Having cultivated the practices and paths of the three vehicles — śrāvaka, solitary realizer, and bodhisattva — the Buddha knows the correct paths leading to nirvāṇa and full awakening and can identify the incorrect paths that lead to continued rebirth in saṃsāra.

(4) The Tathāgata understands as it actually is the world with its many and different elements (*dhātu*).

In the *Sutta of the Many Kinds of Elements* (*Bahudhātuka Sutta*, MN 115), the Buddha demonstrates his knowledge of the eighteen constituents (*dhātu*), the six elements (*dhātu*) — earth, water, fire, air, space, and consciousness — the external and internal sense sources, the twenty-two faculties (*indriya*),<sup>16</sup> the twelve links of dependent origination, and so on. The Buddha does not accept the superficial appearance of things as monolithic wholes, but with wisdom discerns them as impermanent, conditioned, and dependent processes. With knowledge of all these elements, the Buddha is able to teach in accordance with the faculties and abilities of the sentient beings he is addressing.

(5) The Tathāgata understands as it actually is how beings have different inclinations (*adhimokṣa*, *adhimokkha*).

Sentient beings have various inferior and superior inclinations and interests. Inferior inclinations and interests involve aspirations for this life; superior inclinations and interests direct us toward liberation and awakening. Some are virtuous; others are nonvirtuous or neutral. Knowing others' minds with their diverse tendencies, the Buddha spoke to farmers, outcasts, merchants, and nobility, making the Dharma relevant to each person according to his or her way of thinking. The sūtras relate accounts of hostile brahmins or argumentative renunciates meeting the Buddha, who quickly allayed their antipathy and explained the Dharma to them in a way they could understand and accept. Many of these people then become the Buddha's followers.

The Sanskrit tradition adds that the Buddha also knows the inclinations of sentient beings that attract them to the three vehicles. By comprehending these, he is able to guide sentient beings accordingly, teaching whatever is suitable to each individual at a particular time so he or she will develop spiritually. This power is also called the "power that knows the paths that proceed everywhere," because it knows what is needed to attain upper rebirth and the goals of the three vehicles.

(6) The Tathāgata understands as it actually is the disposition of the faculties of other beings.

The Buddha can look deep within each person's mind and know the strength of their faculties of faith, effort, mindfulness, concentration, and wisdom. For people whose faculty of faith is more prominent, the Buddha leads them through devotional means to accomplish the path. Other people are more energetic and enterprising, some people are very mindful, and others are naturally calm because their faculty of concentration is strong. Those with a more developed faculty of wisdom enjoy questioning and investigating. The Buddha teaches each type of person accordingly. In the end, all of us need to balance the five faculties, and when we are ripe to do that, the Buddha will show us the way.

(7) The Tathāgata understands as it actually is the defilement, cleansing, and emergence in regard to the meditative stabilizations, liberations, concentrations, and meditative absorptions.



In this context, *defilement* (*saṃkleśa*, *saṃkileśa*) refers to those impediments that hinder a meditator from entering any of the meditative absorptions or, once having entered, make them deteriorate. *Cleansing* (*vyavadāna*, *vodāna*) is the method for removing that impediment. *Emergence* (P. *vuṭṭhāna*) is the way to come out of a state of meditative absorption after having entered it.

The eight liberations (*vimokṣa*, *vimokkha*) are states of meditative absorption. The nine serial absorptions (*samāpatti*) are the four dhyānas, the four formless absorptions, and the cessation of discrimination and feeling.<sup>17</sup> Because the Buddha has mastered all of these meditative attainments himself, he can guide others who seek them or who have attained them. He teaches the way to actualize these meditative attainments, and he urges practitioners who have the tendency to become attached to the bliss of concentration to continue practicing the path of compassion and wisdom.

In the Sanskrit tradition, this power is the Tathāgata's power that knows the thoroughly afflicted — attachment to the meditative absorptions and liberations — and the completely pure — the freedom from this attachment.

(8) The Tathāgata recollects his manifold past lives — that is, one birth, two births, three births, four births, five births, ten births, twenty births, thirty births, forty births, fifty births, a hundred births, a thousand births, a hundred thousand births, many eons of world-contraction, many eons of world-expansion, many eons of world-contraction and expansion: “There I was so named, of such a clan, with such an appearance, such was my nutriment, such my experience of pleasure and pain, such my lifespan; and passing away from there, I reappeared elsewhere; and there too I was so named, of such a clan, with such an appearance, such was my nutriment, such my experience of pleasure and pain, such my lifespan; and passing away from there, I reappeared here.” Thus with their aspects and particulars he recollects his manifold past lives.

This and the next power are the last two of the five superknowledges and the first two of the three higher knowledges that the Buddha gained while meditating during the night prior to his awakening. Recollecting his own previous rebirths, he understands what types of relationships he had with various sentient beings in the past and consequently how he could benefit them in this

life. The Sanskrit tradition adds that the Buddha knows the previous lives of all other beings as well.

(9) With the divine eye, which is purified and surpasses the human, the Tathāgata sees beings passing away and reappearing, inferior and superior, fair and ugly, fortunate and unfortunate. He understands how beings pass on according to their actions thus: “These worthy beings who were ill-conducted in body, speech, and mind, revilers of ariyas, wrong in their views, giving effect to wrong view in their actions — on the dissolution of the body, after death, have reappeared in a state of deprivation, in a bad destination, in perdition, even in hell. But these worthy beings who were well-conducted in body, speech, and mind, not revilers of ariyas, right in their views, giving effect to right view in their actions — on the dissolution of the body, after death, have reappeared in a good destination, even in the heavenly world.”

The Buddha knows how beings die and are reborn according to their karma. Knowing this, he can manifest in whatever way is most beneficial to guide each being on the path to awakening. While with the previous power he knows past lives, with this power he knows present and future ones.

(10) By realizing for himself with direct knowledge, the Tathāgata here and now enters upon and abides in the liberation of mind and liberation by wisdom (*cittavimukti-prajñāvimukti, cetovimutti-paññāvimutti*) that are unpolluted with the destruction of the pollutants.

This power knows that while śrāvaka and solitary-realizer arhats have eliminated only the afflictive obscurations, a tathāgata has eliminated all obscurations. Someone with the superknowledges can know the spiritual level only of those who are at the same or inferior level as himself. Only the fully awakened Buddha can know the levels of realization and attainment of each and every sentient being. He isn't fooled by our efforts to impress him and knows our strengths and weaknesses and who has attained the awakening of which one of the three vehicles. Thus he can guide us on the path accordingly.

Maitreya speaks of the ten powers in chapter 6 of the *Sublime Continuum*, where their order is slightly different (RGV 193):

- (1) Knowing what is worthwhile and worthless,
- (2) knowing the ripening product of all action,
- (6) knowing faculties, (4) temperaments, and (5) aspirations,
- (3) knowing the path reaching the entire range,
- (7) knowing meditative stability and so on —  
when it is afflicted or without pollution —
- (8) memory of past states, (9) divine sight, and (10) peace  
are the ten aspects of the power of knowledge.

## *The Eighteen Unique Qualities of a Buddha*

Both the Sanskrit and Pāli traditions describe eighteen distinctive qualities of a buddha (*aṣṭādaś-āveṇika-buddhadharma*, *aṭṭhāras-āveṇika-buddhadhammā*) that are not shared by arhats. The *Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra* says:<sup>18</sup>

Subhūti, between the time when the Tathāgata manifestly and completely awakens to the highest, perfect, and complete awakening and the time when he will pass beyond sorrow, not having appropriation (the five polluted aggregates), the Tathāgata has no (1) mistakes, (2) chatter, (3) forgetfulness [lack of mindfulness], or (4) unequipoised mind. Likewise, he has no (5) recognition of difference [discordance], (6) indifference of not investigating individually, (7) loss of aspiration, (8) loss of joyous effort, (9) loss of mindfulness, (10) loss of concentration, (11) loss of wisdom, or (12) loss of complete liberation. (13) His pristine wisdom precedes and follows through all actions of the body. (14) His pristine wisdom precedes and follows through all actions of the speech. (15) His pristine wisdom precedes and follows through all actions of the mind. His unimpeded, unobstructed pristine wisdom vision penetrates into the (16) past, (17) future, and (18) present.

These eighteen distinctive features are consciousnesses. The *Questions of King Dhāraṇīśvara Sūtra* (*Dhāraṇīśvara-raja-paripṛccha-sūtra*) explains each quality, and the *Ornament* divides them into four groups: six unshared behaviors, six unshared realizations, three unshared awakening activities, and three unshared pristine wisdoms. These eighteen features are also found in the Pāli tradition's commentarial texts and are mentioned in Dhammapāla's *Treatise on the Pāramīs*.

### *Six Unshared Behaviors*

1. Due to his mindfulness and conscientiousness, the Buddha has *no mistaken physical actions*, whether he is walking, standing, sitting, or lying down. His feet do not touch the ground when he walks, and any insect that touches them will be reborn in a pure land. He acts in accordance with what he says, and his speech fulfills the needs of each sentient being in that moment.

2. Always speaking appropriately, truthfully, and kindly, he is *free from mistaken speech* and chatter. The Buddha does not dispute with the world, nor does he complain or criticize what others have done.

3. He is *free from any lack of mindfulness* regarding the dhyānas and wisdom. *Without forgetting* sentient beings, he teaches them appropriately.

4. His mind *continuously abides in meditative equipoise* on emptiness and simultaneously teaches the Dharma to sentient beings.

5. He *does not perceive any discordant appearances* of inherent existence and recognizes all phenomena as sharing the one taste of emptiness. The Buddha is not biased toward sentient beings and does not benefit those who praise him and behave well or harm those who do not.

6. He abides in *perfect equanimity free from indifference*, knowing the individual characteristics of each phenomenon as well as when sentient beings' minds are ready to be ripened.

### *Six Unshared Realizations*

7. With all-encompassing love and compassion, a buddha never experiences any decline of his *aspiration* and intention to benefit all sentient beings or to increase their virtuous qualities.

8. His *joyous effort* to lead others to awakening never diminishes. A buddha experiences no physical, verbal, or mental fatigue, and continuously cares for the welfare of sentient beings without laziness or despondency.

9. A Buddha's *mindfulness* is effortless and uninterrupted. He is mindful of the situations each sentient being encounters in the past, present, and future and the methods to subdue their minds.

10. Free from all obscurations, he continuously remains in *samādhi* with pure and stainless wisdom focused on the ultimate reality of emptiness.

11. His *wisdom* knows that his state of awakening, which is free from both afflictive and cognitive obscurations, cannot degenerate. He lacks any dualistic appearance or grasping at duality and knows the clear light nature of the mind.

12. With *total freedom*, his inexhaustible wisdom perfectly knows all existents, the 84,000 Dharma teachings, the doctrines of the three vehicles, as well as how and when to express them to sentient beings.

### *Three Unshared Awakening Activities*

13. Imbued with wisdom, the Buddha's bodily actions are always done to benefit others. He emanates diverse bodies that appear wherever sentient beings have the karma to be led on the path to awakening. Whatever *physical actions* the Buddha does — standing, lying, sitting, walking — automatically have a positive effect on sentient beings and subdue their minds.

14. Knowing the dispositions and interests of each sentient being, he teaches the Dharma in a manner appropriate for that person. His *speech* flows smoothly, is accurate, and lovely to hear. It does not deceive or lead others astray, but is clear, wise, and kind.

15. Filled with undeclining love and compassion, his *mind* encompasses all beings with the intention to do only what is of the highest benefit. He effortlessly and continuously cognizes all phenomena.

### *Three Unshared Pristine Wisdoms*

Without obscuration or error, the Buddha's wisdom simultaneously knows everything in the (16–18) *past, future, and present*. His knowledge of the future does not mean that things are predetermined. Rather, the Buddha knows that if a

sentient being does a particular action, a particular result will follow, and if another course of action is taken, a different result will come. He knows all buddha fields and realms of sentient beings as well as all beings and their activities in them.

Two further excerpts from the *Questions of King Dhāraṇīśvara Sūtra* illustrate how the Buddha's qualities surpass those of bodhisattvas, śrāvaka learners, and arhats.<sup>19</sup>

There, the Tathāgata's knowledge of the exhaustion of pollutions (*āsrava*, *āsava*) is completely purified, stainless, totally pure, clear light; all elaborations due to latencies are well destroyed. Śrāvakas' exhaustion of pollutants is measurable and the latencies are not well destroyed. Solitary realizers' exhaustion of pollutants is measurable; devoid of great compassion, they are devoid of courage. The Tathāgata's exhaustion of pollutants is endowed with the best of all aspects: all elaborations due to latencies are well destroyed. [The Tathāgata is] always upheld by great compassion, fearless, not devoid of courage, not outshone by all the worlds, endowed with one instant of mind. Why? The Tathāgata has no latencies of karma, no latencies of afflictions, no latencies of faulty behavior.

And

It is like this: For example, the sky is totally pure by nature, not abiding together with dust and smoke. Likewise, the Tathāgata's knowledge of the exhaustion of pollutants does not abide together with the latencies of karma and afflictions. Immediately upon thoroughly abiding in such exhaustion of pollutants, he teaches the Dharma in order for sentient beings with pollutants and with appropriation to exhaust the pollutants and abandon appropriation.

Saying, "O sentient beings, arisen from constantly conceptualizing the imperfect, you should realize individually just exactly as they are the pollutants and appropriations," the Tathāgata teaches the Dharma to them with examples that set out this and that [so that] they will, by all means, thoroughly know just exactly as they are the pollutants as imperfect, and having thoroughly

known, by not appropriating any phenomena whatsoever, will also totally pass beyond sorrow.

While ārya śrāvakas may have some of the above qualities, they are not motivated to attain all of them and do not use them to benefit others in the same way ārya bodhisattvas do. For example, bodhisattvas employ the first three of the eight liberations not to unify the mind in samādhi but to develop skill in making emanations, an ability that is crucial to benefit sentient beings. Some śrāvakas develop this ability, others do not. Similarly, although all ārya bodhisattvas cultivate the ability to remember previous lives and know the passing away and rebirth of all sentient beings — a skill necessary to benefit sentient beings most effectively — only some śrāvakas do.

These sūtra passages give us an idea of the Buddha’s magnificent qualities. Contemplating them brings joy in our hearts and expands our mental horizons. It enhances our respect and admiration for the awakened ones as well as for the bodhisattva path they practiced that enabled them to gain those abilities. Furthermore, recollection of the Awakened One’s excellent qualities inspires us to follow the same path he did so that we can provide sentient beings with the same support and relief from duḥkha that he did.

## *Qualities of the Buddha’s Body, Speech, and Mind*

Tsongkhapa praises the Buddha (LC 1:32):

I bow my head to the chief of the Śākyas,  
whose body was formed by ten million perfect virtues,  
whose speech fulfills the hopes of limitless beings,  
whose mind sees precisely all knowable objects.

Śākyamuni Buddha did not come into being independent of causes and conditions; his body was formed by a vast array of perfect virtues. He was once an ordinary being like us, but through enthusiastically and diligently creating the myriad causes for awakening, he attained full awakening. Because the path to buddhahood involves a causal process and because we have the basic “raw material” of the buddha nature, we too can create the causes to become buddhas.

Buddhas are able to manifest an infinite number of emanations simultaneously. Appearing in whatever form is most suitable to communicate with specific sentient beings, they appear throughout the universe wherever sentient beings have created the karma to be receptive to their awakening influence. Although these emanations appear to be ordinary people, their bodies are not made of atoms. A buddha's emanation body is pleasing to look at but does not generate attachment in the viewer. In the case of a supreme emanation body such as Śākyamuni Buddha, it has the thirty-two signs and eighty marks of a great person, which include the crown protrusion and the impression of a thousand-spoke Dharma wheel on the palms of the hands and soles of the feet. Each of these signs is the result of having practiced specific virtuous deeds. In the Sanskrit tradition, the signs and marks and their causes are detailed in the Perfection of Wisdom sūtras, Nāgārjuna's *Precious Garland* (176–97), and Maitreya's *Ornament of Clear Realizations* (*Abhisamayālamkāra*). The thirty-two signs are spoken of in the Pāli *Sutta of the Marks* (*Lakkhana Sutta*, SN 30) and the *Brahmāyu Sutta* (MN 91); the eighty marks are mentioned in Pāli commentarial literature.

The principal way in which buddhas benefit sentient beings is by teaching the Dharma — giving us the tools to create the causes for our own well-being and awakening. In that way, their speech fulfills the hopes of limitless beings — both our temporal and ultimate aspirations and welfare. Being aware of this, we should take every opportunity possible to listen to, reflect, and meditate on the Awakened One's teachings.

The *Sūtra Revealing the Inconceivable Secret of the Tathāgata* (*Tathāgata-cintya-guhyanirdeśa Sūtra*) and commentaries to the *Ornament of Mahāyāna Sūtras* (*Mahāyāna-sūtrālamkāra*) speak of sixty or more magnificent qualities of buddhas' speech through which they guide sentient beings to fortunate rebirths, liberation, and full awakening. When a buddha speaks, each person understands exactly what is most helpful for him or her to hear at that time. For one person, the teaching is about impermanence, for another it concerns emptiness, and for a third it teaches compassion. A buddha's voice is melodious and brings harmony and peace to the minds of the listeners. Never harsh or cruel, a buddha's words are always inspiring; they reinforce and enhance our ability to integrate the Dharma and eliminate our doubts. Like a lion's roar, a buddha's speech conquers extremist views; like the bellow of an elephant, it makes the Dharma known without



hesitation; like Brahmā's melodious voice, sentient beings can listen to it without becoming weary. When someone's mind is ready, no matter where she is or what circumstances she is in, a buddha's speech will ripen her mind, stimulating her to gain understanding and realizations.

The Buddha's mind directly and simultaneously knows all existents — ultimate truths and conventional truths — without discord. No sentient being has this ability. The Buddha's omniscient mind has two aspects: from the perspective of it seeing emptiness, it is called the “pristine wisdom knowing things as they are”; from the perspective of it perceiving the entire diversity and variety of phenomena, it is called the “wisdom knowing the varieties.”

## REFLECTION

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Sometimes the descriptions of the Buddha's qualities are so magnificent that they seem incomprehensible to us. Try this practical way to get an idea of what it would be like to be a buddha:

1. Imagine that all your anger, resentment, and spite are gone forever, not because they are repressed but because their seeds are no longer in your mindstream. No matter how other people treat you or speak to you, your mind remains calm and your only thought is for that person's well-being.
  2. Imagine that all attachment, emotional neediness, craving, and clinging no longer exist in your mindstream because the potential for them to be there has been eliminated. You live without frustration, moodiness, and disappointment.
  3. Imagine having every good quality that you admire: impartial love and compassion, generosity free from even the trace of stinginess or fear, and stable fortitude that enables you to remain calm no matter what you encounter.
  4. Feel admiration and reverence for those holy beings who have such qualities and be confident that you can create the causes to have them too.
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### *The Buddha as a Reliable Guide*

To commence the *Compendium of Reliable Cognition* (*Pramāṇasamuccaya*), Dignāga (480–540) pays homage to the Buddha:

I bow to the one who has become a reliable [guide], [starting out] intent on benefiting migrating beings, [followed by generating the wisdom that] serves as the way, [then reaching the state of] the One Gone to Bliss, [and finally emerging as] the Protector.

Commenting on this, Dharmakīrti (600–60) says in chapter 2 of *Commentary on the “Compendium of Reliable Cognition”* (*Pramāṇavārttika*):

Out of compassion he states what is best [for the listener], and through his pristine wisdom he says what is true. Since he is intent upon stating that which is best and true along with the means to realize it, he is reliable. He is praised as reliable in that his teaching is of that kind, and the purpose of praising him in that fashion is to establish the nature of what is reliable through that teaching.

The Buddha is one who has transformed himself into a reliable being. Saying that he “has *become* a reliable guide” indicates that the Buddha is not an absolute or independently existing being who has possessed magnificent qualities from the beginning. Rather, he cultivated a compassionate intention and the wisdom realizing selflessness and stabilized them in his mind over a long period of time. In this way, he abandoned all defilements, developed all excellent qualities, and is capable of teaching others what to practice and abandon on the path through his own experience. By following the same path, we can do the same.

Why do we want to establish the Buddha as a reliable guide? If we are Buddhist practitioners who seek liberation and awakening, we need to know what to practice and what to abandon to reach our spiritual goals. We don’t know this on our own and need a teacher, and it is imperative that this teacher be unmistakable. If we follow an unreliable teacher who imparts fallacious teachings, we risk confusing virtue and nonvirtue, and as a result falling to an unfortunate rebirth. For this reason, we want to establish that the Buddha is an authoritative guide who teaches the unmistakable path.

Each of the reasons in Dignāga’s praise illustrates why the Buddha is reliable: (1) Because he started out intent on benefiting migrating beings, (2) he strove to gain the true path, the wisdom realizing selflessness. (3) This wisdom led him to attain the state of the One Gone to Bliss (*Sugata*) who has perfect abandonments and realizations, and (4) in that way he became a reliable and trustworthy

Protector-Guide who teaches the four truths from his own experience. Each of these attributes builds on the previous one, culminating in the Buddha being a reliable spiritual guide for those seeking temporal happiness in saṃsāra and the highest goodness of liberation and full awakening.

These attributes are expressed in a series of syllogisms, as was the tradition in ancient India.<sup>20</sup> They show how the person of the previous mental continuum of the Buddha successively gained realizations, attained awakening, and became a reliable guide. That is, before Śākyamuni became the Buddha, he had beginningless previous lifetimes during which he was many different beings — a deer, a monarch, and so forth. The first syllogism of the forward order speaks about the bodhisattva he was in a previous life who had just generated uncontrived bodhicitta; it shows why he was capable of generating the wisdom directly realizing selflessness. The second syllogism speaks of the person that the Buddha was in a previous life when he was on the bodhisattva path of seeing and shows why that person was suitable to become the Sugata.

The syllogisms are presented in a forward and a reverse order.

### *Forward Order*

The forward order follows the sequence in the verse of homage. The Buddha being a reliable or authoritative guide is what is to be proven, and one intent on benefiting migrators, the Teacher, the Sugata, and the Protector are the reasons that establish this. Of these four, the one intent on benefiting migrators and the Teacher are excellent causes that lead to the excellent results of the Sugata and Protector.

1. Consider the person of the same mental continuum as the Buddha, who has just attained the bodhisattva path of accumulation: he is suitable to give rise to the Teacher — that is, the wisdom realizing selflessness — because he is an ordinary bodhisattva endowed with great compassion.

We can understand that this person had great compassion by reading stories in the scriptures that relate his practice as a bodhisattva in previous lifetimes. By familiarizing himself with contrived compassion, this person is able to gain uncontrived compassion because compassion is a mental quality that can continue to increase and become stable with repeated practice. Motivated by great compassion he is unwaveringly *intent on benefiting migrating beings* who

wander from one saṃsāric realm to another under the control of afflictions and karma; he is totally dedicated to working for their welfare.

Seeing sentient beings repeatedly tormented by duḥkha and totally ignorant of the correct means to escape from this desperate situation, he seeks and finds the liberating path and cultivates the *wisdom directly realizing selflessness* — the pristine wisdom that enables him to gradually eradicate all defilements from his mental continuum. In this way, he surpasses practitioners who habituate themselves with erroneous philosophies and whose meditation only reinforces self-grasping.

As a sharp-faculty disciple, he had inferentially realized selflessness before generating the compassionate intention. Now his wisdom, which is conjoined with bodhicitta, directly realizes selflessness. This wisdom is now called “the Teacher” in the sense that it paves the way for him to become a teacher. This is so because based on his own experience of directly knowing selflessness, he is capable of leading or “teaching” himself the method to generate the path to awakening in his mindstream, thus fulfilling the goal of his compassion. For this reason, the phrase “the wisdom that serves as the way” in Dignāga’s verse is translated as “the Teacher” in Tibetan. This is a case of giving the name of the result (Teacher) to the cause (the wisdom realizing emptiness) because this wisdom enables him to proceed on the path to becoming a Teacher.

2. Consider the person in the same continuum as the Buddha, who is on the liberated path of the bodhisattva’s path of seeing: he is suitable to give rise to the Sugata whose abandonments have three distinctive features, because he is a bodhisattva who has directly realized selflessness and is familiarizing his mind with this realization.

Having familiarized himself with bodhicitta and wisdom for a long time and by directly realizing the complementary nature of subtle dependent arising and emptiness, he is well poised to abandon all obscurations and realize all good qualities and knowledge. He will reach the culmination of the spiritual path and become the Sugata, the One Gone to Bliss — the one who understands well (*su*) and goes to the ultimate peace of nonabiding nirvāṇa (*gata*), at which time his qualities of abandonment (true cessations) will have three special features.

The three distinctive features of the Sugata’s abandonments are excellent, irreversible, and complete. (a) *Excellent abandonment* indicates that unlike non-Buddhists, he has abandoned all afflictions. (b) *Irreversible abandonment* means

that these afflictions have been abandoned in such a way that they will never return. This distinguishes him from śrāvaka āryas, such as stream-enterers and so forth, who are still reborn in saṃsāra due to afflictions and karma. (c) *Complete abandonment* shows that all cognitive obscurations have been abandoned, distinguishing the Sugata from śrāvaka arhats who still have those obscurations.

3. Consider the Ārya Buddha in the same continuum as the bodhisattva at the end of his continuum as a sentient being, who has just attained the first moment of omniscience: he is suitable to be the Protector, who perfectly works for the welfare of others and protects sentient beings by teaching them the four truths, because he is a being who has discovered the Sugata whose abandonments have three distinctive features.

As one who has accomplished the entire path, he is fully capable of protecting sentient beings from cyclic existence. He does this by teaching us the path of the four truths and the method to actualize nirvāṇa based on his own experience and insight. Being fully perfected himself, the Buddha does not need to depend on other teachers. He is not lackadaisical, but spontaneously reaches out and connects with sentient beings in all possible ways.

4. Consider the Sage, the Buddha: he is proven to be an authoritative, reliable being for those who seek liberation because he is a being with the Protector, the perfect welfare of others, in his continuum.

Having eradicated all afflictions, the Buddha could have remained in personal nirvāṇa, but due to his compassion, he chose to teach and guide us. Because the Buddha is one who progressed by means of perfecting the above four attributes, he is a reliable, trustworthy, and nondeceptive spiritual guide. Not seeking wealth, fame, or service, his motivation is pure. His wisdom is unobstructed and he has no reason to lie. For these reasons, we can trust his teachings. Knowing this increases our confidence in the Buddha, Dharma, and Saṅgha and eliminates doubts about the viability of the path the Buddha set forth.

All four attributes are necessary to be a perfectly trustworthy guide who teaches a complete path. Imagine someone who has great compassion but lacks the wisdom to free himself from cyclic existence. Consider someone who has realized the ultimate nature but lacks great compassion and enthusiasm to guide others. Imagine if someone's realizations were not complete, yet he tried to guide us. Because the Buddha has great compassion and the wisdom realizing selflessness and his abandonments are complete, those of us who wish to free

ourselves from saṃsāra can rely on him. We will not be disappointed and will not be led astray.

### *Reverse Order*

The reasoning of one nature is used in the forward order by showing that he (the subject of each syllogism) has the nature of being suitable to advance to the next level. Causal reasoning is used in the reverse order in that he (the subject of each syllogism) is preceded by his cause.

1. Consider the Buddha (who is a reliable guide): he was preceded by the Protector, the perfect welfare of others that was his cause, because he is a being who is a consummate guide who unerringly teaches what to adopt and what to abandon in the four truths to those seeking liberation and awakening.

As we learn and practice the four truths, we gain more conviction in the Buddha as an unmistakable and reliable guide. Although we ordinary beings are not yet able to know the sixteen aspects of the four truths by direct experience — one must be an ārya to do that — we can validate the Buddha's explanation of them by employing reasoning. Because he is an authoritative, trustworthy guide on the path who unerringly teaches the four truths with their sixteen aspects, we know the Buddha must have become that by being a Protector.

2. Consider the Buddha: he was preceded by the perfect realization, which has three distinctive features (of a Sugata) that was his cause, because he is a consummate being in possession of the Protector, the perfect welfare of others.

Because he is the Protector who teaches what to practice and what to abandon on the path, the Buddha is also the Sugata who has impeccable realizations with three distinctive qualities: (a) *Excellent realization* — unlike non-Buddhists, he has realized the ultimate nature of reality. (b) *Irreversible or stable realizations* that never decline, unlike those of śrāvaka āryas on the paths of seeing or meditation. (c) *Complete realizations* — unlike śrāvaka arhats, he is omniscient and has realized all knowable objects and knows the methods to do so.

3. Consider the Ārya Buddha in the first moment of omniscience, who belongs to the same continuum as the Buddha: he was preceded by the wisdom that directly realizes selflessness (Teacher) that was his cause, because he is a being

who has discovered the Sugata that has the three distinctive features of realization.

The Buddha became the Sugata by accomplishing the two principal causes: the wisdom realizing selflessness and great compassion that is intent on benefiting migrating beings. Wisdom, which is called “the Teacher,” is identified because the sharpening of this wisdom is what enabled him to go from being an ordinary being to become a Sugata.

4. Consider the person in the same continuum as the Buddha, who is on the uninterrupted path of the bodhisattva’s path of seeing: he was preceded by the great love and great compassion that are his causes, because he is a bodhisattva who has directly realized selflessness.

The person in the same continuum as the Buddha who had attained the wisdom that directly realized selflessness did so propelled by the motivation of great compassion that was intent on alleviating the duḥkha of each and every sentient being and working for their benefit.

I find it inspiring to contemplate the Buddha’s qualities and reflect on the joyous effort motivated by compassion that he put forth to become a reliable guide for us. It also gives me a vision of what we can do in our lives to become reliable guides for others in the future.

Mātṛceṭa, a first-century Indian sage and poet, converted to Buddhism from Hinduism after being defeated in a debate by Āryadeva. At that time, he wrote the *Hymn to the Buddha* (*Śatapañcāśatka*), a stunning book praising the Buddha’s qualities. Mātṛceṭa pays homage to the Buddha by way of the causes he created to attain awakening and his incomparability to other sages and teachers — his body, speech, compassion, teachings, benefits, and so on — all of which point to the Buddha’s being a reliable guide. Praising the causes of the Buddha’s awakening, Mātṛceṭa says:

Having brushed aside doubts  
about whether or not it could be done,  
of your own free will  
you took this helpless world under your protection.

You were kind without being asked,  
you were loving without reason,

you were a friend to the stranger  
and a kinsman to those without kin.

Praising his incomparability, Mātṛceṭa says:

By not envying the superior,  
despising the inferior,  
or competing with equals,  
you attained preeminence in the world.

You were devoted to virtues for their own sake,  
not for the rewards that come from them.  
Thus due to your right progress,  
they have all come to completion within you.

These verses and others like them are helpful to read when contemplating the recollection of the Buddha.

The Buddha encouraged us not to rely on him or his teachings simply because others honor him and follow his doctrine. To the contrary, he encouraged people to practice the teachings and attain the same realizations and awakening he has. When they do, the Buddha said (MN 27):

It is at this point that an ariya disciple comes to the conclusion:  
“The Blessed One is fully awakened, the Dhamma is well-  
proclaimed by the Blessed One, the Saṅgha is practicing the good  
way.”

## *Recollection of the Buddha, Dharma, and Saṅgha*

A practice common to the Pāli and Sanskrit traditions is the six recollections — the recollection of Buddha, Dharma, Saṅgha, generosity, virtue, and deities.<sup>21</sup> The term “recollection” (*anusmṛti*, *anussati*) is a prefixed form of the word mindfulness (*smṛti*, *sati*). The Buddha instructed us to approach the recollections of the Buddha, Dharma, and Saṅgha with faith, effort, mindfulness, concentration, and wisdom, qualities that comprise the five faculties and five



powers found among the thirty-seven harmonies with awakening. In the Sanskrit tradition, this recollection is found in the *Sūtra Recollecting the Ārya Three Jewels* (*Ārya-ratnatraya-anusmṛti Sūtra*).<sup>22</sup> Here we will explain the shorter, commonly recited “Homage to the Three Jewels” from the *Mahānāma Sutta* (AN 6.10) in the Pāli canon.

The meaning of these verses is common to all Buddhist traditions. The explanation below generally follows Buddhaghosa’s *Path of Purification* (Vism 6:2–100), with elements added from the Sanskrit tradition.

### *Recollection of the Buddha*

The Pāli homage that recollects the Buddha reads (AN 6.10.1):

The Bhagavān is an arahant, completely and perfectly awakened, accomplished in higher knowledge and conduct, one gone to bliss, knower of the world, supreme guide of beings to be tamed, teacher of devas and humans, the Buddha, the Bhagavān.

It is almost identical to the homage in the Sanskrit tradition that, translated from Tibetan, reads:

To the Teacher, Bhagavān, Tathāgata, arhat, completely and perfectly awakened one, perfect in knowledge and good conduct, one gone to bliss, knower of the world, supreme guide of beings to be tamed, teacher of devas and humans, to you the Buddha, Bhagavān, glorious victor Śākyamuni, I prostrate, make offerings, and go for refuge.

Understanding each epithet of the Buddha reveals rich meanings.

*Teacher.* The Buddha taught the Dharma of the three vehicles according to the interests and dispositions of various disciples in order to gradually lead all sentient beings to full awakening.

*Bhagavān.* All ancient Indian traditions referred to their most exalted person as Bhagavān (Blessed One or World-Honored One). It signifies the respect and veneration given to one who is distinguished by special qualities as the highest of all beings. *Bhaga* indicates fortune, share, or possession. He is the one honored as

the highest of all beings in the world due to possessing marvelous qualities. *Bhaga* also means “destroyed” — he has destroyed all defilements and the three poisons of attachment, animosity, and ignorance.

In the Tibetan translation of Bhagavān (*bcom ldan 'das*), *bcom* means to destroy — he has destroyed the four Māras of the polluted aggregates, afflictions, death, and the son of the gods;<sup>23</sup> *ldan* means endowed — he is endowed with the four bodies of a buddha and the five pristine wisdoms; *'das* means beyond — he has transcended both saṃsāra and an arhat’s personal nirvāṇa.

*Tathāgata* (One Thus Gone, One Thus Come). “Tathāgata” also predates the Buddha and indicates a perfectly accomplished and realized person. The Buddha refers to himself as a fully awakened one, a tathāgata.

Buddhaghosa explained “Tathāgata” in eight ways, and Dhammapāla added even more explication. As mentioned above, the Buddha has gone thus to nirvāṇa in the same way that all liberated ones of the past have gone, by practicing the thirty-seven harmonies with awakening. He has come thus to buddhahood just as all the buddhas of the past have come, by fulfilling the ten perfections. By working for the benefit of the world, all tathāgatas thus have come to buddhahood. They convey the teaching of the deathless, to which they have gone by their own practice.

The Mahāyāna also explains the Tathāgata as one who has gone to the direct perception of all phenomena as well as their thusness (*tathatā*) or emptiness. He knows everything thus — as it is — and everything is just as he has said it to be. Chinese scriptures add that the Buddha came from thusness or emptiness.

*Arhat* was another term used in various ancient Indian traditions. As with Bhagavān and Tathāgata, the Buddha adopted this word and gave it a specific meaning according to his doctrine. “Arhat” has several meanings: (1) foe destroyer, because of having destroyed all afflictions and pollutants; (2) accomplished one, because of being liberated from saṃsāra; and (3) worthy one, because of being worthy of offerings and respect because he has destroyed all defilements and is free from saṃsāra. “Arhat” is not a term restricted to the Buddha but applies to all those who have destroyed the afflictions and are liberated from saṃsāra.

*Completely and Perfectly Awakened One* (*Samyaksambuddha*, *Sammāsambuddha*). The Buddha has awakened from the sleep of ignorance and awakens others as well. He comprehends completely and perfectly all

phenomena, especially the inner workings of the mind and the paths to liberation and awakening and their resultant states. As one who has completed the path, he possesses the ten powers of a buddha, the four fearlessnesses, and many other magnificent powers. His ability to explain the Dharma in a way that is easily understood by whatever audience he speaks to is indicative of his great knowledge and skill.

Whereas the early Pāli commentaries were more modest when speaking of the Buddha's knowledge, the second-century BCE commentary *Paṭisambhidāmagga* elaborated on seventy-two types of knowledge related to the Buddha's awakening, including omniscient and unobstructed knowledge of all phenomena — past, present, and future.

In general, the Pāli tradition considers the Buddha to be all-knowing, whereas the Sanskrit tradition considers him omniscient. In a Pāli sūtra (MN 71), the wanderer Vacchagotta directly asked the Buddha if he is omniscient such that whether he is walking, standing, sleeping, or awake “knowledge and vision are continuously and uninterruptedly present to him.” The Buddha denied this and replied that he has the three higher knowledges: recollection of previous lives, knowledge of the death and rebirth of all sentient beings, and knowledge of the destruction of all pollutants together with full understanding of the four truths.

In another sūtra, the Buddha says (AN 4.23):

In the world . . . whatever is seen, heard, sensed, and cognized, attained, searched into, pondered over by the mind — all that is fully understood by the Tathāgata . . . By comprehending all the world, all in the world just as it is, from all the world he is released: in all the world he clings to nothing.

Many Pāli commentators understand these passages to mean that although the Buddha knows all that is, everything does not appear to his mind simultaneously and continuously at all times.<sup>24</sup> Rather, all knowledge is available to him, but he must turn his mind to that topic. When he does, it will effortlessly appear because his mind is free from obstructions.

According to the Mahāyāna, the Buddha is fully omniscient; every existent — both veiled and ultimate truths — appears to his mind at all times. He comprehends all phenomena without mistake, as they actually are. The Buddha is

completely and perfectly awakened because he has completed all qualities of body, speech, and mind perfectly, precisely as they should be. He has attained nonabiding nirvāṇa, abiding neither in saṃsāra nor in the personal peace of an arhat.

*Perfect in Knowledge and Good Conduct (Vidyā-caraṇa-saṃpanna, Vijjā-caraṇa-saṃpanna).* The Buddha is perfect in knowledge because he possesses the three higher knowledges, and he is perfect in good conduct because he lives with pure ethical conduct and has restrained his senses and is moderate in eating, drinking, sleeping, and so forth. He has also perfected all the various meditative absorptions. He is able to enter and arise from each of them easily and quickly and can train others to do the same. The Buddha is endowed with knowledge — the higher training in wisdom — and its foundation — the higher trainings in ethical conduct and concentration. Alternatively, “knowledge” refers to the Buddha’s wisdom and “good conduct” to his great compassion. With wisdom he knows all that is beneficial and harmful for sentient beings, and with compassion he acts to lead them away from harm and toward all that is beneficial and liberating.

*One Gone to Bliss (Sugata).* The Buddha is one gone to bliss because he has (1) gone along the sublime eightfold path, and (2) gone to the sublime state, the deathless state, nirvāṇa. As with several of the other epithets, this one was used by other spiritual groups as well.

According to the Sanskrit tradition, the one gone to bliss has two qualities: the realization of unpolled wisdom and the complete abandonment of all objects to be abandoned. He has gone to bliss because he has reached the sublime state of nonabiding nirvāṇa and will never regress.

*Knower of the World (Loka-vid, Loka-vidu).* The Buddha knows the world in multiple ways. (1) He knows the conditioned world (*saṃskāraloka, saṅkhāraloka*) composed of the five aggregates, six sources, and eighteen constituents. He fully understands that the world is simply a collection of constantly changing conditioned phenomena, arising and ceasing in each moment without the involvement of a self, external deity, or permanent substance. He fully understands the twelve links — the process by which sentient beings enter cyclic existence — as well as the way to reverse this and attain liberation. (2) The Buddha knows the world of beings — each individual’s disposition and interests, those who act well and those who don’t, those of sharp faculties and those with

modest faculties. (3) The Buddha knows the universe and the world systems existing in infinite space and time and can describe their dimensions and characteristics.

The epithets above describe the Buddha's personal realizations and attainments that establish him as fully awakened. The epithets below establish him as an excellent spiritual teacher and guide. Combining these, we see the Buddha has fulfilled his own purpose by attaining all realizations and abandoning all that is to be abandoned, and he has fulfilled others' purposes by being a spiritual teacher and leading sentient beings on the path to temporal and ultimate happiness.

*Supreme Guide of Beings to Be Tamed* (*Anuttara-puruṣa-damyā-sārathī*, *Anuttaro puriṣa-damma-sārathī*). Able to lead everyone to liberation, including those who have committed great destructive karma, the Buddha is the unsurpassed guide of all those whose minds are to be subdued. He guided to liberation Aṅgulimāla, who murdered 999 people, and by meditating on love he subdued the mad elephant that his cousin Devadatta unleashed to kill him.

Just as the driver of a cart guides the oxen, the Buddha guides those sentient beings capable of realizing the ārya path to that path. He restrains those who have acted contrary to the Dharma, steers those who have strayed to a wrong path back to the right one, and prods the lazy. As for those unruly ones whose karma is not right for them to encounter the path at this moment, he leaves them undisturbed.

*Teacher of Devas and Humans* (*śāstā deva-manuṣyāṇaṃ*, *Satthā devamanussānaṃ*). While the Buddha teaches all sentient beings, devas and humans are his main disciples because their inner and outer conditions are more suitable for practicing the path. The sūtras tell of the Buddha teaching devas who visited his vihāra (monastic residence) in the middle of the night and of the Buddha visiting the Brahmā realm to teach the devas there.

*Buddha*. The Tibetan word for buddha is *sangye*. *Sangs* indicates the Buddha has awakened from the sleep of afflictions, and *rgyas* indicates he is omniscient, having expanded his awareness to all knowable objects.

*Glorious* (*śrī*). The Buddha is glorious because he is endowed with the perfection of high rebirth and highest goodness. In general, "high rebirth" refers to a fortunate rebirth, but since the Buddha is no longer subject to rebirth, this indicates he is capable of showing others how to create the causes for fortunate

rebirths. “Highest goodness” indicates that he has attained full awakening and leads others to liberation and awakening as well.

*Victor (Jina)*. The Buddha is victorious over the afflictive obscurations, the cognitive obscurations, and the four Māras.

*Śākyamuni*. The Buddha was born in the Śākya clan and is the Capable One or Sage (Muni) because he is capable of subduing the two obscurations.

These epithets give us much to contemplate by illustrating the Buddha’s qualities and the reasons he is a reliable object of refuge. They provide insight into the Dharma he practiced that enabled him to attain those qualities, and the realizations the Saṅgha actualize as they follow the same path. Inspired to practice the path, we feel grateful that the Buddha has shared the precious Dharma methods with us.

Recollection of the Buddha can soothe our hearts in times of physical, mental, or spiritual duress. Tsongkhapa reflects (PDA 44–45):

Here too, as I reflect on your [the Buddha’s] words, I think,  
“Blazing with the glory of noble signs  
and hallowed in a net of light rays,  
this teacher, in a voice of pristine melody,  
spoke thus in such a way.”  
The instant such a reflection of the Sage’s form  
appears in my mind it soothes me,  
just as the moon-rays heal fever’s pains.

## REFLECTION

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1. Imagine the Buddha in the space in front of you and recollect the qualities mentioned in the epithets.
  2. Reflect on other qualities of the Buddha, such as the four types of self-confidence, the ten powers, and the eighteen unique qualities.
  3. Let the feeling of trust in the Buddha arise and, with faith in his ability to guide you to awakening, take refuge in him. You may recite a verse or put it in your own words.
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## *Recollection of the Dharma*

The Dhamma well-expounded by the Bhagavān,  
to be seen here and now, immediate,  
inviting one to come and see, applicable,  
to be personally experienced by the wise.

The verse of recollection of the Dharma (AN 6.10.2) points out several of its magnificent qualities.

*Well-expounded.* Unlike the other qualities of the Dharma that pertain only to the transcendental Dharma (true path and true cessation), “well-expounded” applies to the scriptures as well. The transmitted Dharma is well-expounded because it is good in the beginning, middle, and end. A scripture’s introduction describes the circumstances in which it was taught, its body has a clear meaning that is explained using reason and examples, and its conclusion culminates by generating faith in those who hear or study it. All aspects of the teachings show us how to live a life of purity and purpose. In addition, the Dharma wisely instructs us to begin by practicing ethical conduct, to practice serenity (*śamatha*, *samatha*) and insight (*vipaśyanā*, *vipassanā*) in the middle, and at the end to attain nirvāṇa.

The Dharma is pure in its meaning and detail. It is pure in meaning because its intention is profound — to help us cross the ocean of saṃsāra — and it is pure in detail because its words are clear. There is nothing that needs to be added or removed to improve the Dharma. Whereas other spiritual traditions do not correctly identify the obscurations to be abandoned, the Buddhadharma explains this correctly and without distortion. Because the Dharma is accurate in all respects, practicing it will lead us to realize nirvāṇa.

The supramundane Dharma consists of the four śrāvaka paths and the four fruits of those paths, the bodhisattvas’ paths and grounds, and nirvāṇa. This Dharma is the middle way between asceticism and self-indulgence and between absolutism and nihilism. It is the ultimate refuge, true peace. Can anything better than this ever be expounded?

*To be seen here and now.* The ārya paths and nirvāṇa can be experienced here and now by abandoning obscurations. Those who have actualized the ārya paths do not obsess over their own or others’ afflictions or the objects of affliction, and

thus they do not experience mental misery. Those who have realized the Dharma are sure of their knowledge and do not need to blindly believe another person in order to know what they have already realized directly. Based on the correct view, the Dharma is worthwhile to learn because it frees us from the fears and dangers of saṃsāra.

*Immediate.* The supramundane Dharma bears immediate results. The uninterrupted paths that overcome a portion of afflictions last one moment and are immediately followed by the liberated paths that are free from those afflictions.

*Inviting one to come and see.* This is the famous Pāli phrase *ehipassa-vidhi* (P. *ehipassika*) with which the Buddha invites us to “come and see this Dharma.” He asks us to investigate and test the Dharma and to experience it for ourselves. This Dharma invites verification, and we are encouraged to verify it for ourselves through intelligent analysis and by applying it to our lives and experiencing the Dharma ourselves. Unlike a deceptive person whose purse is empty but says, “I have money,” and unlike a person who thinks a fool will buy his container of rubbish, the Buddha encourages us to inspect and engage with his teachings and discover their purity for ourselves.

*Applicable.* The uninterrupted and liberated paths lead to nirvāṇa, which then becomes our shelter and true refuge.

*To be personally experienced by the wise.* We should not take the Dharma on blind faith, but must learn and practice it ourselves. We cannot hire someone else to do this for us or hope that when our friend attains nirvāṇa, it will magically rub off on us too. The ārya paths cannot be known with our five senses; they are known only by our mind. The Dharma is the province of the wise; the foolish who are distracted with the seeming pleasures of cyclic existence cannot fathom, let alone come close to it. However, if we understand and practice the Dharma correctly, it will lead us to its stated results.

### *Recollection of the Saṅgha*

The Saṅgha of the Bhagavān’s disciples is practicing the good way,  
the Saṅgha of the Bhagavān’s disciples is practicing the straight way,  
the Saṅgha of the Bhagavān’s disciples is practicing the true way,  
the Saṅgha of the Bhagavān’s disciples is practicing the proper way;



that is, the four pairs of persons, the eight types of individuals,  
the Saṅgha of the Bhagavān's disciples,  
is worthy of gifts, is worthy of hospitality,  
is worthy of offerings, is worthy of respect,  
is the unsurpassed field of merit for the world.

Recollection of the Saṅgha (AN 6.10.3) involves reflecting on the qualities of the community of disciples. They are a community because they practice a common ethical code and share the same view. This community practices the good, straight, true, and proper way. Those following the Śrāvaka Vehicle form four pairs: those who have attained the path and fruit of stream-enterer, once-returner, nonreturner, and arhat. The Saṅgha also includes ārya bodhisattvas and buddhas.

*Practicing the good way.* The āryas have gained their realizations by practicing the correct way that accords with how things are and that leads irreversibly to nirvāṇa. The Saṅgha practices the Dharma and the Vinaya, and thus not only actualizes these themselves but also preserves them for future generations.

*Practicing the straight way.* By following the middle way, free from the two extremes, the Saṅgha practices in a straightforward way without being crooked or off track.

*Practicing the true way.* The Saṅgha's aim is nirvāṇa, which is true and nondeceptive.

*Practicing the proper way.* The Saṅgha's practice follows the footsteps of those who are worthy of veneration.

*Is worthy of hospitality.* Since the ārya Saṅgha practices properly, Saṅgha members are worthy to receive gifts of the four requisites — food, clothing, shelter, and medicine — so they can continue their practice. These gifts bear auspicious fruit for the donors due to the virtue and pure practice of the recipients.

*Is worthy of offerings.* Offerings given to the Saṅgha bear good results for the donor. This is not “spiritual business” — we should not give offerings to the Saṅgha only to receive merit in return. Rather, our offerings are expressions of our heartfelt rejoicing in the practice and spiritual qualities of those who live with pure ethical conduct, generate compassion and bodhicitta, and gain wisdom of the ultimate nature.

*Is worthy of respect.* By respecting the qualities of realized beings, we make ourselves receptive to develop those same wonderful qualities.

*Is the unsurpassed field of merit for the world.* When rice seeds are sown in a fertile field, a munificent crop will result. Similarly, the Saṅgha, with the Buddha as its head, is the supreme field where we can grow a bountiful crop of virtue. This comes through making offerings and venerating them with a joyful, appreciative, and humble attitude.

To meditate on the qualities of the Three Jewels, we recollect those qualities one by one and reflect deeply on the reasons the Three Jewels have them. We contemplate, “For this reason the Buddha is a tathāgata, for this reason, he is an arhat,” and so forth. Many benefits arise from this reflection.

Conclude your meditation session on the qualities of the Three Jewels by reflecting, How fortunate I am to have encountered these precious objects of refuge. I can truly trust their guidance because through having practiced the same instructions they now teach, they realized those noble spiritual qualities and aims. Feel deep trust and confidence in the Three Jewels and let that calm uplift your mind. A discouraged or depressed attitude cannot exist at the same time as the mind inspired by recollecting the qualities of the Three Jewels.

You may also conclude your meditation session by thinking, “How fortunate we are that there are holy beings in this universe with the wise and compassionate qualities of the Three Jewels! By following their guidance and subduing our mind, we will create goodness in ourselves and in the world. Feel hopeful, optimistic, and joyful to do your spiritual practice.”

Another way to conclude your recollection is to reflect, “Just as the Buddha practiced the Dharma, abandoned all defilements, and realized all excellent qualities, I can also do this. He taught the path so that I and others will put the teachings into practice and emulate them by actualizing the same realizations for the benefit of sentient beings. To fulfill the purpose of the Three Jewels and the hopes of suffering sentient beings, I will practice earnestly.”

The Buddha advised his disciples that when fear or terror arose in them — for example, when they lived alone in the forest — they should recollect the Awakened One’s qualities, “For when you recollect me, monastics, whatever fear or trepidation or terror you may have will be abandoned.” If they could not recollect the Buddha, he instructed them to recollect the Dharma, and if that was

not possible, then to recollect the Saṅgha and the same benefits will accrue (SN 11.3).

Many benefits accrue to one who recollects the Three Jewels. The Buddha said (AN 6.10.1):

At that time, the ariya disciple's mind is not obsessed by attachment, animosity, or ignorance; on that occasion his mind is simply straight, based on the Tathāgata (Dhamma, Saṅgha). An ariya disciple whose mind is straight gains inspiration in the meaning, gains inspiration in the Dhamma, gains happiness connected to the Dhamma. When he is happy, joy arises. For one with a joyful mind, the body becomes tranquil. One tranquil in body feels pleasure, for one feeling pleasure, the mind becomes concentrated. This is called an ariya disciple who dwells in balance amid an unbalanced population, who dwells unafflicted amid an afflicted population.

Recollection of the Buddha enables practitioners to suppress the five hindrances that impede serenity. Their mental factors of investigation and analysis are firmly placed on the Buddha's magnificent qualities. As these develop, joy arises. With joy, physical and mental disturbances are pacified, and their bodies and minds become pliant and tranquil. This leads to physical and mental bliss, which in turn produces concentration. Through the arising of these dhyānic factors, practitioners attain access concentration (*P. upacāra samādhi*). This concentration is called "recollection of the Buddha" because that recollection was the means by which it was attained.

Recollection of the Buddha produces marked effects on all aspects of practitioners. They become humble and respect the Buddha. Their faith, mindfulness, wisdom, and merit increase, as do their joy and bliss. Fear and dread no longer plague them, and they can endure pain without difficulty. They feel as if they are in the presence of the Buddha, and their minds seek to develop the Buddha's qualities. They are naturally conscientious, and should the opportunity to act unethically arise, their integrity and consideration for others arise clearly, as if they were in the Buddha's presence. They will definitely have a fortunate rebirth and may continue to practice and develop actual dhyāna and insight. In short, the recollections of the Three Jewels not only deepen our refuge but also strengthen

our commitment and ability to maintain pure ethical conduct and increase our concentration.

Recollection of the Buddha plays an important role in the Sanskrit tradition. The Pure Land practice, popular in East Asia, takes the recollection of the Buddha Amitābha as its principal practice, and through it one cultivates serenity and insight. Tibetan Buddhists often use a visualized image of the Buddha as the object upon which to cultivate serenity, and in Vajrayāna, practitioners not only recollect the Buddha's qualities but also meditate on the Buddha they will become by imagining having those qualities now.

## REFLECTION

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1. Reflect on the excellent qualities of the Buddha one by one, thinking, the Buddha is the Teacher because . . . (remember the meaning of a Teacher). Do this for each of the Buddha's excellent qualities.
  2. Reflect on the excellent qualities of the Dharma one by one, thinking, the Dharma is well-expounded because . . . (remember the meaning of being well-expounded). Do this for each of the Dharma's excellent qualities.
  3. Reflect on the excellent qualities of the Saṅgha one by one, thinking, the Saṅgha practices in the good way because . . . (remember the meaning of practicing in the good way). Do this for each of the Saṅgha's excellent qualities.
  4. Conclude your reflection by considering your fortune of having encountered the Three Jewels.
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## *Distinguishing Features of the Three Jewels*

The Three Jewels harmoniously direct us toward the same spiritual aims. Yet each jewel has its own distinguishing features and a distinct role that it plays in guiding us. Understanding these expands the meaning of taking refuge in them. Asaṅga explains six distinguishing features in his *Compendium of Determinations* (*Viniścaya-samgrahaṇī*).

Someone may ask, "Each of the Three Jewels has so many magnificent qualities. Is it sufficient to take refuge in only one of them?" Taking refuge in all three is important because we relate to each jewel differently, owing to their

differences in defining characteristics, awakening influence, distinct qualities, the way of appreciating them, our practice in relation to them, and our creation of merit in relation to them.

In their *defining characteristics*, the buddhas are those who have abandoned all defects and developed all good qualities limitlessly. They are omniscient and are able to know both ultimate and conventional truths simultaneously. The Dharma Jewel consists of true paths and true cessations, which, when actualized in our mind, are the real protection from duḥkha. The Buddha appeared in our world to teach us how to actualize the Dharma Jewel, and in doing so he fulfilled our wishes. The Saṅgha Jewel consists of āryas who have realized the Dharma and are qualified to guide us so we can do the same. They demonstrate the correct practice and prove the validity and usefulness of the Buddha's teachings.

When it comes to their *awakening influence*, the Buddha teaches us the transmitted Dharma in the most effective manner and instructs us what to practice and abandon on the path. The Dharma Jewel eliminates duḥkha and its causes, the afflictions. The Saṅgha Jewel gives us encouragement, inspiration, and assistance in practicing. Their joy in study and practice invigorates us, and their presence reassures us that we are not alone on the path.

We *recollect the distinct qualities* of each of the Three Jewels: The buddhas are free from ignorance, anger, and attachment; they have supreme wisdom and compassion and know all phenomena as clearly as we see a button in our palm. When practiced correctly, the Dharma brings good results in the beginning, middle, and end. The Saṅgha is on the right path. Being impartial, Saṅgha members are true friends and objects of respect. We can count on their companionship and support on the path.

We show our *appreciation*, respect, and gratitude for each of the Three Jewels in a particular way by making offerings, being of service, respecting the buddhas, putting the Dharma into practice so that it transforms our mind, and practicing together with the Saṅgha and joining in their efforts to make Dharma a healing force in the world.

In terms of our *practice*, the buddhas are the role models we emulate. We prostrate, make offerings, and serve and respect them to create the merit enabling us to attain their excellent qualities. We familiarize ourselves with the Dharma, practicing and meditating on it and integrating it with our body, speech, and

mind. We practice harmoniously together with the Saṅgha, sharing teachings and material goods with them and following their good example.

*We create and increase our merit* in relation to each of the Three Jewels in a distinct manner. We offer, prostrate, and serve the Buddha, and we cultivate the Dharma in our mindstream. We engage in virtuous actions together with a Saṅgha of four or more fully ordained monastics who represent the Saṅgha Jewel, and we also make offerings, pay respect, and offer service to them.

## REFLECTION

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1. Why is each of the six distinguishing features important in your refuge practice?
  2. For each of the six, make examples of how you have related to or could relate to each of the Three Jewels.
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## *Causal and Resultant Refuge*

As the Buddha's followers, we take refuge in the causal Three Jewels that guide us to awakening and the resultant Three Jewels we will become upon fulfilling our spiritual aspiration. The *Sublime Continuum* presents the resultant Three Jewels by linking them to the spiritual interests and dispositions of the three types of practitioners. That is, according to their disposition, disciples will have different resultant refuges that are their chief focus.

Even before entering a path, some followers are attracted to bodhicitta and have great admiration for the Buddha's qualities. They enter the Mahāyāna path and yearn to attain the qualities of a fully awakened buddha. As a result, they attain buddhahood. Thus the Buddha Jewel is said to be their main object of refuge.

Other disciples are attracted to the explanation of dependent origination and enter the Solitary Realizer Vehicle. Focusing their effort on realizing the forward and reverse orders of the afflictive and purified sides of the twelve links of dependent origination, they take the Dharma Jewel as their principal resultant refuge. By meditating on dependent origination, they extinguish the causes of cyclic existence and become solitary-realizer arhats.

Another group of disciples are attracted to the four truths of the āryas. Entering the Śrāvaka Vehicle, they learn and meditate on the four truths and take the Saṅgha as their resultant refuge. Relying on the instructions of a Saṅgha member, they become a śrāvaka arhat. In short, the resultant refuge is specific to each individual according to his or her disposition, the path that appeals to them, and their principal spiritual goal.

Although their resultant objects of refuge may differ, all three groups turn to the external Buddha, Dharma, and Saṅgha as their causal refuge. In this context, the Buddha refuge is our Teacher, Śākyamuni Buddha; the Dharma refuge is the true paths and true cessations in the mental continuums of āryas; and the Saṅgha refuge is the āryas of all three vehicles. All Buddhists, no matter which vehicle or Buddhist tradition they follow, take refuge in the causal Three Jewels. We create merit and purify negativities in relation to them by bowing, making offerings, revealing our misdeeds, rejoicing in our own and others' virtues, and so forth. By relying on the causal three objects of refuge, we receive teachings and guidance, practice the three higher trainings, generate love and compassion, realize the correct view of reality, and attain the awakening of the vehicle we enter.

We can also speak of the resultant Three Jewels in terms of the Three Jewels we will become in the future. From this perspective,<sup>25</sup> those of us who aspire for full awakening have as our resultant refuge the Buddha Jewel we will become in the future, the true paths and true cessations that will exist in our mindstream at that time, and the ārya buddhas we will become. At this time the natural buddha nature — the emptiness of our mind — will become the nature truth body of a buddha, and the transforming buddha nature will become the wisdom truth body of a buddha. Simultaneously with attaining the truth body, we will attain a buddha's enjoyment and emanation bodies, becoming the Buddha Jewel ourselves.

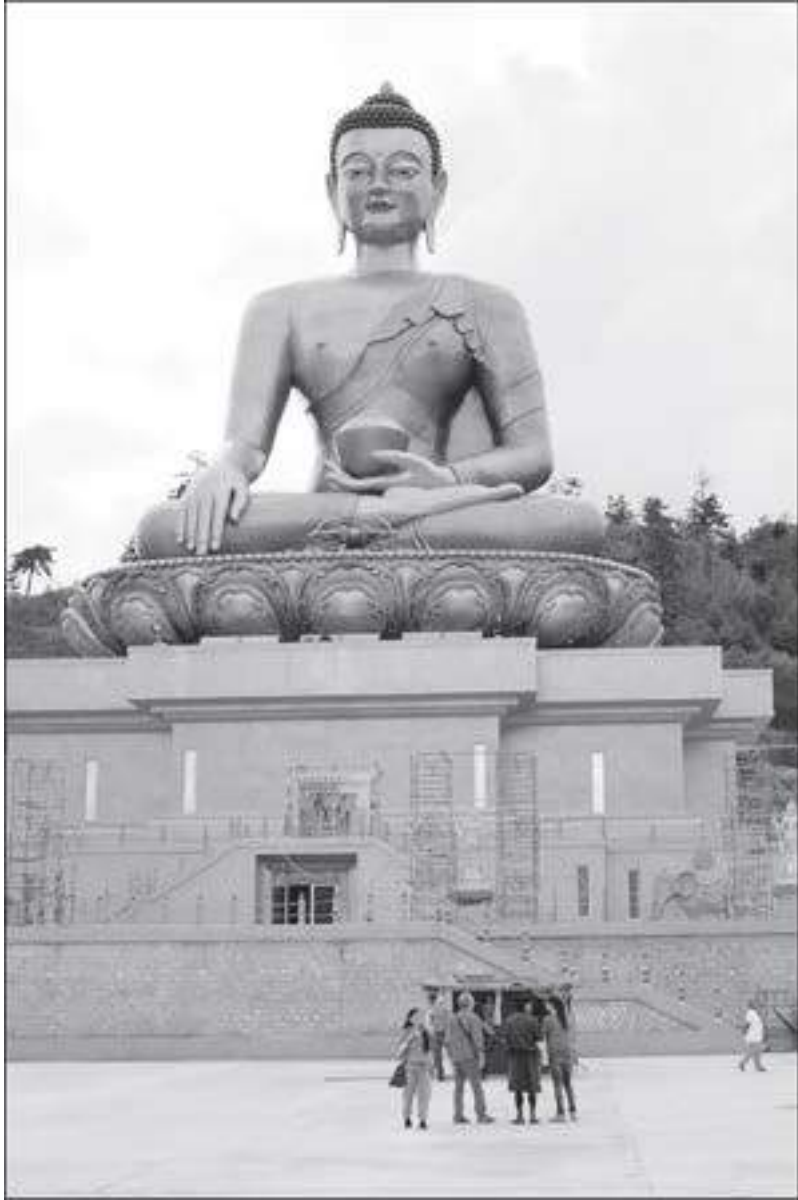
These resultant Three Jewels are our genuine protection from the duḥkha of saṃsāra. The true cessations and true paths in our mindstream when we become āryas are the actual refuge that will protect us. Meditating on impermanence, the defects of saṃsāra, love, compassion, bodhicitta, the correct view, and so on inches us forward on the path to become the Three Jewels. Even though our resultant Three Jewels do not exist now, they will exist in the future. Because we have the potential to actualize them, we can take refuge in the resultant Three Jewels now.

## REFLECTION

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1. What is your causal refuge? What is your resultant refuge?
  2. How do they differ? In what ways are they the same?
  3. How does the causal refuge help you to actualize the resultant refuge?
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### 3 | Heartfelt Connection to the Three Jewels

**I**N THE PRECEDING CHAPTERS we identified the Three Jewels and learned their qualities. Reflecting on these moves the heart. First, we are assured that we are not alone on our spiritual journey, that millions of people have followed the path before us and attained the results of a tried-and-true path. We can trust their guidance.

Second, we have a vision of the spiritual journey we will take and the destination we will arrive at as a result of correct practice. We are not inherently limited beings, but like the Buddha who was once a sentient being and later became an awakened one, we too can follow that path and attain that result. This knowledge transforms our attitude about life into one with great purpose and a long-term perspective that brings reliance in the face of life's vacillations.

#### *Formally Taking Refuge*

Before taking refuge, it is important to know the qualities of the Three Jewels so that we are clear on whom and what we are entrusting our spiritual guidance to and whose instructions we plan to follow on the path. At a certain point in our spiritual journey, we may deeply feel that the Buddhist path resonates within us and we want to follow it. We can then formally take refuge in the Three Jewels during a ceremony.

Traditionally, the demarcation of becoming a Buddhist has been taking refuge. Some people hesitate to participate in a formal ceremony in which they repeat the refuge formula after a spiritual master. Other people want to take refuge formally, but the external conditions are not present. Participating in a ceremony is not necessary. What is important is that we have reflected on the qualities of the Three Jewels, the reasons for taking refuge in them, and the meaning of doing so. Having done that, entrusting ourselves from our hearts to

the Three Jewels for spiritual guidance because we recognize them as reliable objects of refuge is the real meaning of taking refuge.

Some people ask me if believing in rebirth is necessary to take refuge and become a Buddhist. They have learned some of the Buddha's teachings on developing fortitude, love, and compassion, for example, and find them meaningful. They have faith in the Buddha and want to take refuge. However, they are unclear regarding the existence of rebirth, karma, and other realms and do not find those teachings useful for their spiritual practice at present. In such a case, because these people have some faith and a good attitude toward the Dharma and a wish to strengthen these, I allow them to attend a refuge ceremony and consider themselves Buddhist if they wish.

However, some people do not agree with this. They say that the scriptures clearly delineate the causes for taking refuge in the Three Jewels: the person must have a sense of the danger of taking an unfortunate rebirth or of remaining in saṃsāra, faith and confidence in the ability of the Three Jewels to guide us from this danger, and in the case of a Mahāyāna practitioner, compassion and a wish that others be free from this danger. To have these three, a person must accept rebirth, karma, other realms of existence, and emptiness, otherwise taking refuge in the Three Jewels would not be of interest to them.

From my point of view, different levels of refuge in the Three Jewels exist, and people may enter at a level that is comfortable and appropriate for them at the present. This helps them on their spiritual path and encourages them to continue to learn and practice the Buddha's teachings.

To be a Buddhist, a person should trust in the Three Jewels. Some people do this without giving a lot of thought to past and future lives. Other people think about rebirth yet continue to question it even though they respect the Buddha, Dharma, and Saṅgha. We can say that these people are about to become Buddhist. Similarly, some people may trust the Three Jewels but do not immediately accept the teachings on selflessness and emptiness. All these people can still benefit from Buddhist teachings on ethical conduct, love, compassion, generosity, patience, and so on. For these reasons, I don't think that belief in rebirth must necessarily be a criterion for taking refuge in the Three Jewels.

You can practice the teachings that help you in your life and for the moment leave to the side the ones that you do not agree with or do not understand. You do not need to accept everything; forcing yourself to believe passages in the

scriptures that do not make sense to you does not help you to progress. Continue to reflect on the teachings so that what you practice is based on reason. If something can be logically disproved or is not logically consistent, do not accept it even if it is written in a Buddhist scripture.

Initially, a spiritual seeker could trust Jesus, Buddha, God, and other gods, and synthesize them in their personal spiritual practice. But at a certain point this person will need to specialize. To develop further in Buddhist practice, understanding emptiness is very important. Once one fully accepts and is convinced regarding emptiness and dependent arising, accepting the concept of a creator God becomes difficult. Similarly, if someone decides to specialize in Christianity as it is generally taught, accepting the doctrine of emptiness may be difficult. Along the same line, if someone doesn't accept rebirth, then bodhicitta — which wants to liberate sentient beings from rebirth in saṃsāra — doesn't make sense. Thus for one who is a true Buddhist and who wishes to develop the altruistic intention of bodhicitta and become a buddha, belief in rebirth and emptiness are necessary to develop the realizations of the entire path.

In many Pāli sūtras, whenever non-Buddhists meet the Buddha, listen to his teachings, see their truth, and take refuge in the Three Jewels, they express their joy (MN 4.35).

Magnificent, Master Gotama! Master Gotama has made the Dhamma clear in many ways, as though he were turning upright what had been overturned, revealing what was hidden, showing the way to one who was lost, or holding up a lamp in the dark for those with eyesight to see forms. I go to Master Gotama for refuge and to the Dhamma and to the Saṅgha of monastics. From today let Master Gotama remember me as a lay follower who has gone to him for refuge for life.

When preparing for the refuge ceremony, contemplate this and try to generate the same feeling in your heart.

When we take refuge during a ceremony, we take refuge in the Buddha, Dharma, and Saṅgha, not in a particular Buddhist lineage, teacher, or tradition. To take refuge formally in a ceremony, request a spiritual teacher whom you trust and respect to perform the ceremony. At that time, you may also request to receive any or all of the five lay precepts (*pañcaśīla*). These five are to abandon

killing, stealing, unwise and unkind sexual behavior, lying, and taking intoxicants. Since the person from whom you receive refuge and precepts becomes one of your spiritual mentors, it is wise to consider well whom you request.<sup>26</sup> In the ceremony, the spiritual mentor will lead you in generating the aspiration to be free from cyclic existence and to attain liberation. With that strong motivation, you will kneel down and repeat the verse of taking refuge three times after the teacher.

Venerable, please pay attention, from now until the end of my life, I, named \_\_\_\_\_, take refuge in the Buddha, the supreme among human beings; I take refuge in the Dharma, the supreme abandonment of craving; I take refuge in the Saṅgha, the supreme assembly. Venerable, please care for me as a Buddhist who takes refuge (and precepts).

Think deeply about what you say as you repeat this and generate a deep sense of faith and confidence in the Three Jewels, as well as a strong intention to follow the path to liberation. After reciting this verse, your teacher will explain the refuge guidelines, which enable you to continue to deepen your refuge. If you wish, you may also request a refuge name.

## *Deepening Our Refuge*

Taking refuge through a ceremony, while optional, can strengthen our feeling of connection to the Three Jewels. This feeling of connection must be consciously and continually cultivated afterward to reap the benefits of taking refuge. Taking refuge is not something we do once and then forget about. Rather, we begin every meditation session by taking refuge and cultivating a bodhicitta motivation. In this way, over time our refuge in the Three Jewels will deepen and become a tremendous source of inner strength, enabling us to greet whatever life brings with confidence, optimism, and purpose.

Studying and practicing the following guidelines will help you increase your mindfulness and deepen your refuge.

## *General Guidelines*

In his *Compendium of Determinations* (*Viniścaya-samgrahaṇī*), Asaṅga recommends:

- In analogy to taking refuge in the Buddha, commit yourself wholeheartedly to a qualified spiritual mentor. It may take time to find such a spiritual mentor. Don't rush; remember the Buddha is our fundamental teacher.
- In analogy to taking refuge in the Dharma, listen to and study the teachings as well as put them into practice in your daily life.
- In analogy to taking refuge in the Saṅgha, respect the Saṅgha members as your spiritual companions and follow the good examples they set.
- Avoid being rough and arrogant, running after any desirable object you see.
- Avoid criticizing whatever meets with your disapproval.
- Be friendly and kind to others and be concerned more with correcting your own faults than with pointing out those of others.
- As much as possible avoid the ten nonvirtues,<sup>27</sup> and take and keep the eight one-day precepts.<sup>28</sup>
- Have a compassionate and sympathetic heart toward all other sentient beings.
- Make offerings to the Three Jewels on Buddhist festival days, such as new- and full-moon days, Vesak (the day of the Buddha's awakening), and other special holidays.

## *Guidelines for Each of the Three Jewels*

1. Having taken refuge in the Buddha, who has purified all defilements and developed all qualities, do not turn for refuge to worldly deities, who lack the capacity to guide you from all problems.

Respect all images of the Buddha: do not put them in low or dirty places, step over them, point your feet toward them, or sell them to earn a living. Respecting statues and other images is not idol worship; it is mindful practice. When looking at various images, do not discriminate "this Buddha is beautiful,

but this one is not,” because the Buddha’s body is never ugly. However, we can comment on the craftsmanship — some artistry is poor and some is magnificent. Do not treat with respect expensive and impressive statues while neglecting those that are damaged or less costly.

2. Having taken refuge in the Dharma, avoid harming any living being.

Respect the written words that describe the path to awakening by keeping the texts clean and in a high place. Avoid stepping over them, putting them on the floor, putting other things on top of them, such as your glasses, coffee cup, or other books, or throwing them in the rubbish when they are old. It is best to burn Dharma materials; they can also be recycled.<sup>29</sup>

3. Having taken refuge in the Saṅgha, do not cultivate the friendship of people who criticize the Buddha, Dharma, and Saṅgha or who have unruly behavior or do many harmful actions. Be polite and compassionate toward them, but do not become close friends because their views and attitude may have a detrimental influence on your refuge.

Respect monks and nuns, as they are people who are making earnest efforts to actualize the teachings. Respecting them helps your mind, because appreciating their qualities makes you open to learn from their example. By respecting even the robes of ordained beings, you will be happy and inspired when seeing them.

### *Common Guidelines*

1. Mindful of the qualities, skills, and differences between the Three Jewels and non-Buddhist refuges, and mindful of the differences among the Three Jewels themselves, repeatedly take refuge in the Buddha, Dharma, and Saṅgha.

2. Remembering their kindness, make offerings to them, especially offering your food before eating.<sup>30</sup>

3. Mindful of their compassion, encourage others to take refuge in the Three Jewels.

4. Remembering the benefits of taking refuge, do so three times in the morning and three times in the evening by reciting and reflecting upon any of the refuge prayers.

5. Do all actions by entrusting yourself to the Three Jewels. Whatever happens — whether you are sick or well — rely on the Three Jewels. When you are nervous, anxious, or afraid — for example, before a job interview or when

receiving the results of a medical test — take refuge in the Three Jewels. This will help you to recall the Dharma teaching that will be most helpful for you to contemplate in that situation.

6. Do not forsake your refuge at the cost of your life, or even as a joke. Treasure your refuge, respect your spiritual yearnings, and follow the path sincerely.

The refuge guidelines are explained well in the *Great Treatise on the Stages of the Path*. Please study that section.

## *Maintaining Proper Refuge*

Since refuge in the Three Jewels is the demarcation of being a Buddhist, and deep trust in the Three Jewels is essential for a Buddhist's spiritual progress, we want to ensure that we keep our refuge purely. One of the guidelines for doing this is not to turn to other objects of refuge that lack the ability and the qualities to guide us to awakening.

Buddha Śākyamuni is our teacher. For this reason, an image of the Buddha is found at the center front of the altar in a Tibetan monastery. The Buddha is our guide, the one who reveals the path to awakening to us. We wholeheartedly entrust our spiritual well-being to him. If we feel remorse for having acted harmfully or having transgressed our precepts, we should confess and purify this in the Buddha's presence because we revere and admire him. When we have earnest spiritual aspirations, we should likewise address them to the Buddha.

However, this is often not the case. When Tibetans enter the temple, they pay homage to the Buddha, but many direct their attention to the corner of the hall, where there is a small, dark room that is the protector's shrine room. It is here that Tibetans experience a sense of awe and cultivate restraint from negative actions. In front of the protectors, they are terrified of their destructive karma. They make offerings to fierce-looking protectors rather than to the peaceful Buddha in the main temple. The monks in charge of the offering rituals to the protectors generate the most revenue. This indicates that people have not properly understood important elements of Buddhist practice.

Most Buddhist traditions speak of Dharma protectors, beings who help practitioners on the path. These Dharma protectors are of two types:



supramundane and mundane. Supramundane protectors have directly realized emptiness and thus are included in the Saṅgha refuge — for example, Palden Lhamo and Mahākāla. Others, such as Nechung and the four great kings, are worldly beings who have made promises to great masters to protect the Dharma and practitioners. These protectors are not included in the Saṅgha refuge. We can rely on them for temporal help for virtuous purposes in the same way we would rely on a powerful person to help us in time of need. However, we do not seek spiritual refuge in them.

Then there are spirits, who are of many levels and types. Just like human beings, some spirits are helpful and others harmful; some have clairvoyant powers, whereas others do not. Some have virtuous qualities; others are angry and spiteful. Spirits are still within cyclic existence, and while some people may seek their aid, caution is necessary.

I have noticed a trend for people who call themselves Buddhists to turn to spirits to attain worldly success. This is not beneficial for several reasons. First, because these beings help only in temporal ways, a practitioner's motivation will degenerate from one of bodhicitta to one of seeking wealth, reputation, or power. This clearly corrupts his Dharma practice.

Second, Buddhism does not accept the existence of an omnipotent being who can control what happens to us. When people worship spirits, they usually petition, "Please give me this. Please do that." It seems that in their minds they regard the spirits as quasi-omnipotent and think that pleasing them is the means to attain happiness. This runs counter to the Buddha's teachings on karma and its effects, in which he clearly stated that we are responsible for creating the causes for happiness through abandoning harmful actions and creating virtuous ones. We have to discipline our own minds and put effort into improving ourselves.

For example, as a simple monk who has faith in the path the Buddha set out, I must restrain my mind from negativities and be mindful to act constructively. Look at Milarepa. There was nothing in his cave, yet he became a great practitioner. He did not propitiate spirits to increase his wealth or fame or to make his religious institution successful.

If many people begin to pray to an external being for worldly success, the existence of Buddha's teachings will degenerate in our world. People will think, "If I worship this deity, I'll be rich; if I worship that one, I'll live long." They will neglect to observe karma and its effects and will cease refraining from destructive

actions and creating beneficial ones. Instead they will expect an external being to save them from suffering and bring them happiness, and they will teach that to others. When Buddhist practitioners think and act this way, the beneficial influence of Buddha's precious teachings in our world will decline.

Ordinary people everywhere prefer to look outside of themselves to obtain happiness and alleviate suffering. It is easy for them to mistake the pujas and ceremonies done in Tibetan Buddhism as the worship of inherently existent external beings. Because these ceremonies are colorful and entertaining, people are attracted to them, thinking that the performance of a puja in and of itself is virtuous. This is not correct; the virtue or merit created depends on the motivations of the practitioners and their ability to meditate on wisdom and compassion while performing the puja.

In saying this, we should not go to the other extreme and say that all pujas and all deities are irrelevant. The practices of meditation deities such as Avalokiteśvara, Mañjuśrī, Tārā, and so forth contain profound methods for purifying ignorance, attachment, and animosity, and for perfecting the six perfections. These deities are emanations of awakened qualities that appear in a physical representation so that we can relate to them. Their pujas are done with the aspiration for liberation, bodhicitta, and the wisdom realizing emptiness. Those who do these practices properly do not worship these deities as external, omnipotent gods.

Also, we must differentiate between the practice of an ordinary person and the practice of a highly realized master. If a highly realized master propitiates a spirit, he has the ability to control that spirit. The spirit respects and obeys this master, so there is no danger. However, an ordinary person who propitiates the same spirit is not able to do this, and thus the result of his asking for help becomes more uncertain. It is like two people dealing with a ferocious dog. If the master asks the dog to protect the house, the dog will obey. But if another person does, the dog may turn around and bite him.

Unfortunately, the propitiation of the Dolgyal spirit (Shugden) became popular within certain segments of Tibetan society and has also spread abroad. For many years now, I have steadfastly discouraged people from doing this practice for three principal reasons.

First, as Buddhists, our ultimate refuge is in the Buddha, Dharma, and Saṅgha. Our aim is to penetrate the meaning of the four truths and the two

truths and to generate compassion and bodhicitta, all of which are included in the extensive and profound teachings given by our Teacher, the Buddha. Because Shugden is a worldly spirit, propitiating him degenerates the Buddhadharma and makes it a form of spirit worship.

Second, religious tolerance is important within the Tibetan community and among all faiths, and for years I have advocated mutual respect among the various Tibetan Buddhist traditions. I myself do practices from all four traditions — Gelug, Nyingma, Kagyü, and Sakya — and encourage others to do so as well. The practice of Shugden is very sectarian and includes threatening those who practice in a nonsectarian manner. As such, it creates divisiveness among the various Tibetan traditions.

Lastly, from the time of the Fifth Dalai Lama in the seventeenth century until the present, the Dolgyal spirit has been antagonistic to the Dalai Lamas and the Tibetan government they head. The propitiation of Shugden has been controversial in both the Sakya and Gelug traditions. Many great Tibetan lamas, including the Fifth Dalai Lama and the Thirteenth Dalai Lama, have stated the harmful effects of this practice and advised against it. At this crucial juncture in Tibetan history, we Tibetans must remain unified in support of a representative government.<sup>31</sup>

Leaving spirits aside, what, then, is the proper way for a sincere practitioner to relate to worldly Dharma protectors? I believe this depends on the culture and the disposition of the individual. Let's say we are initiating an important project that will benefit people. We work with total dedication and sincerity and exert effort to gather the necessary material facilities. But at some point we find we need others' help. In that case, we can request assistance or inspiration from the Dharma protectors. Some people may have a stronger karmic connection with one protector than another, just as we form friendships more easily with one person than with another. Still, we are aware that we are responsible for creating the causes for success, both temporal and spiritual.

We must always remember that Dharma practice occurs in our mind. We may go to a temple to meditate, but Dharma practice is not limited to that place. When common people think about Tibetan Buddhism, the picture of a Tibetan monastery with monks wearing hats, playing drums, and chanting in deep voices comes to mind. These external scenes and implements are not Buddhism. Real practice means confronting our own selfishness and cultivating a heart seeking to

benefit others. Taking initiations and doing the practices of various deities is a technique to help us develop our inner qualities. If we see these deities as external beings and worship them as omnipotent gods, we have gone beyond the path the Buddha taught.

Building temples and making statues is wonderful; they remind us of the Buddha. But statues cannot speak, and engaging with the Buddha's teachings is most important. We need to listen to and meditate on the teachings; we need to study and compare Pāli, Tibetan, and Chinese canons and translate texts that haven't been translated from the other canons. If we requested Nāgārjuna now for teachings, he would say, "I already wrote a lot, but you aren't studying, reflecting, and meditating on it. So there's no need for me to write more right now."

## *Bodhisattvas' Refuge*

In the *Inquiry of Ugra Sūtra* the Buddha gives guidelines for how bodhisattvas and those aspiring to be bodhisattvas safeguard and cultivate their refuge. This is by engaging in four specific activities in relation to each of the Three Jewels:

A bodhisattva who takes refuge in the Buddha (1) does not abandon bodhicitta, (2) does not break her promise to attain full awakening, (3) does not relinquish great compassion, and (4) does not concern herself with other vehicles.

A bodhisattva who takes refuge in the Dharma (1) relies on and associates with Dharma teachers and, having respect for them and having paid homage to them, listens to the Dharma, (2) having heard the Dharma, reflects on it deeply, (3) teaches and explains what he has heard and reflected on to others, and (4) dedicates the roots of virtue arising from giving the Dharma to other sentient beings so that they may attain full awakening.

A bodhisattva who takes refuge in the Saṅgha (1) leads those who have not yet definitively entered the Śrāvaka Vehicle to generate bodhicitta, (2) guides those who are drawn to materialism and consumerism to take interest in the Dharma, (3) relies on the Saṅgha of ārya bodhisattvas, and (4) strives to cultivate the śrāvakas' excellent qualities, but not for the purpose of attaining personal peace.

These guidelines remind those of us who aspire to be bodhisattvas to be mindful and incorporate refuge and bodhicitta into all actions. Although these

twelve points take little space when written down, living them requires an open mind and great joyous effort.

## 4 | The Higher Training in Ethical Conduct

THE THREE HIGHER trainings in ethical conduct, concentration, and wisdom are essential elements of the path to liberation and full awakening. The true path described in the context of the four truths centers on the eightfold path of the āryas, and these eight are subsumed in the three higher trainings. The Fundamental Vehicle, Perfection Vehicle, and Vajra Vehicle are based on a common meaning of the three higher trainings, with the latter two vehicles adding unique elements to each training.

### *The Three Higher Trainings*

There are two thoughts about when Śākyamuni attained buddhahood. According to the Pāli tradition and the Vaibhāṣika and Sautrāntika tenet systems, he was born as a prince in the Śākya clan and, having renounced worldly life, lived as a renunciant and attained awakening under the bodhi tree at Bodh Gaya. According to the Cittamātra and Madhyamaka tenet systems, he had attained awakening many eons prior and in the life as Śākyamuni displayed the behavior of practicing the path and attaining awakening.

The Sanskrit tradition follows the latter view, explaining that the Buddha's display of newly attaining awakening was skillful means so that practitioners would understand how to follow the steps of the path and become awakened themselves. No matter which version we believe, the Buddha's life is definitely an example for us to follow.

The Buddha attained awakening by practicing step-by-step. While meditating under the bodhi tree, he gained the wisdom that broke through saṃsāra and led to nirvāṇa. He cultivated this wisdom based on having attained deep states of concentration while meditating for six years with five ascetic companions. He developed concentration based on abiding in ethical conduct by leaving the

householder's life and becoming a renunciate. Here in the Buddha's life, the three higher trainings shine as a beacon on the path.

Most spiritual paths contain some practice in ethical conduct, concentration, and wisdom, but as followers of the Buddha, we refer to ours as the three *higher* trainings. These practices are higher in three ways. They are done with refuge in the Three Jewels, indicating they are higher than those of non-Buddhists. They are infused with the understanding of selflessness, showing that they lead to the higher aim of eradicating ignorance. They are done with the aspiration for liberation or full awakening, making them higher than doing them to attain a fortunate rebirth.

People who seek a fortunate rebirth in the desire realm also practice ethical conduct, and meditators who seek rebirth in the form and formless realms attain concentration without cultivating wisdom. The motivation to attain liberation or full awakening is necessary to practice all three higher trainings so that they will bring those supramundane results.

Ānanda affirmed that the Buddha continuously emphasized the importance of the three higher trainings (DN 10.1.6):

Subha, there are three divisions of things which the Lord praised, and with which he aroused, exhorted, and established people. Which three? The division of ariyan ethical conduct, the division of ariyan concentration, and the division of ariyan wisdom.

## *The Importance of Ethical Conduct*

People who are serious about religious practice differ from those who are not. Buddhists accept that human life has a deeper purpose than sensual enjoyments, wealth, power, social status, and praise gained in this life, and that a fortunate rebirth, liberation, and awakening are valuable in the long term. Since afflictions prevent us from actualizing our spiritual purpose, we want to reduce and eventually eliminate them. The various levels of ethical codes guide us to subdue our physical, verbal, and mental actions. Here “ethical code” refers to a set of precepts taken in the presence of a spiritual mentor, and “precepts” refers to the particular trainings set out in that ethical code.

The meaning of mental advancement is that untamed states of mind decrease and beneficial states increase. For obscurations to be removed from the root by the wisdom realizing emptiness, our mind must first be capable of meditating with single-pointed concentration. To subdue the subtle internal distractions that interfere with concentration, firm mindfulness and introspective awareness are necessary. To strengthen our mindfulness (*smṛti*, *sati*) and introspective awareness (*samprajanya*, *sampajañña*) and to gain concentration, we must first overcome the grosser external distractions by developing mindfulness and introspective awareness of our physical and verbal actions. This is done through the practice of ethical conduct.

Ethical conduct means to refrain from doing harm. It applies to both monastics and lay followers because all of us need to refrain from harming ourselves and others in order to progress on the path and to create peace in the lives of those around us. To this effect, the Buddha advised us to abandon the ten destructive paths of action. Taking and keeping the various levels of ethical codes aids us in doing this and points out even subtler nonvirtuous actions to avoid. Tibetan Buddhism contains three levels of ethical codes: prātimokṣa or individual liberation, bodhisattva, and tantric. The prātimokṣa ethical codes focus on abandoning doing harm through body and speech. The bodhisattva ethical code emphasizes abandoning self-centeredness and regulates our mental activities as well as physical and verbal activities. The tantric ethical code helps overcome subtle obscurations, another form of harmful mental activity. Because their focus is more and more subtle, the three sets of ethical precepts are taken in that order: first prātimokṣa, then bodhisattva, and finally tantric.

Whether we principally practice the Fundamental Vehicle, Pāramitāyāna, or Vajrayāna, ethical conduct is the foundation of the practice. Precepts give form and focus to ethical conduct. Although all Buddhists try to live ethically and abandon the ten nonvirtues, the taking of precepts involves special commitment and thus brings special benefit. Living in precepts makes us more aware of our physical, verbal, and mental activities. It enables us to purify destructive karma quickly because by stopping habitual negative actions, we stop their most harmful result, the tendency to do them again. It also brings a rapid and strong accumulation of merit, for every moment that we are not breaking a precept, we are actively abandoning that destructive action and thus enriching our mind with merit from acting constructively. Keeping precepts is also a wonderful



contribution to world peace. Imagine if every sentient being followed the first precept, not to kill, for just one day. How different life in our world would be!

Keeping the precepts we have taken is the best sign of being a holy being. If we want to do a meditation retreat but ignore ethical conduct in our daily lives, our priorities are confused. The foundation of any practice, especially Vajrayāna, is ethical conduct. Without keeping the commitments and precepts we have taken, attaining realization is impossible. Thinking otherwise is a result of not understanding the essence of Dharma practice. We shouldn't cheat ourselves by ignoring ethical living.

Although precepts have such benefits, a person has to feel comfortable taking them and be prepared to assume the responsibility of following them as best as possible. Some people are brave when it comes to taking precepts and commitments — thinking it is their right — but cowardly when it comes to keeping them. We should be the opposite and think well before taking precepts. Then we humbly request to receive them from our teachers and with joy keep them properly.

## *The Prātimokṣa Ethical Code*

Within the first level of ethical codes, the prātimokṣa, there are eight types: three are for householders and five for monastics. The three for lay followers are (1–2) the five precepts for male and female lay followers (*upāsaka* and *upāsikā*), and (3) the one-day precepts for lay followers (*upavāsa*). All of these are taken on the basis of having taken refuge in the Three Jewels.

The five lay precepts are to abandon killing, stealing, unwise and unkind sexual behavior, lying, and taking intoxicants (alcohol, illegal drugs, and misuse of prescription medicines). At the time of formally taking refuge in a ceremony, you can also take one or more of the five precepts.

The eight one-day precepts are the above five — the third precept being celibacy — plus to abandon (6) sitting on high or luxurious seats or beds; (7) singing, dancing, or playing music (entertainment); wearing perfumes, ornaments, or cosmetics; and (8) eating at improper times — that is, between midday and dawn of the following morning. In ancient times, people went to their local monastery on new- and full-moon days to take these precepts and

practice with the monastics. Nowadays many people receive the transmission for the one-day precepts from their teacher and subsequently take them at home before a Buddha image. Some monasteries ask monastic aspirants to reside in the monastery and take the eight precepts for a period of time (many months or a year) before receiving monastic ordination. Some lay followers take the eight precepts and live at home.

The five ethical codes for monastics are for (1) fully ordained monks (*bhikṣu*, *bhikkhu*), (2) fully ordained nuns (*bhikṣuṇī*, *bhikkhuni*), (3) training nuns (*śikṣamāṇā*, *sikkhamāṇā*), (4) novice monks (*śrāmaṇera*, *sāmaṇera*), and (5) novice nuns (*śrāmaṇerī*, *sāmaṇerī*). Monastic aspirants begin with taking the five lay precepts. When both they and their spiritual mentor think they are ready to assume more precepts, aspirants request and then take the novice ordination. This ethical code has ten precepts: the eight as above, including celibacy, plus not handling money or precious substances. The seventh precept is divided in two: one to abandon entertainment such as music, dancing, and singing, the other to abandon wearing perfumes, ornaments, or cosmetics. In Mūlasarvāstivāda, novices receive ten precepts and must abandon three degenerations: (1) failure to formally request the abbot to be your abbot, (2) failure to abandon the signs of a lay person, (3) failure to uphold the signs of a monastic (such as wearing robes and shaving the head). In Tibetan Buddhism, the ten novice precepts have been further divided to make thirty-six.

Nuns also have a two-year training ordination that involves six, twelve, or eighteen precepts, depending on the Vinaya tradition. Bhikṣus and bhikṣuṇīs have the full ordination, with many more precepts. While the number of precepts may vary, in substance and meaning, these Vinaya traditions are very similar.<sup>32</sup>

The bhikṣu and bhikṣuṇī ethical codes were not present during the first twelve years of the Buddha's teaching. When monks began to misbehave, doing naturally negative actions or engaging in rude or unbecoming behavior, the Buddha established precepts. The Vinaya contains stories describing the origin of each precept and the adaptations and exceptions that the Buddha made as new circumstances arose. We see that the precepts are not rigid vows or laws but are trainings and guidelines that help us. Bhikṣuṇīs assumed almost all the precepts that were established in response to the naughty behavior of bhikṣus, in addition to ones established as a consequence of the naughty behavior of bhikṣuṇīs. The

bhikṣus did not assume the precepts established for the bhikṣuṇīs. For that reason, bhikṣuṇīs have more precepts.

### NUMBER OF BHIKṢU AND BHIKṢUṆĪ PRECEPTS ACCORDING TO THE THREE VINAYA TRADITIONS

VINAYA	BHIKṢU PRECEPTS	BHIKṢUṆĪ PRECEPTS
Theravāda	227	311
Dharmaguptakā	250	348
Mūlasarvāstivāda	253	364

Many levels of the prātimokṣa ethical code exist because people have different levels of ability. For those capable of remaining celibate for the duration of their lives, monastic precepts are suitable. For those who are not interested in or not able to be celibate, taking some or all of the five lay precepts is appropriate. For those who are uncertain if they can keep the five precepts for their entire life and those who want to expand their ethical conduct, taking the eight precepts for one or more days is worthwhile.

As the Buddha's life story shows, when Śākyamuni saw a sick person, an old person, and a corpse, he reflected that worldly life has no essence. He then saw a religious mendicant and was inspired to engage in spiritual practice to be free from cyclic existence. For that reason, he left the householder's life and became a monastic. Similarly, as his followers, we generate the actual aspiration to attain liberation, and to that end follow the prātimokṣa ethical code of either a householder or a monastic. We choose to take precepts because we know that following them will help us purify negativities, accumulate merit, and reduce the afflictions that impede liberation.

A base motivation to become a monastic — such as wishing to escape debts, avoid caring for sick or elderly relatives, or not be responsible for children after a divorce — will not do. Neither is wanting a place to live or free food a suitable motivation. Our motivation must be to free ourselves from saṃsāra or to become a buddha in order to best benefit others.

The prātimokṣa precepts concern abandoning harmful actions of body and speech. To do so, we need to restrain the source of these actions, the mind. Some people mistakenly think that purity in ethical conduct involves changing their external behavior to conform to the rules and win others' approval. However, genuine ethical discipline involves subduing the mind, which motivates the physical and verbal behavior.

In countries following the Pāli tradition, laypeople are encouraged to become familiar with the monastic precepts so that they know how to behave in relation to monastics. In Thailand many lay followers know the monastic precepts because there is the custom of young men becoming bhikṣus for three months. In other Theravāda countries, those who have not taken the precepts are often able to read and study them. The belief is that when laypeople know the monastic precepts, they will better understand how to help monastics keep their precepts. In addition, if some monastics are naughty, laypeople will comment, which inspires the Saṅgha to behave properly.

In Central and East Asian countries, people are generally not allowed to study the prātimokṣa precepts before receiving them in a valid ordination. Perhaps this is to avoid prospective monastic candidates from being discouraged when learning the number of precepts or to avoid laypeople disrespecting the Saṅgha if they see a few monastics who do not keep all the precepts well. However, individual teachers will sometimes allow aspirants to learn the precepts under their guidance. In Taiwan, novices learn what bhikṣus and bhikṣuṇīs are to practice and to abandon by living with them and observing them. Almost all monastics attend a Buddhist Institute for five years after ordination, where they learn the Vinaya and Dharma.

Tibetan monks usually receive a detailed explanation of the precepts when studying the Vinaya, which is one of the five main topics studied in the large monasteries. Just after ordination, monks and nuns often receive teachings on the four main precepts and the other categories of precepts. They are also referred to books where the precepts are concisely explained. Because the full ordination for women is not extant in Tibetan Buddhism, nuns can learn the novice precepts but cannot study the full Vinaya.

Furthermore, in all Vinaya traditions, only fully ordained monastics can recite the prātimokṣa precepts together at the fortnightly confession and

restoration of precepts (*poṣadha*); those who are not fully ordained may not attend.

## *Vinaya Schools*

At present, three Vinaya lineages are extant as living traditions that give monastic ordination and have monasteries where the Saṅgha lives. All three stem from the original eighteen schools that predated the historical rise of the Mahāyāna. As such, all Vinaya schools are included in the Fundamental Vehicle; there is no separate Mahāyāna Vinaya ordination, although many people who practice the Mahāyāna become monastics. The three living Vinaya traditions are:

1. The Theravāda (Sthaviravāda, T. *gnas brtan pa*, C. *shangzuo-bu*), found predominantly in South and Southeast Asia. Descended from the Vinaya lineage brought to Sri Lanka by Aśoka's daughter and son in the third century BCE, its Vinaya literature is in Pāli.
2. The Dharmaguptaka (T. *chos sbas pa*, C. *fazang-bu*) Vinaya was translated into Chinese in 410–12 by Buddhayaśas, and in 709 the emperor decreed that it was to be the only Vinaya followed in China. It is also called the “Four-Part Vinaya” and is followed principally in China, Korea, and Vietnam.
3. The Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya (T. *gzhi thams cad yod par smra ba*, C. *genben shuoyiqieyou-bu*), followed in Tibet, Mongolia, and the Himalayan regions. It was brought to Tibet by the Nālandā master Śāntarakṣita.

Considering that the literature of these Vinaya schools was passed down orally for many centuries before being written down, and considering the geographical distance between them — from Sri Lanka and Indonesia in the south to Gandhara and Kashmir in the west, to Tibet and Mongolia in the north, and to China, Korea, and Japan in the East — these schools are remarkably similar in their presentation of the monastic lifestyle. They follow essentially the same precepts and perform the same Saṅgha procedures and rites (*saṅghakarman*). The layouts and contents of the three Vinayas are also similar.

The three Vinaya traditions each rely on their own Vinaya commentaries. Buddhaghosa wrote an authoritative commentary, the *Samantapāsādikā*, on the Theravāda pāṭimokkha in the fifth century. To do this, he relied heavily on very old commentaries written at the Mahāvihāra Monastery in Sri Lanka. Several other Vinaya commentaries were written after this as well.

Five important Vinaya commentaries were translated into Chinese, and many commentaries were written in Chinese. Daoxuan (596–667) was the most famous and prolific commentator, authoring the *Three Books of Nanshan* (*Nanshan San Da Bu*) and other Vinaya materials that have been studied up to the present. Using the Dharmaguptaka Vinaya as the basis, he compared it with the other Vinayas extant in the Chinese canon — the Sarvāstivāda, Mahāsāṃghika, Mahīśāsaka, and Mūlasarvāstivāda — and drew all the good points together in his works. Chinese monastics take advantage of there being four other Vinayas in their canon and consult them when the Dharmaguptaka Vinaya does not give sufficient detail on a point of interest.

Tibetans follow the Vinaya commentaries of the Indian masters Guṇaprabha and Śākyaprabha. Guṇaprabha studied sūtras, Vinaya, and commentaries under the guidance of Vasubandhu, and he specialized in the Sarvāstivāda Vinaya. His commentaries, the *Vinaya Sūtra* and *Ekottarakarmaśataka*, are used to study the monastic code. We also follow the Tibetan subcommentaries by Sherab Sangpo, *Ocean of [Vinaya] Scriptural References* (*dul ba mdo rtsa'i rnam bshad nyi ma'i' od zer legs bshad lung gi rgya mtsho*), and Gyalwa Gendun Drub's *Precious Garland [of Vinaya]* (*bslab bya rin chen phreng ba*).

## *The Benefits of Practicing the Prātimokṣa Ethical Conduct*

The practice of Vinaya — the monastic code — helps to increase contentment. Monastics are limited in the food they can consume — no solid food is taken from midday until early dawn the next morning. Monastics do not have the right to demand this or that food; whatever they receive, they must accept. Monastics in East Asia who also follow the bodhisattva ethical code are vegetarian; Tibetan monastics who also follow the bodhisattva ethical code may or may not be vegetarian.

How does this practice of having limits create contentment? Contentment is an internal feeling that arises when craving is absent. As we practice releasing our craving and being satisfied with the present situation, contentment naturally arises. From our own experience we learn that contentment comes not from having all our desires fulfilled but from freeing ourselves from being under the control of those desires.

Monastics also have limits regarding their clothing. We cannot keep more than one set of robes with the thought, “this is mine.” Extra robes must be regarded as belongings shared with another monastic. We also cannot wear expensive robes. Previously in Tibet some monks wore luxurious robes. This was self-deception. The Chinese Communists were kind to us, liberating us from this corruption. Both the Vinaya and the Communists helped us to be content with the clothes we had!

Monastics limit the time spent with family to avoid being emotionally dependent on them and getting involved in family dramas. Family activities consume much time and take us away from Dharma study and practice. Adopting the name our preceptor gave us at the time of ordination signifies leaving our old identity as relatives or friends of others and beginning a new life as a monastic.

Practicing Vinaya helps us to develop mindfulness and introspective awareness. By being mindful of our precepts and checking if our behavior is proper when we are awake — whether we are walking, sitting, standing, or lying down — our mindfulness becomes stronger. Well-trained monastics can catch themselves and abstain from negative actions even in a dream.

The practice of Vinaya also helps to develop fortitude (patience) and tolerance. The *Prātimokṣa Sūtra* says (DV 43):

Fortitude is the first and foremost path.

The Buddha regards this as supreme in his teachings;  
one who has left the household life yet annoys others  
is not called a renunciate.

The Buddha taught that fortitude leads not only to the ultimate happiness of nirvāṇa but also to happiness in this very life. In this regard, he taught four means of refining virtue. Although he taught that practicing these four is the way to become a genuine monastic, they refine the virtue of everyone who practices them. They also bring harmony to our relationships and to society in general.

If others are angry with you, do not react with anger but with fortitude.

If others hit you, do not attack them back.

If others criticize you, do not criticize them in return.

If others embarrass or insult you, do not respond by embarrassing or insulting them.

These are real ascetic practices that will increase our fortitude. I tell people that the essence of the Buddha's teachings can be put in two sentences: When possible, help others. When that is not possible, at least don't harm them. These four means of practicing fortitude embody that principle.

People who grew up in a theistic religion and later became Buddhist may think of precepts as nonnegotiable rules propounded by an authority. Naturally, this makes them uncomfortable. Two types of rules exist. One is the troublesome kind — those that are only rhetoric and lack a constructive purpose. The other consists of helpful guidelines that lead to happy results. For example, if we want to be healthy, we voluntarily adopt new eating habits and avoid activities and foods that cause illness. Similarly, when we want to abandon the mental disease of ignorance, anger, and attachment, we voluntarily curtail the actions motivated by them and the objects that trigger them. We undertake the precepts voluntarily because they help us live according to our values and attain our spiritual aims; they are not forced on us by an external authority.

The form an ethical code takes and the behavior it encompasses may vary according to the culture in which it exists. To give an analogy, if we are overweight, we need to reduce our food intake. But if we become too thin and weak, we need to eat more. Although the two guidelines are opposite to each other, the purpose of good health is the same.

Similarly, the monastic precepts were established in ancient Indian culture, an agrarian society where it was difficult to find cloth, women were cloistered in their homes, and going on alms rounds was societally acceptable and even seen as virtuous. Contemporary society is very different. There are cars, digital devices, and the Internet — items that are not regulated in the Vinaya. Women are educated, many families have only one parent, and people work long hours and have limited free time. Some monastics choose to keep the precepts exactly as written in the Vinaya, and that is commendable. However, because of the changes



in society, I believe the way we keep some of the precepts needs to be adjusted. We must look at the Buddha's intention in establishing each precept: What mental state is that precept designed to subdue? If societal conditions are not suitable to keep a particular precept literally, how can we implement the meaning of that precept in our lives?

At the first council after the Buddha's parinirvāṇa, the question arose of changing the precepts, since the Buddha had said that minor precepts could be changed when circumstances necessitated it. But no one asked what the minor precepts were, so the council of five hundred arhats decided not to change any precepts. Yet the Buddha's injunction to abandon actions that are in line with those he said to abandon and to do actions concordant with those he prescribed remains. Monasteries have thus developed their own internal rules and guidelines to match present conditions. For example, had digital devices, television, and the Internet existed in his time, the Buddha surely would have established many precepts regarding them. If climate change had been an issue twenty-five centuries ago, he would have established precepts to limit monastics' carbon imprint and to require recycling.

Important elements of the Vinaya should not be changed, and when internal guidelines and rules are established in a monastery, care must be taken not to go against the original intention of the Buddha. The Vinaya precepts should be maintained well. Although people may interpret them differently, only an assembly of monastic elders from all Buddhist traditions has the authority to change any of them.

If Buddha came today, he certainly would modify some areas of the Vinaya and establish new precepts according to contemporary social reality. However, this is not a matter that one individual can decide. Since the Vinaya is common to most Buddhist countries, the issue of reform and modification needs to be discussed by individual monastics of all traditions. By everyone conducting thorough research in their own traditions and examining the general rules as well as the exceptions to them, we could determine what modifications are necessary and permissible given the cultural context of modern times. These are matters that require serious thought.

The prātimokṣa ethical codes are a common element in the śrāvaka and bodhisattva paths. Bodhisattvas, whether they practice the Pāramitāyāna or Vajrayāna, must respect the prātimokṣa ethical codes. Thinking they are inferior

or irrelevant is a transgression of the bodhisattva and tantric ethical code. The thirteenth root bodhisattva precept is “abandon causing others to discard completely their prātimokṣa ethical code and embrace the Mahāyāna.” Being negligent of one’s prātimokṣa precepts is explicitly forbidden in the bodhisattva and tantric precepts.

Bodhisattvas must set a good example for others and inspire their faith; otherwise they will not be able to benefit sentient beings. The ninth auxiliary bodhisattva precept is to abandon “not acting according to one’s vowed trainings when it would generate or sustain faith in others,” the fifteenth is to avoid “not abandoning negative actions that cause one to have a bad reputation,” and the sixteenth is to abandon “not correcting one’s own deluded actions or not helping others to correct theirs.” The second root tantric precept is to abandon “contemptuously disregarding the (prātimokṣa) trainings and precepts,” and the tantric pledges, recited daily in the Six Session Guru Yoga, include “I shall abandon the four roots, intoxicants, and unsuitable activities” and “maintain the ten virtues.” An auxiliary tantric commitment is to abandon “needlessly going beyond the prātimokṣa or bodhisattva precepts.” Assuming higher ethical codes necessitates that we become even more diligent in keeping our prātimokṣa precepts.

## REFLECTION

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1. Ask yourself: How many years have passed since I was born? How many years do I have left? How many months? How many days? See that your precious human life is slipping away and that while you still have this life, it’s important not to take it for granted but to use it wisely.
  2. Recall that all the suffering people experience in saṃsāra comes from destructive actions and recollect the disadvantages of these unwholesome deeds.
  3. Since happiness arises from virtuous karma, make a sincere determination to abandon negativity and create virtue.
  4. Since this begins with practicing ethical conduct, see the importance of taking and living in precepts.
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*Intoxicants*

The precept concerning intoxicants calls for special attention, since intoxicants are prevalent in most societies and cause much damage. Despite the material prosperity and wealth of developed countries, many people there are lonely, unhappy, and suffer from stress and low self-esteem. Knowing that external things do not bring happiness, but not knowing how to find inner happiness, they turn to illegal drugs and alcohol, and abuse prescription drugs as well. Misusing these substances is a clear sign of unhappiness and the failure of consumer society to solve humanity's problems. Of course, intoxicants do not solve these problems either and in fact exacerbate them, ruining people's lives, families, careers, and friendships.

It is in this light that the Buddha warned us to avoid intoxicants. His motivation was to protect us from the suffering that comes from the lack of restraint of an intoxicated mind. One story tells of a monk who was held captive and told that he must either kill a sheep, have sex with a woman, steal another's possessions, lie, or take an intoxicant. Thinking that consuming intoxicants was not a naturally negative action, whereas the others were, he chose that. However, once he was intoxicated, he did the other four actions! In a similar vein, I (Chodron) work with prison inmates, and 99 percent of them were intoxicated at the time they committed their crime. Of course, that doesn't excuse harmful behavior, but it demonstrates that although they didn't plan on harming others when initially taking the intoxicant, the intoxicant destroyed their awareness of the consequences of their actions until it was too late.

The Buddha took a clear stand in relation to intoxicants: "Anyone who calls me their teacher and claims to be my follower will not drink alcohol, not even the amount on the tip of a blade of grass." You may wonder why, then, when giving the five precepts to crowds of thousands of people, I sometimes tell the story of my teacher, Kyabje Ling Rinpoche. When lay Buddhists protested that they found abandoning *chang* — a Tibetan beverage made of fermented barley — too difficult, he told them, "at least drink less and don't get drunk." However, when giving the lay precepts in the context of the Kālacakra empowerment or when the audience consists of more dedicated practitioners, I stick to the Buddha's clear stance of abandoning all intoxicants whatsoever.

*Why Celibacy?*

The precept to be responsible in our sexual behavior and to abandon unwise and unkind forms of sexual behavior is common to all Buddhist traditions. The Buddha was not against sexuality but recognized that it was a powerful energy that practitioners with different spiritual aspirations and different levels of practice had to deal with differently.

On the first level of Buddhist practice, one works within human nature, which comes from having this body in cyclic existence. Here the emphasis is on subduing gross levels of afflictions that motivate harmful actions and avoiding the ten nonvirtues that actively harm others. At this level, one is encouraged to subdue extreme sexual lust and to abandon unwise or unkind sexual behavior that causes pain and confusion for oneself and others. Proper use of one's sexuality is appropriate for lay practitioners; celibacy is not necessary. Enjoying sensual pleasures is part of your life, and Buddhism simply recommends being practical and not getting so carried away with sensual pleasures that you harm others or create heavy destructive karma.

In that light, Thich Nhat Hanh, a renowned Vietnamese monk who teaches in the West, considers sexual activity without love and commitment to be unwise sexual behavior. Although this is not explicitly mentioned in the scriptures, I think it is true. Having love for one's partner and a sense of responsibility and involvement with him or her is important. Then the relationship will last for a long time, which in general is helpful for children to prosper.

People have so many problems in their romantic relationships and are tormented by the emotional, financial, and social problems that broken relationships bring. For this reason, I advise people to build strong relationships over time and not to rush into marriage. You must examine false expectations you may hold: for example, thinking that the other person will meet all your needs or believing that since love conquers all, you do not need to work at building a good relationship or communicating well with your partner.

On the second level of practice, we no longer seek the pleasures of *samsāra*. We see *samsāra* as a type of bondage that we seek to be free of. Attachment is one of the principal causes of *samsāra*, and gaining freedom from attachment — especially to objects of the five senses — is a desirable result on the path to liberation. Of all forms of attachment, sexual relations is the most intense and complex because it involves attachment to objects of all five senses — sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and touch. Thus those who seek freedom from attachment

are advised to subdue sexual desire and refrain from sexual activity. This advice comes from the Buddha and is found in the scriptures.

At this point on the path, we have to confront things that are normally considered a part of human nature, such as sexual desire. Our aim now is not having a career and raising a family, but to attain liberation, and attachment to sexual intercourse prevents fulfilling our spiritual aim. Although sexual desire arises naturally from our body, we can control it and change it. On this second level of practice we go against human nature — which includes our biologically conditioned attitudes and impulses that come from having a body and mind under the influence of afflictions and karma. As our aim is now liberation, monastic ordination, with its requirement of strict celibacy, becomes important.

An example is helpful. Skilled athletes who hold high aspirations eagerly abandon activities that impede their training and the realization of their goals. To be successful, they willingly refrain from eating certain foods, taking intoxicants, and irregular sleeping habits. They give up a grand social life and spend their time in consistent training. Their restraint is not seen as unhealthy suppression but as necessary and conducive circumstances that will lead them to fully develop their potential and achieve their goals. Similarly, monastics willingly give up sexual relations and immersion in sensual pleasures because these hinder the attainment of their spiritual goals. Those activities are time consuming, and monastics prefer to use their time in Dharma activities.

Buddhism speaks of two types of desire. One is based on reason and is beneficial, such as the desire to help those in need or the desire to attain liberation. Another is based on wrong conceptions and is more emotional. This negative type of desire craves for sense pleasures but is never satisfied by obtaining the object of desire. Whatever pleasure we experience leads to craving more or better. Such craving can only be satisfied by gaining freedom from desire.

Western psychology has various views on sexuality and what constitutes a healthy relationship to sexuality at various stages of life. Although Western psychology is very sophisticated, it operates within fixed parameters and with certain assumptions about human nature and happiness that differ from those of Buddhism. If we described suffering, its origins, liberation, and the path from the perspective of psychology, it would differ considerably from the four truths in Buddhism.

In youth, people may have different sexual experiences, including masturbation, but those who choose to become monastics stop all of these. As a result, their health and mental stability often improve. Although following sexual desire can bring temporary satisfaction, those seeking liberation and awakening need to control and redirect this energy. This is emphasized in the *Kālacakra Tantra* and other tantras. Those monastics who can control their experiences even in dreams are truly remarkable.

If liberation from the acute fears and pain of saṃsāra did not exist, then we could go along with human nature and do whatever we like. However, since it is possible to achieve awakening, the purest form of mind, then taking action that seems to be contrary to human nature is worthwhile and leads to supramundane results.

Many factors need to be considered and understood when an individual considers how or whether to use his or her sexuality. The Buddha did not say that everyone must give up sexual activity. It is our own choice.

## REFLECTION

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1. What ethical values do you live by?
  2. Did you accept them because you learned them from others when you were young? Because you examined them and saw the reasons behind them? Both?
  3. Why did the Buddha caution against taking intoxicants? Does your experience and what you have observed about others' experience with intoxicants support this?
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## *Bodhisattva and Tantric Ethical Codes*

The bodhisattva ethical code is part of Mahāyāna practice and is taken with the wish to attain awakening in order to benefit all sentient beings. In Tibetan Buddhism, the bodhisattva ethical code contains eighteen root precepts and forty-six auxiliary ones. In Chinese Buddhism, the bodhisattva ethical code for monastics has ten root precepts and forty-eight auxiliary ones, whereas the bodhisattva ethical code for laypeople has six root and twenty-eight auxiliary precepts. No matter how they are enumerated, all these precepts focus on

subduing self-centeredness, which is the main obstacle to generating bodhicitta and engaging in the bodhisattvas' deeds.

The tantric ethical code found in Vajrayāna Buddhism is undertaken with a more intense bodhicitta motivation — wishing to attain awakening very quickly in order to be capable of benefiting sentient beings sooner. Bodhisattva precepts and tantric precepts emphasize ethical conduct predominantly on the mental level, although certain behaviors are also regulated. Here, motivation and attitude are foremost. Based on this, some scriptures mention that all actions can become Dharma actions; that is, if our motivation is pure and sincere, we can turn all actions into Dharma actions. However, this does not imply an exceptional ethical perspective whereby everything a person does can indiscriminately be seen as virtuous.

According to the Vinaya, where the main emphasis of the practice is on decreasing attachment, monastics are not allowed to touch money, gold, or other precious objects. However, according to the bodhisattva precepts, which presupposes some degree of control over attachment and emphasizes the welfare of others, if the donor would be hurt or feel deprived of the opportunity to create merit if we refused her monetary gift, then we should accept it. Although these actions may superficially seem contradictory, they both involve ethical precepts that apply to one person at different times in her training, according to what she is capable of at the time.

Tantric texts discuss certain behaviors that reflect a person's having overcome polarities and preconceptions regarding such things as cleanliness or beauty. The conduct of very advanced tantric practitioners may reflect this. It is often said that their behavior cannot be spoken of in terms of precepts because their level of spiritual realizations is beyond the preconceptions of inherent good and evil. We must properly understand what this means. Such people are no longer under the influence of ignorance and other afflictions; it is in that sense that they are beyond good and evil. It does not mean that they may transgress precepts at will, with no harmful results. Rather, because they have profound wisdom of ultimate reality, their minds are so thoroughly disciplined that the very purpose of precepts — to tame the unruly mind — has already been fulfilled. Having understood emptiness and dependent arising, they have great respect for ethical conduct. Although such practitioners may act unconventionally on occasion and

outwardly appear to be acting contrary to precepts, no mental defilement is involved, and their actions do not harm others.

For practitioners who are not at that level — and that includes the great majority of us — we need to keep our precepts with mindfulness and introspective awareness to prevent the arising and the acting out of our afflictions. As long as we remain vulnerable to the afflictions and their latencies, ethical conduct is relevant and necessary because there is danger of causing harm to ourselves and others.

### *Making Mistakes and Rectifying Them*

We take precepts because we are imperfect beings who are trying to tame our minds. We do our best to keep the precepts purely so that we can benefit from having them. But we also know that we're not perfect and will make mistakes. If we could keep the precepts perfectly, we would not need to take them. The Buddha set up many ways whereby we can make amends when we transgress precepts, and by following these, we restore the purity of our precepts. In this way, we learn from our mistakes. However, if monastics transgress a root precept — such as killing a human being, stealing something of value, having sexual intercourse, or lying about spiritual attainments — with all factors complete, he or she is no longer a monastic and must return to lay life. Lay followers may retake the five precepts if they have broken them.

When we transgress a precept, it is important not to conceal it, but to reveal it and use the methods taught in the Vinaya to purify both the destructive karma and the infraction of the precept. There are many stories in the sūtras of people who obstinately held wrong views or refused to follow the training,<sup>33</sup> but later regretted their misdeeds. They went to the Buddha to reveal and confess their errors: “Venerable, a transgression overcame me, in that like a fool, confused, and blundering, I did [that behavior]. Venerable, may the Bhagavān forgive my transgression seen as such, for the sake of restraint in the future.” The Buddha then agreed that the person indeed committed a transgression and spoke of the consequences of having done so because he wanted to make sure the person understood the faults of the action. When the Buddha was sure that the person comprehended this and that his confession was genuine, he said: “Since you see



your transgression as such and make amends in accordance with the Dhamma, we forgive you. For it is growth in the ariya's discipline when one sees one's transgression as such and makes amends in accordance with the Dhamma by undertaking restraint in the future.”

It is essential that monastics help one another by giving and receiving advice and admonishment. When a monastic misbehaves but does not acknowledge his error, individual monastics or the Saṅgha community should advise him with a compassionate motivation so that he can correct his ways. When we receive admonishment, we must listen respectfully and contemplate what those who are senior in ordination or wiser in the precepts say. After the root precepts, the second category of precepts — the remainders (*saṃghāvaśeṣa*, *saṃghādiseṣa*) — are the most serious to keep well. Many transgressions of the remainders are tied to defiantly refusing to heed advice and admonition.

Such behavior creates many hindrances to our practice. In some cases, the behavior a person is being warned against may not be naturally negative and thus itself would not create a big hindrance. However, when someone is defiant, stubbornly defends himself, and refuses to listen to wise advice, he creates obstacles to spiritual progress. For example, when the Buddha recommended that monastics eat only before noon, the monk Bhaddāli told the Buddha he was not willing to do that and announced to the Saṅgha as well that he refused to undertake that training (MN 65). While eating after noon is not naturally negative, Bhaddāli's attitude of clinging to his own ideas created the obstacle. Although it can sometimes be hard to listen to others when our self-centered attitude is strong, for our own benefit we should try to take in the compassionate counsel that those wiser than us offer.

Fortunately for Bhaddāli, some wise monks recommended that he apologize to the Buddha, which he did. The Buddha was stern with him in response. It made me (Chodron) wonder what would have happened had Bhaddāli tried to follow the training and then, if he experienced difficulties, had humbly gone to the Buddha to explain. Surely the Buddha would have compassionately helped, and so many problems would not have arisen.

If we keep our precepts well and take the essence of our precious human lives, our minds will transform and we will be able to accomplish much that is of benefit to ourselves and others. How is this to be done? Sāriputta recommended (MN 3.7):

Here disciples of the Teacher who live secluded train in seclusion; they abandon what the Teacher tells them to abandon; they are not luxurious and careless; they are keen to avoid backsliding and are leaders in seclusion.

Sāriputta goes on to say the real evil is greed and hatred, anger and revenge, contempt and domination, envy and avarice, deceit and fraud, obstinacy and presumption, conceit and arrogance, vanity and negligence. In other words, “seclusion” means isolation from afflictions, destructive actions, and the eight worldly concerns. Seclusion from self-centeredness and self-grasping ignorance are best. Someone could live in seclusion in a remote place far from other living beings and still have a mind filled with negativities and distractions. Genuine seclusion entails conscientiousness, mindfulness, introspective awareness, integrity, and consideration for others. In short, seclusion is to train our minds so they become one with the Dharma.

Precepts give structure to our physical and verbal actions and stimulate us to examine our minds, for only by working with our views and emotions can we keep the prātimokṣa precepts well. However, monastic life is more than abiding in precepts. In *Precious Garland*, Nāgārjuna points out fifty-seven faults that monastics (and lay followers too!) should abandon. By noticing when they arise in our minds and knowing the antidotes to each one, we will be able to counteract them and pacify our minds. Nāgārjuna’s verses and their explanation can be found in *Practical Ethics and Profound Emptiness*.<sup>34</sup>

## REFLECTION

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1. What is the reason for not concealing our ethical misdeeds and broken precepts?
  2. What benefits arise from confessing and regretting our harmful actions?
  3. What effect would admitting and regretting your misdeeds have on your mind? Is this something you want to do?
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## 5 | Saṅgha: The Monastic Community

### *The Value of the Monastic Community*

THE SAṄGHA,<sup>35</sup> the monastic community, has been important, respected, and valued throughout history. One reason is that its members practice the higher training in ethical conduct by taking and observing the bhikṣu or bhikṣuṇī precepts. Having a simple lifestyle, they are free from family concerns and the necessity to work to provide for a family. Having more time and energy for Dharma practice, the Saṅgha has been charged with preserving the Buddha's teaching throughout the ages. The Saṅgha upholds the transmitted Dharma by memorizing, learning, contemplating, and teaching the Buddhadharma; it upholds the realized Dharma through meditation and practice that lead to profound spiritual realizations. This is not to say that lay practitioners are incapable of these activities, and there have been great lay practitioners throughout history.

Monasteries act as the physical locations for the full-time practice and preservation of the teachings. When people think of monastics living together for the purpose of studying and practicing the Dharma, they feel inspired. Rejoicing in the monastics' serious practice of purifying their minds and cultivating good qualities, people are uplifted and feel hope for the world. Monasteries also act as physical locations where the public can go when they need spiritual comfort or teachings. They also house large libraries and Buddhist art and artifacts.

In our day and age, Saṅgha living together at monasteries provides an example of a community intent on living ethically. Not conforming to the consumer culture, they show that it's possible to be happy and content with a simple lifestyle and few possessions. Many monasteries take care to reduce, reuse, and recycle; they compost organic material, showing the public that it does not take great effort to do one's part to care for the environment.

Some monasteries have temples of great grandeur that inspire the residents and visitors alike. How is this concordant with a simple lifestyle? It is said that

ideally the monastery should be rich, but the individual monastics living there should be poor. This means that common areas — the temple, library, meeting areas, and so forth — should be attractive and inspiring, but monastic quarters, robes, and personal articles should be modest.

The Buddha indicated the importance of the Saṅgha when he was about to enter parinirvāṇa (DV 45):

Do not say after my parinirvāṇa that pure practitioners have no protector. Now that I have taught the *Prātimokṣa Sūtra* and the excellent Vinaya well, regard these as the World-honored One after my parinirvāṇa.

If this sūtra remains long in the world, the Buddhadharma will be widespread, and because it is widespread, nirvāṇa can be attained.

Failure to keep the *Prātimokṣa Sūtra* and to conduct the poṣadha as it should be is like the setting of the sun, when darkness shrouds the entire world.

Always protect and keep the precepts, just as a yak protects its tail. Always stay together in harmony according to the Buddha's words.

And from the dedication verses of the poṣadha (DV 46):

The Buddha's appearance in the world is to be widely celebrated.  
Listening to the Dharma and practicing it accordingly is the surest  
cause for peace.

The harmony of the assembly is the surest factor for nirvāṇa.  
Liberating sentient beings from suffering is the utmost happiness.

## *The Flourishing of the Dharma and the Existence of the Dharma*

Traditionally the flourishing of Buddhism in a land is dependent on the existence of the Saṅgha. Because lay practitioners are more numerous in the West, some of my Western friends ask me if this is still the case. To answer, we must distinguish

between the flourishing of the Buddha's doctrine in a place and the presence or existence of the Dharma there. According to scripture, whether a place is a "central land" where the Buddha's doctrine flourishes depends on the presence of the fourfold assembly — bhikṣus and bhikṣuṇīs (male and female fully ordained monastics) and male and female lay practitioners with five precepts. Since lay followers are numerous, the flourishing of Buddhism in a country is determined by whether the practice of the Vinaya is present there, specifically if there is a fully functioning monastic community — that is, one that conducts the three principal Vinaya rites: fortnightly confession and restoration of precepts (*poṣadha*, *uposatha*), the annual rains retreat (*varṣā*, *vassa*), and the annual invitation for correction (*pravāraṇā*, *pavāraṇā*).

The existence or presence of Buddhism in a locale depends on the existence of practitioners. If lay followers who have taken refuge in the Three Jewels and abide with the five precepts live in a place, Buddhism is present there. Thus there are very few times when Buddhism has not been present. For example, after Buddhism in Mongolia was destroyed by Communists, laypeople who had taken refuge and kept the lay precepts still lived there. Although Buddhism existed in Mongolia at that time, we can't say it flourished there or that Mongolia was a central land then.

## *The Intent and Purpose of Monastic Life*

Stable interest in becoming a monastic develops naturally from deep reflection on the foundational Buddhist teachings. Contemplating the four truths, especially impermanence and death and the disadvantages of saṃsāra, we develop the aspiration to be free from saṃsāra. As a result of reflecting on compassion and dependent arising, we become interested in the nature of the mind, which leads to an appreciation of emptiness. This leads to an understanding of rebirth, and then to the possibility of achieving liberation. When one is convinced of this possibility, one will naturally be drawn to living a life according to ethical precepts, which could lead to requesting ordination as a monastic. The Buddha explained the development of the motivation to ordain (MN 29.3):

Monastics, here a clansman goes forth out of faith from the home life into homelessness considering, “I am a victim of birth, aging, and death, of sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, and despair. I am a victim of suffering, a prey to suffering. Surely an ending of this whole mass of duḥkha can be known.”

The Buddha established the monastic community for a purpose. To fight afflictions, we need the correct view of emptiness, and to maintain this view, we must develop single-pointedness of mind. To concentrate, mindfulness is needed, and this can be gained from training in ethical conduct. While many lay practitioners maintain the ethical conduct of the five precepts, the ethical conduct of monastics is stricter and thus has a greater effect to subdue the mind. Whereas the life of a householder may be more colorful, monastic life is more stable. Although it is difficult and requires giving up sexual relations and so on, there are some consolations and benefits even in this lifetime. The monastic way of life is praised not because it is inherently worthy of respect, but because it has direct relevance in aiding the development of the three higher trainings.

This latter point is important in the West, where some people may think that monasticism is outdated and irrelevant. We must remember that our teacher Śākyamuni Buddha himself was a monk. The Buddha did not live as a monk for fifty years to avoid working and to get free lunches in villages! Rather, because of the simplicity and lack of worldly activities a monastic life entails, he had more freedom to learn and meditate on the Dharma. The examples of the past great masters — the majority of whom were monastics — should be followed by the disciples of the present and future.

Even after attaining awakening, the Buddha remained a monastic. His ethical restraint and monastic lifestyle were natural expressions of the purity of his mind. His example illustrates how a person whose mind is completely liberated from defilements lives his or her life.

Monastic life is not suitable for everyone. Someone who practices diligently can attain high realizations as a lay Buddhist. Marpa, the great master of the yogi Milarepa, was a lay practitioner and inconceivable tantric adept, as was Milarepa. Everyone must choose the lifestyle most suitable for themselves and have confidence in their ability to practice.

In Tibet, two communities of practitioner evolved: the community of those with braided hair in white dress and the community of ordained monastics in saffron (maroon) robes. The white dress refers to lay practitioners, especially those practicing Vajrayāna. They do not observe the external forms of ordained life, such as wearing monastic robes and shaving the head, but they keep precepts: the five lay precepts, the bodhisattva ethical code, and the tantric ethical code. The saffron-robed are those who are celibate and follow the monastic ethical code. They may also follow the bodhisattva and tantric ethical codes. In Tibet, each community practiced with clarity and direction.

Today we find people who are neither in one camp nor the other. The Tibetan yogi Drukpa Kunleg (1455–1529) said many people who practiced like this are now in the hell realms. If you are a monastic, you should dress and act like one. On occasion I meet people who are wearing monastic robes at one time and lay clothes at another, so even I get confused when I see them!

Sometimes we encounter laypeople who are eager to put on clothes that resemble monastic robes. This, too, is confusing for the general public, and for me too! My debate teacher, Tsenzhap Serkong Rinpoche, said we should not be like bats: in one situation, to fulfill its self-centered interests, a bat will claim to be a bird; in another situation when it is more advantageous, it will announce, “I’m a mouse!” People should make a clear decision regarding which lifestyle they want to live, and then receive the appropriate level of precepts and wear the clothes that correspond to it.

Whichever lifestyle you follow, do it with clarity. If you decide to become a monastic, the change in your appearance should reflect a change in your mind, in your lifestyle, and in the direction of your life. If someone puts on monastic robes without having the proper motivation, he usually does not follow the precepts well. In that case, he damages himself and is in danger of polluting the Dharma. I went to Mongolia when it was a Soviet republic. In a gallery there was a painting of a huge monk with a gaping mouth and laypeople walking into it. The curator was embarrassed to tell me that the painting indicated that people were being exploited by the Saṅgha. I replied that there’s no need for him to be embarrassed because in some cases this happens. Each monastic should analyze his or her motivation and actions and see if they are cultivating the Dharma or disgracing it.

Keeping monastic precepts for a long time is of great benefit. It enables people to gain strong conviction in the efficacy of the three higher trainings and

habituate themselves to them over time. In their future lives, they will encounter conducive circumstances and will be able to continue practicing as a monastic. In this way, awakening will be attained more swiftly because they are habituated to releasing attachment to saṃsāra and to practicing the path.

That said, if a person no longer wishes to be a monastic, he is free to return the precepts and continue his Dharma practice as a layperson. No one is pressured to continue being a monastic if he no longer desires to be.

For those who have the strong desire to keep the precepts but have obstacles to doing so for their entire lifetime, the Thai system of permitting ordination for a limited period — usually three months — is good. However, short-term monastic ordination is not possible in the Tibetan system because all the prātimokṣa precepts, except the eight one-day precepts, must be taken with the motivation to keep them for the duration of our lives. However, someone can take the eight one-day precepts for an extended period of time and reap the benefits of doing so.

## *Maintaining the Purity of the Saṅgha*

In the *Sutta on the Fruits of the Homeless Life*, the Buddha describes how one becomes a monastic and then lives as one (DN 2.42):

And having gone forth [from the householder life to the homeless life of a monastic], he dwells restrained by the restraint of the precepts, persisting in right behavior, seeing danger in the slightest faults, observing the commitments he has taken regarding body, deed, and word, devoted to the skilled and purified life, perfected in ethical conduct, with the sense-doors guarded, skilled in mindful awareness, and content.

To receive ordination precepts, a person must be motivated by renunciation — the aspiration to be free from cyclic existence and attain liberation. However, in ancient India and later in Tibet, a few people took ordination to escape punishment or danger, or as a way of receiving requisites. Of the Tibetan refugees in India today, approximately 10 percent are monastics. Of these, some are genuine practitioners and others are not. Those who are proper monastics should



remain; those who misbehave or are lax should go. More emphasis on the quality rather than the quantity of monastics is necessary. One step in this direction would be to take seriously, and not just as a formality, the part of the ordination ceremony that questions whether a person has any obstacles to receiving ordination. This is my view; other Tibetan teachers may see the situation differently.

The Vinaya states that people should be properly screened and prepared before ordination and then trained in the monastic life afterward. Nevertheless, this is not the case for some monastics. As a result, the individual monastics and the general Buddhist community suffer. This situation saddens me because the existence, well-being, and good example of a well-trained monastic community is important for lay practitioners, other monastics, and society in general.

Although it is up to each person to decide whether to become a monastic, once you are ordained, you should practice sincerely. Putting on robes and shaving one's head are not sufficient to be a monastic. If you wear the robes of a monastic but your way of life is not good, disadvantages accrue to you as well as to the Saṅgha. The Buddha declared that accepting offerings from lay followers who donate with faith but not keeping your precepts well creates powerful karma that will ripen in a hellish rebirth. He explained that there are four ways of enjoying or using requisites: enjoyment with theft, with debt, as an inheritance, and as an owner.

1. When monastics who transgress precepts and have poor conduct enjoy requisites, it is as if they were stealing the requisites because they have been offered to those who practice well. This is *enjoyment with theft*.
2. When monastics with good conduct enjoy offerings but do not reflect on the kindness, generosity, and merit of the donor and do not dedicate for the donor's welfare, it is *enjoyment with debt*. This is because they consume the requisites but have not fulfilled their commitments to the donor.
3. Ārya learners who are on their way to become arhats are those truly worthy of receiving offerings. When these āryas enjoy offerings, it is *enjoyment of an inheritance*, since it is as if they were using the inheritance that will later become theirs.

4. Arhats' use of requisites and offerings is *enjoyment as an owner*. Since they have eradicated all pollutants and fulfilled the aim of the path, the offerings are theirs to use.

If a monastic does not behave properly, the Saṅgha as a whole will face difficulties. Lay followers become disillusioned, which harms their faith in the Dharma. In addition, the lay community will lose respect and look down on monastics. To avoid this, monastics must study and practice well and make themselves into objects worthy of respect, and laypeople should respect and support them. Some people may be surprised at my frankness, but I say these things out of love and respect for the Dharma and the Vinaya and for sentient beings.

Along this line, Atiśa gave excellent advice to monastics:<sup>36</sup>

For those holding monastic ordination,  
the big trap lies in receiving  
material gifts and social respect.  
Avoid attachment to such things.  
Those free from materialistic grasping  
are a source of delight to the wise,  
like a lotus blossoming in fire.

Ordained practitioners have a special responsibility  
in preserving the holy Dharma.  
They should live in the four higher ways,  
such as moderation, and so forth,  
should have few needs and  
learn to be content with a simple life.

One should live with few possessions  
and dwell with one's back turned  
to the things that cause grasping.

Sometimes monastics will begin their monastic life with a sincere motivation but later be sabotaged by various types of attachment and conceit. The Buddha warned (MN 29.2):

When he has gone forth thus, he acquires gain, honor, and renown. He is pleased with that gain, honor, and renown, and his intention is fulfilled. On account of it he lauds himself and disparages others thus: “I have gain, honor, and renown, but these other monastics are unknown, of no account.” He becomes intoxicated with that gain, honor, and renown, grows negligent, falls into negligence, and being negligent, he lives in suffering.

The Buddha compares this to someone who needs heartwood to make an article but passes up the heartwood and takes twigs and leaves instead, thinking he will be able to build what he wants with those. Such a person is sadly mistaken and will not be able to fulfill his aim.

Attachment to offerings and honor are not the only trap for monastics. The sūtra continues, talking about a monk who practices ethical conduct well. He receives gain, honor, and renown but is not pleased with them. He rejoices over his practice of the precepts — and it is fitting to do so — however, he then becomes arrogant because of this, praising himself for upholding the precepts well and disparaging others for being sloppy or immoral. Such attachment and arrogance — this time in relation to the keeping of pure precepts — makes him become self-satisfied, complacent, and negligent in developing further virtues. As a result, he too abides in suffering.

Similar results occur when attachment and arrogance arise in a monastic who has attained serenity, gained supernormal powers, or gotten a taste of temporary liberation in deep concentration. In each case, conceit can cloud the mind, causing the person to become complacent and smug. They lose energy and do not fulfill the noble aspirations they had when joining the Saṅgha. We must remain humble and focused on the ultimate attainments of liberation and awakening.

Meditation on the kindness of others and the disadvantages of the self-centered attitude are good antidotes to such conceit and complacency. Seeing the kindness we have received from others makes us vividly aware that everything we know and all that we have accomplished is not due to an inherently spectacular ability in ourselves. To the contrary, it is due to the kindness of those who have taught us, cared for us, and encouraged us. Therefore conceit is totally inappropriate. When we consider how self-importance and smugness have sabotaged us during our beginningless lives in cyclic existence, we develop

antipathy toward these mental poisons. Strong mindfulness and introspective awareness arise; we are determined to not fall prey to such self-defeating habits and to remain true to our spiritual aims. To help us do that, the Buddha recommended that all monastics reflect thus (AN 10.48):

Monastics, there are these ten points that one who has gone forth should often reflect on. What ten?

One gone forth should repeatedly reflect: “I have entered a different and special way of life.”

One gone forth should repeatedly reflect: “My livelihood [requisites] depend upon others.”

One gone forth should repeatedly reflect: “My deportment should be different [calmer]. There remain further practices that I must do.”

One gone forth should repeatedly reflect: “Do I reproach myself concerning faults in my conduct?”

One gone forth should repeatedly reflect: “Do my wise companions in the spiritual life find fault with my conduct?”

One gone forth should repeatedly reflect: “I must part and be separated from everyone and everything dear and agreeable to me.”

One gone forth should repeatedly reflect: “I am the owner of my kamma, heir of my kamma, I have kamma as my origin, kamma as my relative, kamma as my resort; I will be the heir of whatever kamma, good or bad, that I do.”

One gone forth should repeatedly reflect: “How am I spending my days and nights?”

One gone forth should repeatedly reflect: “Do I delight in solitary dwellings or not?”

One gone forth should repeatedly reflect: “Have I experienced any profound truths or wise insights of the ariyas, so that when facing death, I do not feel embarrassed when questioned by my spiritual companions?”

Monastics, these are the ten points that one who has gone forth should reflect on.

Since attachment to family and attraction to people don't disappear upon receiving precepts, the Buddha gave advice to monastics on the proper way to relate to lay followers. The Pāli commentary *Sāratthappakāsinī* by Buddhaghosa explains (SN 798n272):

As the moon gliding across the sky does not form intimacy, affection, or attachment with anyone, nor give rise to fondness, longing, or obsession, yet remains dear and agreeable to the multitude, so you too should not form intimacy and so forth with anyone. Then, by doing so, you will approach families like the moon, dear and agreeable to the multitude. Further, as the moon dispels darkness and emits light, so you will dispel the darkness of defilements and emit the light of knowledge.

This advice is so moving that all of us, lay and monastic, would do well to heed it. Open-hearted care and concern free from longing and guilt is a healthy way to relate to others.

How do lay followers handle a situation in which a monastic is not behaving according to the precepts? First, we should try to prevent such situations from occurring. For example, lay practitioners should not invite monastics to join them in watching movies with sex and violence. They should not drink alcohol or take recreational drugs in the presence of monastics, take monastics to a casino, hug monastics of the opposite sex, or of the same sex if they are gay. I have heard of all the above happening; such activities are not suitable for monastics, and lay followers must be aware of this. Also, refrain from offering monastics luxury items; some monks become spoiled by lay followers who dote on them.

In the *Inquiry of Ugra Sūtra*, the Buddha gave advice on how to regard a monastic who has transgressed precepts. Without disrespecting the person, we think that the robes are the robes of the fully awakened Buddha, who is free from all pollutants and has complete ethical conduct, concentration, wisdom, and liberation. As such, we have respect for āryas and generate compassion for the monastic. Without whitewashing the situation, we recognize this person's conduct is not appropriate although he wears the Buddha's robes. But since the Buddha advised us not to despise the unlearned, we recall that it is the person's afflictions that have committed the offense. Since this person has access to the Buddha's teachings, if he studies and practices them in the future, he will come to

know, confess, and rectify his lapses. In this case, he will still be able to become an ārya and a buddha one day.<sup>37</sup>

In this way, we protect ourselves from becoming judgmental or from losing faith. In addition, we think, “I, too, have the seeds within me to act in inappropriate and nonvirtuous ways. Thus I will learn from observing this person and invigorate my mindfulness and introspective awareness to prevent myself from acting in a similar manner.”

The Vinaya contains many ways for monastics to confess and make amends for the various types of transgressions. Monasteries with knowledgeable monastics know and practice these ways, thus benefitting the individual, the Saṅgha, and the public.

An important purpose of monastic life is to reduce attachment, and for that, it is essential that monastics live simply. When Atiśa came to Tibet, a big reception was held to welcome him, and monks wearing elaborate costumes and headgear assembled on horseback. Appalled by this extravagant display, Atiśa covered his head with his upper robe and said, “The Tibetan ghosts are coming!” Seeing this, the monks asked what happened and learned that Atiśa was unhappy because they did not have a simple appearance. They descended from their horses and changed into ordinary robes. Seeing this, Atiśa was pleased.

In Tibet before 1959, some abbots and monks wore very elaborate and impressive robes and costumes that reflected their status and connection to rich benefactors and powerful personages. It seems they had more respect for the paraphernalia given by rich benefactors than the robes given by the Buddha. As Kedrup, Tsongkhapa’s disciple, noted, “If monastics do not maintain integrity and instead indulge in excesses, it is a sign of the degeneration of the Dharma.” Therefore monastics must constantly strengthen their motivation to renounce the duḥkha of cyclic existence and attain awakening. As monastics, their task is to learn, think, and meditate on the vast and profound teachings as much as possible. In conjunction with this, they should teach, translate, write, and lead others in practice so that the Dharma will be upheld in our world.

Monastics must be celibate. There are no exceptions: abstention from sexual intercourse is one of the four root precepts, transgression of which means that person is no longer a monastic. While we sometimes hear stories of great practitioners who have consorts, these people are not monastics. If a monastic reaches the level where he or she is capable of doing the consort practice —

isolated mind on the completion stage — he should give back his monastic precepts and return to lay life. Tsongkhapa had attained the stage where he was capable of practicing with a consort in order to dissolve the winds into the indestructible drop at his heart. However, with great compassion for sentient beings and great respect for the Vinaya, he chose not to do this and remained a monk for the rest of his life. He knew that living as a pure monastic would be a clearer and more inspiring example for future generations of monastics. At the time of his death, when the winds naturally dissolve, he meditated on the clear light and attained the next level of tantric realization.

Discipline in monasteries must be strict regarding this point. The Indian yogi Virūpa (8th–9th century), from whom the Sakya lineage stems, was a monk at Nālandā Monastery in India. While he studied Pāramitāyāna, he also practiced highest yoga tantra. One night the disciplinarian at Nālandā was making the evening rounds, and from Virūpa's room he heard women's voices. Opening the door, he saw women who, although they looked like prostitutes, were ḍākinīs. We don't know if the disciplinarian recognized them as such, but in any case he said that because this was a monastery for monks, they must leave. He also expelled Virūpa from the monastery. Even though Virūpa was highly realized, no exception was made for him — in the monastery everyone had to keep the root prātimokṣa precepts no matter their level of realization. I think that is wonderful. Someone who has developed internal Tantrayāna realizations should return his or her monastic precepts and practice tantra outside the monastery.

I doubt that everyone who thinks they are at the level of doing consort practice is capable of doing it. A person does not make this decision for himself; he follows the instructions of his lama. A previous incarnation of Serkong Dorje Chang was a monk when he attained the level in which practice with a consort would be beneficial. Following the advice of the Thirteenth Dalai Lama, he returned to lay life and married even though he was capable of intercourse without emission. This demonstrated his compassion for others — he did not want them to lose faith in the Saṅgha — and his respect for monasticism.

Monastics who are spiritually accomplished must also maintain the prātimokṣa discipline. Vinaya and the prātimokṣa precepts were established in accord with ordinary, worldly conventions, and they should be kept in that perspective. Unconventional behavior or public displays of supernormal powers

could lead other monastics without such accomplishments astray and cause confusion in the minds of lay followers.

Some people put on the mask of being a religious practitioner but are corrupt. Many Christian monastics live simple, contented lives; some live as hermits their whole lives. A cloistered French monastery allowed me to visit. The abbot who received me was barefoot. Some years ago, Pope Francis dismissed a German bishop because he was living a luxurious life. Abbots of our monasteries should do likewise if the monks are living luxuriously. Monastics must learn the Dharma and Vinaya and apply it to their lives. If we sincerely believe in contentment coming from a simple lifestyle, we won't be hypocritical and destroy the faith of others.

Some monastic precepts must be kept strictly, but in certain circumstances the Vinaya allows exceptions. Monasteries may vary in terms of how certain precepts are kept. Personally, I prefer that the precepts are followed more strictly. Once we make an exception for one thing, it's like a crack that eventually becomes bigger and bigger. From the beginning, it's important to follow the discipline closely. We should not relax the discipline just to have more monastics. Quality is more important than quantity.

## REFLECTION

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1. Why is it important for the individual and for society that monastics keep their precepts well?
  2. If you are a monastic, reflect on the ten points the Buddha asked monastics to contemplate. If you are a lay follower, reflect on ways you can help monastics to keep their precepts.
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## *Tibetan Monastics and Monastic Institutions*

The prātimokṣa precepts are to help us regulate actions of body and speech, and in doing so, they make us look at the mind that motivates our physical and verbal actions. Keeping all the precepts meticulously is extremely difficult; not all Tibetan monks are perfect and follow the precepts to the smallest detail. But I think Tibetan monks in general keep the major precepts of the 253 bhikṣu



precepts. The great majority of Tibetan monastics are sincere practitioners, and they form the core of our monastic institutions. They engage in the three major Vinaya rites — the fortnightly confession and restoration of precepts, the rains retreat, and the invitation for correction at the conclusion of the rains retreat. Monastics who do not follow the important precepts are a sign of degeneration. We cannot deny their existence, but they do not represent all Tibetan monastics. In any religious group there are usually a few mischievous people, but to blame the entire community for the bad behavior of a few individuals is wrong.

We should look to the people who practice well for inspiration and not dwell on those who fail to do so. If we can help them improve their conduct, that is good, but if they transgress a root precept, they are no longer monastics and must be expelled from the Saṅgha.

Some lay lamas have families, yet they wear robes that look similar to monastic robes. This is confusing to the public. I have advised them to wear white robes to distinguish themselves from the Saṅgha, but some do not. Some laypeople put on monastic robes in order to collect offerings during large pujas where thousands of people are in attendance. These people are not actual monks, and their pretending to be so creates heavy nonvirtuous karma.

Some monastics in both the Dharmagupta and Mūlasarvāstivāda traditions do not eat in the afternoon. This is wonderful. Most Theravāda monastics also do this; in addition, some go on alms round (*piṇḍapāta*) and some do not touch money. This is also admirable. Due to the large percentage of the Tibetan population that is monastic, practical constraints prevent us from following some of these practices.

Prior to 1959, approximately one-quarter of the male population in Tibet were monks. In the Lhasa area, the monasteries were the size of small towns. Ganden Monastery had approximately 4,000 monks, Sera 8,000, and Drepung 10,000. These large monasteries, and many of the smaller ones, also function as schools where the monks study the main philosophical treatises for up to twenty years. The study program includes classes with a teacher, memorization, many hours of debate, pujas, Vinaya rites, and other group activities. Many young boys join the monasteries. They usually live with an older monk in one of the group houses in the monastery. These large monasteries are schools where children are raised within a lifestyle consisting of religious study and practice. Needless to say, with so many children, adolescents, and young adults who are not only

memorizing and studying but also bursting with energy, Tibetan monasteries generally are not the quiet, remote hermitages found in some other Buddhist countries.

The Buddhist tradition of debate originated in ancient India. In the Pāli sūtras we see that the Buddha himself discussed and debated philosophical principles with the renunciates and brahmins of his time. In later centuries, large monastic universities such as Taxila, Nālandā, Odantapurī, and Vikramaśīla came into being. At these sites monastics used debate as a pedagogical tool for their own learning, as well as to establish the validity of the Buddha's teachings when confronted by the challenges of non-Buddhist scholars. As an extension of the Nālandā tradition, Tibetan Buddhism does the same.

An important element for a successful debating program is a large number of students. By having many people to discuss the Dharma with, monastics are exposed to a variety of viewpoints and perspectives that help to enhance the breadth of their understanding. They learn to evaluate doctrines based on sound logical arguments. Of the three wisdoms, the education program in Tibetan monasteries emphasizes the development of the wisdoms of learning and contemplating. The wisdom of meditation is usually cultivated privately.

Given the large number of monks at these major Tibetan monasteries, it would have been impossible for local villagers to give alms on a daily basis. Even if the monks had gone to Lhasa, several hours' walk by foot, all the streets would have been jammed! Although laypeople brought donations of food to the monasteries, it was difficult to obtain the amount needed to feed so many monastics, and pots big enough to cook for thousands could not be found. Therefore the monks prepared meals in their smaller group houses within the monastery. This necessitated buying and cooking their own food, and for that reason they handled money.

This same system has continued in exile. It would be too difficult for Tibetan refuge settlements or local Indian villages to offer food to thousands of monastics each day. Furthermore, the monastics are immersed in study programs that are time-intensive, so it is easier for a few monastics to buy food and cook for a larger group. The food is served and eaten quickly so they can return to their studies.

The monastics in some Tibetan monasteries observe the practice of not taking food after midday. They gather for the midday meal and have only tea the rest of the day. I once instructed a monastery in Dharamsala to do that, but it

proved to be fruitless. Although the monastery did not serve an evening meal, the monks prepared food in their rooms on one-burner stoves.

Unlike Christian monasteries and Buddhist monasteries in other Asian countries where the monastery supplies robes, shoes, and bags and covers medical and travel expenses, Tibetan monks must supply these themselves. For this reason, too, they use money. They usually receive donations from relatives or friends, or use the offerings distributed during large ceremonies and teachings. In some monasteries, breakfast is provided to all monks who attend the morning puja, and when benefactors sponsor pujas, they often offer a meal to the assembly. In India, the Tibetan Nuns' Project has been able to provide food for the nuns enrolled in some nunneries. However, some of these nunneries are overcrowded, and some nuns must live outside and provide for themselves. Such practical concerns require that Tibetan monastics use money to buy necessities.

In Tibet and in the early years of our lives as refugees in India, some monks studied and practiced with their belly only half full. I know some excellent monks who are now Dharma teachers for whom this was the case.

Some people think that Tibetan monks do not keep Vinaya strictly because they practice tantra. This is not the case. In fact, tantric precepts are stricter because they pertain to mental actions as well as physical and verbal behavior. Practitioners who observe the tantric ethical code and commitments should also observe Vinaya because Vinaya precepts are easier to keep and are good preparation for taking the bodhisattva and tantric precepts. Practicing Tantrayāna should not be used as an excuse to neglect Vinaya. Quite the opposite, we should be stricter in practicing Vinaya because if we aren't, how can we expect to observe the tantric ethical code, which is more difficult to follow?

## *Challenges for Western Monastics*

The situation for Western monastics is especially difficult because few monasteries are established in the West, and while living in India they face visa, health, and language difficulties. Because they are comparatively new to Buddhism, Western monastic aspirants are not always aware of the behavior expected of people holding prātimokṣa precepts. In addition, prospective candidates are not always properly screened or prepared before ordination.

Although they would like training in Vinaya, it is not always available to them in their own language. Western monastics often end up living on their own or at Dharma centers, where they work and receive room and board.

In 1993, during a conference with Western Buddhist teachers, some Western monastics told me of the difficulties they face, and I began to weep. We must think and then act to remedy this situation.

The best solution is for Western monastics to begin monasteries and to develop their own training programs, and we Tibetans can help from our side. Monastics who wish to train in India can establish Western khamtsens (houses) in the Tibetan monasteries and nunneries. In addition to the two-week preordination course currently taught by Western monastics in Dharamsala, India, intensive training courses could be held after ordination, as is done in Taiwan.

Geshes and khenpos at Dharma centers should educate Western monastics in the Vinaya and do the fortnightly poşadha (T. *gso sbyong*) with them. This is important not only for the students but also for the teachers' practice. They should also have special courses where they teach Western monastics the prohibitive and prescriptive precepts and monastic etiquette. I think it is wise for senior Western monastics as well as the geshe or khenpo to assess the aspirants because Westerners can more easily detect potential problematic areas with candidates from their own culture.

The gradual approach of the Christian monasteries — where a candidate for ordination must pass through many stages before receiving full precepts — works well. This gives the person time to think about monastic life and evaluate if it is suitable for them. The monastic community also has the opportunity to assess the suitability of the candidate. I encourage Westerners who are considering monastic ordination to live in a monastery as a layperson for some time so that they have an experience of living and practicing in a monastic community. Then they can slowly take the progressive levels of ethical precepts and adjust to each level before assuming the next.

To receive the four requisites — food, clothing, shelter, and medicine — monastics need the support of lay practitioners. My hope is that lay followers will support Western monastics and reap the benefit of having Dharma practitioners who share their culture and language. At present, many monastics in the West must hold a job in order to sustain themselves; this makes keeping their precepts

and living a monastic lifestyle of simplicity difficult. Many lay followers prefer to donate to monasteries where they see a group of monastics practicing together. Although some Saṅgha members prefer the independence of living alone, they must also accept the difficulties that entails.

After they have received some years of initial training in a monastic setting, some monastics may wish to do as the Tibetan sage Drom Tonpa advised: remain in an isolated area with a small group of peers who have similar attitudes and do similar spiritual practices. Although they may live separately, they remain together as a spiritual community. Then when difficulties arise — sickness or spiritual problems — spiritual companions can help. In addition, by staying with “friends in ethical conduct,” they will support one another in being conscientious and refraining from negativities.

Monastics who are also teachers must carry their sense of renunciation wherever they live. To maintain that, living with other monastics — be they our teachers, peers, or students — is valuable. Although monasteries are rare in the West at present, the hope is that more will be built in the future. This will really help the rooting and flourishing of the Dharma in the West. In the meantime, monastics who do not live in community should cultivate friendships with spiritual comrades with similar views, aspirations, and precepts. They can then discuss the Dharma and various challenges they face together.

## *Full Ordination for Women*

As noted above, Vinaya texts delineate different levels of monastic ordination. For men, there is full ordination (*bhikṣu*) and novice (*śrāmaṇera*). For women, there is full ordination (*bhikṣuṇī*), training (*śikṣamāṇā*), and novice (*śrāmaṇerī*). According to the Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya, a Saṅgha of at least ten bhikṣus (five in outlying areas) must be present for a novice monk to receive bhikṣu ordination. For a training nun to receive bhikṣuṇī ordination, she first goes before a Saṅgha of at least ten bhikṣuṇīs (five in an outlying area), where she receives the abiding-in-pure-conduct<sup>38</sup> (*brahmacāryapasthana*, T. *tshangs spyod nyer gnas*). Then, in the same day, she goes before a Saṅgha of at least ten (or five in an outlying area) bhikṣus and a Saṅgha of bhikṣuṇīs, where she receives the full

bhikṣuṇī ordination. Fewer monastics are needed to preside over novice ordination.

The lineage of full ordination for men came to Tibet from India with Śāntarakṣita (725–88) and his disciples, who established the first monastery in Tibet at Samye in 775. Unfortunately, when Śāntarakṣita brought Indian monks to Tibet, he did not bring nuns. It would have looked suspect had celibate monks traveled with celibate nuns. Because of the lack of requisite bhikṣuṇīs to have the bhikṣuṇī ordination, this ordination never took root in Tibet, although Tibetan women did receive the novice (*śrāmaṇerī*) ordination.

The lineage of full ordination for both men and women was established in Sri Lanka in the third century BCE by King Aśoka's son and daughter, who were both fully ordained monastics. Both lineages were decimated due to the Chola invasions of Sri Lanka in the eleventh century. The bhikṣu lineage was reestablished immediately, but it was not until 1998, when some Sri Lanka nuns received full ordination from Taiwanese monastics, that the bhikṣuṇī lineage was reinstated. Now there are well over one thousand Theravāda bhikṣuṇīs. Many Western women have received Theravāda bhikṣuṇī ordination.

The first bhikṣu ordination in China occurred around 249–53, and the first dual bhikṣuṇī ordination in 434. The lineage of bhikṣuṇī ordination exists in Taiwan, China, Korea, and Vietnam to this day. These nuns are well-educated and leaders in the Buddhist community. Some Western women and a handful of Tibetan women have taken bhikṣuṇī ordination from Chinese, Vietnamese, and Korean Saṅghas.

Scholars have found a few examples of Tibetan lamas giving bhikṣuṇī ordination in Tibet in previous centuries. These ordinations were given in an irregular manner. A question therefore arises regarding the authenticity of that ordination. It is a bhikṣuṇī ordination, but it was not given in the perfect manner. Understanding the nature, purity, and authenticity of an ordination is complex. For example, when someone receives ordination from a preceptor whose ordination has degenerated, if the new monastic is not aware of the preceptor's degeneration, he or she receives the precepts, but the ordination was given imperfectly because the number of monks needed to give it may not have been sufficient.

For many decades I have expressed the hope that the bhikṣuṇī ordination will be given in the Tibetan tradition. When our kind teacher, Buddha Śākyamuni,

established the bhikṣuṇī order, he affirmed women's ability to attain liberation. He explained that the fourfold Saṅgha — fully ordained monks and nuns, and male and female lay followers — harmoniously practicing the Buddhadharma would ensure that his teachings would remain a long time in this world for the benefit of all. If the fourfold assembly is complete, the place becomes a central land, one of the conditions for our precious human life. I often tell Tibetan masters that the introduction of the bhikṣuṇī order is a service to the Buddhadharma, for at present the fourfold assembly is not complete in our culture. Bhikṣuṇī ordination is especially important now, when nuns' education has vastly improved and many nuns are qualified to teach.

I feel that equal opportunity regarding ordination is important. Citing passages in the Vinaya, some Tibetan Vinaya masters suggest that under special circumstances, a valid bhikṣuṇī ordination can be performed by the bhikṣu Saṅgha alone. These special circumstances include a place where bhikṣuṇīs are not available to give the ordination because no bhikṣuṇīs reside in that area or because it is too dangerous for bhikṣuṇīs to travel to that place. Previous and contemporary masters in the Chinese community agree with this.

The bhikṣuṇī ordination is a matter for the Saṅgha<sup>39</sup> as a whole to discuss. No one person has the authority to make the decision. Some people imply that as the Dalai Lama, I can issue a decree introducing the bhikṣuṇī lineage in my tradition, but this is not possible. We must follow the procedure for making major decisions set out in the Vinaya, and this necessitates a group decision by the Saṅgha.

Regarding this issue, the process is complex because the bhikṣuṇī Saṅgha participating in a dual ordination would have to be from the Dharmaguptaka lineage, but the Tibetan bhikṣus follow the Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya. Various conferences have been held on this topic both in India and the West, but no definitive conclusion has been reached, although a conference of Tibetan monks said that Tibetan nuns could go to Taiwan to receive the ordination from Chinese monks. However, then the Tibetan nuns would be Dharmaguptaka bhikṣuṇīs and could not do joint Vinaya activities with Tibetan monks who are from the Mūlasarvāstivāda tradition. Furthermore, the nuns' teachers, who are predominantly monks, tell them it is unnecessary to become bhikṣuṇīs because they already have novice ordination and hold the bodhisattva and tantric ethical codes.<sup>40</sup>

Since Vinaya is a practice common to Theravāda, Chinese, and Tibetan Buddhism, discussing this at the international level would be excellent. Representatives of all traditions would be present to discuss the research and to discuss varying interpretations of Vinaya. These representatives need not be highly ranked bhikṣus. It is more important that good Vinaya scholars and practitioners come together — in a Buddhist holy site if possible — to discuss this. After informal, open discussions, a decision could be made by this international group. Decisions made in this way will be easy for everyone across Vinaya traditions to follow. In preparation for that, it would be good if Tibetan bhikṣus were to agree on a way in which the Mūlasarvāstivāda bhikṣuṇī ordination could be given. Many heads of Tibet's Buddhist lineages have expressed similar support for this, and the present Karmapa has taken active steps to introduce bhikṣuṇī ordination. However, many monks are still very conservative.

We Tibetans were very fortunate that after the bhikṣu Saṅgha was decimated during the reign of King Langdarma in the ninth century, we were able to restore the bhikṣu lineage, which was on the verge of extinction in Tibet. As a result, many people have been able to listen, reflect, and meditate on the Dharma as fully ordained monks. This has been of great benefit to Tibetan society and to sentient beings in general. It is my hope that we can find a way to establish the bhikṣuṇī Saṅgha in the Tibetan community as well.

In the meantime, several individual nuns who practice Tibetan Buddhism have received bhikṣuṇī ordination in the Dharmaguptaka Vinaya from Chinese, Vietnamese, or Korean Saṅghas. We recognize them as bhikṣuṇīs. I encourage them to do the three primary Saṅgha rites together: the fortnightly purification and restoration of precepts, the rains retreat, and the ceremony concluding the rains retreat. Some of these nuns are now establishing monasteries in the West.<sup>41</sup>

According to Vinaya, full ordination is available to both male and female practitioners equally. However, the bias against women in Indian culture at the Buddha's time is reflected in certain aspects of Vinaya. For example, a fully ordained monk is considered higher than a fully ordained nun, although there is no difference in hierarchy of the actual precepts.

In addition to introducing the bhikṣuṇī ordination, bhikṣuṇīs must also become objects of reverence. We must examine sexist passages in Buddhist texts. For example, in the rite to ordain male novices, there is a passage saying that



while the bhikṣuṇī ordination is higher than the male novice ordination, bhikṣuṇīs are not objects of reverence for male novices. This discrimination needs to change.

I am heartened that now, for the first time in Tibetan history, there are nun geshes. They completed the same course of study as the monks, with the exception of studying the full Vinaya, and took the same geshe exams. In December 2016 I was delighted to present the first twenty female geshes their geshe degrees at the convocation held at Drepung Monastery in South India. In future years, more nuns will complete their studies, take the exams, and receive their geshe degrees. Ever since the 1960s, I have advocated for better education for the nuns, and with the aid of the Tibetan Women's Project, the Department of Religious and Cultural Affairs, the monk geshes who instructed the nuns, and most of all, the effort of the nuns themselves, this has been accomplished. As women's education continues to improve, more and more women can take up leadership positions, and with their natural tendency toward compassion, they will make a positive contribution to the Buddhadharma and to society.

We must look also from the larger perspective of the bodhisattva and tantric ethical codes. Especially in tantra, not showing respect to women is a downfall. Women are objects of reverence, so it would be inconsistent to practice tantra yet discriminate against women.

### *Advice for Monastics*

I would like to speak now to those of you who are monastics. The heart of Buddhadharma is nonviolence, and the foundation for training ourselves in nonviolence is ethical conduct, specifically restraint from the seven destructive actions of body and speech that directly harm others and the three nonvirtues of mind that indirectly harm others by motivating harmful physical and verbal behavior. Taking and keeping monastic precepts is a huge aid in cultivating nonviolence, and living in a monastery supports you in keeping the precepts. Just by following the daily schedule and the discipline and guidelines, you will abandon coarse destructive actions and cultivate good qualities. Lone trees are twisted and felled by the wind, but trees in a forest protect each other from the wind and grow upward together. Similarly, monastics grow in the same direction

— the three higher trainings, bodhicitta, and so forth — together. Living together in a monastery — in an environment designed for Dharma practice — they can easily keep their precepts and progress on the path. Monastics support one another in avoiding negativities and help one another to purify negativities.

Since we have obtained a precious human life, now is the time to stop the suffering of cyclic existence. When we are laypeople, we face many interruptions to Dharma practice. Ordained life, in contrast, gives us great opportunity to engage in Dharma practice. Therefore we should appreciate the lives and qualities of a monastic lifestyle and recognize the faults of a householder's lifestyle.

Of course, nonmonastics can practice the Dharma, but laypeople need to take care of their families, which necessitates working to gather financial resources. There is then the need to decide how to spend the money and how to protect the things acquired with it. Householders with children worry about their education and behavior when they're young, and about their livelihood and relationships when they are older. Living within a family, they are attached to people and will make enemies when others hurt their dear ones. In these circumstances, even though they wish to practice the Dharma, they are compelled by the situation to spend most of their life, energy, and time looking after relatives as well as the practical matters that concern their well-being: family income, investments, and long-term financial planning; conflicts among family members and crises in their lives; the education and upbringing of children; various social obligations, and so forth. Of course these activities can be done with a positive motivation, but for many people their motivation is one of attachment. Concerning themselves with so many things that distract their minds, it is often difficult to find time to study and practice the Dharma. On the other hand, monastics are free from such activities and obligations.

By contemplating the difference in lifestyles, be aware of the importance of not engaging in unnecessary activities and of cultivating contentment. If a monastic is not content with what he or she has, his life will be similar to that of a layperson. There is not much sense in simply shaving your hair if you do not practice as a monastic and cultivate Dharma qualities in your heart and mind. A foremost practice is to abandon afflictions. The *Sūtra of Mindfulness* (*Mdo dran pa nyer gzbag*) says:

Pleasant and sweet are the afflictions at first;

however, they ripen into piercing pain.  
Seeing that they bring you despair,  
abandon them as you would poison.

Many serious practitioners choose to live in nature, remaining in the forest or near the sea, where they watch the rising and falling of the waves and experience the changes in seasons. Here they reflect on impermanence, seeing their body as transient. On this basis, they develop a sense of disillusionment and disgust with saṃsāra and the afflictions that cause it. They focus their minds on realizing emptiness and on seeing the world and sentient beings in it as like illusions. Monastics are more likely than householders to have the time and circumstances for such serious practice.

It is helpful for monastics, no matter how long they have been ordained, to contemplate repeatedly some of the verses in the ordination ceremony.<sup>42</sup>

Transmigrating in the three realms,  
one is not able to sever attachment.  
Give up attachment and enter nirvāṇa.  
That is the true way to repay kindness.

Guard integrity and aspiration.  
Cut the bonds of family and kin.  
Leave your worldly home to practice the Dharma.  
Aspire to lead all beings to full awakening.

Go forth to enter the path.  
Cut off bonds and bid family farewell.  
Now you are imbued with the precepts.  
Resolve to cut nonvirtue and cultivate compassion.  
Renounce illusion, return to the truth.  
How happy is the door to liberation.

Whether or not you are ordained, it would be beneficial to develop appreciation for the simplicity of a monastic life. Even if you are unable or do not want to be ordained in this life, appreciating the monastic way of life will leave an imprint so you can be ordained in future lives.

## *The Joy of Monastic Discipline*

To express in a brief way the respect I have for monastic discipline, I would like to share with you a poem I wrote in 1973.

How appropriate it is for those fortunate to follow you,  
the Buddha who taught great purity,  
to engage with minds of faith  
in pure conduct beyond reproach.

Externally pure and also internally pure,  
this is the Buddhist tradition;  
it produces every temporary and ultimate benefit.  
How auspicious to meet with  
this medicine benefitting both self and others.

This opportunity is found this once,  
is difficult to find again,  
and those who strive are so few.  
Make firm effort in your heart  
and apply yourself to pure conduct in a hundred ways.

Since without a doubt such a path  
can easily subdue the very coarse afflictions,  
why even mention freedom from the duḥkha  
experienced in the householder's life?

With discipline as the root,  
what cannot be produced  
from the mighty tree of the Mahāyāna path:  
bodhicitta and the union of serenity and insight?

The extremely swift, ultimate secret path,  
the magnificent and praiseworthy method  
to transform strong poison into medicine —  
the foundation of this, too,

is ethical restraint.

Eh ma! Cherish this discipline,  
which is the cause of attaining swiftly, swiftly  
the inseparable union of emptiness and compassion,  
the state of Vajradhara.

Therefore, O friends with intelligence,  
do not disparage or hold as trivial  
the prātimokṣa ethical code,  
which originates in the śrāvakas' scriptures.

Discipline is praised as the basis and root of the doctrine.  
One should strive to maintain it carefully  
by study and analysis,  
with mindfulness and introspective awareness.

Guard it respectfully with conscientiousness and integrity.  
Do not be lazy or indifferent,  
lest you snap the root of lasting happiness.

I have spoken these words with the thought to benefit,  
lest the purpose be diminished.  
By the kindness of the great father Mañjuḥoṣa  
and my kind and qualified spiritual mentors,  
this monk from Amdo, Tenzin Gyatso,  
has written this with heartfelt respect for these practices.  
Forsaking eloquence in composition,  
it was composed in a plain and simple style.

By any merits it may have,  
may all mother sentient beings in general,  
and especially many intelligent young people from the Land of Snows,  
engage in the practice of this path  
and touch the ground of supreme awakening.

May all good fortune increase!<sup>43</sup>



## 6 | The Higher Training in Concentration and the Perfection of Meditative Stability

THE HIGHER TRAINING in concentration is typically discussed in the context of the fourth truth, the true path, and the perfection of meditative stability is usually explained in the context of the six bodhisattva perfections, emphasizing that it must be done with the bodhicitta motivation. However, they deal with the same topics — conducive conditions for cultivating serenity, observed objects, techniques to deal with hindrances and faults, and the attainment of serenity and higher meditative absorptions. For that reason, the higher training in concentration and the perfection of meditative stability will be discussed together here. In keeping with my wish that the Library of Wisdom and Compassion be unique and bring in perspectives of other Buddhist traditions, after the presentation following the Sanskrit tradition as practiced in Tibet, we'll look briefly at how concentration is cultivated in the Pāli and Chinese traditions. This will enlarge your knowledge and benefit your meditation practice.

### *Concentration and Serenity*

Concentration (*samādhi*) is useful in all aspects of life, although its meaning in common parlance and in spiritual practice differs. Artists, musicians, car mechanics, computer programmers, scholars, and truck drivers have a certain type of concentration, as do children absorbed in a computer game. While useful, this is not the type of concentration cultivated in meditative practice when the mind is focused and absorbed on only one object. When we fix an appliance, play music, or throw a football, we must attend to many objects to perform that one task, whereas in stabilizing meditation the mind is trained to stay put unwaveringly on one object.

“Concentration” has various meanings depending on the context. In the study of mind and awareness, concentration is one of the five object-ascertaining

mental factors that all of us have, even though it may not be adequately developed at present. In the eightfold path, it refers to the single-pointed concentration that leads to gaining states of *dhyāna* (P. *jhāna*) — meditative absorptions of the form realm. As one of the three higher trainings, concentration includes three factors of the eightfold path: right mindfulness, right effort, and right concentration. In this case, the emphasis of *samādhi* is more on developing skill in meditation in general as well as the ability to keep the mind focused on virtue during daily life. In other contexts, “concentration” refers to special meditations that enable a practitioner to engage in a specific activity.

*Samādhi* unifies the primary mind and its associated mental factors in a balanced way so that mindfulness and attention on the object are sustained and the mind is tranquil. This differs from our usual distracted mind that is subject to a flood of external sensory stimuli, jumps from one thought to another, or is overwhelmed with emotions such as anxiety, craving, or resentment. The scattered mind cannot understand things deeply; it sees only superficially and is often afflictive. *Samādhi* brings calm and gentleness. It is like a mirror that clearly reflects objects. Such a mind, when combined with wisdom, can bring deep understanding.

Serenity is concentration (*samādhi*) arisen from meditation and accompanied by the bliss of mental and physical pliancy in which the mind abides effortlessly without fluctuation for as long as we wish on whatever object it has been placed. Cultivating this state of single-pointed concentration requires diligent effort over time, and once attained, it must be maintained through continuous practice. The new calm and concentration beginners experience is wonderful, but it is not serenity, so do not be dismayed when later you are distracted. Similarly, do not try to re-create a marvelous meditative experience in your next session and become disappointed or frustrated when you can't. Developing concentration takes time and diligence.

The enthusiasm that newcomers to Buddhism have to gain concentration is commendable, and it will bear fruit if first they develop a broad understanding of the Buddhist path and cultivate a proper motivation. Cultivating single-pointedness of mind in order to gain psychic powers, be famous, or remain in a blissful meditative state is doing ourselves a great disservice.<sup>44</sup> Without a good motivation such powers could be misused, harming others and planting many seeds of destructive karma on our own mindstreams. At best, it creates the cause



for rebirth in the form and formless realms while in saṃsāra. For this reason, most spiritual mentors begin by instructing students on meditation topics that will help them to generate the aspiration to be free from saṃsāra, the altruistic intention of bodhicitta, and the correct view of emptiness.

In general, meditation is of two types: stabilizing and analytical. Stabilizing meditation is predominantly used to develop serenity, and analytical meditation to develop insight. The difference between serenity and insight is not their object of meditation, but the way the mind engages with the object. Serenity focuses on it single-pointedly; insight analyzes it deeply to understand its characteristics. Although insight is often thought of in relation to emptiness, its object could be other phenomena. While serenity is often associated with meditation on the breath or the image of the Buddha, it can also focus on emptiness.

The teachings on the higher training in concentration and the perfection of meditative stability center on cultivating serenity, dhyānas of the form realm, and meditative absorptions of the formless realm. The Tibetan word translated as serenity has two syllables: *zhi* means “calm” and *gnas* is “to abide.” This mental state is calm in that all distractions to external objects have ceased and all impediments to concentration — especially restlessness and laxity — have been calmed. It abides on an internal observed object. Serenity involves not only mental stability but also vibrant mental clarity. Those on the bodhisattva path can develop serenity either before or after generating uncontrived bodhicitta.

## *The Importance of Developing Serenity*

Many benefits come from attaining serenity and the dhyānas. All our virtuous activities become more focused and thus have a stronger effect on our mind. Whether we meditate on the breath or lamrim topics, recite scriptures or prayers, do tantric visualizations or recite a mantra, being able to focus our mind single-pointedly facilitates understanding the meditation object and integrating Dharma meanings into our mind.

Serenity is the foundation for generating insight and the union of serenity and insight. When the union of the two is focused on emptiness, it has the power to uproot all afflictive and cognitive obscurations that cause saṃsāra and prevent us from attaining buddhahood.

Serenity makes the body and mind peaceful, bringing happiness in this life. It is the basis for cultivating mastery over external elements, as exemplified in the supernormal powers, and for actualizing the superknowledges, which expand our range of knowledge. Serenity is necessary to actualize the generation stage and completion stage of highest yoga tantra and thus become fully awakened.

Together with speaking of the benefits of serenity, meditation masters caution their disciples not to become attached to the bliss of concentration or to become complacent without developing further realizations. Having attained a meditative absorption of the form or formless realm, it is tempting to remain in that peaceful state, in which case we will not progress on the path to liberation and awakening, but will simply create the cause to be born in those realms in the future. Another danger is confusing the bliss of serenity and the absence of manifest afflictions during meditative absorption with liberation. Many non-Buddhist and Buddhist practitioners who have attained meditative absorptions have been sidetracked in these ways. Maintaining a strong and clear motivation, checking our meditative experiences with a qualified spiritual mentor, and following the advice of our spiritual mentors are extremely important so that we will realize our deepest spiritual goals.

Having said this, sometimes I think we Tibetans are overly cautious and neglect this crucial quality of single-pointed concentration. In my own case, even before we left Tibet I had genuine interest in emptiness, and after we went into exile in India I continued to make consistent effort to study and analyze the ultimate nature of phenomena. I got some feeling for it; however, due to the lack of single-pointed concentration, my practice has not progressed further. Saying *gate gate paragate parasamgate bodhi svaha*, the mantra in the *Heart Sūtra*, has little impact without serenity. If we are serious about actualizing the paths and grounds, we must engage in the practice of samādhi.

The two collections of merit and pristine wisdom are the requisites for attaining buddhahood, and to benefit others effectively, gaining the five superknowledges (*abhijñā*)<sup>45</sup> is essential. All these are attained on the basis of serenity and the dhyānas. Atiśa says in *Lamp for the Path to Awakening* (*Bodhipathapradīpa* 34–35, 38–39):

All buddhas say the cause of the completion  
of the collections,

whose nature is merit and pristine wisdom,  
is the development of the superknowledges.

Just as a bird with undeveloped wings  
cannot fly in the sky,  
those without the power of the superknowledges  
cannot work for the good of living beings.

In order to develop the superknowledges  
and the beyond-saṃsāra paths,  
you should first cultivate serenity.  
If your serenity practice is weak,  
you will gain no power  
even through sustained effort.  
Therefore accomplish the trainings  
in the various levels of samādhi.

Śāntideva likewise extols the benefit of serenity and emphasizes that it be accomplished prior to insight (BCA 8.4):

Recognizing that the afflictions are eradicated  
by insight imbued with serenity,  
first seek serenity that is attained  
by those who joyfully renounce worldly [pleasures].

The wisdom realizing emptiness is the actual counterforce that destroys afflictions, their seeds, and latencies. To discern emptiness correctly and then keep our mind focused on it for great lengths of time, concentration and serenity are necessary. Concentration is a powerful state of mind that is able to control mental activity and the arising of afflictions. Serenity is a concentration that is supported by the bliss of pliancy, is able to keep the mind in equipoise on its object as we wish, and is based on the nine stages of sustained attention. Each of the nine stages of sustained attention is concentration in itself because each is the mental factor of concentration, but this alone is not sufficient to be what is usually called “concentration” or “samādhi.”

In short, cultivating single-pointedness in general and attaining serenity in specific has many benefits. The *Sūtra Unraveling the Thought* (*Samādhinirmocana Sūtra*) says (LC 3:14):

Maitreya, you should know that all mundane and supramundane virtuous qualities, whether of śrāvakas, bodhisattvas, or tathāgatas, are the result of serenity and insight.

## REFLECTION

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1. Contemplate the benefits of serenity: it is the foundation for gaining insight, it facilitates the collections of merit and wisdom, it is the basis for gaining the superknowledges, it brings great peace to the mind, and so forth.
  2. Seeing these benefits, aspire to improve your concentration.
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## *Conditions Conducive to the Development of Serenity*

In Sūtrayāna, single-pointed concentration is cultivated with the coarse mental consciousness, which is related to our body. Thus, external factors — altitude, temperature, time of day, and physical health — influence our ability to meditate. In *Śrāvaka Grounds* (*Śrāvakabhūmi*), Asaṅga listed thirteen prerequisite conditions for the development of serenity; Kamalaśīla in his *Middle Stages of Meditation* (*Bhāvanākrama*) summarized these into six. It is important for someone who is entering retreat with the aspiration to attain serenity<sup>46</sup> to seek an appropriate environment with these six conditions. For us practitioners who are not in retreat, having as many of these conditions as possible facilitates our development of concentration.

The Chinese master Zhiyi (538–97) wrote extensively about how to generate serenity, dhyāna, and insight.<sup>47</sup> His list of important factors to have in place in order to generate serenity overlap with those of Kamalaśīla's listed below and are explained together with them.

1. *A favorable place* is one that is calm, quiet, and healthy; it is secluded and free from commotion and hubbub. It has clean water and air and is located where

we can easily obtain food, clothing, shelter, and medicine. This minimizes disrupting our meditation schedule to seek requisites or engaging in wrong livelihoods to procure them. Meditating in a place inhabited by previous great meditators is recommended because such places have been blessed and positively influenced by their practice. The area should be safe, where illness, animals, human beings, or machines do not endanger our well-being. We should be near other meditators, teachers, or Dharma friends who can help us if hindrances or questions arise regarding practice.

Zhiyi explains that meditating in a dwelling in the mountains is best to avoid others disturbing us. If not, a hermitage located at least a mile from a village, where ascetic practices are done, is good. Minimum is a monastic dwelling (*saṃghārāma*) that is not near a town or city. Whatever our residence, it should not require a lot of time and effort to maintain it.

2. Prior to entering strict retreat, we must develop a *clear and correct understanding of the instructions* to gain serenity and to overcome any errors and difficulties that arise. Studying not only the essential instructions on meditation but also the major scriptures on serenity will benefit our practice greatly. These include the description of the five faults and eight antidotes and the nine stages of sustained attention in texts written by Maitreya, Asaṅga, and Kamalaśīla. The *Sūtra Unraveling the Thought* (*Samdhinirmocana Sūtra*) also contains instructions on the practice to attain serenity.

Zhiyi instructs us to stay near our teacher and good Dharma friends. Teachers instruct and guide us through giving teachings, and Dharma friends encourage and support our cultivation. We support and encourage them in their Dharma practice, so we mutually benefit each other.

3. *Being free from coarse desires and having few desires* is important. Even if we live in a secluded place, if we crave a soft bed, music, delicious food, sex, or a good novel, our mind will be constantly distracted.

Zhiyi emphasizes that renouncing the five objects of sensual desire is essential for our meditation practice to progress. Attachment to visual forms, especially good-looking people, is a huge obstacle to cultivating concentration. Clinging to sounds — especially the sweet, ego-pleasing sounds of praise and reputation, not to mention singing and music — captivate and distract us. Remember that even the most delightful and endearing sounds do not last even a split-second; they vanish as soon as they arise, so there is nothing to cling to. Similarly, craving

frangrances, tastes, and wonderful tactile sensations is fruitless, for these pleasures do not last, and procuring and protecting them easily lead to destructive karma and fritter away our precious human life.

4. A mind that is *satisfied and content* — one that doesn't desire "more and better" — is able to meditate. Such contentment is rare in modern society, where most people constantly try to better their position and increase their possessions. We may have to combat much of our previous conditioning and the expectations of society and family to develop contentment.

Having sufficient clothing and food is important; otherwise the mind will be unduly disturbed, making meditation difficult. Yet being content with what we have can be challenging. Zhiyi explains three approaches to clothing, depending on our level of renunciation. The first is to wear a single cloak as the Buddha did in his previous lives as a bodhisattva. He did not see many people, and his body was strong enough to endure the elements. The second is to have only a single set of monastic robes, as Mahākāśyapa — a close disciple of the Buddha — did. The third, for people residing in cold climates whose ability to endure the weather is not developed, is to have an extra set of robes and other garments, as the Buddha permitted. However, they are to mentally offer these to the Buddha so as not to be self-indulgent or accumulate many possessions.

Similarly, there are three approaches to food. The superior person lives in nature, sustaining himself on the plants, fruits, and herbs found there. The middling consumes only the food offered on alms round, and in this way does not engage in wrong livelihood and maintains the ascetic practice. Someone with lower capacity dwells in a hermitage (*aranya, araṇṇa*) where a benefactor offers food, or lives with the Saṅgha community and eats the food offered to it.

5. Our *involvement in worldly activities must be minimal*. If we have a job and engage in many projects, they will occupy our mind, making concentration difficult. Writing emails, texting, reading social media, keeping a blog, reading books not related to the Dharma, or caring for family members will take us away from our meditation seat and occupy our attention when we're seated on it.

Zhiyi emphasizes that we must put our responsibilities to rest by ceasing the busyness of ordinary life. This involves ceasing to direct our energy toward making a living as well as avoiding the company of friends, relatives, and people who have no interest in or respect for Dharma practice. Furthermore, since other interests such as worldly careers, occult practices, and non-Dharma books are

distracting, they are to be avoided. Needless to say, nowadays we must forgo watching the news, checking the stock market, writing a blog, and keeping up with friends and events on social media.

6. *Pure ethical conduct*, keeping whatever precepts and commitments we have accepted, eliminates regret and remorse. At least we must abandon the ten destructive paths of actions. Without being able to control our coarse physical and verbal actions, which are motivated by coarse afflictions, we will not succeed in pacifying the mental factors that prevent concentration.

The remainder of this section comes from Zhiyi, who explained that pure ethical conduct is essential to prevent distractions and karmic obstacles that interfere with the cultivation of serenity. As in building a house, a firm foundation is necessary before constructing the walls or roof. The essence of ethical conduct is the three disciplines of the Mahāyāna: to abandon negativities, to accumulate virtue, and to benefit sentient beings. In this context he emphasized the importance of keeping a vegetarian diet, which stops the slaughter of many living beings.

Of the three levels of observing precepts, those who are supreme have not committed any of the five heinous crimes — matricide, patricide, killing an arhat, causing blood to flow from a Buddha, and causing a schism in a harmonious monastic Saṅgha. They meet a qualified spiritual mentor, take refuge and the five lay precepts, and may also have taken the novice or full monastic precepts. Guarding all the precepts well and avoiding the ten destructive actions, they are free from transgressions. Such disciples are analogous to a cloth that is completely clean and will easily absorb dye; they will attain serenity and insight.

Those who are middling keep the major precepts well but have many transgressions of the minor precepts. If they engage in sincere purification, their Dharma practice will be successful. They are similar to a dirty cloth that has been cleaned so that the dye will take.

The third group, disciples whose ethical conduct is weak, have committed many transgressions of both the major and minor precepts. If the root monastic precepts have been broken with all factors intact, they are no longer monastics and may not reordain in that lifetime. Their destructive karmic seeds require purification, which can be done by sincere application of the appropriate means. To do this, they cultivate a clear understanding of and confidence in the law of karma and its effects, and fear experiencing the results of their destructive actions.

They develop a sense of personal integrity and consideration for others and seek out methods to purify their offenses and negativities. Revealing and confessing their offenses and negativities, they have a strong determination not to do them again. With determination to protect the Dharma, they generate the great vow of bodhisattvas to liberate all sentient beings, which leads them to cultivate continuous mindfulness of the buddhas in all directions and to contemplate the offenses and negativities as empty of inherent existence.

With these elements and sincere regret especially for committing the serious offenses, they engage in purification practices until signs of purification arise. These signs include feeling their body and mind become light and pleasant, having auspicious dreams or seeing auspicious signs, witnessing their virtuous thoughts increase, understanding Dharma teachings, and experiencing Dharma joy and a mind free from worry and regret. In addition, they keep the precepts well in the future. Once they have restored good ethical conduct, they will be able to attain dhyāna. Such disciples resemble a very dirty and torn cloth that has sufficiently been patched and cleaned so that the dye will take.

Another way to purify the seeds of heavy destructive karma is, with strong regret, integrity, and consideration for others, to confess to the Three Jewels and pledge not to do such actions again. With firm concentration, they meditate that these karmas are empty by nature. They also maintain mindfulness of the buddhas in the ten directions, and in the break times offer incense and prostrate to them as well as recite the precepts and Mahāyāna sūtras.

Our activities during the break times between meditation sessions influence the success of our efforts very much. Please see chapter 6 of *The Foundation of Buddhist Practice*, which discusses this.

## REFLECTION

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1. Review the meaning of each conducive condition for cultivating serenity: favorable place, correct understanding of the instructions for cultivating serenity, freedom from coarse desires, contentment, minimal involvement in worldly activities, and pure ethical conduct.
  2. Contemplate why each condition is important.
  3. Consider how you can begin to develop these conditions now.
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## *Observed Objects*

Because sentient beings have different tendencies and dispositions, the Buddha described several objects that could be the observed object (*ālamāna*) for cultivating serenity. In general, any object, internal or external, can be used, even a pebble or a candle. However, this physical thing itself is not the object used to develop serenity; the conceptual appearance of it in our mind is, because serenity is developed with the mental consciousness, not the sense consciousnesses.

Staring at a candle will not lead to serenity because this is done with the visual consciousness, which, unlike the mental consciousness, is not a stable consciousness and does not always function. Staring at an external object may drive away discursive thoughts, but this quality alone does not constitute serenity. However, we may gain familiarity with the object by looking at it with our visual consciousness, and then lower our eyes and meditate on it with the mental consciousness. The internal image — the conceptual appearance of the candle in our mind — is the observed object upon which we develop serenity.

The Buddha spoke of four main categories of observed objects for meditation: (1) extensive objects, (2) objects for purifying behavior, (3) objects of expertise, and (4) objects for purifying afflictions. Understanding the purpose and benefits of these various meditation objects, we will choose one of them, not a candle or a flower, as our object of meditation.

### *Extensive Objects*

Extensive objects are so called because they are used for the development of both serenity and insight. They are of four types:

1. *Analytical images* are observed by insight that analyzes its object.
2. *Nonanalytical images* are observed by serenity that focuses on the object without analyzing it. Analytical and nonanalytical images are posited in terms of how the mind observes the object. They are conceptual appearances of the object, which may be the five objects for purifying behavior, the objects of expertise, and objects for purifying afflictions.
3. *The limits of existence* refers to the extent of phenomena and are posited in terms of the observed object. The *limits for the diversity of phenomena*

means phenomena must be either permanent or impermanent — that is the limit of what they can be. The five aggregates are the limit of what impermanent phenomena can be; if it is impermanent, it must belong to one of the five aggregates. The four truths are the limit of what is to be known. The *limits for the nature of phenomena* means reason establishes the truth of those meditation objects. Upon reaching an understanding of the limit of a phenomenon, we fix our mindfulness on it with stabilizing meditation.

4. *The purpose we seek to accomplish* is posited in terms of the result and refers to gaining the fruit of serenity and insight.

### *Objects for Purifying Behavior*

Meditation on an object for purifying behavior helps those whose behavior is dominated by a specific affliction to pacify that affliction. The affliction is one that we have become familiar with over many lifetimes and is now prominent in our mind. Five objects for purifying behavior are taught according to the affliction that disturbs our mind the most.

1. To counteract strong desire, we concentrate on the ugly aspect of the person or thing to which we are attached. The meditation on the body to counteract sexual desire is an example of this. To investigate whether the body is attractive, we examine the different parts of the body — liver, muscles, blood, and so on — or the body as a corpse. When the aspect of its foulness appears, we concentrate on that.
2. To subdue strong anger, resentment, and animosity, we cultivate serenity on the experience of love, wishing friends, strangers, and enemies to have happiness and its causes.
3. When suffering from confusion, we meditate on the twelve links, the dependent process through which cyclic existence arises. Seeing that there is no person who creates causes and experiences results or who cycles in saṃsāra, we cultivate serenity on that.
4. To purify conceit, we concentrate on the five mental and physical aggregates, the twelve sources, and the eighteen constituents. Focusing on these components dissolves the conceit of being a self separate from

its parts. Because the detail and diversity of these things are difficult to understand, our conceit will decrease.

5. To pacify distracting and discursive thoughts, we meditate on the breath by observing inhalation and exhalation, with or without counting the breaths.

### *Objects of Expertise*

Objects of expertise are so called because becoming skilled or knowledgeable about them refutes a personal self and facilitates realizing emptiness. Meditation on any of the sets of objects below increases concentration as well as wisdom.

1. Knowledgeable about the *five aggregates*, we know that the I and mine do not exist separate from the aggregates.
2. With knowledge about the *eighteen constituents*, we understand that they arise dependent on their respective causes and conditions.
3. Skill in the *twelve sources* is knowing that the six external sources are the object conditions of consciousness; the six internal sources are dominant conditions of consciousness; and the immediately preceding consciousness, which is included in the mental source, is the immediately preceding condition of the six consciousnesses.<sup>48</sup>
4. Knowledge of the *twelve links of dependent origination* entails realizing impermanence, duḥkha, and selflessness in relation to the twelve links.
5. Knowing *appropriate and inappropriate results* is understanding that it is appropriate for fortunate ripening results to arise from virtue but not from nonvirtue.

### *Objects for Purifying Afflictions*

Objects for purifying afflictions are general antidotes to afflictions and help us to purify coarse and subtle afflictions of the desire, form, and formless realms by temporarily suppressing them with concentration and then cutting their root with wisdom. To temporarily suppress afflictions, the meditation object is the coarseness of the lower levels of meditative absorptions and the peacefulness of the higher levels. This is done to gain progressively higher levels of meditative

absorption in the form and formless realms. For example, someone who has attained the first dhyāna and seeks to attain the second dhyāna contemplates the first dhyāna as coarse and the second as peaceful. Through this, she will suppress the afflictions associated with the first dhyāna and attain the concentration of the second dhyāna.

Cutting the root of afflictions is done by meditating on the sixteen attributes of the four truths: impermanence and so forth. Combining serenity with insight into these sixteen leads to attaining the ārya paths and liberation.

In addition to the four main categories of observed objects taught by the Buddha to cultivate serenity, other objects may be used with success.

### *The Conventional Nature of the Mind*

The conventional nature of the mind may be the observed object. Here we focus on the mere clarity (luminosity) and cognizance (awareness) that is the mind. The expression “mind focuses on mind” does not mean that a single instance of mind looks at itself. Rather, one moment of mind focuses on the immediately preceding moment of mind. To do this requires understanding the mind’s nature and being able to identify the mind.

The mind resembles a crystal. When a crystal is placed on a colored cloth, the color of the cloth is evident and prominent, but the clarity of the crystal is obscured. When the crystal is removed from the colored cloth, its own quality of clarity can be perceived. Similarly, when the mind is distracted toward external objects and internal conceptualizations, its own clear and cognizant nature is obscured, but when it can be seen alone, its qualities of clarity (that reflects objects by arising in their aspect) and of cognizance (that knows objects) become evident. Words alone cannot give us the full flavor of clarity and cognizance; to know them we must identify and experience them ourselves.

Identifying the mind is not easy, as it is usually directed outward to sense objects or inward toward feelings of happiness and pain. The mind is covered by layers of conceptions: thoughts and emotions, hopes and fears about the past and the future, all of which obscure its clear and cognizant nature. To perceive the mind, we need to peel away these layers, “capture” the clear and cognizant nature of the mind, and stabilize our attention on it. The mind needs to become familiar with staying in the present; then we will be able to see the true face of our mind.

To identify the mind, look at an object with a muted, uniform color. Gaze at it, but focus on the mind that is perceiving it. Maintain a strong determination to maintain your focus on the mind without being distracted. When your mindfulness is strong, you will be able to immediately identify when the mind is distracted by an external object such as a sound or an internal object such as a thought or feeling. By immediately identifying distractions as they arise and withdrawing your attention from them, return your focus to the perceiving mind. Gradually these obscurations will cease and you will perceive a stable, lucid state of mind.

When the mind is able to remain in the present, undisturbed by thoughts of the past and the future, you may experience a vacuum. This is not the emptiness that is the ultimate truth, but an absence of the solidity you are accustomed to. This experience of a vacuum arises because you are so habituated to external objects that when you remove your mind from them and stay in the present, you feel there is a vacuum, an absence. As you continually increase the duration of this experience, you will have a glimpse of the clear and cognizant nature of the mind. That is, within the experience of the absence of sense stimuli, gradually the clarity and cognizance of the mind become more obvious. This is the conventional mind that is an object of meditation for developing serenity.

At first you will be able to identify and remain focused on the clear and aware nature of mind for only a short while. However, as you continue to practice, this time will be extended. You will begin to see that the mind is like a mirror or like totally clear and still water. Objects can appear and disappear without disturbing the medium in which they arise. Noticing this, you will be able to observe your thoughts and perceptions without getting hooked by them. They will arise and pass away without ruffling the stillness of the mind.

If your attention flags, remember a happy or a suffering experience, and without indulging in these feelings, use them to clearly identify the mind and then return your concentration to the conventional nature of the mind.

The challenge with using the mind as the observed object is that because it lacks form, we can easily slip into meditating on a mere conception of the lack of materiality. We may also fall into blank-minded meditation on nothingness. In both cases we have lost the object of meditation. We may think we are meditating on the mind, but we are not. Longchen Rabjampa speaks of this in his Dzogchen writings and advises that to remedy it practitioners purify the seeds of destructive

karma, accumulate merit, study the teachings, and practice under the guidance of a qualified spiritual mentor.

### *Emptiness*

Some people prefer to use emptiness — the lack of inherent existence — as their observed object for cultivating serenity. This is called “seeking meditation on the basis of the view” and is possible only for practitioners with exceptionally sharp aptitude who have realized emptiness through reliable inference. Temporarily forsaking analysis on the ultimate mode of existence, they concentrate on a conceptual understanding of it.

The danger here is that if you lack clear ascertainment of emptiness, your focus on it may weaken, and you may meditate on nothingness instead. For this reason, most spiritual mentors recommend “seeking the view on the basis of meditation” and encourage first using the image of the Buddha or another object to gain serenity and then look to attain a stable inferential realization of emptiness.

### *The Buddha*

In his *Stages of Meditation*, Kamalaśīla spoke of the image of the Buddha as the meditation object for cultivating serenity. He based this on the *Sūtra on the Concentration That Perceives the Buddha of the Present Face to Face* (*Pratyutpanna-buddha-saṃmukhāvasthita-samādhi Sūtra*) and the *King of Concentration Sūtra* (*Samādhirāja Sūtra*).

Developing deep familiarity with the image of the Buddha has many advantages: We can easily recollect the Buddha’s qualities, which is especially helpful at the time of death. Our refuge will deepen, inspiring our mind. We will create merit, which contributes to the attainment of a buddha’s form body. Other practices such as making offerings and prostrations to the field of merit will become more alive. This also prepares us for tantric practice in which we imagine ourselves as deities and our environment as the deity’s maṇḍala and concentrate single-pointedly on that.

To do this meditation, look at a photo or statue of Śākyamuni Buddha or reflect on an eloquent description of him. Then lower your eyes and visualize the

Buddha as a three-dimensional living being in the space in front of you. Seated on a throne, lotus, and flat cushions of the sun and moon, his body is made of brilliant golden light. Imagining a small figure makes the mind more alert, visualizing it being very bright opposes laxity, and imagining it to be dense or heavy prevents restlessness and scattering.

To begin, mentally recollect the basic features of the Buddha's form — his head, torso, arms, legs, and so on. Then focus single-pointedly on his body as a whole. If it is not completely clear, which it certainly won't be in the early stages, that is fine. Simply focus your attention on it, even if it is just a general golden shape. When the image fades, review the features of his body once again and then sustain your concentration on the entire form. If some parts of the Buddha's body appear clearly, focus on them, and if they fade, return your attention to the entire body.

Do not insist on trying to visualize every detail clearly before concentrating on the image of the Buddha. Doing so interferes with stable concentration. However, if you develop concentration on the image that appears, the mind will settle down and clarity will develop. People are different: for some the image appears easily, for others it does not. Some people have a clear image, others do not. Some people have a stable image, others do not. Regardless, we must continue meditating.

Sometimes instead of a golden body his body may appear to be another color, or instead of a seated Buddha the image of a standing Buddha will appear. Do not follow these distortions but bring your attention back to your original meditation object. Apply the techniques described below to eliminate the various hindrances and faults that may arise.

## REFLECTION

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1. Recall the benefits of developing concentration on the image of the Buddha: it deepens your refuge in the Three Jewels, brings mindfulness of the Buddha's excellent qualities, and plants imprints on your mindstream to be able to think of the Buddha when you die.
2. After looking at a statue or painting of the Buddha, lower your eyes and visualize the Buddha with his body of golden light in the space in front of you.
3. Go over the details and then focus on the Buddha's body as a whole, being satisfied with however clear the image may be.

4. When the image becomes fuzzy, review the details again and then focus again on the whole image.
  5. If distractions arise, renew your mindfulness of the Buddha. If lethargy arises, apply the antidotes to energize the mind.
- 

### *The Breath*

The breath is a good meditation object, especially for beginners, and can be effective for attaining serenity. It is not as subtle as the mind and not as gross as an external object. Some meditators have told me that when they focus on the breath for a while, the mind becomes very still and settled. Breathing meditation is helpful to calm the mind when it gets excited or upset in daily life. The stillness it brings enables the mind to take a rest and have some respite from the afflictions. Nevertheless, a more lasting and powerful approach to subduing the afflictions is to reflect on dependent arising, emptiness, and the benefits of bodhicitta.

### *Observed Objects in Tantra*

Some people prefer to generate serenity during tantric practice, using the image of themselves as a deity or a syllable visualized at a specific point in the deity's body as the observed object. This is fine, although some masters advise developing serenity on one of the objects mentioned in Sūtrayāna first because they consider serenity as preliminary to tantra. Meditating on the deity's body has the additional benefits of counteracting ordinary appearance and ordinary grasping. For those practicing the three lower tantras, serenity is attained during the yoga with signs; for those practicing highest yoga tantra, it is attained during the generation stage. The method for developing serenity by pacifying the five hindrances, eliminating the five faults, cultivating the eight antidotes, and so forth is the same as in Sūtrayāna.

To use the image of yourself as a deity as the meditation object involves receiving tantric empowerment. During the sādhana practice, meditate on emptiness and dissolve your polluted body into emptiness. Then think that the mind understanding emptiness appears as the deity with a divine body made of



light. Establish divine identity of yourself as the deity. Then review the features of the deity's body and focus single-pointedly on the general image.

### *Other Objects*

Bodhibhadra, a master at Nālandā and one of Atiśa's spiritual mentors, set out a variety of meditation objects to develop serenity in his *Chapter on the Collections of Concentration* (*Samādhi-sambhāra-parivarta*). To outline them (LC 3:38):

1. Serenity attained by looking inward
  - a. Focusing on the body
    - Focusing on the body itself in the aspect of a deity
    - Focusing on the body as foul, for example as a skeleton
    - Focusing on a special syllable or implement of a deity
  - b. Focusing on what is based on the body
    - Focusing on the breath
    - Focusing on a subtle divine syllable
    - Focusing on the subtle drops in the body
    - Focusing on the aspects of light rays
    - Focusing on joy and bliss
2. Serenity based on an object of meditation
  - a. Special
    - Focusing on a deity's body
    - Focusing on a deity's speech
  - b. Common

### *Choosing Our Meditation Object*

The choice of object for serenity meditation depends on our disposition, faculties, and proclivity toward one object or another. For example, people who have asthma or allergies find focusing on the breath difficult. They prefer a visualized image or another object. People who can visualize easily may prefer to use a visualized image of the Buddha as their observed object. It is wise to consult

with your spiritual mentor when choosing the meditation object, but once you have chosen an object, do not keep changing it.

Many benefits are derived from choosing a meditation object that helps familiarize your mind with virtue. Noting this, Tsongkhapa cautions (LC 3:38):

Since you must achieve concentration using an object of serenity that has a particular purpose, those who achieve concentration using things like pebbles and twigs for objects of meditation are clearly ignorant of the teachings on objects of concentration.

Serenity is a practice of Buddhists and non-Buddhists alike; concentration is necessary to gain deeper understanding no matter which spiritual tradition we practice. Our Christian, Jewish, Hindu, and Muslim brothers and sisters may choose a meditation object from their own tradition as the observed object — the image of Christ, the star of David or a Hebrew letter, a Hindu deity, or an Islamic symbol — and apply the instructions described below to develop serenity.

Those from other faiths may also do analytical meditation. For instance, they could practice both stabilizing and analytical meditation to develop faith in God or to generate love for their fellow human beings. At an interfaith conference at Gethsemani, the late Thomas Merton's monastery in Kentucky, United States, I described how to gain serenity. The participants were sincere practitioners of their own faiths, and these teachings undoubtedly benefited them.

## *Structuring the Meditation Session*

A realistic attitude free from grandiose expectations of quick results is important when cultivating serenity. Unbroken continuity in our practice is also necessary. If we meditate for many hours one day and then not at all for three days, the benefit of cumulative practice will elude us.

For the first session each day, do all six preparatory practices described in chapter 6 of *The Foundation of Buddhist Practice*. Place an image of the Buddha on a table in front of you, make many offerings, and generate bodhicitta, thinking that you will develop serenity in order to attain full awakening for the benefit of all sentient beings. Sit in the seven-point position of Buddha Vairocana. This

position straightens the internal, subtle energy channels, allowing the winds or qi to flow smoothly.<sup>49</sup> This, in turn, makes the mind calmer. Sitting in this position facilitates concentration and establishes auspicious predispositions to attain a buddha's form body. Be sure to cultivate a bodhicitta motivation and observe your breath for a few minutes to calm the mind before focusing on your chosen meditation object.

For the remaining sessions begin with taking refuge in the Three Jewels and generating bodhicitta. Then contemplate the seven limbs to purify negativities and create merit, and request your spiritual mentors for inspiration so your meditation session will bear the desired fruits. Always dedicate the merit at the conclusion of each session.

In retreat or in daily practice, short meditation sessions are recommended to develop serenity. Pushing yourself to do long sessions is counterproductive. It makes the mind tight, so that instead of looking forward to meditating you will put it off, whereas if you are content at the conclusion of a session you will be happy to meditate later. As the mind becomes more stable, gradually increase the length of the sessions. Although cultivating serenity may be difficult at first, as you progress you will experience its benefits and meditation will become easier.

When cultivating serenity, meditation masters recommend having many meditation sessions each day. In each have several mini-sessions; initially meditate for five minutes, then take a short break during which you open your eyes and relax for a minute. Then do another five-minute session followed by another short break. Remain seated during the short breaks, but stretch your legs if necessary. Continue like this for the duration of the session. As your stability on the object increases, have fewer, but longer, mini-sessions. If suitable, you can eventually do four sessions each day in retreat setting. When cultivating serenity as part of your daily practice, your session may be fifteen to thirty minutes total.

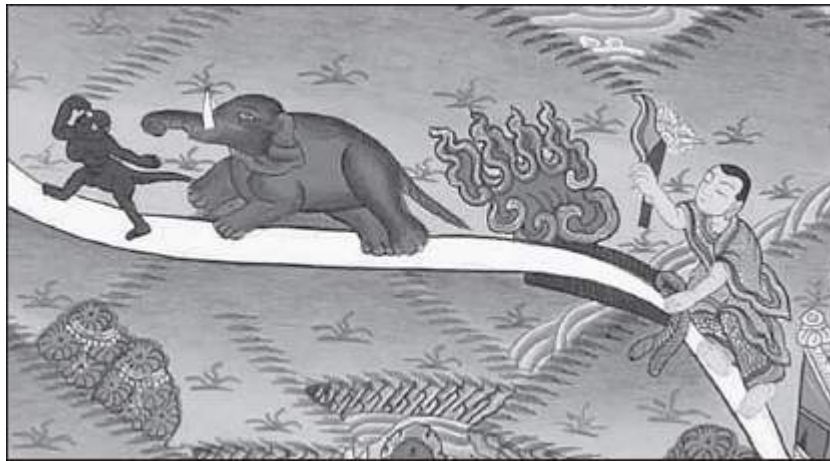
## *Working with the Body*

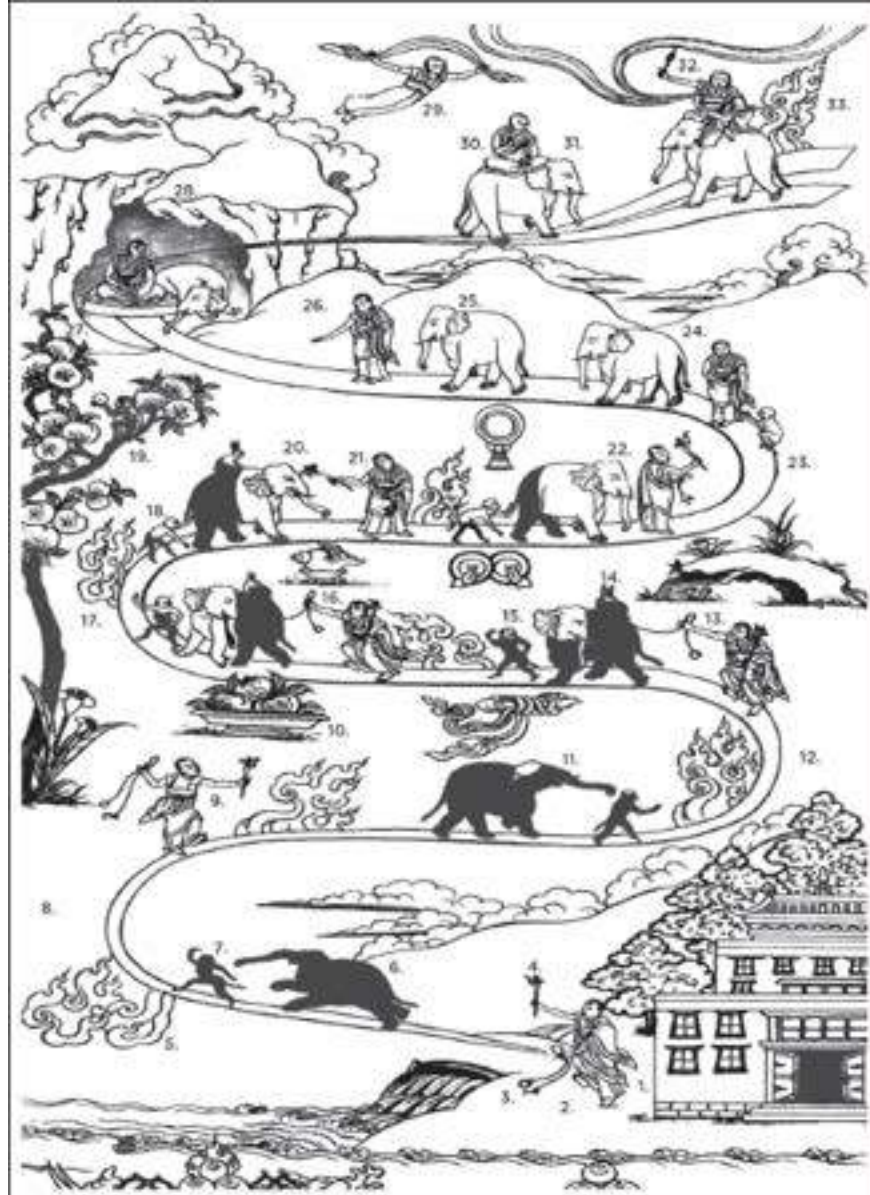
When we begin meditating, our body may be very restless. We fidget, trying to find that elusive comfortable position. We try using different cushions or putting them in different places. We may sit on a bench with our legs underneath it, or sit

on a chair. Although sometimes we are successful in finding a comfortable position, at other times no matter what we do the body isn't comfortable.

This in part is due to our body being unfamiliar with the meditation posture. Doing yoga, tai chi, qigong, or other exercises are effective for stretching the body and calming its energy. Keeping our body fit and healthy is important for meditation. Sometimes the physical restlessness is related to mental restlessness: our habituation with seeking distraction, craving for new and exciting experiences, or addiction to pleasurable feelings and the activities that bring them. We begin to notice that the stress in our mind and tightness in our body affect and amplify each other. Those of us who never thought of ourselves as being particularly anxious may discover that, in fact, we have a lot of anxiety and this makes sitting calmly in meditation a challenge.

Śāntideva said that there is nothing that does not become easier with practice, so we must persevere without pushing ourselves or holding unrealistic expectations. If we do so, gradually our body will get used to the meditation posture and tension will disperse.





## 7 | Obstacles and Antidotes

**L**EARNING THE METHOD to attain serenity is a precious opportunity, even if we are unable to implement every facet of it at this moment. We employ whatever we can in our daily practice, gradually increasing our ability to concentrate. When possible, we do long or short retreats. Studying and applying these teachings enables us to practice properly and to deal with the various hindrances that everyone experiences at one time or another while meditating. These instructions are detailed, and it is worthwhile to study them well.

### *The Five Hindrances*

When we meditate, distracting thoughts and afflictions easily arise in the minds of us ordinary beings. As our introspective awareness improves, we notice these more; memories of the past, plans for the future, objects of attachment, and images of people and situations we dislike pass through our mind. Some may think meditation is making them more distracted, but in fact this jumble of thoughts has been going on for a long time and only now are we noticing it. These thoughts and images impact us — affecting our outlook, moods, self-confidence, and behavior — even though we may not register them at the moment.

Because distracting thoughts are so pervasive, Asaṅga strongly advises that before we seriously endeavor to cultivate serenity, we direct our meditation toward subduing whichever affliction is strongest so that it does not repeatedly interrupt our meditation. Meditating on the objects for purifying behavior helps this. Becoming acquainted with the five hindrances and developing skill in their antidotes is also essential. This will make our mind more malleable and improve our ethical conduct and psychological well-being. With a more virtuous and focused mind, concentration, bodhicitta, and wisdom can grow.

The Pāli, Tibetan, and Chinese Buddhist traditions all speak of five hindrances (*nīvaraṇa*) that interfere with the cultivation of concentration: (1)



sensual desire (*kāmacchanda*), (2) malice (*vyāpāda, byāpāda*), (3) lethargy and sleepiness (*styāna-middha, thīna-middha*), (4) restlessness and regret (*auddhatya-kaukr̥tya, uddhacca-kukkucca*), and (5) deluded doubt (*vicikitsā, vicikicchā*). The explanation below is an amalgamation of instructions from these three traditions that come to the same point. It includes citations from Pāli scriptures, citations from Nāgārjuna's *Commentary to the Great Perfection of Wisdom* found in the Chinese canon,<sup>50</sup> and meditations from Vasubandhu's *Treasury of Knowledge* (*Abhidharmakośa*) and its *Autocommentary* (*Abhidharmakośa-bhāṣyam*) in the Tibetan canon.

Although the five hindrances are separate mental factors, separating one from the other in practice is not always easy because they arise in close proximity to one another. For example, we perceive or think about a pleasing person and sensual desire arises. But soon after, the same person becomes annoying and malice arises. This occurs because the craving and delight affiliated with sensual desire are also the cause for aversion and malice. These emotions are not unrelated.

The five hindrances obstruct the mind from abiding calmly and stably on the meditation object. It is the work of samādhi to clear these hindrances and calm the proliferations of thoughts and moods. To overcome them, we must see them clearly and then apply the antidotes.

### *Sensual Desire*

Sensual desire is attachment for objects of the desire realm, be they material — such as money, possessions, or food — or social — such as approval, praise, and reputation. Sensual desire is the hallmark of most societies; we are consumed with wanting more or better, and our minds are filled with plans and images of everything we believe will bring us happiness.

Sexual desire is human beings' strongest desire, and modern culture extols it. From childhood, we have been exposed to sexual images and have received the message that a large part of our worth as human beings is being sexually attractive. In addition to the natural desire that our bodies have as biological organisms, our self-esteem becomes wrapped up in our appearance and sexuality. This overemphasis on sex is psychologically unhealthy.

While pleasure itself is not “bad,” attachment to it diverts our mind from spiritual practice. We can spend an entire meditation session lost in fantasies of sensual desire. When this desire manifests, we often feel compelled to fulfill it, no matter what. This leads us to make impulsive decisions that often create destructive karma and bring problems down on us. Remembering the impermanent and unsatisfactory nature of the desirable object or person is helpful to subdue the urge to grasp it in order to fill the void, boredom, or loneliness inside of us. Nāgārjuna said in *Commentary to the Great Perfection of Wisdom* (NSP 635–36):

Desire is the net of the demons and an entangling web from which it is difficult to escape. Desire constitutes a burning heat which dries up all bliss. . . . Desire, like drawing close to a fiery pit, is extremely fearsome. It is like cornering a venomous snake, like an enemy invader brandishing a knife, like swallowing molten copper . . . like a lion blocking one’s path. All desires are just like this and are worthy of being feared. Desires cause people to undergo torment and suffering.

Those people who are attached to desire are like convicts in a prison, like a deer caught in a corral-trap, like birds snared in a net, like fish who have swallowed a hook . . . like a crow in the midst of a band of owls. . . . Desires are like blind men approaching an abyss, like a fly caught in hot oil, like a peaceful man caught up in military combat, like one who had entered a river of boiling brine, like one who licks a honey-smear blade.

When our mind becomes overwhelmed with sensual desire, an excellent antidote is contemplating the foul nature of the body — our own and others’ — to calm lust and craving. In chapter 8 of *Engaging in the Bodhisattvas’ Deeds*, Śāntideva presents the body to us as it actually is, exposing the senselessness of lust. Meditating on these verses, as well as analyzing the parts of the body in meditation, are effective methods for counteracting sexual attachment.

*Malice*



Malice, the wish to give harm, may arise toward many objects — a particular person, physical pain or mental anguish, loneliness, conflicting ideas, political figures, sounds, or whatever else meets with our disapproval. Malice is an unpleasant state that makes us vengeful, cynical, and fearful, but it is one that we may be familiar with, one that distracts us from using our human potential to do good.

Malice causes our actions to contradict Dharma advice and, as a result, we fall to unfortunate rebirths. It is likened to a thief that steals our virtue and a storehouse filled with all types of harsh speech. If malice arises while we sit in meditation, we may spend the entire session ruminating on the harms done to us, such that any concentration — except on the object of our anger — becomes impossible. Nāgārjuna quotes Śakra, the king of the devas, asking the Buddha (NSP 391):

What thing is it which, killed, brings peace and security?  
What thing is it which, slain, one has no regrets?  
What thing is it which is the root of venomousness?  
And which devours and destroys all forms of goodness?  
What thing is it which one slays and then one is praised?  
What thing is it which, slain, brings one no more distress?

The Buddha replies:

If one kills anger, the mind will be peaceful and secure.  
If one slays anger, the mind will have no regrets.  
It is anger which is the root of venomousness.  
It is anger which destroys all forms of goodness.  
If one slays anger, all buddhas offer praise.  
If one slays anger, one has no more distress.

Recognizing the disadvantages of anger and malice, turn your mind to the kindness of others. Releasing the judgmental, vengeful attitude, cultivate forgiveness and love. Our meditation on love should be personal. It is not difficult to wish well to an amorphous group of sentient beings suffering on the other side of the world. But wishing specific individuals to have happiness and its causes — especially those we know who have different political opinions or who

have harmed us or our dear ones — can be more challenging. Begin the meditation with individuals and gradually radiate love to all beings everywhere.

### *Lethargy and Sleepiness*

Lethargy manifests physically as lacking physical energy and stamina and mentally as mental heaviness; the mind is dull, unclear, and lacks energy. We feel bored and don't want to exert the energy to be interested in anything. This may occur because the mind is mired in negativity or exhausted by too much emotion.

Sleepiness is drowsiness; the five sense faculties have withdrawn and we may even nod off in meditation.

Lethargy and sleepiness are distinct mental factors but are explained together because they have the same cause, function, and antidote. They are caused by five factors: bad dreams, mental unhappiness, physical exhaustion, unbalanced food consumption, and depression. Both function to make the body and mind dull and are counteracted by a bright, alert mind.

From one perspective, lethargy and sleepiness are more problematic than other hindrances in that other hindrances can often be dispelled simply by recognizing them, whereas the mind is totally clouded over and unaware when lethargy and sleepiness reign. Nāgārjuna says that the buddhas and bodhisattvas admonish their indolent disciples by reminding us of the faults of saṃsāra and urging us to wake up immediately and follow the path to liberation (NSP 629):

You! Get up! Don't lie there hugging that stinking corpse  
that is all sorts of impurities falsely designated as a "person."  
It's as if you've gotten a serious disease or been shot by an arrow.  
With such an accumulation of suffering and pain, how can you sleep?

The entire world is burning up by the fire of death.  
You should be seeking means of escape. How then can you sleep?  
You're like a person in shackles being led to his execution.  
With disastrous harm so imminent, how can you sleep?

With insurgent fetters not yet destroyed and their harm not yet  
averted,  
it's as if you were sleeping in a room with a venomous snake

and as if you have met up with the soldiers' gleaming blades.  
At such a time, how can you sleep?

Sleep is a vast darkness in which nothing is visible.  
Every day it deceives and steals away your clarity.  
When sleep blankets the mind, you are not aware of anything.  
With such great faults as these, how can you sleep?

While sitting in meditation, you may notice that the mind can be restless one moment and drowsy the next. This indicates that lethargy and sleepiness are not necessarily signs of physical fatigue or lack of sleep. They are often a way that ignorance and resistance sabotage your attempts to meditate. Sometimes they occur as a result of destructive karma created in the past: we may have avoided the Dharma or treated holy beings and holy objects disrespectfully. Making prostrations together with the four opponent powers before we sit in meditation is an excellent way to invigorate the body while purifying karmic obstacles. This may be done in conjunction with reciting "A Bodhisattva's Confession of Ethical Downfalls." While prostrating, imagine brilliant light from the Buddha filling your body-mind, dispelling physical and mental heaviness and uplifting your mental energy. While doing breathing meditation, imagine inhaling bright light with each breath and exhaling dullness in the form of smoke that vanishes in space. Remembering impermanence is also effective, as is contemplating uplifting topics, such as the qualities of the Three Jewels, the preciousness of your human life, and the rare opportunity you possess to cultivate wonderful spiritual qualities.

Chinese monasteries have wake-up devices that some monastics use. One is a piece of wood attached to the meditator's ear with a string. If he nods off, it falls and pulls the ear. Another is a stick that when hit on an acupuncture point on a meditator's back makes a cracking sound that rouses the person.

During break times, look long distances, and look at the stars and the moon at night to enlarge your mental scope. Make the meditation room cooler or remove your sweater, and avoid overeating. Splash cold water on your face before the session.

*Restlessness and Regret*

Restlessness and regret are separate mental factors that are combined as one hindrance because they have the same cause, function, and antidote. Both arise due to preconceptions that remember our relatives, friends, home, previous good times, and loving companions. Both function to make the mind unsettled, and both lack calm. Serenity is their antidote.

Restlessness is mental agitation that includes anxiety, fear, apprehension, excitement, and worry. An incessant flow of thoughts bounce from one topic to another. Restlessness is of three types: physically restless, we jump from one activity to another aimlessly; verbally restless, we get caught up in singing, chatting, arguing over trivial topics, and discussing worldly affairs; mentally restless, we are filled with distractions and discursive thoughts. Restlessness is likened to an unrestrained drunken elephant and a camel without a nose ring; both are nearly impossible to control. For these reasons, rather than allow restlessness to continue unabated, we must recognize it and then deliberately calm body, speech, and mind so that they will be undisturbed and more manageable.

Regret is an uncomfortable feeling that we did something we should not have done or did not do something we should have done. Regret is of two types. (1) We spend time and energy in useless activities. When we realize how much time we have wasted, we feel remorse and worry that we'll never be able to meditate properly. (2) After engaging in serious destructive karma, we feel overwhelmed with guilt and self-reproach. Although regretting our misdeeds is virtuous, here the mind is unclear and falls into unproductive and exaggerated guilt.

Both restlessness and regret take us into the past, longing for pleasures long gone or worrying and guilty about actions done or not done. Both also take us into the future, restlessness planning pleasurable experiences, regret anxious about what could go wrong. Our thoughts are immersed in events that are not happening now.

Observing our breath is one antidote to the flurry of agitated and remorseful thoughts. Mindfulness of the movements of the body helps to return attention to the present. Paying attention to our present physical, verbal, and mental activities alleviates fears about the future and remorse about the past. We discover that the present is agreeable and full of opportunities to create virtue.

Guilt is especially useless; it draws us into self-preoccupation in a most unhealthy way. Nāgārjuna counsels (NSP 631):

If you feel regret for an offense,  
having regretted it, put it down and let it go.  
In this way, the mind abides peaceful and happy.  
Do not constantly remain attached to it in your thoughts.

If you possess the two kinds of regret,  
of having not done what you should have done, or having done what  
you should not have done,  
because this regret attaches to the mind,  
it is the mark of a foolish person.

It is not the case that, on account of feeling guilty,  
you will somehow be able to do what you failed to do.  
All of the ill deeds that you have already committed  
cannot be caused to become undone.

Generating the type of regret involved in purification is useful. Having sincerely performed the four opponent powers, we can release self-reproach and guilt.

### *Deluded Doubt*

Doubt is indecisiveness. One type of doubt involves seeking answers to genuine questions we have about the path or the meditation technique. That doubt invites curiosity and can usually be cleared up by consulting our spiritual mentor or a knowledgeable Dharma friend.

Another type of doubt — a useless spinning of thoughts — is deluded. We have so many options to choose from that we get caught in doubt: Should I go to this Dharma center or that one? Should I rely on this teacher or that one? Should I ordain? Am I doing this meditation correctly? How long should my meditation sessions be? We may doubt our abilities or doubt that it is possible to actualize our spiritual goals. We are mired in the quicksand of indecision and confusion.

Deluded doubt specifically concerns Dharma teachings: It seems that rebirth doesn't exist. I'm not sure but it sounds like emptiness means nothing exists. Is it really possible to become a buddha? Isn't that just fantasy and wishful thinking?

Appearing so real and important, doubt immobilizes us. It's like trying to sew with a two-pointed needle: we can't go this way; we can't go that way. Deluded doubt inhibits generating the faith and confidence in the Three Jewels that makes our minds receptive to learning and practicing the Dharma. As a result, even if we meet the Buddhadharma and encounter an excellent spiritual mentor, the benefit we receive from them is lost to us. We resemble someone who goes to a land of great wealth, but lacking a bag, is unable to take anything away with him.

While not all forms of doubt inhibit gaining serenity, three foremost ones do:

1. Doubt in ourselves prevents us from trying: I'm not capable of this; my intelligence is limited and the defilements and seeds of destructive karma obscuring my mind are too great. Such unrealistic self-denigrating thoughts paralyze. The opportunity to act to improve our situation — especially by employing the mind-training methods — is always present.

2. Doubt in our spiritual mentor arises from looking only at his or her superficial characteristics with a judgmental attitude: My spiritual mentor's behavior is nothing special. He or she doesn't have any realizations of the path, so what will I gain from following him? Considering ourselves wise enough to evaluate our spiritual mentor's practice, we are blind to our own arrogance. To free ourselves from this doubt, Nāgārjuna recommends that we think of gold in a smelly pouch. If we want the gold, we have to take the pouch too. Then, instead of dwelling on the mentor's shortcomings, we reflect that our mentor is instructing us in the Buddha's teachings, just as the Buddha himself would do. Rather than focus on the pouch, we direct our interest to the gold inside.

3. Doubt in the Dharma makes us wonder if buddhahood and the path to attain it exist. Not knowing how to think clearly about the topic, our mind swirls in confusion. We need some patience; it's unrealistic to think that all our questions must be answered before we can do any Dharma practice at all. By practicing what we understand, we increase our respect in the teachings and open our minds to understanding other topics. Nāgārjuna advises (NSP 631):

Just as when a person stands at a fork in the road  
and is so confused by doubt that he goes nowhere at all,  
[when you seek realization of] the true character of phenomena,  
doubt acts in just the same way.

Because you remain doubtful, you don't diligently seek  
[to realize] the true character of phenomena [*dharmatā*].  
This doubt comes forth from confusion.  
Among all the detrimental [mental factors], it is the worst . . .

Although you may possess doubts while abiding in the world,  
you should still accord with the sublime and virtuous Dharma.  
Just as when you contemplate a fork in the road,  
you should follow that path which is most beneficial.

The five hindrances are subsumed in the three poisons and are related to the 84,000 afflictions. The hindrance of sensual desire is the poison of attachment, the hindrance of malice is the poison of anger, the hindrances of lethargy and sleepiness and doubt are the poison of confusion, and the hindrance of restlessness and regret is based on all three poisons. These four categories — attachment, anger, confusion, and all three — each subsume 21,000 afflictions, for a total of 84,000. By applying antidotes to three poisons and five hindrances, all afflictions are overcome.

Zhiyi says that a practitioner who has successfully suppressed these five through serenity is like a person who has recovered from a threatening disease, a famished person arriving in a land of plenty, and a hostage being released from terrorists. Her mind is peaceful, responsive, clear, and blissful. Suppressing afflictions through serenity gives us temporary respite; only insight into emptiness will eradicate the hindrances forever.

## REFLECTION

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Review the five hindrances and for each one contemplate:

1. What is the meaning of this hindrance?
  2. How does it interrupt concentration?
  3. Pinpoint examples of it in your own experience. Which of the five is most troublesome for you?
-

## *Taming the Five Hindrances*

Although we may think that we are the only ones in the meditation hall who are distracted while everyone else abides in blissful samādhi, we are not alone in having difficulty concentrating. Everyone must deal with the same hindrances in meditation. The hindrances may manifest as images in the mind, ruminating thoughts, or powerful emotions. When a hindrance is not so strong, simply returning the mind to the object of meditation and renewing our mindfulness is sufficient. But when it is strong, we must temporarily leave the object of meditation and reflect on another topic to counteract the hindrance and bring the mind back to a balanced state. In the *Discourse on the Removal of Distracting Thoughts* (MN 20), the Buddha taught five methods for doing this. In sequence they are:

1. Pay attention to a virtuous object. Precisely contemplate the opposite of the distracting thought or emotion.
  - For attachment to material possessions, contemplate impermanence.
  - For sexual desire, contemplate the parts of the body.
  - For anger, hatred, and resentment toward sentient beings, contemplate love.
  - For anger at inanimate things, analyze their components — the four elements (earth, water, fire, and wind).
  - For aversion to situations, contemplate that they are the result of your previous karma and of circumstances that you do not have control over in this life (such as other people's actions, the weather, and so on).
  - For intellectual doubt, study the teachings.
  - For emotional doubt, contemplate the qualities of the Buddha, Dharma, and Saṅgha.
2. Examine the danger and disadvantages of those distracting thoughts:
  - They cause your own and others' suffering now and in the future.
  - They obstruct wisdom, cause difficulties on the path, and lead you away from nirvāṇa.



- Like the carcass of a snake, dog, or human being hanging around your neck, they weigh you down.
3. Do not give attention to those thoughts; ignore them. This resembles turning our head away from something that we do not want to see. In the break time between sessions, engage in an activity that does not allow your attention to go to these thoughts: take a walk, clean the room, paint the figure of the Buddha.
  4. Examine the formation of those thoughts. For example:
    - Ask yourself, Why am I thinking this? What are the factors that led to this thought or emotion coming into my mind?
    - From a detached perspective, watch the thoughts flow by until gradually the flow of thoughts quiets down.
  5. “Crush mind with mind” — that is, crush the nonvirtuous mental state with a virtuous one.

When we repeatedly apply these counterforces to the hindrances and train the mind in serenity meditation over time, nonvirtuous thoughts will decrease and the mind will become quiet, single-pointed, and concentrated. We will become the master of our own thoughts and will not be subjected to disturbing thoughts. This occurs not through unhealthy psychological repression of thoughts but by learning to work with the mind in a constructive way. By employing these five techniques in the proper circumstances and proper manner, with practice we will be able to redirect the mind in order to attain the “higher minds” (*P. adhicitta*) — the four dhyānas and four formless absorptions.

Although we ultimately seek nonconceptual realizations, both the Pāli and Sanskrit traditions employ conception in varying ways in the process of developing serenity. For example, in the Pāli tradition the *asubha* meditation on the unattractive nature of the body involves focusing on the conceptual appearances of the various parts of the body. To meditate on love, we reflect on others’ kindness and visualize sentient beings around us. The antidote to lethargy is to visualize sunlight filling our body-mind. All these involve conceptual consciousnesses.

Using thought in this way is beneficial in counteracting incorrect ways of thinking, such as proliferating conceptualizations (*prapañca*, *papañca*, T. *spros pa*), a profusion of discursive, ruminating thoughts. These unrealistic thoughts

distract the mind and lead it to negativity. Learning to think clearly and in accord with the truth the Buddha taught helps to remedy them.

### *Meditating on the Body to Counteract Desire*

The meditations on the body found in the *Treasury of Knowledge* are presented as antidotes to the sensual desire that interferes with concentration. They can also be done as practices of mindfulness of the body that aid in the cultivation of wisdom. These meditations on the body may initially appear off-putting, but this is precisely why they work to counteract sexual desire. Perhaps the resistance we have to these meditations is that we aren't yet ready to give up enjoyable sensual pleasures!

To do these meditations on the body, examine what the body is, both now when it is alive and later after it has become a corpse and is in various stages of decay. When dissecting sexual attachment, see that it arises in relationship to the body's color, shape, tactile contact, and usefulness. To counteract attachment to the beautiful color of someone's body — the color of their skin, eyes, teeth, and so forth — contemplate that no matter how beautiful his or her body is now, after death it will not be good looking in the least. Imagine it as a corpse: first it will turn a dark-bluish color; as it decays further it will become reddish, and finally it will become a rotten, black corpse. Even when the person is alive, the color of their body may turn ugly — for example, when bruised or scarred. Open sores, boils, and infected areas are likewise unpleasant to look at.

As an antidote to attachment to the attractive shape of another's body, contemplate its appearance when it is a bloated and swollen corpse. Larger animals and birds eat the flesh and then tear the body apart to gnaw on the bones, destroying its beautiful shape. Even when a person is alive, the shape of their body may be disfigured due to illness or injury.

To counteract attachment to the touch of their body, imagine it as a corpse being devoured by maggots and other insects; just the idea of touching it quickly fades away. Eventually the flesh is consumed, revealing the skeleton; this is hardly a body we want to embrace. Even when alive, the body may be covered with open sores infested with worms. Here in India we see lepers whose flesh has rotted and fallen off, revealing the bone underneath.

The usefulness of another's body refers to the pleasure derived from it. This may be sexual pleasure, pleasure because they serve us, or pleasure from their personality. Here we consider that person almost like an instrument for our own use, enjoyment, and pleasure. As an antidote, meditate on an unmoving corpse or cadaver. It lacks a personality and cannot do anything for us.

As an antidote to all four — color, shape, touch, and usefulness — beginning at the person's forehead or toe, visualize the person's flesh rotting and falling off piece by piece, until only a skeleton remains. Then imagine the same happening to others' bodies, until the entire universe is entirely filled with bones. Alternatively, meditate on the components of the body — the intestines, stomach, muscles, kidneys, spleen, brain, blood, and so on. Whether the body is alive or dead, the color, shape, and touch of its organs are unpleasant. Some people faint when seeing the inside of a body.

Contemplate your own body in a similar way, for one day it will be a rotting corpse or just a pile of ashes if cremated. Meditating on the body as described above causes the mind to become disillusioned with the splendors of saṃsāra. It is less distracted by sensual desire and can more easily be applied to concentration.

### *Meditating on a Skeleton to Counteract Restlessness*

Meditating on your own body as a skeleton makes the mind sober and is a general antidote for restlessness. The following meditations on a skeleton may also work to eliminate laxity because the mind focuses on an object that becomes more and more subtle.

Begin the meditation by focusing at your midbrow and visualize the flesh gradually falling off until only your skeleton remains. The skeleton grows in size and more bones appear until all of space is filled with bones. Concentrate on that for a while, then imagine the bones absorbing one into another until only the room is filled with bones. They absorb further until your skeleton is all that remains. Meditate single-pointedly on this. This is the yoga for beginners.

Once you are able to do the above meditation well, you can move on to the second level, the yoga of thorough training. The process of visualization is similar: begin by focusing on a small piece of exposed bone at your mid-brow and imagine the flesh gradually falling away from the rest of your body until only your skeleton remains. It expands, filling the entire room with bones. More bones

appear until the whole environment is brimming with bones. Then narrow the scope of the visualization as before, with the bones gradually absorbing one into another until only your skeleton remains. The skeleton dissolves from the bottom upward until only the upper half of your skull remains. Concentrate on this, fine-tuning the focus of your meditation in this way.

In the third level, the yoga of complete attention, visualize in the same way as before, expanding the range of bones and then withdrawing and absorbing them until only the upper half of the skull remains. Then that dissolves until only a tiny fragment of bone is present at your midbrow. Concentrate on that single-pointedly.<sup>51</sup>

This meditation brings many advantages. First, meditating on the foul aspects of the body subdues attachment and restlessness, which fantasizes about the pleasures we crave. The mind settles, and our attention no longer scatters to objects of attachment. Second, by making our observed object subtler and subtler — first the skeleton, then the upper half of the skull, and finally the bone fragment at the midbrow — we also counteract laxity by increasing the intensity of the clarity of our visualization. These two bring the third advantage, the ability to concentrate single-pointedly on the chosen object of meditation.

The above meditations on foulness act as antidotes to attachment and restlessness. Although they do not eliminate the seeds of these afflictions from our mindstreams, they reduce their coarse level by preventing their manifesting in our minds. Whether an object is actually attractive or not, our minds are fully capable of fabricating beauty. By reflecting that our own and others' bodies ultimately become bones, we see that there's nothing left to desire but the bones, which are not very attractive. If you wonder if these meditations really work to calm attachment, the way to find out is to do them.

### *Meditating on the Breath to Counteract Discursive Thought*

The Buddha recommended meditation on the breath to overcome discursive thought (*vikalpa*, *vikappa*, T. *rnam rtog*) — mental busyness that hinders our meditation. This meditation, taught by Vasubandhu in *Abhidharmakośa-bhāṣyam*, progresses in six phases. The Chinese master Zhiyi's *Six Dharma Gates to the Sublime*, written in the sixth century, also teaches this meditation. The coming and going of the breath as you exhale and inhale is the observed object.

1. *Counting the breath.* Relax the mind and body. Then breathe comfortably, letting your out and in breaths be equal in speed and strength. Mentally count each cycle of the breath going out and coming in until you reach ten. Don't count more than ten because restlessness may arise from the mind focusing too tightly. If you count less than ten, you may not be able to overcome laxity. Count clearly; don't mix up the numbers or forget them. Avoid confusion over whether you're exhaling or inhaling.

As you exhale, be aware, Now I'm about to breathe out, I'm breathing out, the exhalation is almost finished, the exhalation has finished. When inhaling, think, Now I'm about to breathe in, now I'm breathing in, the inhalation is about to finish, the inhalation has finished.

Even though the instructions are simple, doing this meditation properly with concentration is difficult. If you concentrate well, thoughts will disappear and you will be left with the radiant nature of the mind.

2. *Following the breath.* Breathe slowly and while inhaling follow the breath in. Imagine it going to the throat, heart, navel, thighs, and soles of the feet. Get a sense that the breath pervades the body, which has many channels through which the breath passes. When exhaling, follow the breath as it leaves your body. Imagine it goes a short distance outside your nostrils before you inhale again. This is called "following," because the mind follows the breath.

3. *Placing.* Breathe normally, but rather than concentrate on exhaling and inhaling, concentrate on the internal flow of the breath within the body. It is like a fine, still thread running from the tip of your nose to the soles of your feet. Examine the sensations the breath causes within the body along the points of this thread. Do you feel hot, cold, comfortable, uncomfortable, and so forth? Examine the pleasant, unpleasant, and neutral feelings that arise from the breath's movement in the body.

4. *Investigating.* Observe the breathing process. As you inhale and exhale, be aware that the breath isn't just wind; it's in the nature of all four elements — earth, water, fire, and wind — and the four element derivatives — visible form, odor, taste, and tangible objects. The breath is part of the body. Observe how the mind and mental factors depend on the breath, and how the mind and mental factors depend on the body and breath. The breath and the mind and mental factors are interrelated. Observe the way in which they mutually affect each other. When the relationship of mind and body is broken, the person dies.

5. *Changing*. Instead of focusing on the breath, use your mind, which has become serviceable and concentrated, to examine the four truths, which now become your object of meditation. As a result of this, the mind is able to proceed through the four stages of the path of preparation (heat, peak, fortitude, and supreme dharma).

6. *Purifying*. The mind goes on to cultivate the paths of seeing, meditation, and no-more-learning.

These six meditations are progressive and profound, the latter being harder than the preceding ones. When developing ability in them, start with the first and, when it is stable, proceed to the second, and so on. Alternatively, you can do several in one sitting, going all the way through the sequence of six.

The above three meditations on the foul aspects of the body, the skeleton, and the breath can be the observed objects for cultivating serenity or they can be used to counteract the hindrances of attachment, restlessness, and discursive thought when they interrupt your meditation on another observed object. In the latter case, return to your original observed object after the affliction has subsided.

People tell me that when doing analytic meditation on lamrim or deity yoga practice, their minds are either distracted, wandering from this object to that, or they are drowsy. In this case, I recommend doing the meditations described above over a period of time. Witness for yourself the effect they have. The Buddha recommended these meditations because he knew they work!

## REFLECTION

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1. Do the three meditations described above by first making an outline of the meditation points: (1) meditating on the body to counteract desire, (2) meditating on a skeleton to counteract restlessness, and (3) meditating on the breath to counteract discursive thought (mental chatter).
  2. Be aware of how each meditation affects your mind when you do it repeatedly.
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## *Overcoming Hindrances*

It is important not to become discouraged when the five hindrances arise in your meditation, but to make effort to eliminate them. This effort is different from pushing ourselves — it is steady and consistent; the mind is neither too tight nor too loose. As we familiarize ourselves with the antidotes over time, hindrances will gradually subside and the mind will become clearer. The concentrated mind of samādhi is blissful and focused. Free from the five hindrances, it can see the body, feelings, mind, and phenomena for what they are. With samādhi, we will come to know the power and potential of the mind, and will be able to integrate wisdom and compassion in our way of being. The Buddha gave several similes for the relief and freedom one feels when the five hindrances have subsided:

Suppose a person is afflicted, suffering and gravely ill, and his food does not agree with him and his body has no strength, but later he recovers from the affliction and his food agrees with him and his body regains strength. Then on considering this, he will be glad and full of joy. Or suppose a person is a slave, not autonomous but dependent on others, unable to go where he wants, but later he is released from slavery, independent of others, a free person able to go where he wants. On considering this, he is glad and full of joy. Or suppose a person with wealth and property enters a road across a desert, but later he crosses over the desert, safe and secure, with no loss of property. On considering this, he is glad and full of joy. So too, monastics, when these five hindrances are not abandoned in himself, a monastic sees them respectively as a disease, slavery, and a road across a desert. But when these five hindrances have been abandoned in himself, he sees that as good health, freedom from slavery, and a land of safety (MN 39.14).

The development of samādhi and serenity is a gradual process; it does not happen quickly or with little effort on our part — no matter how much we wish realizations could occur in that way! The Buddha used the simile of a goldsmith gradually purifying gold to illustrate this. He washes the gold well several times to separate the gold dust from earth, grit, sand, and dust. He then puts it into a melting pot and repeatedly melts it to remove all flaws. Only when the gold is pliant, workable, and bright can the goldsmith make what he wishes with it. The Buddha explains (AN 3.101):

It is similar, monastics, with a monastic devoted to the higher mind: there are in him gross impurities, namely bad conduct of body, speech, and mind. Such conduct an earnest, capable monastic abandons, dispels, eliminates, and abolishes.

When he has abandoned these, there are still impurities of a moderate degree that cling to him, namely sensual thoughts, thoughts of malice, and violent thoughts. Such thoughts an earnest, capable monastic abandons, dispels, eliminates, and abolishes.

When he has abandoned these, there are still some subtle impurities that cling to him, namely thoughts about his relatives, his home country, and his reputation. Such thoughts an earnest, capable monastic abandons, dispels, eliminates, and abolishes.

When he has abandoned these, there still remain thoughts about higher mental states experienced in meditation.<sup>52</sup> That concentration is not yet peaceful and sublime; it has not attained full serenity, nor has it achieved mental unification; it is maintained by strenuous suppression of the defilements.

But there comes a time when his mind becomes inwardly steadied, composed, unified, and concentrated. That concentration is then calm and refined; it has attained to full serenity and achieved mental unification; it is not maintained by strenuous suppression of the defilements.

Then to whatever mental state realizable by direct knowledge he directs his mind, he achieves the capacity of realizing that state by direct knowledge, whenever the necessary conditions occur.

Fortitude, continuous effort, and a relaxed mind free from unrealistic expectations are great aids to gain serenity and other realizations.

Some great Buddhist meditators dwell alone in the forest or mountains, not speaking to anyone and braving hardships. Hearing about them, some people have a romantic notion of living in solitude, withdrawn from the world. One day the Buddha heard about a bhikṣu who was dwelling alone and who encouraged others to do so. He entered a village on alms round alone, returned to his isolated place alone, sat alone, and did walking meditation alone. Calling this monk to



him, the Buddha said that what he was doing was a way of dwelling alone, but fulfilling the real purpose of dwelling alone differed (SN 21:10):

How is dwelling alone fulfilled in detail? Here, what lies in the past has been abandoned, what lies in the future has been relinquished, and attachment and sensual desire for present forms of individual existence have been thoroughly removed . . .

The wise one, all-conqueror, all-knower,  
among all things unsullied, with all cast off,  
liberated in the destruction of craving:  
I call that person “one who dwells alone.”

*Abandoning what lies in the past* means releasing attachment and sensual desire for the aggregates of the past, which include the material possessions, reputation, praise, appreciation, and so forth we have received in the past. *Relinquishing what lies in the future* is to give up attachment to the aggregates of the future with all of its inner and outer trappings. *Removing attachment to present forms of existence* is to leave aside attachment to present sensual pleasures. In short, abandoning the view of a personal identity and craving for existence in the past, present, and future is the highest meaning of dwelling alone.

Keeping this in mind is important, lest conceit arise: I am a great meditator doing what others cannot do. I hope others speak well of me and bring me offerings because they respect my renunciation. Actually, such a person may have given up good food, but they are nourishing their conceit instead.

“All conqueror” is one who has overcome compulsive rebirth in saṃsāra. “Unsullied” is one who has given up craving and views, “all cast off” is freeing oneself from all defilements, and “liberated in the destruction of craving” is the attainment of arhatship. If we keep this in mind, we will train our mind to dwell alone in peace, separated from defilements.

## REFLECTION

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1. What does it mean to abandon what lies in the past, in the future, and in the present?

2. To function in society, we need to remember what we have learned in the past, to plan for the future, and to act in the present. Surely the Buddha is not instructing us to do nothing. How do we integrate his advice to abandon what lies in the past, present, and future with being an effective person, like he himself was?
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## *The Five Faults and Eight Antidotes*

The Sanskrit tradition as practiced in Tibet and China relies on the texts of Maitreya and Asaṅga for instructions on the method to cultivate serenity. In *Differentiation of the Middle and the Extremes (Madhyāntavibhāga)*, Maitreya spoke of five faults that impede serenity and eight antidotes that eliminate them.

### **FIVE FAULTS AND THEIR ANTIDOTES**

FAULT	ITS ANTIDOTES
laziness	confidence (faith) aspiration effort pliancy
forgetting the instruction (forgetting the object)	mindfulness
restlessness and laxity	introspective awareness
nonapplication of the antidote	application of antidotes
overapplication of the antidote	equanimity

#### *1. Laziness and Its Antidotes: Confidence, Aspiration, Effort, and Pliancy*

Laziness comes in three forms: (1) Sleeping a lot and laying around, doing nothing much at all, we procrastinate. (2) Keeping ourselves busy with worldly activities — work, socializing, shopping, looking at the latest happenings on our devices — we lack time to meditate. (3) Overwhelmed by discouragement, we

feel inadequate and don't try to train our minds. It is easy to identify instances of all three types of laziness in our lives; overcoming them is more difficult. All three interfere with our ability to gain serenity. In the context of cultivating serenity, laziness refers to not wanting to do the practice to develop serenity.

The actual antidote to laziness in the context of cultivating serenity is mental pliancy. Since it takes a while to strengthen this mental factor, we begin by cultivating *confidence* (faith) in the benefits of serenity and concentration. These benefits include mental calm and peace, freedom from coarse destructive emotions, the ability to remain focused on a virtuous object without distraction, and a clear, powerful mind that facilitates the realization of emptiness.

Confidence is a joyous state of mind that gives rise to *aspiration*, which is interested in and aspires to cultivate serenity. This leads to *effort* that takes delight in concentration and is enthusiastic to attain it. This is like having confidence in the qualities of a product advertised on television. We aspire to buy it and happily make effort to do so.

On the path to attain serenity, we pass through the nine stages of sustained attention, during which we abandon the faults and hindrances to concentration — especially restlessness and laxity. *Pliancy*, the fourth antidote, actually accomplishes this. Pliancy is a mental factor that is free from all mental and physical unserviceability — factors that impede the body and mind from cultivating virtue whenever we like. With physical and mental pliancy, our body feels light and flexible, and our mind easily remains focused on whatever virtuous object we choose.

## *2. Forgetting the Instruction and Its Antidote, Mindfulness*

Forgetting the instruction means forgetting the meditation object. Having overcome coarse laziness, we sit on the meditation cushion and try to concentrate, but our untrained mind quickly strays from the observed object to objects of attachment, anger, jealousy, and worry. Instead of focusing on the meditation object, we think about future vacation sites or the argument we had with a colleague. The antidote is mindfulness, a mental factor that is familiar with the meditation object and holds the mind on it in such a way that distraction and forgetfulness cannot arise. Mindfulness is closely related to memory and applies only to an object with which we are well acquainted.

Losing the meditation object mainly occurs on the first four stages of sustained attention. Losing the object is like a child running out of the room; mindfulness is analogous to bringing him back inside. By continually bringing our mind back to the observed object whenever it strays, mindfulness makes the distracting thoughts gradually subside. Bhāvaviveka said:<sup>53</sup>

The elephant of the mind wandering wildly  
is to be securely bound with the rope of mindfulness  
to the pillar of a meditation object,  
and is gradually tamed with the hook of wisdom.

Ethical conduct is a precursor to serenity, because it develops mindfulness in daily life activities. Whether we are walking, standing, sitting, or lying, we must maintain mindfulness of our precepts and of suitable behavior for that situation. Doing this facilitates mindfulness of our meditation object because physical and verbal actions are easier to control than mental activity. Conscientiousness — a mental factor that values thinking, speaking, and acting constructively — is a key element.

Talking and having a busy social life cause many thought preconceptions to flood our minds. By speaking and socializing less, unrealistic and unbeneficial conceptualizations gradually decrease. One meditator I know in Dharamsala spends six days of the week in total silence but talks a little on the day his attendant brings his weekly supplies. Sometimes, even for several months, he will not talk at all. While this is not practical for most of us, we should try to speak only what is necessary, wise, kind, and appropriate to the circumstances. Chatting here and there with this person and that disturbs our meditation, as well as the people around us!

### *3. Restlessness and Laxity and Their Antidote, Introspective Awareness*

Single-pointedness of mind has two characteristics: (1) *Stability* is the ability to stay on the meditation object without wandering to another object. The chief obstacle to stability is restlessness, which scatters the mind toward other objects. (2) *Clarity* is vibrancy of the subject, the meditating mind apprehending the object. Its chief obstacle is *laxity*, which decreases the intensity of the clarity, so that the mind's way of apprehending the object becomes loose. Because

restlessness<sup>54</sup> and laxity have the same antidote, introspective awareness, they are grouped together as the third fault.

## Restlessness

Scattering (T. *'phro wa*) occurs when the mind moves to another object. It may be virtuous — for example, straying from the meditation object of the image of the Buddha to think about precious human life instead. It may be nonvirtuous, such as plotting our revenge for a harm inflicted on us. It may be neutral — for example, thinking about doing the laundry after the meditation session. Distraction (mental wandering, T. *rnam gyeng*) is the same as scattering. Discursiveness or conceptualization (*vikalpa*, *vikappa*, T. *rnam rtog*) is similar to scattering and distraction and implies that the mind is filled with mental chatter, useless thoughts, and worries.

Restlessness is a type of scattering and distraction; it is associated with attachment because the mind goes to objects of attachment. Restlessness, not scattering, is considered one of the five faults because when we try to cultivate concentration, our attention tends to stray toward objects of attachment more than toward other objects. *Coarse restlessness* causes us to lose the meditation object completely and shifts our attention to a desirable object — food, an attractive person, a car, or a promotion.

With *subtle restlessness*, the meditation object is not entirely lost, but one part of the mind comes under the influence of discursive thought and a pleasing object of desire is about to appear in our mind. This is compared to water under ice; the ice (our concentration) looks firm, but something else (subtle restlessness) is going on under the surface and the ice risks cracking. Subtle restlessness is like a bird with a chained foot: the mind hasn't forgotten the meditation object but is unable to fully engage in it. It is more difficult to recognize than coarse restlessness because there is still stability and clarity, but the undercurrent of mind is moving toward another object due to attachment. This often arises when our focus on the meditation object is too tight. If subtle restlessness increases and we lose the meditation object completely, coarse restlessness has arisen.

The antidote to restlessness is introspective awareness, a mental factor that monitors the mind and is a form of intelligence. When mindfulness is powerful, introspective awareness comes naturally, and when introspective awareness is strong, mindfulness can easily be maintained. Mindfulness holds the object of

meditation, and introspective awareness assesses whether restlessness or laxity have arisen and are interrupting concentration. While our main focus remains on the meditation object, introspective awareness, like a spy, discreetly surveys the situation from time to time to see if any faults to concentration are present. If so, we must apply the specific antidote to that fault.

Introspective awareness is especially important during the early stages of developing concentration. When concentration is more stable and faults are less likely to arise, introspective awareness does not need to monitor the mind as much. Employing introspective awareness too often may provoke restlessness, so skill is needed in using it.

Although introspective awareness is posited as the antidote to both restlessness and laxity, it is not the actual antidote. By observing the mind, it identifies the presence of restlessness or laxity and sets in motion the process to remedy it. Lacking introspective awareness is analogous to a burglar entering our house and our having no awareness of theft occurring right under our nose.

The remedy to coarse restlessness is to bring attention back to the meditation object and renew mindfulness on it. If this does not work, temporarily leave the meditation object and reflect on a topic that makes the mind sober, such as impermanence and death or the *duḥkha* of cyclic existence. When the mind's energy is lower, return to your original meditation object. Focusing on the breath may also calm restlessness.

If these methods do not work and restlessness continues, visualize your spiritual mentor in the form of the Buddha above your head. Imagine white light and nectar flowing from his heart, flowing down into your body, purifying all negativities and eliminating all hindrances to serenity, especially restlessness. Request inspiration from the Buddha to gain serenity for the benefit of all sentient beings.

If your mind is still very agitated, pause the meditation session and resume it at another time.

The remedy for subtle restlessness is to relax the intensity of concentration slightly, but not so much that we lose the object.

Although restlessness is the chief form of scattering to look out for, whenever your attention wanders to another meditation object, even a virtuous one, bring it back. If you are visualizing the Buddha and your attention scatters to *Tārā*, bring the mind back to the Buddha. When contemplating impermanence, if you

switch to meditating on the disadvantages of saṃsāra, immediately return to your original object. If a camper wants to start a campfire but becomes distracted by the beautiful scenery and lets the fire diminish, she must begin all over again. So, too, if we want to cultivate concentration but let our attention wander, we will have to start anew.

While knowing the definitions and functions of the mental factors that interrupt concentration and those that support it is necessary, identifying these in our own experience is essential. It takes time and effort to observe how our mind operates, but doing this is the key to making the Dharma come alive for us. Otherwise there is danger that our intellectual knowledge of the teachings will simply increase our arrogance rather than decrease our afflictions.

### **Laxity**

Laxity differs from lethargy, which is a heaviness of body and mind that is close to sleep. Lethargy causes the decline of both stability and clarity. The mind is dull and passive; it may even begin to dream. Lethargy isn't mentioned as one of the five faults because on higher levels of concentration it is less frequent than laxity, but when laxity is mentioned, lethargy is implied. At initial levels of practice, lethargy is a noticeable obstacle for many people.

When *coarse laxity* is present, there is some stability on the object, but the clarity has decreased. The object doesn't appear so clearly, and we may start to lose it. Although the mind isn't distracted to another object and isn't drowsy, it lacks force. It remains in a vague state with an agreeable sensation. Perhaps it resembles what my Western friends call "spaced out."

Because the mind has become too withdrawn inside, the antidote to coarse laxity is to enlarge the scope of the meditation object. Make it brighter, elaborate on the details. If the meditation object is the image of the Buddha, employ analysis to review the details of the Buddha's form. Visualizing bright light filling the room or looking at a light also helps. If coarse laxity persists, temporarily leave the meditation object and contemplate a topic that will elevate your spirits and invigorate the mind — for example, precious human life, the benefits of concentration, the benefits of bodhicitta, or the excellent qualities of the Three Jewels. Such reflection energizes the mind and makes it joyful. If coarse laxity continues, visualize your spiritual mentor and make a request as described above,

and then return to your meditation object. Otherwise stop the session, splash water on your face, take a walk outdoors, and look out at a vista.

*Subtle laxity* is the worst fault when trying to generate serenity. With it, the mind has become too relaxed. Although clarity remains and the mind may abide single-pointedly on the object, the freshness or vigor of the clarity has declined because the mind's grip on the object has become too loose; a subtle sluggishness, weakness, and lack of comprehension are present.

Subtle laxity is difficult to recognize because it's similar to samādhi in that both have stability and clarity and both are characterized by the mind being peaceful and experiencing a pleasurable sensation. Because of these similarities, subtle laxity is especially dangerous. A meditator's breath may stop, and she may sit in meditation for days. Afterward, she may think she has attained serenity and makes no effort to improve her meditation, when in fact subtle laxity was present.

Subtle laxity has many disadvantages. Our meditation doesn't become a cause to attain serenity and we may become forgetful in this life and be born as an animal in the next. Mindfulness becomes weak and wisdom decreases. Eventually coarse laxity returns and we may lose clarity completely.

Someone once said to me, "I have good concentration on the object, but I lack energy for the welfare of other beings." I believe this was because the person's meditation suffered from subtle laxity. Subtle laxity is like a tied donkey; it looks calm but is ignorant. Correct concentration, on the other hand, should make the mind alert and vibrant.

Another person mentioned to me that while he was meditating to gain serenity, his mind became duller and he couldn't think as clearly. I responded that this indicated that something was amiss in his meditation — he had not detected the presence of subtle laxity.

The remedy for subtle laxity is to hold the meditation object more firmly and tighten the mode of apprehension of the object. But if we hold the object too tightly, restlessness may arise. Finding the right balance is like holding a tiny bird: our grip must be neither too tight nor too loose. The proper balance is developed only through experience. If we err, it's better to be on side of tightness because restlessness is easier to recognize and overcome than laxity.

Skill is required to use introspective awareness properly to identify lethargy, laxity, distraction, and restlessness. If our introspective awareness is weak, we won't recognize interruptions to concentration. If it is overactive, it interrupts the



flow of concentration and prevents the mind from becoming stable. Mindfulness and introspective awareness go hand in hand. Mindfulness is like holding a full cup of water; introspective awareness is like an occasional glance to see if the water is spilling. Initially we aim for stability on the object through mindfulness. Later, when we are more familiar with the object and our attention span is longer, introspective awareness is needed to check for faults such as restlessness and laxity. Until introspective awareness is strong, our meditation remains prey to these two faults.

Initially periods of laxity and restlessness are strong and frequent. Through practice they become weaker and periods of concentration on the object become longer. In time, subtle laxity and restlessness lose their force and disappear.

### *Nonapplication and Its Antidote, Application of the Antidotes*

*Nonapplication* is not applying the antidote even when we know restlessness or laxity is present. It is similar to a general not sending out troops once a spy has discovered the enemy lurking about. Nonapplication occurs principally in the seventh stage of sustained attention, but something similar to it may occur earlier. The antidote is to *apply the appropriate antidote* to whichever fault has arisen and exert effort to eliminate it: holding the object and paying closer attention to it when laxity arises, relaxing our mental grip on the object when restlessness is present.

### *Overapplication and Its Antidote, Equanimity*

*Overapplication* is excessive exertion; it occurs when we apply antidotes to restlessness and laxity although they haven't occurred or have already been eliminated. It resembles a parent correcting a child when the child is behaving well — it simply disturbs the child. This fault occurs mainly in the eighth stage of sustained attention, although a similitude may occur earlier. The antidote to overapplication is *equanimity*, in which we relax our effort a little, but not too much.

In short, the Indian sage Atiśa advises us:

Avoid all factors that hinder samādhi,  
and cultivate conducive factors

[by] applying the eight antidotes for eliminating negativities.  
This is the rubbing stick  
free from the moisture of attachment  
for igniting the fire of the spiritual path.  
Meditate in this way with intensity.

## REFLECTION

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1. Identify each of the five faults in your own meditation. Which one is the most troublesome for your present level of development?
  2. Practice noticing each fault when it arises and applying its antidote. Do this over a period of time.
  3. What change do you see in your meditation?
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### *The Nine Stages of Sustained Attention*

The nine stages of sustained attention and six powers are explained in Asaṅga's *Śrāvaka Grounds* and *Compendium of Knowledge* (*Abhidharmasamuccaya*).

The nine stages of sustained attention (*navākārā cittasthiti*) are stages of concentration on the way to serenity. The six powers and four types of attention (mental engagement) help to overcome faults, stabilize the mind on the object, and increase clarity. In doing so, they enable meditators to progress sequentially through the nine stages. The six powers (*bala*) are:

1. Through *hearing* (*śruta*), we learn the teachings on the method to cultivate serenity and place our mind on the observed object as instructed by our teacher. The first stage of sustained attention is accomplished by hearing.
2. Through repeated *reflection* (*cintā*) on the meditation object, we become able to stabilize the mind on it for a short while. Reflection accomplishes the second stage of sustained attention.
3. *Mindfulness* (*smṛti*) repeatedly brings the mind back to the object and accomplishes the third stage. Generated at the beginning of the session,

mindfulness stabilizes the mind on the object and prevents distraction so the fourth stage is attained.

4. *Introspective awareness (samprajanya)* sees the faults of discursive thoughts, auxiliary afflictions, and distraction to sense objects, and does not allow the mind to go toward other objects, thoughts, or emotions. It helps to tame and calm the mind and becomes prominent during the fifth and sixth stages.
5. *Effort (vīrya)* exerts energy to eliminate even subtle discursive thoughts and auxiliary afflictions and prevents the mind from getting involved with them. Preventing restlessness, laxity, and so forth from interfering with the flow of concentration, effort enables the meditator to focus the mind by releasing distractions. It is prominent on the seventh and eighth stages.
6. Through *complete familiarity (paricaya)* with the above powers, the mind spontaneously remains in samādhi. This power is found on the ninth stage.

The four types of attention determine how the mind engages with the meditation object.

1. *Tight focus (balavāhana)* is used on the first and second stages of sustained attention to reinforce mindfulness.
2. When there is more stability, *interrupted focus (sacchidravāhana)* is used to attain the third through seventh stages.
3. *Uninterrupted focus (nīschidravāhana)* corresponds with the eighth stage.
4. *Spontaneous focus (anābhogavāhana)* is present with the ninth stage.

Maitreya outlined the nine stages of sustained attention in his *Ornament of Mahāyāna Sūtras*. Each line describes the activity of one stage.

1. Having directed the mind to the object of observation,
2. do not allow its continuum to be distracted.
3. Having noticed distraction, quickly return [the mind] to that [object].
4. The aware also withdraw the mind inwardly more and more.

5. Then, seeing the good benefits of concentration, tame the mind in concentration.
6. By seeing the faults of distraction, pacify dislike for [concentration].
7. Desire and so forth as well as discomfort and so forth likewise should be pacified [immediately] upon arising.
8. Then, those who make effort at restraint [of faults need only] make [a little] effort to [concentrate] the mind.
9. Natural arising is attained. Aside from familiarizing with that, one desists from activity.

Let's look at the nine stages of sustained attention and the role the six powers and four types of attention play in them.

### *1. Placing the Mind (Cittasthāpana)*

To begin, we must identify the observed object and place the mind on it, even though our attention may not remain on it for long. To do this, withdraw your attention from external objects and with mindfulness place it on the meditation object. Do not follow distracting thoughts, sounds, and so forth.

The appearance of the object isn't clear, and the mind is filled with discursive thoughts, one coming after the other. Our mind may seem noisier than usual, although in actuality it isn't. It's simply that for the first time we are aware of how busy the mind is. For example, someone living near a highway is so familiar with the sound of traffic that he does not usually notice it. Only when he goes to a quiet place does the noise he is accustomed to become apparent. Discursive thoughts are automatically pacified in the process of progressing through the nine stages, so do not be discouraged. As your mindfulness strengthens, the flood of thoughts will gradually subside.

The first stage of sustained attention is accomplished by the power of hearing, for we apply the mind to the instructions we have previously heard from a teacher and set our mind on the object. Tight focus helps us to gain a strong hold on the object.

### *2. Continual Placement (Samsthāpana)*

Initially our goal is to keep our attention on the object and not let it stray. Through practice and employing the power of reflection, the mind is able to continually stay on the object for a short while. This marks the second stage of sustained attention. Tight focus is still necessary to keep the mind on the meditation object, but now the mind can remain on the object a little longer. Still, the time spent in distraction exceeds the time the mind abides on the object, and our concentration is constantly interrupted by scattering to other objects. However, distractions and discursive thoughts begin to take a rest and their force weakens. We begin to experience a little peace of mind.

### *3. Repeated Placement (Avasthāpana)*

Now our aim is to recognize when the object is lost due to distraction and reset it on the object more quickly. Gradually, distractions decrease, and when they do arise, we are able to recognize them. Previously we couldn't immediately regain concentration on the object once it was lost, but now, due to developing mindfulness on the previous two stages, mindfulness easily returns to the meditation object and attention returns inward. Our focus is interrupted because concentration is not continuous. Still, scattering is recognized at once, so its duration is shorter and our ability to remain on the object increases. At this time, the third stage of sustained attention arises.

### *4. Close Placement (Upasthāpana)*

As we develop more familiarity with the object, forgetting the object greatly decreases. Mindfulness is generated at the beginning of a session and attention remains on the object with fewer distractions. The mind becomes subtler and is more easily drawn inward, away from the expansive diversity of thoughts and objects. Coarse restlessness and laxity are present, so our focus on the object is still interrupted.<sup>55</sup> Nevertheless, the power of mindfulness is strong. Now the fourth stage of sustained attention arises.

### *5. Taming (Damana)*

The mind is disciplined and tamed so that it can stay on the object almost continuously. The power of introspective awareness stops the mind from wandering to destructive emotions and discursive thoughts about sense objects. Coarse laxity and coarse restlessness are no longer problems. Previously subtle laxity wasn't a problem because single-pointedness was difficult to attain. However, now the mind may become too absorbed in the object so that subtle laxity occurs. Subtle laxity and subtle restlessness interrupt the focus, but concentration is easily restored by the power of introspective awareness. Being aware of the benefits of concentration, we take delight in it and attain the fifth stage of sustained attention.

### *6. Pacifying (Śamana)*

Through the power of introspective awareness, conviction that distraction is to be abandoned becomes firm, and all resistance to or dislike for single-pointed meditation is gone. During the previous stage, concentration was tightened in order to eliminate laxity. Now it may be too tight, making the mind restless and causing subtle restlessness. Subtle laxity may still arise occasionally, so both subtle laxity and subtle restlessness cause interrupted focus on the object. Having matured through practice, the power of introspective awareness can sometimes identify and deal with restlessness and laxity before they arise. The sixth stage of sustained attention, pacifying, now arises.

### *7. Thoroughly Pacifying (Vyupaśamana)*

Even if subtle thoughts or subtle destructive emotions such as attachment, resentment, lethargy, and so on manifest, they are easily pacified. Subtle laxity and subtle restlessness arise occasionally, so focus is still interrupted, but the power of effort easily and quickly stops them. Mindfulness, introspective awareness, and effort are well developed, but nonapplication of the antidotes may still occur. At this point the seventh stage of sustained attention arises.

### *8. Making Single-Pointed (Ekotikarāṇa)*

As a result of mindfulness and effort, laxity and restlessness are not able to interrupt concentration, so focus is uninterrupted. After sitting down to

meditate, we can immediately apprehend the meditation object and concentration remains on it continuously. Only a little effort is needed at the beginning of a session to discern the details of the object and to guard against laxity and restlessness. After that, the mind stays on the object without faltering through the power of effort. The eighth stage of sustained attention now arises and single-pointed concentration can remain for a long time.

### *9. Placement in Equipoise (Samādhāna)*

Gradually the power of complete familiarity becomes stronger and effort to maintain mindfulness and introspective awareness is no longer required. The mind engages with the object willingly and the ninth stage is attained. Just the wish to meditate is required at the beginning of the session. Once mindfulness is placed on the object and the mind enters meditative equipoise, it effortlessly and naturally remains in single-pointed concentration without having to evoke mindfulness. The focus on the object of meditation is spontaneous and single-pointed meditation automatically continues for a long time. The sense consciousnesses are totally absorbed and no longer respond to external stimuli during meditation. This is the highest concentration attainment with a desire-realm mind. It is a similitude of serenity; fully qualified serenity has not yet been attained.

According to the Tibetan scholar Chim Jampelyang, the first three stages are means to enable the mind, which is generally fluctuating and moving from object to object, to abide on its meditation object. The second three stages are the means to stabilize the mind that is already abiding on its object, although stability can still be disturbed by coarse restlessness and laxity. The last three stages are means to gain full control of the mind that has achieved stability.

As we progress through these stages of sustained attention, the strength of our mind and the power of our meditation increase in dependence on each other. Clarity and stability correspondingly increase, resulting in mental and physical peace and happiness. Our complexion becomes youthful and radiant, we feel light and vigorous, and dependence on coarse food decreases.

## *Mental and Physical Pliancy and the Bliss of Physical and Mental Pliancy*

After the ninth stage, mental pliancy, physical pliancy, the bliss of physical pliancy, and the bliss of mental pliancy need to be cultivated in that sequence to attain serenity. Some people are able to do this quickly; others must meditate for weeks before attaining serenity. Asaṅga says in *Compendium of Knowledge* (LC 3:82):

What is pliancy? It is a serviceability of the body and mind due to the cessation of the continuum of physical and mental dysfunctions. It functions to dispel all obstructions.

Physical dysfunctions are factors related to winds (*prāṇa*) in the body that make the body heavy and uncomfortable when we try to engage in virtue. Mental dysfunctions prevent taking delight in eradicating afflictions. Through increased familiarity with concentration, physical dysfunctions are overcome. At this time, the brain feels heavy — though not in an uncomfortable way — and there is a pleasant tingling sensation at the top of the head, as if a warm hand were placed on the crown after our head was freshly shaved. This sensation occurs as dysfunctional winds leave from the crown. Immediately afterward, dysfunctional mental states are overcome and *mental pliancy* is attained. In general, mental pliancy is a mental factor that accompanies all virtuous minds and enables the mind to be directed toward a virtuous object. However, this is a special mental pliancy that is a serviceability of mind — a lightness and clarity of mind coupled with the ability to set the mind on whatever virtuous object we wish. The mind no longer resists being directed toward virtuous objects and is happy to meditate and stay on the meditation object.

### **THE NINE STAGES OF SUSTAINED ATTENTION**



STAGE	POWER	ATTENTION	MAIN FAULT	MAIN ANTIDOTE	WHAT TO ACCOMPLISH ON THIS STAGE
1. placing the mind	hearing	tight focus	laziness, forgetting the object, distraction, scattering	conviction, aspiration, effort	identify meditation object and place the mind on it
2. continued placement	reflection		forgetting the object, distraction, scattering	mindfulness	remain on the object a little longer
3. repeated placement	mindfulness	interrupted focus	forgetting the object, distraction, scattering	mindfulness	recognize when object has been lost and reset attention on it
4. close placement			coarse restlessness and coarse laxity	introspective awareness	strengthen mindfulness so can remain on object longer without distraction
5. taming	introspective awareness		subtle laxity	introspective awareness	stop wandering so can remain on object almost continuously
6. pacifying			subtle laxity and subtle restlessness		abandon all resistance to concentration, identify laxity and restlessness before they arise
7. thoroughly pacifying			nonapplication of the antidote/ restlessness and laxity may arise, but are quickly stopped	application of the antidote	easily pacify subtle afflictions
8. making single-pointed	effort	uninterrupted focus	overapplication of the antidote	equanimity	only a little effort is needed at beginning of session, guard against restlessness and laxity
9. placement in equipoise	complete familiarity	spontaneous focus		pliancy	no effort needed to maintain mindfulness and introspective awareness, mind habitually remains single-pointed

Mental pliancy in turn induces serviceability of the winds flowing through the body because the winds that power afflictions have subsided. A wind of physical pliancy pervades the entire body and the body's lack of serviceability for meditation is overcome. This is *physical pliancy* — a lightness, buoyancy, and serviceability of body that enables the body to be used for whatever virtuous purpose we wish without pain, fatigue, or hardship. The body feels as light as a cotton ball, almost as if we could ride on our own shoulders. Physical pliancy immediately leads to experiencing the *bliss of physical pliancy*, which is a very blissful tactile sensation. The body feels incredibly comfortable and fresh, and we can use it in virtuous activities as we wish.

As concentration continues, there is the sense that the body has melted into the meditation object. At this point, the *bliss of mental pliancy* is experienced. The mind is very joyous — almost too buoyant — and we feel as if we could focus on each atom of a wall. Following this, there is a sensation on the top of the head — similar to placing a cool hand on top of a freshly shaven head — and the mental

bliss decreases a little. When it becomes stable, *unfluctuating bliss of concentration* and *unfluctuating mental pliancy* arise. At this point serenity is attained. I know a monk who studied well and later meditated to develop serenity. He described to me the bliss arising from physical and mental pliancy.

Serenity is concentration arisen from meditation that is accompanied by the bliss of mental and physical pliancy in which the mind abides effortlessly without fluctuation for as long as we wish on whatever object it has been placed. Stabilizing meditation has been brought to fulfillment. Kamalaśīla's second *Stages of Meditation* says (LR 3:80):

For you who have cultivated serenity in this way, when your body and mind become pliant and you have mastery over your mind in directing it as you wish, at that time know that you have accomplished serenity.

Many signs occur with the attainment of serenity: The body and the mind are flexible and serviceable; physical and mental pliancy arise quickly when we meditate. The mind is very spacious and can abide firmly and steadily on its meditation object; even a loud sound will not interfere with concentration. There is a sense of great clarity, as if we could count atoms. In postmeditation time, afflictions don't arise as often or as strongly, and craving for sense pleasures has decreased. We can meditate as long as we wish without any discomfort; the body feels light and at ease and the mind is free from the five hindrances. Sleep can easily be transformed into meditation and wonderful experiences may occur during sleep. Even after arising from meditation, some degree of physical and mental pliancy remain. Afflictions may arise in break times, but in general they are weaker and can be easily subdued.

Serenity has three qualities:

1. *Nonconceptuality* is nondiscursive stability, the stability that comes with the absence of distracting thoughts. In this context "nonconceptuality" does not mean that the mind perceives its object directly without the medium of a conceptual appearance. Rather, it indicates the mind can stay on the observed object of meditation for as long as we wish because it is free from restlessness and does not conceptualize any other object.

2. *Clarity* in this context means that the mind is free from laxity and the object clearly appears.
3. *Benefit* in this context means that the bliss of mental and physical pliancy has been attained.

Once serenity has been attained, four afflictions can interfere with maintaining and improving the quality of concentration. It is important to monitor the mind diligently and avoid falling prey to them.

1. *Attachment* to the pleasure of serenity or whatever level of absorption we have attained prevents us from cultivating wisdom. Content to remain in blissful concentration, we relinquish the opportunity to realize emptiness.
2. *Arrogance* thinking that we are superior to others because we have attained meditative absorption distracts us from deepening our concentration and wisdom.
3. *Ignorance* mistaking deep states of absorption for liberation keeps us bound in saṃsāra. The result of this is especially painful at the time of death, when a meditator expects to attain nirvāṇa without remainder but instead realizes he will be reborn in saṃsāra.
4. *Wrong views* obstruct gaining the correct, liberating view of emptiness.

In *Śrāvaka Grounds*, Asaṅga recommends (LC 3:89):

When you attain the mind of serenity, in this way, signs, thoughts, or auxiliary afflictions may appear, manifest, or become the object, because of forgetfulness or the fault of lack of habituation. Do not fall immediately under the influence of the faults that you have previously observed. Neither recall them nor pay attention to them. In this way, because you are neither being mindful of this object nor attending to it, it dissolves; and when it is dispelled, you will settle in the absence of the appearance of these obstructions.

While cultivating the nine stages of sustained attention and during the first period of time after attaining serenity, the meditation object is a conceptual appearance perceived by a conceptual mental consciousness. As meditation

continues and serenity becomes more refined, a point is reached where the object is so vivid that it is known nonconceptually. At this point, the object is no longer a conceptual appearance of, for example, the Buddha, but a form that is a phenomena source (*dharmāyatana rūpa*) — a form appearing only to mental consciousness.

Human beings who have attained serenity or higher absorptions do not lose their single-pointed concentration during the break times between meditation sessions. However, it is not manifest, and their five senses function when they go about their daily activities. Although their afflictions are weaker due to the power of samādhi, they may still manifest, so practitioners must maintain mindfulness and introspective awareness in all activities.

During such a retreat to generate serenity, do mainly stabilizing meditation with little analytical meditation. Asaṅga instructs (LC 3:89):

At that time [of cultivating serenity], this [concentration] attends to an image without discursive thought, and it exclusively focuses mindfulness one-pointedly on the object. It does not examine it, classify it, investigate it, ponder it, or analyze it.

Asaṅga indicates that the practice of serenity does not involve analytical activity. Kamalaśīla agrees and says in *Stages of Meditation* (LC 3:89):

The nature of serenity is nothing more than a one-pointed mind.  
This is the general characteristic of all meditative serenity.

Serenity is not a stage of concentration. It is a quality that pervades all meditative absorptions.

Some people erroneously believe that any meditation that lacks analysis and discursive thought must be meditation on emptiness, but this is not the case.

When, after attaining serenity, concentration is conjoined with the aspiration for liberation, it becomes a path to liberation. When it is conjoined with bodhicitta, it becomes a Mahāyāna path leading to awakening.

## *A Diagram Illustrating the Process of Attaining Serenity*

The diagram on page 166 illustrates the process of cultivating serenity. It depicts a monk (the meditator) chasing after and finally subduing an elephant (his mind). The numbers on the diagram correspond to the following explanations.

1. The six bends in the road represent the six powers. The first bend signifies the power of hearing our spiritual mentors' instructions on how to cultivate serenity.
2. The first stage, placing the mind, is attained by the power of hearing instructions.
3. The rope represents the power of mindfulness.
4. The taming hook represents the power of introspective awareness.
5. The flame is found from this point until the seventh stage, after which it is no longer present. It decreases in size, indicating the decreasing amount of effort needed to apply mindfulness and introspective awareness.
6. The elephant represents the mind; its black color indicates laxity.
7. The monkey symbolizes distraction in general; its black color indicates restlessness in particular. The monk is chasing the elephant and monkey, indicating that he has little control over the laxity and distraction that plague his mind.
8. This bend represents the power of reflection on the meditation object, which will lead to the second stage.
9. The second stage, continual placement is attained when the length of focus on the meditation object has increased.
10. Exposure to the five sense objects incites restlessness and hinders concentration.
11. The elephant now walks instead of runs — the mind is beginning to calm down. The elephant gradually turns white, representing increased clarity on the object and increased focus on it.
12. This bend represents the power of mindfulness, which leads to attaining both the third and fourth stages.
13. The third stage, repeated placement, is attained. The meditator has lassoed the elephant and can bring his attention back to the meditation object when it has been interrupted by coarse laxity or restlessness.

14. The hare represents subtle laxity. Now the meditator can distinguish between gross and subtle laxity.
15. The animals looking backward indicates that the mind is gaining strength over the faults and represents the mind's ability to return to the meditation object after recognizing mental wandering.
16. The fourth stage, close placement, is attained. The meditator is able to bring his attention back to the meditation object more quickly.
17. This bend represents the power of introspective awareness, which leads to the attainment of the fifth and sixth stages.
18. Restlessness's ability to affect the mind is curbed.
19. The monkey gathering fruit from the tree to the side of the meditation path represents the distinction between virtuous thoughts that arise when doing stabilizing meditation and at other times. The ones that arise during stabilizing meditation must be suppressed because they distract the meditator from the meditation object, whereas virtuous thoughts that arise at other times are to be encouraged.
20. The meditator is no longer chasing the wild elephant of the mind but is now leading it. Laxity and restlessness have decreased.
21. The fifth stage, taming, is attained and coarse laxity and coarse restlessness are no longer problems. The meditator begins to lead the elephant and the monkey follows. The mind is more controlled, although the meditator must goad the elephant.
22. The sixth stage, pacifying, is attained, and all resistance to or dislike for single-pointed meditation is gone. The hare (subtle laxity) is gone.
23. This bend represents the power of effort, which leads to attaining the seventh and eighth stages.
24. The seventh stage, thoroughly pacifying, is attained. It is now difficult for subtle laxity and subtle restlessness to arise, and if they do, they can be easily eliminated with a small amount of effort. The monkey stands behind the meditator and pays homage to him.
25. The elephant is completely white and the monkey is no longer present, symbolizing that by applying a little mindfulness and introspective awareness at the beginning of the meditation session, the meditator can enter an interrupted state of single-pointed concentration in which

- laxity, restlessness, and distractions do not have the power to interrupt concentration. The eighth stage is near.
26. The eighth stage, making single-pointed, is attained. Laxity and restlessness are not able to interrupt concentration, so the focus is uninterrupted. At the beginning of the session, the meditator can immediately apprehend the meditation object and can continuously maintain concentration on it.
  27. This bend represents the power of complete familiarity, through which the ninth stage is attained.
  28. The ninth stage, placing in equipoise, is attained. The elephant rests besides the meditator, who sits at ease. The mind effortlessly stays on the meditation object without any interruption during the entire session. A rainbow streams from the meditator's heart.
  29. The meditator rides the elephant along the rainbow path en route to serenity. The meditator experiences the bliss of physical and mental pliancy.
  30. Serenity is attained.
  31. Mental joy is present.
  32. The monk rides the completely pacified elephant. By attaining the union of serenity and insight with emptiness as the object, the monk holds the sword of wisdom. Ignorance, the root of saṃsāra, is now in the process of being cut.
  33. With extremely powerful mindfulness and wisdom, represented by the flames, the meditator continues to meditate on emptiness. With his meditation informed by bodhicitta, he eradicates all defilements from the mind.

## 8 | The Meditative Absorptions

SERENITY IS A TOOL to aid our practice; it is not an end in itself. The purpose of gaining serenity is to be able to cultivate insight and then to unite serenity and insight, which empowers the mind to be able to either temporarily suppress or completely eliminate afflictions. Having attained serenity, a practitioner may follow one of two paths. One is a *mundane path*, leading to the attainment of higher meditative absorptions in this life, birth in the form or formless realm in the next life, and perhaps the first five superknowledges. The mundane path involves mundane insight, which contemplates the drawbacks (grossness) of the lower states of meditative absorption and the benefits (peacefulness) of the higher states within cyclic existence and results in temporarily suppressing afflictions.<sup>56</sup> This path is common to both Buddhists and non-Buddhists.

The other is a *supramundane path*, in which serenity is used as the basis for the cultivation of insight into the sixteen attributes of the four truths, especially selflessness and emptiness. This is unique to Buddhist practitioners and leads to nirvāṇa and full awakening. Serenity is required to proceed on either of these two paths.

Understanding the meditative absorptions will benefit your practice. You will know that the practice of cultivating serenity and higher meditative states requires patience, fortitude, and effort, and that it's best to approach this without expectation of quick results gained with little effort. These teachings provide a road map to follow that enables us to practice in a steady, sequential manner and to more accurately evaluate our practice and experiences in meditation. This prevents us from becoming arrogant or giddy with excitement after having an especially "good" session or an unusual experience. In this way, we will continue to practice with a balanced mind and a good motivation.

The teachings in this chapter and the next are complex and require study on our part to learn. There are several new terms, which, with study, you will become familiar with. You may find it helpful to make an outline of the topics.



## *Cultivating Mundane Insight*

Samsāra consists of three realms — the desire, form, and formless realms.<sup>57</sup> The desire realm is so called because the beings in it are distracted to external objects of desire. The form realm, where beings have a subtler body than ours, consists of four levels of dhyāna (meditative stabilizations), while the formless realm, where beings do not have a coarse body, has four levels of meditative absorption.

We live in the desire realm and know it exists. How can we establish the existence of the form and formless realms? One way is to examine our states of mind. Our mental state in the desire realm is much grosser due to our distraction and obsession with external objects and their perception by the five sense faculties — eye, ear, nose, tongue, and touch. When we develop even a little concentration, our mind becomes more peaceful and stable. When this is enhanced, serenity is attained and the mind becomes even calmer and subtler. From this we can intuit that there are progressively deeper states of meditative absorption that are even more peaceful and subtle, and we can infer that there are sentient beings who take birth in these deep meditative absorptions and dwell in them for a long time.

Corresponding to the three realms (*dhātu* or *laukya, loka*) are the three spheres (*avacara*) of consciousness: (1) the desire sphere of consciousness (P. *kāmāvacaracitta*), (2) the form sphere of consciousness (P. *rūpāvacaracitta*), and (3) the formless sphere of consciousness (P. *arūpāvacaracitta*). These spheres of consciousness are a classification of mental states while the realms are planes of existence or worlds into which sentient beings are born. Usually beings in a particular realm have the sphere of consciousness corresponding to that realm. However, a being of another realm may have that sphere of consciousness on occasion. For example, human beings are born in the desire realm and have a desire-sphere consciousness. Upon attaining serenity, a human being's meditating mind becomes a form-sphere consciousness, although their body remains a desire-realm body.

Each dhyāna has two parts: (1) the preparatory stages — also called “access” (*sāmantaka*) — of that dhyāna, and (2) the actual dhyāna that is attained upon the completion of its preparatory stages. To attain the actual first dhyāna, meditators must first accomplish its seven preparatory stages or preparations, which are first dhyāna spheres of consciousness. The seven preparations consist of

the initial level of serenity, where one is called a “mere beginner,” and the first six of the seven mental contemplations (*manaskāra*). Here, “serenity” refers to a form-sphere consciousness and a level of meditative equipoise. Serenity must be strengthened by repeated meditation before meditators proceed to the seven mental contemplations. *Śrāvaka Grounds* lays out the seven mental contemplations (LC 3:98):

For the sake of freedom from the desire realm, diligent yogis use the seven types of mental contemplation and subsequently achieve their freedom. The seven types of mental contemplation are: the mental contemplations of (1) discernment of characteristics, (2) arisen from belief, (3) isolation, (4) delight or withdrawal, (5) analysis, (6) final training, and (7) the result of final training [which is the actual first dhyāna].

These seven can be practiced in terms of cultivating understanding of grossness and peacefulness or of the four truths. (1) *Grossness and peacefulness* refers to the disadvantages of the lower sphere of consciousness and the relative peacefulness of the present one. When mental contemplations are practiced for this aim, they are mundane paths practiced by Buddhists and non-Buddhists alike who want to deepen their meditative state. Both serenity and insight are employed: insight analyzes the grossness and peacefulness of the realms, and at the conclusion of analysis, serenity focuses one-pointedly on their relative grossness and peacefulness. (2) Buddhists practice the seven mental contemplations to cultivate understanding of the *four truths* in order to attain a supramundane path leading to nirvāṇa.

First we’ll discuss the mental contemplations in terms of grossness and peacefulness as outlined by Asaṅga in *Śrāvaka Grounds*.

1. The *mental contemplation of discernment of characteristics* involves study and reflection on the individual characteristics of the desire realm and the first dhyāna, the former being gross and the latter peaceful. One becomes a beginner at purifying afflictions. Here meditators analyze the grossness of the desire realm: Sentient beings fight; they create all ten paths of nonvirtue. Their bodies are made of foul substances and their minds are filled with afflictions such as anger, resentment, jealousy, miserliness, and lack of integrity — qualities that are absent in the first dhyāna. They experience suffering when they are born, age, fall ill, and

die, and in between birth and death they are dissatisfied, fearful, anxious, and despondent.

Having analyzed the defects of the desire realm, meditators analyze the peacefulness of the first dhyāna: Beings do not suffer from birth and aging. They have whatever they need, fulfill their desires without much effort, and experience contentment. No one engages in the ten paths of nonvirtue, so there are no wars over resources or honor. They have long lifespans and don't experience the horrible diseases that beings in the desire-realm face. Their environment is beautiful, embellished with spectacular buildings and jeweled grounds.

Meditators focus single-pointedly first on the grossness of the desire realm followed by the peacefulness of the first dhyāna; these two are their observed objects. Because it is difficult to analyze within the state of serenity, meditators alternate stabilizing and analytical meditation and again cultivate the nine sustained attentions, overcoming the five faults with the eight antidotes and employing the four powers and six engagements. Should restlessness start to arise, they emphasize stabilizing meditation; should laxity manifest, they emphasize analytical meditation.

Continuing to meditate, they gain mental and physical pliancy, the bliss of physical pliancy, and the bliss of mental pliancy, which is a special mental pliancy induced by analysis. This is a concentration that is a union of serenity and insight and is also the attainment of insight. The union of serenity and insight is so called because previously analysis interfered with the stability of serenity, and the stability of serenity interfered with analysis. Now there is no interference, and the stability at the end of analysis is a special kind of serenity. This marks passing on to the second mental contemplation.

2. The *mental contemplation arisen from belief* is so called because it arises from the belief derived from learning and thinking about grossness and peacefulness during the first mental contemplation. Both serenity and insight are used during these mental contemplations. Insight is cultivated by analyzing the grossness and peacefulness; at the end of analysis, serenity focuses on the grossness and peacefulness discerned through analysis. Meditators now gain the ability to abandon some of the desire-realm afflictions through suppressing them by the power of concentration. This abandonment is temporary, for the afflictions are only completely abandoned by meditation uniting serenity and insight on emptiness.

Desire-realm afflictions are of nine grades. The three general grades are great, middling, and small. Each of these is divided in turn into great, middling, and small. The great-great afflictions are the coarsest ones and thus the easiest to abandon; the small-small are the most intractable and require more time and effort to abandon (see the chart “Grades of Afflictions of the Desire Realm” on page 226).

3. The *mental contemplation of isolation* arises from repeatedly cultivating the second mental contemplation viewing the desire realm as gross and the first dhyāna as peaceful with insight. When meditators can overpower the manifest form of the great-great root and auxiliary afflictions of the desire realm by the uninterrupted path that is their antidote, that marks the beginning of the third mental contemplation. This uninterrupted path views the desire realm as gross; it is immediately followed by a liberated path that views the first dhyāna as peaceful. The uninterrupted path is so called because it suppresses the manifest great-great afflictions of the desire realm so that these afflictions no longer cause any interruption. The liberated path is so called because it is liberated from those afflictions.

The mental contemplation of isolation has three uninterrupted paths and three liberated paths, one each for the great-great, middle-great, and the small-great levels of afflictions. An uninterrupted path, without break in meditation, becomes a liberated path when the suppression of each level of manifest afflictions is complete. This mental contemplation is so called because it's the first time meditators' minds are separated or isolated from the great afflictions of the desire realm. In addition to the uninterrupted paths and liberated paths, there is the mental contemplation of isolation that is neither. This is the meditation that occurs after one liberated path and before the next uninterrupted path that overcomes the next level of afflictions. For example, the uninterrupted path overcoming the great-great afflictions is seamlessly followed by the liberated path that has overcome them. Then the path that is neither occurs; here concentration is strengthened until it is strong enough to bring the uninterrupted path that overcomes the middle-great afflictions and so on.

4. The *mental contemplation of delight or withdrawal* also consists of three uninterrupted paths and three liberated paths. These abandon the three levels of middling afflictions. This mental contemplation is called “withdrawal” because the uninterrupted paths view the desire realm, shed attachment to it, and

withdraw from its grossness. It is called “delight” because the liberated paths viewing the first dhyāna are free from the middling afflictions. As above, a mental contemplation of withdrawal or joy that is neither also exists.

5. The *mental contemplation of analysis* is so called because after having abandoned the first six levels of afflictions, meditators may think they have overcome all nine. To discern if that is the case, they analyze by imagining an object that could easily give rise to a desire-realm affliction and see if even a small affliction arises in response. Having detected that some desire-realm afflictions can still manifest, they continue their meditation.

6. The *mental contemplation of final training* has three uninterrupted paths and three liberated paths that overcome the three small afflictions. Between one liberated path and the next uninterrupted path, there is a mental contemplation of final training that is neither. The last liberated path suppresses the small-small desire-realm afflictions. The third, fourth, and sixth mental contemplations are the antidotes that suppress afflictions.

7. The *mental contemplation of the result of final training* is free of manifest desire-realm afflictions and occurs at the time of entering the first dhyāna. Since the afflictions have been suppressed but not destroyed and their seeds remain in the mindstream, one is not an ārya.

Jinaputra summarizes the seven mental contemplations in his commentary to Asaṅga’s *Compendium of Knowledge* (ISBP 171):

[The mental contemplation] of discernment of characteristics brings about a comprehensive understanding of what is to be abandoned and what is to be attained, and then directs the mind toward their respective abandonment and attainment. Following that, [the mental contemplation] arisen from belief takes up the correct practice. [The mental contemplation] of isolation abandons the great grades of afflictions. [The mental contemplation] of delight abandons the middle grades of afflictions. [The mental contemplation] of analysis places the mind in a state that is free of the exaggerated pride that believes [the goal] has been attained. [The mental contemplation] of final training abandons the small grades of afflictions. [The mental contemplation] of the result of

final training experiences the fruit of having meditated effectively on those [preceding six] mental contemplations.

In a manner that conforms to each specific instance, it should be understood that a description similar to the one that explains the seven mental contemplations that bring about the attainment of the first dhyāna applies to all the other meditative levels up to the [formless absorption of] neither-discrimination-nor-nondiscrimination.

The seven preparations should not be confused with the seven mental contemplations. The seven preparations consist of the initial level of serenity and the first six of the seven mental contemplations. The seven mental contemplations do not include the initial level of serenity and add the actual first dhyāna as the last mental contemplation. Serenity is found in all dhyānas and formless meditative absorptions.

#### **RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE SEVEN PREPARATIONS AND SEVEN MENTAL CONTEMPLATIONS OF THE FIRST DHYĀNA**

<b>SEVEN PREPARATIONS (ACCESS)</b>	<b>SEVEN MENTAL CONTEMPLATIONS (ŚRĀVAKA GROUNDS)</b>
1. mere beginner, which is the initial level of serenity	beginner at mental contemplation, which is the initial level of serenity
2. discernment of characteristics	1. discernment of characteristics (beginner at purifying afflictions)
3. arisen from belief	2. arisen from belief
4. isolation	3. isolation
5. delight or withdrawal	4. delight or withdrawal
6. analysis	5. analysis
7. final application	6. final training
The last liberated path is the actual first dhyāna.	7. result of final application (the actual first dhyāna)

## *Meditative Absorptions of the Form Realm*

*The first dhyāna* is a meditative absorption because the mind and its associated mental factors operate equally on the object. While several mental factors are present, five are chief: two are antidotes, two are benefits, and one is the basis. Investigation (coarse engagement, *vitarka*, *vitakka*) and analysis (subtle engagement, *vicāra*, *vicāra*) are *antidotes* because they are the continuation of the investigation and analysis in the preparations that led to the abandonment of the faults of the desire realm. Investigation examines the nature of the observed object in a general way; analysis examines its attributes in detail.

The mental bliss that accompanies the mind of the first dhyāna performs two functions. From the perspective that it causes the mental consciousness and the other mental factors to be joyful, it is called joy (*prīti*, *pīti*). From the perspective that it makes the body blissful, it is called bliss (*sukha*). Joy and bliss are *benefits* because the meditator experiences the joy and bliss that come with having left behind the faults of the desire realm. One-pointedness (*ekāgratā*, *ekaggatā*) is the *basis* because it serves as the foundation of the other four mental factors. Together, these five are known as the “five absorption factors.”

The meditative absorption of the first dhyāna is of two kinds. The *causal absorption of the first dhyāna* is attained in this life. If it has not degenerated when the meditator dies, it brings the *resultant-birth absorption of the first dhyāna*, and the meditator is born in the first dhyāna with the physical and mental aggregates of the first dhyāna. In this case, the seven mental contemplations of the first dhyāna are the second link of formative action — the invariable karma that projects rebirth in the first dhyāna. The ripened effect of that action is the aggregates of a being born in the first dhyāna. Once born in the first dhyāna, beings experience the environmental result — a pleasing environment — and causally concordant results, such as a mind without the desire-realm afflictions. The process is the same when yogis are reborn in higher meditative absorptions.

The *causal meditative absorption* of the first dhyāna has two types. The first is a mere first dhyāna that has all five absorption factors; the second is the special first dhyāna that has separated from the coarser factor of investigation and has neutral feeling instead of joy and bliss.

The uninterrupted paths and liberated paths described above are mundane paths in that they only suppress manifest afflictions. They are not ārya paths that

eradicate afflictions completely.

We may also speak about three types of causal meditative absorptions of the first dhyāna:

1. With the pure (*śuddha*) meditative absorption, meditators are free of all afflictions associated with the first dhyāna. When one initially attains the first dhyāna, it is pure; but later it may become afflictive if one of the afflictions of the first dhyāna — attachment, for example — arises in one's mind. Nevertheless, a pure meditative absorption is still polluted because afflictions have only been temporarily suppressed, not eradicated.
2. The unpolluted (*anāsrava*) meditative absorption is used by āryas as the basis for their path consciousness that eradicates afflictions.
3. The afflictive (*kliṣṭa*) is polluted by one or more of the afflictions of the first dhyāna. This dhyāna has five afflictions: attachment, view, arrogance, ignorance, and doubt. Experiencing the bliss of the first dhyāna, some meditators become *attached* to it. Generating one of the superknowledges, meditators see their previous lives and have the *view* of a permanent self. Thinking they are exceptional for having attained the first dhyāna, they may become *arrogant*. Being *ignorant*, they may *doubt* whether the first dhyāna is a path to liberation. Any of these makes the first dhyāna afflictive.

Meditators may now seek deeper states of absorption: the second, third, and fourth dhyānas of the form realm and then the four meditative absorptions (*samāpatti*) of the formless realm. To gain the other three dhyānas, meditators cultivate the seven mental contemplations for that dhyāna by contemplating the grossness of the lower dhyāna and the peacefulness of the higher one. Meditators suppress the three great, three middling, and three small levels of afflictions associated with the lower dhyāna by means of nine uninterrupted paths and nine liberated paths that abandon them as they advance through the seven mental contemplations for the next dhyāna. Similar to the first dhyāna, the second, third, and fourth dhyānas also have causal and resultant birth types of dhyānas and pure, unpolluted, and afflictive types.



*The second dhyāna* has four dhyānic factors: one antidotal, two benefits, and one basis. The antidotal factor is internal clarity (*adhyātmāsamprasāda*). It includes the mental factors of mindfulness (*smṛti*), which remembers the observed object of the second dhyāna and its aspects; introspective awareness (*samprajanya*), which monitors whether the mind is focused on the object; and equanimity (*upekṣā*), which here has subdued the fluctuation caused by investigation and analysis in the first dhyāna.<sup>58</sup> The second dhyāna is now free from investigation and analysis. Its benefits are joy and bliss, although joy, being very exuberant, can sometimes agitate the mind. As with all four dhyānas, the basis is one-pointedness.

*The third dhyāna* has five dhyānic factors: three antidotal, one benefit, and one basis. The antidotal factors are mindfulness, introspective awareness, and equanimity, which together cause the mind to overcome attachment to the second dhyāna. Equanimity especially subdues the restlessness of joy, which is no longer present in the third dhyāna. Equanimity equalizes and balances the mind and its accompanying mental factors. The benefit factor is the bliss of the third dhyāna, which is not as disturbing as the bliss of the second dhyāna. The basis is single-pointed concentration.

*The fourth dhyāna* has four dhyānic factors: two antidotal (mindfulness and equanimity), one benefit (the equanimity that is a neutral feeling), and one basis (single-pointedness). Mindfulness, equanimity, and neutral feeling are now said to be thoroughly pure because meditators have relinquished eight faults that cause fluctuation in concentration: investigation, analysis, inhalation (*śvāsa*), exhalation (*praśvāsa*), physical pain (*duḥkha*) of the desire realm, mental unhappiness (*daurmanasya*) of the desire realm, mental happiness (*saumanasya*) up to and including the second dhyāna, and the feeling of bliss (*sukha*) of the third dhyāna. Equanimity has pacified these and balanced the mind, making the fourth dhyāna the best basis for attaining the path of seeing. Although the fourth dhyāna has introspective awareness, it is not listed because it is no longer necessary since the eight faults have been overcome. Having abandoned inhalation and exhalation, these meditators stop breathing while in deep meditative equipoise.

The first and second dhyānas differ in that although both are clear and stable, the power of the first dhyāna is incomplete due to investigation and analysis. When these are subdued in the second dhyāna, the power of concentration is

complete. The second and third dhyānas differ in that the benefit is not complete in the former because both joy and bliss are present. When the joy and bliss of the second dhyāna are overcome and only the bliss of the third dhyāna remains, the factor of benefit is complete. The third and fourth dhyānas differ in that the faults of inhalation, exhalation, and the feeling of bliss remain in the former but are absent in the latter, bringing about the completion of thorough purity in the fourth dhyāna. Of all eight meditative absorptions, it is the one most suitable for attaining the excellent qualities of the three vehicles. Bodhisattvas in general rely on the concentrations of the dhyānas to generate excellent qualities; only bodhisattvas on the eighth ground and above have the power to use the formless absorptions for that purpose.

### PRINCIPAL MENTAL FACTORS IN THE FOUR DHYĀNAS

DHYĀNA	FACTORS PRESENT	NEWLY ABSENT FACTORS
1	2 antidotal: investigation, analysis 2 benefits: joy, bliss 1 basis: one-pointedness	
2	1 antidotal: internal clarity (includes mindfulness, introspective awareness, equanimity) 2 benefits: joy, bliss 1 basis: one-pointedness	investigation, analysis
3	3 antidotal: mindfulness, introspective awareness, equanimity 1 benefit: bliss 1 basis: one-pointedness	joy
4	2 antidotal: mindfulness, equanimity 1 benefit: equanimity that is a neutral feeling 1 basis: one-pointedness	inhalation, exhalation, pain, mental unhappiness, mental happiness, feeling of bliss

## *Meditative Absorptions of the Formless Realm*

Meditators practicing the mundane path who have gained the fourth dhyāna may proceed to attain the four meditative absorptions of the formless realm: limitless space (*ākāśānantya*), limitless consciousness (*viññānānantya*), nothingness (*ākimkāntya*), and the peak of saṃsāra (*bhavāgra*). While the four dhyānas differ in terms of the presence or absence of different dhyānic factors, the four meditative absorptions of the formless realm are distinguished by their observed object. Also, whereas analysis is the prominent meditative activity in the four dhyānas, stabilization is the main meditation done in the four formless absorptions. The sense that the body is sinking under the earth is the sign of attaining any of the four dhyānas, whereas the sense that the body is flying in space is the sign of attaining any of the four formless absorptions.<sup>59</sup>

Each of the formless absorptions has seven mental contemplations where meditators analyze within a mind of serenity and focus on the lower dhyāna or absorption as gross and the discrimination of the upper one as peaceful. However, they principally engage in stabilizing meditation. They actualize nine uninterrupted paths and nine liberated paths, the last liberated path being the actual absorption they seek to attain. Each of the four formless absorptions has causal and resultant rebirth absorptions as well as pure, unpolluted, and afflictive types of absorption, although some say the peak of saṃsāra does not have an unpolluted absorption.

Practitioners who have attained the fourth dhyāna still have a sense of craving even though all attachment to objects of the desire realm have been abandoned. This occurs because obstructive contact is still present in the dhyānas. Seeing this attachment as a fault, they strive for a state that is like space in which there is no obstructive contact. Taking this state as their meditation object, they view the fourth dhyāna as gross and focus one-pointedly on the thought, “Space is limitless.” By meditating in this way, they attain the nine uninterrupted paths and nine liberated paths and then the actual *absorption of limitless space*. At this time the appearance of forms ceases and there is no perception of obstructions, such as walls or mountains, and no perception of variety, such as various colors and shapes. Meditators don’t think that these no longer exist, rather they cultivate their nonappearance to the mind. Space exists everywhere.

Having attained the state of separation from obstruction and contact, they still have feeling, and again craving arises. In short, until self-grasping has been eliminated, as soon as there is an appearance, craving will arise in relation to it. So practitioners aspire to go beyond limitless space and seek the state of limitless consciousness. To attain the *absorption of limitless consciousness*, meditators focus on the absorption of limitless space as gross and the discrimination that consciousness is limitless as peaceful.

After a while, they begin to see the state of limitless consciousness as unsatisfactory and look for whatever is different from consciousness, be it material or immaterial. Not finding anything, they transcend the actual absorption of limitless consciousness and stay in the contemplation beyond this — a state in which there is absolutely nothing whatsoever. Drawn to the perception that there is nothing, they pursue it repeatedly, causing them to go beyond the preparations to nothingness to attain the actual absorption of nothingness. In short, to attain the *absorption of nothingness*, they focus on the discrimination that consciousness is limitless as gross and see the discrimination that there is nothing to apprehend that is material or immaterial as peaceful.

To attain the *absorption of the peak of saṃsāra*, meditators view the discrimination that there is nothing to apprehend as material or immaterial as gross and they cultivate the thought that coarse discrimination (of nothingness) doesn't exist, and subtle discrimination is not nonexistent. They release all coarse discrimination so only subtle discrimination remains. Cultivating the seven preparations, they suppress the nine grades of afflictions of nothingness and attain the meditative absorption of the peak of saṃsāra.

Beings in the formless realm have very long, peaceful lives, but after the karma for these rebirths has been exhausted, without choice they fall to lower levels of rebirth. It's like ascending to the top of the Eiffel Tower: the only way to go is down. Some people mistake the peace of rebirth in the formless realm for liberation, only to be horrified when they die and take rebirth in the desire realm again because they still have self-grasping ignorance. Dharmakīrti counsels (PV 221cd–222ab):

Where there is grasping at self, there is the view of other.  
From this duality of self and other  
arise attachment and animosity.

Due to this, all faults of cyclic existence ensue.

For this reason, it is essential to lay the foundation of a strong aspiration to be free from saṃsāra, knowledge of the paths and grounds leading to liberation and awakening, and reliance on a fully qualified spiritual mentor who can guide us.

### *Meditative Absorptions on the Four Truths*

The methods to attain serenity, the dhyānas, and the formless absorptions are found in both Buddhism and Hinduism. Christians and followers of other faiths may also benefit from learning the techniques leading to serenity, and we can share these with them. Non-Buddhists who seek to attain the dhyānas and formless absorptions practice the mundane path of meditating on grossness and peacefulness as described above.

Buddhist teachers often caution their disciples from seeking the eight meditative absorptions without first having a clear aspiration to attain liberation or buddhahood. Their concern is that the disciples may easily become attached to the bliss and equanimity of those meditative states and cease to pursue their spiritual aim of nirvāṇa. Followers of the Mahāyāna, in particular, are strongly encouraged to emphasize the cultivation of bodhicitta so that they are not distracted by either the joys of saṃsāra or the bliss of the personal peace of arhatship. Nāgārjuna tells us (MMK 18.5a):

Through the elimination of karma and affliction there is nirvana.

Buddhists who take this to heart do not follow the mundane path of grossness and peacefulness in order to attain higher rebirths in saṃsāra.<sup>60</sup> They instead seek the ultimate reality (*dharmatā*), nirvāṇa. Their aim is liberation or full awakening, and to attain these they must cultivate the union of serenity and insight on the four truths or on emptiness in order to generate the supramundane paths — the only paths that can eradicate the afflictive obscurations and cognitive obscurations.<sup>61</sup> The mental contemplations that focus on grossness and peacefulness used to attain the dhyānas are not suitable to do this. Tsongkhapa said (LC 3:101):

Nowadays there is no one who uses these methods [of the mundane path of grossness and peacefulness] to accomplish the actual dhyānas and so on, so there is no one to lead you astray.

In Tibet meditators did not practice the meditation on grossness and peacefulness to attain rebirth in the form and formless realms. In this way, they did not get sidetracked by attachment to the bliss and equanimity of the meditative absorptions.

Asaṅga's *Śrāvaka Grounds* speaks of four types of people who do not practice the supramundane paths in that lifetime but proceed only by practicing the mundane path of meditation on grossness and peacefulness: (1) non-Buddhists because they do not understand the four truths, (2) Buddhists with dull faculties who have excessively emphasized meditation on serenity for a long time, (3) sharp-faculty Buddhists whose roots of virtue haven't completely ripened, and (4) bodhisattvas who defer their attainment of buddhahood to a future life and do not attain it in this life.

To attain liberation, it is not necessary to gain all the meditative absorptions of the form and formless realms. In fact, some of the lower absorptions may be more conducive for this. Tsongkhapa says (LC 3:95):

Furthermore, even if you do not achieve the higher dhyānas of the form realm or meditative absorptions of the formless realm, but do achieve the serenity explained previously, which is included in the level of access to the first dhyāna, then you can achieve liberation — freedom from all the fetters of cyclic existence — by cultivating insight based on that serenity.

However, since buddhas' minds have perfected all excellent qualities limitlessly, they have mastered all the meditative absorptions.

The three vehicles are distinguished in terms of the method aspect of the path; according to the Prāsaṅgikas, followers of all three vehicles realize the same selflessness — the emptiness of inherent existence of all persons and phenomena. To achieve the union of serenity and insight on selflessness, cultivating concentration is essential. In this light, pursuing the dhyānas helps to enhance their concentration.

Practitioners unite serenity and insight and eradicate afflictions in different ways. Śrāvakas become arhats by passing through the five śrāvaka paths of accumulation, preparation, seeing, meditation and no-more-learning. However, they need not attain all four fruits of that path — the fruits of stream-enterer, once-returner, nonreturner, and arhat — because there are different ways to overcome the innate afflictions. To discuss this in-depth would take us into the complex topic of the Twenty Saṅghas.<sup>62</sup> This topic involves the many and varied ways that śrāvakas can attain arhatship, including the realms they abide in while practicing, the afflictions abandoned at different stages, their meditative attainments, and so forth. Texts present this topic in various ways, and scholars differ in their presentations as well. In addition, the topic can be presented in a detailed or abbreviated manner, which may sometimes sound different from each other even when the same scholar wrote both presentations. Below is one presentation explained briefly.

The afflictions to be abandoned are divided into eighty-one grades. Each of the nine levels — the desire realm, the four dhyānas, and the four formless absorptions — has three grades of afflictions — great, middle, and small. These three are further subdivided into three — the great-great, middle-great, and small-great afflictions — so there are nine afflictions for each level. The nine grades of afflictions for each of the four dhyānas and four formless absorptions are laid out similarly, for a total of eighty-one grades all together.

### *Grades of Afflictions of the Desire Realm*

- Great
  1. Great-great
  2. Middle-great
  3. Small-great
- Middle
  1. Great-middle
  2. Middle-middle
  3. Small-middle
- Small
  1. Great-small



2. Middle-small
3. Small-small

These afflictions may be abandoned in two ways: The first is by temporarily suppressing them by means of the preparations for each successive dhyāna. The second is by eradicating them forever by means of the supramundane paths directly realizing selflessness. Someone may have temporarily suppressed a certain grade of afflictions by the power of their samādhi but not yet eradicated them by the power of their wisdom.

In *Śrāvaka Grounds*, Asaṅga describes how śrāvakas progressively develop the seven mental contemplations in relation to the four truths. The descriptions of the mental contemplations here differs from that for cultivating mundane insight.

1. The *mental contemplation of discernment of characteristics* involves learning, reflecting on, and analyzing the meaning of the sixteen aspects of the four truths as they apply to all rebirths in saṃsāra. This stage employs both the wisdom arising from hearing and the wisdom arising from reflection.
2. The *mental contemplation arisen from belief* is attained when analysis brings certainty regarding the four truths. This is gained through the cultivation of the wisdom arising from meditation and brings awareness of the full extent and nature of the four truths and evokes aversion toward true duḥkha and true origins. Nevertheless, a practitioner’s mind still resists the peacefulness of nirvāṇa because of strong familiarization with sensory pleasure that has been present since beginningless time. Identifying the conceit “I am” as the source of this and applying the antidote to the conceit, a practitioner meditates on the subtle impermanence of the mindstream and cultivates a deeper understanding of the sixteen aspects of the four truths. She then develops awareness that the apprehending mind has the same nature as the apprehended meditation object, an understanding that arises on the heat level of the path of preparation. It is called “heat” because the fire of wisdom will consume the kindling of the afflictions in the future. Continued meditation brings the peak level, which is so called because it is the highest point of unstable virtue — that is, one could still fall back or take an unfortunate rebirth. More practice leads to attaining the third level of



- the path of preparation, fortitude, which is so called because the mind now strongly accepts four truths and there is no longer the possibility of backsliding. By continuing to examine the nature of the mind, the practitioner attains a mental state that seems to be without discrimination, as if the mind lacks an object and has ceased functioning, although it hasn't. This is the level of supreme Dharma, where one is on the verge of perceiving emptiness directly.
3. The *mental contemplation of isolation* is attained after the practitioner exerts herself with respect to four truths and generates a direct perceiver of the true nature of the four truths. This realization marks the advent of the path of seeing and heralds the destruction of afflictions that are to be abandoned on that path.
  4. The next three mental contemplations are attained during the path of meditation. The *mental contemplation of analysis* examines what obstacles have been abandoned and what are yet to be abandoned.
  5. With the *mental contemplation of delight* one continues to meditate, occasionally investigating what obstacles have and have not yet been abandoned, periodically generating aversion toward things for which the practitioner should feel aversion (the first two truths), and from time to time generating great delight toward things for which she should feel delight (the last two truths).<sup>63</sup>
  6. Through practicing the mental contemplation of delight, the vajra-like concentration arises. It abandons all remaining afflictions to be abandoned by the path of seeing. This is the *mental contemplation of final training*.
  7. The *mental contemplation of the result of final training* occurs after the vajra-like concentration has eradicated all remaining afflictive obscurations and arhatship has been attained.

With respect to the way śrāvakas proceed on the path to liberation, there are four types of śrāvaka āryas: simultaneous eliminators, leapers, gradual attainers, and gradual eliminators.<sup>64</sup>

*Simultaneous eliminators* attain only the fruits of stream-enterer and arhat, not the fruits of once-returner and nonreturner. They eradicate afflictions by using serenity as the basis for cultivating insight into emptiness. To do this they

employ a preparation of the first dhyāna called the “capable preparation” (*anāgamyā*), which is a mind of the form realm.<sup>65</sup> It is attained by first developing serenity and then alternating analytical and stabilizing meditation on emptiness to attain a similitude of insight. Continuing to meditate in this way, they attain a fully qualified insight — the capable preparation. It is so called because it is able to serve as the mental basis for supramundane paths — the unpolluted paths of seeing, meditation, and no-more-learning — that are the antidotes to afflictive obscurations of the three realms. The simultaneous eliminators easily abandon the eighty-one afflictions of the three realms using the capable preparation, because it abandons the great-great afflictions of all nine levels simultaneously, the middle-great afflictions of all nine levels simultaneously, and the small-great afflictions of all nine levels simultaneously, and so on through to the small-small afflictions of all nine levels. These śrāvakas go through nine uninterrupted paths and nine liberated paths.

Simultaneous eliminators have sharp faculties and attain nirvāṇa faster than the other types of śrāvaka āryas. However, the capable preparation alone cannot abandon the cognitive obscurations.

*Leapers* bypass one or more fruits. One type of leaper has suppressed between six and nine of the nine grades of desire-realm afflictions prior to entering the path of seeing. This enables them to leap over the fruit of stream-enterer and become a once-returner when they attain the path of seeing. The second type of leaper has suppressed all nine grades of desire-realm afflictions and leaps over both stream-entry and once-returner, becoming a nonreturner upon attaining the path of seeing.

*Gradual attainers* proceed gradually through all four fruits one after the other.

*Gradual eliminators*, like gradual attainers, sequentially suppress and eradicate the various grades of afflictions. However, some gradual eliminators attain all four fruits, some do not attain the fruit of stream-enterer, and some do not attain the fruits of stream-enterer and once-returner.

Some śrāvakas seek birth in one of the five pure abodes (T. *gnas gtsang ma*) in the form realm. To be born there, they engage in the alternating dhyāna meditation (T. *bsam gtan spel sgom*), which involves alternating between polluted (mundane) and unpolluted (supramundane) fourth dhyānas. In this way, they transmute previously created propelling karma that would lead to a rebirth in one

of the first three levels of the fourth dhyāna so that it ripens instead as birth in one of the five pure abodes in the fourth dhyāna. These abodes are pure in the sense that birth there is not taken by polluted propelling karma, so only āryas are born there.<sup>66</sup> Vasubandhu explains the alternating dhyāna meditation (ADK 6:42–43ab):

Initially, the fourth [dhyāna] is alternated.  
It is achieved by mixing instants.  
It is for the sake of being reborn and abiding  
as well as out of fear due to the afflictions.  
Because there are five types [of alternating dhyāna meditation],  
there are only five rebirths in pure places

*Who practices or uses alternating dhyāna meditation?* It is not practiced by ordinary beings, including those on the paths of accumulation and preparation, because it has an unpolluted component. In terms of āryas, it is not practiced by stream-enters or once-returners because they have not attained an actual dhyāna and are still liable to be born in the desire realm under the force of afflictions and karma.<sup>67</sup> Thus it must be nonreturners or arhats who practice alternating dhyāna meditation. Nonreturners do this practice to be reborn in a pure abode and attain nirvāṇa there. Sharp-faculty arhats are liberated, but do this practice to gain a happy abiding in that life. Dull-faculty arhats do it to distance themselves from obscurations that relish the pleasant taste of concentration.

*In which realms is this meditation done?* It is practiced by beings in either the desire or form realms.

*How many versions of the alternating dhyāna meditation are there?* There are five, one corresponding to each of the five pure abodes: (1) small-three, (2) middling-six, (3) big-nine, (4) very-big-twelve, and (5) extremely-big-fifteen alternating dhyāna meditations.

*How are they practiced?* There are two phases: the preparation when meditators are training, and the actual practice after they have gained proficiency in the alternating dhyāna meditation. The following is the description for the small-three alternating dhyāna meditation.

Preparation: Āryas who aspire to do this practice initially abide continuously in the unpolluted actual fourth dhyāna, which is the most serviceable mind

because it is free from the eight faults: investigation, analysis, inhalation, exhalation, physical pain of the desire realm, mental unhappiness of the desire realm, mental happiness up to and including the second dhyāna, and the bliss of the third dhyāna. That is followed by continually abiding in the polluted actual fourth dhyāna. After that, they continually abide in the unpolluted actual fourth dhyāna again. Initially they may take breaks between these periods of abiding. Eventually these periods of abiding become shorter, so that each of the three periods of abiding in the unpolluted, polluted, and unpolluted fourth dhyāna lasts only two moments.

Actual: once the meditators are trained as above, they do the same three-period alternation with one effort — that is, all in one go without a break.

*What is the measure of having attained the alternating dhyāna meditation?* Vaibhāṣikas say that it is the ability to abide in the unpolluted actual fourth dhyāna for one shortest moment, then abide in the polluted actual fourth dhyāna for a shortest moment, and finally abide in the unpolluted actual fourth dhyāna for one shortest moment. This entire sequence is done with one effort and lasts for only three shortest moments — a shortest moment is 1/64 of a fingersnap. Vasubandhu disagrees, saying only the Buddha can do this; he asserts that each phase lasts for a moment — that is, the length of time of a fingersnap. The Mahāyāna agrees with this.

*What form does each of the five alternating dhyāna meditations take?* The small-three is described above. The middling-six alternates the unpolluted actual fourth dhyāna with the polluted one to make six moments. The big-nine is nine moments, the very-big-twelve is twelve moments, and the extremely-big-fifteen alternating dhyāna meditation is fifteen moments of alternately abiding in the unpolluted and the polluted actual fourth dhyāna. To be able to go from unpolluted to polluted absorptions is extremely difficult, and to be able to do this in the shortest moment is almost unimaginable. Yet these are the skills these diligent śrāvakas develop.

The small-three alternating dhyāna meditations bring birth in the lowest or first of the five pure abodes, Not Great; the middling-six in the second, Untroubled, and so on to the third, Beautiful; the fourth, Clear-Sighted; and the fifth, Highest Pure Abodes.

Asaṅga's *Bodhisattva Grounds* says that the dhyānas of bodhisattvas can be categorized as two: mundane and supramundane. Alternatively, they may also be

classified in three: (1) dhyānas cultivated for happiness in this life, (2) dhyānas cultivated to attain the excellent qualities of concentration,<sup>68</sup> and (3) dhyānas cultivated to accomplish the welfare of sentient beings.<sup>69</sup>

Bodhisattvas seek to develop a mind that is serviceable, wise, and able to benefit others. For this purpose, they need knowledge of the various meditative absorptions, especially the fourth dhyāna, the best support to enter the Mahāyāna path of seeing. Since bodhisattvas are of different faculties and at different stages, they go about this accordingly. Those bodhisattvas who first became arhats through following the śrāvaka path have attained the dhyānas and formless absorptions during that path. Some scholars maintain that at the time of having eliminated all afflictive obscurations, śrāvaka arhats attain all eight meditative absorptions, in which case these bodhisattvas would have them.

New bodhisattvas who did not previously follow the śrāvaka path to arhatship could generate the fourth dhyāna in several ways. Sharp-faculty disciples who already have an inferential realization of emptiness now make effort to attain the concentrated mind of serenity. However, those who used a meditation object other than emptiness to attain serenity must gain the correct view of emptiness and then traverse the nine stages of sustained attention to gain serenity with emptiness as the object.

Bodhisattvas seek to suppress the afflictions in order to increase the clarity of insight and attain the supramundane paths. As the power of their minds increases as a result of meditating on emptiness for prolonged periods of time, they approach the level of the first dhyāna. Through persistent one-pointed meditation on emptiness, their minds become more stable and subtle, and they reach a level of experience whereby the afflictions of the desire realm have been suppressed. At that point it could be said that they have reached the first dhyana.

To determine that this is the case, they think of an object that would normally trigger manifest attachment to the sensual pleasures of the desire realm and check if such attachment arises in their minds. If not, they confirm to themselves that they have reached the first dhyāna or a state equivalent to it. They progress in a similar way, meditating on emptiness, and then testing to see if the particular afflictions corresponding to each subsequent meditative absorption arise in their mind. In that way, they confirm their level of meditative absorption.

After bodhisattvas have attained serenity on emptiness, they must unify serenity and insight on emptiness. This is necessary because otherwise the

stability of serenity interferes with the analysis of insight, and analysis interferes with stability. To harmonize the two, based on having traversed the nine stages of sustained attention and attained serenity, they alternate stabilizing and analytical meditation on emptiness and again apply the four attentions until special pliancy is induced through the force of analysis. At that time, they attain fully qualified insight, a wisdom of thorough discrimination of phenomena conjoined with special pliancy induced by the power of analysis. The clarity of this mind is much greater than that of serenity alone, and its wisdom can penetrate emptiness more deeply. Since the one-pointedness of serenity continues to operate with insight, the mind that is the union of serenity and insight becomes very powerful. At this point there is the wisdom arisen from meditation, and the path of preparation is attained.

When, with the fourth dhyāna, bodhisattvas realize emptiness directly, they attain the path of seeing and begin to gradually eradicate the afflictive obscurations and then the cognitive obscurations. Eradicating defilements so they can never arise again goes far beyond merely temporarily suppressing them on the mundane path.

Some masters and scriptures point to yet another path whereby Buddhist meditators deepen their concentration and progress to the fourth dhyāna. This is by contemplating the first two truths — for example, true duḥkha and true origins of the desire realm as gross and the remaining two truths of the desire realm as peaceful. Here their meditation object is the four truths and their sixteen attributes.

Bodhisattvas can attain a concentration called the “stream of Dharma” (T. *chos rgyun gyi ting nge ’dzin*) on the great stage of the path of accumulation. This samādhi is concomitant with mindfulness and wisdom, and by entering it bodhisattvas can listen to the teachings of innumerable buddhas in various buddha fields without ever forgetting them. They can even hear teachings given by a supreme emanation body without needing to be physically near that buddha.

The fifth chapter of the *Ornament of Clear Realizations* explains that to attain this concentration, bodhisattvas sequentially develop each meditative absorption up to the peak of saṃsāra. After meditating in each absorption in the ascending order, they descend in reverse order, and then meditate upward sequentially to the fourth dhyāna, where they then attain the ultimate fourth dhyāna (T. *rab mthā'i bsam gtan bzhi pa*). Some people say bodhisattvas attain this meditative



ability by meditating on grossness and peacefulness; others say it may be attained with emptiness as one's meditation object.<sup>70</sup> In either case, by the great stage of the path of accumulation, bodhisattvas have attained all eight meditative absorptions.

Causes to attain the concentration of the stream of Dharma are hard to accumulate. We must have a union of serenity and insight that has a special ability to hear teachings from a supreme emanation body. In addition, we must have heard many teachings, collected merit and wisdom for a long time, purified obscurations to directly seeing buddhas and hearing the Dharma from them, and gained correct views and pure ethics.

*Bodhisattvas following the Perfection Vehicle or the three lower tantras* (action, performance, and yoga tantra) attain serenity first, followed by insight. Insight itself is the union of serenity and insight.

*Bodhisattvas who enter highest yoga tantra without having previously become an arhat* may do so with the mental basis of the capable preparation. They do not seek to suppress the afflictions of the desire realm or attain the first dhyāna because they employ desire on the path.

If bodhisattvas have not already attained the union of serenity and insight, they may do so using special techniques in highest yoga tantra on the basis of having either the Cittamātrin or Madhyamaka view of emptiness.<sup>71</sup> After meditating on emptiness during the *coarse generation stage*, practitioners imagine that their wisdom understanding emptiness manifests in the form of the deity and the mandala. With analytical meditation, they meditate on the clear appearance of themselves as the deity, and with stabilizing meditation, they focus on the divine dignity of being a deity who is empty of inherent existence. To remedy laxity and restlessness, they focus on a subtle drop at the upper or lower tip of the central channel, respectively. The coarse generation stage is completed when the meditator can maintain concentration on the entire mandala and its deities as well as the subtle deities on the sense bases for four hours.

During the *subtle generation stage*, yogis visualize the mandala and its deities — all of them being empty of inherent existence — in a subtle drop at the upper or lower tips of the central channel. They attain the union of serenity and insight by visualizing the mandala deities emanating from and then reabsorbing into the mandala deities in this subtle drop. Emanating the deities subsumes analytical meditation; their reabsorption subsumes stabilizing meditation. In this way,

analytical and stabilizing meditation are done at the same time with one consciousness, not alternately as in the Perfection Vehicle. This unique quality of highest yoga tantra enables serenity and insight to be attained simultaneously, at which time the subtle generation stage is complete.

## REFLECTION

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1. What are the three realms and how do they relate to the three spheres of consciousness?
  2. What are the principal mental factors present in each of the four dhyānas? What are their functions and why are some of them abandoned as concentration deepens?
  3. What is the difference in outcome between developing insight by contemplating grossness and peacefulness, and by contemplating the aspects of the four truths?
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## *The Eight Liberations*

The Buddha spoke of eight liberations (*vimokṣa*, *vimokkha*, T. *rnam thar*), which are deep states of concentration. Here “liberation” does not mean freedom from saṃsāra — which is the meaning of *vimukti* (*vimutti*, T. *rnam grol*) — but the mind’s temporary release from defilements, which is brought about by developing particular meditative skills.

### *Sanskrit Tradition*

In the Sanskrit tradition, the eight liberations are explained in the *Mahāvibhāṣā*, the *Mahāprajñāpāramitā Śāstra*, and the *Ornament of Clear Realizations* and its commentaries.<sup>72</sup> There is some difference in the presentation of the eight liberations and nine serial absorptions in various texts. The *Ornament of Clear Realizations* defines these liberations as exalted knowers that are not polluted by the afflictions of their own level. They are practiced in order to abandon the obscurations to absorption. When practiced by bodhisattvas, the first three liberations are called the “three paths of emanation” because by abandoning attachment to forms, they eliminate obstacles to emanating many forms that fulfill the needs of sentient beings. Ārya bodhisattvas can generate the eight



liberations into supramundane paths, although the first seven can also be found in the continuums of non-āryas.

1. *Liberation of that having form viewing forms*: Depending on an actual dhyāna, a yogi emanates many forms while her own body remains visible to others.

2. *Liberation of that not having form viewing forms*: Depending on an actual dhyāna and considering herself as formless and having only the four mental aggregates, a yogi emanates many forms while her body is not visible to others.

3. *Liberation of the attractive that eliminates obstacles*: Depending on an actual dhyāna, a yogi counteracts his preference to emanate beautiful forms and his dislike of emanating unattractive ones. All forms appear to him as attractive.

The first two liberations eliminate obscurations to emanating forms and the third eliminates the fault of liking beautiful forms and disliking unattractive ones. These are practiced by bodhisattvas on the great stage of the Mahāyāna path of accumulation and above. When practiced by śrāvakas, these three liberations depend on a dhyāna or a formless meditative absorption as a support and are attained by nonreturners who manifest a body and by arhats who are free from afflictive obscurations and obscurations to absorption.

The next five liberations are called the “five paths of abiding happily in the present life.”<sup>73</sup>

4–7. The *liberations of infinite space, infinite consciousness, nothingness, and neither-discrimination-nor-nondiscrimination* are the four meditative absorptions of the formless realm. In this context, these four absorptions are ones that act as a cause for a path of liberation and abide in accordance with unpolluted liberation. They are called “liberations” because they are free from the manifest afflictions of their corresponding levels. Although ārya bodhisattvas may meditate with the four formless absorptions, they do not take rebirth in these realms because they have exhausted the polluted karma that would cause this and because they cannot benefit the sentient beings born there.

8. The *liberation of cessation* is a meditative equipoise existing in the continuum of āryas meditating on emptiness by depending on both a supramundane path and a mind of the peak of saṃsāra. It is a consciousness in which coarse feelings and discriminations associated with the mental consciousness have ceased. By stopping these, as well as other coarse consciousnesses and mental factors, yogis stop the afflictions that arise in

association with them, rendering the mind very peaceful. Through practicing in this way meditators increase their meditative pliancy and agility and abandon the obscurations to ceasing discriminations and feelings.

The liberation of cessation differs from the *absorption of cessation* (*nirodha-samāpatti*), which is an abstract composite in an ārya's continuum. It is not a consciousness, but is the state in which coarse feelings and discriminations associated with the subtle primary mental consciousness have ceased by the power of a supramundane path. It is the same as the cessation of discrimination and feeling (*saṃjñā-vedayita-nirodha*, *saññā-vedayita-nirodha*). It is not an actual absorption, but is called one because it arises dependent on meditating in a meditative absorption.

Śrāvaka meditators absorb in the last five liberations in order to abide happily in the present life; bodhisattvas practice them for the benefit of others. The first seven liberations show a progressive refinement of samādhi, while the eighth liberation requires both concentration and insight. All eight liberations can be attained only by those who have entered a path and who possess an actual dhyāna,<sup>74</sup> but only nonreturners and arhats who have mastered the four dhyānas and four formless absorptions and ārya bodhisattvas can attain the eighth liberation.

### *Pāli Tradition*

The eight liberations are enumerated in MN 77:22 and DN 16:3.33 and are described in the *Paṭisambhidāmagga* in the Khuddaka Nikāya and the *Aṭṭhasālinī* by Buddhaghosa.<sup>75</sup>

1. The embodied looking at form: the attainment of the four dhyānas using a kasiṇa derived from a color in one's own body. Meditators perceive themselves as embodied, and using a color found on their body as the initial object of meditation — the color of their hair, blood, eyes, and so forth — they generate the learning and counterpart signs<sup>76</sup> and attain dhyāna.

2. The formless looking at a form: the attainment of the dhyānas using a kasiṇa derived from an external object, such as the four elements. Meditators perceive themselves as disembodied and enter a dhyāna by using an external color as a kasiṇa. To progress from the first to the second liberation, they release some degree of conceit and attachment regarding their own physical appearance, and

before progressing to the third liberation, they do the same regarding others' bodies.

3. Resolved only upon the beautiful that eliminates obstacles: the attainment of the dhyānas through using either a very pure and beautiful colored *kaṣiṇa* or the four brahmavihāras as the object of meditation. The first two liberations lead to perceiving the body as foul, and the third releases any excessive disgust by focusing on a beautiful object. When cultivating the four immeasurables as a liberation of mind, meditators see sentient beings as attractive.

4–7. The four formless absorptions that lead meditators to experience a pleasant abiding in this life. Meditators enter the first absorption by transcending all perceptions of form. They enter the last three by surmounting the object of the preceding absorption.

8. The attainment of cessation of discrimination and feeling, also called the absorption of cessation, is an absence of all manifest activity of the six consciousnesses. Attained by the combination of serenity and insight, it is accessible only by nonreturners and arhats who have mastered the preceding meditative absorptions.

To attain it, Pāli commentators say the meditator enters the first dhyāna. After emerging from it, she applies insight to contemplate the dhyāna factors as impermanent, *duḥkha*, and no-self. She then enters the second dhyāna, and upon emerging from it, she similarly analyzes its factors in terms of the three characteristics. She continues like this up through the absorption of nothingness. In this way, she both accomplishes these meditative absorptions and develops insight wisdom regarding them. Having emerged from the absorption of nothingness and contemplated its factors as impermanent, *duḥkha*, and no-self, she makes the resolution to enter the cessation of discrimination and feeling. Before entering that cessation, she determines how long she wants to remain in it; this can be from a short time up to seven days. If she is a monastic, she resolves that if the Saṅgha needs her, she will automatically emerge from this absorption.

She then enters the absorption on the base of neither-discrimination-nor-nondiscrimination (the peak of *saṃsāra*), and from there goes into the cessation of discrimination and feeling in which all mental functions stop for the predetermined length of time. When this time is over, she emerges from that state and mental functions resume. Bhikkhunī Dhammadinnā explained (MN 44.16–21) that the meditator does not think, I will attain the cessation of discrimination

and feeling, I am attaining this, or I have attained it. Later, she does not think, I will emerge from the cessation of discrimination and feeling, I am emerging from it, or I have emerged from it. All this is accomplished by force of the determination made prior to that meditation session.

As with anyone in the fourth dhyāna and above, this meditator's breath stops when entering the cessation of discrimination and feeling. There are stories in the scriptures of arhats in this meditative state who were mistaken as dead by people who saw them. When they tried to cremate the body, it would not burn. When emerging from this state, the first consciousness to arise is the fruition consciousness of either a nonreturner or arhat that has nirvāṇa as its object.

The cessation of discrimination and feeling is considered an exalted state and the highest of all samādhis. It is not a support for higher attainments because arhats also enter it, so it's not clear why this state would be sought. Nonetheless, offerings made to those who have just emerged from the cessation of discrimination and feeling are said to create special great merit. For this reason, Mahākāśyapa would often enter this absorption for a short while before going on alms round to benefit those who offered food to him.

## *The Nine Serial Absorptions*

The nine serial absorptions are spoken of in the *Ornament of Clear Realizations* and its commentaries. Also called the nine abidings in equipoise, these nine are the serial absorptions of the four dhyānas, the four meditative absorptions of the formless realm, and the absorption of cessation. The Sanskrit tradition considers the first eight supramundane paths.

The nine serial absorptions are so called because meditators must initially attain them successively in their forward order. After having mastered all nine in both ascending and descending order, they train to enter them in a leap-over manner. This is done in order to develop mental dexterity, and on that basis to cultivate many other abilities leading up to the capabilities of a buddha.

The leap-over meditative absorption (*vyukrāntaka-samāpatti*) is presented differently in the *Ornament of Clear Realization* and the *Treasury of Knowledge* (ADK 8:18cd–8:19ab):

Join the two types to the eight levels.  
Leap over one through going and coming.  
Proceed to the third dissimilar type.  
This is the leaping meditative absorption.

This meditation is done by arhats who are human beings; they have clear minds, lack afflictions, and have control over their concentration so they can unwaveringly engage in this practice. The eight levels are the four dhyānas and four formless absorptions. The two types are the polluted and unpolluted, which are to be joined with the eight levels.

First meditators develop the ability to absorb in the polluted eight absorptions in the ascending order from the polluted first dhyāna to the polluted peak of saṃsāra, and in the descending order from the polluted peak of saṃsāra to the polluted first dhyāna. They then do the same using the eight unpolluted absorptions. This is known as the “long preparation.”

Next, they do the short preparation. They absorb in a polluted first dhyāna, after which they leap over the second dhyāna and absorb in a polluted third dhyāna. They then leap over the fourth dhyāna and absorb in polluted infinite space, followed by leaping over infinite consciousness and absorbing in polluted nothingness. They then descend to the polluted first concentration in the same leap-over fashion. Here all the absorptions are polluted or mundane ones. This is followed by doing the same using unpolluted, supramundane absorptions.

Finally, they do the actual leap-over absorption. First they absorb in a polluted first dhyāna, leap over the second dhyāna, and absorb in an unpolluted third dhyāna. They leap over the fourth dhyāna and enter a polluted infinite space absorption, leap over infinite consciousness and enter an unpolluted nothingness absorption, and then descend in the same manner.<sup>77</sup>

There are other ways to do the leap-over absorption — for example, starting with the unpolluted first dhyāna, leaping over the second dhyāna and absorbing in a polluted third dhyāna, leaping the fourth dhyāna, entering an unpolluted infinite space, and so on in the ascending and descending fashion. In addition, meditators can begin with the polluted second dhyāna, leap over the third dhyāna, and enter the unpolluted fourth dhyāna, ascending in this manner to the peak of saṃsāra and then descending again. There are many more ways to do this meditation as well. The meditative dexterity of these yogis is amazing!

Another version of the leap-over meditative absorption is described in Maitreya's *Ornament of Clear Realizations* (5:24–25). This is done by bodhisattvas on the path of meditation to develop a very flexible mind and to perfect the meditative absorptions.

Having gone and come in the nine meditative absorptions,  
including cessation in the two aspects,  
a consciousness included in the desire [realm] not in meditative  
equipoise  
is taken as the boundary,

whereupon one enters in absorption in the manner of leap-over,  
leaping over one, two, three, four,  
five, six, seven, and eight,  
going variously until entering into absorption of cessation.

In the context of the leap-over meditation, the eight meditative absorptions are minds realizing emptiness, and the absorption of cessation is an abstract composite. The desire-realm mind focuses on the attributes of the desire realm — forms, sounds, and so forth — and is a coarse mind.

To prepare, bodhisattvas first master all eight meditative absorptions (the four dhyānas and four formless absorptions) in their ascending order, as well as the absorption of cessation. This is followed by entering all nine in the descending order, beginning with the absorption of cessation and ending with the first dhyāna.

Next, they meditate successively on the eight meditative absorptions in the ascending order, beginning with the actual first dhyāna. In between each of the eight, they enter the absorption of cessation, so the sequence is first dhyāna, absorption of cessation, second dhyāna, absorption of cessation, and so on up to the peak of saṃsāra, followed by absorption of cessation.

Between the ascending and descending sequences, sharp-faculty bodhisattvas enter a desire-realm mind that is a bridge between the two sequences. Being sharp faculty, they can go from the very subtle, refined absorption of cessation to this very coarse bridge-desire-realm mind, and then to the absorption of cessation that initiates the descending sequence. For dull-faculty bodhisattvas, this is too difficult, so after completing the ascending order, they enter a mind called the

“peak of saṃsāra of small capacity,” which is a little coarser than the peak of saṃsāra, and from there enter the bridge-desire-realm mind. They then begin the descending sequence.

In the descending order, the nine serial absorptions are alternated with a desire-realm mind. Bodhisattvas enter the absorption of cessation, desire-realm mind, peak of saṃsāra, desire-realm mind, nothingness, desire-realm mind, and so on down to first dhyāna, desire-realm mind.

When they become fully proficient in this, meditators can use either the absorption of cessation or the desire-realm mind as the interwoven state as they sequentially ascend and descend the eight meditative absorptions.<sup>78</sup> Before entering the leap-over meditation, bodhisattvas set their intention, “After entering absorption, I will go from the first dhyāna to the absorption of cessation, and so forth.” In that way, they can pass from one absorption to the next in the ascending sequence while remaining in meditative equipoise.

There are thirty-four leap-over bases. In the ascending order, there are sixteen bases — the eight meditative absorptions and eight absorptions of cessation that are in between them. In the descending order, there are eighteen bases because all nine serial absorptions alternate with a desire-realm mind. This makes a total of thirty-four.

In the verse above, it is said that the bodhisattvas *leap over one, two, three, and so forth* because during the meditative absorptions the mind is focused in deep single-pointed meditation. Meditators emerge from that and have a desire-realm mind that is a coarse, nonequipoise mind. When they enter the next absorption, they must leap over the previous one (two, three, and so on) absorption. For example, in the descending order, they go from absorption of cessation to desire-realm mind. To enter the next absorption, they must leap over the absorption of cessation to directly enter the peak of saṃsāra. Alternating a subtle, equipoise mind and a coarse, nonequipoise mind is extremely difficult, and the ability to do this makes the meditative abilities of these bodhisattvas truly remarkable. How they train their minds and the abilities they gain from doing so are an indication of how powerful our minds can be as a result of correct practice done with a Dharma motivation.

The difference between the serial absorptions and the eight liberations is a matter of emphasis. The liberations are spoken of from the viewpoint of being



free from certain obscurations; the serial absorptions emphasize that the body, mind, and mental factors are in equilibrium.

In the chapters on the higher training in concentration we have learned of the astounding abilities that sincere meditators can develop. We may wonder why they are explained to those of us who are beginners — won't some people be discouraged by their own comparatively feeble concentration when they see how far they have to go? This depends on our perspective. Learning about the capacities of the human mind inspires us; we know that if we put in the same time and effort as past meditators have, that we too can actualize abilities like theirs. In addition, knowing that there are Buddhist meditators who have already attained these abilities gives us a better idea of the Saṅgha that is our object of refuge; faith and respect in them automatically arises in our mind. As a side benefit, if we have the tendency toward spiritual arrogance, learning of these advanced practices checks our pride, suppressing that hindrance to spiritual progress.

## *The Superknowledges*

The principal aim of the Buddha's teachings is to stop duḥkha by stopping rebirth under the influence of ignorance, afflictions, and karma and to attain nirvāṇa, or full awakening. Nevertheless, the sūtras present other spiritual accomplishments that are valued as well. The first of these is mastery over the various dimensions of the mind — the dhyānas and formless absorptions — that are accomplished by means of samādhi. Scriptures frequently praise the peace and ease these mental states bring. They were sought after and attained by many non-Buddhist spiritual seekers from the Buddha's time to the present.

Another spiritual accomplishment praised in the scriptures is the superknowledges (*abhijñā*, *abhiññā*), supernatural physical and mental powers through which meditators can perform feats that ordinary people consider miraculous or preternatural because they cannot be explained by either the science of old or modern-day science. These special abilities are a by-product of samādhi and give meditators access to hidden laws of the material world that can only be known through refined states of meditative absorption.

Like mastery of dimensions of the mind, the superknowledges can be attained by non-Buddhists as well as Buddhists. While some spiritual seekers



hold them as the purpose of the path, the Buddha sees them as a by-product of deep concentration. He emphasized to his disciples that they should not be content with attaining the various meditative absorptions or supernormal abilities, because without the attainment of nirvāṇa they are still susceptible to all forms of saṃsāric duḥkha. For this reason, when Buddhists cultivate these abilities, it is of utmost importance to have a motivation to benefit others. Otherwise they risk falling prey to conceit and clinging and will find themselves in unfortunate rebirths in future lives.

For example, a meditator in Tibet had deep concentration and could maintain the visualization of himself as the wrathful deity Yamāntaka. But since he lacked the aspiration for liberation, he did not cultivate wisdom and in his next rebirth was born as a spirit that looked like Yamāntaka. There is also a story of a novice who could fly. Since his determination to attain liberation was not strong, one day when he heard the enchanting singing of a maiden working in the fields below, he fell in love and disrobed to marry her. On the other hand, practitioners who use supernormal powers with compassion to benefit others and to spread the Buddha's teachings enact great benefit.

Although the Buddha taught all three aims — nirvāṇa, mastery over dimensions of the mind, and the superknowledges — he knew his followers had different aptitudes and interests and did not expect all of his disciples to accomplish the latter two. These arhats who attain nirvāṇa but not the other two are called “those liberated by only wisdom” (P. *paññāvimutta*). They attain liberation either by using the capable preparation or by developing wisdom and eradicating defilements simply on the basis of access concentration.<sup>79</sup> Those who attain nirvāṇa as well as the four dhyānas, four formless absorptions, and perhaps even the cessation of discrimination and feeling have mastery of a wide range of mental states and are called “those liberated in both ways” (P. *ubhatobhāgavimutta*). Disciples who attain nirvāṇa as well as mastery over mental states and the superknowledges are called “arhats with the six superknowledges.” In countries following the Pāli tradition, they say that we find all three types of persons to this day.

In short, although the superknowledges are not a sign of insight or wisdom, Buddhist texts do consider them a sign of spiritual accomplishment. In the Buddha's time, many yogis had these abilities and would even challenge the Buddha to contests in miraculous powers. One of the four special Buddhist days

in the Tibetan calendar — the full moon of the first lunar month — celebrates the Buddha’s victory in one such contest. After a group of non-Buddhist yogis kept prodding the Buddha to participate in such a contest, he reluctantly consented. His purpose was to subdue their arrogance, and by showing extraordinary miraculous powers he successfully did this, and they later became his disciples.

To meet the expectations of society at that time, some of the Buddha’s disciples accomplished supernormal powers, but the Buddha prohibited his followers from displaying these powers to show off. In fact, monastics who speak even truthfully about their supernormal powers transgress a *prātimokṣa* precept. Those who lie about having powers they do not have commit a root offense. Throughout the ages, the Buddha’s disciples with these abilities have used them to work in unobtrusive ways to benefit others and to spread the Dharma.

A *sūtra* tells the story of the layman Kevaddha who asked the Buddha to increase the faith of the laypeople by demonstrating his supernormal abilities, but the Buddha refused. Kevaddha then asked him to display his ability to read others’ minds, which the Buddha also declined. Instead he showed Kevaddha another type of miracle (DN 11.8).

And what is the miracle of instruction? Here, Kevaddha, a monastic gives instructions as follows: “Consider in this way, don’t consider in that way. Direct your mind this way, not that way. Give up that, gain this, and persevere in it.”

The true miracle is being able to instruct others and inspire their faith in the Dharma so that they may be led away from *duḥkha* and attain *nirvāṇa*.

When used with a good motivation — such as to attain liberation or awakening, or to benefit sentient beings with great compassion — these powers allow us to accumulate merit and generate wisdom quickly. They enable bodhisattvas to benefit sentient beings easily and exactly according to their needs. The first five superknowledges are mundane abilities: supernormal powers, divine ear, understanding the minds of others, recollection of past lives, and divine eye. The sixth superknowledge is a supramundane realization — the destruction of pollutants.

While non-Buddhists may actualize the first five, only Buddhists who seek liberation from *samsāra* seek the sixth — the attainment of liberation. The last

three superknowledges — recollection of past lives, divine eye (knowledge of the passing away and rebirth of beings according to their karma), and destruction of the pollutants — are also the three higher knowledges that the Buddha actualized under the bodhi tree prior to his awakening. In the Pāli tradition, sometimes two other powers — knowledge and vision and mind-made body — are included at the beginning of the list of superknowledges, bringing the total to eight.<sup>80</sup>

The Sanskrit tradition asserts that the first five superknowledges can be attained on the basis of the actual first dhyāna. The Pāli tradition says the actual fourth dhyāna is required because the mind is very pliant and concentration is strong and imperturbable.

### 1. *Supernormal Powers*

Training for the five superknowledges is rigorous, but when the mind is developed in this way, it is able to have mastery over nature and defy ordinary scientific laws. The Buddha describes meditators with such powers (MN 77.31):

Having been one, they become many; having been many, they become one; they appear and vanish; they go unhindered through walls, through enclosures, through mountains, as though through space. They dive in and out of the earth as though it were water; they walk on water without sinking, as though it were earth. Seated cross-legged, they travel in space like birds. With their hands they touch and stroke the moon and sun, so powerful and mighty. They wield bodily mastery even as far as the Brahmā world.

People with supernormal powers (*ṛddhi, iddhi*) can make their body into many bodies and then absorb these diverse bodies back into a single body. They can make themselves invisible, vanishing and reappearing at will. They pass through solid materials with ease, walk on water, fly in space, and even touch the sun and moon.

The *Path of Purification* describes the process to develop these powers, which is done by means of samādhi developed in a series of preliminary exercises with the kasiṇas (S. *krtsna*) — colored disks or different elements — as meditation objects. With the earth kasiṇa as an object, meditators first attain the first dhyāna. They then attain the first dhyāna successively using seven other kasiṇas

— water, fire, air, blue, red, yellow, and white. Then they do this in reverse, entering the first dhyāna beginning with a white kasiṇa, then yellow, red, blue, air, fire, water, and earth kasiṇa. After that, they enter the first dhyāna using each kasiṇa in sequential and reverse orders many times.

Then beginning with the earth kasiṇa, they attain each of the four dhyānas and the four formless absorptions in succession. From the absorption of neither-discrimination-nor-nondiscrimination (peak of saṃsāra) they descend, absorption by absorption, to the first dhyāna, still using the earth kasiṇa. They then practice going in and out of each dhyāna very quickly in forward and reverse orders, using the earth kasiṇa. When this has been mastered, they proceed to do the same with each of the other seven kasiṇas in turn, so that they have mastered all eight meditative absorptions with these eight kasiṇas in forward and reverse orders.

Following this, they alternate dhyānas. Using the earth kasiṇa they attain the first dhyāna, third dhyāna, infinite space, and nothingness. They then do this with each of the other seven kasiṇas. They also train so that they can enter the first dhyāna with one kasiṇa, the second dhyāna with another kasiṇa, the third with yet another, up to the absorption of neither-discrimination-nor-nondiscrimination.

Having mastered this, they now go from absorption on neither-discrimination-nor-nondiscrimination down to the first dhyāna, using a different kasiṇa to attain each absorption. They develop the ability to go into the first dhyāna quickly, stay for a moment, emerge from it, and, using another kasiṇa, go into the second dhyāna, stay in it a moment, emerge from it, and so on up to the absorption of neither-discrimination-nor-nondiscrimination, and then back down to the first dhyāna. In this way, they build up amazing mastery of the mind, entering and emerging from deep states of absorption in a few seconds. This preparatory process develops extraordinary mental power, which is then used to direct the mind to the exercise of the supernatural powers. Through the force of their intention, and based on this profound acuity and agility in samādhi, they gain the supernatural powers described above.

One of these is the ability to create a mind-made body (*manomaya-kāya*) in which the dhyānic mind creates another physical body that is an exact replica of the meditator's own body with all its limbs and sense faculties. The Buddha describes it as like a reed extracted from a sheath, a sword pulled out of its

scabbard, or a snake removed from its slough (MN 77.30). Once the mind-made body has been extracted from the physical body, the meditator mentally controls it because it has no mind of its own, even though to others it looks as if it is a normal body moved by its own consciousness. This mind-made body can travel to distant places while the meditator remains at the monastery. It can appear to teach Dharma elsewhere, and when it has served its purpose, the meditator absorbs it back into his own body.

## *2. Divine Ear (Clairaudience)*

With the divine ear, meditators can hear sounds in the heavenly realm, human world, and other realms and directions where sentient beings dwell. They can hear sounds, listen to conversations, and hear cries of pleasure or pain that are far away as easily as ones nearby (MN 77.32).

With the divine ear element, which is purified and surpasses the human, they hear both kinds of sounds, the divine and the human, those that are far as well as near.

## *3. Understanding the Minds of Others*

With this superknowledge, meditators know (MN 77.33):

the way to understand the minds of other beings, of other persons, having encompassed them with their own minds. They understand a mind affected by lust as affected by lust and a mind unaffected by lust as unaffected by lust; they understand a mind affected by hate as affected by hate and a mind unaffected by hate as unaffected by hate; they understand a mind affected by confusion as affected by confusion and a mind unaffected by confusion as unaffected by confusion; they understand a contracted mind as contracted and a distracted mind as distracted; they understand an exalted mind as exalted and an unexalted mind as unexalted; they understand a surpassed mind as surpassed and an unsurpassed mind as unsurpassed; they understand a concentrated mind as concentrated

and an unconcentrated mind as unconcentrated; they understand a liberated mind as liberated and an unliberated mind as unliberated.

With this superknowledge meditators know the mental states of others as clearly as they see a spot on their own face reflected in a clean, bright mirror. For example, if another person's mind is affected by attachment or anger, they know it as such. If it is free from those, they also know that.

#### *4. Recollection of Past Lives*

Meditators with this superknowledge know (MN 77.34):

the way to recollect their manifold past lives, that is, one birth, two births . . . a hundred thousand births, many eons of world-contraction and expansion: “There I was so named, of such a clan, with such an appearance, such was my nutriment, such my experience of pleasure and pain, such my lifespan, and passing away from there, I reappeared elsewhere; and there too I was so named . . . and passing away from there I reappeared here.” Thus with their aspects and particulars they recollect their manifold past lives.

This superknowledge gives meditators the ability to know particular details of their previous lives from long ago. The *Path of Purification* says to develop this ability, a meditator must first master the dhyānas up to the fourth dhyāna, bringing the mind to imperturbability. Because the dhyānas are states of single-pointed concentration on one object, remembering previous lives, which involves turning the mind to many objects, cannot be done while in the fourth dhyāna itself. Meditators emerge from the fourth dhyāna into a state of ordinary consciousness, where the mind is still suffused with the power and clarity of the dhyāna. They begin by recalling what took place just before their meditation session, then remember what happened before that, gradually extending their memory as far back as possible to events from childhood and infancy. It isn't necessary to remember every detail of every day; sometimes they remember larger segments of their lives, such as being a young adult or an adolescent. Whenever their memory becomes cloudy, they pause and enter the fourth dhyāna to refresh, strengthen, and purify their mind. Reemerging from this dhyāna, they take up

recollecting events in their life from where they left off, going back to the time of birth, life in the womb, and up to the time of conception, when the consciousness first entered the union of egg and sperm of this life.

At this time, it seems as if they come up against a wall and cannot remember further back. But without giving up, they again enter the fourth dhyāna to refresh the mind and make it focused, sharp, and clear. Emerging from that dhyāna, they again try to recall what happened in the moment before rebirth. They apply their mind with determination to break through the wall that obstructs memory until eventually the concentrated mind is able to penetrate the fog of forgetfulness and recollect the last moment of the previous life (or the bardo). They continue progressing back in time, gradually remembering events from the previous life. Again encountering the wall of obscuration when they reach the beginning of that life, they persevere, sharpening and purifying the mind by entering the fourth dhyāna for a period of time. They then resume the recollection process until they can recall the second preceding life. And so on, they practice, developing the ability to remember vividly thousands, if not millions or billions, of previous lives.

### 5. *Divine Eye (Clairvoyance)*

The divine eye gives meditators access to the death and rebirth of sentient beings (MN 77.35).

With the divine eye, which is purified and surpasses the human, they see beings passing away and reappearing, inferior and superior, fair and ugly, fortunate and unfortunate. They understand how beings pass on according to their actions thus: “These worthy beings who were ill-conducted in body, speech, and mind, revilers of ariyas, wrong in their views, giving effect to wrong view in their actions, on the dissolution of the body, after death, have reappeared in a state of deprivation, in a bad destination . . . but these worthy beings who were well-conducted in body, speech, and mind, not revilers of ariyas, right in their views, giving effect to right view in their actions, on the dissolution of the body, after death, have reappeared in a good destination, even in the heavenly world . . . they understand how beings pass on according to their actions.

The attainment of the divine eye, which sees beings dying and reappearing in their next life according to their karma, brings several special abilities. They understand clearly how sentient beings are governed and controlled by their karma. They know the actions sentient beings did to cause rebirth in particular realms during specific lives. They have the ability to see events in other realms in the universe, in places far away, and in other dimensions that our normal eyes are not privy to.

For a Dharma teacher, this ability is especially useful, for she can see various beings and their karma and thus knows their unique dispositions and how to skillfully benefit them. There are many stories in the sūtras of the Buddha knowing by means of his divine eye which beings were receptive to the Dharma at that time and whose faculties were ripe to gain realizations if they were taught. By knowing which beings in other realms or universes are ripe to be led on the Dharma path, bodhisattvas with supernormal powers can go to those places to teach them.

The divine eye is attained by using the light *kasiṇa* to enter the fourth *dhyāna*.<sup>81</sup> Having developed a luminous mind, they emerge from this *dhyāna* and turn this inner perception of light outward, using their clear and powerful minds to radiate this bright light that illuminates ever greater distances and extends to other realms of existence.

Sometimes while extending light further, the mind becomes dull and the light cannot penetrate to reveal those realms and events. At that time meditators again cultivate concentration with the light *kasiṇa* and use it to enter the fourth *dhyāna*. When their mind is refreshed and clear, they emerge from that *dhyāna* and resume radiating the light.

Eventually this powerful *samādhi* can illuminate other realms that are ordinarily concealed, and meditators can see devas, hungry ghosts, hell beings, as well as human beings and animals in other parts of the universe. Fixing their attention on particular beings, they inquire: What is the karma that brought this being to be born in this realm of existence? By the power of the divine eye, they gain direct understanding of this karma. They see that those beings in unfortunate realms were born there owing to the power of specific destructive actions and that those in fortunate realms attained such rebirths due to constructive actions. Some future events may become apparent as well.



## 6. *Destruction of Pollutants*

The sūtra says (MN 77.36):

By realizing for themselves with direct knowledge, they here and now enter upon and abide in the liberation of mind and liberation by wisdom that are unpolluted with the destruction of the pollutants.

According to the Prāsaṅgika Madhyamaka view, this superknowledge is concomitant with the concentration and wisdom that abandon afflictive obscurations; it directly knows these abandonments. It is possessed by āryas who have exhaustively abandoned all afflictive obscurations. This includes śrāvaka arhats and bodhisattvas of the pure grounds — the eighth, ninth, and tenth grounds — and buddhas. In the mindstreams of buddhas this superknowledge knows their abandonments of both the afflictive and the cognitive obscurations.<sup>82</sup>

According to Pāli commentaries, unlike the other superknowledges, the destruction of pollutants is possessed only by arhats. It may be attained on the basis of access concentration, the momentary concentration of “dry-insight” meditators, or any of the four dhyānas. Dry-insight arhats are so called because their wisdom lacks the softening and moistening effects of the dhyānas that make the mind more receptive. Although such wisdom is “hard,” it can still eradicate defilements.

This superknowledge realizes a liberation called the “liberation of mind and liberation by wisdom” (P. *cetovimutti-paññāvimutti*), which is free from defilements. When the pollutants — the fundamental defilements obscuring the mind — have been uprooted by wisdom, a meditator enters upon and dwells in the liberation of mind liberation by wisdom. The liberation of mind is the concentration factor associated with the fruition attainment of arhatship because it is free from attachment. Liberation by wisdom is the wisdom factor associated with the fruition attainment of arhatship because it is free from ignorance. The former is primarily the result of serenity and the latter is primarily the result of insight, but coupled together like this, they refer to the fruition attainment of arhatship made accessible by the destruction of the pollutants. The fruition attainment of arhatship (P. *arahattaphala-samāpatti*) is a special meditative

attainment accessible to an arhat, by which he directly experiences nirvāṇa through the duration of the attainment.

## *The Value of the Superknowledges for Bodhisattvas*

Although some śrāvakas choose to develop the first five superknowledges, others do not. However, these are crucial for bodhisattvas because they enable bodhisattvas to accumulate great merit that is dedicated to full awakening and they enable both bodhisattvas and buddhas to be of great benefit to sentient beings. With *supernormal powers*, bodhisattvas go to pure lands where they listen to Dharma teachings directly from various buddhas. In pure lands, they create enormous merit by emanating abundant and magnificent offerings that they offer to the buddhas and bodhisattvas there. In the human realm, buddhas and bodhisattvas benefit others by revealing these powers to specific disciples to enhance their faith and joyous effort. They do so discreetly, with no wish to gain reputation or fame. Buddhas and bodhisattvas can also manifest many bodies, appearing as ordinary individuals in diverse places to teach and guide the beings there. In addition, these miraculous abilities enable bodhisattvas to know where the spiritual mentors, Dharma friends, and disciples with whom they have karmic connections are living and to go there quickly to either receive or give teachings and guidance.

By means of *clairaudience*, bodhisattvas can hear teachings in other places and understand all languages. This enables them to understand a wide range of teachings and to know their students' Dharma discussions. With this knowledge, bodhisattvas have the ability to resolve their students' doubts and dispel their misconceptions.

Through *knowledge of others' minds*, bodhisattvas directly know others' interests and dispositions as well as their emotional patterns and habitual thoughts, and thus can teach them accordingly. They know whose mind is under the influence of afflictions and whose is free from afflictions. Cherishing others more than themselves, bodhisattvas are never judgmental when they see that someone's mind is overcome with afflictions. Instead, their compassion and determination to help that person increase.

By means of *knowing past lives*, bodhisattvas know their spiritual mentors, Dharma practices, and spiritual friends from previous lives and thus seek them out again in this life. Studying and practicing under the guidance of teachers with whom they have associated and in whom they have deep trust and faith from previous lives, and continuing practices in which they have already trained in previous lives enables them to progress rapidly. In addition, they know the disciples with whom they have had Dharma connections in previous lives and continue to guide and teach them. By clearly seeing the karma that their disciples have created in the past, these bodhisattvas understand their disciples' present experiences and tendencies and know how to guide them effectively.

The *divine eye* enables bodhisattvas to know others' karmic tendencies as well as where they have been reborn. They also know the karmic results of actions that people are doing now, which helps them to guide their disciples more effectively. Clairvoyance gives bodhisattvas the ability to discern sentient beings' karmic receptivity to the Dharma and to interact with them accordingly. It also enables them to locate their previous disciples and benefit them in their present life forms. Understanding others' minds, bodhisattvas know who has entered the path and their level of realization as well as who has not entered the path, and thus can guide all these beings accordingly.

With *knowledge of the destruction of pollutants*, bodhisattvas of the pure grounds know their own level of spiritual attainments, fortifying their confidence in their ability to benefit others.

In short, some of the superknowledges involve extrasensory perception — perception by means other than our five senses; others involve supernormal powers — special physical powers that affect how one's body interacts with the surrounding environment.

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Since we are discussing these special abilities that most people do not have, I would like to make a few comments. When I posed questions to my senior tutor, Kyabje Ling Rinpoche, he would sometimes give strange answers. I began to suspect that he had other sources of knowledge, so once I asked him, "Do you have clairvoyant experiences?" He responded, "I don't know, but sometimes certain unusual types of knowledge seem to arise in me." Ling Rinpoche was a

knowledgeable spiritual master with great integrity, and I had known him since I was a child. Therefore I trust him and believe that clairvoyance and other superknowledges exist.

Theoretically, the ability to know is a natural property of consciousness. Even in our ordinary experiences, we sometimes have premonitions of what might happen. I think these indicate that the seed for such cognitive powers lies within us. Through meditative practices and single-pointed concentration in particular, we begin to sharpen the focus of our memory and mindfulness, increasing our ability to recollect experiences. As the power of recollection becomes sharper, the potential for precognition is enhanced as well. This is the theoretical basis for believing in precognition.

These abilities seem to arise in different forms in different people. In the eighteenth century, during the time of the Seventh Dalai Lama, a highly realized master named Dagpu Lobsang Tenpe Gyaltzen was universally recognized as having clairvoyant powers. Changya Rolpay Dorje, another great master, asked him, “How does this knowledge arise in you?” Dagpu Lobsang Tenpe Gyaltzen replied, “Whenever I have to seriously think about something, I focus on the first image that appears in my mind. This is usually a bell. On top of that appears certain images and patterns that give me particular premonitions.”

Teachings of the highest yoga tantra contain specific practices that enable people to develop that kind of power. The sūtras also speak of extrasensory perception, but that is usually only visual and auditory, never olfactory. Even in our ordinary experiences we can cognize objects at a distance through our visual and audio perceptions, though we can't do this for odors. The power of clairvoyance is limited to visual forms.

While extrasensory perception and supernormal powers are possible, the Buddha forbade his disciples to talk about their accomplishments in this area. One of the precepts of a fully ordained monastic is to abandon publicly proclaiming that one is an arhat or has special abilities. This is to ensure that practitioners remain humble.

Some people claim to have superknowledges, but personally I am very skeptical. Because of misconceptions originating centuries ago, some people believe that many Tibetan monastics have special powers. When I visited Taiwan, I warned some of the Tibetan teachers and monks there not to pretend to have

realizations or special powers that they did not possess, because one day their pretense might be revealed.

Some ordinary people may have some ability to know future events or someone's thoughts. When these abilities are a result of previous karma — not of samādhi developed in this life — they are generally limited in scope and are lost at death. They do not protect the people who possess them from falling into unfortunate rebirths and do not indicate that they possess spiritual realizations. Furthermore, these special abilities do not necessarily propel them along the path to awakening and sometimes become a distraction to spiritual practice. In some cases, a person may believe they have extrasensory perception when in fact they do not. In this case, telling others what they intuit could be inaccurate and harmful. This is especially true if they give unasked-for advice.

Some people may gain extrasensory perception or supernatural powers through single-pointed concentration. When used with compassion to benefit others, some special abilities are constructive. But if those people have not cultivated compassion, there is danger that they use those powers to gain respect, material gain, or power over others, in which case such powers are useless at best and harmful at worst. The goal of the Buddhist path is not to gain supernatural powers but to attain liberation and awakening. Therefore these special abilities must be cultivated with the proper motivation, and practitioners must know that until they become fully awakened buddhas their extrasensory perception and supernatural powers are not complete and may be erroneous.

## REFLECTION

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1. What are the six superknowledges? What are their functions?
  2. Reflect on the ways bodhisattvas use each superknowledge with compassion to benefit sentient beings.
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## *Serenity in Buddhist Practice*

What makes the cultivation of serenity a Buddhist practice? The most important criterion is that it is held by refuge in the Three Jewels. What allows serenity to

lead to nirvāṇa and awakening? When the union of serenity and insight is coupled with the aspiration for liberation and the wisdom realizing emptiness, it leads to nirvāṇa; when it is conjoined with bodhicitta and the wisdom realizing emptiness, the union of serenity and insight leads to full awakening. To ensure that our practice of serenity contributes to our ultimate spiritual aims, we should not seek meditative concentration to the exclusion of other practices, especially when we are relatively new to Dharma practice. Analytical meditation on the stages of the path is necessary to cultivate a proper motivation and a firm foundation for practicing both serenity and insight.

There is a story of a meditator who spent so many years absorbed in the bliss of samādhi that his hair grew into long dreadlocks. When he eventually arose from meditation, he noticed that some mice had nested in his hair. Furious, he swatted the mice and chased them away. Although this meditator had firm concentration, he lacked fortitude, such that a small provocation triggered a huge outburst of anger.

Most of our daily meditation practices involve both analytical and stabilizing meditation. To develop compassion we employ analytical meditation to understand the kindness of others and their suffering in saṃsāra. When compassion arises, we focus on that experience with stabilizing meditation. Should compassion weaken, engaging in more analysis will reinvigorate it, at which point we resume stabilizing meditation on compassion. Most meditation on the stages of the path is done by alternating analytical meditation and stabilizing meditation in this way.

During meditative absorption, a meditator may temporarily pass beyond manifest afflictions, but the enemy of afflictions will still surface in post-meditation time. For this reason, we must not be satisfied with the bliss of concentration but must develop insight into emptiness as well, for only that will free us from saṃsāra. However, without the powerful concentration of serenity or the dhyānas, our understanding of emptiness will lack sufficient strength to serve as a counterforce to self-grasping ignorance. Repeatedly entering into the realization of emptiness with single-pointed concentration is required to make the mind strong enough to uproot ignorance. This involves the union of serenity and insight on emptiness.

That union is a state imbued with physical and mental pliancy induced by analytical meditation on emptiness. Concentration alone can focus single-

pointedly on emptiness, but analysis interrupts the stability of concentration. Analysis can plunge the depth of emptiness, but alone it cannot focus on emptiness single-pointedly. Uniting the two involves analysis being able to induce the physical and mental pliancy that brings deep concentration. Tsongkhapa says (LC 3:24):

Discerning wisdom becomes insight when, without focusing on a single object, it can generate pliancy through the power of analysis. So generating pliancy by setting your attention on a single object of meditation — even if the object is emptiness — is nothing more than a way to achieve serenity; that alone does not count as attaining insight.

Meditating with pliancy and concentration on emptiness is serenity meditation. To become insight focused on emptiness — which itself is considered the union of serenity and insight — analysis must induce the pliancy of serenity.

The sequence of first meditating on serenity and then insight pertains to when these two are being newly attained. After meditators have gained both of them, they can begin a meditation session with serenity followed by insight, or they may directly enter into insight.

Although attainment of serenity precedes attainment of insight, that does not mean that we should wait until we have full serenity before studying and contemplating the correct view. It is good to seek teachings on emptiness and gain familiarity with it as soon as we have a general understanding of the path.

In the Perfection Vehicle and the practice of the three lower tantras (Action, Performance, and Yoga Tantra), serenity must be attained first. Although a meditator may have serenity, the stabilizing meditation of serenity and the analytical meditation of insight interfere with each other. They must be practiced alternately until analysis itself can induce the pliancy of serenity. At that time, the union of serenity and insight is attained. When this powerful mind has emptiness as its object, the meditator enters the path of preparation. As mentioned, the process of attaining serenity and insight in highest yoga tantra differs.

*Words of Advice*

I would like to speak now to those who have completed many years of study in the monastic universities. It seems that some Tibetan Buddhists belittle serenity perhaps because it is a practice shared with non-Buddhists or perhaps because they are concerned with becoming attached to the bliss of concentration. Holding this attitude, they neglect trying to improve their concentration. They may be well-educated lamas who are able to teach topics from the beginning to the end of the path, yet because they lack single-pointed concentration they cannot experience what they teach. The experiences described in Tsongkhapa's *Bright Lamp of the Five Stages* (*Rim nga gsal sdron*) and *Completing the Five Stages in a Single Seating* (*Rim nga gdan rdzogs*) are readily available for us to relish, yet we haven't devoted the time and energy to attain serenity and these higher attainments evade us.

The lengthy texts on the lamrim are designed to facilitate systematic practice of the topics explained in the classical treatises and commentaries, and as such they should be our primary guide for Dharma practice. But some people forget this and use the classical treatises to increase their intellectual understanding rather than incorporating them into the lamrim practice. Other lamas may not read the lamrim extensively and teach it simply because it is customary to do so. On the other hand, I have heard of some monks that meditate on the lamrim while they study the treatises at the monastic universities. That is excellent!

Some people do retreats and recite many mantras. Although this is good, practitioners in retreat should meditate on the teachings they have received. The autobiography of Jamyang Shepa, one of the great lineage lamas, relates that he did retreat on the 173 aspects of the three knowers as taught in the *Ornament*. It would be good if more people did serious meditation on these and other topics taught in the Indian treatises and commentaries.

The disciplinarian of one monastic university suggested that periods of silent meditation be incorporated into the daily prayer sessions and pujas, and I enthusiastically agreed. Pabongkha Rinpoche used to remain in silent meditation on emptiness at the point of taking death as the path to the dharmakāya when he did deity yoga practices. I have advised Namgyal Monastery to do this as well, instead of chanting "Everything becomes empty" and "Within emptiness arises . . ." in the same breath.

Our monasteries must produce people who are accomplished meditators as well as skilled scholars. To this end, I suggest that monastic institutions establish



some colleges for meditation practice. I also appeal to the new generation of monastics to put more effort into gaining personal experience of serenity and insight in order to preserve the realized Dharma and benefit sentient beings.

## 9 | Concentration in the Pāli Tradition

WITHIN THE PĀLI TRADITION, there are various approaches to the development of serenity<sup>83</sup> and insight. According to the Majjhima Nikāya Commentary (II 346), serenity includes the eight meditative absorptions that are the basis for insight. Some teachers advocate cultivating serenity and insight separately and combining them afterward. Of those, some emphasize developing serenity first, followed by insight, while others teach insight first, followed by samādhi. Still other meditation masters instruct their disciples to develop serenity and insight together. Teachers also have different preferences for meditation objects.

It is important to train in samādhi under the guidance of a qualified teacher and not to do these practices on our own. Working with the mind is a delicate venture and without proper guidance it is easy to go astray. A good meditation master who understands the various experiences that may arise in meditation will be able to steer you in the correct direction and confirm your progress. This enables you to practice free from worry and prevents taking unnecessary detours on the path.

### *Objects of Meditation*

Depending on the disciple's temperament, a meditation teacher usually prescribes one of forty objects for the cultivation of serenity. There are six kinds of temperament: those who are attached, angry, confused, faithful, intelligent, and speculative and scattered. These temperaments depend on a person's habits and the balance of humors in their body. A teacher discerns disciples' temperament by observing their posture, the way they walk, eat, wear their clothes, and engage in daily actions.

These are the forty possible meditation objects (Vism 3.104):<sup>84</sup>

- The ten kaṣiṇas are earth, water, fire, air, blue, yellow, red, white, light, and limited-space kaṣiṇas.<sup>85</sup>
- The ten unattractive objects are corpses in various states of decay. Unlike the meditation on corpses in mindfulness of the body where the purpose is to understand our own impermanence, here the purpose is to focus single-pointedly on the object with no reflective thought.
- The ten recollections are the recollection or mindfulness of the Buddha, Dharma, Saṅgha, ethical conduct, generosity, deities (the divine qualities of devas), death, the body, breathing, and nirvāṇa.
- The four divine abidings (four immeasurables) are love, compassion, empathic joy, and equanimity.
- The four formless states are the bases of infinite space, infinite consciousness, nothingness, and neither-discrimination-nor-nondiscrimination. These are the meditation objects of those born in the formless realm.
- One discrimination is discerning the repulsiveness of food.
- One analysis is defining the four elements.

Of these forty, twenty-two have the counterpart sign as the object: the ten kaṣiṇas, ten unattractive objects, mindfulness of breathing, and mindfulness of the body. This means the actual object when serenity is attained is the counterpart sign — a clear, luminous mental image or conceptual appearance, which is an object only of mental consciousness. Although we may begin by focusing on the breath, for example, the breath is not the actual object perceived in states of deep concentration; the sign (*nimitta*) is.

Of these forty, eight recollections (omitting mindfulness of the body and of breathing), the discrimination of the repulsiveness of food, and the defining of the four elements bring access concentration (P. *upacāra samādhi*) only. All the others will bring full absorption (P. *appanā samādhi*). Any of the kaṣiṇas is a condition for cultivating the first five superknowledges.

A beginner initially apprehends the various objects in different ways. All the kaṣiṇas, except the air kaṣiṇa, are initially apprehended by sight. For example, the earth kaṣiṇa is a round disk made of clean clay about four fingers wide. It is braced up and placed on a board in front of the meditator.

The ten unattractive objects are also first seen with the eyes. In previous times meditators went to charnel grounds to view these. The body's innards are known by hearing descriptions of them. The breath is apprehended by the tactile consciousness, the air kasiṇa by sight and touch, and the remaining objects by hearing a description of them. Beginners cannot apprehend the divine abiding of equanimity or the four formless states; only experienced meditators are able to engage with those objects.

The forty objects can be correlated with the various temperaments. If we are aware of our overall temperament, we can get a sense of the type of object that it would be most beneficial for us to focus on. If we have a lot of attachment, using the ten ugly objects and the body is helpful to reduce attachment and focus the mind. If we suffer from anger, the four divine abidings and the four color kasiṇas are useful. Those who are confused or scattered find the breath a helpful meditation object. Someone inclined toward faith will find the first six recollections riveting. Death, nirvāṇa, defining the four elements, and repulsiveness of food are useful for the intelligent. The other kasiṇas and the four formless states can be used by all.

Before going to a quiet place to practice, we should fully dedicate ourselves to the Buddha, thinking, I give my life to the Buddha. Doing this strengthens the mind, so if we encounter something frightening we will not run into town, socialize with a lot of people, or give up our practice. Instead, even if a fearful image appears, we won't be alarmed because we have dedicated ourselves to the Buddha.

A good motivation — one that seeks to gain realizations on the path to arhatship — is also important, as is a strong determination to confront and work with the afflictions. We should then request our spiritual mentor to select a meditation object for us and receive instructions on how to develop serenity with it as a base. Rushing off to an isolated place with a lot of enthusiasm but no knowledge on how to meditate will not lead to fulfillment of our spiritual aims.

At the beginning of a meditation session, review the disadvantages of sensual desire and cultivate the wish to be free from it. Recollect the qualities of the Three Jewels and feel joyful. Reflect that you are entering the path of renunciation that all āryas have followed. Feel eager to meditate, knowing that by doing this you will gain the bliss of Dharma realizations.

In the process of developing serenity, three signs (P. *nimitta*) are to be cultivated: the preliminary sign (P. *parikkamma-nimitta*), learning sign (P. *uggaha-nimitta*), and counterpart sign (P. *paṭibhāga-nimitta*). Using the example of an earth kasiṇa, first make the kasiṇa disk by filling a wooden rim — approximately twelve to eighteen inches in diameter — with clay, smoothing the clay to get the sense of earth. Place the disk on a stand or raised platform in front of your meditation seat, about two feet away or at any distance that feels comfortable. The disk may be lower than your head or directly in front of you.

With eyes open, look at it, thinking, earth, earth. When the image of earth is firm in your mind, lower your eyes and continue to focus and think, earth, earth. Don't ignore the color of the earth, but don't give it prominence either, because the actual object of meditation is the conceptual appearance of earth, which is an object of mental consciousness, not visual consciousness. This mental image is called the *preliminary sign*; the mental consciousness conceptually apprehends the earth kasiṇa seen by the visual consciousness. If the mental image fades, look at the earth kasiṇa to refresh your visualization of it and then lower your eyes and visualize it.

Gradually you will be able to form the image in your mind, sometimes with your eyes open and sometimes with them closed. This is called *developing the sign*. Concentration at this initial stage is called “preliminary concentration” (P. *parikkamma-samādhi*), and most of your effort goes toward being mindful of the object, noticing when a distraction or other hindrance has arisen, applying the antidote to it, and bringing the mind back to the meditation object.

Continue to develop the preliminary sign until the *learning sign* arises. This is a subtler object that replaces the preliminary work sign. It arises when you see the mental image just as clearly with closed eyes as with open eyes looking at the kasiṇa. At this point stop looking at the external earth kasiṇa and focus exclusively on the mental object, the learning sign. If your apprehension of the learning sign isn't stable and fades away, open your eyes and look at the physical earth kasiṇa. Investigation is important at this point to establish familiarity with the learning sign.

As you continue to meditate, the five hindrances are gradually suppressed by the five absorption factors (discussed below). Suppression in the context of developing concentration differs from psychological suppression. Here the mind and body are at ease and free from stress; the mind is virtuous and the feeling is

either happy or equanimous. Unlike psychological suppression in which the person does not see his mental functioning clearly, here suppression of the five hindrances leads to greater clarity and ability to discern the functioning of the mind.

Untroubled by manifest afflictions, especially by the five hindrances, the mind becomes more concentrated. The *counterpart sign* arises and access concentration is attained. The difference between the learning sign and the counterpart sign is that the former has imperfections and flaws, whereas the latter is brighter and more purified. Very luminous, beautiful, and vivid, the counterpart sign is immaterial and lacks physical color or shape because it is not an object of visual consciousness. It is likened to a looking-glass disk taken out of its case, a very clean mother-of-pearl dish, or the moon coming out from behind a cloud. Stabilizing the counterpart sign is difficult, so you must guard it carefully and practice it over time in order to attain full absorption.

Access concentration begins when the counterpart sign arises and the five hindrances have been suppressed.<sup>86</sup> This is called the “stage of suppression abandonment” (P. *vikkhambhana-pahāna*). The first dhyāna begins with the stable and full development of the five absorption factors. Although the absorption factors are present in access concentration, they are not firm and access concentration may easily be lost, which may be likened to a toddler falling down while learning to walk. But just as an adult can stand firmly for a long time, the absorption factors remain strong for a long time during actual meditative absorption. The mind in full absorption does not perceive sensory objects.

Nowadays in Asia, few masters are familiar with kasiṇa meditation and most meditators use the breath as the object for cultivating serenity. Focusing on the breath slows down the thought processes and clears the mind of the barrage of scattered thoughts. To use the breath as your meditation object, begin by placing your attention at the nostrils and upper lip and observing the physical sensation of the breath as it enters and exits.<sup>87</sup> Some people recite “buddho” to help them maintain focus on the breath, thinking “bud” when inhaling and “dho” while exhaling. The learning sign is a mental image arisen from this physical sensation. When it arises, turn your attention to that nimitta that has arisen based on the breath — a colored luminous sphere or a radiant light — and make that your object of meditation.

## *The Four Brahmavihāras*

The practice of the four immeasurables (P. *appamaññā*), or four brahmavihāras — love, compassion, joy, and equanimity — is common to the Pāli and the Sanskrit traditions. This practice may be done in diverse contexts and for different purposes: to soothe rough emotions, develop serenity, aid in the cultivation of bodhicitta, and so on. In several sūtras, the Buddha presented the four brahmavihāras as a means to cultivate samādhi (DN 13.76).

The ariya disciple — who is thus devoid of covetousness, devoid of malice, unconfused, introspectively aware, ever mindful — dwells pervading one quarter (direction) with a mind imbued with love, likewise the second quarter, the third quarter, and the fourth quarter. Thus above, below, across, and everywhere, and to all as to himself, he dwells pervading the entire world with a mind imbued with love, vast, exalted, measureless, without hostility, without malice.

The ariya disciple . . . dwells pervading the entire world with a mind imbued with compassion, vast, exalted, measureless, without hostility, without malice.

The ariya disciple . . . dwells pervading the entire world with a mind imbued with altruistic joy, vast, exalted, measureless, without hostility, without malice.

The ariya disciple — who is thus devoid of covetousness, devoid of malice, unconfused, introspectively aware, ever mindful — dwells pervading one quarter with a mind imbued with equanimity, likewise the second quarter, the third quarter, and the fourth quarter. Thus above, below, across, and everywhere, and to all as to himself, he dwells pervading the entire world with a mind imbued with equanimity, vast, exalted, measureless, without hostility, without malice.

The four brahmavihāras are practiced in conjunction with mindfulness and are used to cultivate samādhi. Before meditating on them, it is necessary to shed animosity for others by seeing the danger of holding onto anger, hatred, and resentment.<sup>88</sup> Recall that if these people were happy, they would act differently.

People harm others because they are unhappy; therefore it makes sense to wish them to have a peaceful mind and good circumstances in their lives.

Love is the wish for beings to have happiness and its causes. Before beginning, consider what happiness is and what the actual causes for happiness are. Happiness does not refer exclusively to the feeling of security brought about by external objects — possessions, reputation, family, and so forth — but rather to a sense of peaceful well-being and contentment in any circumstance. Then generate a sense of love (*mettā*) for yourself, wishing yourself happiness and its causes. For some people this comes easily, but others must first let go of feelings of unworthiness by contemplating that each and every sentient being is worthy of happiness. Wish yourself to have the requisites for life and especially wish yourself to have the happiness that comes through mental transformation and Dharma practice.

On this basis, now extend love to someone you respect. When that is stable, extend it to friends and radiate love to them. Continue by extending love to people toward whom you feel neutral. Even though they may be strangers, they want happiness with the same intensity that you do. When that feeling is stable, think of beings with whom you have a contentious relationship, where there is conflict or distrust. As your love becomes more powerful, radiate it outward to include more and more beings. Finally, spread love to all sentient beings in all directions and realms.

When barriers to extending love to the five groups — yourself, the respected person, friend, neutral person, and hostile person — have been broken down and you are able to radiate love equally to all five, simultaneously the counterpart sign<sup>89</sup> appears and access concentration is attained. Continuing to meditate, attain the full concentration of the first dhyāna by developing and repeatedly practicing that same sign. In the first dhyāna the five hindrances have been suppressed and the five factors — investigation (applied thought), analysis (sustained thought), joy, bliss, and one-pointedness — are present. With the attainment of the first dhyāna, a practitioner also attains the liberation of mind with love (P. *mettā-cetovimutti*).<sup>90</sup> As meditation continues, the second and third dhyānas (in the fourfold schema) will be gained.

Compassion (*karuṇā*) is wishing beings to be free from suffering and its causes. Reflecting on the three kinds of duḥkha — the duḥkha of pain, change, and the pervasive duḥkha of conditioning<sup>91</sup> — wish yourself to be free of them.



Then gradually increase the scope of your compassion to include dear ones, strangers, and people you don't like, and wish them to be free from all *duḥkha* whatsoever.

To develop empathic joy (*muditā*), begin with a dear person, followed by a neutral person, and then a hostile one. Contemplate the goodness they have in their lives and have a sense of abundance. Rejoice in their good fortune and rejoice in the merit that caused it. Wish them not to be parted from this well-being — not by their possessively clinging to it but by joyously appreciating it. Then recollect other beings who are currently experiencing good fortune and feel happy for them; rejoice that they have goodness in their lives and rejoice in their virtuous activities. Let go of any sense of jealousy or competition that wants to deprive them of the causes of well-being. Instead, have the sincere wish that everyone not be separated from abundance, well-being, and excellent opportunities. Here, too, include yourself, rejoicing at your good fortune and virtue.

Equanimity (*upekkhā*) is explained differently in various contexts. In the Pāli tradition, it refers to a sense of acceptance about what is and is not possible. To cultivate it, reflect on the difficult and painful things in your life that haven't yet been resolved. Consider that these circumstances came into being as a result of karma, your own actions. Karma is real and powerful; once karmic seeds have ripened we cannot unripen them. We must accept the situation, stop fighting the reality of what is happening, and cultivate fortitude and equanimity. This will make the mind strong and prevent becoming bitter about life. After cultivating equanimity for yourself, gradually extend it to others. When spreading equanimity to dear ones, strangers, people you don't like, and all beings, recall that beings fare according to their karma. Although you may want to help them, sometimes their situation is such that you are unable to help because of the strength of their karma or because they are not receptive at this moment. Abide in equanimity and don't suffer unnecessarily, thinking that you should be able to fix their problem. Keep your heart open to them, but realize that just as you can't always resolve all of your own dilemmas caused by your karma, neither can you resolve others' difficulties.

Breaking down the barriers between oneself and the neutral person, the dear one, and the hostile one are as above in the meditations on love, compassion, and joy. So too is cultivating and repeatedly practicing the sign. Through this one

enters the fourth dhyāna. A meditator can gain the fourth dhyāna only on the basis of having attained the third by means of meditation on one of the other immeasurables. In other words, only after attaining the first, second, and third dhyānas on love, compassion, and empathic joy can a meditator attain the fourth dhyāna on equanimity.

Serenity can be cultivated with any of the four brahmavihāras, beginning with love. You can abide in them with access concentration or absorption into one of the dhyānas. The “liberation of mind by love” refers to dhyāna absorption on love. The four brahmavihāras, when perfected to the state of dhyāna, are liberations of mind in that they are free from the five hindrances and gross negativities of body, speech, and mind. They are also free from confines because love, compassion, joy, and equanimity are radiated in all directions. The expansive karmic result of these liberations of mind overpowers the negative karmic influence of the limited karma of the desire realm. All four brahmavihāras are liberated from hostility and malice. Specifically, love has the remarkable ability to liberate the mind from malice, compassion liberates from vexation, joy liberates from discontent, and equanimity from attachment. These four liberations of mind weaken the fetters and lead meditators to becoming nonreturners. Once combined with the awakening factors, those concentrations lead to final liberation from saṃsāra.

## REFLECTION

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1. Reflect on the various types of happiness — physical, mental, spiritual — and their external and internal causes, and generate love, the wish that all beings have these.
  2. Releasing all thoughts of unworthiness, respectfully wish yourself to have happiness and its causes. Imagine your healthy needs being fulfilled.
  3. Spread this love to those you respect.
  4. When this is stable, gradually spread love to friends, strangers, and people you don't get along with.
  5. Then extend love to all beings in all realms of existence. Focusing on that experience of love, develop concentration.
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By cultivating the five absorption factors (*dhyānāṅga*), a meditator successfully suppresses the five hindrances and attains the first dhyāna. These five absorption factors were discussed in the Sanskrit tradition as well.

1. Investigation directs and applies the mind to the meditation object. Uplifting the mind and placing it on the object, it brings the mind onto the object.

2. Analysis sustains awareness on the meditation object until the mind gradually becomes peaceful. For example, if the meditation object is the breath, analysis sustains attention on the breath, examining and knowing each breath very clearly.

Investigation is compared to ringing a bell, and analysis is like the resonance of the sound. Other analogies are: investigation is like a bird flapping its wings, and analysis resembles it floating; investigation is like holding a dish, and analysis is like drying it.

3. Joy is delight and a sense of satisfaction that arises by being interested in the object. It arises when the mind settles down and becomes peaceful as a result of investigation and analysis. For example, by recollecting the Buddha with deep concentration, we feel deep inspiration and elation. Joy brings lightness of body and mind. Sometimes it may even feel like the body is floating in air. Joy is the result of having developed some degree of concentration.

4. Bliss is the pleasant and happy feeling that accompanies concentration as a result of the peacefulness and stillness of the mind. This bliss is unlike what we usually call bliss in a worldly sense because now the mind is tranquil and satisfied. Joy is likened to the delight a thirsty traveler has upon seeing an oasis, and bliss is likened to the happiness and pleasure he experiences by drinking the water and resting under a tree.

5. One-pointedness unifies the mind and its accompanying mental factors on the object. It is a stillness of the mind that allows the mind to stay in a relaxed manner on the meditation object.

As we approach dhyāna, the five factors sequentially increase in strength. When all five are present and work together to plunge the mind into the meditation object so that the mind becomes completely absorbed in the object, the first dhyāna is attained. Investigation and analysis are the basic application of mind that leads to samādhi. While they investigate and examine the object, respectively, they do not judge or form opinions about it. Instead investigation

and analysis come to know the object well and maintain interest in it. Investigation is initially more prominent because it applies the mind to the object repeatedly. Once the object is fixed in the mind, analysis continues the awareness and examination of the object. For example, investigation applies the mind to the meditation object, which at this stage is the counterpart sign, and analysis sustains that awareness and examines and knows the counterpart sign. These are the two basic and most important functions that develop samādhi.

Joy and bliss arise when investigation and analysis harmonize and work together and become more refined. As concentration increases, joy arises. Having elements of exuberance and elation, joy is relatively coarse compared with bliss, which is the feeling of pleasure that accompanies concentration. Although joy is exhilarating, bliss is more relaxed and satisfying.

These five factors have to be cultivated with patience. We cannot will access concentration or any other meditative state to arise. Making meditation into a struggle is not the way to attain blissful samādhi. Pushing makes the mind tight and agitated, producing the opposite of what we wish. It is more effective to soften the mind and allow concentration to deepen. If we cultivate the factors with consistent but relaxed effort, when they are mature and strong the mind will go into full absorption by itself.

While the five factors may sometimes be present in ordinary consciousnesses, they do not work together. When cultivating samādhi, they work together to reduce and finally suppress the hindrances, although each factor has more sway in counteracting one or another of the hindrances. Investigation opposes lethargy and sleepiness by putting the mind on the meditation object. Analysis counteracts doubt by keeping the mind steady on the object without the jumpiness of doubt. Joy counteracts malice, and bliss is the remedy to restlessness and regret because the mind naturally prefers what is delightful over what is agitating. One-pointedness works against sensual desire by unifying the mind on the object in a worthwhile way.

The five dhyāna factors consolidate the mind on the meditation object. Investigation directs the mind to the object, analysis secures it there, joy generates interest in it, bliss experiences its affective quality, and one-pointedness focuses the mind on it.

A mind with full concentration is like a room with only one chair. When the chair is occupied, if another guest comes in, he leaves immediately because there

is no place for him to sit. Similarly, when samādhi is focused one-pointedly on the meditation object, other thoughts cannot stay in the mind. As wonderful as concentration is, it only suppresses the hindrances; it does not eradicate them. Only the wisdom developed by unifying serenity and insight can do that. The mind endowed with mindfulness, introspective awareness, and samādhi gives rise to true wisdom that knows all conditioned phenomena as impermanent, duḥkha, and selfless and that leads to the path wisdom that knows nirvāṇa.

## *The Four Dhyānas*

Once the five hindrances are suppressed by the five absorption factors, full meditative absorption is attained. There are eight levels of absorption — four of the form realm and four of the formless realm — that a meditator in the human realm can attain. In each successive state of absorption, concentration deepens. However, the formless absorptions are not useful for gaining realizations because the mind is too absorbed.

In the Pāli sūtras, the Buddha describes right concentration in terms of the four dhyānas that are form-realm spheres of consciousness (SN 45.8).

What is right concentration? Herein, secluded from sense pleasures, secluded from nonvirtuous states, a monastic enters and dwells in the first dhyāna, which is accompanied by investigation and analysis with joy and bliss born of seclusion.

With the subsiding of investigation, he enters and dwells in the second dhyāna which has inner confidence and mental unification, is without investigation and analysis, and has joy and bliss born of concentration.

With the fading out of joy, he dwells in equanimity, and with mindfulness and introspective awareness he experiences bliss with the body; he enters and dwells in the third jhāna of which the ariyas declare: “He is equanimous, mindful, one who dwells happily.”

With the abandoning of pleasure and pain and with the previous disappearance of joy and displeasure, he enters and dwells in the fourth dhyāna, which is neither painful nor pleasant and

includes the purification of mindfulness by equanimity. This is called right concentration.

The dhyānas are distinguished by their component factors, as shown in the chart below. While the presentation in the sūtras and the Abhidharma analysis may differ superficially, they come to the same point.

### THE FOUR DHYĀNAS AND THEIR CORRESPONDING DHYĀNIC FACTORS

DHYĀNA	ABHIDHARMA ANALYSIS	SŪTRA EXPOSITION
First	Present: investigation, analysis, joy, bliss, one-pointedness of mind	Absent: sensual pleasures, nonvirtuous states of mind Present: investigation, analysis, joy, bliss born of seclusion (from the five hindrances)
Second	Present: joy, bliss, one-pointedness	Absent: investigation, analysis Present: internal stillness, one-pointedness of mind, joy, bliss born of concentration
Third	Present: bliss, one-pointedness	Absent: joy Present: equanimity, mindfulness, introspective awareness, bliss experienced by body
Fourth	Present: neither-pleasure-nor-pain, one-pointedness	Absent: bliss (of body) and pain, joy and displeasure Present: neither-pain-nor-pleasure, purity of mindfulness, equanimity; mind is purified, bright, unblemished, rid of imperfection, malleable, wieldy, steady, and attained to imperturbability.

#### *First Dhyāna*

The Buddha describes the experience of the first dhyāna (MN 39.15):

Having abandoned these five hindrances, imperfections of the mind that weaken wisdom, quite secluded from sensual pleasures, secluded from nonvirtuous states, he enters upon and abides in the first dhyāna, which is accompanied by investigation and analysis, with joy and bliss born of seclusion. He makes the joy and bliss born of seclusion drench, steep, fill, and pervade his body, so that there is no part of his whole body not pervaded by the joy and bliss born of seclusion.

When the five factors are fully developed and have suppressed the five hindrances, the mind naturally flows into the concentrated state of the first dhyāna. The mind is now totally withdrawn from sense objects, although there is some difference of opinion whether there is recognition of sound while in dhyāna. Some people say there could be slight recognition of sound but it does not disturb the mind. Others say there is no perception of sound at all. The mind being secluded from nonvirtuous states means that it is separated from the five hindrances, and the joy and bliss the meditator experiences is a result of having abandoned the five hindrances.

Concentration in the dhyānas is sharp and focused, but also free from tension and stress. It is arrived at through balanced effort that is firm but not tight. Buddhaghosa gives an analogy of balanced effort (Vism 4.68). In ancient India a surgeon's students would practice using a scalpel on a lotus leaf. Someone who is hurried and tense applies too much force and either cuts the lotus leaf in two or pushes it under the water. Someone who is too lax and timid doesn't dare touch the scalpel to the lotus leaf for fear of dunking it or slicing it. However, someone with balanced effort is relaxed yet knows the right degree of pressure to cut the leaf properly.

Prior to attaining the first dhyāna, a meditator puts effort into increasing joy and bliss. When she enters the first dhyāna, joy and bliss are firm and she no longer makes a conscious effort to increase them. Without thought, the mind remains clearly focused on the meditation object, experiencing this great delight. The Buddha compares the experience of the first dhyāna to bath powder kneaded with water to form a ball, where the water permeates the entire ball but does not ooze out. Likewise, the meditator "makes the joy and pleasure born of seclusion drench, steep, fill, and pervade her entire body, so that there is no part of her body unpervaded by the joy and pleasure born of seclusion."

Some people mistakenly believe that pleasure is antithetical to Dharma practice and must be relinquished. Here we see meditators actively cultivate joy and bliss, so that in the first dhyāna joy and bliss pervade their entire body, which stops the mind's obsession with sensual pleasure. They stop creating destructive karma involving sense objects, enabling them to have a flexible state of mind that can be directed toward realizing reality.

Just as meditators must have stable access concentration before going on to develop the first dhyāna, so too should they master the first dhyāna before going on to the second. There is a delicate balance here: On the one hand, there may be a tendency to become complacent enjoying the first dhyāna and not continue to practice. On the other hand, there may be an overeager tendency to push ahead and attain the second dhyāna quickly. Both of these tendencies are detours to avoid; taking the time to master the first dhyāna prevents them. Mastery of a dhyāna involves perfecting the skill in this dhyāna so that the meditator is able to enter, abide, and emerge from it without difficulty. She can stay in the dhyāna for as long as she wishes, and upon emerging, the mind is clear and she is not confused about where she is or what is happening around her. She is able to review the experience, noting the process by which she entered, abided, and emerged from that dhyāna. She is also able to analyze the dhyāna into its different factors, clearly knowing each absorption factor that is present.

The *Connected Discourses on Dhyāna* (SN 34) discuss the meditative skills to master in one dhyāna before going on to the next:

1. Concentration: knowing what factors — such as investigation, joy, and so forth — that each dhyāna has.
2. Attainment: entering dhyāna easily.
3. Maintenance: steadying the mind in dhyāna.
4. Emergence: being able to emerge from the dhyāna at the time one has determined before entering meditation.
5. Pliancy: relaxing the mind and making it pliant.
6. Object: knowing and being comfortable with the kasiṇa object.
7. Range: knowing the range of concentration to be produced in the mind — as in knowing, “This concentration has a nimitta as the object, this one has the three characteristics as the object.” In serenity concentration the nimitta is the object; in insight concentration mental and material



phenomena characterized by one or another of the three characteristics are the object.

8. Resolution: resolving to elevate the mind to the next, higher dhyāna.
9. Thoroughness: acting with care in order to enter dhyāna.
10. Persistence: maintaining continuity in the practice.
11. Suitability: fulfilling the qualities that are pertinent and beneficial for concentration.

### *Second Dhyāna*

While the meditator develops the eleven skills and becomes familiar with the first dhyāna, he continues to practice samādhi, receiving the four requisites with right livelihood, alternating walking and sitting meditations, and sleeping in moderation in the middle part of the night. At some point he begins to reflect on that experience. While absorbed in the first dhyāna, there is no thought or deliberation, so he leaves the first dhyāna and resumes normal consciousness, although that consciousness still bears the flavor of the first dhyāna's concentration. In that state, he evaluates the first dhyāna. Although the first dhyāna has been the most wonderful experience he has had and is definitely better than the pleasures of the desire realm, it also has some faults. It isn't far removed from the desire-realm mind with its five hindrances and manifest defilements. Furthermore, investigation and analysis are comparatively coarse factors. He recalls that the Buddha spoke of another meditative absorption that is even more excellent, in which investigation and analysis are not present. Having repeatedly reflected on the defects of the first dhyāna and the benefits of the second, he makes a determination to attain the second dhyāna.

After continuing to meditate and strengthen his faculty of concentration, when his faculties are strong enough, he enters access concentration and then goes directly into the second dhyāna without passing through the first dhyāna.<sup>92</sup>

To attain the first dhyāna, investigation and analysis were necessary to direct the mind to the meditation object and hold it there. Now other factors perform those functions, so those two factors are released, and there is an inner stillness and clarity of mind that become more prominent. Joy and bliss are still present, and the one-pointed unification of mind is stronger, so the depth of concentration increases. Whereas previously joy and bliss arose due to being

separated from the five hindrances, now they are present due to the power of samādhi itself.

The Buddha compared the joy and bliss experienced in the second dhyāna to a cool fount of water that wells up from below and permeates the entire lake. Similarly, the meditator “makes the joy and bliss born of concentration drench, steep, fill, and pervade this body, so that there is no part of his whole body not pervaded by the joy and bliss born of concentration.” As before, he familiarizes and trains in the second dhyāna, developing the skills mentioned above.

### *Third Dhyāna*

Although the meditator initially experiences the second dhyāna as much superior to the first, after some time he sees that even the peace of the second dhyāna is not free from faults. As concentration deepens, joy is seen as undesirable because it makes the mind too exhilarated. Aware that there is a deeper level of meditation, the meditator determines to attain it. He renews his practice with the meditation object, this time with the intention to abandon joy, and strengthens his faculty of concentration until it makes joy subside. When it does, the third dhyāna dawns. Bliss and one-pointedness are still present. The mindfulness, introspective awareness, and equanimity that were present before (but submerged due to the strength of the other factors) now become stronger and are prominent. There are various types of equanimity (Vism 4.157–66); in the third dhyāna, the equanimity of dhyāna, which leads to impartiality even toward bliss, is present. The Buddha compares the experience of the third dhyāna to lotuses that grow and thrive while immersed in water without rising out of it, such that the “cool water drenches, steeps, fills, and pervades them . . . so that there is no part of all those lotuses not pervaded by water . . . So too does the pleasure divested of joy drench, steep, fill and pervade this body, so that there is no part of his whole body unpervaded by the pleasure divested of joy.”

In addition, the meditator “feels bliss with his body.” This indicates that in dhyāna he experiences the bliss of his mental body and makes the bliss free from joy drench and pervade his entire mental body. After emerging from dhyāna, he experiences bliss in his physical body. Cultivating skill in the various aspects of the third dhyāna, he trains in it and develops some degree of mastery in it.

### *Fourth Dhyāna*

After mastering the third dhyāna, the meditator sees that it too is faulty in that the feeling of bliss in it is comparatively coarse and can provoke subtle attachment. That is, the bliss of samādhi had counteracted attachment to sensual pleasures, but now it disturbs the tranquility of the mind by making subtle attachment arise. Even though the blissful feeling coexists with equanimity in the third dhyāna, bliss is not the strongest support possible for equanimity; it pulls the mind away from equanimity because there is some attachment to it. A neutral feeling — one that is neither painful nor pleasurable — is the best support for equanimity. Having considered the defects of the third dhyāna and knowing that there is a superior state of concentration, he makes a determination to attain the fourth dhyāna. He practices in order to release the bliss, and when his faculties are strong enough, the bliss fades away and he enters the fourth dhyāna. Pleasure and pain, joy and displeasure all vanish, and the meditator abides in the fourth dhyāna, which is free from painful and pleasurable feelings. Equanimity, which is far more peaceful than bliss, comes to the forefront. The firmness of equanimity fully purifies mindfulness, and his one-pointed unification of mind is strong.

Equanimity is present in all four dhyānas, although in the first two it is in the background, overshadowed by the other absorption factors. In the first dhyāna investigation and analysis bring fluctuation, and in the second dhyāna joy causes ripples in the stillness of the mind. In the third dhyāna, because joy has faded away, mindfulness, introspective awareness, and equanimity are prominent. However, equanimity is not fully evident because bliss provokes a subtle attachment to the blissful feeling. In the fourth dhyāna, this subtle attachment and the blissful feeling are released and equanimity flourishes. Now the meditator “sits pervading this body with a pure bright mind, so that there is no part of his whole body not pervaded by the pure bright mind.” This radiant mind abides in equanimity, undisturbed even by bliss. This is the feeling of equanimity that has neither-pain-nor-pleasure. It is completely free from physical feelings of pain and pleasure and mental feelings of joy and grief.

The dhyānas are higher levels of the mundane mind; they are more focused, flexible, and have greater ability to perceive more clearly than the confused and obscured mental states of the desire realm. The dhyānas are called “blissful abidings here and now” because the pleasant feeling of bliss accompanies the first three. The fourth dhyāna is a pleasant abiding because the peace of equanimity

pervades it. People who have attained any of the dhyānas see sensual pleasure as pointless and boring. They would much rather partake in dhyāna meditation, where they can remain peaceful for days at a time and emerge refreshed and invigorated, unlike people in the human realm who go on vacation and return exhausted.

Some meditation masters encourage their disciples to use insight to analyze the mental state of that meditative absorption after they emerge from it. They examine every factor of that meditative absorption to determine if there is a self lurking in it. Analyzing states of samādhi in this way, practitioners understand that even these wonderful, blissful experiences are composed of various factors and arise due to causes and conditions. These sublime states are impermanent, impersonal, and not to be grasped at as a self. Such analysis prevents meditators from craving and longing for these meditative experiences for their own sake and encourages them to use these meditative attainments as tools to attain liberation. Analyzing these states also prevents practitioners from generating the erroneous view that these states are a self or the experience of God or another absolute deity. Furthermore, such analysis prevents conceit, thinking oneself is a great practitioner for having such meditative experiences. Instead, practitioners see once again that everything lacks self.

### *The Four Formless Absorptions*

Beyond the four dhyānas are deeper states of concentration, the four formless states. Advancing from one dhyāna to the next involves refining the mind by successively abandoning coarse mental factors, whereas progressing through the four formless states entails refining the object of meditation. Taking their names from their meditation objects, the four formless states are the base of (1) infinite space, (2) infinite consciousness, (3) nothingness, and (4) neither-discrimination-nor-nondiscrimination.

Although the dhyānas are called “blissful abidings here and now,” the four formless absorptions are referred to as “peaceful abidings” because the mental peace experienced in them deepens and remains undisturbed. As with the dhyānas, these peaceful abidings of the formless realm are cultivated serially, the lower ones being mastered before the higher ones are cultivated.

To review, many meditators training to gain the four dhyānas begin with a meditation object that is a form — the breath, a kasiṇa, and so forth. Through this, a conceptual appearance or learning sign appears, and that becomes the meditation object. With continued meditation, that mental image becomes more purified and beautiful, transforming into a bright light or a luminous sphere — the counterpart sign — and the mind becomes absorbed in that. This nimitta is the object for all four dhyānas.

If a meditator wants to go beyond the dhyānas into the formless absorptions, he focuses on the luminous sphere or radiant light of the kasiṇa object — blue, for example — which is the counterpart sign of his dhyānic meditation and expands it until it is as vast as space. He now becomes completely absorbed in this vast blueness with the mind of the fourth dhyāna. Blue is the only thing in his field of awareness; it is undivided and seamless, pervading the entire universe as far as the mind can reach. Then, to enter the absorption of infinite space, he considers that although the fourth dhyāna is peaceful, it is nevertheless faulty because its object is a form, and that a meditative absorption without form would be superior and more peaceful. He makes the determination to attain the absorption of infinite space, and resolving, “let this form vanish,” he mentally removes the blue pervading all of space. When the mind is properly prepared, the blue light disappears and all that remains as an object of awareness is the infinite space that was where the bright light had been. His mind now becomes immersed in this infinite expanse of space, with no perception of a nimitta at all. All perception of form or any other sense object has disappeared, and the meditator is only aware of the infinitude of space. Thus he enters and dwells in the absorption of infinite space, the first formless absorption.

The process of advancing from one meditative absorption to the next is similar to advancing from one dhyāna to the next. After mastering the present absorption, a meditator considers its defects and the benefits of the higher absorption. However elevated the present absorption is, it is still coarse and unpeaceful compared with the description of the next one. Seeking to be free from the defects of the previous state and to experience the deeper peace and mental refinement of the next, he generates the determination to attain the next absorption.

When the meditator has mastered the absorption of infinite space, he reflects that it is consciousness that is aware of infinite space. It is as if consciousness

pervades that infinite space. He shifts his attention from infinite space to the infinity of the consciousness that is conscious of and pervades that space, and he makes a determination to attain the absorption of infinite consciousness. By means of making this determination and repeated practice, the perception of space falls away and only consciousness remains, extending infinitely. This is the second formless state.

After mastering the absorption of infinite consciousness, he reflects that there is no obstruction and impediment in it. He now focuses on the unimpeded nature of infinite consciousness until the awareness of consciousness falls away and there remains just the awareness of nothingness — its unimpeded and unobstructed nature. The object his mind focuses on is the nonoccurrence or nonexistence of the consciousness of the base of infinite space. That is, he is now aware that the consciousness of infinite space is no longer occurring. By focusing the mind on this, he enters the absorption of nothingness.

After becoming familiar with this deep concentration, he turns his attention to the consciousness that is aware of nothingness. Perceiving this very subtle consciousness to be even more peaceful, he enters and abides in the base of neither-discrimination-nor-nondiscrimination. This absorption is so refined that when in it, one cannot say discrimination is present, nor can one say there is no discrimination at all. Discrimination is still present but it is so subtle that it does not perform the normal function of discrimination. It is so subtle that if one tries to detect it, one cannot; but if one does not try to perceive it, one will be vaguely aware that there is subtle discrimination functioning. Thus the fourth formless absorption is called “neither-discrimination-nor-nondiscrimination,” and neither-discrimination-nor-nondiscrimination is the object of that absorption. That state is also called the “peak of saṃsāra” because it is the most refined state of mind possible for beings caught in the cycle of rebirth.

Beings born in the formless realms due to having attained these meditative absorptions while they were human beings stay in these states of samādhi for eons. When the karma for that rebirth is exhausted, other karma ripens and they again fall to other realms in saṃsāra. The formless absorptions are so refined that it is difficult, though not impossible, for a human meditator to use them to cultivate the wisdom and insight leading to liberation. When the Buddha was still a bodhisattva, he trained with two meditation teachers after he left the palace. Under the first, he mastered the absorption of nothingness and under the

second the absorption of neither-discrimination-nor-nondiscrimination. Realizing that despite having attained such refined samādhi his mind was not completely free from defilements, he left those teachers. Years later under the bodhi tree he perfected the wisdom and insight that culminated in full awakening.

## *Four Kinds of Development of Samādhi*

The Buddha speaks of four types of concentration, according to the results they produce. Of course the results depend on the method used as well as on a practitioner's motivation — the result they seek. The Buddha says (AN 4.41):

There are, monastics, these four kinds of development of concentration. What four? (1) There is a development of concentration that leads to a pleasant abiding in this very life; (2) there is a development of concentration that leads to obtaining knowledge and vision; (3) there is a development of concentration that leads to mindfulness and introspective awareness; (4) there is a development of concentration that leads to the destruction of the pollutants.

The first development of concentration leads to happiness in this very life, what the Buddha calls “a pleasant dwelling in this very life.” Here meditators train in the prescribed method, attain serenity, and then meditate progressively to attain the first, second, third, and fourth dhyānas. They abide blissfully in these states of concentration and create invariable karma that leads to rebirth in the corresponding form realm.

The second is the development of concentration that leads to attaining knowledge and vision, which refers to the superknowledge of the divine eye. Gaining this depends on mastery of the fourth dhyāna. The divine eye is useful for practitioners with compassion who seek to benefit others.

The third is the development of concentration that leads to mindfulness and introspective awareness. In this meditation, three of the five aggregates — feelings, discriminations, and miscellaneous factors (views and emotions) — are

known as they arise, abide, and pass away. Through this concentration one develops a very focused mind that observes and understands the arising, abiding, and ceasing of these three mental events in one's own mind.

With the development of concentration that leads to the destruction of pollutants, a practitioner is aware of the momentary rising and passing away of each of the five aggregates as it occurs. Much more refined than the previous concentrations, this concentration is combined with insight. Some wisdom is present in the concentration leading to mindfulness and introspective awareness, but it cannot see the momentary arising and passing away. It sees things as abiding for a while before ceasing. This fourth development of concentration knows subtle impermanence deeply. By seeing the momentary nature of all things — in particular the five psychophysical aggregates we cling to as self — a meditator gains profound realizations. She knows that everything that is impermanent is unsatisfactory in nature. Things that cease as soon as they arise are unstable and cannot provide lasting happiness. She also knows that whatever is impermanent is not a self; transient aggregates cannot endure long enough to be a real self.

Realization of the three characteristics — impermanence, *duḥkha*, and no-self — is considered mundane insight. It precedes the breakthrough to the wisdom knowing *nirvāṇa* that marks the attainment of the path of stream-entry. Through meditation with the wisdom knowing *nirvāṇa*, one will destroy the pollutants in stages and attain *nirvāṇa* as an arhat.

## *Samādhi and Insight*

The ultimate purpose of *samādhi* is, in combination with insight wisdom, to eradicate defilements completely by propelling meditators gradually through the four stages of awakening — stream-enterer, once-returner, nonreturner, and arhat.

While on the path, meditation on the *dhyānas* refreshes the mind and can protect the meditator in dangerous situations. There are accounts of many forest meditators entering *samādhi* when a tiger is nearby. Later, upon arising from meditation unharmed, they saw tiger paw prints around the area.

We may be skeptical, thinking that since the *dhyānas* are so blissful, it is somehow wrong for practitioners to indulge in them. The Buddha had a similar doubt at the beginning. As one practicing extreme asceticism, he thought



pleasant experiences were dangerous because they would entice the practitioner into desire. After doing ascetic practices for six years, he remembered going into states of samādhi as a child and wondered if it was the path to awakening. As he reflected on this, he understood that there was no reason to be afraid of the pleasure of meditative absorption, because it did not involve nonvirtuous states of mind as sensual pleasures did. He began to meditate with dhyānas and recommended this type of meditation to his disciples as a way to overcome hindrances by drawing the mind away from sensual pleasure to a higher pleasure and then to awakening.

In recommending the dhyānas, the Buddha urged his disciples to use higher types of happiness to abandon attachment to lower types of happiness. The peace of the dhyānas so outshines the happiness derived from sensual pleasures that it automatically helps practitioners to see the futility and unsatisfactoriness of sensual happiness.

Of course if we were to indulge in the peace of the dhyānas, there is the danger of becoming attached to them. This attachment could dissuade us from making effort to eradicate defilements completely. For this reason, the Buddha taught how to abandon attachment to the dhyānas. Having meditated in a dhyāna, the practitioner arises and reflects on that mental state itself: the dhyāna is impermanent, is duḥkha in nature, and lacks a self; it is a saṃsāric state, and as such, not worth being attached to. He then meditates with insight to free himself from saṃsāra.

As shown by the Buddha's awakening, attaining the fourth dhyāna is necessary to become a buddha. It is the door to the three higher knowledges — knowledge of past lives, of the passing away and reappearance of beings, and of the destruction of pollutants — that preceded the Buddha's awakening. The Buddha described how he employed that concentrated mind to attain awakening (MN 36.38):

When my concentrated mind was thus purified, bright, unblemished, rid of imperfection, malleable, wieldy, steady, and attained to imperturbability, I directed it to knowledge of the recollection of past lives . . . to knowledge of the passing away and reappearance of beings . . . to knowledge of the destruction of the pollutants. I directly knew as it actually is [the four truths] . . .

When I knew and saw thus, my mind was liberated from the pollutant of sensual desire, from the pollutant of existence, and from the pollutant of ignorance. When it was liberated there came the knowledge, “It is liberated.” I directly knew, “Birth is destroyed, the holy life has been lived, what had to be done has been done, there is no more coming to any state of being.”

Although it may be possible to go from access concentration to insight meditation, it is wiser to develop at least the first dhyāna. This is because in access concentration, the five hindrances are not well suppressed and may rebound, disturbing insight meditation. Doing insight meditation on the basis of the first dhyāna prevents this.

For other people cultivating insight first is more suitable. Practicing insight meditation weakens the five hindrances. After the hindrances have been worn down by insight, these practitioners cultivate serenity and attain the dhyānas.

For people who seek liberation from saṃsāra, the higher training in wisdom is essential, and this requires insight. Insight requires some degree of samādhi. While some stream-enterers and once-returners may not have attained a dhyāna, or if they have, have not mastered it, they do have the wisdom of insight into the three characteristics, which has some degree of concentration.

In general, the four establishments of mindfulness are used to develop insight. However, certain practices within the four establishments can be used as absorption practices — for example, the mindfulness of breathing and the mindfulness of the foul aspects of the body. Buddhaghosa said that the contemplation of feelings, mind, and phenomena do not lead to attainment of even the first dhyāna.<sup>93</sup>

The sūtras are not completely clear about the degree of samādhi needed to become an arhat, and it seems that there are a variety of ways to go about attaining liberation. Wisdom and insight are essential elements in all of them, but the degree of samādhi is variable.

While the dhyānas focus the mind on one object only, the Pāli commentarial literature speaks of another kind of concentration — momentary concentration (*khaṇika-samādhi*), which does not restrict the range of awareness to one object. To develop it, meditators do not exclude the multiplicity and diversity of phenomena from their field of attention. Instead, they direct mindfulness toward

the changing states of mind and body, noting any phenomenon that appears. In other words, in meditation they maintain continuous awareness of whatever enters into their field of perception and release any clinging to it, simply noting the variety of sensory objects, feelings, mental states, and so forth that arise and cease in their field of awareness.

By doing this, concentration becomes continuously stronger until it becomes established one-pointedly on the constantly changing stream of events. Despite the change in the object — one moment it is a memory, the next a physical sensation, then a mental feeling, and so forth — the single-pointed unification of the mind remains. Whereas previously when cultivating concentration any change of object would disturb the concentration, now it does not. In fact, after a while the mind that is aware of the constantly changing phenomena in the field of awareness becomes strong enough to suppress the five hindrances, in the same way as access concentration does. These meditators progress on the path of insight, which in time will lead to the breakthrough to the wisdom knowing *nirvāṇa*. Practicing the four establishments of mindfulness is one way to develop this flexible yet steady concentration. According to some commentaries, these meditators can gain an arhatship by cultivating insight knowledge with access concentration, without attaining any of the *dhyānas*.<sup>94</sup>

Dry-insight meditators develop insight focused on the ever-changing stream of experience — the arising and ceasing of the five aggregates. Because their meditation is not focused on a single object, their minds do not enter *dhyāna*. However, when their mind shifts from the rising and ceasing of the aggregates and takes *nirvāṇa* as its object — as it does during the path and fruit of stream-enterer and so on — their concentration rises to the level of the first *dhyāna* for that experience. Thus their paths and fruits are the supramundane first *dhyāna*,<sup>95</sup> because all paths and fruits must occur at the level of *dhyāna*.

In *dhyāna* the mind is focused single-pointedly and unwaveringly on an unchanging object — such as the mental image of the foulness of the body<sup>96</sup> — whereas the mind used to cultivate insight requires certain mental functions that are not operative within *dhyāna*, such as the ability to observe, analyze, and be mindful of a changing object of perception. Thus to do insight meditation, meditators emerge from a *dhyāna*. While their minds are still infused with the power of *dhyāna*, they do analysis. Although this concentrated state is not as deep

as a dhyāna, it is sufficiently focused to analyze the object and generate insight without being distracted to other objects.

The dhyāna that accompanies the supramundane paths and fruits is a supramundane dhyāna, which is not the same as a mundane dhyāna. According to the *Path of Purification* and the Abhidhamma system, meditators in general practice insight in a state of concentration that is not a dhyāna. This is called insight concentration (P. *vipassanā-samādhi*). When meditators make the breakthrough to the supramundane path, the mind naturally jumps into a dhyānic state. If they have practiced dhyāna first, the path and fruit will occur at the level of the dhyāna that they used as the “basis dhyāna” for practicing insight (another opinion is that it occurs at the level of the dhyāna that was investigated with insight-knowledge; a third opinion is that it can occur at either level, depending on the wish of the meditator).<sup>97</sup>

Samādhi does not achieve its ultimate purpose without insight, and insight is gained through practicing the four establishments of mindfulness. So it is to the practice of the four establishments of mindfulness that we turn in chapters 12 and 13.



## 10 | The Practice of Serenity in Chinese Buddhism

THE QUIESCENCE of serenity and the analytical wisdom of insight are like the two wings of a bird or two wheels of a cart: they must be balanced for the aspired result to come about. This is true also for Chan meditation, which leads to both serenity and insight.<sup>98</sup> Serenity suppresses the afflictions, nurtures the mind, and can be used to create merit. Insight brings wisdom and cultivates Dharma understanding. As the Buddha says in the *Dharmapada* in the Chinese canon (Taishō 04.210.572a):

In the absence of concentration, one does not exercise wisdom. In the absence of wisdom, one does not course in concentration. The path comes forth from concentration and wisdom.

Learning how to practice serenity and insight is essential before engaging in the actual practice, but merely knowing the words — even being able to teach this method to others — is not sufficient. Not practicing it ourselves is like a beggar who calculates others' wealth.

### *Meditation*

Nāgārjuna's *Treatise on the Middle Way* does not give instructions on how to cultivate serenity, but assumes that practitioners have already attained it and are prepared to meditate on the correct view once they have discerned it. Much of this preparation depends on being well grounded in the method aspect of the path, including serenity, described in the Yogācāra scriptures by Asaṅga and others. On the other hand, just cultivating serenity without the wisdom realizing emptiness is common to non-Buddhists and does not bring liberation. Only when we gain the union of serenity and insight can we generate the unpolluted

wisdom that realizes the eight negations in Nāgārjuna's homage in the *Treatise on the Middle Way* and knows emptiness directly.

Before entering samādhi, it is essential to think of the duḥkha of all sentient beings to avoid becoming attached to the bliss of samādhi. In this way, we conjoin the mind of great compassion and bodhicitta with all our meditation practices and reflect on the emptiness of all the practices we do. This is practiced repeatedly over time in order to gain familiarity with it.

For many centuries we Tibetan practitioners have had the misconception that meditators following Chinese Buddhism engage in blank-minded meditation. During the time of Śāntarakṣita, Chinese monks resided at Samye Monastery in Central Tibet, where they translated texts from Chinese into Tibetan. If they had had this wrong view, Śāntarakṣita would have refuted it himself and would not have asked Kamalaśīla to come in later years to do so. This shows that Hwashang Mahāyāna's (C. Hoshang Mohoyen) corrupted view of Chan was not shared by all Chinese practitioners.

The great debate at Samye (c. 792–94) between Hwashang Mahāyāna (meaning “Mahāyāna abbot”) and Kamalaśīla was a decisive point in Tibetan Buddhist history. As recounted by Tibetan historians, Hwashang Mahāyāna asserted that all thoughts are useless and to be abandoned on the path. Just as clouds, be they black or white, obscure the sky, so too thoughts, be they constructive or destructive, obscure the true nature. Thus the method side of the path was unnecessary because it involved thought. One simply has to empty the mind of all thought whatsoever and nirvāṇa will be attained. The Indian sage Kamalaśīla refuted blank-minded meditation by asserting that practices on the method side of the path are imperative for the collection of merit and that emptiness must first be approached by means of constructive thought before it can be nondualistically perceived. As a result of the debate Tibetans turned toward India, rather than China, as the principal source for Buddhist scriptures and ideas.

Interestingly, a similar debate was going on at approximately the same time in China as well, where the Huayan and Chan patriarch Guifeng Zongmi (780–841) criticized the views and practices of certain Chan practitioners.

While meditation instructions in Chinese Buddhism are vast, most of the important points have been covered in the forgoing chapters about concentration and will not be repeated here. These include guidelines about choosing a

meditation place, preparing for the session, meditation objects, methods to counteract the five hindrances and other faults, progressing through the nine stages of sustained attention, maintaining mindfulness and introspective awareness during break times, and so forth. Meditation masters also warn against “dead-tree” samādhi, where meditators become attached to the peace of samādhi and fail to generate wisdom.

## *Creating Balance at the Beginning and End of a Meditation Session*

The writings of the Chinese master Zhiyi (538–97), who emphasized practicing serenity and insight together in a balanced fashion, are particularly important because they appeared early in the history of Chinese Buddhism when proper meditation instruction was not readily available to the general Buddhist practitioner who was not a scholar. His comprehensive and clear instructions were a great boon to practitioners of his time and for those up to the present day. A good deal of this chapter is based on his book, *The Essentials of Buddhist Meditation*.

Someone wishing to engage in meditation to attain serenity must first generate the great vows to liberate all sentient beings from saṃsāra and to follow the Buddha’s way to do this. Such a motivation makes the mind strong, courageous, and resilient. Serenity is also cultivated within the recollection that all phenomena exist in dependence on the mind. As the *Sūtra on the Ten Grounds* says (EBM 77):

Throughout the three realms, there is nothing else at all. It is all created solely from the mind.

By understanding that the mind is empty of inherently existing nature, we will understand that all phenomena are not objectively real. By ceasing ignorance, afflictions cease, karmic formations cease, and saṃsāric duḥkha ends.

The body, breath, and mind are interrelated and therefore are discussed together. The body is the coarsest, the breath a little less coarse, and the mind the least coarse. Adjusting and balancing the body makes the breath subtler, which in



turn makes the mind subtle. Such a subtle, fine mind is conducive for cultivating serenity. The influence goes the other way as well: when the mind is subtle, the breathing pattern changes and becomes more refined, and in turn the body is more relaxed.

Having mindfulness and introspective awareness of our body, breath, and mind during the break times is crucial. If our physical actions are rough, impulsive, and reckless, our breath will be coarse, and because of this our thoughts will be scattered and unclear. When we later sit down to meditate, our body will be agitated and uncomfortable, making the mind correspondingly restless and unsettled. During the break time, we should therefore reflect on what is important to do and how to do it, and then go about it in a relaxed yet focused manner.

Begin a meditation session by settling the body into a comfortable and stable posture. If possible, sit in the vajra position with the left foot on the right thigh and the right foot on the left thigh. Loosen your belt and put your left hand on top of the right,<sup>99</sup> in your lap, against your body.

Now balance the breath by expelling the stale breath: gently exhale it through the mouth while imagining that any blockages in the flow of the body's internal energy are released. Then close the mouth and gently inhale fresh air through the nose. Do this a few times. Then sit with the mouth closed and breathe through the nose. Sitting very still while meditating is important.

Begin meditation by adjusting the breath and helping it to become subtle if it is windy, uneven, or ordinary. Windy breathing is when inhaling and exhaling produce a sound; this makes the mind scattered and unfocused. Uneven breathing may occur even when breathing is noiseless; here the breath catches and does not flow smoothly. As a result, the mind becomes stuck and blocked. Ordinary breathing occurs when the breath is still coarse, even though there is no sound and it does not catch. Breathing this way makes the mind tired.

To subdue these three imbalanced ways of breathing, adjust the breath by focusing the mind at the navel; this has a stabilizing effect. Check that the body is relaxed and tension free. Also imagine the breath penetrating all the pores freely and without obstruction. In this way, the breath becomes subtler and more refined. The breathing process is slower, smoother, and more relaxed. Breathing in this way automatically makes the mind more stable, peaceful, and content. When the breath and mind are more subtle and refined, it is easier to enter meditative

absorption. In addition, disorders such as stress and imbalances of the winds and qi do not occur.

Having balanced the breath when entering meditation, now balance the mind by first reining in distracted thoughts. Then look out for and make adjustments should lethargy, restlessness, agitation, or laxity occur. Lethargy occurs when the mind is muddled and unclear. At this time, firmly place the attention at the tip of the nose. Focusing on this one object without letting the mind sink into dullness is a remedy for lethargy. Restlessness occurs when the body and mind are fidgety, ill at ease, and unsettled. Anchoring the attention at the navel helps to stabilize restive energy and stop distractions. Agitation may arise when mindfulness is strong and the mind is more concentrated, yet the mind's focus has moved upward so that the chest area becomes painful. Should this happen, relax the mind and let the focus go downward toward the navel. This helps the qi to flow down and become more balanced, which eliminates the chest pain. Laxity manifests when we don't maintain suitable posture in meditation and a lack of mental lucidity and determination has set in. To remedy this, reestablish the recommended meditation posture and anchor the mind with strong mindfulness on the meditation object.

Having entered meditation as described above, maintain strong mindfulness and ensure the body, breath, and mind remain balanced by being aware of what is happening with each of them. Regarding the body, occasionally check to make sure that it remains in the proper position and is not slumped over or leaning to one side, and that our hands, mouth, and so forth are in the proper position. If anything is askew, correct your posture by straightening it. Similarly, check that the breath is gentle and smooth. If it has become windy, uneven, or ordinary, or if it is forced and not relaxed, apply the appropriate antidotes so that it becomes refined and gentle. If the mind has been infected by lethargy, restlessness, agitation, or laxity, apply the antidotes so that it becomes balanced. Keeping the body, breath, and mind in balance prevents disorders and obstacles from previous lives from arising and aids in concentration.

How you emerge from meditation is important. Since the body, breath, and mind have become subtler in meditation, they need to become coarser and more active before you engage in other activities. Immediately arising from the meditation seat and rushing around without allowing the body, breath, and mind to gradually adjust to the change in activity may bring on headaches or stiffness

later. In addition, in future meditation sessions you may feel uncomfortable and fidgety. When coming out of meditation, first allow the mind to focus on an object different from the meditation object. Then open your mouth and gently exhale, imagining the wind dispersing from the energy channels in the body. Then uncross and move the feet a little. Follow this by rubbing your hands together to warm them and then rubbing the body briefly. Now put your hands over your eyes and open your eyes. Once any excessive physical heat has gone, get up and move about.

Cultivating skill in how we enter, abide, and arise from meditation plants the seeds to be like the great bodhisattvas described in the *Lotus Sūtra* (EBM 97):

For the sake of the Buddha Path, the bodhisattvas in this great assembly have already diligently practiced effort for an incalculable number of tens of millions of crore<sup>100</sup> of eons. They have become skillful in entering, abiding in, and emerging from an incalculable number of trillions of crores of samādhis. They have gained great superknowledges, have long cultivated the pure, holy conduct, and have become well able to practice all of the good dharmas in appropriate sequence.

## REFLECTION

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1. Settle the body into a comfortable and stable posture.
  2. Balance the breath by expelling the stale breath.
  3. Adjust the breath if it is windy, uneven, or ordinary by focusing at the navel.
  4. Place mindfulness on your meditation object if it is other than the breath.
  5. Balance the mind by reining in distracted thoughts and then looking out for lethargy, restlessness, agitation, and laxity, and apply the appropriate antidotes should they occur.
  6. At the conclusion of the session, dedicate the merit and arise from meditation gently.
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*Cultivating Serenity and Insight in Sitting Meditation*

In the actual practice, serenity and insight are used as antidotes to the roughness and disorder of a beginner's mind, as a way to counter the faults of lethargy and agitation, as a means to deal with subtle states of mind in meditative absorption, and as the method to perfectly balance meditative absorption and wisdom.

Even if meditators avoid the trap of dead-tree samādhi — becoming attached to the bliss of samādhi and failing to generate wisdom — they may still not have the correct balance of concentration and wisdom. If they lack the wisdom based on insight, their meditative absorption will be characterized by ignorance. Even if their concentration is strong, they will be unable to cut the fetters that bind them to saṃsāra. The remedy is to emphasize the cultivation of wisdom and then combine it with serenity.

Other people have sharp wisdom of the ultimate nature, but their concentration is weak and their meditation is hampered by distraction or laxity. Like a candle flame in the wind, their concentration cannot illuminate objects clearly and they are unable to cease the cycle of birth and death. These people must emphasize serenity and then unify it with insight so that their concentration becomes like a candle burning in a closed area that clearly illuminates all that is there.

Many people combine the Amitābha practice with Chan meditation. They concentrate their minds on the recitation of the Amitābha Buddha's name. When their concentration is firm, they “turn back the light” and observe the mind that is meditating, asking, “Who is reciting the Buddha's name?” This *hua-tou* — a short phrase or question used as a subject of meditation to focus the mind — becomes all-consuming in the sense that the mind is completely drawn into this investigation. As the intellect is confounded by this question, great doubt arises until suddenly there is a breakthrough and emptiness is realized. When done on the basis of firm serenity, the meditation on this *hua-tou* is insight meditation. It must then be conjoined with serenity. It is like picking up a pearl at the bottom of a pond: finding it when there are waves or ripples is difficult. The water must be still and clear, and then the mind-pearl appears by itself.

## *Cultivating Serenity and Insight while Interacting with the Environment*

Zhiyi eloquently explains how to practice serenity and insight while engaged in various activities. Regarding walking, he says (EBM 117–19):

At times when you are involved in walking, bring forth this thought, “For what purpose do I now wish to walk?” If it is on account of being directed by afflictions or by nonvirtuous or neutral matters, you should not proceed with walking. If it is not an instance of being directed by afflictions and if it is for the sake of a matter that produces virtuous benefits and that is in accord with the Dharma, you should go ahead and proceed with walking.

How do you go about cultivating serenity while walking? If you are walking, maintain awareness that, due to walking, there may come to exist all of the phenomena of the afflictions, of good, of bad, and so forth. If you are completely aware that the mind engaged in walking as well as all phenomena present in walking cannot be found, the false-thinking mind will cease. It is this that constitutes the cultivation of serenity [while walking].

How do you go about cultivating [insight] contemplation while walking? Bring forth this thought, “It is due to the mind that I move the body. As a result I bring about that forward movement referred to as walking. It is due to walking that there may then come to exist all of the phenomena of the afflictions, of good, of bad, and so forth.”

Then immediately turn back the attention and contemplate the mind that is engaged in walking. You will fail to perceive any characteristic appearance associated with it. Realize that the one who walks as well as all the phenomena involved in walking are both ultimately empty and still. It is this which constitutes the cultivation of [insight] contemplation [while walking].

The instructions for practice are clear: first examine your motivation for walking, and if it is conjoined with afflictions or even a neutral intention, do not proceed but stop and assess once again what is best to do at that moment.

To cultivate serenity while walking, maintain your introspective awareness so that afflictions do not arise. Furthermore, reflect on the mind engaged in walking as well as everything else involved in walking — our legs, feet, and shoes; the

road, its bumps and turns; our destination, others on the road, and so forth — and see that none of them can be found in their parts. Seeing this, the mind that mistakenly grasps them as real will cease.

To practice insight while walking, analyze what the word “walking” refers to. See that there is no independent action of walking; there is no independent I or mind that instructs the body to move. Walking exists by being merely designated in dependence on the legs moving the body forward. What is the mind that has the intention to walk? Does it have color, shape, or location? Does it exist in the past, present, or future? Is it unitary or does it have different aspects? Is it caused or uncaused? By employing ultimate analysis, understand that all phenomena involved in walking are empty of existing from their own side. Because their ultimate nature is beyond the afflictive conditioning of the world, they are said to be still.

Zhiyi continues by describing serenity and insight in relation to standing, sitting, lying down, doing various physical activities, and speaking in a similar way. He discusses how to practice serenity and insight when the six sense faculties are cognizing the six sense objects. As for the ear and sounds, he says (EBM 129–31):

[Regarding] the cultivation of serenity when the ear hears sounds: Whichever sounds are heard by the ear, immediately realize that they are characterized by being like echoes. If you hear sounds with which you are temperamentally agreeable, do not give rise to attachment. As for sounds to which you are temperamentally opposed, do not give rise to hate. As for sounds to which you are neither opposed nor agreeable, do not give rise to a discriminating mind. It is this which constitutes the cultivation of serenity [while hearing].

What is meant by the cultivation of [insight] contemplation in the hearing of sounds? Bring forth this thought, “No matter what sound is heard, it is empty and utterly devoid of any [inherent] existence. It is only from the coming together of the sense faculty and the sense object that there is the generation of the auditory consciousness. Next, the mental consciousness arises and, in a forced manner, gives rise to discriminations. It is because of this that there

may then come to exist all of the phenomena of the afflictions, of good, of bad, and so forth.”

[Then] turn back the attention and contemplate the mind that hears sounds. You will not perceive any characteristic appearance. Realize that the one who hears as well as all of the other associated phenomena are ultimately empty and still. It is this which constitutes [insight] contemplation [in relation to the ear and sounds].

To practice serenity while hearing various sounds throughout the day, understand that all the sounds are false, like echoes. Just as an echo falsely appears to be the voice of a person, but is not, so too do all sounds falsely appear to have an independent essence, although they do not. Because these sounds do not exist in the way they appear, do not let attachment arise for ones that appear pleasant or anger arise for ones that appear unpleasant. There is no use in forming opinions and ideas about neutral sounds, as they, too, are false.

To cultivate insight regarding hearing, regard all sounds as empty of inherent existence. Why? Because all sounds, as well as the act of hearing and the one who hears, arise dependently, not by their own power. The auditory consciousness depends on the ear faculty encountering the sound, and sound itself is nothing more than vibratory waves in the air. The mental consciousness that reacts to the sounds arises dependent on the auditory consciousness, and then the afflictions of attachment, anger, and confusion arise in reaction to the pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral feelings experienced while hearing.

Then examine the mind that hears. What is it? Does it exist independent of the ear faculty and sound waves in the air? It, too, does not exist from its own side, nor does the person who is hearing, nor all the other phenomena associated with hearing a sound.

The analogies and descriptions Zhiyi uses for each sense object differ but come to the same point. Visual forms are like the moon reflected in water. Odors are false, deceptive, and unreal. Flavors are like tastes in a dream, and tactile sensations resemble reflections, illusions, and conjurations. He also encourages us to analyze the mind cognizing mental phenomena in sitting meditation.

A person who is able to cultivate serenity and insight of all these objects and in all situations is a true bodhisattva. Nāgārjuna says (NSP 301–3):

When sitting undisturbed within the forest,  
in a state of stillness, one extinguishes the manifold ills.  
Calmly and contentedly, one gains unity of mind.  
This bliss is unequaled even by the bliss of the celestial realm.

People seek after worldly profit,  
fame, clothing, and fine furnishings.  
This sort of pleasure affords no peace or security.  
One thus pursues his own benefit, but finds no satisfaction.

The one with patched robes practices reliance on alms,  
and, whether moving or still, his mind is always unified.  
Spontaneously employing the eye of wisdom,  
he contemplates and knows the reality of all phenomena.

Among all the different entryways into the Dharma,  
all are entered through equanimous contemplation.  
When the understanding and wise mind abides in stillness,  
nothing anywhere in the three realms is able to equal this.

## REFLECTION

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1. List the sequence of points to practice serenity when walking. Then walk slowly while practicing these.
  2. After ten minutes, pause and notice the effect this has had on your mind.
  3. List the sequence of points to practice insight when hearing. Sitting in meditation, observe the sounds you hear and practice these points.
  4. Remember these points and practice them when you hear pleasant or unpleasant sounds in your daily life.
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*Deviant Meditation and Correct Meditation*



Sometimes when practicing meditative absorption strange sensations or perceptions may occur. For example, the body moves about restlessly; it feels heavy as if there were a weight on it or it feels very light as if it were going to fly. The body may feel extremely hot or cold, tied up, or twisted, as if it were hanging or suspended from something. The body may experience tactile sensations that spark nonvirtue in the mind. Sometimes meditators experience strange mental states. The mind becomes heavy, clouded, and filled with unethical ideas; it may be distracted, confused, distraught, or filled with inappropriate happiness or sorrow. The mind may be moody: overwhelmed with sad thoughts or so happy that one appears drunk. These are all signs of deviant meditative absorptions.<sup>101</sup>

If someone becomes attached to these sensations and appearances, grasping them to be true and real, he may become mentally ill and may open himself up to harm from spirits. Sometimes spirit interferences make the meditator seem especially intelligent, powerful, or charismatic, and as a result he becomes arrogant and clings to wrong views. Worldly people may think he is highly realized and blindly follow his guidance, so that he misleads other people on the path or draws them into harmful activities. Due to the heavy karma this person creates, when he dies, he will fall to an unfortunate rebirth.

If a practitioner of concentration has such symptoms or appearances, he should immediately recognize that they are false and deceptive and not believe them. Turning his mind to virtuous objects, he should not become enchanted by or attached to such inverted signs and focus instead on the Buddha's teachings. He should consult his spiritual mentor, follow proper meditation instructions, and renew his refuge in the Three Jewels.

In contrast, meditators who attain the various dhyānas and are free from these abnormal signs are progressing well. They have a sensation of emptiness or lack of obstructions, brightness, and purity. Their minds are calm and tranquil and their thoughts accord with the Dharma. Their confidence in the Three Jewels deepens and their bodies and minds are responsive so that they can engage in virtue with ease. They are not interested in worldly concerns and do not feel obliged to get involved in them. Satisfied, content, and tranquil, they can enter into and emerge from dhyāna according to their wish.

Those who are progressing well should continue in their practice, applying serenity and insight at the appropriate times in their meditation. If they have deep meditative experiences, they should consult a realized master and explain

their insight or experience. The master will either agree it was an authentic realization or give wise guidance to steer the meditators in the right direction. In this way, they will continue to advance in accord with the Buddha's teachings, which will bring good results to themselves and others.

## *Counteracting the Work of Māra*

Buddhist scriptures speak of the four *māras*, or corrupting forces: (1) the afflictions, (2) five aggregates, twelve sense sources, eighteen constituents, (3) death, and (4) ghost and spirit demons. The first three are remedied by practicing the path and attaining liberation. The last *māra* generally refers to other beings who create interferences. In the *sūtras* Māra is depicted as a being who tries to create problems for sincere cultivators so that they deviate from the Dharma path. While some people regard Māra and his forces as a metaphor, others see them as actual external beings.

Mental states of desire, worry, craving, sleepiness, laziness, fear, doubt, remorse, arrogance, resentment, and so on are the work of Māra's armies. Some demons may enter the person's mind, causing violent mood swings and erratic behavior that could expose him to calamity. Demons may also inspire the kind of deviant concentration discussed above, where practitioners have all sorts of strange physical and mental experiences and may even appear to have spiritual powers and great charisma, such that they lead some people astray.

One method to dispel these demons involves the practice of serenity. Here a practitioner is to recognize these objects and people as false and not let them disturb the mind. She should neither fearfully push them away or desirously grasp at them, but rather return to her meditation and strengthen her concentration. When her concentration is strong, these interferences automatically disappear.

This method is reminiscent of the great Tibetan meditator Milarepa (1052–1135), who, when disturbed by spirits, asked them where they came from and why they wanted to bother him. The spirits replied, "Why did your mind, filled with preconceptions and superstitions, call us here?" In other words, the source of our suffering and fear is our own unsubdued, afflictive mind.

A second method employs insight. Here the meditator turns the light back on his own mind, asking, "What is the mind that is observing these things?"

Since a self-enclosed, independent mind cannot be found, what can be disturbed by these interferences? The wisdom realizing emptiness is the ultimate protection. To paraphrase Nāgārjuna's statement in the *Commentary on Wisdom*, "Aside from the true character of phenomena (*dharmatā*), everything else is demonic phenomena." That is, since whatever is associated with ignorance and saṃsāra is not to be trusted, we should not get caught up in it, but put energy into attaining awakening. While sitting under the bodhi tree, the Buddha said to Māra (EBM 417):

Numerous armies such as these  
may vanquish the monastic.  
I use the power of dhyāna and wisdom  
to smash all these armies of yours,  
and after perfecting the path to buddhahood,  
I will bring all beings across to liberation.

If a practitioner is not yet strong enough to dispel these interferences through serenity or insight, she holds her mind steady, not letting false thoughts and disturbing emotions proliferate. She contemplates that the emptiness of the demon realm and the emptiness of the buddha realm are a single emptiness. There is nothing in the demon realm to fear and nothing in the buddha realm to cling to. In this way, her mind transforms into wisdom and the demons vanish.

Even if the frightful or attractive appearances do not vanish, Zhiyi counsels practitioners not to worry. There has never been a case in which a tiger that was a transformation of a demon has actually eaten anyone. Nor has an attractive man or woman who was a transformation of a demon ever become someone's spouse.

Furthermore, the disturbance comes principally from the side of the practitioner's mind because he allows fear, anger, and desire to arise and grow. The antidote is to increase wisdom and, by doing so, become more immune to such interferences. Practitioners can also recite mantras while maintaining mindfulness on the Three Jewels or the Buddha. Purification practices, recitation of precepts, and cultivation of a sense of integrity and consideration for others will also protect them from involvement in harmful actions. Negativity is unable to stand up to or conquer strong virtue, so if we keep our minds aligned with the Buddha's teachings, demons will vanish by themselves.

The Buddhist sage Tsung-pen (1020–99) advises that while meditating sometimes beautiful scenes or figures may appear to the mind, and at other times terrifying ones may appear. We should avoid being joyful at the former and despondent or antagonistic toward the latter.<sup>102</sup>

You must realize that such scenes do not come from outside: all are born from being sunk in oblivion or are brought about by karmic consciousness. All that the eyes see and the ears hear is false — don't get attached to it! Keep on making energetic progress.

Wise advice, indeed!



## 11 | Higher Training in Wisdom: The Role of Mindfulness and Introspective Awareness

### *Introduction to the Thirty-Seven Harmonies with Awakening*

HAVING DISCUSSED the higher training in concentration and the cultivation of serenity, we will now turn to the higher training in wisdom and the cultivation of insight. This involves the thirty-seven harmonies with awakening, practices shared in the Pāli and the Sanskrit traditions. The thirty-seven harmonies contain elements of all three higher trainings, and they all directly or indirectly cultivate the wisdom that realizes the four truths and the ultimate nature of reality. This is the wisdom that eliminates ignorance and leads to nirvāṇa.

From the perspective of the Sanskrit tradition, the Fundamental Vehicle teachings as explained in the Pāli, Chinese, and Tibetan canons are the foundation of the entire path. Here is where the four truths, three higher trainings, and thirty-seven harmonies with awakening are first taught. On this basis, the Mahāyāna explains the third truth — true cessation and emptiness — in more detail in the Perfection of Wisdom sūtras. The Mahāyāna also delves deeper into the meaning of the cognizing subject and the true path in the tathāgatagarbha teachings. On this basis, the Tantrayāna teachings follow. Here we see that the Fundamental Vehicle emphasized in the Pāli tradition and the Theravāda, the Mahāyāna teachings of the Perfection Vehicle, and the Tantrayāna teachings are not separate and unrelated paths, but the latter build on the former.

Unfortunately, some practitioners of Tibetan Buddhism do not pay adequate attention to these valuable practices of the thirty-seven harmonies with awakening. While the thirty-seven harmonies are explained in Mahāyāna sūtras and commentaries, they are not widely practiced among followers of the Tibetan tradition. Perhaps this is because in the Indo-Tibetan tradition, these thirty-seven

practices are correlated with the levels of the five paths, as explained below, so practitioners think that they are to be done later, after they have attained a path. However, I read a sūtra that explains how to include them in our daily practice, even at the beginner's level. I would like to encourage Tibetan Buddhists to do these thirty-seven practices, especially the four establishments of mindfulness. We meditate on them with a bodhicitta motivation and the Prāsaṅgika view of emptiness.

Studying the thirty-seven harmonies gives me the wonderful opportunity to relate to the Buddha as a bhikṣu who lived in India. This is different from seeing him as Vajradhara in a maṇḍala, as we do in Vajrayāna. For me it is very moving to read the sūtra accounts of the Buddha interacting with his disciples. I get a real sense of his life as a human being who lived on our Earth and taught people like me. I feel very close to the Buddha, our marvelous teacher.

Most of the sūtras were given in response to questions his disciples asked him, or they are follow-ups to questions he asked them or other renunciates. Someone would ask the Buddha, “How do we develop this realization or quality?” Other times, a problem would arise concerning a disciple's behavior, and one of the monks would ask the Buddha how to deal with it. It was in this very human way of interacting with the people around him that the Buddha gave instructions on the thirty-seven harmonies with awakening.

Before speaking in depth about the thirty-seven harmonies, there are two mental factors — mindfulness and introspective awareness — that are worthy of more attention because they play an important role in all three higher trainings.

## *The Importance of Mindfulness and Introspective Awareness*

Discussed in both Pāli and Sanskrit traditions, the mental factors of mindfulness and introspective awareness primarily function to focus on what is important in the moment — be it our meditation object, the movement of our body, the reason for engaging in a certain action, and so forth. They work together to keep our mind in virtue and to redirect our attention back to what is important should it stray toward nonvirtue. They protect our minds from nonvirtue, thus preventing suffering and obstacles on the path. Śāntideva pleads (BCA 5:23):

To those who wish to guard their minds,  
I make this appeal with palms joined:  
You must use every effort to employ  
both mindfulness and introspective awareness.

Mindfulness and introspective awareness also enable us to work for the benefit of others, as Togme Zangpo encourages in the “Thirty-Seven Practices of Bodhisattvas” (36):

In brief, whatever you are doing,  
ask yourself, “What’s the state of my mind?”  
With constant mindfulness and introspective awareness  
accomplish others’ good — this is the practice of bodhisattvas.

Mindfulness and introspective awareness will be explained separately and then we’ll see how they operate together.

## *Mindfulness*

The original meaning of “mindfulness” in Indian languages is memory or recollection. The Buddha used this ordinary word but gave it a new meaning specific to his doctrine. According to the two *Knowledges*,<sup>103</sup> mindfulness is a distinct mental factor that repeatedly brings to mind a phenomenon of previous acquaintance without forgetting it. In *Compendium of Knowledge* Asaṅga says (LC 3:49):

What is mindfulness? In regard to a familiar object, the mind is not forgetful and operates without distraction.

Mindfulness has three features: (1) Its *focal object* is a familiar object. It cannot be generated toward an unfamiliar object. (2) The *subject*, the mind, is not forgetful of the object, meaning that it is focused on that object and not distracted from it. (3) Its *function* is to prevent distraction to other objects. After attention has been placed on the meditation object, mindfulness keeps it there.



When discussing mindfulness as one of the five faculties, the Buddha said (SN 48.10):

And what, monastics, is the faculty of mindfulness? Here, monastics, the ariya disciple is mindful, possessing supreme mindfulness and discretion, one who remembers and recollects what was done and said long ago. He dwells contemplating the body in the body . . . feelings in feelings . . . mind in mind . . . phenomena in phenomena, ardent, introspectively aware, mindful, having removed longing and displeasure for the world. This is called the faculty of mindfulness.

*Contemplating the body in the body* means *contemplating the body as a body*. This indicates the specific object of contemplation: it is the mere body, not the painful, pleasureable, and neutral feelings it generates in us, not our ideas about our body, our like or dislike of the body, but simply what is there, a momentary body that is in the nature of duḥkha and that neither has a self nor is a self. The same pertains to feelings, mind, and phenomena. In short, mindfulness focuses on its object in a way that both remembers it and observes its characteristics just as they are. Conjoined with introspective awareness and wisdom, it brings insight into the nature of the object.

Mindfulness also means memory, calling to mind, and recollection. It recollects the precepts so that we can live within their boundaries. It prevents the mind from becoming engrossed in sense objects, daydreams, and anxious thoughts. It counteracts absentmindedness and protects us from nonconscientiousness, being so focused on the plethora of inner preconceptions that we do not pay attention to what is at hand.

Mindfulness increases our store of knowledge by focusing our mind when we are listening to teachings and enabling us to remember them later. This twofold function of mindfulness — taking in what is happening in the present and recalling it afterward — facilitates learning, contemplation, and meditation on the Buddha's teachings as well as applying the teachings in all facets of our life.

Mindfulness reminds us of the goals of spiritual practice: attaining fortunate rebirths, liberation, and full awakening. In the practice of ethical conduct, it remembers our precepts, preventing nonvirtuous actions. In the cultivation of concentration, it remembers the meditation object, preventing distraction and

restlessness. In the context of developing wisdom, it enables the mind to stay on the object and, together with wisdom, examines the person and the aggregates. In daily life, mindfulness remembers what has been done and what needs to be done. It distinguishes what is worthy of our attention and what is not. The Buddha compared mindfulness to a gatekeeper that safeguards what is important (AN 7.67):

Just as the royal frontier fortress has a gatekeeper — wise, experienced, intelligent — to keep out those he doesn't know and to let in those he does, for the protection of those within and to ward off those without; in the same way an ariya disciple is mindful, highly meticulous, remembering and able to call to mind even things that were done and said long ago. With mindfulness as his gatekeeper, the ariya disciple abandons what is unskillful, develops what is skillful, abandons what is blameworthy, develops what is blameless, and looks after himself with purity.

In the Pāli tradition, a beginner will be given a basic object of meditation — usually the breath. Mindfulness of breathing settles and clears the mind during meditation sessions. In daily life, practitioners keep mindfulness on their breath as much as possible, and if afflictions or distractions enter the mind, they renew mindfulness on the breath. If they need to turn their attention to another activity, they temporarily relax mindfulness of the breath and devote attention to the new task. Once that is finished, rather than glance around the room to see what interesting sights there are, they renew mindfulness on the breath.

In the Sanskrit tradition, mindfulness is maintained when contemplating a particular Dharma topic — for example, death, the kindness of others, emptiness — during meditation sessions. In the break times, we keep that topic in mind, reflecting on it as we go through the day. This is very effective for increasing wisdom and keeping the mind in virtue. The object of mindfulness for tantric practitioners, both in and out of formal sessions, is oneself as the meditation deity.

The purpose of restraining the senses is to restrain the mind. When our senses are unguarded, our minds become involved with sensory objects, which leads to experiencing pleasurable, painful, and neutral feelings. These feelings easily bring a flood of afflictive emotions in our minds. By being careful of the quality and

quantity of objects we allow our senses to perceive, we can free the mind from emotional reactions to the various pleasant, painful, and neutral feelings that arise. This doesn't mean ignoring everyone and everything around us or moving through the environment like a robot. Rather, maintaining mindfulness on a specific virtuous or neutral object protects the mind from getting lost in the proliferation of thoughts, opinions, preferences, and emotions that center on external objects.

Mindfulness differs from bare attention. Bare attention is aware of and notes all the various objects, sensations, feelings, ideas, and emotions that arise in the mind. Mindfulness is related to wisdom; it chooses a virtuous or neutral object and focuses on it, becoming familiar with it and preventing mental wandering. In daily life, mindfulness focuses on our ethical values and precepts, thus ensuring that we act in accordance with them. Mindfulness must be wise and judicious; wisdom cannot arise in a mind that lacks mindfulness. The monk Māluṅkyaputta shares what the Buddha taught him about mindfulness (SN 35.95):

Having seen a form with mindfulness muddled,  
attending to the pleasing sign,  
one experiences it with infatuated mind  
and remains tightly holding to it.

Many feelings flourish within,  
originating from the visible form,  
covetousness and annoyance as well,  
by which one's mind becomes disturbed.  
For one who accumulates dukkha thus  
nibbāna is said to be far away . . .

When, firmly mindful, one sees a form,  
one is not inflamed with lust for forms;  
one experiences it with dispassionate mind  
and does not remain holding it tightly.

One fares mindfully in such a way  
that even as one sees the form  
and while one undergoes a feeling,

[dukkha] is exhausted, not built up.  
For one dismantling dukkha thus,  
nibbāna is said to be close by.

What is said applies equally to sounds, odors, tastes, and tangible objects. With all of them, mindfulness imbued with wisdom exhausts duḥkha by ceasing its causes so that the practitioner approaches nirvāṇa.

The Buddha stressed the importance of mindfulness on the path. Of the thirty-seven harmonies with awakening, mindfulness constitutes eight: the four establishments of mindfulness, the faculty of mindfulness, the power of mindfulness, the awakening factor of mindfulness, and correct mindfulness as one of the eightfold path. Although the characteristics of mindfulness in these contexts is the same, its strength and ability to eliminate afflictions differs, as can be seen when the harmonies with awakening are correlated with stages of the path.

## REFLECTION

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1. What is the role of mindfulness in cultivating ethical conduct?
  2. What is the role of mindfulness when cultivating serenity?
  3. How does mindfulness differ from bare attention?
- 

## *Introspective Awareness*

In the Sanskrit tradition, introspective awareness (*saṃprajanya*, *sampajañña*) is considered a type of intelligence (*prajñā*), but it is not wisdom.<sup>104</sup> Wisdom develops from introspective awareness but understands phenomena in a deeper way. Introspective awareness's knowing can range from clearly knowing simple occurrences, such as “now I am moving my arm,” to more complex and discriminative knowing, such as knowing the impermanent, transient nature of feelings or the arising of craving dependent on a sense faculty's contact with an object.

Although introspective awareness is not specifically defined in the two *Knowledges*, its opposite, nonintrospective awareness, is. From this we can infer what introspective awareness is. Nonintrospective awareness is not just the lack of introspective awareness; it is a mental factor that is an afflictive intelligence that does not understand an object correctly. Vasubandhu in the *Five Aggregates* says (ISBP 310):

What is nonintrospective awareness? [It is] intelligence that is concomitant with an affliction and [it is the mental factor] that causes one to engage in activities of body, speech, or mind inattentively.

Sthiramati adds to this that nonintrospective awareness doesn't know what is to be done and what is to be avoided. It functions to allow the increase of destructive actions of body, speech, and mind, supports the accumulation of transgressions from broken precepts, and hinders the application of the four opponent powers. It also causes whatever wisdom we have developed to degenerate and hinders the further development of analytical wisdom. Nonintrospective awareness is of three types: the nonintrospective awareness (1) that accompanies wrong views, (2) that hinders development of reliable analytical wisdom because it misunderstands the object, and (3) that interrupts serenity because the mind is unable to attend alertly to the meditation object.

Using this as a guideline, we can infer three types of introspective awareness: the introspective awareness that (1) accompanies correct views, (2) understands the object and supports the development of reliable analytical wisdom, and (3) enables the mind to attend to the meditation object and supports the practice of serenity. The first two show that introspective awareness is associated with the cultivation of wisdom, and the third is the introspective awareness associated with serenity. Here introspective awareness is a meta awareness that monitors and is aware of what is happening in the mind. Assessing whether the mind is directed to a virtuous or nonvirtuous object, introspective awareness must be sharp and have a strong element of intelligence. Otherwise, like a foolish spy, it will ruin everything. When I was young, I asked one of my personal attendants to alert me when my senior tutor was coming. But sometimes this attendant slept when he shouldn't have and didn't inform me. Naturally that caused some problems!

Pāli commentaries explain four types or aspects of introspective awareness:

1. With *introspective awareness of purpose* we pause before acting to clarify the purpose of our action. Why am I doing this? Will this action be of benefit or is it best not to do it? This introspective awareness enables us to avoid acting impulsively, foolishly, or by force of habit.

2. *Introspective awareness of suitability* examines the suitability of the circumstances and knows how to achieve the determined purpose or goal most effectively in accordance with the Dharma. In all our activities a beneficial purpose and suitable means are important. If the purpose is good but how we go about attaining it is unethical or harmful to others, it is not suitable to do.

These two types of introspective awareness apply especially to daily life activities and lead to refined behavior. When we know the purpose of eating we will eat what the body needs but not more. We will not chatter about unsuitable topics because we know the purpose of talking and the suitable circumstances for engaging in conversation.

3. *Introspective awareness of the domain* helps us to keep the mind on the meditation object and propels us back to it should distraction set in. It enables mindfulness and meditation to be continuous. During break times, it brings our minds to the meditation object or another virtuous object.

4. *Introspective awareness of nonignorance* is practiced during meditation on the four establishments of mindfulness and is applied during insight meditation. Regarding the body, feelings, mind, and phenomena, this type of introspective awareness leads to peeling away layers of afflictions that prevent seeing the body and so forth as they actually are. As the layers of afflictions recede, penetrative wisdom analyzes and knows the true nature of physical and mental phenomena, thus dispelling ignorance.

Asaṅga's *Śrāvaka Grounds* speaks of introspective awareness in two ways. The first is in a general context that applies to many activities in the course of the day. This explanation is similar to the first two meanings of introspective awareness in the Pāli tradition. The second is in the specific context of attaining serenity and insight, which includes the latter two meanings.

### *The General Meaning of Introspective Awareness*

Asaṅga describes the general meaning of introspective awareness as a mental factor that is aware of what we are doing and how we are doing it or should do it.

Here it is not a technical term and is used as an adverb, as in acting with awareness or abiding in awareness. A person acting with awareness is paying attention to her actions as well as to the surrounding environment and her relationship to it:<sup>105</sup>

What is abiding in awareness? Having trained in such a way in staying awake, he now abides with awareness while going and returning, while looking ahead and to the sides, while extending and bending his limbs, while wearing his robes and carrying his outer robes and bowl, while eating and drinking, chewing and tasting, while standing, walking, sitting or lying down (falling asleep), waking up (being awake), talking or being silent, and while removing drowsiness and sleepiness.

This passage is almost identical to one that appears often in the Pāli sūtras, such as *The Discourse to Gaṇaka-Moggallāna* (MN 107.7).<sup>106</sup> Both of these passages are very similar to a passage in *The Twenty-Five-Thousand-Verse Perfection of Wisdom Sūtra* (*Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā-prajñā-pāramitā Sūtra*) that describes the bodhisattva practices (PVS 204, in ISBP 151–52).

Furthermore, Subhūti, . . . [the bodhisattva mahāsattva] maintains awareness when he goes [from his residence] or returns; he maintains awareness when looking ahead or looking to the sides; he maintains awareness when bending or extending [his leg, foot, arm, or hand]; he maintains awareness when carrying his outer robe, robes, or alms bowl; he maintains awareness when eating, chewing, drinking, or tasting; he maintains awareness when sleeping or dispelling drowsiness; he maintains awareness when going, coming, standing, sitting, lying down, waking up, speaking, being silent, or retiring in order to practice meditation. O Subhūti, thus does the bodhisattva mahāsattva, one who practices the Perfection of Wisdom, dwell watching the body in relation to the inner body. Moreover, he does not form deliberative thoughts associated with the body, on account of his not apprehending [an inherently existent body]. He is ardent, introspectively aware, mindful, having removed longing and displeasure for the world.

The Buddha recommends that bodhisattvas practice awareness in the four physical positions and during all activities, be they mundane such as dressing, conversing, or eating, or specific Dharma activities such as teaching the Dharma or meditating.

Asaṅga explains the meaning of abiding in awareness while going out and returning, activities found in all three passages above:

Concerning abiding in awareness, while going, he fully knows: “I am going,” while returning, he fully knows: “I am returning.” He fully knows: “Here I should go, here I should not go.” He fully knows: “Now I should go; now I should not go . . .” This is what is called “awareness.”

If he possesses such awareness, while going, he fully knows, “I am going,” he only goes where he should go, he only goes when he should go, and he only goes as he should go, in the right manner. This is what is called “abiding in awareness regarding going and returning.”

In short, the general meaning of introspective awareness is to know what we are doing when we are doing it and to know how to do it in an appropriate way. When driving a car, we clearly know what we are doing and are not preoccupied with thoughts and worries or with texting. We know where it is suitable for us to go, when to go there, and how to go there. Before turning the car key, we clearly know our destination and the direction to get there. We know if our destination is an appropriate place for us to go. For example, if someone is trying to be sober, it is not wise to meet friends at the bar or visit friends who like to take drugs. We are aware of the appropriate time to do things. When our friend is busy or when we have many tasks to do, it is wise to have a long conversation with that friend later. We are aware of how we are doing something: What is the tone of our voice? What vocabulary are we using? Are we interrupting the other person? Are we listening with attention and empathy to what they are saying? Being aware of what, where, when, how, and why we are acting in our daily life will facilitate our interactions with others, improve our relationships, and prevent us from acting or speaking in ways that we will later regret.

In another passage Asaṅga discusses lying down, presumably to sleep.



How does one lie in bed with awareness? When the mind of the person lying down with mindfulness is disturbed by one affliction or another, he knows this disturbance fully, he does not indulge in it, he abandons it, he penetrates it, and he turns away from this thought. Therefore it is called “lying in bed while abiding in awareness.”

Here introspective awareness monitors the mind for afflictions, and should one arise, it detects the affliction and prevents it from overwhelming the mind. Introspective awareness propels the application of an antidote — such as viewing the affliction as false and empty — to counteract it. Should anger arise, introspective awareness knows this and without allowing the mind to get lost in vicious thoughts, it turns the mind to meditation on love. This is similar to how introspective awareness functions when developing concentration. In short, Asaṅga says, “How can one be restrained in one’s body and speech? By possessing introspective awareness.”

Śāntideva agrees (BCA 5:108):

In brief, this alone is the definition  
of introspective awareness:  
the repeated examination of the state  
and actions of our body and mind.

In *Engaging in the Bodhisattvas’ Deeds*, Śāntideva devotes an entire chapter to introspective awareness. It is a delight to read and I strongly encourage you to do so. In an emphatic way that confronts our denial and avoidance, Śāntideva describes the disadvantages of the afflictions and encourages us to act with introspective awareness at all times to prevent them from arising and to counteract them if they do. He also gives practical advice on how to move our body, speak to others, and watch over our mind, which is the source of verbal and physical actions. If we want to attain awakening and be of benefit to others, mindfulness and introspective awareness are essential.

Śāntideva also speaks of mindfulness and introspective awareness in the context of maintaining the bodhisattva precepts. Having cultivated conscientiousness, we must develop mindfulness and introspective awareness in order to maintain the bodhisattva precepts. Mindfulness remembers the essential

points of the bodhisattva ethical code, and introspective awareness monitors the body, speech, and mind to prevent their being controlled by afflictions and to ensure compassion is present. When introspective awareness is absent, afflictions arise, and when it is present, the practice of the six perfections increases.

### *Introspective Awareness when Training in Serenity*

Maitreya speaks of introspective awareness as one of the eight antidotes that counteract the five faults when cultivating serenity. Here “introspective awareness” is a technical term referring to a mental factor that is likened to a spy. It is a corner of the mind that monitors the whole mind and detects if restlessness or laxity has arisen and disturbed our concentration. When refined, introspective awareness is able to discern when restlessness or laxity are about to arise and to prevent that. Asaṅga speaks of introspective awareness in the context of the six powers that lead to single-pointedness:

Then, by the power of introspective awareness he does not allow [the mind] any room for wandering between signs (sense objects), thoughts, and afflictions, and in such a way he tames and pacifies [the mind].

Asaṅga describes the fifth, sixth, and seventh stages of sustained attention during which introspective awareness is prominent:

How does he tame? When his mind is distracted by these signs — such as signs of form, sound, smell, taste, touch, and signs of attachment, anger, ignorance, woman, and man — he reaches the recognition that these are disadvantageous from the very beginning. He focuses his mind on this [recognition] and does not give his mind any room to wander among these signs. Thus he tames.

How does he pacify? When his mind is restless due to these thoughts and auxiliary afflictions, such as the aspiration for the desire [realm] and so forth, he reaches the recognition that these are disadvantageous from the very beginning. He focuses his mind on this and does not give his mind any room to wander among these thoughts and auxiliary afflictions. Thus he pacifies.

How does he thoroughly calm? When these two appear due to forgetfulness, he does not tolerate these thoughts and auxiliary afflictions that keep rising again and again, and abandons them. Thus he thoroughly calms.

While mindfulness keeps our attention on the meditation object, introspective awareness recognizes, prevents, and remedies faults in our concentration. It prevents faults by knowing their disadvantages and not allowing the mind to follow after them.

Cultivating mindfulness is the chief cause to gain introspective awareness. When mindfulness is strong, the mind does not forget the object or become distracted easily. When it is distracted, introspective awareness can easily detect it. Śāntideva says (BCA 5:33):

When mindfulness stands guard  
at the gate of the mind,  
introspective awareness arrives,  
and once it has come, it does not depart again.

In brief, mindfulness functions to focus and stabilize the mind on the meditation object. Introspective awareness functions to not allow it to wander to other objects, or if it has fallen into restlessness or laxity, to remedy that fault.

## REFLECTION

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1. What are the different types of introspective awareness?
  2. What is the role of introspective awareness in daily life? How does it help us live ethically?
  3. What is its role when training in serenity?
- 

*Mindfulness and Introspective Awareness Working in Tandem*

Mindfulness and introspective awareness are intricately related. Mindfulness and introspective awareness are present at the beginning of the practice when we train to become aware of our physical movements. For example, they are at play when new monastics are trained to move in a refined and dignified manner that is suitable for one who has gone forth. In the middle of our practice, they are present when we undertake formal meditation on the body, feelings, mind, and phenomena. At the end of the path, āryas employ mindfulness and introspective awareness in serenity and insight meditation and in the smooth functioning of their daily activities.

They are mentioned together when speaking of the higher training in ethical conduct because mindfulness focuses on what to practice and abandon and introspective awareness sees if our body, speech, and mind are following suit. As a form of intelligence, introspective awareness distinguishes virtuous from corrupted motivations, and mindfulness keeps the mind focused on virtuous intentions.

It is said that with strong mindfulness and introspective awareness, even if a monk sleeps near a woman he will not break his precepts. However, if these two mental factors are weak, even if a monastic goes to a solitary mountain hermitage, he will eventually transgress the precepts.

In the higher training in concentration, mindfulness stays on the meditation object and introspective awareness surveys the mind and detects hindrances to concentration. Mindfulness then corrects the situation by either returning to the meditation object or focusing on an antidote. Both mindfulness and introspective awareness are among the antidotes to faults that interfere with attaining serenity. Mindfulness counteracts forgetting the meditation object, while introspective awareness protects against and remedies restlessness and laxity.

By developing mindfulness, introspective awareness automatically follows. In *Explanation of “Distinguishing the Middle and the Extremes”* (*Madhyānta-vibhāga-ṭīkā*) Sthiramati says (LC 3:61):

The statement, “There is recognition of laxity and restlessness by introspective awareness if mindfulness does not lapse,” indicates that mindfulness, when fully present, is accompanied by introspective awareness.

When mindfulness is present in the mind, so is introspective awareness. Sometimes the order may be reversed: when mindfulness lapses, introspective awareness detects the presence of an affliction and then mindfulness steps in and focuses on the specific antidote to it.

Although mindfulness and introspective awareness are compatible and work together, each has its own function. In the context of serenity, introspective awareness notices when laxity and restlessness are on the verge of arising, while mindfulness prevents forgetting the meditation object in a flurry of distractions. It's important to distinguish these two.

The name we give a specific meditation practice often has to do with the specific mental factor whose development is emphasized in it. When the cultivation of mindfulness is chief, it is called mindfulness practice, as in the four establishments of mindfulness. When the development of single-pointedness is foremost, it is called serenity practice. When the cultivation of wisdom is emphasized, it is called the practice of insight. In fact, all three of these mental factors and more are present at the same time.

Taking intoxicants impedes the cultivation of mindfulness and introspective awareness, which in turn leads to accruing all sorts of negativities. Sometimes people are so unaware of what is going on that they wake up in a strange place and don't know how they got there!

Mindfulness and introspective awareness practiced together naturally leads to a calmer and more focused mind. In my own experience, mindfulness of my precepts, which restrains me from involvement with physical and verbal actions, increases mindfulness of my behavior in general. This spurs me to examine what is happening in my mind. As a result, distraction decreases and the mind is drawn inward toward a calm, one-pointed state even when I'm not actively engaged in cultivating serenity.

When anger arises in a well-trained mind, introspective awareness notes, anger has arisen. We become mindful of the sensations anger arouses in the body and the mood in the mind. When we experience anger, it sometimes seems as though our entire self has turned into the nature of anger. Observing the anger as it manifests in the mind — instead of fixating on the story that sparked it — immediately helps dissolve the anger.

Alternatively, introspective awareness identifies the anger and mindfulness remembers karma and its effects: we experience disturbing situations as a result of

the actions we have engaged in, so being angry at another person is misplaced. Or we are mindful of the instructions for the taking and giving meditation and focus on imagining taking on others' anger and its effects and giving them our body, wealth, and merit to bring them happiness.

When mindfulness and introspective awareness operate together, we become aware of how swept away we are by sensory objects, the feelings of pleasure and pain experienced upon contact with them, and the emotional whirlwind those feelings produce in our minds. This affects us not only as individuals but also as a culture. I often observe that the current education system is too materialistic and too focused on the pleasure derived from sense objects that are perceived by sense consciousnesses. Compassion, on the other hand, involves the mental consciousness and brings more peace. For this reason, we need to introduce a better understanding of how the mind works to educators, business people, and others.

It is important to distinguish between conceptual and sensory consciousnesses. When we are thinking seriously or when our mindfulness is strong in meditation, we don't pay attention to sense experience. Understanding these different levels of consciousness opens the door to a deeper understanding of the mind. The inability to distinguish between sensory and mental consciousnesses leads to confusion. This is why I suggest that compared with ancient Indian understanding of the workings of the mind, modern psychology is at a preliminary level.

## *Mindfulness in Modernity*

Some people use the word "mindfulness" to refer to nonjudgmental bare awareness of what is happening in the present moment. Being mindful of the present moment and what is arising in our field of sensual and mental experience helps us to differentiate nonconceptual and conceptual consciousnesses, the former directly perceiving their object, the latter cognizing their object by means of a conceptual appearance.<sup>107</sup> We begin to differentiate the bare experience of sense objects and our internal conceptualizations about them. The stories and opinions our conceptual mind fabricates about these objects not only cause

mental suffering here and now but also trigger anger, attachment, resentment, and other disturbing emotions.

Training the mind to have bare attention on what is occurring in the present moment stops the proliferation of mistaken conceptualizations and anxiety about what has happened or what will happen. It calms and focuses the mind. Nowadays, there are many and varied uses of some of the basic principles of mindfulness meditation in a variety of fields, including medicine, psychotherapy, education, sports, business, and corrections (prisons). Here the principles of mindfulness are employed for specific purposes, such as to reduce chronic pain or mental stress or to increase attention. It is wonderful to see Buddhist teachings benefit a wide range of people in this way.

When bare awareness of the present moment is taught in a secular context, I suggest prefacing the instructions by emphasizing that this is a meditation technique derived from Buddhism. In that way, people who practice mindfulness to reduce stress or chronic pain will neither feel pressured to become Buddhist nor think they are doing the full practice of mindfulness as taught by the Buddha. Similarly, people who are new to Buddhism will understand that mindfulness meditation as taught by the Buddha is done in the context of the four truths and the Buddhist worldview; it is practiced for the purpose of attaining liberation from cyclic existence. They will understand that the Buddha's teachings are expansive; there is much to learn and practice — mindfulness is not the simplified technique they do with an app.

## *The Thirty-Seven Harmonies with Awakening*

The thirty-seven harmonies with awakening are explained in detail in *Treasury of Knowledge* and in Maitreya's *Ornament of Clear Realizations, Ornament of Mahāyāna Sūtras* (*Mahāyāna-sūtrālamkāra*), and *Differentiation of the Middle and the Extremes* (*Madhyāntavibhāga*). Candrakīrti's *Supplement* speaks of them and Śāntideva's *Guide* discusses the four establishments of mindfulness in the chapter on wisdom. In the Pāli tradition, many sūtras are devoted to the thirty-seven harmonies.

The phrase for the thirty-seven harmonies with awakening in the Tibetan language is *byang chub kyi phyogs kyi chos*. *Byang* refers to purifying all our

afflictions so that once we attain awakening we have the security that they have ceased and will never arise again. Regarding this state of peace, there are three types of awakening: that of the śrāvakas, solitary realizers, and bodhisattvas, the latter being the unsurpassable, supreme awakening. These thirty-seven practices form the common path that creates the causes for actualizing all three states of awakening.

In the structure of the stages of the path, the thirty-seven harmonies with awakening are described under the path of the middle-level practitioner. However, they can also be done with the bodhicitta motivation, in which case they become the path of advanced practitioner and lead to full awakening. The thirty-seven harmonies are also referenced in the Vajrayāna, where, for example, they are symbolized by Yamāntaka's thirty-four arms and body, speech, and mind.

Mention of the thirty-seven harmonies is found throughout the Pāli canon, especially in the fifth part of the *Connected Discourses*, the *Great Book* (*Mahāvagga*). They are likewise spoken of in many sūtras in the Sanskrit canon, the chief source being the *Sūtra on the Ten Grounds*. Here they are spoken of in the context of the fourth bodhisattva ground, the Radiant. Candrakīrti says (MMA 4.2abc):

There, for the Sugata's children, generated from  
higher meditation on the harmonies with full awakening,  
arises an appearance [of wisdom] surpassing the [third ground's]  
copper light . . .

The copper light of the fire of perfect pristine wisdom that burns up the afflictions is cultivated based on meditating on the thirty-seven harmonies and on their emptiness of inherent existence.

The passages in the Pāli and Sanskrit canons describing the thirty-seven are remarkably similar. For example, the *Sūtra on the Ten Grounds* in the Sanskrit canon speaks of mindfulness of the body (MMAB 50):

O Children of the Conqueror [bodhisattvas], the bodhisattva abiding in this bodhisattva ground, the Radiant, having become ardent, introspectively aware, mindful, having removed longing and displeasure for the world, with regard to the inner body contemplates the body and abides. Having become ardent with



regard to the outer body, contemplates the body and abides . . . with regard to the inner and outer bodies, contemplates body and abides.

*The Twenty-Five-Thousand-Verse Perfection of Wisdom Sūtra* contains the same passage. In the Pāli canon, the *Establishments of Mindfulness Sutta* (*Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*, MN 10.3.5) says:

Here a monastic abides contemplating the body as a body, ardent, introspectively aware, mindful, having removed longing and displeasure for the world . . . In this way, he abides contemplating the body as a body internally, or he abides contemplating the body as a body externally, or he abides contemplating the body as a body both internally and externally.

These are English translations, so most likely the originals in the two canons are exactly the same, the only difference being the Buddha's audience — bodhisattvas in the former, monastics in the latter. The main differences in how the thirty-seven harmonies are practiced in the Śrāvaka Vehicle and in the Mahāyāna is that bodhisattvas do them with the motivation of attaining awakening for the benefit of all sentient beings and apply them to all sentient beings. For example, when establishing mindfulness of the body, bodhisattvas meditate on the impermanence of both their own body and the bodies of others in order to increase their compassion for others. Although śrāvakas may also meditate on the impermanence of others' bodies, it is for the purpose of ending desire for them. From the Prāsaṅgika perspective, practitioners of all three vehicles meditate on the thirty-seven harmonies as being empty of inherent existence.



# 12 | The Four Establishments of Mindfulness: Body, Feelings, and Mind

**T**HE PURPOSE  
*satipaṭṭhāna*

*smṛtyupasthāna*

*abhiṣeka dbang*

*rjes gnang*

*Precious Garland*

108

*Sūtra on the Ten Grounds*  
*Ornament of Clear Realizations Abhisamayālaṅkāra*  
*Greater Discourse on the Establishments of Mindfulness*  
*Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna Sutta*      *Discourse on the Establishments of Mindfulness*

*Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*  
*Anāpānasati Sutta*  
*Kāyagatāsati Sutta*

*Discourse on Mindfulness of Breathing*  
*Discourse on Mindfulness of the Body*

*Sūtra on the Ten Grounds*  
*Mindfulness Sutta*

*Establishment of*

*Introduction to the Four Establishments of Mindfulness*

*Precious Jewel on the Crown Sūtra*     *'Phags pa gtsug na rin po che'i mdo*

*internal body*

*external body*

*both internal and external*

*Sūtra on the Ten Grounds*

*inner mind*

*outer mind*

*inner and outer mind*

*dharmāyatana*

*Inner phenomena*

*outer phenomena*

*inner and outer phenomena*

## REFLECTION

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Investigate assumptions in your mind that may be so habitual you don't recognize them. Identify in your experience these four conceptual errors:

1. Conceiving your body to be the place where a real self resides: I am here, inside my body.
  2. Conceiving your feelings to be what a real self experiences: I feel happy. I feel miserable. I feel indifferent.
  3. Conceiving your mind to be a real self: I am what thinks and perceives.
  4. Conceiving phenomena — especially mental factors — as what make a real self afflictive or purified: I am good because I am compassionate. I am bad because I am spiteful.
- 

*Shared and Specific Characteristics*



*Shared Characteristics*

*shared characteristics*

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*Specific Characteristics*

*body*

## REFLECTION

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1. Contemplate the relationship between mindfulness of the body, mindfulness of feelings, mindfulness of the mind, and mindfulness of phenomena and the four truths. Why is mindfulness of the body correlated with true duḥkha, mindfulness of feelings with true origins, mindfulness of the mind with true cessations, mindfulness of phenomena with true paths?
2. Why is mindfulness of all four objects important?

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## THE OBJECTS OF MINDFULNESS, DISTORTED CONCEPTIONS, AND TRUTHS

OBJECT OF MINDFULNESS	MISCONCEPTION	UNDERSTANDING OF A SPECIFIC CHARACTERISTIC	ĀRYA TRUTH
Body	Holding the foul as clean	The body is foul in nature	Truth of duḥkha
Feelings	Holding what is unsatisfactory (duḥkha) in nature as pleasurable	Feelings are unsatisfactory in nature	Truth of the origins of duḥkha
Mind	Holding what is momentary as permanent	The mind arises and passes away each moment	Truth of cessation
Phenomena	Holding what lacks a self as having a self	Phenomena are not the self. Some phenomena are to be practiced and others abandoned.	Truth of the path

*Mindfulness of the Body (Kāyasmṛti, Kāyagatāsati)*

*causes*

*nature*

*result*



## REFLECTION

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1. What are the purposes of meditating with mindfulness of the body?
  2. Some people feel resistant to doing this meditation because they are concerned it will reinforce negative views of the body they learned as children, because they are artists or scientists and find the body fascinating to paint, sculpt, or study, or because they enjoy intimate physical relationships and this meditation will affect that. Do you find hesitation or resistance in yourself? If so, where is it coming from?
  3. What ideas do you have for how to soften this resistance? Try using them.
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*Establishments of Mindfulness Sutta*

*Mindfulness of Breathing (Ānāpānasmṛti, Ānāpānasati)*









*Sūtra on the Mindfulness of Breathing Anāpānasati Sutta*

*Mindfulness in the Four Postures*

*kuti*



*Mindfulness of the Foulness of the Body*











*Mindfulness of the Four Elements*



*The Nine Charnel Ground Contemplations*



# *Mindfulness of Feelings*

*vedanā*

*Worldly feelings*

*spiritual feelings*

*Worldly painful feelings*

*Spiritual painful feelings*

*Worldly neutral feelings*

*Spiritual neutral feelings*

*Worldly pleasant feelings*

*Spiritual pleasant feelings*



*Causes and Results of Feelings*

*cause*

*results*

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*Feelings Cause Craving and Clinging*

*Clinging to desirable objects*

*Clinging to a view*

*Clinging to rules and practices*

*Clinging to a view of self*

*satkāyadr̥ṣṭi sakkāyadiṭṭhi*

*Mindfulness of Feeling as an Antidote to Pain*



*prapañca pañca spros pa*

*Ārya Ratnacūḍa Sūtra*

*Mindfulness of the Mind*

*Sūtra on the Ten Grounds*



*Mindfulness of the Impermanence of the Mind*

*Mindfulness of the Conventional Nature of the Mind*



*Mindfulness of the Emptiness of the I*

*Treatise on the Middle Way*



*Commentary on Bodhicitta*

*Mindfulness of Mental States*

*Establishment of Mindfulness Sūtra*









# 13 | The Four Establishments of Mindfulness: Phenomena

## *Mindfulness of Phenomena*

THE *Sūtra on the Ten Grounds* advises bodhisattvas who have mindfulness and introspective awareness, and who have eliminated longing and displeasure for the world, to contemplate phenomena (*dharma*) with regard to the inner phenomena, outer phenomena, and both the inner and outer phenomena, and to abide without clinging.

In *Golden Rosary (Legs bshad gser phreng)*, Tsongkhapa states that the principal phenomena to be contemplated are the factors to adopt and to abandon on the path. Here *dharma* refers to both the pure class of phenomena — beneficial mental states to cultivate — and the impure class — afflictions to abandon. By reflecting on these mental factors, we enter the practice of the fourth truth, the true path.

Here too we apply mindfulness and identify the afflictive mental factors in our own mind — their causes, characteristics, and results. The afflictive mental factors disturb the mind, making it unclear and unmanageable, whereas the purified mental factors affect the main mind positively, making it clear, manageable, and tranquil. Observe this in your own experience both when you meditate and in daily life.

Also observe that the afflictive mental factors lack a valid basis and thus are easily uprooted by wisdom. Lacking anything true to support them, they rest entirely on misconception. The positive mental factors, however, have the force of reasoning as their backing, and therefore can uproot the afflictive factors. Moreover, positive emotions and correct views can be increased limitlessly.

Mindfulness of phenomena leads to practicing the true path, the essence of which is the realization of selflessness and emptiness. We have already seen that the self is not the body, feelings, or mind. Now examining all other phenomena

— especially the mental factors — we are still unable to pinpoint an inherently existent self and can with certainty conclude that the self is empty of inherent existence. But the self being empty does not mean it is nonexistent. Instead, because it lacks inherent or independent existence, it must exist dependently — dependent on its causes, parts, and on being merely designated by the mind. This merely designated, conventional I is the person that cycles in saṃsāra and attains nirvāṇa. In short, the I being empty of inherent existence and existing by the force of being designated in dependence on the aggregates are not contradictory. This realization is the ultimate true path that leads to true cessation.

The Pāli sūtra prescribes five sets of phenomena to examine in mindfulness of phenomena: the five hindrances, five aggregates, twelve sources, seven awakening factors, and four truths.<sup>117</sup> Contemplating them will lead us to the realization of the ultimate Dharma, true cessations. The practice of mindfulness of phenomena is not about contemplating categories of items. Rather, these schemas are used to elucidate and make our experience intelligible. They serve as maps and guidebooks that lead us through the complexities of our experiences to reach liberation.

The sequence of the five sets is itself a map. Mindfulness of the five hindrances comes first because they are the major impediment to development of the mind, specifically to cultivating serenity and insight. Overcoming them is an essential first step, which enables us to explore the field of our experience using the framework of the five aggregates and twelve sources. As insight develops, the seven awakening factors become prominent, and as they mature, penetrative understanding of the four truths becomes clear and strong. This results in understanding the ultimate truth of the Dharma.

Most of the practices in the four establishments of mindfulness are related to insight meditation, either as preparatory practices or as actual insight meditations. Although mindfulness of body, feelings, and mind can be used to generate insight, they are also helpful preliminaries for the mindfulness of phenomena because developing mindfulness and concentration on these three is easier and sets the stage for the analysis done during mindfulness of phenomena. The practice of insight becomes central in the mindfulness of phenomena.

The four establishments of mindfulness are not mutually exclusive practices. For example, if mindfulness of breathing is your primary practice, but a strong feeling arises during your meditation session, you can temporarily contemplate it

until it subsides and then return to contemplation of breathing. A similar diversion can be done to pacify a strong affliction that has arisen. Naturally as mindfulness of breathing continues, the five hindrances will arise and mindfulness of phenomena is used to deal with them skillfully. As the practice continues, the seven awakening factors and so forth will also be encountered.

We can begin practicing the four establishments of mindfulness without serenity. In fact, these practices can lead to access concentration, especially when the object of mindfulness is one that easily leads to concentration, such as mindfulness of breathing and mindfulness of the parts of the body. Concentration when meditating on mindfulness of feelings and mindfulness of mental states does not focus long enough on only one object to lead to access concentration. In these two practices we observe whatever feeling or mental state arises at the moment and do not focus on one constant object. However, mindfulness of feelings and of mind does lead to a kind of samādhi in which the mind is stabilized steadfastly although the object of mind constantly changes. Because the mind is stable and steady, the concentration is sufficient for insight knowledge to arise.

Some of the five sets of phenomena have been explained earlier in the *Library of Wisdom and Compassion* series. You may want to review them. The following explanation accords with the Pāli tradition in terms of the description of the path and when certain events occur. Other than that, the explanation accords with the Sanskrit tradition.

## *Mindfulness of the Five Hindrances*

The five hindrances — sensual desire, malice, lethargy and sleepiness, restlessness and regret, and doubt were explained in the higher training in concentration in chapter 7. Here they are considered as objects of the mindfulness of phenomena. The *Establishments of Mindfulness Sūtra* gives a four-step process to abide contemplating phenomena as phenomena in terms of the five hindrances. Using the example of *sensual desire*:<sup>118</sup>

1. *Understand when sensual desire is present in you and when it is absent.* When we do not know that a hindrance has arisen, we will be unaware of its effects on our thoughts, mood, speech, and actions. To counteract this, when a

hindrance interrupts meditation, note its presence, release it, and return your focus to the primary meditation object. If the hindrance persists, temporarily switch mindfulness from your meditation object to observe the hindrance, making it the meditation object. Observe how it affects the feelings in the body and mind. Watch it arise and subside; note if it is constant or if it fluctuates in intensity. Observing a hindrance in this way weakens its strength. After the hindrance ceases, observe the change in your feelings and mood.

2. *Understand the causes for sensual desire to arise.* Sensual desire arises as a result of contact with an attractive object — a person, place, possession, and so forth. From this arises distorted attention, which projects or exaggerates its desirable qualities. This triggers sensual desire, and attachment for it arises.

Attachment also arises from not guarding our senses — gazing at attractive people, looking in store windows, reading advertisements. Socializing with people who talk about desirable objects and people also triggers desire.

3. *Understand how to temporarily suppress manifest sensual desire.* If sensual desire — in particular sexual desire — persists, contemplate its antidote, the thirty-two parts of the body and so forth. For attachment to possessions, think of their impermanence and the problems that arise from protecting possessions; consider the disappointment you experience when they break or become outdated. Contemplate the disadvantages of attachment itself. Desire is like a debt collector who follows us around saying, “Give me this, give me that.” We can’t freely move because the debt collector trails us everywhere, breathing down our neck and not letting us rest peacefully.

4. *Understand how to eliminate sensual desire completely.* Sensual desire is abandoned upon becoming a nonreturner. The commentary to the Pāli sūtra says it is totally eliminated at arhatship. This is because the commentary has a broader definition of sensual desire, seeing it as any craving whatsoever, not just attachment to sensual objects. According to the Sanskrit tradition, all hindrances are completely eradicated at arhatship.

Since mindfulness is applied to all five hindrances using these four steps, the remaining four hindrances will be touched on only briefly.

*Malice* arises when distorted attention projects or exaggerates the unattractive qualities of a person or object. As with the other hindrances, noting it, letting it go, and returning to the meditation object is the first antidote to apply. If it persists, make it the object of mindfulness, observing how it affects the mind.

Malice and resentment come from within us; others are only the canvas on which we paint our disparaging projections.

The direct antidote to malice is loving-kindness. Daily meditation on loving-kindness is an effective way to gradually chip away at the judgmental, angry mind. When our irritation is directed toward an inanimate thing — for example, a device that malfunctions — reflect that the object is simply a combination of elements that arose due to causes and conditions.

Good friends, suitable conversations, and guarding the sense doors help to prevent malice, which is likened to a person with a severe illness: everything that person is given is pushed away and he finds nothing agreeable anywhere. Malice is abandoned upon becoming a nonreturner, according to the Pāli tradition, and at arhatship, according to the Sanskrit tradition.

As our mindfulness increases, we become aware of subtler levels of the hindrances. Sometimes dormant levels that have not been recognized get stirred up. Someone who is usually easygoing may find layers of anger and resentment he didn't know he had. Someone who is generally active and alert may find herself dull and sleepy. Doubts that we thought we had resolved — or didn't know we had — suddenly plague us. Making these hindrances the object of mindfulness is a skillful way to defuse them as well as to learn about ourselves and the workings of the mind.

*Lethargy and sleepiness* make the mind heavy and unserviceable. Lethargy is a rigidity of mind, while sleepiness is not the natural sleepiness that comes when the body is tired, but is a way of inhibiting the mind from progressing on the path by making it doze. Lethargy and sleepiness arise from distorted attention on discontent. Being bored and dissatisfied, the mind gets sluggish and is unable to function in an alert manner.

The antidote is to give appropriate attention to energy — the initial energy that gets us going, energy in the middle period that maintains and enhances the momentum, and vigorous energy to complete the Dharma task at hand. Exercise and moderation in eating are used to counteract lethargy and sleepiness. Rapid walking meditation energizes the body and mind, as do looking long distances, going outdoors, and breathing fresh air. Good friends and suitable conversations encourage us to practice and increase our energy for practice.

Meditation on light is also very effective. Here temporarily leave aside the primary meditation object and visualize very bright light. Imagine brilliant

sunlight fills your body and the environment around you.

Lethargy and sleepiness are likened to being in a prison cell where the space is narrow and restricted and we cannot move. They are eliminated completely at arhatship.

*Restlessness and regret.* Restlessness and regret are counted as one because both cause uneasiness. Restlessness brings agitation; regret weighs on us by thinking we did not do what we should have done or did do what we should not have done.

Distorted attention to the unsettledness in the mind is the cause. That is, when there is an underlying sense of unease and we do not deal with it in a beneficial way, it becomes worry, fear, restlessness, regret, and anxiety.

Appropriate attention to the peace of the mind is an antidote. For example, mindfulness of breathing releases anxiety, worry, and mental flurry. Restlessness and regret are likened to being enslaved. Wherever a slave tries to go, someone prevents his freedom. Similarly, when guilt, shame, anxiety, and restlessness impose on the mind, we feel there is nowhere safe to turn.

According to the Pāli tradition, regret is abandoned at the nonreturner level and restlessness at arhatship. According to the Sanskrit tradition, both are completely abandoned at arhatship.

*Deluded doubt* is inclined to the wrong conclusion. It is not the inquisitive doubt that encourages us to learn, question, and seek clarification, but a restive and uncooperative mental state that arises by distorted attention to a topic, such as the existence of the Three Jewels. One antidote that counteracts doubt is contemplating the difference between virtue and nonvirtue, between what is beneficial and what is not beneficial. By cultivating appropriate attention to such topics, we will gain the clarity that knows confusion, attachment, and anger are nonvirtuous, and generosity, ethical conduct, and fortitude are virtuous. Dharma study helps to resolve doubts, and mindfulness of breathing eases the tormenting type of doubt. Making a firm resolve to not let ourselves be submerged by doubts and to continue on the path despite having some doubts helps direct the mind in a constructive direction. Patience is also useful, for we realize that not all of our doubts need to be resolved immediately for us to practice and benefit from the Buddha's teachings.

Deluded doubt is compared to traveling across a barren desert where nothing grows. It is also likened to being at a crossroads in the wilderness with no one



around to ask for directions. Deluded doubt has been eradicated by stream-enterers. Although they may still have questions about how to practice, their experience of reality has vanquished doubt about the path and the Three Jewels.

## *Mindfulness of the Five Aggregates*

To make the mind fit to investigate phenomena deeply, concentration is essential, and that necessitates overcoming the five hindrances. For this reason, the five hindrances are the first set in mindfulness of phenomena. Once they have been tamed, the mind can, with clarity and precision, contemplate the nature of mental and physical phenomena by employing the schema of the five aggregates. Cultivating mindfulness of the aggregates involves comprehending the nature, function, causes, and conditions of each aggregate.

All five aggregates exist simultaneously in each moment of our human experience, no matter what we are doing. Sometimes one or another aggregate may be prominent: when we say, “I feel good today,” the pleasant feeling is more noticeable; when we’re looking for our friend in a crowd, discrimination is chief; when we have to carry out a plan, intention, which is a miscellaneous factor, is prominent. Beings in the formless realm lack a body and have four aggregates.

The five aggregates are called “the five aggregates subject to clinging”<sup>119</sup> because these five are the basis in dependence on which we cling to I, mine, and my self. We take the aggregates to be identical with ourselves, making them I. We look at them as things we use that belong to us and will bring us pleasure — that is, as mine. In response to the notions of I and mine, we create doctrines and views about the self. Considering the body as I, some people believe that when the body dies, the self becomes nonexistent. This is the view of nihilism. Thinking the self is unchanging, monolithic, and autonomous, other people assert it as an eternal personal identity — a Self, ātman, or soul; this is the absolutist view. They then speculate on whether the Self, ātman, or soul is universal or individual, finite or infinite, with or without form. In this way, so many doctrines and views about the self have arisen throughout human history.

Mindfulness of the five aggregates examines these five bases for grasping I, mine, and my self and knows them for what they are. In the sūtra, the Buddha directs us to contemplate phenomena as phenomena in terms of the five



aggregates affected by clinging by understanding each aggregate individually in three phases: its characteristics, its origin, and its cessation (MN 10.38).

The aggregates are listed in the following order to illustrate their increasing subtlety. Forms are coarse and easy to discern. Feelings are internal and subtler. Discriminations are less apparent, miscellaneous factors are difficult to differentiate, and consciousness is even harder to know and understand. Let's first look at the *characteristics* of each aggregate.

1. *Form* in general refers to material objects made of the four great elements — earth, water, fire, and air — and their derivatives, the five sense faculties (the eye faculty and so on), their objects (color and so on), and so forth. When referring to the five aggregates of a sentient being, form is the body.

In *A Ball of Foam Sutta* (SN 22.95) the Buddha gave a simile for each aggregate. Form is likened to a ball of foam. A ball of foam appears solid, but when examined closely it is found to be insubstantial, hollow, empty, and void. So, too, is the body.

2. *Feeling* is the quality of experience — pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral. Feelings are classified in several ways, one being according to contact through the six faculties — eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind. Each of these six faculties may experience any of the three feelings.

Feelings are compared to a water bubble. When raindrops hit a puddle of water, bubbles arise and immediately burst. Similarly, when examined with deep mindfulness, only a continuum of moments of feeling is present. Each moment of feeling arises and ceases extremely quickly; it does not last until the next moment. Feelings, too, are void, hollow, and insubstantial.

3. *Discrimination* is a mental factor that selects, discerns, and identifies features of an object. Discerning an object's characteristics and qualities, simple discrimination can lead to the more complex discrimination involved in conceptually categorizing and classifying objects. It is involved in recognizing the object later on. There are six types of discrimination, which are classified according to their object — form, sound, smell, taste, tactile sensation, and mental.

Discriminations are compared to a shimmering mirage seen by tired and thirsty travelers. Water appears, but when examined, no water is to be found. Discriminations deceive us into thinking that there is some lasting pleasure or pain in things. Whether these discriminations are of the past, present, or future,

internal or external, coarse or subtle, inferior or superior, far or near, they are in fact void, hollow, and insubstantial.

4. *Miscellaneous factors* shape, construct, alter, and modify the other aggregates.<sup>120</sup> They range from the mental factor of intention to the mental factors of conscientiousness, wrong views, faith, and arrogance. The wide variety of mental factors included in miscellaneous factors influences our feelings, moods, and actions. By coloring the intentions that motivate our actions, miscellaneous factors influence the karma we create and thus the results we experience.

Miscellaneous factors are likened to a plantain tree. Someone may need heartwood, but nowhere is it to be found in a plantain tree, whose core is hollow. Similarly, although a self-existing person appears to be behind each emotion, view, or intention, when examined, no personal identity or self is to be found in any of the miscellaneous factors.

5. *Consciousness* performs the function of cognizing or illuminating the general aspects of phenomena. There are six primary consciousnesses, classified according to the sense faculty through which it arises: visual, auditory, olfactory, gustatory, tactile, and mental primary consciousnesses.

Consciousness is compared to a magical show. In ancient India, by reciting mantras or using a special salve, magicians could cause pebbles and sticks to appear as elephants and horses. But someone with clear senses unaffected by these causes of deception will not be fooled. Likewise, in dependence on polluted consciousnesses, we concoct distorted ideas — this is I, this is mine, I like this and not that — that lead to duḥkha.

Of the six consciousnesses, only the mental consciousness is involved in the rebirth process. The active mental consciousness that thinks, evaluates, imagines, remembers, and plans is not present at the moments of death and rebirth; only a subtle continuum of moments of mental consciousness that carries the karmic seeds is. This consciousness is not an everlasting soul or self. When a monk said, “The same consciousness runs and wanders through the round of rebirths” and “it is that which speaks and feels and experiences here and there the result of good and bad actions,” the Buddha emphatically corrected him, saying that consciousness arises dependently; it is not I, mine, or a self.

After understanding the characteristics of each aggregate, we investigate its *origin and disappearance*. There are two ways to do this: (1) we know and

understand the conditions through which each aggregate arises, and (2) we know and understand the impermanent nature of the aggregate.

*Knowing and understanding the conditions through which each aggregate arises.* The five aggregates have common conditions that produce them, and each aggregate has its own specific conditions that cause it to arise. Nutriment (edible food) is the condition that supports the existence of the body. After eating, meditators with strong mindfulness are able to be aware of the food being transformed into energy and nourishing the body. When food is absent, the body withers and dies.

Contact is the specific condition for feeling, discrimination, and miscellaneous factors. Contact is the mental factor that is the coming together of the sense faculty, object, and preceding moment of consciousness. It is the meeting of the consciousness with the object via the sense faculty. For example, the visual consciousness comes into contact with a new car via the eye faculty. This contact leads to the experience of feeling, in this case a pleasant one. Contact leads to the discrimination identifying the object as a car, and to other miscellaneous factors responding to the object, such as attachment. Chief among the miscellaneous factors is the mental factor of intention, which is karma.

The specific conditions for consciousness are name and form as explained in the twelve links of dependent origination.<sup>121</sup>

Conditions common to all five aggregates are ignorance, craving, and karma. The teaching on dependent arising explains that due to ignorance in previous lives, karma was created. Craving instigated the ripening of karmic seeds, bringing forth the five aggregates of a new rebirth. Virtuous karma leads to the five aggregates of a human being or a celestial being (deva); nonvirtuous karma leads to the five aggregates of an animal, hungry ghost, or hell being.

When any of the conditions specific for each aggregate cease, so does that moment of that aggregate. When the contact of seeing the car ceases, the feeling, discrimination, and miscellaneous factors associated with that moment of perception of the car also cease. That is, the pleasurable feeling from seeing the car, the discernment that it is a car, and the intention to drive it all cease. When the common conditions of ignorance, craving, and karma have ceased through wisdom, the five polluted aggregates are eventually extinguished. This is the first way of understanding the arising and disappearance of the aggregates.

*Knowing and understanding the impermanent nature of the aggregates.* This is done by mindfulness of the constantly changing nature of each aggregate — the fact that it arises and passes away in each micro moment. Here we don't contemplate arising and ceasing occurring due to conditions, but focus on the impermanent nature of the aggregates. Being transient by nature, the cells in the body continuously arise and cease, feelings are in constant flux, discriminations change, miscellaneous factors are unstable, and moments of consciousness arise and cease without interruption. As mindfulness deepens, it becomes capable of seeing the arising and ceasing of each aggregate at subtler and subtler levels, until their subtle impermanence is directly seen.

At this point, meditators dwell contemplating phenomena internally, externally, and both internally and externally, as described above. As a result, they abide peacefully, without clinging to anything in the world.

## *Mindfulness of the Six Sources*

Regarding mindfulness of the six sources, the sūtra says (MN 10.40):

How does a monastic abide contemplating phenomena as phenomena in terms of the six internal and six external sources? Here a monastic understands the eye, he understands forms, and he understands the fetter that arises dependent on both. He also understands how there comes to be the arising of the unarisen fetter, and how there comes to be the abandoning of the arisen fetter, and how there comes to be the future nonarising of the abandoned fetter.

The sūtra continues in terms of ears and sounds, the nose and odors, the tongue and tastes, the body and tangibles, the mental faculty (which includes all six consciousnesses) and mental objects. In all these cases, the faculty is the internal source and the object is the external source.

Then with mindfulness, we observe how the six internal and six external sources start a chain of events that leads to duḥkha. In the *Six Sets of Six Sutta* (MN 148) the Buddha explained that dependent on the eye and forms, visual

consciousness arises; the meeting of the three is contact. Contact serves as a condition for feeling — pleasant, painful, or neutral — to arise. Delighting in and craving pleasant feelings indicates the underlying tendency to attachment is present. Reacting adversely and being repulsed by a painful feeling shows the underlying tendency to anger is present. Experiencing a neutral feeling, but not understanding it as it actually is, indicates the underlying tendency to ignorant confusion is present. In this way, the three poisons arise in response when the three feelings are experienced without mindfulness or appropriate attention.

Then the Buddha taught how to abandon the fetters once they have arisen.<sup>122</sup> This begins with restraining the sense sources, especially at the beginning of practice when our mental control is weak. With strong mindfulness, the functioning of the six pairs of sources can be clearly observed. Such mindfulness brings forth strong concentration, which can then examine them with wisdom at a subtle level. When a meditator gains insight into the process of the six objects and six faculties leading to contact, which stimulates feelings that cause fetters to arise, he is able to abandon craving for all the factors in this process by knowing them as impermanent, *duḥkha* by nature, and selfless. The misery of his body and mind is terminated and his mind rests peacefully.

The understanding of how there comes to be the future nonarising of the abandoned fetter comes by deepening insight into the three characteristics and abandoning the various fetters by progressing through the stages of stream-enterer, once-returner, nonreturner, and arhat.

### *Mindfulness of the Seven Awakening Factors*

The Buddha often spoke about what to abandon and what to practice, and this is a theme in the mindfulness of phenomena. As the main obstacles to serenity, the five hindrances are to be eliminated. As important factors leading to the liberation of mind and deep *samādhi*, the seven awakening factors are to be cultivated. These seven are the awakening factors of mindfulness, discrimination of phenomena, effort, joy, pliancy, concentration, and equanimity.

Mindfulness of phenomena is also concerned with the development of insight that knows things as they are, and the objects to investigate and

understand are the five aggregates, the six internal sources and six external ones, and the four truths.

A mind with serenity can easily be directed toward investigating all the elements of experience with insight, knowing them for what they are — impermanent, in the nature of *duḥkha*, and selfless.

To review the sequence of topics to be contemplated in the mindfulness of phenomena, a meditator's first task at this point in her practice is to subdue the five hindrances. Doing this makes the mind suitable to understand the five aggregates and six sources. As she progresses, the seven awakening factors, which previously were present but not well developed, now become prominent. Thus the Buddha says (MN 10.42):

How does a monastic abide contemplating phenomena as phenomena in terms of the seven awakening factors? Here, there being the mindfulness awakening factor in him, a monastic understands, "There is the mindfulness awakening factor in me" or there being no mindfulness awakening factor in him, he understands, "There is no mindfulness awakening factor in me." He also understands how there comes to be the arising of the unarisen mindfulness awakening factor and how the arisen mindfulness awakening factor comes to fulfillment by development.

The *sūtra* continues in like manner regarding the discrimination of phenomena, effort, joy, pliancy, concentration, and equanimity awakening factors. Mindfulness of each awakening factor has three parts: (1) understanding when it is present in our mind and when it is absent, (2) understanding the causes that make it arise in our mind, and (3) understanding how it is brought to fulfillment once it has arisen. These are explained below.

1. *Mindfulness awakening factor.* The Buddha gave the word "mindfulness" a special meaning that includes not only memory — for example, remembering the teachings we have heard — but also mindfulness of things that are occurring in the present. Both of these meanings pertain to the mindfulness awakening factor.

Mindfulness has been cultivated beginning with the four establishments of mindfulness. After being repeatedly rejuvenated when it was weak, it is now strong enough to become an awakening factor. We are aware of when it is manifest and functioning well and when it is absent or slacking.

The principal condition causing mindfulness to arise is appropriate attention to the body, feelings, mind, and phenomena, which are the basis for the mindfulness awakening factor. Among other conditions are having mindfulness and introspective awareness, especially during daily life activities, and associating with people who are mindful and want to cultivate mindfulness.

2. *Discrimination of phenomena awakening factor.* As meditation continues, the mindfulness awakening factor is brought to fulfillment by diligent practice. We are able to distinguish subtle mental states, knowing them clearly and precisely. Now, with wisdom, we discern those to cultivate and those to abandon. Appropriate attention to virtuous and nonvirtuous mental states is the condition that brings about discrimination of phenomena. Gradually this ability to discriminate will develop further and can be used to understand the specific characteristics of phenomena and their shared characteristics of impermanence, *duḥkha*, and selflessness.

Other conditions that cause discrimination of phenomena are investigating the aggregates, personal cleanliness to facilitate the mind functioning clearly, cultivating the five faculties — faith, effort, mindfulness, concentration, and wisdom — in a healthy balance, deep reflection and asking questions, associating with wise people, and having the inclination and resolve to cultivate such wise discrimination.

3. *Effort awakening factor.* With practice, discrimination of virtuous and nonvirtuous mental states becomes refined and it is possible to strengthen the former and restrain the latter. As the mind becomes purer and less energy is diverted to nonvirtuous activities, effort to practice comes easily. The conditions for this are appropriate attention to the three phases of energy: arousing effort, continuing with effort, and unstoppable effort that makes it possible to meditate a long time and without needing much sleep. Other conditions are reflecting on the disadvantages and dangers of *saṃsāra*, the benefits of effort, and the great qualities of the Dharma. Avoiding people who are lazy and associating with those who put energy into Dharma practice also help.

4. *Joy awakening factor.* As effort flows with greater ease, the mind becomes focused and experiences a great sense of purity and joy. The conditions are appropriate attention to the basis for the joy awakening factor — especially the effort that has arisen through mindfulness and discrimination of phenomena. Other conditions are recollecting the Three Jewels and the benefits of ethical

conduct, avoiding confused people, and associating with those who have good values.

5. *Pliancy awakening factor.* Joy can be too enticing and there is a danger of becoming attached to it. To counteract this, observing joy and its subtle agitating effects on the mind are important. By releasing attachment to joy and bringing the mind back to the meditation object, joy settles down and bliss arises. Calm and peaceful, bliss enables the mind to settle deeply on the meditation object. At this time, physical and mental pliancy arise.

Balancing the five faculties, being skilled in meditation, avoiding people who are restless, and associating with those who are tranquil are also conditions for pliancy.

6. *Concentration awakening factor.* Pliancy naturally leads to deep concentration. The conditions are appropriate attention on the nimitta — the subtle inner object of meditation that arises when the mind becomes concentrated. This could be a light that is seen only in meditation by the mental consciousness, not by the eye. Although the sign has arisen and has been developed previously, now it is to be protected and strengthened. The concentration awakening factor arises and the mind becomes completely absorbed in the nimitta.

Other conditions are balancing the five faculties and skill in meditation that knows how to calm or exert the mind when needed. Avoiding people who are restless and associating with those who are concentrated also facilitate concentration.

7. *Equanimity awakening factor.* As concentration deepens, equanimity, which has been present, now becomes prominent. This mental factor observes the meditation object without fluctuating. The mind ceases to go up and down, becoming too restless or too dull. Equanimity arises from appropriate attention to overcoming faults and cultivating all conditions for serenity. Abandoning attachment, not associating with self-centered people, and befriending those who are impartial and open are also conditions.

While the seven awakening factors follow subduing the five hindrances in the sequence outlined in this sūtra, the five hindrances can still arise again if the meditator is not careful. For example, joy is related to sensuality at a very subtle level, so if the meditator's mindfulness slackens while experiencing joy, sensual desire may sneak in. If someone has strong effort but their mindfulness weakens,



their effort can become a type of restlessness. Thus a practitioner should not become complacent, thinking that the five hindrances cannot arise during serenity and insight meditation. Continual diligence is necessary to stabilize and deepen spiritual attainments.

The above explanation is from the viewpoint of cultivating serenity, but mindfulness of phenomena is also aimed at developing wisdom, and the seven awakening factors are cultivated during insight practice as well. At that time, with steady concentration — even if it is not at the level of *dhyāna* — mindfulness focuses on the five aggregates and six sources in terms of their being impermanent, the nature of *duḥkha*, and selfless. Mindfulness stirs investigation, which invokes great energy. The energy brings joy, and when joy subsides, it gives way to pliancy. While cultivating insight, the meditation object changes because we observe each phenomenon individually, in each moment, as it arises in the mind. Although this is not concentration on one object, it is steady concentration that observes the five aggregates and six sources as they arise and pass away in each moment. This observing mind is equanimous, neither being attached to nor repulsed by impermanence.

### *Mindfulness of the Four Truths*

Observing the three characteristics with insight endowed with the seven awakening factors is the beginning of contemplation on the four truths. This brings mindfulness of phenomena to its true purpose, as we are able to clearly see the dharmas of our experience and thus penetrate the Dharma that is the truth of the Buddha's teachings. Contemplating phenomena as phenomena in terms of the four truths is understanding *duḥkha*, its origin, its cessation, and the path to that cessation as they actually are.

Observing the three characteristics in the five aggregates and six sources is knowing *duḥkha* and the objects that are unsatisfactory in nature as they are. Knowing through direct experience that when craving arises, *duḥkha* follows is understanding the truth of origin. Knowing that when craving subsides so does *duḥkha* brings understanding of the truth of cessation. Knowing that the path we are practicing will end *duḥkha* is understanding the truth of the path. Insight into

the four truths is increasing, although full penetration and understanding of them has not yet occurred.

When all necessary conditions come together, a disciple with mature faculties knows the three characteristics as they come together as one. This is the point where she can go from the conditioned world to the unconditioned — the point where the mind momentarily breaks through the conditioned world and has a glimpse of nirvāṇa. The mind sees and understands, this is the cessation of duḥkha. At this point the mind cannot hold the realization for long and falls back again to the conditioned world. But now when the person sees the five aggregates, six sources, eighteen constituents, and twelve links of dependent origination, she knows with certainty, this is duḥkha. Seeing that saṃsāra evolves as a result of ignorance and craving, she knows, this is the origin of duḥkha. With her own experience she now knows the āryas' eightfold path is the path leading to the cessation of duḥkha. This first breakthrough experience during which she has direct and full knowledge of the unconditioned establishes her as a stream-enterer. This is the culmination of the four establishments of mindfulness. After insight is developed repeatedly, she will attain the full realization of nirvāṇa and become an arhat.

When teaching the establishment of mindfulness on phenomena, the Buddha presented many different schemas of phenomena to contemplate. Why is this? These schemas present similar factors from different perspectives, providing us with multiple ways to investigate our experience and thus increase our wisdom. The five aggregates are examined primarily because they are the basis on which wrong views of self arise, and the self or person is the one who cycles in saṃsāra, practices the path, and attains nirvāṇa. The six sources emphasize how craving arises from the six faculties and their objects. How craving is abandoned is explained in the twelve links of dependent origination.<sup>123</sup> The seven awakening factors are significant elements in eradicating craving and the five hindrances, and the four truths encompass the entirety of saṃsāra and nirvāṇa that the self has experienced or will experience.

To conclude the sūtra the Buddha asserts that the four establishments of mindfulness is the direct path that purifies beings and leads to the abolition of duḥkha and the attainment of nirvāṇa.

Just before the Buddha's parinirvāṇa, Ānanda asked the Buddha to "make a statement about the order of monks," hoping he would appoint a successor to

lead them. The Buddha replied (DN 16:2.26):

You should live as islands unto yourselves, being your own refuge, with no one else as your refuge, with the Dhamma as an island, with the Dhamma as your refuge, with no other refuge. And how does a monastic live as an island unto himself . . . with no other refuge? Here, Ānanda, a monastic abides contemplating the body as body, earnestly, introspectively aware, mindful and having put away all hankering and fretting for the world, and likewise with regard to feelings, mind, and phenomena.

Hearing only the first part of the Buddha's statement, some people interpret being an island unto ourselves as license to do as they see fit. But when we hear the entire passage, it is clear that the Buddha wants people to hold wisdom as their refuge, and that involves holding the Dharma — the true path and true cessation — as our final refuge. To do that, we must have realizations of the path, and those are gained by means of practicing the four establishments of mindfulness.

### *Mindfulness in Vajrayāna*

Mindfulness has a role in tantric practice as well. While doing the meditation of taking death as the path to dharmakāya, at the time of meditating on the clear light, one practices four mindfulnesses: (1) the appearance is clear light, emptiness; (2) we understand this is the emptiness of inherent existence, the actual nature of all phenomena; (3) the experience is bliss; and (4) we hold the divine identity of the resultant dharmakāya, and on this valid base, designate the I.

Another way mindfulness is spoken of in Vajrayāna as expressed in “A Song of the Four Mindfulnesses as a Guide to the View of the Middle Way” by H. H. Kelsang Gyatso, the Seventh Dalai Lama. Here he spoke of mindfulness of the spiritual mentor, mindfulness of compassion, mindfulness of your body as the deity's body, and mindfulness of the view of emptiness.

## *Bodhisattvas' Practice of the Four Establishments of Mindfulness*

The practice of the four establishments of mindfulness becomes a Mahāyāna practice when done with the motivation of bodhicitta, aspiring for full awakening in order to benefit all sentient beings most effectively. These four practices advance bodhisattvas' own practice and also enable them to guide śrāvakas, who make the thirty-seven harmonies their principal practice.

To develop the wisdom that will liberate themselves from saṃsāra, bodhisattvas meditate on the coarse and subtle aspects of the thirty-seven harmonies. They engage with the subtle thirty-seven harmonies with the awareness of their emptiness of inherent existence and their illusion-like nature, and engage with the coarse thirty-seven harmonies with the awareness of their impermanence or lack of self-sufficient substantial existence.

In the context of the four establishments of mindfulness, coarse mindfulness of the body contemplates the body qualified by the emptiness of a self-sufficient substantially existent person, and subtle mindfulness of the body takes as its object the body qualified by the emptiness of inherent existence. This is in line with the Prāsaṅgikas' delineation of coarse and subtle afflictions. Similarly, bodhisattvas cultivate coarse and subtle wisdoms that realize the absence of a self-sufficient substantially existent person and the absence of inherent existence, respectively. The same differentiation of coarse and subtle aspects is made in mindfulness of feelings, mind, and phenomena, contemplating them as lacking a self-sufficient substantially existent person and being empty of inherent existence, respectively.

Bodhisattvas seek to realize the emptiness of inherent existence of the body, feelings, mind, phenomena, and the person designated in dependence on them, as well as to establish their conventional existence in that they exist by being merely designated by mind. As conventionally existent objects, the body is like an illusion, feelings are like a dream, the mind is like space, and phenomena are like fleeting clouds. In this way, bodhisattvas do both space-like and illusion-like meditation on emptiness.

To cultivate compassion, bodhisattvas meditate on the impure aspects of others' bodies not only to subdue their own sexual desire but also to understand sentient beings' suffering in cyclic existence. Seeing sentient beings bound to foul

and fragile bodies as the result of self-grasping ignorance, bodhisattvas generate great compassion and bodhicitta. They practice the six perfections to become fully awakened buddhas so they can more effectively benefit sentient beings in saṃsāra and lead them to awakening as well.

## *The Selflessness of Phenomena and the Four Establishments of Mindfulness*

In your practice of the four establishments of mindfulness, first cultivate a general understanding of the four meditation objects and how to practice mindfulness of them. Then gradually delve into subtler levels. For example, first understand the characteristics of the body that you can easily perceive. By deepening your mindfulness, subtler levels of the nature of the body become apparent. These levels are not fabricated; they are discovered through meditation and can be examined. Then apply meditation instructions found in texts such as Maitreya's *Ornament of Clear Realizations*, Candrakīrti's *Supplement*, and Śāntideva's *Engaging in the Bodhisattvas' Deeds* to the body, feelings, mind, and phenomena. Below is Śāntideva's elucidation of the selflessness of phenomena in terms of the four establishments of mindfulness. The selflessness of phenomena will be explained in more depth in future volumes, but the presentation here will give you a sense of the way bodhisattvas meditate on the four objects in order to realize the ultimate nature of reality.

Ultimate analysis inquires into phenomena's actual mode of existence to determine if phenomena exist inherently, from their own side, and with their own independent essence as they appear to exist. When we search to identify how the body exists, can we find its essence? Do feelings arise independent of other factors? Is the mind the I?

If something has an independent or inherent essence, we should be able to pinpoint it when investigating what that object actually is. If it cannot be found, the only conclusion to draw is that the object does not possess such an essence. Ultimate analysis refutes the object's inherent existence, not its conventional existence. The object is not totally nonexistent. Conventional existence is not within the purview of ultimate analysis.

Ultimate analysis examines the relationships between cause and effect, a whole and its parts, a phenomenon and its basis of designation, and agent, object, and action. This analysis is not mere intellectual amusement, because the ignorance grasping inherent existence is the root of saṃsāra, the source of our misery and confusion. Proving that ignorance is erroneous because the inherent existence it apprehends does not exist is crucial to our own and others' well-being and awakening.

### *Selflessness of Phenomena in Relation to Mindfulness of the Body*

If the body were truly existent, it should be findable when searched for with ultimate analysis. A truly existent body would exist independent of all other factors — its causes and conditions, its parts, and the mind that conceives and designates it. Śāntideva examines the body in relation to its parts, trying to find the body in its parts, searching for a part or collection of parts that *is* the body. He begins (BCA 9:78):

A body is neither the feet nor the calves.  
Nor is a body the thighs or the hips.  
Neither the belly nor the back is the body.  
Nor is a body the chest or the arms.

The sides of the torso and the hands are not a body.  
Nor is a body the armpits or the shoulders.  
The visceral organs also are not it.  
And neither is a body the head nor the neck.  
So what then is a body?

The body appears to have its own objective existence and we assent to that appearance, believing it to be true. Is it? If the body had objective or inherent existence, it would be findable as either one and the same with its parts or as completely unrelated to them. When we mentally divide the body into its parts, are any of the parts the body? The hands are parts of the body, but they are not a body. Similarly, the feet, torso, internal organs, and head are parts of the body, but they are not a body.

The collection of all these parts is also not a body. Since each part individually is not a body, a collection of non-bodies could not be a body. For example, an apple is not a grapefruit, so a collection of apples cannot be a grapefruit. Furthermore, if the parts of the body were mentally spread out on a mat, we wouldn't see a body. There would be only the collection of the individual parts. The body comes about by our conceptually combining different components into a whole and giving it the name "body." But within that collection a body cannot be found.

We might think of the body as a single unit and ask, "Does a portion of the body exist in each part or does a whole body exist in each part?" But if a portion of the body were located in each part, that would still leave us searching for the whole body. And if a whole body existed in each part, there would be as many bodies as there are parts. For example, when looking at Tashi's body, we would see many bodies because each hand, foot, tooth, and so on would be a body. This is certainly not the case. For these reasons, the body and its parts are not one and the same.

Could a body exist separate from its parts? If a body and its parts were inherently separate, all the parts could be removed and the body itself would remain. But without a head, torso, limbs, and internal organs, a body cannot be found. If the body is neither the same as its parts nor different from them, what is the body? Where can our body be found? In Chan (Zen) this is called the "Great Doubt." If you persist in questioning, there may be a breakthrough when you realize that the body you feel is so real does not exist.

The *Dharmasaṅgīti Sūtra* says (§§ 2):

One establishes mindfulness with the question, "What is called *the body*?" "This body is like space" . . . This body has not come from the past. It does not proceed to the future. It is not present in the past or the future. Other than being something that has arisen from unreal afflictions, it is devoid of an agent or one who experiences, it has no beginning, end, or middle, no fundamental location, no master, no owner, and no possessor. It is designated by the transient labels "assemblage," "body" . . . This body has no essence. It arose from the semen and ovum of one's father and mother, is by nature

impure, putrid, and foul-smelling. It is troubled by the thieves of attachment, animosity, and confusion and by fear and despair.

## REFLECTION

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Śāntideva compares our confusion about how the body exists to our thinking an effigy or a scarecrow is a person (BCA 9:83–84):

Thus, a body is not [truly] existent.  
But because of ignorance,  
the mind perceiving a [truly existent] body in hands, and so forth,  
arises,  
like the mind perceiving a person in an effigy,  
because the [effigy] is shaped in the form [of a person].

For as long as the conditions persist,  
the body [of the effigy] is seen as a person.  
Likewise, for as long as there is [grasping at true existence] of the  
hands and so on,  
they are seen as the body.

Although a truly existent body does not exist at all, because of ignorance our mind perceives a truly existent body mixed in with the hands and other parts of



the body. For example, if we see a scarecrow in a field and mistakenly think it is a person, we'll want to stop and chat with him. The scarecrow may be shaped like a person, but it is not a person, even though our confused mind thinks it is. Similarly, even though the ignorant mind apprehends the body as truly existent, it does not exist that way.

Our mind imputes “person” to the scarecrow due to the arrangement of parts — the pole, straw, clothes, hat, and so forth. The mind also imputes “body” to a collection of parts, such as the skin and so forth. Both the person and the body are mere imputations. However, there is a difference between them. The basis in dependence on which the confused mind imputes “person” — straw and cloth — cannot function as a person. However, the body that exists by being merely imputed in dependence on the collection of bodily parts is capable of functioning as a body.

A nominally existent body is present; it is imputed in dependence on the parts, even though it is neither identical with nor completely separate from its parts. The body is mere name, a mere designation. Saying it is “mere name” doesn't mean that the body is just a name and does not exist. Rather, “mere” excludes its existing from its own side. It means the body exists by being merely designated in dependence on its basis of designation: the collection of its parts.

As long as the conditions to mistake a scarecrow for a person are present — such as dim light and distance — we apprehend it as a person. Once they are removed by our approaching it, this wrong perception ceases. Similarly, as long as the ignorance grasping true existence resides in our mental continuum, we will misapprehend the collection of parts to be a truly existent body. However, when the wisdom realizing reality dawns in our minds, the wrong perception of a truly existent body ceases. This is the realization of its emptiness.

This concludes showing that the whole or “part possessor” — the body — lacks true existence. In the same way, each part of the body lacks true existence. Looking at one part of the body, such as the hand as a whole, we see that it too is composed of parts. It is not identical to any of the fingers, the palm, or their collection, nor is it totally unrelated to them. Neither a portion of the hand nor the whole hand is found in each finger. The hand is also not found separate from the fingers and palm. Thus, like the body, a truly existent hand cannot be found. A hand exists by being merely designated in dependence on the collection of its

parts — the fingers and the palm. Likewise, a finger cannot be found in any of the individual joints, or as a collection of the joints, or separate from the joints.

Continuing to mentally dissect phenomena into smaller and smaller parts, we are unable to find a smallest part that cannot be further subdivided. Although atoms and even subatomic particles may seem to lack parts, if we look closer we see that this is not the case. They are in constant flux, moving here and there. In order to move and to contact other particles, they must have directional parts — a north, east, south, and west side, a top and a bottom. All composite things depend on their parts. Anything that is dependent cannot be independent. Since “independent of all other factors” is the meaning of true existence, no phenomenon exists truly. Śāntideva then asks (BCA 9.87):

Who with discernment would be attached  
to a body that is like a dream?  
Since a body does not (truly) exist,  
then what is a male and what is a female?

Our identity as male or female is very strong. When our mother gave birth, the first question people asked was, “Is it a girl or a boy?” However, seeing that our biological sex is merely designated in dependence on the shape of a collection of molecules, we can release grasping at truly existent males and females. Women and men come about only through the process of imputation; they do not exist truly, from their own side.

A person with discernment is one who uses probing awareness to examine how things exist. Seeing that all things lack any findable or inherent essence, a wise person dwells in space-like meditative equipoise on emptiness — the absence of inherent existence.

Although all things are empty of true existence, they are not nonexistent. How do they exist? Like dreams, in that they do not exist in the way they appear. When dreaming, we believe the objects and people in our dreams are real. So, too, when we are in the sleep of ignorance, we believe the people and environment around us have independent, findable essences. When we realize that they do not, we awake from the sleep of ignorance and understand that what we formerly believed to be absolutely real was like a dream in that it does not exist the way it appears. Although people and phenomena are empty, they appear. Although they appear, they are empty.

## *Selflessness of Phenomena in Relation to Mindfulness of Feelings*

Feelings are very important to us. All day long, we try to arrange our environment so that we experience only happy feelings and avoid painful feelings. Attachment to feelings is a prime motivator for our actions. When we feel pleasure, we crave for it to continue and do everything possible to make that happen. Faced with suffering, we crave to be free of it and act on that impulse, often neglecting to consider the effects of our actions on ourselves or on others.

What is the actual mode of existence of these feelings that constantly preoccupy us? If they had an inherent nature, perhaps being attached to pleasant feelings and averse to unpleasant ones would be justified. But if they do not have an inherent nature and resemble dreams or illusions, such craving is unsuitable and can be released.

Nāgārjuna inquires into the nature of our mental world of experience (LS 6):

Since without the felt there is no feeling;  
feeling itself is devoid of self.  
So you uphold that what is felt too  
is devoid of inherent existence.

Feeling is a complex process involving an object of experience (the felt), the subjective experience (the feeling), and the act of experiencing it. Feeling itself is dependent on two factors: the object of the experience and the act of experiencing it. An object that is felt depends on the agent that is feeling it and the action of feeling. The action of experiencing a feeling depends on the agent experiencing it and the feeling that is being experienced. The agent, object, and action are mutually defined; one of them cannot be teased out and identified independent of the other two. In the first two lines, Nāgārjuna says that without the object of experience, there is no subjective feeling. Being dependent, the feeling cannot be independent and lacks inherent existence. In the last two lines, he says that the object is dependent on the feeling that is experienced, so it too is empty of inherent existence.

This investigation of the agent, object, and action is a standard line of reasoning that Nāgārjuna uses repeatedly in the *Treatise on the Middle Way*, where he analyzes concepts such as “coming,” “going,” “arising,” “ceasing,” and so forth in terms of these three factors: (1) the agent — who or by which (T. *gang*

*gis*), (2) the object — what (T. *gang*), and (3) the action or process — how (T. *jitar*). In the case of investigating feeling, “what” is the felt experience — pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral. “Who or by which” has two dimensions. One is the person, the agent who experiences the feeling. The second is the subjective mental state itself. It is also the agent in that it is the medium or instrument through which the feeling is experienced. “How” is the action of feeling. These three exist in dependence on each other. Because they exist dependently, they do not exist inherently.

Bodhisattva āryas, who have directly realized the lack of inherent existence, do not usually grasp feelings to exist inherently. Due to their wisdom, they do not experience painful mental feelings. Due to their merit, they do not experience painful physical feelings, although śrāvaka āryas may.

According to Mādhyamikas, anything that exists inherently cannot depend on causes and conditions and thus is permanent. In that case, a suffering feeling would never cease. But we know through personal experience that suffering ceases. Conversely, if happiness existed truly, it would always arise when a desirable object was present. However, this is not the case. Delicious food normally produces feelings of pleasure, but when someone is overwhelmed by grief, it does not. If feelings truly existed, this fluctuation could not occur because feelings would not be affected by causes and conditions.

Pain and pleasure do not abide in the objects we contact. If they did, we would always have the same experience when seeing a particular person and everyone else would also have the same feeling arise upon seeing them. If cake were truly pleasurable, eating it when we are full would produce pleasure. Furthermore, everyone would like the same foods. Believing that feelings exist inherently contradicts our daily life experiences.

*Seven Point Thought Training* speaks of three objects (attractive, unattractive, and neutral), three feelings (pleasure, pain, neutral), and three poisons (attachment, animosity, and confusion). When meeting an attractive object, ordinary beings experience pleasure, and immediately attachment arises for both the object and the feeling. When they encounter an unattractive object, pain or displeasure is experienced and they become upset. When contacting neutral objects, they experience neutral feelings and respond with confusion. Here the unsatisfactory nature of saṃsāra and its lack of lasting peace are vividly apparent. Since we cannot avoid objects that trigger feelings, we need to see that we have a

choice regarding our emotional reactions to them and then train our minds in more beneficial and realistic responses to feelings. One method is to recall with compassion that all sentient beings experience these three feelings and the disturbing emotions they provoke. Then imagine taking these feelings and disturbing emotions from sentient beings so that they can experience peace. Follow this by imagining that you give them your happiness. This practice of “taking and giving” functions to increase our love and compassion and reduce our three poisons.

When skilled practitioners experience pleasure and happiness, they recognize that these feelings are not truly existent and are like dreams. They do not crave for happiness to continue and do not become anxious when suffering arises. They feel compassion for others who are unaware of the actual nature of feelings and respond to feeling with craving that leads to the creation of afflictive karma.

Śāntideva employs many reasonings to refute the inherent existence of the body, feelings, mind, and phenomena because he is addressing practitioners with sharp faculties. While one reasoning is sufficient to establish phenomena’s emptiness of inherent existence, understanding emptiness through many reasonings swiftly consumes the obscurations to liberation and awakening and enables bodhisattvas to teach others about emptiness in a skillful manner.

In this light, Śāntideva now refutes the true existence of feelings by refuting the true existence of their cause, contact. He begins by questioning assertions that sense faculties and their objects are made of partless particles.

In order for a consciousness with its accompanying feeling to arise, three conditions are necessary: the object, the sense faculty, and an immediately preceding moment of consciousness. The combination of these three gives rise to contact, which allows the characteristics of the object to be known. Contact then gives rise to feeling. If these three factors existed truly, they would give rise to truly existent contact followed by truly existent feeling.

The sense faculties for the five physical senses are subtle forms, and their objects are also form. According to Vaibhāṣikas and Sautrāntikas, forms are composed of partless particles — subtle particles that have no sides or parts. Śāntideva asks: if a gap or space existed between the sense faculty and its object so that they did not touch, how could contact occur? Without the two touching, the sense faculty could not contact the object and feeling could not arise. On the other hand, if the partless particles of the sense faculty touched the partless

particles of the object, the two would collapse into one. This is because particles that lack directional parts cannot have one side that touches another particle and another side that does not. Without the particles of both the sense faculty and the object having sides (directional parts), they could not contact each other.

If they do meet, each one should have a side that touches the other and another side that doesn't. If each one lacks two sides, the two particles would merge together. However, being partless particles they cannot merge because there is no space within them and they are the same size.

Some scientists seek the smallest particle that cannot be subdivided and is the ultimate building block of the universe. Years ago, it was thought that atoms were that indivisible unit, but then it was found that atoms were composed of other particles and could be subdivided. Since then, a variety of subatomic particles have been discovered, but none of them has been shown to be ultimately the smallest.

Furthermore, contact between the immediately preceding consciousness and its object isn't possible. Since the consciousness is immaterial, it cannot physically contact a sense faculty that is material. In the context of things being truly existent, such an aggregation of the three — consciousness, sense faculty, and object — cannot occur. This aggregation, which is contact, is composed of parts and is dependent on its parts, meaning contact is a mere designation in the same way that the body is a mere designation dependent on the collection of its parts and the mind that designates it.

Since truly existent contact does not exist, it cannot give rise to truly existent feelings. Since feelings arise dependently, why should we tire ourselves out craving pleasurable feelings?

Feelings also do not exist truly as they appear to; they are like dreams. Since pleasurable feelings have no essence, why go through so much effort to have them?

Before refuting the selflessness of phenomena in *Engaging in the Bodhisattvas' Deeds*, Śāntideva established the selflessness of persons. There is no sense in craving happiness and fearfully rejecting suffering when neither the person experiencing those feelings nor the feelings themselves truly exist. Since both the persons who experience feelings and the feelings are not ultimately findable entities, the craving that arises based on grasping at their true existence can be

eliminated. By familiarizing ourselves with the view of emptiness, ignorance and craving are worn away until they are finally eradicated, leading to liberation.

The person experiencing feelings and the feelings exist conventionally. Arhats and buddhas have feelings, but having destroyed self-grasping ignorance, they do not grasp them as truly existent. Nevertheless, happiness and suffering exist dependently, so mindfulness of the actions that produce them is important. One of the principal ways in which karma ripens is the production of feelings: constructive karma produces happiness, whereas destructive karma leads to suffering.

Each consciousness has a feeling component that arises simultaneous with it. If that feeling existed from its own side, it could not be experienced by that mind. This is because the feeling would exist independent of everything else and would have no relationship with the consciousness that it accompanies.

In the context of true existence, a mind could not experience a feeling that arises before or after it. Feelings that arose before that moment of mind have already ceased when that mind arises, and cannot be experienced by that mind. Feelings arising after that moment of mind have not yet arisen, and that moment of mind cannot experience them. If feelings existed truly, it would be impossible for any mind — before, simultaneous, or after a feeling — to experience it. In this case there would be no experiencer (the mind) and nothing that is experienced (the feeling).

If the mind cannot experience feeling, then nothing else can either. Feeling cannot experience itself because then the experiencer and the experienced would be the same, and that is not tenable. Asserting truly existent feelings is a conundrum!

### *Selflessness of Phenomena in Relation to the Mindfulness of the Mind*

The presence of the mind demarcates the difference between a corpse and a living being. The mind cognizes, experiences, perceives, and feels. Both saṃsāra and nirvāṇa depend on the mind, and it is the mind that is transformed by practicing the path. Most people have never asked themselves what their mind is or how it exists. Does it exist as a self-enclosed, independent entity? Is it independent and findable when searched for with ultimate analysis? Or does it exist like a dream, appearing truly existent even though it is not?

Where could a truly existent mind exist? It is not in the sense faculties — the eyes, ears, and so forth — nor is it in the objects that the mind cognizes — forms, sounds, and so forth. It cannot be found between the object and sense faculty. It is not the body and cannot be found either inside the body or completely separate from it. The notion of a truly existent mind is fabricated by distorted conception and ignorance. The *Ratnacūḍa Sūtra* says (ŚS 7–8):

Kāśyapa, even though one looks for the mind everywhere, it is not found. Whatever is unfindable is unobservable. Whatever is unobservable does not arise in the past, or in the future, or in the present. Whatever does not arise in the past, or in the future, or in the present really transcends the three times. Whatever transcends the three times is neither [inherently] existent nor [totally] nonexistent.

When we search for exactly what the mind is using ultimate analysis, there is nothing we can identify as the mind. Rather, the mind is what exists by being merely designated in dependence on a continuum of moments of mental states.

Because no truly existent mind exists, sentient beings have natural nirvāṇa (*prakṛti-nirvṛta*), meaning that their minds are, by their very nature, free from true existence. This natural emptiness of the mind is one aspect of buddha nature; it makes possible the elimination of obscurations and the attainment of liberation and awakening.<sup>124</sup> When we realize that the mind does not exist from its own side, the grasping at such a mind subsides. By familiarizing ourselves with this realization we will be able to cleanse all obscurations from our minds.

Saying that a truly existent mind cannot be found in any of the various types of mind or separate from them does not mean that the mind is totally nonexistent. The mind exists nominally, as do all phenomena: it functions, it arises and ceases. Since each moment of mind is dependent on causes and conditions, the mind can be transformed. There are many types of mind, including primary consciousness, mental factors, and virtuous and nonvirtuous states of mind. All of these perform their own function although they lack any inherent essence.

If we search for a truly existent mind that perceives yellow, can we find it? If the mind existed before yellow, yellow could not be perceived because it wouldn't



exist yet. If the cognizing mind and the object existed simultaneously, yellow would not be the cause for the perception because causes must always precede their effects. If a truly existent perceiver existed after the yellow, it could not perceive yellow because yellow would have already ceased. While conventionally the object of a perceiver exists just prior to that perceiving consciousness, if things existed truly this could not be the case. A truly existent perceiver is independent of all other factors and would not depend on an object or a sense faculty to arise. Similarly, a truly existent object cannot produce a perceiver of that object because it would exist independent of any mind.

### *Selflessness of Phenomena in Relation to the Establishment of Mindfulness of Phenomena*

The *Ārya Lalitavistara Sūtra* states (ŚS 13):

Composite phenomena are impermanent and unstable. They are subject to destruction, like an unbaked pot. They are like a borrowed article. Like a sandcastle, they do not last long. These composite phenomena are destructible . . . They are fragile, for they depend on cooperative conditions. Composite phenomena are like the diminishing flame of a lamp, for their nature is to quickly arise and pass away. Like the wind, they do not remain long. Like a bubble, they are fragile and devoid of an essence. Composite phenomena are unmoving and empty. When investigated, they are seen to be like a mound of plantain trees. Like an illusion, they delude the mind . . . All changes in composite phenomena are brought about by causes and conditions, with one acting as the cause for another, which arises in dependence on it.

By contemplating the selflessness of composites — conditioned things such as the body, feelings, and mind — we ascertain that the truly existent arising of any thing is impossible. In the *Treatise on the Middle Way*, Nāgārjuna asks: If there are no truly existent composites, how can there be truly existent uncompounded phenomena? If conditioned phenomena do not truly exist, neither can unconditioned phenomena, because the latter are posited in dependence on the former. For example, true cessation, an unconditioned

phenomena, is posited on the basis of a mind that is freed from all defilements. True cessation is a quality of this mind, and this mind is conditioned.

As a Mādhyamika, Śāntideva wishes to demonstrate emptiness as an attribute of all phenomena, so this section on the mindfulness of phenomena is a short summation of the previous arguments; it is not a presentation of the emptiness of mental objects. However, arguments similar to the ones that refute the inherent existence of the body, feelings, and mind can be applied to mental objects as well. Seeing that all phenomena exist only by name, we meditate on their emptiness.

### *The Benefits of the Four Establishments of Mindfulness*

The four establishments of mindfulness follow a particular sequence. Establishing mindfulness on the body is first because we ordinary beings think the body is the place where an independent I is located. Mindfulness of feelings follows because we ignorantly think feelings are what an independent self enjoys. Mindfulness of the mind is next because we erroneously believe the self is the mind that thinks and perceives. Or, put another way, we adhere to the false belief that the mind is an independent self. All the tenet systems below Prāsaṅgika Madhyamaka identify the mind, the continuity of mind, or one type of mind as the ultimate illustration of the self. Prāsaṅgikas, however, say the mere I — the person that is merely designated in dependence on the aggregates — is the illustration of the person. Mindfulness of phenomena follows because ordinary beings mistakenly believe our emotions and attitudes are what makes an independent self afflictive or worthwhile. In brief, on the basis of the body, feelings, mind, and phenomena, ignorance generates abundant misconceptions that keep us bound in saṃsāra.

In short, seeing the body as impure, we investigate its origins and see that it came from karma created by afflictions. Afflictions arose due to afflictive feelings. Tracing the origin of feelings leads us to investigate the nature of mind, and through this we see that the mind is neutral and its nature is pure. Having the wish for happiness, we seek a method to free the mind from the afflictions, which arise from feelings, which in turn keep us bound to this impure body. Investigating the method to attain happiness, we discern what to cultivate and what to abandon on the path. Through mindfulness and probing wisdom, we see that although the body, feelings, mind, and mental factors are the basis of

designation of the person, they are not the person. There is no independent person that is findable by analysis seeking the person's ultimate mode of existence. The I is empty of inherent existence. Continuous meditation on this cuts the ignorance that is the root of saṃsāra.

When meditating on the body, feelings, mind, and phenomena, it is important to observe your own experiences. Don't think about these topics intellectually or abstractly, but examine your body and see its impurity. Observe your feelings and experience for yourself their suffering nature. Focusing on your mind, recognize its momentariness and determine that the mind is not you.

The four establishments of mindfulness help us to understand our daily life experiences. For example, when people fall ill or suffer from aging, many of them are caught by surprise and think these experiences should not happen. Their mind rejects these events, thinking that they happen only to other people. Through mindfulness of the body, we discover that the body is unclean, impermanent, and duḥkha by nature. We also understand that the mind arises and changes dependent on causes and conditions. Being dependent on these factors, the mind lacks independent existence. Understanding this enables us to accept the reality of illness, aging, and death because they are simply the nature of the body.

The purpose of meditating on the four establishments of mindfulness is to discern what to practice and what to abandon and then to train our body, speech, and mind accordingly so that we can free ourselves from saṃsāra. By countering the four distorted conceptions, the four establishments of mindfulness deepen our understanding of the four truths. In addition, these meditations make the aspiration for liberation arise within us, show us the way to liberation, and generate within us the wisdom that leads to that goal.

Mindfulness of the body examines the nature of this body and sees that it is composed of tissue, organs, and bone, none of which are attractive. This body produces foul substances while alive and becomes an ugly corpse when it dies. Seeing this, we overcome the distorted conception of the body as clean and pure and gain a clear insight into the first truth, the truth of duḥkha, because we become well aware of the unsatisfactory nature of our body.

Through mindfulness of feelings, we observe the physical and mental feelings that we experience throughout the day. When the mind becomes involved in these feelings — craving pleasurable ones, desiring to be free from unpleasant ones, not wanting neutral feeling to change into suffering — we veer off balance.

Mindfulness of feelings overcomes the distorted conception that what is unsatisfactory in nature is pleasurable and brings awareness of the second truth, the truth of the origin of duḥkha, because we see clearly how ignorance and craving bring duḥkha.

When we try to point to where this I or self is, we usually identify our mind. Although the self does not exist in the mind, and the mind is not the self, from habit and misconception we identify the mind as the self. But when we carefully reflect on the nature of the mind, we understand that the mind is composed of many parts — the mind of the past, the mind of the future, and the mind of the present — and thus is not a unitary whole. By examining the present mind, we see its momentary nature: it continually changes in each nanosecond and depends on many factors, such as its causes. This leads to understanding that there is no permanent, unitary, and independent self based on this mind and eliminates the grasping at such a self. Thus mindfulness of the mind is associated with overcoming the distorted conception holding the impermanent as permanent. And by making evident the lack of a permanent, unitary, and independent self, mindfulness of the mind leads us to see the possibility of eradicating self-grasping ignorance and attaining the third truth, the truth of the cessation of duḥkha and its causes.

The practice of mindfulness of phenomena involves contemplating the fifty-three phenomena of the afflictive class associated with cyclic existence and the fifty-five phenomena of the pure class associated with the path to nirvāṇa. Reflecting on the specific and general characteristics of these two kinds of phenomena brings knowledge of how to traverse the stages of the path and understanding of the fourth truth, the true path. The essence of the true path is the realization of selflessness; thus mindfulness of phenomena destroys the distorted conception that what lacks a self has one and brings understanding that all phenomena are empty of true existence.

Since the four establishments of mindfulness eliminate the four distorted conceptions and bring understanding of the four truths, it is a comprehensive and profound practice. By practicing as explained above, our positive qualities will grow, and correct understanding will increase in power, so that liberation and awakening will become not only an aspiration but a reality. In *Differentiation of the Middle and the Extremes* (*Madhyāntavibhāga* 4:1), Maitreya concludes:

Because [the body] is unmanageable,  
because [feelings] are the cause of craving,  
because [the mind] is the ground,  
and because [the path] is not ignorant,  
one is led to realize the four truths [of āryas].  
Therefore, meditate on the establishments of mindfulness.

In short, mindfulness is a mental factor that is active in many types of meditation. Practices that rely heavily on mindfulness, such as the four establishments of mindfulness, are embedded in the structure of the Buddhist path to liberation as a branch of the thirty-seven harmonies with awakening. For their true purpose to be accomplished and maximum benefit derived, these mindfulness practices are done with refuge in the Three Jewels and the aspiration to attain liberation or full awakening.



## 14 | The Thirty-Seven Harmonies with Awakening

IN THE *Greater Discourse to Sakuludāyin* (MN 77), the ascetic Sakuludāyin stated that the Buddha’s disciples revere the Buddha because he lives in seclusion, eats little, is satisfied with whatever alms food he receives, is content with any robe he has, and with whatever place he sleeps — even in a cemetery. The Buddha replied that if this were the criteria for his disciples’ respect, then they would venerate those who are more ascetic than he. Rather, they respect him because he teaches the four establishments of mindfulness, four supreme strivings, four bases of spiritual power, five faculties, five powers, seven awakening factors, and the āryas’ eightfold path — that is, the thirty-seven harmonies.

In the sūtra *What Do You Think about Me?* (MN 103), the Buddha’s disciples proclaim that they treasure him not because he teaches the Dharma for the sake of receiving offerings, but because he seeks their welfare and teaches the Dharma with compassion. What is that Dharma? The four establishments of mindfulness, four supreme strivings, four bases of spiritual power, five faculties, five powers, seven awakening factors, and the eightfold path — that is, the thirty-seven harmonies.

In the *Connected Discourses on the Unconditioned* (SN 43.5–11), the Buddha asked, “What is the path leading to the unconditioned — to nibbāna?” Here, too, he listed each of the thirty-seven harmonies individually. Clearly these are the essence of his teaching that he wishes his followers to study, reflect on, and meditate on so that they will attain the lasting peace of nirvāṇa.

The thirty-seven harmonies are called “harmonies with awakening” because they are requisites for the attainment of awakening and are conducive to awakening. In the Pāli tradition “awakening” in this context refers to the four supramundane paths and the fruits of stream-enterers and so forth. In the Sanskrit tradition, it refers to the final goal of any of the three vehicles — arhatship or buddhahood. In both traditions, some of the thirty-seven are supramundane paths, others are not.

We covered the four establishments of mindfulness in the preceding chapter and will now continue with the other six sets. The English translations of the Sanskrit and Pāli sūtra passages listing these sets are very similar, so sometimes we will reference the Pāli passage and at other times the Sanskrit passage. When the explanations in the two traditions are similar, they are interwoven; when there are differences they are explained separately. None of the differences contradict meanings found in the other tradition.

## *The Four Supreme Strivings*

Meditation on the fourth establishment of mindfulness — the mindfulness of phenomena — inspires us to develop positive qualities and remove disturbing emotions. The four supreme strivings (*samyak pradhāna, sammāpadhāna*) are the way to do this.<sup>125</sup> The *Sūtra on the Ten Grounds* says (STG 54.62):

The four supreme strivings are like this: (1) To prevent the arising of nonvirtues that have not yet arisen, he generates aspiration, makes effort, arouses energy, holds the mind firmly, and steadfastly places the mind. (2) To abandon the nonvirtues that have arisen he generates aspiration . . . (3) To generate virtues that have not yet arisen, he generates aspiration . . . (4) To maintain and enhance virtues that have arisen, he generates aspiration, makes effort, arouses energy, holds the mind firmly, and steadfastly places the mind.

The first two supreme strivings are practiced with respect to afflictions and destructive actions — to eliminate those already manifest and avoid generating new ones in the future. The latter two are practiced in relation to positive qualities — strengthening and expanding those already cultivated and cultivating new ones that have yet to be cultivated. These four supreme strivings are called “forms of effort”; they are “supreme” because, combined with the bodhicitta motivation, they will lead to full awakening.

The sutra instructs us to practice by generating aspiration, making effort, arousing energy, holding the mind firmly, and steadfastly placing the mind. That



particular sequence is because the four supreme strivings are meditation practices to enhance serenity and insight.

With *aspiration*, we engage in the meditative practices of the four supreme strivings. *Making effort* is the remedy to the imbalance of serenity and insight. This is accomplished by means of the three: serenity, holding the mind firmly, and equanimity. During meditation, if insight is more powerful than serenity, the mind is not in balance and is compared to a lamp in the wind. When the lamp of serenity isn't stable, suchness cannot be firmly held in mind. Strengthening serenity is the remedy. But at other times serenity is strong while insight is weak; although the mind is stable, ultimate reality cannot be discerned clearly. *Holding the mind firmly* remedies this. When serenity and insight are in balance, the mind remains in equanimity.

*Arousing energy* means to eliminate laxity and restlessness, two faults impeding serenity. *Holding the mind firmly* remedies laxity. When laxity arises in the mind, the mind is drawn inside and the intensity of the clarity is lacking. Applying antidotes to uplift the mind — such as visualizing light or reflecting on precious human life — counteracts laxity. *Steadfastly placing the mind* is the remedy to restlessness. To settle the mind, apply antidotes that make the mind more sober, such as contemplating death and impermanence.

### *The Four Supreme Strivings in the Pāli Tradition*

The four supreme strivings are spoken of in the *Connected Discourses on the Supreme Strivings* (SN 49). In practicing each of the four, after generating the aspiration, a practitioner makes effort, arouses energy, applies his mind, and strives, all of which describe different ways to apply effort.

1. A practitioner arouses the aspiration and applies effort to *prevent or restrain afflictions and nonvirtuous mental states from arising*. To do this, we must restrain the senses and the mind. For example, restraining our eyes from looking at all the ads on our digital devices will prevent greed and attachment from arising. Restraining our mind from mulling over others' faults impedes malice from consuming the mind.

2. A practitioner arouses the aspiration and makes effort to *abandon or overcome nonvirtuous states that have already arisen*. If we experience jealousy, for instance, instead of tolerating it, we overcome it by rejoicing in others' virtues.

3. A practitioner generates the aspiration and makes effort to *bring into being virtuous states that haven't yet arisen*. Here we make effort to cultivate any and all virtuous practices of studying, thinking, and meditating, and specifically to cultivate the four establishments of mindfulness and the seven awakening factors. When our mind lacks familiarity with these qualities, we make effort to practice them.

4. A practitioner generates the aspiration and arouses effort to *maintain virtuous states that have arisen — to strengthen and enhance them and to prevent them from degenerating*. Doing this enables us to protect virtuous mental states and bring them to full maturity. Specifically, it refers to sustaining favorable meditation objects so that full samādhi can be attained.

With these four supreme strivings, a practitioner is said to “slant, slope, and incline toward nibbāna.” The aspiration mentioned above is a virtuous desire or wish. Striving is synonymous with effort (*vīrya, viriya*), and with it the mind is able to abandon nonvirtuous states such as attachment, anger, and confusion, whether they have already arisen or have the potential to arise. Supreme striving leads to the cultivation of the virtuous mental states of nonattachment, nonanger, and nonconfusion.

Striving is the mental factor that leads to the abandonment of the floods,<sup>126</sup> the underlying tendencies, the various types of craving, and the higher fetters of attachment to the form and formless states, conceit, restlessness, and ignorance. In its fully developed form, striving is the path factor of effort in the supramundane path.<sup>127</sup>

## REFLECTION

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1. Consider that a nonvirtuous thought or action that hasn't yet arisen could arise in your mind. Imagine how generating aspiration, making effort, arousing energy, holding your mind firmly, and steadfastly placing the mind could prevent this.
2. Make an example of a nonvirtue that has arisen and generate aspiration, make effort, arouse energy, hold your mind firmly, and steadfastly place the mind to subdue that thought.
3. Think of a virtuous quality you would like to have and apply the above steps to generate it.
4. Think of a virtuous quality you already have and apply the above steps to enhance it.

5. Feel that you now have new tools to apply to help you become the kind of person you would like to be.
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## *The Four Bases of Spiritual Power*

The Sanskrit *ṛddhipāda* and the Pāli *iddhipāda* can be translated as “bases of spiritual power” or “legs of magical feats.” *Ṛddhi* (*iddhi*) refers to supernormal powers that are gained through mental development, specifically deep concentration. The worldly supernormal powers include making manifestations of one’s body, flying in the air, walking on water, passing through walls or mountains, going under the earth, becoming invisible and then visible again, and so forth. The Buddha said the highest supernormal power is unpolluted liberation of the mind, *nirvāṇa*.

The *Ornament of Sūtras* (*Mahāyāna Sūtrālamkāra*) discusses the four bases of spiritual power in detail, saying that their purpose is to generate numerous emanations by which the meditator can travel to various buddha fields. *Pāda* literally means foot, thus the common Tibetan translation for *ṛddhipāda* is legs of magical emanations. Just as our legs take us places, with the four concentrations we can emanate many bodies and go to many buddha lands to hear teachings from and make offerings to a multitude of buddhas.

By extension, *pāda* can mean basis or foundation. Just as the body rests on the feet, spiritual powers — both miraculous feats and the ultimate spiritual power of liberation — rest on these four.

The *Sūtra on the Ten Grounds* says (MMAB 51):

The four bases of spiritual power are like this: (1) The basis of spiritual power of *aspiration* combined with concentration, and the application [of antidotes] that abandon [faults], abides in isolation, abides in detachment, abides in cessation, and is meditation directed toward thorough complete abandonment. (2) Similarly, the basis of spiritual power of *effort* . . . (3) Similarly, the basis of spiritual power of *intention* . . . (4) Similarly, the basis of spiritual power of *investigation* combined with concentration [and] zeal,

abiding in isolation, abiding in detachment, abiding in cessation,  
and directed toward thorough complete abandonment.

*The application [of antidotes] that abandon [faults]* refers to overcoming the five hindrances and five faults that interfere with serenity. *Abides in isolation* can refer to the physical isolation of living in a remote place distant from worldly distractions, or to the mental isolation of being separated from conceptual chatter. *Abides in detachment* is being content with little and having few needs and wants. *Abides in cessation* means ceasing distractions as well as ceasing the three poisons.

The four establishments of mindfulness are the mental factor of mindfulness with the presence of wisdom, the four supreme strivings are the mental factor of effort, and the four bases of spiritual power are concentrations. With the four supreme strivings, practitioners make effort to reduce and eliminate afflictions and destructive actions and to strengthen positive qualities. By refining their serenity they attain a concentration in which the mind is serviceable. The four bases of spiritual power are exalted knowers of someone who has entered the path and are concentrations attained by applying zeal so that the eight antidotes overcome the five faults, as in the explanation of attaining serenity. The five faults, eight antidotes, and nine stages of sustained attention are usually taught at this point.

The four bases of spiritual power are concentrations (*samādhi*) — the concentrations of aspiration, effort, intention, and investigation. They are not the mental factors of aspiration, and so forth, but are concentrations concomitant with them. Aspiration, effort, intention, and investigation are the means to refine concentration in order to develop spiritual powers, such as the first five superknowledges. Practitioners who train in these four concentrations develop special powers to emanate and transform themselves and other objects; they can make their bodies very large, emanate several bodies, transform an ugly place into a beautiful one, and so on.

The four are practiced sequentially when training to make manifestations. First one has the aspiration to make a manifestation. This arouses the effort to do so. This leads to the intention that draws the mind to the object, and then to investigation of the instructions. All four of these powerful concentrations are present when a manifestation is being made.

1. The base of spiritual power of *aspiration* (*chanda*) is those qualities primarily associated with concentration that are achieved through intense aspiration to cultivate virtue and the effort of rigorous application.

2. The base of spiritual power of *effort* (*vīrya*, *virīya*) is those qualities primarily associated with concentration that are achieved through the effort of consistent application. This application is smooth, peaceful, and continuous, not aggressive, laborious, or tiring.

In general, virtuous antidotes may be applied in two ways. With rigorous application, we practice energetically but not consistently. With consistent application, we practice steadily but lack rigor and intensity. For our meditation to bear the best results, both rigorous and consistent effort to apply antidotes and cultivate virtuous qualities are needed.

3. The base of spiritual power of *intention* (*citta*) is those qualities primarily associated with concentration that are achieved through familiarization and having previously practiced concentration. Someone may have miraculous powers although she has not engaged in extensive cultivation of concentration in this life. These powers are the ripening of latencies on her mindstream from having previously developed concentration in previous lives.

4. The base of spiritual power of *investigation* (*mīmāṃsā*, *vīmaṃsā*) is those qualities primarily associated with concentration that are achieved through discriminating investigation shared by others. That is, someone teaches a practitioner how to do a meditation practice. She examines these instructions, practices them, and gains single-pointed concentration.

Two factors contribute to each spiritual power. One is the factor unique to each — aspiration, effort, intention, or investigation. The other is the concentration and zeal necessary to develop the concentration that becomes a basis for spiritual power.

One way of speaking about the four bases of spiritual power is in terms of eliminating the five faults that impede serenity. Through aspiration, we develop confidence and devotion to the practice, which counteracts the first fault, laziness. Effort enables us to retain the instructions and remember the object of meditation, eliminating the fault of forgetting the object and the instructions. Intention opposes the faults of restlessness and laxity by promoting the application of their antidotes and dispelling the fault of neglecting to apply them.

Investigation is alert and dispels the fault of applying an antidote when one isn't needed.

### *The Four Bases of Spiritual Power: Pāli Tradition*

These are explained in the *Connected Discourses on the Bases for Spiritual Power* (SN 51):

Monastics, these four bases for spiritual power, when developed and cultivated, lead to going beyond from the near shore to the far shore. What four? Here monastics, a monastic develops the basis for spiritual power that possesses concentration due to (1) *aspiration* and the volitional formations of striving, thinking, “Thus my aspiration will be neither too slack nor too tense; and it will be neither constricted internally nor distracted externally.” And he dwells perceiving after and before: “As before, so after; as after, so before; as below, so above; as above, so below; as by day, so at night; as at night, so by day.” Thus with a mind that is open and unenveloped, he develops the mind imbued with luminosity. He develops the basis for spiritual power that possesses concentration due to (2) *effort* . . . , (3) *mind* or *intention* . . . , and (4) *investigation* . . .

The four bases for spiritual power are explained:

1. *Aspiration* or desire is a deep desire or wish to attain spiritual powers. It fuels a practitioner's efforts to attain samādhi.
2. Through emphasizing *effort*, a practitioner cultivates the concentration that leads to spiritual powers.
3. Another practitioner may emphasize calming his *mind*, making it tranquil, pure, and radiant. This gentle but firm approach brings clarity of mind, and through this one gains the concentration that is a basis for spiritual attainments.
4. *Investigation* examines the mind and what factors promote and hinder its development. Alternatively, fueled by a wish to analyze and realize the nature of reality, a practitioner strives to attain concentration.

Using the example of the first base for spiritual power, in the sūtra passage above, “aspiration that is too slack” is aspiration associated with lassitude and “aspiration that is too tense” is aspiration associated with restlessness. “Aspiration that is constricted internally” is aspiration accompanied by lethargy and sleepiness, and “aspiration that is distracted externally” is repeatedly disturbed by sensual desire. “Perceiving after and before” has several meanings, one of them being the ability to focus continuously on the meditation object during the entire meditation session. “Perceiving below and above” refers to reviewing all the parts of the body from the soles of the feet to the tips of the hair on the head and back down again. “Dwelling by day and night” means that the practitioner develops the aspiration base of spiritual power by striving in a similar way in both the daytime and the night. “Developing the mind imbued with luminosity” means that when the practitioner sits on a terrace and pays attention to the perception of light alternating between eyes open and eyes closed, the light appears to be the same.

Having cultivated the four bases of spiritual power, a practitioner attains the five superknowledges. Once concentration is attained by means of aspiration, effort, mind, or investigation together with the volitional formations of striving, it can be combined with wisdom and used to attain the sixth superknowledge, the destruction of pollutants. Then the practitioner can abide in the liberation of mind and liberation by wisdom.

Aspiration, effort, a receptive and clear mind, and investigation are useful traits in our daily life as well. They facilitate our ability to attain the goals we seek. When these goals are spiritual, the four support the concentration that has the power to plummet the depth of the truth and bring liberation.

### *The Five Faculties and Five Powers*

These five qualities — faith, effort, mindfulness, concentration, and wisdom — are essential to gain all Mahāyāna virtuous qualities. The five faculties (*indriya*) have strong influence to oppose their opposites — indecision, laziness, forgetfulness, distraction, and ignorance. The five powers (*bala*) are the same mental factors that cannot be shaken by their opposites and are empowered with respect to their object, the four truths. They are paths that have great power to

produce their effects, the ārya paths. All five may simultaneously accompany a single primary consciousness.

Regarding the five faculties, the *Sūtra on the Ten Grounds* says (MMAB 51):

The five faculties are like this: (1) The faculty of faith abides in isolation, abides in detachment, abides in cessation, and is meditation that is meditation directed toward thorough complete abandonment. (2) Similarly, the faculty of joyous effort . . . (3) Similarly, the faculty of mindfulness . . . (4) Similarly, the faculty of concentration . . . (5) Similarly, the faculty of wisdom faith abides in isolation, abides in detachment, abides in cessation, and is meditation directed toward thorough complete abandonment.

1. Here *faith* refers to convictional faith, which has confidence and trust in the path of practice and the resultant liberation or full awakening. This faith arises from investigation, so it is naturally combined with wisdom and has conviction in the four truths. It also includes faith based on accepting scriptural quotations describing very obscure phenomena. This is not blind acceptance but is based on analyzing the reliability of a scripture's content.<sup>128</sup> Faith is a basis for all virtuous qualities. With it the mind is joyful, inspired, and enthusiastic.

According to their mental capacity, people generate faith by different means. Those of sharp faculties generate faith in the four truths, for example, through reasoning, investigation, and analysis. Those of modest capacities have faith in them because the Buddha or someone whom they respect explained them. A person may start out accepting a teaching due to her respect for the Buddha; but after hearing more teachings and being encouraged to investigate their meaning, she will develop confidence based on examination and understanding.

2. *Effort* enables us to quickly realize the four truths and takes delight in overcoming true duḥkha and true origins and in actualizing true cessation and true paths. Effort may also be enthusiasm to practice the six perfections. Like faith, effort is essential for the cultivation of virtuous qualities.

3. *Mindfulness* ensures that we do not forget the objects and aspects of the four truths. For Mahāyāna practitioners, it is conjoined with bodhicitta that seeks others' welfare.



4. On the basis of mindfulness, single-pointed *concentration* focused on the four truths is attained. In particular, this concentration focuses on the emptiness of true existence of all phenomena.

5. The faculty of *wisdom* is a single-pointed mind that realizes the four truths. From concentration comes the penetrative wisdom that individually discriminates the features and qualities of the four truths as well as their ultimate mode of existence. Bodhisattvas cultivate the wisdom that realizes all aspects of all phenomena — both their conventional and ultimate modes of existence.

The *Sūtra on the Ten Grounds* says (MMAB 51):

The five powers are like this: (1) The power of faith abides in isolation, abides in detachment, abides in cessation, and is meditation directed toward thorough complete abandonment. (2) Similarly, the power of joyous effort . . . (3) Similarly, the power of mindfulness . . . (4) Similarly, the power of concentration . . . (5) Similarly, the faculty of wisdom faith abides in isolation, abides in detachment, abides in cessation, and is meditation directed toward thorough complete abandonment.

The five faculties and the five powers have the same names and the same objects — the four truths — but the five powers are the stronger and fuller development of the five faculties. With the five faculties practitioners are unable to stop the discordant factors — nonfaith, laziness, forgetfulness, distraction, and ignorance or faulty wisdom — that may occasionally arise. However, with the five powers they have gained mastery over these five so that they can no longer manifest. The five powers are able to override, though not yet fully abandon, any opposing factors. The power of faith has conquered the lack of faith in the four truths, the power of effort has overcome the three types of laziness that interrupt meditation on them, the power of mindfulness has counteracted forgetfulness of the aspects and objects of the four truths, the power of concentration has eliminated the five hindrances to concentration on the four truths, and wisdom has destroyed all misunderstandings and wrong conceptions about them.

According to the *Compendium of Knowledge*, the five faculties and five powers are also distinguished by the path in which they are foremost. The five faculties are emphasized during the first two stages of the path of preparation — heat and peak. Here the five discordant factors — nonfaith and so forth — do

not arise during meditative equipoise but may manifest during subsequent attainment. The five powers are developed primarily in the third and fourth stages of the path of preparation — fortitude and supreme dharma. Here the five discordant factors also cannot arise during subsequent attainment.

Nāgārjuna encourages us to practice the five faculties and five powers:<sup>129</sup>

With faith, effort, and mindfulness,  
concentration and wisdom — five in all,  
you must strive hard to reach the highest state:  
as powers, these faculties take you to the peak.

### *The Five Faculties and Five Powers: Pāli Tradition*

The five faculties are explained in the *Connected Discourses on the Faculties* (SN 48) and the five powers in the *Connected Discourses on the Powers* (SN 50). The five faculties may be present in both ordinary beings and in those on a supramundane path. The wisdom faculty comprises both insight knowledge that knows the arising and passing away of things and path knowledge that directly experiences nirvāṇa. The knowledge of phenomena as impermanent, duḥkha in nature, and without a self is preliminary to the supramundane path. Path knowledge is the supramundane path. The five faculties and five powers reach fulfillment in nirvāṇa. Their explanations are similar to those in the Sanskrit tradition. In brief:

1. Faith has trust in the Three Jewels. The faculty of faith directs us to the path and keeps us on it even when we go through bouts of questioning, doubts, or strong afflictions.

2. Effort is an energetic mind. The faculty of effort combats and overpowers its opposites — laziness, heedlessness, unconscientiousness — and enables us to practice the four supreme strivings.

3. Mindfulness keeps us aware. As a faculty, in daily life it keeps us cognizant of what we are doing and remembers what to practice and abandon. In meditation, it remembers and focuses the mind on the object of meditation. In both situations, it prevents the mind from drifting away from what it should be paying attention to. It combats and overcomes forgetfulness, oblivion, and mental drifting.

4. Concentration keeps the mind focused one-pointedly on its chosen object and prevents distraction. As a faculty in serenity meditation, it keeps the mind one-pointedly on the meditation object; in insight meditation, it enables the mind to remain focused on whatever momentary phenomena in the body-mind complex it is examining without straying to other objects.

Mindfulness and concentration function in tandem yet can be differentiated. Mindfulness keeps the mind on what we are doing in daily life or on the meditation object by recollecting it. Concentration sustains the attention and unifies the mind so that it is one-pointed. Mindfulness counteracts forgetfulness, while concentration prevents distraction.

5. Wisdom correctly understands its object. As a faculty, it knows the three characteristics, correctly understands the four truths, and penetrates the unconditioned, nirvāṇa. It combats ignorance, confusion, and wrong views, and it examines, investigates, and analyzes conditioned phenomena to know their nature.

Although the five faculties are spoken of individually, in practice they function harmoniously together. They complement each other and cooperate to eliminate hindrances and obstacles, make the breakthrough<sup>130</sup> to the unconditioned, and attain nirvāṇa.

Since the five faculties influence one another, balancing them is important. Without balance, faith may become blind faith or devotion without understanding. Wisdom may slide into intellectual skill that has memorized texts and can debate well but lacks real feeling and receptivity toward the Buddha's message. When in balance, faith and wisdom bring realizations.

If effort and concentration are not balanced, effort may result in pushing ourselves, which makes the mind tense and stressed, whereas pseudoconcentration makes the mind too passive. We sit quietly and empty the mind, believing this is meditation when in fact we are not focused properly on a meditation object.

With mindfulness we can keep these two pairs properly balanced. Although the examples of imbalance above are coarse, imbalance may occur on more subtle levels as well.

These same five mental qualities become known as "powers" when they reach a degree of strength or power such that they cannot be dislodged by their opposites.

1. The power of faith cannot be overcome by doubt, skepticism, or disbelief.
2. The power of effort is not affected by laziness, procrastination, or discouragement.
3. The power of mindfulness cannot be harmed by forgetfulness.
4. The power of concentration is resistant to distraction and scattering.
5. The power of wisdom cannot be harmed by ignorance.

The five powers are developed in order to directly know and then abandon the five higher fetters — desire for existence in the form realm, desire for existence in the formless realm, conceit, restlessness, and ignorance. They also overlap with others of the thirty-seven harmonies with awakening (AN 5.15):

Where, monastics, can the power of faith be seen? In the four factors of stream-entry (unshakable faith in Buddha, Dharma, and Saṅgha, and perfect ethical conduct).

Where can the power of effort be seen? In the four right efforts.

Where can the power of mindfulness be seen? In the four establishments of mindfulness.

Where can the power of concentration be seen? In the four jhānas (dhyānas).

Where can the power of wisdom be seen? In the four truths.

The five faculties and five powers are wonderful companions along the path.

## REFLECTION

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1. Review the functions of each of the five faculties and powers.
  2. How can you generate and enhance them in your life?
  3. What will help you to overcome their opposites — doubt, laziness, forgetfulness, distraction, and ignorance?
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## *The Seven Awakening Factors*

Regarding the seven awakening factors (*bodhyaṅga, bojjhaṅga*), the *Sūtra on the Ten Grounds* says (MMAB 51):

The seven awakening factors are like this: (1) Correct mindfulness abides in isolation, abides in detachment, abides in cessation, and is meditation directed toward thorough complete abandonment. (2) Similarly, correct discrimination of phenomena . . . (3) Similarly, correct effort . . . (4) Similarly, correct joy . . . (5) Similarly, correct pliancy (tranquility) . . . (6) Similarly, correct concentration . . . (7) Similarly, correct equanimity abides in isolation, abides in detachment, abides in cessation, and is meditation directed toward thorough complete abandonment.

The adjective “correct” indicates that these seven qualities are no longer qualities of an ordinary being but have been transformed into ārya paths. “Factors” indicates that they are causes of awakening.

Many qualities, such as mindfulness, effort, concentration, and wisdom, are included in several of the seven sets comprising the thirty-seven harmonies. For example, mindfulness is an establishment of mindfulness, a faculty, a power, an awakening factor, and a path factor. These are the same mindfulness, but at different stages of development, capacity, and potency.

1. The *mindfulness* (*smṛti, sati*) awakening factor enables us to control the afflictions. With it the mind is thoroughly familiar with the four truths and can remain focused on them without being distracted by other objects.

2. The awakening factor of *discrimination of phenomena* (*dharmapracaya, dhamma vicaya*) directly realizes selflessness and thus destroys obscurations. It also clearly knows what to practice and what to abandon.

3. The *effort* (*vīrya, viriya*) awakening factor stabilizes renunciation, enabling us to attain awakening quickly.

4. The *joy* (*prīti, pīti*) awakening factor makes the mind continually happy, thus benefiting the body and mind.

5. The *pliancy* (*praśabdhi, passaddhi*) awakening factor removes all mental and physical discomfort and unserviceability and makes the body and mind

flexible, blissful, and capable of engaging in virtue. As an ārya's path, it is without affliction.

6. The *concentration* (*samādhi*) awakening factor abides single-pointedly on a chosen object of meditation, enabling us to fulfill all our wishes by developing awakened qualities. In an ārya's continuum, it is without affliction, and when combined with wisdom, it abandons afflictions.

7. The *equanimity* (*upekṣā, upekkhā*) awakening factor enables us to adopt what is to be practiced and avoid what is to be abandoned. It is the mental factor, not the feeling, of equanimity. As the opposite of the unbalanced mind of afflictions, it enables the mind to be free from restlessness, laxity, and over- and underapplication of the antidotes.

### *The Seven Awakening Factors: Pāli Tradition*

To give an example of how the seven awakening factors function as described in the *Mindfulness of Breathing Sutta* (MN 118): After describing the establishment of mindfulness on breathing, the Buddha shows that, when developed and cultivated, it fulfills the four establishments of mindfulness. He goes on to explain how the four establishments of mindfulness, when developed and cultivated, fulfill the seven awakening factors, and then how the seven awakening factors, when developed and cultivated, fulfill true knowledge and liberation.

The Buddha explains mindfulness of breathing in terms of sixteen aspects, which are organized into four groups of four. The four groups correspond to the four establishments of mindfulness.

Mindfulness of the body includes (1) breathing in and out long, (2) breathing in and out short, (3) experiencing the whole body, and (4) calming the body.

Mindfulness of feelings includes (1) joy, (2) bliss, (3) mental formations (feeling and discrimination), and (4) calming the mental formations.

Mindfulness of the mind includes (1) experiencing the mind, (2) gladdening the mind, (3) concentrating the mind, and (4) temporarily liberating the mind from hindrances.

Mindfulness of phenomena include (1) contemplating impermanence, (2) fading away, (3) cessation, and (4) relinquishment of the five hindrances by the seven awakening factors.

The first three groups apply mostly to the practice of concentration and serenity; the last group is the practice of insight. In this way, meditation on the sixteen aspects of breathing fulfills the four establishments of mindfulness.

In the *Four Establishments of Mindfulness Sutta* (DN 22), the Buddha spoke of mindfulness of breathing as only the first tetrad, making it one form of mindfulness of the body. In the *Mindfulness of Breathing Sutta*, he extended mindfulness of breathing to include all four establishments of mindfulness.

How can we be mindful of the breath and of the four aspects of feelings, mind, and phenomena at the same time? In practicing the latter three tetrads, the primary object of meditation is the feelings, mind, and phenomena, respectively. While contemplating the four aspects of each of these, the meditator maintains mindfulness of the breath in the background to stabilize the mind and make it tranquil and focused.

How does the cultivation of the four establishments of mindfulness fulfill the seven awakening factors? The Buddha explains:

1. When someone contemplates the body as a body, he arouses strong mindfulness, develops it, and brings it to fulfillment. This is the awakening factor of *mindfulness*.

2. Based on this, he investigates and examines bodily phenomena — such as the parts of his body — by means of the *discrimination of phenomena*, which is wisdom. For example, he discerns the various bodily phenomena and observes their impermanence. Through continuous practice, he develops and fulfills the awakening factor of the discrimination of phenomena.

3. Probing with discrimination boosts his *effort* because the discrimination brings understanding that inspires deeper practice. In this way, the awakening factor of *effort* becomes strong and is fulfilled.

4. Effort leads to the experience of *joy*, which floods the body from head to toe. This joy is exhilarating but needs to be channeled properly so that he doesn't become attached to it or become arrogant, thinking he is special because of experiencing joy. Because the ecstasy of joy can be agitating, it must be refined and brought to fulfillment.

5. This leads to *pliancy* or tranquility of body and mind, the fifth awakening factor.

6. As pliancy is developed and brought to fulfillment, bliss increases. Together bliss and pliancy enable the mind to settle on the object with more

stillness, deepening the awakening factor of *concentration*.

7. Now that concentration is firm, the meditator does not need strong effort to meditate and rests the mind in *equanimity*, the last awakening factor.

Up to this point, the invigorating factors of discrimination of phenomena, effort, and joy, which oppose lethargy and laxity, needed to be balanced with the calming factors of pliancy and concentration, which oppose restlessness. Mindfulness helps to balance these so the mind can remain in equanimity.

The meditator then practices mindfulness of the four aspects of feeling, mind, and phenomena while breathing. Progressing through the development and fulfillment of the seven awakening factors, he culminates each establishment of mindfulness by resting in equanimity in deep concentration.

How does he then employ the seven awakening factors to attain true knowledge (*vidyā, vijjā*) — clear and complete knowledge of the four truths — and liberation? The Buddha explains how these are attained (MN 118.42–43):

A monastic develops the mindfulness awakening factor, which is supported by seclusion, dispassion, and cessation, and ripens in relinquishment. He develops the discrimination of phenomena awakening factor . . . the effort awakening factor . . . the joy awakening factor . . . the pliancy awakening factor . . . the concentration awakening factor, and the equanimity awakening factor, which is supported by seclusion, dispassion, and cessation, and ripens in relinquishment. This is how the seven awakening factors, developed and cultivated, fulfill true knowledge and liberation.

Now each awakening factor is cultivated and supported by seclusion, dispassion, and cessation, and ripens in relinquishment. Seclusion (*viveka*) is a simple lifestyle and a peaceful mind free from the five hindrances. Dispassion (*virāga*) is the fading away of sensual desire. Cessation (*nirodha*) is the eradication of defilements, and relinquishment (*vossagga*) is the abandonment of pollutants and entrance into nirvāṇa. The seven awakening factors are supported by these qualities in that on the early stages of the path the meditator's goal is to attain nirvāṇa by practicing them, and on the supramundane paths nirvāṇa is the object of meditation.



The awakening factors have now been developed to the point where they will culminate in full, profound knowledge of the four truths and liberation of the mind from all defilements. Within equanimity, the meditator strengthens her discrimination of phenomena so that it becomes wisdom supported by single-pointed concentration. By investigating the nature of phenomena, especially the three characteristics, the meditator breaks through and perceives nirvāṇa.

Although the awakening factors reach prominence sequentially, they are present to some extent from the beginning of the practice. As each new awakening factor reaches prominence, the preceding ones are not necessarily relinquished. For example, mindfulness remains strong while all the other awakening factors are cultivated. In short, when the four establishments of mindfulness are practiced fully in the context of mindfulness of breathing, it leads to the development of the other six awakening factors. When all seven awakening factors have been properly cultivated and have completely matured, they culminate in the direct knowledge that brings liberation.

The seven awakening factors are so called because they lead to awakening, not because they constitute awakening or are present only in awakened beings (SN 46.5):

They lead to awakening, therefore they are called factors of awakening. Here, one develops the awakening factor of mindfulness [discrimination of phenomena, effort, joy, pliancy, concentration, equanimity] that is based upon seclusion, dispassion, and cessation, maturing in release.

When the seven are consummated and found together, one is awakened due to having penetrated the four truths.

## *The Āryas' Eightfold Path*

The āryas' eightfold path (*āryāṣṭāṅga mārga*, *ariya aṭṭhaṅgika magga*) consists of eight path factors. *The Sūtra on the Ten Grounds* says (MMAB 52):

The eightfold path is like this: (1) right view abides in isolation, abides in detachment, abides in cessation, and is meditation

directed toward thorough complete abandonment; (2) right intention . . . ; (3) right speech . . . ; (4) right action . . . ; (5) right livelihood . . . ; (6) right effort . . . ; (7) right mindfulness . . . ; (8) right concentration abides in isolation, abides in detachment, abides in cessation, and is meditation directed toward thorough complete abandonment.

Speaking of the eightfold path of āryas, Maitreya's *Differentiation of the Middle and the Extremes* says:

One that thoroughly realizes,  
one that makes you understand,  
the three factors [that] make others develop trust,  
as antidotes to those on the opposite side —  
these are the eight factors of the path.

This verse shows the eight path factors classified into four branches as they pertain to bodhisattvas.

1. *One that thoroughly realizes* refers to right view, which realizes in postmeditation time the correct understanding of the four truths that was realized in meditative equipoise. Right view is the *branch of affirmation* because it affirms the realization of emptiness that occurred during meditative equipoise.

2. *One that makes you understand* is right intention, the intention that wishes to correctly explain to others the view of selflessness we have realized in meditation. Right intention is the *branch of promoting understanding in others*.

3. *The three factors [that] make others develop trust* are right speech, action, and livelihood. *Right speech* is the speech that explains to others the right view we have realized. *Right action* refers to refraining from harmful physical deeds such as killing, stealing, and unwise and unkind sexual behavior. Right actions in these areas are pure and do not harm others or ourselves. *Right livelihood* is ways of procuring our requisites — food, shelter, clothing, and medicine — that are free from the five wrong livelihoods — hinting, flattery, bribery, coercion, and hypocrisy. These three are the *branch that develops trust and respect* in others' minds because others know our speech is truthful and kind, our actions are ethical, and our physical needs are modest.

4. *Antidotes to those on the opposite side* are right effort, mindfulness, and concentration. *Right effort* is making effort to develop the antidotes that eliminate the objects to be abandoned on the path of meditation. It overcomes unfavorable conditions, such as the innate afflictions, in order to advance to higher levels of the path. *Right mindfulness* does not forget the object of meditation and thus prevents and eliminates hindrances to single-pointedness, such as restlessness and laxity. *Right concentration* is the antidote to the obscuration to mental absorption — the unserviceability of the mind that hinders the development of concentration. By means of right concentration, we are able to cultivate the superknowledges and to focus on the meaning of the four truths single-pointedly. These three form the *branch of antidotes to the discordant class* because they overcome and purify obstructions.

As practices developed on the path of meditation, all eight path factors are exalted knowers (*jñāna*, T. *mkhyen pa*), which are mental qualities or paths. Although we sometimes say, “follow the path to awakening” as if “path” meant a series of steps, paths are realizing consciousnesses in the continuum of a practitioner. Because Prāsaṅgikas say physical and verbal actions can be form, they assert that right speech, action, and livelihood can be forms. For example, prātimokṣa precepts are ethical conduct and they are imperceptible forms.<sup>131</sup> According to those who do not accept prātimokṣa ethical restraints as imperceptible form, these three refer to knowers — mental states that intend to keep pure ethical conduct of speech, actions, and livelihood — not to the actual physical actions, speech, or means of procuring our livelihood themselves.

### *Integrating the Eightfold Path with Our Lives*

While the eightfold path is usually spoken of as a supramundane path, I appreciate the perspective of the Pāli tradition in which we begin to practice it now, as ordinary beings. In doing so, it will guide our lives until we actually enter the path.

1. A healthy and well-lived life is based on *right view*; we understand that our actions affect others and have an ethical dimension that influences what we ourselves will experience. Understanding virtuous and nonvirtuous actions and being able to discern the difference between them is essential. As practitioners, we avoid the extremes of indulgence in materialism and in asceticism. Holding the

Middle Way view, we keep our body healthy by eating and sleeping an appropriate amount of time but not more than is needed. Since our body is useful for Dharma practice, we must care for it wisely without pampering it.

2. *Right intention* is one of renunciation — a balanced mind free from attachment — love (benevolence), and compassion (nonharmfulness). Those on the bodhisattva path cultivate bodhicitta.

3. *Right livelihood* entails receiving the requisites for life in an ethical way, unpolluted by corruption. Considering the number of scandals reported in the news and the damage that people in the financial, manufacturing, and business sectors can inflict on many lives, the benefit of earning a living in an ethical manner cannot be understated.

For monastics who are dependent on others for their food, clothing, shelter, and medicine, practicing right livelihood is essential. This entails abandoning the five wrong livelihoods: (1) Hinting is not asking directly for something we need but dropping hints. “You gave me a warm jacket last year. It has been very useful, but now it is worn out.” (2) Flattery involves saying pleasant and sweet words to others with the intention of getting them to give us something. “You are an intelligent and generous disciple. Other teachers would like their students to be like you.” (3) Bribery is giving someone a small gift so that they will feel obliged to give us a big one. “Please enjoy this Dharma book that I’m giving you.” (4) Coercion is putting someone in a position where they cannot say no, or using our power to influence them to give us something. “All the other sponsors gave \$100. How much would you like to give?” (5) Hypocrisy is pretending to have qualities that we do not have. Usually we sleep late and lounge around, but when our benefactor comes to visit, we awake early and do pujas.

When we receive donations from people with faith in the Dharma, we must use them appropriately, not to go to the movies, purchase articles we do not need, or buy luxury items. The *Heap of Ethical Conduct Sūtra* (*Śīlaskandhikā*) says:

Monastics who have enjoyed donations out of faith, if [they use those donations for idle pleasures such as] watching elephant fights and so forth, it is wrong livelihood.

While elephant fighting is not the entertainment of choice nowadays, the point is valid: when we accept offerings given by those with faith, we have an obligation

to use them in a way that accords with their faith — for example, to sustain our lives and increase our wholesome qualities.

For lay practitioners, right livelihood means earning our living honestly, without deceiving or lying to clients, customers, or the public and without cheating others by overcharging, embezzling, exploitation, and so on. Doing work that contributes to killing or harming others is discouraged — for example, making weapons and insecticides, publishing or selling pornography, selling alcoholic beverages or recreational drugs, or writing unnecessary prescriptions for addictive drugs. Carelessly throwing pollutants into the environment and not maintaining proper safety standards for employees, while not specifically wrong livelihood, should be abandoned. Although wrong livelihood is not different from unwholesome physical and mental actions, the Buddha listed it separately to emphasize its importance.

4–5. On the basis of right livelihood, we then practice *right speech* and *right action*. This includes abandoning the seven unwholesome actions of body and speech and practicing the seven virtuous ones.

6. With *right effort*, we enthusiastically establish a daily meditation practice and study the Dharma.

7–8. Employing *right mindfulness* and *right concentration*, we develop our practice, contemplating and meditating on whatever Dharma topics we are studying. As time goes on, we will engage in critical analysis on the ultimate mode of existence — emptiness — using proper thought and reasoning. This brings us around once more to cultivating *right view* free from the extremes of absolutism and nihilism.

### *The Eightfold Path: Pāli Tradition*

In *The Great Forty Sutta* (MN 117), the Buddha discusses each of the eight path factors by first differentiating the wrong understanding of it to abandon from the right understanding of it to practice. Knowing this puts us on secure ground before even beginning to practice the eight.

Knowing the right path factor, we can then see its mundane (*loka*) and supramundane (*transcendental, lokottara, lokuttara*) aspects. The *mundane* aspect is together with the pollutants and exists in the mindstreams of those who have not attained any of the eight paths and fruits of stream-enterer, once-returner,

nonreturner, and arhat. The mundane aspect is meritorious and leads to fortunate rebirths, but not to liberation. These are the path factors that we ordinary beings practice in our daily lives.

The *supramundane* path factors exist in the mindstreams of the eight ārya Saṅgha. These are free from the pollutants and lead to liberation. Because the path is a gradual one, we first cultivate the mundane path factors. When they are mature and serenity and insight are strong, then the eight supramundane path factors all manifest together in an instant during a state of samādhi on the unconditioned, nirvāṇa.

### **Wrong View**

Wrong views are of many sorts: for example, believing that our actions have no ethical value, that our actions do not bring results, that there is no continuity of being and everything ends at the time of death, that other realms of rebirth do not exist, or that attaining liberation or full awakening are impossible because defilements inhere in the mind. Wrong view in this context is the same as the wrong views of the ten nonvirtues.

Many more wrong views exist; they are too numerous to list here. In fact, in our confusion, we human beings invent new ones in every generation. Nowadays, some people believe that killing their enemies brings a fortunate rebirth; that racial, ethnic, religious, and gender prejudices are based on correct cognizers; that ethical principles and societal laws do not apply to them; that human beings are inherently selfish so trying to become more compassionate is useless; and so on. When people use these views to validate their actions, great suffering ensues.

### **Right View**

What is right view? Knowledge of dukkha, knowledge of the origin of dukkha, knowledge of the cessation of dukkha, knowledge of the way leading to the cessation of dukkha.<sup>132</sup>

Right views are of two types: mundane and supramundane right views. *Mundane right views* are the opposite of the wrong views mentioned above. We believe that our actions have an ethical dimension and bring results, that there is a continuity of being after death, that caring for others has spiritual benefit, that holy beings

who have actualized the path exist, and so on. Mundane right view understands the functioning of the law of karma and its effects.

Mundane right views also understand what each of the other path factors are and are not. Without being able to differentiate right intention from wrong intention, right speech from wrong speech, and so on, we will not know what to practice and what to abandon, and our Dharma practice will be a mass of confusion. Hearing teachings, studying, and discussions with wise Dharma friends will help us arrive at the right view that is so essential to begin and continue on the Buddha's path. Although mundane right views are in the mindstreams of those affected by the pollutants, they lead to fortunate rebirths.

Mundane right views are also views concordant with the supramundane right view. These are the conceptual or intellectual right views of the four truths by someone who has not yet penetrated the four truths or had an experience of nirvāṇa. Conceptual understanding is important; it is what gets us going on the path. When cultivated diligently, it will lead to direct realization. However, being conceptual and lacking the deep experience of āryas, conceptual understanding is not stable. Because our wisdom is not fine-tuned, there is the chance that we will be swayed by another teacher or teaching. Thus it's important to continually reinforce our understanding of the right view of the four truths through study, discussion with serious Dharma students, and meditation.

*Supramundane right views* are the right views in the mind of one who has eliminated any or all of the pollutants and fetters. The supramundane right views are the direct penetration of the four truths as well as direct knowledge of nirvāṇa. They comprise the faculty of wisdom, the power of wisdom, the discrimination of phenomena awakening factor, and the path factor of right view in the mindstreams of āryas.

Supramundane paths penetrate the four truths and have nirvāṇa as their object.<sup>133</sup> Although stream-enterers have pollutants and fetters, they also possess supramundane consciousnesses when they experience the breakthrough that directly perceives nirvāṇa. The supramundane path factors are those present in a mind moment that is supramundane, a mind moment that perceives nirvāṇa. It is at that time that right view and the other seven become actual path factors. In short, supramundane consciousnesses are the path and the fruit consciousnesses of the four āryas, but not all the consciousnesses in their mindstreams are supramundane.

At the time of breakthrough to nirvāṇa — which occurs whenever āryas directly realize nirvāṇa, which is the object of their meditation — all eight path factors are present simultaneously in the mind. These are the supramundane eightfold path. At this time, right view is the wisdom seeing nirvāṇa. Right intention fixes the mind on nirvāṇa, directing the mind to and absorbing it in nirvāṇa. Right speech, right action, and right livelihood are the desisting from their opposites that occurs when the mind apprehends nirvāṇa. They are also the mental factors of nonattachment and so on that are now fully developed in the mind that experiences breakthrough to the truth. Right effort is the effort that penetrates the truth of the Dharma, right mindfulness attends to and is mindful of this truth, and right concentration is the unification of the mind in that experience. It is by the gradual strengthening of the eight factors of the mundane eightfold path that the supramundane eightfold path comes about in a momentary breakthrough to nirvāṇa that eradicates a portion of the afflictions.

Each of the eight mundane factors is meritorious and leads to a fortunate rebirth as well as good circumstances while we are born in saṃsāra. They lead to the end of duḥkha, but not directly because they lack the power to eradicate the defilements from their root. They lead to nirvāṇa by eventually becoming strong enough to give rise to the supramundane path factors.

### **Wrong Intention**

Wrong intentions are those of sensual desire, malice, and cruelty.

### **Right Intention**

What is right intention? Intention of renunciation, intention of nonmalice, intention of harmlessness.

*Mundane right intentions* are affected by attachment but nevertheless create merit. They include the intentions of renunciation, nonmalice, and compassion (noncruelty, *ahimsa*). Renunciation in this context is a balanced mind free from attachment to sense objects. Noncruelty is compassion and nonviolence, the principle that Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King used as the foundation of their actions and the social movements that sprung from them. I have great respect for all those people who compassionately work to improve the world



through nonviolent actions. With right intention, we live our daily lives and share our knowledge and realizations with others. Right intention also spurs us to have right speech, action, and livelihood.

*Supramundane right intention* is the “thinking, thought, intention, mental absorption, mental fixity, directing of mind, verbal formation in an ariya’s mind” (MN 117:14). “Thinking” and “thought” refer to investigation (*vitarka, vitakka*), which contributes to attaining meditative absorption by directing and fixing the mind on the meditation object.<sup>134</sup>

## Wrong Speech

Wrong speech is the four nonvirtues of speech: lying, divisive speech, harsh speech, and idle talk.

## Right Speech

What is right speech? Abstinence from false speech, abstinence from divisive speech, abstinence from harsh speech, abstinence from idle talk.

*Mundane right speech* is speech that is meritorious and abstains from the four types of wrong speech. This is the right speech of the ten virtues — speech that is truthful, harmonious, gentle, wise, kind, and appropriate. It is clear so that others understand our meaning, and it prevents discord, creates harmony, and is in accord with the Dharma. Right speech, action, and livelihood pertain to the higher training in ethical conduct.

Our speech is a powerful instrument with which we can create peace and harmony or conflict and pain. The Buddha mentions five points to be mindful of when we speak (MN 21:11):

1. Speak at the right time, when others are not occupied in another activity and have time to converse. For example, if we want to speak with a friend about their inappropriate behavior, we should speak privately, not in front of others where they will be embarrassed.
2. Speak what is true; do not spread rumors when you cannot verify the information. For example, when we have not asked someone what his

- motivation was for an action he did, we should not impute an intention that may be false.
3. Speak gently, choosing suitable words that express your intention. If we simply blurt out what we think or feel, accusing others of being the source of our unhappiness, hurt feelings and an argument are almost assured.
  4. Speak with a beneficial underlying purpose, not with the wish to cause harm.
  5. Speak with loving-kindness. Take a few moments — or a few minutes — to observe and calm your mind and generate a kind motivation before speaking.

Although we can improve how we speak to others, we cannot control how they speak to us. The Buddha advises us (MN 21:11):

There are these five courses of speech that others may use when they address you: their speech may be timely or untimely, true or untrue, gentle or harsh, connected with good or with harm, spoken with a mind of loving-kindness or with inner hate . . . you should train thus: “Our minds will remain unaffected, and we shall utter no nasty words; we shall abide with compassion for their welfare, with a mind of loving-kindness, without inner hate.”

Having restrained our minds from proliferating with hateful thoughts, we then generate loving-kindness for the person who spoke to us. We then spread our loving-kindness to all beings throughout the universe. Although it may not be easy, if we train our minds in this way day by day, our anger will subside and our responses will follow suit. In this way, we contribute to world peace, and over time we will notice that all of our relationships have improved.

In the midst of a difficult situation, figuring out what is right speech can be challenging, especially when there are many factors to consider. What we say may be true or false, beneficial or unbeneficial, and agreeable or disagreeable. With which combinations of these six qualities is it suitable to speak? The Buddha gives us some wise pointers by describing when the Tathāgata speaks (MN 58):

1. If the speech is false, not beneficial, and disagreeable, he does not utter it. What counts against this speech is that it is false and not beneficial.
2. If the speech is true, not beneficial, and disagreeable, he does not say it. Even though the words are true, because the speech has no benefit there is no reason to say it.
3. If the speech is true, beneficial, and disagreeable, the Buddha will say it at the appropriate time. The important factors are that it is true and beneficial. Sometimes to correct people who are stubborn or unruly, the Buddha had to speak to them sternly. For example, there was a group of six monks who were very naughty, and the Buddha had to say words that were unpleasant to their ears to help them. This is done for their long-term benefit and to protect the Dharma and Vinaya so that they will last a long time.
4. If the speech is false, not beneficial, and agreeable, it also should not be said. Flattery and nice stories may please someone's ego, but they have no value because they are false and lack benefit.
5. If the speech is true, not beneficial, and agreeable, it should not be spoken.
6. If the speech is true, beneficial, and agreeable, the Buddha will say it at the proper time.

In short, compassion and benefit are the yardstick by which to measure the value of our speech and all other actions as well. While our intention should always be benevolent, the words we use to express ourselves should be according to the listener's aptitude, personality, and culture.

Mundane right speech, action, and right livelihood are not unique to Buddhism. They are taught by all great spiritual leaders and all those who promote ethical behavior. Mundane right speech and right action are the seven virtuous actions of body and speech that are the opposite of the seven nonvirtuous ones.

*Supramundane right speech* is restraint from the four kinds of wrong speech in an ārya's mind.

## **Wrong Action**

Wrong action centers on killing sentient beings, stealing, and unwise or unkind sexual behavior.

## **Right Action**

What is right action? Abstinence from the destruction of life, abstinence from taking what is not given, and abstinence from unwise sexual behavior.

*Mundane right action* involves abandoning the three destructive physical actions — killing, stealing, and unwise sexual behavior and using our physical energy to preserve life, protect others' possessions, and preserve marital harmony. For lay practitioners, it entails using sexuality wisely and kindly; for monastics it involves celibacy.

*Supramundane right action* is the restraining and abandoning of the three wrong actions done by an ārya.

## **Wrong Livelihood**

Wrong livelihood for monastics includes scheming, flattering, hinting, belittling, and giving someone a small gift in the hope of receiving a larger one. For lay practitioners, it includes harmful ways of earning a living, such as manufacturing weapons or poisons; working in the armaments industry; killing livestock; operating a casino; or making, selling, or serving intoxicating substances. Wrong livelihood also includes lying to and cheating customers and clients, denying that your business practices adversely affect the environment, putting other people's investments at risk, false advertising, and so forth.

## **Right Livelihood**

What is right livelihood? Here an ariya disciple, having abandoned a wrong mode of livelihood, earns his living by a right livelihood.

*Mundane right livelihood* is avoiding all forms of wrong livelihood and earning our livelihood in nonharmful and honest ways. Lay practitioners should engage

in work that does not damage others and, if possible, seek work that contributes to the healthy functioning of society and the welfare of others.

Right livelihood is having a lifestyle free from the two extremes of asceticism and luxury. Of course, we can enjoy the basic necessities of life, but it is important not to have or use more than what we actually need. A sense of contentment is essential.

*Supramundane right livelihood* is the abandonment of all wrong livelihood by āryas.

An example of right speech, action, and livelihood functioning together is a teacher who instructs her students in a gentle way with the intention to benefit them. She sets a good example for them through her own nonharmful actions and truthful, kind speech. As a monastic, she is content and lives a simple lifestyle and speaks of others' good qualities, not advertising their faults.

Abandoning intoxicants is not included in the three ethical factors of right speech, action, and livelihood. However, if we are to cultivate these three mundane virtues, let alone their supramundane forms, abandoning intoxicants is essential. Why? Mindfulness is difficult to cultivate even when the mind is clear; how much more so when the mind is intoxicated and our ethical restraints are lax.

## **Right Effort**

What is right effort? Here a monastic generates desire for the nonarising of unarisen nonvirtuous states; he makes an effort, arouses energy, applies his mind, and strives. He generates desire for the abandoning of arisen nonvirtuous states . . . He generates desire for the arising of unarisen virtuous states . . . He generates desire for the maintenance of arisen virtuous states, for their nondecay, increase, expansion, and fulfillment by development; he makes an effort, arouses energy, applies his mind, and strives.

*Mundane right effort* is the four supreme strivings: effort to prevent the arising of nonvirtues, to abandon nonvirtues that have arisen, to cultivate new virtues, and to maintain and enhance virtues that are already present. With right effort we direct our energy away from harmful mental, verbal, and physical actions to the

development of beneficial thoughts, words, and deeds, and make every effort to live a nonviolent and compassionate life. Right effort enables us to abandon the five hindrances and attain all realizations. Through right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration, the higher training in concentration is accomplished.

*Supramundane right effort* is the effort present with the other path factors at the time of realizing nirvāṇa.

## **Right Mindfulness**

What is right mindfulness? Here a monastic dwells contemplating the body in the body, ardent, introspectively aware, mindful, having removed longing and displeasure for the world. She dwells contemplating feelings in feelings . . . She dwells contemplating mind in mind . . . She dwells contemplating phenomena in phenomena, ardent, introspectively aware, mindful, having removed longing and displeasure for the world.

*Mundane right mindfulness* is the four establishments of mindfulness. In daily life right mindfulness remembers our precepts and ethical values. In meditation right mindfulness attends to phenomena, enabling us to discern their distinct characteristics, relationships, and qualities. In a highly concentrated mind right mindfulness leads to insight and wisdom.

*Supramundane right mindfulness* is the mindfulness present with the other path factors at the time of realizing nirvāṇa.

## **Right Concentration**

What is right concentration? Herein, secluded from sense pleasures, secluded from nonvirtuous states, a monastic enters and dwells in the first jhāna, which is accompanied by investigation and analysis and filled with joy and bliss born of seclusion. Then with the subsiding of investigation and analysis, by gaining inner confidence and mental unification, he enters and dwells in the second jhāna, which is free from investigation and analysis but is filled with joy

and bliss born of concentration. With the fading of joy, he dwells in equanimity, mindful and clearly comprehending, and experiencing bliss with the body he enters and dwells in the third jhāna, of which the ariyas declare: “He is equanimous, mindful, one who dwells happily.” With the abandoning of pleasure and pain and with the previous disappearance of joy and displeasure, he enters and dwells in the fourth jhāna, which has neither-pleasure-nor-pain and purity of mindfulness due to equanimity.

*Mundane right concentration* is the four dhyānas. Concentration directed toward liberation investigates the nature of phenomena with mindfulness. For beginners on the path, right concentration involves gradually developing meditative abilities in our daily meditation practice.

*Supramundane right concentration* is the four dhyānas that are conjoined with wisdom and the other path factors at the time of perceiving nirvāṇa. The supramundane path is a right concentration. In it, all eight path factors are present simultaneously, each performing its own function. Right concentration leads to right knowledge and right liberation. Right knowledge is reviewing knowledge that reviews the experience of liberation. It is knowledge that the mind is fully liberated from the pollutants.

After explaining each of the eight factors, the Buddha describes how right view, right effort, and right mindfulness circle around each factor. Right view of each factor is necessary to ensure we understand it correctly, right effort invigorates and develops our practice of each factor, and right mindfulness practices each factor by focusing on it in a proper way. For example, for right speech, actions, and livelihood to be aspects of the mundane eightfold path, they must be accompanied by right view, undertaken with right effort, and sustained by right mindfulness.

## REFLECTION

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1. Review the wrong aspect of each path factor that is to be abandoned. Reflect if it is present in your mind and behavior. Make examples from your life.
2. Think of antidotes to help you release that attitude or behavior. Imagine practicing them in situations that you are likely to encounter.

3. Review the right mundane aspect of each path factor. Rejoice at times when that has arisen in you. Contemplate how to increase it in your life.
  4. Review the right supramundane aspect of each path factor. Imagine what it would be like to have that in your mindstream, as the way you naturally think and act. Aspire to cultivate the path factors and perfect them in this way.
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## *Relationships among the Thirty-Seven Harmonies with Awakening*

The seven sets that comprise the thirty-seven harmonies are intertwined. They are not separate qualities or practices that are to be cultivated on different occasions. Among the seven sets, the eightfold path is broader than the others because it specifically discusses ethical conduct while the other sets pertain more to cultivating concentration and wisdom.

The path factors of right view and right intention are associated with wisdom. At the beginning of our practice they help us to develop the Buddhist worldview by means of learning and thinking about the Dharma. This conceptual right view sets the stage for all the practices that follow. Right intention follows upon that, indicating that to practice properly an attitude of benevolence, renunciation, and nonharming is necessary as we live within the Buddhist worldview. At this early stage, right view and right intention are not at the level to be considered either the faculty or the power of wisdom.

The eightfold path is undertaken with faith and confidence. Gaining the right view increases our confidence in the Three Jewels. With the faculty of faith, we cultivate right intention and undertake the practices of right speech, right action, and right livelihood. The faculty of faith also inspires us to begin training our mind in earnest.

At this point the path factors of right effort and right mindfulness come in as effort is needed to practice mindfulness. This brings in the faculty of effort and the faculty of mindfulness. The faculty of effort involves the four supreme strivings, which influence how we practice all eight path factors. The faculty of effort links to the power of effort and the base of spiritual power that is concentration brought about through effort. Right mindfulness is the four



establishments of mindfulness, which link with the faculty of mindfulness, the power of mindfulness, and the mindfulness awakening factor.

This deep practice of effort and mindfulness leads to the awakening factors of joy and concentration, which are also the path factor of right concentration and the essence of the four bases for spiritual power. To the extent that effort, mindfulness, and concentration are unshakable by their opposites, they become the powers of effort, mindfulness, and concentration.

Once right concentration is stable, it is used to examine the nature of phenomena, the twelve links of dependent origination, the four truths, the five aggregates, the six sources, and so on. Here the awakening factor of discrimination of phenomena comes in as meditation is undertaken in order to see the three characteristics of impermanence, unsatisfactory nature, and no-self. The effort awakening factor and the power of effort enable wisdom to deepen. This leads to penetration of the four truths, which is the path factor of higher right view and the faculty of wisdom and the power of wisdom, which are supported by the other faculties and powers. Please contemplate the thirty-seven harmonies yourself and see other ways in which they are interrelated and complement one another. This will enable you to practice them in a seamless, appropriate, and noncontradictory way.

Many of the same mental factors appear repeatedly in the thirty-seven harmonies, emphasizing the vital role they play in the path to liberation. The fact that they are found in different contexts and sets illustrates not only the various situations in which they are needed but also how they progress and develop as a practitioner advances.

## **OCCURRENCES OF MENTAL FACTORS IN THE SEVEN SETS OF HARMONIES WITH AWAKENING**

MENTAL FACTOR	ESTABLISHMENTS OF MINDFULNESS	SUPREME STRIVINGS	BASES OF SPIRITUAL POWER	FACULTIES	POWERS	AWAKENING FACTORS	EIGHTFOLD PATH	TOTAL
Mindfulness	4			1	1	1	1	8
Effort		4	1	1	1	1	1	9
Concentration			4	1	1	1	1	8
Wisdom			1	1	1	1	1	5
Faith				1	1			2
Aspiration			1					1
Intention			1				1	2
Joy						1		1
Pliancy						1		1
Equanimity						1		1

### *The Thirty-Seven Harmonies and the Five Paths*

In general, a path is a consciousness that is conjoined with uncontrived renunciation of saṃsāra. When speaking of the Mahāyāna or bodhisattva path, it is a consciousness conjoined with both renunciation and bodhicitta. In other contexts we may speak of “practicing the path,” where “path” connotes a spiritual journey. But here, a path is a pristine wisdom, a consciousness with Dharma realizations.

The mantra in the *Heart Sūtra* — *tayata gate gate paragate parasamgate bodhi svaha* — outlines the five paths that lead to awakening. In terms of the Mahāyāna,

the first *gate* refers to the path of accumulation. This bodhisattva path begins when practitioners have stable, unfabricated bodhicitta. The second *gate* indicates the path of preparation. Bodhisattvas enter this path when they attain the union of serenity and insight on the emptiness of inherent existence. *Paragate* indicates the path of seeing, which commences when bodhisattvas first realize emptiness directly and nonconceptually. Here they abandon all acquired afflictions. *Parasamgate* refers to the path of meditation, on which bodhisattvas progressively eradicate innate afflictions as well as cognitive obscurations. *Bodhi* refers to the path of no-more-learning — that is, full awakening or buddhahood — when all obscurations whatsoever have been eradicated and all excellent qualities developed to their utmost. Excluding the path of no-more-learning, the first four learning paths can be correlated with the thirty-seven harmonies, the practice that results in the path of no-more-learning.

The *Treasury of Knowledge* by Vasubandhu and the *Compendium of Knowledge* by his brother Asaṅga present different ways of correlating the thirty-seven harmonies with the five paths. Before describing that, I would like to share with you a story about these two remarkable brothers, both of whom made great contributions to the Nālandā tradition.

Asaṅga was the elder brother. A follower of the Mahāyāna, he wrote many texts according to the Cittamātra viewpoint, although it was said that he himself actually held Madhyamaka tenets. His younger brother Vasubandhu was an advocate of the Vaibhāṣika tenets and was very critical of his brother following the Mahāyāna. Asaṅga spent twelve years meditating in the wilderness. Through developing incredible fortitude and compassion, he had a vision of Maitreya, who took him to the Tusita pure land and taught him five Mahāyāna treatises, which Asaṅga then brought to Earth. Commenting on his brother's retreat, Vasubandhu sarcastically said, "My brother Asaṅga was unsuccessful in accomplishing any spiritual realization during his twelve years of retreat. Instead, he left the cave with a huge stack of commentaries that even an elephant couldn't carry!"

Later on Vasubandhu read one of Asaṅga's texts, where he first learned about great compassion, bodhicitta, and the six perfections. This caused him to think, "Great compassion and bodhicitta are excellent, and the Mahāyāna is quite rich in Dharma." Previously he had thought there was little difference between buddhahood and arhatship, but in a later part of Asaṅga's text, he learned of the ten powers of the Buddha as well as the eighteen distinctive qualities of buddhas

from the Mahāyāna perspective. This made him reflect, “Not only are the causes — bodhicitta and the perfections — explained in the Mahāyāna so noble, but the result is wonderful as well. Buddhas have many more excellent qualities than arhats.” He then felt deep regret for the criticism he had heaped on his brother and on the Mahāyāna teachings. In despair, he thought to cut out his tongue with which he had uttered such calumny. But then a sign came that said, “Don’t do that. Cutting out your tongue is silly. You can use that same tongue to propagate the Mahāyāna teachings.” Inspired, Vasubandhu wrote many commentaries to Mahāyāna sūtras, such as *Twenty Stanzas (Viṃśatikā)* and *Thirty Stanzas (Trimśikā)*, both from the Cittamātrin viewpoint.

The following chart illustrates the ways Vasubandhu and Asaṅga correlated the thirty-seven harmonies with the five paths. It applies to practitioners of all three vehicles.

#### **CORRELATION OF THE THIRTY-SEVEN HARMONIES WITH THE FIVE PATHS.**

<b>PRACTICE</b>	<b>PATH ACCORDING TO VASUBANDHU'S TREASURY OF KNOWLEDGE</b>	<b>PATH ACCORDING TO ASAṄGA'S COMPENDIUM OF KNOWLEDGE</b>
Four establishments of mindfulness	Path of accumulation	Small stage of the path of accumulation
Four supreme strivings	Heat stage of the path of preparation	Medium stage of the path of accumulation
Four bases of spiritual power	Peak stage of the path of preparation	Great stage of the path of accumulation
Five faculties	Fortitude stage of the path of preparation	Heat and peak stages of the path of preparation
Five powers	Supreme dharma stage of the path of preparation	Fortitude and supreme dharma stages of the path of preparation
Seven awakening factors	Path of meditation	Path of seeing
Eightfold path	Path of seeing	Path of meditation

By cultivating the four establishments of mindfulness and reflecting on their specific and common characteristics, we will understand the four seals: (1) all conditioned phenomena are impermanent, (2) all polluted phenomena are in the nature of duḥkha, (3) all phenomena are empty and selfless, and (4) nirvāṇa is true peace.<sup>135</sup> Having understood these, especially that nirvāṇa is peace, we will want to engage in the practice to attain nirvāṇa. This leads to practicing the four supreme strivings, which are the nature of joyous effort. Through putting forth effort, we will develop concentration, which is the essence of the four bases of spiritual power. If we have not attained serenity prior to entering the path of accumulation, we do so at this point.

Then, on the path of preparation, we put special attention on the five faculties and five powers in order to overcome all unfavorable conditions and to continue our meditation with the union of serenity and insight on selflessness. Concentration and insight may be either mundane or supramundane. In Buddhism, they are done for a special purpose — to attain nirvāṇa. The seven awakening factors and the eightfold path are then cultivated to bring this about.

Here, these seven sets are spoken of as qualities cultivated by practitioners on the four paths of accumulation, preparation, seeing, and meditation, not with regard to someone who has yet to enter a path. Some sūtras explain the thirty-seven harmonies for those who have yet to enter a path, such as us ordinary beings. The eightfold path is especially effective for us because the eight path factors are subsumed in the essential practice of the three higher trainings: right view and right intention are included in the higher training in wisdom; right action, speech, and livelihood are related to the higher training in ethical conduct; and right mindfulness, concentration, and effort pertain to the higher training of concentration. This way of speaking of the eight gives us ordinary beings clear and easy-to-understand directions about how to practice the Dharma in daily life.

Correlating the seven sets with specific paths does not mean that practitioners on previous or future stages of the path do not practice them. For example, the four establishments of mindfulness are practiced before we enter a path and throughout the five paths. They become prominent and reach a certain stage of mastery on the path of accumulation, and for that reason are correlated with that path. The thirty-seven harmonies are correlated with the fourth bodhisattva ground, where bodhisattvas gain extraordinary expertise in the

wisdom of the coarse and subtle thirty-seven harmonies. However, these thirty-seven are also practiced on earlier and later stages of the path. In short, avoid understanding correlations as solid relationships. It is helpful to remember that categories are flexible and are designated by our conceptual minds.

## *Conventional and Ultimate Thirty-Seven Harmonies*

The thirty-seven harmonies with awakening must be understood and meditated on in terms of their conventional nature and ultimate nature. The conventional nature is as explained above; for example, in terms of the four establishments of mindfulness, we understand the body is unclean, feelings are unsatisfactory in nature, the mind is impermanent, and particular phenomena are to be practiced or abandoned on the path. Through examining their conventional nature, we understand the relationships among the thirty-seven factors, their functions in bringing about liberation, and their causes and results. Such investigation gives us an expansive understanding of their role on the path.

Meditating on their ultimate nature is seeing that they lack inherent existence. Maitreya in the first chapter of his *Ornament of Clear Realizations* speaks of this. Here the thirty-seven harmonies are seen as meditation objects, not as practices to cultivate, and with wisdom analyzing the ultimate nature, we investigate their deeper mode of being. Although they appear to have an inherent nature, when searched for, a fixed, independent nature cannot be found. They appear one way but exist in another. Reflecting on the emptiness of inherent existence of the meditations, realizations, and qualities we cultivate is extremely powerful because it prevents us from reifying the very paths that liberate us. In addition to meditating that the thirty-seven harmonies are empty of inherent existence, we reflect that likewise the I — the person cultivating them — and the awakening to which they lead lack inherent existence.

## *The Thirty-Seven Harmonies for Fundamental Vehicle and Mahāyāna Practitioners*

The terms “Fundamental Vehicle” and “Mahāyāna” can be used with respect to one’s tenet system or one’s spiritual goal. According to tenet system, Vaibhāṣika and Sautrāntika are Fundamental Vehicle systems and Cittamātra and Madhyamaka are Mahāyāna systems. According to spiritual aim, practitioners who seek liberation from saṃsāra and want to become arhats are Fundamental Vehicle practitioners — śrāvakas and solitary realizers. Practitioners seeking full awakening in order to benefit all beings are Mahāyāna and follow the bodhisattva path.

A Fundamental Vehicle practitioner may be a proponent of either a Fundamental Vehicle or Mahāyāna tenet system. Similarly, a Mahāyāna practitioner may be a proponent of either a Fundamental Vehicle or a Mahāyāna tenet system. For example, Joe aspires for full awakening and therefore is a Mahāyāna practitioner. But since he follows the Vaibhāṣika tenet system, he is Fundamental Vehicle by tenet. Mary aspires to become an arhat, but is Madhyamaka by tenet. The thirty-seven harmonies are practices common to Fundamental Vehicle practitioners — śrāvakas and solitary realizers — and to Mahāyāna practitioners — bodhisattvas. They are explained in both the Pāli and Sanskrit sūtras and commentaries. Although most Buddhist practitioners meditate on the thirty-seven harmonies, individuals may differ in terms of their motivation — whether they seek arhatship or buddhahood — and in terms of the tenet system and view of selflessness that they hold.

The thirty-seven harmonies easily blend into the lamrim, or stages of the path. The purpose of practicing the thirty-seven harmonies in the Pāli tradition is to realize with correct wisdom the three characteristics: impermanence, duḥkha, and no-self (selflessness). The lamrim teachings are geared toward generating these same three understandings, in addition to bodhicitta.

Dharmakīrti said, “From impermanence, duḥkha. From duḥkha, selflessness.” That is, first we understand impermanence — the constantly changing nature of our mind and body and of our self. We are transitory by nature because we are governed by a multiplicity of causes and conditions that will change. We know that even if we feel strong and vibrant now, later we’ll lose our strength. While many of the changes we undergo result from causes and conditions in the external environment, many more occur under the influence of our afflictions and karma. This state of being under the influence of these polluted conditions without a moment’s respite is duḥkha — unsatisfactory.

Investigating further, we find that our body and mind being both impermanent and the nature of duḥkha is due to their dependence on other factors. As saṃsāric beings, we are under the power of other factors. Since that is so, we cannot be independent beings that exist under our own power. This leads us to understand selflessness, the lack of inherent existence. We depend on causes and conditions, we depend on the parts that compose us, and we depend on being designated by terms and concepts. We are empty of any existence from our own side and are not self-enclosed independent entities.

By meditating on the mindfulness of the body, we understand what it means to be an embodied being, one who is involuntarily trapped within a body that is impermanent, unsatisfactory in nature, and composed of thirty-two substances that are disgusting when seen for what they are. In mindfulness of feelings, we see how reactive, and thus unfree, we are with respect to our feelings and experiences. These and other insights arising from the practices of the four establishments of mindfulness lead us to generate renunciation — the aspiration to be free from saṃsāra and attain liberation. By meditating on the four establishments of mindfulness regarding others, we understand that they are similarly trapped by afflictions and karma and, with a compassionate attitude, we want them to be free and are willing to act in order to bring this about. This great compassion is an indispensable cause of bodhicitta.

Meditation on the third characteristic, selflessness, in the context of the Prāsaṅgika Madhyamaka view of emptiness, involves seeing all phenomena — the thirty-seven harmonies, the four truths, all sentient beings, and so forth — as empty of existing from their own side and thus existing by mere designation. When combined with great compassion, this view of emptiness leads to the “compassion observing the unapprehendable” that Candrakīrti mentions in the homage in his *Supplement*. This compassion is so called because it is informed by an understanding of emptiness — here unapprehendable means emptiness. It demonstrates that we have compassion for sentient beings that are empty yet exist dependently.

The four supreme strivings relate to the practice of karma and its results as described in the lamrim texts. We can also practice these in terms of abiding in bodhisattva and tantric ethical codes as well. The four bases of spiritual power relate to the development of serenity and the dhyānas. These states of concentration can then be applied to gaining the superknowledges that Atiśa



praises in *Lamp of the Path* as essential for completing the collections of merit and wisdom and for compassionately working for the benefit of sentient beings.

The qualities mentioned in the five faculties, five powers, seven awakening factors, and eightfold path are applicable to all practitioners, whether they follow the Fundamental Vehicle, the general Mahāyāna, or the Tantrayāna.

The *Sūtra on the Ten Grounds* explains the ten aims of bodhisattvas' practice of the thirty-seven harmonies with awakening: to refrain from forsaking all beings; to be sustained by their original unshakable resolve; to make great compassion foremost; to perfect the great kindness; to reflect on and bear in mind the cognition of all-knowledge; to completely accomplish the adornment of buddha lands; to completely realize the Tathāgata's powers, fearlessnesses, unique qualities, signs, marks, and speech; to further their quest, to acquire the most special supreme path; to accord with what they have learned regarding the extremely profound liberation of the Buddha; and to reflect on greatly wise and good skillful means.<sup>136</sup> Contemplating the expansive and beneficial results of completing these thirty-seven practices inspires us to engage in them.

## *The Thirty-Seven Harmonies in Tibetan Buddhism*

The thirty-seven harmonies form the foundation practice for Buddhist practitioners of the three vehicles. Why, then, aren't they described in the lamrim texts on which Tibetan Buddhists base their practice? I (Chodron) asked His Holiness this, and his response clarified the role of lamrim studies, the philosophical studies done in the large monasteries, and Tantra: While the thirty-seven harmonies are not explicitly found in the lamrim texts, they are taught extensively in the *Pharchin* texts — the commentaries on Perfection of Wisdom sūtras — such as Maitreya's *Ornament of Clear Realizations*. Students also study them when learning Candrakīrti's *Supplement to the Middle Way* and Tsongkhapa's commentary on it, *Illuminating the Thought*.

The way one traverses the ten bodhisattva grounds in Tantra is slightly different than in Sūtra. One reason has to do with speed: due to Tantra's special way of combining wisdom and method, tantric practitioners can accumulate merit very rapidly once they enter the first of the five paths, making their progress through the ten bodhisattva grounds quicker. Another is that the paths, the main

practices done on them, and the demarcation lines between the paths differ in Sūtrayāna and Tantrayāna. This could be one reason why the practice of the thirty-seven harmonies, which is essential for a bodhisattva following Sūtrayāna, is not explained in depth for someone practicing lamrim as preparation for tantric practice.

However, this does not mean that a lamrim practitioner does not need to practice the thirty-seven harmonies. Tsongkhapa's presentations of lamrim, especially his *Great Treatise on the Stages of the Path* and his *Middling Lamrim*, seem to be directed especially at people who have already studied the Perfections and the Middle Way. These lamrim texts synthesize what those practitioners have already learned, which includes the thirty-seven harmonies. Tsongkhapa's direct disciples were great scholars and geshe, so it seems that he took it for granted that they already knew how to practice the thirty-seven harmonies. Since lamrim was given as a summary before entering Tantrayāna practice, such practitioners would already have cultivated the thirty-seven harmonies.

Such a qualified tantric practitioner must know the thirty-seven harmonies. In the visualization practice of the deity and the maṇḍala, specific correlations are made with the thirty-seven harmonies. For example, when speaking of the symbolism of Yamāntaka's body, the nine faces represent the nine scriptural categories, which set forth the teachings. The two horns symbolize the two truths — the illusion-like veiled truth and the space-like ultimate truth — which are to be understood and realized. The thirty-four arms plus the body, speech, and mind represent the thirty-seven harmonies with awakening, which are the path for comprehending the two truths. The four doors of Yamāntaka's maṇḍala represent the purification of the four establishments of mindfulness, the purification of the four supreme strivings, the purification of the four basis of spiritual power, and the purification of the five powers.

Furthermore, the primordial wisdom of great bliss is explained in relation to the thirty-seven harmonies, but with different designations. Its functions are similar to those of the thirty-seven harmonies. Therefore a tantric practitioner must have complete understanding of the thirty-seven harmonies in order to have the proper basis to visualize these aspects of the deity and the maṇḍala.

Another reason why we do not hear of many monastics in large Tibetan monastic universities meditating on the thirty-seven harmonies may be because, as explained above, the Perfection of Wisdom and Abhidharma texts present the

thirty-seven harmonies as practices accomplished on the five bodhisattva paths. The students may therefore think that these are advanced practices undertaken by practitioners on one of the paths and not by persons like themselves who have not yet entered a path.<sup>137</sup> I noticed in the Pāli texts that the thirty-seven harmonies are often taught for people who are yet to enter a path. This is very good. I think it is very helpful to practice the four establishments of mindfulness before entering a path and before entering the Tantrayāna.

Unfortunately, in the Tibetan community there is widespread belief that geshees consider lamrim as a “small” teaching because there is very little philosophy in it and therefore very little to debate. People also have the incorrect notion that only those geshees and lamas who are not so scholarly teach lamrim, and that when they do teach it, since it is a simple teaching, there is no need to incorporate material from the major Indian philosophical treatises.

This is a sign of degeneration. When Tsongkhapa gave oral transmission or teachings on lamrim, it is likely that he incorporated teachings clarifying intricacies of the great philosophical treatises. I received a copy of a lamrim text composed by one of the teachers of the Thirteenth Dalai Lama, a lama from Amdo named Shamar Gendun Tenzin (1852–1912).<sup>138</sup> After reading a note in the Thirteenth’s copy of the book, I concluded that if a teacher is scholarly and highly learned, when he teaches lamrim he will definitely incorporate subtleties of topics from all the major treatises and commentaries. On the other hand, some lamrim texts, such as that by Pabongka Rinpoche, are straightforward, with no complexities or sophistications. I think that neglecting to include material from the great treatises when one teaches lamrim is not a positive sign but an indicator of degeneration that reflects the teacher’s level of scholarship and learning.

Tsongkhapa spoke about Buddhists who are rich in study of the great texts yet impoverished regarding practice. Although he said this centuries ago, he is speaking to us today. This poor state of affairs occurs when we are unable to understand that what we study is actually practical meditation instruction. In the *Great Treatise*, Tsongkhapa even admitted that the number of people who really integrate what he has taught in that text into their practice will be very few. To benefit those who are unable to do that, he composed another, small text, the *Lines of Experience* (*Lam rim bsdus don*), which summarizes the important points so that people could easily apply them to their lives in a practical manner.

In the Tibetan community many people think of meditation or practice as doing tantric sādhanas. This, too, indicates serious degeneration. There are two types of monasteries: those where the monastics study the major Indian treatises and those called “tantric monasteries” where the monastics memorize and perform sādhanas and rituals. For example, the monks in Namgyal Monastery, which is traditionally considered a tantric monastery, memorize one thousand pages, but they do not necessarily understand the meaning. An old monk from Namgyal Monastery once told me, “We are meant to simply recite the texts, not to receive explanations on them.” It is very sad that he believed this. I have heard that some Chinese and Japanese Buddhists think similarly — that chanting without understanding or meditating on the meaning is sufficient to carry on the Buddhist tradition. They leave it to the academic scholars to study and understand the meaning. This is very unfortunate. In the last twenty or thirty years, we have made effort in the Tibetan community to improve this situation. Now the monks at Namgyal Monastery also study philosophy. The nuns’ education has also greatly improved, and they now study philosophy and dialectics. In December 2016 twenty Tibetan nuns received their geshe degree and many more will follow. Some lay followers are also studying the treatises and engage in debate.

Many people incorrectly believe that the Indian treatises and commentaries are for study, not meditation. For meditation they read short meditation manuals and base their practice on those. In fact, everything we study is material to be examined and practiced in our meditation sessions. If we only needed a few brief teachings for meditation, why did our Teacher, the Buddha, teach for forty-five years and give 84,000 teachings?

In the past, many Tibetans — both laypeople and monastics — developed certain bad habits due to lack of knowledge. This is unfortunate. We cannot consider these habits and views as part of the Tibetan Buddhist tradition or as something to preserve. We must change these things. That is why I emphasize to the Tibetans, Chinese, Japanese, and Koreans who attend my teachings that we are now in the twenty-first century, so we must be twenty-first century Buddhists who don’t depend on faith alone but have a reasoned understanding of the Buddhadharma. We must then put what we have learned into practice.

In brief, the traditional style of teaching lamrim has been to teach a lamrim text without incorporating information and practices described in the great

Indian treatises. Although some people think this is good, in fact it is a sign of degeneration and needs to be changed. We must bring what is taught in the 108 volumes of the Kangyur and the 225 volumes of the Tengyur into our daily practice. In this way, the thirty-seven harmonies explained in these scriptures will become part of our practice and not just something we study or think about meditating on once we are on the five paths.

For example, in the study of the Perfection of Wisdom sūtras, we learn the 173 aspects of the three knowers. Although these are qualities of the three awakened states — those of śrāvaka and solitary-realizer arhats and buddhas — and are beyond our comprehension, we can still imagine these qualities and train to develop them. Although they are qualities of awakened states, the 173 aspects of the three knowers must be applied and practiced in our daily life. This is very important.

Many years ago I was giving the oral transmission of the *Eight-Thousand-Line Perfection of Wisdom Sūtra* and the *Ornament of Clear Realizations* in South India. The ex-abbot Pema Gyaltzen attended, and I asked him some questions about the 173 aspects of the three knowers. This great scholar described how all of them could be incorporated into the practices of the twenty applications. I was struck by his precise, wonderful explanation, which I had not seen clearly in the treatises. Perhaps he had written it in his own commentaries on Madhyamaka or logic (*pramāṇa*). In any case, he gave me a different way to think about and practice these 173 in my life. My point is that we should explore whatever we study from numerous viewpoints, relate it to other aspects of the path, and apply it in our daily life.

We now conclude volume 4, which discussed taking refuge in the Three Jewels and, having done so, engaging in the three higher trainings, which are the primary practices leading to nirvāṇa. Although the three higher trainings are expressed in the order of ethical conduct, concentration, and wisdom, such that they sequentially build on one another, in fact they are interrelated. For example, living with ethical conduct is a natural expression of wisdom; someone with wisdom of the ultimate nature automatically respects the law of karma and its effects and the prātimokṣa ethical restraints, as the Buddha illustrated in the example of his life.

Teachings on the thirty-seven harmonies with awakening encapsulate and elaborate on the higher trainings. Ethical conduct, concentration, and wisdom

permeate the stages of the path and will appear many times as we study the stages of the path, as we will see in future volumes of the *Library of Wisdom and Compassion*.

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## Notes

1. This is similar to the uninterrupted path and liberated path spoken of in the Sanskrit tradition.
2. Another reference to the dhammakāya is found in the *Sutta on the Knowledge of Beginnings* (*Agganna Sutta*, DN 27:9). The monk Vāseṭṭha from the brahmin caste was reviled by other brahmins for having deserted his caste and mixing with those of lower castes when he ordained. Brahmins consider themselves to be the superior caste because according to their beliefs, the brahmin caste was born from Brahmā's mouth. Here the Buddha told his disciples how to describe themselves should brahmins ask:

He . . . can truly say: "I am a true offspring of the Blessed Lord, born of his mouth, born of Dhamma, created by Dhamma, an heir to Dhamma." Why is that? Because, Vāseṭṭha, this designates the Tathāgata: "The Dhamma body," that is the "body of Brahmā," or "Become Dhamma," that is, "Become Brahmā."

Here "Brahmā" means "the highest," indicating the Dhamma is the highest truth and the highest attainment.

3. The topic of the Twenty Saṅghas in the *Ornament of Clear Realizations* in the Sanskrit tradition lays out the various stages the eight āryas may pass through en route to arhatship.
4. This version is according to Pabongka Rinpoche.
5. Specifically, the cognitive obscuration spoken of here is āryas' unpolluted actions, which are the subtle motivation to engage in activities that benefit others. This unpolluted karma enables bodhisattvas to take rebirth according to their intention.
6. A buddha's pristine wisdom knowing the diversity and variety of conventionalities also directly knows emptiness, but within the division of a buddha's two pristine wisdoms — one of the ultimate nature, the other of the diversity of phenomena — it is said to be only the latter. A buddha's pristine wisdom knowing the ultimate nature of phenomena — their emptiness — also directly knows all conventionalities although it is called the pristine wisdom knowing the ultimate nature. In short, although both pristine wisdoms are omniscient and know all phenomena and their ultimate nature, they are posited in relation to their chief knowable object.
7. Individual self-knowledge is an ārya's experiential wisdom that directly knows its object — ultimate truth, subtle impermanence, or subtle conventionalities — by itself.
8. In other contexts, the word "deceptive" describes something appearing to be truly existent although it is not. This is not the meaning here.
9. There are many ways to speak of the Three Jewels. This is one way.
10. "Actual jewel" means it fits the definition of that particular jewel.
11. For more about the clear light mind, see chapters 12–14 in *Saṃsāra, Nirvāṇa, and Buddha Nature*, vol. 3 in the *Library of Wisdom and Compassion*.
12. For more about how to select qualified spiritual mentors and how to relate to our spiritual mentors, see chapters 4 and 5 of *The Foundation of Buddhist Practice*, vol. 2 in the *Library of Wisdom and Compassion*.
13. These are, for example, the female counterparts to the four Dhyāni Buddhas.
14. "Wheel of Brahmā" refers to the excellent speech of the Buddha's doctrine.
15. Sometimes the realm of the demi-gods (*asuras*) is mentioned as a sixth class of sentient being.



16. These are the six sensory faculties (five sense and one mental), two regenerative faculties (the disposition to masculinity and femininity that is responsible for the features, demeanor, behavior, and so forth of a male or female), life force, five feeling faculties (mental happiness and unhappiness, physical pleasure and displeasure, neutral feelings), five faculties to separate from the mundane (faith, effort, mindfulness, concentration, and wisdom), and three unpolluted faculties (path of seeing, path of meditation, path of no more learning). In general, the first fourteen are involved with cyclic existence (although arhats and buddhas also have the six sensory faculties) and the last eight are causes of liberation and awakening.
17. See chapter 8 for more on the eight liberations and the nine serial absorptions.
18. Geshe Jampa Gyatso, *Commentary to Candrakīrti's Supplement to the "Middle Way,"* unpublished transcript, vol. 7, 1228.
19. These two sūtra citations are from Candrakīrti's *Autocommentary on the Supplement*. See Geshe Jampa Gyatso, *Commentary to Candrakīrti's Supplement to the "Middle Way,"* vol. 7, 1358–59.
20. Commentators have different versions of the syllogisms. The ones presented here are drawn from Longdol Rinpoche Ngawang Lozang.
21. Of the six topics of recollections, the Three Jewels serve as the basis of the path; ethical conduct represents abandoning nonvirtue, generosity represents practicing virtue, and the buddhas and other divine beings are included among the deities. By recollecting the deities, we feel that we are in their presence and that they are witnessing our Dharma practice. In this way, we are inspired and our conscientiousness increases.
22. English translations of this sūtra can be found at <http://www.lotsawahouse.org/words-of-the-buddha/sutra-recalling-three-jewels> and [https://fpmt.org/wp-content/uploads/education/teachings/sutras/sutra\\_remembering\\_the\\_three\\_jewels\\_c5.pdf](https://fpmt.org/wp-content/uploads/education/teachings/sutras/sutra_remembering_the_three_jewels_c5.pdf).
23. “Son of the gods” refers to a celestial being from the desire realm who shoots arrows of the five afflictions to bedevil sentient beings. In other cases it refers to conceit.
24. See note 714, MN 1273.
25. This perspective is more general and differs slightly from that of the *Sublime Continuum*, which is from the viewpoint of ārya bodhisattvas.
26. See chapters 4 and 5 in *The Foundation of Buddhist Practice*.
27. Killing, stealing, unwise or unkind sexual behavior, lying, divisive speech, harsh words, idle talk, covetousness, malice, and wrong views.
28. Lay followers can take the eight one-day precepts included in the Prātimokṣa ordinations (discussed in the section below on the Prātimokṣa ethical code). Both monastic and lay followers can take the Eight Mahāyāna Precepts for one day.
29. According to [http://www.fpmt.org/golden\\_light\\_sutra/pdf/questions.pdf](http://www.fpmt.org/golden_light_sutra/pdf/questions.pdf), question 57, “How should I treat or dispose of images of buddhas and bodhisattvas,” recite *om ah hum* before burning Dharma papers. Visualize the text dissolving into the syllable *ah*, which represents the Buddha’s speech and also represents the ultimate nature, emptiness. Then visualize the *ah* dissolving into you and your mind being unified with its meaning. You may also recite this verse: Om, You that act for the benefit of sentient beings, / you that bestow similar siddhis (attainments), / although you depart for the land of the buddhas, / please return again.
30. See Thubten Chodron, *The Compassionate Kitchen: Buddhist Practices for Eating with Mindfulness and Gratitude* (Boulder, CO: Shambhala Publications, 2018).
31. For more statements on this issue, see <https://www.dalailama.com/messages/dolgyal-shugden>.
32. Please see The Dalai Lama and Thubten Chodron, *Buddhism: One Teacher, Many Traditions* (Somerville, MA: Wisdom Publications, 2014), 66–70, for more information about the precepts and the contents of the Vinaya in each of the three extant traditions.

33. See the *Greater Discourse on the Destruction of Craving* (MN 38) for the example of Sāti, who held wrong views. Unfortunately, he did not recognize his error and did not repent. Nor did Ariṭṭha, the holder of wrong views in the *Simile of the Saw* (MN 22). In both cases, the Buddha rebuked them and explained the errors in their thinking and the consequences of adhering to wrong views. In both cases, although dejected after being rebuked by the Buddha, neither of the monks apologized or publicly relinquished their wrong views. On the other hand, in the *Exposition of the Elements* (MN 140), Pukkusāti apologized profusely after addressing the Buddha as a friend because he did not recognize that the person before him was the Tathāgata.
34. Khensur Jampa Tegchok, *Practical Ethics and Profound Emptiness* (Somerville, MA: Wisdom Publications, 2017).
35. Traditionally “Saṅgha” refers to the monastic community, not to a group of lay practitioners.
36. *A Summary of the Means for Accomplishing the Mahāyāna Path* (*Mahāyāna-patha-sādhana-varna-samgraha*), in Doboom Tulku and Glenn Mullin, *Atisha and Buddhism in Tibet* (New Delhi: Tibet House, 1983), 48–50.
37. Jan Nattier, *A Few Good Men: The Bodhisattva Path according to The Inquiry of Ugra* (*Ugraparipṛcchā*) (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2003), 263–64.
38. This is according to the Dharmaguptaka Vinaya. The Mūlasarvāstivāda requires twelve bhikṣuṇīs, or six in an outlying area. The Mūlasarvāstivāda calls this an “ordination”; however, no new precepts are received.
39. This refers to the bhikṣu Saṅgha; since Tibetan nuns do not have full ordination, they can provide information to the bhikṣu Saṅgha but cannot take part in the decision-making process.
40. For more information on introducing the bhikṣuṇī ordination into Tibetan Buddhism, see <http://www.bhiksuniordination.org/>. The booklet *Revival of the Bhikṣuṇī Vow* can be downloaded at <http://www.bhiksuniordination.org/pdfs/2016-CBO-booklet.pdf>.
41. Sravasti Abbey in the United States is the first training monastery for Western nuns who practice in the Tibetan tradition and have Dharmaguptaka bhikṣuṇī ordination.
42. *Dharmaguptaka Vinaya: Pravrajyā and Śikṣamāṇā Ordination Rites* (Newport WA: Sravasti Abbey, 2017), 12, 16, 38.
43. The colophon for this poem reads: Written in 1973 in the Tegchen Choling, Dharamsala, India, 2517 years after the passing into parinirvāṇa of the Lord Buddha according to the *śrāvaka* tradition, in the water-ox year, 2100 years since the coming of Tibet’s revered King Nyatri.
44. Psychic powers may be gained by single-pointed concentration or by mantra recitation. Practitioners with single-pointed concentration will not use their psychic powers to harm others because their gross afflictions have been temporarily suppressed. However, someone with the aspiration to harm others may cultivate psychic powers through mantra recitation and use those powers to harm others. Such was the case with Milarepa, who used his magical powers to kill over thirty people before he encountered the Buddha’s teachings and purified his mind. He became a great yogi who attained awakening in that very life.
45. The superknowledges are supernormal powers, clairaudience, knowledge of others’ minds, recollection of past lives, and clairvoyance (divine eye).
46. It is said that serenity may be attained in six months in proper retreat circumstances. Of course, this depends on the practitioner’s ability, prior preparation, retreat conditions, and so forth.
47. Zhiyi, whose writings are rooted in the classic Indian texts, composed some of the clearest and most important texts on meditation, practiced by meditators in all Chinese traditions. His four major texts on this subject are *The Great Serenity and Insight, An Explanation of the Dharma Gateway of the Perfection of Dhyāna, Essentials for Practicing Serenity, Insight, and Dhyāna*, and *Six Gates to the Sublime*. These four are found in T46.1911 and 1915–17.

48. The object condition (*ālabhāna-pratyaya*) is the cognized object. The dominant condition (*adhipati-pratyaya*) for a consciousness is the sense or mental faculty that directly produces the consciousness. The immediately preceding condition (*samanantara-pratyaya*) is the consciousness of the immediately preceding moment. For a visual consciousness perceiving blue, for example, these would be the color blue, the eye faculty, and the moment of consciousness immediately preceding the arising of the visual consciousness perceiving blue. In terms of a mental consciousness, any of the six consciousnesses may serve as the dominant condition.
49. Qi (also chi or ki) is the circulating life force whose existence and properties are the basis of Chinese philosophy and medicine.
50. Zhiyi often quoted Nāgārjuna's lengthy *Commentary to the Great Perfection of Wisdom*, which is not found in the Tibetan canon.
51. Alternatively, after your skeleton expands with bones filling all of space and then contracts to a normal size, imagine the flesh reappearing. First the flesh goes halfway up the legs, then covers the torso, and so on, until only the upper part of the skull is exposed. Inspect the flesh as it reappears. In the second level, the yoga of thorough training, conclude by concentrating on the top half of the skull that is exposed. In the third level, the yoga of complete attention, after the flesh reappears, contemplate the tiny fragment of bone at the midbrow.
52. These are the ten corruptions of insight meditation. See *Vism* 10.105–28.
53. His Holiness the Dalai Lama and Jeffrey Hopkins, *How to See Yourself as You Really Are* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2007), 107.
54. *Phro wa* is sometimes translated as “excitement” or “agitation.”
55. Some scholars say that coarse restlessness is no longer present on the fourth stage.
56. The terminology in the Sanskrit tradition in this chapter may differ from that in the Pāli tradition. For example, what is called “mundane insight” here is seen as a reflective contemplation in the Pāli tradition. In the Pāli tradition, insight knows impermanence, *duḥkha*, and selflessness (non-self).
57. See chapter 2 of *Saṃsāra, Nirvāṇa, and Buddha Nature* for a description of the three realms of cyclic existence.
58. There are many types of equanimity, such as the feeling of equanimity and the equanimity of the four immeasurables, and so forth. The equanimity present in the second dhyāna is the virtuous mental factor of even-minded equanimity that balances the mind and its accompanying mental factors.
59. This is mentioned the fourth chapter of Asaṅga's *Śrāvaka Grounds*, which explains the mundane and supramundane path.
60. It seems that there are cases where śrāvakas meditate on grossness and peacefulness, but this is generally done to increase their meditative dexterity.
61. See chapter 1 of *Saṃsāra, Nirvāṇa, and Buddha Nature* for an explanation of the sixteen attributes of the four truths.
62. For more details on the Twenty Saṅghas, see James B. Apple, *Stairway to Nirvana: A Study of the Twenty Saṅghas Based on the Works of Tsong Kha pa* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2008).
63. In the previous list of mental contemplations, the one of delight was fourth and the one of analysis was fifth.
64. Also see Napper, *Traversing the Spiritual Path*.
65. *Anāgamya* may also be translated as the “not-unable preparation.”
66. See chapter 2 in *Saṃsāra, Nirvāṇa, and Buddha Nature* for more on the realms of saṃsāra in general and the five pure abodes in particular.
67. To attain an actual dhyāna, Buddhist meditators must have suppressed the nine grades of afflictions of the desire realm, something these stream-enterers and once-returners have not done. Thus alternating

dhyāna meditation is done only by nonreturners or arhats who have suppressed all afflictions of the desire realm.

68. Absorptions cultivated to attain the excellent qualities of concentration include those practiced in common with śrāvakas, such as the eight liberations and the ten concentrations that see the entire universe as water, fire, and so on. They also include concentrations unique to bodhisattvas that are cultivated limitlessly and have unimaginable diversity, such as concentrations included in the category of the ten powers and concentrations “that śrāvakas and solitary realizers don’t even have the name for, let alone absorb in.”
69. There are eleven such concentrations that correspond to the eleven groups of sentient beings whom bodhisattvas especially take care to benefit, as mentioned in the bodhisattva’s ethical conduct of benefiting others.
70. According to the *Treasury of Knowledge*, whose explanation of the bodhisattva path differs from the Mahāyāna explanation, the concentration of the stream of Dharma is attained by a bodhisattva on the path of accumulation who employs this concentration to pass through the remaining four bodhisattva paths in a single meditation session to attain buddhahood. This is how this text explains the path the Buddha traversed in his lifetime.
71. Tantric practitioners may initially meditate according to the Cittamātra view. When they have gained stability on the generation stage and have reached a stage called “the slight falling of wisdom,” to progress further they must adopt the Madhyamaka view.
72. The first two texts are found only in Chinese, but in recent decades efforts have been made to translate the *Mahāvibhāṣā* into Tibetan. For more about the eight liberations and nine serial absorptions, see *The Explanation Ornament of the Essence along with (i) the Root Text of the Treatise of Quintessential Instructions of the Perfection of Wisdom: Ornament for Clear Realization and (ii) the Commentary Clear Meaning*, trans. Toh Sze Gee (Pomaia, Italy: FPMT Masters Program, 2015), 345–47.
73. In the Pāli sutras, liberations 4–7 are called “abiding peacefully in the present life.” The four dhyānas are called “happy” or “pleasant abidings.”
74. It seems like these bodhisattvas have already traversed the śrāvaka path and possess actual dhyānas.
75. Also see Anālayo, *From Craving to Liberation*, 141–48.
76. These signs are explained in the following chapter. See also “learning sign” and “counterpart sign” in the glossary.
77. For more on śrāvakas’ leap-over absorption see *Vasubandhu, “Treasury of Manifest Knowledge” [and] First Dalai Lama Gedun Drup, “Clarifying the Path to Liberation,”* review by Geshe Jampa Gyatso (Pomaia, Italy: FPMT Masters Program, 2008–2013), 283–84.
78. For more on the bodhisattvas’ leap-over absorption, see Jeffrey Hopkins and Jongbok Li, *Ngag-wang-pal-dan’s Explanation of the Treatise “Ornament for the Clear Realizations” from the Approach of the Meaning of the Words: The Sacred Word of Maitreyañātha* (Dyke, VA: UMA Institute for Tibetan Studies, n.d.), 411–15. See also Tsongkhapa’s *Golden Garland (Gser gyi phreng)*.
79. Unless otherwise mentioned, “access concentration” refers to the preparatory stages of the first dhyāna.
80. The *Discourse on the Fruits of the Homeless Life* (Sāmaññaphala, DN 2.83) describes knowledge and vision (ñānadassana) as follows: The meditator who has attained the fourth dhyāna “directs and inclines his mind toward knowledge and vision. He knows, “This my body is material, made up of the four great elements, born of mother and father, fed on rice and gruel, impermanent, liable to be injured and abraded, broken and destroyed; and this is my consciousness, which is bound to it and dependent on it.” The mind-made body is described in the next section.
81. This is according to Vism and Pāli commentaries.
82. The *Ornament of Clear Realizations*, which extensively discusses the superknowledges, is written from the Svātantrika Madhyamaka viewpoint, which asserts that the afflictive obscurations and cognitive obscurations are abandoned simultaneously at buddhahood. For that reason, the Svātantrikas say this



superknowledge is present in the mindstreams of śrāvaka arhats who have an actual dhyāna. Bodhisattvas who are definite in the Mahāyāna lineage — that is, they enter the Mahāyāna directly without becoming śrāvaka arhats — attain this superknowledge at buddhahood.

83. The Aṅguttara Nikāya Commentary (II 119) says, “One-pointedness of mind is called serenity.” According to the Majjhima Nikāya Commentary (II 346), serenity is “the eight attainments (the eight meditative absorptions) that are the basis for insight.” The Udāna Commentary says (233): “The eight attainments together with access [concentration], which serve as the basis for insight, are called mundane samādhi.” Since I don’t think the commentaries would drive a wedge between samādhi and samatha, they would certainly say that samatha includes access concentration. Bhikkhu Bodhi, personal correspondence, July 4, 2018.
84. Not all of these meditation objects are unique to Buddhism; meditators of other sects at the Buddha’s time used the kasiṇas and the four formless states.
85. *Kaṣiṇa* means “totality” or “entirety.”
86. It seems that the access concentration spoken of in the Pāli tradition and the preparatory stages (*sāmantaka*) spoken of in the Sanskrit tradition refer to the same thing. Each of the four dhyānas has preparatory stages or access concentration that precedes it.
87. Some teachers instruct students to focus on the rise and fall of the abdomen while breathing, but this does not lead to serenity. According to Bhikkhu Bodhi: “Observation of the rise and fall of the abdomen has, to my knowledge, never been taught as a samatha practice. The observation of the abdomen arose in a lineage of Burmese meditation masters (though it might go back even to Indian teachers in an oral lineage) as a way to move quickly and directly into vipassanā meditation. If one were to observe the rise and fall of the abdomen, I doubt that one could obtain the proper nimitta of the object, because the focus of observation is too large and is always in motion. It is, however, possible that for certain meditators, as they observe the rise and fall of the abdomen, the mind settles down and reaches a preliminary stage of concentration. If they have practiced samatha meditation successfully in a past existence — that is, [have attained] access concentration or dhyāna — the mind might cast up a nimitta, arising from the depths of the subconscious, and the meditator might then turn away from the rise and fall of the abdomen and focus on the nimitta.” Personal correspondence, December 29, 2008.
88. How to do this will be discussed in a future volume. See the Dalai Lama’s *Healing Anger: The Power of Patience from a Buddhist Perspective*, trans. Thupten Jinpa (Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion Publications, 1997) and Thubten Chodron’s *Working with Anger* (Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion Publications, 2001). See also chapter 9 in *Vism* (Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli’s translation of Buddhaghosa in *The Path of Purification*).
89. Bhikkhu Bodhi said, “It seems that when using this meditation, the counterpart sign as described in relation to kasiṇa meditation and ānāpānasati (mindfulness of breathing) does not appear. Some meditators who use *mettā-bhāvanā* (meditation on love) have told me that they do perceive the colored nimitta, but it seems to me that if one switches from love to the colored nimitta one is no longer practicing *mettā-bhāvanā*, but kasiṇa meditation, using a mentally perceived form as the object.” Private correspondence, January 1, 2008.
90. Although Buddhaghosa encourages developing the four divine abodes toward all sentient beings, the first dhyāna can be attained without all beings in all directions being the object. “The object of any of the four divine abodes is a single living being or many living beings, as a mental object consisting in a concept.” (*Vism* 314)
91. See chapter 2 of *Saṃsāra, Nirvāṇa, and Buddha Nature*.
92. This is the sequence according to the commentaries. Some individual meditators have reported that they go into access concentration, enter the first dhyāna, and from there attain the second dhyāna.
93. In personal correspondence (August 31, 2008), I asked Bhikkhu Bodhi for his thoughts on why this is and he responded: “This reflects the commentarial understanding of the way the four establishments of mindfulness are to be practiced, perhaps related to the commentarial understanding of jhāna (dhyāna)

as a state in which self-reflection on one's own experience cannot occur while one is in the state itself. In this interpretation, jhāna is a state of utter absorption in the object and thus precludes reflection on and introspective knowledge of one's own experience. I'm not sure that this is entailed by the canonical presentations on jhāna and the four *satipaṭṭhānas*. It seems that, according to the Nikāyas, in the jhānas one *can* reflect on (not "think of," but look back at) one's immediate experience. Thus the second and third satipaṭṭhānas partly involve an evaluation of experience, in terms of one's feelings and states of mind, as one moves from ordinary consciousness toward, and then *into*, jhāna.

"But in the Vism view, since feelings and mind-states are things that are constantly arising and passing away, to objectify them in meditation means that one has a changing object of awareness, and this cannot be the object of jhāna, which must be an unchanging object, the nimitta. Therefore, according to Buddhaghosa, they have to be objects of contemplation leading to vipassanā (insight) or paññā (wisdom), but not jhāna. This is the way I would understand the reason behind the statement at Vism 9.113."

94. The Sanskrit traditions agrees with what Bhikkhu Bodhi said, that those on the śrāvaka path can develop insight and attain arhatship on the basis of access concentration without gaining dhyāna.
95. See Vism 21.111–12.
96. Since the breath is constantly changing, it cannot be the meditation object of serenity. However, focusing on the breath generates a sign, which does not change, and this is the actual observed object when cultivating serenity.
97. See Vism 21.112ff.
98. The Chinese word "Chan" and Japanese word "Zen" are translations of the Sanskrit "dhyāna" and the Pāli "jhāna."
99. This is opposite in the Tibetan tradition.
100. A crore is 10 million.
101. Tibetan meditators attribute these symptoms to *loong*, an imbalance of the internal energy winds in the body. This disorder can cause uncomfortable physical sensations, mental distress, and moodiness.
102. Chu-hung and Tsung-pen, *Pure Mind, Pure Land*, trans. J. C. Cleary (New York: Sūtra Translation Committee of the United States and Canada, 1994), 135.
103. The two *Knowledges* are Vasubandhu's *Treasury of Knowledge* and Asaṅga's *Compendium of Knowledge*.
104. English translations for the term *samprajanya* vary: alertness, clear knowing, vigilance, clear comprehension, and so forth.
105. The following citations are from this text. This and other quotations below from Asaṅga in the *Śrāvakabhūmi* and *Compendium of Knowledge* were translated by Boaz Amichay (private correspondence).
106. The major difference between this and Asaṅga's passage is that the later says "removing fatigue and sleepiness," whereas the Pāli sūtra says "defecating and urinating."
107. See chapter 3 in *The Foundation of Buddhist Practice* to learn about conceptual and nonconceptual minds.
108. Although phenomena include all existents, in the four establishments mindfulness of mental factors is predominant. Thus their being continuums of moments of consciousness is emphasized.
109. See *Approaching the Buddhist Path*, 205–7, for the explanation of these four principles.
110. According to the Pāli commentary to MN, in the context of mindfulness of breathing, "internally" refers to the breathing in one's own body, "externally" to the breathing in the body of another person, and "both internally and externally" means contemplating the two alternately. In terms of the other body contemplations, the explanation of inner, outer, and both differs according to the object contemplated.
111. See chapter 1 of *The Foundation of Buddhist Practice* for more on the four seals.

112. See chapter 1 of *Samsāra, Nirvāṇa, and Buddha Nature* for more on the four distorted conceptions and the four truths.
113. Interestingly, in the *Establishment of Mindfulness Sutta* in the *Middle Length Discourses* in the Chinese canon, mindfulness of the body in the four postures comes before mindfulness of breathing. Perhaps the emphasis there is to be mindful of the body first while the body is in gross and active positions, and then progress to mindfulness of the body in formal meditation posture. Bhikkhu Anālayo has done a careful comparison of different versions of the sūtra in his books *Perspectives on Satipaṭṭhāna* (Cambridge, UK: Windhorse Publications, 2014) and *Satipaṭṭhāna: The Direct Path to Realization* (Birmingham, UK: Windhorse Publications, 2003).
114. This is a liquid found mostly on the palms and soles of the feet.
115. Other sūtras that relate to mindfulness of the body are MN 28, MN 62, MN 119, MN 140, and DN 22.
116. For more on the twelve links of dependent origination, see chapters 7 and 8 of *Samsāra, Nirvāṇa, and Buddha Nature*.
117. It seems that the earliest descriptions of the mindfulness of phenomena contained only two categories: the five hindrances and seven awakening factors. As an example, some scholars point out that only these two are found in the explanation of mindfulness of phenomena in the Pāli *Vibhaṅga*, the second Abhidharma text. Others say that this section evolved and expanded over time. The *Great Sutta on the Establishments of Mindfulness* (DN 22) contains a more expansive explanation of the mindfulness of phenomena, defining many of the terms that are commonly found in descriptions of the four truths and the eightfold path.
118. This refers to the desire found in the desire realm.
119. Tibetan translators often translate *upādāna* (T. *len pa*) in this context as “appropriated,” as in “the five appropriated aggregates.” Regardless of the translation, the meaning is the same in both traditions.
120. *Samskāra* (P. *saṅkhāra*) is also translated as “compositional factors” or “volitional formations.”
121. See chapter 7 of *Samsāra, Nirvāṇa, and Buddha Nature*.
122. For more about the fetters, see chapter 3 of *Samsāra, Nirvāṇa, and Buddha Nature*.
123. See chapters 7 and 8 of *Samsāra, Nirvāṇa, and Buddha Nature* for an explanation of the twelve links of dependent origination.
124. See chapters 13 and 14 in *Samsāra, Nirvāṇa, and Buddha Nature*.
125. The Sanskrit term is *samyak pradhāna* or *samyak prabhāna*. The Pāli term is *sammāpadhāna*. All of these terms may be translated into English as “supreme (or right) striving” or “supreme exertion.” *Pradhāna* was translated into Tibetan as *spong ba* — in English, “abandonment.” Tibetans call these the four supreme abandonments, saying that this is a case of the name of one point — the second one, “abandoning nonvirtues already generated” — being given to the entire set. They describe the first one as abandoning letting nonvirtues arise in the future and the last two as abandoning not enhancing virtues that have been generated, and abandoning not generating new virtues in the future. To do this, nonaspiration, noneffort, nonintention, and nonwisdom must be abandoned. However, it is clear from the meaning of these four factors, as well as from the Pāli and Chinese translation of the term and fact that the path factor of joyous effort is described as these four supreme strivings (see MN 141), that *pradhāna* (P. *padhāna*) is the correct reading and “striving” or “exertion” is the correct translation of the set.
126. The four floods are (1) *desire*, which includes the afflictions of the desire realm except for ignorance; (2) *existence*, which includes the afflictions of the form and formless realms except ignorance. Existence also refers to interest in being born in the form and formless realms and the tenth of the twelve links that leads to rebirth there; (3) *ignorance*, and (4) *wrong views*.
127. When used in the technical Abhidharmic sense, as we’re using it here, supramundane (*lokottara*, *lokuttara*) refers only to nine phenomena: the four supramundane paths, their four respective fruits,

and nirvāṇa. Sometimes teachers may use it in a general sense as that which is conducive to or tends toward liberation, in contrast to that which brings a good rebirth and happiness in saṃsāra.

128. See the section “Reliable Cognizers Based on Authoritative Testimony” in chapter 2 of *The Foundation of Buddhist Practice*.
129. Padmakara Translation Group, *Nagarjuna’s “Letter to a Friend”* (Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion Publications, 2005), 45.
130. The Sanskrit and Pāli word for “breakthrough” is *abhisamaya*, which is often translated as “clear realization.”
131. Imperceptible forms are discussed in chapter 12 of *The Foundation of Buddhist Practice*.
132. All of the following offset quotations defining the eight path factors are from SN 45.8.
133. Nirvāṇa is both the state of cessation in which true duḥkha and true origins of duḥkha have been eliminated, and reality, the object of meditation of an ārya’s meditative equipoise. Here nirvāṇa is the latter. See *Saṃsāra, Nirvāṇa, and Buddha Nature*, chapter 11.
134. In MN 44:15 investigation and analysis are considered verbal formations because they are a type of thought, and a person first thinks about what to say and then speaks.
135. See chapter 1 of *The Foundation of Buddhist Practice* for more on the four seals.
136. See Bhikshu Dharmamitra’s “The Ten Bodhisattva Grounds,” 71.
137. To enter the śrāvaka or solitary-realizer path, one must have stable renunciation that day and night seeks liberation. To enter the bodhisattva path requires uncontrived renunciation and bodhicitta.
138. The Fourth Amdo Shamar, Gendun Tenzin Gyatso, *Stages of the Path (Zhwa dmar lam rim)*.



## Glossary

*absolutism* (*eternalism* or *permanence*, *śāśvatānta*). The belief that phenomena inherently exist.

*absorption of cessation* (*nirodha-samāpatti*). An abstract composite in an ārya's continuum in which coarse feelings and discriminations associated with the subtle mental primary consciousness have ceased.

*abstract composites* (*viprayukta-samskāra*). Impermanent phenomena that are neither forms nor consciousnesses.

*access*. See preparatory stages for a dhyāna.

*access concentration* (P. *upacāra samādhi*). A level of concentration that prepares the mind to enter the next actual dhyāna.

*actual dhyāna* (T. *bsam gten gyi dngos gzha*). A more refined dhyānic concentration attained upon completing its preparatory stages.

*afflictions* (*kleśa*). Mental factors that disturb the tranquility of the mind. These include disturbing emotions and wrong views.

*afflictive obscurations* (*kleśāvaraṇa*). Obscurations that mainly prevent liberation; afflictions and their seeds.

*aggregates* (*skandha*). The four or five components that make up a living being: form (except for beings born in the formless realm), feelings, discriminations, miscellaneous factors, and consciousnesses.

*analytical meditation* (*vicārabhāvanā*, T. *dpyad sgom*). Meditation done to understand an object.

*arhat*. Someone who has eliminated all afflictive obscurations and attained liberation.

*ārya* (P. *ariya*). Someone who has directly and nonconceptually realized the emptiness of inherent existence; someone who is on the path of seeing, meditation, or no-more-learning.

*ārya buddha*. A person who is fully awakened, such as an enjoyment body or emanation body.

*ārya learner*. A person who has realized emptiness directly but is not a buddha.

*bardo* (*antarābhava*). The intermediate state between one life and the next.

*basis of designation*. The collection of parts or factors in dependence on which an object is designated.

*bodhicitta*. A main mental consciousness induced by an aspiration to bring about others' welfare and accompanied by an aspiration to attain full awakening oneself. It marks entry into the Mahāyāna.

*bodhisattva*. Someone who has genuine bodhicitta.

*bodhisattva ground*. A consciousness in the continuum of an ārya bodhisattva characterized by wisdom and compassion. It is the basis for the development of good qualities and the basis for the eradication of ignorance and mistaken appearances.

*buddha*. All aspects of a buddha. It includes the four buddha bodies.

*capable preparation* (*not-unable, anāgāmya, T. nyer bsdogs mi lcog med*). A preparation of the first dhyāna that is so called because it is able to serve as the mental basis for supramundane paths.

*causal meditative absorption*. The meditative absorption attained as a human being that causes rebirth in the form or formless realms.

*causally concordant result*. The karmic result that corresponds to its cause. It is of two types: the result similar to the cause in terms of our experience and the result similar to the cause in terms of our habitual behavior.

*cognitive faculty (indriya)*. The subtle material in the gross sense organ that enables perception of sense objects; for the mental consciousness, it is a previous moment of any of the six consciousnesses.

*cognitive obscurations (jñeyāvaraṇa)*. Obscurations that mainly prevent full awakening; the latencies of ignorance and the subtle dualistic view that they give rise to.

*collection of merit (punyasambhāra)*. A bodhisattva's practice of the method aspect of the path that accumulates merit.

*concentration (samādhi)*. A mental factor that dwells single-pointedly for a sustained period of time on one object; a state of deep meditative absorption; single-pointed concentration that is free from discursive thought.

*conceptual appearance (artha-sāmānya, T. don spyi)*. A mental image of an object that appears to a conceptual consciousness.

*conceptual consciousness (kalpanā)*. A consciousness knowing its object by means of a conceptual appearance.

*concomitant (T. mtshungs ldan)*. Accompanying or occurring together in the same mental state.

*consciousness (jñāna)*. That which is clear and cognizant.

*conventional existence (samvṛtisat)*. Existence.

*conventional truths (samvṛtisatya)*. That which is true only from the perspective of grasping true existence. It includes all phenomena except ultimate truths. Syn. veiled truth.

*counterpart sign* (P. *paṭbhāga-nimitta*). The meditation object of a dhyāna consciousness; a conceptual object that arises on the basis of a visible object.

*cyclic existence* (*saṃsāra*). The cycle of rebirth that occurs under the control of afflictions and karma.

*death* (*maraṇabhava*). The last moment of a lifetime when the subtlest clear-light mind manifests.

*defilement* (*mala*, T. *dri ma*). Either an afflictive obscuration or a cognitive obscuration.

*deity* (*iṣṭadevatā*, T. *yi dam*). A manifestation of the awakened mind that is meditated on in Tantra.

*dependent arising* (*pratītyasamutpāda*). This is of three types: (1) causal dependence — things arising due to causes and conditions, (2) mutual dependence — phenomena existing in relation to other phenomena, and (3) dependent designation — phenomena existing by being merely designated by terms and concepts.

*desire realm* (*kāmadhātu*). One of the three realms of cyclic existence; the realm where sentient beings are overwhelmed by attraction to and desire for sense objects.

*deva*. A being born as a heavenly being in the desire realm or a being born in the form or formless realm.

*dhyāna* (P. *jhāna*). A meditative absorption of the form realm.

*dry-insight arhats*. Those who have attained arhatship on the basis of momentary concentration or access concentration, without having actualized the dhyānas.

*dualistic appearance*. The appearance of subject and object as separate or the appearance of inherent existence.

*duḥkha* (P. *dukkha*). Unsatisfactory experiences of cyclic existence.

*Dzogchen*. A tantric practice emphasizing meditation on the nature of mind, practiced primarily in the Nyingma tradition.

*eight worldly concerns* (*aṣṭalokadharmā*). Attachment or aversion regarding material gain and loss, fame and disrepute, praise and blame, pleasure and pain.

*emanation body* (*nirmāṇakāya*). The buddha body that appears as an ordinary sentient being to benefit others.

*emptiness* (*śūnyatā*). The lack of inherent existence, lack of independent existence.

*enjoyment body* (*sambhogakāya*). The buddha body that appears in the pure lands to teach ārya bodhisattvas.

*establishments of mindfulness* (*smṛtyupasthāna, satipaṭṭhāna, T. dran pa nyer bzhag*). One of the seven sets of practices comprising the thirty-seven harmonies with awakening. It focuses mindfulness on the body, feelings, mind, and phenomena.

*exalted knower* (*jñāna, T. mkhyen pa*). A realization of someone who has entered a path. It exists from the path of accumulation to the buddha ground. Exalted knower, path, ground, pristine wisdom, and clear realization are mutually inclusive.

*existent* (*sat*). That which is perceivable by mind.

*fetters* (*saṃyojana*). Factors that keep us bound to cyclic existence and impede the attainment of liberation. The five lower fetters — view of a personal identity, deluded doubt, view of rules and practices, sensual desire, and malice — bind us to rebirth in the desire realm. The five higher fetters — desire for existence in the form realm, desire for existence in the formless realm, arrogance, restlessness, and ignorance — prevent a nonreturner from becoming an arhat.

*five dhyānic factors.* Investigation (*vitarka, vitakka*), analysis (*vicāra, vicāra*), joy (*prīti, pīti*), bliss (*sukha*), and one-pointedness of mind (*ekāgratā, ekaggatā*).

*five heinous crimes (ānantārya).* Killing one's mother, father, or an arhat, wounding a buddha, and causing schism in the Saṅgha.

*five hindrances (āvaraṇa, T. sgrib pa).* Hindrances that interfere with attaining serenity: sensual desire (*kāmacchanda*), malice (*vyāpāda, byāpāda*), lethargy and sleepiness (*styāna-middha, thīna-middha*), restlessness and regret (*auddhatya-kaukr̥tya, uddhacca-kukkucca*), and deluded doubt (*vicikitsā, vicikicchā*).

*form body (rūpakāya).* The buddha body in which a buddha appears to sentient beings; it includes the emanation and enjoyment bodies.

*form realm (rūpadhātu).* A realm in saṃsāra in which the beings have subtle bodies; they are born there by having attained various states of concentration.

*formless realm (ārūpyadhātu).* The realm in saṃsāra in which sentient beings do not have a material body and abide in deep states of concentration.

*four seals (caturmudrā).* Four views that make a philosophy Buddhist: all conditioned phenomena are transient, all polluted phenomena are duḥkha, all phenomena are empty and selfless, nirvāṇa alone is true peace.

*four truths of the āryas (catvāry āryasatyāni).* The truth of duḥkha, its origin, its cessation, and the path to that cessation.

*full awakening (sam्यaksambodhi).* Buddhahood; the state where all obscurations have been abandoned and all good qualities developed limitlessly.

*fundamental innate mind of clear light (T. gnyug ma lhan cig skyes pa'i 'od gsal gyi sems).* The subtlest level of mind.

*Fundamental Vehicle.* The vehicle leading to the liberation of śrāvakas and solitary realizers.

*god (deva)*. A being born as a heavenly being in the desire realm or in the form or formless realms.

*grasping inherent existence (svabhāvagraha)*. Grasping persons and phenomena to exist truly or inherently; syn. grasping true existence.

*grasping true existence (true-grasping, satyagrāha)*. Grasping persons and phenomena to exist truly or inherently.

*harmonies with awakening (bodhipāṅśya-dharma, bodhipakkhiya-dhamma)*. Thirty-seven practices condensed into seven sets that lead to liberation and awakening.

*hell being (nāraka)*. A being born in an unfortunate realm of intense physical pain due to strong destructive karma.

*hungry ghost (preta)*. A being born in one of the unfortunate realms who suffers from intense hunger and thirst.

*ignorance (avidyā)*. A mental factor that is obscured and grasps the opposite of what exists. There are two types: ignorance regarding ultimate truth and ignorance regarding karma and its effects.

*impermanent (anitya, anicca)*. Momentary; not remaining in the next moment.

*inferential cognizer (anumāna)*. A mind that ascertains its object by means of a correct syllogism.

*inherent existence (svabhāva)*. Existence without depending on any other factors; independent existence.

*insight (vipāśyanā, vipassanā, T. lhag mthong)*. A wisdom of thorough discrimination of phenomena conjoined with special pliancy induced by the power of analysis.

*insight knowledge (P. vipassanā-ñāṇa)*. Knowledge of the three characteristics gained through insight.

*introspective awareness* (*samprajanya, sampajañña*). An intelligence that causes one to engage in activities of body, speech, or mind heedfully.

*karma*. Intentional (volitional) action; it includes intention karma (mental action) and intended karma (physical and verbal actions motivated by intention).

*karmic seeds*. The potencies from previously created actions that will bring their results.

*knowable* (*jñeya*). That which is suitable to serve as an object of an awareness.

*latencies* (*vāsanā*). Predispositions, imprints, or tendencies.

*leapover meditative absorption* (*vyukrāntaka-samāpatti, T. thod rgyal gyi snyoms 'jug*). A meditative absorption in which the eight serial absorptions are alternated with the absorption or cessation and with a desire-realm mind.

*learning sign* (P. *uggaha-nimitta*). A subtler object that replaces the preliminary sign when the meditator sees the mental image of something — a kasīṇa, for example — as clearly with closed eyes as with open eyes looking at it.

*liberated path*. A wisdom directly realizing emptiness that has completely eradicated a portion of defilements; a path that has temporarily suppressed a portion of the manifest afflictions.

*liberation* (*mokṣa, T. thar pa*). A true cessation that is the abandonment of afflictive obscurations; nirvāṇa, the state of freedom from cyclic existence.

*liberation* (*vimokṣa, vimokkha, T. rnam thar*). The eight liberations, which are the mind's temporary release from defilements that is brought about by mastering certain meditative skills.

*liberation* (*vimukti, vimutti, T. rnam grol*). Sanskrit tradition: Complete freedom from saṃsāra; Pāli tradition: a conditioned event that brings nirvāṇa.



*Mahāmudrā*. A type of meditation that focuses on the conventional and ultimate natures of the mind.

*Māra*. Four corrupting forces: (1) the afflictions, (2) five aggregates, twelve sense sources, and eighteen constituents, (3) death, and (4) a god in the desire realm who interferes with our creation of virtue.

*meditative equipoise on emptiness*. An ārya's mind focused single-pointedly on the emptiness of inherent existence.

*mental consciousness (mano-vijñāna)*. A primary consciousness that knows mental phenomena in contradistinction to sense primary consciousnesses that know physical objects.

*mental contemplation (manaskāra, T. yid la byed pa)*. A mind that meditates on either grossness and subtleness or on the four truths in order to attain either the dhyānas or the union of serenity and insight on emptiness.

*mental factor (caitta)*. An aspect of mind that accompanies a primary consciousness and fills out the cognition, apprehending particular attributes of the object or performing a specific function.

*mind (citta)*. That which is clear and aware; the part of living beings that cognizes, experiences, thinks, feels, and so on. In some contexts it is equivalent to primary consciousness.

*mind-made body (P. manomaya-kāya)*. A physical body, created with a mind of dhyāna, that is an exact replica of the meditator's own body.

*mindfulness (smṛti, sati)*. A mental factor that brings to mind a phenomenon of previous acquaintance without forgetting it and prevents distraction to other objects.

*mindstream (cittasaṃtāna)*. The continuity of mind.

*momentary (kṣaṇika)*. Not enduring to the next moment.

*momentary concentration* (P. *khanika-samādhi*). Concentration developed by directing mindfulness to the changing states of mind and body, noting any phenomenon that appears. While not at the depth of an actual dhyāna, śrāvakas may use it to attain arhatship.

*monastic*. Someone who has received monastic ordination; a monk or nun.

*nature truth body* (*svabhāvika dharmakāya*). The buddha body that is the emptiness of a buddha's mind and that buddha's true cessations.

*nihilism* (*ucchedānta*). The belief that our actions have no ethical dimension; the belief that nothing exists.

*nimitta*. The sign or mental image that is the object for cultivating serenity. It is of three types: the preliminary, learning, and counterpart nimittas.

*nine stages of sustained attention* (*navākārā cittasthiti*, T. *sems gnas dgu*). Stages of concentration on the way to attaining serenity.

*nirvāṇa*. The state of liberation of an arhat; the purified aspect of a mind that is free from afflictions.

*nirvāṇa without remainder* (*anupadhiṣeṣa-nirvāṇa*, *anupādisesa-nibbāna*). (1) The state of liberation when an arhat has passed away and no longer has the remainder of the polluted aggregates; (2) an ārya's meditative equipoise on emptiness when there is no appearance of true existence.

*nonaffirming negative* (*prasajyapratishedha*, T. *med dgag*). The mere absence of the object of negation. A negative phenomenon in which, upon the explicit elimination of the object of negation by an awareness, another phenomenon is not suggested or established.

*nonconceptual consciousness*. A consciousness that knows its object directly, not by means of a conceptual appearance.

*nondeceptive* (*avisamvādi*). Incontrovertible, correct.

*nonexistent (asat)*. That which is not perceivable by mind.

*object (viṣaya, T. yul)*. That which is known by an awareness.

*object of negation (pratiṣedhya)*. What is negated or refuted.

*observed object (ālambana, T. dmigs pa)*. The basic object that the mind refers to or focuses on while apprehending certain aspects of that object.

*one final vehicle*. The belief that all beings — even śrāvakas who have become arhats — will eventually enter the Mahāyāna and become buddhas.

*ordinary being (pṛthagjana, T. so so skye bo)*. Someone who is not an ārya.

*path (mārga, T. lam)*. An exalted knower that is conjoined with uncontrived renunciation.

*path of accumulation (sambhāramārga, T. tshogs lam)*. First of the five paths. It begins when one aspires for liberation day and night for a śrāvaka path or when one has spontaneous bodhicitta for the Mahāyāna path.

*path of meditation (bhāvanāmārga, T. sgom lam)*. The fourth of the five paths. This begins when a meditator begins to eradicate innate afflictions from the root.

*path of no-more-learning (asaikṣamārga, T. mi slob lam)*. The last of the five paths; arhatship or buddhahood.

*path of preparation (prayogamārga, T. sbyor lam)*. The second of the five paths. It begins when a meditator attains the union of serenity and insight on emptiness.

*path of seeing (darśanamārga, T. mthong lam)*. Third of the five paths. It begins when a meditator first has direct, nonconceptual realization of the emptiness of inherent existence.

*permanent (nitya)*. Unchanging, static. It does not mean eternal.

*permanent, unitary, independent self.* A soul or self (*ātman*) asserted by non-Buddhists.

*person (pudgala).* A living being designated in dependence on the four or five aggregates.

*pliancy (tranquility, praśrabdhi, passaddhi).* A mental factor that enables the mind to apply itself to a constructive object in whatever manner it wishes and dissipates mental or physical rigidity.

*polluted (āsrava, āsava).* Under the influence of ignorance or its latencies.

*Prāsaṅgika.* The Buddhist philosophical tenet system that asserts that all phenomena lack inherent existence both conventionally and ultimately.

*prātimokṣa.* The different sets of ethical precepts for monastics and lay followers that assist in attaining liberation.

*preliminary sign (P. parikkamma-nimitta).* The initial conceptual appearance of a physical object — for example, a kaṣiṇa — to the mental consciousness.

*preparatory stages for a dhyāna (access, preparations, sāmantaka, T. bsam gtan po'i nyer bsdogs).* Stages of meditation that prepare the mind to enter the actual dhyāna.

*primary consciousness (vijñāna).* A consciousness that apprehends the presence or basic entity of an object. There are six types of primary consciousness: visual, auditory, olfactory, gustatory, tactile, and mental.

*probing awareness (reasoning consciousness, yuktijñāna, T. rigs shes).* A consciousness using or having used reasoning to analyze the ultimate nature of an object. It can be either conceptual or nonconceptual.

*proliferations (prapañca, papañca, T. spros pa).* Mental fabrications ranging from anxious thoughts to grasping true existence.

*pure lands.* Places created by the unshakable resolve and merit of buddhas where all external conditions are conducive for Dharma practice.

*resultant-birth absorption.* The mental and/or physical aggregates of a being born in the form or formless realm due to having attained the comparable level of absorption in a previous life.

*ripening result of karma.* The karmic result that is rebirth in one of the three realms; the five aggregates a being takes when reborn.

*sādhana.* The means of achievement expressed in a tantric text or manual that details the steps of visualization and meditation in the practice of a deity.

*samādhi.* See concentration.

*Sautrāntika.* A Buddhist tenet system that espouses Fundamental Vehicle tenets.

*self (ātman).* (1) A person; (2) inherent existence.

*self-grasping (ātmagrāha).* Grasping inherent existence.

*self-sufficient substantially existent person* (T. *gang zag rang rkya thub pa'i rdzas yod*). A self that can be identified independent of the aggregates. Such a self does not exist.

*sentient being (sattva).* Any being that has a mind and is not a buddha.

*serenity (śamatha, samatha).* Sanskrit tradition: concentration arisen from meditation that is accompanied by the bliss of mental and physical pliancy in which the mind abides effortlessly without fluctuation for as long as we wish on whatever virtuous object it has been placed. Pāli tradition: one-pointedness of mind, the eight attainments (meditative absorptions) that are the basis for insight.

*six perfections (ṣaḍpāramitā).* The practices of generosity, ethical conduct, fortitude, joyous effort, meditative stability, and wisdom that are motivated

by bodhicitta and sealed with the wisdom seeing them as both empty and dependent.

*solitary realizer* (*pratyekabuddha*). A person following the Fundamental Vehicle who seeks liberation and emphasizes understanding the twelve links of dependent arising.

*śrāvaka* (*hearer*, P. *sāvaka*). Someone practicing the Fundamental Vehicle path leading to arhatship who emphasizes meditation on the four truths.

*stabilizing meditation* (*sthāpyabhāvanā*, T. *'jog sgom*). Meditation to focus and concentrate the mind on an object.

*substantial cause* (*upādāna-kāraṇa*). The cause that becomes the result, as opposed to cooperative causes that aid the substantial cause in becoming the result.

*superknowledge* (*abhijñā*, *abhiññā*, T. *mngon shes*). Direct, experiential knowledge, of six types: (1) supernormal powers, (2) divine ear, (3) knowledge of others' minds, (4) recollection of past lives, (5) divine eye (includes knowledge of the passing away and rearing of beings and knowledge of the future), and (6) the destruction of the pollutants. The sixth is attained only by liberated beings.

*supernormal powers* (*ṛddhi*, *iddhi*). The first of the six superknowledges, gained in deep samādhi: to replicate one's body, appear and disappear, pass through solid objects, go under the earth, walk on water, fly, touch the sun and moon with one's hand, go to the Brahmā world, and so forth.

*supramundane* (*transcendental*, *lokottara*, P. *lokuttara*). Pertaining to the elimination of fetters and afflictions; pertaining to āryas.

*taking and giving* (T. *gtong len*). A meditation practice for cultivating love and compassion that involves visualizing taking others' suffering, using it to destroy our self-centered attitude, and giving our body, possessions, and merit to others.

*tathāgata*. A buddha.

*tenets (siddhānta)*. A philosophical principle or belief.

*thought (kalpanā)*. Conceptual consciousness.

*three characteristics*. Impermanence, duḥkha, and no-self.

*three higher knowledges (trividyā, P. tevijjā, T. rig gsum)*. The last three superknowledges: recollection of past lives, divine eye, and destruction of the pollutants.

*three realms (tridhātuka, tedhātuka)*. Desire, form, and formless realms.

*true cessation (nirodhasatya)*. The cessation of a portion of afflictions or a portion of cognitive obscurations.

*true existence (satyasat)*. Existence having its own mode of being; existence having its own reality.

*true knowledge (vidyā, vijjā)*. Clear and complete knowledge of the four truths.

*truth body (dharmakāya)*. The buddha body that includes the nature truth body and the wisdom truth body. Sometimes it refers only to a buddha's omniscient mind.

*twelve links of dependent origination (dvādaśāṅga-pratītyasamutpāda)*. A system of twelve factors that explains how we take rebirth in saṃsāra and how we can be liberated from it.

*two truths (satyadvaya)*. Ultimate truths and veiled (conventional) truths.

*ultimate nature*. The ultimate or deepest mode of existence of persons and phenomena.

*ultimate truth (paramārthasatya)*. The ultimate mode of existence of all persons and phenomena; emptiness.

*unfortunate realms (apāya)*. Unfortunate states of rebirth as a hell being, hungry ghost, or animal.

*uninterrupted path.* A wisdom directly realizing emptiness that is in the process of eliminating some portion of defilements; a path that is in the process of temporarily suppressing some portion of manifest afflictions.

*union of serenity and insight.* Absorption in which the bliss of mental and physical pliancy has been induced by analysis.

*unpolluted (anāsrava).* Not under the influence of ignorance.

*veiled truths (samvṛtisatya).* Objects that appear true to ignorance, which is a veiling consciousness; objects that appear to exist inherently to their main cognizer although they do not; syn. conventional truths.

*very obscure phenomena (atyantaparokṣa).* Phenomena that can be known only by relying on the testimony of a reliable person or a valid scripture.

*view of a personal identity (view of the transitory collection, satkāyadrṣṭi, sakkāyaditṭhi).* Grasping an inherently existent I or mine (according to the Prāsaṅgika system).

*Vinaya.* Monastic discipline; a body of texts about monastic life, discipline, and conduct.

*wind (prāṇa, T. rlung).* One of the four elements; energy in the body that influences bodily functions; subtle energy on which levels of consciousness ride.

*wisdom truth body (jñāna dharmakāya).* The buddha body that is a buddha's omniscient mind.



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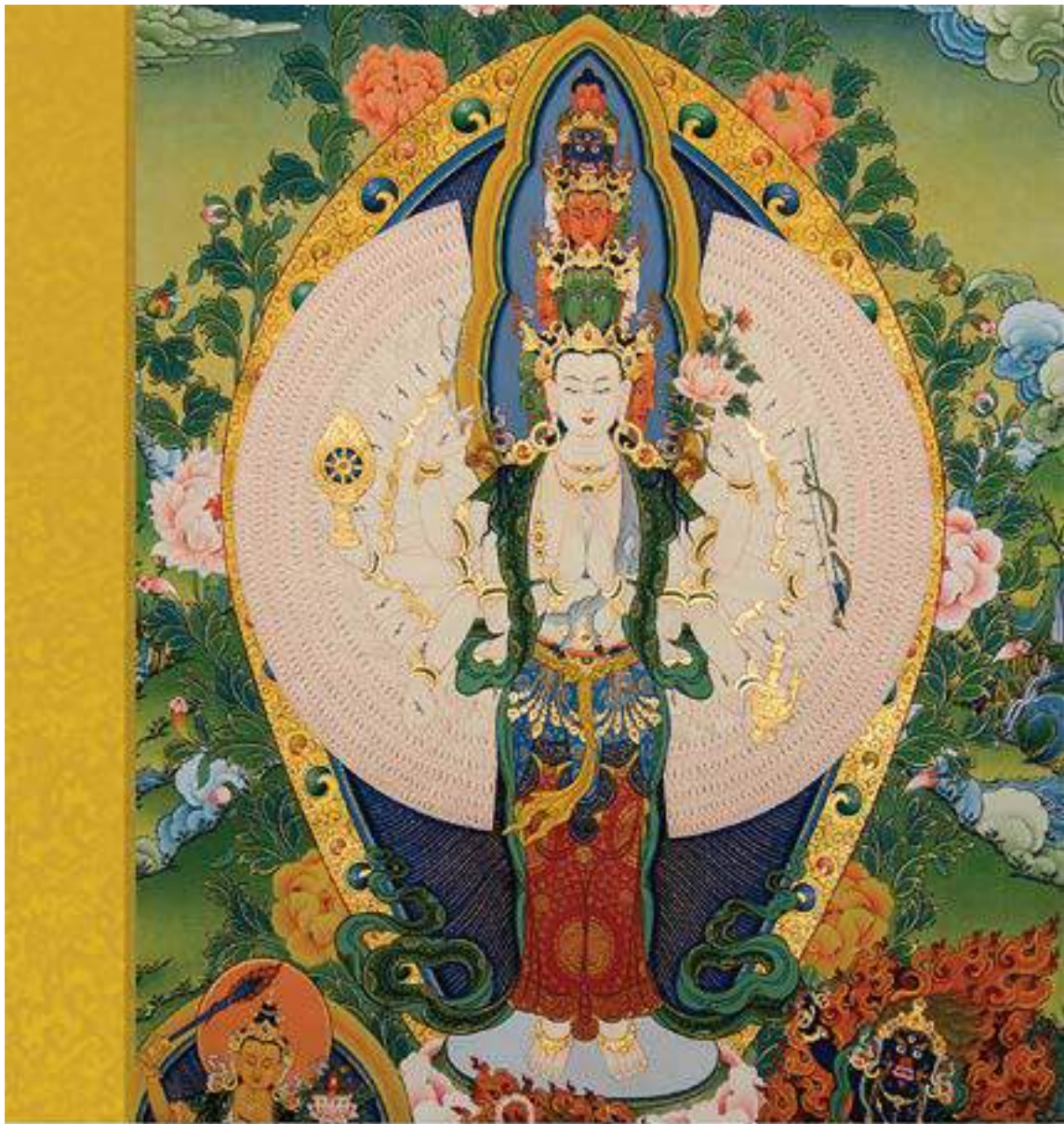
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*and*

Bhikṣuṇī Thubten Chodron





“The Buddha’s journey to full awakening could have ended with liberation, but his infinite compassion in the face of the suffering of all beings led him to continue his journey by sharing what he had learned with others. In this fifth volume of the *Library of Wisdom and Compassion*, the Dalai Lama explores in depth just how central compassion and empathy are to the path to awakening. It’s a comprehensive look at the teachings on compassion in every Buddhist tradition and is wonderfully complemented by the reflections and meditation suggestions of his co-author, Thubten Chodron.”

— SHARON SALZBERG,  
author of *Lovingkindness* and *Real Change*

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**I**N *PRAISE OF GREAT COMPASSION*, the fifth volume of the *Library of Wisdom and Compassion*, continues the Dalai Lama’s teachings on the path to awakening. While previous volumes focused on our present situation and taking responsibility for creating the causes of happiness, this volume concerns opening our hearts and generating the intention to make our lives meaningful by benefiting others.

We are embedded in a universe with other living beings, all of whom have been kind to us in one way or another. More than any other time in human history, we depend on one another to stay alive and flourish. When we look closely, it becomes apparent that we have been the recipient of great kindness. Wanting to repay others’ kindness, we cultivate a positive attitude by contemplating the four immeasurables of love, compassion, empathic joy, and equanimity, and the altruistic intention of bodhicitta. We learn to challenge the self-centered attitude that leads to misery and replace it with a more realistic perspective enabling us to remain emotionally balanced in good and bad times. In this way, all circumstances become favorable to the path to awakening.

*Publisher's Acknowledgment*

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## Preface

**T**HE LIBRARY OF WISDOM AND COMPASSION, of which this volume is the fifth in the series, will be, when completed, His Holiness the Dalai Lama's major English-language text on the path to awakening. Before delving into this volume, a review of previously covered topics is helpful; you may want to read previous volumes for more on ideas and concepts mentioned in this volume or to provide background so that you will know where topics explained in this volume fit in the overall scheme of the path. The first volume, *Approaching the Buddhist Path*, explores the Buddhist view of life, mind, and emotions. It provides historical background, introduces us to a systematic approach to the spiritual path, and discusses how to apply Buddhist ideas to contemporary issues.

The second volume, *The Foundation of Buddhist Practice*, discusses gaining nondeceptive knowledge, the nature of mind, and the rebirth process. Chapters on how to be a sincere Dharma student, how to create a healthy relationship with spiritual mentors, and how to structure a meditation session follow. We then consider the essence of a meaningful life and the law of karma and its effects, which has to do with the ethical dimension of our actions. If we use our lives wisely and make wise ethical decisions, our deaths will be free from regret and fear. Having fortunate rebirths in the future, we will have conducive circumstances to continue our spiritual practice.

Volume 3, *Samsāra, Nirvāṇa, and Buddha Nature*, explores the four truths that constitute the Buddha's first teaching and encompass a study of, first, our present situation within cyclic existence (*samsāra*), the cycle of constantly recurring difficulties (*duḥkha*) under the influence of ignorance, mental afflictions, and polluted karma; second, the origins of this unsatisfactory situation, the afflictions that exist in our mind; third, the

possibility of release — the cessations of saṃsāra and its cause, the peaceful state of nirvāṇa; and fourth, the path of practice and transformation leading to that state. Liberation and full awakening are possible because each of us has the potential to become a fully awakened buddha. Although this buddha nature may temporarily be covered by defilements, it never disappears and the obscurations covering it are adventitious and can be removed.

Volume 4, *Following in the Buddha's Footsteps*, begins with a discussion of taking refuge, the process of entrusting our spiritual guidance to the Three Jewels — the Buddha, Dharma, and Saṅgha. This follows naturally from volume 3, because the last two truths — true cessation and true paths — are the Dharma Jewel, which when actualized in our own mindstream protects us from all misery. The true path encompasses the methods to practice in order to overcome these defilements: the three higher trainings of ethical conduct, concentration, and wisdom. This includes practical instructions on how to live ethically, how to develop meditative concentration, and how to generate wisdom through the practice of the four establishments of mindfulness — mindfulness of the body, feelings, mind, and phenomena — and the thirty-seven harmonies with awakening.

This leads us to the present volume, *In Praise of Great Compassion*.

### *Overview of In Praise of Great Compassion*

In volumes 3 and 4, we delved into the four truths; the first two truths concern saṃsāra and its causes, the last two liberation and the path that brings it about. The emphasis was on our situation as an individual and taking responsibility for it: our mind is the creator of both duḥkha and peace, of saṃsāra and nirvāṇa, so rather than blame others or adopt a victim mentality, we are encouraged to be conscientious regarding our actions, tame our afflictions, and cultivate ethical conduct, concentration, and wisdom to free ourselves from saṃsāra.

This does not mean that we are isolated individuals in a cold universe. Rather, the buddhas and bodhisattvas, who have accomplished what we aim to achieve, are always ready to teach and guide us. In addition, we are embedded in a universe with other sentient beings, all of whom have been

kind to us in one way or another and in one rebirth or another. It is only suiting that we repay their kindness, and the best way to do this is to subdue our afflictions and cultivate our good qualities so that we can increase our ability to benefit them temporarily while we're in saṃsāra, and ultimately, by leading them to supreme awakening. *In Praise of Great Compassion* is about opening our hearts to others and generating and strengthening our determination to benefit sentient beings.

To do this, we begin with cultivating a positive attitude toward others by contemplating the four immeasurables — immeasurable love, immeasurable compassion, immeasurable empathic joy, and immeasurable equanimity — as taught and practiced in both the Pāli and Sanskrit traditions. The method to do this is the topic of the first chapter. Bodhicitta, the aspiration to attain full awakening in order to benefit all sentient beings most effectively, is based on the four immeasurables and on knowledge that attaining liberation and awakening is possible; this is explained in chapter 2. The Sanskrit tradition has two ways of developing the altruistic intention of bodhicitta — the seven cause-and-effect instructions and equalizing and exchanging self and others — which are described in chapters 3 and 4.

Chapter 5 discusses the difference between the self-centered attitude and self-grasping ignorance as well as other topics that pertain to cultivating bodhicitta and becoming a bodhisattva, and chapter 6 explains Candrakīrti's famous homage to great compassion at the beginning of his *Supplement to the "Middle Way"* (*Madhyamakāvātāra*). With all this as background, in chapter 7 we are ready to generate aspiring and engaging bodhicitta. Aspiring bodhicitta wishes to attain full awakening for the benefit of all beings, and engaging bodhicitta commits to practice the path that leads to supreme awakening by adopting the bodhisattva ethical code.

Love, compassion, bodhicitta, and the bodhisattva ethical codes in Chinese Buddhism are explained in chapter 8, showing how bodhicitta is emphasized in East Asian Buddhist traditions. Many people do not know that the Pāli tradition also presents bodhicitta, its cultivation, and the perfections; these are discussed in chapter 9. Chapter 10 describes the very practical techniques of mind training that help us to generate bodhicitta and maintain an attitude of kindness and compassion no matter what comes our way. Each chapter contains reflections that you are encouraged to



contemplate. The reflections not only review some of the major points but also give you a chance to put these teachings into practice and transform your mind.

A glossary, section on recommended reading, and index can be found at the end of the book. The next volume in the series will continue by setting forth the ten perfections as practiced in both the Pāli and Sanskrit traditions.

## *How This Book Came About*

The prefaces of the preceding volumes of the *Library of Wisdom and Compassion* told the story of the conception and development of this series, so here I will mention only a few things that pertain to this volume in particular.

You will notice that the volume contains many citations from Śāntideva's *Engaging in the Bodhisattvas' Deeds (Bodhicaryāvatāra)*. His Holiness has often stated that this is one of his favorite texts, which explains why he has frequently taught it during public teachings in India. The experience of sitting in a crowd of thousands of people who have gathered together to learn about great compassion and bodhicitta from a teacher such as His Holiness is indescribable, especially considering that most large events in our world are sports events, political rallies, concerts, and conferences where people's motivations range widely.

His Holiness also frequently teaches mind-training texts such as “The Thirty-Seven Practices of Bodhisattvas” and “The Eight Verses of Mind Training” — short texts that emphasize bodhicitta — in non-Buddhist countries and in India and Asia as preludes to Buddhist tantric empowerments. Another of his favorite texts to teach is Kamalaśīla's *Middle Stages of Meditation (Bhāvanākrama II)*, which discusses the seven cause-and-effect instructions, and various texts on the stages of the path (*lam rim*) that emphasize bodhicitta. It happens not infrequently that His Holiness is moved to tears when teaching one of these texts or when giving the ceremonies for aspiring and engaging bodhicitta.<sup>1</sup>

## *Please Note*

Although this series is coauthored, the vast majority of the material is His Holiness's teachings. I researched and wrote the parts about the Pāli tradition, wrote some other passages, and composed the reflections. For ease of reading, most honorifics have been omitted, but that does not diminish the great respect we have for the most excellent sages, practitioners, and learned adepts. Foreign terms are given in italics

parenthetically at their first usage. Unless otherwise noted with “P” or “T,” indicating Pāli or Tibetan, respectively, italicized terms are Sanskrit or the term is the same in Sanskrit and Pāli. When two italicized terms are listed, the first is Sanskrit, the second Pāli. For consistency, Sanskrit spelling is used for Sanskrit and Pāli terms in common usage (nirvāṇa, Dharma, arhat, and so forth), except in citations from Pāli scriptures. The term *śrāvaka* encompasses solitary realizers, unless there is reason to specifically differentiate them, as is done, for example, in chapter 5. To maintain the flow of a passage, it is not always possible to gloss all new terms on their first usage, so a glossary is provided at the end of the book. “Sūtra” often refers to Sūtrayāna and “Tantra” to Tantrayāna — the Sūtra Vehicle and Tantra Vehicle, respectively. When these two words are not capitalized, they refer to two types of scriptures: sūtras and tantras. Mahāyāna here refers principally to the bodhisattva path as explained in the Sanskrit tradition. In general, the meaning of all philosophical terms accords with the presentation of the Prāsaṅgika Madhyamaka tenet system. Unless otherwise noted, the personal pronoun “I” refers to His Holiness.

### *Appreciation*

My deepest respect goes to Śākyamuni Buddha and all the buddhas, bodhisattvas, and arhats who embody the Dharma and with compassion teach us unawakened beings. I also bow to all the realized lineage masters of all Buddhist traditions through whose kindness the Dharma still exists in our world.

This series appears in many volumes, so I will express appreciation to those involved in each individual volume. This volume, the fifth in the *Library of Wisdom and Compassion*, has depended on the abilities and efforts of His Holiness’s translators — Geshe Lhakdor, Geshe Dorji Damdul, and Mr. Tenzin Tsepak. I am grateful to Geshe Dorji Damdul, Geshe Dadul Namgyal, and Bhikṣuṇī Sangye Khadro for checking the manuscript, and to Samdhong Rinpoche for clarifying important points. I also thank Bhikkhu Bodhi for his clear teachings on the Pāli tradition and for generously answering my many questions. He also kindly looked over the sections of the book on the Pāli tradition before publication. The staff at

the Private Office of His Holiness kindly facilitated the interviews, and Sravasti Abbey supported me while I worked on this volume. Mary Petruszewicz skillfully edited this book. I thank everyone at Wisdom Publications who contributed to the successful production of this series. All errors are my own.

Bhikṣuṇī Thubten Chodron  
Sravasti Abbey

## Abbreviations

- AN      *Aṅguttara Nikāya*. Translated by Bhikkhu Bodhi in *The Numerical Discourses of the Buddha* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2012).
- BCA     *Engaging in the Bodhisattvas' Deeds (Bodhicaryāvatāra)* by Śāntideva.
- BV      *Commentary on Bodhicitta (Bodhicittavivarāṇa)* by Nāgārjuna.
- BVA     *Buddhavaṃsa (Chronicle of Buddhas)*. Translated by I. B. Horner in *The Minor Anthologies of the Pāli Canon*, vol. 3 (London: Pāli Text Society, 2007).
- CP      *Cariyāpiṭaka (The Basket of Conduct)*. Translated by I. B. Horner in *The Minor Anthologies of the Pāli Canon*, vol. 3.
- DB      *Birth Stories of the Ten Bodhisattvas (Dasabodhisattuppattikathā)* by Hammalawa Saddhatissa (London: Pāli Text Society, 1975).
- DN      *Dīgha Nikāya*. Translated by Maurice Walshe in *The Long Discourses of the Buddha* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 1995).
- ERB     *Exhortation to Resolve on Buddhahood* by Peixiu. Translated by Bhikṣu Dharmamitra in *On Generating the Resolve to Become a Buddha* (Seattle: Kalavinka Press, 2009).
- LC      *The Great Treatise on the Stages of the Path (T. Lam rim chen mo)* by Tsongkhapa, 3 vols. Translated by Joshua Cutler et al. (Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion Publications, 2000–2004).

- LS *Praise to the Supramundane (Lokātītastava)* by Nāgārjuna.
- MA *Madhyamakālamkāra* by Śāntarakṣita. In James Blumenthal, *The Ornament of the Middle Way: A Study of the Madhyamaka Thought of Śāntarakṣita* (Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion Publications, 2004).
- MMA *Supplement to “Treatise on the Middle Way”* by Candrakīrti. Translated by Jeffrey Hopkins in *Compassion in Tibetan Buddhism, Tsong-ka-pa* (Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion Publications, 1980).
- MMK *Treatise on the Middle Way (Mūlamadhyamakakārikā)* by Nāgārjuna.
- MN Majjhima Nikāya. Translated by Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi in *The Middle-Length Discourses of the Buddha* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 1995).
- P Pāli.
- POW *Pearl of Wisdom: Buddhist Prayers and Practices, Book 2*. Edited by Thubten Chodron (Newport, WA: Sravasti Abbey, 2014).
- PV *Commentary on the “Compendium of Reliable Cognition” (Pramāṇavārttika)* by Dharmakīrti.
- RA *Ratnāvalī* by Nāgārjuna. Translated by John Dunne and Sara McClintock in *The Precious Garland: An Epistle to a King* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 1997).
- RGV *Sublime Continuum (Ratnagotravibhāga, Uttaratantra)* by Maitreya.
- SCP *Tale of a Wish-Fulfilling Dream (Svapna-cintāmaṇi-parikathā)* by Nāgārjuna. Translated by Geshe Kelsang Wangmo. At [http://ibdbuddhism.org/GeshePALSANG/2017DreamTale/DreamTale\\_Tib-Eng\\_20171104.pdf](http://ibdbuddhism.org/GeshePALSANG/2017DreamTale/DreamTale_Tib-Eng_20171104.pdf).
- Sn Suttanipāta. Translated by Bhikkhu Bodhi in *The Suttanipāta* (Somerville, MA: Wisdom Publications, 2017).

- SN Saṃyutta Nikāya. Translated by Bhikkhu Bodhi in *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2000).
- T Tibetan.
- TP *A Treatise on the Pāramīs* by Ācariya Dhammapāla. Translated by Bhikkhu Bodhi (Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 1978). Also at <https://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/authors/bodhi/wheel409.html>.
- TTG *Treatise on the Ten Grounds* by Nāgārjuna. Translated by Bhikṣu Dharmamitra (Seattle: Kalavinka Press, 2019).
- Vism *Visuddhimagga* by Buddhaghosa. Translated by Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli in *The Path of Purification* (Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 1991).
- VTBV *Treatise on the “Generating the Bodhi Resolve Sūtra”* by Vasubandhu Bodhisattva. Translated by Bhikṣu Dharmamitra in *Vasubandhu’s Treatise on the Bodhisattva Vow* (Seattle: Kalavinka Press, 2009).
- WSW *The Wheel of Sharp Weapons* by Dharmarakṣita, in Thubten Chodron, *Good Karma* (Boston: Shambhala Publications, 2016).





## Introduction

**K**INDNESS IS our first experience in life; our mother and those around her immediately extended affection, care, and a warm heart toward us. As we grow up, we continually experience the kindness of others — our teachers, friends, even the people we don't know personally who provide the food, shelter, clothes, and medicine we need to stay alive. The kind hearts of others benefit us, but developing a kind heart ourselves really enriches our life by connecting us to others and enabling us to experience the joy of caring for and loving other sentient beings. In short, a kind heart is essential for our own and others' welfare. For this reason I say, "My religion is kindness." Everyone — even animals and insects — understands kindness and thrives by giving and receiving kindness.

Why should we be kind to others? First, kindness isn't something foreign. Even ants and bees cooperate and take care of one another. They know that to survive they must work together. Animals look after their own kind. Rather than survival of the fittest, survival of the most cooperative enables life to continue. Charles Darwin said in the *Descent of Man*:<sup>2</sup>

As man advances in civilisation, and small tribes are united into larger communities, the simplest reason would tell each individual that he ought to extend his social instincts and sympathies to all the members of the same nation, though personally unknown to him. This point being once reached, there is only an artificial barrier to prevent his sympathies extending to the men of all nations and races . . . Sympathy beyond the confines of man, that is, humanity to lower animals, seems to be one of the latest moral acquisitions . . . This virtue, one of the noblest with which man is endowed,

seems to arise incidentally from our sympathies becoming more tender and more widely diffused, until they are extended to all sentient beings.

And Albert Einstein tells us:<sup>3</sup>

A human being is part of the whole, called by us “Universe,” a part limited in time and space. He experiences himself, his thoughts and feelings as something separate from the rest — a kind of optical delusion of consciousness. The striving to free oneself from this delusion is the one issue of true religion. Not to nourish it but to try to overcome it is the way to reach the attainable measure of peace of mind.

Our happiness and well-being are interrelated with those of others. We depend on one another to have the necessities and enjoyments of life; so if others suffer, we too will be affected. Since we depend on others so much, they deserve to be treated well; repaying their kindness only makes sense. Extending ourselves to others with a warm heart, even in small ways, brings so much goodness in our world.

Love and compassion are not foreign to us. Those mental factors are an inextricable part of our minds. Through Buddhist practice, we consciously cultivate and extend our instinctual affinity for kindness and our innate ability to empathize and share with others. As sentient beings’ love and compassion increase, so does forgiveness. We become able to communicate better with others, listening to their stories and paying attention to their feelings and needs as well as to our own. This has a ripple effect in society, spreading a feeling of well-being within each person as well as among people, groups, and nations.

Generating love and compassion takes effort; first we must learn how to cultivate these qualities and use them effectively with wisdom. Reading the teachings in this book will give you the tools to go in that direction. Practicing under the guidance of a Buddhist teacher who can model the teachings in his or her own behavior is of great help and inspiration as well.

# 1 | The Four Immeasurables

FOLLOWERS OF the Pāli tradition cultivate the four brahmavihāras (divine abidings, immeasurables) — immeasurable equanimity, love, compassion, and empathic joy — toward others. In the Mahāyāna these four are expanded and built upon to become the altruistic intention of bodhicitta that seeks to attain buddhahood in order to benefit all sentient beings. Practitioners engage in the practices of the Perfection and Vajra Vehicles motivated by this altruistic intention.

We'll begin by exploring the four immeasurables as explained in the Pāli text *The Path of Purification (Visuddhimagga)*, by the fifth-century Indian sage Buddhaghosa. His explanation not only accords with Mahāyāna teachings but also gives practitioners of the Mahāyāna some new angles to approach love (*maitrī, mettā*), compassion (*karuṇā*), empathic joy (*muditā*), and equanimity (*upekṣā, upekkhā*). This will be followed by an explanation of the four immeasurables in the Perfection Vehicle (*Pāramitāyāna*) and in the Vajra Vehicle (*Vajrayāna*). All of these explanations are instructions for meditation.

## *The Four Immeasurables in the Pāli Tradition*

Buddhaghosa devotes an entire chapter of *The Path of Purification* to the development of the four immeasurables, which are widely taught and practiced in both the Pāli and Sanskrit traditions. They are called “immeasurable” or “boundless” (*apramāṇa, appamañña*) for several reasons. First, they are directed with a mind free of prejudice or partiality toward an immeasurable number of sentient beings. In addition, they are ideally to be practiced in states of *dhyāna* in which the limited intentions of desire-realm minds have been superseded. Although meditators may have

been born in the desire realm, their minds become form-sphere consciousnesses when entering a dhyāna with one of these four as its object. A form-realm consciousness is not limited by the five hindrances (āvaraṇa) that interfere with the cultivation of concentration: sensual desire (*kāmacchanda*), malice (*vyāpāda*, *byāpāda*), lethargy and sleepiness (*styāna-middha*, *thīna-middha*), restlessness and regret (*auddhatya-kaukr̥tya*, *uddhacca-kukkucca*), and deluded doubt (*vicikitsā*, *vicikicchā*). Dhyānic states also are imbued with the five dhyānic factors: investigation (*vitarka*, *vitakka*), analysis (*vicāra*), joy (*prīti*, *pīti*), bliss (*sukha*), and one-pointedness (*ekāgratā*, *ekaggatā*) that render them boundless.<sup>4</sup>

The four immeasurables are also called “brahmavihāras” or “divine abodes,” after Brahmā, the deity who is the ruler of one of the dhyānic realms where beings’ minds are pure, smooth, and gentle. In the term “brahmavihāra,” “brahma” implies pure because these four are free from attachment, anger, and apathy. They are also the best — another implication of the term “brahma” — because they are beneficial attitudes to have toward sentient beings. The four are called “abodes” or “ways of living” because they are peaceful resting places for the mind, in that they are virtuous mental states that help us to live in constructive ways that help ourselves and others.

Practiced in daily life, love, compassion, empathic joy, and equanimity will make our minds and relationships with others warmer and more peaceful. Practiced in meditation, these four can be used to cultivate concentration and attain the dhyānas (meditative stabilizations). Of course the best effects come if we do both, because maintaining a peaceful mind by practicing the four immeasurables between formal meditation sessions increases their power during meditation sessions. Similarly, after abiding single-pointedly in one of the four immeasurables during meditation, a person’s mind tends to be permeated with it after the meditation session.

### *The Three Higher Trainings and the Four Immeasurables*

The three higher trainings are encapsulated in the four immeasurables, as illustrated by the *Mettā Sutta*. At the outset of this sūtra, the Buddha spoke of the type of person who practices love. This practice involves the higher

training in ethical conduct, because to develop love for others we must first refrain from harming them. The second part of the sūtra details all the beings to extend love toward and explains how to meditate on love so that it leads to states of meditative absorption, which pertains to the higher training in concentration. The end of the sūtra speaks of how this practice can lead to the cultivation of insight and thus to nirvāṇa, which necessitates the higher training in wisdom.

When practiced by someone who has not cultivated wisdom, meditation on the four immeasurables has the potential to lead to rebirth in any of the divine realms of the Brahmā world that correspond to the dhyānas.<sup>5</sup> However, the ultimate aim of meditation on the four brahmavihāras is to attain a pliable, concentrated mind that can penetrate the three characteristics — that is, the impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and selflessness of things — and serve as a basis for insight.

In many sūtras, the Buddha spoke of practitioners abiding with their hearts imbued with love that extends in all directions. Such practitioners have attained a meditative absorption that is called the “liberation of mind with love” (P. *mettā-cetovimutti*). This mind, which genuinely wishes all beings to have happiness, has temporarily abandoned the five hindrances, especially anger and malice, through the force of single-pointed concentration. The Buddha praises this samādhi because of its ability to prevent anger from arising and banish anger that has arisen. When practitioners have attained the ārya eightfold path and apply this mind of dhyāna to it, they progress through the stages and attain arhatship.<sup>6</sup>

Teachers may present the four immeasurables in slightly different ways — for instance, as a practice to improve our relationships with others, as a practice to heal destructive emotions, or as a practice through which to cultivate serenity.

One way to practice them in our relationships with others in daily life is as follows: Love has the aspect of friendliness toward sentient beings and wishes them to have happiness and its causes. This should be our basic attitude toward any living being we encounter. When we see the suffering of sentient beings, we respond with compassion, abandoning any fear or disgust, and do what we can to be of assistance. When we witness their happiness, success, virtue, and good qualities, our response is empathic joy

— the opposite of the jealousy that so often plagues us. After that, we remain balanced and equanimous because our aims for sentient beings have been accomplished. However, sometimes we see others' duḥkha and try to help, but they are not open to removing the causes of their misery. At that time, rather than giving in to frustration or despair, practicing equanimity is best. In that way, the door remains open so that we can help them if an opportunity arises at a later date.

### *Introduction to the Four Divine Abodes*

*The Path of Purification* says **love** “has the aspect of friendliness as its characteristic. Its function is to promote friendliness. It is manifested as the disappearance of malice and annoyance. Its proximate cause is seeing others as lovable. When it succeeds, it eliminates malice. When it fails, it degenerates into selfish affectionate desire.”

Love views one, many, or all beings as lovable and wishes them well. We may begin with one or just a few people. By gradually increasing our ability to love, we will be able to extend love to more and more living beings until it spreads to all beings without exception. It will spread to both those who treat us well and those who disparage or harm us, to those who have good values and those who do not, to those we approve of and those we don't, to those who are well-liked by all and those who are despised. This love does not seek anything for ourselves; the pleasure is in loving. Such love is strong, not fickle according to either our mood or how others treat us. It is ready to help, but does not have an agenda or coerce others to fulfill our expectations.

Many movies, novels, and other art forms deal with romantic and sensual “love.” From a Buddhist viewpoint, this emotion should more accurately be called “attachment,” as it is generally based on exaggerating someone's good qualities or projecting excellent qualities that aren't present. Attachment also gives way to emotional neediness and possessiveness that lead to making demands or having high expectations of the other. Immeasurable love is free from such complications.

Combining the understanding of selflessness with love demolishes any sense of possession. Love infused with a sense of selflessness knows that

ultimately there is no possessor or person to possess. There is no independent soul or essence in a person to love or to be loved. The highest love wishes beings to have the highest happiness and will show others the path to the end of suffering, the path realized and taught by the Buddha.

In *The Path of Purification* Buddhaghosa says **compassion** “has the aspect of allaying suffering for its characteristic. Its function is to find others’ suffering unbearable. It manifests as noncruelty and nonviolence. Its proximate cause is seeing helplessness in those overwhelmed by suffering. When it succeeds, it reduces cruelty. When it fails, it produces personal distress.” Compassion enables us to look at suffering in all its tortuous varieties without succumbing to despair. From the annoyance of the smallest inconvenience, to extreme physical pain, to unfathomable emotional misery, all beings caught in saṃsāra are susceptible to duḥkha. Instead of reacting by medicating the distress we experience when seeing our own or others’ suffering, compassion opens our heart to this universal experience and reaches out either directly or indirectly to others. This compassion isn’t limited to those who are evidently suffering, but extends to those who seem happy at this moment yet still live under the control of ignorance, afflictions, and polluted karma.

Immeasurable compassion, like immeasurable love, does not favor some and exclude others. It does not blame others for their own suffering, but realizes that it was caused by a mind overwhelmed by ignorance. In addition, compassion does not blame one person for another person’s suffering, but understands that both beings are controlled by karma and thus both are worthy of compassion, whether they are the perpetrator or victim of harm.

**Empathic joy** delights at the happiness and good fortune of others. Buddhaghosa says empathic joy “is characterized by bringing joy. Its function is to oppose envy, and it manifests as the abandonment of jealousy and boredom. Its proximate cause is seeing others’ success. When it succeeds, it reduces jealousy and boredom. When it fails, it produces overexcitement.” In contrast to the misery of jealousy — thinking that we, not they, should be happy and have good opportunities — empathic joy is gladness in our own hearts that rejoices at others’ well-being. When we consciously cultivate empathic joy, we see so much goodness in the world.

Instead of the world seeming bleak and filled with narrow-minded people and corrupt governments, our view will expand to see the goodness in others and the many ways in which people help each other on a daily basis. At present the source of our empathic joy may be limited to our own personal gain and the gain of those we cherish. As our empathic joy expands, we will rejoice in the virtue and success of others.

Buddhaghosa describes **equanimity** as “characterized by promoting the aspect of balance toward beings. Its function is to see equality in beings. It manifests as the subduing of anger and attachment. Its proximate cause is seeing the ownership of karma thus: ‘Beings are owners of their karma. Whose (if not theirs) is the choice by which they will become happy, or will be free from suffering, or will not lose the success they have attained?’ When it succeeds, equanimity makes anger and attachment subside. When it fails, it produces an unknowing equanimity, which is [worldly indifference and apathy] based on the householder life.”

Our lives consist of so many extremes — wealth and poverty, loneliness and belonging, high and low status, praise and blame — and our emotions likewise vacillate with each new object, person, or situation we encounter. Equanimity is steadiness of mind, tranquility in the midst of whatever environment we find ourselves in and whatever treatment we receive. It is not uninterested, apathetic indifference in which we build a wall to protect ourselves from emotional pain. Rather, equanimity is relaxed, receptive, free of fear and clinging. It allows our spiritual practice to stay on track without being buffeted around here and there by exciting new ideas or intense emotions. Without clinging to anything, equanimity gives space to appreciate everything.

Understanding karma fosters equanimity. People meet with results of causes they created. For example, when we encounter misfortune, there’s no reason for depression. The situation is a result of actions we ourselves did, and as with everything, it too will pass. When success comes our way, there’s no reason for elation, because it is a passing result of our actions. Rather than blame other people, we accept the results of our actions, knowing that if we want a different future, we must act now to create the causes for it.



Practicing equanimity is helpful when dealing with people who insult us or people who are not receptive to our help. In the former case, we remain equanimous in the face of others' insults, knowing that we don't need to take their words personally and that what they say is more a reflection of their unhappiness than it is of anything we did. In the latter case, someone may have responded to our intention to help by telling us to mind our own business. Rather than feeling frustrated or becoming angry, we can choose to remain equanimous and let the other person be, knowing that we can control neither him nor the situation. As related in the *Upakkilesa Sutta* (MN 128), the monks at Kosambī were engaged in vicious disputes that sometimes spilled over into brawls. The Buddha gave them advice, but the monks refused to listen and responded that it was their quarrel. Seeing that these disciples' minds were overwhelmed with anger, resentment, and belligerence, the Buddha went alone to another village where his disciples were more receptive.

Insight into the nature of reality is helpful for the cultivation of equanimity. Suffering ensues from grasping at I and mine. We think, "I was criticized," "My new car was dented," "His lies destroyed my reputation." Grasping at I and mine clearly disturbs the mind, sending it away from equanimity and into flurries of clinging, animosity, and resentment. Understanding that there is no I or mine releases craving and other afflictions, allowing equanimity to arise.

The commentary *The Illuminator of the Supreme Meaning* (*Paramatthajotikā*), attributed to Buddhaghosa, succinctly defines the four immeasurables (2.128):

Love is the state of desiring to offer happiness and welfare, with the thought "May all beings be happy," and so forth. Compassion is the state of desiring to remove suffering and misfortune, with the thought "May they be liberated from these sufferings," and so forth. Empathic joy is the state of desiring the continuity of [others'] happiness and welfare, with the thought "You beings are rejoicing; it is good that you are rejoicing; it is very good," and so forth. Equanimity is the state of observing [another's] suffering or happiness

and thinking, “These appear because of that individual’s own past activities.”

The four brahmavihāras are generated in the above order. Each successive one does not override its predecessor; all four permeate and complement one another. Compassion prevents love and empathic joy from forgetting the misery of the world or becoming wrapped up in the pleasant feelings that they bring. Love prevents compassion from becoming partial and keeps it focused on all beings, not just those with manifest gross suffering. Empathic joy prevents compassion from sliding into despair because empathic joy remembers goodness and happiness. Equanimity keeps love, compassion, and empathic joy focused on the ultimate aim of nirvāṇa. It makes them stable so they don’t deteriorate into uncontrolled or sentimental emotionalism.

Here we see that the path is not about cultivating isolated virtuous emotions and attitudes. When cultivated together, these virtuous mental states complement, balance, and enhance one another. It is clear that the path to nirvāṇa does not entail doing one practice only, but developing all aspects of our human character.

## REFLECTION

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Contemplate the gist of each of the brahmavihāras. How do these short explanations expand the usual way you think of love, compassion, empathic joy, and equanimity? Do these summaries pique your interest in having a deeper understanding of the four?

1. **Love** has the aspect of friendliness and its function is to promote friendliness. It makes malice and annoyance disappear. Its proximate cause is seeing others as endearing. When it succeeds, it eliminates malice. When it fails, it degenerates into selfish affectionate desire.
2. **Compassion** has the aspect of allaying suffering. It functions to find others’ suffering unbearable and manifests as noncruelty and nonviolence. Its proximate cause is seeing those overwhelmed by

suffering as needing help. When it succeeds, it reduces cruelty. When it fails, it produces personal distress.

3. **Empathic joy** delights at the happiness and good fortune of others. It brings joy and functions to oppose envy; it causes jealousy and boredom to subside. Its proximate cause is seeing other beings' success. When it succeeds, it reduces jealousy and boredom. When it fails, it produces giddy excitement.
  4. **Equanimity** promotes balance toward beings and functions to see equality in beings. It subdues anger and attachment. Its proximate cause is seeing that each being is the owner of their karma. When it succeeds, equanimity reduces anger and attachment. When it fails, it produces indifference and apathy.
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### *Meditation on Love*

The *Sutta on Love* (*Karaṇīya Mettā Sutta*, Sn 1.8) speaks of immeasurable love in particular and is one of the most well-liked and oft-recited sūtras. Since animosity is the opposite of love and prevents its development, it is essential to reduce anger and ill will. We begin this process by reflecting on the disadvantages of animosity and the benefits of patience and fortitude. This step occurs at the outset, because we “cannot abandon unseen dangers and attain unknown advantages” (Vism 9.2).

Anger and hatred destroy trust and tear apart valued relationships; they destroy the merit created with great effort; they compel us to act in ways we later regret, bringing on guilt and remorse. Fortitude, on the other hand, is like a soothing balm on a wound and a beautiful piece of jewelry that attracts others to us. It protects our virtue and all that is valuable to us in this and future lives.

Initially it is important to cultivate love toward specific people in a definite order. It is recommended not to begin the cultivation of any of the four immeasurables toward someone to whom you are or could be sexually attracted. There is the amusing but unfortunate story of a man who was

meditating on love for his wife and, confusing love with sexual attraction, tried to leave his meditation room to get to his wife. However, so blinded was he by lust, he couldn't see the door and so spent all night fighting with the wall! Also, the people we initially cultivate love toward should be alive. Since the deceased are no longer in the form in which we knew them, cultivating love for them is difficult. However, out of concern for our deceased relatives and friends, we can make offerings to the Three Jewels on their behalf and imagine that they rejoice in the merit dedicated for them.

First cultivate love toward yourself. Contemplate repeatedly, "May I be happy and free from suffering. May I be free from animosity, affliction, and anxiety, and live happily." Add whatever other good wishes you would like, such as, "May I be generous and kind," and "May I be free from internal and external obstacles on the path." Focusing on yourself first is important to develop the feeling of what it is like to wish someone well. In the process of doing this, you will realize that being happy and peaceful and avoiding pain are everyone's fundamental wishes.

Some people may wonder if generating love toward themselves is selfish or self-indulgent. Cultivating love toward yourself is not selfish because the goal is to generate love toward all beings, which includes yourself. You are no more or less important than others; you are also worthy of love and kindness. Since many people suffer from self-hatred, this meditation is an excellent counteracting method. While cultivating love for yourself alone does not bring meditative absorption, it does get you going in the right direction. Conversely, following selfishness and self-indulgence is unkind to yourself and causes misery. Self-centeredness, which makes you greedy, easily offended, and vindictive, does not bring you happiness, whereas developing mental tranquility that is free from afflictions does.

Having generated love for yourself, extend love to others by contemplating, "Just as I want to be happy and never experience suffering, so too do other beings." The next person to send love to should be someone you respect and for whom you have positive feelings. It is recommended to consider the qualities of your spiritual mentor, preceptor, or another teacher and recall the help you have received from them. With awareness of his or her kindness, cultivate love by contemplating, "May he be happy and free

from suffering. May he be free from animosity, affliction, and anxiety and live happily.” By recalling the inspiring example of this person’s virtuous conduct and learning, it is possible to attain meditative absorption on love with respect to him.

Continue to extend love more broadly. Doing this involves breaking down the barrier in your mind that puts people into narrow categories and believes stereotypes. Now cultivate love toward a very dear friend, thinking in the same way as above. Generating love for a dear friend is done after generating it for a respected person because focusing on a dear person can easily make attachment arise under the guise of love, whereas this doesn’t happen toward a person you respect and appreciate.

When the mind is malleable, turn your attention to a neutral person and, seeing her as a dear friend, generate love. When your mind is compliant with this, go on to develop love for a hostile person, seeing him as neutral. A hostile person is not someone who is hostile toward you — although he may feel that way — but someone for whom you have hostile feelings. Those fortunate few who do not see others as harmful or threatening and who do not get upset with uncooperative people can skip generating love toward hostile people.

## REFLECTION

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1. Cultivate love for yourself by reflecting again and again, “May I be happy and free from suffering. May I be free from animosity, anxiety, and live happily.” Add whatever other good wishes you would like, such as “May I be generous and kind” and “May I be free from internal and external obstacles on the path.” Do this slowly so you feel the change in your attitude for yourself.
2. Contemplate in the same way, wishing the same good circumstances for someone you respect.
3. Contemplate in the same way, wishing the same good circumstances for a friend.

4. Contemplate in the same way, wishing the same good circumstances for a neutral person — for example, a stranger you see at the store.
  5. Contemplate in the same way, wishing the same good circumstances for someone you usually feel hostile toward. Imagine that person being happy and because of that their actions and speech change.
  6. Rest your mind in the feeling of wishing everyone happiness and imagining them as being happy.
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### *Counteracting Animosity and Anger*

Many of us find it difficult to wish happiness and well-being to those who have harmed us, because our mind is chained by resentment and grudge-holding. We may wish to retaliate for the harm we received or hope the government does it for us, through imprisonment, capital punishment, or military strikes. If we see ourselves as civilized, we may simply wish that those who harmed us encounter misfortune that will teach them a lesson or give them a taste of their own medicine. If you cannot get past these negative feelings, return to generating love toward one of the previous persons, and when the mind is drenched in that feeling, then return to the difficult person.

If animosity persists, apply an antidote, such as the ones offered below. If one doesn't release the anger, try another. Practice these antidotes repeatedly over time; don't expect that simply changing your thought once will change it forever.

Reflecting on the disadvantages of anger is a worthy antidote. The Buddha said (MN 128.6.):

“He abused me, he struck me,  
he defeated me, he robbed me” —  
In those who harbor thoughts like these  
hatred will never be allayed.

For in this world hatred is never  
allayed by further acts of hate.  
It is allayed by nonhatred (compassion) —  
That is the fixed and ageless law.

Bhikkhu Anuruddha explains how he lives in harmony with other bhikkhus (MN 128.12):

I think thus: “It is a gain for me, it is a great gain for me that I am living with such companions in the holy life.” I maintain physical acts of love toward these venerable ones both openly and privately. I maintain verbal acts of love toward them both openly and privately. I maintain mental acts of love toward them both openly and privately. I consider: “Why should I not set aside what I wish to do and do what these venerable ones wish to do?” Then I set aside what I wish to do and do what these venerable ones wish to do. We are different in body, but one in mind.

Imagine practicing like Anuruddha does with your family, colleagues, and community members.

The Buddha detailed seven disadvantages of anger in *Sutta on the Wretchedness of Anger* (AN 7.64) by describing what someone wishes for his enemy and showing that anger accomplishes his enemy’s wishes. For example, an enemy may wish us to be ugly, to have an unfortunate rebirth, to experience pain, or to lack prosperity, wealth, a good reputation, and harmonious relationships. We accomplish all these things for him, through our own anger, without him harming us at all.

1. Even if we have bathed in fragrant water, wear stylish clothes, and are adorned with luxurious jewelry, we become ugly when angry.
2. Even if we are lying on a comfortable bed snuggled in luxurious blankets, we are in pain when we’re angry.
3. We may have prosperity, but when we ruminate with angry thoughts, we make bad decisions that destroy our prosperity.

4. We may have wealth, but a mind bound by anger cannot enjoy it. Although we may work hard to procure wealth, it is dissipated in fines due to unwise actions motivated by anger.
5. We may have a good reputation, but lose it by falling prey to anger.
6. We may want friends and good family relations, but dreading our temper, others stay away from us.
7. Although we wish for a peaceful death and a fortunate rebirth, anger fuels destructive physical, verbal, and mental actions, creating the causes for the opposite.

## REFLECTION

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Contemplate the seven disadvantages of anger one by one. For each:

1. Imagine relaxing with a peaceful mind untainted by anger.
2. Then think of a person and situation you are upset and angry about and watch your comfort instantly evaporate.
3. Recognize that it is your attitude that brings the pain. The unpleasant situation is not happening to you now, but because the mind clings to an image of the past, you are miserable in the present.

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Contemplating these helps us realize that letting our mind dwell in anger and malice is self-sabotaging. External enemies do not make us miserable; our anger already does an excellent job of that.

Hearing others' disturbing speech often triggers anger to arise in the mind. If we remember the above seven disadvantages of anger and apply the following advice the Buddha gave, we'll be able to release animosity and replace it with love (MN 21.11).

There are these five courses of speech that others may use when they address you: their speech may be timely or



untimely, true or untrue, gentle or harsh, connected with good or with harm, spoken with a mind of love or with inner hate . . . Herein, monastics, you should train thus: “Our minds will remain unaffected, and we shall utter no evil words; we shall abide compassionate for their welfare, with a mind of love, without inner hate. We shall abide pervading that person with a mind imbued with love, and starting with him, we shall abide pervading the all-encompassing world with a mind imbued with love, abundant, exalted, immeasurable, without animosity and without malice.” That is how you should train.

The love the Buddha speaks of here is love at the state of dhyāna. Such love will carry over when the person leaves the dhyāna state and returns to an everyday state of mind. Even if we have not attained dhyāna yet, training our mind to approach all beings with such a loving attitude will overwhelm any discomfort, suspicion, and malice that our mind harbors and imbue it with a sense of ease and affection toward all.

Contemplating the simile of the saw can free the mind from malice (MN 21.20):

Monastics, even if bandits were to sever you savagely limb by limb with a two-handled saw, he who gave rise to a mind of hate toward them would not be carrying out my teaching.

Rather than responding with hate, the Buddha recommended responding as in the previous quotation. For those who have strong faith and confidence in the Buddha’s teachings and want to adhere to and embody them, thinking as above is effective in releasing enmity.

Reflecting on the person’s good qualities is also helpful to bring the mind back to a more balanced perspective. For example, the person who spoke harshly is not physically violent and often helps others to meet a deadline at work. Another person may be ill mannered when driving, but refined when greeting strangers. Recalling the person’s good qualities when he is in a congenial situation enables us to dispel our rigid and critical

attitude of him. It is best to do this type of reflection often, especially in times when we are not upset. By familiarizing ourselves with this more comprehensive understanding of the other person, we strengthen our mindfulness and will be able to call it to mind more quickly when a difficult situation arises.

If we have difficulty seeing any good qualities in the person, then we should generate compassion for her, thinking of the karma she is creating and the kind of results she will experience due to it. Considering that she will likely have an unfortunate rebirth, or if born human, will encounter numerous obstacles and sufferings, there is no use wishing her harm. It is similar to seeing someone who is ill: the person is already suffering, so compassion, not malice, is appropriate. To overcome resentment toward someone whose behavior is vulgar and harmful, Śāriputra advises us to contemplate the following (AN 5.162):

May this respectable individual abandon improper physical actions and cultivate proper ones. May he abandon improper verbal actions and cultivate proper ones. May he abandon improper mental actions and cultivate proper ones. Why? So that this respectable individual will not be reborn in a state of loss, in an unfortunate realm, in ruin, or in hell after the dissolution of the body and death.

Another method to dispel animosity is to reflect on the karmic result of holding on to it. Here we reflect that we are the owner of our deeds and are the heir of our actions. We ask ourselves: “Is my way of thinking going to lead to awakening? Will it create the cause for a fortunate rebirth so I can continue practicing the Dharma? Or will this anger cause me to be separated from the Dharma, from companions in the holy life, and from an excellent spiritual mentor?”

Thinking of the Buddha’s responses when he faced the aggression of others in his previous lives as a bodhisattva can inspire us to forgive others their faults and relax our mind. The *Jātaka* tells many stories of the bodhisattva’s previous lives as human beings or as animals, in which others harmed him, were ungrateful, or betrayed his trust. In all of these, he

responded with compassion, never retaliating or holding a grudge. His ability to forgive and love those who harmed him were important factors in his attaining full awakening. The bodhisattva's behavior is an inspiring role model and emulating it will release the pain of our anger.

Another technique to free our mind from anger is to reflect that all sentient beings have been our mother, father, siblings, and children. As our mother, they carried us in their womb, gave birth to us, fed us, cleaned us, played with us, and taught us. As our mother or father, they worked hard to earn an income to feed and support us. As our siblings, they helped us and played with us. As our children, we loved them unconditionally and they brought us great joy by trusting and loving us. Earnestly reflecting in this way, we come to see that we have received outstanding benefit from all sentient beings in the past. It is unfitting that we now harbor enmity for them. In this way, our feelings of affection and gratitude overpower any resentment or grudge we may hold against others (Vism 9.36).

Bringing in analytical wisdom is also useful. Ask yourself, "What am I angry at? Is it the hair on his head? His teeth? Nails? The water element in the body? The earth element?" Or we examine, "Among the five aggregates in dependence on which this person is called so-and-so, what aggregate am I angry with? His body? His mind? A primary mind or a mental factor?" Searching for the real person who is the source of our anger becomes like painting in space (Vism 9.38).

Another idea is to give the person a gift. Others' animosity toward us and ours toward them subside when a gift is given and received earnestly (Vism 9.39).

When anger has subsided by employing one of these methods, we experience the satisfaction of having transformed our mind into either a neutral or wholesome state. We experience happiness or equanimity and increase our ability to prevent and abandon anger in the future. Both our body and mind are tranquil.

## REFLECTION

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1. Think of a person whom you are angry with. Think, “This person is a complex human being with good qualities and faults.” Focus on their admirable qualities.
  2. Contemplate the karma this person is creating by doing the action that you find objectionable: what a sad situation it is that they want to be happy but are creating the causes for suffering. Try to feel how much they want happiness, yet through their harmful actions they are preventing their own happiness. In addition, they will have to experience the suffering results of their actions. Generate compassion for the person.
  3. Reflect that you’re in a similar situation — wanting happiness, not suffering, yet by holding on to anger and resentment you too are creating the cause for suffering. Have compassion for both the other person and yourself and release the anger.
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### *Continuing the Meditation on Love*

Once anger and resentment have dissipated, cultivate love toward the hostile person, just as you did toward the others.

Reciting the formula “May they be happy and free from suffering; may they be free from animosity, affliction, and anxiety, and live happily” is a tool. Cultivating love is not about reciting the formula; it is about generating the state of mind that corresponds to the words that you are saying. If the recitation becomes mechanical and monotonous, change the formula by expressing it in your own words; contemplate in more detail the types of happiness and good fortune you would like someone to experience. Imagine that person in their ordinary state with confusion and suffering. Then imagine how he would feel and act if he were free from specific miseries and had specific types of opportunities, good qualities, and conducive conditions. Imagine him having these. Making the meditation detailed and personal opens your heart to the experience of love. When the

feeling of love arises, it will gain momentum, and after a while the meditation will carry on by itself without your having to use the formula.

Follow this by breaking down the barriers: see the five individuals — ourselves, the respected person, the friend, the neutral person, and the hostile person — as equal and generate love equally for each of them. Buddhaghosa describes the sign of having succeeded in breaking down the barriers: Let's say five people are being held hostage and one has to give up his or her life. If you feel no difference among the five when the hostage-taker selects one, you have succeeded in breaking down the barriers. In other words, you lack any animosity that hopes the hostile person is chosen, no self-disparagement in wanting yourself to be sacrificed, no attachment in not wanting the dear one or respected person to be selected, and no apathy in not caring if the neutral person is chosen.<sup>7</sup>

According to Buddhaghosa, when barriers of extending love to the five individuals have been broken down and a meditator is able to radiate love equally to all five, simultaneously the counterpart sign (P. *paṭibhāganimitta*) appears, and access concentration (P. *upacāra samādhi*) is attained. Continuing to meditate, she attains the full concentration (P. *appanā samādhi*) of the first dhyāna by developing and repeatedly practicing the counterpart sign. In the first dhyāna, the five hindrances have been suppressed and the five factors — investigation, analysis, joy, bliss, and one-pointedness — are present. She also attains the liberation of mind with love. As meditation continues, the second and third dhyānas will be gained.

Only when a meditator has attained one of the dhyānas does she have the ability to train her mind in extending love so that she (MN 43.31)

dwells pervading one direction with a mind (heart) imbued with love, likewise the second direction, the third direction, and the fourth direction. Thus above, below, across, and everywhere, and to all as to herself, she dwells pervading the entire world with a mind imbued with loving-kindness, vast, exalted, measureless, without animosity, without malice.

Meditators begin by extending love to one direction — the east — so that it pervades all sentient beings there. When doing this, it is recommended to

begin small, thinking of one dwelling and extending love to everyone there. When the mind is malleable, then expand it to two dwellings, radiating love there. Gradually extend the radius of love to the town, state, and the entire eastern sector. When that meditation is firm, add on the other directions — the remaining three cardinal directions, the four intermediate directions, up, and down — sending love to each place, one by one.

Then radiate love everywhere without specifying a particular direction. Love is extended equally to all beings regardless of their realm of existence, social status, race, ethnicity, religion, and so forth. Love is shared with everyone, be they friend, enemy, or stranger, irrespective of how they feel about us or treat us. This love is measureless or boundless in that love for each being is unlimited, it extends to immeasurable sentient beings, and meditators are totally familiar with it. Without any pollution by bad feelings, grief, or suffering, this love is pure, impartial, and unconditional.

To practice love as a divine abode, meditators contemplate it at all times when they are awake and in all postures — sitting, standing, lying down, and walking. This leads to the liberation of mind with love — that is, love at the level of the full concentration of a dhyāna. It is called “liberation of mind with love” because while in that absorption, the mind is liberated from anger and animosity. Any manifest anger will disappear and anger that hasn’t arisen will not arise. The suppleness of such love is available only to those whose minds have reached absorption.

Together with extending the range of their love, meditators also intensify the experience of love. This is done by seeing all sentient beings as their children. The *Mettā Sutta* says (Sn 1.8):

As a mother would, with all her life, protect her only child,  
so one should develop a boundless heart toward all beings.

A mother loves her only child with all her being and does not lament relinquishing her own happiness — even her life — to protect her child. In a similar way, meditators view other sentient beings with intense affection, care, and concern. Remembering that in our beginningless infinite rebirths we have all been one another’s mothers helps us eliminate feelings of

separateness and self-concern and open our hearts to unconditionally love all beings just as a mother loves her only child.

To cultivate love we must contemplate many points: why our anger is unreasonable, others' kindness, the wide variety of living beings, and so forth. Given that so much thinking and visualization are involved, we may wonder, how can we attain the single-pointedness of dhyāna?

In the early stages of cultivating love, thought and imagination are necessary. But once love is aroused and becomes strong and stable, these are no longer needed. Instead, we abide in the experience of love and radiate that to others. Radiating love does not depend on verbalization or conception. When the mind is well trained and very familiar with love, mentally reciting “extend love to the east, to the west . . .” is not necessary. Rather, the mind becomes absorbed in the experience of love, and radiating love assumes a momentum of its own. Cultivating love in meditation leads to a level of samādhi that corresponds to dhyāna. Interestingly, the four brahmavihāras were not explained as states of dhyāna in the early sūtras, but Pāli commentaries say that practitioners can develop them to the level of dhyāna.

The liberation of mind with love is practiced with unspecified pervasion by thinking, “May all beings be happy and free from suffering. May they be free from anger, affliction, and anxiety, and live happily.” Then “all breathing things,” “all creatures,” “all persons,” and “all those with a personality” are substituted, one by one, for “all beings,” and love radiated to them. Although these five terms are synonymous with “all beings,” meditating on each of them one by one gives us different perspectives on the object of our love.

The liberation of mind with love can also be practiced in seven ways with specified pervasion by thinking in this order: “May all women be happy and free from suffering. May they be free from animosity, affliction, and anxiety, and live happily.” Then “men,” “āryas,” “ordinary beings,” “devas,” “human beings,” and “those born in unfortunate realms” are substituted for “women” and love spread to them.

The liberation of mind with love is cultivated to pervade the ten directions in ten ways, by thinking as above first toward all beings in the east, then the west, north, south, northeast, southeast, southwest, northwest,

above, and below. Then each of the twelve types of beings<sup>8</sup> can be thought of in each of the directions: “May all beings in the east . . .” up to “May all those in unfortunate realms in the downward direction be free from animosity, affliction, and anxiety, and live happily.” In addition, each of the phrases for well-being — “be free from animosity,” “be free from affliction,” “be free from anxiety,” and “live happily” — is one meditative absorption, so when put together there are quite a number of absorptions. Developing any of the liberations of mind with love with any of these absorptions will bring the eleven benefits mentioned below.

## REFLECTION

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1. Imagine the person who you are upset with in their ordinary state afflicted with confusion and suffering.
2. Then imagine how they would feel, act, and speak if they were free from specific miseries and had specific types of opportunities, good qualities, and conducive conditions. Imagine them having these.
3. Seeing the person in a different light, let love wishing them to have happiness arise.
4. Do the above reflection for other beings until you get to the point where it is easy to extend the wish for them to be happy to all sentient beings.

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### *Cultivating Love Benefits Self and Others*

The Buddha speaks of eleven benefits accruing to those who practice the liberation of mind with love regularly (AN 11.15):<sup>9</sup>

1. They sleep well, free from restless sleep and apnea.
2. They awake well, without groaning, yawning, and rolling over to go back to sleep.



3. They do not experience nightmares but have auspicious dreams, such as paying respects at a stūpa or offering homage to the Three Jewels.
4. They are dear to humans, who appreciate and respect them.
5. They are dear to nonhumans, who are grateful for their serenity that brings peace among them.
6. Deities protect them.
7. Fire, poison, and weapons do not affect them. Here a story is told of a hunter who threw a spear at a cow who was nursing her calf. The spear bounced off her due to the power of her love that wished for the well-being of her calf.
8. Their minds are easily concentrated, not subject to sluggishness.
9. The expression on their face is serene.
10. They die without confusion, as if they were simply falling asleep.
11. If they do not attain a supramundane realization, after death they will be born in the Brahmā world in the form realm. Meditators who have attained any of the four immeasurables — that is, a mind of dhyāna with any of these four as its object — during their life will have the intention associated with this immeasurable arise as they die. This is an invariable karma that will ripen by the person being reborn in the corresponding level of the Brahmā world.<sup>10</sup>

The cultivation of love benefits our own mind as well as the society around us. At the time of the Buddha, a murderous bandit named Aṅgulimāla terrorized the land. Having killed 999 people and made a necklace of their finger bones, he was seeking his next victim when the Buddha intervened. The power of the Buddha's peace and love subdued Aṅgulimāla, who became one of his monastic disciples. Then one day when King Prasenajit went to visit the Buddha, the Buddha introduced him to Aṅgulimāla. The king reacted with terror and dread, but the Buddha assured him that there was nothing to fear. Conversing with Aṅgulimāla, the king was astounded by the change and relieved that his subjects could now live without fearing this serial murderer. Addressing the Buddha, King Prasenajit said (MN 86.13):

It is wonderful, venerable sir, it is marvelous how the Blessed One tames the untamed, brings peace to the unpeaceful, and leads to nibbāna those who have not attained nibbāna. Venerable sir, we ourselves could not tame him with force and weapons, yet the Blessed One has tamed him without force or weapons.

Love is also effective at stilling disturbance by spirits, negative energy, and threats from human beings. The Buddha taught the famous *Sutta on Love* because his disciples' meditation was being disturbed by antagonistic spirits. By the monastics cultivating profound love for all beings, the spirits were subdued and their interference ceased. When Devadatta released a wild elephant with the hopes it would trample the Buddha, the Buddha's meditation on love soothed the elephant, who bowed to him instead. The laywoman Sāmāvati was protected from the actions of her jealous husband by meditating on love. The Buddha also instructed monastics to contemplate love for snakes, scorpions, centipedes, spiders, lizards, and rodents, and to speak of the excellent qualities of the Three Jewels to protect themselves from being bitten by these creatures.

Cultivating love in a dangerous situation cannot be done out of fear or anger, for such emotions are the antithesis of love. Rather, understanding the suffering of these beings and wishing them well, cultivate love and compassion for them. Love, particularly in a mind of dhyāna, protects you from external and internal disturbances. Furthermore, the liberation of mind with love energizes practitioners to reach out and directly help others whenever the possibility arises. In the process of helping others, it is important not to transgress whatever precepts we have taken.

Meditating on love reduces interferences and increases conducive circumstances so that meditation on other topics will proceed smoothly. Here a practitioner generates love for members of the Dharma community where she lives; this results in their living harmoniously together. Then she meditates on love for the deities in the area, who respond by protecting her. She continues by cultivating love for her benefactor, who, feeling her genuine concern, wishes to provide her with the requisites to continue her Dharma practice. She expands her love to include all the sentient beings in

the area, which is conducive to having good relations with them such that they do not feel malice toward her and do not cause problems or interfere with her Dharma practice. In modern-day Thailand, some disciples cite the power of their spiritual mentor's love as creating peaceful and conducive circumstances to meditate in that monastery.

The cultivation of love aids in the three types of abandonment of defilements: temporary abandonment, abandonment by suppression, and abandonment that eradicates. Developing love toward others can be used as an antidote to anger, resentment, spite, and other hostile emotions, and leads to *temporary abandonment* or abandonment by substitution of the opposite. For example, when we become angry because someone criticizes us or when resentment surges when remembering a harsh event from years ago, we can cultivate a loving feeling that replaces the disturbing emotion. This temporarily removes the affliction.

By attaining the full concentration of dhyāna on love, the five hindrances are suppressed by the power of concentration and cannot manifest.<sup>11</sup> This is *abandonment by suppression*, and it lasts as long as the meditator remains in dhyāna or until the strength of the dhyāna has diminished to such a point that gross afflictions arise again.

By using the liberation of mind with love as the basis for developing insight, a meditator can attain arhatship, a state of *abandonment that eradicates the defilements* so that they can never return. This is done by meditating in a dhyāna, then leaving the dhyānic state and analyzing its components. Through this method, the meditator sees that even the blissful state of concentration is impermanent, unsatisfactory in nature, and selfless. This understanding of the three characteristics in turn leads to the realization of nirvāṇa, in which the fetters are forever eradicated.

Cultivating love benefits ourselves and others. The Buddha explains (SN 47.19):

“I will protect myself.” Monastics, thus should the establishments of mindfulness be practiced. “I will protect others.” Monastics, thus should the establishments of mindfulness be practiced. Protecting oneself, one protects others. Protecting others, one protects oneself.

And how is it that by protecting oneself one protects others? By the pursuit, development, and cultivation [of the four establishments of mindfulness] . . . And how is it that by protecting others one protects oneself? By fortitude, harmlessness, love, and empathic joy.

The commentary to this nikāya explains “protecting oneself, one protects others” as follows: Practicing the four establishments of mindfulness well by abandoning worldly pursuits, a meditator protects himself from duḥkha by attaining arhatship. Others who see his serene conduct develop the virtuous minds of confidence and inspiration. This will lead others to have a heavenly rebirth and to practice the path to liberation themselves. In this way, by protecting himself, a meditator protects others.

It further explains “protecting others, one protects oneself”: By cultivating fortitude, compassion (nonharm), love, and empathic joy, a meditator develops the dhyānas by taking the four immeasurables as the object. In this way, she protects others. By then employing the dhyānas as the basis for cultivating insight into the three characteristics and realizing nirvāṇa, she becomes an arhat, and in this way protects herself.

Some readers may wish that the Buddha had used the meditation on love to stimulate his disciples to become social activists and directly benefit suffering sentient beings. Here, however, the Buddha is focusing on meditation and its relationship with liberation. In other contexts, he explains how to apply fortitude, compassion, love, and empathic joy to improve living standards and educational opportunities and to promote social equality, justice, and environmental protection. For example, in *The Kindred Sayings* the Buddha recommends that lay followers plant trees, dig wells, construct dams, and provide shelter for the homeless, and in another sūtra he advises monarchs to share their wealth with their subjects in order to create a harmonious society that is easy to govern. In *Precious Garland (Ratnāvalī)*, Nāgārjuna spends considerable time advising the king on social policy and how to benefit the denizens of his kingdom as well as travelers and refugees staying there.

*Meditation on Compassion*

Similar to the meditation on love, begin the cultivation of compassion by contemplating the disadvantages of lacking compassion and the benefits of having it. Choose someone who is suffering greatly as the first person who is the object of your compassion. This person may or may not be someone you know personally; the media provides us with more than enough images of people who live in miserable conditions. Still, the compassion will be stronger if you have direct contact with the person.

If you don't encounter an appropriate person, cultivate compassion for someone who is creating horrendous destructive karma, even if that person appears to be happy at the moment. This person is like someone who is given delicious food just before he is executed. He may look happy at the moment, dining on sumptuous food, but that happiness is false. Similarly, someone who legally or illegally orders the death of many people, steals their wealth, or creates massive disharmony through lying and dissimulation may appear to enjoy good circumstances now. However, due to lack of constructive karma, horrible suffering in unfortunate rebirths awaits him.

After generating compassion for a miserable person, do so for a dear person, followed by a neutral person, and finally a hostile person. Should anger or fear arise toward a hostile person, counteract it by employing the methods described above. Even if these hostile people are not experiencing extreme suffering at the moment, they are still under the control of afflictions and polluted karma and therefore are not free from the pervasive *duḥkha* of conditioning in *samsāric* existence. For this reason alone, they are worthy of compassion. Even if some of them have created constructive karma yet are experiencing troubles with their health, family relations, job, and so forth, they are deserving of compassion.

Then break down the barriers between the four kinds of people — ourselves, dear ones, neutral people, and hostile people — until the counterpart sign appears and access concentration is attained. By repeatedly meditating on the counterpart sign, attain the first three *dhyānas*. With that concentration, develop malleability and versatility by generating compassion for all the various beings in all directions as described in the meditation on love. The eleven advantages as detailed above also accrue.

When viewing others' suffering and cultivating compassion, if your mind becomes overwhelmed by feelings of despair or helplessness, you have missed the mark. Distress about others' suffering, anger at societal forces that cause suffering, and frustration with others for carelessly getting themselves into predicaments may be natural emotions for ordinary beings, but they are far from the Buddhist understanding of compassion. Compassion is the wish for others to be free from all *duḥkha*, and to cultivate it we must remain focused on responding with tender concern and the wish to help.

## REFLECTION

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1. Think of someone undergoing great suffering and imagine what it would feel like to be in their situation. Think of that person's buddha nature and good qualities — their potential to contribute to the world and their potential for good.
  2. Let the wish for them to be free from suffering arise in your mind. That is compassion.
  3. Then go through the above steps thinking of friends, neutral people, hostile people, and finally generalize to all sentient beings of the six realms in *samsāra*. Let compassion arise in each case.
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### *Meditation on Empathic Joy*

Empathic joy is feeling joy at others' success, merit, good qualities, and happiness. Here the first person to cultivate empathic joy toward is a dear person who is good-natured and happy and whose happiness and success is worthy of rejoicing over. Sincerely rejoicing at others' good fortune fills our mind with delight and is an excellent antidote to dispel jealousy and envy. Empathic joy is extended not only for the person's present good fortune but also for their past successes and future virtuous actions. Having generated empathic joy toward this dear person, proceed to cultivate

empathic joy for the success and happiness of a neutral person and then a hostile one. Proceed to subdue anger for the hostile person, break down the barriers, and cultivate and repeatedly practice the counterpart sign to increase the absorption up to the third dhyāna in accord with the explanation above. Similarly, cultivate versatility and then reap the benefits of generating empathic joy as explained before.

### *Meditation on Equanimity*

To develop equanimity fully entails previous attainment of the third dhyāna on the basis of cultivating immeasurable love, compassion, and empathic joy. Having become familiar with the third dhyāna, the meditator emerges from it and contemplates the risks of the previous three divine abodes and the benefits of equanimity. The first three divine abodes are risky because attachment and anger are not far away. For example, when developing love and wishing for others to be happy, attachment may arise instead. Also, the first three immeasurables are associated with happiness, which lessens the depth of concentration. For these reasons, the meditator now seeks equanimity, which is a constancy or steadiness of mind when seeing the happiness and suffering of others. The mind is free from longing and repugnance regarding others. Seeing that their happiness and suffering are results of their own karmic actions, the mind of equanimity remains balanced when seeing sentient beings' felicity and misery.

The chief benefit of equanimity is its peacefulness, and peace comes when the mind is balanced. This equanimity is not indifference or apathy, for meditators have already gained dhyāna on love, compassion, and empathic joy. These three imbue equanimity with calm affection for sentient beings and balanced involvement with them, while equanimity remains peaceful and receptive.

Having contemplated the first three immeasurables, meditators now focus on a neutral person and cultivate equanimity. When this is stable, they then develop equanimity toward a dear one, and then toward a hostile person.

Breaking down the barriers between the neutral person, the dear one, the hostile one, and themselves is the same as in the meditation on love,

compassion, and empathic joy. So too is cultivating and repeatedly practicing the counterpart sign. Through this they enter the fourth dhyāna. Meditators can gain the fourth dhyāna only on the basis of having attained the third dhyāna by means of meditation on one of the other immeasurables. In other words, only after attaining the first, second, and third dhyāna on love, compassion, and empathic joy can meditators attain the fourth dhyāna on equanimity. In addition, they cannot attain the fourth dhyāna on equanimity on the basis of having attained the third dhyāna with another meditation object, such as the earth kasiṇa, because that object differs considerably from equanimity. Developing versatility and receiving the advantages are similar to the other immeasurables. In the fourth dhyāna, the dhyānic factor of bliss has ceased and the predominant feeling is equanimity. However, as explained below, the divine abode of equanimity and the feeling of equanimity are not the same.

The sequential cultivation of the four immeasurables is compared with the evolving attitude parents have toward their children. When the baby is in the womb, the parents think with a *loving* mind, “May our child be healthy.” After he is born, when the adorable baby lies on his back and cries because he is hungry or has been bitten by insects or has had a bad dream, the parents feel *compassion*. When the child grows up and the parents see him playing, being inquisitive about the world, and learning, they feel *empathic joy* and rejoice at their child’s happiness. When the child is grown and becomes a successful person in his own right, the parents have *equanimity*, knowing that he can take care of himself.

This analogy shows the usefulness of each attitude in a specific situation. However, do not take this analogy too far. It does not mean that equanimity is the superior attitude to have toward all sentient beings. Nor does it mean that equanimity is to be favored more than the other immeasurables or that it is higher or more desirable. Skill in all four is helpful because depending on the situation, love, compassion, or empathic joy may be more appropriate than equanimity. As we see by the parents’ response to their child at different times, love is called for at one time, compassion at another, empathic joy in one circumstance, and equanimity in another. Versatility in the dhyānas and in the range of positive emotions



meditators experience expands their practice. It also affects their ability to reach out and benefit others in their daily life.

Even after his awakening, when he had nothing further to cultivate or attain, the Buddha continued to meditate on all four immeasurables. Most likely this was because of the benefit they bestow on others and to encourage his direct disciples and future generations of practitioners to cultivate them. Certainly the four immeasurables were satisfying and pleasant abodes for the Buddha himself. As we see from the example of his life, the Buddha was a loving, compassionate, and joyful individual whose evenness of mind enabled him to be effective in all situations and with all people.

### *Types of Equanimity*

“Equanimity” has a variety of meanings, depending on the context. Buddhaghosa differentiates ten types of equanimity (Vism 4.156–66). The prominent six are as follows:

1. The *feeling of equanimity* is a neutral feeling, one that is neither pain nor pleasure. It can arise in virtuous, nonvirtuous, and neutral states of mind.
2. *Even-minded equanimity* maintains an even attitude, balances the mind and its accompanying mental factors, and makes our responses even and balanced. It is present in virtuous minds but absent in nonvirtuous minds. The next four are types of even-minded equanimity that are differentiated according to the circumstance in which they arise.
3. The *equanimity of purity* is the equanimity of the fourth dhyāna. In the first three dhyānas, even-minded equanimity maintains the balance of investigation, analysis, joy, and bliss, but in a sense it is overshadowed by them. In the fourth dhyāna, these four dhyānic factors are absent and the feeling of equanimity is present, which enables even-minded equanimity to shine forth purely.
4. The *divine abode of equanimity* is the fourth immeasurable. It is a blend of equanimity toward dear ones, strangers, and enemies with

the evenness of the mind and its accompanying mental factors. Being very peaceful, divine-abode equanimity differs from the equanimity of purity only in terms of its object. Equanimity of purity arises in relation to the counterpart sign, while divine-abode equanimity arises toward sentient beings.

5. The *awakening factor of equanimity* is the balance among the various factors of the mind that realizes nirvāṇa. It is one of the thirty-seven harmonies with awakening.<sup>12</sup>
6. *Six-limbed equanimity* keeps the mind balanced when it contacts attractive or unattractive sense objects and when it experiences pleasure or pain. Only arhats have perfected this type of equanimity, which may be accompanied by pleasant, painful, or neutral feelings. It is the equanimity spoken of when describing an arhat: “(When) he sees form with his eye, he becomes neither mentally pleased, nor mentally displeased, but remains equanimous, mindful, and discriminating (and so on for all six senses).”<sup>13</sup>

Dhammapāla speaks of unknowing equanimity, which is ignorance combined with the feeling of equanimity. This is the dull apathy that is a defilement.

Of the four immeasurables, immeasurable equanimity is the most potent in helping a meditator develop the awakening factor of equanimity that is needed to realize nirvāṇa.

### *The Four Divine Abodes and Insight*

Meditation on the four divine abodes can be done for several purposes: for protection when suffering or in danger, as a path to rebirth in the Brahmā world, and as a basis for insight. When perfected, these four immeasurables become “immeasurable liberations of mind,”<sup>14</sup> which are states of dhyāna that are liberated from attachment to sensual objects and free from the five hindrances. Although these immeasurable liberations of mind alone cannot bring liberation from cyclic existence, when these minds of deep concentration are used to meditate on the three characteristics and nirvāṇa,

the resulting insight will lead to the ultimate goal of liberation from saṃsāra.

For example, meditators who develop the first dhyāna based on love enter into that dhyāna through love. After stabilizing their concentration in the dhyāna on love, they emerge from the dhyāna and, looking back at it, they examine it. The experience in dhyāna is so blissful that if they did not examine it, attachment for it would easily arise and they might forgo liberation in favor of the bliss of samādhi.

But when analyzing the dhyāna they see the dhyāna of love as a composite phenomena consisting of the five aggregates. There is a pleasant or equanimous feeling, some discrimination, and other miscellaneous factors such as love, attention, contact, intention, and concentration, as well as the mental primary consciousness. In short, the four mental aggregates and the physical body were present when they were in dhyāna. They see each of the dhyānic factors as a distinct mental factor, instead of their usual experience of seeing them as a seamless whole. With insight, these meditators see the dhyāna is impermanent because it is produced by causes and conditions and it ceases with the cessation of its causes and conditions. Because it is impermanent — unceasingly arising and perishing in every moment — it does not bring ultimate satisfaction; thus it is in the nature of duḥkha. Because it is impermanent and duḥkha in nature, it is not worthwhile clinging to — it is not I, mine, or my self. There is no substantially real person findable within or separate from the ever-changing combination of physical and mental aggregates.

Continuing to investigate their experience of the dhyāna more deeply by seeing it in light of the three characteristics, meditators increase their wisdom until there is a breakthrough to seeing or vision. With this insight perceiving the unconditioned, nirvāṇa, comes the abandonment of the first three fetters — view of a personal identity, doubt, and view of rules and practices. Having used the dhyāna on love to develop insight and realize nirvāṇa, these meditators have now become stream-enterers.

As they continue cultivating wisdom, stream-enterers reduce their malice and their attachment to sense pleasure sufficiently so that they become once-returners. When these two are abandoned completely, they

become nonreturners, and if they don't attain arhatship in that life, they will be reborn in the pure lands where they will attain it.

Some meditators cultivate the four immeasurables after becoming āryas, but before attaining arhatship. In this case, they will be reborn in the Brahmā worlds in the form realm after death, continue to practice insight there, and become arhats. This is very different from worldlings who, rather than seeking liberation, cultivate the four immeasurables for the purpose of being born in the Brahmā world. While attainment of the four immeasurables will bring rebirth in the Brahmā world, because these practitioners lack insight and wisdom as well as the interest in developing them, they may be reborn in an unfortunate realm after the karma for rebirth in the Brahmā world has been exhausted.

## REFLECTION

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1. Meditate on one of the four divine abodes as taught above until you experience it.
2. Step back from the experience and see it is simply a mental state.
3. Note the feeling, discrimination, and any other mental factor such as mindfulness, intention, or concentration that are present. Note that the mental primary consciousness is present and that your body is there too.
4. Dissecting the experience of the divine abode into the five psychophysical aggregates in this way, see that it is a state composed of many changing factors.
5. Note that the mental state is impermanent because it's produced by causes and conditions. Because it is impermanent, it does not bring ultimate satisfaction and is thus in the nature of duḥkha. Because it is impermanent and duḥkha in nature, it is not worthwhile clinging to — it is not I, mine, or my self. There is no substantially real person findable within or separate from the aggregates.

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## *Near and Far Enemies of the Four Immeasurables*

Each of the four immeasurables has a “near enemy” and a “far enemy.” The near enemy is an affliction that is similar in some way to that virtuous immeasurable; the far enemy is an affliction that is the opposite of the emotion we are trying to cultivate.

The near enemy of love is attachment because both love and attachment see the good qualities in the other person. However, attachment clings to others with unrealistic expectations; it wants something from others, and thus the affection we feel is polluted with possessiveness and neediness. Malice is the far enemy of love. We must ensure that our love is free of both these dangers.

Compassion’s near enemy is personal distress or grief based on worldly life. This grief is the sadness and distress felt when we or those we care about cannot get what we want. It may be sorrow over past frustrations or present disappointments. The grief is similar to compassion in that both have an element of sorrow due to others’ misery. Compassion’s far enemies are cruelty and violence.

The near enemy of empathic joy is joy based on worldly life — that is, delight at receiving sense pleasures in the past or present. Here our mind becomes giddy with excitement; we become too involved and attached to someone else’s happiness. Empathic joy’s far enemies are jealousy and boredom, which interfere with our experiencing empathic joy at others’ successes and happiness. Jealousy resents the other person’s successes and happiness, and boredom doesn’t care about them.

Equanimity’s near enemy is the equanimity of unknowing based on worldly life; this is the indifference and apathy that people often experience. Indifference and apathy are similar to equanimity in that none of them notices the faults or good qualities of others. Equanimity’s far enemies are anger and attachment, which push some beings away and hold others near and dear.

IMMEASURABLE	CHARACTERISTIC	NEAR ENEMY	FAR ENEMY
Love	Sincere wish for the welfare and happiness of beings	Personal attachment, worldly affection, clinging or possessive love	Malice, hatred
Compassion	Wanting to dispel the suffering of others	Worldly grief, personal distress	Cruelty (the wish to inflict suffering on others), violence
Empathic joy	Joy produced by seeing the success and good fortune of others	Worldly happiness, giddiness, and excitement that is too involved with others' success	Jealousy, boredom
Equanimity	Impartiality toward living beings	Indifference, cold uncaring apathy	Attachment and anger, partiality

It's good for us to keep the near and far enemies of each immeasurable in mind so that when we cultivate each of the four, our meditation will be on target. The near enemies are much harder to detect, so special vigilance regarding them is needed. How disappointing it would be to think we were cultivating love when actually we were building up attachment toward someone! And how deleterious it would be to try to generate compassion but get stuck in personal distress. By precisely understanding the qualities of each immeasurable and monitoring our mind closely, our meditation will have a transformative effect.

Meditation on love is recommended for people whose anger and malice are strong; it will help them overcome those obstacles. Meditation on compassion is advised for people who tend toward cruelty, because with compassion they will cease wanting to inflict suffering on others and instead will want sentient beings to be free of suffering and its causes. Meditation on empathic joy is especially helpful for people with strong jealousy and boredom, as it will enable them to rejoice and take delight in others' happiness instead of resent or disregard it. Meditation on equanimity

is suitable for those who suffer from much attachment, anger, prejudice, and partiality, because it helps them to accept all others and have an equal and balanced attitude toward them.

Buddhaghosa says we should practice the four immeasurables like a mother with four children — a young child, a sickly child, one in the flush of youth, and one who is busy with her own life. A mother wants to nurture the young child so he will grow up and become a happy and ethical adult; she wants her sickly child to recover and regain his health. She hopes the one in the flush of youth will enjoy the benefits of good health and many opportunities for as long as possible, and she does not intrude or worry about the one who is handling her own affairs, but peacefully lets her be.

Joyous effort is crucial when beginning to practice the four divine abodes. Taming the hindrances by applying their antidotes is important in the middle as practice continues. Meditative absorption is essential at the conclusion. The object of any of the four divine abodes is a single living being or as many living beings as we think of.

As noted above, immeasurable equanimity and the feeling of equanimity differ. Immeasurable equanimity is impartiality with respect to all sentient beings; it is a mental factor in the aggregate of miscellaneous factors. The feeling of equanimity is a neutral feeling that is neither pain nor pleasure; it belongs to the feeling aggregate.

## REFLECTION

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1. Contemplate the near and far enemies of each of the four immeasurables.
  2. Are there particular ones that you tend to fall into?
  3. What ideas do you have to remedy that, so that you can experience genuine love, compassion, empathic joy, and equanimity?
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*The Four Immeasurables in the Mahāyāna*

The four immeasurables are an important practice in the Mahāyāna as well. As in the Pāli tradition, they are objects for cultivating the dhyānas, and practicing them culminates in attaining the dhyānas. However, they also play a strong role in creating the causes to attain bodhicitta and in strengthening bodhicitta when it has been generated.

Chapter 5 of the *Bodhisattvapiṭaka Sūtra*, which is part of the *Sūtra of the Heap of Jewels*, has an extensive explanation of the four immeasurables.<sup>15</sup> In general, the four are contemplated at the beginning of a meditation session in order to stabilize and increase bodhicitta. The short version of the four immeasurables is as follows:

May all sentient beings have happiness and its causes. (love)

May all sentient beings be free of suffering and its causes.  
(compassion)

May all sentient beings not be separated from sorrowless bliss.  
(empathic joy)

May all sentient beings abide in equanimity, free of bias,  
attachment, and anger. (equanimity)

The long version:

How wonderful it would be if all sentient beings were to abide in equanimity, free of bias, attachment, and anger. May they abide in this way. I shall cause them to abide in this way. Guru Buddha, please inspire me to be able to do so.

How wonderful it would be if all sentient beings had happiness and its causes. May they have these. I shall cause them to have these. Guru Buddha, please inspire me to be able to do so.

How wonderful it would be if all sentient beings were free from suffering and its causes. May they be free. I shall cause them to be free. Guru Buddha, please inspire me to be able to do so.

How wonderful it would be if all sentient beings were never parted from fortunate rebirths and liberation's



excellent bliss. May they never be parted. I shall cause them never to be parted. Guru Buddha, please inspire me to be able to do so.

In the long version of the four immeasurables, each verse has four parts, which gradually serve to intensify the emotion: (1) a wish (How wonderful it would be . . . ), (2) an aspiration (May they . . . ), (3) a resolution (I shall cause them . . . ), and (4) a request for inspiration (Guru Buddha, please inspire me to be able to do so).

Using love as an example, first we have the wish that sentient beings have happiness and its causes. Focusing our attention on this wish, the wish intensifies and becomes an aspiration that they have happiness and its causes. After that aspiration takes root in our mind, it grows into a resolution to get involved, and we take responsibility to make our aspiration a reality. Because we may feel inadequate to fulfill this grand resolution, we seek inspiration from the Buddha and our spiritual mentor. In this way, we feel supported by the buddhas who have perfected their ability to fulfill this resolution. Our love becomes stronger and more stable, as does our confidence to engage in whatever is necessary so that sentient beings will have happiness and its causes.

In the short version of the four immeasurables, equanimity comes at the end, while in the long version it comes at the beginning. Placing equanimity at the end emphasizes our wish that others enjoy the peace of being free from attachment to friends, anger toward enemies, and apathy toward strangers.

By putting equanimity first, the long version becomes a synopsis of the method of generating bodhicitta called the “seven cause-and-effect instructions,” which will be described in chapter 3. Cultivating equanimity at the beginning pacifies the attachment, animosity, and apathy that all too often constitute our reactions to others. Such partiality renders generating equal compassion for all beings impossible, and such compassion is a prerequisite for generating bodhicitta, the mind aspiring to attain full awakening in order to benefit all sentient beings more effectively. Equanimity — a state free from attachment and aversion toward all beings — is preliminary to the seven instructions.

With a mind of equanimity, we then generate love for all beings. Love is the fourth of the seven instructions and the result of the first three — seeing all sentient beings as our mother, recognizing their kindness, and wishing to repay it. The third immeasurable, compassion, is the fifth instruction. This leads to the great resolve and bodhicitta, the sixth and seventh instructions. With bodhicitta, we work for the welfare of all sentient beings, which includes their temporal happiness in saṃsāra, such as taking fortunate rebirths, and their ultimate happiness — liberation and full awakening. This is the meaning of empathic joy that wishes sentient beings to never be separated from fortunate rebirths or liberation’s excellent bliss. Empathic joy rejoices at their well-being and wants it to arise and continue.

## REFLECTION

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1. Meditate on the four immeasurables in the short way, with equanimity as the fourth point.
  2. Meditate on them with equanimity as the first point.
  3. What difference do you experience?
  4. Meditate on the four immeasurables in the long way with all four phrases.
  5. Both methods are effective; it’s good to develop familiarity with both.
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When meditating on the four immeasurables, we aim to generate these four thoughts or emotions in our mind. Unlike meditation on impermanence or emptiness when we try to apprehend an object not previously realized, in these meditations we want to transform our mind into that mental attitude. Using love as an example, we do not meditate on love as an object of contemplation — that is, we do not focus on love and its definition, reciting them over and over again — but we try to imbue our mind with love.

In both the Pāli and Sanskrit traditions, we are instructed to develop the four immeasurables first toward specific individuals — ourselves, a friend, a stranger, and an enemy — and then gradually extend them to include all others, including sentient beings in other realms of existence.<sup>16</sup> A Pāli sūtra, the *Simile of the Cloth*, says (MN 7.13):

He abides pervading one quarter with a mind imbued with love (compassion, empathic joy, equanimity), likewise the second, likewise the third, likewise the fourth; so above, below, around, and everywhere, and to all as to himself, he abides pervading the all-encompassing world with a mind imbued with love (compassion, empathic joy, equanimity), abundant, exalted, immeasurable, without hostility and without malice.

If we immediately jumped to cultivating the four immeasurables toward all sentient beings as an amorphous group, our love, compassion, empathic joy, and equanimity will be only intellectual. It is comparatively easy to think of a vague group of beings who are far away and wish them well. But to feel love, compassion, empathic joy, and equanimity toward specific individuals with whom we come in contact daily is another matter. Therefore, while knowing our aim is to extend these emotions toward all beings, we must begin by cultivating them toward specific individuals and extend them in stages so they become immeasurable and heartfelt toward all sentient beings.

Empathic joy is expressed as wishing all beings to attain liberation — the state of undeclining peace that is free from sorrow — as well as rejoicing in their virtuous actions that create the causes of happiness. It also rejoices in others' temporal happiness and wishes them never to be separated from whatever worldly happiness they have.

The great Nyingma master Longchenpa (1308–1363) makes empathic joy more immediate by emphasizing its relationship to sentient beings' buddha nature. Because we want them to experience the joy of awakening, we rejoice that they already have the blissful, pure nature of mind that enables that awakening to be possible.

In the Mahāyāna, equanimity is expressed as a mental state in which we wish all sentient beings' minds to be free from gross attachment, anger, and apathy. In the *Compendium of Knowledge*, Asaṅga (fourth century) explains that immeasurable equanimity thinks, “May all sentient beings receive benefit.” This can be interpreted in two ways, the first wishing that they all receive equal benefit, without some receiving more and others less, the second wishing that sentient beings free their own minds from bias, attachment, and anger and thus benefit by developing equanimity themselves. Tsongkhapa explains in the *Great Treatise* that equanimity may refer to the meditator feeling equanimity toward others, and to all sentient beings having equanimity whereby their minds are free from bias, attachment, and anger. Either way, equanimity is a calming attitude that helps us live harmoniously both inside our own hearts and together with others.

Similar to the explanation in the Pāli tradition, Maitreya says in the *Ornament of Clear Realizations* (*Abhisamayālamkāra*) that equanimity, love, compassion, and empathic joy are not immeasurables unless they are accompanied by an actual dhyāna. Here we see that the four immeasurables may be meditated upon in the Mahāyāna not only to increase our bodhicitta but also as an object of meditation for cultivating serenity.

It is also important to combine wisdom with equanimity, love, compassion, and empathic joy by viewing their agents, objects, and actions — also known as the “circle of three” — as empty of true existence. Taking love as an example, we contemplate the emptiness of inherent existence of the meditator who is generating love for sentient beings (the agent), the sentient beings who are the object of her love (the object), and the action of wishing them to have happiness and its causes (the action). These three factors exist dependent on one another. Having such “objectless” wisdom — that is, the wisdom that does not grasp an inherently existent object because it has realized its emptiness of inherent existence — combined with love, compassion, empathic joy, and equanimity, will lead to liberation. Without this wisdom, abiding in the four immeasurables will lead only to rebirth in the Brahmā realm within cyclic existence.

Some masters, such as Atiśa, say that the four immeasurables are preliminary to generating bodhicitta. Other masters, such as Maitreya and

Asaṅga, emphasize their development as practices of bodhisattvas. This doesn't mean that the four are developed only after generating bodhicitta and becoming a bodhisattva. Rather, the four immeasurables act to strengthen the bodhicitta that was generated previously.

The *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa Sūtra* (chapter 7) speaks of the immeasurable love of bodhisattvas:

Mañjuśrī then asked further, “Noble sir, if a bodhisattva considers all living beings in this way, how does he generate the great love toward them?”

Vimalakīrti replied, “Mañjuśrī, when a bodhisattva considers all living beings in this way, he thinks: ‘Just as I have realized the Dharma, so should I teach it to living beings.’ Thereby, he generates the love that is truly a refuge for all living beings,

the love that is peaceful because it is free of grasping,  
the love that is not burning because it is free of afflictions,  
the love that accords with reality because it is equanimous in  
all three times (past, present, and future),  
the love that is without conflict because it is free of the  
violence of the afflictions,  
the love that is nondual because it is involved neither with  
the external nor with the internal,  
the love that is imperturbable because it carries through to  
the end.

“Thereby he generates the love that is firm, its high  
resolve unbreakable, like a diamond,

the love that is pure, purified in its nature,  
the love that is even, its aspirations being equal,  
the ārya's love that has eliminated its enemy [anger],

the bodhisattva's love that continuously develops living beings,  
the Tathāgata's love that understands reality,  
the Buddha's love that causes living beings to awaken from their sleep,  
the love that is spontaneous because it is fully awakened spontaneously,  
the love that is awakening because it is unity of experience,  
the love that has no presumption because it has eliminated attachment and aversion,  
the love that is great compassion because it infuses the Mahāyāna with radiance,  
the love that is never exhausted because it knows that all [persons and phenomena] is empty and selfless,  
the love that is giving because it bestows the gift of Dharma free of the tight fist of a bad teacher,  
the love that is ethical because it improves unethical living beings,  
the love that is fortitude because it protects both self and others,  
the love that is joyous effort because it takes responsibility for all living beings,  
the love that is meditative stability because it refrains from indulgence in tastes,  
the love that is wisdom because it causes attainment at the proper time,  
the love that is skillful means because it has manifestation suited for every occasion,  
the love that hides nothing because it is pure in motivation,  
the love that is without deviation because it acts from decisive motivation,  
the love that is high resolve because it is without afflictions,  
the love that is without deceit because it is not artificial,

the love that is happiness because it introduces living beings to the happiness of the Buddha.

“Such, Mañjuśrī, is the great love of a bodhisattva.”

Mañjuśrī: “What is the great compassion of a bodhisattva?”

Vimalakīrti: “It is the giving of all accumulated roots of virtue to all living beings.”

Mañjuśrī: “What is the great joy of the bodhisattva?”

Vimalakīrti: “It is to be joyful and without regret in giving.”

Mañjuśrī: “What is the equanimity of the bodhisattva?”

Vimalakīrti: “It is what benefits both self and others.”

### *The Four Immeasurables in the Vajrayāna*

The four immeasurables are found in many tantric sādhanas (meditation texts) as well. One example is in the sādhana of the meditational deity Cakrasaṃvara:

May all sentient beings come to hold the special sublime bliss.

May all sentient beings be freed from duḥkha and its causes.

May all sentient beings never be separated from the bliss of liberation.

May all sentient beings be free from afflictions and their associated defilements.

The first line is love, but here the happiness we wish for all beings is the special sublime bliss that arises in tantric practice and is used to realize emptiness. Tantra specializes in the development of blissful wisdom, so it is natural here to wish that all sentient beings will be able to generate this special bliss that leads to the penetrating wisdom that eradicates all defilements and brings full awakening. The tantric meaning of empathic joy is similar to the meaning in the general Mahāyāna — that is, it is not simply

rejoicing at others' worldly well-being, but wishing them to have the bliss of liberation, which here means full awakening. For that to come about, their being free from afflictions is essential — thus equanimity is wanting them to be free from afflictions and their associated defilements through the generation of bodhicitta and the realization of emptiness.

In the Yamāntaka sādhana, the four immeasurables are expressed like so:

May all sentient beings be endowed with bliss.

May all sentient beings be parted from duḥkha.

May all sentient beings never be parted from bliss.

May all sentient beings be placed in a state of equanimity unperturbed by preconceptions of apprehender and apprehended or by the eight worldly concerns.

Here, too, love wishes that all sentient beings have the great bliss that leads to realizations in tantric practice. How does the experience of great bliss do this? Through melting the subtle drops of the subtle body, great bliss is produced, and this is used to make manifest the fundamental innate mind of clear light. When this mind realizes emptiness, even subtle defilements can be eradicated quickly.

Equanimity here includes two wishes. The first, that sentient beings be unperturbed by preconceptions of apprehender and apprehended, is the wish that they realize emptiness directly. When the absence of inherent existence is known nonconceptually, there is no appearance whatsoever of an apprehending mind and an apprehended object. That is, emptiness is perceived nondually, without any feeling at all of “I am perceiving emptiness.” It is said the subject (the mind realizing emptiness) and the object (the emptiness of inherent existence that is apprehended) are experienced inseparably, like water poured into water. Since Yamāntaka is the wrathful form of Mañjuśrī, the Buddha of Wisdom, immeasurable equanimity wants all sentient beings to attain that liberating wisdom.

The second wish associated with equanimity is that all sentient beings be free from the eight worldly concerns — attachment or aversion regarding material gain and loss, fame and disrepute, praise and blame, pleasure and



pain.<sup>17</sup> While these eight worldly concerns and methods to subdue them are taught early in the stages of the path, they are difficult to counteract while our body and mind are in the desire realm. While meditative absorption suppresses them, it cannot eradicate them completely from the mind. Only the wisdom directly realizing emptiness can do this. Thus, wishing that sentient beings be free from delight regarding money and possessions, praise and approval, reputation and image, and pleasant sense objects, and free from dejection when confronting poverty, blame and disapproval, notoriety and a bad reputation, and unpleasant sense experiences, is wishing that they have this supreme wisdom.

### *An Intimate Feeling with All Beings*

The four immeasurables are important for all of us, be we spiritual practitioners or not. A mind imbued with these four thoughts is tranquil and spreads peace to those around us. For this reason, many Theravāda masters encourage their disciples to meditate on the four immeasurables at the beginning of meditation sessions on mindfulness or insight, and Mahāyāna masters encourage their disciples to contemplate them early in every meditation session.

The use of the mother-child analogy in cultivating love and bodhicitta is found in both the Pāli and Sanskrit traditions. While imperfect, this analogy is the best one found in our world because this connection between parent and child is precious — it is the closest example we have to illustrate unconditional love and gratitude. The Pāli tradition recommends seeing sentient beings as our children and cultivating unconditional love for them, wanting to protect them from harm and misery as a parent does his or her child. The Sanskrit tradition encourages contemplating sentient beings as our mother and feeling gratitude and the wish to repay their kindness through attaining buddhahood.

Personally speaking, I (Chodron) find contemplating others' kindness very helpful to do before meditating on the four immeasurables. Doing this changes how I feel about others and myself and opens my heart, because I realize a fact that I am often blind to — that I have been, am, and will continue to be the recipient of incredible kindness from others. Dear ones,

neutral people, hostile people, friends, strangers, and enemies — all have been kind to me not only because they have been my parents in previous lives but because I receive the benefits of the labors and various jobs they undertake in this life as well. With this awareness, turning my mind to being concerned about their well-being and wishing them to have happiness and be free from suffering comes much easier, almost automatically.



## 2 | The Altruistic Intention of Bodhicitta

### *The Fundamental Vehicle and Mahāyāna*

IN THIS VOLUME, bodhicitta — the altruistic intention to become a buddha in order to benefit others most effectively — will be front and center. Bodhisattvas are those who have cultivated spontaneous bodhicitta that arises with respect to every sentient being. Because of being motivated by bodhicitta, bodhisattvas fulfill the two collections of merit and wisdom and attain the resultant full awakening of a buddha with the four buddha bodies. Bodhisattvas follow the Bodhisattva Vehicle, also called the Mahāyāna or Universal Vehicle.

Śrāvakas and solitary realizers, on the other hand, are motivated by the aspiration for liberation. Although they realize the same emptiness as the bodhisattvas do, they do not gather the same amount of merit; the awakenings they attain from practicing their vehicles are the awakenings of śrāvakas and solitary realizers. They attain liberation and become arhats.

There is some difference between the way arhatship is described in the Pāli and Sanskrit traditions. Although both agree that Śākyamuni Buddha was an arhat, the Sanskrit tradition distinguishes arhatship and buddhahood. Arhatship is the abandonment of all afflictive obscurations, whereas buddhahood involves the abandonment of both afflictive obscurations and cognitive obscurations.

The choice of vehicle depends on the disposition of the individual. The practitioners of all three vehicles are to be respected for their spiritual attainments. We must admit, however, that some Mahāyāna sūtras may appear to denigrate those who seek arhatship rather than buddhahood. This was done to encourage practitioners inclined toward the Bodhisattva Vehicle to see the value of bodhicitta and put energy into generating it.

Unfortunately this has been misunderstood and has become the source of sectarianism. This and other misconceptions that Buddhist traditions have about one another have been passed down historically. Remedying them was one reason why we wrote *Buddhism: One Teacher, Many Traditions*, which explains the doctrines of the Pāli and Sanskrit traditions. Here we see that both traditions contain teachings on the Śrāvaka, Solitary Realizer, and Bodhisattva Vehicles, and that many teachings practiced by bodhisattvas are built on the foundation of the practices of śrāvakas and solitary realizers. For example, we can easily see that the teachings on bodhicitta are founded on the teachings of the four immeasurables, which are contained in both traditions. That is, the teachings on immeasurable love, compassion, empathic joy, and equanimity are available to all Buddhist practitioners. The teachings on bodhicitta are not separate from those on the four immeasurables; they simply take these four wonderful thoughts a step further.

In extolling the magnificent qualities of bodhicitta and bodhisattvas, there is the danger that ordinary people who aspire to enter the Mahāyāna may look down on the Fundamental Vehicle. That is wrong. The greatness of any approach must be explained contextually. In the Mahāyāna, the primary motivation that inspires practitioners is seeking the awakening of all sentient beings. From this point of view, striving for our own personal awakening is limited. However, from the viewpoint of people drowning in saṃsāra, the Fundamental Vehicle that leads to nirvāṇa is magnificent.

By examining the practice and the results of these two vehicles, we see one is more expansive, while the other is more modest. Those following the Fundamental Vehicle seek their own liberation and practice the three higher trainings as the method to attain arhatship. Those following the Mahāyāna must do all the practices taught in the Fundamental Vehicle, including generating renunciation of saṃsāra and practicing the three higher trainings. However, they renounce not only their own saṃsāra but also that of all sentient beings, and for this reason they aspire for full awakening. Practitioners of the Fundamental Vehicle and the Mahāyāna share the ethical conduct of restraining from the ten paths of nonvirtue and abiding in the prātimokṣa ethical code. Mahāyāna practitioners additionally train in the ethical conduct of restraining from actions motivated by self-interest alone

and practice the ethical conducts of accumulating virtue and benefiting sentient beings.

Fundamental Vehicle practitioners aspire to attain nirvāṇa without remainder, in which they abide in the personal peace of nirvāṇa. Mahāyāna practitioners seek to attain the enjoyment body of a buddha because through it they will be able to fulfill the purpose of others: leading all sentient beings out of saṃsāra and to full awakening.

These differences do not mean that the Fundamental Vehicle teachings or its practitioners should be denigrated. The sixth root bodhisattva precept is to not abandon the holy Dharma by saying that texts that teach the three vehicles are not the Buddha's word. Mahāyāna practitioners must not denigrate the scriptures of the Fundamental Vehicle by saying they are faulty and therefore were not spoken by the Buddha. The thirteenth root bodhisattva precept is to abandon causing others to forsake their prātimokṣa precepts and embrace the Mahāyāna. Mahāyāna practitioners must not disparage maintaining prātimokṣa precepts in an attempt to bring Fundamental Vehicle practitioners into the Mahāyāna fold. The fourteenth root bodhisattva precept is to abandon causing others to hold the view that the Fundamental Vehicle does not abandon attachment and other afflictions. Such a view is untrue and could adversely affect Fundamental Vehicle practitioners by making them lose faith in the Śrāvaka and Solitary Realizer Vehicles, which do lead to liberation.

Nevertheless, the Fundamental Vehicle and the Mahāyāna bring different results. Nāgārjuna says in *Commentary on Bodhicitta (Bodhicittavivarāṇa, 83–85)*:

Because of their detachment,  
did not the śrāvakas attain less awakening?  
By never abandoning sentient beings  
the fully awakened buddhas attained [full] awakening.

Thus when one considers the occurrence of  
the fruits of beneficial and nonbeneficial deeds,  
how can anyone remain even for an instant

attached [only] to one's own welfare?

Rooted firmly because of compassion,  
and arising from the shoot of bodhicitta,  
[full] awakening that is the sole fruit of altruism —  
this is what the bodhisattvas cultivate.

Based on the firm foundation of the practices of the Fundamental Vehicle, bodhisattvas go beyond the aspiration for their own liberation; seeing that others are trapped in cyclic existence, they seek full awakening.

## REFLECTION

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1. The Buddha taught three vehicles to correspond to the different dispositions and interests of sentient beings. Practitioners follow the vehicle that corresponds to their disposition and way of thinking.
2. The more we learn about the three vehicles, the more we see what a skillful teacher the Buddha was.
3. The teachings in each vehicle originate from the Buddha and thus are worthy of our respect, appreciation, and honor. Likewise, all practitioners are to be respected.

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### *The Ultimate Purpose of Dharma Practice*

From a Mahāyāna perspective, the ultimate purpose for practicing the Dharma is to attain buddhahood, a state that is completely free of all defilements and is fully endowed with all positive qualities. Buddhas have attained their own ultimate peace as well as made themselves fully able to benefit all others. They have accomplished their own purpose in that they have attained a buddha's omniscient mind, the truth body, in which they know all phenomena that exist as clearly as we can see an apple in our hand. They have accomplished the purpose of others in that they have

attained a buddha's form bodies — the enjoyment body and the emanation body — with which they can work to benefit sentient beings and lead them to awakening.

All other Dharma practices are either preliminaries to bodhicitta or subsequent practices through which bodhisattvas express their bodhicitta and fulfill their altruistic intention. Preliminaries include the meditations in common with the initial- and middle-capacity practitioners, as well as all the meditations done to generate bodhicitta, such as the seven cause-and-effect instructions and equalizing and exchanging self and others. Subsequent practices include the six perfections and the four ways of assembling disciples (*saṃgrahavastu*, *saṅgahavatthu*). Vajrayāna's specialty lies in enhancing the perfections of meditative stability and wisdom, and possessing bodhicitta is one of the chief criteria to enter the Vajrayāna. Due to the importance of bodhicitta, the Kadampa masters of eleventh- and twelfth-century Tibet advised us to apply whatever abilities we have to only one purpose — the cultivation of bodhicitta if we have not yet generated it, and to sustain and enhance it once we have.

The principle cause of the wonderful state of buddhahood is bodhicitta. Without it, buddhahood is impossible. Why? Because bodhicitta is the mind aspiring to attain full awakening in order to benefit all sentient beings most effectively, and without this intention, someone will not engage in the practices to attain full awakening. To become a buddha we must first generate bodhicitta and then engage in the actual practice of an advanced practitioner: the six perfections — generosity, ethical conduct, fortitude, joyous effort, meditative stability, and wisdom.

Deep and continuous meditation on the defects of cyclic existence imprints on our mindstream the understanding that the happiness found in saṃsāra is transient and unsatisfactory in nature. Pursuing saṃsāra's limited happiness is not worthwhile when we can attain liberation from saṃsāra, which offers actual peace and joy. When this is clear in our mind, we have no reluctance in relinquishing saṃsāra and attaining liberation. This is compassion for ourselves.

But the question still remains: What about everyone else? We are surrounded by sentient beings, all of whom are like us in wanting happiness and not wanting suffering. In addition, any happiness we have had, are



having, and will experience in cyclic existence is dependent on them. Would we feel right to seek only our own liberation? Āryasūra questions us (LC 2:14):

When people see that joy and unhappiness are like a dream  
and that beings degenerate due to the faults of ignorance,  
why would they strive for their own welfare,  
forsaking delight in the excellent deeds of altruism?

When we can enact so much good in this and other worlds, why not aspire for full buddhahood, a state of body and mind in which exists full wisdom, compassion, and skillful means for benefiting all beings? To do this we must first generate bodhicitta. The *Array of Stalks Sūtra* (*Gaṇḍavyūha Sūtra*) says (LC 2:17):

O child of good lineage (bodhisattva), bodhicitta is like the  
seed of all buddha qualities.

Each and every awakened quality depends on bodhicitta. Regarding this precious mind, Śāntideva reflects (BCA 1.8, 1.26):

Those who long to overcome the abundant miseries of mundane  
existence,  
those who wish to dispel the adversities of sentient beings,  
and those who yearn to experience a myriad of joys  
should never forsake the altruistic intention [of bodhicitta].

How can one measure the merit of the jewel of the mind,  
which is the seed of the world's joy  
and is the remedy  
for the world's suffering?

*What Is Bodhicitta?*

The word “bodhicitta” has two syllables, *bodhi* and *citta*. *Bodhi* means awakened or enlightened, and *citta* means mind. What type of mind? There are two types of mind: primary consciousnesses and mental factors. Primary consciousnesses know the general nature of an object, be it an object of sight, sound, smell, taste, or touch, or a mental object. Auxiliary mental factors know the specifics of the object. As a primary consciousness, bodhicitta focuses on the general nature of its object, which in this case is bodhi. “Bodhi” implies both purification and realization. To show this, Tibetan translators translated “bodhi” or “awakening” as *byang chub* (pronounced *jang chup*) in Tibetan. *Byang* indicates purification; we can understand that through purification of all mental obscurations it’s possible for the mind to directly know all phenomena. *Chub* indicates enhancing our good qualities so we can attain that state. In this way *byang chub* connotes that the awakening that comes about by completing the purification process is omniscience — buddhahood with the four buddha bodies.

Similarly, Tibetan translators rendered the word “buddha” as *sangs rgyas* (pronounced *sang gyey*). *Sangs* means to eliminate, and refers to the eradicating of all faults and obscurations, and *rgyas* means to expand, in the sense of knowing all phenomena and actualizing all excellent qualities. Someone who has done this is *sangs rgyas*, or buddha.

Looking at the words *byang chub* and *sangs rgyas*, we see that they have similar meanings: both *byang* and *sangs* portray the purification of all obscurations, while both *chub* and *rgyas* indicate the expansion of good qualities and the development of all realizations, especially the direct realization of emptiness. This realization of emptiness is common to āryas of all three vehicles — the Śrāvaka, Solitary Realizer, and Bodhisattva Vehicles, each of which has its own awakening. Due to how śrāvakas, solitary realizers, and bodhisattvas practice before attaining their respective awakenings, there are differences in these three types of awakening. In the present case, “bodhi” refers to Mahāyāna bodhi or great awakening, so *byang* indicates the purification of both afflictive obscurations and cognitive obscurations, and *chub* is a buddha’s realization of ultimate reality in which meditative equipoise and post-meditative realization cannot be differentiated. A buddha’s awakening has the ability to simultaneously remain in the union of meditative equipoise and post-meditative realization

until the end of space; unlike sentient beings, buddhas are omniscient and can directly perceive all veiled truths and ultimate truths simultaneously.

Bodhicitta is a primary mental consciousness.<sup>18</sup> As such, it is accompanied by (is concomitant with) various mental factors, a principal one being the aspiration to attain full awakening. How does this aspiration arise? Contemplation of the kindness of sentient beings and their duḥkha in saṃsāra causes great compassion, which is a mental factor wishing sentient beings to be free from suffering. The observed object of compassion is sentient beings. Strong meditation on great compassion causes the aspiration to benefit sentient beings. This aspiration leads us to examine how best to benefit sentient beings, and we conclude that it is through attaining the qualities of a buddha. Thus the aspiration for full awakening is born. This aspiration accompanies the primary mind of bodhicitta. The observed object of bodhicitta is bodhi — our own full awakening. Bodhicitta is directed toward full awakening because we want to work for the welfare of all sentient beings by attaining full awakening. Wisdom is the force that will purify our mind and transform it into the fully awakened mind of a buddha. The observed object of this wisdom is emptiness.

To have the aspiration for full awakening, we have to understand what we are aspiring toward, and to do this we first need to be convinced of the possibility of attaining true cessations, nirvāṇa. This returns us to the topic of the mind's nature being pure and the afflictions being adventitious, which was discussed in an earlier volume.<sup>19</sup> This, in turn, leads us to investigate the ultimate nature of the mind, through which we come to understand and then have an inferential realization of emptiness. Sharp-faculty practitioners generate bodhicitta on the basis of an inferential realization of emptiness that confirms the possibility of attaining full awakening. Their bodhicitta is especially firm and cannot degenerate because it is based on reasoning. Modest-faculty practitioners, inspired by their teachers, past practitioners, and the scriptures, assume that awakening is possible. With this vague understanding of awakening, they generate bodhicitta. Because their bodhicitta is based on faith, it is not firm and is vulnerable to degeneration.

In the *Ornament of Clear Realizations* Maitreya describes twenty-two types of bodhicitta that will be explained in a later chapter. Practitioners on the initial level of the path of accumulation have earth-like bodhicitta,

which may degenerate so that the practitioner loses his bodhicitta and relapses to the state of a non-bodhisattva. However, gold-like bodhicitta, attained on the middle level of the path of accumulation, is stable and cannot degenerate. Bodhicitta divorced from the wisdom realizing emptiness cannot develop beyond the initial level of the path of accumulation; thus it is important to further our understanding of emptiness while we also create the causes to generate bodhicitta.

This wisdom mind that focuses on bodhi is completely developed at buddhahood. To arrive at the state of mental enrichment indicated by *chub*, we must understand the observed object of bodhicitta — full awakening. The potential to attain full awakening is not something that must be newly generated; it is an innate quality of our mind present from beginningless time. The Buddha said (AN 1.51):

This mind, O monastics, is luminous, but it is defiled by adventitious defilements.

And Maitreya said in the *Sublime Continuum* (RGV 1.50):

The pollutants are adventitious; the good qualities exist innately.

Dharmakīrti makes a similar statement (PV 2.208ab):

The nature of the mind is clear light;  
the defilements are adventitious.

Both of these masters emphasize two reasons why pollutants can be eliminated from the mind. First, there exist strong counterforces capable of destroying the pollutants. Second, the nature of the mind is clear light — that is, the pollutants do not abide in the nature of the mind. The ability to cognize and understand objects is the innate nature of mind. When the obscurations are overcome and this ability is perfected and focused on worthwhile objects, the mind is purified and all obscurations removed. At that time, our mind will become the omniscient mind of a buddha.

If the ability to realize something is in the nature of the mind, why doesn't our present mind realize all existents? Because it is polluted by obscurations. While *chub* indicates enriching the mind with realizations, to arrive at the state of perfect enrichment or realization, total purification is necessary. That is, purification must happen for enrichment to come about. Thus *byang* comes first, followed by *chub* in the word *byang chub* — the Tibetan word for awakening — because without purification there is no possibility of knowing all objects.

However, saying that the ability to cognize and understand that an object — even an object such as the emptiness of inherent existence — is an innate quality of the mind does not mean that we can sit back and relax and awakening will come to us without effort. Bringing to fruition the two aspirations associated with bodhicitta involves effort and diligence because serenity and insight must be cultivated and unified in order to nonconceptually realize ultimate bodhicitta — the wisdom directly realizing emptiness. Only that wisdom has the capacity to remove all obscurations from the mind in such a way that they can never reappear.

## REFLECTION

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Contemplate the meaning of bodhicitta in order to orient and motivate yourself to cultivate it.

1. Bodhicitta is a primary mental consciousness with two aspirations.
2. The causal aspiration is rooted in great compassion and seeks to benefit all sentient beings by freeing them from saṃsāra and leading them to full awakening.
3. The second aspiration is to attain one's own full awakening in order to be able to benefit all beings in these ways.
4. It is possible to attain full awakening because all mental defilements can be eradicated from the mindstream.

5. All defilements can be eradicated because strong counterforces that can eliminate the defilements exist and the nature of the mind is clear light.
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### *The Causes of Bodhicitta*

Like all other conditioned phenomena, bodhicitta does not arise without causes, nor does it arise from discordant causes — that is, factors that do not have the ability to produce it. Some causes of bodhicitta are internal, others are external. The internal causes lie in our own mind. We have the mental factors of love and compassion within us now. Love is the virtuous mental factor of nonhatred. It overcomes and prevents anger and hatred and is the basis for increasing patience and fortitude. Compassion is the virtuous mental factor of nonharmfulness that lacks any intention to cause harm and wishes all sentient beings to be free of duḥkha. The inability to bear the duḥkha of others is the basis of the desire to benefit sentient beings and to not disrespect them by harming them. Compassion is said to be the essence of the Buddha's teachings.

Although the mental factors of love and compassion already exist in our mindstreams, they must be nourished and expanded through habituating ourselves with these emotions. Releasing hindrances by purifying destructive karma and making our mind receptive by accumulating merit are also necessary causes of bodhicitta. In addition, we must listen to teachings and study texts that describe the method to generate bodhicitta and the conduct of bodhisattvas and then contemplate and meditate on what we learn. Remembering the qualities of the Buddha inspires us to generate bodhicitta, as do understanding the advantages of bodhicitta and wishing that the Mahāyāna teachings last forever.

External causes of bodhicitta include being guided by a Mahāyāna spiritual mentor, who compassionately teaches us the method to develop bodhicitta, and living near others who aspire for and practice bodhicitta. In addition, our generating bodhicitta depends on sentient beings. Kind sentient beings provide the requisites for living so we are free to practice bodhicitta; they also give us the opportunities for practice by being the objects of our generosity, ethical conduct, and fortitude. Their suffering and

their kindness are the prime motivating forces leading us to generate bodhicitta. If we admire bodhicitta and seek the benefits of generating it but dislike sentient beings, then we've failed to understand that without caring for sentient beings it's impossible to generate bodhicitta.

Practice and training are necessary to learn any skill, be it car mechanics or compassion. As with gaining any ability, first coarse hindrances must be eliminated and then subtle ones. Therefore, at the start of your practice, removing or reducing obsession with the happiness of only this life is a must, as that is the coarsest hindrance to Dharma practice. With an attitude concerned for only our own happiness in this life, we try to procure what we think will bring us happiness and destroy what seems to bring us misery, without caring about the effects of our actions on others. Blinded by ignorance, we engage in a plentitude of destructive actions to gain or protect name and fame, material possession and wealth, approval and praise, and sense pleasures. Doing this puts us in conflict with people and creates greater problems. Thus the eight worldly concerns and the destructive actions of body, speech, and mind that result from them are the first and principle factors to subdue at the beginning of the path.

Subduing our attachment and anger regarding the eight worldly concerns does not come about from simply telling ourselves that attachment and animosity are hindrances. Rather, we must reflect deeply on their disadvantages so that we gather the inner strength to oppose them. By examining our own life, we see how worldly concerns and obsession with the happiness of only this life make us unhappy now and create the causes for unhappiness in future lives. We observe how they prevent us from practicing and realizing the path. Our efforts in virtue can be reinvigorated also by contemplating the advantages of a precious human life so that we will be energized to abandon harmful actions and engage in constructive ones in order to receive another precious human life in the future. This is the practice in common with the initial-level practitioner.

Having done this, we then reflect that although a precious human life with many excellent conditions is advantageous, our very existence is still under the control of afflictions and polluted karma, and thus we have no lasting freedom or security. This will motivate us to renounce the *duḥkha* of cyclic existence and its causes and generate a strong aspiration for

liberation. In this way, our enchantment with the pleasures of future lives comes to an end. This is the practice in common with the middle-level practitioner. Both the initial and the middle levels constitute preparatory practices for the generation of bodhicitta. On this basis, we now turn our mind to the cultivation of bodhicitta, that most noble of all aspirations.

The cultivation of bodhicitta depends on many causes. Among these, one is to learn about the qualities of buddhas and bodhisattvas from a reliable spiritual mentor or from scriptures. By admiring the magnificent abilities of these beings, faith arises in our mind and we aspire to attain these qualities. This aspiring faith is essential for overcoming the complacency thinking that attaining nirvāṇa alone is sufficient to fulfill our own spiritual purpose.

How do we gain conviction that full awakening is necessary to fulfill our own purposes so that we turn away from seeking only our own liberation? By knowing that (1) śrāvakas have not abandoned all defilements or actualized all realizations, (2) śrāvakas are liberated from cyclic existence but not from the drawbacks of the personal peace that is an arhat's nirvāṇa, and (3) a buddha's truth body is the fulfillment of our own purpose because it's the complete abandonment of all obscurations and the full realization of all excellent qualities. A buddha's form bodies fulfill the purpose or aim of others by manifesting in diverse forms in order to teach and guide sentient beings to awareness. By knowing and admiring the qualities of the buddhas, we aspire to attain them in order to accomplish our own *and* others' purposes.<sup>20</sup> Fulfilling others' purpose is not sufficient, nor is fulfilling only our own purpose. Buddhahood enables us to do both. This is important to prevent us from backsliding and seeking personal liberation alone.

Another cause of bodhicitta is understanding that the existence of the bodhisattvas' teachings is not stable in our degenerate world; they will disappear. Finding this unbearable and wanting these precious teachings to remain a long time so that sentient beings' suffering can be eliminated, we aspire to gain a buddha's pristine wisdom.

Yet another cause is seeing that it is difficult enough in this age to generate a śrāvaka's aspiration for liberation; generating bodhicitta is even more difficult. Knowing the rarity of this opportunity and knowing the



preservation of the bodhisattvas' teachings for future generations depends on people actualizing them now, we aspire to attain buddhahood.

While compassion and bodhicitta are cultivated separately from the wisdom realizing emptiness, the realization of emptiness in the mindstream of someone who already admires and appreciates bodhicitta and who aspires to generate it will help their compassion grow. Deep realization of emptiness by those inclined toward the Mahāyāna gives rise to understanding that ignorance is the fundamental cause of their own duḥkha. These practitioners will more thoroughly understand the relationship between ignorance, afflictions, and their karmic actions. Furthermore, the realization of emptiness will undermine their ignorant view of the world, giving them stronger conviction in the possibility of attaining liberation. When they extend this understanding to other sentient beings, it leads to feeling strong compassion for others, which, in turn, gives rise to bodhicitta.

## REFLECTION

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Contemplate the conditions of bodhicitta to enable yourself to cultivate it.

1. Bodhicitta is a conditioned phenomenon that arises as a result of causes and conditions.
2. External causes of bodhicitta include being guided by a Mahāyāna spiritual mentor, who compassionately teaches us the method to develop bodhicitta, and living near others who aspire for and practice bodhicitta. It also depends on sentient beings, the object of our great compassion.
3. Internal causes include the seeds of love and compassion we have right now, recognizing the defects of saṃsāra, knowing the qualities of the buddhas and bodhisattvas and wanting to attain them, recognizing the disadvantages of the self-centered attitude, and being endowed with great compassion.

4. Knowing the rarity of our present situation with its excellent conditions to practice the Dharma and wanting the precious teachings to remain in our world are also causes to generate bodhicitta.
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### *The Benefits of Bodhicitta*

Bodhicitta, the essence of the path of the advanced practitioner, brings inconceivable and inexpressible benefits to self and others in this and future lives. Having even a general awareness of these benefits will stimulate us to enthusiastically cultivate bodhicitta. In this life, personal happiness and peace come from practicing bodhicitta. Why? When we sincerely wish to benefit others, we forgo judgmental and critical attitudes toward them. Without these negative thoughts churning around in our mind, we automatically feel better. When our mind is filled with kind thoughts, our physical health improves, as do our relationships with family and friends. If we practice bodhicitta during illness or injury, our mind will be calm, and we will be able to take our physical situation and its treatment in stride. Having the altruistic intention at the time of death brings peace to our minds; we die with no regrets because our life was worthwhile.

Generally, when an ordinary person encounters difficulties she becomes frustrated, angry, and resentful. At that time she may believe that anger is her friend, supporting her and enabling her to have the courage to face the problem. Gaining inner strength through the force of anger is not simply foolish, it is dangerous. We do not think clearly or express ourselves well when we are angry, and actions done in a rage generally worsen the problem.

Some analogies illustrate the benefits of bodhicitta:

- It is like supreme nectar that prevents death and replaces our unclean body with the form body of a buddha.
- It resembles an inexhaustible treasure because it nourishes and sustains us spiritually.
- It is a supreme medicine because it cures the illness of the afflictions.

- It resembles a resting tree in that it gives us protection of the exhaustion of saṃsāra.
- It is like a boat that keeps us safe while we're still in the ocean of saṃsāra with its dangerous sea monsters of afflictions and karma.
- Bodhicitta is like soothing moonlight that calms our entire body and mind.
- It is like water from a pond that cools the fire of afflictions.
- Bodhicitta resembles bright sunlight in that it sheds light on dark corners and broadens our perspective so we can see possibilities we couldn't see before.
- It resembles perennial flowers that continue to bring the beautiful blossoms of virtue.

Compassion and bodhicitta bring genuine self-confidence and self-esteem. The courage and conviction that come from them have a strong foundation in reason. These qualities enable us to face problems and suffering without being overwhelmed by confusion, depression, or low self-esteem. We will be able to deal with what life brings with determination and confidence. Why? Because with bodhicitta we are aware that suffering arises from causes and conditions such as afflictions and karma, and we know that these causes and conditions can be overcome. In this way, bodhicitta brings optimism and hope.

Bodhicitta is the best way to deal with an enemy. If we get angry, the enemy has been successful in harming us, but if we maintain a peaceful mind, the enemy has failed to bring us trouble. Of course, sometimes we still have to run away to protect ourselves from harm — for example, if a mad dog is nearby — but in many cases, when we practice compassion and altruism, someone who was previously an enemy will become our friend. This is evident in international relations. The Allies helped to rebuild Germany and Japan after World War II, and now those countries are friendly.

People ask what enables me to remain optimistic, considering all that has happened in my homeland, Tibet, and to me personally due to the tragedy there. Bodhicitta gives me a sense of hope, for I see the basic good

in human beings and know that their mistaken actions occur not because they are evil people but because their afflictions overwhelm them. For that reason, I do not harbor grudges or wish for revenge and thus can work with optimism to help improve the situation.

We may think that when we practice compassion, the primary beneficiaries are other sentient beings. But in fact we benefit even more than others do from our practice of compassion. When I practice compassion, I receive 100 percent benefit — my mind is upbeat — but the extent to which others benefit from my compassion is uncertain. Some people may even become suspicious when I act with compassion! Love and compassion make our mind joyful; bodhisattvas on the first ground are called the Very Joyful because their happiness is much greater than that of an arhat, even though they haven't abandoned all afflictions as arhats have done. The great joy of these bodhisattvas derives from their mind that cherishes others and enables them to manage problems and difficulties with ease. After hearing bad news, they swiftly regain their sense of well-being and optimism. Compassion is like nectar that immediately calms their mind. Someone who has peace of mind and inner calm as a result of practicing compassion and understanding emptiness is not easily dispirited.

Bodhicitta motivates us to act in ways that bring peace in the larger society. I often tell people half-jokingly that if they are going to be selfish, they should be wisely selfish. And the best way to do that is to help others because when the people around us are happy, we naturally are too! However, when our self-centered behavior damages others, we live surrounded by miserable people who make their pain known to us.

With bodhicitta, we care for the environment because we care about other species as well as the future generations of human beings who will inherit this planet. These benefits of a kind heart and bodhicitta are obvious. There is no controversy about them, and no special logic is needed to understand them.

Meditating on bodhicitta enriches our practices of the initial and middle levels of the path. At the initial level, the goal is to pacify our coarse destructive actions and prepare for a good rebirth. A mind wishing to benefit others abstains from harming them and thus stops engaging in destructive actions that destroy their happiness. Bodhicitta also inspires us

to purify previously accumulated destructive karma and to act in beneficial ways. As a result of this, a fortunate rebirth will naturally follow.

As a middle-level practitioner, the aim of our practice is to abolish the afflictions that cause cyclic existence. Many of these afflictions are disturbing emotions, such as resentment, jealousy, or belligerence toward living beings. When we generate bodhicitta, we see others as loveable and dear, so afflictions directed toward them are dramatically curtailed.

Those who exclusively practice the initial and middle levels of the path aspire for liberation from cyclic existence but not for the full awakening of buddhahood. Following the Fundamental Vehicle, they meditate to gain the direct realization of emptiness that will cut the continuity of their afflictions forever. Although they realize the same emptiness that bodhisattvas do, their wisdom eliminates only the afflictive obscurations preventing liberation. It does not become the antidote to the cognitive obscurations preventing omniscience. Those practicing the advanced level of the path develop bodhicitta, which gives their wisdom extra force, enabling it to cut through the subtle obscurations and attain buddhahood. Dza Patrul Rinpoche cautions:

Even if you have the generation and completion stages [of Tantra]  
and single-pointed concentration,  
if they are not linked to authentic bodhicitta,  
they're just the seeds of rebirth in the deceptive appearances of  
saṃsāra  
and are no help in attaining the state of omniscience.<sup>21</sup>

Without bodhicitta and the direct realization of emptiness, the merit created by reciting tantric sādhanas and mantras and by doing vase breathing and so forth becomes the cause of rebirth in saṃsāra, not of a buddha's omniscient mind.

Bodhicitta is a vast mind because it wants to benefit all beings and seeks to attain the highest awakening in order to do so. All actions motivated by bodhicitta accumulate merit corresponding to the vastness of this intention. This enables a practitioner to accumulate quickly the great collection of merit needed to attain full awakening. Bodhicitta also enables the wisdom

realizing emptiness to become powerful enough to remove from the mindstream subtle latencies and the dualistic appearances they create. For this reason, it leads to buddhahood. Without this altruistic intention, attaining the ultimate bliss and magnificent qualities of buddhahood is not possible. In sum, everything positive and admirable in cyclic existence and nirvāṇa can be accomplished with bodhicitta. As Nāgārjuna says (BV 105–7):

This bodhicitta is stated  
to be the highest [ideal] in the great vehicle,  
so with an absorbed [determined] effort  
generate this altruistic intention.

To accomplish the welfare of yourself and others  
no other methods exist in the world;  
apart from the bodhicitta,  
to date the buddhas saw no other means.

The merit that is obtained  
from mere generation of bodhicitta,  
if it were to assume form  
it would fill more than the expanse of space.

Not understanding the value of bodhicitta, some people say that generating it is too difficult and put it aside. Giving in to ignorant arrogance, others say bodhicitta is a preliminary practice that is not so important and they're engaged in more profound tantric practices. Such thoughts impede our spiritual growth. Someone who has cultivated bodhicitta will attain awakening whereas someone meditating on any profound tantric practice without this altruistic intention will not attain awakening.

## REFLECTION

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Contemplate the benefits of bodhicitta to energize yourself to cultivate it.

1. It increases our self-confidence, inner strength, and optimism by giving us a long-term inspiring goal to work toward.
2. Bodhicitta motivates us to act in ways that bring peace in society at large.
3. It enriches our practices of the initial and middle levels of the path.
4. The merit created by even simple actions done with bodhicitta is limitless because we're working for the benefit of limitless sentient beings.
5. Buddhas and bodhisattvas are role models that inspire us to transform our actions of body, speech, and mind into virtue. In this way, we become the kind of person we would like to be.
6. Spiritual realizations will come quicker due to the power of working for the benefit of all beings.

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### *Bodhisattvas as Inspiring Role Models*

The examples of bodhisattvas' lives and their marvelous activities inspire us to want to become like them. Personally speaking, thinking about the bodhisattvas encourages me to practice more than does thinking about the buddhas. If I thought just of the buddhas' qualities without being attentive to the qualities of bodhisattvas on the training paths, I could become disheartened, thinking that the buddhas are too high and I can never catch up to them. For example, when I view Tsongkhapa as an emanation of Mañjuśrī, I think he had all those marvelous qualities because he was the emanation of a buddha. But when I regard him as an ordinary person who sincerely took on serious spiritual practice and gained high realizations in his lifetime, I am encouraged. Since both of us began as ordinary beings, if I practice just as he did, I will become like him.

It is similar to being in a race. If someone is a kilometer in front of us, we feel we can never catch up and quit trying. But if someone is only a few steps in front of us, we do not lose courage. We try harder because we know that if we make effort, we can draw near to them. This could be called a positive kind of competition that results from comparing ourselves to others in a way that is not completely egocentric. I encourage you to read about the great deeds of bodhisattvas and the biographies of past great practitioners. Let your mind feel joyous and inspired knowing that people like this exist in the world and that you can become like them by developing bodhicitta.

In the Pāli tradition and also in the *Ornament of Clear Realizations* by Maitreya, six recollections are taught: recollections of the Buddha, Dharma, Saṅgha, generosity, ethical conduct, and deities. The recollection on deities can refer to mundane gods (*devas*) or to transcendental divine beings who are ārya bodhisattvas. In the Fundamental Vehicle, recollection of the deities focuses on being mindful of the qualities that caused beings to be born in these celestial states, thus inspiring us to emulate them in our practice of generosity, ethical conduct, and meditation. In the Mahāyāna, recollection of the deities is done so that they will serve as witness to our proper cultivation of the path. Recollection of the compassionate qualities of the bodhisattvas also gladdens and inspires our mind. This deepens our refuge in the bodhisattva saṅgha and inspires us to practice bodhicitta in order to work for the benefit of all beings, as they do.

The Perfection of Wisdom sūtras and the Mahāyāna sūtras in general contain stories of many bodhisattvas. Eight of these — Mañjuśrī, Avalokiteśvara, Vajrapāṇi, Kṣitigarbha, Ākāśagarbha, Sarvanivāraṇa-*viṣkambhin*, Samantabhadra, and Maitreya — are especially close spiritual heirs of Śākyamuni Buddha. Of these bodhisattvas, Avalokiteśvara is seen as the manifestation of compassion, and so meditating on and making supplications to Avalokiteśvara is extremely helpful when practicing compassion and bodhicitta.<sup>22</sup>

If we doubt our ability to generate bodhicitta and become bodhisattvas, it is helpful to reflect on Dharmakīrti's teachings in chapter 2 of *Commentary on the "Compendium of Reliable Cognition"* (*Pramāṇavārttika*). Using reasoning, he first establishes the existence of



past and future lives to demonstrate that since it takes time to familiarize ourselves with great compassion for all sentient beings, we can cultivate it gradually over many lifetimes. He continues by comparing physical and mental development. The physical abilities of an athlete have limitations due to the limitations of the body. In addition, to improve, an athlete, such as a high jumper, must cover the area they previously jumped plus some. Mental development is different; the mental factors of love and compassion already exist in our minds. The mind is a stable basis for the cultivation of these emotions, and the love and compassion we generate today can build on what we generated yesterday, so that these qualities continually increase.

Two factors are necessary to train the mind in developing compassion: consistency and intensity. Consistency involves training our mind in compassion every day through having a stable meditation practice, and intensity involves doing our practice with sincerity and concentration without letting the mind be distracted. Together they enable us to familiarize ourselves with great compassion repeatedly so that it becomes a natural part of our mind and arises easily. Overcoming adverse conditions, such as anger, resentment, and jealousy, is also an important element. It is possible to do this because these mental factors that are contrary to love and compassion are based on ignorance and have antidotes.

If we doubt that we can develop great compassion at all, Dharmakīrti reminds us that we have all been one another's parents and children in previous lives. Parents and children have natural bonds of affection, love, and compassion for one another. Since we have the imprints from such close relationships with all others in previous lives, it is possible to cultivate great compassion for everyone now. Although effort is needed at the beginning of our practice, by increased familiarization with love and compassion, they will arise more easily in our lives.

### *Two Types of Mahāyāna Disciples*

Some Mahāyāna disciples have sharp faculties, whereas others have more modest faculties. Here "faculties" refers in particular to wisdom, but more broadly to the five faculties of faith, effort, mindfulness, concentration, and wisdom. The disciples with sharp faculties first seek the correct view of

emptiness. Through using reasoning, they understand that ignorance apprehends phenomena to exist inherently, whereas phenomena exist dependently. Seeing that the wisdom that realizes emptiness can eradicate this ignorance that is the root of saṃsāra and can thus cease saṃsāra completely, they are convinced that attaining awakening is possible through gaining insight into emptiness. They then develop compassion and generate bodhicitta. In this way, sharp-faculty disciples aspire for full awakening, enter the bodhisattva path, overcome the self-grasping ignorance, practice the six perfections, and attain awakening.

The disciples of modest faculties admire bodhicitta due to the strong faith they have in the teachers who speak about bodhicitta, and their aspiration to attain awakening derives from their faith in the Three Jewels. They cultivate heartfelt compassion for others' duḥkha and build up altruism on that basis. These disciples have not yet gained the wisdom to deeply appreciate selflessness and its essential role in attaining awakening. They generate uncontrived bodhicitta, enter the bodhisattva path, and then make effort to gain an inferential understanding of emptiness.

Bodhisattvas with sharp faculties are not content to believe that liberation and full awakening are possible because their spiritual mentors stated that or because it is written in sūtras. They want to know, What is the root of all afflictions? Can afflictions be removed? What is the realization that can eradicate them? What is the object perceived by the wisdom that eradicates afflictions? With strong compassion and altruism, these disciples examine whether sentient beings' duḥkha can be totally eliminated and whether a path to liberation exists. This leads them to understand emptiness at least on an intellectual level, because the wisdom realizing emptiness is what will destroy the afflictions and directly bring about awakening. Based on understanding emptiness, these disciples generate the conviction that a way to eradicate the origins of duḥkha exists, liberation is possible, and there is a path leading to it.

In short, modest-faculty bodhisattvas first cultivate compassion and bodhicitta and then turn their mind to understand emptiness; sharp-faculty bodhisattvas first emphasize the cultivation of wisdom and then, on the basis of understanding that liberation is possible, generate great compassion and bodhicitta.

In the Autocommentary to the *Ornament of the Middle Way* (*Madhyamakālaṃkāra-vṛtti*) Śāntarakṣita explains the sequence of meditation for the two types of Mahāyāna disciples:<sup>23</sup>

First searching to know reality,  
they ascertain well the ultimate [truth]  
and then generate compassion  
for the world obscured by bad views.

Emboldened to undertake migrants' welfare  
and skilled in the vast mind of awakening,  
they practice the Subduer's discipline (the bodhisattva deeds)  
adorned with wisdom and compassion.

Followers of pure faith (modest-faculty disciples) generate  
the mind of perfect awakening (bodhicitta),  
and then assume the discipline of the Subduer,  
and strive for knowledge of reality.

Cultivating compassion and wisdom in tandem is very beneficial. As one's understanding of emptiness increases, so will one's compassion for sentient beings who are under the influence of ignorance. Furthermore, generating wisdom is difficult when the mind is tormented by coarse afflictions. Decreasing the intensity and frequency of the coarse afflictions through practicing compassion makes meditation easier and opens the mind to be more receptive to realize emptiness.

The compassion that is not complemented by the wisdom realizing emptiness differs from the compassion that is. While the former compassion may be so powerful that bodhisattvas continuously think of others and work for their welfare, those bodhisattvas do not yet know how to accomplish their own or others' liberation. In contrast, compassion complemented by the wisdom realizing emptiness knows that self-grasping ignorance binds sentient beings to cyclic existence and that the wisdom directly realizing emptiness can free them. Bodhisattvas who generate bodhicitta with wisdom have great enthusiasm and courage because they know a path to

liberation exists. This is the way of generating bodhicitta taught by Śāntideva (eighth century) — equalizing and exchanging self and others.

To explain the path for sharp-faculty bodhisattvas in more detail: Having gained a general idea of the path to awakening, these disciples focus on gaining ultimate bodhicitta — the wisdom realizing emptiness — by cultivating the wisdom of suchness in terms of dependent arising.<sup>24</sup> That is, they meditate on dependent arising as the reason that proves all persons and phenomena lack inherent existence. When they have developed a conceptual understanding of the ultimate truth, they recognize that the root of our duḥkha is the ignorance that misapprehends the ultimate truth. This ignorance is the first link of the twelve links of dependent origination,<sup>25</sup> and sharp-faculty bodhisattvas know that it is erroneous.

Through this, these sharp-faculty bodhisattvas come to understand buddha nature — the clear light nature of the mind — and know that the pollutants that defile the mind are adventitious and can be separated from the mind, as the quotations from the Buddha, Maitreya, and Dharmakīrti earlier in this chapter state. In this way, they generate a deep, stable, genuine aspiration to seek liberation from suffering. This is truly well-grounded renunciation.

Having such genuine renunciation, these sharp-faculty bodhisattvas then direct their thoughts to other sentient beings and know that just as their own suffering is not endless, it is possible for other sentient beings' duḥkha to come to an end. They know that other sentient beings also have the buddha nature. This certainty stimulates such strong compassion to arise that whenever they perceive any sentient being whatsoever, their instinctive response is, “How terrible it is that they suffer! Their suffering can and must be ended!” This is a genuine wish that others be free from duḥkha and is called “compassion in the form of a wish.” Such compassion can also arise in śrāvakas, but when this compassion is cultivated further, it culminates in a profound level of compassion called “compassion that wants to liberate sentient beings.” Here the element of wanting to act to bring about others' freedom from suffering is much stronger, and these bodhisattvas are committed to help eliminate sentient beings' duḥkha. This is the great compassion that culminates in the altruistic resolve and bodhicitta.

From the perspective of this sequence of mental development, Nāgārjuna says that with regard to bodhisattvas with sharp faculties, insight into suchness in terms of dependent arising will lead to the arising of compassion (BV 73):

In a yogi in whom the realization  
of emptiness has arisen,  
there is no doubt that  
compassion for all beings will arise.

Before these sharp-faculty disciples investigate the ultimate nature of phenomena, they already have a strong tendency toward compassion, bodhicitta, and the Mahāyāna. When they cultivate an understanding of emptiness, this aids them in generating bodhicitta. However, it is not the case that the realization of emptiness alone will enable them to generate great compassion and bodhicitta. In that case, arhats would have realized these. Rather, practitioners must also learn, contemplate, and meditate on the methods for generating great compassion and bodhicitta.



### 3 | How to Cultivate Bodhicitta: The Seven Cause-and-Effect Instructions

**T**RAINING THE MIND in bodhicitta can be done by two methods. The first is the seven cause-and-effect instructions and the second is equalizing and exchanging self and others. Tsongkhapa received the lineages of both methods to generate bodhicitta and combined them.

In both of these methods, the principal cause of bodhicitta is great compassion, and seeing others as pleasing and lovable is the key to cultivating compassion. Without seeing sentient beings in a positive light, wishing them to be free from suffering is difficult. Thus the strength of our compassion depends on the degree to which we see others as lovable and feel close to them as well as the depth of our understanding of their suffering. If either one of these is missing or weak, our compassion will be either flat or fake.

The seven cause-and-effect instructions sets forth three steps to see sentient beings as pleasing and lovable: recognizing that all sentient beings have been our parents (especially our mother) in previous lives, contemplating the kindness of our parents, and wishing to repay their kindness. Since all sentient beings have been our parents and have been kind to us at that time, a natural feeling of wanting to reciprocate that kindness arises in our hearts. These three steps produce in us feelings of affection and heart-warming love for all beings, which leads to having love and compassion for them.

Equalizing and exchanging self and others depends more on reasoning to generate compassion for others. Here, we see that all beings — not only friends and relatives but also strangers and enemies — have been kind because we have been, are, and will continue to be dependent on the

kindness of others to stay alive. In addition, each and every sentient being wants happiness and freedom from suffering as intensely as we do; there is no difference among us on that account. In fact, differentiating ourselves from others is only a matter of perspective. We say “I” in reference to our body and mind, but others say “I” in reference to their bodies and minds. Furthermore, limitless benefits come from cherishing others, while self-centeredness leads only to misery. Seeing this, a wise person generates love and compassion for all beings.

### *The Seven Cause-and-Effect Instructions*

The seven cause-and-effect instructions is a popular method for generating bodhicitta practiced in the Sanskrit tradition. Its origins are traced to Maitreya’s *Ornament of Clear Realizations* — especially the chapter on mind generation (bodhicitta) — and the teaching of his disciple Asaṅga. Candragomin, Śāntarakṣita, and Kamalaśīla generated bodhicitta through this method, which was also popular among the early Kadampa masters. Kamalaśīla writes about this method of developing bodhicitta in his middle *Stages of Meditation (Bhāvanākrama)*, and Candrakīrti speaks of it in his commentary on Āryadeva’s *Four Hundred*.

To practice the seven cause-and-effect instructions we begin by understanding the order of the stages, how compassion is the root of the Mahāyāna, and that six of the instructions are either the causes or the effects of compassion. We then begin training the mind to be intent on others’ well-being, which is followed by developing the attitude that is intent on others’ welfare.

The seven points that are meditated on in sequence are (1) seeing all sentient beings as having been our mother, (2) recalling their kindness to us when they were our parent or caregiver, (3) wanting to repay that kindness, (4) love, (5) compassion, (6) the great resolve, and (7) bodhicitta.

Of these seven, compassion is the root of the Mahāyāna. At the beginning of our practice compassion motivates us to cultivate bodhicitta and to engage in the bodhisattva deeds. In the middle, compassion enables us to look beyond our own happiness and suffering and to take others’ joy and misery to heart. In this way, it keeps us involved and encourages us to



continue accumulating the collection of merit and the collection of wisdom, two essential requisites to attain supreme awakening. At the completion of the path, compassion enables bodhisattvas to attain nonabiding nirvāṇa in which they dwell neither in the extreme of saṃsāra nor the extreme of personal liberation. Compassion motivates buddhas to manifest in innumerable forms until saṃsāra ends in order to guide sentient beings to full awakening.

The seven points center around compassion, with the first four being the causes of compassion, and the last two being the effects of compassion. For this reason, some masters consider the cause-and-effect instructions to refer to the causes and effects of compassion. Other masters say that the first six points are the causes for the seventh point, bodhicitta.

To cultivate compassion two elements are needed: we need to be aware of the three types of duḥkha of sentient beings and to see them as endearing so that the compassion — the wish that they be free from duḥkha — arises easily in our mind. The awareness of their duḥkha comes from first contemplating our own duḥkha in saṃsāra and cultivating the wish to be free from it and then seeing that all other sentient beings are in the same position. To see sentient beings as endearing we must first free ourselves from attachment to friends and dear ones and animosity for enemies — enemies here being anyone who disturbs our well-being. We do this in the equanimity meditation, which is a forerunner to the seven points.

To cultivate affection and a sense of endearment toward others, we contemplate that they have all been our parents in previous lives and will be our parents in the future as well. As our parents — especially as our mother who carried us in her womb and in general was the chief caregiver when we were little — they were extremely kind to us. In response to their kindness, we develop a wish to repay their kindness. In this way, the first three points result in heart-warming love that cares for sentient beings as a mother cares for her only child. Heartwarming love is the fourth point and is the cause of the compassion that is the fifth point.

There is another kind of love too — the love that wishes others to have happiness and its causes. This love does not have a cause and effect relationship with compassion. Whether we then develop love and compassion depends on whether we first consider sentient beings as bereft

of happiness and want them to have happiness and its causes (love), or whether we consider sentient beings' duḥkha and want them to be free of it and its causes (compassion). The first four points are the cause for both of these.

The great resolve and bodhicitta are the effects of compassion. Fundamental Vehicle practitioners may have developed immeasurable love and compassion, but they do not have the resolve to act on these and bring about others' happiness and the alleviation of their duḥkha. With great resolve, Mahāyāna practitioners make a commitment and assume the responsibility to do so.

Once we have made this commitment, we must consider how to fulfill it. In our ordinary condition, we are incapable of doing this. As an arhat, we will be able to lead some sentient beings to liberation but not to the omniscient state of a buddha. Because only a fully awakened buddha has the compassion, wisdom, and capacity to do this most effectively, we generate bodhicitta, resolving to attain buddhahood.

### *Training the Mind to Be Intent on Others' Well-Being*

To train our mind to be intent on others' well-being, as noted above, we must develop a sense of impartiality that is free of attachment and animosity toward others and then cultivate a sense of affection and endearment toward them. The first is done by cultivating equanimity, the second by meditation on the first four of the seven points.

Genuine compassion for all sentient beings is based on having evened out any tendency toward bias that we may have, bias meaning seeing some beings as close and worthwhile and seeing others with animosity as distant. As long as our mind has strong attachment or animosity toward others, our compassion will extend only to those to whom we are attracted and attached. Such compassion isn't stable; if those people later harm us, our compassion for them vanishes.

### *Equanimity*

In general, the Sanskrit tradition speaks of three types of equanimity:

(1) The *feeling of equanimity* is a feeling toward all phenomena that is free from pleasure or pain and is part of the feeling aggregate. It is also the feeling that is dominant in the fourth dhyāna.

(2) The *virtuous mental factor of equanimity* prevents restlessness and laxity when cultivating serenity and does not let the mind be affected by them. It does not unnecessarily apply antidotes when the mind is concentrated and the faults impeding serenity are not present. This mental factor is developed during the nine sustained attentions leading to serenity.

(3) *Immeasurable equanimity* is one of the four immeasurables. It is an evenness of mind that enables us to be impartial without being indifferent toward sentient beings. It has two types: one wishes all sentient beings to be free from bias, attachment, and antipathy toward others; the second is cultivating equanimity ourselves so that we are free from attachment and animosity. The second type of immeasurable equanimity is the precursor to love, compassion, and bodhicitta. It ensures that we spread these good qualities to all beings.

In cultivating equanimity, we do not seek to abandon the notions of friend and enemy but to abandon the biased emotions of attachment and antipathy that we feel toward them. In his second *Stages of Meditation*, Kamalaśīla suggests two ways to do this.

The first is to contemplate that from the perspective of others, each and every living being is equal in wanting happiness and freedom from suffering. Therefore it isn't reasonable for us to favor some with a mind of attachment and to dismiss others with an attitude of animosity. Being even-minded toward all is more suitable.

Think about this deeply. This contemplation is good to do when you are in a public place such as a store or a traffic jam. Look around and reflect that each person there is just trying to be happy and avoid suffering. That thought motivates every one of their actions. For us to hold either attachment or antipathy toward these beings who have the same fundamental human wish is not at all appropriate.

The second way to generate equanimity is to reflect that from our own perspective, in our beginningless previous lives, we have been in every kind of relationship possible with every sentient being. None of these relationships are fixed, and a slight change of circumstance can turn

attachment to antipathy and vice versa. For example, someone gives us a gift today; we consider her a friend and become partial toward her. But if tomorrow she criticizes us, our fondness evaporates and we are angry. Meanwhile, another person talks about us behind our back today, triggering our animosity, but tomorrow he praises us and we think he's great. We see similar changes in the shifting alliances of international politics. The *Tantra Requested by Subāhu (Subāhupariṣcchātantra)* advises (LC 1:282):

Within a short space of time an enemy can become a friend,  
and a friend can become an enemy.

Likewise, either one may become indifferent,  
while those who were indifferent may become enemies or intimate  
friends.

Knowing this, the wise never form attachments.

They give up the thought of delighting in friends  
and are content to focus on virtue.

When we take the vacillations of rebirth into consideration, the instability of relationships becomes even more pronounced. These roles change from one life to the next, depending on the vagaries of karma. During our beginningless lives in cyclic existence, we have been friends, enemies, and strangers to one another countless times. Considering the changeable nature of our relationships, feeling close and attached to friends and relatives and distant and angry toward enemies is not suitable. A sense of equanimity and impartiality toward all is more realistic.

## REFLECTION

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1. Because it is easier to generate equanimity toward people for whom we have neutral feelings, begin by focusing on strangers. Release any attachment or aversion you may have toward them.
2. Focus on a friend or relative and recall that, given the instability of relationships, it is unsuitable to be attached to him. Release the

attachment and cultivate equanimity.

3. Consider someone for whom you have hostile feelings and similarly see that she has not always been and will not continually be your enemy. People change and relationships change. It doesn't make any sense to develop a rigid image of someone and think that is the whole of that person's life when it is merely fabricated conceptualization on your part.
4. Maintain mindfulness on the understanding that no one is a friend, enemy, or stranger forever. If you meet them in a different situation or if their behavior changes, your feeling close to or distant from them will change too. Therefore feeling attachment or animosity toward them doesn't make sense. Be aware of the calm that equanimity brings to your mind and the way in which it makes your behavior more thoughtful and considerate.

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Although equanimity ceases bias and partiality in our mind, we do not necessarily treat or trust everyone equally. Conventional roles and relationships still exist. We don't treat colleagues whom we don't know well like family members whom we do. We don't confide in the cashier at the grocery store; we discuss private matters with people who are interested and who will understand. We give people the trust they deserve in different areas. For example, we may love a child, but we don't trust him with matches, whereas we trust an adult who is a stranger to fly the plane we're on because that person is a trained pilot. We trust our dog to warn us of danger, but we don't expect our aged grandparents with health problems to do this.

It requires skill to reflect on what areas to trust what people in, and if we slow down and do this wisely, many difficulties are prevented. However, despite interacting with living beings in different ways, we respect them equally and care about their well-being equally. From our side, the attachment and antipathy that foster prejudice, emotional swings, and rash actions are gone. We trust old friends more than we do strangers, even though we want both equally to be happy and free from suffering. We deal

with difficulties that arise through the words and actions of those who are hostile toward us but without anger or resentment. Although I want all beings to be happy, in my position as the Dalai Lama I must still point out that Tibetans suffer under the policies of the Communist Chinese government and advocate for their rights.

Here is another way to meditate on equanimity that includes strangers and freeing ourselves from feeling apathy toward them. This method includes the mind-training teaching in which we practice seeing that individuals can vacillate from one category to another depending on whatever distorted judgments and emotions we may have at that moment. The categories of friends, enemies, and strangers are fabricated by our mind, and when we practice mind training, we come to see all sentient beings as teachers.

## REFLECTION

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1. Imagine three people in front of you: a dear one to whom you are very attached and from whom you don't want to be separated; an enemy toward whom you feel anger, resentment, and fear; and a stranger toward whom you are apathetic. Think of specific individuals.
2. Focus on the dear one and ask yourself, "Why am I so attached to this person?" There are no right or wrong answers, and the answer isn't an intellectual one. Just listen to what your mind replies.
3. Now focus on the enemy and inquire, "Why do I have so much anger, resentment, or even belligerence toward this person? Again, without judging your thoughts, observe the reasons you give for holding animosity toward this enemy.
4. Focus on the stranger and ask yourself, "Why do I feel apathetic and indifferent toward this person?" Once more, listen to what your mind replies.

5. In observing your responses to the above three points, what word did you hear repeatedly?

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That word was “I,” wasn’t it? We classify people as friends worthy of attachment, enemies deserving of our anger, and strangers whom we usually ignore based on how they relate to *Me*. We believe our opinions about people are true — that people are inherently good, bad, or indifferent — but when we stop and question why we think that, we see that it depends on how they relate to *Me*. If someone is kind to us, they are a friend, but if someone is kind to our enemy, we are upset. Their trait of kindness is the same, but who they show the kindness toward makes the difference between whether I like them or hate them. If someone ruins my reputation, they are evil, but if they ruin the reputation of a person I don’t like, then they are good and I applaud their action. Our views of people are very subjective, very biased; they invariably depend on how they treat *Me*, as if we were the most important person alive.

When we’re able to see this clearly, we relax our opinionatedness and self-righteousness. We release the rigid categories of friend, enemy, and stranger, together with our fixed beliefs and emotions toward them. This brings space in our mind for another perspective, one that cares equally about the welfare of all beings.

Reflecting on the faults of attachment, animosity, and apathy helps us to release those unrealistic and unbeneficial emotions and cultivate a state of equanimity that is open and receptive toward all beings. Although anger is difficult to release, understanding its harm opens our mind to forgiveness. Releasing resentment and grudges, no matter how “right” our anger may seem, is essential not only to cultivate equanimity but also to be happy in this life. An angry, bitter person who cannot forgive events that happened years ago is miserable.

Śāntideva wrote a marvelous chapter on fortitude, the antidote to anger, in his book *Engaging in the Bodhisattvas’ Deeds*. Some of his methods for working with our anger will be discussed in the next volume, where the six perfections are explained. If we understand fortitude as Śāntideva explained it, our mind and heart will be deeply affected. Of course it takes time and

effort to transform habitual negative reactions and to release judgments about people, but the more we generate equanimity, the more peaceful we will be.

Meditation on equanimity complements sociological, psychological, and neuropsychological research on prejudicial attitudes people bear toward others. Most people have spontaneous compassion for a hungry, impoverished child in another part of the world, but if that child lived down the street from us, how would we feel? If that child were of a different race or nationality, would our empathy be the same? What if a group of those hungry children roamed our neighborhood searching for food, emptying the garage bins and scattering the rubbish around? Researchers have found that context plays an important role in how we feel about others.

We are easily influenced by the attitudes of those around us and of those in authority. Stanley Milgram's famous research in 1963 showed that average people would administer what they believed to be strong electric shocks to others when a person they saw as an authority figure ordered them to do so. Similarly, in 1971 the Stanford University professor Philip Zimbardo wanted to observe the effects of perceived power and studied the interactions of college students who volunteered to be "prisoners" and "guards" in a simulated prison. Both of these research projects were halted before completion because of the violence inflicted by normal people when given power. In our meditation, we should examine how power and authority affect our prejudices, empathy, and equanimity.

Emile Bruneau, a cognitive neuroscientist at MIT, has found that the strength of our identity with a group affects our empathy and thus our equanimity. The more we identify with a particular group — be it racial, ethnic, religious, political, and so on — the less we can empathize with the situation and feelings of those from another group, even if our group is not in conflict with that group.<sup>26</sup>

When we have strong prejudice against a particular group of people, it is difficult to accept new information about that group. Should we befriend a person from that group, we view them as not a real member of that group, whereas when we met someone who fits our stereotype, we use that to justify and strengthen our prejudice. Similarly, when we are biased toward a particular group, if a person from that group abrogates social norms, we see



them as an exception — perhaps someone who has mental problems — instead of allowing that our favored group also contains individuals with antisocial behavior.

In short, to develop true equanimity entails deep exploration of our own prejudices and fears. Without identifying and addressing these aspects of ourselves, our equanimity will be superficial and unstable.

### ***Seeing All Sentient Beings as Having Been Your Mother***

Having leveled the field by dampening attachment and animosity toward others, we now turn to cultivating a sense of affection and endearment toward sentient beings. This is done by means of the first four points, beginning with seeing all sentient beings as having been our mother, remembering their kindness, wishing to repay it, and generating heartwarming love. When our heart is opened by heartwarming love, compassion for them will easily arise.

In ancient India at the time of the Buddha and in many present-day cultures too, people assume the existence of past and future lives; it was not necessary to prove it to them. However, in Western cultures, this idea is foreign and people do not automatically assume there are past and future lives. If accepting the idea of multiple lives is difficult for you, try provisionally accepting it and see if considering that all beings could have been your mother helps you to cultivate a feeling of closeness with them. You may also want to review explanations of rebirth in previous volumes. See chapter 2 of *Approaching the Buddhist Path* and chapter 7 of *The Foundation of Buddhist Practice*. There are also reliable accounts of people who remember their previous lives.<sup>27</sup>

If you accept the idea of past and future lives, then it seems reasonable that in your beginningless previous lives each and every sentient being has been your mother at one time or another. Contemplating that all sentient beings have been our parents helps us to overcome feelings of alienation and isolation. We see that in previous times we and others have been very close, and that others have cared for us with the unconditional love parents have toward their infants. This feeling of closeness helps us to trust others more readily and to give them the benefit of the doubt instead of instantly believing habitual suspicious thoughts that may arise.

The Indian sage Dharmakīrti uses reasoning to prove the existence of rebirth in *Commentary on the “Compendium of Reliable Cognition” (Pramāṇavārttika)*. There are also many sūtra passages that affirm past and future lives (LC 2:38):

I have difficulty seeing a place wherein you have not been born, gone to, or died in the distant past. I have difficulty seeing any person in the distant past who has not been your father, mother, uncle, aunt, sister, master, abbot, guru, or someone like a guru.

In short, in infinite previous lifetimes we have been born in all realms in saṃsāra, done everything (except practice the Dharma leading to direct realization of emptiness), and been in intimate relationships with all sentient beings. No one is a stranger; no one has not helped us in the past. The *Mother Sutta* in the Pāli canon says (SN 15.14):

This saṃsāra is without discoverable beginning . . . It is not easy to find a being who in this long course has not previously been your mother . . . your father . . . your brother . . . your sister . . . your son . . . your daughter. For what reason? Because, monastics, this saṃsāra is without discoverable beginning.

Reflect on this repeatedly. Remember that we haven’t always been who we are now, and neither have others. Even in this life, as infants we are very different from the adults we became and the senior citizens we will become. Similarly others are not the same from one rebirth to the next and our relationships with them can vary a lot. When we have a sense of multiple lives, then recalling the kindness of others during them is surely reasonable.

### ***Recalling the Kindness of Sentient Beings When They Were Your Mothers***

To cultivate a feeling of closeness and endearment toward sentient beings, we choose someone who has been very kind to us as an example and then

generalize that to all other sentient beings. Generally speaking, most human beings and animals regard their mother as someone extremely dear and close. Of course, exceptions exist, so if you have a closer feeling toward your father, grandparent, sibling, another relative, or a friend, focus on seeing the kindness of that person. Every one of us has had caregivers when we were infants, toddlers, and children. The proof is that we are alive today. We lacked the ability to do simple tasks to care for ourselves and needed the care of others. Although I refer to the mother, please apply it to whomever took care of you when you were little.

Our mother carried us in her womb for over nine months and gave birth to us. She then took care of us or, if she was unable to do so, she made sure that someone else did. She fed us, changed our diapers, protected us from danger, comforted us when we cried, covered us when we were cold. She held us gently, looking upon us with love. We may not remember this nurturing from infancy, but we can get an idea by observing how mothers around us care for their young children. We can see this loving devotion in the animal world too. At a monastery where I (Chodron) lived in Nepal, there was an old, crippled dog named Sasha, who dragged herself around on her front paws because her back legs had been injured. Even though it was so difficult for her to take care of herself, after she gave birth to a litter of puppies, she nursed and protected her pups with amazing love. Watching her painfully drag herself here and there to find food so she could nurse her pups would bring tears to my eyes.

Similarly, when we were toddlers, our parents and caregivers protected us from harm, rescuing us when we were about to tumble down a flight of stairs or stick a paper clip into an electric outlet. They taught us to speak, to tie our shoelaces, and to walk. In their efforts to teach us the disadvantages of self-centeredness and to make us more considerate of others so that we could get along with people, they taught us manners and disciplined us when we misbehaved. They also had to endure our childish bad behavior, teenage rebelliousness, and the way in which we took them for granted. So many abilities that we take for granted as adults we learned from our parents when we were young. Without their kindness to us then, where would we be now?

My mother was my first teacher of compassion. There was no school in our village and she was illiterate, but she was naturally kind and I experienced her compassion from the day I was born. My father had a temper, so I avoided him when possible. One time I yanked his moustache and was hit hard in return, but my mother was kind to everyone. She gave birth to sixteen children; seven survived. When I was a young boy, I had no toys to play with, but instead rode on her shoulders, hanging on to her long, braided hair as she went about her work in the fields or with our animals. We, her children, never saw an angry expression on her face. She was kind to us, kind to our neighbors, and when victims of famine came to the door, she always found something for them to eat. It's because of her that I am the happy, smiling person I am today. The way she lived showed me the value of kindness and compassion. All of her children, children-in-law, and grandchildren loved her in return. Tibetans called her Gyalmo Chenmo, the Great Mother.

In general, there are some differences between how people who grow up in traditional Asian cultures and in contemporary Western cultures view their families and parents. Over the last hundred years or so in Western society some people have begun to speak publicly about the ill treatment they experienced from their parents when they were children. As mentioned above, if emotions resulting from childhood abuse make contemplating the kindness of your parents difficult, contemplate the kindness of whomever cared for you as an infant and young child, and in this way, develop awareness of others having cared for you with kindness. Later, after the turbulent emotions from childhood abuse have lessened or been resolved completely, turn your mind to consider the kindness of your parents.

Your parents did the best they could given their emotional, social, and financial situation. As a result of karma, they experienced physical and mental problems, but they still cared for you in the best way they knew how and to the best of their abilities given the constraints they faced from their own upbringing. Developing an attitude of acceptance, appreciation, and forgiveness of others' foibles will prevent you from being encumbered by bitterness and hatred. Instead of dwelling on what was lacking in your upbringing, focusing on the care and compassion you received as a young child is psychologically and spiritually therapeutic.

Opening your heart to experience gratitude in response to whatever kindness you have received is an important element in being a healthy adult and good parent to your own children. By contemplating the kindness of your parents or other caregivers, recognize that you have been the recipient of tremendous kindness during your life. Instead of holding on to feelings of resentment, relax the mind and allow gratitude to arise — gratitude is a natural human response to kindness. There is no sense in denying yourself the opportunity to experience that wonderful emotion.

Having seen the kindness of your mother or caregiver, consider that your friends and relatives have all been your mother in previous lives and have been as kind to you as your present mother. Let yourself feel grateful and close to them. Then recognize that strangers have also been kind to you in that same way when they were your mother in previous lives, and allow the same positive emotions to arise. Continue by seeing that your present enemies were kind to you in the past when they were your parents. Finally, extend that awareness of kindness to all sentient beings, all of whom have been your mother in beginningless saṃsāra, all of whom will continue to be your kind mother in future lives until you are free from saṃsāra. Just as you feel great gratitude and love toward your present mother, open your heart and feel that toward all sentient beings.

### ***Wishing to Repay Their Kindness***

Seeing the kindness we have experienced from all sentient beings when they were our parents throughout our beginningless previous rebirths, how can we turn our backs on them and seek our own liberation? Thinking that because we don't recognize them as our parents in this life there is no connection between us and that therefore there is no reason to repay their kindness is a poor excuse. Let's say you were separated from your kind mother when you were a young child. Fifty years later you meet an elderly impoverished woman sitting on the corner begging for food. You begin to talk with her; one thing leads to another and you discover that she is your long-lost mother. An intense feeling of love for her arises. Would you just give her a dollar and leave her there, or would you do everything in your power to help her?

Recognizing all beings as having been your mother and as having been kind to you in countless previous lives, consider that most of your mothers are completely ignorant about their existence in saṃsāra. Thinking that the self-centered attitude is their friend, they follow its demands, thereby creating so many causes for suffering. They don't even know "ignorance is the root of cyclic existence" and, unaware, they don't try to overcome it. Attachment, animosity, and confusion arise easily in their minds, implanting them deeper in the wheel of life held in the hands of the lord of death. Isn't this reason enough to benefit them, especially considering the kindness they have shown you as your mother in infinite previous lives? Even people who are foolish or deceitful, or who have poor ethical conduct, have affection for people who were kind to them and want them to be safe.

For many years I (Chodron) have worked with incarcerated people — some who have inflicted horrible suffering on others — and have witnessed the deep love and affection they and their mothers have for each other. Many inmates tell me that they were extremely inconsiderate of their mother's feelings and well-being when they were young. Seeking only their own pleasure, they were blind not only to the effects of their actions on others but also to the affection and support their mother continually offered and the hardships she endured for their sake. Once imprisoned, they reflected on their lives and, much to their own surprise, realized this about their mothers. This realization led many of them to connect with their mother and appreciate her in ways they never would have imagined before. They say how much it pains them that their mother is old now and they are not able to take care of her. It is truly moving to see big burly men who put on a tough face in prison to protect themselves soften and get teary-eyed when speaking of their mother and their wish to repay her kindness.

This wish to repay the kindness of sentient beings — all of whom have been our parents countless times — is not simply the wish for them to live comfortably and enjoy the pleasures of saṃsāra. Having contemplated the disadvantages of saṃsāra, we see that such comfort is without essence. Our mothers, blinded by ignorance and wounded by karma, wander near the precipice of unfortunate rebirths, aimlessly searching for happiness in a land of deceptive illusions. As their child who has been the recipient of their tremendous kindness since beginningless time, we cannot turn our

backs on them. When we were young and immature, we may have mistreated them or left them to their own devices, but now our gratitude for them is too strong to do this. We must help them to be free from saṃsāra. In *Heart of the Middle Way (Madhyamakahr̥daya)* Bhāvaviveka says (LC 2:40):

Furthermore, like applying salt  
to the wounds of those who have been possessed  
by the madness of their afflictions,  
I created suffering for those sick with suffering.

Now, what else is there other than nirvāṇa  
to repay the help of those  
who in other lives  
helped me with love and service?

## REFLECTION

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1. Reflect that the mind is a continuum. The clarity and awareness that constitute the mind do not cease at death and the mindstream continues to another rebirth.
2. In most rebirths we have had parents. Since there is no beginning to our previous lives, every sentient being at one time or another has been our parent.
3. Think of the kindness of your mother or of whoever took care of you when you were little. Remember how she fed and cleaned you and protected you from danger when you were an infant. She loved and encouraged you; she rejoiced in your successes, and taught you skills to deal with difficulties. She taught you to speak and how to cooperate and get along with others. She made sure you received an education and helped you to grow into a responsible adult. And much more.

4. All other sentient beings, who have been your mother in previous lives, were similarly kind and loving toward you.
  5. Seeing sentient beings as endearing, let the wish to repay their kindness arise in your heart and feel heartwarming love toward all beings.
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The above meditations — equanimity, recognizing all sentient beings as having been our mother, remembering the kindness of our mother or other caregiver and wishing to repay it — are the basis for developing the attitude intent on others' welfare. Through these meditations we come to cherish sentient beings and feel a sense of affection and endearment toward them. Such feelings of closeness and endearment are likened to the love a parent has for their child. This affectionate love is the fourth point, heartwarming love. It arises naturally as a result of the first three points; a separate meditation is not necessary to cultivate it.

### *Developing the Attitude That Is Intent on Others' Welfare*

There are different types of love. Heartwarming love that sees all sentient beings as endearing is the fourth point, which is the sum of the first three points — seeing that all sentient beings have been your mother, remembering their kindness, and wishing to repay it. This love is a necessary cause for the fifth point, compassion. One is not the cause or effect of the other. Love that wishes sentient beings to have happiness and its causes and compassion do not have a fixed order. Generating love or compassion depends on whether we first think of sentient beings as lacking happiness or as being overwhelmed by *duḥkha*. In the former case, we generate love; in the latter, compassion.

The next meditations — love, compassion, and the great resolve — bring about the attitude intent on others' welfare. Bodhicitta, the firm aspiration to work for others' welfare and the aspiration to attain buddhahood in order to do so, is the result of the previous six meditations.

### *Love*



The seed of love is in the mind of each of us. The seed doesn't need to be newly generated, but we do need to learn the method to enhance it; both love and compassion need to be consciously cultivated. The observed object (*ālambana*, *ārammaṇa*) of love is sentient beings who are bereft of happiness and its subjective aspect is the wish for them to have happiness and its causes.

Love wishes others to have happiness and its causes as in “How wonderful it would be if they had happiness and its causes. May they have these.” Because love is preceded by equanimity toward friends, strangers, and enemies, we seek to cultivate love toward all beings, excluding none. This kind of love is immense. Its field is vast: it extends to each and every sentient being, no matter how they treat us. Its goal is vast: it wishes them to have every happiness, from the smallest pleasure up to the happiness of having eliminated all obscurations and being able to easily work for the benefit of all sentient beings. Its time is vast: to work to benefit sentient beings for as long as space exists. We also relinquish a vast amount: we willingly give up our own enjoyments and even our own life for the benefit of sentient beings.

We use words to describe this kind of love, but actually it is difficult to understand and experience. To cultivate it from the depth of our heart, understanding its benefits is a necessary first step. By understanding the advantages of cultivating great love and the disadvantages of not doing so, our interest and enthusiasm to cultivate great love and compassion will increase, giving us the inner strength to actualize these qualities no matter what comes our way in the process of doing so.

Here and now we can experience for ourselves the benefits of an unbiased, kind, and loving heart. In my own case, I meet many different people and regard all of them as my friends. This loving attitude brings me much inner peace, regardless of how others respond to my friendliness. Nevertheless, people usually respond with a friendly and kind demeanor. Meditators who cultivate serenity and the dhyānas on love are well-loved in this life. Their presence influences the people and environment around them in a positive way, making them more peaceful. In future lives, these practitioners are reborn in the peaceful celestial realm of Brahmā if that is

their wish. Bodhisattvas' love goes beyond that and leads to bodhicitta and full awakening. Nāgārjuna speaks of eight benefits of love (RA 283–84):<sup>28</sup>

Even offering three hundred cooking pots of food three times a day does not match a portion of the merit in one instant of love.

Although [through love] you are not liberated,  
you will attain the eight good qualities of love —

- (1) gods and (2) humans will be friendly, and
- (3) even [nonhumans] will protect you.
- (4) You will have mental pleasures and
- (5) many [physical] pleasures.
- (6) Poison and weapons will not harm you,
- (7) effortlessly you will attain your aims and
- (8) be reborn in the world of Brahmā.

In short, having love and compassion for others is the source of all temporal happiness in saṃsāra and the ultimate happiness of liberation and full awakening. Having a precious human life and not cultivating love and compassion is a great loss and waste of our potential.

## REFLECTION

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Contemplate these benefits of love and compassion one by one and make examples of them in your life.

1. You will have less anger, jealousy, arrogance, and resentment, so your mind will be more peaceful.
2. You will refrain from nonvirtuous actions, so your relationships with others will improve.
3. People and animals will feel comfortable around you, and you will be able to influence them to take a positive direction in life.

4. You will abstain from the ten nonvirtues and practice the ten virtues, creating a wealth of causes for fortunate rebirths.
5. You will die peacefully without regret or guilt and feel satisfied that you had a life well-lived.
6. You will easily develop bodhicitta, enter the Mahāyāna path, and attain full awakening.
7. From now until full awakening you will be able to benefit countless sentient beings and lead them on the path.
8. You will become an ārya bodhisattva and be able to create a pure land where you will attain full awakening and teach ārya bodhisattvas. You can also establish a pure land where ordinary sentient beings can be born and thrive in the Dharma.
9. By having single-pointed concentration on love and compassion, you will be able to travel to many pure lands and receive teachings from many buddhas. You will also attain the six super-knowledges.

Feel joyful at your opportunity to cultivate love and compassion and be enthusiastic to use this opportunity.

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In *Tale of a Wish-Fulfilling Dream (Svapna-cintāmaṇi-parikathā)*, Nāgārjuna spoke of five reasons why it is necessary to generate love for all sentient beings. The first reason is that we and all sentient beings are equal in wanting happiness and not suffering (SCP 2):

I and all sentient beings are equal [with regard to] happiness and suffering.

Being equal [with regard to] happiness and suffering, we are family.

It is not right to completely abandon these [beings],  
yet enter nirvāṇa.

Our equality in seeking peace and avoiding pain was discussed in the meditation on equanimity above. Reflect that in the same way you have problems, so do all sentient beings. In the same way you don't want pain, neither do they. Just as you want freedom from suffering, so do others; just as you want happiness, they do too. Just as family members go through good and bad together, you and all sentient beings are like family in these ways. In addition, you and all others are equal in having the same enemy, the afflictions.

Think about others' difficulties and what it would be like to have them: to be a refugee, to be poverty stricken or terminally ill, to have a disability or chronic pain, to face the death of your child, to be oppressed or to constantly face racism or gender discrimination, and so on. Imagine being left on your own to face these problems and contemplate how strong your wish to receive help, or at least understanding and empathy, would be. Remember times when you have faced trying experiences and how relieved you were when someone stepped up to help you. Think that that's how others would feel if you reached out to them.

Just as you are joyful when you're able to accomplish your goals, so are others. Just as you feel supported when others show appreciation for your talents and contributions, so do others. Since beginningless time in saṃsāra, we've been desperately searching for lasting happiness and for meaning in our lives, but haven't been successful. We already know this, but we forget it. As we repeatedly familiarize ourselves with these points, they will arise more frequently in our mind. Then when we encounter situations that require our help, we won't hesitate to give it.

Seeing that there are no significant differences between ourselves and others in our deepest longings, and considering that we are close like family, it is not suitable to abandon others. Especially if someone has understood the four truths and knows the disadvantages of saṃsāra and the possibility of attaining nirvāṇa, it would be completely unacceptable to seek one's own liberation and abandon others. For example, someone has great wealth and lives in a mansion that overlooks a slum, yet he doesn't think at all about the suffering of his neighbors and at times even ridicules them. We would consider that person to be cold-hearted and his actions despicable.

This is similar to attaining our own nirvāṇa and leaving others — especially our kind parents — drowning in saṃsāra.

We have heard of people who have jumped onto the train tracks to protect a complete stranger who has fallen there from an oncoming train. When asked afterward why they did that, the rescuer inevitably says that it was only the right thing to do; they couldn't have done otherwise. Similarly, if we understand the horror of saṃsāra, how can we not help others escape from it?

The second reason: It is important and possible to love other sentient beings because we have gone through the same experiences in saṃsāra repeatedly. This common experience brings us close to each other. Nāgārjuna says (SCP 3):

Together with these beings I experienced  
the sufferings of the unfortunate realms and  
all sorts of happiness of the higher realms.  
Since we dwelt as one, I am fond of them.

We've had countless rebirths in saṃsāra — experiencing intense pain in unfortunate realms and incredible bliss in celestial realms. In all these rebirths we've been with other sentient beings, experiencing joy and misery together; for a long time we have dwelt as one, confronting problems and enjoying pleasures together. The feeling of familiarity opens the door to feeling fondness for them. They helped me when I needed caring companions or even strangers to reach out and give me a hand. Now that my situation is better, I have the responsibility to help them. It wouldn't be right for me to abandon them and enter nirvāṇa myself.

The third reason is that in limitless previous lives we've been one another's parents and children. Nāgārjuna observes (SCP 4):

Not just once did I reside in every womb,  
nor is there a single sentient being  
who did not reside in my womb.  
Therefore, we are all family.

This and the previous verse rely on the notion of rebirth. If you have accepted the notion of rebirth or are at least open to it, it is not difficult to think that we have all been one another's relatives in previous lives and will be family in future lives as well. If rebirth is still difficult to imagine, it's fine to set it aside for the time being and come back to it later. You may also want to review the explanation of the nature of mind and its continuum from one life to the next, as discussed above, and look into the resources mentioned in note 27.

For those who accept rebirth, think that all sentient beings have been your parents and children numerous times. Since you change bodies in each birth, you don't recognize each other, but the connection is still there. If you were to remember your previous relatives — and in the future when you develop the superknowledges, you will — the feeling of closeness and affection you had for them will arise again. Given our long and deep connections, it is only fitting that I wish all these beings to have happiness and its causes.

The self-grasping ignorance spawns the feeling of being an isolated, independent individual when in fact we are dependent on and interrelated with everyone else. If there is a person you find despicable now, remember that they haven't always been that person. They are conditioned beings, and as the external and internal conditioning changes, so do their personalities, beliefs, and actions. Remember that we are in the nature of impermanence, so you have loved people you may not be fond of now, but you will be close to and fond of them again in the future.

Someone could say: If all sentient beings have been my parents, then I've also been their parents, so shouldn't they appreciate me for my kindness? Someone may also say: If others have been kind to me in countless previous lives, they've also harmed me countless times too, so why should I try to benefit them now? Although there may be some truth to these statements, thinking like this benefits neither ourselves nor others. It only stimulates thoughts of revenge and resentment that create more turbulence and unhappiness in our mind and motivate destructive actions. On the other hand, reflecting on our close and endearing relationships with others stimulates thoughts of kindness and love and leads to harmony and virtuous actions. When we adopt a positive perspective on others, we have

many opportunities to be happy; when we hold a critical, judgmental view, unhappiness follows us wherever we go.

The fourth reason supporting the importance and possibility of loving others takes a different approach. Here we reflect on the Buddha's relations with all these living beings: The Buddha purified his mind and accumulated merit for a long time because he cherished all sentient beings, and he sought full awakening so he could benefit them most effectively. Since I have respect and devotion for the Buddha and he sees sentient beings as being so precious, I should too (SCP 5):

Further, I am fond of the Buddha.  
As he worked hard for the sake  
of these [sentient beings] for a very long time,  
that too makes me fond of sentient beings.

Parents love their children dearly, so if we help their children, the parents are delighted. In fact, they're happier than if we helped them! Because of anger and partiality, we don't see sentient beings accurately and undervalue the kindness and help we receive from them. Ārya bodhisattvas and buddhas know their past relationships with sentient beings and cherish sentient beings more than themselves. Because we admire and respect these highly realized holy beings, it makes sense for us to cherish sentient beings who are so dear to their hearts. It would seem rather strange if we said to the Buddha, "You've got it all wrong. Sentient beings are not trustworthy; they're conniving and two-faced. I don't cherish them, and neither should you!" Are we wiser than the Buddha?

The fifth reason is that just as benefiting and harming our spiritual mentors brings happiness or suffering, respectively, so does helping and harming sentient beings (SCP 6):

In this way, since benefiting and harming  
are the [respective] causes of immeasurable  
happiness and suffering,  
sentient beings are also my gurus.

We create virtuous and nonvirtuous karma in dependence on the recipients of our actions. Our spiritual mentors are powerful fields of merit for us because of their spiritual qualities and because of their kindness in leading us on the path. For that reason, we create enormous merit by offering material possessions and service to them. Similarly, if we get angry with our spiritual mentors, if we criticize, insult, or beat them, we create great nonvirtuous karma. The situation is similar with respect to ordinary sentient beings. Sentient beings have been our parents, friends, and dear companions in previous lives, and even as strangers doing their jobs in society, they have benefited us greatly. When we benefit them they are happy, and in addition we reap the result of temporal and ultimate happiness. When we harm sentient beings physically, verbally, or mentally, they are pained and we create great destructive karma that will ripen in our own misery. In this way sentient beings are like our spiritual mentors.

When we contemplate the kindness we have received from sentient beings in this life and from beginningless lives, it is clear that our ability to stay alive depends on them, and a feeling for the endearing qualities of sentient beings arises in our heart. In this way, they are precious and endearing.

Sentient beings are also precious and endearing in that our creation of virtue depends on them. Our being able to practice the six perfections and progress through the ten bodhisattva grounds to attain buddhahood depends on sentient beings (SCP 14–18):

If those sentient beings did not exist,  
with whom could one be generous?

If living beings did not exist, on what basis  
could one achieve the ethical discipline of the Vinaya?

We don't practice generosity by making offering to a chair, nor do we practice ethical conduct by abandoning harming a rock. We need impoverished beings in order to practice generosity; and we need sentient beings in order to practice the ethical conduct of abandoning harm.

For whose sake does a hero meditate



on patience with those who commit a fault?  
For the sake of whom does he diligently work  
to achieve his deeply desired object of attainment?

We can't practice fortitude with holy beings because they don't harm us. Fortitude can only be cultivated with harmful and quarrelsome sentient beings. Our practice of joyous effort likewise depends on sentient beings. To accomplish our own purpose and the purpose of others — which is to attain the truth body and form body of a buddha — we need sentient beings. Otherwise there would be no use in generating joyous effort to accomplish the path.

If living beings did not exist,  
how would one — by correctly depending on  
love, compassion, joy, and equanimity —  
attain the bliss of meditative absorption?

Among the meditation objects for cultivating the dhyānas are the four immeasurables. We can't cultivate love, compassion, empathic joy, and equanimity for empty space. Sentient beings are the necessary objects of these meditations.

Knowing the functioning and nonfunctioning bliss of liberation,  
presenting dispositions, attitudes, and tendencies,  
the thoroughly afflicted or completely pure,  
if [sentient beings] did not exist how could those be known?

“Functioning and nonfunctioning” refers to the two truths. “The thoroughly afflicted or completely pure” are factors pertaining to saṃsāra and nirvāṇa, respectively. Saṃsāra and nirvāṇa exist because of sentient beings; we cannot develop the wisdoms realizing the two truths without sentient beings.

Since all these sentient beings are  
the cause of the factors of awakening,

therefore, all who wish for complete awakening should regard sentient beings as gurus.

All of the above practices would be impossible without the existence of sentient beings. They are indeed precious and are as essential for our spiritual progress and buddhahood as our spiritual mentors are. For this reason, how can we not value, respect, and have love and compassion for sentient beings? Śāntideva exclaims (BCA 8.129):

Whatever joy there is in this world  
all comes from desiring others to be happy;  
and whatever suffering there is in this world  
all comes from desiring myself to be happy.

All these points that show the value and necessity of benefiting sentient beings are based on the reasoning of dependent arising. Sentient beings have benefited us and will continue to do so. In addition, both we and sentient beings benefit when we cherish them, extend love and compassion to them, and work for their benefit. The more we ponder these points, the clearer it becomes that benefiting sentient beings is the wellspring of all joy — now and in the future — and harming them is the source of all misery. As your heart and mind evolve on this point, you'll find yourself being less angry and upset and more content and peaceful. The pain and problems brought on by the critical, judgmental, self-centered mind fade away.

## REFLECTION

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1. Think of all the practices the Buddha did and the hardships he endured to become a fully awakened one. He did all this because he cherished sentient beings even more than himself. Feel respect, gratitude, and devotion for the Buddha.
2. Reflecting that the Buddha's magnificent qualities — the superknowledges, the fulfillment of the ten perfections, the ten powers<sup>29</sup> and four fearlessnesses<sup>30</sup> of a buddha, and so on — are all

dependent on his cherishing sentient beings, open your heart to cherish those whom the Buddha cherishes.

3. Contemplate that sentient beings, just like your spiritual mentors, are precious because it is in dependence on them that you create virtue.
4. Seeing them as precious and endearing, generate love, wishing them to have happiness and its causes, and compassion, wishing them to be free from suffering and its causes.

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To generate love, contemplate that sentient beings want only happiness and its causes but lack these. Focusing first on friends, then strangers, and finally on enemies, wish them to have happiness and its causes and imagine them happy as well as happily creating the causes for well-being. Meditating earnestly in this way will heal many of your own unresolved disturbing emotions left over from previous experiences.

From a Buddhist perspective, several types of happiness exist, and it is good to wish that sentient beings have all of them. The first is the happiness derived from having the basic requisites for life — food, shelter, clothing, and medicine — as well as other factors that bring happiness in this life — good health, harmonious relations with relatives and friends, safety, money, possessions, social standing (even animals seek that!), and worldly success. This is what most people think of as happiness, even though it is unstable, transient, and difficult to control. While having good external conditions brings a certain type of happiness, it does not guarantee well-being. Worldly pleasures bring an assortment of difficulties — the fear of losing what we have, the anxiety of not getting what we desire, and jealousy of those who have more and better.

Another type of happiness is emotional peace — acceptance of who we are, the lessening of anger, releasing grudges. The causes of this type of happiness are internal reflection and the deliberate cultivation of wholesome mental states. Psychotherapy can help with this, as can nonviolent communication,<sup>31</sup> secular mindfulness practices, and other skills.

In general, working hard is the social ethic and norm across cultures, and society identifies one's chosen work as the cause of happiness and well-being. Some people recognize that a society's social, economic, and political systems can either bring about or interfere with the type of happiness that is dependent on work. But looking deeper, we see that the cause of temporal happiness depends on merit — virtuous actions (good karma) created through generosity and benefiting others, ethical conduct, and fortitude.

Still greater than the happiness of emotional well-being is the joy, bliss, and equanimity derived from states of meditative absorption. This peace is experienced by those who have suppressed manifest afflictions by attaining the deep states of concentration of the four dhyānas and the four formless absorptions. While this bliss is more stable than the happiness that depends on external circumstances, such as the people and environments we live in, it does not last forever. The causes of well-being derived from meditative states involve practicing the steps to gain serenity — eliminating the five hindrances, overcoming the five faults by the eight antidotes, traversing the nine stages of sustained attention, accomplishing the seven mental contemplations, and so forth.<sup>32</sup>

An even higher level of happiness is the fulfillment of our ultimate spiritual aims — nirvāṇa and full awakening. This necessitates subduing and then completely overcoming afflictions such as craving, ignorance, animosity, jealousy, and arrogance. Imagine the kind of peace, fulfillment, and bliss we and others would feel if our minds were free of these! The bliss and joy experienced in these states does not decline or disappear. In nirvāṇa, the mind is totally free from the vagaries of afflictions and polluted karma and dwells peacefully in the realization of emptiness. With full awakening, the mind is free from afflictive and cognitive obscurations and all beneficial internal qualities have been limitlessly developed. This is ultimate security, satisfaction, and fulfillment that enables us to benefit and bring meaning not only to ourselves but also to others.

Our wish for sentient beings to have spiritual happiness entails wishing that they have all the conducive circumstances needed to meet, learn, and practice the Dharma, beginning with having a fortunate rebirth, meeting qualified spiritual mentors, and having supportive Dharma friends and

environments. We also wish them to be imbued with interest in spiritual matters and to question how persons and phenomena exist — that is, to seek the truth. The causes for this are observing karma and its effects as well as studying, reflecting, and meditating on the Buddha’s teachings to the best of our ability in the present life.

The cause of nirvāṇa is the mind of renunciation and the practice of the three higher trainings, especially wisdom. The causes of full awakening are — in addition to those for nirvāṇa — bodhicitta, the six perfections, and the generation and completion stages of Tantra. We wish that all sentient beings create these causes that come about from a qualified disciple meeting a qualified spiritual mentor and then practicing diligently with joyous effort.

When meditating on love, wish that sentient beings have all these levels of happiness and peace as well as their causes. When done in depth, this meditation is quite extensive and expansive. Please continue to contemplate in this way, looking ever deeper.

Like self-respect, loving ourselves in a realistic and practical way is important. Self-love must be distinguished from self-indulgence. Self-indulgence is fraught with selfish attachment and leads to anxiety and guilt, whereas loving ourselves involves caring for ourselves with an acceptance and kindness that are free from unrealistic expectations. Like all sentient beings, we seek happiness. Self-indulgence involves thinking we must fulfill all our worldly wishes; self-centeredness is believing that our happiness is more important than anyone else’s. Genuine self-love enables us to love others, while self-centeredness uses others for our own pleasure. Self-love cares for self and others in an expansive way and enables us to live harmoniously with others. At its most exalted levels, genuine love and compassion for ourselves wish us to be free from cyclic existence and to attain full awakening. Working toward these spiritual goals is true kindness to ourselves, and it brings about the joy of others as well.

## REFLECTION

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What is happiness? Reflect on the various types of happiness there are and then wish sentient beings to have it and its causes.

1. The happiness of having the basic requisites for life — food, shelter, clothing, and medicine — as well as good health, harmonious relations, safety, money, and possessions.
  2. The happiness of emotional peace — acceptance of who we are, the lessening of anger, releasing grudges.
  3. The calm of elevated states of consciousness that is the joy, bliss, and equanimity derived from states of meditative absorption.
  4. The happiness of the fulfillment of our ultimate spiritual aims — nirvāṇa and full awakening.
  5. Contemplate the causes of each type of happiness and wish sentient beings to have these too.
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### ***Compassion***

As we said, love and compassion do not occur in a fixed order. Which one is generated depends whether we first see sentient beings as lacking happiness and want them to have happiness and its causes, or if we first see them as being burdened by duḥkha and want them to be free from it.

Our first experiences after birth were of kindness and compassion. Love and compassion are not unfamiliar to us. Not only have we received love and compassion from others, but also each of us has the seed of love and compassion in our mindstream. By learning and practicing the methods to generate great love and great compassion, we can nurture those seeds that are already in our mindstream, enabling them to grow into the beautiful, life-sustaining love and compassion of a bodhisattva.

Although based on ordinary love and compassion, the great love and great compassion cultivated in the Mahāyāna differ from them in several important ways. First, great love and great compassion are impartial and unbiased. Usually affection arises easily toward close friends and relatives; concern about their welfare arises naturally. However, those feelings are mixed with attachment. They depend on the other person's attitude and

actions toward us. When the other person's speech and behavior are pleasing, we feel affection for them. But when their attitude or behavior do not meet our expectations, wants, or needs, our love and compassion evaporate; we may even become enraged with this person. Genuine love and compassion, on the other hand, arise irrespective of others' attitudes and actions toward us. Rather, our perspective is "Others are just like me; they want happiness and don't want duḥkha as much as I do. They also have the right to overcome suffering." We feel such unbiased love and compassion even toward enemies and those whom we dislike because they, too, are sentient beings who have the wish and the right to overcome suffering.

Furthermore, unlike ordinary love and compassion, which are felt only toward a limited number of beings, great love and great compassion are extended toward all sentient beings — including ourselves, people we like, those we dislike, and those we don't know.

Ordinary love and compassion are usually dependent on our personal preferences and prejudices and arise automatically in us ordinary beings whose minds are under the influence of afflictions. Great love and great compassion, on the other hand, are consciously cultivated with a clear purpose. Reasoning is used to overcome the bias and favoritism that color our self-centered emotions toward others. Wisdom helps our love and compassion become more stable and less influenced by the vagaries of others' behavior. This enables ordinary love and compassion to expand to include all sentient beings and to wish them to be free from all types of duḥkha and have all types of happiness, transforming them into great love and great compassion.

The focal object of compassion is sentient beings who are suffering. Its subjective aspect is the wish for them to be free from suffering. Compassion depends on two principal attitudes: a sense of closeness with others and concern for their suffering. Seeing sentient beings as endearing through remembering their kindness creates a sense of intimacy and affection toward others in our heart. Meditating on the fact that sentient beings undergo all the diverse kinds of duḥkha just as we do brings concern for their suffering. Bringing these two together arouses genuine compassion for living beings.

As with cultivating love, we begin cultivating compassion with ourselves, our dear ones, then toward those for whom we have neutral feelings, followed by enemies, and finally all sentient beings. To develop compassion for others, we must be in touch with how we ourselves are oppressed by duḥkha and wish to be free of it. For this reason, meditating on the four truths — especially true duḥkha and true origins — and the twelve links of dependent origination is essential. Without the support of these meditations, our compassion for others will lack energy and risks becoming pity instead.

It is important to cultivate compassion beginning with specific individuals because this brings a personal quality to our compassion. This is very different from feeling sorry for a large amorphous group of beings we don't know. We are generating the wish for individuals whom we feel close to and care about to be free from duḥkha and its causes. Meditating on individuals also brings to light the resentment, prejudice, and fear that interferes with having compassion. When we have successfully dealt with these hindrances, then it is suitable to extend the range of our compassion to more and more sentient beings.

Just as when generating love there are many kinds of happiness to wish sentient beings to have, when cultivating compassion there are diverse forms of duḥkha that we wish them to be free from. Here it is helpful to contemplate the three kinds of duḥkha, the six disadvantages of cyclic existence, and the eight unsatisfactory conditions one by one.<sup>33</sup> The more we have contemplated these faults of saṃsāra in terms of our own lives and generated the aspiration to attain liberation, the easier it will be to consider that others suffer from them as well and to generate compassion for them. The same is true when we contemplate afflictions and karma as the causes of saṃsāric suffering and wish sentient beings to be free from them.<sup>34</sup>

You can also begin your meditation on compassion by thinking of someone whose suffering is such that you cannot bear it. Recall that he is similar to you in wanting happiness and not wanting suffering, and by reflecting on this, in time you will feel very strong concern for him and compassion will arise. Then extend your meditation to close friends and relatives; think of them one by one and cultivate compassion for each person. Then focus on strangers — road workers, secretaries, citizens of



other countries, refugees — and recall their suffering. Recall that they are just like you in wanting and deserving to be free from duḥkha and to have happiness. Finally bring to mind people for whom you have negative emotions: people who have harmed you, whom you fear, and who hold views and opinions that you find totally unacceptable. Think of them one by one, remembering that they are just like you in wanting happiness and not suffering and in having the right to be free from duḥkha. Do this until you feel that their suffering is intolerable. In this way, develop the same strength of concern toward them that you have toward those who are dear to you. Finally, extend compassion to all sentient beings in all the realms of saṃsāra. Remember that planet Earth is not the only place with living beings; there are countless sentient beings, each having their own experience of duḥkha at this moment. Enlarge your heart to include them all.

Another way to meditate on compassion is to visualize an animal — it could be a pet, an animal raised for its meat or fur, or any other animal. Contemplate the difficulties it faces in an animal rebirth — being under others' control, its vulnerability to being killed, and so forth. Unable to understand the Dharma, animals face huge obstacles to creating virtuous karma and to gaining a better rebirth. When compassion arises for this being who has the buddha nature but is trapped in a body that brings physical suffering and limits its ability to learn, change your focus to hungry ghosts and think of the suffering they experience — the strong desires that are never met; the hunger and thirst that cannot be satisfied. From there, contemplate the suffering of hell beings — their fear and terror and physical suffering. Think also of human beings: although they have less physical suffering than beings in the unfortunate realms, their mental suffering can be formidable. In addition, they are often distracted from creating virtue, as are desire-realm gods. The form- and formless-realm gods experience great pleasure, but when the karma for these rebirths is consumed, they helplessly fall to rebirths with more duḥkha. In this way, cultivate a strong wish that all of these beings be free from their duḥkha.

One especially poignant thought to contemplate when cultivating compassion is that although sentient beings long only for happiness and freedom from suffering, because they are overwhelmed by ignorance and

other afflictions, they continuously create more karma that will ripen in their suffering. Śāntideva said (BCA 1.28):

Although wishing to be rid of misery,  
they run toward misery itself.  
Although wishing to have happiness,  
like an enemy, they ignorantly destroy it.

Think about this in terms of the people you care for. They want only happiness but due to their mental afflictions they constantly self-sabotage, abandoning the causes of happiness as if they were a horrible disease. Because they are confused regarding the causes of misery, they embrace them as if they were the path to happiness. Not only are our friends in this sorrowful state but so too are all other sentient beings, including ourselves. What a sorrowful state sentient beings are in! Feeling that their experience of even the subtle pervasive *duḥkha* of conditioning is intolerable, allow compassion to arise in your mind.

When meditating on compassion, do not fall prey to personal distress. Keep your focus on others' experiences, not on the pain you feel from observing their *duḥkha*. Have deep concern for the plight of yourself and all sentient beings, but remember that the causes for all *duḥkha* can be eliminated, so maintain an optimistic yet grounded attitude. Love, compassion, and *bodhicitta* are not uncontrolled emotions that render us incapable of action. To the contrary, they make us strong and courageous. But we must work hard to generate them. Tsongkhapa cautions (LC 2:45):

Therefore, if you are satisfied with just a little personal instruction and neglect to familiarize yourself with the explanations of the classical texts, your compassion and love will be very weak . . . You must then analyze these explanations with discerning wisdom and elicit the experience produced after sustaining them in meditation. You will not achieve anything with the unclear experiences that come when you make a short, concentrated effort without precisely clarifying the topic with your

understanding. Know that this is true for other kinds of practice as well.

There are many types of compassion that are possessed by different people. Ordinary people who may or may not follow a particular religion or spiritual tradition have compassion when they see the evident suffering of the people and animals they care about. They may extend this compassion to more living beings, but because they usually aren't aware of the *duḥkha* of change and the pervasive *duḥkha* of conditioning, their compassion is generally confined to wishing beings to have health, wealth, job fulfillment, and happy families in this life.

Some *śrāvakas* and solitary realizers have immeasurable compassion (synonymous with limitless compassion). This compassion is at the level of a *dhyāna*, and although it is spread to immeasurable sentient beings, it is not strong enough to inspire them to shoulder the responsibility to liberate all sentient beings. Nevertheless, the immeasurable love and compassion of *śrāvakas* and solitary realizers are to be lauded and these practitioners are to be respected for their attainments. There is no reason for us bodhisattva-aspirants to be proud, for our present love and compassion are weak, biased, and of short duration. In all cases, it is fitting to respect those who are more spiritually accomplished than we are and to endeavor to generate the excellent qualities they possess.

In his first *Stages of Meditation*, Kamalaśīla delineates the measure for having generated great compassion (LC 2:45):

When you spontaneously feel compassion that has the subjective wish to completely eliminate the *duḥkha* of all living beings — just like a mother's desire to remove her dear child's unhappiness — then your compassion is complete and is therefore called great compassion.

Here Kamalaśīla uses an example that is familiar to us — the compassion of a mother for her child — to give us a sense of something extraordinary that we have not yet experienced — the spontaneous, heartfelt desire to completely eliminate the *duḥkha* of all sentient beings. As with all

analogies, however, not all aspects of the example apply to the object to understand. In this case, a mother's compassion for her child is tinged with attachment and partiality, whereas a bodhisattva's compassion is free from these. The measure of having generated great love can be inferred from the above passage.

Great compassion observes all sentient beings and its healing effect extends to all of them. Great compassion wants not only to liberate all sentient beings from the duḥkha of pain and the duḥkha of change but also to free them from the pervasive duḥkha of conditioning that afflicts all beings wandering in saṃsāra.<sup>35</sup> This great compassion is a prerequisite for bodhicitta and therefore must be present in order to enter the first bodhisattva path, the path of accumulation.

Knowing the characteristics of the realizations of love, compassion, and bodhicitta enables us to assess our spiritual progress. This prevents false conceit, thinking we have actualized something that we have not. For example, it is not too challenging to think, "I will attain awakening for the benefit of all sentient beings." But feeling this sincerely and spontaneously as our immediate response when seeing any sentient being is quite difficult.

Bodhisattvas' great compassion is strong, stable, and resilient. They do not succumb to despondency and feelings of hopelessness even though they may feel unsettled when observing sentient beings suffer. Deep inside their minds courage, inner strength, and optimism abound. Bodhisattvas express their compassion in creative and appropriate ways. They neither succumb to personal distress upon seeing others' suffering nor take it upon themselves to "fix" those sentient beings' predicaments by interfering in unwanted ways.

Śāntideva uttered a phrase that leads us to imagine a world where great compassion abounds: "May people think of benefiting one another." May each of us become one of those people.

### ***The Great Resolve***

By practicing the steps of mental trainings over time, our love and compassion will increase to the point where they become the great resolve, which assumes the responsibility to bring sentient beings happiness and to eliminate their suffering. This is much stronger than the wish to repay the

kindness of sentient beings. It is also stronger than the love and compassion that think how wonderful it would be if sentient beings had happiness and its causes and were free of duḥkha and its causes. The great resolve has energy behind it: it is the heartfelt commitment to act in order to give happiness to each and every sentient being and to protect them from all three types of duḥkha. It thinks, “I will give happiness to all sentient beings and free them from duḥkha.” It is very helpful to think like this frequently during the day so that this intention supports our physical and verbal actions. Try thinking like this during your workday and see how it transforms your attitude and relationships and increases the sense of meaning in your life.

Śrāvakas and solitary realizers may have immeasurable love and immeasurable compassion that wish sentient beings to have happiness and be free of duḥkha. This love and compassion, however, are not strong enough to induce their commitment to act to bring this about. Great compassion is so called because it goes beyond the compassion of śrāvakas and solitary realizers. When our compassion can no longer endure sentient beings’ suffering, it induces the great resolve, a type of great compassion that is willing to bear the responsibility of liberating sentient beings from all duḥkha whatsoever. With the great resolve that is induced by compassion and love, practitioners have the confidence and determination to work for the benefit of all sentient beings, are willing to do it without any regret, and act to fulfill their aim.

The great resolve has overcome gross self-centeredness and is ready to act on the aspiration to benefit and protect sentient beings. The *Questions of Sāgaramati Sūtra* gives the example of a family that has only one child, who was charming and loved by his parents. One day the child was playing and fell into a pit filled with sewage and filth. His aunts and uncles screamed and lamented as they stood by the side of the pit. When his parents came along and saw the situation, their only thought was to save the child, and without hesitation or revulsion they jumped into the sewage pit and pulled the child out.

The sewage and filth are the three realms of saṃsāra; the treasured child is all sentient beings; the other relatives are the śrāvakas and solitary realizers; the parents are bodhisattvas. While the compassion of śrāvakas

and solitary realizers is like that of the aunts and uncles for their beloved nephew caught in a pit of filth, it isn't moved to action. For this reason bodhisattva aspirants must generate the great resolve that is firmly committed to liberating all sentient beings oneself.

The deeper our understanding of duḥkha, the stronger our compassion will be. When our compassion reaches the point where we feel that sentient beings' duḥkha in saṃsāra is unbearable and we want them to be free from it as well as from the afflicted obscurations and cognitive obscurations, the great resolve to work for their welfare arises. We commit to work for the temporal well-being of sentient beings as well as to lead them to the highest good — liberation and full awakening.

### *Bodhicitta*

It's important to understand precisely what bodhicitta is so that our efforts to generate it will bear fruit. In *Illumination of the Thought*, Tsongkhapa defines bodhicitta as “the wish to attain highest awakening — the object of attainment — for the sake of all sentient beings — the objects of intent.”<sup>36</sup> This is the noble mind that we should do everything in our power to generate in our own mental continuum. Considering this definition, we see that this precious altruistic intention isn't only wishing others to be free of suffering, wishing them to become buddhas, or wanting to become a buddha ourselves. Bodhicitta isn't just being kind and cooperative, nor is it only praying to take on others' suffering. Kamalaśīla says the measure of having generated genuine bodhicitta is (LC 2:45) as follows:

When you have committed yourself to being a guide for all living beings by conditioning yourself to great compassion, you effortlessly generate the bodhicitta that has the nature of aspiring to unexcelled perfect awakening.

Generating actual bodhicitta requires first cultivating several other attitudes. In addition to having stable experience in the paths in common with the initial- and middle-level practitioners, Śāntideva leads us through several other steps in *Engaging in the Bodhisattvas' Deeds*: contemplating

the benefits of bodhicitta; practicing the seven limbs, which includes confessing innumerable nonvirtues by means of the four opponent powers,<sup>37</sup> taking refuge in the Three Jewels; and understanding the bodhisattva trainings.

Through contemplating the previous six steps, we generate the primary mind held by two aspirations, one seeking to benefit all sentient beings, the other aspiring to attain full awakening in order to do so. This mind is the bodhicitta. It is the seventh point, which is the effect of the six preceding causes.

A naïve assumption that awakening is easy to attain and half-hearted effort is sufficient does not bring the strong resolve necessary to generate bodhicitta. How, then, does the great resolve induce bodhicitta? It comes from reflecting, “At present, I can’t even save myself from the duḥkha of saṃsāra, let alone lead others to freedom. Who is most capable of doing that?” Investigating, we see that no saṃsāric being is fully equipped to guide sentient beings to awakening. Arhats, although they have compassion for others, lack the great compassion and great resolve to do this. Although they are free from the afflictive obscurations, their minds are still affected by cognitive obscurations, so they are able to lead a few beings to liberation but not to buddhahood. Ārya bodhisattvas have bodhicitta, but their minds aren’t free from the cognitive obscurations. The only ones fully equipped to benefit sentient beings most effectively are the buddhas, who have eradicated all obscurations and perfected all excellent qualities. Therefore, we must become a fully awakened buddha with stainless wisdom, unwavering compassion, and full capacity.

Buddhas cannot liberate sentient beings by themselves; if they could, they would have already done so. Sentient beings must learn and practice the Dharma themselves. To teach and guide sentient beings on the path, buddhas must have personal experience of all the practices and the paths to awakening. They must know others’ individual spiritual dispositions, interests, and tendencies as well as the effective ways to practice that would help them actualize their spiritual goals. For the sake of helping others, we must fully prepare ourselves.

When we understand that the wisdom realizing the ultimate nature can remove afflictions and their seeds and lead to liberation, we can also see

that eliminating the cognitive obscurations — the latencies that produce the appearance of inherent existence and cause us to see the two truths as different natures — is also possible. For this reason, we seek to eliminate all obscurations from our mindstreams and realize all excellent qualities. In short, we need to attain full awakening — the nonabiding nirvāṇa of a buddha — in which we abide neither in cyclic existence nor in the complacency and personal peace of our own liberation.

The Perfection Vehicle presents the path to full awakening, and the explanation in highest yoga tantra sharpens this understanding by revealing the extremely subtle wind-mind, the fundamental innate mind of clear light, as well as the tantric path. In this context, the possibility of attaining the four buddha bodies becomes much clearer. Once we have an accurate and stable understanding of what awakening is and how attaining it is possible, we will be able to develop genuine bodhicitta aspiring for buddhahood.

The method for developing bodhicitta is not difficult to understand. However, to gain firm love, compassion, and altruism involves training our mind and eliminating the extremely strong tendency toward considering our own happiness as more important than others. If self-centeredness were not so deeply rooted, the śrāvakas and solitary realizers — who are great and wise practitioners with high attainments — would have abandoned it. Eliminating it takes great courage and strength of mind because making the commitment to work for others' welfare for eternity and to attain buddhahood in order to do so is a radical reversal of our usual way of thinking and relating to the world.

Sometimes during meditation sessions we may feel an intense great resolve to better sentient beings' condition. But after our meditation session, our resolve falters, our love and compassion recede into the background, and self-centeredness reemerges. To remedy this requires continued vigilance and application in all aspects and activities of our life. We can't take a holiday from love and compassion in order to "enjoy the pleasures" of self-centeredness. For this reason, in the first *Stages of Meditation*, Kamalaśīla encourages us (LC 2:47):

Cultivate this compassion toward all beings at all times,  
whether you are in meditative concentration or in the course



of any other activity.

Tsongkhapa advises (LC 2:48):

The mindstream which has been infused since beginningless time with the bitter afflictions will not change at all from just a short cultivation of the good qualities of love, compassion, and so forth. Therefore you must sustain your meditation continuously.

Cultivating spontaneous bodhicitta once is a wonderful start. Then you must make it stable through repeated meditation. To do this, continue meditating on the duḥkha of saṃsāra, the kindness of sentient beings, love, compassion, and the great resolve. In addition, contemplate the physical, verbal, and mental qualities of the buddhas and their awakening activities to keep your spiritual goal in mind. Meditate on the emptiness of inherent existence to abandon the obscurations on your mindstream, and continue to support all these practices by purifying and accumulating merit. In short, make your bodhicitta strong so that you won't give it up when difficulties arise.

May we follow their excellent advice and complete the entire path in good time.

## REFLECTION

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1. Cultivate compassion first toward one person and then gradually expand it to all sentient beings according to the instructions here and in chapter 1.
2. Generate the great resolve to actively engage in increasing others' happiness and diminishing their suffering.

Who can do this? As ordinary beings we lack the wisdom and skill. As śrāvakas we lack the compassion. Only buddhas have the ability to benefit

others most effectively. Therefore, we must follow the path to buddhahood and attain full awakening.

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## 4 | Equalizing and Exchanging Self and Others

I AM OVER EIGHTY years old now. For almost seventy years, I have contemplated bodhicitta and emptiness daily. I'm not saying I have attained the bodhisattva paths and grounds, but I am getting closer. If we create the cause, the result will come. This daily contemplation has brought peace in my mind as well as the confidence that my life has been meaningful. I encourage all of you to dedicate your lives to contemplating and approaching these two bodhicittas: the conventional bodhicitta (the altruistic intention) and the ultimate bodhicitta (the wisdom realizing emptiness).

In the preceding chapter we discussed the seven cause-and-effect instructions for generating bodhicitta. The second method to cultivate bodhicitta is equalizing and exchanging self and others. This method is traced to Nāgārjuna's *Commentary on Bodhicitta (Bodhicittavivaraṇa)* and his *Precious Garland of Advice for the King (Rājaparīkathāratnāvalī)*. Later Śāntideva explained this method in detail in *Engaging in the Bodhisattvas' Deeds*, and it was passed down privately among the early Kadampa masters in Tibet.

The method of equalizing and exchanging self and others as well as the practice of taking and giving included in it were practiced secretly, not because practitioners wanted to deprive others of knowledge about it but because thinking according to this approach shakes us up. Although we know intellectually that we aren't the most important person in the world, in our heart the self-grasping ignorance and self-centered attitude refuse to accept this. This method hits right at the heart of our self-centered attitude and makes us question the view of self-grasping ignorance as well. The self-honesty and directness of this approach are what make it so profound.

Let's start at the beginning and gradually transform the mind that anxiously clings to I and mine into a relaxed, joyful mind that cherishes others more than self. The method to do this consists of the following steps: (1) equalizing self and others, (2) becoming convinced of the disadvantages of self-centeredness, (3) understanding the great benefits of cherishing others, (4) exchanging self and others, (5) taking others' duḥkha with compassion and giving them our happiness with love, and (6) bodhicitta.

### *Equalizing Self and Others*

The first step is to equalize ourselves and others by recognizing that all sentient beings — ourselves and others — are equally important and worthy of being happy and peaceful and free from pain and misery. This counteracts the ingrained notion that we deserve to have every happiness and to be free of all sufferings, but others deserve these less. The hazards of this self-centered view are clear: we seek the means to eliminate only our problems and procure our happiness, while ignoring the well-being of others.

The meditation to equalize self and others differs from the equanimity meditation explained in the previous chapter. The equanimity meditation overcomes the emotional reactions of attachment and animosity with respect to friends and enemies. It steers us toward unbiased openness for these two groups of people. The meditation on equalizing self and others overcomes something deeper: our tendency to consider ourselves more valuable and important than other sentient beings. This meditation brings a deep conviction that we and others are fundamentally equal in wanting happiness and freedom from suffering. Whereas equanimity levels the playing ground of friends, enemies, and strangers, equalizing self and others levels it between us and others.

When we question our innate assumption of self-importance, we find that it is false, that we and others are equal in wanting happiness and wishing to be free from suffering. We and others have the same right to be happy and free of suffering because all of us equally have buddha nature. Try as we may, we cannot come up with a valid reason why our happiness is more important than others and why our suffering hurts more than theirs.

If our happiness and misery were unrelated to those of others, it would be reasonable to say that we do not need to bother about their joy and pain. But this is not the case. Our happiness and suffering do not arise in isolation. They are interwoven with those of others. Because we are interconnected in this way, caring more about others' happiness, helping them attain it, and eliminating their suffering are crucial, even for our own well-being. The problem with caring only about the safety and well-being of ourselves and our dear ones is that we will live in a society where the vast majority of people are miserable. They will make their suffering and unfair treatment known to us, so that all of us will live in a tumultuous society. Caring for others as we care for ourselves will easily remedy this.

To equalize self and others, on your left imagine your usual self, and on your right visualize all other sentient beings. Both have the reasonable wishes to be safe and free from suffering. Then be the judge and determine whose well-being is more important. On one side is one sentient being, on the other side are all sentient beings minus one. Better yet, hold a vote on whose welfare is more important. Wouldn't the side of all sentient beings minus one win by a landslide? Surely it is more important to bring about the happiness and remove the suffering of other sentient beings than of just ourselves.

If our self-centeredness refuses to admit defeat, we must protest against it because it is a tyrannical despot that refuses to turn over power to the rightful victor of the vote. We should plan protest marches and write editorials in the newspaper against this unjust ruler, the self-centered attitude. When an autocrat ignores the welfare of the citizens, the world condemns him as greedy, arrogant, and power hungry. Similarly, isn't our self-centered attitude a ruthless dictator that ignores the welfare of other living beings and arrogantly uses them for his own enjoyment? In the past, oppressive monarchs were overthrown by the populace, and as a result government policies and cultural customs changed. Likewise, our customs and actions will change as we overthrow the tyranny of self-preoccupation and institute the reign of cherishing others.

My junior tutor Trijang Rinpoche taught a nine-point meditation on equalizing self and others when he gave teachings on the "Guru Pūjā." This meditation has three major points, each of which has three subpoints. Two

of those major points are based on conventional truths, one on ultimate truth.

1. Self and others are equal from the perspective of conventional truths. These reasons do not delve into the mode of existence of self and others, but work on the level of appearances.

A. The three reasons from the viewpoint of others primarily examine others and consider whether there is any difference between them and ourselves.

1. Everyone equally wants happiness and freedom from suffering. Not only do all six classes of sentient beings equally want this but also ourselves and others are equal in having this desire. Seeing that deep within everyone's heart, each and every being has the same wish, discriminating among them is unsuitable.
2. Favoring some beggars over others is not suitable because each of them has needs, although their specific needs may differ. Similarly, we and others equally have needs and desires, although their specifics may differ. Therefore it is not right to be partial to our friends over enemies or to favor ourselves over others. Instead, we should aim to benefit everyone equally.
3. Curing the suffering of some patients and not others is not proper. Although each one suffers from a different illness or injury, they all equally want to be free from pain. Therefore we should try to remove suffering from everyone equally without helping ourselves and neglecting others.

B. The three reasons from the viewpoint of self focus on our attitudes toward others.

1. All sentient beings have been kind to us in the past, are kind to us in the present, and will be kind to us in the future. Everything that is used to sustain our lives

— food, clothing, shelter, and medicine — and all our enjoyments were produced and given to us by others. Everything we use in our life was made by others. Even our body came from others. All our knowledge and skills came because others taught and encouraged us. Seeing the immeasurable kindness we have received from all sentient beings since beginningless time, we should help them equally in return, without abandoning any of them.

2. “But sentient beings have also harmed us,” harps the self-centered attitude. If we were to weigh the help and the harm we have received, the help we have received from others greatly outweighs the harm. In fact, the harm is miniscule. In addition, when we were harmed, many sentient beings came to our aid. Our self-centered mind keeps tabs on and seldom forgets even the slightest harm we have received, while it takes for granted every benefit we have received and expects more. If we take stock of our lives, we’ll see how true this is.
3. If we still cling to old hurts and indulge our resentment, let’s recall that we and others are impermanent beings who are subject to death. In that light, there is no sense in discriminating against anyone, holding grudges, or seeking revenge. Such attitudes only make us miserable and create the cause for suffering in future lives. Furthermore, the beings we seek to harm in return are caught in cyclic existence; given that they are going to die in any case, what use is harming them?

2. Self and others are equal from the viewpoint of ultimate truth. These reasons examine if there is an inherently existent self and others. If not, there is no sense in being attached to these labels and distinguishing self as more worthy of happiness than others.



- A. If friends, enemies, and strangers existed from their own side inherently, rather than being mere imputations, the Buddha would see this. But the Buddha makes no distinction between a person massaging him on one side and someone cutting him on the other. They are equally objects of his love and compassion.
- B. If friends, enemies, and strangers were truly existent, each sentient being would always remain in whatever category he or she is presently found. However, our experience is that relationships change. The friend of one year is the enemy of the next, and vice versa. Both can become strangers, and someone who is currently a stranger can easily become a friend or enemy. Making these differentiations is a function of our mind; they are not inherent in those sentient beings.
- C. Self and others are dependent designations. They depend on each other just as this side of the valley and that side are posited in mutual dependence on the other. Depending where we stand, one side is labeled “this” or “that”; these labels change depending on our viewpoint. Similarly, calling one set of aggregates “I” or “other” is dependent. The aggregates I currently call “I” other people call “other.” If they were inherently mine, then everyone would see them as mine; but most people see them as other, and therefore not so important.

The above nine points are powerful tools to cut away at our ingrained feeling of entitlement. Meditating on them produces a definite change in the mind. Self-centered attitude sees myself and others as unrelated and deems others’ suffering and happiness as less important than my own. But there is no logical reason to support this belief. We all equally want happiness and not suffering. In addition, others have been kind to me and everything I have or know comes from them. Seeing this, holding myself as more worthy is unconscionable. Furthermore, myself and others are not inherently existent entities. Why is “I” to be labeled only in dependence on this set of aggregates and not on others? From the viewpoint of others, “I” is designated in dependence on other aggregates and “other” is imputed in

dependence on mine. Śāntideva asks himself very pointed questions about why we care for ourselves and neglect others (BCA 9:92–96):

Although my suffering does not  
cause pain in other bodies,  
nevertheless that suffering is mine and is difficult to bear  
because of my attachment to myself.

Likewise, although I myself do not feel  
the suffering of another person,  
that suffering belongs to that person and is difficult [for her] to bear  
because of her attachment to herself.

I should eliminate the suffering of others  
because it is suffering, just like my own suffering.  
I should take care of others because they are sentient beings,  
just as I am a sentient being.

When happiness is equally dear  
to others and myself,  
what is so special about me  
that I strive after happiness for myself alone?

When fear and suffering are equally abhorrent  
to others and myself,  
what is so special about me  
that I protect myself but not others?

Śāntideva's questions deserve some thought. He also asks us to be humble when helping others and to care for them in the same way we do for ourselves, without expecting anything in return (BCA 8.116–17):

When I work in this way for the sake of others,  
I should not let conceit or the feeling that I am wonderful arise.

It is just like feeding myself —  
I hope for nothing in return.

Therefore, just as I protect myself  
from unpleasant things, however slight,  
in the same way, I should habituate myself  
to have a compassionate and caring mind toward others.

## REFLECTION

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This reflection is on equalizing self and others. Since nine points to contemplate are easily seen in the explanation above, please refer to them there.

1. Consider each of the points establishing why you and others are equal from the perspective of conventional truths.
  2. Consider each of the points regarding why you and others are equal from the perspective of ultimate truth.
  3. How will this reflection influence how you think of yourself? How will it influence how you think about and act toward others?
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### *The Disadvantages of Self-Centeredness*

Self-centeredness has several different aspects. *Coarse self-centeredness* considers ourselves more important than others and seeks primarily our own happiness in this life. This self-centeredness leads us not only to be apathetic toward others' welfare but to also create a great deal of destructive karma. A less coarse form of self-centeredness seeks our own fortunate rebirth in saṃsāra. It is a virtuous attitude, even though it cares more for ourselves than others. *Subtle self-centeredness* is the mind that seeks liberation for ourselves alone. In general, subtle self-centeredness seeking our own nirvāṇa — also called “attending to our own goal” — is

not an object of abandonment; it is a valid mind that enables śrāvakas and solitary realizers to abandon harming others and to attain liberation. People inclined toward the śrāvaka path hear about or see arhats and think, “I want to attain liberation like they have,” and by attending to that goal they practice well, eradicate the afflictive obscurations, and attain nirvāṇa. These arhats are worthy of our respect. However, from the perspective of bodhisattvas who seek to become fully awakened buddhas, subtle self-centeredness is to be abandoned because it leads one to forfeit the opportunity to attain buddhahood with its ability to vastly benefit sentient beings, in favor of gaining the personal peace of arhatship.

In the following sections, we will predominantly speak about the disadvantages of the coarse self-centeredness. In contemplating its faults, it is important to distinguish it from seeking the well-being of the conventional self — the self that exists. The conventional self has the capacity to practice the path and will one day attain the bliss of awakening; seeking the ultimate happiness of the mere I is a productive endeavor. The self-centered attitude, on the other hand, is an adventitious, ingrained thought on our mindstream. A limited attitude that pretends to look out for our welfare but in fact constricts our open-heartedness and potential, it can be overcome. Pointing out the disadvantages of self-centeredness is not a criticism of the legitimate wish for the conventional I to be happy and free of pain, so do not get confused and blame yourself for being selfish. Rather, recognize the self-centered attitude as the troublemaker that makes you create destructive karma and causes you misery in this and future lives. Aspire to free yourself from it so that you and all other sentient beings will not be adversely affected by it in the future.

Recalling that others and ourselves are equal in wanting to be happy and avoid suffering, consider the faults of being self-centered. All the problems we experience in cyclic existence are tied to our self-preoccupation. These problems and turmoil are the results of our own destructive actions, which are supported by self-centeredness. For example, wrongdoings such as the ten nonvirtues are supported by a self-centered motivation. Lying is done to protect ourselves and get what we want; talking behind others’ backs to create disharmony is done with the thought to benefit ourselves, and so forth.

All of our emotional and physical pain is a result of the self-centeredness that motivated the karmic actions that resulted in this pain. In addition, self-centeredness adds to that pain by feeling sorry for ourselves, blaming others for our problems, and complaining about the unfairness of life.

Self-centeredness is the root of guilt, anxiety, and fear. These painful emotions swirl around a twisted sense of importance: I am hopeless, I am unworthy, I am unloved, I am mistreated. By ruminating on our own difficulties, our perspective becomes very narrow and turned in on itself. Brooding over thoughts of shame, low self-esteem, and self-hatred, our pain and distress increase.

Moreover, doing one's spiritual practice with principally one's own welfare in mind is responsible for resting complacently in nirvāṇa and relinquishing the commitment to lead others to full awakening.

In the path of the middle practitioner, we identified the faults of the afflictions and became convinced that they were the source of suffering and lack any good qualities whatsoever. Similarly, here meditate in the same way with regard to the self-centered attitude. See that it has absolutely no benefit and only harms yourself and others. Just as you previously made a firm determination to be free from afflictions and aspired to develop the wisdom realizing emptiness to overcome them, now develop the same strong determination to rid yourself of self-preoccupation and to practice cherishing others from your heart. Only through this can the joy and benefit of buddhahood be attained. When instructing us how to meditate on this topic, Tsongkhapa summarizes the defects of the self-centered attitude (LC 2:55):

Out of attachment to self, my self-centered attitude has produced all sorts of undesirable things throughout the beginningless time of cyclic existence up to now. Although I wanted to make things perfect for myself, I emphasized my own welfare and engaged in improper methods. I have spent countless eons at this, but have not at all accomplished my own or others' aims. Not only have I not achieved these, I have been tormented only by suffering. If I had replaced

concern for my own welfare with concern for others' welfare, I would certainly have already become a buddha long ago and would have completely and perfectly accomplished my own aims as well as those of others. As I did not do this, I have spent my time uselessly and laboriously.

Śāntideva warns (BCA 8.134):

Since all the injury,  
fear, and pain in this world  
arise from the self-centered attitude,  
what use is that great demon to me?

The self-centered attitude interferes with our spiritual practice and our attainment of awakening; it creates havoc in our world. Once when I was speaking with a Muslim friend, Dr. A. P. J. Abdul Kalam, a scientist and the eleventh president of India, he mentioned that many problems of this world are due to our having overly strong clinging to concepts of “I” and “me.” This is true, isn't it? If we thought more in terms of “we” than of “me versus them,” we would be able to work together in a way that would benefit all of us.

A teenager once asked me (Chodron), “Do Buddhists believe in the devil?” I replied that there is not an external devil and there is no one who is thoroughly evil because each sentient being has buddha nature. Rather, the most fearsome devil is the self-centered attitude because it causes us to neglect others and seek only our own happiness.

Cherishing others from the heart is not easy, for self-centeredness sneaks in to cause many problems. For example, we might do what someone wants so that she will like us, not because we genuinely care about her. We may be kind so that others will approve of us, praise us, or speak well of us so that we have an excellent reputation. In these instances, our care for others is not genuine, for self-centeredness has polluted it by seeking some worldly gain for itself. Constant introspective awareness is necessary to flush out the many and varied deceptive intrigues of the self-

centered thought and to transform the energy that was restricted in self-absorption into an open heart that cares impartially for all others.

In developing antipathy toward our self-preoccupation, do not mistakenly think that if you experience any happiness you are self-centered and that the only way to sincerely care for others is to suffer yourself. This is not correct at all. Practicing the path should be joyful, although it requires effort and there are bumps on the road. Even in terms of our relationship to sense objects, happiness and pleasure themselves are not the problem — don't feel guilty for experiencing them. They are just feelings arising as a result of karma. Self-centered attachment to them is the culprit. Thus let's strive to diminish and eventually banish self-preoccupation so we and others will be genuinely happy.

Some people may think they have to neglect themselves in order to cherish others. This too is a mistaken notion. Although we want to cease letting self-preoccupation run our lives and make our decisions, this doesn't mean that we should neglect our own situation entirely. The kind of selfishness that leads us to exploit others must be reduced, but disparaging ourselves is not helpful on the path and it is to be abandoned. Our aim is to cherish all sentient beings, including ourselves. If we neglect ourselves, then instead of being able to work for others, they will have to take care of us! Rather, we need to respect ourselves and our buddha potential and, on that basis, discern the appropriate way of caring for ourselves that will support our practice of bodhicitta.

## REFLECTION

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Contemplate the disadvantages of following the self-centered attitude and think of more disadvantages that haven't been listed below. Remember you are not your self-centeredness, so don't criticize yourself for being self-centered. Remember the self-centered attitude is your enemy.

1. It motivates the destructive karmic actions that bring unfortunate rebirths and many problems in future lives.
2. It is the source of all our interpersonal problems and disputes.

3. It prevents us from understanding the Dharma and especially from realizing bodhicitta.
  4. It makes us extremely sensitive to anything concerning ourselves and interprets whatever others do in terms of how it affects us.
  5. It causes us to think others wish to harm us when they have no such thought.
  6. It is the root of guilt, anxiety, low self-esteem, self-hatred, fear, and so forth. All those disturbing emotions arise due to focusing on ourselves in an unhealthy and unrealistic way.
  7. Make examples of each of the above from your own experience.
  8. Make a strong determination to catch the self-centered attitude when it arises and to abandon it.
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### *Benefits of Cherishing Others*

All good comes from benefiting others. That's why I tell people: even if you want to selfishly care about yourself, the best way to achieve your own happiness is to take care of others. This applies even to people who are not interested in liberation or awakening. Cherishing others will bring them happiness and peace in this life.

We live in a society where we are completely interdependent. This is especially true now that people's careers and knowledge are narrowed to specialized fields and we must depend on one another to complete our own projects. If we look out only for our own welfare, how will we be happy in an interdependent world? If we don't care about the environment we share, we will create many difficulties and problems that future generations will experience. We see that countries that care only for their own citizens exploit other nations, thereby evoking their ire. Similarly, groups that work only for their own benefit soon find themselves abandoned by others. If one



member of a family is self-centered, the other members lose their wish to help him.

If we take whatever is good for ourselves and ignore others' plight, we soon find ourselves living amidst a group of unhappy people. Their unhappiness will surely affect us; they will complain, they will resent our success, they might even try to steal our things. On the other hand, if we work for the benefit of society as a whole, there is a better chance that those around us will be content and kind, and this will certainly make our life more pleasant!

On a personal level, if we are self-centered, we will lack genuine friends and will be lonely. When we have problems, others will not extend a helping hand. However, when we are kind and fair, others reciprocate and, as a result, we feel cared for and respected.

Thinking beyond this life, cherishing others brings great benefits. We create so much constructive karma, will die without fear or regret, and will secure a good rebirth. Realizations of the path will come easily because our mind has been made fertile with merit. Bodhicitta will arise in our mind and with that we will progress through the bodhisattva's paths and grounds, attaining full awakening.

In short, our accumulation of virtue depends on cherishing sentient beings. Practicing the perfections of generosity, ethical conduct, and fortitude are dependent on sentient beings. Seeing that sentient beings are necessary for our accumulating merit and generating realizations, feel grateful to them and cherish them. In fact, our happiness and awakening depend on each and every sentient being. If one sentient being is omitted from our love and compassion, we cannot generate bodhicitta, and thus awakening will be beyond our reach. Only by depending on each insect and animal, each hungry ghost, each hell being, each human being, and each deva can we generate bodhicitta. By creating the causes to attain a buddha's truth body, cherishing others fulfills our own purpose. By creating causes for a buddha's form bodies, we are enabled to fulfill others' purpose. In short, in the long term only benefit and never harm results from cherishing other sentient beings.

From beginningless time until now, our sworn enemy — the self-centered attitude that is responsible for all our problems — has been

residing comfortably inside us as if it were our best friend. It keeps whispering in our ear, “If I don’t take care of you, no one will,” and in our confusion we believe it. On the other hand, our true friend — the mind cherishing others, which is the source of all happiness — has been kept at a distance with suspicion. Now that we clearly see the disadvantages of self-preoccupation and the benefits of caring for others, let’s rectify this injustice and cherish others as much as possible in our daily life.

Maintaining and enhancing bodhicitta depends on continuously cherishing sentient beings, and that depends on understanding with valid reasons the importance of doing so. If we cherish others because they praise us, give us gifts, agree with our ideas, and act in other ways that gratify our self-centered attitude, we will not be able to sustain that affection for a long time, and our bodhicitta will suffer as a result. As soon as others blame us, lie to us, disagree with our opinions, or act in ways that we don’t like, our affection will dry up and be replaced by anger. However, if our reasons for cherishing others are sound, we will withstand the vacillations in sentient beings’ moods, behavior, and feelings toward us. For this reason, we must frequently remember the kindness of sentient beings and the benefit we receive from cherishing them. In addition, it’s good to recall that the buddhas cherish sentient beings more than themselves. Since we take refuge in the buddhas, we should cherish whom they cherish — sentient beings. If we give up cherishing sentient beings, we neglect what is most valuable to the buddhas. After all, each buddha practiced the Dharma for eons in order to attain awakening so they could be of the greatest benefit to sentient beings. How can we neglect, or worse yet, harm those the buddhas cherish more than themselves? Therefore, remembering the sound reasons why sentient beings are worthy of our love, compassion, and care, let’s continuously maintain a positive attitude toward them.

## REFLECTION

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Contemplating the benefits of cherishing others will inspire you to do so. Then, when you actively cherish others, you’ll experience the benefits yourself.

1. It is the source of all happiness in this and future lives.
  2. Others are happy and your life becomes meaningful.
  3. By being kind to others, they will be drawn to you and you will have harmonious relationships.
  4. Others will respect you and will take your words to heart.
  5. You will create great virtuous karma that will bring a fortunate rebirth and happiness in future lives.
  6. This virtue will also fertilize your mind so that the teachings will enter at a deeper level.
  7. You will die free of regrets.
  8. Generating love, compassion, and bodhicitta will come easily.
  9. Whenever you look at any sentient being you'll have a feeling of warmth.
  10. Make more examples from your experience.
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### *Exchanging Self and Others*

Seeing that self-preoccupation is the path to suffering and cherishing others is the path to bliss, we now exchange the object of our cherishing, replacing self with all sentient beings. Exchanging self and others does not mean that I become you and you become me. Nor does it mean your possessions are mine and mine are yours. Rather, we exchange the attitude with which we hold each one important. We consider others as we would ourselves — we cherish them, want them to be happy and free from pain, seek their success in temporal and spiritual endeavors. Whereas previously we held ourselves as most important, now we hold others as supreme. Whereas previously we

thought others' misery was of secondary importance, now we consider our own problems as minor.

We may have some doubts: Is it possible to exchange ourselves with others? Is there benefit in doing so? If it were useful but not possible, or possible but not useful, then meditating to exchange ourselves with others would just be a waste of time. However, on examination, we find that it's both possible and useful.

But aren't living beings biologically programmed to look out for their own benefit first? Could exchanging ourselves and others bring about the demise of the human species because we would be totally defenseless in the face of others' aggression?

In fact, holding ourselves as foremost is a matter of habit. For example, we may dislike someone and even fear him at one point in our life, but later we meet him in different circumstances and discover that he is very amicable. Developing a close friendship, we miss him when he is absent. This change in feeling is due to our adopting a different attitude about the person and becoming familiar with it.

"But," we may retort, "I don't feel the pain and pleasure that another person's body does, so how could I have the same attitude toward it as I do toward my own body?" Here, too, the answer is that our considering this mass of organic matter "my body" is a matter of familiarity. When we look closer, what about this body is ours? The sperm and egg and genetic material belong to our parents and ancestors. The rest is the result of the food we have eaten, which came from the earth and was given to us by others. It is simply by habit that we consider this body mine. By closely examining the parts of the body and the feelings of pain and pleasure in the body when practicing mindfulness of the body and of feelings, we will see that there is no I or mine in them. There are simply elements and feelings; the notions that there is an inherently existent person and that the body is inherently mine are our mental fabrications. Śāntideva tells us (BCA 8.101–2):

Such things as a continuum and a collection  
are false in the same way as a rosary and an army.  
There is no real owner of duḥkha;

therefore who has control over it?

There being no inherent owner of duḥkha,  
there can be no distinction at all between the duḥkha of myself and  
others.

Thus I shall dispel duḥkha because it hurts.

The basis for designating the I is the collection of the body and mind; the I is a continuum made up of many moments. There is no inherently existent I to be found in the continuum of I or in the collection of the body and mind. The I exists by being merely conceived and designated. Therefore we cannot make a hard and fast line between my duḥkha and others' duḥkha, saying that one hurts more than the other. Because suffering hurts no matter whose it is, we should work to eliminate it.

As for the concern that the human species would be obliterated if we were more concerned with others' well-being than with our own, I believe that in our case survival of the most cooperative overrides survival of the fittest. Unbounded self-concern and competition lead to destruction, whereas caring and cooperating with one another lead to the benefit of all. Ants and bees survive because they cooperate and care for one another; we human beings do as well. If each ant refused to trust and care for others, all of them would soon die. It is the same with us human beings sharing life on planet Earth. We flourish when we work for the common good; we destroy each other when we think only of our own benefit.

Two principal obstacles block our exchanging self and others. The first is thinking self and others are inherently separate; the second is believing that since others' happiness and suffering doesn't affect us, we don't need to care about it. Regarding the first obstacle, self and others depend on each other. "Self" is posited only when "others" is also posited, similar to one side of the valley being this side only when the other side is that side. Of course, which is this side and which is that side depend on our perspective — where we happen to be standing. They are not inherently this and that; when we go to the other side of the valley, it becomes this side.

The second obstacle is thinking that it's not necessary to dispel others' suffering because it doesn't harm us and it's not necessary to care for others

because that doesn't benefit us. This, too, is based on seeing self and others as unrelated and entirely separate, when in fact we living beings depend on one another. It would be similar to thinking, "There's no need to save money for my old age because that old person is a different person and her suffering doesn't harm me." It would also be similar to the hand refusing to pull a thorn out of the foot because they are unrelated and the foot's pain doesn't hurt the hand.

We might think that ourselves and the old person we will become are in the same continuum and that the hand and the foot are parts of the same body, so it is suitable for them to care for each other. But what we call "continuum" is simply a label imputed in dependence on a collection of moments and what we call "body" is similarly a name designated in dependence on a collection of parts. There is nothing inherently existent in either of these. The various moments of mind and the various parts of the body have no inherent relationship that binds them together. It is simply a matter of conception and designation. Śāntideva says (BCA 9.115–16):

Just as in this form, devoid of I,  
the thought of self arose through long habituation,  
why, in dependence on the aggregates of living beings,  
should not the thought I, through habit, be imputed?

Thus when I work for others' sake,  
there is no reason for boasting or amazement,  
for it is just as when I feed myself —  
I don't expect to be rewarded.

Contemplating this for some time will open our mind to seeing the possibility and benefit of exchanging self and others.

Wishing to exchange ourselves and others is a heartfelt desire that stems from having clearly seen the disadvantages of self-centeredness and the benefits of cherishing others through repeated meditation. Śāntideva recounts his own internal dialogue about this (BCA 8.125, 8.130–31):

"If I give this, what will be left for me?"

Concern for my own welfare is the attitude of demons.

“If I keep this, what will be left to give?”

Concern for others’ welfare is the approach of the divine beings.

All the joy the world contains

has come through wishing happiness for others.

All the misery the world contains

has come through wanting pleasure for myself.

Is there need for lengthy explanations?

Childish beings look out for themselves,

while buddhas work for the good of others:

see the difference that separates them!

When the mind is unripe, the thought of exchanging self and others by placing others foremost and ourselves last is frightening. Should fear arise, remember that it is the self-centered attitude that is anxious because it is losing its ascendancy and control. Develop a courageous attitude to weather that fear; it will not destroy you. Still, it is important to go at a pace that is suitable for us and be content to create the causes so that our meditation on this topic will be successful. Pushing ourselves is counterproductive. Thus if you don’t feel capable of exchanging self with others yet, focus on cultivating love and compassion and engage in practices of purification and collection of merit to strengthen your mind. It is also helpful to request your spiritual mentors and the buddhas for inspiration. When you feel more confident, return to the meditation of exchanging self and others.

Although we practice the meditation of exchanging self and others, on a practical level we still must take care of our body and mind. We’re the only one who can do that, and we need to preserve our precious human life for the sake of others. Looking out for our own well-being at the expense of others is selfish, yet caring for our health and safety as one person among many is a valid concern. Everyone has a natural sense of wanting happiness and freedom from suffering. In and of itself, this wish is not negative. When supported by wisdom, it induces us to discern the causes of happiness and the causes of suffering and to practice the former and abandon the latter. As

our compassion and wisdom grow, so will our ability to exchange self and others.

Deep understanding is necessary to effect such a dramatic change in attitude. Exchanging ourselves with others is not something we can intellectually force on ourselves, and simply telling ourselves we should feel it will not change our attitude. Firm conviction that self-centeredness is our enemy and that cherishing others is beneficial is needed. This conviction comes only through familiarization over time. There is no shortcut. While exchanging self and others may initially seem frightening, with familiarity and practice it will become joyful and easy.

### *Using Jealousy, Competition, and Arrogance in the Exchange*

To demolish our self-centered attitude and hit it at its vulnerable points, Śāntideva describes a meditation in which we exchange ourselves with others and then cultivate jealousy, rivalry, and arrogance toward our old self. This mimics and then inverts the emotions our self-centered attitude usually holds toward people we consider better, equal, or inferior to us. In the following verses, “I” refers to other sentient beings, those who are to be cherished, and “he” refers to our self-centered attitude that is the source of our misery. In other words, we adopt the perspective of others — now called “I” — and criticize our self-centered attitude — now called “he” or “others” (BCA 8.146):

Indifferent to the plight of living beings,  
who tread the brink of unfortunate rebirths,  
he makes an outward show of virtues,  
even sets himself among the perfect!

This verse shows contemptuous jealousy toward the self-centered attitude, looking at it the same way as other beings do. He (our self-centered attitude) does not care about others’ plight but sees himself as the most wonderful being, making a show of being virtuous when he is anything but that. Furthermore, he has high status; we are no one and are jealous of and resent him. Thinking in this way helps us to see how misplaced our self-



preoccupation is, generating within us the determination not to bow to its antics.

The following verses are the means to compete with our self-centered self (BCA, 8.148–49):

By every means I'll advertise  
my gifts to all the world,  
ensuring that his qualities  
remain unknown, ignored by everyone.

My faults I will conceal, dissimulate,  
for I, not he, will be the object of devotion;  
I, not he, will gain possessions and renown;  
I will be the center of attention.

Usually we compete with others, bragging of our own good qualities and ignoring theirs; we make ourselves the center of attention, the one who is famous and respected, and we either put others down or treat them as if they were nonentities. In the above verses, we identify with others and turn that same attitude toward our self-centered attitude, the source of all pain and misery. Truly, our self-centered attitude should be disparaged and neglected.

The following verse illustrates arrogance toward our self-centered attitude. The voice of others (now I) is being arrogant toward our self-centeredness (he) (BCA 8.153):

Granted, even if he does have something,  
I'm the one he is working for!  
He can keep enough just to survive,  
but with my strength I'll steal away the rest.

If the self-centered self possesses wealth, reputation, and so forth, since it is now the servant of others, it should work for their benefit. We (others, whose welfare is more important) will allow him (our self-centered attitude) to keep enough to stay alive, but even then that is just so that he has the energy to serve us.

This verse reminds us of a useful attitude to cultivate toward our possessions, good reputation, and so forth. With love we offer ourselves to all sentient beings as their servants to lead them to temporal and ultimate joy. Mentally we give them all our possessions. Having done so, we must now use these items only for their benefit, never with self-centered concern. Similarly, any good reputation we have is offered to others and used solely for their benefit; we are not arrogant with respect to our own accomplishments, bragging or showing off to others in a way that humiliates them. Gradually training ourselves to think in this way will free us from the tyranny of self-centeredness.

Initially we may encounter difficulties with the meditation cultivating jealousy, rivalry, and arrogance toward our self-centered attitude and our old self. One obstacle is that we are so habituated with self-identification, referencing everything to ourselves, that it's hard to understand the use of "I" and "he" in these verses. With repeated practice, this can be overcome.

Another obstacle is that emotions of resentment, competition, and conceit are so despicable that we wonder what the use of cultivating them is; in fact, it seems rather unbecoming or perhaps even damaging as Dharma practitioners to dredge up these feelings. This meditation does indeed play on the repulsiveness of these emotions, but this time their object is our self-centered attitude, not other sentient beings. In this way, they are used as tools to show us just how contemptible our self-centeredness is so that we will stop following its dictates.

### *How to View the Body*

After exchanging self with others and caring for others the way we care for ourselves, we need to adopt a suitable view toward our present body. In the four establishments of mindfulness, we contemplate the foul nature of this body produced by afflictions and polluted karma. That meditation spurs us to seek liberation from cyclic existence to free ourselves from taking problematic bodies that age, fall ill, and die. Śāntideva now builds on that meditation, encouraging us to cease pampering our bodies and instead use them to work for others' welfare and create the causes for buddhahood. Similar to the meditation on selflessness in mindfulness of the body,

Śāntideva encourages us to counteract the grasping that holds this body as I and mine and to release the obsessive, self-preoccupied worry and attachment we have toward the body. Doing that lessens the suffering caused by clinging to this body and enables us to dedicate our body to practice the path to awakening and to engage in activities that bring happiness to all sentient beings. In his usual forthright style, Śāntideva says (8.178–80, 8.184):

In the end my body will turn to dust;  
unable to move by itself, it will be propelled by other forces.  
Why do I grasp this unbearable  
and unclean form as I, my self?

Whether it lives or whether it dies,  
what use is this machine to me?  
How is it different from a clod of earth?  
O why do I not dispel this conceit of self?

Through lavishing attention on this body,  
such sorrow have I brought myself, so senselessly.  
What use is all my wanting, all my hating —  
for what indeed is like a log of wood?

Therefore, in order to benefit all beings  
I shall give up this body without any attachment.  
Although it may have many faults,  
I should look after it while experiencing the results of my previous  
karma.

Our body is simply a compilation of material elements. Why, then, do we think of it as I and mine? Since it is like an inanimate machine or a clod of dirt, it doesn't make sense for me to generate the conceit of "I am" toward it. Since beginningless time I've treasured and pampered whatever body I had as if it were a pleasure palace. I've craved sensory pleasures, hated

others who prevented me from getting them, and created great destructive karma by doing so. My past behavior was senseless because this body itself is like an inanimate log. Seeing my folly, I will now devote my physical energy to benefiting others. Even though this body has faults — it ages and dies — I will care for it properly and use it for a good purpose.

The *Akṣayamati Sūtra* instructs bodhisattvas how to think about the body:<sup>38</sup>

“I should throw this body into the needs of all sentient beings” . . . Regarding the body as dedicated to this goal, [a bodhisattva] looks at physical pain and is not distressed, but takes care of sentient beings.

Bodhisattvas who cherish others from the depth of their hearts and have practiced exchanging self and others can practice this sincerely, without fear for what will become of themselves. Thinking in this way gives them great joy — joy that is greater than any self-centered happiness we may ever experience.

Such bodhisattvas imbue habitual daily actions with love and compassion and transform what ordinary beings consider unpleasant into an opportunity to benefit others. For example, the *Heap of Jewels Sūtra* (*Ratnakūṭa Sūtra*) counsels bodhisattva monastics who enter a village on alms round but do not receive any food to think:<sup>39</sup>

“These Brahmins, leading merchants, and religious wanderers are so busy, they certainly [have no time] to give to me. It is a wonder that they notice me at all! How much more unusual it would be if they gave me alms.” Not discouraged in this way, he should go for alms.

And as for those sentient beings who come into his field of vision, women, men, boys, and girls, even including animals, he should arouse thoughts of lovingkindness and compassion towards them all . . .

Whether the alms-food he receives is of good quality or of poor quality, he should look around to all four directions,

thinking, “In this village, town, or city, who is a poor person with whom I can share this alms-food?” If he sees a poor person, he shares his alms-food with that person. If he does not see any poor people, he should think, “There are unseen sentient beings who do not come into my field of vision. I give them the best share of this alms-food. May they accept it and eat it!”

For people who have equalized and exchanged self and others, such thoughts and practices as these arise spontaneously in their minds. Those of us in training should try to remember to think like this. Although initially such thoughts are fabricated and our self-centered attitude may rebel, with repeated meditation on exchanging self and others and continuous practice in daily life situations, our minds will come to cherish others as much as, if not more than, we currently cherish ourselves.

### *Taking and Giving*

The taking-and-giving meditation has its source in the *Precious Garland*, where Nāgārjuna says (RA 484cd):<sup>40</sup>

May their ill deeds ripen on me  
and all my virtues ripen on them.

This meditation is also championed by Śāntideva. Because it is so powerful, in the past it was practiced privately and taught only to advanced disciples who were spiritually prepared. Even the thought of experiencing our own suffering, let alone taking on others’ suffering, is anathema to most people. Similarly, to consider offering our body, hard-earned wealth, and merit to others is antithetical to our ingrained self-centeredness.

It wasn’t until the twelfth century that the spiritual mentor Kadampa Geshe Chekawa (1102–76) dared to publicly teach this meditation. He taught the practice to a group of lepers, who cured themselves of leprosy by doing it. Wanting these teachings to be available to others, he composed the now-classic text *The Seven-Point Mind Training*. In our time the practice is taught more openly and people find it very helpful.<sup>41</sup>

The taking-and-giving practice helps to further increase our love and compassion and our capacity to exchange self and others. *Taking* entails generating the compassionate wish “I will take all problems, sufferings, and confusion of other sentient beings on myself so that others may be free from them.” *Giving* is motivated by love: “I will give my body, possessions, and virtuous qualities and their causes to others so that they may be peaceful and happy.” Through this we generate a very courageous and resolute mind that will make our bodhicitta effective.

### ***Taking***

To practice taking, imagine a specific person or group of people in front of you and contemplate the duḥkha they experience. As compassion arises, think, “I will take on their duḥkha so that they will be free of it.” Imagine their duḥkha leaving them in the form of dark clouds, smoke, or pollution and entering you as you inhale. Think how wonderful these beings feel now that their duḥkha has left them.

Now use what sentient beings don’t want — their suffering and afflictions — and use it to destroy what you don’t want — your self-centered attitude and self-grasping ignorance. At your heart is a dark lump, the embodiment of your own self-centered attitude and self-grasping ignorance. As the clouds, smoke, or pollution enters you, it transforms into lightning that strikes this lump, shattering it so that it no longer exists. Feel the freedom and great spaciousness at your heart now that these two have been forever destroyed.

If it is initially difficult to think of taking on others’ suffering, begin by taking on the suffering you will experience later on in this life as you age, fall ill, or have interpersonal problems. Take on this suffering of your future self voluntarily, and imagine that doing so eliminates your present self-centeredness. Then imagine transforming your present body, possessions, and merit into everything you will need in the future, and give it to your future self, who receives it happily. After you become familiar with this practice, contemplate taking on others’ suffering and its causes and giving them your happiness in the form of whatever will bring them temporal and ultimate bliss.

When you are ready to develop this meditation further, imagine taking the duḥkha of the sentient beings of the three realms. Then take the obstacles to the long life and successful deeds of the spiritual masters, buddhas, and bodhisattvas, as well as the hindrances to the existence and flourishing of the Buddha's teachings in the world.

After taking these, think that all beings are liberated from their suffering and its causes because you have taken them and think that your self-centeredness and grasping an inherently existent I are destroyed. In other words, you have taken what others don't want — their duḥkha — and used it to destroy what you don't want — your self-centered attitude. Meditate on emptiness for a while, feel the spaciousness, the absence of self-grasping and self-centeredness. Then, thinking that everything is dependently arising and is like an illusion, train in generosity.

### ***Giving***

In that clear, open space at your heart (the heart cakra at the center of your chest) appears a beautiful light, the embodiment of your love. With that sentiment, give to others all they need to find temporal happiness while they are in saṃsāra and, more important, all the conditions to attain the ultimate bliss of buddhahood. Here, visualize giving first your body, which transforms into a wish-fulfilling body that gives others everything they desire, principally a precious human life so they can practice the Dharma. Your wish-fulfilling body purifies sentient beings' environments so they have the necessities of life, including a good education, understanding friends, and community members who think of benefiting one another. Imagine they have all the necessary circumstances for practice, especially interest from their own side as well as spiritual mentors, teachings, and Dharma friends nearby. Think that they practice and then realize the entire path to awakening. Second, visualize giving your possessions, which transform into what others need. These give others perfect conditions so they have temporal happiness and conducive circumstances to learn and practice the Dharma. Third, visualize giving your merit, which gives others the good karma you have accumulated so they can progress on the path.

When you give to āryas and arhats, think that their last remaining obstacles to liberation and omniscience are purified and that they become

buddhas. When giving to buddhas, imagine that your body, possessions, and merit transform into magnificent offering objects that please them, giving rise to great bliss in them.

Do the visualization of giving as you exhale; imagine offering to sentient beings whatever they need on light rays radiating from your heart. Feel great contentment and joy that you are able to benefit sentient beings in this way.

### ***How to Progress in This Practice***

At the beginning, it may be helpful to imagine taking on your own future suffering of tonight, tomorrow, and the rest of this life and giving happiness to your future self. Then expand to take the suffering of dear ones and to give them happiness. Expand it further to take and give to strangers, then enemies, then all beings.

Having taken on sentient beings' duḥkha, don't neglect to transform it into lightning (or whatever cleansing agent appeals to you) and destroy your self-centered attitude and self-grasping ignorance. Stop and feel the effect of that within yourself. Imagine what it would be like to be free from the constant attachment, fear, and worry about the self. Imagine feeling the openness of genuine love and compassion that can welcome anyone into its space.

Take your time doing these visualizations and allow yourself to feel love and compassion as well as relief and delight at being instrumental in dispelling others' burden of duḥkha and bringing them both ordinary and long-term satisfaction and bliss. Taking and giving can be done elaborately, taking on each suffering, cause, and obstacle of each realm individually and giving each object to beings in each realm separately. The practice can also be done in a condensed way, according to the time available.

This practice is very effective when you're sick or depressed, when you have obstacles in your practice, or when someone you are close to is sick. Do it to remove hindrances in the world around you, such as political turmoil, climate change, corruption, and so forth. Instead of rejecting this duḥkha, take it on yourself so that others are free from it and you are liberated from the self-centered attitude and self-grasping.



After the riots in Tibet in the spring of 2008 during which many people — Tibetans and Chinese alike — were killed or injured, I did the taking-and-giving meditation with respect to the Chinese leaders and policymakers. Cultivating compassion toward them, I imagined taking on their suffering, anger, and negativities and giving them my happiness and virtues. Although my meditation did not remove their animosity or change their policies toward Tibet, it did give me a greater sense of stability and calm as well as courage and compassion in the face of the tragic situation in my country.

When you are familiar with this practice, it can be incorporated with your breathing, taking on others' sufferings and their causes during each inhalation and giving them your body, possessions, and merit during each exhalation. If you wish, when taking imagine that others' *duḥkha* leaves them from their right nostril and enters into your left nostril. When giving, imagine that your gifts leave through your right nostril in the form of white light and enter others through their left nostril.

Practicing taking and giving for someone who is ill or experiencing difficulties and then dedicating the merit from that practice to them can benefit them by nourishing the conditions for their own good karma to ripen. Although we cannot in fact take the sufferings of others and give them our happiness, imagining that it is possible strengthens our courage, love, and compassion. It also eliminates any hesitation or reluctance to help others when we have the opportunity and propels us toward full awakening where we will have all the faculties necessary to be of the greatest service.

When doing the meditation seriously, anxiety may arise, fearing that perhaps this is not just a visualization but we may actually experience the suffering of others. At this time, use the fear to identify the object of negation in the meditation on emptiness, because at that time the ignorance grasping an inherently existent I is clearly manifest. Then using Madhyamaka analysis, refute the existence of such an I.

## REFLECTION

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1. With compassion take on the problems and confusion of others by inhaling it in the form of black smoke.
  2. This turns into a thunderbolt of lightning that completely obliterates the black lump of selfishness and ignorance at your heart.
  3. Feel the open space, the lack of wrong conception about self and others, the absence of self-preoccupation.
  4. In this space, imagine a white light that radiates to all beings and think that you are increasing and transforming your body, possessions, and merit into whatever others need and giving it to them.
  5. Imagine them being satisfied and happy and rejoice that you've been able to bring this about.
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### *True Practitioners*

One of my students told me about research he had done into the invasion of Nalanda Monastery in the thirteenth century. At that time, large numbers of monks were slaughtered. It seems that many monks were not afraid when they were being stabbed. We can't say that they didn't feel pain, because without pain they could not have practiced fortitude. They felt pain but, as a result of their great compassion, did not respond with anger or fear.

I heard a moving story of a monk who was the tutor of Jamyang Shepa's tulku.<sup>42</sup> I met him in 1955. He was a good monk and great learned adept who practiced the taking-and-giving meditation. In 1958 there was an uprising against the Communist Chinese in Amdo, the eastern area of Tibet. About two hundred monks from Labrang Tashikhyil Monastery were arrested, and about fifteen or twenty monks were executed. Among the latter was this monk. When he was brought to the execution place, he asked if he could pray before they shot him and recited the taking-and-giving verse from the "Guru Pūjā" (95):

Thus, venerable compassionate gurus, inspire me so all negativities, obscurations, and sufferings of mother beings ripen on me right now and I give my happiness and virtue to others, securing all wanderers in bliss.

This shows that he was a true practitioner. Ordinary beings would have had far too much fear and anger to even think of exchanging their happiness and virtue for the pain of others. Before beginning the taking-and-giving meditation, you may find it helpful to recite this verse.

### *Comparing and Combining the Two Methods*

The equalizing and exchanging self and others method for generating bodhicitta is more suitable for sharp-faculty disciples because it employs reasoning to establish others' equality. In the seven cause-and-effect instructions our fondness and compassion for sentient beings arises based on our family relationships and how family members have acted toward us personally — the kindness they have shown to us as our relatives. Equalizing and exchanging self and others does not require seeing ourselves as having been the recipient of kindness in a privileged relationship with sentient beings in the past. Rather we connect with them on a more fundamental level — each of us wants happiness and not suffering. Thus this method enables us to see the kindness of enemies without first transforming their appearance into someone pleasing, such as a relative.

The reasoning used by equalizing and exchanging self and others also brings in an understanding of the ultimate truth, emptiness. What we designate “I” and cherish and what we call “other” and neglect is not based on some inherent nature that I and others have. I and others are dependent on each other; they are also seen as mere designations, which loosens our grasping at self. For these reasons, equalizing and exchanging self and others is seen as a more profound method that is directed toward disciples with sharp faculties.

The two methods of cultivating bodhicitta may also be combined. This method is more effective for some people. Here the order for contemplating the topics is (1) equanimity regarding friends, enemies, and strangers, (2)

recognize all sentient beings have been your mother, (3) remember the love and kindness of others both when they have been your mother and when they have not, (4) wish to repay that kindness, (5) equalize self and others, (6) examine the disadvantages of self-centeredness and (7) the benefits of cherishing others, (8) exchange self and others, (9) take others' suffering with special emphasis on compassion, (10) give away your own happiness with special emphasis on love, (11) make the great resolve, and (12) generate bodhicitta.

To close this chapter, I'd like to quote a passage by Tsongkhapa that encapsulates the essential instructions. I found it very moving because bodhicitta is dear to my heart (LC 2.59):

Whether you plant the roots of the Mahāyāna or not, or whether you have genuinely entered the Mahāyāna or not, is all founded upon this [bodhicitta]. Therefore always consider what you should do to develop this. It is excellent if you do develop this; if you have not, do not let it remain that way. Always rely on a teacher who gives this kind of teaching. Always associate with friends who are training their minds in this way. Constantly look at the scriptures and commentaries that describe this. Amass the [two] collections [of merit and wisdom] as causes for this. Clear away the obstructions that prevent this. Moreover, if you train your mind in this way, you will definitely acquire all the seeds for developing this, so this work is not insignificant; take joy in it.

What better way is there to live than to generate bodhicitta? We live in challenging times where some ideologies of hate and prejudice are prevalent. Do not let yourself fall under their sway, but nourish the seeds of love, compassion, and altruism in yourself and then share the fruit of doing so with all living beings.



## 5 | Becoming a Bodhisattva

### *The Self-Centered Attitude and Self-Grasping Ignorance*

**S**ELF-CENTEREDNESS (T. *rang gces 'dzin*) and self-grasping (*ahamkāra*, T. *bdag 'dzin*) are not the same, although both hinder our progress on the bodhisattva path and are obstacles to buddhahood. Self-centeredness holds our own happiness as more important than that of others; self-grasping apprehends the self as inherently existent.

The self-centered attitude is neither an afflictive nor a cognitive obscuration. It is not a pollutant (*āsrava*, *āsava*) or a defilement (*mala*), nor is it the root of cyclic existence. It is often called an “inferior obscuration” that those following the bodhisattva path must prevent because it impedes their attainment of the nonabiding nirvāṇa of a buddha — the nirvāṇa that abides neither in the extreme of cyclic existence nor in the extreme of personal liberation. Although the self-centered attitude is called an “obscuration,” it is not an actual obscuration because it is not the object of abandonment of a path, as are the afflictive and cognitive obscurations. However, it is a hindrance for bodhisattvas to abandon.

Self-grasping ignorance is the root of saṃsāra; it grasps persons and other phenomena to exist inherently. It is an afflictive obscuration that has been eliminated by arhats and eighth-ground bodhisattvas.

Self-centeredness and self-grasping do not have a causal relationship — one does not cause the other. They are also not the same nature: if one exists in a person’s mindstream, the other is not necessarily present. Arhats have abandoned self-grasping but have subtle self-centeredness. Bodhisattvas below the eighth ground who freshly enter the Mahāyāna path (that is, they are not arhats who later enter the bodhisattva path) have self-grasping but do not have coarse self-centeredness. Coarse self-centeredness

is abandoned upon generating spontaneous bodhicitta and entering the bodhisattva path; subtle self-centeredness and its latencies are overcome upon attaining the eighth bodhisattva ground, although some sharp-faculty bodhisattvas eliminate them before that. Subtle self-centeredness does not manifest once sharp-faculty bodhisattvas reach the path of preparation and when middle-faculty bodhisattvas attain the path of seeing.

The self-centered attitude and self-grasping ignorance also have different counterforces. Bodhicitta is the opposite of subtle self-centeredness; the wisdom realizing emptiness is the antidote eradicating self-grasping ignorance. Bodhicitta is easier to understand than emptiness, but it is more difficult to realize and fully integrate in our mind. While emptiness is harder to understand, once understood properly it is easier to realize than bodhicitta. Śrāvakas lack the fortitude, effort, and courage to cultivate bodhicitta, although they understand and admire it.

Arhats have abandoned self-grasping; when they eat or put on clothes, they do so without any self-grasping or craving. But their motivation for doing these everyday actions is not concerned with benefiting all sentient beings; it is neutral, neither virtuous nor nonvirtuous. Bodhisattvas — even those who have not realized emptiness directly — do all activities, including everyday ones such as eating, dressing, breathing, or walking, with the virtuous motivation of bodhicitta. Although they are attending to their own needs, their motivation is to dedicate their lives to benefiting sentient beings. With great love and great compassion, they constantly direct their minds to what is most beneficial in the long term for all sentient beings. Here we see that it's not so much what we do, but the motivation with which we do it that determines whether or not an action is altruistic.

In Mahāyāna teachings, the disadvantages of self-centeredness are discussed at great length because it is an obstacle to generating bodhicitta and an impediment to attaining full awakening and to benefiting all sentient beings. A verse in the “Guru Pūjā” says, “This chronic disease of self-centeredness is the cause giving rise to unwanted suffering.” This does not mean that self-centeredness is the root of saṃsāric duḥkha. It is not; self-grasping ignorance is. Self-centeredness is the major impediment for entering the Bodhisattva Vehicle, and in this context it is considered worse than ignorance.

All people recognize coarse self-centeredness as harmful. It believes that our happiness and suffering are more important than that of others, that what we want to happen should happen, and that our opinions are right and our ideas are the best. This is the self-preoccupation that we see in children and that as adults we learn to hide under the pretense of gentility, although it is still present. Coarse self-centered attitude lies behind the creation of all destructive karma. It is involved with low self-esteem, guilt, rage, jealousy, greed, anxiety, and unhealthy fear. Self-centeredness chases others away and then we feel sorry for ourselves because we lack friends. Coarse self-centeredness supports afflictive minds and actions, and it harms living beings, whether or not they are spiritual practitioners. For that reason, the practice of loving-kindness and compassion in daily life is essential for combating it.

## REFLECTION

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1. The self-centered attitude is neither an afflictive nor a cognitive obscuration. It is called an “inferior obscuration” that those following the bodhisattva path must prevent because it impedes attaining buddhahood.
2. Coarse self-centeredness considers ourselves more important than others. It is abandoned on generating spontaneous bodhicitta and entering the bodhisattva path.
3. Subtle self-centeredness is the mind that seeks liberation for ourselves alone. It and its latencies are abandoned upon attaining the eighth ground, although some bodhisattvas abandon it earlier. Bodhicitta is its antidote.
4. Self-grasping ignorance grasps persons and other phenomena to exist inherently. It is an afflictive obscuration that has been eliminated by arhats and eighth-ground bodhisattvas. The wisdom realizing emptiness is its antidote.



5. As you practice more, you'll be able to identify these in your mind and overcome them.
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### *Self-Interest and Self-Confidence*

When we hear about bodhisattvas and their ability to cherish others more than themselves, doubts may arise: If we abandon all self-interest and only cherish others, does that mean we neglect ourselves? If so, won't our own suffering increase?

Cherishing others does not mean that we ignore our own needs and care only for others. If we did that, we would fall into a deplorable state in which we could neither benefit others nor practice the Dharma. In that case, instead of our helping others, they would need to take care of us!

Not all self-interest is negative. While one type of self-interest is selfish and looks out only for ourselves, another is wise self-interest that understands that benefiting ourselves and helping others are not necessarily contradictory. The Buddha had both self-interest and care for others. As mentioned in the teachings on refuge, the Buddha's truth body is the fulfillment of his own interest or purpose in that he has purified his mind completely and possesses direct knowledge of all existents. His form bodies are the fulfillment of others' interest or purpose in that they enable him to manifest in various forms in order to be of benefit to all the sentient beings who are receptive. A practitioner attains the truth body and form bodies simultaneously, achieving her own purpose at the same time as achieving the purpose of others.

Similarly, while one sense of self (T. *nga'o snyam pa'i blo*, literally "the mind experiencing I am"), is a troublemaker, the sense of a conventional self is useful. The former is the self-grasping that is the root of saṃsāra. The latter is the sense of the conventional self that exists; it allows for us to have stable and realistic self-confidence. This self-confident sense of self must be stronger in bodhisattvas than in ordinary people because bodhisattvas are ready to forgo their own happiness in order to benefit others. Although many Westerners believe that healthy self-esteem is demonstrated by being a unique individual, for bodhisattvas self-esteem is

connected with extraordinary generosity and joyful relinquishment of self-centeredness.

Śrāvakas also have firm self-confidence and a strong, positive sense of self. They think, “I will restrain from destructive actions and cultivate the three higher trainings. I will attain liberation no matter what it takes.” Such self-confidence is not egotistical or arrogant; it aspires for what is virtuous without clinging to it. Wisdom is required to differentiate self-confidence and arrogance.

Self-confidence is essential to begin, continue, and complete the path to awakening. Without self-confidence at the beginning, we won’t even think to start on the path; without self-confidence in the middle, we’ll get discouraged and quit before attaining any enduring qualities; and without self-confidence at the end, we won’t share the results of awakening with others or work for their welfare.

Buddha nature is a valid basis on which to generate such self-confidence. Our buddha nature is stable and cannot be destroyed. Reflecting on emptiness helps us to recognize this buddha potential, for we see that the defilements are adventitious and can be removed. Compassion for others also builds self-confidence, as does remembering our precious human life, its meaning and purpose, and its rarity. It’s important that, as aspiring bodhisattvas, we cultivate such strong and resilient self-confidence.

## REFLECTION

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1. There are two types of self-interest. One is selfish and looks out only for ourselves; another is wise self-interest that understands that benefiting ourselves and helping others can go together.
  2. There are two senses of self. One is the self-grasping that is the root of saṃsāra, which is the source of our duḥkha. The other is the sense of the conventional self that exists, which allows for stable and realistic self-confidence. Bodhisattvas must have strong self-confidence to complete the path and attain buddhahood.
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## *Integrating the View with Bodhicitta*

Integrating the view of emptiness according to the Yogācāra or Prāsaṅgika Madhyamaka perspective aids our cultivation of bodhicitta by loosening rigid clinging to friend, enemy, and stranger, and to self and others. It also deepens our compassion for sentient beings under the control of afflictions and karma.

According to the Yogācāras, the seemingly external objects that appear to our sense consciousnesses have in fact arisen as a result of seeds on our foundation consciousness. These objects do not exist as separate entities from our mind, although they appear that way because the mind is obscured by ignorance. Regarding phenomena, they are like illusions in that they arise due to the same seed as the consciousness perceiving them. Some of the seeds on our foundational consciousness are karmic seeds that color our perspective according to the realm we are born in. For example, the appearance of fluid being pure nectar in the deva realm, water in the human realm, and pus and blood in the hungry ghost realm is a result of karmic seeds placed on our foundational consciousness by previous actions.

Seeing whatever appears to us as a karmic appearance loosens the solidity with which we ordinarily view sentient beings and the environment. From this perspective, friends, enemies, and strangers are simply karmic appearances, and thus having attachment, anger, and apathy toward them is misplaced. Similarly, attractive and unattractive objects, praise and blame, reputation and notoriety, and wealth and poverty are simply appearances to the mind due to the activation of karmic seeds. They lack any real external existence that is separate from the mind to which they appear.

Everything we encounter or experience that seems to be external and “out there” is created by the seeds on our foundational consciousness. Becoming angry when others criticize us or steal our possessions is inappropriate because these events occur due to the ripening of the seeds of our own previous actions that were nourished by self-centeredness. If we seek happiness, we need to subdue the self-centered attitude so that it does not provoke the creation of destructive karma. Ignoring others’ welfare only plants seeds of destructive karma on our mindstream, and these lead to our own suffering. On the other hand, if we habituate ourselves with cherishing

others and work to benefit them, our actions will be constructive. As a result, these seeds of constructive karma will ripen so that we will encounter pleasant situations and have all conducive circumstances for continuing Dharma practice. According to the Yogācāras, in addition to increasing our compassion and bodhicitta, meditating on the nonduality of subject and object is crucial. This meditation brings the understanding that the subject and object of our perceptions are produced from the same substantial cause — the seed in our foundational consciousness — in order to eradicate the ignorance that propels cyclic existence.

According to the Prāsaṅgika view, to integrate the view with bodhicitta we train ourselves to see that sentient beings as well as their suffering and happiness do not exist inherently. They are not solid things existing independent of all other factors, and their appearance to us as self-enclosed objects that exist from their own side is false. In this view, the chief culprit is self-grasping ignorance. The last three of the nine points of the meditation on Equalizing Self and Others show the falsity of seeing self and others as existing from their own side. In other words, what we call “self” does not exist in its own right; it exists by being merely designated in dependence on many factors, one of them being our perspective. From the perspective of all sentient beings except one (ourselves), what we call “self” is labeled “other.” As that is the case, what is so special about me? From the viewpoint of the vast majority of sentient beings our suffering and happiness are considered the experiences of another person, which makes them much less significant. When we understand that exchanging self and others is possible, then others’ happiness and suffering become our own, so how can we possibly dismiss them? Contemplating these questions enables us to greatly reduce our self-centered attitude and to increase our care for and engagement with the welfare of others.

Sometimes when we consider engaging the deeds of the great bodhisattvas, our mind is overcome with trepidation. What will happen to *me* if I help others selflessly? At these times, meditating on the lack of an inherently existent self is helpful to dispel this fear and clinging attachment to the self. In addition, contemplating that pain and pleasure, suffering and happiness, all exist as mutually dependent and thus are empty of having

their own inherent essence lessens our fear of suffering. In this way, our mind will be more courageous in extending ourselves to others.

Cultivating the compassion observing phenomena and the compassion observing the unapprehendable, which will be explained in chapter 6, changes our perspective. Briefly explained, with compassion observing phenomena we view sentient beings as impermanent and lacking a self-sufficient substantially existent self. Seeking happiness, ordinary beings turn to impermanent phenomena such as their aggregates, as well as people and things in the external environment, in the hopes of finding it. Because these phenomena lack the ability to give them lasting happiness, they remain continually disappointed, disillusioned, and frustrated. Seeing them suffer in this way due to the erroneous self-grasping in their minds increases our compassion for them.

Compassion observing the unapprehendable views sentient beings as empty of true existence. Because they grasp their own self, the selves of others, and all other things as truly existent, ordinary beings believe that such things can give them genuine happiness and are again left disappointed and befuddled. Configuring the world around a truly existent I, they divide others into friends, enemies, and strangers and think that they truly exist in that way. Grasping true existence, sentient beings continuously generate afflictions, which create karma, which in turn leads to *duḥkha*. Seeing sentient beings in this predicament increases our compassion for them.

### *Who Can Generate Bodhicitta?*

The precious bodhicitta can be newly generated by sentient beings with the physical support (body) of any of the six classes of migrating beings who have faith and regard for the Mahāyāna teachings and for awakening. There is some discussion about hell beings who newly generate bodhicitta, however. There is a story about Śākyamuni Buddha, who, before he became a buddha, was born in a hell realm in a previous life. Some say he generated bodhicitta then, although others assert that he generated the cause of bodhicitta — compassion — at that time, and generated bodhicitta in a later rebirth. Clearly, doing the meditations to cultivate bodhicitta and actually generating it are easier when we have a precious human life.

Regarding the mental support for newly generating bodhicitta, some say it must be either a preparation of the first dhyāna or an actual dhyāna. Others say that serenity is not necessary, although certainly a good degree of concentration is necessary to familiarize the mind with the steps to develop bodhicitta and to change the ingrained habit of self-centeredness to the mind that cherishes others more than self.

In Asaṅga's *Bodhisattva Grounds* and Atiśa's *Lamp of the Path*, it is said that the support of engaging bodhicitta must be one of the Pratimokṣa ethical codes. However, this is considered a special support that is more advantageous but not necessary.

Do buddhas have bodhicitta? In the *Ornament of Clear Realizations*, Maitreya described twenty-two kinds of bodhicitta by way of similes. There he said that the last two are possessed only by buddhas. Seeking the awakening of others, their bodhicitta enables their two form bodies to lead sentient beings to full awakening. Some learned adepts say that buddhas possess bodhicitta by way of fulfillment. That is, although they have attained full awakening, their aspiration for bodhi has not been relinquished; it has been fulfilled. Nevertheless, there are some learned adepts who say buddhas don't have bodhicitta because they have already attained full awakening.

### *Definite and Indefinite Lineage*

There are three lineages or types of beings: those of śrāvaka, solitary realizer, and bodhisattva (Mahāyāna) lineages.<sup>43</sup> Some people are definite in one of the lineages — that is, they will definitely enter a particular vehicle. Other people are indefinite; various conditions will influence which vehicle they enter. An ordinary being who is definite in the Mahāyāna lineage will directly enter the Mahāyāna regardless of the teacher they meet, while an ordinary person who is indefinite in the Mahāyāna lineage may first enter the Śrāvaka Vehicle if they meet a teacher following the Śrāvaka Vehicle, or they may directly enter the Mahāyāna if they meet a Mahāyāna teacher. In other words, there is no certainty which path the person who is indefinite in lineage will initially follow. It depends a great deal on the teacher they decide to follow. However, someone may be definite in the śrāvaka lineage,

progress through the five śrāvaka paths to become an arhat, and later enter the Mahāyāna, progress through the bodhisattva paths and grounds, and become a buddha.

Why are some people definite in lineage while others are not? The main factor is what they have come to value and appreciate over many lifetimes. For example, some people may hold compassion and altruism as primary virtues and seek a path that details a step-by-step method to develop them. They may have a very courageous and strong mind that can endure assuming the responsibility to lead all sentient beings to awakening. Such people will probably be attracted to the Mahāyāna. Other people may be more cautious, thinking that there are too many sentient beings to lead them all to awakening, that the Mahāyāna path takes too long or is too difficult, or that the result of the Mahāyāna, full awakening, is too high or is impossible to attain. The mind of such people is not strong at the present moment, and as a result they will think that attaining their own liberation is best.

However, a person's karmic latencies from previous lives and the dedication prayers they made in previous lives may also play a powerful role regarding which vehicle they enter in this life. For example, someone may have followed the Mahāyāna in previous lives and have made strong dedication prayers at that time to meet, learn, and practice the Mahāyāna in all future lives. They may have made strong aspirations to meet fully qualified Mahāyāna teachers and to follow their instructions in future lives. Due to these strong latencies from previous lives, these people will meet Mahāyāna teachers and will naturally want to follow that path. Other people may have followed the Śrāvaka Vehicle in previous lives and, having felt comfortable practicing the Dharma in the way it teaches, dedicated to meet Śrāvaka Vehicle spiritual mentors and practice that vehicle in future lives. They will naturally be attracted to the Śrāvaka Vehicle and enter that.

### *Can Bodhicitta Degenerate?*

Once generated, bodhicitta may degenerate. Although bodhisattvas who are definite in the Mahāyāna lineage will not lose their bodhicitta and fall from the Mahāyāna path, bodhisattvas who are indefinite in the Mahāyāna

lineage can. This occurs on the initial level of the path of accumulation before they reach the middle level of that path. It is especially important to guard against anger and frustration, as these are the main causes of abandoning bodhicitta. For example, someone we help may return our kindness by betraying our trust, criticizing us, or blaming us when things go wrong. It is very easy in such situations to get fed up and exasperated, thinking that sentient beings — or even just this one person — are too corrupt, selfish, or unappreciative for our goodwill to affect them in a positive way. Under the sway of anger, we either strike this person from our compassion or abandon the wish to benefit all sentient beings and relinquish the aspiration to attain buddhahood for their sake. Because bodhicitta aspires to benefit *all* sentient beings, omitting even one sentient being from the scope of our bodhicitta constitutes abandoning bodhicitta.

### *Signs of Irreversibility*

On the path to buddhahood, there are forty-four signs of irreversibility that illustrate that bodhisattvas will not turn back from seeking full awakening but will proceed directly to it. A bodhisattva who has attained any of these forty-four signs, such as having turned away from manifest grasping to forms and so forth as truly existent, is a bodhisattva with signs of irreversibility. According to the *Ornament of Clear Realizations*, such bodhisattvas range from the heat level (the first of four levels) of the path of preparation through to the end of the continuum of a sentient being (the moment just before attaining buddhahood). Bodhisattvas on the path of accumulation have stopped interest in their own liberation from manifesting, but they haven't eliminated all propensities to seek only their own liberation and they haven't received a sign of irreversibility.

Attaining irreversibility is supported by attaining fortitude of the nonarising of phenomena (*anutpattika-dharma-kṣānti*), which is a realization of emptiness. This conviction in emptiness buoys bodhisattvas as they continue to work for the welfare of sentient beings; all fear of the path being difficult is banished, for they are fully confident in emptiness. Knowing that there are no inherently existent sentient beings to be liberated



from saṃsāra and no inherently existent holy beings to lead them to awakening, bodhisattvas are irreversibly headed to full awakening.

We can often, but not always, tell if a person has excellent qualities by observing how they speak and act. However, some people who have ill intentions act nicely and some people who have kind intentions don't express themselves well. Because we are limited beings who see other people through the veil of our ignorance and afflictions, we cannot clearly distinguish people's qualities and cannot see the signs of irreversibility in others. As our minds become clearer, we'll be able to discern others' excellent qualities.

Bodhisattvas may attain signs of irreversibility at three points of the path. Sharp-faculty bodhisattvas attain them at the earliest on the heat level of the path of preparation, middling-faculty bodhisattvas on the path of seeing, and modest-faculty bodhisattvas on the eighth ground.<sup>44</sup> The irreversible bodhisattvas of the eighth ground and above are a refuge for all beings because their pristine wisdom is close to the tathāgatas' pristine wisdom that knows things just as they are and the tathāgatas' pristine wisdom that knows the varieties of phenomena.

The stains of the self-centered attitude may exist up to the eighth ground, but not after that. By the eighth ground, bodhisattvas have completely overcome any propensity for the individual liberation of an arhat and have also eradicated the seeds of this propensity.

### *Classifications of Bodhicitta*

The *Ornament of Clear Realizations* speaks of several ways to classify bodhicitta: according to its name, its nature, its aim, and similes and accompanying features. The *Ornament of Mahāyāna Sūtras* explains bodhicitta according to its levels. Thinking of bodhicitta from these different viewpoints gives us a broader perspective on this precious mind and how it functions to propel us on the path to awakening and to bring about the happiness of sentient beings.

#### *According to Its Name*

Here bodhicitta may be classified as conventional and ultimate:

*Conventional bodhicitta* is the altruistic intention that is a primary mind held by two aspirations: the aspiration to benefit sentient beings and the aspiration to attain full awakening in order to do so most effectively. This is what is commonly called “bodhicitta” or the “altruistic intention,” and most of the following classifications are ways to speak about conventional bodhicitta.

*Ultimate bodhicitta* is the pristine wisdom in the continuum of an ārya bodhisattva or a buddha that directly perceives the emptiness of inherent existence. In other words, ultimate bodhicitta is the direct perception of the nature of complete awakening that is informed by conventional bodhicitta. While śrāvakas have realized emptiness directly, their realization is not informed or supported by conventional bodhicitta, and so they do not possess ultimate bodhicitta. The ten bodhisattva grounds (*bhūmi*) are divisions of the ultimate bodhicitta.

Ultimate bodhicitta can be understood in two ways. The first is in common with Sūtra as explained above. The second is unique to Tantra: in highest yoga tantra, the fundamental innate clear-light mind that is focused on emptiness is ultimate bodhicitta. The object is the subtlest object — the emptiness of inherent existence — and the mind realizing it is the subtlest subject — the fundamental innate clear-light mind.

Categorizing bodhicitta according to the name given indicates that the division into conventional and ultimate bodhicitta is a terminological division. That is, although given the name “bodhicitta,” not all of the subdivisions are actual bodhicitta. In this case, conventional bodhicitta is actual bodhicitta, but ultimate bodhicitta is not, even though it is given the name “bodhicitta.” Conventional bodhicitta is so called because it is involved with conventional truths, such as sentient beings, whereas the object of ultimate bodhicitta is ultimate truths.

Conventional bodhicitta exists from the Mahāyāna path of accumulation through the buddha ground (i.e., in the mental continuum of a buddha). Ultimate bodhicitta is a Mahāyāna ārya’s primary consciousness that directly realizes the emptiness of inherent existence of full awakening. It exists from the first bodhisattva ground through the buddha ground. Together conventional and ultimate bodhicitta represent the method and wisdom sides of the path.

These two bodhicittas are the essence of the Mahāyāna path and are very precious and amazing. Nāgārjuna praises bodhisattvas (BV 87–88):

This is indeed amazing, praiseworthy it is;  
this is the excellent way of the sublime;  
that they give away their own flesh  
and wealth is not surprising at all.

Those who understand this emptiness of phenomena  
Yet [also] conform to the law of karma and its effects,  
that is more amazing than amazing!  
that is more wondrous than wondrous!

The first verse speaks of the magnificent qualities of conventional bodhicitta in terms of equalizing and exchanging self and others. That bodhisattvas cherish others to such an extent that they can give away their body — not to mention their possessions — is an amazing quality to be honored. In terms of the method aspect of the path, there is nothing more magnificent than bodhicitta.

The second verse praises ultimate bodhicitta. A bodhisattva with the correct view avoids the two extremes of absolutism and nihilism and is able to live according to the law of karma and its effects while at the same time understand that all phenomena are empty of true existence. In terms of the wisdom aspect of the path, there is nothing more marvelous than ultimate bodhicitta.

### *According to Its Nature*

According to its nature, bodhicitta may be classified as aspiring or engaging:

*Aspiring bodhicitta* is the wish to attain full awakening for the benefit of all sentient beings.

*Engaging bodhicitta* is that wish when it is strong enough to motivate us to engage in the bodhisattva deeds and assume the bodhisattva ethical code.

Both aspiring and engaging bodhicitta are actual bodhicitta. They will be explained in more depth in chapter 7.

### ***According to the Aim***

People may generate bodhicitta in different ways according to how they see themselves leading sentient beings to awakening. Each of these ways requires great self-confidence.

With *monarch-like bodhicitta*, bodhisattvas aspire to become fully awakened buddhas and, like leaders with great capabilities and power, to then work for the welfare of the general population. They think, “Just as a monarch leads others, I will attain awakening first and lead others there.”

With *boatman-like bodhicitta*, bodhisattvas progress to awakening together with other sentient beings, just as a boatman rows others across a river and arrives at the other shore at the same time as the passengers. These bodhisattvas think, “Sentient beings and I are in the same boat in the ocean of cyclic existence. I will row them across, and we will reach the other shore of nirvāṇa together.”

With *shepherd-like bodhicitta*, bodhisattvas intend to attain awakening after leading others to awakening, similar to a shepherd driving the flock in front of him to the destination. These bodhisattvas think, “I will guide sentient beings to awakening, like a shepherd guides his flock. After they have attained awakening and are safe, I will attain awakening.”

Bodhisattvas may meditate on each of these three types of bodhicitta because each one brings out a particular quality in their bodhicitta. Nevertheless, they know that in order to benefit others most effectively, they must attain awakening first and then lead others. Guiding all sentient beings to awakening and later attain awakening or attaining awakening at the same time as all others is not the most effective way to serve sentient beings.

### ***According to Similes and Accompanying Features***

By comparing the bodhicitta found on the successive levels of the path to various pure or lovely things around us, we can see how bodhicitta spreads joy to sentient beings and acts as the source of all of a buddha’s realizations. Contemplating these poetic similes of twenty-two types of bodhicitta from

the *Ornament of Clear Realizations* gives us a vision of the qualities we can develop and realizations we can gain by generating bodhicitta in our hearts and minds and living our lives according to it. Each type of bodhicitta is correlated with a level of the bodhisattva path and has an accompanying feature that enhances it. All twenty-two types of bodhicitta have the same object — sentient beings — and aspect — the wish to protect them from all samsāric duḥkha.

1. Found on the small path of accumulation, *earth-like bodhicitta* is accompanied by aspiration. Just as the earth is the basis for planting and growing crops, the aspiration of this bodhicitta makes it the basis for all the virtuous causes of buddhahood and is the source from which all attainments of the bodhisattva paths and grounds arise.
2. Found on the middle path of accumulation, *gold-like bodhicitta* is accompanied by intention. Just as gold is pure and never loses its nature of being pure gold no matter how it is examined, the bodhicitta accompanied by an intention is stable and never loses its character of benefiting others until we attain awakening.
3. Found on the great path of accumulation, *bodhicitta like the waxing moon* is accompanied by a special resolve. Just as the moon gradually becomes brighter and eliminates darkness, the special resolve of this bodhicitta grows in strength and helps to continuously increase the collections of merit and wisdom as well as virtuous qualities and knowledge, such as the thirty-seven harmonies with awakening.
4. Found on the path of preparation, *fire-like bodhicitta* is accompanied by application to meditate on the similitudes of the three exalted knowers. Just as fire consumes its fuel, with application to meditate on the similitudes of the three exalted knowers this bodhicitta enables bodhisattvas to meditate on emptiness with the union of serenity and insight and to burn all manifest obstructions to the direct realization of emptiness. It eliminates obstructions to knowing the three unborn natures (emptinesses) that are the objects of the three exalted knowers, as

follows: (1) The exalted knower of the basis, which is the wisdom of śrāvakas āryas. It realizes the unborn nature (emptiness) of the four truths. (2) The exalted knower of the path, which is the wisdom of ārya bodhisattvas. It realizes the unborn nature of the five paths. (3) The exalted knower of all, which is the omniscient wisdom of buddhas. It realizes the unborn nature of the aspects of all phenomena.

Each of the following ten bodhicittas, from the fifth through the fourteenth, are associated with one of the ten perfections and one of the ten bodhisattva grounds.

5. Found on the first ground, the Very Joyful, *treasure-like bodhicitta* is accompanied by generosity. Someone with a great treasure never suffers from need and is able to fulfill her own and others' wishes. Similarly, this bodhicitta imbued with generosity is able to satisfy the needs of countless sentient beings. In even a single moment of generosity, bodhisattvas' virtue of generosity excels that of śrāvakas. As a result, the Very Joyful bodhisattvas never suffer from a lack of material possessions and bountifully share them with others. With this bodhicitta, bodhisattvas can convince the miserly to be generous.
6. Found on the second ground, the Stainless, *bodhicitta like a jewel mine* is accompanied by ethical conduct. A mine of jewels is filled with pure gems of various colors and sizes. Similarly, bodhisattvas with this bodhicitta engage in the surpassing practice of ethical conduct, which is the support of all jewel-like qualities, such as the powers of the Buddha.
7. Found on the third ground, the Luminous, *ocean-like bodhicitta* is accompanied by fortitude. Like a perfectly still, great ocean, this bodhisattva, who has a surpassing practice of fortitude, is never disturbed and remains calm no matter how much he suffers or is harmed by fire, weapons, and so forth.
8. Found on the fourth ground, the Radiant, *vajra-like bodhicitta* is accompanied by joyous effort. Just as a vajra is immovable and

unshakable, this bodhisattva, who has a surpassing practice of joyous effort, is never discouraged or shaken from her goal due to her firm conviction in unsurpassable awakening.

9. Found on the fifth ground, the Extremely Difficult to Overcome, *mountain-like bodhicitta* is accompanied by meditative stability. Just as a mountain is stable and does not move no matter what external forces are present, owing to her surpassing practice of meditative stability this bodhisattva can easily remain in firm concentration undistracted by the appearance of true existence.
10. Found on the sixth ground, the Approaching, *medicine-like bodhicitta* is accompanied by wisdom. Just as medicine cures all diseases, this bodhicitta, which is imbued with a surpassing practice of wisdom, cures all afflictive obscurations, such as attachment, and all cognitive obscurations as well.
11. Found on the seventh ground, the Gone Afar, *bodhicitta like a virtuous guide* is accompanied by skillful means. A virtuous guide or spiritual master is skilled in working for the benefit of disciples and subduing their afflictions. Similarly, a bodhisattva with this bodhicitta has the surpassing practice of skillful means, such that she never relinquishes the welfare of sentient beings and skillfully dedicates even a single moment of virtue so that it becomes infinitely great.
12. Found on the eighth ground, the Immovable, *bodhicitta like a wish-fulfilling gem* is accompanied by unshakable resolve. Someone who possesses this gem is able to fulfill all wishes by praying to it. Similarly, a bodhisattva with the surpassing practice of unshakable resolve can fulfill all his own and others' aims.
13. Found on the ninth ground, Excellent Intelligence, *sun-like bodhicitta* is accompanied by power. Just as the sun ripens plants, this bodhisattva, who has a surpassing practice of power, ripens the virtues of sentient beings by the four ways of maturing disciples.
14. Found on the tenth ground, the Cloud of Dharma, *bodhicitta like a melodious voice* is accompanied by pristine wisdom. Just as someone with a melodious voice draws others to himself and pleases them with his voice, a bodhisattva with this bodhicitta has

the surpassing practice of pristine wisdom that she uses to attract and please sentient beings with her interesting and pleasing teachings on ultimate and conventional reality.

15. Found on the three pure grounds, *monarch-like bodhicitta* is accompanied by the first five superknowledges. Just as a monarch who fulfills his or her duties properly has power and is able to benefit the populations of the land, this bodhisattva is skilled in the first five superknowledges and thus is strong, unshakable, and can manifest in many forms or display supernormal powers in order to benefit sentient beings according to their various dispositions and needs. Just as a monarch's decisions are clear and definitive, bodhisattvas with this bodhicitta clearly and correctly know what to abandon and what to practice and do not let realizations already attained go to waste.
16. Found on the three pure grounds, *treasury-like bodhicitta* is accompanied by the collections of merit and wisdom. Just as the royals' valuables are found in their treasury, one with this bodhicitta acquires the valuable collections of merit and wisdom that lead to the form body and truth body of a buddha in order to fulfill the needs of sentient beings. In the same way that the royal treasure is not easily exhausted, this bodhisattva's virtue — which is sustained by the accumulations of merit and wisdom — cannot be devastated by wrong views and so forth.
17. Found on the three pure grounds, *bodhicitta like a great path* is accompanied by the thirty-seven harmonies with awakening. Just as all travelers of the past, present, and future who are going to a magnificent land follow a great path, all ārya bodhisattvas of the three times go to buddhahood by means of practicing the thirty-seven harmonies with awakening.
18. Found on the three pure grounds, *bodhicitta like a conveyance* is accompanied by compassion and insight. Just as someone driving an excellent carriage is able to reach her destination easily and without danger, a bodhisattva with this bodhicitta excels in great compassion and insight into emptiness. He will reach the destination of awakening easily and without the danger of falling to



the two extremes of saṃsāra and the personal peace of an arhat's nirvāṇa.

19. Found on the three pure grounds, *fountain-like bodhicitta* is accompanied by retention and confidence. Coming from a constant source, fountain water is inexhaustible. Similarly, those with this bodhicitta have concentration that has the capacity to retain whatever they have learned, are learning, and will learn about what the Buddha has taught, is teaching, and will teach in the ten directions. Confidence causes them never to be exhausted.
20. Found on the tenth ground, *bodhicitta like a lovely voice* is accompanied by the celebration of the four seals. Just as one with a lovely voice pleases all who hear, a buddha pleases all those seeking liberation by giving inspiring teachings on the four seals.
21. Possessed only by a buddha and found in the continuum of the enjoyment body, *stream-like bodhicitta* is accompanied by the universal path. A stream flows naturally and without interruption; it does not discriminate who drinks from it, and it tastes the same to and refreshes all who drink its water. Similarly, by the power of compassion and wisdom, one with this bodhicitta realizes the nonduality of subject and object and spontaneously engages in diverse activities to benefit sentient beings. Buddhas dedicate their body, speech, and mind equally to all sentient beings without partiality. Their aid is available to all who wish to receive it.
22. Possessed only by buddhas and found in the continuum of the emanation body, *cloud-like bodhicitta* is accompanied by the truth body. Just as in space a cloud appears and showers rain that makes plants grow, in the space-like mind of a buddha, the cloud of bodhicitta forms and, by performing the twelve deeds of a buddha and giving teachings, realizations grow in the minds of sentient beings.

### ***According to Its Levels***

Maitreya's *Ornament of Mahāyāna Sūtras* (5.2) speaks of the bodhicitta present on various levels of the path:

Bodhicitta on the various levels is held  
To be accompanied by aspiration,  
pure special resolve, full maturity  
and the elimination of all obscurations.

The *bodhicitta of aspiration or belief* is found on the paths of accumulation and preparation. Of the twenty-two types of bodhicitta mentioned above, the first four are considered the bodhicitta of belief or faith. Of these, the first three are from the path of accumulation and the fourth is from the path of preparation. Generated by having faith and receiving teachings, this bodhicitta is called the “bodhicitta of belief” because bodhisattvas on the first two paths believe and think that all phenomena are empty of true existence, but they do not yet have direct realization of emptiness.

The *bodhicitta of pure special resolve* is found in the bodhisattvas from the first through the seventh grounds and includes seven of the twenty-two types of bodhicitta — the fifth through the eleventh. This bodhicitta is so-called because the bodhisattvas who possess it have direct realization of emptiness.

The *fully ripening bodhicitta*, which includes nine of the twenty-two types of bodhicitta (the twelfth through the twentieth) is found in bodhisattvas of the three pure grounds (eighth, ninth, and tenth). These three grounds are called “pure” because these bodhisattvas have purified all afflictive obscurations. The fully ripening bodhicitta is so-called because all aspirational prayers and dedication are ripening, and these bodhisattvas are about to attain the fully ripened result of full awakening.

The *bodhicitta free from obscurations* is found only in buddhas who are free from both the afflictive and the cognitive obscurations. These are the twenty-first and twenty-second types of bodhicitta. Nevertheless, the last three bodhicittas are subsumed under the category “the Buddha’s bodhicitta,” as the preparation, actual, and final bodhicitta of a buddha. *Bodhicitta like a lovely voice* is the preparation because the tenth ground is a preparation for full awakening. *Stream-like bodhicitta* and *cloud-like bodhicitta* are the actual and final bodhicittas of a buddha.

## REFLECTION

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Reflecting on bodhicitta according to the twenty-two analogies and according to its four levels will give us a good sense of how bodhicitta grows and deepens as bodhisattvas progress through the paths and grounds.

1. What type of bodhicitta is present with each path and ground and what is the activity of each bodhicitta?
  2. How does each successive type of bodhicitta differ from the previous one? What does each type of bodhicitta do for the bodhisattva or buddha who possesses it?
  3. How does each type of bodhicitta, which is the method aspect of the path, relate to the wisdom realizing emptiness, which is the wisdom aspect of the path?
  4. Sit quietly and let your mind be inspired by knowing that there are beings who have generated such bodhicitta and that you can also generate it in the future.
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## 6 | Homage to Great Compassion

**W**HETHER WE FOLLOW a religion or not, everyone appreciates compassion. Compassion is one of our first experiences as newborn infants, when our parents, doctors, and nurses welcomed us into this world with compassion. Others compassionately protected and cared for us and kept us alive when we were children. Compassion is a basic emotion, found even in animals. It arises naturally in us when beings we see as dear are suffering.

While this commonly shared compassion exists in all of us, it differs from the great compassion that Mahāyāna practitioners cultivate. Ordinary people extend compassion toward friends, family, and others who care about and help them. This compassion is usually biased and conditioned. It depends on how others treat us and is reserved for those we have cordoned off from the mass of sentient life and consider “dear ones.”

At present our compassion is limited in several ways: We feel compassion only when we see someone whom we care for suffer. We have a lesser degree of compassion when we hear of strangers suffering, and for people we don’t like, we may even rejoice, thinking that they are now getting a taste of their own medicine.

Our compassion is also limited in that it arises for those experiencing the *duḥkha* of pain — what all sentient beings consider as undesirable — but not for those who are young, healthy, rich, successful, talented, powerful, artistic, athletic, or attractive. Thinking that they are not suffering, we don’t feel compassion for them. We forget that they are imprisoned in *saṃsāra* owing to afflictions and polluted karma, and we neglect to consider that they’re experiencing the *duḥkha* of change and the pervasive *duḥkha* of conditioning.

Bodhisattvas, however, have compassion for these people, for they know that all sentient beings are submerged in the three kinds of duḥkha. Although people who are considered successful in worldly terms may not be experiencing gross suffering — the duḥkha of pain — at this moment, due to their ignorance and afflictions they are creating the causes to have such suffering in the future. Recognizing this, we cease to glorify or envy the wealthy, the powerful, and the famous. Not only do they often have great mental suffering, but through attachment, anger, and confusion, they create the causes for future duḥkha. Bodhisattvas see beyond the superficial appearances of this life and see sentient beings' actual situation in saṃsāra, which is truly terrifying. Their compassion arises naturally and impartially for all these people.

While we ordinary beings may have compassion for the poor and sick who live in other places, when we are in the same room with them, our disgust with their physical appearance or our fear of their illness or poverty squelches any compassion that may arise. We must remember that all these sentient beings, no matter their appearance during this life, want to be happy and free from pain, just like us. Furthermore, all of them have been kind to us in this or previous lives and will be kind to us in future lives.

The great compassion of bodhisattvas does not depend on whether others act kindly toward them or behave in ways that they approve of and appreciate. Great compassion extends to all beings equally and unconditionally. Spiritual practitioners who aspire to be bodhisattvas must consciously cultivate this compassion. It doesn't arise by praying to the Buddha or by sitting in a machine that alters our brain waves.

### *Compassion Is the Root of All Goodness*

In his homage at the beginning of the *Supplement*, Candrakīrti says (MMA 1–4c):

Śrāvakas and solitary realizers arise from the excellent sages  
(buddhas);  
the excellent sages are born from bodhisattvas;  
the mind of compassion, nondual awareness,

and bodhicitta — these are the causes of bodhisattvas.

Compassion alone is seen as the seed  
of a Conqueror’s rich harvest, as water that nourishes it,  
and as the ripened fruit that is the source of long enjoyment;  
therefore, at the start I praise this compassion.

Like a bucket in a well, migrators have no autonomy;  
first, with the thought “I,” they cling to a self;  
then, with the thought “mine,” they become attached to things;  
I bow to this compassion that cares for migrators.

[Homage to that compassion for] migrators  
seen as evanescent (fluctuating) and empty of inherent existence  
like the reflection of the moon in rippling water.

In this homage, Candrakīrti does not praise the buddhas and bodhisattvas, as we might expect, but instead praises great compassion, the attitude that wants to completely protect all the sentient beings wandering in saṃsāra under the control of afflictions and karma, and to lead them to liberation and buddhahood. There is great meaning to unpack in these inspiring verses. The first two verses praise great compassion without differentiating different types of compassion; the last two verses praise compassion by means of pointing out three types of great compassion.

The first lines of the homage say:

Śrāvakas and solitary realizers are born from the excellent sages  
(buddhas);  
the excellent sages are born from bodhisattvas . . .

Śrāvakas and solitary realizers are born from buddhas in that they hear teachings on the four truths and the twelve links of dependent origination from the buddhas. By contemplating and meditating on these teachings, they fulfill their spiritual aims and attain arhatship. “Śrāvaka” is translated as “listen and hear,” and these practitioners are so called because they listen

to correct teachings from others and later cause others to hear that they attained arhatship by saying (MN 27:26), “Birth is destroyed, the holy life has been lived, what had to be done has been done, there is no more coming to any state of being.” “Śrāvaka” can also mean “hearer and proclaimer” because they hear about supreme awakening and the path leading to it from the buddhas and then proclaim these teachings to those seeking the Mahāyāna path. We might think that bodhisattvas could then also be considered śrāvakas because they hear and proclaim the Mahāyāna path. However, there is a great difference between them: śrāvakas only hear and proclaim these teachings, whereas bodhisattvas practice and actualize them.

Unlike śrāvakas who can practice the path and become arhats in three lifetimes, solitary realizers amass merit and wisdom for a hundred eons before attaining arhatship. However, unlike bodhisattvas, they lack great compassion, and because of that their collections of merit and wisdom are considered secondary collections and not the fully qualified collections of bodhisattvas that lead to full awakening. Nevertheless, their secondary collections of merit and wisdom that are beyond those of śrāvakas allow solitary realizers to attain arhatship in their last saṃsāric life in the desire realm without depending on the teaching of another master. For this reason, they are called “solitary” realizers. Śrāvakas, solitary realizers, and bodhisattvas all realize the emptiness of inherent existence and meditate with that wisdom to attain the fruits of their respective paths. Śrāvakas and solitary realizers may have immeasurable compassion, but they lack the great compassion that shoulders the responsibility to liberate all sentient beings from saṃsāra.

Buddhas are born from bodhisattvas in the sense that through practicing the path of method and wisdom of the Mahāyāna, an individual bodhisattva will abandon all obscurations, perfect all realizations and excellent qualities, and become a fully awakened buddha. That buddha is in the same substantial continuum of that bodhisattva and thus is born from him or her.

The meaning of “born” in these two cases is different. In the case of śrāvakas and solitary realizers being born from buddhas, the buddhas are the cooperative condition supporting the śrāvakas and solitary realizers so they can achieve their respective awakenings. Although the buddhas themselves do not become śrāvakas and solitary realizers, they enable



others to do so by giving them Dharma instructions. In the case of buddhas being born from bodhisattvas, an individual bodhisattva is the substantial cause of the buddha he or she will become upon completing the Mahāyāna. That bodhisattva and that buddha belong to the same continuum.

Another way that a buddha can be born from a bodhisattva is the case of one bodhisattva being a cooperative condition for another bodhisattva to stabilize his bodhicitta. For instance, a senior bodhisattva encourages and instructs a beginning bodhisattva on how to secure and enhance his bodhicitta. When the younger bodhisattva later becomes a buddha, it can be said that the senior bodhisattva was a cause of that buddha because she helped his bodhicitta to expand and flourish.

Of course bodhisattvas are born from buddhas in the same way as śrāvakas and solitary realizers are — by hearing teachings given by buddhas. Candrakīrti specifically mentioned the buddhas teaching the śrāvaka and solitary realizer learners to demonstrate the crucial, indirect role that bodhicitta plays in their attaining arhatship. Even though the śrāvakas and solitary realizers don't generate bodhicitta themselves, their attainments ultimately derive from compassion because the buddhas who taught them the path attained supreme awakening in dependence on bodhicitta, which in turn is derived from great compassion.

## REFLECTION

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1. In dependence on a buddha's great compassion, those inclined to the Śrāvaka and Solitary Realizer Vehicles receive the teachings that will lead them to liberation from cyclic existence.
2. Because of generating great compassion, those with Mahāyāna inclination will become bodhisattvas.
3. Through practicing the path of great compassion, those bodhisattvas will become buddhas who work for the welfare of all beings.

4. Let your mind rest in reverence for great compassion as the source for all goodness. Generate the aspiration to cultivate such compassion yourself.
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### *The Three Principal Causes of Bodhisattvas*

Candrakīrti continues:

The mind of compassion, nondual awareness,  
and bodhicitta — these are the causes of bodhisattvas.

His understanding is based on a passage by Nāgārjuna in *Precious Garland* (RA 174cd–175):

If you and the world wish to attain  
unparalleled awakening,  
its roots are the altruistic aspiration to awakening  
firm like the monarch of mountains,  
compassion reaching to all quarters,  
and wisdom not relying on duality.

Here three main causes of bodhisattvas are set out: compassion for each and every sentient being throughout space, nondual understanding that is free from the two extremes of absolutism and nihilism, and conventional bodhicitta, the primary mind that seeks to work for the benefit of all sentient beings and aspires to attain full awakening in order to do so most effectively. These three are said to be causes for a new bodhisattva, one who is now generating bodhicitta and entering the Mahāyāna path of accumulation.

### *The Mind of Compassion*

Many Mahāyāna authors say “compassion” when they mean “great compassion.” This may be done to keep the meter of verses they are writing, or just for convenience. When Candrakīrti cites compassion as the

cause of bodhisattvas in the above verse, he is referring to the great compassion that finds sentient beings' suffering unbearable and wants to alleviate it and lead them to nirvāṇa. This great compassion, which is possessed only by bodhisattvas, is a cause of bodhicitta.<sup>45</sup> Kamalaśīla tells us (LC 2.45):

When you have committed yourself to being a guide for all living beings by conditioning yourself to great compassion, you effortlessly generate bodhicitta, which has the nature of aspiring to unexcelled perfect awakening.

We will come back to the role of compassion in giving rise to bodhisattvas later.

### ***Nondual Understanding***

A question arises: First someone generates bodhicitta and becomes a bodhisattva. Then she trains in the six perfections. Only when she practices the perfection of wisdom does she gain the wisdom free from the two extremes. So how can nondual understanding be a cause for a bodhisattva when it is developed after one has already become a bodhisattva?

The nondual understanding that Candrakīrti refers to here is not an ārya's wisdom directly realizing suchness, where the appearance of subject and object and the appearance of true existence have totally vanished. Rather, it is a conceptual realization of emptiness, an understanding of nonduality cultivated by a practitioner with sharp faculties prior to becoming a bodhisattva. This wisdom is nondual in the sense of being free from the two extremes of absolutism and nihilism. It is an inferential realization of emptiness that has the appearance of subject and object and is not nondual in that sense.

Previously we discussed Mahāyāna practitioners with sharp faculties and those with modest faculties. To review, sharp-faculty bodhisattva-aspirants first establish the correct view of emptiness and then generate bodhicitta. Establishing the correct view of emptiness removes doubt and convinces them that attaining buddhahood is possible. How does this happen? By understanding that all persons and phenomena lack inherent

existence, they understand that ignorance is an erroneous consciousness. It can be eradicated by the wisdom realizing emptiness that perceives the opposite of what ignorance perceives. When ignorance is overcome, the afflictions that depend on it cease, as does the creation of polluted karma by the afflictions. In this way saṃsāra comes to an end and nirvāṇa is attained.

With the confidence that arises from knowing that liberation is possible, sharp-faculty bodhisattvas now generate bodhicitta, become a bodhisattva, and commit to follow the bodhisattva path to buddhahood. Before being certain that full awakening is possible, they do not want to make this promise.<sup>46</sup> Candrakīrti spoke of nondual awareness as the second of the three causes of bodhisattva and bodhicitta as the third because he was speaking primarily of sharp-faculty disciples.

A further question comes: Śrāvakas and solitary realizers also generate nondual wisdom, so why is it explicitly mentioned as a cause of bodhisattvas?

Although śrāvakas and solitary realizers cultivate the same wisdom as bodhisattvas, their spiritual aspiration is different: they seek the personal peace of nirvāṇa and, with strong renunciation of saṃsāra and aspiration to attain liberation, enter the Śrāvaka or Solitary Realizer Vehicles. By progressing through their vehicle's five paths, they attain arhatship. Some arhats have compassion and the mind wishing to benefit others, and some also have immeasurable compassion. However, they have strong yearning for their own nirvāṇa, which inhibits their wish to benefit others from being robust and resilient.

In the case of bodhisattvas, their realizations of emptiness and great compassion complement and assist each other. By realizing emptiness, they gain the direct antidote to the afflictions that cause saṃsāra. When they see sentient beings under the sway of afflictions that create the causes of suffering, bodhisattvas' compassion increases dramatically. That stimulates them to meditate on emptiness because the wisdom realizing emptiness is the only antidote that shatters cyclic existence completely. Understanding emptiness not only overcomes afflictions, it also reinforces the positive aspects of the mind, which, in turn, motivate bodhisattvas to deepen their realization of emptiness.

## ***Bodhicitta***

Another question arises concerning bodhicitta being a cause of a bodhisattva: Someone becomes a bodhisattva the moment he or she generates stable, uncontrived bodhicitta. How, then, can bodhicitta be a cause of a bodhisattva when it is simultaneous with becoming one? A cause must occur before its result.

Here, the bodhicitta that is said to be the cause of a bodhisattva is not full-fledged bodhicitta; it is the contrived bodhicitta we initially cultivate after meditating on the seven cause-and-effect instructions or equalizing and exchanging self and others. Both contrived bodhicitta and actual, uncontrived bodhicitta have the same observed object — full awakening — and both have the same aspect — they aspire to attain it. The difference between them is compared to the difference between tasting sugarcane bark and actual sugarcane. Sugarcane bark has a sweet flavor, but it's not the full taste of sugarcane. In the same way, contrived bodhicitta wishes to attain awakening to benefit all sentient beings but lacks the actual experience; it is a rudimentary bodhicitta. Bodhicitta like sugarcane bark is going in the right direction and is a necessary step that leads to the full experience of uncontrived bodhicitta, whereas uncontrived bodhicitta is firmly committed to attaining awakening for the sake of sentient beings.

Compassion is the chief cause of bodhicitta like sugarcane bark, which itself is a cause of actual bodhicitta and of bodhisattvas, so Candrakīrti could have mentioned just two causes of a bodhisattva: bodhicitta like sugarcane bark and nondual wisdom. However, he designated compassion as a cause of bodhisattvas to emphasize its importance at the beginning, middle, and end of our practice.

## ***Compassion as the Root Cause***

The buddhas teach the Dharma to sentient beings of all three vehicles, and by practicing these teachings, sentient beings are freed from duḥkha and attain their spiritual aims. Seeing great compassion as the root of this goodness and excellence, Candrakīrti praises it.

Compassion alone is seen as the seed  
of a conqueror's rich harvest, as water that nourishes it,

and as the ripened fruit that is the source of long enjoyment.  
Therefore, at the start I praise compassion.

Here, Candrakīrti points to great compassion as the root of the other two causes of bodhisattvas and explains why compassion is important at the beginning, middle, and end of the path to full awakening. To reap an abundant harvest there must be the seed at the beginning, water in the middle, and the ripening of the crop at the end. Similarly, great compassion is likened in importance to a seed, water, and the ripened fruit that together produce the harvest of a buddha's magnificent qualities.

At the beginning, before we have entered the bodhisattva path of accumulation, compassion is like a seed that will grow into all the magnificent qualities of a buddha. Without compassion, bodhicitta cannot arise, but when we view the duḥkha of ourselves and others with compassion, the strong aspiration to protect all sentient beings from the misery of saṃsāra and lead them to full awakening will arise. Based on this, we make the strong, vibrant determination to attain the highest awakening — to become a buddha — in order to lead others to that state. This is bodhicitta. Seeing that to actualize this aspiration we need to amass the two collections and engage in the six perfections — the chief of which is wisdom — we immerse ourselves in these practices and cultivate nondual wisdom. In this way, compassion is the root of the other two causes of a bodhisattva and is the seed that bears the fruit of buddhahood. As Nāgārjuna reminds (RA 378):

The universal vehicle says  
that all activities should be motivated by compassion,  
and that wisdom will make them pure —  
what sensible person would deride this?

As mentioned above, this order of cultivation — compassion leading to bodhicitta and then to nondual wisdom — is followed by those of modest faculties. Those with sharp faculties first generate compassion, then nondual understanding, followed by bodhicitta. In either case, compassion

is the chief motivating force for the development of the other two realizations.

In the middle of our practice, great compassion is likened to water, for once a seed sprouts, it must be carefully nurtured in order to survive and grow. If our bodhicitta is not nourished by compassion, it will degenerate, which would be a great loss for all sentient beings as well as for ourselves. Thinking of the numberless sentient beings who are drowning in saṃsāra and the great length of time that is required to amass the collections of merit and wisdom, we may become discouraged and even relinquish bodhicitta. However, repeatedly generating great compassion nourishes our heart, giving us courage and strength to engage in the bodhisattva deeds and to meditate on emptiness. In this way, great compassion ensures that we will fulfill the two collections of merit and wisdom and complete the path to buddhahood. Compassion keeps our heart connected to the practice so we will not waver in developing all of the vast causes needed to attain full awakening.

At the conclusion of the path, after bodhisattvas have overcome the last vestiges of defilement, great compassion resembles ripe fruit. It spurs the buddhas to continually benefit sentient beings through their awakening activities for as long as saṃsāra remains. With great compassion, buddhas do not remain in their own peaceful nirvāṇa, but turn the Dharma wheel according to the disposition of each and every sentient being so as to enact their welfare. In that way, buddhas become a source of enjoyment and benefit for all beings.

To illustrate the importance and value of great compassion, the *Compendium of the Teachings Sūtra (Dharmasaṃgīti Sūtra)* says (LC 3.30):

Bhagavan, bodhisattvas should not learn many teachings. Bhagavan, if bodhisattvas grasp and know one teaching, they will have all of the Buddha's teachings in the palm of their hand. What is this one teaching? It is great compassion . . . once great compassion exists, all the other bodhisattvas' qualities will appear.

Spend some time contemplating these verses and become convinced of the importance of familiarizing your mind with compassion, bodhicitta, and the nondual understanding of emptiness. Tsongkhapa recommends that we train our mind so the thought automatically arises, “If I wish to become a bodhisattva, my mind must first come under the influence of great compassion. Then in dependence on this, I must generate from the depths of my heart fully qualified bodhicitta. Once I have done this, I must engage in the general practices of bodhisattvas and in particular the profound view, and I will continue these until reaching full awakening.” With such intention and determination, our efforts will go in the right direction and will bear the fruit of being able to benefit all beings.

## REFLECTION

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1. What is the role of compassion in generating bodhicitta?
  2. Why does bodhicitta energize us to contemplate emptiness?
  3. How can understanding emptiness increase our compassion and bodhicitta?
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### *Compassion Observing Sentient Beings*

In the next two verses, Candrakīrti again pays homage to great compassion. I find this section especially powerful for generating great compassion and often meditate on it (MMA 3–4ab).

Like a bucket in a well, migrators have no autonomy;  
first, with the thought “I,” they cling to a self;  
then, with the thought “mine,” they become attached to things;  
I bow to this compassion that cares for migrators.

[Homage to that compassion for] migrators



seen as evanescent and empty of inherent existence  
like the reflection of the moon in rippling water.

In these two verses, Candrakīrti honors and pays respect to three types of compassion: the compassion observing sentient beings, the compassion observing phenomena, and the compassion observing the unapprehendable. All three minds of compassion have both an observed object (*ālambana*) and a subjective aspect (*ākāra*). The observed object is the basic object that the mind focuses on, whereas the subjective aspect is the way the mind relates to that object. All three types of compassion observe sentient beings, and all three have the subjective aspect of wanting to protect them from saṃsāric duḥkha. That is, while observing sentient beings (who are the observed object), the mind of great compassion has a wholehearted determination to protect them from saṃsāric suffering (this is the aspect).

The first compassion observes just sentient beings who are afflicted by one form of duḥkha after another; it does not observe them as qualified by either impermanence or by emptiness. The last two types of compassion focus on sentient beings qualified by specific attributes. Here the wisdom side of the path that involves the realizations of impermanence, selflessness, and emptiness accompanies the method side of the path, adding depth to our compassion.

The observed object of the compassion observing phenomena is sentient beings qualified by momentary impermanence or qualified by lacking a self-sufficient substantially existent I. The observed object of the compassion observing the unapprehendable is sentient beings qualified by being empty of true existence.

“Qualified by” means that a quality appears to that mind through the force of previously having brought that attribute to mind. Before the second compassion can arise in the mind, we must first ascertain that sentient beings are momentarily impermanent; for the third compassion to arise, we must first ascertain that sentient beings lack inherent existence. It is not necessary that these two compassions themselves apprehend sentient beings as impermanent or as lacking inherent existence; the appearance of these attributes to the compassionate mind due to these attributes being previously ascertained is sufficient. This is because one mind cannot have

two discordant aspects — one being the wish for sentient beings to be free from duḥkha and the other being either subtle impermanence or emptiness.

*Compassion observing sentient beings* is a contraction for “compassion observing just sentient beings.” Contractions are made for ease of speaking, and “just” in the original term indicates that this compassion observes only sentient beings, not sentient beings qualified by being either impermanent or empty like the other two types of compassion. Compassion observing sentient beings focuses on sentient beings who migrate from one saṃsāric realm to another under the control of ignorance, afflictions, and karma. The process of how we migrate again and again is extensively described in *Saṃsāra, Nirvāṇa, and Buddha Nature*, which explains the four truths and the twelve links of dependent origination. Afflictions are delineated and described in the same book, and karma is explained in depth in *The Foundation of Buddhist Practice*. We ordinary beings live in this unsatisfactory situation; saṃsāra is our daily life although we seldom recognize it for what it is. Understanding it well is the basis for generating compassion.

How does saṃsāra come about? With the thought “I,” we cling to the self as an inherently existent person. Whereas the mere I or person exists by being merely designated in dependence on the aggregates, a mental factor called the “view of a personal identity” (*satkāyadr̥ṣṭi, sakkāya-diṭṭhi*) grasps it to exist inherently, with its own essence that is independent of all other factors.

Viewing the aggregates as under the control of an inherently existent person who regards things as “mine,” the view of a personal identity then grasps mine as inherently existent. From this, attachment to what makes *me* happy and anger at what disrupts *my* happiness or causes *me* pain, as well as all other afflictions, arise. We discriminate every person and object we encounter in terms of its ability to bring us happiness or pain; this makes our view very narrow and our actions self-centered. When conjoined with the mental factor of intention, which is karma, afflictions such as craving, hatred, jealousy, pride, deluded doubt, and heedlessness create the paths of action that leave karmic seeds on our mindstream. When these seeds ripen, they influence our future rebirths, what we experience in those lives, our habitual actions, and the type of places where we are born.<sup>47</sup> Seeing how

sentient beings are trapped in this cycle of constantly recurring problems inspires us to generate the compassion that cares for migrators.

Six analogies that compare the experience of migrators — sentient beings born in one life after another in different situations in saṃsāra — to a bucket in a well explain how sentient beings suffer in saṃsāra and help to generate great compassion in our minds.<sup>48</sup>

(1) Just as a bucket in a well is tied by a strong rope, sentient beings are tightly bound to cyclic existence by afflictions and karma. While we seek happiness, we are unable to move freely and lack the autonomy to choose what we encounter in life. Although we wish for happiness and freedom from suffering, afflictions such as greed, anger, and confusion overwhelm our minds and we act counter to our own best interests. In addition, governed by our previously created actions, we find ourselves facing many problems and difficulties — personal, social, political, economic, and so forth.

(2) Just as the operator of a pulley moves the bucket in the well, the afflictive mind propels sentient beings into various rebirths where again and again we find ourselves in situations of conflict and pain. Although we see ourselves and others as independent beings who are in control of our lives, in fact afflictions and karma are our overlords and determine our experiences.

(3) Just as the bucket continuously goes up and down in the deep well, sentient beings wander without end in cyclic existence, from the highest formless realm to the lowest hellish realm. We have been born and will continue to be reborn as every type of life form in saṃsāra countless times until we develop the compassion and wisdom that will liberate us.

(4) The bucket descends easily, but great exertion is needed to pull it up again. Similarly, sentient beings easily fall to lower, unfortunate rebirths, but must exert great energy to create the causes and conditions for a fortunate rebirth. We can see this in our lives: harsh words, harmful actions, and disturbing thoughts that embroil us in conflicts and cause unfortunate rebirth come easily. Greed and attachment readily involve us in sticky situations that we cannot free ourselves from no matter how much we dislike them. Fortitude and great effort are needed to restrain ourselves from acting out of anger or greed and to consciously change our unproductive

emotional responses into ones that lead to good communication. The difficulty in reversing the ease with which sentient beings fall to unfortunate rebirths is reflected in the *Bases of Discipline (Vinayavastu)*, which says that unfortunate rebirths are as numerous as atoms of the Earth and upper rebirths are as few as the particles of dust under a fingernail.

(5) Just as the bucket goes round and round without a discernable beginning or end, sentient beings cycle through the three sets of thoroughly afflictive links where the end of one and the beginning of another are difficult to distinguish. These three sets refer to the twelve links of dependent origination. They are the paths of afflictions — ignorance, craving, and grasping; the paths of karma — formative actions and renewed existence; and the paths of duḥkha — consciousness, name and form, six sources, contact, feeling, birth, and aging and death. By the power of neutral obscurations, such as ignorance, and meritorious karma, we temporarily wander in fortunate realms. By the power of demeritorious karma, we wander in unfortunate realms for a long time. One set of twelve links is so intertwined with many other sets that it is difficult to distinguish them. This is our experience.

(6) The bucket is constantly battered as it forcefully knocks into the side of the well. It is dented, punctured, and worn down. Likewise, sentient beings are battered by the three kinds of duḥkha — the duḥkha of pain, the duḥkha of change, and the pervasive duḥkha of conditioning. This unbearable duḥkha is our close companion and accompanies all sentient beings — our dear ones, refugees, pets, politicians, movie stars, insects, and so on — wherever we go. The duḥkha of pain is painful physical and mental feelings; the duḥkha of change is the fleeting nature of our pleasure and the ease with which a happy situation transforms into an uncomfortable one. The pervasive duḥkha of conditioning is having a body and mind under the control of afflictions and karma, such that pain can come suddenly without any warning.

Buddhas and bodhisattvas teach us the Dharma, showing us the way to free not only ourselves but all others as well. Being the recipients of their extraordinary kindness and compassion, it's only suitable that we extend compassion and benevolence to others, especially since buddhas cherish sentient beings more than themselves.

To get a deep experience of this meditation, it is necessary to think first that we ourselves are like a bucket, endlessly going up and down, getting knocked around in all the realms of saṃsāric life. If we cannot see the duḥkha in our own lives in saṃsāra, we will not be able to see that of others. Without facing this unsatisfactory experience, it will be difficult to generate stable compassion that is courageous in practicing the path and benefiting sentient beings.

The arising of great compassion depends not only on contemplating that all sentient beings are tormented in saṃsāra but also on seeing all sentient beings as endearing. To do that, freeing ourselves from attachment to friends and animosity to enemies is essential. In addition, we must contemplate sentient beings' kindness to us in this and previous lives. Without training our mind in these perspectives, we risk succumbing to our habitual tendency to be indifferent to the misery of other beings. Bodhicitta will not arise in our minds, and without bodhicitta awakening is not possible. If we lack compassion, both our own and others' well-being face obstacles.

For this reason, repeatedly training ourselves in the seven cause-and-effect instructions and equalizing self and others is essential. Neglecting to meditate on these, yet receiving many tantric empowerments and boasting of meditating on deity yoga, inner heat, and the channels, winds, and drops, fulfills neither our own spiritual aspirations nor the well-being of others.

After meditating on how sentient beings are tormented by duḥkha, and on their kindness so that we can see them as endearing, we then generate the three subjective aspects of compassion that are found in the long meditation on the four immeasurables:

(1) *How wonderful it would be if all sentient beings were free from duḥkha and its causes.* Thinking like this from our heart — not just from our mouth — opens us to imagine all beings — friends, enemies, and strangers — as free from the three types of duḥkha: the duḥkha of pain, duḥkha of change, and the pervasive duḥkha of conditioning. Spend some time imagining all beings as free from all fear, pain, and anxiety. They abide with satisfaction, fulfillment, peace, and prosperity.

(2) *May they be free from duḥkha and its causes.* With this thought, our compassion increases in intensity. We're not simply thinking it would be

wonderful if sentient beings were free of duḥkha and its causes; now we are wishing and aspiring that this will come about. Nevertheless, in terms of our engagement, we are still on the sidelines. Although mentally we want sentient beings to be free of duḥkha and its causes, we're not actively participating in bringing that about.

(3) *I shall cause them to be free from duḥkha and its causes.* With this thought, our compassion becomes fearless and unmarred by self-preoccupation. We are determined to become involved, and now our actions will correspond to our aspirations.

With each of the three types of compassion — the compassion observing suffering sentient beings, the compassion observing phenomena, and the compassion observing the unapprehendable — we progressively generate the above three thoughts or subjective aspects. The third thought is the great compassion that Candrakīrti refers to in his homage. From there, generating bodhicitta flows naturally, for in order to free sentient beings from all duḥkha and all of its causes, we must first free ourselves, and that entails realizing emptiness and using that realization to cleanse our mind from all defilements so that we can attain supreme awakening.

## REFLECTION

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1. Visualize a bucket in a deep well — the rope that binds it, the pulley that moves it, its quick descent, and the enormous effort needed to lift it up again. Imagine it going round and round without any discernable end, being battered as it strikes rocks and debris.
2. Think of sentient beings — yourself and others — as being similar to this bucket. We are bound to saṃsāra by afflictions and karma, afflictions being the root cause of our dire situation. In cyclic existence we go up and down from the highest pleasure to the deepest pain. We easily create the causes to fall to unfortunate rebirths, but it requires great effort to reverse our habits and create the causes for happiness. We go up and down in saṃsāra without discernable beginning or end,

and are battered by the circumstance we meet in each rebirth. Contemplate the confining and confusing situation in cyclic existence.

3. Let compassion for yourself and other sentient beings arise in your mind, and stay one-pointedly on that.
4. Gradually generate the three subjective aspects of compassion: How wonderful it would be if all sentient beings were free of duḥkha and its causes. May they be free . . . I shall cause them to be free . . . Feel each one in your heart.
5. Contemplate that an escape from saṃsāra exists: by cutting through the ignorance that lies at the root of our afflictions and karma, we can stop this cycle and attain peace. Generate bodhicitta — the aspiration to attain the highest awakening in order to help all sentient beings overcome their saṃsāra.

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This meditation can be very powerful for developing renunciation and compassion. When we think of ourselves in this situation, the determination to be free arises. This is the meaning of compassion for ourselves. When we think of others experiencing the same thing, compassion for them comes to the fore. This meditation also inspires us to take deep refuge in the Three Jewels: the Dharma is the cessation of duḥkha and the true paths leading to it; how kind the Buddha is to teach us the way to liberation and how kind the Saṅgha is in supporting us on the path.

### *Compassion Observing Phenomena*

The lines “[Homage to that compassion for] migrators seen as evanescent (fluctuating) and empty of inherent existence like the reflection of the moon in rippling water” speak of the second and third forms of compassion: compassion observing phenomena and compassion observing the unapprehendable. Reading those lines as “I pay homage to the compassion that views beings as subject to moment-by-moment disintegration, as fluctuating as the reflection of the moon in water that is being stirred by

wind” is paying homage to the compassion observing phenomena. Reading the lines as “Homage to the compassion that views beings who, although appearing to exist inherently, are like the reflection of the moon in water, devoid of inherent existence” is paying homage to compassion of the unapprehendable.

In a clear pool of water shimmering with ripples caused by a breeze, the reflection of the moon appears. The excellent ones who understand its nature understand the impermanence of the reflection and also know that it is empty of being a real moon. Similarly, bodhisattvas under the sway of compassion observe sentient beings suffering in the ocean of the view of a personal identity, which is continuously filled by the vast river of ignorance. The water is stirred by the wind of distorted conceptions, and the reflections of sentient beings’ virtuous and nonvirtuous karma are like the moon in the sky that is reflected in front of them. In this way, wise bodhisattvas, observing sentient beings as disintegrating in each moment and as empty of inherent existence, generate compassion for them.

Although the view of a personal identity is a form of ignorance, here Candrakīrti speaks of ignorance as nourishing this view to point out that the ignorance that induces the view of a personal identity is the self-grasping ignorance of phenomena. In other words, based on grasping our aggregates of body and mind as having their own, independent, inherent nature, we then grasp the person, the I, as being a self-enclosed entity with its own inherent nature.

*Compassion observing phenomena* is a contraction for “compassion observing sentient beings who are designated on just phenomena, such as the aggregates and the like.”<sup>49</sup> The collection of aggregates is the referent of the term “phenomena” in “compassion observing phenomena.” But the observed object of this compassion is not sentient beings’ aggregates; it is sentient beings qualified by impermanence, sentient beings qualified by lacking a permanent, unitary, and independent self, or sentient beings who lack a self-sufficient substantially existent self, depending on whether compassion is affected by an understanding of impermanence; the lack of a permanent, unitary, and independent self; or the absence of a self-sufficient substantially existent self.



What does it mean to say that great compassion observes sentient beings as qualified by subtle impermanence? Sentient beings have had the quality of subtle impermanence since beginningless time, so this quality is not being made up or projected on them. Sentient beings appear impermanent and the mind apprehends them as impermanent. That is, a wisdom that has previously apprehended the momentary impermanence of sentient beings accompanies great compassion. Here “accompanying” means that the wisdom apprehending the impermanence of sentient beings influences the present consciousness of great compassion that has the intense wish to protect sentient beings from all saṃsāric duḥkha. Some learned adepts say that the wisdom knowing impermanence and the mind of great compassion are explicitly conjoined — that is, both of these minds are manifest simultaneously in a bodhisattva’s continuum. A bodhisattva now apprehends sentient beings with a compassion that intensely wishes to deliver them from all saṃsāric duḥkha and a wisdom that knows them to be impermanent. Other learned adepts have a different view: they say that the mind of great compassion is manifest, but the wisdom understanding impermanence is a subliminal mind (*T. lkog gyur gyi blo*). Still, these two mental consciousnesses are simultaneous.

Bodhisattvas observe sentient beings as momentarily impermanent, “evanescent . . . like the reflection of the moon in rippling water.” The rippling of the water indicates both the gross impermanence of death that all of us are subject to and the subtle impermanence of disintegrating in each moment. The water’s nature is to change; it can never remain static. Similarly, sentient beings’ bodies, minds, environments, companions, and enjoyments arise and cease in each moment. To get a strong sense of sentient beings’ impermanence, imagine a reflection of the moon shimmering in rippling water as the breeze constantly blows. Then think that constant, rippling change is like the unstoppable momentary change of our body and mind in saṃsāra.

Blind to this transitory nature, we cling to the notion that we and everything around us is reliable and unchanging. When a loved one is injured or we receive a terminal diagnosis, when we lose our job or our country is torn apart by war, or when things don’t turn out as we wish, we sentient beings suffer. Holding what is impermanent to be permanent makes

the mind inflexible; we refuse to accept the reality of a situation that doesn't agree with our expectations. Observing that sentient beings suffer by holding what is impermanent as permanent, bodhisattvas experience compassion for sentient beings.

When we realize that sentient beings change moment by moment, we implicitly know that they do not have a permanent, unitary, and independent self or soul, as asserted by non-Buddhists. If sentient beings are not independent, they must be dependent. In this case, they depend on their aggregates — the body and mind. This dependent self is not a different entity from the aggregates that compose it. Sentient beings are designated just on the collection of their impermanent aggregates. In this context being designated just on the collection of aggregates eliminates sentient beings being separate entities from their aggregates. Sentient beings do not exist apart from their body and mind; they are not self-sufficient substantially existent selves. This is the common selflessness of persons; it is called “common” because it is shared by all Buddhist tenet systems. For Prāsaṅgikas, this is not the final or deepest selflessness.

Saying that the person is designated on just the collection of aggregates means that in order to cognize the person, we have to cognize one of their aggregates. To know that Joe is here, we must either see his body or hear his voice. The meaning of being designated here is not the same as Prāsaṅgikas saying that the person is merely designated in dependence on the aggregates, where “merely designated” indicates that aside from only being imputed by name and concept, the person has no objective existence.

Considering the fact that sentient beings change moment by moment, like the reflection of a moon in water rippling in a breeze, wakes us up to a reality about our lives: there is no lasting or fixed security in saṃsāra. Our bodies and minds — and therefore our identities and our selves — are like the reflection of the moon in rippling water, changing in each moment. Observing that sentient beings grasp impermanent things as permanent and knowing that they suffer intensely because of this will stimulate compassion in our hearts.

When sentient beings appear to our mind as momentarily impermanent or as lacking self-sufficient substantial existence, the quality of our compassion for them deepens. On the one hand, we understand more clearly

how and why they suffer by grasping themselves as permanent or as self-sufficient substantially existent persons. On the other hand, we know that they can change and develop their good qualities because they are not fixed, static beings with a substantial self. Seeing their potential increases our compassion for them.

## REFLECTION

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1. Contemplate that phenomena — the body and mind as well as the sentient beings that depend on them — are in a constant state of flux, arising and ceasing in each moment without respite.
2. Consider how much sentient beings suffer by grasping themselves and everything in saṃsāra as static, secure, and predictable. Make examples from your life and the lives of beings around you.
3. Focus on sentient beings as qualified by momentary impermanence. Generate great compassion aspiring to release these sentient beings, who arise and cease in each moment, from all duḥkha and its causes.

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### *Compassion Observing the Unapprehendable*

The phrase *compassion observing the unapprehendable* is a contraction for “compassion observing sentient beings qualified by lacking true existence, which is unapprehendable although it is the conceived object of grasping true existence.” In other words, true existence is unapprehendable because it doesn’t exist; nevertheless it is the conceived object of the erroneous mind grasping true existence.

Compassion observing the unapprehendable arises after a practitioner meditates on emptiness, when that mind understanding the emptiness of sentient beings informs the compassion wishing to protect all sentient beings from all saṃsāric duḥkha. At that time, the observed object of the mind of compassion is sentient beings qualified by the lack of true existence. Here too compassion does not apprehend emptiness, although

emptiness appears to it because the person has previously ascertained sentient beings as empty of true existence.

As with the compassion observing phenomena, some learned adepts say that both the mind of compassion and the mind knowing emptiness are manifest simultaneously, while other learned adepts assert that the mind of great compassion is manifest and the wisdom understanding emptiness is subliminal. Both agree that these two mental consciousnesses are simultaneous and that the aspect of emptiness appears in dependence on the practitioner who possesses compassion having first ascertained sentient beings as empty of true existence.

In this way, preceded and supported by an inferential realization of the emptiness of true existence of sentient beings, compassion observing the unapprehendable views sentient beings qualified by their emptiness of true existence, like the reflection of the moon in water. Previously, to illustrate the compassion observing phenomena, the analogy of the moon's reflection in water emphasized the transient nature of sentient beings: just as the reflection of the moon in rippling water is constantly changing, so too are sentient beings. Now, in the context of the compassion observing the unapprehendable, the analogy emphasizes the illusory nature of sentient beings: just as the moon reflected in water falsely appears to be a real moon, although it isn't, sentient beings falsely appear to be truly existent, although they are not. If we reach over and try to touch the moon in the pond, we will be disappointed because a real moon is not there. If a space mission sends an astronaut to walk on the moon in the pond, the mission will fail because there is only the false appearance of the moon. Similarly, although all persons appear to be "real," having their own essential nature that makes them who they are, they are actually reflections of their previously created karma. We are continually baffled, depressed, and upset when illusion-like people and things do not fulfill our expectations that they should be predictable and reliable.

Recall the analogy: the water corresponds to the ocean of the view of a personal identity that grasps I and mine as truly existent. This ocean is fed by the powerful river of ignorance grasping the five aggregates to exist truly. While sentient beings struggle to stay afloat, the powerful winds of distorted conceptions agitate the water where sentient beings appear as

reflections of their virtuous and nonvirtuous karma. They lack true existence, yet unaware of this fact, they continue to grasp themselves and all other phenomena as truly existent and generate afflictions that bind them in saṃsāra. Seeing sentient beings as qualified by being empty of true existence, and knowing that they suffer due to grasping themselves and everyone and everything around them as truly existent entities, bodhisattvas generate strong compassion wanting sentient beings to be free from ignorance, afflictions, and polluted karma, and all the duḥkha that these cause.

Although there is no moon in the water of a still pond, the reflection exists as a dependent arising, the product of the water, moon, and light coming together in a certain arrangement. Just as there is no truly existent person in either the body or mind or in the collection of the two, a person still exists. The I is a dependently arising product of conceiving and designating the person in dependence on the collection of physical and mental aggregates.

Compassion observing the unapprehendable is not content to wish sentient beings to be free from duḥkha; it actively engages in ways to reduce and eventually eradicate their duḥkha and its causes. Taking the meaning of compassion to heart increases our respect and admiration for great compassion and for the bodhisattvas who possess it. It also stimulates us to see sentient beings as bodhisattvas do and to respond with the same love and compassion. Because the buddhas cultivated such great compassion as well as the wisdom realizing emptiness, they attained buddhahood and continue to turn the wheel of Dharma to benefit us sentient beings. As such, Buddhapālita admires them:<sup>50</sup>

Though seeing transmigrators as empty,  
because you wish to remove their suffering  
you have toiled for a long time.  
This is most amazing!

The great bodhisattvas and the magnificent buddhas do not see us transmigrating sentient beings as truly existent, “concrete” personalities, yet

they are concerned with our welfare and work for our benefit. Let's emulate these great beings!

Compassion observing the unapprehendable enables bodhisattvas to know that realizing emptiness is not antithetical to having compassion for sentient beings. That is, emptiness does not mean that sentient beings are nonexistent; it means they lack inherent existence, a false type of existence. That the wisdom realizing emptiness and great compassion are not only compatible but necessary for bodhisattvas is apparent in Nāgārjuna's *Praise to the Supramundane* (*Lokātīstava*, LS 2):

That apart from the mere aggregates  
no sentient being exists, you uphold.  
Yet, great sage, you continue to remain  
perfectly immersed in the welfare of beings.

The first two lines affirm that sentient beings do not exist separate from their physical and mental aggregates. Rather, the person is understood on the basis of and in dependence on the collection of the physical and mental aggregates. Similarly, all phenomena are understood only on the basis of the coming together of the parts that constitute them.

Buddhapālita expresses the same meaning in another way. In his commentary on chapter 22 of Nāgārjuna's *Treatise on the Middle Way*, he makes this challenge: If phenomena exist inherently, in their own right, what need is there to characterize them as being dependent on other factors? If they possess an inherent reality, when we ask, "What is the true referent of a term?" we should be able to point to one thing and say, "This is it." However, this is not the case. We are able to understand things only in the context of their dependence on other things.

Does that mean there are no suffering sentient beings who are worthy of compassion because no sentient being can be found when searched for among the aggregates or separate from them? In the third and fourth lines, Nāgārjuna praises the Buddha for being completely immersed in working for the well-being of sentient beings despite the fact that sentient beings are not findable under ultimate analysis. Sentient beings exist dependently. Similarly, *duḥkha* is empty of inherent existence yet exists dependently.

Thus sentient beings exist and are worthy of our compassion, and we must strive to relieve their duḥkha. The Buddha instructs Śāriputra in a Perfection of Wisdom sūtra:

When bodhisattvas mahāsattvas cultivate the perfection of wisdom, there are no sentient beings. However, a continuum of empty [mind] is designated “sentient being.” O Śāriputra! Bodhisattvas mahāsattvas rely on the two truths — conventional truth and ultimate truth — in order to teach sentient beings. O Śāriputra! Although sentient beings are intangible in either truth, bodhisattvas mahāsattvas practice the perfection of wisdom and use the power of skillful means to teach sentient beings.

Although sentient beings lack inherent existence, they exist by being merely designated in dependence on their aggregates, especially the continuum of their mental consciousness. Their emptiness is an ultimate truth; their nominal, dependent existence is a veiled or conventional truth. They are empty yet exist dependently. These two attributes are compatible, not contradictory. The two truths are perceived by different types of minds — ultimate truth is known by the probing awareness realizing emptiness, veiled truths are known by a conventional reliable cognizer. When ārya bodhisattvas abide in meditative equipoise on emptiness, they do not perceive any conventional objects, including sentient beings; they perceive only emptiness. However, that does not negate the conventional existence of sentient beings, whom ārya bodhisattvas perceive as illusion-like in the postmeditation time. They have great compassion and work for the benefit of these illusion-like sentient beings; the realization of emptiness nourishes the bodhisattvas’ compassion. Nāgārjuna says in *Commentary on Bodhicitta* (BV 63, 73):

In brief, the Buddha taught that agents,  
actions, and consequences  
are, in conventional terms,  
empty things generated from empty things . . .

In this way, when yogis practice  
meditating on that emptiness,  
without a doubt, they grow attached  
to the well-being of others.

Here “attached to the well-being of others” means bodhisattvas care deeply for the welfare of sentient beings.

Sentient beings are burdened by saṃsāric suffering because they grasp themselves and all phenomena as truly existent. This grasping can be eliminated and their duḥkha ceased. Thus the duḥkha they currently experience is unnecessary. It is not predetermined or unavoidable; it exists only because its root cause — self-grasping ignorance — exists, but this cause can be eradicated so that it never returns. Viewing sentient beings this way arouses intense compassion that seeks to liberate them from unnecessary misery and its causes. This strengthens the resolve to attain buddhahood to be fully capable of guiding them to awakening.

Seeing sentient beings as empty of existing from their own side protects compassion and altruism by preventing afflictions from arising when we seek to benefit them. If we see sentient beings as truly existent, our relationships with them could easily become complicated. We may expect them to follow our advice and to appreciate our guidance, or we may be attached to the outcome of our efforts. By remembering that no inherently existent person is there, our mind is freer to meet situations freshly, as the Buddha prescribed in the *Diamond Sūtra (Vajracchedikā Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra)*:

Subhūti, what do you think? You should not maintain that the Tathāgata has this thought, “I shall take living beings across.” Subhūti, do not have that thought. And why? There are actually no living beings taken across by the Tathāgata. If there were living beings taken across by the Tathāgata, then the Tathāgata would hold the existence of a self, of others, of living beings, and of a life. Subhūti, the existence of a self spoken of by the Tathāgata is no existence of a self, but common people take it as the existence of a self.



Inherently existent living beings do not exist, even conventionally, even though common people believe they do. However, living beings who arise dependently do exist; it is these living beings that the Tathāgata takes across to freedom.

Compassion in the continuum of someone who has not realized impermanence or emptiness does not necessarily focus on permanent, unitary, and independent sentient beings. It often focuses just on sentient beings — that is, sentient beings who are not qualified by either momentariness or emptiness. Even in the mindstreams of those who have realized impermanence and emptiness, their compassion frequently focuses on mere sentient beings, not on sentient beings qualified by either of those characteristics. For example, someone who has realized emptiness may have compassion for the unapprehendable when her mind of compassion is explicitly conjoined with wisdom apprehending emptiness, but at another time her compassion may observe mere sentient beings.

All three types of compassion have the aspect of wanting to protect all sentient beings from all duḥkha, and the great bodhisattvas possess all three. Such great compassion differs from the compassion of śrāvakas and solitary realizers. Bodhisattvas' compassion does not just wish sentient beings to be free from duḥkha and its causes, it also wants to be actively involved in making this happen, and thus it leads to the generation of bodhicitta.

While the third compassion depends on a deep understanding of emptiness, in general compassion and emptiness are cultivated separately. The former involves transforming the mind into the entity of compassion; the latter entails realizing an object not previously known: emptiness, the nature of reality. These require different types of meditation. Compassion will not automatically arise in our minds from realizing there is no inherently existent self to be attached to. We must also contemplate sentient beings' duḥkha as well as their kindness and see them as endearing by following one of the methods to generate bodhicitta.

Nevertheless, an understanding of emptiness deepens our compassion and vice versa. For example, when I sit down to teach I notice that everyone in the audience appears to me to exist from their own side, not through the power of thought. They appear to be “out there,” each person on their own seat. I remind myself that this is a false appearance, that none of them are

either inherently one with or separate from their body-mind. Looking out at everyone, I see that each person is thinking, “I, I, I,” as if they had their own inherent essence and that is who they really are. This mistaken view brings forth their afflictions, which create polluted karma that leads them to experience difficulties in this life and in future rebirths in saṃsāra. Seeing that, I cultivate compassion.

Candrakīrti’s homage to great compassion is most precious and profound. I hope you feel joyful in learning about it and will keep it in your heart as an invaluable treasure.

## REFLECTION

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1. Investigate how sentient beings exist: Are they one and the same as their aggregates? Are they completely different from their aggregates? Conclude that they cannot be found in either way when searched for with ultimate analysis.
2. Contemplate how much these sentient beings suffer because they grasp inherent existence and generate afflictions based on this ignorance. All this suffering is unnecessary because phenomena do not exist with an inherent nature, from their own side.
3. Focus on sentient beings who do not exist inherently. These sentient beings are like illusions — appearing to exist inherently but actually existing dependently. Let the great compassion arise that wants to release them from all duḥkha and its causes.

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### *Combining Wisdom and Compassion*

Compassion observing the unapprehendable is a powerful example of one way that bodhisattvas combine wisdom and compassion in their practice. Sharp-faculty Mahāyāna disciples first gain an inferential cognizer of the emptiness of inherent existence. This gives them the confidence that defilements can be removed from the mind and awakening attained. On this

basis, they meditate on one of the two methods to generate great compassion and bodhicitta. Mahāyāna practitioners with modest faculties first develop faith in the Buddha, Dharma, and Saṅgha through reading the scriptures and accepting the teachings because the Buddha explained them. On that basis, they generate compassion and bodhicitta. For them, the realization of emptiness comes later, and compassion observing the unapprehendable only thereafter.

Try to become a sharp-faculty disciple whose faith is based on reasoning, not just thinking that the teachings are true and awakening is possible because the Buddha said so. Apply reasoning to understand emptiness and then gain deeper understanding of the ultimate nature without remaining content to simply understand it intellectually. Some old and infirm people may have little choice but to follow the path on the basis of faith because physical liabilities now prevent them from engaging in deeper studies. But when you are healthy and have the ability to do so, study well and follow the path without hesitation, just as sharp-faculty practitioners do. Disparaging yourself by thinking you lack intelligence or potential is ignorant and self-sabotaging. So is thinking that you cannot cultivate sharp faculties in this life but must be born with them. Without falling prey to fallacious or discouraging thoughts, make yourself into a sharp-faculty disciple and cultivate your potential to become a buddha.

When we examine our situation, it is clear that all our destructive emotions arise based on false appearances. Things appear to exist objectively, and we assent to that appearance and grasp them to exist in that way. Even scientists are changing their ideas about external objects. Quantum physicists now believe that external objects don't exist objectively but depend on the observer. It seems that they are approaching the Yogācāra view, which asserts that although blue and the mind perceiving blue appear to be substantially different and unrelated, they do not exist in that way. The appearance of duality between the subject and object of a perception is false. In fact, the blue does not exist as an external object but is a reflection of the latency to perceive blue. This latency exists on the foundation consciousness and gives rise to both the subject — the visual consciousness perceiving blue — and the blue color that is the object of this perception.

Prāsaṅgikas explain the ignorance that underlies these false appearances differently but agree that things appear to exist objectively, “out there,” independent of the mind. We ignorantly grasp them to exist in this way. This leads to distorted conceptions and inappropriate ruminations that exaggerate the desirable or undesirable qualities of objects or project qualities that aren’t there. This, in turn, gives rise to attachment, anger, and other afflictions. Nāgārjuna explained this process clearly.

The American scientist Aaron Beck, who was instrumental in the development of cognitive therapy, has worked for decades with clients whose minds are very disturbed by anger. He once told me that the object we get angry at — usually another person — appears to us to be completely negative. But 90 percent of this negativity is actually mental projection. This accords with what Nāgārjuna stated in chapters 18, 22, and 24 of the *Treatise on the Middle Way*. That some scientists are coming to some of the same conclusions as Buddhist sages is intriguing.

Although Yogācārins assert that external things do not exist objectively, they say that our internal feelings and consciousnesses are truly existent. Madhyamaka philosophy disagrees; Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti both say that the apprehending subject and the apprehended object of a cognition do not exist independently.

Within the Madhyamaka system, there is debate whether the object of negation, what we seek to prove does not exist — in this case, true or objective existence — appears to our sense consciousnesses or not. Those who assert that the object of negation does not appear to sense perception — the Svātantrika Mādhyamikas — accept that on the conventional level things exist by their own characteristics — that is, conventionally, things inherently exist. According to them, phenomena lack inherent existence ultimately but not conventionally. For Svātantrikas, the object of negation is true existence, which they say exists neither ultimately nor conventionally. They define true existence as existence without being posited by the force of appearing to a nondefective awareness. A nondefective awareness is a mind free from superficial causes of error, such as having bad eyesight or being under the influence of hallucinogens. They say that two criteria are necessary for things to exist: they must appear to a nondefective consciousness and be designated by mind. Grasping true existence is

apprehending things as existing by appearing to a nondefective awareness without their also being designated by mind.

Prāsaṅgika Mādhyamikas, on the other hand, assert that even conventionally there's no objective existence — neither external objects nor our internal experiences of pain and pleasure have their own, independent essence. It's clear from our experience that things appear to have some objective existence, but Prāsaṅgikas say that appearance is false. Candrakīrti makes the point in his *Supplement* that if you assert that phenomena exist by their own characteristics, then ultimate analysis should establish veiled (conventional) truths. In other words, when you analyze the entity of phenomena with reasoning, you should find some essential nature. However, when we search with reasoning for such an inherent essence in phenomena, nothing can be found.

Through our own experience, we know that external objects as well as internal feelings and mental states affect us; they benefit or harm us. But if we actually search within their parts or their bases of designation, we discover that the way they exist is not the way they appear to exist. They don't exist from their own side, objectively, independent of all other factors. External objects and internal experiences exist, but if we search for their identity, we cannot find anything that we can point to as being them. The more we search for the objects in our environment or for our subjective, internal experiences, the clearer it becomes that they do not have any objective existence from their own side, even though they appear to.

How, then, do they exist? Only by convention. They exist nominally, merely in name. When we don't search for them they appear, but when we analyze to seek their essence, there is nothing to be found except the emptiness of any inherent essence.

Although the quantum physicists agree that nothing exists objectively, when it comes to the observer, they don't know what to say. If Yogācāras say that external things don't exist objectively, they should also say that internal experiences don't exist objectively. How can there be a difference in the mode of existence between the two? Prāsaṅgikas, on the other hand, negate the true existence of both the perceiving subject and perceived object. They say there's no other way that external and internal phenomena can exist except nominally, by convention, by being merely designated.

That alone is the way phenomena exist. Seeing that things exist by being merely designated is very powerful. The more you think about it, the more you'll understand its significance.

The understanding that things exist by being merely designated tallies with reality. It is an awareness of reality. Afflictions, on the other hand, arise due to distorted conceptions, which, in turn, are rooted in grasping true existence. Nāgārjuna says (MMK 18.5):

Through ceasing karma and afflictions there is nirvāṇa.

Karma and afflictions come from conceptualizations.

These come from elaborations.

Elaborations cease by (or in) emptiness.

Karma comes from afflictions, which depend on distorted conceptions. Distorted conception is the aspect of our mind that exaggerates the positive or negative qualities of an object or person, or projects good or bad qualities that the object or person lack. These conceptualizations are rooted in the ignorance that grasps true existence, a mental factor that grasps phenomena to exist objectively, inherently, from their own side.

Grasping at true or inherent existence apprehends inherently existent objects that don't exist, whereas the wisdom realizing emptiness apprehends the opposite: the emptiness of inherent existence. This is the way that phenomena actually exist. That is, grasping inherent existence is a mental state that is discordant with reality, whereas the realization of emptiness accords with how phenomena exist.

In short, phenomena appear to us to exist objectively. Even though that appearance is false, self-grasping ignorance holds phenomena as having some objective existence. But when we search for the inherently existent object that ignorance grasps, we can't point to anything that is it. Instead we find their emptiness. Since phenomena do exist, there is only one way they can exist — as mere name, mere designation, nominally. There is nothing existing from the side of the object; things exist in dependence on the mind conceiving and designating them.

When we understand that grasping true existence is not in accord with reality, whereas the awareness that phenomena exist nominally is in accord

with reality, we see the possibility to overcome afflictions and attain true cessation. That is done by applying the antidotes that can eradicate the self-grasping ignorance that is the root of the afflictions. The principal antidote is the wisdom realizing emptiness. This wisdom will overcome not only ignorance and afflictions but also cognitive obscurations, which are the latencies of ignorance and the mistaken appearances it produces.

In his commentary on the *Ornament of Clear Realizations*, Haribhadra spoke of two powerful characteristics of bodhisattvas: With wisdom they focus on awakening, and with compassion they focus on sentient beings. But even before we become bodhisattvas, if we are sharp-faculty disciples our wisdom can understand emptiness and know that it is possible to eliminate the afflictions as well as all other obscurations.

When we understand this, we can also clearly see that the ignorance grasping true existence and its latencies bind sentient beings in saṃsāra and impede their becoming buddhas. Although sentient beings have the possibility of overcoming these defilements, they are ignorant of their potential and thus continue to create polluted karma under the influence of afflictions. In this way their saṃsāra, with all its attendant duḥkha, continues without any end in sight. Although sentient beings do not want suffering, they are unaware that afflictions dominate their minds and that on a daily basis afflictions instigate them to create the causes for duḥkha. As a result, sentient beings sink deeper into saṃsāra. Seeing this desperate situation, how can compassion for sentient beings not arise?

If their duḥkha were innate and unavoidable, we could not do anything about it. But that is not the case. Śāntarakṣita says (MA 96):

Therefore, the intelligent who follow the system of [the Tathāgata]  
will generate intense compassion  
for those believing in tenets  
that are based on mistaken [views].

Unless we have full conviction in the possibility that all afflictions and obscurations can be eradicated and that the counterforce to do this is the wisdom realizing emptiness, our bodhicitta will be weak: we won't feel completely confident that it's possible to attain full awakening, let alone to

lead other sentient beings to that state. If we don't gain certainty in this through the path of reasoning, we're left with saying, "This is so because the Buddha said so," or "This is so because my spiritual mentor said so," and there's not much weight in this. If you follow like those with modest faculties, your conviction and understanding will not be stable. You may sometimes find contradictions in the scriptures or the teachings of your spiritual mentor and, not having developed astute wisdom through reasoning, you won't know how to make sense of these and will become confused and doubtful.

But if you are able to follow the Buddha's teachings as the sharp-faculty disciples who follow reasoning do, awakening will be yours and the Buddhadharma will remain for centuries. Even if someone criticizes the Dharma, as a sharp-faculty disciple, you will be able to respond by using reason, just as Nāgārjuna and his followers did. Try to develop the wisdom knowing reality, beginning with a correct assumption, progressing to an inferential reliable cognizer, and finally gaining a wisdom consciousness that knows emptiness directly. As Śāntarakṣita says in *Ornament of the Middle Way (Madhyamakālamkāra, MA 75)*:

[Those who realize emptiness are] those who know it inferentially  
with reasonings that make [the lack of a real nature] known  
and that cut superimpositions,  
as well as those powerful yogis who know it clearly by direct  
perception.

Śāntarakṣita was one of the seventeen Nalanda masters whose writings are the life force of the Buddhadharma in Tibet. If we follow and practice the teachings by using reasoning as they did, we will sustain the Dharma for a long time, as the great Indian and Tibetan masters have done. They studied all the texts of the Nalanda masters and wrote commentaries on them, using reasoning to explain the points. In *Destiny Fulfilled* (vol. 2), Tsongkhapa advised us not to be partial or superficial when studying the texts of the great masters:

Therefore, not content with a partial or superficial understanding



of the treatises of the Invincible Lord of Dharma  
and those of [the great sages] widely renowned in India  
as the six ornaments and two supreme ones,  
I studied them all in great detail.

The invincible Lord of Dharma is Maitreya, also known as Ajita. The Vinaya masters Guṇaprabha and Śākyaprabha are the two supreme ones. Nāgārjuna and Āryadeva are ornaments of the Madhyamaka; Asaṅga and Vasubandhu are ornaments of the Abhidharma; and Dignāga and Dharmakīrti are ornaments of epistemology. Tsongkhapa recommends we study their texts thoroughly and put what we learn into practice, just as he did. What excellent advice!



## 7 | Aspiring and Engaging Bodhicitta

THE PRECIOUS MIND of bodhicitta is spoken of in many different ways. In the *Ornament of Clear Realizations*, Maitreya calls bodhicitta “mind-generation” and defines it as “the desire to [attain] perfect, complete awakening for others’ welfare.” It is a mental consciousness that is associated with two aspirations: the first is the causal aspiration that seeks the welfare of others; the second is the assisting aspiration that seeks full awakening. The general understanding is that the causal aspiration occurs first, followed by the aspiration for wakening, at which time the actual bodhicitta is born.

### *Identifying Aspiring and Engaging Bodhicitta*

One way of speaking about bodhicitta is in terms of aspiring and engaging bodhicitta. *Aspiring bodhicitta* is the initial wish to become a buddha in order to benefit all sentient beings. This bodhicitta is generated before making the formal commitment to engage in the bodhisattva deeds by taking the bodhicitta vow. *Engaging bodhicitta* arises when someone follows up on the initial wish of aspiring bodhicitta by taking the bodhisattva vow and making the commitment to create the causes for buddhahood. Aspiring bodhicitta is analogous to wishing to go to Dharamsala; engaging bodhicitta is acting on that wish by buying the air ticket, packing the bags, getting on the plane, and so on.

These two types of bodhicitta are generated sequentially as part of a single substantial continuum of bodhicitta. That is, someone meditates on either the seven cause-and-effect instructions, equalizing and exchanging self and others, or their combined instruction, and when they generate bodhicitta, the continuum of that mind becomes aspiring bodhicitta. When

bodhisattvas, upon taking the bodhisattva vow, engage in acts of generosity, ethical conduct, or fortitude, and so forth, the continuity of their bodhicitta becomes engaging bodhicitta. Both bodhicitta and the active practice of the bodhisattva deeds must be manifest to be engaged bodhicitta.

There is some debate on whether bodhicitta is present when an ārya bodhisattva enters meditative equipoise directly perceiving emptiness. Some learned adepts say that during this profound meditation on the path of seeing or path of meditation, aspiring bodhicitta exists in an unmanifest state in the mindstream of the meditator and only emptiness appears to that mind. In short, the substantial continuum of bodhicitta is always present in that individual, and it becomes aspiring or engaging bodhicitta depending on what the bodhisattva is doing.

Other learned adepts say that to be present, a mind has to be manifest. In this case, it is impossible for bodhicitta to accompany a mind of meditative equipoise directly perceiving emptiness because it would be manifest and during meditative equipoise directly perceiving emptiness no conventional phenomenon appears to the mind; only emptiness appears. Therefore they say conventional bodhicitta is not present and does not exist in the bodhisattva's continuum at that time. However, the bodhisattva still possesses bodhicitta because their bodhicitta hasn't degenerated and will manifest in post-meditation time.

It is worthwhile to spend time developing a good understanding of the importance and meaning of bodhicitta with its objects and aspects. When we feel that the time has come to seriously undertake the cultivation of bodhicitta, we may generate contrived bodhicitta in the presence of our teacher. This is called *cultivating aspiring bodhicitta in a ceremony*. This helps stabilize our determination to cultivate bodhicitta.

Later, when we feel capable to train in the four causes for keeping our bodhicitta from deteriorating in this and future lives, we can do the ceremony again in the presence of our teacher and generate bodhicitta with the thought never to give it up. This is called *receiving aspiring bodhicitta with commitment in a ceremony*.

After training the mind in aspiring bodhicitta with commitment, we can take the bodhisattva vow. Our bodhicitta at this time is engaging bodhicitta. Even if we engage in the six perfections with a mind aspiring "May I

become a buddha,” or “I will become a buddha,” as long as we have not taken the bodhisattva vow, engaging bodhicitta is not yet present in our mindstream. Kamalaśīla says (LC 2:49):

The initial aspiration thinking “May I become a buddha in order to benefit all sentient beings” is aspiring bodhicitta. Once you have taken the vow and you engage in the collection [of merit and wisdom], the initial aspiration becomes engaging bodhicitta.

Both aspiring and engaging bodhicitta are the thought seeking to attain awakening for the benefit of all sentient beings. Their difference lies in that engaging bodhicitta is present when, conjoined with the bodhisattva vow, a practitioner is engaged in physical, verbal, or mental activities leading to awakening; aspiring bodhicitta is not conjoined with the bodhisattva vow.

Who can generate aspiring and engaging bodhicitta? All those attracted to the bodhisattva practice and of sound mind can generate aspiring and engaging bodhicitta. Optimally, they should have antipathy for cyclic existence, be mindful of impermanence and death, and have trained in wisdom and compassion. In short, they should have studied and practiced the earlier stages of the path in common with the initial- and middle-level practitioners and have some experience of compassion that deeply inspired them.

## REFLECTION

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1. *Aspiring bodhicitta* is the wish to become a buddha in order to benefit all sentient beings. It is generated before making the formal commitment to engage in the bodhisattva conduct.
2. *Engaging bodhicitta* is the thought to become a buddha to benefit sentient beings that has formally committed to engage in the bodhisattva deeds and create the causes for buddhahood.

3. Reflect on the benefits of bodhicitta, the duḥkha of sentient beings, and their wish to be happy and not suffer. Aspire to become a buddha in order to benefit them.
  4. Sentient beings are overpowered by afflictions and karma and as a result they cycle in saṃsāra. They have been, are, and will be kind to us and are endearing. Reflecting deeply on these two points, generate the aspiration to become a buddha. Make a firm commitment to engage in the bodhisattva conduct in order to benefit sentient beings most effectively.
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### *The Ceremony for Generating Aspiring Bodhicitta*

We may have an intellectual understanding of bodhicitta, but to become a buddha the experiential feeling is essential. Once we have even an inkling of that feeling, we can develop it further and transform it into uncontrived bodhicitta. One way to generate the experience of bodhicitta is to undergo the ceremony of cultivating aspiring bodhicitta. The ceremony for receiving aspiring bodhicitta with commitment is the same; the difference is whether your intention is simply to generate aspiring bodhicitta or to make a commitment to not let it decline in this or future lives.

The spiritual mentor in whose presence you generate bodhicitta in a ceremony should have the bodhisattva vow and practice bodhicitta. He or she will guide you in the ceremony. Visualize in the space in front of you the Buddha, his body made of golden light. Think of him as a living being, not a statue or painting. He is surrounded by all the buddhas and bodhisattvas who look at you with delight because you're joining them in generating bodhicitta and dedicating yourself to awakening and to benefiting living beings. Also visualize the great Indian masters: Nāgārjuna, Āryadeva, Asaṅga, Vasubandhu, and others. Think they are holding their precious texts that you can still read and learn. If you follow another Buddhist tradition, imagine the lineage masters from that tradition too. If your own spiritual mentor is not living, imagine him or her as well.

If a spiritual mentor who can perform the aspiring bodhicitta ceremony is not available, you can generate and perform the ceremony alone by visualizing the Buddha and all the buddhas and bodhisattvas in front of you as explained above. Then proceed as follows.

Mentally offer your body, speech, and mind to your spiritual mentors and the Three Jewels. In the presence of all these esteemed beings, recite and contemplate the meaning of the seven-limb prayer. The following are the opening verses of “The King of Prayers: The Extraordinary Aspiration of the Practice of Samantabhadra” from the *Flower Ornament Sūtra* (*Avatamsaka Sūtra*) (POW 2:64–74). If you prefer, recite verses from *Engaging in the Bodhisattvas’ Deeds* (chapter 2 and the beginning of chapter 3).

I bow down to the youthful Ārya Mañjuśrī.  
You lions among humans,  
gone to freedom in the present, past, and future  
in the worlds of ten directions,  
to all of you, with body, speech, and sincere mind I bow down.

With the energy of aspiration for the bodhisattva way,  
with a sense of deep respect,  
and with as many bodies as atoms of the world,  
to all you Buddhas visualized before me, I bow down.

On every atom are Buddhas numberless as atoms,  
each amidst a host of bodhisattvas,  
and I am confident the sphere of all phenomena  
is entirely filled with Buddhas in this way.

With infinite oceans of praise for you,  
and oceans of sound from the aspects of my voice,  
I sing the breathtaking excellence of Buddhas,  
and celebrate all of you Gone to Bliss.

Beautiful flowers and regal garlands,  
sweet music, scented oils, and parasols,  
sparkling lights and sublime incense,  
I offer to you Victorious Ones.

Fine dress and fragrant perfumes,  
sandalwood powder heaped high as Mount Meru,  
all wondrous offerings in spectacular array,  
I offer to you Victorious Ones.

With transcendent offerings peerless and vast,  
with profound admiration for all the Buddhas,  
with strength of conviction in the bodhisattva way,  
I offer and bow down to all Victorious Ones.

Every harmful action I have done  
with my body, speech, and mind  
overwhelmed by attachment, anger, and confusion,  
all these I openly lay bare before you.

I lift up my heart and rejoice in all merit  
of the Buddhas and bodhisattvas in ten directions,  
of solitary realizers, śrāvakas still training, and those beyond,  
and of all ordinary beings.

You who are the bright lights of worlds in ten directions,  
who have attained a Buddha's omniscience through the stages of  
awakening,  
all you who are my guides,  
please turn the supreme wheel of Dharma.

With palms together I earnestly request:  
You who may actualize parinirvāṇa,



please stay with us for eons numberless as atoms of the world,  
for the happiness and well-being of all wanderers in saṃsāra.

Whatever slight merit I may have created,  
by paying homage, offering, and acknowledging my faults,  
rejoicing, and requesting that the Buddhas stay and teach,  
I now dedicate all this for full awakening.

Now review the steps for generating bodhicitta according to either the seven cause-and-effect instructions, equalizing and exchanging self and others, or the combined instructions. Arouse the bodhicitta in your heart just as the great masters visualized before you have done.

I often offer the aspiring bodhicitta rite using three of my favorite verses. The first verse is taking refuge, the second is generating aspiring bodhicitta, and the third is dedicating the merit. I will include these here for you to contemplate if you have not yet generated aspiring bodhicitta, and to use as part of your daily practice to renew your bodhicitta if you have (POW 2.73).

With the wish to free all sentient beings,  
I take refuge at all times  
in the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Saṅgha  
until the attainment of full awakening.

Today in the presence of the awakened ones,  
inspired by compassion, wisdom, and joyous effort,  
I generate the mind aspiring for full buddhahood  
for the well-being of all sentient beings.

For as long as space endures,  
and for as long as sentient beings remain,  
until then may I too abide  
to dispel the misery of the world.

## *Guidelines of Aspiring Bodhicitta*

Because the mind of bodhicitta cherishes others more than self, it runs counter to the well-entrenched self-centered attitude. As we ordinary beings cultivate bodhicitta, and even after we generate spontaneous bodhicitta and enter the bodhisattva path of accumulation, our bodhicitta is fragile and vulnerable to the power of self-preoccupation. Until we reach the middle level of the path of accumulation, our bodhicitta may degenerate and even be lost. To prevent this, after having received aspiring bodhicitta with commitment in a ceremony, follow the four guidelines that prevent bodhicitta from deteriorating in this lifetime. If you follow these, there is no doubt that your bodhicitta will grow.

1. To increase enthusiasm for generating bodhicitta, *repeatedly recollect the benefits of bodhicitta*. Reflect on the great merit you create by generating bodhicitta, the increased ability you will have to be a positive influence in the lives of people around you and in the world, and the delight of placing yourself firmly on the path to awakening.
2. To increase the intention to become awakened, *generate bodhicitta three times during the day and three times at night*. Dividing the day and the night into three periods each and generating bodhicitta during each of these periods is excellent. It's like regularly eating nourishing food. If this is not possible, at least once in the morning and once at night generate bodhicitta three times. Even if you don't recite the verse, reflecting on the object of intent — awakening — and the motivation for attaining it — to benefit all sentient beings — strengthens your bodhicitta.
3. *Do not give up or neglect the welfare of even one sentient being*. If you develop a negative attitude toward someone — for example, an insect that frightens you or a person who criticizes you — and exclude this person from the scope of your bodhicitta, you are no longer working for *all* sentient beings and your bodhicitta has degenerated.

4. As much as possible, try to *fulfill the two collections of merit and wisdom*. Fulfilling the collection of merit involves engaging in virtuous activities. Fulfilling the collection of wisdom necessitates generating the understanding of the uncommon Madhyamaka view. Because this is difficult, at least maintain the wish and put effort into understanding the Yogācāra system.

To prevent your bodhicitta from deteriorating in future lives, train in four wholesome actions and avoid four unwholesome ones. The unwholesome actions to abandon are the following:

1. *Lying to your abbot or spiritual mentor* makes it impossible for them to trust you or to guide you. Being open and honest with your abbot or abbess and your spiritual mentors enables you to receive and be receptive to their wise advice. Trying to make yourself appear to be someone you're not only muddles the relationship and plants the seeds of destructive karma on your mindstream.
2. *Causing others to regret their virtuous actions* runs counter to a bodhisattva's wish to lead sentient beings to full awakening. Regretting virtuous actions destroys the merit created from doing them.
3. *Criticizing or blaming a bodhisattva* creates impediments in your practice and interferes with that bodhisattva's virtuous actions to be of benefit to others. Bodhisattvas are your role models and criticizing them turns your mind away from their excellent example. Disparaging those who have compassion for all beings is a warning of how twisted your views have become.
4. *Acting with pretension or deceit* in order to receive offerings and service leads you down the malignant path of manipulation and fraud. Pretension is pretending to have good qualities you lack; deceit is covering up your bad qualities.

To prevent and counteract the above unwholesome actions and to preserve your bodhicitta in future lives, practice these virtuous actions:

1. *Abandon deliberately lying to any living being.* Being truthful creates trust, which is an essential quality for harmonious relationships. This remedies the first unwholesome action.
2. *Be honest, straightforward, and sincere with all living beings.* If you do so, they will act similarly toward you. This counteracts the fourth unwholesome action.
3. *Consider bodhisattvas as great teachers and treat them respectfully.* Since knowing who is a bodhisattva is difficult, it is best to treat everyone with respect. Does this mean that we don't point out anyone's harmful actions because they might be a bodhisattva? By differentiating the person and the action, we can say the action is harmful without denigrating the person who did it. This guideline remedies the third unwholesome action.
4. *Directly or indirectly encourage the people who rely on you to seek full awakening.* This is a wonderful way to aid sentient beings and counteracts the second unwholesome action.

We diligently protect our valuables by putting them in a safe at home, a safe-deposit box at a bank, or in other safe places. Bodhicitta is a treasure beyond any worldly money or jewels, so we must protect it assiduously. If we preserve our bodhicitta well in this life, just a small condition will trigger us to remember bodhicitta in future lives. Admiring bodhicitta and manifesting compassion from childhood will definitely be an advantage for our Dharma practice in future lives.

## REFLECTION

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1. Contemplate each guideline of aspiring bodhicitta. In what way does each one keep your bodhicitta from degenerating in this life? In future lives?
  2. Would it help you in your Dharma practice to follow these guidelines? You can try to do so without formally taking them.
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## *Engaging Bodhicitta*

During a ceremony in the presence of our spiritual mentors and the Three Jewels visualized in front of us, we may cultivate contrived bodhicitta. Although we may experience a special feeling when generating the aspiring bodhicitta at that time, for most of us this is not genuine bodhicitta, and we have not yet become actual bodhisattvas. The difference between contrived and actual bodhicitta is that the former arises with effort and will later fade, whereas the latter is deep, stable, and continuous. It arises spontaneously whenever a sentient being is brought to mind. The cultivation of uncontrived, genuine bodhicitta requires effort and persistence and may take many months, years, or lifetimes.

Do not become discouraged thinking that you're not making progress or that despite your effort, your bodhicitta is still contrived. Rather, remember the noble and extraordinary qualities of bodhicitta and be willing to familiarize yourselves with it over the course of many years because you know in your heart that this is of real value and meaning in your life.

As your bodhicitta becomes even stronger, you will naturally want to engage in the bodhisattva's deeds — generosity and the other perfections — that lead to awakening. When that wish arises and you start to engage in the bodhisattva deeds conjoined with the bodhisattva vow, engaging bodhicitta is present.

During the ceremony of taking the bodhisattva vow, you promise to observe the bodhisattva precepts from now until awakening. Unlike the various prātimokṣa ethical codes, the bodhisattva and tantric vows are not lost at the time of death but continue with our mental continuum into future lives. Does this mean that we might commit transgressions in a future life even if we are not aware at that time of having received the bodhisattva or tantric vow in a previous life? No, it does not, because we lack conscious awareness of having assumed that vow. However, having received and kept the bodhisattva or tantric vow in a previous life is very advantageous in that it plants the latencies for being able to meet these practices in a future life and receive the precepts again, thus reinforcing the ethical conduct practiced in the previous life.

Most people who take the bodhisattva vow in a ceremony are not yet full-fledged bodhisattvas with uncontrived bodhicitta. As long as you have the aspiration to become a bodhisattva and a buddha and the intention to keep the bodhisattva vow as best you can, taking it is beneficial. The bodhisattva vow in your mindstream is a similitude, not the actual bodhisattva vow, but doing your best to live in accord with the bodhisattva precepts will help you to develop bodhicitta and to conduct yourself like a bodhisattva. When transgressions occur, reciting the *Sūtra of the Three Heaps: The Bodhisattva's Confession of Ethical Downfalls*, together with prostrations to the thirty-five buddhas, is an excellent way to purify.<sup>51</sup> In time you will generate spontaneous bodhicitta and become an actual bodhisattva.

If you admire bodhicitta and want to practice it but are hesitant to take the bodhisattva vow, you can practice living according to the precepts of aspiring and/or engaging bodhicitta without taking them. Mindfulness of your motivations and actions will increase and you will create merit by doing this. Later, when you feel confident and more prepared, you can join an aspiring or engaging bodhisattva vow ceremony.

Becoming a bodhisattva is highly admirable. All the buddhas praise bodhisattvas. Candrakīrti comments that they do so for four reasons. First, being a bodhisattva is a cause of becoming a buddha and thus is precious and profound. In addition, by praising bodhisattvas as the causes of buddhas, we implicitly praise the buddhas as well. Furthermore, new bodhisattvas are like the sprout of a medicinal plant that will bear great fruit as it grows. Finally, others will be inspired to enter the Mahāyāna path to buddhahood by hearing the bodhisattvas being praised. If buddhas praise bodhisattvas, needless to say, we should too!

### *Taking the Bodhisattva Vow*

Regarding those who can generate engaging bodhicitta, Atiśa says in the *Lamp of the Path* (LP 21):

Those who maintain any of the seven kinds  
of the prātimokṣa ethical codes

have the ideal (prerequisite) for  
the bodhisattva vow, not others.

The seven kinds of prātimokṣa ethical codes taken for life are those of male and female lay followers, male and female novice monastics, nuns in training, and male and female fully ordained monastics. Maintaining one of these seven ethical codes is a “special support” for human beings who generate engaging bodhicitta. However, desire-realm gods, form-realm gods, and formless-realm gods also can generate engaging bodhicitta, even though they cannot take the prātimokṣa precepts because they are not human beings.

During large Dharma gatherings attended by people who are at various stages of spiritual practice, I often allow all those who see the value of aspiring bodhicitta to generate it during a ceremony. However, those taking the bodhisattva vow must have at least taken refuge in the Three Jewels. Although living in one of the seven types of prātimokṣa ethical codes is the ideal basis on which to receive the bodhisattva vow, it is not required. However, you should have a very strong determination to abandon the naturally negative actions such as killing, stealing, unwise sexual conduct, and lying. Without living in an ethically disciplined way that refrains from gross negativities, it will be difficult for your actions to accord with the bodhisattva vow or to benefit others. The precepts included in the bodhisattva vow are more difficult to keep than the prātimokṣa precepts because they regulate mental activities, not just physical and verbal behavior. For that reason, many people find training in one of the prātimokṣa ethical codes a good preparation before receiving the bodhisattva vow.

There are several ceremonies for taking the bodhisattva vow and a variety of verses that may be recited to do so. The spiritual mentor in whose presence you take the bodhisattva vow should be someone who herself has the bodhisattva vow and practices engaging bodhicitta. Atiśa recommends that this spiritual mentor have specific qualities (LP 23):

Understand that a good spiritual mentor  
is one skilled in the ordination ceremony,

who lives by the precepts, and  
has the confidence and compassion to bestow them.

In cases when it is not possible to receive the precepts the first time in the presence of a spiritual mentor, the ceremony may be done by visualizing the buddhas and bodhisattvas in front of you and reciting the verse of taking the bodhisattva vow. This procedure is unique to taking the bodhisattva vow; both the prātimokṣa ethical restraints and the tantric vow must be taken from a spiritual mentor, although a tantric practitioner, after doing the approximation retreat and concluding fire pūjā, can renew the tantric vow by doing the self-empowerment.

The place in which the bodhisattva vow will be given should be decorated in a joyous way befitting a celebration. Participants should bathe and put on fresh clothing and sit respectfully while the spiritual mentor delivers an encouraging talk. Purify and collect merit by reciting the verses of one of the seven-limb prayers mentioned above, and then crouch or kneel and recite after the spiritual mentor a verse to take the bodhisattva vow, such as this one from Śāntideva's *Engaging in the Bodhisattvas' Deeds* (BCA 3.23–24):

Spiritual masters, buddhas, and bodhisattvas, please listen to what I now say from the depths of my heart. Just as the sugatas of the past have developed bodhicitta and dwelt in the sequential trainings of the bodhisattva, so I too, to benefit migrating beings, will develop bodhicitta and practice the sequential trainings of the bodhisattvas.

As you recite each phrase after the spiritual mentors, think about what you are saying. Make this a living experience in which you generate your deepest aspiration in the presence of your spiritual mentor, the buddhas, and bodhisattvas.

The verse of taking the bodhisattva vow from the *Guhyasamāja Root Tantra*, quoted by Nāgārjuna at the beginning of his *Commentary on Bodhicitta*, is quite powerful:



All buddhas and bodhisattvas, please give me your attention.<sup>52</sup> Just as the blessed buddhas and the great bodhisattvas have generated bodhicitta, I, too, shall from now until I arrive at the heart of awakening generate bodhicitta in order that I may liberate those who are not liberated, free those who are not free, relieve those who are not relieved, and help to thoroughly transcend sorrow those who have not thoroughly transcended sorrow.

There are three ways of interpreting the phrases “liberate those who are not liberated, free those who are not free, relieve those who are not relieved, and help to thoroughly transcend sorrow those who have not thoroughly transcended sorrow.” Examining them reveals many ways of understanding this brief passage that can enrich our meditation on bodhicitta.

### *Version 1*

“Liberate those who are not liberated” refers to liberating sentient beings who have cognitive obscurations; these are śrāvaka arhats and ārya bodhisattvas. “Free those who are not free” indicates freeing sentient beings who have afflictive obscurations. “Relieve those who are not relieved” means to lead to higher rebirth those sentient beings who are inflicted with evident pain and misery, especially those in unfortunate realms. “Help to thoroughly transcend sorrow those who have not thoroughly transcended sorrow” summarizes benefiting the above three groups of sentient beings.

### *Version 2*

This version is in relation to the four truths. “Liberate those who are not liberated” refers to liberating sentient beings who are subject to true duḥkha. “Free those who are not free” means to free sentient beings who are not free from the bondage of the true origins of duḥkha. “Relieve those who are not relieved” is to relieve sentient beings who are not yet relieved from the grasping at true existence by teaching them how to generate true paths. “Help to thoroughly transcend sorrow those who have not thoroughly transcended sorrow” is to enable those who are not endowed with true cessations to have them.

### *Version 3*

This version is explained in relation to four vehicles as set forth in *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra*. Because sentient beings have diverse inclinations and ways of thinking, different vehicles or paths exist in order to meet their needs.

(1) The vehicle of humans and devas (celestial beings) contains instruction on how to abandon harming others and to help them. Seeking the elimination of pain, it encourages us to have contentment, love, compassion, fortitude, generosity, and other qualities acknowledged as virtuous in the world. This vehicle seeks to eliminate the duḥkha of pain and enables people to attain a good rebirth and have good facilities in this life. Theistic religions fall into this category, as they generally emphasize attaining a pleasurable heavenly state after death by means of living an ethical life and being kind to others.

(2) The vehicle of Brahmā is followed by non-Buddhists who seek rebirth in the form and formless realms. It encompasses the teachings of many ancient Indian schools that emphasize the cultivation of samādhi, serenity, and worldly insight. Worldly insight is insight cultivated on the basis of seeing the coarseness of lower states of mind and the peacefulness of higher states. By seeing the faults of attachment to sense objects — for example, so many problems ensue from trying to procure and protect them — practitioners become disinterested and repulsed by sense objects. They are drawn to focus inwardly and gain mental peace through attaining various levels of samādhi. This vehicle leads practitioners to attain the meditative absorptions of the form and formless realms, which are delineated according to the depth of meditative concentration. For example, those who attain the fourth dhyāna as human beings are free from the duḥkha of pain and the duḥkha of change. They are born as devas in the fourth dhyāna, where they experience only neutral feelings. However, they are not yet free from the pervasive duḥkha of conditioning and continue to cycle in saṃsāra.

(3) The Śrāvaka and Solitary Realizer Vehicles have the goal of being free from all three types of duḥkha and attaining liberation. They seek to eliminate the self-grasping that acts as the basis for all other afflictions. Practitioners accomplish this by cultivating the wisdom realizing emptiness,

which counteracts the self-grasping ignorance. While there are some slight differences between the vehicles of śrāvakas and solitary realizers, broadly speaking they can be classified together because they both seek liberation from all three types of duḥkha, which is gained by eliminating the afflictive obscurations.

(4) The Bodhisattva Vehicle seeks to eliminate not only afflictive obscurations but also cognitive obscurations so that its practitioners attain nonabiding nirvāṇa — the nirvāṇa of a buddha that is free from the extreme of saṃsāra and the extreme of the personal peace of śrāvakas’ and solitary realizers’ nirvāṇa. These practitioners have the aim of freeing all sentient beings — themselves and others — from all obscurations both afflictive and cognitive.

With this as background, “liberate those who are not liberated” means to liberate those who are not free from the duḥkha of pain — human beings, desire-realm devas, and especially those born in unfortunate realms. This is done by guiding them so that they will abandon the ten nonvirtues and practice the ten virtues, and as a result will take rebirth in fortunate rebirths. This is how a bodhisattva liberates followers of the vehicle of humans and celestial beings.

“Free those who are not free” means to free the followers of the vehicle of Brahmā from the duḥkha of pain and the duḥkha of change. Although followers of the vehicle of Brahmā have renounced sensual pleasures, they are ensnared by craving for the calm of samādhi and for rebirth in the form and formless realms. To be free from this craving and the rebirths it brings, they need to learn and practice the Śrāvaka and Solitary Realizer Vehicles that eliminate all duḥkha completely by overcoming afflictive obscurations.

“Relieve those who are not relieved” refers to liberating those following the Śrāvaka and Solitary Realizer Vehicles from afflictive obscurations by giving them teachings on the four truths and twelve links of dependent origination. When these sentient beings engage in those practices, they will attain nirvāṇa.

“Help to thoroughly transcend sorrow those who have not thoroughly transcended sorrow” indicates leading bodhisattvas — especially those who have attained the ten grounds of the Perfection Vehicle — to the practice of highest yoga tantra. While the fundamental innate clear-light mind is

naturally free from coarser levels of mind, sentient beings must learn how to access it and then free it from both afflictive and cognitive obscurations by the practices of highest yoga tantra. In this way, they will attain the full awakening of buddhahood. Here we wish to lead sentient beings to make manifest through the power of meditation the fundamental innate clear-light mind that is freed from the coarser levels of mind, which are called “sorrow” here. By transcending these coarser levels of mind, they will access the innate clear-light mind and use it to realize emptiness directly. In this way, they will quickly become fully enlightened buddhas.

While reciting and contemplating this verse from the *Guhyasamāja Tantra*, recollect all sentient beings and pledge to attain awakening for their benefit. Dedicating all your lives for this purpose is truly worthwhile and rewarding.

### *The Bodhisattva Ethical Code in the Tibetan Tradition*

After receiving the bodhisattva vow, take it yourself each morning and evening by visualizing the buddhas and bodhisattvas in the space in front of you and reciting three times one of the verses for taking the bodhisattva vow, such those cited above.

The bodhisattva vow entails avoiding eighteen root downfalls and forty-six misdeeds. As explained in the Tibetan tradition, the Buddha taught the bodhisattva precepts at different times and they are dispersed among several Mahāyāna sūtras. Asaṅga collected many of these precepts and explained the four root downfalls and forty-six misdeeds in the “Chapter on Ethical Conduct” in his *Bodhisattva Grounds (Bodhisattvabhūmi)*. The lay practitioner Candragomin (seventh century) condensed this longer explanation and wrote *Twenty Verses on the Bodhisattva Ethical Code (Bodhisattva-saṃvara-viṃśaka)*. Śāntideva also searched the Mahāyāna sūtras and, drawing principally from the *Ākāśagarbha Sūtra*, he compiled a list of fourteen root precepts, which is found in his *Compendium of Training (Śikṣāsamuccaya)*. One of the fourteen is almost the same as the first one in Asaṅga’s list, so the duplication was removed and Śāntideva added the eighteenth root precept from the *Sūtra on Skillful Means (Upāyakauśalya Sūtra)*. In short, of the root precepts, numbers 1–4 were gathered by Asaṅga

and Candragomin, and numbers 5–18 by Śāntideva. All forty-six auxiliary precepts are from Asaṅga's and Candragomin's texts.

The ethical conduct of bodhisattvas consists of three aspects: refraining from destructive actions, gathering virtue, and benefiting sentient beings. The eighteen root downfalls pertain to the ethical conduct of refraining from destructive actions; the first thirty-four of the auxiliary precepts are included in the ethical conduct of gathering virtue, and the last twelve auxiliary precepts pertain to the ethical conduct of benefiting sentient beings. In this way, keeping all the bodhisattva precepts, both root and auxiliary, fulfills the three types of ethical conduct for bodhisattvas.

The precepts are described briefly below. I recommend studying them in depth; in that way, you will know all the factors involved in a complete downfall or misdeed so that you can avoid them. Asaṅga's *Bodhisattva Grounds* and Candragomin's *Twenty Verses* are good places to start.<sup>53</sup>

While only people who have taken the bodhisattva vow are capable of transgressing these precepts, you will benefit from training yourself to avoid these activities even if you haven't taken the vow. These precepts point out specific activities as well as states of mind to be aware of with mindfulness and introspective awareness. Reciting and studying the precepts helps us to identify which actions to practice and which to abandon. Contemplating the precepts informs us about how to direct our body, speech, and mind so that they are compassionate, wise, and peaceful, like those of a bodhisattva.

### ***The Eighteen Root Bodhisattva Precepts***

When a precept has more than one aspect, engaging just one aspect constitutes a transgression of the precept. Abandon these actions:

1. (a) Praising yourself or (b) belittling others out of jealousy for others' possessions, status, or good qualities or with attachment to receiving material offerings, praise, and respect.
2. (a) Not giving material aid or (b) not teaching the Dharma to those who are suffering and have no one else to turn to for help, because of miserliness. When we have the opportunity to help someone who is in deep suffering and is without friends or support by giving

material aid or explaining the Dharma to them, we should do it. This does not mean we have to give to every charity or every beggar.

3. (a) Not accepting someone's sincere apology, continuing to be angry at the person and verbally abusing them, or (b) angrily striking or injuring them. When someone genuinely wants to make amends, we should accept their apology and not continue to hold a grudge.
4. (a) Abandoning the Mahāyāna by saying that Mahāyāna texts are not the words of the Buddha or (b) teaching false doctrines that appear to be Mahāyāna teachings but are not. This involves thinking or saying that bodhicitta is impractical and bodhisattva practices are too vast and difficult to actually practice, and that therefore they could not have been taught by the Buddha, or propagating views that contradict the Dharma and encouraging others to practice false teachings. Doing either of these not only harms us but also has a deleterious effect on others' spiritual practice.
5. Taking things belonging to the (a) Buddha, (b) Dharma, or (c) Saṅgha. This entails taking back, robbing, or embezzling offerings given to any of the Three Jewels, using material given to either an ārya or the monastic community for your own purposes without permission, or borrowing and not returning things belonging to the Saṅgha.
6. Abandoning the holy Dharma by saying that texts that teach any of the three vehicles (the Śrāvaka, Solitary Realizer, or Bodhisattva Vehicles) are not the Buddha's word — for example, criticizing or declaring that any of the Fundamental Vehicle or Mahāyāna teachings are not the Buddha's word or despising the three baskets (Vinaya, Sūtra, and Abhidharma) of any of the three vehicles.
7. With anger, (a) taking the robes of a monastic, beating and imprisoning them, or (b) causing them to lose their ordination and return to lay life even if they have impure ethical conduct — for example, by saying that being ordained is useless.

8. Committing any of the five heinous actions: (a) killing your mother, (b) killing your father, (c) killing an arhat, (d) intentionally drawing blood from a buddha, or (e) causing a schism in the Saṅgha community by supporting and spreading sectarian views.
9. Holding wrong views that are contrary to the teachings of the Buddha, such as denying the existence of the Three Jewels, rebirth, or the law of cause and effect, and so forth. Holding such views makes having confidence in and practicing the Buddhadharma very difficult.
10. Destroying a (a) town, (b) village, (c) city, or (d) large area by means such as fire, bombs or other explosives, pollution, or black magic, with the intention to harm others. Today, this would be considered a hate crime.
11. Teaching emptiness to those whose minds are unprepared. If we teach emptiness to a person who is not well-trained in the fundamental teachings, especially in the law of karma and its effects, there is the danger that this person will misunderstand the meaning of emptiness and conclude that nothing exists. Teachers must check the mental capacity of students before instructing them.
12. Causing those who have entered the Mahāyāna to turn away from working for the full awakening of buddhahood and encouraging them to work merely for their own liberation from duḥkha. For example, discouraging someone who has interest in the Bodhisattva Vehicle by telling them that practicing the bodhisattva deeds for three countless great eons is too difficult or that there are too many sentient beings to lead them all to awakening. We recommend that they instead seek an arhat's liberation, and as a result of our words, they relinquish bodhicitta.
13. Causing others to abandon completely their prātimokṣa (monastic) precepts and embrace the Mahāyāna. Here we tell a monastic that there is not much benefit in keeping their monastic precepts and it would better if they disrobed and practiced the Mahāyāna. A transgression occurs if they follow this bad advice.
14. Holding and causing others to hold the view that the Fundamental Vehicle does not abandon attachment and other afflictions. For

- example, telling someone who follows the Fundamental Vehicle that they won't be able to eradicate all afflictions and attain liberation. This could cause the person to hold that erroneous view and give up their efforts to attain liberation.
15. Falsely saying that you have realized profound emptiness and that if others meditate as you have, they will realize emptiness and become as great and as highly realized as you. This hypocritical action involves lying and claiming to possess a realization of emptiness that we do not have.
  16. (a) Not giving offerings to the Three Jewels that others have given you to give to them, (b) fining a monastic and thereby obliging him or her to steal from the Three Jewels to pay the fine, or (c) accepting property stolen from the Three Jewels. These actions involve an abuse of power related to the Three Jewels.
  17. (a) Depriving those engaged in serenity meditation of their belongings or of offerings intended for them by giving them to those who are merely reciting texts, or (b) making harmful rules that interfere with monastics' Dharma practice.
  18. Abandoning aspiring bodhicitta by resolving to exclude even one sentient being from your bodhicitta. It is important to guard against deep anger and grudges toward any sentient being.

The eighteen root downfalls are closely related to our mental state. For sixteen of them, all four binding factors must be present to commit a defeat. For the other two root downfalls, numbers 9 and 18, only the action itself is required for a defeat to be committed. When a defeat is committed, the bodhisattva vow is lost. Unlike the prātimokṣa vow of a monastic, which cannot be retaken in this lifetime if a defeat has been committed, the bodhisattva vow may be restored in this lifetime by taking it again in the presence of a spiritual master or in the presence of the objects of refuge — the buddhas and bodhisattvas — visualized before you. However, just as it's better not to break our leg than to break it and have it reset, it is better not to commit any of the root downfalls or misdeeds than to engage in them and then purify.

The four binding factors are the following:



1. Not regarding our action as negative, or not caring that it is even though we recognize that the action is transgressing a precept.
2. Not wanting to abstain from the action in the future and wanting to do it again.
3. Being happy and rejoicing in the action.
4. Not having a sense of integrity or consideration during or after doing the action. Integrity is abandoning destructive actions because of respecting our principles and precepts. Consideration for others is abandoning harmful behavior because we don't want to adversely influence others or cause them to lose faith.

If the first binding factor is present — that is, the person doesn't regard the action as negative or even if they do, they don't care — and the other three factors are missing, a medium fault is committed. If the first factor is absent — that is, the person is aware that what they are doing is negative — and the other three factors are present, they commit a lesser misdeed.<sup>54</sup> If all four binding factors are not present, the bodhisattva vow is not lost. Nevertheless, the transgression inhibits the possibility of generating a great store of merit for awakening.

To prevent experiencing the results of transgressing a precept, it is important to purify by employing the four opponent powers — regret, making a determination to restrain from such actions in the future, taking refuge and generating bodhicitta, and engaging in remedial actions.<sup>55</sup> Prostrations to the thirty-five buddhas and the Vajrasattva meditation and recitation are excellent methods to purify the destructive karma created by transgressing precepts.

Only three conditions can make someone lose their bodhisattva vow: holding wrong views that are contrary to the teachings of the Buddha, abandoning aspiring bodhicitta, or committing a root downfall with all four binding factors complete. If none of these is present, the bodhisattva vow is not lost at death and is still present in our mindstream regardless of where we are reborn. Although we may forget the vow in our future life, we can retake it from a spiritual mentor to refresh our memory and our commitment to attaining full awakening in order to benefit all sentient beings.

### ***The Forty-Six Auxiliary Bodhisattva Precepts***

The first thirty-four auxiliary precepts that constitute the ethical conduct of gathering virtue are classified according to the six perfections. The seventh group is included in the ethical conduct of helping others.

The bodhisattva auxiliary precepts may be transgressed in three ways: (1) by being under the influence of manifest afflictions, in which case an afflictive fault will be incurred; (2) by being subject to conditions such as laziness or forgetfulness, in which case a nonafflictive fault is incurred; or (3) as a result of legitimate reasons such as sickness or attending to more important activities, in which case no fault is incurred.

Attachment and miserliness are the chief obstacles to practicing generosity. To eliminate obstacles to the perfection of generosity and obstacles to the ethical conduct of gathering virtuous actions, abandon these actions:

1. Not making offerings to the Three Jewels every day with your body, speech, and mind. These could be physical offerings (bowing, circumambulating), verbal offerings (reciting texts or prayers), or mental offerings (contemplating the teachings, having faith in the Three Jewels, remembering their good qualities). The transgression is heavier if it is done with a lack of respect or faith in the Three Jewels or delight in worldly activities.
2. Following thoughts of desire, dissatisfaction, attachment to material possessions, and attachment to signs of respect without trying to oppose them. This mental action is a transgression; if we don't oppose it, we'll soon find ourselves acting out these thoughts.
3. Disrespecting your elders (those who have taken the bodhisattva vow before you). Paying respect to those who have received the bodhisattva vow prior to you helps you to better abide in the vow.
4. Not answering sincerely asked questions that you are capable of answering. When people ask sincere questions — Dharma questions or ordinary questions — you should sincerely answer them. If you don't know the answer, don't humiliate the other person; simply tell them you don't know and refer them to someone who does.

5. Not accepting invitations from others out of anger, pride, or other negative thoughts. Not accepting their invitations denies them the opportunity to practice generosity. If you're busy or the invitation is to a place you'd better not go, it's fine to decline. Abandon declining invitations because you think you're too good to associate with those people or you're angry or spiteful.
6. Not accepting gifts of money, gold, or other precious substances that others offer to you. With anger or ill will, refusing a gift. If you're concerned that accepting an object will create hardship for the giver, that you may become attached to it, or that it was stolen from others, it's fine to decline. Normally, it's good to accept the gift so that the other person can create merit; you can then give it away to someone else.
7. Not giving the Dharma to those who desire it. Refusing to share the Dharma out of miserliness, anger, ill will, or jealousy is counter to cherishing others. Exceptions are if we don't know the teachings or if the person who requests is not a suitable vessel, has a bad motivation, or is disrespectful.

To eliminate obstacles to the perfection of ethical conduct, abandon these actions:

1. Forsaking or scorning a person who has engaged in many destructive actions or who has broken their precepts. If such a person sincerely apologizes or requests help to improve, you should accept. Refusing out of anger, vengefulness, or malice is a lack of compassion on your part.
2. Not acting according to your trainings as it would generate or sustain faith in others. We should keep well whatever prātimokṣa ethical restraints we have taken as well as all the bodhisattva precepts. Our behavior influences others and misbehavior or flagrant neglect of our prātimokṣa precepts could ruin someone's faith in the Dharma.
3. Doing only limited actions to benefit sentient beings, such as strictly keeping the Vinaya rules in situations when not doing so

would be of greater benefit to others. For example, not helping someone of the opposite sex who is injured if you're the only person there because it would involve touching them.

4. Not doing the seven nonvirtuous actions of body and speech with loving-compassion when circumstances deem it necessary to benefit others. This is for the spiritually advanced, people whose compassion is so great that they are willing to accept the karmic result of their action. However, spiritually advanced monastics should not transgress their root prātimokṣa precepts; if they truly feel it is necessary to do so, they should disrobe first. Do not misconstrue this bodhisattva precept to rationalize or justify doing negative actions.<sup>56</sup>
5. Acquiring requisites — food, shelter, clothing, or medicine — and other goods by any of the wrong livelihoods of hypocrisy, hinting, flattery, coercion, or bribery. Be honest and appreciative without selfishly exploiting others' generosity.
6. With attachment and excitement, engaging in amusement, entertainment, parties, talking and laughing loudly, and so forth without any beneficial purpose, or leading others to join in these distracting activities. If there is a useful purpose that benefits others without harming your practice, this is not a transgression.
7. Believing and saying that followers of the Mahāyāna should remain in cyclic existence and not try to attain liberation from afflictions. When it is said that bodhisattvas remain in saṃsāra to benefit sentient beings, it does not mean that they do not strive with effort to eradicate all obscurations and attain awakening. Bodhisattvas know that their attaining full awakening is more useful to sentient beings so they work diligently to do that. Ārya bodhisattvas may make emanations that work for the benefit of others in saṃsāric realms.
8. Not trying to overcome disrepute by either admitting our mistake or clarifying the situation if we did not err, or not avoiding actions that would cause us to have a bad reputation. If we have bad habits that provoke others' scorn or aversion, we must work to change them.

The motivation for having a good reputation is so that others will trust us and we can help them; it is not attachment to our reputation.

9. Not helping others to correct their destructive behavior when doing so would be helpful. If we can influence someone positively, we should try to. If we don't get involved and let others create negativity because we don't want to lose face or because it is inconvenient for us or we simply don't care, it is a transgression.

To eliminate obstacles to the perfection of fortitude, abandon these actions:

1. Returning insults, anger, beating, or criticism with insults and the like. Practicing fortitude by overcoming anger is crucial at these times. Learn the antidotes to anger;<sup>57</sup> practice them in meditation so that you are familiar with these new perspectives and can apply them when you encounter difficulties.
2. Neglecting those who are angry with us by not trying to pacify their anger. If we have acted in a way that provoked others' anger, even unintentionally, we should do what we can to assuage their anger and upset.
3. Not accepting someone's apology and remaining angry at them. The difference between this and the third root transgression presence is that the four binding factors are present for the root transgression.
4. Following thoughts of anger and not counteracting them by applying antidotes. If you are angry but don't try to calm yourself and instead let the anger increase or harbor resentment, it constitutes a transgression.

To eliminate obstacles to the perfection of joyous effort, abandon these actions:

1. Gathering a circle of friends or disciples because you desire respect or profit. We should not attempt to attract people if our motivation is bad — for example, wanting to impress them in order to receive offerings, become famous, or be respected. Rather, we should give

teachings, build monasteries, or work in Dharma centers with a sincere motivation to share the Dharma.

2. Not dispelling the three types of laziness: (1) sleeping excessively and lounging around, (2) being very busy doing worldly activities or harmful actions, and (3) indulging in self-pity or self-criticism that results in discouragement.
3. With attachment, indulging in idle talk and joking. Exceptions are chatting or joking for a good purpose — for example, to connect with someone who feels left out or depressed. Otherwise we should not waste time gossiping or engaging in meaningless conversations just to amuse ourselves.

To eliminate obstacles to the perfection of meditative stability, abandon these actions:

1. Not seeking proper instructions on how to develop concentration. Avoid doing so with pride, thinking you know everything about this subject.
2. Not abandoning the five hindrances: sensual desire, malice, lethargy and sleepiness, restlessness and regret, and doubt. Not learning how to overcome these or not trying to overcome them are transgressions.<sup>58</sup>
3. Becoming attached to the good qualities of meditative absorption after experiencing them. Attachment to the bliss or equanimity of meditative absorption can impede our cultivation of wisdom and attainment of awakening.

To eliminate obstacles to the perfection of wisdom, abandon these activities:

1. Abandoning the scriptures or paths of the Fundamental Vehicle as unnecessary for one following the Mahāyāna. Thinking or saying these teachings are not important or necessary for someone following the Bodhisattva Vehicle is a transgression. In fact, Mahāyāna practice is based on the practice of the Fundamental

- Vehicle. In addition, bodhisattvas must know and practice these teachings in order to teach Fundamental Vehicle practitioners.
2. Exerting effort principally in the Fundamental Vehicle while neglecting your own tradition, the Mahāyāna. Although we should study and practice the Fundamental Vehicle, beginning to favor it over the Mahāyāna is unwise; this slows our practice in the Mahāyāna and could eventually lead to abandoning bodhicitta.
  3. Exerting effort to learn or practice the treatises of non-Buddhists that are not proper objects of your endeavor, or studying them without good reason. Becoming so interested in non-Buddhist practices that we neglect studying, thinking, and meditating on the Mahāyāna is a transgression. However, we can study non-Buddhist philosophies to understand and help practitioners of these religions.
  4. Beginning to favor and take delight in the treatises of non-Buddhists while studying them for a good reason. We can study non-Buddhist treatises in order to refute wrong views, but we should not begin to favor these views or become attracted to them because doing so will impede our development of wisdom.
  5. Abandoning any part of the Mahāyāna because you don't understand it or think it is uninteresting. This includes criticizing or rejecting essential Mahāyāna teachings — such as the teachings on emptiness and bodhicitta — or thinking it's not possible to develop the wisdom realizing selflessness as taught by the Mahāyāna. This differs from the fourth root transgression, which entails saying a particular Mahāyāna teaching was not taught by the Buddha.
  6. Praising oneself or belittling others because of arrogance, anger, and so on. This differs from the first root transgression, which is done with the desire to receive gifts or respect.
  7. Not going to Dharma gatherings or teachings due to arrogance or anger. Exceptions are being sick, not knowing the teaching is occurring, suspecting the person teaching doesn't know the topic well, knowing our teacher would not want us to attend, being very learned on that topic already, or if it would interrupt our meditation.

8. Scorning, disrespecting, or being rude to our spiritual mentor, or not paying attention to the meaning of the teachings but picking at faults in the presentation. We need guidance from a living spiritual mentor. If we prefer books and neglect listening to or thinking about our spiritual mentors' teachings, we lose much benefit.

To eliminate obstacles to the ethical conduct of benefiting others, abandon these actions:

1. Motivated by anger or spite, not helping those who are in need — for example, those needing help in making a decision, settling a question, traveling, doing a task, protecting possessions, reconciling with a friend, planning events, and organizing celebrations. Exceptions are if we are ill, have another appointment, are busy doing something more important, lack the knowledge or ability to help or if the activity contradicts the Dharma, the person can complete the task themselves, others are already helping, it is better for the person's spiritual development not to receive help, our help would upset many other people, or the task is counter to our prātimokṣa precepts.
2. Avoiding taking care of the sick due to anger, arrogance, or other afflictions. Exceptions include if we are ill, are already helping another sick person, need to focus on our studies and practice or if the sick person is already receiving help or can do things themselves, we have helped for a long time and the person is getting better, or helping would create negative karma.
3. Not alleviating the sufferings of others out of anger, spite, pride, and so forth. This includes not helping travelers, the distressed, the blind, the deaf, the abused, those who are being trafficked, or those who have lost their job or social position. As people committed to compassion, when we are able to help others or alleviate their suffering, we should.
4. Not explaining what is proper conduct to those who are reckless. People who are careless and not conscientious can't discriminate the wholesome from the harmful. They make bad decisions or



engage in actions that are harmful to themselves or others. We should advise them skillfully and make them aware of the possible painful results of their actions. Exceptions are when helping would lead to difficulties, we lack the knowledge to help, a qualified person is already helping, or the person doesn't like us or isn't receptive to help.

5. Not repaying the kindness others have shown to us because of ill will or lack of conscientiousness. When people have helped us in some way or contributed to our welfare, we should have a kind attitude toward them and reciprocate when possible. Exceptions are when we lack the capacity to help, they don't want help, we try to help but aren't successful, and so forth.
6. Not relieving the sorrow of others, not consoling the distressed who are separated from loved ones or have lost their wealth or property as a result of theft or natural disasters. Exceptions are similar to those in previous precepts in this category.
7. Not giving material possessions to those in need — such as food, clothing, and other necessities to the poor and needy who ask for help — out of miserliness, anger, or other afflictions. Exceptions: we don't have what they need, they may misuse the gift, the substances they want are dangerous to them, or others would be harmed.
8. Not working for the welfare of your circle of friends, disciples, relatives, or employees by teaching them the Dharma and helping them materially if needed.
9. Not acting in accordance with the wishes of others if doing so does not bring harm to you or others. We should try to be pleasant, polite, and considerate of others' wishes and feelings and have genuine care for them.
10. Not praising those with good qualities. When others have good qualities, knowledge, or Dharma realizations, we should rejoice and praise them. Similarly, let's rejoice and praise them if they have specific practical skills or artistic or athletic talents and so forth.

11. Not taking corrective action when the situation demands it — for example, when someone is acting harmfully or behaving in a way detrimental to the Dharma or a Dharma community. When peaceful means do not help, this may entail using strong measures, such as criticizing the person in public or even having him arrested. If we allow them to continue their harmful actions when it is within our ability to stop them, we commit a transgression.
12. Not using psychic powers if you possess them, in order to stop others from doing destructive actions.

## REFLECTION

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1. Contemplate each precept of engaging bodhicitta. In what way does each one help guide your life as well as your thoughts, words, and actions in a good direction?
2. Would it help you in your Dharma practice to follow these bodhisattva precepts? You can try to do so without formally taking them. For example, pay special attention to live according to the first nine of the root precepts for a week, then do the same for the second nine.
3. Following that, focus on the precepts to eliminate obstacles to the perfection of generosity for a week. Do the same for each subsequent group of auxiliary bodhisattva precepts.

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### *A Kind Heart*

In short, developing a kind heart is most important for sustaining life on our planet and improving the quality of life. Needless to say, a kind heart is crucial for our individual spiritual progress. Without affection we will not be fulfilled personally, and without cooperation born from respecting others our communities will not be happy. Affection and compassion are part of our human nature; they go beyond religious precepts. When we are born, our parents' or caregiver's compassion nurtures us. When we die, we feel

comforted if a trusted, compassionate person is nearby. Any person, no matter what their religious or political beliefs, responds to kindness and compassion and shares their own affection and compassion with others.

We must increase this feeling in society, and doing that begins with ourselves. Then as individuals we come together to work for the welfare of all. Just as isolated fingers are not very powerful without the central palm, we human beings cannot function well without affection and compassion binding us together. People in every country and walk of life must generate and increase their feelings of kindness and interconnectedness with all others.

Compassion must be deliberately cultivated. It will not arise simply by stilling the mind and developing concentration. Nor will it arise by realizing emptiness, although understanding emptiness will deepen our compassion. We know that sentient beings suffer by the power of their ignorance, and this ignorance can be removed through realizing emptiness. However, we must still practice the causes of compassion as explained in this book, in order to generate it fully and maintain its strength within ourselves.

Some people understand emptiness first and then generate great compassion; others develop great compassion first and then realize emptiness. This is due to differences in their aptitudes. Although understanding compassion is easier than understanding emptiness, actually generating compassion in our mindstream is more difficult than realizing emptiness. These virtuous emotions and attitudes won't appear in us magically by praying to the Buddha. How worthwhile it is to put in effort to cultivate them!



## 8 | Love, Compassion, and Bodhicitta in Chinese Buddhism

**B**UDDHISTS OF MANY countries — China, Tibet, Vietnam, Korea, Japan, and so forth — share the Mahāyāna scriptures, teachings, and practices from India. Each tradition has its distinct teachings and interpretations as well. In this chapter, we’ll look at some of the ways that love, compassion, and bodhicitta are cultivated in Chinese Buddhism.

### *Love and Compassion — Prerequisites to Bodhicitta*

Chan (Zen) Buddhism says that all sentient beings possess buddha nature, which is by nature pure — “pure” meaning it transcends the duality of purity and impurity. When the buddha nature is fully manifested, that is buddha. However, being obscured by afflictions and defilements, the buddha nature is not presently manifest in sentient beings. Similarly, all sentient beings possess compassion, but our compassion is weak because it is obscured by grasping at self.

Love and compassion are prerequisites for actualizing bodhicitta, the “pure nature.” Without having love and compassion for all beings, the aspiration for buddhahood cannot arise, and generating this aspiration is necessary to enter the first of the five bodhisattva paths. Overcoming grudges and forgiving others is very difficult for ordinary people. Someone mired in resentment, spite, and anger has no wish to help the enemy who destroys their happiness. Love and compassion are the antidotes we must cultivate to dispel this hatred.

In Chinese Buddhism, several methods are used to cultivate love and compassion. One is meditation on the four immeasurables. Another is the

seven-round compassion meditation, which has its source in Vasubandhu's autocommentary on the *Treasury of Knowledge* (*Abhidharmakośa-bhāṣyam*) in the Chinese canon.<sup>59</sup> This meditation is so called because there are seven rounds and each round consists of seven steps. The seven steps involve contemplating our relationship with seven groups of people:

1. Our elders — parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles, teachers, bosses, people of higher rank, and those who were our elders in previous lives.
2. Our peers — siblings, classmates, friends, associates, coworkers, helpers, and those who were our peers in previous lives.
3. Our juniors — employees, students, children, and people whom we take care of.
4. Enemies of our elders in this and previous lives.
5. Our own enemies in this and previous lives.
6. Enemies of our juniors in this and previous lives.
7. Neutral people with whom we do not have a close relationship in this life.

*First step:* Recollect with fondness all the elders that you have known during this life. Recall each person who has taken care of you, raised you, taught you, guided you, protected you, and was a good role model. Take your time in doing this. Contemplate the many ways they influenced your life in a positive way. Then think: My elders have done so much for me. They have raised and taught me. They have risked their life for me. They have selflessly helped me, so it would seem natural that I would try to repay their kindness. However, I don't do that. Instead, I often argue with them, make them angry, and cause them to worry. I don't listen to them and I treat them rudely, without appreciating all they have done to help me during my life. I confess and regret this.

Feel this in your heart. Now think of all the merit you have accumulated and dedicate it to all of your elders: I dedicate my merit to these elders. I share with them all the merit I have created in my Dharma practice and all the merit from all virtuous deeds I have done. May my elders' suffering cease and may they attain full awakening.

Then think about all the elders you had in past lives: Just as I have parents and teachers in this life, I had parents and teachers in previous lives. I don't know who they are now because all of us have been reborn. Still, they were kind to me, so I dedicate my merit to return kindness to them whenever and however I meet them in this and all future lives.

*Second step:* Think in the same way regarding your peers — all the friends and companions you have had during your life. Remember your siblings and childhood friends as well as colleagues, team members, and associates. Reflect: My friends, siblings, and helpers have kept me company. They have befriended me and assisted me when I needed help. My colleagues have worked with me on projects; I worked and played together with fellow team members. It would only be natural for me to help them when they need help, to care about them and comfort them; but instead I have argued with them, competed with them, fought with them, called them names, been inconsiderate, and sometimes even jealous of their successes. On projects we did together, I claimed the success and ignored their contributions. I confess and regret this. Now I dedicate my merit to them. May their suffering be eliminated and may they attain full awakening.

Then contemplate the friends and peers you had in previous lives and think in the same way.

*Third step:* Recall your juniors. These people look to me for help, education, and guidance. They trust and respect me. I should help them and be patient with them, but instead I lose my temper or get frustrated. Neglecting to treat them fairly, I shout at them and use my authority to humiliate them or to force them to do things. I don't encourage and help them in the best way possible but make sure they are always subordinate to me. I confess and regret this. I dedicate all my merit to them. May they be free from all suffering and attain awakening.

After that, think in the same way with regard to your juniors or subordinates in previous lives.

*Fourth step:* Think about all the enemies of your elders — all the people who have created nonvirtuous karma with your elders and interrupted their happiness. Reflect: I should be compassionate toward these people, but instead I hold rancor toward them because they harmed the people I care about. I must release my negative feelings and wish them to be happy. May

they purify their harmful karma and act constructively. No matter who they are, whether they hurt or cheated my parents, may they be free from suffering and have happiness.

Similarly, if your elders mistreated people, think: May these people toward whom my elders felt malice be free from suffering and have happiness. I dedicate my merit to the enemies of my elders. May they be happy and attain awakening.

Then think in the same way toward those who were enemies of your elders in previous lives.

*Fifth step:* Consider your own enemies — people who have hurt you, interfered with your happiness, cheated you, lied to you, betrayed your trust, or taken advantage of you. This is the hardest group to generate love and compassion for because it concerns sentient beings who have hurt us directly. Recall all of these beings. Reflect on the suffering they experienced that made them think that hurting you would relieve their misery. Recall that they are saṃsāric beings who are controlled by ignorance, craving, and hatred.

In addition, think of all the people whom you have hurt. Reflect that your bad relationships with others are not just because they have hurt you but also because you have harmed them. Think: I forgive all those who have hurt me. I let go of all hostility toward them. I will not retaliate or do anything to further antagonize them. I regret any harmful words and actions I have inflicted on them. Feel this in your heart. Then think: I dedicate my merit to them, with the wish that they will practice the path and become buddhas. May I help them on the path. Sincerely dedicate your merit to them.

Then think of those who were your enemies in previous lives — whether they harmed you or you harmed them — regret the harm and dedicate your merit for their welfare.

*Sixth step:* Think similarly toward those who are the enemies of your children, employees, students, and so forth — people who have hurt your juniors or whom your juniors have hurt by bullying them, taking advantage of them, ridiculing them, and so forth. Think: I regret and relinquish any hard feelings I hold toward them. I dedicate my merit to them. May they be free of misery and have happiness.



Then do the same for the people who were enemies of your juniors in previous lives.

*Seventh step:* Contemplate neutral people — those who have neither helped nor harmed you, those you don't know, whom you pass in the street, or clerks in the store — all those with whom you don't have strong karmic relationships at this moment. Think: I dedicate my merit to them too. May they be happy and free from suffering. May they take refuge in the Three Jewels and become awakened. Think this as well for all those who were neutral in previous lives. In this step there is no confession or regret, because you have not interacted with them. Of course those who are strangers and neutral now could have been friends or enemies in previous lives, and vice versa.

Contemplating the seven steps in this way constitutes one round. The second round is thinking in the same way toward these seven groups, this time in reverse order beginning with neutral people and ending with your elders. The third round is done by going through the seven steps again, this time from your elders to neutral people. The meditation is done, back and forth, in this way seven times, making it the seven-round compassion meditation.

At the conclusion, meditate on emptiness. During the seven-round compassion meditation you think a lot, so at the end make sure to turn the mind to emptiness. Empty your mind of all thoughts, ideas, and grasping at true existence, and keep pure awareness.

Take your time contemplating each step. Really feel others' kindness toward you and your responsibility toward them. Regret the mistakes, misunderstandings, and bad decisions made in these relationships. Cultivate love and compassion for these people and dedicate your merit for their well-being in this and all future lives as well as for their awakening. As you become more familiar with the steps, you will sometimes be able to do them more quickly but with the same depth of feeling. Anyone who practices this compassion contemplation for some months will definitely see a change in their life and relationships with sentient beings.

The four immeasurables and the seven-round compassion meditation are the two standard meditations used to develop love and compassion for sentient beings. The seven-round compassion meditation principally deals

with human beings, whereas the four immeasurables concern all sentient beings from all six realms. The four immeasurables covers not only this world system but also all world systems in all directions throughout infinite space. For this reason, the seven-round compassion meditation is usually taught first, followed by the four immeasurables.

## REFLECTION

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1. Do the seven-round compassion meditation as explained above by contemplating with affection your relationships with your elders, peers, and juniors. Think of their kindness and love for you.
  2. Regret when you have treated them poorly.
  3. Express the loving and compassionate wishes and aspirations you have for them.
  4. Reflect on your relationships with the enemies of your elders, your own enemies, and the enemies of your juniors. Release any anger you may have toward them and wish them well.
  5. Reflect on your relationship with neutral people and wish them well.
  6. You may want to do purification practice to clear any destructive karma you created with these seven groups of people. This removes obstacles to having sincere positive aspirations for their well-being.
  7. Rest your mind in feelings of love and compassion for sentient beings.
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### *Causes and Conditions to Generate Bodhicitta*

In “On Generating the Resolve to Become a Buddha,” the sixth chapter in Nāgārjuna’s *Treatise on the Ten Grounds (Daśabhūmikavibhāṣā)*, he speaks of seven causes and conditions that facilitate generating bodhicitta: the

influence of a tathāgata, observing that the Dharma is on the verge of destruction in our world and wanting to protect it, feeling compassion for sentient beings, receiving instructions from a bodhisattva on how to generate bodhicitta, observing the conduct of a bodhisattva and wanting to emulate it, being inspired after being generous, and being delighted by seeing the signs and marks of a buddha.<sup>60</sup> These are different ways through which a person may generate bodhicitta, depending on his or her disposition and tendencies.

### ***1. The Influence of a Tathāgata***

Through his supernatural powers, a buddha is able to see that a person's roots of virtue are sufficiently mature that they are capable of taking on the commitment to become a fully awakened buddha. That buddha then instructs them, "Child of a good family, come forth. You are now capable of bringing forth the resolve to liberate beings from duḥkha and afflictions." In this way the person generates bodhicitta.

### ***2. Observing that the Dharma Is on the Verge of Destruction in Our World and Wanting to Protect It***

Thinking about the vast and profound qualities that the Buddha practiced and the hardships he endured as a bodhisattva in order to attain awakening for our benefit, feel grateful and indebted to the Buddha. Be aware that as a result of the degeneration of sentient beings' minds, these precious teachings are on the verge of vanishing in the world. Resolve to plant firm roots of virtue and to generate bodhicitta in order to cause the Dharma to be preserved for countless eons in the future.

### ***3. Feeling Compassion for the Duḥkha of Sentient Beings***

Observe sentient beings beset by afflictions, drowning in cyclic existence, experiencing terror and adversity as they cycle in the six realms, separating from their loved ones, encountering happiness infrequently, taking one rebirth after another without any foreseeable end, and having no protector. Find this unbearable and, spurred by compassion, proclaim, "I shall become a protector for those who have no protector. I shall become a refuge for those who have no refuge. I will become one on whom those with no one to

rely on may depend. Once I have succeeded in making my way across saṃsāra, I shall endeavor to bring beings across as well. Once I have gained liberation, I shall liberate these beings as well. Once I have succeeded in gaining peace, I shall see that all beings are established in peace as well.”

#### ***4. A Bodhisattva Instructs Us in Generating Bodhicitta***

There are those who, simply by hearing others talk about bodhicitta and full awakening, generate bodhicitta. Sometimes it could happen that they later lack instructions on bodhicitta and the perfections and adopt the path to arhatship instead. But before they attain the stage of the fortitude of the nonarising of phenomena (*anutpattika-dharma-kṣānti*) of the śrāvaka path, they meet an ārya bodhisattva on the seventh to tenth grounds, who knows their faculties and disposition. The Buddha or bodhisattva will then instruct these people again on bodhicitta and the bodhisattva path and, due to the ripening of their roots of virtue, they will again abide in the bodhisattva path upon realizing the stage of the fortitude of the nonarising of phenomena, which is attained with the eighth bhūmi.

#### ***5. Observing the Conduct of a Bodhisattva and Wanting to Emulate It***

Some people observe how bodhisattvas practice and want to emulate it. They see that bodhisattvas proceed on the path with the protection of compassion, engage in countless beneficial deeds without self-centeredness toward their own body and life, have vast and profound learning and meditation experience, are sources of protection for those afflicted with the misery of cyclic existence, and possess pure minds. Being inspired by the example of these great bodhisattvas, these people think: I, too, want to generate bodhicitta and attain unsurpassed awakening for the welfare of all sentient beings.

#### ***6. Inspiration after Being Generous***

Some people, when making offerings to the Buddha or the Saṅgha, call to mind the great bodhisattvas of the past who excelled in the perfection of generosity. Being inspired by their example, they immediately generate bodhicitta and then dedicate the merit from their generous action to full awakening.

### ***7. Delight upon Seeing the Signs and Marks of a Buddha***

Some people hear about those who have directly seen the thirty-two signs or eighty marks of a buddha. These are physical signs, such as the imprint of the Dharma wheel on a buddha's palms and the soles of his feet, the crown protrusion on his head, and the golden color of his body. They become delighted and inspired by seeing these, and think: I, too, wish to possess these exquisite physical signs and marks so I will practice what these buddhas have practiced and generate the same realizations as they have. In this way, they generate bodhicitta.

People may generate bodhicitta as a result of any of these seven causes and conditions. However, only those who have generated bodhicitta by means of the first three ways — (1) instruction by a buddha who understands their faculties, (2) respecting the Dharma and wishing to protect it in the world, or (3) having strong compassion for sentient beings experiencing duḥkha — will certainly be successful in attaining full awakening. This is because the roots of virtue created by generating bodhicitta in these three ways are very deep.

Those who generate bodhicitta in any one of the other four ways — (1) instruction by a bodhisattva who influences them to generate bodhicitta, (2) having observed the practice of bodhisattvas and been inspired by them, (3) having performed an action of generosity that made them recall bodhisattvas' virtues, or (4) having seen or heard about the physical signs on a buddha's body — are not certain to be successful because their roots of virtue are not firmly established. However, those who practice well will be successful.

### ***Ten Factors to Spur the Generation of Bodhicitta***

Sheng'an Shixian (1686–1734), a meditation master and pure-land patriarch, wrote *Exhortation to Resolve on Buddhahood*, in which he expressed the importance of generating bodhicitta, urged the reader to generate it, and gave ten points for reflection to spur the generation of bodhicitta. But first, to encourage us to cultivate bodhicitta purely and perfectly, he discussed eight distinctions in the characteristics of

practitioners' aspirations: deviant or correct, genuine or false, great or small, and one-sided or perfect.

Some practitioners do not examine their mind and are very concerned with external matters. Seeking wealth, fame, or sense pleasures, their aspiration is *deviant*. On the other hand, some practitioners are not attached to personal profit, reputation, and pleasure either in this life or the next. Their generation of bodhicitta is *correct*.

We should constantly direct our mind to the Buddha's path and try to benefit sentient beings in every thought by teaching and guiding them. Hearing of all the perfections that need to be practiced for countless eons, we should not become intimidated and retreat but should go forward with courage and confidence. Observing the depth of sentient beings' defilements and the difficulty in teaching and guiding them, we must abandon discouragement and not give in to exhaustion. Like someone climbing a high mountain or building a huge stūpa, we must complete the path to its end. Such bodhicitta is *genuine*.

On the other hand, not purifying our destructive karma or the downfalls from transgressing precepts, being internally confused while acting as if we were clear, undertaking projects with excitement but not completing them, having virtuous thoughts that are mixed with attachment to wealth and reputation, following the virtuous path but remaining defiled with destructive karma — generating bodhicitta on such a basis is called *false*.

When we resolve to maintain our bodhicitta motivation, to keep the bodhisattva vow until all sentient beings are awakened, and to practice until we attain awakening, this is a *great* resolve. On the other hand, if we see cyclic existence like a prison and aspire only for our own liberation without caring for the situation of others, this resolve is *small*.

Thinking that the Buddha's path is separate from and outside of our own mind, we may aspire to become awakened and lead others to awakening but remain attached to our own merit, knowledge, and views. Such resolve is *one-sided*. On the other hand, when we realize that others want happiness and not suffering, just as we do, and that all of us are empty of inherent existence; when we realize that our nature is in line with the Buddha's path and thus aspire to actualize it; and when we see that no phenomenon exists independent of and unrelated to the mind, we are going in the correct

direction. When we then generate bodhicitta and take the bodhisattva vow with a mind supported by the wisdom realizing emptiness, when we engage in the perfections with a mind grounded in the understanding of emptiness and do not view emptiness itself as existing by its own characteristics, then our generation of bodhicitta is *perfect*.

By understanding these eight distinctions, we know what constitutes bodhisattva practice and what does not. We must then continuously examine our mind to see if our bodhicitta is deviant or correct, genuine or false, great or small, one-sided or perfect. With mindfulness of this we should then proceed to rid ourselves of the deviant, false, small, and one-sided and cultivate the correct, genuine, great, and perfect. A bodhisattva practice done in this way will certainly be successful.

The ten points for reflection follow. The first five concern mindfulness of the kindness that we have received from the Buddha, our parents, teachers, benefactors, and all sentient beings. Recognizing that we have been the recipient of tremendous kindness inspires in us the wish to repay that kindness, and the most effective way to do that is to generate bodhicitta and practice the bodhisattva path. The remaining five points support and direct our bodhicitta.

### ***1. Mindfulness of the Extreme Kindness of the Buddha***

Many eons ago, the person who was to become Śākyamuni Buddha with great compassion generated bodhicitta and practiced the path until he attained buddhahood. Where would we be had he not done this for our sake? How would we learn the Dharma and practice the path in this degenerate age, had the Buddha not vowed to lead us on the sacred path?

When we created destructive karma, the Buddha experienced agony because we were creating the cause for our own suffering. He tried to lead us to virtue with his skillful means, but we were often too obtuse, skeptical, and cynical to accept the teachings or to have confidence in them. When we floundered in unfortunate rebirths, the Buddha was overwhelmed with compassion and wanted to take on our destructive karma and suffering so that we would not have to experience them. However, our karma was so heavy that he could not free us from this torment. When we finally gained a

human rebirth, he tried to lead us in the virtuous path and his loving attention never strayed from its focus on us.

When the Buddha was alive, we were sunken in unfortunate rebirths. Now that we have a precious human life, he is in parinirvāṇa. Due to our previously created destructive actions, we have been born in this degenerate time. Yet, due to constructive karma, we have become the Buddha's followers and have the opportunity to practice the Dharma. Due to mental obscurations, we cannot see Śākyamuni Buddha now, but due to virtuous karma and open-mindedness, we can hear the teachings. Understanding the Buddha's kindness and the rare opportunity we have at present, let's generate bodhicitta, accomplish the bodhisattva path, attain buddhahood, and liberate sentient beings from cyclic existence. If we don't do this to repay the kindness of the Buddha, then how else can we repay it?

## ***2. Mindfulness of the Kindness of Our Parents***

Our parents gave us this body, which is the support for us to practice the Dharma. They spent years caring for us when we were unable to take care of ourselves. They taught us basic living skills: how to speak, eat, and clean ourselves. They taught us social skills: how to get along with others, deal with the frustration of not getting what we want, and work as a member of a team. If our parents were not in a position to do these things for us because of poverty, illness, or their own confusion and limitations, they made sure that others cared for and guided us. They had great hopes and wishes for us to be happy and successful. Yet we often repaid their kindness with self-centeredness, not caring how our actions affected them, not appreciating what they had done for us but just expecting more.

If we do not put energy into generating bodhicitta, all their sacrifice and efforts for our sake would be wasted. But if we study and practice the Mahāyāna, we will be able to liberate our present parents, all those who have been our parents in previous lives, and everyone's parents. To guide them over the abyss of cyclic existence to the security and peace of awakening — what a wonderful thing to be able to do!

## ***3. Mindfulness of the Kindness of Our Teachers and Senior Practitioners***



Those who teach us skills useful in the secular world and especially those who teach us the Dharma have been and continue to be immeasurably kind to us. Everything we know has come from the kindness of our teachers. Without them we would not know how to read and write, nor would we have basic ethical values. Our behavior would be like that of an animal.

Our opportunity to learn the Buddha's teachings is due to the effort of our spiritual mentors and senior practitioners. They guide us on the path, encouraging us when we feel tired, steering us in the right direction when wrong views or bad behavior threaten our practice, and practicing patience when we are stubborn, rebellious, or ungrateful. The fact that we have been able to take refuge and the five lay precepts, to become monastics, to take the bodhisattva precepts — all this is due to the kindness of our Dharma teachers. Whatever transformation in our thoughts and behavior has occurred since we started to practice the Dharma can be traced to their instructions and guidance. What better way to repay their kindness than to tame our mind and train in bodhicitta so that we will be able to humbly share the Dharma with others just as they have shared it with us?

#### ***4. Mindfulness of the Kindness of Benefactors***

Those who support us so that we can learn and practice the Dharma are very generous indeed. Monastics do not earn wages. We are completely dependent on kind benefactors who provide us with the four requisites of life: food, clothing, shelter, and medicine. We should live simply as part of our practice of developing contentment and counteracting attachment in order not to inconvenience those who so kindly support us.

Our benefactors work hard all day, often laboring overtime and becoming stressed as a result of their job. Yet, out of the kindness of their hearts, they share what they have earned with us. We do not live in poverty as many people in the world do. We are in a position to choose to moderate our consumption and care for the planet. Taking benefactors' support for granted is certainly not appropriate. Having a nicer living situation with better food and clothes than our supporters would be repugnant to the wise; it is the path to an unfortunate rebirth for us and deprives the kind benefactors of benefiting from our Dharma practice. The only appropriate

way to repay their kindness is to keep our precepts well, generate bodhicitta, and fulfill the collections of merit and wisdom for their sake.

### ***5. Mindfulness of the Kindness of Sentient Beings***

All sentient beings have been our loved ones in so many previous lives. How do we know that the crawling and flying insects we see were not once our parents? Or that the meat we eat or leather we wear is not the flesh and skin of our friends? Our dear ones have changed form since we knew them as friends and relatives in previous lives, so we may not instantly recognize them. If a child was separated from her parents, she may not recognize them when she encounters them as an adult. But once someone has pointed out to her, “Those people are your parents who cared for you with so much love many years ago,” her feeling of familiarity will return and she will be overjoyed to be reunited with them. Similarly, when the Buddha points out to us that all sentient beings have been our loved ones many times in previous lives, we lose our sense of distance and hesitation and come to cherish them again.

Some of our dear ones may now be screaming in torment in the hell realms, starving as hungry ghosts, or befuddled and used as beasts of burden in the animal realm. Surely they would appreciate our help. Were it not for the Buddha informing us about this, we would be oblivious to their situation. Thus, we must remain ever-mindful that the sentient beings around us — enemies included — have been our dear ones and have the potential to become buddhas in the future. We must continuously contemplate how to benefit them and be aware of our responsibility to do so. Thinking of all the past benefits we have received from sentient beings stimulates us to care for them in return by giving rise to the bodhi mind.

### ***6. Mindfulness of the Suffering of Repeated Birth and Death in Cyclic Existence***

Under the influence of afflictions and karma, we go up and down in saṃsāra — sometimes born amidst the delights of the celestial realms, other times trapped in the pain and agony of the hell realms. Once a seed of destructive karma has ripened, we cannot purify it; we are left with experiencing its result. At this time, we may realize that our misery is

brought about from our own harmful actions and regret them, but there is no possibility to go back and undo them. Later, when our immediate suffering has ceased, we forget about the law of karma and its effects, going back to our old ways of seeking pleasure in the present moment, lacking conscientiousness regarding the effects of our actions on others or on our own future experiences. With this mindset, we will undoubtedly create more nonvirtuous karma, leading to more misery. Seeking happiness, we slaughter animals to fulfill our desire for meat, yet these beings have been our kind mothers and friends in previous lives. Although we seek security and safety, there is none to be found as long as ignorance, afflictions, and karma rule our lives.

If we truly understood our relationships with others and the law of karma, we would feel horrified by our many destructive actions. If we actually understood what being in saṃsāra meant, we would laugh at the tiny problems our afflictive mind makes into catastrophes on a daily basis. Our ignorance causes us to believe we are happy, or if we are not, to believe that simply improving our situation in saṃsāra will bring the relief we long for. How wrong we are! People who don't know the Buddha's teachings have difficulty grasping this, as do people who are obsessed with the happiness of only this life; they live and die in confusion. Their wealth and reputation cannot protect them at the time of death, when their agony can be immense. For a tortoise to have its shell ripped off is less anguish than for those whose minds are immersed in ignorance and craving to separate from their bodies at death.

Having a precious human life at this moment, we are unbelievably fortunate. Yet this life goes by so quickly. As youngsters, we just want to play; any talk of karma or future lives seems irrelevant to us. As young adults, desire takes over the body and mind, and we work hard to procure and protect the pleasures of this life. But in the blink of an eye, we are old, our skin dried out, our muscles withering, our mind forgetful. While we think we can control things, we actually have little control over our own body and mind, let alone the people and environment around us. If the tears we have shed in previous lives were amassed, they would be greater than the ocean. If the bodies we have taken in saṃsāra were piled up, they would fill the universe.

Thinking about this, we see that cyclic existence is a desperate situation. Without the Buddha's teachings, where would we be? We would have no knowledge of how to liberate ourselves, let alone liberate others, from this wretched situation. It is in this life — and with our precious human life — that we have the opportunity to attain buddhahood. If we do not make use of this rare and precious chance, when will it come again? Using this special situation wisely is of utmost, long-lasting importance. We must aspire to liberate ourselves and all sentient beings from the broad and deep ocean of cyclic existence through practicing bodhicitta.

### ***7. Respect Your Own Buddha Nature***

The nature of our mind is no different from the nature of the Buddha's mind. Yet we are still struggling for pleasure amidst confusion while Śākyamuni Buddha enjoys unending bliss. Why is it that the Buddha has compassion, wisdom, and superknowledges, and is adorned with the ten perfections, while we are confused by wrong views and have a storehouse of afflictions and destructive karma? This occurred because even though the person who is now the Buddha was once drowning in saṃsāra, he took hold of the life raft of the Dharma, practiced it, and attained full awakening. Meanwhile we neglected the precious jewel of our beautiful buddha nature, opting to wallow in the mud of saṃsāra. Considering that the nature of the Buddha's mind and the nature of our mind is the same, what a pitiful situation we have allowed ourselves to remain in!

Meanwhile, the jewel of our buddha nature has been lying unnoticed in the mud too long. We must appreciate and respect this jewel, clean it, and put it on top of the canopy of awakening where its radiance will shine everywhere. Let's gather together the force of our joyous effort and do it! In the process, may we never denigrate or ignore our buddha nature and may we never be ungrateful for the Buddha's teachings. Unfolding the true beauty of our buddha nature involves aspiring for full awakening for the benefit of all sentient beings, so may we quickly give rise to this illustrious mind that is the cause of all happiness in saṃsāra and nirvāṇa.

### ***8. Think of the Disadvantages of Nonvirtuous Karma, Confess, and Purify It***

We boldly take monastic ethical restraints and the bodhisattva vow in our spiritual mentors' presence but are cowardly when it comes to keeping them. We much prefer seeking what we want when we want it to practicing the path to awakening, and in doing so, we blithely transgress our precepts and commit other nonvirtues without a second thought. But when it comes to confessing and purifying these transgressions, laziness sets in and we lack the time and energy to do it. If we take the time to consider it, we will see that the accumulation of destructive karma in each day is enormous and the accumulation of virtuous karma rather feeble. Faced with this distressing state of affairs and the suffering it will bring us and others, let's generate bodhicitta as the supreme method of confessing and purifying this mountain of destructive karma created by our self-centered mind and self-grasping ignorance.

### ***9. Aspire to Be Born in the Pure Land***

While practice in our polluted world is difficult — we are constantly buffeted here and there due to afflictions and karma — in a pure land all conditions are in place to be able to practice the Dharma with ease and to become a buddha. While many buddhas have pure lands, Amitābha Buddha's pure land is especially suited for us because we can be reborn there without having realized emptiness. Merit and virtue are needed to be born in Sukhāvātī, Amitābha Buddha's pure land, and there are no better methods to accumulate them than concentrating on Amitābha, his name, and his excellent qualities, and by generating bodhicitta. The root of gaining mindfulness and concentration on Amitābha is the aspiration to become a buddha. Without this indispensable ingredient of bodhicitta, we could practice mindfulness of Amitābha but it will not be successful. But once we have generated bodhicitta, mindfulness of Amitābha will prevent it from declining. Bodhicitta establishes the foundation for further realizations of the path. For those who have generated bodhicitta, dying will not be fearful and birth in the pure land will occur. However, if we aspire to be born in the pure land, but let the mind wander throughout the universe and do not cultivate bodhicitta even the slightest, even reciting Amitābha Buddha's name eon after eon will not bring about our desired goal.

If we generate bodhicitta, then even if we are not born in Amitābha's pure land, our future lives will be spent meaningfully aiding sentient beings in this world. In addition, completing the collections of merit and wisdom will occur without stress or obstacles.

### ***10. Pray for the Buddha's Teachings to Remain in Our World Purely and Forever***

The Buddha attained awakening for our benefit, yet we lacked the good fortune to be born while he was alive. Fortunately, the Buddha's liberating teachings still exist in our world. But despite this, the minds of human beings cling to wrong views and are addicted to the eight worldly concerns, even using the Dharma itself to bolster our prestige or bring us wealth. Nowadays, people are so enamored of worldly success that it is difficult to even hear the words *Buddha*, *Dharma*, and *Saṅgha* — our supreme refuge. Sheng'an Shixian writes (ERB 67):

If, as a child of the Buddha, I am unable to repay such kindness — inwardly there shall be no benefit for myself and outwardly there shall be no benefit for others. It shall then be the case that, while alive, I provide no benefit to anyone, and after I die, I afford no benefit to those who come along afterward. In such a case, though the heavens may extend high above, still they remain unable to give me cover. Though the earth may be massive, it remains unable to support me. Then, if the phrase “a person possessed of the most extremely grave karmic crimes” does not apply to me, to whom could it even be applied at all?

On account of this, I feel unbearable pain and discern that there is no way to escape [from this indictment]. Suddenly, I forget my inferior qualities and immediately generate the great resolve [for buddhahood]. Although I remain unable to turn back the Dharma-ending process dominating this era, I nonetheless will remain determined to strive to guard and maintain right Dharma throughout [this and all] my future lifetimes.

He then describes going to a bodhimaṇḍa — here referring to a temple or monastery — repenting and taking the forty-eight precepts,<sup>61</sup> “wherein each and every precept is devoted to bringing beings across to liberation.” He calls on each of us to give rise to bodhicitta so that, thought after thought, our mind is focused on buddhahood. He urges us to practice the bodhisattva path and be reborn in Sukhāvātī, Amitābha’s pure land. Having attained awakening there, we must return to this suffering world to spread the light of the Buddha’s teachings, to purify the Saṅgha, and to liberate all beings. Pointing out that we have a precious human life with the eight freedoms and ten fortunes that provides the excellent conditions for generating bodhicitta, Sheng’an Shixian challenges us, “If you do not now on this very day proceed to generate this great resolve, then for which more suitable day [could you possibly] be waiting?” He encourages us to unite with like-minded people in generating bodhicitta (ERB 71):

Those who have not generated it may now generate it. Those who have already generated it may now cause it to develop more fully. Those who have already caused it to develop more fully may now cause it to remain perpetually manifest.

Sheng’an Shixian continues by counseling us:

Do not, fearing difficulty, shrink back in timidity. Do not, regarding this matter as easy, take it but lightly. Do not, seeking a swift conclusion, fail to make a long-enduring commitment. Do not, through indolence, remain bereft of heroic bravery. Do not, on account of being shiftless and spiritless, fail to incite yourself to bold action. Do not, drifting along in customary fashion, continue to put it off for another time. Do not, judging yourself to be foolish and dull-witted, continue depriving yourself of resolve. Do not, possessing only shallow roots [of virtue], judge yourself to be an inferior person with no share in this . . .

Do not claim that a single thought is insignificant. Do not hold the opinion that “empty vows” are devoid of any

benefit. If your mind abides in truths, then your endeavors will be genuine. If your vows are vast in their scope, then your practice will be profound . . .

As for what we have vowed to achieve, it is for all of us together to gain rebirth in the Pureland, for all of us together to see Amitābha Buddha, for all of us together to engage in the teaching of beings, and for all of us together to perfect the right awakening.

Developing bodhicitta is not easy, but it is the most worthwhile thing we can do. We must be persistent and patient, practicing with enthusiasm and fortitude without allowing our mind to descend into despondency. Worrying about difficulties saps energy; remaining stuck in the past has no purpose. But if we have found a qualified Mahāyāna spiritual mentor, correct teachings, and virtuous Dharma friends, we must make use of this rare chance and do what will lead to the highest happiness for ourselves and all others. Having planted the seed of bodhicitta in our mind, it will sprout and its roots will grow deeper day by day. When we realize the nonarising (unborn, unproduced — emptiness) and attain the fortitude of the nonarising of phenomena, all concerns about the path being difficult will vanish.

The bodhicitta is so precious that we must do our utmost to generate, enhance, and protect it. The *Flower Ornament Sūtra* advises:

Even if a wheel of fire about your head  
is wildly whirling and flaming,  
just do not abandon your bodhi mind,  
even amidst such strong suffering.

When we suffer, we give up what is not essential for our well-being in order to focus on what is important. The bodhicitta is tremendously important for the well-being of ourselves and all others; we must never relinquish it. To the contrary, if we reflect on bodhicitta at times of suffering, our mental suffering will decrease, and by generating compassion our physical



suffering will be transformed so that it becomes meaningful on the path to awakening.

## REFLECTION

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Contemplating the ten factors will spur our generation of bodhicitta.

1. The first five concern mindfulness of the kindness that we have received from the Buddha, our parents, teachers, benefactors, and all sentient beings. Reflect on these until you recognize that you've been the recipient of tremendous kindness in this and previous lives.
2. Reflect on sentient beings' suffering of repeated birth and death in cyclic existence.
3. Generate respect for your own buddha nature.
4. Think of the disadvantages of nonvirtuous karma, confess, and purify it.
5. Aspire to be born in the pure land.
6. Pray for the Buddha's teachings to remain in our world purely and forever.
7. Generate bodhicitta and feel its importance for the happiness of sentient beings and for the continued existence of the Dharma in our world.

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### *Vasubandhu on Cultivating Bodhicitta and the Bodhisattva Vow*

Vasubandhu (c. 300), who is highly regarded in China, wrote the *Treatise on the "Generating the Bodhi Resolve Sūtra,"* in which he discusses the benefits of bodhicitta, the way to generate it in our mind, and the establishment of the bodhisattva vow. This is followed by chapters on each

of the six perfections, two chapters on the view of reality — emptiness and signlessness — and dedication of merit.

Vasubandhu clarifies that bodhicitta is not for the faint-hearted (VTBV 23):

Because empty space is endless, beings too are endless. Because beings are endless, the bodhisattva's generation of the resolve [to attain buddhahood] is equivalent in its vastness to the realms of [all] beings. As for the realms of beings, they are limitless.

Bodhisattvas who have generated bodhicitta but whose wisdom of contemplation is not yet moistened by deep samādhi in the dhyānas must set forth correct vows. Doing this will enable them to draw in followers and deepen their practice of bodhicitta and the perfections. This practitioner should proclaim, “I seek to realize the unsurpassed awakening and to rescue and liberate everyone without exception so that every one of them is caused to reach all the way to nirvāṇa without remainder.” Vasubandhu continues (VTBV 39–43):

“Therefore, in the initial generation of bodhicitta, it is the great compassion which is foremost. It is on account of the mind of compassion that one becomes able to generate ten ever more superior great right vows. What are those ten? They are:

1. Regarding those roots of virtue I have planted in previous lives and in this present body, I pray that all of these roots of virtue may be bestowed upon all of the boundlessly many beings and dedicated to the unsurpassed bodhi (full awakening). May it be that these vows of mine shall grow in each succeeding thought-moment, shall be produced again in each successive lifetime, shall always be bound to my mind, shall never

be forgotten, and shall be guarded and retained by *dhāraṇīs*.<sup>62</sup>

2. Having already dedicated these roots of virtue to bodhi, I pray that on account of these roots of goodness, no matter where I may be reborn, I shall always be able to make offerings to all buddhas and shall definitely never be reborn in a land where there is no buddha.
3. Having already succeeded in being reborn in the lands of the buddhas, I pray that I shall always be able to draw personally close to them, shall follow along and serve them in every way, shall remain as close to them as a shadow to a body, and shall never become distantly separated from the buddhas even for the briefest of moments.
4. Having already succeeded in drawing personally close to the buddhas, I pray that they will then speak Dharma for my sake in accordance with whatsoever is appropriate for me. May I then straightaway perfect the bodhisattva's five superknowledges.<sup>63</sup>
5. Having already perfected the bodhisattva's five superknowledges, I pray that I shall thereupon be able to reach a penetrating understanding of conventional truth together with its widespread artificial designations; that I shall also then completely comprehend, in accordance with its genuine nature, the foremost ultimate truth; and that I will gain right Dharma wisdom.
6. Having already realized the right Dharma wisdom, I pray that, free of any thoughts of aversion, I shall then explain it for the sake of beings, instructing them in the teachings, benefiting them, delighting them, and causing them all to develop an understanding of it.
7. Having already become able to create an understanding [of right Dharma] in beings, I pray that, availing myself of the spiritual power of the buddhas, I shall be able to go to all worlds without exception everywhere

throughout the ten directions, making offerings to the buddhas, listening to and accepting right Dharma, and extensively drawing in beings [to the Dharma].

8. Having already received right Dharma in the abodes of the buddhas, I pray that I shall thereupon be able to turn the wheel of the pure Dharma in accordance with it. May it then be that all beings of the worlds in the ten directions who hear me proclaim the Dharma or who merely hear my name shall then straightaway succeed in abandoning all afflictions and in generating bodhicitta.
9. Having already become able to cause all beings to generate bodhicitta, I pray that I may constantly follow along with them, protecting them, ridding them of whatever is unbeneficial, bestowing on them countless sorts of happiness, relinquishing my life and wealth for their sakes, drawing in beings, and taking on the burden of right Dharma.
10. Having already become able to take on the burden of right Dharma, I pray that, even though I shall then practice in accordance with right Dharma, my mind shall nonetheless have nothing whatsoever that it practices. May it be that, in this, I shall conform with the way that the bodhisattvas themselves practice right Dharma and yet have nothing whatsoever that they either practice or do not practice.

For the sake of carrying on the transformative teaching of beings, one never relinquishes right vows. This is what is meant by the ten great right vows of the bodhisattva who has brought forth the resolve [to realize unsurpassed bodhi].

These ten great vows extend everywhere to all realms of beings and subsume all vows as numerous as the Ganges' sands. [Hence one reflects thus:] If beings were to come to an end, then and only then would my vows come to an end.

However, beings are truly endless. Therefore these great vows of mine shall also never come to an end.”

Vasubandhu then describes how each perfection acts as a cause of full awakening and comments that the four immeasurables, the thirty-seven harmonies with awakening, and all the many other excellent practices work together to bring perfect realization of full awakening.

## REFLECTION

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1. Slowly read and contemplate the ten superior great right vows that Vasubandhu articulated.
  2. Be aware of how each vow builds on the power of the preceding one and empowers the subsequent one.
  3. Take these vows into your heart and aspire to fulfill them.
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### *Exhortation to Resolve on Buddhahood*

Peixiu (797–870), a district magistrate at the time of writing *Exhortation to Resolve on Buddhahood*, later became the Chinese prime minister during the Tang dynasty. A layman, he was a devoted Buddhist and an educated literatus. His text on generating bodhicitta was so highly regarded that the Huayan and Chan patriarch Guifeng Zongmi (780–840) wrote a foreword to it, saying Peixiu was an emissary of the Buddha who carried out the Buddha’s work in writing this essay.

In the foreword, Zongmi says that generating bodhicitta involves great virtue, vast merit, an understanding of emptiness, and the determination to treat our body as the vehicle for Dharma practice without being attached to it. Generating bodhicitta also entails a vast view, great empathy and compassion for others, and supremely strong determination. He cautions us against deviation, one-sided biases, laziness, and haste.

*Deviation*, for example, is seeking the Dharma outside of the mind and grasping at a self within this body. Comprehending the nature of our own mind and attaining excellent qualities equal to the Buddha's counteract the deviant view that awakening is somewhere apart from our own mind; understanding that form and consciousness are empty and like illusions counteracts the erroneous notion of self.

Looking only at the ultimate nature or only at cause and effect are examples of *biases*. Understanding the four truths and engaging in the six perfections counteract unbalanced focus on the ultimate nature and the wisdom aspect of the path; understanding true suchness (emptiness) and original awakening (buddha nature) remedy a disproportionate focus on conventional truth and the method aspect of the path.

*Laziness* is keeping the Dharma at an intellectual level only, without putting it into practice; laziness is also becoming so involved in emptiness and serenity that we forget sentient beings. Accumulating merit, generating wisdom and compassion, and making strong vows are the antidote to being too immersed in emptiness and serenity.

Making the body exhausted by pushing ourselves or depriving ourselves of a peaceful mind in an attempt to gain realizations according to a certain self-created schedule are examples of *haste*. Haste is remedied by making prostrations and offerings, praising the Three Jewels, reciting scriptures, and leading by being a good example when teaching others. It is important to keep our body and mind in balance when responding to life's circumstances. Resting when the time is right and practicing without impatiently waiting for results counteracts craving swift results. Following Zongmi's sage advice will enable our practice to flow more smoothly and consistently.

Peixiu begins by explaining the term "highest, perfect, and complete awakening" (*anuttara-samyaksambodhi*). "Highest" refers to the unsurpassed or ultimate awakening, "perfect" means that it accords with the wisdom realizing emptiness, and "complete" indicates immeasurable wisdom that fully knows both the ultimate and conventional truths. This awakening is the magnificent path realized by all the buddhas, and it is what sentient beings are most obscured and deluded about. The initial resolve to attain highest, perfect, and complete awakening comes from

admiring the Tathāgata’s cessation of all duḥkha and obscurations, and feeling sad that so far we have neglected this opportunity ourselves.

Bodhicitta or bodhi mind must be generated from our “true mind” — from the pure aspect of our mind that is part of our buddha nature. It does not arise from identifying with our flesh-and-bones body composed of the four elements, which arises and disintegrates in each moment. It also does not arise from identifying with the false, obscured mind obsessed with sense pleasure and worldly success. Like the body, this mind is impermanent and unstable.

Our genuine body is “perfect and complete, empty and quiescent”; our genuine mind is vast in its scope and imbued with intelligence and awareness. The perfect and complete Dharma body is replete with countless virtuous qualities; it is empty and quiescent in that it goes beyond all forms and characteristics and is forever free of disturbance. The genuine mind is vast in that it coincides with the dharmadhātu — the sphere of reality (Dharma realm). It is imbued with intelligence and awareness in that it is a focused, penetrating, clear, investigating illumination. Encompassing great virtuous qualities, the genuine mind cuts through the fallacious thinking of the tetralemma — such as the distorted view that things arise from self, other, both, or causelessly — and the convoluted conceptual mind.

Like a full moon obscured by the clouds of afflictions so that we are unaware of it, the original purity of the genuine mind will manifest when the afflictions have been abandoned. As said in the *Flower Ornament Sūtra*, “The mind, the Buddha, and beings as well — in these three, there are no distinctions.” This genuine mind is the same as the essence of bodhi mind. When we do not see this, we become entwined with our false conceptualizations and engage in actions that bind us in continual rebirth. Having generated the resolve for the highest path, we should cultivate the three types of mind, establish the five vows (explained below), and engage in all the practices that lead to awakening. In addition, we should take the buddhas as our spiritual mentors and the bodhisattvas as our spiritual companions, regard sentient beings in the six realms as our followers, see cyclic existence with its afflictions as the field of practice, and vow in all future times to liberate sentient beings. This is the mind that has resolved to realize the highest, perfect, complete awakening.

## *Cultivating the Three Types of Mind and the Five Great Vows*

The three types of mind are an essential support for bodhicitta. These are great compassion, great wisdom, and the mind established in great vows. Based on seeing that our mind is originally unborn and unceasing, we feel *great compassion* for sentient beings who are drowning in the *duḥkha* of cyclic existence. Although we have not yet attained awakening ourselves, we still want to liberate sentient beings by placing their liberation before our own. With such compassion, we engage in the four ways of gathering disciples, establishing them in refuge in the Three Jewels and in correct views so that they will practice the path to awakening.

*Great wisdom* is necessary to fulfill the aspiration of great compassion. Sentient beings have so many diverse faculties, dispositions, tendencies, and aspirations that wisdom and skill are needed to guide them. To gain such wisdom we must serve the Buddha and study the Dharma extensively. In this way we will know and will have practiced all the teachings and paths the Buddha taught. This will enable us to benefit others by teaching them the Dharma that is appropriate for their disposition and stage of the path at that particular time.

Although the fundamental nature of the mind is pure, it is obscured by afflictions and habitual tendencies that do not vanish quickly. To make ourselves suitable vessels for the Dharma, we contemplate the prospect of continual rebirth in *samsāra* without encountering the Buddhadharma. This frightful prospect inspires us to establish *great vows* and to wholeheartedly engage in the bodhisattva practices. The vows and practices mutually complement each other, and in this way we progress to awakening. As the *Flower Ornament Sūtra* says:

The lamp of the bodhi mind takes great compassion as its oil, great vows as its wick, and great wisdom as its illumination.

Of these three — great compassion, great wisdom, and great vows — great vows is chief because it supports the compassion and wisdom that will enable us to liberate sentient beings. For this reason, the initial generation



of bodhicitta entails making great vows. When we die, our body and wealth are abandoned, our relatives and friends cannot come with us, and all our power is lost. It is only these precious bodhisattva vows that will continue to lead and guide us until awakening. Therefore, we should not doubt their efficacy and importance but eagerly make them. The five vows are these:<sup>64</sup>

1. Sentient beings are countless, I vow to liberate them all.
2. Merit and wisdom are boundless, I vow to accumulate them.
3. The Buddhadharma is vast, I vow to study it.
4. The tathāgatas are countless, I vow to serve them.
5. Mahāyāna is unsurpassed and perfect, I vow to realize it.

Making these five great vows and maintaining them in our mind thought after thought, so that there is no time in which they are not present, is the meaning of implementing the great mind of awakening and upholding the precepts of the bodhi mind. This is the path that all the buddhas of the three times follow. The three types of mind and the five vows support each other.

A series of exhortations follows. If you are able to follow them and always maintain your bodhicitta, you will continually approach buddhahood until you succeed in attaining it.

Whether you are a monastic or lay follower, announce your vows to the buddhas, engage in attracting sentient beings to the Dharma, and constantly uphold the five vows whether you are sitting, standing, walking, or lying down. Never cheat or deceive sentient beings or neglect to uphold the trust of the Tathāgata. Maintaining the transmitted Dharma — the words and meanings of the Buddha's teachings in the scriptures — endeavor to gain the realized Dharma — the realizations of the teachings in the mind — especially the fortitude of the nonarising of phenomena. By serving as bright lights along the dark shore and as the rafts that carry sentient beings across the ocean of cyclic existence, cause sentient beings to realize the knowledge and vision of the buddhas. In this way, when the thousand buddhas of this fortunate eon appear, you will be a leader among the disciples and will attain full awakening.

Accumulate merit with sentient beings (the field of compassion) and with the buddhas and bodhisattva (the field of reverence). This is done by

giving your external wealth — your possessions and body — and your internal wealth — your time, energy, and merit. When doing this, guard against the self-centered thought seeking reward in this life or even in future lives that would sabotage your generosity.

Make a strong determination to learn and master all the Buddha's teachings from now until attaining full awakening. To instruct others, endeavor to realize the four immeasurables, the six perfections, the provisional and definitive meanings of the Dharma, the law of cause and effect, the two teachings of sudden and gradual awakening, and the two doctrinal lineages that focus on the nature and on the dharmic characteristics. Schools focusing on the nature were the Madhyamaka, Tathāgatagarbha, Chan, and Perfect Teaching (Avatamsaka), which emphasized the realization of emptiness. The school focusing on dharmic characteristics was primarily the Yogācāra.

Vow to encounter a wise and compassionate spiritual mentor, to serve him or her without fatigue or laziness, and to listen with eager interest to Dharma teachings. Happily accept instructions and guidance, and then put them into practice, as did Sudhana, the youth whose spiritual journey took him to fifty-three spiritual mentors, as related in the *Flower Ornament Sūtra*.

Furthermore, vow to always maintain the aspiration for full awakening, never letting it degenerate into a wish to become a śrāvaka or solitary-realizer arhat. Seeing yourself as interrelated with all sentient beings, dedicate all merit for full awakening and encourage others to do so as well.

In addition, never abandon monastics and lay followers who have the same resolve for awakening and the same great vows that you have. Rather, practice together with them, cultivating the meditative absorptions and wisdom. Toward some members of your “Dharma family” you serve as younger siblings and toward others you serve as older siblings. In this way, support and encourage one another, enabling everyone to succeed in their spiritual journey. If someone loses the path, everyone must come together to free him from his problems and bring him back to his purpose. When someone gains realizations of the path, take refuge with them. Having a good relationship with your fellow aspirants enables each person to benefit and the Dharma to remain long in the world.

Although you may have the resolve for awakening, until you fathom the nature of the mind, you will be stuck in the provisional perspective and not realize the ultimate nature. So strive to develop the correct cause of awakening by understanding (ERB 107):

The perfect, bright, and pure awakening is originally devoid of any delusive ignorance. The illusional obscurations and “flowers floating in space” do not constitute the substance of reality. [This awakened mind] is distantly separate from any sort of attachment-based grasping and is as uniform in nature as empty space itself. Expansively great compassion and wisdom constantly flow forth from this quiescent and radiant mind.

The fundamental nature of the mind is pure. “Flowers floating in space” refers to floaters in the eyes — the vision of falling hairs that in fact do not exist. The appearance of inherent existence that ignorance projects on phenomena is not reality. The pure mind that realizes emptiness is unimpeded like space. In this still and luminous mind, great compassion can manifest to benefit sentient beings. Sūtras that speak of the means to cultivate this radiant mind are the Perfection of Wisdom sūtras, the *Perfect Mahāyāna Sūtra*, the *Flower Ornament Sūtra*, and the *Nirvāṇa Sūtra*.

The *Flower of Compassion Sūtra* (C. *Beihua jing*) instructs bodhisattvas to cultivate four inexhaustible treasuries: the treasuries of inexhaustible merit, inexhaustible knowledge, inexhaustible wisdom, and inexhaustible unified Dharma of the Buddha. To do this it is necessary to practice many factors that assist in the attainment of awakening:

- generosity, to attract others in order to teach them the Dharma
- ethical conduct, which is a support for accomplishing virtuous aspirations
- fortitude, through which the thirty-two signs and eighty marks of a buddha are perfected
- joyous effort, which leads to success in our endeavors
- meditative stability, to skillfully subdue and train the mind

- wisdom, to recognize and excise afflictions
- extensive study and learning, to gain unimpeded eloquence in teaching the Dharma
- the collection of merit, which is a necessity for progress
- thoughtful reflection, to destroy doubts
- love, to perfect a mind free from obstruction
- compassion, to teach and guide sentient beings without fatigue
- empathic joy, to increase affectionate happiness based on right Dharma
- equanimity, to eliminate attachment and animosity
- listening to the Dharma, to subdue the five hindrances (sensual desire, malice, lethargy and sleepiness, restlessness and regret, and doubt)
- transcending the world, to go beyond worldly existence
- dwelling in a solitary place, to abandon destructive karma
- joyfully according with the virtuous actions of others, to increase the roots of virtue
- the four establishments of mindfulness, to firmly comprehend the body as foul, the feelings as duḥkha in nature, the mind as impermanent, and all phenomena as selfless
- the four supreme strivings, to abandon nonvirtue and cultivate virtue
- the four bases of spiritual power, to perfect physical and mental pliancy
- the five faculties, to enhance and strengthen these five factors so that they can become the five powers
- the five powers, to demolish all afflictions
- the seven awakening factors, to gain an awareness of phenomena that accords with ultimate truth<sup>65</sup>
- the six harmonies of the monastic community (physical, verbal, and mental harmony, harmony in views, the sharing of resources, and the way to keep precepts), to restrain and train sentient beings while steering them toward purification

Cultivating these constitute the “accumulation of pure Dharma gateways through which we bring about liberation from cyclic existence.” Thus motivated by bodhicitta, engage in these practices enthusiastically and with mindfulness. Then we should adorn and establish a pure land in accordance with our aspirations.

Four factors can make you lazy in Dharma practice and thereby create suffering. Avoid them.<sup>66</sup>

1. Inferior conduct is transgressing the prātimokṣa precepts that regulate your physical and verbal actions.
2. Inferior companions are śrāvakas and solitary realizers who could influence you to relinquish bodhicitta.
3. Inferior generosity is the inability to give everything, to choose certain recipients due to prejudice, or to give with the motivation to take rebirth in a celestial realm.
4. Inferior vows are the inability to single-pointedly vow to go to a buddha land. These are weak vows that render you unable to subdue and train sentient beings.

These are counteracted by the four swift factors of bodhisattvas:

1. Upholding your precepts and purifying your body, speech, and mind enable you to protect and maintain the Dharma teachings.
2. Becoming close to people who study and practice the Mahāyāna will naturally lead you to become involved in virtuous endeavors.
3. Releasing all miserliness and activating compassion leads to being able to give to everyone.
4. Single-pointedly vowing to go to and adorn Buddha lands aids you in training and taming sentient beings.

## REFLECTION

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1. Reflect on the four factors that can make you lazy in Dharma practice and create suffering. Which ones hinder you the most?

2. Reflect on the four swift factors of bodhisattvas that counteract them.
  3. As you do this repeatedly, be aware of the positive changes in your mind.
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The merit created by a bodhisattva when she first generates bodhicitta is beyond imagination. It dwarfs a trillionfold the merit of making huge and magnificent offerings to innumerable buddhas, the merit of encouraging a huge number of sentient beings to keep precepts and abide in the ten pathways of virtuous karma for eons, the merit of causing others to attain the various meditative absorptions of the upper realms and remain in them for eons, and the merit of instructing and guiding others to attain the stages of a stream-enterer, once-returner, nonreturner, or arhat. These virtuous deeds, while indisputably wonderful, are not the purpose for which buddhas first generated bodhicitta. Rather, their purpose was to continue the lineage of the Tathāgata and to prevent it from being cut off, to fill all world systems with the Dharma, to liberate the beings in all worlds, to know the creation and ceasing of all worlds, to know the defilement and purity of all worlds, to know the purity of the fundamental nature of all worlds, to know the happiness, afflictions, and latencies in sentient beings' minds, to know sentient beings' death in one life and birth in another, to know sentient beings' faculties and the skillful means to guide them, to know their thoughts and mental activity, to know the past, present, and future of all beings, and to know the uniformity in the minds of all buddhas.

Due to such intentions, these bodhisattvas are held in the minds of all the buddhas, who then bestow the magnificent Dharma on them. It is as if they had already actualized the entire path and attained the four fearlessnesses and the ten powers, and the merit, wisdom, and mind state of the buddhas, because they are bound to attain buddhahood. At this time of initially generating strong bodhicitta (that is, the time of attaining the first bodhisattva ground) they are praised by all the buddhas and become able to teach and subdue sentient beings in the various worlds. They can cause worlds to shake, illuminate all worlds, stop the anguish of unfortunate rebirths in all worlds, adorn and purify all worlds, manifest the attainment of buddhahood in all worlds, cause happiness in the minds of all beings,

enter into the very nature of the entire dharmadhātu, maintain the lineage of all buddhas, and gain the wisdom light of all buddhas.

At the same time, bodhisattvas who have initially generated strong bodhicitta — first-ground bodhisattvas — find that there is nothing to attain in the past, present, or future. They seek only omniscience, and the mind is free from attachment to any aspect of the dharmadhātu.<sup>67</sup> Although these first-ground bodhisattvas are said to have initially generated bodhicitta, it is actually the perfection of the generation of the bodhi resolve. It is called “initial” because it is the first time they have perfected it by the direct realization of emptiness, thus becoming an ārya.

Should you wonder if it’s actually possible to possess such incomparable faculties and qualities, recall that the ultimate nature of the mind of an ordinary person and of an ārya are the same. It is simply a matter of your thoughts — allowing afflictions and wrong views to take over the mind is the impediment. But if you awaken to the ultimate nature of the mind and its brilliance, you will be able to generate bodhicitta within the uniformly empty nature that is shared with all the buddhas.

In the meantime, as ordinary beings we can lessen the afflictions that interfere with our bodhicitta. Practicing generosity will lessen attachment and covetousness, whereas practicing the four ways of gathering disciples will decrease animosity. Cultivating serenity and insight will reduce our afflictions. This is true even if we are not able to cultivate these practices perfectly at this moment. In addition, we must continue to cultivate compassion. Generating both bodhicitta and the direct realization of emptiness is critically important; everything else is related to cyclic existence. It was in this manner that the Buddha himself progressed.

Peixiu concludes his *Exhortation* with final words of advice (ERB 127–29):

It is essential to liberate all beings. It is essential to strive to gain the knowledge of all modes and plant roots of virtue throughout the auspicious eon during the reigns of the Thousand Buddhas. Thus one’s merit and wisdom will naturally become vast and deep such that in the world, one

will always be among the leaders of those who serve as guides [on the path] . . .

After communicating one's generation [of bodhicitta], one should invoke that resolve in each and every thought. This will then constitute a correct cause for the realization of buddhahood. It is only appropriate that one should then feel profound sentiments of joyful felicitation. Neither monastics nor laity should allow themselves to become estranged from Dharma friends. How could even mountains and rivers [be allowed to] present an obstacle to [the realization of] genuine wisdom?

### *The Four Great Vows*

The Mahāyāna Buddhist traditions throughout East Asia recite the Four Great Vows daily, making them the centerpiece of their Dharma practice. Containing the condensed meaning of all the bodhisattva precepts, the Four Great Vows are found in sūtras and commentaries such as *The Sixth Patriarch Platform Sūtra*, *Sūtra on the Practice of Prajñāpāramitā*, the *Lotus Sūtra*, the *Medallion Sūtra on the Bodhisattva Path*, and others.<sup>68</sup>

The Four Great Vows are as follows:

Countless are sentient beings; I vow to liberate them.

Endless are defilements; I vow to eradicate them.

Measureless are Dharma doors; I vow to cultivate them.

Supreme is the Buddha's Way; I vow to attain it.

The last of the four vows is the generation of bodhicitta; “the Buddha's Way” refers to bodhi, the awakening of the Buddha, and bodhicitta is the vow to complete the path to full awakening. To actualize this aspiration for full awakening, the support of the first three great vows is needed. The first great vow is to liberate each and every one of the countless sentient beings because we feel their suffering in saṃsāra as our own. This great compassion leads to the second great vow, to eradicate the numberless defilements of ourselves and all others. This shows that great compassion is



neither sentimental pity nor a romantic idea of spirituality; it spurs the generation of wisdom that will eliminate the defilements completely. This leads to the third great vow, to cultivate the countless approaches that remove these defilements. Just as there are numberless defilements, there are measureless realizations and measureless skillful means to master to overcome them.

Although someone could protest that these four vows are too vast and may be impossible to actualize, such concerns do not plague a genuine Mahāyāna practitioner. Instead, her mind is focused on the awakening of all sentient beings, and thus she is willing to do everything possible to bring it about, such as eradicate the endless defilements that pollute her own and others' mindstreams, cultivate all the diverse remedies the Buddha has taught for overcoming defilements, actualize all awakened qualities, and attain the supreme awakening of a buddha.

## REFLECTION

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1. Compare the Four Great Vows with the Five Great Vows mentioned before.
2. Ponder each great vow and feel it in your heart. While doing this, let your mind and heart open. Don't let doubt interrupt your contemplation.

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In his *Treatise on the Ten Grounds* (TTG 266), Nāgārjuna counsels us never to be lax in benefiting others:

No matter where the bodhisattva abides,  
if he fails to initiate the transformative teaching of beings,  
thus allowing them to fall into the three wretched destinies,  
he then thereby richly deserves the censure of the buddhas.

And so it is that the bodhisattva, no matter in what country he abides, and no matter whether he is in the city or village, in the mountains, or beneath a tree — wherever he has the power by which he is able to benefit and teach beings — if he instead withdraws from them in disgust, begrudging them their covetous attachment to the pleasures of the world and thus becomes unable to initiate their transformative teaching, thereby allowing them to fall into the wretched destinies — this bodhisattva thereby becomes richly deserving of the censure of all buddhas now abiding throughout the ten directions and thereby becomes worthy of feeling shame and disgrace in their eyes, [worthy, too, of being rebuked by their asking], “Oh, how could you let such petty reasons occasion the abandonment of such a great endeavor?!”

Consequently, if the bodhisattva does not wish to become deserving of being rebuked by the buddhas, even when faced with all sorts of flattering, devious, and severely evil beings, he should not let his resolve degenerate. Rather he should benefit them in whatever way befits his powers to help them. He should resort to all manner of expedients and diligent resolve to initiate their transformative teaching.

### *The Bodhisattva Ethical Code in Chinese Buddhism*

Two renditions of the bodhisattva ethical code exist in Chinese Buddhism. One is presented in the *Brahmā's Net Sūtra (Brahmajāla Sūtra)*.<sup>69</sup> For monastics the bodhisattva ethical code comprises ten root precepts and forty-eight auxiliary precepts. The second version is presented in the *Treatise on the Grounds of Yogic Practice (Yogācārabhūmi Śāstra)* by Maitreya,<sup>70</sup> with four root precepts and forty-one auxiliary precepts. There is much overlap in the listing of the bodhisattva precepts in these two scriptures, and there is also much overlap with the bodhisattva precepts as found in Tibetan Buddhism.

In general, the bodhisattva precepts according to the *Brahmā's Net Sūtra* are considered more suitable for bodhisattvas who have attained some

realization of emptiness, whereas those from the *Yogācārabhūmi Śāstra* are said to be more fitting for less experienced bodhisattvas. In the past, the set of precepts from the *Brahmā's Net Sūtra* (*Brahmajāla Sūtra*) was more popular in Taiwan, but in recent years many preceptors are following the version in the *Yogācārabhūmi Śāstra*. The *Brahmā's Net Sūtra* lists the bodhisattva precepts in a way similar to the *Prātimokṣa Sūtra*, in which the ten root precepts are referred to as defeats (*pārājika*). Here “pārājika” refers to a major transgression; it does not mean that a person who transgresses it will be expelled from the Saṅgha. The bodhisattva precepts are taken from now until full awakening, and all transgressions, no matter how serious, can be purified through confession and repentance. The bodhisattva precepts for lay followers have six major and twenty-eight auxiliary precepts. In many Chinese temples, monastics recite the bodhisattva precepts together twice a month. Chinese Buddhist monasteries also regularly hold day-long repentance ceremonies that lay followers may also participate in.

### ***Bodhisattva Precepts according to the Yogācārabhūmi Śāstra***

The four root bodhisattva precepts from the *Yogācārabhūmi Śāstra* are to abandon these activities:

1. Praising oneself and deprecating others — relinquishing great compassion, one is miserly and concerned with one's own name and fame and with receiving offerings.
2. Refusing to help those in need — losing one's great compassion, one makes no effort to share the Dharma or material goods with those who are in dire need.
3. Refusing to accept someone's sincere apology and not helping those who repent and wish to follow the correct path — giving in to anger, one forsakes one's great compassion and is not willing to teach or guide those who are repentant.
4. Deceiving others by teaching what appears to be the Buddhadharma but is not, teaching wrong views to others while telling them this is the pure Dharma.

The forty-one auxiliary precepts in the *Yogācārabhūmi Śāstra* are to abandon (unless extenuating circumstances are present) these activities:

1. Not making offerings such as bowing, chanting, or thinking of the excellent qualities of the Three Jewels and praising them.
2. Being greedy and discontent, and longing for material possessions.
3. Failing to greet or pay proper respect to elder or fellow bodhisattvas (those who have taken the bodhisattva vow before you).
4. Refusing to accept offerings (thereby depriving people of the opportunity to create merit by being generous).
5. Refusing to accept gold, silver, jewels, and so forth offered by the faithful (thereby denying the donor the opportunity to create merit).
6. Not teaching the faithful when requested.
7. Abandoning, making others abandon, or refusing to guide those who are evil and wrong.
8. Being restricted by the rules of the Fundamental Vehicle instead of working to benefit many beings.
9. Engaging in insincere deeds or speech for profit; engaging in unwholesome livelihood without integrity or regret.
10. Acting in an undisciplined manner, joking, and partying.
11. Thinking or saying that bodhisattvas should dislike and turn away from nirvāṇa or that bodhisattvas should not reject and dislike worldliness.
12. Not preventing or correcting slander.
13. Not teaching with sincerity and serious words because of seeking profit, fear of reprisal, or displeasure.
14. Returning insult for insult, anger for anger, beating for beating, or criticism for criticism.
15. Not apologizing; even if you are innocent, you should apologize to calm suspicions.
16. Refusing to confess and repent one's misdeeds or bad behavior.
17. Being motivated by hatred, unwilling to forgive someone.
18. Being attached to comfort, keeping pets and servants.

19. Being lazy, sloppy, and sleeping excessively or at improper times.
20. Engaging in idle talk about worldly matters.
21. Rejecting the guidance or advice of your teacher.
22. Failing to oppose the five hindrances to serenity: attachment to sensual pleasure, malice, lethargy and sleep, restlessness and regret, and doubt.
23. Being attached to states of meditative absorption.
24. Slandering the Fundamental Vehicle, not studying its teachings.
25. Refusing to learn the skillful means of the bodhisattva path and learning only the Fundamental Vehicle teachings.
26. Not learning the Buddha's teachings and only studying non-Buddhist teachings or worldly subjects.
27. Refusing to accept teachings on the profundity of the bodhisattva way, its ultimate meanings, and the immeasurable power of the buddhas and bodhisattvas, and slandering those teachings by saying they lack benefit, are not the Buddha's words, and cannot bring relief to sentient beings.
28. Motivated by greed or unhappiness, praising your own merits and virtues and slandering others.
29. Not attending a Dharma talk or discussion out of arrogance or displeasure.
30. Disrespecting or slighting a Buddhist teacher, laughing at or slandering them, and picking at a teacher's words without examining their meaning.
31. Not being supportive and benevolent by refusing to participate in road works, farming, arbitrating, and other beneficial public affairs.
32. Not visiting or caring for the sick.
33. Not correcting someone who is about to or who has created a misdeed.
34. Not repaying the kindness of those who have helped you.
35. Knowing someone has family or financial problems but not comforting him or attempting to alleviate his distress.
36. Refusing to help the poor who ask for food and clothing.

37. Accepting disciples but not giving them proper guidance and not providing sufficient food, clothing, shelter, or medicine.
38. Being disagreeable or uncooperative.
39. Not praising others who are worthy of praise.
40. Not scolding, correcting, or restraining someone who is acting harmfully.
41. Not using supernormal powers to teach or help sentient beings if you have them.

Here we see that the bodhisattva precepts in Chinese Buddhism and Tibetan Buddhism rely on similar textual sources and have much in common. By studying the bodhisattva precepts of all the Buddhist traditions we gain more knowledge about how bodhisattvas conduct themselves in daily life. This gives us much help when we encounter difficult situations and need guidance on how to act in beneficial ways. It also gives us a detailed map of how to steer our thoughts, words, and deeds so that they accord with bodhicitta. The benefit for self and others of doing this is immeasurable.

### ***Bodhisattva Precepts according to the Brahmā's Net Sūtra***

The ten root bodhisattva precepts according to the *Brahmā's Net Sūtra* are to abandon these activities:

1. Killing.
2. Stealing.
3. Sexual misconduct (for monastics, this means celibacy).
4. Lying.
5. Dealing in intoxicants.
6. Discussing offenses of members of the four assemblies.<sup>71</sup>
7. Praising oneself and disparaging others, and concealing others' good work so that they are blamed.
8. Being stingy regarding material possessions or the Dharma, humiliating and scolding a person who asks for something.
9. Holding a grudge, refusing to accept another's apology.

## 10. Slandering the Three Jewels.

The forty-eight auxiliary precepts in the *Brahmā's Net Sūtra* are these:<sup>72</sup>

1. Do not disrespect senior teachers.
2. Do not consume alcohol.
3. Do not eat meat.
4. Do not eat the five pungent roots (garlic, scallions, leeks, onions, and asafetida).
5. Do not fail to encourage others to repent.
6. Do not fail to request instruction in the Dharma from visiting teachers.
7. Do not miss the chance to attend Dharma lectures.
8. Do not turn your back on the Mahāyāna and adopt the Fundamental Vehicle.
9. Do not fail to care for the sick.
10. Do not amass weapons.
11. Do not serve as a negotiator for the military.
12. Do not get involved in trading that causes trouble for others — for example, selling human beings, slaves, or certain kinds of animals.
13. Do not make groundless accusations.
14. Do not harm the living by setting fires.
15. Do not teach non-Buddhist doctrines.
16. Do not be stingy with material wealth or the Dharma.
17. Do not seek to gain political influence.
18. Do not pretend to be an accomplished teacher.
19. Do not get involved in treachery.
20. Do not fail to help the living or the deceased.
21. Do not be intolerant of wrongs done.
22. Do not arrogantly despise your Dharma teacher.
23. Do not despise beginning practitioners.

24. Do not fear the superior [scriptures and views] and follow inferior ones.
25. Do not fail to properly fulfill administrative duties.
26. Do not receive guests improperly.
27. Do not accept personal invitations.
28. Do not offer personal invitations to monastics.
29. Do not earn your livelihood improperly.
30. Do not hurt people while feigning intimacy.
31. Do not be lax in rescuing holy articles or images and important persons (spiritual mentors, parents, and so forth) from danger.
32. Do not deviously confiscate the property of others.
33. Do not pass your time idly.
34. Do not retreat from bodhicitta.
35. Do not fail to make unshakable resolves.
36. Do not fail to initiate unshakable resolves on your own.
37. Do not intentionally go to dangerous places.
38. Do not sit out of ordination order.
39. Do not pursue personal gain.
40. Do not err in terms of who can be taught. Give teachings and precepts equally to those who request to receive them.
41. Do not seek disciples for the wrong reasons — for example, to receive respect, fame, or offerings.
42. Do not teach the precepts to the wrong persons — for example, those without fame or those with wrong views.
43. Do not intentionally break the precepts.
44. Do not fail to revere the sūtras and the Vinaya.
45. Do not fail to teach sentient beings.
46. Do not teach the Dharma using improper protocol.
47. Do not establish systems that undermine the Dharma.
48. Do not undermine the Dharma from within.



Whether or not we have formally received the root and auxiliary precepts, we can see that they contain good guidance for living a virtuous life that does not harm self or others and that benefits both self and others.

The bodhisattva precepts are called the “threefold pure precepts” because they are composed of (1) precepts of restraint, which include the basic prātimokṣa and Mahāyāna precepts to abandon destructive actions; (2) precepts to engage in virtuous actions; and (3) precepts to benefit sentient beings. In Tibetan Buddhism, these three constitute the perfection of ethical conduct.

Both monastics and lay followers can receive bodhisattva ordination. Laypeople who take the bodhisattva precepts according to the *Brahmā’s Net Sūtra* do not need to already have the basis of the five lay precepts, whereas those who take the bodhisattva precepts from the *Treatise on the Grounds of Yogic Practice* must have received the five precepts first.<sup>73</sup>

Monastics who receive the bodhisattva precepts must do so on the basis of the bhikṣu or bhikṣuṇī ordination. The bodhisattva precepts are given as the final phase of the Three Platform Ordination, a retreat of at least a month, during which monastic candidates first receive the śrāmaṇera/śrāmaṇerī ordination, the śikṣamāṇā (for women only) ordination, the bhikṣu/bhikṣuṇī ordination, and the bodhisattva ordination. The preceptor and the temple where the ordination platform is held agree on which version of the bodhisattva precepts to give.

Preceding the ceremony to receive the bodhisattva precepts is a voluntary ceremony in which people offer their body to the Buddha. For lay practitioners, this is done by making three small burns on the inside of their arm, near the elbow joint. In the case of monastics, they kneel and a senior Saṅgha member places three cones of incense on their freshly shaven head. While the hall resonates with everyone chanting “Homage to our Fundamental Teacher, Śākyamuni Buddha,” the incense is lit. It burns down, later forming three small circular scars on the head. This moving ceremony is performed with three purposes in mind. It symbolizes offering our body to the buddhas and bodhisattvas, being willing to endure suffering when working for the benefit of sentient beings and striving for full awakening, and being a validly ordained monastic “bodhisattva.” In ancient China, monastics were exempt from arrest by civil officials and punishment

by civil law because they were governed by the Vinaya precepts. To avoid arrest by the police, some criminals would don monastic robes. To discern who was a genuine monastic from imposters, the custom was instituted to burn three, six, nine, or even twelve incense cones on a monastic's head. The incense marks also serve as an important daily reminder of monastics' precepts. Every morning, monastics touch their heads where the burns are and remind themselves: as I have this minor burn, sentient beings are immersed in the burning sea of saṃsāra. I will never forget my vow to cultivate bodhicitta diligently and to liberate all beings. When lay followers take the bodhisattva vow, they may also participate in an incense-burning ceremony, in which case the incense cones are placed on their forearm.

## REFLECTION

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1. Contemplate each of the ten root precepts. In what way does each one help guide your life as well as your thoughts, words, and actions in a good direction?
2. Contemplate each of the forty-eight auxiliary precepts in the same way.
3. Think of the benefit you could derive by trying to live your life according to them.
4. Without formally taking them, divide them into groups and try paying special attention to one group for a week until you have practiced all the precepts.
5. How has doing this helped you and those around you?

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### *The Bodhisattva Ethical Code in Japanese Buddhism*

The lineage of the prātimokṣa ordination does not exist in Japan at present, although Zen priests and lay followers may take the bodhisattva precepts. This entails keeping sixteen precepts:

1. Do not kill, but cherish all life.
2. Do not take what is not freely given, but respect all things.
3. Do not lie, but speak the truth.
4. Do not engage in improper sexuality, but live a life of purity and self-restraint. (How this precept is kept depends on one's life circumstances.)
5. Do not take substances that confuse the mind, but keep the mind clear at all times.
6. Do not speak of the misdeeds of others, but be understanding and sympathetic.
7. Do not praise oneself and disparage others, but work on one's own shortcomings.
8. Do not withhold spiritual or material aid, but give them freely where needed.
9. Do not indulge in anger, but exercise restraint.
10. Do not revile the Three Treasures of the Buddha, Dharma, and Saṅgha, but cherish and uphold them.
11. Avoid evil.
12. Do good.
13. Liberate all sentient beings.
14. Take refuge in the Buddha and resolve that, together with all beings, I will understand the Great Way whereby the seed of buddhahood may forever thrive.
15. Take refuge in the Dharma and resolve that, together with all beings, I will enter deeply into the sūtra treasury, whereby my wisdom may grow as vast as the ocean.
16. Take refuge in the Saṅgha and in their wisdom, example, and never-failing help, and resolve to live in harmony with all beings.

While there are differences in the delineation of the bodhisattva precepts in the various Mahāyāna traditions, their essence and purpose are the same. Taking and living in the bodhisattva precepts brings only benefit.

## *Bodhicitta, True Suchness, and Buddha Nature*

Pure mind and buddha nature refer to the same thing but approach it from different angles. “Pure mind” indicates that the nature of the mind is not and cannot be polluted by defilements. “Buddha nature” refers to the aspect of that mind that guarantees our potential and capability to become buddhas. When fully purified, this is called the “awakened mind” or actual bodhicitta, indicating that while ignorance was initially present and we did not know our pure nature, now with the removal of ignorance we see and understand it. From the perspective that unawakened beings do not yet recognize the pure nature of their mind, it is said that they do not have the bodhi mind, but from the perspective of the fundamental nature of the mind being pure of adventitious defilements, it is said that they have the bodhi mind.

In this latter sense, “bodhicitta” or “bodhi mind” refers to the pure mind that can never be tarnished. It is like a pearl that has been covered with mud for thousands of years. Even though it is hidden in mud and its luster cannot be seen, none of its shining beauty has been lost; it is just temporarily obscured. It can be removed from the mud and cleaned so that its beauty is visible to all. Its luster did not decrease even though it was covered in mud for millennia, and its luster did not increase once it was extracted from the mud. Similarly, our buddha nature is always pure. Its qualities do not decrease when it is covered with the mud of defilements and they do not increase when the defilements are eradicated.

Bodhicitta is buddha nature. In the Chan tradition the terms “true suchness,” “buddha nature,” “original nature,” “ultimate reality,” “pure nature,” and so on have similar meanings. They are different terms that refer to what is indescribable. To realize the buddha nature or bodhicitta is to realize that it is uncreated; it does not disappear and it is originally pure. When it is covered by defilements, we experience saṃsāra; grasping saṃsāra as real is an affliction that must be overcome to attain buddhahood.

### *The Five Stages of Cultivating Bodhicitta*

As taught in scriptures, the Chan and Tiantai traditions say bodhicitta is cultivated and expanded in five stages. The first is making the vow to

become a buddha and liberate all the countless sentient beings. This aspiration for buddhahood is called “bringing forth the bodhi mind (bodhicitta).” Although it is necessary to attain the bodhi mind, it is not the fully developed bodhi mind. Rather it is an aspiration to attain genuine bodhicitta, the bodhi mind, the One Mind.

The second is to engage in many practices and meditations to overcome attachment, anger, and other afflictions and to work toward awakening.

The third stage is called “awakening of the bodhicitta.” At this time practitioners have a taste of actual bodhicitta because for the first time they directly realize the ultimate nature. In Chan this realization is called “awakening,” and it occurs when one realizes the pure mind, which is the actual bodhicitta. In other words, a practitioner deeply understands and has direct experience of his or her own bodhi mind. At the same time he realizes the emptiness of this pure mind. Here “bodhicitta” does not mean the aspiration to attain awakening in order to benefit all sentient beings; it refers to the direct realization of one’s own buddha nature. When people say a Chan master is awakened, it means he or she has attained at least the third stage. This awakening, however, is not complete, perfect awakening in that not all the obscurations have been forever eradicated.

The fourth stage is continuing to cultivate the bodhisattva practice in order to become fully and perfectly awakened. It is like the new moon gradually growing until it becomes full. This involves completing and perfecting the six perfections, which may take eons. But bodhisattvas are not discouraged by the length of time it takes. Like the bodhisattva Sudhana in the *Flower Ornament Sūtra*, they are willing to do whatever is necessary for whatever length of time is required in order to become a buddha so that they have the qualities and abilities that enable them to be of the greatest benefit to sentient beings.

The final stage is called the “supreme, ultimate bodhicitta”; this is buddhahood.

These five stages are very similar to the five paths of a bodhisattva as explained in the Tibetan tradition: the paths of accumulation, preparation, seeing, meditation, and no-more-learning. Nevertheless the meaning of the word “bodhicitta” and the manner in which it is used in Chinese and Tibetan Buddhism are slightly different. In the Tibetan tradition,

“bodhicitta” usually refers to the aspiration to become a buddha for the benefit of sentient beings, although “ultimate bodhicitta” refers to the realization of emptiness. This is the ultimate reality that is directly realized on the third stage above, the awakening of the bodhicitta, or what in the Tibetan tradition is called the “path of seeing.” Is this a realization of the emptiness of the mind, or is it a realization of the mind that is empty? Buddhist traditions have different assertions regarding this issue.

Here too, “awakening” has different meanings. From the Tibetan perspective, for bodhisattvas it refers only to the last stage, buddhahood, the path of no-more-learning. Chinese Buddhism also uses “awakening” to refer to any direct, nonconceptual realization of selflessness, which occurs before buddhahood. Neither tradition says that this first experience of the ultimate nature is final awakening; they agree that this realization needs to be cultivated and developed over time to attain the final goal of buddhahood. In addition, bodhisattvas must continue to create vast merit to support that wisdom so that it becomes powerful enough to eradicate all defilements. “Awakening” can also refer to the arhatship attained by following the Śrāvaka and Solitary Realizer Vehicles; however, for Mahāyāna practitioners, this is not the full awakening of a buddha.



## 9 | Bodhicitta and Bodhisattvas in the Pāli Tradition

**M**ANY PEOPLE associate the Śrāvaka Vehicle with Theravāda Buddhism and the Bodhisattva Vehicle with the Mahāyāna. They then think that Theravāda and Mahāyāna as well as the vehicles and practices they teach do not coincide. Historically, these misconceptions have manifested in Theravāda practitioners alleging that the Mahāyāna teachings are not the word of the Buddha, and Mahāyāna practitioners claiming that Theravādins are selfish and lack compassion. Such rigid concepts are erroneous, and the ill will they create among the Buddha's disciples would surely displease the Buddha.

If we were to learn more about one another's traditions, many of these misconceptions would evaporate. Please see chapters 4 and 5 in *Approaching the Buddhist Path* and chapter 1 in *Buddhism: One Teacher, Many Traditions*. As discussed in these chapters, there are reasons to believe that the Mahāyāna sūtras were the Buddha's word. In this and future chapters we will see that not only are love and compassion taught and practiced in Theravāda Buddhism but so is the bodhisattva path. While the majority of practitioners in one or the other tradition may favor the aim of arhatship or buddhahood, that does not mean that the other option, together with its teachings and practitioners, is not found in that tradition.

### *Compassion*

The Pāli suttas emphasize compassion time and again as the motivating force for the Buddha's attainment of awakening (AN 1.170):

There is one person who arises in the world for the welfare of many people, for the happiness of many people, out of



compassion for the world, for the benefit, welfare, and happiness of devas and humans. Who is that one person? The Tathāgata, the Arahant, the Perfectly Awakened One.

Here the word translated as compassion is *anukampā*, which etymologically means to be moved in response to others.<sup>74</sup> We sentient beings are the beneficiaries of the Buddha’s compassion. The commentary explains the passage above: “for the welfare of the multitude” indicates that the Buddha is endowed with wisdom and thus instructs sentient beings on how to obtain benefit now and in the future; “for the happiness of the multitude” means that with an open hand, he demonstrates the joy of serving others; “out of compassion for the world” indicates that the Buddha protects the world with love and compassion like those of a parent for their beloved child; “for the benefit, welfare, and happiness of devas and humans” shows that his primary audience consists of those suitable to realize the paths and fruits in this lifetime because they have the optimum rebirth and conditions to do so as gods and humans. Of course, the Buddha aims to benefit the beings born in unfortunate realms as well, first by helping them to attain rebirth as gods and humans. He works for the “benefit” or the ultimate aim of nirvāṇa, for the “welfare” of the path that leads to it, and for the “happiness” of the fruition-attainment (P. *phala samāpatti*) — the reexperiencing of nirvāṇa after initially attaining it — which is the supreme happiness.

The Buddha describes his compassion, which is totally unbiased and unlike our ordinary notion of compassion (SN 10.806–7):

If, O Sakka, for some reason  
intimacy with anyone should arise,  
the wise person ought not to stir his mind  
with compassion (that is, attachment) toward such a person.

But if, with a mind clear and pure,  
he gives instructions to others,  
he does not become fettered  
by his compassion and tender care.

These verses explain that a wise person does not instruct others or become close to them if there is danger that attachment (called “compassion” in the first verse) will arise between them. However, a wise person whose mind is clear and free from attachment teaches others for their benefit with compassion and tender care that are free from the stickiness of attachment.

Whereas ordinary people are compassionate toward relatives and friends because those people help them, the Buddha is compassionate simply because others are suffering, regardless of whether or not they benefit him. Whereas the compassion of ordinary beings is often mixed with attachment and expectations, which pull them into unhealthy relationships, the Buddha’s mind is clear and his compassion and tender care are free from attachment, the need for approval, and other self-centered emotions. The Pāli Abhidharma explains that attachment is a mental state that sticks to its object as meat sticks to a hot frying pan. It is always accompanied by confusion, agitation, lack of integrity, and lack of consideration for others. Attachment is shrouded in unclarity, whereas true compassion is bright, clear, and without limits.

The Buddha’s compassion is evident in the sūtras. Compassion was the force enabling him to speak to so many different kinds of people — the rich and the poor, the educated and the uneducated, those who respected him and those who scorned him. Motivated by compassion for others who are ensnared in cyclic existence by their ignorance and craving, he shared the teachings that brought temporal and ultimate happiness with whomever was interested. He did not ask for anything in return; there was no charge to attend his discourses.

Compassion also fueled the Buddha’s choice of lifestyle. Because he was free from attachment, he could have lived in a comfortable setting without incurring any faults. However, out of compassion for future generations of practitioners, he continued to live a simple lifestyle as a monastic. He usually dwelled in the forest, wore patched robes, and went on alms round to receive food. In this way, he set an example for future practitioners to also live a simple lifestyle and practice sense restraint, and in this way to quickly attain nirvāṇa.

*The Compassion of Arhats and Śrāvaka Learners*

Accounts in the Pāli sūtras clearly show that arhats, as well as śrāvaka learners — practitioners who are on the path — have compassion. In fact, the Buddha encourages them to practice with the motivation of compassion (DN 16.3.50):

Monastics, for this reason those matters which I have discovered and proclaimed should be thoroughly learnt by you, practiced, developed and cultivated, so that this holy life may endure for a long time, for the welfare of the multitude, for the happiness of the multitude, out of compassion for the world; for the benefit, welfare, and happiness of devas and humans.

That is, monastics engage in the path to liberation not only for their own benefit but also in order to preserve the Dharma so that future generations will have access to these liberating teachings. They practice to become exemplars who inspire others to practice the path and attain liberation, or full awakening. The Buddha stressed that out of concern and compassion for others, monastics must remain in harmony with regard to his teachings, without quarreling or dividing into factitious groups.

Speaking of Anuruddha, Nandiya, and Kimbila, three arhat monks, the Buddha commented that if people, devas, and even Brahmās thought of them with a confident heart, that would bring about their welfare and happiness for a long time. This would occur because rejoicing at others' virtue uplifts our mind and creates merit. The Buddha says (MN 31.22):

See how those three clansmen are practicing for the welfare of the multitude, for the happiness of the multitude, out of compassion for the world, for the benefit, welfare, and happiness of gods and humans.

The Buddha also praises Mahākāśyapa for teaching the Dharma to others with compassion, and Mahākāśyapa himself says that he became a monastic and cultivated contentment with simple food, plain clothing, and rudimentary shelter in order to benefit others. His hope was that others

would see value in this lifestyle, adopt it for themselves, and obtain liberation.

The Vinaya (monastic discipline) explains that monastics are to admonish one another with kindness. In this way, they will avoid negativity, correct bad behavior, and overcome complacency and laziness. They should admonish one another with compassion even if it temporarily brings aggravation, as long as there is the possibility of leading someone on the wholesome path.

Although we see a difference in the expression of compassion in the Pāli and Sanskrit traditions, all of the Buddha's disciples try to be of benefit to others. In the Sanskrit sūtras, bodhisattvas not only teach the Dharma but also actively engage with suffering people in society. They sacrifice their own comfort to directly relieve the misery of others. In the Pāli sūtras, śrāvaka learners and arhats teach the Dharma and live the simple lifestyle of a monastic out of compassion for others, wishing to set an example for others to follow on how to practice in order to attain liberation.

### *Compassion in Daily Life*

Nowadays many people feel that they have to decide between benefiting themselves and benefiting others because doing both is either impossible or impractical. They see this as a black-and-white choice: because there is only a finite amount of various material resources and a limited amount of time, they must choose whom to benefit — self or others. Then, pushed by the self-centered attitude, they choose to benefit themselves.

Holding the view that benefiting self and benefiting others are mutually exclusive is restrictive. Seen from a broader perspective, intelligently benefiting others also aids us. When we help others, we immediately witness others experiencing the good results of our actions. Our actions cause the environment in which we live to be more pleasant. Similarly, wisely benefiting ourselves aids others. Maintaining good health and keeping ourselves well-balanced physically and mentally creates a better atmosphere for all those we encounter. It also gives us more energy to share with others and enables us to practice the Dharma more consistently for the benefit of all. Thus in the Pāli canon, the Buddha praises those who work

for both their own welfare and the welfare of others. The two are mutually beneficial (AN 4.95).

There are these four kinds of persons found existing in the world. What four? (1) One who practices neither for his own welfare nor for the welfare of others; (2) one who practices for the welfare of others but not for his own welfare; (3) one who practices for his own welfare but not for the welfare of others; and (4) one who practices for both his own welfare and the welfare of others . . .

The person practicing both for his own welfare and for the welfare of others is the foremost, the best, the preeminent, the supreme, and the finest of these four persons. Just as from a cow comes milk, from milk curd, from curd butter, from butter ghee, and from ghee cream-of-ghee — which is reckoned the foremost of all these — so the person practicing for both his own welfare and the welfare of others is the foremost, the best, the preeminent, the supreme, and the finest of these four persons.<sup>75</sup>

The Buddha encouraged both his lay and monastic disciples to be kindhearted and compassionate and to express these emotions verbally and physically. In the *Advice to Sigāla* (*Sigālaka Sutta*, DN 31), the Buddha taught the householder Sigāla how to behave in a caring manner to people in a variety of relationships, such as friends, spouses, parent and child, employer and employee (master and servant), teacher and student, and monastic and lay follower. For example, friends should help one another, share one another's fortune and misfortune as if it were their own, and advance one another's prosperity and good qualities. Employers should assign tasks according to the employees' capabilities, pay them fairly, care for them when they are sick, and give them sufficient leisure time after they have worked diligently. Employees should respect their employers, carry out assignments with a pleasant attitude, complete their jobs, and be honest. Lay followers care for monastics with physical, verbal, and mental affection, supply the four requisites to facilitate their practice, and respect them for keeping precepts. Monastics reciprocate by living in pure ethical

conduct, counseling lay followers to restrain from destructive actions and to be compassionate and engage in constructive actions, and showing them the path to fortunate rebirth and liberation. To the Buddha, kindness and compassion weren't simply to be developed on the meditation cushion; they were to be put into practice in daily life encounters in the various relationships we have with others.

In the Pāli canon monastics are separate from society in that they do not have a householder's lifestyle, but they are part of society in that they interact with all people. They are to be receptive to, accept offerings from, and counsel those from all socioeconomic, racial, ethnic, and educational classes. The monastics' duty is to show people how to live ethically and earn their livelihood in a nonharmful manner, to encourage them to practice mindfulness, to teach them the Dharma, and to be grateful recipients of their gifts so that the laity can accumulate merit from making offerings. Since there are always many people whom monastics can potentially benefit, it is recommended that they first serve those who have confidence in the Dharma and have a generous heart. The Buddha sent the monastics out to share and spread the Dharma, saying (SN 4.5):

Monastics, go and travel around for the welfare of the multitude, for the happiness of the multitude, out of compassion for the world, for the benefit, welfare, and happiness of devas and humans. Let not two go the same way. Teach the Dharma that is good in the beginning, good in the middle, and good in the end with the right meaning and phrasing.

In traditional Theravāda societies and within some groups in the West, monastics' way of demonstrating compassion accords with the above description. However, in Asia and in the West there is also a call for monastics to become more involved in social welfare projects and for lay followers to become Dharma teachers. The ways in which monastics and lay followers live their compassion is changing as society changes.

Compassion may involve interceding when harm is occurring or when someone is behaving in an inappropriate manner. It is important to ensure

our motivation is one of compassion, however, and not an urge to control others or to angrily correct them. In *What Do You Think about Me?* (*Kinti Sutta*, MN 103) the Buddha recommends not to rush to reprove someone who is behaving improperly. First, we should evaluate the situation. If our mind will not be disturbed, and if the other person is not prone to anger and is not attached to his views, speaking to him is suitable. If our mind won't be disturbed, and if the other person is prone to anger, but it appears in this situation that he is not firmly attached to his views, we should speak. Although he may be irritated, it will be a trifle and the benefit of helping him avoid nonvirtue is great. In a third situation, we may be troubled, but the other person will not be provoked because he is not easily angered even though he is attached to his view. Here, too, if we can help turn the person away from bad behavior, we should do so.

In the fourth situation, we will be disturbed and the other person provoked because they are prone to anger and attached to their opinion, yet we think we can still turn them away from committing a wrongdoing. Here, our discomfort and the other's sensitivity and hurt are seen as minor compared to the value of preventing them from engaging in a great misdeed. In this case, we should intervene.

However, equanimity and nonintervention are called for when we will be disturbed and the other will be provoked because they are easily angered and are strongly attached to their idea, and we don't think we can change their mind. If they are impolite, equanimity on our part is called for. If we correct someone over every small, bad-mannered action they do, both of us will get irritable and no good will result.

## REFLECTION

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Make examples of the following situations you have faced, heard about, or seen in the media. How did you or other people respond and what was the result of that response? If the result was not positive, what would have been a more appropriate course of action?

1. If our mind will not be disturbed, and if the other person is not prone to anger and is not attached to his views, speaking to him is suitable.

2. If our mind won't be disturbed, and if the other person is prone to anger, but it appears in this situation that he is not firmly attached to his views, we should speak.
  3. If we may be troubled, but the other person will not be provoked because he is not easily angered although he is attached to his view, and if we can help turn the person away from bad behavior, we should do so.
  4. If we will be disturbed and the other person provoked because they are prone to anger and attached to their opinion, yet we think we can still turn them away from committing a wrongdoing, we should intervene.
  5. If we will be disturbed and the other will be provoked because they are easily angered and are strongly attached to their idea, and we don't think we can change their mind, we should not intervene but should practice equanimity.
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A loving mind is needed when others criticize or strike us, our friends, or our relatives. It is also needed when we are tempted to criticize others. A loving mind, especially at the level of access concentration or actual dhyāna, dispels fear. Fear arises easily in a mind that is angry and self-absorbed, whereas a mind filled with love for all beings is not suspicious of others' behavior and does not dwell on their faults. By treating them kindly, someone with a loving mind does not become the object of others' hostility, jealousy, or resentment.

Love manifests in your physical, verbal, and mental activities. Physically refrain from harming others, protect them, be considerate of them when living and working together, give them gifts, and offer your help and service when they need it. Keeping your precepts, showing respect to those worthy of respect, and being considerate of others' property and possessions are also loving physical activities.

Verbally speak truthfully, kindly, at appropriate times, and with meaningful words. If you know the Dharma well, explain good conduct and



meditation practices to others. Help to organize Dharma events and other activities that benefit others. These are expressions of loving speech because much communication is needed when planning events. Also point out others' good qualities, their talents, and specific actions that they have done well. Encouraging others to be generous and to refrain from harming others and explaining to them how to subdue their anger or overcome hurt are also loving physical activities.

By abandoning a judgmental, critical attitude, mentally focus your attention on others' good qualities and worthy accomplishments. Leaving aside arrogance, competition, and jealousy, wish them well. Cultivate loving actions of body, speech, and mind openly when you are in the presence of others and also privately in your own mind in their absence. Thinking and acting in this way requires practice and mental training, but it brings about better relationships and fosters a more peaceful, joyful mind in us. Cultivating single-pointed concentration on such love brings the spiritual benefits of higher stages of concentration and insight.

The monk Anuruddha spoke eloquently of loving actions when the Buddha questioned him about how the peaceful accord with his fellow companions came about (MN 31.7):

I think thus: "It is a gain for me, it is a great gain for me that I am living with such companions in the holy life." I maintain physical acts of loving-kindness toward those venerable ones both openly and privately. I maintain verbal acts of loving-kindness toward them both openly and privately. I maintain mental acts of loving-kindness toward them both openly and privately. I consider, "Why shouldn't I set aside what I wish to do and do what these venerable ones wish to do?" Then I set aside what I wish to do and do what these venerable ones wish to do. We are different in body, but one in mind.

## REFLECTION

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1. Anuruddha’s words above are wise advice. Think of times in your life when you could practice them.
  2. Imagine maintaining acts of physical, verbal, and mental kindness in these situations. How would you feel acting in that way? What effects would your actions have on the situation and the other people in it?
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### *Levels of Love and Compassion*

The Buddha talked to all his disciples about the importance of love and compassion for others in daily life, and to those involved in cultivating states of samādhi, he recommended them as “objects” of meditation. Here love — and by implication compassion,<sup>76</sup> empathic joy, and equanimity as well — are deliberately cultivated through special meditation techniques and are spoken of in three levels, according to the level of samādhi attained: (1) Love cultivated at the level of *full concentration* (P. *appanā samādhi*) is a mental state of full meditative absorption at the level of at least the first dhyāna; this is the immeasurable love of the four immeasurables. (2) Love at the level of *access concentration* (P. *upacāra samādhi*) is in a mental state of the preparations for a dhyāna, just before full absorption. (3) The *preliminary level of love* (P. *mettāya pubbabhāga*) is love in a mind that is not in a state of concentration.

Love and compassion also lead to the liberation of mind (P. *cetovimutti*) when concentration is at the level of the first, second, or third dhyānas. They are called “liberation of mind” because the mind is free from the five hindrances, especially anger. This state of concentration is an excellent basis for cultivating the insight that leads to liberation by wisdom and the four states of āryas.

But even the rudimentary level of love is valuable. The Buddha said that a monastic who has this love — love that relates to sentient beings with the wish for their well-being — for even the length of a fingersnap can “breathe easy” and accept offerings without worry of not deserving them. However, this love isn’t simply an ordinary positive feeling toward a few people. It is universal and extended to all beings.

## *The Bodhisattva Path*

Bodhicitta and the bodhisattva path are presented in the Pāli tradition. The oldest sūtras in the Pāli canon talk of three types of beings who attain awakening or arhatship: (1) The śrāvaka (P. *sāvaka*) hears teachings from a fully awakened buddha, practices them, and teaches others according to his ability after attaining awakening. (2) The solitary realizer (P. *paccekabuddha*) arhat attains awakening without the aid of a teacher in her last life, but does not establish a dispensation (P. *sāsana*) — that is, she does not turn the Dharma wheel. (3) A fully awakened buddha (P. *sammāsambuddha*) first becomes a bodhisattva, attains awakening without the aid of a teacher in his last life, and begins a dispensation, turning the Dharma wheel so that the Buddhadharmā exists in the world. This is the awakening attained by Śākyamuni, and it is extolled as superior to the awakening of either the śrāvaka or the solitary realizer.

The *Nidhikaṇḍa Sutta* (in the Khuddaka Nikāya)<sup>77</sup> says that by practicing generosity, ethical conduct, self-restraint, and other virtues, a practitioner may attain the perfection of a śrāvaka (P. *sāvaka-pāramī*), the awakening of a solitary realizer (P. *paccekabodhi*), or the ground of the Buddha (P. *buddhabhūmi*).

The *Upāsaka-janālakāra*, a twelfth-century Pāli treatise written by Thera Ānanda in the Theravāda tradition of the Mahāvihāra, speaks of three types of awakening: the awakening of the śrāvaka, the awakening of the solitary realizer, and the complete and perfect awakening (P. *sammāsambodhi*) of a buddha.<sup>78</sup>

While śrāvaka arhats, solitary-realizer arhats, and buddha arhats are equal in having realized nirvāṇa, there are some differences in their qualities, as noted above. All the paths leading to the goals of the three vehicles are presented in the Pāli canon, and the option of which one to follow is an individual choice. Nevertheless, the vast majority of people following the Theravāda tradition have chosen the path of the śrāvaka arhat because it is the prominent ideal presented in the Pāli scriptures. Even though the path of the bodhisattva is present, most Theravāda sages of ancient as well as modern times see that as a path for exceptional individuals. They thus encourage their disciples to follow the eightfold path

of the āryas and attain nirvāṇa, as the overwhelming number of sūtras propound.

However, at present and in the past, some Theravādins practice the bodhisattva path.<sup>79</sup> It is incorrect to think that bodhisattvas exist only in countries with Mahāyāna practitioners. Some Theravāda students learn and practice the bodhisattva path, and ārya bodhisattvas may manifest among Theravāda practitioners.

Although the path of a bodhisattva is not the prominent path explained in the Pāli sūtras, many Theravāda practitioners throughout the centuries have found it appealing and have followed it. Many of the early kings of Ceylon were spoken of as having bodhisattva-like qualities of compassion and generosity similar to those of the Buddha in his penultimate worldly life as King Vessantara. These rulers included King Duṭṭagāmaṇī and King Sirisaṃghabodhi, as recorded in the Ceylonese historical text the *Mahāvamsa*, and King Buddhadāsa, as recorded in the Ceylonese history text the *Cūlavamsa*. By the eighth century some kings in what are now Sri Lanka, Myanmar, and Thailand were either referred to as bodhisattvas by others or declared themselves to be bodhisattvas or practitioners of the bodhisattva path.<sup>80</sup> In tenth-century Sri Lanka, King Mahinda IV (956–972) declared in an inscription that “none but the bodhisattvas would be kings of Ceylon.”<sup>81</sup> The Thai King Lu T’ai of Sukhothai reputedly “wished to become a buddha to help all beings . . . leave behind the sufferings of transmigration.” The twelfth-century King Alaungsithu of Pagan in present-day Myanmar had a Pāli inscription written after he sponsored the building of the Shwegugyi Temple. In this verse he declared his intention to become a fully awakened buddha, not a śrāvaka. Many other kings of ancient Myanmar also aspired for buddhahood.

While this connection between royal rule and the bodhisattva ideal may have been influenced by Mahāyāna ideas present in those countries at that time, Theravāda Buddhism was the prominent tradition in those areas. Clearly the kings as well as the populace found the bodhisattva ideal not only acceptable but also exemplary, and saw their leader as embodying bodhisattva aspirations and deeds.

Some Theravāda learned adepts and practitioners were also attracted to the Bodhisattva Vehicle. For example, at the end of the commentary to the

*Jātaka*, its author vows to fulfill the ten bodhisattva perfections (*pāramīs*) in order to become a buddha and liberate all beings from saṃsāra and lead them to nirvāṇa. In addition, the twelfth-century author of the *Milinda-ṭīkā*, Thera Mahā-Tipitaka Cūlabhava of the Mahāvihāra tradition in Sri Lanka, wrote of his bodhicitta motivation in the colophon of this book. Here he stated, “*Buddho Bhaveyyam*” — May I become a Buddha — implying he was a bodhisattva aspiring to become a buddha.<sup>82</sup> Furthermore, some of the scribes of Buddhist texts on palm leaves in Sri Lanka stated their aspiration to become buddhas and are consequently regarded as bodhisattvas.

In the Mahāvihāra Monastery in Anuradhapura, Buddhaghosa was seen as the incarnation of Metteyya (Maitreya) Buddha, although it is not said that Buddhaghosa took the bodhisattva precepts or practiced the bodhisattva perfections.

Some Theravāda monks have also sought full awakening. The Sri Lankan Bhikkhu Doratiyāveye (ca. 1900) was accepted by his teacher to receive special instructions. However, he did not practice them because, by doing so, he believed he would become a stream-enterer and he had previously made the bodhisattva vow to become a buddha. Nowadays, also, there are Theravāda monastics and lay followers in Myanmar, Thailand, Sri Lanka, Cambodia, and so forth who make the resolve to become buddhas for the benefit of all sentient beings.<sup>83</sup>

In short, while we usually think of bodhisattvas in connection with the Mahāyāna tradition, they are not unknown in Theravādin countries. Two Thai masters are regarded as incarnations of Maitreya Bodhisattva, and statues of Kuan Yin (Avalokiteśvara) have been unearthed in Thailand, especially in the south. In some areas, there is a festival in the autumn in honor of Kuan Yin and people maintain a vegetarian diet during that time. While this practice probably originated with Chinese immigrants to Thailand, it has been adopted by many Thais in those areas.

### *The Bodhisattva in Pāli Literature*

The concept of the bodhisattva has been present in Pāli literature from the beginning. In the sūtras, the Buddha often referred to himself as a bodhisattva. For example, in the *Shorter Discourse on the Mass of*

*Suffering*, the Buddha says (MN 14.5), “Before my awakening, while I was still only an unawakened bodhisattva . . .” In the *Wonderful and Marvelous Sutta* (*Acchariya-abbhūta Sutta*, MN 123), Ānanda recalls the Buddha calling himself “the bodhisattva” when he spoke of his previous time in Tuṣita and his early life before attaining awakening under the bodhi tree. In the *Great Discourse on the Lineage* (*Mahāpadāna Sutta*, DN 14), the Buddha speaks about previous buddhas and their lives as bodhisattvas.

Well before the Mahāyāna was spread publicly, bodhisattvas began to appear more often in Pāli literature and practice. Since the Buddha said he was a bodhisattva before he attained awakening under the bodhi tree, naturally people were interested in how he practiced and what motivated him. In addition, scriptures talked of other wheel-turning Buddhas — buddhas who teach the Buddhadharma in a place and at a time when it had not previously been taught. In doing so, these buddhas liberate many beings from saṃsāra and initiate the Buddhadharma in the world, where it will benefit countless beings. Metteyya (Maitreya) is said to be the next wheel-turning Buddha and six preceding buddhas were also mentioned.

The Buddha spoke the *Chronicle of Buddhas* (*Buddhavaṃsa*) at the request of Śāriputra. This comparatively late text in the Khuddaka Nikāya, tells the story of twenty-five buddhas, including Buddha Gotama (Śākyamuni Buddha) in a previous life, who generated bodhicitta and made the vow to become a fully awakened buddha.

It is said that many eons ago, in one of his previous lives, Śākyamuni Buddha was a young man who cared for his blind mother after his father’s death. He thought to become a merchant in order to support her well. As she had no one to care for her otherwise, she came along on the boat for one of his trading expeditions. Encountering bad weather, the ship wrecked and the mother and son were set afloat in the sea. The other passengers had drowned, and when the young man saw his mother struggling to keep her head above water, he felt her suffering was unbearable and swam to rescue her. In the process he realized that all sentient beings were drowning in the ocean of saṃsāra. Filled with compassion, he thought to cross the ocean of misery that was saṃsāric existence in order to take others across. To do that, he aspired to become a fully awakened buddha. In this way he awakened the thought of awakening, becoming a bodhisattva.<sup>84</sup>



Some lifetimes after that, Śākyamuni was born as Sumedha, a matted-hair ascetic practicing the path to arhatship. Hearing that Dīpaṅkara Buddha<sup>85</sup> was in a nearby town and eager to meet a fully awakened one, he went there. Upon seeing the Buddha, Sumedha was deeply moved. Realizing that becoming a fully awakened buddha would be of much greater benefit to the world, Sumedha knelt down and, in the presence of Dīpaṅkara Buddha, made the aspiration-vow (P. *abhinīhāra*) to become a fully awakened buddha.

His faith and exuberance for full awakening were apparent that same day, when he learned that the Buddha Dīpaṅkara and his disciples were soon to come along the path. He began to clear the path for them to pass, but when he was unable to finish before they arrived, Sumedha prostrated to Dīpaṅkara Buddha and then laid down in the mud. Sumedha relates this moving event (BVA II A.52–54):

Loosening my hair, spreading my bark-garments and piece of hide there in the mire, I lay down prone. “Let the Buddha tread on me with his disciples. Do not let him tread in the mire — it will be for my welfare.” While I was lying on the earth it was thus in my mind: If I so wished I could burn up my defilements today.

When he initially invited the Buddha and his disciples to use him as a bridge to cross the mud, Sumedha was focused on his own welfare. He knew that if he wished, he could eradicate all defilements and become an arhat that very day. Nevertheless, he questioned this self-centered intention and made the following determination to become an omniscient buddha and to lead all other beings out of cyclic existence (BVA II A.55–58):

What is the use while I [remain] ignorant of realizing Dharma here? Having reached omniscience, I will become a buddha in the world with the devas. What is the use of my crossing over alone, being a person aware of my strength? Having reached omniscience, I will cause the world together with the devas to cross over.

By this act of merit of mine toward the supreme amongst human beings, I will reach omniscience; I will cause many people to cross over. Cutting through the stream of saṃsāra, shattering the three renewed existences (the desire, form, and formless realms), embarking in the ship of Dhamma (the eightfold path of the āryas), I will cause the world with the devas to cross over.

At that time, Dīpaṅkara Buddha gave Sumedha the prediction of his awakening: he would actualize his vow to attain full awakening, becoming a buddha with the name Gotama after four countless and a hundred thousand eons.<sup>86</sup> Had Sumedha not made that aspiration and vow to attain buddhahood, he would have realized an arhat's awakening that very day by listening to a discourse by Dīpaṅkara Buddha. Sumedha had no regret, however; he was joyfully determined to become a buddha no matter how long it took.

Sumedha then went into seclusion and contemplated how to fulfill his aim of full awakening. He saw that the main virtuous qualities he would have to develop were the ten perfections. The *Buddhavaṃsa* then briefly sets out the ten perfections (BVA 116–66), making known a full-fledged bodhisattva path to supreme awakening. It is complete with a firm aspiration to attain buddhahood, the bodhisattva vow, the path of practicing the ten perfections and fulfilling them to the highest degree, the view of selflessness, and so forth. The *Chronicle of Buddhas* also names the ten perfections and records the names of each buddha's chief male and female disciples, attendants, life span, parinirvāṇa, and other details.<sup>87</sup>

The *Basket of Conduct (Cariyāpiṭaka)* in the Khuddaka Nikāya contains thirty-five stories of the bodhisattva Gotama's dedicated efforts to complete the perfections during the times of previous buddhas. For example, the ten perfections can be practiced to a normal, higher, and ultimate degree. This is illustrated in the practice of generosity, the first perfection. Giving such things as food, drink, bedding, and sandals is normal generosity; giving his eyes and other body parts is higher generosity; and giving his own life is generosity at the ultimate level. The *Jātaka* contains about 550 stories of the bodhisattva in his previous lives while he was practicing the bodhisattva



path and perfecting the perfections that would enable him to become a fully awakened buddha in our age.

In the *Great Discourse on the Lineage*, the Buddha spoke of six previous buddhas — Vipassin, Sikhī, Vessabhū, Kakusandha, Koṇāgamana, and Kassapa — after whom he arose as the seventh buddha. Each of these previous buddhas had also been a bodhisattva. He then describes Vipassin’s bodhisattva activities from descending from Tuṣita to his awakening and teaching the Dharma and Vinaya. In the *Apadāna*,<sup>88</sup> thirty-five precious buddhas are mentioned, implying that all of them had generated bodhicitta and practiced the bodhisattva path.

In the *Lion’s Roar on the Turning of the Wheel (Cakkavatti Sīhanāda Sutta, DN 26)*, the Buddha predicted the future Buddha Metteyya, who also would follow the bodhisattva path prior to becoming a buddha. However the Buddha did not present the bodhisattva path and the full awakening of buddhahood as being limited to the previous six buddhas and to the future Metteyya Buddha. In the *Sutta on Serene Faith*, Sāriputta says (*Sampasādanīya Sutta, DN 28.19*):

I have heard and received it from the Blessed One’s own lips, “There have been in the past, and there will be in the future, Arahant Buddhas equal in awakening to myself.”

In other words, the bodhisattva path and the attainment of full awakening through it are open to many others. As mentioned above, the *Nidhikaṇḍa Sutta* presents full awakening as one of three possible results that a spiritual seeker may aim for.<sup>89</sup>

Discriminating knowledge, release of mind, the perfections of an ariya disciple (a śrāvaka ārya), the awakening of a solitary buddha (solitary realizer), and the requisites for (supreme) buddhahood — all these [qualities] can be obtained by this [treasure] . . . Therefore wise and educated men praise the acquisition of meritorious actions.

Here we see that buddhahood is not limited to people the Buddha specifically mentioned in other sutras but is open to all who may choose it.

The *Birth Stories of the Ten Bodhisattvas* (*Dasabodhisattuppattikathā*), a post-canonical Pāli composition, extolls the qualities of bodhisattvas and relates the stories of ten bodhisattvas, including Metteya, who in the future will generate bodhicitta, practice the perfections, and attain awakening. This work begins with Sāriputta asking the Buddha if there will be perfect buddhas in future eons, to which the Buddha responds (BD 1.1–2):

Sāriputta, there have been limitless and countless ariya people in the world who have successively fulfilled the pāramīs, attained buddhahood, and, having completed a buddha’s duty, passed away at the end of their life span. In the future, too, there will be limitless and countless ariya people who, having enjoyed the pleasures of the sensual world and the bliss of the Brahmā worlds, having successively fulfilled the pāramīs with courage and determination, will attain buddhahood and pass away having completed a buddha’s duty.

Dhammapāla, a sixth-century commentator, composed the *Treatise on the Pāramīs*, which is included in his commentary on the *Basket of Conduct*. He draws on the *Jātaka*, *Chronicle of Buddhas*, and *Basket of Conduct*, which are Pāli canonical texts, as well as on the *Bodhisattva Grounds* (*Bodhisattvabhūmi*) by Asaṅga.

## REFLECTION

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1. Imagine and let your mind be inspired by the story of the Buddha in a previous life when he was a young man caring for his blind widowed mother, his insight into the nature of saṃsāra, and the awakening of his bodhicitta.
2. Contemplate Sumedha’s encounter with Dīpaṅkara Buddha, his offering to Dīpaṅkara Buddha, and the way his mind transformed into

bodhicitta. Imagine Dīpaṅkara Buddha prophesizing Sumedha becoming Śākyamuni Buddha. Recognize that you too have the potential to generate bodhicitta and attain full awakening.

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### *For the Success of Bodhicitta*

All twenty-four buddhas whose life stories are found in the *Buddhavaṃsa* traversed a similar path in becoming buddhas. First, they made an unshakable resolve (*praṇidhāna*, *praṇidhāna*) to become a bodhisattva and then a buddha. This mental resolve is expressed repeatedly by making an aspiration-vow (P. *abhinīhāra*) to attain full awakening for the benefit of all sentient beings in the presence of many buddhas. This aspiration is concerned with both the short-term and long-term welfare of all beings, wanting them to have temporal happiness in saṃsāra and especially wanting to help them tame and purify their minds so that they can attain nirvāṇa and full awakening. Then bodhisattvas perform an act of merit (P. *adhikāra*) to demonstrate to each buddha their sincerity and dedication to fulfilling their aspiration. This is followed by each buddha making a prediction (*vyākaraṇa*, *veyyākaraṇa*) of when that bodhisattva will become a buddha and what that buddha's name will be.

For the aspiration to attain awakening to be successful and for buddhahood to be attained, it should be supported by eight conditions (BVA II A.59): The person who makes this altruistic aspiration (1) is a human being (*manussa*, or *manussatta*); (2) is a male (P. *liṅgasampatti*); (3) has the necessary supportive causes and conditions (P. *hetu*) — for example, a firm Dharma practice; (4) has generated the bodhicitta aspiration (P. *sattthāradassana*) in the presence of a living buddha (not a spiritual mentor, statue, stūpa, bodhi tree, or śrāvaka or solitary-realizer arhat); (5) has gone forth as a monk (P. *pabbajjā*); (6) has achieved special qualities (P. *guṇasampatti*), such as the direct knowledges (P. *abhiñña*) and the higher states of meditative absorption; (7) has such deep dedication and devotion (P. *adhikāra*) for the Buddha that he is willing to give up his life and perform great acts of merit for the Three Jewels; and (8) has strong virtuous

desire and determination to cultivate the qualities that bring about buddhahood (P. *chandatā*).

A bodhisattva's desire for full awakening should be so intense that "if he were to hear, 'buddhahood can only be attained after experiencing torture in hell for four countless and a hundred thousand eons,' he would not deem that difficult to do, but would be filled with desire for the task and would not shrink away" (TP 6).

At the time of generating bodhicitta when a person becomes a bodhisattva, his mind becomes completely fixed on and devoted to awakening; thereafter he investigates the perfections, trains in them, and fulfills them as Sumedha did.

In addition to generating the aspiration for awakening, great compassion (P. *mahākaruṇā*) and skillful means (P. *upāyakosalla*) are also conditions needed to practice the perfections. Skillful means is the wisdom that transforms the ten perfections into the collections necessary to attain awakening. Dhammapāla says (TP 6):

These Great Beings devote themselves to working uninterruptedly for the welfare of others without any concern for their own happiness and without any fear . . . they are able to promote the welfare [of all sentient beings] and even on occasions when they are merely seen, heard of, or recollected inspire confidence [in others]. Through his wisdom a bodhisattva perfects within himself the character of a buddha; through his compassion, the ability to perform the work of a buddha. Through wisdom he brings himself across [the ocean of saṃsāra]; through compassion he leads others across. Through wisdom he understands the suffering of others, through compassion he strives to alleviate their suffering. Through wisdom he becomes disenchanted with suffering, through compassion he accepts suffering. Through wisdom he aspires for nirvāṇa, through compassion he remains in saṃsāra. Through compassion he enters saṃsāra, through wisdom he does not delight in it. Through wisdom he destroys all attachments, but because his wisdom is

accompanied by compassion he never desists from activities that benefit others. Through compassion he trembles with sympathy for all, but because his compassion is accompanied by wisdom, his mind is unattached. Through wisdom he is free from “I-making” and “mine-making,”<sup>90</sup> through compassion he is free from lethargy and depression.

So, too, through wisdom and compassion respectively, he becomes his own protector and the protector of others, a sage and a hero, one who does not torment himself or torment others, one who promotes his own welfare and the welfare of others, fearless and a giver of fearlessness, dominated by consideration for the Dhamma and by consideration for the world, grateful for favors done and active in doing favors for others, devoid of ignorance and craving, accomplished in knowledge and in conduct, possessed of the powers and of the grounds for self-confidence. Thus wisdom and compassion, as the means for attaining each of the specific fruits of the pāramīs, is the condition for the pāramīs. The same pair is a condition for the resolution as well.

Other qualities are also conditions to practice the perfections. These are zeal, competence, stability, and beneficent conduct. *Zeal* is energy in completing the collections, *competence* is wisdom in skillfully practicing the collections, *stability* is firm determination, and *beneficent conduct* is cultivating love and compassion. A bodhisattva also cultivates six inclinations — renunciation, solitude, nonattachment, nonhatred, nonconfusion, and release from saṃsāra — based on seeing the faults of their opposites. For example, seeing the disadvantages of lay life with its sense pleasures, he inclines toward renunciation, and seeing the disadvantages of a distracting social life, he inclines toward solitude. When the opposites of these six inclinations flourish in the mind, cultivating the bodhisattva practices becomes extremely difficult, if not impossible. Seeing the faults of the opposites of the perfections helps to create good conditions for us to train in them. For example, seeing the disadvantages of miserliness inclines us to practice generosity, and seeing the disadvantages of deceptive speech inclines us to practice truthfulness. Therefore, to actualize our deep

admiration for the bodhisattva path and its results, it is wise to cultivate the conditions that enable us to practice the perfections and to abandon their interfering opposites.

In conclusion, although many people believe that the bodhisattva path as found in the Pāli scriptures is for only those who are destined to become wheel-turning buddhas, when we explore the Pāli literature more deeply, we find that Dhammapāla described a complete bodhisattva path that is open to all, should they aspire to follow it. In addition, we find that some Theravāda practitioners have followed that path and that historical texts in Theravāda areas refer to bodhisattvas subsequent to Śākyamuni Buddha.

## 10 | Mind Training

**A**LTHOUGH THE PURPOSE of all the Buddha’s teachings is to train the mind, there arose in Tibet a special set of teachings called “mind training” or “thought training” (T. *blo sbyong*). It was developed by the Kadampa geshe, disciples of Atiśa and Dromtonpa, beginning around the twelfth century, but has its textual roots in Nāgārjuna’s *Precious Garland* and Śāntideva’s *Engaging in the Bodhisattvas’ Deeds*, as well as in the *Ākāśagarbha Sūtra*, *Vimalakīrti Sūtra*, and *Akṣayamati Sūtra*, among others.

Taken up by all Tibetan Buddhist traditions, the mind-training texts center on the development of the two bodhicittas — conventional bodhicitta, which is the altruistic intention, and ultimate bodhicitta, the wisdom realizing emptiness. They especially emphasize cultivating bodhicitta by means of equalizing and exchanging self and others, and most are written in a pithy, straightforward style that aims directly at the self-centered attitude and self-grasping, the two principal enemies of bodhisattvas. The mind-training teachings eviscerate these hindrances and call out their ridiculous “logic” that leads to misery, replacing it with more realistic perspectives. The advice the mind-training texts give us is the opposite of what the self-centered attitude and self-grasping demand, and their recommended actions are the opposite of what our afflictive mind wants to do at that moment. Of course, that is what makes them so effective at quelling afflictions and protecting us from negativity.

The mind-training practices challenge us to reorient the framework through which we view the world, releasing the self-centered attitude and focusing instead on cherishing others more than self, and dedicating our lives to benefiting others temporally in saṃsāra and ultimately by showing them the way to full awakening. The practice of mind training helps us to

remain balanced when we experience either happiness or suffering, without becoming giddy and overly optimistic when we are happy or discouraged and depressed when we face suffering. Whatever we encounter in life — wealth or poverty, success or failure, a multitude of friends or loneliness — we are steadfast in our pursuit of full awakening. In short, mind training shows us how to make all circumstances favorable to the path.

*The Seven-Point Mind Training* by Geshe Chekawa is perhaps the most well-known of the mind-training texts. I received the transmission and teachings on this text from my senior tutor, Ling Rinpoche, and have applied them throughout my life; this has brought great benefit to my mind and thus to all the beings I come in contact with. The seven points are (1) practicing the preliminaries, (2) training in the two types of bodhicitta, (3) taking adversity into the path to full awakening, (4) a summary of a lifetime's practice, (5) the measure of having trained the mind, (6) the commitment of mind training, and (7) the precepts of mind training.

The first point — the preliminaries of contemplating our precious human life, death and impermanence, karma and its effects, and the disadvantages of saṃsāra — were explained in previous volumes of the *Library of Wisdom and Compassion*. Regarding the second point on how to develop the two bodhicittas, the cultivation of conventional bodhicitta — what we commonly call simply “bodhicitta” or the altruistic intention — is the topic of the preceding chapters of this volume.

The third point comes below as we explore taking adversity into the path, referring to verses from several mind-training texts. The fourth point is a concise explanation of how to practice mind training throughout one's life and at death. This will be followed by the commitments and precepts of mind training — points six and seven — that give direction to our practice. To complete the chapter we'll look at some *gāthās* — short sentences or verses that apply to everyday actions, imbuing them with spiritual meaning and transforming them into the path.

Some mind-training texts dwell on how to transform adverse circumstances into the path. Such advice is applicable every day since, as we have all experienced, unwanted problems easily find their way into our lives. It's best to become familiar with this advice in our daily meditation when a strong affliction is not manifest in the mind. Recall a disturbing



situation from the past and rerun it in your mind, but now think and imagine acting according to the mind-training instructions. At first this may seem unnatural, but as we become more familiar with a new, beneficial way of thinking, the easier it becomes. And when our perspective regarding difficulties begins to shift when we meditate, it will also change when we are in the midst of an actual situation.

### *Taking Adversity into the Path*

Verses explaining how to take adversity into the path are dear to my heart. They have given me courage, compassion, and fortitude in difficult situations, such as when I fled Tibet and became a refugee, as well as in exile when I have done my best to help hundreds of thousands of Tibetans adapt to a new life without giving up hope of returning to our homeland.

In *The Seven-Point Mind Training*, the third point reads:

When the vessel and its contents are filled with negativities, transform these unfavorable conditions into the path to awakening. Immediately apply whatever you encounter to meditation.

The “vessel” is our environment and “its contents” are the sentient beings who live in it. The degeneration of both is obvious: corruption, war, disharmony, and dispute are rampant between groups and nations and within them as well. Our environment is adversely affected by climate change, which will bring additional hardships to the sentient beings on planet Earth. In confronting this, we have four choices. The first is to hope it will go away and ignore it, which will only allow it to increase. The second is to become paranoid and aggressive, to yell and scream, and to accuse and threaten others, which only inflames a bad situation. The third is to despair and become depressed, which brings everyone down. The fourth is to get involved and try to help. Needless to say, this is the course we should choose. But it is important to maintain the proper mental attitude when doing so and to accept that our efforts may or may not produce the changes we seek. At the end, we are left with the state of our mind. How

can we navigate living in these times and transform our experience into something valuable for what is most important for us as Dharma practitioners: attaining awakening so we can most effectively help in the long term?

Doing this begins with accepting the situation. Instead of becoming attached to hope, which here means magical thinking of success, or to fear that is based on imagining worst-case scenarios and living in dread of them, we ask ourselves how we can use these situations in our Dharma practice.

The answer depends on having a deep understanding of karma and its effects, knowing that whatever we experience is a result of our past actions. Try thinking: I'm experiencing difficulties now because of harmful actions done either earlier in this life or in previous lives. These actions were created under the influence of self-centeredness and ignorance. It's no use blaming others for my misery, and it's foolish to think that I deserve to suffer because I erred in the past. Rather, I will learn from my misdeeds. Since I don't like the result I'm experiencing, in the future I will avoid creating its cause.

If we're unsure what kind of causes we may have created in the past that bring this result, we can read about karma and its results. A mind-training text called *The Wheel of Sharp Weapons* discusses this, bringing in specific examples. In it are verses such as (WSW 9) this:<sup>91</sup>

When my body falls prey to unbearable illnesses,  
it is the weapon of destructive karma returning on me  
for injuring the bodies of others;  
from now on I will take all sickness upon myself.

Accepting the reality of being ill eliminates the mental suffering — especially anxiety, worry, and fear — and makes being sick much more manageable. Think: This is a result of my physically injuring others in the past. What motivated such behavior? My self-centered attitude. Seeing the faults of self-preoccupation, I will now do my best to shun this attitude when it manifests in my mind; that will prevent my harming others in the future. In addition, I will do the taking and giving meditation, imagining taking all the illness of others on myself and giving them my happiness.

DEEP SECTION

## REFLECTION

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1. In your meditation, think of a situation in which you experienced great mental suffering and contemplate this verse from *The Wheel of Sharp Weapons* (WSW 10):

When my mind falls prey to suffering,  
it is the weapon of destructive karma turning upon me  
for definitely causing turbulence in the hearts of others;  
from now on I will take all suffering upon myself.

2. Accept your mental discomfort by linking it to the self-centered attitude and make a strong determination to not deliberately cause turmoil in others' minds and hearts.
3. Do the taking and giving meditation regarding this. At the conclusion, rest your mind in a peaceful state.

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A similar approach is to meditate: "May my suffering suffice for all the suffering of others." Contemplate the various problems sentient beings are undergoing at this very moment: health problems, relationship problems, oppression, environmental hazards, and so forth. With a mind of compassion that cherishes all these beings and wants them to be free of suffering, think, "May the suffering I'm experiencing now be sufficient to eliminate all of their suffering." Imagine others being free of their pain. In doing this meditation, one surprising result is that we often realize that compared to what others are going through, our problem is not that bad. We can endure it. This gives us a lot of confidence and courage and alleviates our pain. However, we have to do this meditation with genuine compassion; if we do it just to get our own suffering to decrease, it won't work!

Another mind-training technique to use in difficult situations is to give all your suffering to the self-centered attitude, which is the real enemy responsible for this predicament. Here it is important to remember that the self-centeredness is not you; it is something apart from you, something that

disturbs you and causes you problems. Feel that, having given the misery to the self-centered attitude, you are free of suffering.

The sincere practitioners of mind-training practice in a remarkable way, one that we have to build up to gradually. One prayer they make is this:

If it's better for me to be sick, may I be sick;  
if it is better for me to get well, may I be well;  
if it is better for me to die, may I die.

Their minds have shifted out of the self-centered perspective of ordinary beings that is anchored to “my happiness now” and they now look at life through the lens of “what will be best for all sentient beings in the long term?” With this new perspective, they feel completely comfortable in making the above wishes. Try thinking like this.

With this long-term perspective that not only understands karma but also knows what mental states are conducive to spiritual progress, a Kadampa master would think:

If people despise me, I like it;  
if they praise me, my pride will grow.  
If they criticize me, I will clearly see my faults  
and have the opportunity to correct them.  
Suffering is fine. If I enjoy too much, I will exhaust my good karma.  
If I suffer, I exhaust my bad karma, and that is good.

When we are sincerely intent on generating bodhicitta and practicing the bodhisattvas' deeds, thoughts such as these make perfect sense. This way of thinking is not masochistic; in fact, it is beneficial. Self-centeredness brings us only pain. By relinquishing it and training the mind to cherish others even more than ourselves, our minds and hearts will be peaceful and content.

Maitrīyogi, one of Atiśa's principal teachers of mind training, thought in a similar way when he chanted “Melodies of an Adamantine Song”:<sup>92</sup>

Alas! To guide all beings who have been my parents,

I'll extract without exception the five poisons of each being  
by means of the five poisonous afflictions present in me.  
Whatever virtue I may possess, such as an absence of attachment,  
I will distribute equally to all beings of the six classes [of sentient  
beings].

Using the painful fruits [of my karma], such as sickness and so on,  
I will extract all similar sufferings of sentient beings.  
Whatever joy and benefit I may possess, such as absence of illness,  
I will distribute equally to all beings of the six classes.

If I do this, what occasion is there for me, even for a single instant,  
to wander aimlessly in this ocean of cyclic existence?  
Yet until I have attained [full] awakening,  
whatever class of the five poisons and their fruits may lie in store,  
I will exhaust entirely in this very lifetime.

I will extract them this very year and this very month;  
I will exhaust them this very day and this very instant;  
I will seek the means to cut even the thread of minor sufferings.  
O Maitrīyogi, make sure that your mind becomes trained!

In the colophon Maitrīyogi says that he “regularly recites this song, wherein loving-kindness, compassion, and bodhicitta are sung as a diamond song,” and that one time near the Ganges River, Maitreya Buddha, the future buddha who is the embodiment of great compassion, appeared to him in the form of a king.

Maitrīyogi brings up another important point in mind training: when experiencing happiness due to the ripening of virtuous karma created in the past, share the satisfaction with other sentient beings. Sometimes the happiness is such that we can give an object or share some kind words with others. Other times we mentally share our joy by dedicating it to others, as Maitrīyogi does when he mentally gives his joy and benefit to all the six classes of samsāric beings.

There is no reason to feel guilty when experiencing happiness, joy, or pleasure. We should be happy when we practice the Dharma! Rather, understand that it is a product of our own virtuous actions and make a strong determination to continue engaging in such actions. Rejoicing at our merit and virtuous actions is important. That increases the karma of doing them. Likewise, rejoicing in the merit and virtue of others makes our mind happy and we create karma similar to that of the person who did the action.

### *Specific Advice for Difficult Situations*

Another mind-training text is *The Thirty-Seven Practices of Bodhisattvas* by the Tibetan sage Togmay Sangpo (1295–1369). This text is one of my favorites and I have taught it frequently at large Dharma gatherings both in India and in the West. Like other writings in this genre, it is in the form of short, pithy verses or sentences and covers all the major topics on the stages of the path. Its verses on transforming adversity into the path are especially pointed, often giving advice that is hard to listen to when our mind is afflictive, because the advice is the opposite of our usual, worldly way of thinking, feeling, and behaving. But of course, that’s why the advice is the remedy! One good way to approach this is to “play” with the advice — that is, to imagine following it. Investigate for yourself if the new perspective is more reasonable than following your habitual emotional patterns. Examine if the new strategies for dealing with difficulties work better than blindly doing what you have always done. Below are a few verses from *The Thirty-Seven Practices of Bodhisattvas* that will give you not only a taste of the entire text but also some practical advice you can apply immediately (12, 15, 16, 19, 36).

Even if someone out of strong desire  
steals all your wealth or has it stolen,  
dedicate to him your body, possessions,  
and your virtue, past, present, and future —  
this is the practice of bodhisattvas.

Ordinary beings who do not know the Dharma usually become very angry when their possessions are stolen. They feel violated and want their things to be returned and the thief punished. But when we practice with awakening as our goal, we have already mentally given our possessions to others. In that case, this supposed thief already owns our former belongings and has now come to collect them. Not only is there no reason to be angry at him, but in addition we should dedicate to him our body, possessions, and merit of the past, present, and future. May he be free of suffering and have all the external riches he desires as well as the internal riches of nonattachment and generosity.

Though someone may deride and speak bad words  
about you in a public gathering,  
looking on her as a spiritual teacher,  
bow to her with respect —  
this is the practice of bodhisattvas.

We don't at all like when people ruin our reputation or put us down in front of others. Our usual way of dealing with public criticism is to insult the person in return, embellishing his faults and humiliating him. In fact, those who point out our faults are our teachers. Just as we have to see the dirt in a room to clean it, only by seeing our misdeeds and character faults can we have the opportunity to correct them. If we are sincerely interested in transforming our minds rather than enhancing our egos, we will respectfully thank this person.

Have you ever seen a speaker criticized during a public talk? If the speaker thanks the other person, the issue is quickly settled and the talk can continue. Thanking the other person doesn't mean we necessarily agree with what he said; it means we appreciate his comment and will think about it.

Even if a person for whom you've cared  
like your own child regards you as an enemy,  
cherish him specially, like a mother  
does her child who is stricken by sickness —

this is the practice of bodhisattvas.

When someone we trust and care about deeply returns our kindness by treating us as an enemy, ordinary beings feel hurt and angry. This situation may be likened to that of a mother who cares for her child with love and even sacrifices her happiness for the benefit of the child, but then the child is delirious with fever and, not knowing what he is doing, attacks his mother. Here the mother understands that the illness is the source of the child's behavior; likewise, those practicing the bodhisattva path understand that their dear one is overcome by afflictions and karma, which are the actual source of their bad behavior. In short, rather than taking someone's bad behavior toward you personally, reflect that they are stricken with the sickness of afflictions and karma and have compassion for them.

Having a compassionate attitude doesn't mean we allow the person to continue with their poor behavior. We do what we can to protect ourselves and to help that person stop, but our actions are motivated by compassion, not antipathy. This is a difficult but essential practice.

Though you become famous and many bow to you,  
and you gain riches to equal Vaiśravaṇa,  
see that worldly fortune is without essence,  
and be unconceited —  
this is the practice of bodhisattvas.

This verse is the opposite of the previous three. Here we are well-known, respected, and even well-to-do financially. Many people know about our good qualities or Dharma knowledge, and we are widely admired. The self-centered tendency in this situation is to become smug and conceited, thinking that we are someone great and looking down on others. We could even start to think that we are above the law or that our negative karma will not ripen.

But in such situations, well-trained practitioners think that whenever others treat them like a guest of honor, it is in the nature of suffering. They see its impermanence and know that being attached to praise, reputation, or wealth is meaningless because with a small change in conditions they could



lose everything. As Dromtonpa said, “Though others may rate us very highly, the most expedient course is to see ourselves in the lowest rank.” I try to practice this, and do my best to put myself at the lowest level. This is in fact the most practical thing to do; otherwise considerations of hierarchy cause trouble and agitation.

I know some people who have little knowledge but act with great pretentiousness. I find their behavior so futile that inwardly I cannot help laughing. To be without pride is the practice of a bodhisattva. It makes our life much easier; otherwise our mind is continuously tormented by comparing ourselves with others, feeling jealous of those who are better and arrogant toward those whom we consider inferior.

In brief, whatever you are doing,  
ask yourself, “What’s the state of my mind?”  
With constant mindfulness and introspective awareness  
accomplish others’ good —  
this is the practice of bodhisattvas.

This verse sums up the bodhisattva practice. Though we may look like a great practitioner who is very holy and benevolent, we may harbor resentment, revenge, and envy in our hearts. This is not Dharma practice, even if others are fooled by it. For our own sake and for the sake of others, we must be mindful in all circumstances so that nothing in us is secret, pretentious, or deceptive. We must be straightforward and honest. Should we notice corrupt motivations or bad behavior of our body, speech, or mind, we must think, “I am a follower of the bodhisattva path, of the Mahāyāna Dharma. I have the opportunity to be guided by many precious spiritual mentors and to hear their teachings. With all these opportunities, if I still act badly I’m deceiving my spiritual mentors, the bodhisattvas, and the sentient beings who trust me and count on my help. This would be a horrible thing for me to do.”

As Śāntideva says (BCA 2.27), “I beseech you with clasped hands to be mindful in all your activities.” Therefore, we must practice for the benefit of others, dedicate all our qualities, happiness, and abilities of body, speech, and mind to the service of sentient beings. We should constantly see

ourselves as the servant of others and do nothing else except work for their benefit. This means maintaining a sincere and compassionate attitude in all we do, even small daily activities. The gāthās presented below will show you how to do this.

## REFLECTION

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1. Remember a time when your wealth or possessions were stolen or someone deprived you of what was rightfully yours. How did you feel? What did you want to do?
  2. To free yourself from the pain of anger and to meet the emotional or physical need of the other person, give up ownership of those items and mentally give them to the other person.
  3. Think of a time when someone derided and criticized you in front of a group of people.
  4. Watching your reaction to this event, what do you learn about yourself? Is there anger, attachment to reputation, self-righteousness, or self-pity? See this person as being like a spiritual teacher: because they pointed out your weaknesses, you can now see them clearly and go about remedying them.
  5. Recall a time when someone you trusted turned on you and acted in ways that caused you pain.
  6. See that the person was overwhelmed by the power of their afflictions, like your child who is stricken with delirium as a result of fever. Have compassion for them, just as you would for your sick child.
  7. Make a determination to have mindfulness and introspective awareness and to be aware of the state of your mind as much as possible. With compassion, work to benefit others.
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## *A Lifetime's Practice*

Geshe Chekawa (1102–76), the Kadampa geshe who wrote the *Seven-Point Mind Training*, condenses a lifetime's Dharma practice into five forces: the motivation, seed of merit, destruction, prayers of aspiration, and familiarity.

The force of the *morning motivation* starts the day off well. Before getting out of bed we set our intention: “Today I will not harm others and will benefit them in whatever way I can. To make my life meaningful, I will cherish others and use my body, speech, and mind to cultivate bodhicitta. With mindfulness and introspective awareness I will be vigilant and notice afflictions and the self-centered attitude as soon as they arise and immediately apply the appropriate counterforce.”

Establishing a positive and optimistic motivation at the beginning of the day affects everything we do. Even if we engage in one of the ten nonvirtues, due to the power of our initial intention in the morning, it won't be so strong. It's helpful throughout the day to recall your motivation and center yourself so you stay on course.

The force of the *seed of merit* involves purification and collection of merit. To generate and continually grow bodhicitta, purifying negativities — those created long ago and those created recently — and creating merit are very important. They are like the water and fertilizer that prepare the field of the mind so that when the seeds of the Dharma teachings are planted, a large harvest of realization will grow. The preliminary practices, such as the seven-limb prayer, taking refuge, reciting the names of the buddhas and prostrating to them, making offerings, reciting the mantra of Vajrasattva, and so on are excellent ways to purify and create merit. Do these practices when you feel blocked in your practice or your mind is dull and unreceptive. They will help to clear obstacles.

The force of *destruction* involves destroying the self-centered attitude and the self-grasping ignorance. To do this, begin by contemplating their disadvantages: self-centeredness is the source of all suffering; it prevents our generating bodhicitta, entering the Mahāyāna path, and attaining full awakening. Self-grasping ignorance is the root of saṃsāra; it gives rise to attachment, anger, and all other afflictions and is the source of all

nonvirtuous actions. It prevents us from realizing the ultimate nature of phenomena, becoming an ārya, and attaining full awakening.

Understanding their faults, whenever they arise counteract them. Cherishing others as well as love and compassion banish self-centeredness, and the wisdom realizing emptiness overcomes self-grasping ignorance. Put on the armor of joyous effort and oppose these enemies and enhance their opposites.

The force of *prayers of aspiration* can be done throughout the day, but especially at the end of the day it's helpful to review your attitudes and actions. Rejoice at all virtuous actions you and others did. Regret whatever nonvirtues you were involved in and purify them with the four opponent powers. Then dedicate all the past, present, and future merit of yourself and others to your own and all beings' full awakening. Dedicate so that you will never be separated from the practice of bodhicitta in this and all future lives, that the bodhicitta you have generated will never decrease but always increase, and that the bodhicitta you have not yet generated will arise and grow. Recalling all the goodness in the world and the merit of sentient beings and holy beings delights and uplifts the mind. Be sure to do this every day.

The final force is that of *familiarity*. By continually being aware of the higher aims that are the purpose of your life, bring everything you encounter into the path to awakening. Through study and contemplation, familiarize yourself with all aspects of the path, especially the determination to be free from saṃsāra, bodhicitta, and the wisdom realizing emptiness. When you are well acquainted with those, enter the Vajrayāna and learn and meditate on deity yoga. As Śāntideva reminds us, there's nothing that doesn't become easier through familiarity.

Setting our motivation sets the foundation for the practice of mind training and the two bodhicittas. The seed of merit strengthens these and the force of destruction overcomes obstacles to them. Prayers of aspiration strengthen them even more, so that we will not stray from making the generation of the two bodhicittas the most important activity of our lives. Familiarity enables us to be successful in the cultivation of love, compassion, bodhicitta, and the six perfections, especially the wisdom that will free us from saṃsāra.

Practicing these five forces every day ensures that we have covered the most important factors of mind training. There are many levels in which these five are done — some briefer, others more extensive; some emphasizing one force, others emphasizing another — but however we do them, the result will definitely be beneficial for yourself and others.

The five forces are also practiced at the time of dying and were explained in *The Foundation of Buddhist Practice*, 226–27. Since the time of our death is uncertain, it behooves us to learn and become familiar with these. Then, like the great masters, our death will be peaceful and free from fear and regret.

### *The Commitments and Precepts of Mind Training*

The sixth and seventh points of the Seven-Point Mind Training consist of short statements with great meanings. Learning and following these will prevent us from getting distracted by the allures of saṃsāra and prevent self-centeredness from sabotaging our Dharma practice. In this way, our Dharma practice will remain on track.

### *The Eighteen Commitments of Mind Training*

The following commitments keep our mind rooted in the mind-training practice.

#### **1–3. Always practice the three general points.**

(1) Don't go against the mind-training instructions or transgress any of the ethical restraints you have taken. Don't think that because you practice mind training that you are above abandoning the ten nonvirtues. (2) Don't use mind training as a reason for taking unnecessary risks — for example, pridefully thinking that because you practice mind training, you are special and won't get sick or injured. (3) Don't be partial — for example, practicing mind training with people you like but not with those you dislike, being generous with friends but miserly with enemies, being courteous to important people but not to those you consider inferior.

#### **4. Change your attitude while remaining natural.**

Don't be conspicuous or show off your Dharma training practice so that others will think you are an advanced practitioner. Externally act like other people, although internally you transform situations by practicing mind training.

### **5. Speak not of the shortcomings of others.**

Don't belittle or disparage others or exaggerate others' faults and spread nasty stories about them. Avoid separating people who are harmonious by talking behind their backs. With a kind heart, offer advice to help others; your motivation is key.

### **6. Think not about whatever is seen in others.**

Your mindfulness needs to be on your own actions, not on what others do or don't do. If you walk near a cliff, watch your own feet, not those of others. If you look critically at others, you will find faults, and once you are in the habit of judging others, eventually you will find fault with the Buddha. It's better to place our attention on others' good qualities, and if we do see faults, to recall that they are adventitious and are not in the nature of that person's mind.

### **7. Purify first whichever affliction is heaviest.**

Whichever affliction is strongest in you, work on subduing that one first. If you have a problem with anger and often speak harshly, don't ignore that and instead focus on lessening your attachment to peanut butter. Learn the appropriate antidote for each affliction. For example, for anger, practice fortitude, forgiveness, and love. For lust, contemplate the unclean aspects of the body. For jealousy, practice rejoicing.

### **8. Give up all hope of reward.**

Don't harbor corrupt motivations of getting something for yourself from practicing the Dharma. Instead, dedicate all the merit of your practice for the welfare of others and recognize that whatever personal benefit you receive from your practice is a side effect. Abandon the expectation to receive thanks, appreciation, acknowledgement, or status — for example, people commenting that you are for sure a bodhisattva.

### **9. Abandon poisonous food.**

Self-centered attitude and self-grasping ignorance are poisonous food. Don't keep them close to you but throw them far away.

### **10. Do not serve the central object leniently.**

Don't be lenient with your afflictions, thinking, for example: it's only a little belligerence and anyway it's justified because those other people really are domineering. Instead, see the disadvantages of the afflictions and apply the counterforces to them.

### **11. Be indifferent toward malicious comments.**

If someone ridicules you, don't respond with sarcasm or slander on the one hand or hurt and self-pity on the other. Understand that others' comments tell you about their feelings and moods, and therefore don't take everything personally. In a month you won't remember it and in a year it will be far from your mind. So there's no sense in reifying it now and being miserable.

### **12. Do not lie in ambush.**

Don't wait for an opportunity to take revenge on people for perceived attacks or inconsiderate behavior. Holding grudges and waiting for the perfect time to get back at someone only makes you miserable.

### **13. Never strike at the heart.**

Don't hit others' sensitive points and abandon uttering spiteful words that you know will hurt someone. If you know someone's weakness, don't deliberately embarrass them in front of others in an attempt to make yourself look better.

### **14. Do not load an ox with the load of a dzo.**

In Tibet a dzo, which is a hybrid of a cow and a yak, is a very large and strong animal, much larger than an ox. That is, don't give your responsibilities to others who aren't capable of bearing them. Don't try to get others to do your disagreeable tasks. This may happen in families where one of the parents is an alcoholic and the child takes on this parent's role. It

may also happen in a school where the teacher gives a child an assignment that the child doesn't yet have the knowledge or skill to fulfill.

**15. Do not compete by a last-minute sprint.**

Don't stand back when others work hard on a project and then at the end step in and claim the credit for yourself. Don't try to get the biggest piece of pie, but share resources, knowledge, and prosperity. Practice putting down your self-importance.

**16. Do not be treacherous.**

This one is also called "Don't fill your belly in the wrong way." That is, don't deceive others, making them think you're doing one thing when you're actually doing another. Don't use people for self-gain under the pretense of benefiting them.

**17. Do not bring a god down to a devil.**

If we're supposedly generating bodhicitta but instead nourish our afflictions, then Dharma practice, which is like a god, has been brought down to the level of a devil.

**18. Do not inflict misery for possession of happiness.**

Don't wish your enemies suffering and feel good about it when they have problems. Don't harm others to get what you want. Such behavior is completely counter to the purpose of bodhicitta mind training.

***The Twenty-Two Precepts of Mind Training***

The following instructions are to strengthen our mind-training practice.

**1. Perform all activities by one.**

The "one" is bodhicitta. Whether you are meditating or engaged in daily activities, make sure that your motivation is bodhicitta. As the gāthās explained below illustrate, you can apply Dharma and train your mind in bodhicitta no matter what you are doing. Take advantage of every opportunity to practice bodhicitta — even when you are eating, dressing, sleeping, or walking — and to abandon the eight worldly concerns. For



example, before eating offer your food to the Three Jewels, and at the conclusion of your meal dedicate the merit to all the people who made your meal possible.<sup>93</sup>

## **2. Deal with all wrong and oppression in one way.**

The “one way” is mind training. As you practice, external hindrances such as difficulties with other human beings or with animals may arise. Instead of succumbing to anger and revenge, generate love and compassion for them and do the taking and giving meditation, thinking: “May their suffering and negativity ripen on me and may I give them my happiness so that their lives can be peaceful and tranquil.” When internal hindrances arise — such as strong attachment, self-pity, rage, and so forth — recall that these emotions have been following us since beginningless time. Since you care about other sentient beings and don’t want to subject them to your foul moods and harmful actions, make a strong determination to apply the antidotes to these afflictions.

Remember that cherishing others and working for their welfare is the path to purify your mind and develop your excellent qualities and that nurturing resentment and refusing to forgive bring suffering to yourself. Nāgārjuna reminds us (SCP 26, 27, 30):

Through relying on those [sentient beings] I attain the very great;  
through harming them I fall into distressing states.  
Even if I have to completely give up my life,  
it is fitting to be fond of them.

By interacting with sentient beings with a mind of love and compassion, we will attain the great awakening, whereas harming them leads to unfortunate rebirth and distressing events in our life. Although we may think we’re getting even for a perceived wrong, harming others is actually an act of self-sabotage and in the long term the suffering results we experience are far greater than what we inflict on others. Understanding this, the wise see the great benefits that arise from sincerely cherishing others.

It is those sentient beings that many  
relied on to attain siddhis.

Among migrators there is no [merit] field for siddhis  
other than the great field of sentient beings.

“Siddhis” are spiritual accomplishments. Mundane siddhis are the first five superknowledges; the ultimate siddhi is the sixth — full awakening.

For someone who has firm confidence in karma and its effects, the greatest danger they face is that of creating nonvirtue, and there are many opportunities for this in our world. On the other hand, there are also many opportunities to create virtue and purify nonvirtuous actions by generating love and compassion, because we’re continually encountering various living beings.

This is the conduct of the great Sage;  
one should not be indecisive about its rationale,  
for as long as one does not actualize [such conduct]  
that long accomplishment is impossible.

The great Sage, our Teacher, the Buddha practiced in this way. The suitability of cherishing others and influencing them in a constructive manner in any way possible has been established by scripture and reasoning. After putting energy into understanding this, any doubt in its truth will vanish. However, spending our time in the eight worldly concerns and neglecting to transform our mind precludes all spiritual accomplishments. What we choose to do is up to us.

### **3. There are two duties: at the beginning and the end.**

Every day we wake up and go to bed. When awaking in the morning, immediately generate a motivation of bodhicitta for the day: “As much as possible today I will not harm others. As much as possible today I will benefit them in whatever big or small way I can. Today I will be mindful of bodhicitta and enhance it.” In the evening, review the day and rejoice at your virtuous actions and merit. Confess any negativities and purify any transgressions of precepts. Dedicate the merit from practicing like this all

day: “May I never be separated from bodhicitta in all my lives. May all sentient beings quickly attain full awakening. May the pure Dharma exist in our world forever, and may all sincere spiritual mentors and practitioners have long lives.”

#### **4. Whichever of the two comes, accept it.**

Whether you feel happy or sad, well or ill, whether you are successful or fail, are wealthy or impoverished, accept the situation. Don’t get carried away emotionally by any impermanent situation. The economy goes up, it goes down. The politicians you favor are elected, they lose the election. You get married, your partner dies or you divorce. Whenever there is a change in your life, remain constant in your Dharma practice. Welcome difficulties or situations when your buttons are pushed; see them as challenges to cultivate good qualities and take them all into the path to awakening.

#### **5. Hold both as dear as life.**

Steadfastly adhere to general advice and commitments, such as to abandon the ten nonvirtuous paths of actions and practice the ten virtuous ones, and to keep your prātimokṣa, bodhisattva, and tantric precepts (if you have taken them). With dedication, follow the specific commitments of mind training to cherish others and abandon self-centeredness.

#### **6. Train in three difficult things.**

These three are as follows: (1) Prevent afflictions from arising. This entails recognizing them quickly by employing mindfulness and introspective awareness. (2) When afflictions arise, turn them away by employing the antidotes and returning your mind to a neutral or virtuous state. (3) Sever the continuity of the afflictions by realizing the emptiness of inherent existence. This is the ultimate antidote and will take some time to develop.

#### **7. Adopt three main prerequisites.**

These three are as follows: (1) Find a qualified Mahāyāna spiritual mentor who holds the pure lineage of the Buddha and make a strong connection with him or her. If you are new to the Dharma, this may take time; pray to meet a suitable spiritual mentor.<sup>94</sup> (2) Improve the state of your mind by

receiving teachings, remembering them, and reflecting on them to gain a correct conceptual understanding. Then meditate on them to integrate them into your mind and your life. (3) Gather the physical and mental circumstances that are conducive to practice, such as confidence in the law of cause and effect, joy in practicing bodhicitta, and good Dharma friends who encourage and support your practice, as well as basic requisites such as food, clothing, and shelter. If you have all of these, rejoice and pray that others may enjoy these conducive circumstances. If you don't have them, consider the lives of others who don't enjoy the conditions to practice; generate compassion and imagine taking on the negativity that prevents them from having conducive circumstances and praying for them to have wonderful conditions for Dharma practice.

### **8. Meditate on the three undeclining attitudes.**

These three are as follows: (1) Your relationship with your spiritual mentors should be without any disrespect. Be aware of the benefit you receive from your mentors and appreciate your relationships with them. It would be nearly impossible to progress on the path without their teachings and instructions. (2) Don't let your joy in cultivating bodhicitta or your faith in mind training decline. Rejoice at having encountered the mind-training teachings — especially those on bodhicitta and emptiness — which are the heart of the Buddha's teachings. (3) Don't let your mindfulness and introspective awareness of these points decline. Hold them firmly in your mind.

### **9. Never be separated from three things.**

Don't allow your body, speech, and mind to be separated from virtue. Physical virtue is created by making prostrations, circumambulating holy objects, serving your spiritual mentors, and helping others with physical tasks. Verbal virtue is created by reciting prayers and mantras and using your speech to create harmony and encourage others in virtue. Mental virtue is created by cultivating the strong wish to properly practice the two bodhicittas and then making effort to practice them. The two bodhicittas are the conventional bodhicitta, which is the altruistic intention to become a

buddha to benefit all sentient beings, and the ultimate bodhicitta, which is the wisdom realizing emptiness.

**10. Always practice with pure impartiality to all objects.**

Avoid bias with respect to people, places, and things. Bring them all into the scope of mind training.

**11. Cherish the in-depth and broad application of all skills.**

Apply your skill in mind training to all events. Reading or listening to the news becomes a teaching on karma and its effects; watching movies is an exercise in contemplating the illusory appearance of all phenomena; and documentaries are lessons on impermanence.

**12. Always meditate on those closely related to you.**

Although we practice equanimity toward all beings, it is important to care for those whom we encounter on a daily basis and with whom we have close connections — for example, our spiritual mentors, parents, colleagues, competitors, companions, roommates, and people who dislike us or whom we have aversion for on first sight. It's easy for afflictions to arise regarding these groups of people, so be especially alert when speaking or interacting with them.

**13. Don't rely on other conditions.**

Don't wait for perfect conditions before starting to practice: "Once I find a new job, I'll start attending teachings again." "When my children are older or my roommate's schedule changes so that it's silent in the house, I'll begin a daily meditation practice." Remember that your future life may come before perfect conditions, so make hay while the sun is out, as my American friends say. In addition, don't behave like a practitioner only when the sun is shining and your stomach is full, and then when problems arise get upset and blame others, like ordinary people do. Whenever problems arise — and they will, as this is the nature of saṃsāra — think of the situations of others who suffer from the same conditions and do the taking and giving meditation for them.

#### **14. Exert yourself, especially at this time.**

Many previous lives have been wasted in distraction, so don't let the rare opportunity of your precious human life slip by. The most important practice is not observing what others do and don't do, but to work on yourself. Value the Dharma, not worldly possessions and reputation. When you die your wealth, your friends and family, and your body will remain here. The karmic seeds on your mindstream and mental habits will go with you into future lives.

#### **15. Do not follow inverted deeds.**

There are six types of inverted deeds. (1) Inverted patience is being very patient and able to put up with many difficulties so that education, career, and worldly activities are done well, but having little fortitude when it comes to practicing the Dharma. (2) Inverted aspiration is having a strong aspiration and great determination to make money, get promoted, or win an argument, but a weak aspiration to subdue afflictions and counteract self-centeredness. (3) Inverted taste is taking pleasure in objects of the six senses, despite their being like "honey on a razorblade," but not seeking to taste the flavor of nirvāṇa by learning, thinking, and meditating on the Dharma. (4) Inverted compassion is feeling sorry for great practitioners who endure suffering while doing intense purification, who refrain from certain pleasures in order to follow their precepts, or who live simply without worldly clutter. On the other hand, we don't feel much compassion for people who engage in negative behavior in order to be famous, powerful, and envied by the public. Great practitioners don't need our pity because they have internal strength, but the people who continually create the causes for suffering are worthy of compassion. (5) Inverted loyalty is coaching our students, friends, and relatives to relax and have a good time engaging in worldly activities but neglecting to guide them in the Dharma. (6) Inverted rejoicing is rejoicing when our friends and relatives win the lottery, make some money under the table, or have an affair, but neglecting to rejoice at our own and others' virtue and diligence in subduing afflictions.

#### **16. Don't be erratic.**

Instead of meditating and doing some spiritual reading every day, you do it sporadically only when you need it to calm yourself. Or you practice diligently for many hours one or two days but after not having a spiritual experience, you get fed up and stop practicing. It's important to remember that all meditations that don't yield bliss or an "ah ha" moment are creating the cause for experiencing the beautiful results of practice later on.

### **17. Don't underestimate your ability.**

Don't shirk responsibility, but with confidence enhance your abilities and then, without biting off more than you can chew, take on beneficial tasks. Focus with firm resolve on accomplishing your goal and continue to create the causes for it until it comes to fruition.

### **18. Be liberated by two: investigation and analysis.**

Investigation is a coarse examination of the object, whereas analysis is a deeper, more extensive examination. Investigation identifies the disturbing emotions that are stronger and more frequent; analysis identifies the distorted conceptualizations that lie behind their arising. With knowledge provided by both, prevent afflictions from arising by stopping the distorted conceptualization before it spins a false story about your being a victim, someone who is taken advantage of or not given a fair chance, and so forth. Allowing the mind to go around and around with these stories stifles our ability to grow. Instead, as Śāntideva recommended, if there is something you can do to remedy the situation, there's no need to be upset — do what needs to be done. If there is nothing you can do to change the situation, there's no need to be upset, so relax the mind and direct your energy where it can have a positive effect.

### **19. Don't boast.**

Boasting is an activity sported by those who lack self-confidence. Working to benefit others and transforming your mind with the Dharma are simply the right things to do. There is no need to make a big deal about them in others' presence. Furthermore, if you boast, it makes others feel less important, and that is contrary to your aim of cherishing others.

## **20. Do not retaliate.**

Don't keep track of harms you've experienced, waiting for the right time to seek revenge. Your human life is short, why spend it on holding grudges? What happened in the past is not happening now. Ruminating on past situations serves only to make you upset and angry. Why become aggravated and aggrieved over events that are not happening now? Open your eyes and see that at this moment you are in a safe environment and have the protection of the Dharma.

If someone says something nasty about you in front of many people, don't respond in kind. Remember that you created the principal cause to receive public rebuke because in the past you inflicted such behavior on others. After many years of practicing the Dharma, if you are easily provoked to anger, that indicates that your practice is not very deep and the purpose of Dharma practice — to subdue the mind — has evaded you. Make a strong determination to renew your relationship with the Three Jewels.

One time when Geshe Langri Tangpa (1054–1123), a monk and the author of the “Eight Verses of Mind Training,” was teaching, a woman holding an infant entered the hall. In front of the assembly she falsely accused him of fathering the child and gave him the child to raise. The monk didn't respond, but took the infant and raised him as if he were his own. Years later, the woman returned and demanded to have the child back. Again Geshe Langri Tangpa acquiesced without dispute.

In our time, there would have been a paternity test to quickly settle the matter and clear the monk from wrongdoing. But this story is told as an example of how a monk, having his purity challenged in front of an assembly, responded without anger or retaliation.

## **21. Do not be mercurial.**

If things are going well, you get excited and tell many people about your success, but when your activities aren't going so well, you become very depressed and withdrawn. When people conform with your wishes, you think they are the greatest and become close to them, but as soon as they do something that doesn't accord with what you want, you dump them. When you hear a new teaching, you become excited and want to immediately do a



long retreat, but after a week or so, you get tired of it. When your spiritual mentor praises you, you have deep faith in him or her, but when they point out your faults, you leave and look for another spiritual mentor who will tell you what you want to hear. Since such impulsiveness irritates others and prevents you from being consistent and accomplishing what you set out to do, make a conscious effort to be more stable and considerate.

## **22. Don't wish for gratitude.**

When you help others, don't expect praise or thanks; this feeds the ego. Make the calm that arises from your heartfelt intention the reward. We cannot control how others respond to our kindness — sometimes they even reject it or become angry at us — so it's important to take pleasure in doing the action, not in receiving their gratitude or gifts afterward.

## **REFLECTION**

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1. One by one reflect on each of the commitments and precepts of mind training.
  2. Think of specific situations in your life that each one applies to.
  3. In your mind, imagine applying that commitment or precept to that situation and thinking in a different way.
  4. Imagine the difference in outcome there would be from doing that.
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### *Gāthās to Train the Mind*

All countries in which the Mahāyāna is widespread share the special practice of enhancing bodhicitta through transforming common activities that are usually done with a neutral motivation — one that is neither virtuous nor nonvirtuous — into a bodhisattva's practice. *Gāthās* — short lines or verses extracted from sūtras or written by great masters — guide us to steer our mind to a virtuous state. When doing everyday activities, such

as getting dressed, washing, brushing our teeth, or going up stairs, we recite a corresponding verse to broaden our perspective and imbue these ordinary actions with a compassionate motivation. Engaging in this mind-training practice is an excellent method for transforming neutral actions that we usually do without any particular motivation into virtuous activities done with love, compassion, and bodhicitta. Practicing bodhicitta in this way helps us to increase our collection of merit while continually familiarizing our mind with wholesome thoughts and aspirations. Washing the dishes is no longer a chore but a short meditation on cleansing defilements from the minds of sentient beings.

In some Chinese, Vietnamese, and Japanese monasteries, gāthās are written and placed near the area where a particular activity occurs. Other times monastics and lay devotees will memorize gāthās and bring them to mind when doing the corresponding activity. Sometimes mantras accompany these verses; if it is difficult to memorize the mantras, that's fine; reciting the verses and transforming your attitude is the purpose. Some of the gāthās are from the “Pure Conduct” chapter in the *Flower Ornament Sūtra*.

*Waking up*

Upon waking from slumber,  
may each and every sentient being  
awaken to omniscient wisdom  
and regard sentient beings in the ten directions with compassion.

*Getting out of bed*

Unceasingly from dawn till dusk,  
may all sentient beings protect themselves.  
If they should lose their lives beneath my feet,  
may they instantly be reborn in a pure land.

*Om iddhiruni svaha (3x)*

*Using the toilet*

As I relieve myself,

may each and every sentient being  
abandon attachment, anger, and ignorance  
and abandon all negative deeds.

*Om laludaya svaha (3x)*

*Removing filth with toilet paper*

As I cleanse filth from my body,  
may each and every sentient being  
be pure and gentle,  
constantly in a state free from defilements.

*Om garamirti svaha (3x)*

*Washing hands*

As I wash my palms with water,  
may each and every sentient being  
have hands clean and pure  
to receive and uphold the Buddhadharmā.

*Om shukalaya svaha (3x)*

*Washing the face*

As I wash my face with water,  
may each and every sentient being  
access the doors to the pure Dharma  
and be free from defilements at all times.

*Om ram svaha (21x)*

*Holding toothbrush in hand*

May each and every sentient being  
attain the sublime Dharma  
and be completely purified.

*Om sarvashudda sarjbadalima sarvavashudali om ram svaha*

*Brushing teeth*

When I brush my teeth,  
may each and every sentient being  
have harmonious and pure minds,  
eating away all afflictions.

*Om amoghamimali nivakala soyudani padmakumara nivasayudaya  
daradarasu nimalisha svaha (3x)*

*Rinsing the mouth*

When I rinse my mouth as well as my mind,  
the water's touch brings the fragrance of hundreds of flowers.  
With three doors of karma — body, speech, and mind — constantly  
clear and pure,  
may I proceed to the pure land with the Buddha.

*Om kam om gan svaha (3x)*

*Dressing (lay followers)*

As I put on upper garments,  
may each and every sentient being  
reap excellent roots of virtue  
and reach the other shore of nirvāṇa.

As I put on lower garments,  
may each and every sentient being  
gird their roots of virtue  
by having integrity and consideration for others.

Smoothing my clothes and fastening my belt,  
may each and every sentient being  
examine and dedicate their roots of virtue  
lest they get lost.

*Dressing (monastics putting on antarvāsas)*

How wonderful is this garment of liberation,

robe of an unsurpassable field of merit.  
I now respectfully receive it above the crown of my head.  
May I never be separated from it for life after life.

*Dressing (monastics putting on uttarāsaṃga)*

How wonderful is this garment of liberation,  
robe of an unsurpassable field of merit.  
I now respectfully receive it above the crown of my head.  
May I wear it often for life after life.

*Om dhupadhupa svaha (3x)*

*Dressing (monastics putting on saṃghāṭī)<sup>95</sup>*

How wonderful is this garment of liberation,  
robe of an unsurpassable field of merit.  
Respectfully upholding the Tathāgata's instructions,  
may I extensively liberate all sentient beings.

*Om maha kapapata siddhi svaha (3x)*

*Joining Saṅgha assemblies*

Hearing the sound of the bell reduces my afflictions;  
wisdom grows and the awakening mind is born.  
Leaving the hell realms and escaping the pits of fire,  
may I attain buddhahood to liberate all sentient beings.

*Om karatiye svaha (3x)*

*Ascending to the Dharma hall*

When I have the opportunity to see the Buddha,  
may each and every sentient being  
attain unobstructed vision<sup>96</sup>  
and behold all the buddhas.

*Om amrte hum phat tat (3x)*

*Arranging the seat and sitting in meditation*

When I arrange my seat,  
may each and every sentient being  
expand their practice of virtue  
And see the ultimate nature of reality.

When I straighten my body and sit upright,  
may each and every sentient being  
sit on the seat of awakening  
with minds free from attachment.

*Om vasora anipanrani yutaya svaha (3x)*

*Leaving the room*

When I leave my dwelling,  
may each and every sentient being  
gain deep insight into the Buddha's wisdom  
and leave behind the three realms (desire, form, and formless)  
forever.

*Walking without harming insects*

As I lift my feet,  
may each and every sentient being  
emerge from the ocean of birth and death  
equipped with a multitude of virtuous deeds.

*Om tilivili svaha (3x)*

*Holding the (alms) bowl, before receiving food*

When I see an empty alms bowl,  
may each and every sentient being  
attain the final state of purity  
abiding in emptiness without afflictions.

*Seeing an (alms) bowl filled with food*

When I see a full alms bowl,

may each and every sentient being  
be replete and abundantly filled  
with all virtuous deeds

*Concluding the meal*

Those who practice making offerings  
will certainly receive its benefits.  
Those who take delight in giving  
will certainly have peace and happiness later.

*The meal is finished*

May each and every sentient being  
accomplish all their endeavors  
and be fully endowed with the Buddhadharmā.

*Shaving hair*

When I shave my hair and beard,  
May each and every sentient being  
Leave their afflictions far behind  
And attain final cessation.

*Om sidhanta mantara bhādaya svāha (3x)*

*Bathing*

When I bathe my body,  
may each and every sentient being  
have bodies and minds free from defilements,  
internally and externally brilliant and pure.

*Om bājeraṇa jāca svāha (3x)*

*Washing feet*

When I wash my feet,  
may each and every sentient being  
be endowed with supernormal powers,

free from obstructions wherever we go.

*Om ram svaha (3x)*

*Sleeping*

When it is time to sleep and rest,  
may each and every sentient being  
have physical peace and security,  
with minds free from disturbance.

*Ah*

*Visiting someone who is ill*

When I see a sick person,  
may each and every sentient being  
realize that their bodies are empty in reality  
and abandon wrong and conflicting views.

*Om srita srita kundali svaha (3x)*

The gāthās below are from another source and are equally suitable to use.

*Using the toilet*

May all sentient beings discard their greed, hatred, and confusion  
and eliminate destructive conduct.

*Washing the hands*

May all sentient beings attain purified hands to uphold the  
Buddhadharma.

*Bathing*

May all sentient beings be pure and harmonious and ultimately  
without defilement.

*Sitting cross-legged*

May all sentient beings have firm and strong roots of goodness, and  
attain the state of immovability.



*Sitting up straight*

May all sentient beings sit on the seat of awakening, free from attachment.

*Practicing contemplation*

May all sentient beings see truth as it is and be forever free of opposition and contention.

*Giving something*

May all sentient beings be able to relinquish everything with hearts free from clinging.

*In gatherings*

May all sentient beings let go of conditioned things and attain total knowledge.

*In danger and difficulty*

May all sentient beings be free and unhindered wherever they go.

*Traveling on a road*

May all sentient beings tread the pure realm of reality, their minds free of obstructions.

*Seeing a road uphill*

May all sentient beings forever transcend saṃsāra, their minds free from doubt and confusion.

*Seeing a road downhill*

May all sentient beings be humble in mind and develop a strong base of awakened virtue.

*Seeing a winding road*

May all sentient beings abandon false paths and forever purge distorted views.

*Seeing a straight road*

May all sentient beings be straight and true in mind, without pretention or deceit.

*Seeing blossoms on trees*

May all sentient beings' features be like flowers with all marks of distinction.

*Seeing fruit*

May all sentient beings attain the supreme teaching and realize the way of awakening.

*Seeing people attached to pleasure*

May all sentient beings delight in truth and not abandon love for it.

*Seeing people suffer*

May all sentient beings attain fundamental knowledge and eliminate all misery.

*Seeing or caring for a sick person*

May all sentient beings, realizing that the body is but an empty shell, forsake opposition and conflict.

*Seeing a monastic*

May all sentient beings be harmonious and tranquil and ultimately conquer themselves.

*Seeing handsome people*

May all sentient beings aspire for all beings to have pure faith in the awakened ones.

*Seeing ugly people*

May all sentient beings not become attached to any nonvirtuous activities.

*Seeing ungrateful people*

May all sentient beings not increase the punishment of those who act harmfully.

*Seeing grateful people*

May all sentient beings know the blessings of the buddhas and bodhisattvas.

*Washing dishes, clothes, etc.*

I will cleanse the defilement from the minds of all sentient beings.

*Walking down stairs*

I will go to the lowest hell realm to rescue sentient beings there.

*Walking up stairs*

I will lead all sentient beings up through the bodhisattva grounds to the highest awakening.

The beauty about practicing the gāthās on a daily basis is that our mind is constantly steered toward love, compassion, and bodhicitta. With a wholesome motivation, doing even small tasks makes our life meaningful, so we experience happiness now and in the future.

## REFLECTION

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1. Memorize a few of the gāthās and practice thinking according to them as you go about your life.
  2. For situations that you frequently experience that aren't mentioned above, make up your own gāthās and apply them. For example, every time you hear your child whine "Mommy" or "Daddy," think, "I will have patience and compassion for all sentient beings."
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# Notes

1. See, for example, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Nn46qZIU3T0>.
2. Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex*, rev. and augmented 2d ed. (New York: D. Appleton, 1901 [1871]), 124–25.
3. Alice Calaprice, *The New Quotable Einstein* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), 206.
4. Chapters 6–11 in *Following in the Buddha's Footsteps* discuss the cultivation of serenity, the dhyānas, and other meditative absorptions.
5. The first dhyāna of the form realm contains three Brahmā worlds: Retinue of Brahmā, Ministers of Brahmā, and Great Brahmā. See chapter 2 of *Saṃsāra, Nirvāṇa, and Buddha Nature*.
6. See AN 4:125, 4:126, 3:66.
7. A bodhisattva with unfabricated bodhicitta would be willing to sacrifice his or her life. However, only bodhisattvas who have attained the path of seeing are allowed to do so. Better yet, a bodhisattva would try to find a way to avoid such an atrocity occurring at all.
8. The five synonyms for “all beings” and the seven specific categories of beings mentioned above.
9. These are explained in Vism 9.60–76.
10. Invariable karma is an action that is the cause for rebirth in a specific meditative absorption and no other.
11. “Suppression” does not refer to psychological suppression, but to afflictions not appearing in manifest form due to the force of concentration.
12. These are qualities and practices that śrāvakas, solitary realizers, and bodhisattvas cultivate. See chapters 12–14 in *Following in the Buddha's Footsteps*.
13. Harvey Aronson, *Love and Sympathy in Theravāda Buddhism*, 85.
14. There are various types of liberation of mind; not all of them are merely states of serenity. For example, there is the “unshakable liberation of mind,” which is the liberation of the fruit of arhatship, also called “the taintless liberation of mind, liberation by wisdom,” in which concentration and wisdom are merged and the mind is completely released from all defilements.
15. According to Paramārtha, a sixth-century monk from central India, the *Avatamsaka Sūtra* is also called the *Bodhisattva Piṭaka*.
16. Although Buddhaghosa says that meditation on each of the four divine abodes should be expanded to include all sentient beings, for some reason unknown to me (Chodron) Tibetan scholars say śrāvakas and solitary realizers cultivate them toward immeasurable sentient beings, but not all sentient beings.
17. See chapter 8 of *The Foundation of Buddhist Practice* for more on the eight worldly concerns.

18. See chapter 3 of *The Foundation of Buddhist Practice* to learn about primary consciousnesses and mental factors.
19. See chapters 12–14 in *Samsāra, Nirvāṇa, and Buddha Nature*.
20. To learn more about the qualities of the fully awakened ones, see chapters 1–2 in *Following in the Buddha's Footsteps*.
21. Patrul Rinpoche, *Advice to Kunzang Chogyal* (Brussels: Wisdom Treasury Publishing House, 2005).
22. Mañjuśrī embodies wisdom, Avalokiteśvara compassion, Vajrapāṇi power, and Kṣitigarbha increases the richness and fertility of the land. In Chinese Buddhism he is said to aid those born as hell beings. Sarvanivāraṇa-viṣkambhin purifies wrongdoings and obstacles, Maitreya embodies love, Samantabhadra is expert in making offerings, unshakable resolves, and aspirational prayers, and Ākāśagarbha purifies ethical transgressions. Drawing on stories in sūtras and tantras, Jamgon Ju Mipham Gyatso has written *Garland of Jewels: The Eight Great Bodhisattvas*.
23. Hopkins, *Compassion in Tibetan Buddhism*, 124.
24. This applies to bodhisattvas who are freshly entering the bodhisattva path; this wisdom is inferential and they generate direct insight into emptiness later, on the path of seeing. Bodhisattvas who first attained arhatship by following the Fundamental Vehicle and later enter the Bodhisattva Vehicle already have the wisdom that directly realizes emptiness.
25. The twelve links of dependent origination (*dvādaśāṅga-pratītyasamutpāda*) is a system of twelve factors that explains how we take rebirth in saṃsāra and how we can be liberated from it. See chapters 7 and 8 in *Samsāra, Nirvāṇa, and Buddha Nature*.
26. See Jeneen Interlandi, “The Brain’s Empathy Gap,” *New York Times Magazine*, March 19, 2015, <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/03/22/magazine/the-brains-empathy-gap.html>.
27. Dr. Sam Parnia at New York University discusses the possibility from a medical point of view: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WnoIf2NwaRY>. This video speaks about the rebirth of Kyabje Ling Rinpoche, His Holiness’s senior tutor: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tPNcwXVOQFM>. Here is the account of the young Indian girl Shantidevi who remembered her previous life: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J7IK6OoU6SI>. His Holiness has often spoken about her case. James Linegar is a young American boy who remembers being James Houston, a pilot shot down by the Japanese in World War II: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VnXxC-nVsJY&feature=youtu.be>.
28. In the Pāli canon, the Buddha spoke of eight benefits of love. While there is overlap between the two lists, they are not exactly the same.
29. See chapter 2 of *Following in the Buddha's Footsteps*. The ten powers are knowing (1) what is possible and impossible, (2) the ripening result of all actions, (3) the paths leading to all destinations, (4) the world with its many different elements, (5) inclinations of sentient beings, (6) the dispositions of sentient beings, (7) meditative absorptions, (8) past lives, (9) sentient beings passing away and being reborn, and (10) liberation and full awakening.
30. See chapter 2 of *Following in the Buddha's Footsteps*. The Tathāgata is completely confident and lacks all fear in declaring that (1) he is fully awakened regarding all phenomena, (2) he has destroyed all pollutants, (3) he has correctly identified all obstructions to be eliminated on the path, and (4) when practiced, his teachings lead to the complete destruction of duḥkha.
31. See Marshall Rosenberg’s work on nonviolent communication in Rosenberg, *Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Life*, 3d ed. (Encinatas, CA: PuddleDancer Press, 2015).

32. For more about developing concentration, see chapters 6–8 in *Following in the Buddha's Footsteps*.
33. See chapter 2 of *Samsāra, Nirvāṇa, and Buddha Nature* for more on these aspects of true duḥkha.
34. See chapter 3 of *Samsāra, Nirvāṇa, and Buddha Nature* for more on the true origins of duḥkha.
35. In his *Autocommentary to the Treasury of Knowledge*, Vasubandhu presents great compassion in another way, saying that it is possessed only by a buddha, not by bodhisattvas. He says the Buddha's compassion is great because it is produced by a great collection of merit and wisdom, it wishes sentient beings to be free from all three types of duḥkha, it focuses on all beings in the three realms of saṃsāra, it is concerned with the welfare of all these beings equally, and there is no other type of compassion that surpasses it. He goes on to differentiate it from ordinary compassion in eight ways: (1) ordinary compassion lacks hatred, whereas great compassion is free of ignorance; (2) ordinary compassion wishes to free beings from the duḥkha of pain, whereas great compassion wishes to free them from all three types of duḥkha; (3) ordinary compassion is concerned with beings in the desire realm, whereas great compassion focuses on beings of all three realms; (4) ordinary compassion is supported by the four dhyānas, whereas great compassion is supported by the fourth dhyāna; (5) ordinary compassion exists in the mindstreams of śrāvakas and solitary realizers, but great compassion is present in the mindstream of buddhas; (6) ordinary compassion is acquired through detaching from the desire realm, whereas great compassion is obtained by separating from attachment to the peak of existence; (7) ordinary compassion does not completely protect the welfare of beings, whereas great compassion completely protects their welfare; and (8) ordinary compassion is unequal because it feels only for suffering beings, whereas great compassion extends to all beings equally. See the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣyam of Vasubandhu*, vol. 4, English translation by Leo M. Pruden, from the French translation by Louis de La Vallée Poussin (Berkeley, CA: Asian Humanities Press, 1991), 1143–44.
36. Hopkins, *Compassion in Tibetan Buddhism*, 111.
37. Four points to purify destructive karma. These are regret, generating bodhicitta and taking refuge, engaging in a remedial action, and making a determination not to do the harmful action again.
38. Goodman, *The Training Anthology of Śāntideva*, 25.
39. Goodman, *The Training Anthology of Śāntideva*, 126.
40. In Tibetan the practice is known as giving-and-taking. We changed the order of the words to correspond to the order in which they are practiced.
41. See Geshe Jampa Tegchok. *Transforming Adversity into Joy and Courage*, chapter 11, for an excellent and expansive explanation of the taking-and-giving meditation.
42. Jamyang Shepa (1648–1721) was a learned and well-respected scholar and practitioner from Labrang Tashikhyil Monastery. His textbooks are followed in Drepung Gomang Monastery. *Tulku* indicates his reincarnation.
43. Since there are no solitary realizers in our world at present, in the *Library of Wisdom and Compassion* they have often been included with the śrāvakas, unless the two diverge on a major point.
44. Some scholars say the fortitude of the nonarising of phenomena is attained on the bodhisattva path of seeing or the eighth ground, not on the bodhisattva path of preparation. Others say it is attained only on the eighth ground. Because this fortitude involves realization of emptiness, it is

sometimes applied to those Fundamental Vehicle practitioners who have realized emptiness directly.

45. Some scholars assert that śrāvakas and solitary realizers have ordinary great compassion in the sense that they think, “How wonderful it would be if sentient beings were free from duḥkha and its causes” and “May they be free of them.” However, they lack special great compassion that is the great compassion Candrakīrti says is one of the causes of a bodhisattva. That compassion is willing to shoulder the responsibility to protect all sentient beings from saṃsāric duḥkha.
46. Candrakīrti’s verse makes clear that the inferential understanding of emptiness is essential for sharp-faculty practitioners to generate bodhicitta and enter the Mahāyāna path of accumulation. But what about modest-faculty disciples who accept the emptiness of inherent existence and the existence of nirvāṇa because of their faith in the Buddha or in their spiritual mentor? Some scholars say they generate bodhicitta, become bodhisattvas by entering the Mahāyāna path, and then gain the inferential understanding of emptiness. Other scholars say that although such people are called “bodhisattvas,” they are not full-fledged bodhisattvas and have not yet entered the Mahāyāna path because they lack the conviction that liberation is possible, which comes from realizing emptiness. Only when they gain this inferential realization do they become actual bodhisattvas. Similarly, there may be practitioners who hold the Yogācāra view, meditate on great compassion, and want to become buddhas. Although they may be called “bodhisattvas,” they too are not actual bodhisattvas because they lack the correct nondual understanding.

These scholars say having the correct conceptual view of emptiness according to the Prāsaṅgika system is also necessary for practitioners to enter the path of accumulation of the Śrāvaka and Solitary Realizer Vehicles. That is, feeling disgust with saṃsāra leads to renunciation, but they must also know that another state — nirvāṇa — exists and can be attained. They obtain that confidence in the existence of nirvāṇa by gaining the inferential realization of the emptiness of inherent existence. For example, to find safety, someone on a sinking ship must not only want to exit the ship, they must also see land in the distance and know that they can reach it.

47. For more on the view of a personal identity, see chapters 3 and 7 in *Saṃsāra, Nirvāṇa, and Buddha Nature*.
48. Some translations say it is a waterwheel in motion. The idea is the same.
49. “And the like” includes the sources and constituents.
50. As cited in Gyaltsap (on Āryadeva’s *Four Hundred*), in *Yogic Deeds of Bodhisattvas*, 200.
51. See *Pearl of Wisdom, Book 1*, 58–64, for the text of this practice. Instructions on how to do it can be found at <https://thubtenchodron.org/2000/01/purification-visualization-prostration-thirty-five-buddhas/>.
52. This line is not in the root Tantra but is added when reciting the verse to take the bodhisattva vow.
53. In English, see Dagpo Lama Rinpoche, *The Bodhisattva Vows*; Geshe Sonam Rinchen and Ruth Sonam, *The Bodhisattva Vow*; and Sakya Drakpa Gyaltzen, *Chandragomin’s Twenty Verses on the Bodhisattva Vow* in the Recommended Reading section. In Tibetan, see Ngulchu Dharmabhadra’s (1772–1851) brief but detailed text *The Essence of “The Main Path of Bodhisattvas’ Training”*: *Notes on the Bodhisattva’s Precepts (Byang-sems kyi bslab-bya’i zin-bris byang-chub gzhung-lam snying-po)*. “The Main Path of Bodhisattvas’ Training” is Tsongkhapa’s commentary on the “Ethical Conduct” chapter of Asaṅga’s *Bodhisattva Ground*.
54. We may wonder why it is not as negative to know that the action is negative but to go ahead and do it anyway. Knowledge that the action is destructive will inspire a sincere practitioner to do



purification, thus lessening the heaviness of the negative karma.

55. For more on the four opponent powers, see chapter 12 in *The Foundation of Buddhist Practice*.
56. If bodhisattvas engage in actions that appear unethical, although as ordinary beings we don't know their motivation, their compassion is so strong that they are willing to accept the criticism, legal action, and ostracism that results from their actions.
57. See Thubten Chodron, *Working with Anger*, and His Holiness the Dalai Lama, *Healing Anger*, in the Recommended Reading.
58. These hindrances and the methods to overcome them are described extensively in chapter 7 of *Following in the Buddha's Footsteps*.
59. The source is chapter 8, "Analysis/Elaboration on Samādhi," verses 29–31, of the *Abhidharmakośa-bhāṣyam of Vasubandhu*, vol. 4. In Chinese, this text was divided into thirty scrolls, and this chapter is in scroll 29.
60. Some, but not all, of these seven are mentioned in Tsongkhapa's *Great Treatise* (LC 2:22–24), but they are found in more than one list. Some of them are also mentioned in Gyaltsab's commentary to the *Ornament of Clear Realizations*, and Śāntideva's *Compendium of Trainings* (*Śikṣāsamuccaya*) explains the four modes of generating bodhicitta: (1) having seen the exalted body of a buddha, one wonders, "What if I were to attain such [a body]?" (2) seeing and hearing about the inconceivable strength of buddhas and bodhisattvas, and so forth; (3) not being able to bear the decline of the Mahāyāna teachings; and (4) not being able to bear that sentient beings are tormented by suffering.
61. These could refer to the forty-eight auxiliary bodhisattva precepts in the *Brahmā's Net Sūtra* or the forty-eight unshakable resolves of Amitābha.
62. Dhāraṇīs are verbal formulas that encapsulate the meaning of a lengthy text and serve as mnemonic devices. Dhāraṇīs are also similar to mantras that provide protection and overcome adversity.
63. For more on the superknowledges, see chapter 8 of *Following in the Buddha's Footsteps*.
64. The import of these five great vows is the same as that of the four great vows that are traditionally explained below.
65. The English text did not include the eightfold path of the āryas. I don't know if this was an accidental omission or if it was absent in the Chinese text.
66. These four factors and their antidotes, the four swift factors of bodhisattvas, are from the *Flower Ornament Sūtra*.
67. See chapter 17, "The Merit Associated with Generating the (Bodhi) Resolve," in the *Flower Ornament Sūtra* for more details.
68. See Master Hsing Yun, *From the Four Noble Truths to the Four Universal Vows*, trans. Ching Tay and Mu-Tzen Hsu (Hacienda Heights, CA: Buddha's Light Publishing, 2002), 58–62.
69. Traditionally this text is said to have been translated from Sanskrit into Chinese by Kumarajiva in 406. However, some modern scholars believe it was composed in China in the mid-fifth century. See Ann Heirman, "Vinaya from India to China," in *The Spread of Buddhism*, ed. Ann Heirman and Stephan Peter Bumbacher (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2007), 175.
70. Tibetans ascribe this treatise to Asaṅga, Maitreya's student.
71. The four assemblies are bhikṣus, bhikṣuṇīs, upāsakas, and upāsikās. The last two are lay followers who have taken refuge in the Three Jewels and the five lay precepts.
72. For an explanation about the meaning of the auxiliary precepts, see *Exposition of the Sutra of Brahma's Net*, trans. A. Charles Muller (Seoul: Jogye Order of Korean Buddhism, 2012), 318–

73. This paragraph is from private correspondence with Bhikṣuṇī Tzushin (Kind Star), July 22, 2009.
74. The word is the same in Sanskrit and Pāli. It is formed from the prefix *anu*, meaning alongside or along with, and the verb *kamp*, to tremble. We tremble along with or alongside another and feel their pain. In the *Bodhisattvabhūmi*, *anukampā* is translated into Tibetan as *rjes su snying rtse ba*.
75. Perhaps this sūtra is a precursor to the Mahāyāna idea of the Buddha's truth body and form body fulfilling the purposes of self and others, respectively.
76. Above, *anukampā* was the Pāli term translated as "compassion." *Anukampā* is a more general type of compassion that is described in the commentaries as "the state of having a tender mind." It is a sense of goodwill toward others that everyone has to some extent. When speaking of compassion as one of the four immeasurables that can be cultivated to a state of dhyāna, the Pāli term is *karuṇā*.
77. The Khuddaka Nikāya (Minor Collection) is the last of the five nikāyas, or collections, in the Sūtra Basket of the canon.
78. Ven. Dr. W. Rahula, "Theravāda–Mahāyāna Buddhism," in *Gems of Buddhist Wisdom* (Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia: Buddhist Missionary Society, 1996), <http://www.budsas.org/ebud/ebdha125.htm>.
79. Guy Armstrong, "The Pāramīs: A Historical Background," [https://www.crab.rutgers.edu/~adelson/Paramis\\_intro.pdf](https://www.crab.rutgers.edu/~adelson/Paramis_intro.pdf). I [Chodron] also heard this from Theravāda monks during my stay at a Thai wat in 2007. In addition, when I described meditation on a buddha as it is done in Mahāyāna traditions to the abbot of a Theravāda monastery in Thailand, he commented that visualizing a bodhisattva above your head and holding that visualization in mind with faith and reciting that bodhisattva's mantra are ways to cultivate certain types of samādhi.
80. See Jeffrey Samuels, "The Bodhisattva Ideal in Theravāda Theory and Practice," *Philosophy East and West* 47, no. 3 (1997): 399–415. This article may also be found at [https://info-buddhism.com/Bodhisattva-Ideal-Theravada\\_JeffreySamuels.html](https://info-buddhism.com/Bodhisattva-Ideal-Theravada_JeffreySamuels.html). Samuels gives more detailed examples as well as historical references for many of these kings.
81. Ven. Dr. W. Rahula, "Bodhisattva Ideal in Buddhism," in *Gems of Buddhist Wisdom*, <http://www.budsas.org/ebud/ebdha126.htm>.
82. Ven. Rahula, "Bodhisattva Ideal in Buddhism."
83. Ven. Rahula, "Theravāda–Mahāyāna Buddhism."
84. Some say that this was the first time the bodhisattva who was to become Śākyamuni Buddha generated bodhicitta. I (Chodron) don't know the origin of this account but have read it more than once. See <https://dharma.net.org/DellaBodhisattva.htm>.
85. Dīpaṅkara is the fourth buddha whose story is told in the *Buddhavaṃsa*. He is said to have lived four incalculable world-periods and a hundred thousand eons ago. It is said that countless other buddhas had appeared in the world before him.
86. "Four countless and a hundred thousand eons" means four countless eons plus a hundred thousand regular eons.
87. These twenty-five buddhas are Dīpaṅkara, Kakusandha (Kondañña), Maṅgala, Sumana, Revata, Sobhita, Anomadassin, Paduma, Nārada, Padumuttara, Sumedha, Sujāta, Piyadassin,

Atthadassin, Dhammadassin, Siddhattha, Tissa, Phussa, Vipassin, Sikhī, Vessabhū, Kakusandha, Koṇāgamana, Kassapa, and Gotama.

88. The *Apadāna* is a collection of autobiographical accounts and poems of Buddhist sages and senior monks and nuns. It is located in the Khuddaka Nikāya.
89. *Khuddakapāṭha* 8:15–16.
90. This is the view of a personal identity that grasps an independent I and mine.
91. For commentaries on *The Wheel of Sharp Weapons*, see Thubten Chodron, *Good Karma*, and Geshe Lhundub Sopa, *Peacock in the Poison Grove*, in the Recommended Reading section.
92. Thupten Jinpa, trans., *Mind Training: The Great Collection* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2006), 171.
93. The verses and an explanation of how to offer your meal and dedicate the merit can be found in Thubten Chodron, *The Compassionate Kitchen: Buddhist Practices for Eating with Mindfulness and Gratitude* (Boulder, CO: Shambhala Publications, 2018).
94. See chapters 4 and 5 in *The Foundation of Buddhist Practice* for the qualifications of a good spiritual mentor and how to rely on them in a way that furthers your spiritual development.
95. The antarvāsas is the *shamdup*, or lower robe; the uttarāsamga is the *chogu*, or seven-strip robe; the samghāṭī is the *namjar* made of many patches.
96. This refers to the five sublime eyes: (1) the physical eye limited to the range of sight of the being that possesses it, (2) the divine eye that sees the death and rebirth of all beings, (3) the wisdom eye that knows all conditioned and unconditioned phenomena, (4) the Dharma eye that knows the attainments of all āryas, and (5) the Buddha eye that views all phenomena from the state of full awakening.

## Glossary

*Abhidharma.* A field of study and its texts that contain detailed reworkings of material in the Buddhist sūtras according to schematic classifications.

*access.* See *preparatory stages for a dhyāna.*

*access concentration* (P. *upacāra samādhi*). A level of concentration that prepares the mind to enter the next actual dhyāna.

*actual dhyāna* (T. *bsam gten gyi dngos gzhi*). A more refined dhyānic concentration attained upon completing its preparatory stages.

*afflictions* (*kleśa*). Mental factors that disturb the tranquility of the mind. These include disturbing emotions and wrong views.

*afflictive obscurations* (*kleśāvaraṇa*). Obscurations that mainly prevent liberation; afflictions and their seeds.

*aggregates* (*skandha*). The four or five components that make up a living being: form (except for beings born in the formless realm), feelings, discriminations, miscellaneous factors, and consciousnesses.

*arhat.* Someone who has eliminated all afflictive obscurations and attained liberation.

*ārya* (P. *ariya*). Someone who has directly and nonconceptually realized the emptiness of inherent existence; someone who is on the path of seeing, meditation, or no-more-learning.

*basis of designation.* The collection of parts or factors in dependence on which an object is designated.

*bodhicitta*. A main mental consciousness induced by an aspiration to bring about others' welfare and accompanied by an aspiration to attain full awakening oneself. It marks entry into the Mahāyāna.

*bodhisattva*. Someone who has genuine bodhicitta.

*bodhisattva ground*. A consciousness in the continuum of an ārya bodhisattva characterized by wisdom and compassion. It is the basis for the development of good qualities and the basis for the eradication of ignorance and mistaken appearances.

*buddha*. All aspects of a buddha. It includes the four buddha bodies.

*Buddhadharma*. The teachings of the Buddha.

*cognitive obscurations (jñeyāvaraṇa)*. Obscurations that mainly prevent full awakening; the latencies of ignorance and the subtle dualistic view that they give rise to.

*collection of merit (puṇyasambhāra)*. A bodhisattva's practice of the method aspect of the path that accumulates merit and is the main cause for a buddha's form body.

*collection of wisdom (jñānasambhāra)*. In the wisdom aspect of the path, a Mahāyāna exalted knower that focuses on the ultimate truth, emptiness, and is the main cause for a buddha's truth body.

*collections (requisites, sambhāra, T. tshogs)*. A bodhisattva's practice of method and wisdom that leads to full awakening.

*concentration (samādhi)*. A mental factor that dwells single-pointedly for a sustained period of time on one object; a state of deep meditative absorption; single-pointed concentration that is free from discursive thought.

*concomitant (T. mtshungs ldan)*. Accompanying or occurring together in the same mental state.

*consciousness (jñāna)*. That which is clear and cognizant.

*conventional existence (samvṛtisat)*. Existence.

*conventional truths (saṃvṛtisaṭya)*. That which is true only from the perspective of grasping true existence. It includes all phenomena except ultimate truths. Syn. *veiled truths*.

*counterpart sign (P. paṭibhāga-nimitta)*. The meditation object of a dhyāna consciousness; a conceptual object that arises on the basis of a visible object.

*cyclic existence (saṃsāra)*. The cycle of rebirth that occurs under the control of afflictions and karma.

*death (maraṇabhava)*. The last moment of a lifetime when the subtlest clear-light mind manifests.

*defilement (mala, T. dri ma)*. Either an afflictive obscuration or a cognitive obscuration.

*deity (iṣṭadevatā, T. yi dam)*. A manifestation of the awakened mind that is meditated on in Tantra.

*deity yoga*. A meditation practice that involves uniting one's mind with the realizations of a meditation deity.

*dependent arising (pratītyasamutpāda)*. This is of three types: (1) causal dependence — things arising due to causes and conditions, (2) mutual dependence — phenomena existing in relation to other phenomena, and (3) dependent designation — phenomena existing by being merely designated by terms and concepts.

*desire realm (kāmadhātu)*. One of the three realms of cyclic existence; the realm where sentient beings are overwhelmed by attraction to and desire for sense objects.

*deva*. A being born as a heavenly being in the desire realm or a being born in the form or formless realm.

*dhyāna (P. jhāna)*. A meditative absorption of the form realm.

*dualistic appearance*. The appearance of subject and object as separate, the appearance of inherent existence, the appearance of conventional phenomena (to a sentient being).

*duḥkha* (P. *dukkha*). Unsatisfactory experiences of cyclic existence.

*duḥkha of change*. The unsatisfactory situation of the instability and changing nature of what is pleasant.

*duḥkha of pain*. Evident physical and mental pain.

*Dzogchen*. A tantric practice emphasizing meditation on the nature of mind, practiced primarily in the Nyingma tradition.

*eight worldly concerns* (*aṣṭalokadharmā*). Attachment or aversion regarding material gain and loss, fame and disrepute, praise and blame, pleasure and pain.

*emanation body* (*nirmāṇakāya*). The buddha body that appears to ordinary sentient beings in order to benefit others.

*emptiness* (*śūnyatā*). The lack of inherent existence, lack of independent existence.

*enjoyment body* (*saṃbhogakāya*). The buddha body that appears in the highest pure lands to teach ārya bodhisattvas.

*establishments of mindfulness* (*smṛtyupasthāna*, *satipaṭṭhāna*, T. *dran pa nyer bzhaḡ*). One of the seven sets of practices comprising the thirty-seven harmonies with awakening. It focuses mindfulness on the body, feelings, mind, and phenomena.

*exalted knower* (*jñāna*, T. *mkhyen pa*). A realization of someone who has entered a path. It exists from the path of accumulation to the buddha ground. Exalted knower, path, ground, and clear realization are mutually inclusive terms.

*extreme of absolutism* (eternalism or permanence, *śāśvatānta*). The belief that phenomena inherently exist.

*extreme of nihilism* (*ucchedānta*). The belief that our actions have no ethical dimension; the belief that nothing exists.

*fetters* (*saṃyojana*). Factors that keep us bound to cyclic existence and impede the attainment of liberation. The five lower fetters — view of a

personal identity, deluded doubt, view of rules and practices, sensual desire, and malice — bind us to rebirth in the desire realm. The five higher fetters — desire for existence in the form realm, desire for existence in the formless realm, arrogance, restlessness, and ignorance — prevent a nonreturner from becoming an arhat.

*five dhyānic factors.* Investigation (*vitarka*, *vitakka*), analysis (*vicāra*), joy (*prīti*, *pīti*), bliss (*sukha*), and one-pointedness of mind (*ekāgratā*, *ekaggatā*).

*five heinous crimes (ānantārya).* Killing one's mother, father, or an arhat, wounding a buddha, and causing schism in the saṅgha.

*five hindrances (āvaraṇa, T. sgrib pa lnga).* Hindrances that interfere with attaining serenity: sensual desire (*kāmacchanda*), malice (*vyāpāda*, *byāpāda*), lethargy and sleepiness (*styāna-middha*, *thīna-middha*), restlessness and regret (*auddhatya-kaukr̥tya*, *uddhacca-kukkucca*), and deluded doubt (*vicikitsā*, *vicikicchā*).

*form body (rūpakāya).* The buddha body in which a buddha appears to sentient beings; it includes the emanation and enjoyment bodies.

*form realm (rūpadhātu).* A realm in saṃsāra in which the beings have subtle bodies; they are born there by having attained various states of concentration.

*formless realm (ārūpyadhātu).* The realm in saṃsāra in which sentient beings do not have a material body and abide in deep states of concentration.

*fortitude of the nonarising of phenomena (anutpattika-dharma-kṣānti, T. mi skye ba'i chos la bzod pa).* A special realization of emptiness and nonduality by bodhisattvas that makes them irreversible on the path to full awakening.

*four fearlessnesses.* The Tathāgata is completely confident and lacks all fear in declaring that (1) he is fully awakened regarding all phenomena, (2) he has destroyed all pollutants, (3) he has correctly identified all



obstructions to be eliminated on the path, and (4) when practiced, his teachings lead to the complete destruction of duḥkha.

*four opponent powers.* Four points to purify destructive karma. These are regret, generating bodhicitta and taking refuge, engaging in a remedial action, and making a determination not to do the harmful action again. See chapter 10 of *The Foundation of Buddhist Practice*.

*four truths of the āryas (catvāry āryasatyāni).* The truth of duḥkha, its origin, its cessation, and the path to that cessation.

*four ways of gathering or assembling (saṃgrahavastu, saṅgahavatthu,* T. *bsdu ba'i dngos po bzhi).* (1) being generous and giving material aid, (2) speaking pleasantly, (3) encouraging disciples to practice, and (4) acting congruently and living the teachings through example.

*full awakening (samyaksambodhi).* Buddhahood; the state where all obscurations have been abandoned and all good qualities developed limitlessly.

*fundamental innate mind of clear light (T. gnyug ma lhan cig skyes pa'i 'od gsal gyi sems).* The subtlest level of mind.

*Fundamental Vehicle.* The vehicle leading to the liberation of śrāvakas and solitary realizers.

*gāthās.* Short verses or lines extracted from sūtras or written by great masters that steer our mind to a virtuous state.

*god (deva).* A being born as a heavenly being in the desire realm or in the form or formless realms.

*grasping inherent existence (svabhāvagraha).* Grasping persons and phenomena to exist truly or inherently; syn. *grasping true existence*.

*grasping true existence (satyagrāha).* See *grasping inherent existence*.

*ground (bhūmi).* A path. Ten bodhisattva grounds span the bodhisattva paths of seeing and meditation.

*harmonies with awakening (bodhipākṣya-dharma, bodhipakkhiya-dhamma)*. Thirty-seven practices condensed into seven sets that lead to liberation and awakening.

*hell being (nāraka)*. A being born in an unfortunate realm of intense physical pain due to strong destructive karma.

*highest yoga tantra (anuttarayogatantra)*. The most advanced of the four classes of tantra.

*hungry ghost (preta)*. A being born in one of the unfortunate realms who suffers from intense hunger and thirst.

*ignorance (avidyā)*. A mental factor that is obscured and grasps the opposite of what exists. There are two types: ignorance regarding ultimate truth and ignorance regarding karma and its effects.

*impermanent (anitya, anicca)*. Momentary; not remaining unchanged in the next moment.

*inferential cognizer (anumāna)*. A mind that ascertains its object by means of a correct reason.

*inherent existence (svabhāva)*. Existence without depending on any other factors; independent existence.

*insight (vipaśyanā, vipassanā, T. lhag mthong)*. A wisdom of thorough discrimination of phenomena conjoined with special pliancy induced by the power of analysis.

*introspective awareness (samprajanya, sampajañña)*. An intelligence that causes one to engage in activities of body, speech, or mind heedfully.

*invariable karma*. Propelling karma that is the cause for rebirth in a specific level in the form or formless realm and no other.

*karma*. Intentional (volitional) action; it includes intention karma (mental action) and intended karma (physical and verbal actions motivated by intention).

*karmic seeds*. The potencies from previously created actions that will bring their results.

*latencies (vāsanā)*. Predispositions, imprints, or tendencies.

*liberation (mokṣa, T. thar pa)*. A true cessation that is the abandonment of afflictive obscurations; nirvāṇa, the state of freedom from cyclic existence.

*liberation (vimukti, vimutti, T. rnam grol)*. Sanskrit tradition: complete freedom from saṃsāra; Pāli tradition: a conditioned event that brings nirvāṇa.

*liberation of mind by love (P. mettā cetovimutti)*. A mind genuinely wishing all beings to be happy that has temporarily abandoned the five hindrances, especially anger and malice, through the force of concentration.

*Madhyamaka*. A Mahāyāna tenet system that refutes true existence.

*Mahāmudrā*. A type of meditation that focuses on the conventional and ultimate natures of the mind.

*meditative equipoise on emptiness*. An ārya's mind focused directly and single-pointedly on the emptiness of inherent existence.

*mental consciousness (mano-vijñāna, mano-viññāṇa)*. A primary consciousness that knows mental phenomena in contradistinction to sense primary consciousnesses that know physical objects.

*mental contemplation (manaskāra, manasikāra, T. yid la byed pa)*. A mind that meditates on either grossness and subtleness or on the four truths in order to attain either the dhyānas or the union of serenity and insight on emptiness.

*mental factor (caitta, cetasika)*. An aspect of mind that accompanies a primary consciousness and fills out the cognition, apprehending particular attributes of the object or performing a specific function.

*mind (citta, T. sems)*. That which is clear and cognizant; the part of living beings that cognizes, experiences, thinks, feels, and so on. In some

contexts it is equivalent to primary consciousness.

*mindfulness (smṛti, sati)*. A mental factor that brings to mind a phenomenon of previous acquaintance without forgetting it and prevents distraction to other objects.

*mindstream (cittasaṃtāna, cittasantāna)*. The continuity of mind.

*momentary (kṣaṇika)*. Not enduring to the next moment.

*monastic*. Someone who has received monastic ordination; a monk or nun.

*nature truth body (svabhāvika dharmakāya)*. The buddha body that is the emptiness of a buddha's mind and that buddha's true cessations.

*nimitta*. The sign or mental image that is the object for cultivating serenity. It is of three types: the preliminary, learning, and counterpart nimittas.

*nine stages of sustained attention (navākārā cittasthiti, T. sems gnas dgu)*. Stages of concentration on the way to attaining serenity.

*nirvāṇa*. The state of liberation of an arhat; the purified aspect of a mind that is free from afflictions.

*nirvāṇa without remainder (anupadhiśeṣa-nirvāṇa, anupādisesa-nibbāna)*. (1) The state of liberation when an arhat has passed away and no longer has the remainder of the polluted aggregates. (2) An ārya's meditative equipoise on emptiness when there is no appearance of true existence.

*nonabiding nirvāṇa (apraṭiṣṭha-nirvāṇa)*. The nirvāṇa of a buddha that does not abide in either the extreme of saṃsāra or the extreme of personal peace of a śrāvaka's nirvāṇa.

*nondeceptive (avisamvādi)*. Incontrovertible, correct.

*nonexistent (asat)*. That which is not perceivable by mind.

*object (viśaya, visaya, T. yul)*. That which is known by an awareness.

*object of negation (pratiśedhya, T. dgag bya)*. Something that appears to our mind, which in fact is nonexistent and is to be negated or refuted.

*observed object* (*ālambana, ārammaṇa, T. dmigs pa*). The basic object that the mind refers to or focuses on while apprehending certain aspects of that object.

*one final vehicle*. The belief that all beings — even śrāvakas who have become arhats — will eventually enter the Mahāyāna and become buddhas.

*ordinary being* (*pṛthagjana, puthujjana, T. so so skye bo*). Someone who is not an ārya.

*path* (*mārga, magga, T. lam*). An exalted knower that is conjoined with uncontrived renunciation.

*path of accumulation* (*sambhāramārga, T. tshogs lam*). First of the five paths. It begins when one aspires for liberation day and night for a śrāvaka path, or when one has spontaneous bodhicitta for the Mahāyāna path.

*path of meditation* (*bhāvanāmārga, T. sgom lam*). Fourth of the five paths. It begins when a meditator begins to eradicate innate afflictions from the root.

*path of no-more-learning* (*aśaikṣamārga, T. mi slob lam*). The last of the five paths; arhatship or buddhahood.

*path of preparation* (*prayogamārga, T. sbyor lam*). Second of the five paths. It begins when a meditator attains the union of serenity and insight on emptiness.

*path of seeing* (*darśanamārga, T. mthong lam*). Third of the five paths. It begins when a meditator first has direct, nonconceptual realization of the emptiness of inherent existence.

*permanent* (*nitya, nicca, T. rtag pa*). Unchanging, static in nature. It does not mean eternal.

*permanent, unitary, independent self*. A soul or self (*ātman*) asserted by non-Buddhists.

*permission* (T. *jenang*). A meditative ceremony in which the recipient receives the inspiration of an awakened deity's body, speech, and mind.

*person* (*pudgala*, *puggala*, T. *gang zag*). A being designated in dependence on the four or five aggregates.

*pervasive duḥkha of conditioning*. Taking the five aggregates under the influence of afflictions and polluted karma. This is the basis of the duḥkha of pain and the duḥkha of change.

*pliancy* (tranquility, *praśrabdhi*, *passaddhi*). A mental factor that enables the mind to apply itself to a constructive object in whatever manner it wishes and dissipates mental or physical rigidity.

*polluted* (contaminated, *āsrava*, *āsava*, T. *zag pa*). Under the influence of ignorance or its latencies.

*Prāsaṅgika*. The Buddhist philosophical tenet system that asserts that all phenomena lack inherent existence both conventionally and ultimately.

*prātimokṣa*. The different sets of ethical precepts for monastics and lay followers that assist in attaining liberation.

*preliminary practices*. (1) Meditating on important initial stages of the path, such as precious human life, death and impermanence, karma and its effects, and the defects of saṃsāra. (2) In the context of tantra, practices that purify negativities and collect merit, such as taking refuge, reciting the names of the buddhas and prostrating to them, making offerings, reciting the mantra of Vajrasattva, guru yoga, and so on.

*preparatory stages for a dhyāna* (access, preparations, *sāmantaka*, T. *bsam gtan gyi nyer bsdogs*). Stages of meditation that prepare the mind to enter an actual dhyāna.

*primary consciousness* (*vijñāna*). A consciousness that apprehends the presence or basic entity of an object. There are six types of primary consciousness: visual, auditory, olfactory, gustatory, tactile, and mental.

*probing awareness* (reasoning consciousness, *yuktijñāna*, T. *rigs shes*). A consciousness using or having used reasoning to analyze the ultimate

nature of an object. It can be either conceptual or nonconceptual.

*pure lands*. Places created by the unshakable resolve and merit of buddhas where all external conditions are conducive for Dharma practice.

*realized Dharma*. The realizations in a person's mindstream.

*sādhana*. The means of achievement expressed in a tantric text or manual that details the steps of visualization and meditation in the practice of a deity.

*samādhi*. See *concentration*.

*saṃsāra*. (1) Constantly recurring rebirth under the control of afflictions and polluted karma. (2) The five aggregates of a person who has taken rebirth in this way.

*Sautrāntika*. A Fundamental Vehicle tenet system that asserts that functional things are ultimate truths and phenomena that exist by being imputed by thought are conventional truths.

*self* (*ātman*, *attan*, T. *bdag*). (1) Conventional I, the person, (2) independent I that does not exist, (3) inherent existence.

*self-grasping* (*ātmagrāha*, *attagaha*, T. *bdag 'dzin*). Grasping inherent existence.

*self-sufficient substantially existent person* (T. *gang zag rang rkya thub pa'i rdzas yod*). A person that can be identified independent of the aggregates. Such a self does not exist.

*sentient being* (*sattva*, *satta*, T. *sems can*). Any being that has a mind and is not a buddha.

*serenity* (*śamatha*, *śamatha*, T. *zhi gnas*). Sanskrit tradition: concentration arisen from meditation that is accompanied by the bliss of mental and physical pliancy in which the mind abides effortlessly without fluctuation for as long as we wish on whatever virtuous or neutral object it has been placed. Pāli tradition: one-pointedness of mind; the eight attainments (meditative absorptions) that are the basis for insight.

*six perfections* (*ṣaḍpāramitā*, T. *phar phyin drug*). The practices of generosity, ethical conduct, fortitude, joyous effort, meditative stability, and wisdom that are motivated by bodhicitta.

*solitary realizer* (*pratyekabuddha*, *paccekabuddha*, T. *rang sangs rgyas*). A person following the Fundamental Vehicle who seeks liberation, emphasizes understanding the twelve links of dependent arising, and pursues their practice without teachings from a master in their last lifetime before becoming an arhat.

*sphere of three*. The agent, object, and action.

*śrāvaka* (hearer, P. *sāvaka*, T. *nyan thos*). Someone practicing the Fundamental Vehicle path leading to arhatship who emphasizes meditation on the four truths.

*stabilizing meditation* (*sthāpyabhāvanā*, T. *'jog sgom*). Meditation to focus and concentrate the mind on an object.

*stages of the path to awakening* (T. *lam rim*). A systematic presentation or sequential practice of the steps of the path to awakening found in Tibetan Buddhism.

*subjective aspect* (*ākāra*, T. *rnam pa*). The way that a mind engages with its object.

*substantial cause* (*upādāna-kāraṇa*, T. *nyer len gyi rgyu*). The cause that becomes the result, as opposed to cooperative causes that aid the substantial cause in becoming the result.

*subtle latencies*. Latencies of ignorance and other afflictions that are cognitive obscurations that prevent simultaneous cognition of the two truths.

*superknowledge* (*abhijñā*, *abhiññā*, T. *mngon shes*). Direct, experiential knowledge, of six types: (1) supernormal powers, (2) divine ear, (3) knowledge of others' minds, (4) recollection of past lives, (5) divine eye (includes knowledge of the passing away and re-arising of beings and knowledge of the future), and (6) the destruction of the pollutants. The sixth is attained only by liberated beings.



*supernormal powers* (*rddhi, iddhi*, T. *rdzu 'phrul*). The first of the six superknowledges, gained in deep samādhi: to replicate one's body, appear and disappear, pass through solid objects, go under the earth, walk on water, fly, touch the sun and moon with one's hand, go to the Brahmā world, and so forth.

*supramundane* (transcendental, *lokottara, lokottara*, T. *'jig rten las 'das pa*). Pertaining to the elimination of fetters and afflictions; pertaining to āryas.

*taking and giving* (literally giving and taking, T. *gtong len*). A meditation practice for cultivating compassion and love that involves visualizing taking others' suffering, using it to destroy our self-centered attitude, and giving our body, possessions, and merit to others.

*tathāgata*. A buddha.

*ten powers*. Qualities found only in a buddha. The ten powers are knowing (1) what is possible and impossible, (2) the ripening result of all actions, (3) the paths leading to all destinations, (4) the world with its many different elements, (5) the inclinations of sentient beings, (6) the faculties of sentient beings, (7) the meditative stabilizations and absorptions, (8) past lives, (9) sentient beings passing away and being reborn, and (10) liberation and full awakening.

*tenet* (*siddhānta*, T. *grub mtha'*). A philosophical principle or belief.

*thirty-seven harmonies with awakening*. Thirty-seven qualities and practices that śrāvakas, solitary realizers, and bodhisattvas cultivate. See chapters 12–14 in *Following in the Buddha's Footsteps*.

*thought* (*kalpanā*, T. *rtog pa*). Conceptual consciousness.

*three characteristics*. Impermanence, duḥkha, and no-self.

*three realms* (*tridhātuka, tedhātuka*, T. *kham s gsum*). Desire, form, and formless realms.

*transmitted (scriptural) Dharma*. The words and meanings of the Buddha's teachings in the form of speech and scriptures.

*true cessation (nirodhasatya)*. The cessation of a portion of afflictions or a portion of cognitive obscurations.

*true existence (satyasat)*. Existence having its own mode of being; existence having its own reality.

*truth body (dharmakāya, T. chos sku)*. The buddha body that includes the nature truth body and the wisdom truth body.

*twelve links of dependent origination (dvādaśāṅga-pratītyasamutpāda)*. A system of twelve factors that explains how we take rebirth in saṃsāra and how we can be liberated from it.

*two truths (satyadvaya)*. Ultimate truths and veiled (conventional) truths.

*ultimate nature*. The ultimate or deepest mode of existence of persons and phenomena; emptiness.

*ultimate truth (paramārthasatya)*. The ultimate mode of existence of all persons and phenomena; emptiness.

*unfortunate realm (apāya)*. Unfortunate state of rebirth as a hell being, hungry ghost, or animal.

*union of serenity and insight*. Absorption in which the bliss of mental and physical pliancy has been induced by analysis.

*unpolluted (anāsrava)*. Not under the influence of ignorance.

*Vajrasattva*. A meditation deity whose practice is especially powerful to purify destructive karmic seeds and other defilements.

*veiled truths (saṃvṛtīsatya)*. Objects that appear true to ignorance, which is a veiling consciousness; objects that appear to exist inherently to their main cognizer, although they do not; syn. *conventional truths*.

*view of a personal identity* (view of a [distorted] personal identity based on the transitory collection, *satkāyadr̥ṣṭi*, *sakkāyadit̥ṭh*, T. 'jig lta). Grasping an inherently existent I or mine (according to the Prāsaṅgika system).

*Vinaya*. Monastic discipline; a body of texts about monastic life, discipline, and conduct.

*wind* (*prāṇa*, T. *rlung*). One of the four elements; energy in the body that influences bodily functions; subtle energy on which levels of consciousness ride.

*wisdom truth body* (*jñāna dharmakāya*). The buddha body that is a buddha's omniscient mind.

*Yogācāra* (*Cittamātra*). A Buddhist philosophical tenet system asserting that objects and the consciousnesses perceiving them arise from the same substantial cause, a seed on the foundation consciousness, and that the mind is truly existent.

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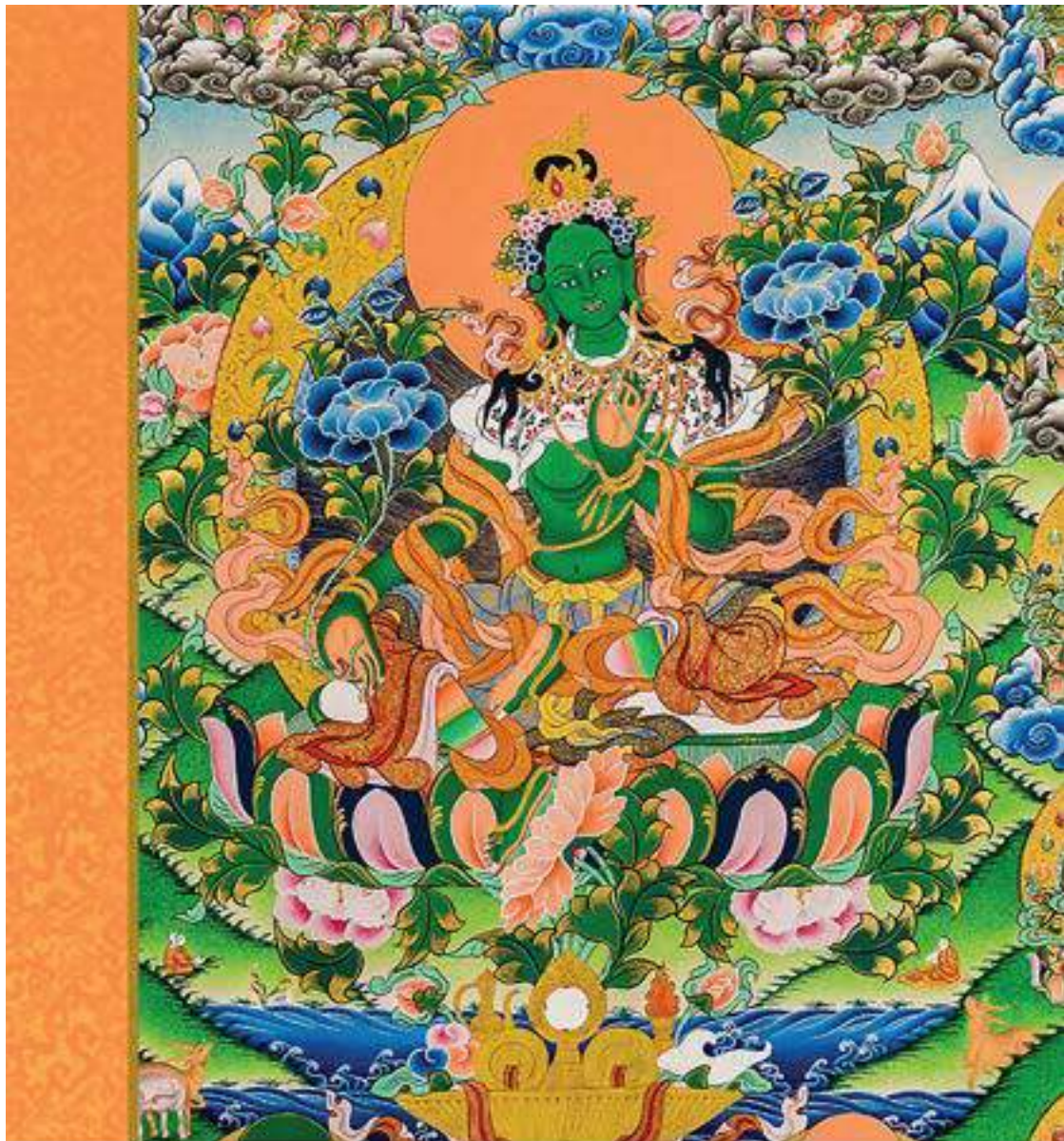
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—JESUNMA TENZIN PALMO

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**C***ourageous Compassion*, the sixth volume of the *Library of Wisdom and Compassion*, continues the Dalai Lama’s teachings on the path to awakening. The previous volume, *In Praise of Great Compassion*, focused on opening our hearts with love and compassion for all living beings, and the present volume explains how to embody compassion and wisdom in our daily lives. Here we enter a fascinating exploration of bodhisattvas’ activities across multiple Buddhist traditions—Tibetan, Theravāda, and Chinese Buddhism.

After explaining the ten perfections according to the Pāli and Sanskrit traditions, the Dalai Lama presents the sophisticated schema of the four paths and fruits for śrāvakas and solitary realizers and the five paths for bodhisattvas. Learning about the practices mastered by these exalted practitioners inspires us with knowledge of our minds’ potential. His Holiness also describes buddha bodies, what buddhas perceive, and buddhas’ awakening activities.

*Courageous Compassion* offers an in-depth look at bodhicitta, arhatship, and buddhahood that you can continuously refer to as you progress on the path to full awakening.

*Publisher's Acknowledgment*

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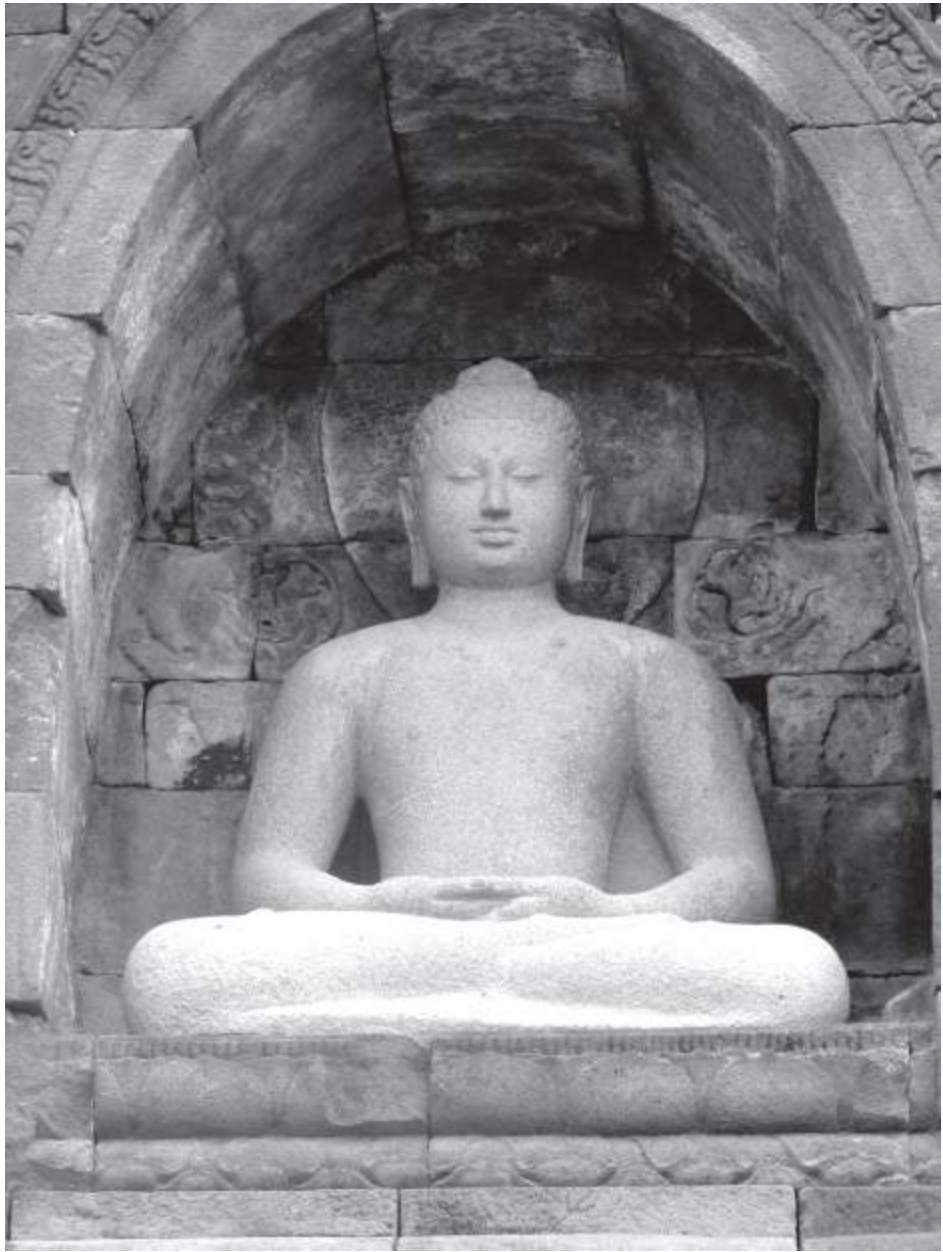
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## Preface

**H**IS HOLINESS and I are pleased to offer you *Courageous Compassion*, the sixth volume of *The Library of Wisdom and Compassion*. The present volume details the activities of bodhisattvas, compassionate beings who seek full awakening in order to benefit others most effectively. This volume follows volume 5, *In Praise of Great Compassion*, which explains the methods to develop great compassion and the altruistic intention of bodhicitta. Both of these practical and inspiring volumes present us with another vision of how to live besides the habitual patterns that many people fall into these days—patterns that lead to boredom, anxiety, and a sense of meaninglessness on the one hand, or being too busy trying to fulfill our own or others’ unrealistic notions of success on the other.

As we saw in volume 5, generating bodhicitta depends on taking refuge in reliable spiritual guides—the Three Jewels of the Buddha, Dharma, and Saṅgha. This, as well as the core Buddhist practices of the higher trainings in ethical conduct, concentration, and wisdom, are explained in volume 4, *Following in the Buddha’s Footsteps*.

To follow in the Buddha’s footsteps we must be familiar with our current situation in saṃsāra—the unsatisfactory cycle of existence fueled by ignorance, afflictions, and polluted karma—as well as its alternatives, liberation and full awakening. This centers on understanding the four truths of the *āryas* as presented in volume 3, *Saṃsāra, Nirvāṇa, and Buddha Nature*. Awareness of our buddha nature, the fundamental purity of our minds, enhances our confidence in being able to attain the spiritual freedom of nirvāṇa.

An essential element in comprehending duḥkha—our unsatisfactory experiences in saṃsāra—and its causes is understanding the law of karma

and its effects, how our actions have an ethical dimension that influences the conditions of our birth and what we experience while alive. This, in turn, is based on valuing the preciousness of a human life that has the opportunity to encounter, learn, and practice the Buddha's liberating teachings. However, this opportunity is short-lived; we are mortal beings, so it is essential to set our priorities wisely and make our lives meaningful. As beginners or advanced students of the path, knowing how to select excellent spiritual mentors to guide us on the path is important, as is knowing how to develop healthy relationships with them that enable us to be receptive to their teachings. These topics are elaborated in volume 2, *The Foundation of Buddhist Practice*, which also explains the importance of relying on reasoning to examine the teachings and how to establish a daily meditation practice and structure meditation sessions.

Since the *Library of Wisdom and Compassion* is designed for people who have not necessarily grown up knowing Buddhism, volume 1, *Approaching the Buddhist Path*, explores the Buddhist view of life, mind, and emotions, provides historical background to the origins and spread of the Buddha's teachings, and introduces us to a systematic approach to the spiritual path. Tools on the path, how to evaluate our progress, working with emotions, and the way to apply Buddhist ideas to contemporary issues are also discussed in this volume.

More volumes are to come. They will go in depth concerning the nature of reality, the emptiness of inherent existence, and the profound practice of tantra. Now let's turn to the present volume, *Courageous Compassion*.

### *Overview of Courageous Compassion*

The story of how the *Library of Wisdom and Compassion* came to be written is found in the prefaces to previous volumes. Here, I'd like to share a little about preparing the present volume, which depended in part on conferring with His Holiness regarding particular topics. It is said that highly realized yogīs see our world as a pure land. My asking about this during one interview sparked a long, very dynamic discussion in Tibetan, with His Holiness conferring with the four geshés and rinpochés who were present. After a while they broke out into laughter. Smiling and chuckling,

His Holiness turned to me and said, “We don’t know. Maybe this, maybe that.” Later, I brought up the topic of what buddhas perceive, and again there was a long, animated debate in Tibetan that ended with laughter and the conclusion that all of us must become buddhas in order to know this. Out of compassion, His Holiness and Samdhong Rinpoche then explained what some of the great treatises say about what the Buddha perceived. As you’ll see in chapter 11, His Holiness’s treasured teacher Gen Nyima-la agreed that only buddhas can answer this question!

When he came up with the idea for the *Library of Wisdom and Compassion*, His Holiness emphasized that it must be unique and not focus only on Buddhism as practiced in Tibetan communities. He wants people, especially his students, to have broad knowledge and educated appreciation of the Buddha’s teachings by being familiar with both the Pāli and Sanskrit traditions, and within the Sanskrit tradition, Buddhism as practiced in both Tibetan and Chinese communities. He aims for increased cooperation among Buddhists of all traditions based on knowledge of one another’s tenets and practices. In reading this series, you’ll see the fundamental premises that are shared in all Buddhist traditions, as well as interpretations unique to each one.

The present volume contains two parts: the first concerns the bodhisattva practices and activities, the second concerns the three vehicles—the paths of śrāvakas, solitary realizers, and bodhisattvas—and their resulting fruits of arhatship and supreme awakening. Part I begins with an introduction to the practices of the bodhisattvas, compassionate beings who have bodhicitta and practice the bodhisattva deeds. Although we may not yet be bodhisattvas, we can still practice as they do and in that way gain familiarity with compassionate and wise actions. Bodhisattvas’ activities are spoken of in terms of six perfections: the perfections of generosity, ethical conduct, fortitude, joyous effort, meditative stability, and wisdom. These six practices in turn can be spoken of as ten, with the last four subsumed in the sixth, the perfection of wisdom. The additional four perfections are skillful means, unshakable resolve, power, and pristine wisdom. The Sanskrit tradition’s explanation of the ten bodhisattva perfections is found in chapters 2 and 3.

Chapter 4 encourages us to share the Dharma with others with skill and compassion. The contents of this chapter come predominantly from a conference with His Holiness and a group of Western Buddhist teachers in Dharamsala in 1993. Western Buddhist teachers shared with His Holiness their activities in Western Dharma centers and the way that Dharma was spreading in the West. Since Buddhism is new to Western countries, challenges and problems naturally arise, as well as confusion about how to teach, the role of rituals, Western students' relationships with Asian teachers, and Western teachers' relationships with Dharma students. During this conference, as well as in other venues and in the interviews for this series, His Holiness shared his thoughts, making it clear that he was not establishing policies. The position of the Dalai Lama is not like that of the Pope, and he does not have institutional control over Tibetan Buddhist organizations or teachers. Rather, he was sharing thoughts and suggestions that people were free to accept or reject. Some of his advice relating to spiritual mentors' behavior was explained in chapters 4 and 5 of *The Foundation of Buddhist Practice*.

Many people are unaware that the Pāli tradition describes a bodhisattva path. Bodhicitta and bodhisattvas in the Pāli tradition were explained in chapter 8 of *In Praise of Great Compassion*, and chapter 5 in the present volume explains the bodhisattva practices as presented in the Pāli sage Dhammapāla's *Treatise on the Pāramīs*, written in the sixth century. His treatise complements the Sanskrit tradition's explanation, and both open our minds to a new way of being in the world.

Part II delves into the topic of the three vehicles and their fruits and describes the stages of the paths and grounds that Fundamental Vehicle and Mahāyāna practitioners accomplish as they progress toward their respective spiritual aims of arhatship and buddhahood. The paths and grounds of the Fundamental Vehicle practitioners—śrāvakas and solitary realizers—as set forth in the Pāli tradition is found in chapter 6, and as set forth in the Sanskrit tradition in chapter 7. The remaining chapters are from the perspective of the Sanskrit tradition. Chapter 8 speaks of the five bodhisattva paths, and chapter 9 and 10 explain the bodhisattva grounds that occur during the bodhisattva paths of seeing and meditation. The attainments of these practitioners are truly magnificent and admirable.



Chapters 11 and 12 speak of the final goal: supreme awakening, buddhahood.

The paths and grounds are not usually included in the stages of the path (T. *lam rim*) material but are taught separately. However, His Holiness wants students to learn important aspects of the philosophical studies found in the monastic curriculum, and for that reason the paths and grounds as well as many other topics have been included in the *Library of Wisdom and Compassion*. His Holiness often reminds us that we should meditate on everything we study, and not think that some texts are for study and smaller manuals are for meditation.

Each chapter contains reflections that you are encouraged to contemplate. The reflections not only review some of the major points but also provide the opportunity to put these teachings into practice and transform your mind.

### *Please Note*

Although this series is coauthored, the vast majority of the material is His Holiness's teachings. I researched and wrote the parts about the Pāli tradition, wrote some other passages, and composed the reflections. For ease of reading, most honorifics have been omitted, but that does not diminish the great respect we have for the most excellent sages, learned adepts, scholars, and practitioners. Foreign terms are given in italics parenthetically at their first usage. Unless otherwise noted with “P” or “T,” indicating Pāli or Tibetan, respectively, italicized terms are Sanskrit. When two italicized terms are listed, the first is Sanskrit, the second Pāli. For consistency, Sanskrit spelling is given for Sanskrit and Pāli terms in common usage (nirvāṇa, Dharma, arhat, ārya, and so forth), except in citations from Pāli scriptures. To maintain the flow of a passage, it is not always possible to gloss all new terms on their first usage, so a glossary is provided at the end of the book. “Sūtra” often refers to Sūtrayāna, and “Tantra” to Tantrayāna—the Sūtra Vehicle and Tantra Vehicle, respectively. When these two words are not capitalized, they refer to two types of scriptures: sūtras and tantras. “Mahāyāna” here refers principally to the bodhisattva path as explained in the Sanskrit tradition. In general, the

meaning of all philosophical terms accords with the presentation of the Prāsaṅgika Madhyamaka tenet system. Unless otherwise noted, the personal pronoun “I” refers to His Holiness.

### *Appreciation*

My deepest respect goes to Śākyamuni Buddha and all the buddhas, bodhisattvas, and arhats who embody the Dharma and with compassion teach us unawakened beings. I also bow to all the realized lineage masters of all Buddhist traditions through whose kindness the Dharma still exists in our world.

This series appears in many volumes, so I will express appreciation to those involved in each individual volume. This volume, the sixth in the *Library of Wisdom and Compassion*, has depended on the abilities and efforts of His Holiness’s translators—Geshe Lhakdor, Geshe Dorji Damdul, and Mr. Tenzin Tsepak. I am grateful to Geshe Dorji Damdul, Geshe Dadul Namgyal, and Bhikṣuṇī Sangye Khadro for checking the manuscript, and to Samdhong Rinpoche for clarifying important points and his encouraging presence. I also thank Bhikkhu Bodhi for his clear teachings on the Pāli tradition and for generously answering my many questions. He also kindly looked over the sections of the book on the Pāli tradition before publication. The staff at the Private Office of His Holiness kindly facilitated the interviews, and Sravasti Abbey supported me while I worked on this volume. Mary Petruszewicz skillfully edited the manuscript. I thank everyone at Wisdom Publications who contributed to the successful production of this series. All errors are my own.

Bhikṣuṇī Thubten Chodron  
Sravasti Abbey

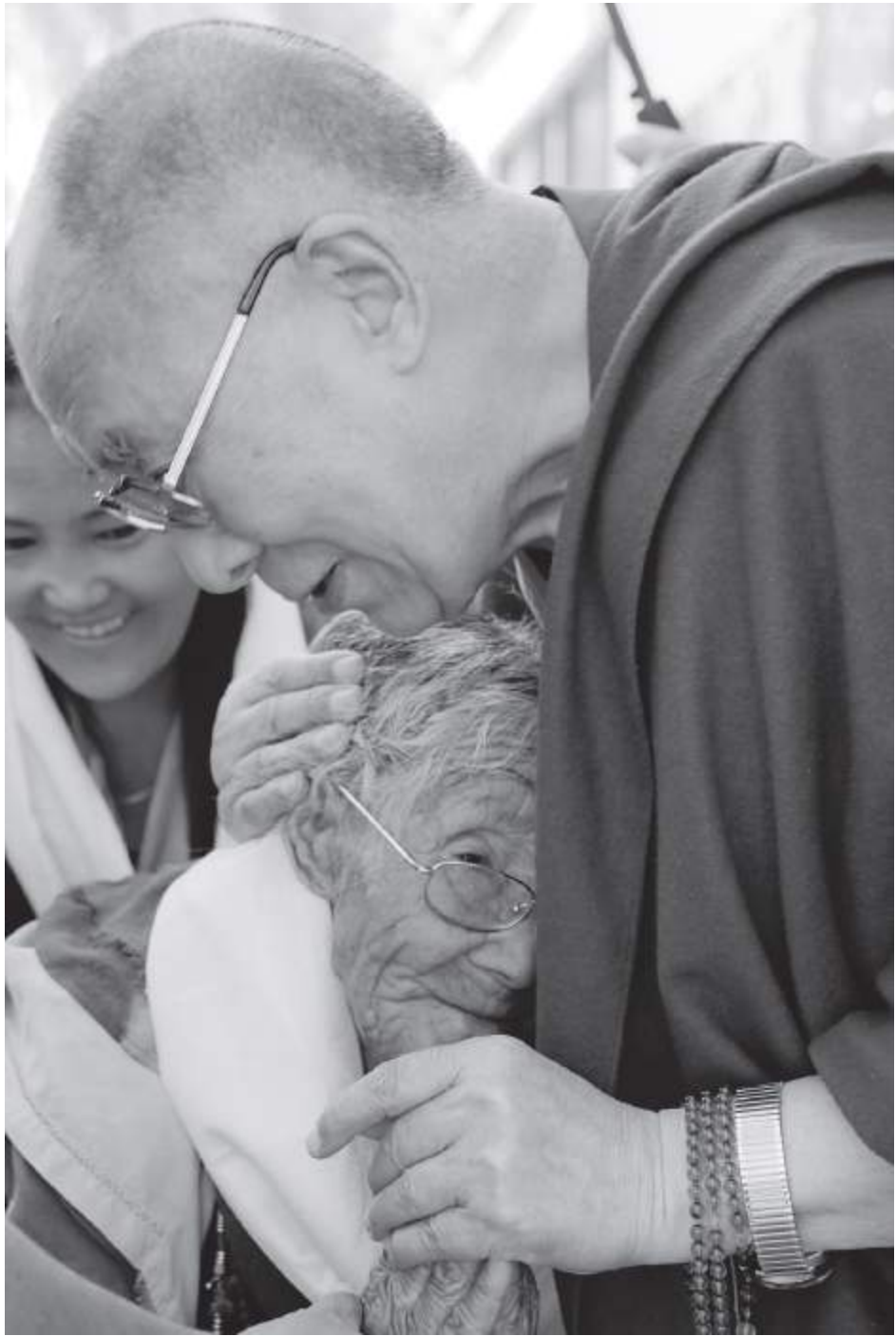
## Abbreviations

- AN      *Aṅguttara Nikāya*. Translated by Bhikkhu Bodhi in *The Numerical Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Aṅguttara Nikāya* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2012).
- BCA     *Engaging in the Bodhisattvas' Deeds (Bodhicaryāvatāra)* by Śāntideva. Translated by Stephen Batchelor in *A Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life* (Dharamsala, India: Library of Tibetan Works and Archives, 2007).
- CP      *Basket of Conduct (Cariyāpiṭaka)*. Translated by I. B. Horner in *The Minor Anthologies of the Pāli Canon*, vol. 3 (London: Pāli Text Society, 2007 [1975]).
- C        Chinese
- CTB     *Compassion in Tibetan Buddhism* by Tsong-ka-pa. Translated and edited by Jeffrey Hopkins (Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion Publications, 1980).
- DBS     *The Ten Grounds Sūtra (Daśabhūmika Sūtra)*. Translated by Bhikṣu Dharmamitra (Seattle: Kalavinka Press, 2019).
- DN      *Dīgha Nikāya*. Translated by Maurice Walshe in *The Long Discourses of the Buddha* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 1995).
- EOM     Jetsun Losang Dadrin (Tayang). *A Brief Presentation of the Grounds and Paths of the Perfection Vehicle, Essence of the Ocean of Profound Meaning*. Translated by Jules Levinson. Unpublished MA thesis, University of Virginia, 1983.

- Iti *The Udāna and the Itivuttaka*. Translated by John Ireland (Kandy, Sri Lanka: Buddhist Publication Society, 2007).
- IU *A Few Good Men: The Bodhisattva Path according to the Inquiry of Ugra (Ugrapariṣṭchā)*. A Study and translation by Jan Nattier (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2005).
- LC *The Great Treatise on the Stages of the Path (T. Lam rim chen mo)* by Tsongkhapa, 3 vols. Translated by Joshua Cutler et al. (Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion Publications, 2000–2004).
- LP *Lamp of the Path* by Atiśa Dīpaṃkaraśrījñāna.
- MMA *Supplement to “Treatise on the Middle Way”* by Candrakīrti. Translated by Jeffrey Hopkins in *Compassion in Tibetan Buddhism* by Tsong-ka-pa (Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion Publications, 1980).
- MMK *Treatise on the Middle Way (Mūlamadhyamakakārikā)* by Nāgārjuna.
- MN Majjhima Nikāya. Translated by Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi in *The Middle-Length Discourses of the Buddha* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 1995).
- MPU *Exegesis of the Great Perfection of Wisdom Sūtra (Mahāprajñāpāramitā Upadeśa)*. Translated by Bhikṣu Dharmamitra in *Nāgārjuna on the Six Perfections* (Seattle: Kalavinka Press, 2009).<sup>1</sup>
- P Pāli
- R *Heap of Jewels Sūtra (Ratnakūṭa): A Treasury of Mahāyāna Sūtras*. Edited by Garma C. C. Chang (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1983).
- RA *Precious Garland (Ratnāvalī)* by Nāgārjuna. Translated by John Dunne and Sara McClintock in *The Precious Garland: An Epistle to a King* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 1997).
- RGV *Sublime Continuum (Ratnagoṭravibhāga, Uttaratantra)* by

Maitreya.

- Sn *Suttanipāta*. Translated by Bhikkhu Bodhi in *The Suttanipāta* (Somerville, MA: Wisdom Publications, 2017).
- SN Saṃyutta Nikāya. Translated by Bhikkhu Bodhi in *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2000).
- SR *King of Concentration Sūtra (Samādhirāja Sūtra)*.
- T Tibetan
- TP *A Treatise on the Pāramīs* by Acariya Dhammapāla. Translated by Bhikkhu Bodhi (Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 1978). Also at <https://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/authors/bodhi/wheel409.html>.
- Vism *Path of Purification (Visuddhimagga)* by Buddhaghosa. Translated by Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli (Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 1991).



## Introduction

**D**EAR READERS, it's a privilege for me to share the Buddha's teachings as well as a few of my ideas and experiences with you. Wherever I go I emphasize that all seven billion human beings on our planet are physically, mentally, and emotionally the same. Everybody wants to live a happy life free of problems. Even insects, birds, and other animals want to be happy and not suffer. What distinguishes us human beings is our intelligence, although there are occasions when we use it improperly—for example, when we design weapons to kill one another. Animals like lions and tigers that stay alive by attacking and eating other animals have sharp teeth and claws, but human beings' nails and teeth are more like those of deer. We use our intelligence to fulfill our desires, but compared to other animals our desires seem to have no limit. We have one thing and want two; we have something good and we want something better. Satisfaction eludes us.

Right here and now I'm sitting in a peaceful place and imagine that you are too. But at this very moment, in other parts of the world people are killing each other. Devising ever better military strategies and ever more lethal arms is a poor use of human intelligence. Developing new nuclear weapons that are more effective in destroying people is the worst. I've been to both Hiroshima and Nagasaki. On my first visit to Hiroshima I met a woman who had been there when the nuclear bomb was dropped; somehow she survived. In the museum I saw a watch that had stopped at the exact instant of the explosion; it was half melted by the heat of the blast. Instead of using our human intelligence to create joy, the result has sometimes been fear and misery.

Now in the twenty-first century we must make an effort not to repeat the errors of the last century with its endless series of wars. Historians estimate that 200 million people died by violent means during that century. It's time

to say, enough. Let's make the twenty-first century a time of peace and compassion by recognizing the sameness of all eight billion human beings alive today. Strongly emphasizing differences in nationality, religion, ethnicity, or race culminates in feelings of us and them; we feel divided and we act divided. It is important to remind ourselves that at a deeper level all human beings are the same. We all want to live a happy life. Being happy is our right. To create a peaceful society we must heed the ways to achieve inner peace. This involves creating the circumstances for freedom, being concerned with human rights, and protecting the environment.

There are no natural boundaries between human beings on this earth; we are one family. At a time of increasing natural disasters, climate change and global warming affect all of us. We must learn to live together, to work together, and to share what we have together. Making problems for one another is senseless. We will achieve genuine peace in the world if we pursue demilitarization, but before countries can demilitarize, as individuals we must disarm ourselves internally. To begin, we must reduce our hostility and anger toward one another. That entails each of us looking inside ourselves and releasing our self-centered attitude and painful feelings rather than blaming others for things we don't like. As long as we don't accept responsibility for our own actions and thoughts, we will experience the same results as before. But when we realize that our actions affect others and care about their experience, we will stop harming them. When we change our behavior, others will also change theirs. Then real change is possible.

A mother gave birth to each of us and cared for us with love. I am sad that our educational system fails to nurture this sense of loving-kindness and aims instead to fulfill material goals. We need to reintroduce such inner values as warm-heartedness to our educational system. If we could be kinder, we'd be happier as individuals, and this would contribute to happier families and more harmonious communities. Human beings are social animals. What brings us together is love and affection—anger drives us apart. Just as we employ physical hygiene to protect our health, we must use “emotional hygiene” to tackle our destructive emotions and achieve peace of mind.



I belong to the twentieth century, an era that is past. I want to share with those of you who are young: if you start to collect the causes now, you'll live to see a happier, more peaceful world. Don't be content with the present circumstances; take a more far-sighted view. When the heart is closed, it leads to fear, stress, and anger. Nurturing the idea of the oneness of humanity has the effect of opening the heart. When you think of all other human beings as your brothers and sisters it's easy to communicate with them all. It makes it easier to smile, to be warm and friendly. This is what I try to do. Beggars or leaders—all human beings are the same. If I think "I am a Buddhist, I am Tibetan, I am the Dalai Lama," it just increases my sense of isolation. If I think of myself as a human being who is like everyone else, I feel at ease: I belong, I can contribute to others' well-being, I can communicate and share with others. We have to take the initiative to connect with one another.

All religions convey a message of love, compassion, and self-discipline. Their philosophical differences arose to suit people of different dispositions, at different times, and in different places and conditions. The fundamental message of love remains the same. Buddhism, especially the Nālandā tradition, with its emphasis on reasoned investigation, takes a realistic stance that accords with the scientific method. To become a twenty-first century Buddhist, simply having faith and reciting the sūtras is not enough; far more important is understanding and implementing what the Buddha taught.

Bhikṣu Tenzin Gyatso, the Fourteenth Dalai Lama

Thekchen Chöling



## Part I. How to Live with Compassion: The Bodhisattva Perfections

**A**LL OF US APPRECIATE others' kindness and compassion. Even before we came out of our mother's womb, we have been the recipients of others' kindness. Although being on the receiving end of compassion mollifies our anxiety and suffering, being compassionate toward others brings even more joy and feelings of well-being. This is what the eighth-century Indian sage Śāntideva meant when he said (BCA 8:129–30):

Whatever joy there is in this world  
all comes from desiring others to be happy,  
and whatever suffering there is in this world  
all comes from desiring myself to be happy.

What need is there to say much more?  
The childish work for their own benefit,  
the buddhas work for the benefit of others.  
Just look at the difference between them!

We need to learn methods to release our self-centeredness and cultivate genuine love and compassion for others. This does not entail feeling guilty when we are happy or sacrificing our own well-being, but simply recognizing that our self-centeredness is the cause of our suffering and cherishing others is the cause of the happiness of both self and others. *In Praise of Great Compassion* explains the two methods for doing so: the seven cause-and-effect instructions and equalizing and exchanging self and others. Now we'll look at the activities that bodhisattvas engage in with compassion and wisdom to benefit the world.



# 1 | Introduction to the Bodhisattva Perfections

**W**E MAY NOT YET BE bodhisattvas, but we can certainly engage in the same activities they do. In the process, we can continually expand and boost the intensity of our love and compassion.

Bodhisattvas train in bodhicitta for eons, so do not think that having one intense feeling of bodhicitta or reciting the words of aspiring bodhicitta is all there is to it. In *Engaging in the Bodhisattvas' Deeds*, the first two chapters lead us in cultivating bodhicitta, and the third chapter contains the method for taking the bodhisattva vow. The other seven chapters describe the practices of bodhisattvas, training in the six perfections. Although these bear the names of familiar activities—generosity, ethical conduct, and so forth—now they are called “perfections” because they are done with the motivation of bodhicitta that aims at buddhahood, the state of complete and perfect wisdom and compassion.

As you progress through the bodhisattva paths and grounds, you will deepen and expand your bodhicitta continuously, as indicated in the twenty-two types of bodhicitta mentioned in the *Ornament of Clear Realizations*.<sup>2</sup> With joy make effort to understand bodhicitta and the bodhisattva path, and endeavor to transform your mind into these. Avoid conceit and cutting corners; in spiritual practice there is no way to ignore important points and still gain realizations. Cultivate fortitude, courage, and the determination to be willing to fulfill the two collections of merit and wisdom over many years, lifetimes, and eons. The result of buddhahood will be more than you can conceive of at this moment.

*The Two Collections of Merit and Wisdom*

Bodhicitta is a primary mind conjoined with two aspirations. The first is to work for the well-being of all sentient beings, the second is to attain full awakening in order to do so most effectively. Once you have generated bodhicitta and are determined to attain buddhahood, you'll want to accumulate all the appropriate causes and conditions that will bring it about. These are subsumed in the collection of merit (*puṇyasam̐bhāra*) and the collection of wisdom (*jñānasam̐bhāra*). The collection of merit is the method or skillful means aspect of the bodhisattva path that concerns conventional truths such as other living beings; the collection of wisdom is the wisdom aspect of the bodhisattva path that focuses on the ultimate truth, emptiness. When completed, the two collections lead to the form body and truth body of a buddha. In *Sixty Stanzas (Yuktiṣaṣṭikā)* Nāgārjuna summarizes these two principal causes:

Through this virtue, may all beings complete  
the collections of merit and wisdom.  
May they attain the two sublime buddha bodies  
resulting from merit and wisdom.

**TWO ASPECTS, TWO COLLECTIONS, TWO TRUTHS, PERFECTIONS, AND RESULTS**

ASPECT OF THE PATH	COLLECTION	TRUTH (BASIS)	PERFECTIONS (PATH)	RESULT
Method	Merit	Conventional	Generosity, ethical conduct, fortitude, joyous effort	Form bodies of a buddha
Wisdom	Wisdom	Ultimate	Meditative stability, wisdom, joyous effort	Truth bodies (nature truth body and wisdom truth body)

Note: There are various ways of categorizing the six perfections by way of method and wisdom. In another way, the first five perfections are included

in method.

The collection of merit consists of virtuous actions motivated by bodhicitta. The collection of merit includes mental states, mental factors, and karmic seeds related to these virtuous actions. It deals with conventional truths, such as sentient beings, gifts, precepts, and so forth. To fulfill it, bodhisattvas practice the perfections of generosity, ethical conduct, and fortitude, as well as all other virtuous actions such as those done with love and compassion, prostrating, making offerings, and meditating on the defects of saṃsāra.

The collection of wisdom is a Mahāyāna pristine knower that realizes emptiness. It consists of learning, contemplating, and meditating on the ultimate nature of persons and phenomena that is supported by bodhicitta, and includes both inferential reliable cognizers of emptiness that are free from the two extremes of absolutism and nihilism and āryas' meditative equipoise on emptiness. The collection of wisdom is not necessarily a union of serenity and insight, but being a Mahāyāna exalted knower, it must be conjoined with actual bodhicitta and bear the result of buddhahood.

The collection of merit is primarily responsible for bringing about a buddha's form bodies (*rūpakāya*), and the collection of wisdom is primarily responsible for bringing about a buddha's truth bodies (*dharmakāya*). The word "primarily" is significant because each collection alone cannot bring about either of the buddha bodies. Both collections are necessary to attain both the form bodies and the truth bodies. (Here "body" means a corpus of qualities, not a physical body.) Bodhisattvas fulfill their own purpose by gaining the buddhas' truth bodies and omniscient minds. They fulfill others' purpose by manifesting in buddhas' countless form bodies through which they benefit, teach, and guide sentient beings.

With bodhicitta as their motivation, bodhisattvas delight in creating the cause for buddhahood by practicing the perfections. Practices and activities that comprise the collections of merit and wisdom become perfections because they are conjoined with actual bodhicitta, which differentiates them from the practices of merit and wisdom cultivated by śrāvakas and solitary realizers. Although śrāvakas and solitary realizers collect merit and wisdom, they are not the fully qualified collections of merit and wisdom and are thus considered secondary collections. Because solitary realizers'

progress in merit and wisdom is superior to that of śrāvakas, some solitary realizers are able to become arhats without depending on hearing a master’s teaching during their last lifetime in saṃsāra.

Likewise, bodhisattva-aspirants who have not yet generated actual bodhicitta and entered the Mahāyāna path of accumulation create merit and enhance their wisdom, but their practices are called “similitudes” of the two collections and are not fully qualified collections. However, people who aspire to enter the bodhisattva path plant the seeds to be able to do the actual collections later.

Our virtuous actions accompanied by a strong wish for a good rebirth act as a cause for the places, bodies, and possessions associated with fortunate rebirths. Those accompanied by the determination to be free from cyclic existence are similitudes of the collections and lead to liberation. Only when our virtuous actions are accompanied by bodhicitta do they constitute the actual collections. Practitioners of the Perfection Vehicle build up the actual collections over three countless great eons on the bodhisattva path. The first eon of collecting merit and wisdom is done on the path of accumulation and the path of preparation; the second eon is fulfilled on the first seven of the ten bodhisattva grounds that span the path of seeing and part of the path of meditation; the third eon is done on the last three of the ten bodhisattva grounds called the “three pure bodhisattva grounds”—the eighth, ninth, and tenth. Bodhisattvas who follow the Vajrayāna fulfill the two collections more quickly due to the special practice of deity yoga that combines method and wisdom into one consciousness.

The method side entails cultivating an aspiring attitude—that is, we enhance our intentions to give, to not harm others, to remain calm in the face of suffering, and so on. With the practice of wisdom, we learn and contemplate the teachings on emptiness, bringing conviction and ascertainment that all persons and phenomena lack inherent existence. This wisdom complements and completes the practices on the method side of the path. Similarly, our virtuous actions of the method aspect of the path enhance wisdom by purifying the mind and enriching it with merit, which increases the power of wisdom. Method practices help the understanding of emptiness to arise when it hasn’t occurred, and when it has, merit enables wisdom to increase, deepen, and become a more powerful antidote to the



afflictive and cognitive obscurations. Ultimately, however, it is wisdom that determines progress on the path because advancing from one bodhisattva ground to the next occurs during meditative equipoise on emptiness.

### *The Six Perfections*

Cultivating contrived bodhicitta through effort is virtuous and auspicious; it paves the way to generate uncontrived bodhicitta, which entails engaging in the bodhisattvas' deeds. These deeds can be subsumed in the six perfections—generosity (*dāna, dāna*), ethical conduct (*śīla, sīla*), fortitude (*kṣānti, khanti*), joyous effort (*vīrya, viriya*), concentration (*dhyāna, jhāna*), and wisdom (*prajñā, paññā*). The sixth perfection, wisdom, can be further expanded into four, making ten perfections—the first six, plus skillful means (*upāya*), unshakable resolve (*praṇidhāna, paṇidhāna*), power (*bala*), and pristine wisdom (*jñāna, ñāṇa*). To ripen others' minds, we train in the four ways of gathering disciples—generosity, teaching the Dharma according to the capacity of the disciples, encouraging them to practice, and embodying the Dharma in our life. These four can be included in the six perfections, so the six are said to be the main bodhisattva practices to ripen both our own mind and the minds of others.

You may wonder: From the beginning, the lamrim teachings encourage us to be generous and ethical, to have fortitude and practice with joyous effort, and to develop meditative stability and wisdom. Why, then, are these six practices explained only now? Also, practitioners of all three vehicles cultivate these qualities. Why are they explained now as unique Mahāyāna practices?

Let's use generosity as an example. It is practiced not only in all Buddhist traditions but also in all religions. People who are not interested in any religion but value kindness and compassion also practice generosity. A difference exists, however, between the mere practice of generosity and the perfection of generosity. The perfection of generosity is not simply an absence of miserliness when giving or a casual wish to share things. Nor is it being generous with the motivation to be rich in future lives. Rather, it is giving done with the aspiration to become a buddha in order to benefit all beings most effectively.

In addition to being motivated by bodhicitta, the perfection of generosity is sealed by the wisdom of emptiness. That is, when giving, we reflect on the ultimate nature of the giver, the gift, the recipient, and the action of giving. All of them are empty of inherent existence but exist dependent on one another. Through this reflection, any attachment or misconceptions that could arise from generosity are purified. Based on bodhicitta and assisted by the wisdom of emptiness, the perfection of generosity encompasses both the method and wisdom sides of the path and is enriched by them.

The term perfection—*pāramitā* in Sanskrit and *pāramī* in Pāli—has the meaning of going beyond the end and reaching perfection or fulfillment. The Tibetan term *pha rol tu phyin pa* means to go beyond to the other shore. These practices take us beyond saṃsāra to the freedom of full awakening where both obscurations have been eliminated and all good qualities have been developed limitlessly. “Go beyond” connotes the goal—full awakening, or the Mahāyāna path of no-more-learning—as well as the method for arriving at that goal—the six perfections done by those on the learning paths. Motivated by bodhicitta and refined with meditation on emptiness, these practices take us beyond both saṃsāra and the pacification of saṃsāra that is an arhat’s nirvāṇa. For example, bodhisattvas who conjoin their actions of giving with unpolluted wisdom see the giver, the object given, the recipient, and the action of giving as empty of inherent existence. Because their wisdom is supramundane, the generous actions conjoined with it lead them beyond saṃsāra. Ārya bodhisattvas, who have achieved an extraordinary level of training in the six perfections, are objects of veneration and respect, for they both perceive ultimate truth directly and seek to benefit all beings.

Generosity and other perfections that are not conjoined with such wisdom are considered mundane because the agent, object, and action are seen as truly existent. To integrate the wisdoms of emptiness and dependent arising into your practice of generosity, reflect that you as the giver (agent), the gift that is given (object), the recipient, and the action of giving do not exist from their own side; they exist dependent on one another. A person does not become a giver unless there is a gift, recipient, and action of giving. Flowers do not become a gift unless there is a person giving them

and one receiving them. Seeing all the elements of generosity as appearing but empty makes our generosity extremely powerful, transforming it into the supramundane practice of the perfection of generosity.

Similarly, when purifying nonvirtue during your practice of ethical conduct, contemplate that prostrations and mantra recitation, for example, do not have inherent power to purify destructive karma. Their ability to do so arises dependent on the strength of your regret, your motivation, the depth of your concentration, and faith in the Three Jewels. Both prostrations and the seeds of destructive karma they destroy are dependent arisings; they exist nominally, by being merely imputed by term and concept.

How can purification occur if both the seeds of destructive actions and the purification practices lack inherent nature and exist like illusions? It is analogous to soldiers in a hologram destroying an arsenal in a hologram. The scene and its figures appear, but none of them exists in the way they appear. If seeds of destructive karmas had their own intrinsic nature, independent of all other things, nothing could affect them and they would be unchangeable. But because they do not exist under their own power, they can be altered and removed by purification practices that alter the factors upon which they depend. This contemplation differentiates the perfection of generosity and so forth from the same actions done by others. The presence of the bodhicitta motivation differentiates the perfection of generosity from the giving done by śrāvakas and solitary realizers.

Each of the perfections is a state of mind, not a set of external behaviors. When certain mental qualities are cultivated, they undoubtedly affect a person's behavior. However, external behavior may or may not be indicative of particular mental qualities. For example, a person may outwardly appear generous while her internal motivation is to manipulate the recipient. Likewise, we shouldn't think that bodhisattvas always give extravagantly. A practitioner may have deep bodhicitta and a strong aspiration to give but, due to lack of resources, only give a small amount. Practitioners of the six perfections are extremely humble. They hide their realizations and do not seek fame or recognition.

## REFLECTION

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1. Activities such as generosity, ethical conduct, and so forth are valued by all religions and by people who have no religion as well. What makes them perfections?
  2. In addition, what makes them become supramundane practices of the perfections?
  3. Examine the dependent nature of each perfection. For example, someone can't be a giver without there being a gift and the action of giving; the action of fortitude can't exist without a person who practices it and a person who is problematic or harmful.
  4. Contemplate how engaging in the practice of the perfections with the awareness of emptiness entails seeing the agent who does the action, the action itself, and the object acted upon as empty of inherent existence but existing dependently.
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### *The Basis, Nature, Necessity, and Function of the Six Perfections*

Maitreya's *Ornament of the Mahāyāna Sūtras* (*Mahāyānasūtrālaṅkāra*) describes the six perfections in detail. The following explanation is taken predominantly from that text.

#### *The Basis: Who Engages in the Perfections?*

Those who are a suitable basis for these practices have awakened their Mahāyāna disposition—that is, they have great compassion, deep appreciation, and fortitude for the Mahāyāna Dharma. They rely on a qualified Mahāyāna spiritual mentor and receive extensive teachings on the Mahāyāna texts that teach the six perfections. In that way, they learn what the bodhisattva practices are and how to do them correctly. These practitioners are not satisfied with intellectual knowledge: they reflect and meditate on these teachings to collect both merit and wisdom and they engage in the practice of the perfections at every opportunity. The Mahāyāna disposition is awakened before a practitioner generates bodhicitta. When this disposition is nourished and developed, it will lead a

practitioner to generate uncontrived bodhicitta and enter the bodhisattva path.

*Nature: What Constitutes Each Practice?*

Knowing what constitutes each perfection gives us the ability to practice it more carefully.

- Generosity is physical, verbal, and mental actions based on a kind thought and the willingness to give.
- Ethical conduct is restraining from nonvirtue, such as the seven nonvirtues of body and speech and the three nonvirtues of mind that motivate them, as well as other negativities.<sup>3</sup>
- Fortitude is the ability to remain calm and undisturbed in the face of harm from others, physical or mental suffering, and difficulties in developing certitude about the Dharma.
- Joyous effort is delight in virtues such as accomplishing the purposes of self and others by creating the causes to attain the truth bodies and form bodies of a buddha.
- Meditative stability is the ability to remain fixed on a constructive focal object without distraction.
- Wisdom is the ability to distinguish conventional and ultimate truths as well as to discern what to practice and what to abandon on the path.

In the *Precious Garland*, Nāgārjuna speaks of the six perfections and their corresponding results. He adds a seventh factor, compassion, because it underlies the motivation to engage in the six perfections (RA 435–37).

In short, the good qualities that a bodhisattva should develop are generosity, ethical conduct, fortitude, joyous effort, meditative stability, wisdom, compassion, and so on.

Giving is to give away one's wealth;

ethical conduct is to endeavor to help others;  
fortitude is the abandonment of anger;  
joyous effort is enthusiasm for virtue.

Meditative stability is unafflicted one-pointedness;  
wisdom is ascertainment of the meaning of the truths;  
compassion is a state of mind that savors  
only loving-kindness for all sentient beings.

## REFLECTION

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Read the above verses again while contemplating their meaning.

1. How can you generate these various practices and apply them in your life?
2. What emotions or attitudes make you hesitate to engage in these practices even though you hold them in high regard?
3. How can you remove these mental impediments so that you can joyfully enrich your life and the lives of others through engaging in these practices?

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### *The Necessity and Function of the Perfections*

The six perfections are necessary (1) to accomplish the welfare of other sentient beings, (2) to fulfill the aims of ourselves and others, and (3) to receive a precious human life in future rebirths so that we can continue to practice. These are explained below.

### **Accomplishing the Welfare of Other Sentient Beings**

Our practice of each perfection functions to benefit sentient beings:

- By giving generously, we alleviate poverty and provide others with the basic necessities of life and other practical items as well as with

things they enjoy.

- By living ethically, we refrain from harming them, thus easing their fear and pain.
- By being patient with others' inconsiderate or harmful behavior, we avoid causing them either physical pain or the mental pain of guilt, remorse, and humiliation.
- With joyous effort, we continue to help others without laziness, resentment, or fatigue.
- With meditative stability, we gain the superknowledges, such as clairvoyance (the divine eye), and use them to benefit sentient beings.
- With wisdom, we are able to teach others so that they can actualize the wisdoms understanding conventional truths, ultimate truths, and how to benefit others. Through this we eliminate their doubts and lead them to awakening.

### **Fulfilling Our Own Aims**

The last three perfections—joyous effort, meditative stability, and wisdom—are cultivated primarily to fulfill our own aims—that is, to spur us on the path to buddhahood. Wisdom realizing the ultimate truth directly eliminates our ignorance, afflictions, and polluted karma so that our mind can be transformed into a buddha's omniscient mind. To develop this wisdom that is a union of serenity and insight, we need deep meditative stability that makes the mind pliant and able to meditate on a virtuous object for as long as desired. To develop meditative stability, joyous effort is important to overcome laziness and resistance to Dharma practice.

### **Fulfilling the Aims of Others**

The first three perfections primarily help to fulfill others' aims. These center around ethical conduct. If we are attached to our possessions, body, and friends and relatives, we will harm others to procure and protect them. By cultivating generosity, our attachment will decrease and we will not harm others to get what we want. If our anger is strong, it will move us to cause others pain and misery. By cultivating fortitude, we will abandon harming others. Not only will they not feel pain from our harm but they will

also not create more destructive karma by retaliating. Furthermore, they could be inspired by our fortitude and become more interested in learning how to subdue their own anger.

The first three perfections benefit others in another way as well. Through our being generous, they receive what they need and desire. Generosity also attracts others to us, so that we can teach them the Dharma and guide them on the path to awakening.

Even though we may practice generosity, harming others will damage our virtuous actions and diminish any benefit we could provide others. By living ethically, we stop injuring others physically and mentally. In addition, our ethical conduct draws others to us because they know we are trustworthy. This enables us to benefit them even more.

To practice generosity and ethical conduct well, fortitude is indispensable. If others are not grateful after we give them something, we might become angry and retaliate. That would harm them and violate our own ethical conduct. By practicing the fortitude of not retaliating, our ethical conduct will be stable and we will not become discouraged by others' lack of gratitude when we are generous and kind to them. Fortitude with students, benefactors, and others we encounter in society is necessary because if we are irascible, they will avoid us—depriving us of the opportunity to benefit them.

### **Ensuring a Precious Human Life in the Future**

Fulfilling the collections of merit and wisdom will take a long time. Thus it is essential to ensure that we obtain fortunate rebirths in which all the conducive circumstances for Dharma practice are present. If we are careless and fall to an unfortunate birth, we will not be able to help ourselves or practice the Dharma, let alone benefit others. To fulfill the purposes of self and others, a precious human life with excellent conditions is needed. Practicing the six perfections creates the causes to obtain this.

- Poverty creates difficulties in practicing the Dharma. Thus we need resources in future lives, and generosity creates the cause to obtain them.



- To make use of the resources, a human life is essential; ethical conduct is the principal cause of attaining an upper rebirth.
- Someone who ruminates with anger or loses their temper is not pleasant to be with and will lack good friends in the Dharma. Practicing fortitude creates the cause to have a pleasing appearance, good personality, and kind companions who encourage our Dharma practice and practice together with us.
- Being unable to follow through and complete projects is a hindrance to benefiting others. To be able to complete our virtuous projects in future lives and to be successful in all constructive activities we undertake, practicing joyous effort in this life is important. It creates the cause to have these abilities and to attract others to practice together with us in future lives.
- If our mind is filled with many afflictions in future lives, we will create great destructive karma. Having a stable and peaceful mind is important to maintain focus on what is important and not be distracted by uncontrolled thoughts and emotions. Practicing meditative stability in this life creates the cause for this.
- The ability to clearly discriminate between misleading teachers and those imparting the correct path is essential, as is the ability to discern what to practice and what to abandon on the path. Cultivating the wisdom that correctly understands the law of karma and its effects creates the cause to have such wisdom in future lives.

Engaging in all six perfections and reaping their results facilitates our Dharma practice in future lives. If the practice of even one perfection is weak or absent, our opportunity to progress on the bodhisattva path in future lives will be limited. For example, without the meditative stability that subdues the gross afflictions, our meditations on bodhicitta and emptiness will be weak; without wisdom, even if we have a good rebirth in the next life, we won't have one after that because our ignorance will prevent us from creating the causes.

In short, Nāgārjuna sums up the temporal results of engaging in the six perfections that will facilitate our Dharma practice in future lives (RA 438–39):

From generosity comes wealth; from ethics happiness;  
from fortitude comes a good appearance; from [effort in] virtue  
brilliance;  
from meditative stability peace; from wisdom liberation;  
compassion accomplishes all aims.

From the simultaneous  
perfection of all seven,  
one attains the sphere of inconceivable wisdom—  
protector of the world.

Thinking about these teachings in relationship to our own lives will deepen our understanding and invigorate our Dharma practice. It is easy to be blasé about having the conditions to continue Dharma practice in future lives. However, imagining being born in circumstances that lack all the conducive conditions wakes us up to the need to create the causes to have them in future lives. Since those causes must be created now, our mind returns to the present with renewed vigor and interest in practice.

### *How the Six Perfections Relate to Other Practices*

Although monastics and lay followers alike practice all six perfections, the first three—generosity, ethical conduct, and fortitude—are said to be easier for lay practitioners. In that context, generosity is giving material wealth and protection, ethical conduct is living in the five lay precepts and the bodhisattva precepts, and fortitude is the fortitude of gaining certitude about the Dharma, especially about the teachings on emptiness. The last three perfections—joyous effort, meditative stability, and wisdom—are likewise practiced by everyone but are said to be more pertinent to monastics.

Although we are encouraged to practice all six perfections as best as we can from the beginning, it is easier to cultivate and perfect them in their given order. Generosity precedes ethical conduct because attachment to possessions and greed to have more and better are obstacles to abandoning nonvirtuous actions. Ethical conduct is needed for fortitude because by practicing ethical conduct, it is easier to control afflictions and remain calm

in the face of harm or suffering. Fortitude is needed to gain joyous effort because the internal calm that fortitude brings sustains joyous effort. Joyous effort is needed to develop meditative stability because meditative concentration does not come quickly and requires continuous effort over time. Meditative stability is essential for developing sharp, clear wisdom that penetrates the meaning of any topic, especially ultimate reality.

The six perfections comprise the two collections, as discussed above. They can also be included in the three higher trainings of bodhisattvas. Here generosity, ethical conduct, and fortitude are included in the higher training of ethical conduct; meditative stability pertains to the higher training of concentration; and wisdom is incorporated in the higher training of wisdom. Joyous effort is needed for all of them.

#### THE THREE HIGHER TRAININGS AND THEIR CORRESPONDING PERFECTIONS

HIGHER TRAINING	PERFECTIONS INCLUDED IN IT
Ethical conduct	Generosity, ethical conduct, fortitude
Concentration	Meditative stability
Wisdom	Wisdom

The six perfections also make up the two purposes of a practitioner: to obtain a higher rebirth and to actualize the highest good—liberation and full awakening. The first four perfections assist in attaining a higher rebirth. Meditative stability and wisdom are the keys to the highest good.

#### THE CAUSES FOR HIGHER REBIRTH AND THE HIGHEST GOOD

CAUSES FOR HIGHER REBIRTH	CAUSES FOR THE HIGHEST GOOD
Generosity, ethical conduct, fortitude, joyous effort	Meditative stability, wisdom

From another perspective the six perfections can be included in the three types of generosity. The perfection of generosity is the generosity of giving material possessions. Ethical conduct and fortitude are the generosity of fearlessness because by acting ethically we protect others from the fear of our harming them and by having fortitude we do not cause others pain by losing our temper. The perfections of meditative stability and wisdom are

the generosity of Dharma because instructions on serenity and insight are the principal teachings to give to sentient beings when they are receptive vessels. Joyous effort is needed to complete all three types of generosity.

#### THE THREE TYPES OF GENEROSITY AND THEIR CORRESPONDING PERFECTIONS

TYPE OF GENEROSITY	PERFECTIONS INCLUDED IN IT
Generosity of giving material possessions	Generosity
Generosity of fearlessness	Ethical conduct, fortitude
Generosity of Dharma	Meditative stability, wisdom

The six perfections are necessary to keep us on the path and to enable us to accomplish our heartfelt spiritual aims. Two factors inhibit us from embarking on the path: attachment to wealth and attachment to family and home. By sharing our resources, generosity lessens the first. By keeping monastic precepts, ethical conduct alleviates the second.

We may go beyond these two attachments but still abandon the spiritual journey as a result of two hindrances: the first is resentment for others' bad behavior and their lack of appreciation and respect, the second is discouragement regarding the length of time needed and the depth of practice required to accomplish our aims. Fortitude counteracts the first by strengthening our ability to handle hardship. Joyous effort remedies the second by increasing our delight and enthusiasm for creating virtue. These two together soothe the mind and give us great confidence and perseverance to continue on the path no matter what.

We may continue to practice, but our virtue may go to waste and our efforts may bring negligible results due to two causes: distraction and mistaken intelligence. Distraction scatters the mind to sense objects, useless thoughts, and disturbing emotions, diminishing the force of our virtue. Meditative stability remedies this by keeping our attention focused on a virtuous object and enables us to penetrate the Buddha's teachings and integrate their meaning in our mind. Mistaken intelligence inhibits comprehending and practicing the Buddha's teachings correctly and could actively misunderstand the teachings and lead to activities that cause unfortunate rebirths. Wisdom prevents this by correctly ascertaining what is

and is not the path, and in this way guides our body, speech, and mind in the right direction.

#### FACTORS INHIBITING THE ACCOMPLISHMENT OF SPIRITUAL GOALS AND THEIR ANTIDOTES

INHIBITING FACTORS	HOW THEY INTERFERE	PERFECTIONS THAT ARE THEIR ANTIDOTE
Attachment to wealth	Inhibits embarking on the path	Generosity
Attachment to family	Inhibits embarking on the path	Ethical conduct
Resenting others' bad behavior and lack of respect	Abandon the spiritual journey	Fortitude
Discouragement	Abandon the spiritual journey	Joyous effort
Distraction that scatters the mind	Virtue going to waste and efforts bringing negligible results	Meditative stability
Mistaken intelligence that inhibits correct understanding of the Buddhadharma	Virtue going to waste and efforts bringing negligible results	Wisdom

All six perfections can be included in the practice of each one. For example, giving even a glass of water—a small act of generosity—can be done with bodhicitta. The mental state is most important, and in this case it is the wish to give in order to accumulate merit to attain awakening for the sake of all sentient beings as well as to directly benefit the recipient.

Not harming others physically or verbally when getting the water and when giving it is ethical conduct. Refraining from a condescending attitude or rude behavior and eschewing harsh speech when offering also constitute ethical conduct. If the recipient harms us physically or verbally in return, remaining calm and not retaliating in response to their ingratitude is the practice of fortitude. Giving the water is done with joyous effort that takes delight in being generous. Stability of mind is necessary so that the mind does not get distracted while giving. Stability also maintains the bodhicitta motivation and prevents the mind from becoming polluted by afflictions while giving.

Prior to giving, wisdom is needed to know what, when, and how to give. While giving, contemplating the emptiness of the giver, gift, recipient, and action of giving cultivates wisdom. An early Mahāyāna sūtra, the *Inquiry of Ugra (Ugrapariṣcchā)*, describes how this is done (IU 244):

When the householder bodhisattva sees someone in need, he will fulfill the cultivation of the six perfections:

1. If as soon as the householder bodhisattva is asked for any object whatsoever, his mind no longer grasps at the object, in that way his cultivation of the perfection of generosity will be fulfilled.
2. If he gives while relying on bodhicitta, in that way his cultivation of the perfection of ethical conduct will be fulfilled.
3. If he gives while bringing to mind love toward those in need and not producing anger or animosity toward them, in that way his cultivation of the perfection of fortitude will be fulfilled.
4. If he is not depressed due to a wavering mind that thinks “If I give this away, what will become of me?” in that way the perfection of joyous effort will be fulfilled.
5. If one gives to someone in need and, after having given, is free from sorrow and regret, and moreover gives [these things] from the standpoint of bodhicitta and is delighted and joyful, happy, and pleased, in that way his cultivation of the perfection of meditative stability will be fulfilled.
6. And if, when he has given, he does not imagine the phenomena [produced by his generosity] and does not hope for their maturation, and just as the wise do not settle down in [their belief in] any phenomena, just so he does not settle down [in them], and so he transforms them into supreme, full awakening—in that way his cultivation of the perfection of wisdom will be fulfilled.

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## REFLECTION

1. Review the example above that illustrates how the other perfections are also practiced while engaging in the perfection of generosity.
2. Using ethical conduct as the chief perfection being practiced, reflect on how the other five perfections are practiced in tandem.
3. Do the same for the perfections of fortitude, joyous effort, meditative stability, and wisdom—showing how the other perfections can be practiced together with it. This exercise will expand your awareness of how to make even small actions very worthwhile.

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While learning about the perfections, you may become discouraged, thinking that the practices are so difficult and you will never be able to do them. If this happens, instead of expecting yourself to be an expert when you are a beginner, accept your present level of abilities and continue to increase them in the future. The Buddha did not start off fully awakened and there was a time when he too found practicing the bodhisattva deeds very challenging. However, because causes bring their corresponding results, through steady practice you will be able to begin, continue, and complete the bodhisattvas' practices. Ratnadasa said in *Praise of Endless Qualities* (*Guṇapāryantastotra*, CTB 201):

Those deeds which, when heard of, scare worldly [people],  
and which you could not practice for a long time,  
will in time become spontaneous for all familiar with them.  
Those not so familiar find it hard to increase attainments.

Śāntideva agrees (BCA 6.14ab):

There is nothing whatsoever  
that is not made easier through acquaintance.

Seeing that this is the case, let's recall our buddha nature and transform our mind!





## 2 | Living as a Bodhisattva: The Perfections of Generosity, Ethical Conduct, and Fortitude

HAVING GENERATED BODHICITTA and taken the bodhisattva precepts, now do your best to live like a bodhisattva, imbuing all your actions with great compassion, wisdom, and bodhicitta. Pay special attention to the foremost bodhisattva actions, the ten perfections: generosity, ethical conduct, fortitude, joyous effort, meditative stability, wisdom, skillful means, unshakable resolve, power, and pristine wisdom. As you do this, be unassuming and don't flaunt your spiritual practice. As my spiritual mentor Tsenshap Serkong Rinpoche once told Chodron, who is also his student, "If I am a good cook, I don't need to advertise it. If I cook a meal, people will know for themselves."

### *The Perfection of Generosity*

Generosity is the mind with a kind thought that wants to give. It not only directly helps others but also releases the pain of miserliness and fills our mind with joy. In the *Heap of Jewels Sūtra*, the Bodhisattva Surata says (R 244–45):

One who accumulates billions  
and is greedily attached [to this wealth],  
unable to give it away,  
is said by the wise  
to be a person ever poor in the world.

A penniless person

who will readily give whatever he has  
is said by the wise  
to be the noblest and richest on earth.

Giving is the first perfection because it is the easiest for us to do. Generosity acts as the cause to receive resources—food, shelter, clothing, medicine, and other pleasurable objects—in this and future lives. Candrakīrti in the *Supplement to “Treatise on the Middle Way”* says (MMA 10):

All these beings want happiness,  
but human happiness does not occur without resources.  
Knowing that resources arise from generosity,  
the Subduer first discoursed on that.

Generosity can take many forms, and four types of generosity are commonly discussed: (1) giving material possessions or money, (2) giving protection, (3) giving love, and (4) giving the Dharma.

### *Giving Material Possessions and Money*

Giving material goods is a wonderful opportunity to connect with others, especially when we give with a pleasant expression and use both hands. It’s important to give at an appropriate time, without harming or inconveniencing anyone. We can also encourage others to be generous by inviting them to join us in making a gift or an offering.

Once you have decided to give something, give it soon, not letting the gift decay or get damaged. Avoid giving a little at a time when you could make the offering all at once, and definitely don’t belittle the recipient or give harmful objects such as weapons, poisons, and so on. Make sure that your gift was obtained with right livelihood.

Some people fear that if they give they will be impoverished because they won’t have that object later when they need it. Karmically, the opposite occurs: according to what we give, generosity is the cause to receive wealth, protection, love, and Dharma teachings. Even people who selfishly seek wealth will reap good results in future lives by being generous now.

Although they are motivated to receive the karmic “reward” of giving, their generosity will still bring them abundance and the comfort of their material needs being met. Candrakīrti tells us (MMA 11):

Even for beings with little compassion,  
brutal and intent on their own aims,  
desired resources arise from generosity,  
causing extinguishment of suffering.

In addition, those who are generous will come in contact with holy beings who will guide them on the path in this or future lives. The karmic connection from making offerings to Dharma practitioners, especially to bodhisattvas who are motivated by pure compassion, enables the giver to receive teachings in future lives and thus to progress on the path to liberation.

In the *Inquiry of Ugra Sūtra*, the Buddha encourages us by speaking of the benefits we receive by practicing generosity (IU 240–41):

The bodhisattva...should reflect as follows: “What I give away is mine; what I keep at home is not mine.<sup>4</sup> What I give away has essence; what I keep at home has no essence. What I give away will bring pleasure at another [i.e., future] time; what I keep at home will [only] bring pleasure right now. What I give away does not need to be protected; what I keep at home must be protected. [My] desire for what I give away will be exhausted; [my] desire for what I keep at home increases. What I give away I do not think of as mine; what I keep at home I think of as mine. What I give away is no longer an object of grasping; what I keep at home is an object of grasping. What I give away is not a source of fear; what I keep at home causes fear. What I give away supports the path to awakening; what I keep at home supports the party of Māra.”

## REFLECTION

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1. Think of something that you hesitate to part with, even though someone else could derive happiness from receiving it.
2. Contemplate as the Buddha said above: “What I give is not mine. I will not need to protect it anymore and I will be free from the fear of it getting lost, broken, or stolen. My painful mental obsession for it will decrease, and I will feel the pleasure of giving instead. Furthermore, my greed, anger, and confusion about it will diminish and I will create merit that will support my future awakening.”
3. Contemplate: “With a miserly attitude, if I keep it, I will fret over it and my mind will be stressed, fearful, and trapped by clinging. I will eventually have to separate from it, and all that will remain then is the destructive karma I created through attachment to it.”
4. Compare the happy feeling in your mind when you think of the benefits of giving and the painful mental feelings when you imagine clinging to the object and keeping it for yourself. In this way, encourage yourself to be generous.

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Bodhisattvas’ generosity differs from that of ordinary beings in many respects. Because ordinary beings do not immediately see the results of their generosity, many of them do not give. Bodhisattvas, on the other hand, are free from miserliness and do not seek their own benefit when they give. Having taken the bodhisattva precepts, they have pledged to lead all sentient beings to awakening and to help them temporarily as much as possible. Whenever bodhisattvas give, they experience the supreme joy that comes from seeing others benefit from their actions. There is not a touch of sadness, fear, or sense of loss after they give, only happiness. In fact, when bodhisattvas hear someone say, “Please give me...,” they feel overwhelming joy. Such joy is not experienced by śrāvaka and solitary-realizer arhats who abide in the peace of nirvāṇa, let alone by ordinary beings. Knowing these benefits, let’s try to practice generosity as bodhisattvas do.

In *Precious Garland*, Nāgārjuna counsels the king to use his wealth to benefit others and create merit now while he has the chance. The time of death is not certain, and while dying, he will be unable to practice generosity. Meanwhile, his ministers will be planning to divide up the treasury and still leave some for the new ruler (RA 316–17):

When dying, since you will lose your independence,  
you will be unable to give away [your possessions]  
through ministers who shamelessly cease to value you  
and seek the affection of the new king.

Therefore, while healthy, quickly use all your resources  
to build Dharma sites,  
for you stand in the midst of death's causes  
like a lamp in the midst of a storm.

You may not be a monarch, but Nāgārjuna's advice is still valuable. Give now and give with a bodhicitta motivation. Then while dying, rejoice at your merit and know that your wealth was distributed as you wish.

It may sometimes happen that you know the benefits of giving and the disadvantages of stinginess but still cannot bring yourself to give something to a person who has asked for it. The Buddha advises to humbly explain to the person (IU 258–59):

At this point my strength is meager and my roots of virtue  
are immature. I am only a beginner in the Mahāyāna. I am  
subject to thoughts of not giving. I still have the perspective  
of grasping, and am stuck in taking things as I and mine.  
And so, good person, I beg you to forgive me and not to be  
upset. [In the future] I will act, accomplish, and exert myself  
in order to fulfill your desires and those of all beings.

In other words, when giving a particular item is too much of a stretch for your present mental capacity, acknowledge your limitation without feeling ashamed or denigrating yourself. At the same time, resolve to put energy

into eliminating this hindrance so that you will be able to joyfully give in the future.

Be careful also about going to the other extreme of giving so much away that you leave yourself bereft. Be practical so that you do not become a burden to others by being unable to take care of yourself. Remember, it is the strength of your kind motivation that is the most important factor, not the size of the offering.

Misunderstanding the meaning of generosity, people sometimes think it entails giving whatever another person wants. This is not the case; we must give with wisdom. If a person with a drug or alcohol problem asks for money that we know will be used to feed their substance abuse, giving it to them is not an act of kindness and generosity. In this case, the most helpful action is to not give the money but to help the person enroll in a treatment program. We do this not with anger or stinginess but out of care and concern for the person.

Similarly, giving children whatever they want does not help them grow into responsible adults. In fact, it can impair their ability to function in society later on because they will take possessions for granted and expect all their wishes to be fulfilled. Teaching children how to deal with the frustration of not getting what they want will help them for the rest of their lives. Likewise, teaching them to be generous with their possessions is helping them more than catering to their every desire. Similarly, when children quarrel about a toy or device, teaching them methods to resolve conflicts nonviolently will help them much more than stepping in and fixing the external situation.

Each situation in which we are asked for help needs to be examined individually, in light of our motivation, capability, and the repercussions of our action. Not giving out of miserliness is self-centered, but if we have the wish to give but are unable to, there is no fault. Being generous does not mean that we have to cure all the poverty and need in the world. While sentient beings are still in cyclic existence, a perfect world is impossible. Nevertheless, do what you can with a caring attitude.

People often want to be generous but are confused when they receive requests for donations from a myriad of charities. Is not giving something to each a transgression of the bodhisattva precept to give whenever asked? No,

it isn't. The bodhisattva precept refers to giving in situations where the person is in desperate need, directly asks us for help, and has no one else to turn to. If you receive requests for help from too many charities, pick those whose causes touch you the most and contribute to them. In your mind have a supportive and compassionate attitude and make prayers for the welfare of the others.

Learning to be a kind recipient is also practicing generosity and ethical conduct, for we're giving someone the opportunity to take delight in giving. Sometimes we are too proud, afraid of feeling obliged, or immersed in feeling unworthy to accept others' generosity. Rebuffing their gifts—be they material possessions, loving support, or the offer of help—is stinginess on our part. As a result, the giver may feel hurt, rejected, or demoralized. Recalling that our aim is to benefit sentient beings, let's open our hearts and accept their kindness and generosity, neither exploiting it nor rejecting it. Admiring their kind actions and rejoicing in their merit can invigorate us to "pay it forward."

## REFLECTION

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1. Contemplate your fortune in having the possessions you have—which is the result of being generous in previous lives. Think how wonderful others who are lacking in possessions would feel if they could enjoy such fortune.
2. Clean out a closet or dresser in your home, removing everything you haven't used in the last year.
3. Note if the thought "But if I give it away, I won't have it" arises, and remind yourself of the benefits of generosity.
4. Take those things to a charity, hospital, nursing home, school, and so forth, and with joy in your heart, donate them.

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*Giving the Body*



Bodhisattvas may give their bodies to someone in need only when they have no clinging to their bodies. To such bodhisattvas, giving their body and life is like giving a carrot to someone; they have no attachment, fear, or hesitation. Some bodhisattvas attain the ability to give their body on the path of preparation. Bodhisattvas on the first ground, who excel in the perfection of generosity, do not experience any physical or mental suffering when giving their body or life. Because of their great merit, they do not experience physical pain, and because of their profound wisdom realizing emptiness, they experience no mental suffering. Nāgārjuna says (RA 221–23):

What is called immeasurable merit  
and also that called immeasurable wisdom  
quickly eradicate the suffering  
of both body and mind.

Hunger, thirst, and other such physical suffering  
occur in unfortunate rebirths due to one's misdeeds.  
[Bodhisattvas] do not engage in misdeeds;  
due to merit, they have no such suffering in other rebirths.

From confusion comes the mental suffering  
of attachment, anger, fear, lust, and such.  
[Bodhisattvas] quickly eliminate this  
by realizing that [all phenomena] are foundationless.

Furthermore, being free from the self-centered thought and having deep compassion, their attention is focused on the suffering of others (RA 226):

They have no physical suffering;  
how could they have mental suffering?  
Through their compassion they feel pain  
for the world and so stay in it long.

Ordinary bodhisattvas who have not yet attained the first ground feel physical suffering when giving parts of their body. However, the pain they experience serves only to intensify their compassion for other sentient beings, who experience far greater pain in the hells. It reinforces their commitment and increases their activities to lead sentient beings to awakening until all realms in cyclic existence are emptied of beings. Candrakīrti said (MMA 15):

Through his own suffering in cutting and giving away his body  
he sees with knowledge others' pain  
in hells and so forth, and strives quickly  
to eliminate their suffering.

However, many great masters say that bodhisattvas who have not yet reached the first ground (on the path of seeing) should not give their lives because they are not yet capable of controlling their rebirth. It is better for these bodhisattvas to remain alive in this body and practice the Dharma for the remainder of their life.

Similarly, it is wiser for ordinary beings, who still cling to their bodies, to maintain their precious human lives and use them to purify negativities, create merit, and to study, contemplate, and meditate on the Dharma. Nowadays people can safely donate a kidney or another part of the body, and if they wish they can donate various organs after they die.

Although we are not yet capable of giving away our body, it is helpful to imagine doing so, since one day we will have to relinquish this body. The inner maṇḍala offering, where we imagine the parts of our body becoming the various aspects of the universe in its purified form, is a good way to do this. Our trunk becomes Mount Meru, our hands and feet the four continents, the upper and lower parts of our arms and legs become the eight subcontinents, our intestines the rings of water, our two eyes the sun and moon, our two ears the umbrella and victory banner, and our inner organs transform into gorgeous offerings that fill the entire sky. To offer this to the holy beings, we recite:

The objects of attachment, aversion, and ignorance—friends, enemies, and strangers, my body, wealth, and enjoyments—I offer these without any sense of loss. Please accept them with pleasure, and inspire me and others to be free from the three poisonous attitudes. *Idam guru ratna maṇḍala kam nirya tayami.*

Visualizations such as those in the practice of Cutting the Ego (Chod) and the Kusali offering in the Vajrayoginī practice are also helpful in this regard.

In short, practice giving your possessions and making offerings as much as you can—for example, by offering water bowls to the Three Jewels each morning, offering your food before eating, and giving to those in need. Doing practices in which you imagine giving your possessions and virtues of the past, present, and future are also beneficial. With each actual or imagined action of giving, remember to contemplate that the agent, action, and object are empty of inherent existence but exist dependent on one another. If miserliness arises, counteract it by recalling that you will have to separate from your resources sooner or later in any case. Therefore it would be better to actually give them or at least to give them in your imagination in order to increase delight in giving and free your mind from the pain of miserliness. Śāntideva tells us (BCA 3.11–12):

Without any sense of loss,  
I shall give up my body and enjoyments  
as well as all my virtues of the three times  
for the sake of benefiting all.

By giving away all,  
my mind aspires to transcend sorrow (nirvāṇa).  
When I give away everything  
it is best to give to sentient beings [now].

*Giving Protection from Danger and Fear*

Helping travelers, providing medical services and medicine, teaching Dharma to the incarcerated, providing aid to refugees, and volunteering in a homeless shelter are examples of giving protection from danger and fear. Tutoring and acting as mentors for at-risk youth, helping single mothers apply for social services, running a no-kill animal shelter that facilitates animal adoptions, providing legal services for immigrants, migrants, and refugees—there are many ways to reach out and help living beings experiencing fear and danger in the world today. All actions to protect the environment—be it recycling, researching renewable energy sources, planting trees, helping endangered species, taking injured wild animals to a wildlife shelter or sanctuary, and so forth—are also included in the generosity of protecting others. Rescuing insects drowning in water is another form of giving protection.

All of us have experienced fear and danger in the past; we know the feeling of relief that fills us when someone—a friend, relative, stranger, and sometimes even a former enemy—gives us a helping hand.

### *Giving Love*

Giving love complements giving protection and is done in similar situations. It includes giving love to abused children, orphans, the grieving, the neglected, and all other beings. Many people need emotional support while going through difficult situations such as divorce, losing their job, and family problems. When we are able, let's help them. We must be sensitive to each individual situation, however, not pushing our solutions on others or embarrassing them. Giving love also includes volunteering in social welfare projects, using our education and creativity to help others, and consoling those who are grieving.

### *Giving the Dharma*

Giving the Dharma is said to be the supreme form of generosity because it enables others to create the causes for temporal and ultimate happiness. As with all forms of generosity, our motivation is important; when sharing the Dharma, the purity of motivation is of even greater importance, because sharing the Dharma with a corrupt motivation could cause widespread and long-term harm. For example, with a motivation that wants to use others to

obtain fame and wealth, someone gives incorrect teachings. Others believe these fallacious speculations and practice incorrectly, leading them to unfortunate rebirths. Such wrong teachings may remain in circulation even after the person who first spoke them has died. Nāgārjuna said (MPU 81):

The giving of Dharma consists of constantly employing a pure mind and wholesome thoughts in the offering of instruction to everyone. Just as it is with the giving of material gifts, wherein there is no measure of blessings or virtue associated with it if one fails to maintain a wholesome mind, so too it is with the giving of the Dharma: If one fails to maintain a pure mind and wholesome thoughts, then it is not the case that this actually qualifies as the generosity of Dharma.

But if the speaker of Dharma is able to maintain a pure mind and wholesome thoughts as he praises the Three Jewels, opens the door to understanding offenses and blessings, explains the four truths, and thus goes about teaching and transforming beings so that they are caused to enter the buddha path, this does qualify as true and pure Dharma generosity.

As Buddhist practitioners, share whatever knowledge you have of the Dharma when people ask for advice. When sharing the Dharma, do not expect special treatment, respect, or offerings, but simply give Dharma instructions or advice to others as one friend to another. Giving Dharma teachings for payment is doing business—the worst kind of business!

Not everyone wants to teach the Dharma and not everyone is qualified to be a Dharma teacher; but there are many other ways to give the Dharma to others such as chanting mantras to children and teaching them the melodies to chant them too. Doing our recitations out loud so that animals and insects around us hear them, reading texts and prayers to those recovering from an illness or those whose lives are coming to a conclusion, contributing funds to print Dharma books for free distribution, and donating books on Buddhism to college libraries as well as public libraries are also

acts of giving the Dharma. Volunteering at a Dharma center, monastery, or temple supports the sharing of the Dharma.

When friends ask for advice on how to deal with problems, describe Dharma methods without using any Buddhist words. This is easy to do because so many of the Buddha's teachings—especially those on working with emotions and building healthy relationships—are common-sense instructions that people of any or no religion can easily apply in their lives.

### *Bodhisattvas' Practice of Generosity*

Nāgārjuna describes bodhisattvas' perfection of generosity (MPU 99–100):

As for that giving performed by bodhisattvas, it is done with the realization that the act of giving is neither produced nor destroyed. It is conducted in a state that has gone beyond polluting impurities, is unconditioned, and is characterized by being like nirvāṇa. That giving is performed for the sake of all beings. This is what is referred to as the perfection of generosity.

There are those who say that when one gives everything of every sort, giving exhaustively of all inner and outer resources, and also gives without seeking any reward as a result, this kind of giving qualifies as the perfection of generosity...

One knows that the thing that is given is ultimately empty [of inherent existence] and characterized as being like nirvāṇa. Because one employs this kind of mind in giving to beings, the result accruing from it is inexhaustible and it is therefore referred to as the perfection of generosity...

[Bodhisattvas] employ a kind of giving that is coated with nirvāṇa-like reality-concordant wisdom through which [that giving] becomes inexhaustible. Moreover, bodhisattvas give for the sake of all beings. Because the number of beings is inexhaustible, that giving too is inexhaustible.

Bodhisattvas give for the sake of the Buddhadharma. The Buddhadharma is immeasurable and boundless. So too is

that giving also immeasurable and boundless.

For these reasons, bodhisattvas' generosity surpasses that of śrāvakas. Although we may not yet be capable of practicing generosity in that vast way, we can rejoice in the bodhisattvas' generosity and aspire to practice generosity as they do. This is done by familiarizing ourselves with the above elements of generosity that Nāgārjuna pointed out. In short, by practicing generosity whenever possible with the motivation of bodhicitta and the awareness of emptiness, our minds will be very joyful and we will progress on the path to buddhahood.

## REFLECTION

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1. Think of examples of how you can practice the generosity of protection.
  2. Think of examples of how you can practice the generosity of love.
  3. Think of examples of how you can practice the generosity of the Dharma.
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Asaṅga in his *Mahāyāna Compendium* recommends practicing generosity with six supremacies: (1) the *supreme basis* is practicing generosity based on bodhicitta; (2) *supreme things* is that you give all that can be given, and when that is limited, maintain the aspiration to give away everything; (3) *supreme aim* is giving to all sentient beings for the sake of their temporal happiness and ultimate benefit; (4) *supreme skillful means* is when generosity is informed by nonconceptual wisdom, or in the case of beginning bodhisattvas, with wisdom that conceptually knows that all phenomena are empty; (5) *supreme dedication* is dedicating the merit from practicing generosity to the full awakening of self and others; and (6) *supreme purity* is stopping both afflictive and cognitive obscurations.

Contemplating these six one by one before, during, and after giving transforms our generosity from an ordinary, mundane act of giving to giving that is deeply meaningful for self and others. Try it!

Maitreya's *Ornament of the Mahāyāna Sūtras* contains a concise verse with deep meaning that explains how the Buddha engages with all six perfections. Here the example of generosity is used; the italicized word changes according to each perfection:

Buddha's *generosity* is  
not attached, unattached, never attached;  
it is not at all attached,  
not attached, unattached, never attached.

“Attachment” here means stickiness, an attitude that prevents our practice of that perfection from being in accord with the Dharma. Pointing out these seven discordant elements helps us to improve our practice, making it accord with bodhisattvas' deeds.

1. *Not attached*: Attachment indicates the opposite of that perfection, which in the case of generosity is miserliness regarding possessions. Turning away from miserliness is being not attached.
2. *Unattached*: Here attachment appears in the form of procrastination. By being unattached, we will seize the present opportunity.
3. *Never attached*: This attachment is to limits, such as limited objects, recipients, areas, or time. It prevents us from practicing wholeheartedly—for example, being easily satisfied with offering a little when we're capable of offering more. Without attachment, we will make effort to go beyond self-imposed limits and narrow ways of thinking. In regard to generosity, we will overcome our hesitation to give.
4. *Not at all attached*: Here attachment is to the hope for reward; this is giving with the expectation of receiving something in return in this life. Our generosity is done in the spirit of a transaction. We give in order to receive; the gift isn't free because expectations are attached. Afterward if our expectations are not met, we feel cheated and complain, when in fact our corrupt motivation is the problem. Being not at all attached, our motivation for practicing each perfection is free from seeking reward or acknowledgment here and now.



5. *Not attached*: The attachment is expecting a beneficial karmic return in future lives. This attitude is unbecoming for a bodhisattva who aims for awakening and wastes an opportunity to create virtue. Being not attached, bodhisattvas don't expect good results in future lives, even though these may come naturally as an effect of virtue.
6. *Unattached*: Here attachment is for the self-centered attitude that is a formidable obstacle because it seeks only our own liberation. This is countered by renewing our bodhicitta motivation. Being unattached is giving with the full force of a generous motivation.
7. *Never attached*: This attachment undermines the purity of our practice. It has two aspects. The first is being tinged by the latencies of stinginess that obscure the mind. The second is grasping true existence. When giving, try to be fully aware that the agent, object, and action of generosity are empty of true existence. See them as existing by mere designation.

Although these seven are not explicitly mentioned in the context of each perfection, contemplate them on your own. It will enhance your practice of the other perfections.

Train so that your generosity is like a snake shedding its skin: there is no regret. Be like a deer who doesn't have any sense of ownership. Giving without these seven impediments is a bodhisattva's generosity. Although our generosity may fall short of this, remember that we are *practicing* generosity; the expectation is not that we will be perfectly generous at the beginning. As the old adage goes, "practice makes perfect."

### *The Perfection of Ethical Conduct*

The second perfection, ethical conduct, is a mind that has abandoned all thoughts of harming others. In particular, the ethical conduct of a bodhisattva is a state of mind that has relinquished the self-centered attitude. There are three types of ethical conduct:

1. *Restraining from destructive actions* is to abandon the ten nonvirtues and to abide in whatever precepts and commitments we

have taken.

2. *Gathering virtue* involves taking every possible opportunity to enhance the collections of method and wisdom in order to progress on the path.
3. *Benefiting sentient beings* is to enact our love and compassion by helping those in need.

These three occur in a fixed sequence. Restraining from harm establishes the foundation for engaging in virtuous actions, which in turn enables us to work for the welfare of sentient beings.

### *The Ethical Conduct of Restraining from Destructive Actions*

Ethical conduct evolves from generosity, because if we are generous, not attached to possessions, and not greedy for more, then we will not harm others to get things. In the *Supplement*, Candrakīrti emphasizes the first type of ethical conduct, in which we abandon naturally negative actions—that is, actions that when done by ordinary beings are almost always motivated by afflictions. Of particular importance is abandoning the ten nonvirtuous paths of karma, the first seven being destructive actions (killing, stealing, unwise or unkind sexual behavior, lying, divisive speech, harsh speech, and idle talk) and the last three being the afflictions that motivate them (covetousness, malice, and wrong views). Furthermore, keeping whatever precepts we have taken is of crucial importance. These include the prātimokṣa precepts for monastics and lay followers, the bodhisattva precepts, and tantric precepts and commitments. If we have taken lay or monastic precepts, engaging in proscribed actions such that the four branches of the basis, attitude, performance, and completion are complete constitutes a full transgression of the precept.

There are four gates through which ethical misdeeds occur. By learning and remembering these we can avoid misdeeds and transgressions of precepts.

(1) By *not knowing what to abandon and what to practice*, we easily harm others. For example, being ignorant of the ten nonvirtues and not remembering the precepts we have taken set the stage for unethical actions that harm others.

(2) *Lacking respect for the precepts and not thinking that ethical conduct is important* facilitate misdeeds. Someone may know what to abandon and practice but not think that ethical conduct is important. Such a person easily interferes with the well-being of others because they don't care about the effects of their actions on themselves or others.

(3) *Carelessness and heedlessness*. Someone may know the ten nonvirtues and may know the precepts they promised to uphold, but not monitor their behavior. Lacking mindfulness and introspective awareness, they don't recognize when afflictions and harmful intentions arise in their minds and easily act on whatever impulsive thoughts enter their mind.

(4) *Strong afflictions*. When the mind is unsubdued, afflictions can arise strongly and overwhelm someone's ethical restraint. Before they know it, afflictions are in control, forcing them to get involved in harmful actions. Even if they intellectually know the antidote for that affliction, it is weak and they cannot call it up when it is most needed.

The more we are aware of the above four factors and seek to counteract them, the more peaceful our demeanor will be and the purer our ethical conduct will be. The tools to shut the four doors to transgressions are mental factors in our mind. We must learn to identify them in our own experience and then strengthen them through Dharma study and practice. The antidotes to the four gates for transgressions are:

(1) Learn the ten nonvirtues and the four branches for them to be complete.<sup>5</sup> Know the precepts and commitments you have taken and study them well.

(2) Develop faith and respect for the precepts. Understand the disadvantages of unethical behavior and the benefits of ethical conduct. Live near your preceptor, Dharma teachers, and virtuous friends so that you have support in your practice of ethical conduct and good examples to follow. Remembering that the precepts in your mindstream represent the Buddha, you won't be indifferent toward them.

(3) Be careful and conscientious in your actions. Cultivate mindfulness of your precepts and develop introspective awareness to monitor the thoughts and emotions in your mind.

(4) Learn the antidotes to the afflictions and apply them. Contemplate impermanence to counteract attachment, fortitude to subdue anger, and rejoicing to counter jealousy. Meditating on precious human life and buddha nature are excellent antidotes to depression and lack of self-confidence. Breathing meditation calms the mind when doubt, restlessness, or rumination arise. Also cultivate integrity, which abandons negativities because of holding to our own values, and consideration for others, which abandons negativities because of not wanting others to lose faith in us, in the Dharma, or in human beings in general.

As said in the “Eight Verses of Thought Transformation” (3):<sup>6</sup>

In all actions I will examine my mind,  
and the moment a disturbing attitude arises,  
endangering myself and others,  
I will firmly confront and avert it.

## REFLECTION

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Contemplate the four gates through which ethical wrongdoings occur, making examples from your life or from the lives of people you see in the news. Then reflect on their antidotes and see how those would prevent the wrongdoing and save so many people from experiencing pain.

1. By not knowing what to abandon and what to practice, you easily harm others.
2. The remedy is to learn the ten nonvirtues and the four branches for them to be complete. Know the precepts and commitments you have taken and study them well.
3. Lacking respect for the precepts and not thinking that ethical conduct is important makes you apathetic toward the effects of your actions on yourself and on others.
4. Counteract this by developing faith and respect for the precepts. Understand the disadvantages of unethical behavior and the benefits of

ethical conduct. Live near your preceptor, Dharma teachers, and others who support your good conduct.

5. Carelessness and heedlessness lie behind not monitoring your behavior and not recognizing afflictions and harmful intentions when they arise.
6. The antidote to this is being conscientious in your actions. Cultivate mindfulness of your precepts and develop introspective awareness to monitor your thoughts and emotions.
7. Being overwhelmed by strong afflictions renders you unable to control your physical, verbal, and mental actions.
8. The counterforce is to learn the antidotes to the afflictions and practice them repeatedly in your meditation so that you are familiar with them when an actual situation arises.

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Abandoning destructive actions brings coolness to the mind as the fire of guilt and remorse has been reduced. Practicing the ten virtuous pathways of action brings delight and peace to the mind. It is said that a special fragrance called the “scent of pure ethical conduct” naturally surrounds people who have pure ethical conduct.

Ethical conduct is like a dike; it holds us back from involvement in a harmful situation. It is like a lamp that illuminates dark corners of our mind so that we can clean them. It is like our goatee being on fire; we must focus on what is happening inside ourselves, not on others.

Bodhisattvas on the second ground excel in ethical conduct. Whether they are awake or asleep, standing, sitting, walking, or lying down, their body, speech, and mind are free from even subtle ethical misdeeds. Although our ethical conduct may not be of that caliber now, we should direct our intentions to that and cultivate pure ethical conduct as best as we can. Through the force of our sincere intention, gradually all our actions will become wholesome.

Practicing ethical conduct is extremely important for ordinary beings as well as for āryas. We may create much merit by practicing generosity, but if

we neglect ethical conduct—which is the primary cause of fortunate rebirths—we will enjoy the wonderful fruits of generosity in an unfortunate realm. For example, instead of having a precious human life with good resources and conducive conditions in which we can practice the Dharma easily, we will be reborn as a pampered dog in a wealthy family. I hear that some people in the West take their dogs to spas, have their claws manicured, and give them the most delicious and expensive dog food available. While the dog may enjoy the food—I'm not sure about the spa and the manicure—the dog's merit of generosity has been exhausted with no long-term benefit having accrued, because it was unable to create merit in a dog rebirth.

On the other hand, if someone practices ethical conduct as well as generosity, both will ripen as the conducive circumstances of a precious human life. On that basis they can continue practicing the Dharma, creating more and more causes for awakening. In the process of doing this, they will also create the causes for good rebirths in the future in which they will have all excellent conditions necessary for Dharma practice. This is like accruing compounded interest; Candrakīrti, on the other hand, likens practicing generosity without ethical conduct to frittering away both principal and interest.

It is extremely difficult to practice ethical conduct when born in an unfortunate realm, making the creation of the causes for another higher rebirth very problematic. Candrakīrti warns (MMA 22):

If when one has freedom and a favorable rebirth,  
he does not act to hold [himself back from falling],  
he will fall into an abyss and lose control;  
how will he raise himself from there in the future?

While we have a precious human life, it is crucial to engage in ethical conduct not only to prevent suffering in lower rebirths from which it is hard to escape but also to create the causes for fortunate rebirths that can be used to practice the Dharma again. Candrakīrti encourages us (MMA 23):

Thus the Conqueror, having discoursed on generosity,

spoke on the following [perfection], ethical conduct.

When virtues are nurtured in the field of ethical conduct, the enjoyment of effects is unceasing.

Because ethical conduct is the basis of all good qualities, it is called a “field.” When the virtues of generosity, fortitude, and so forth are cultivated in this field, the crop of fortunate rebirths and excellent resources ripens. With these conducive circumstances, we can continue to practice until attaining full awakening without being hindered by unfortunate rebirths or lack of resources. Although our long-term aim is buddhahood, a series of excellent rebirths is gained along the way.

For ordinary beings, ethical conduct is the cause for higher rebirths; for those on the śrāvaka, solitary realizer, and bodhisattva paths it is the cause of the highest goodness—liberation and awakening. Although other causes also factor into attaining these two, ethical conduct is the fundamental basis without which the other causes won’t ripen in the desired way.

Ethical conduct brings desired results in this life too. Our hearts are lighter and we have less regret and remorse. People trust us; being confident that we will not harm them, they are relaxed around us. Even animals feel the difference between people who have abandoned harming others and those who are angry and fearful.

### *The Ethical Conduct of Gathering Virtue*

Gathering virtue is using all opportunities to engage in virtuous actions. Refraining from nonvirtue is virtuous in itself, and doing the opposite of nonvirtuous actions—for example, saving life instead of killing—is virtuous too. Keeping whatever precepts we have taken creates great merit. The eight Mahāyāna precepts is a special one-day practice that creates great merit because it is done with the bodhicitta motivation. These precepts resemble the eight one-day prātimokṣa precepts to abandon killing; stealing; sexual behavior; lying; intoxicants; sitting on high or luxurious beds or seats; using scents, cosmetics, and jewelry; singing, dancing, and playing music; and eating after midday. Because these precepts are taken motivated by bodhicitta, monastics can also take them.<sup>7</sup> This practice is good to do on

special Buddhist holy days, on full and new moon days, or whenever you need a day of mindfulness and spiritual reflection.

We should also take care not to destroy virtue already created by succumbing to anger or wrong views and do our best to enhance virtue in the future. The latter can be done by ensuring our motivation is one of bodhicitta before beginning the action, sealing the action at its conclusion by contemplating the emptiness of the sphere of three, and dedicating the merit to full awakening.

### *The Ethical Conduct of Benefiting Sentient Beings*

The third type of ethical conduct—helping sentient beings—involves guiding others so they will aspire to and engage in constructive attitudes and actions. Benefiting sentient beings does not mean we fix all their problems, for it is far more valuable to teach them how to think, speak, and act clearly so that they are able to remedy their problems themselves. Our job is to give them the confidence and skills to create virtue and to handle situations skillfully without harming others, not to make them dependent on us because we seek to feel needed and valued by others.

There are eleven groups of people to be particularly diligent about benefiting:

1. *Aiding those who are suffering or ill* by giving them assistance—for example, helping someone who cannot walk well, preparing food for someone recovering from an injury or illness, visiting people in the hospital. The wonderful work done by hospice staff and volunteers is included here too.
2. *Guiding people who are obscured or ignorant of means to help themselves* is accomplished, for example, by explaining proper behavior to the reckless, counseling those preparing to be released from prison on what to say in job interviews, and instructing young adults on the way to manage finances.
3. *Those who need help to realize their desires* are aided by helping them to move homes, plan events, and think ahead to what they may need in the future.



4. Helping *sentient beings who are afraid, in danger, or about to be killed or injured* includes, for example, buying an animal that is about to be slaughtered, stepping in to redirect people's attention to prevent a dispute, guiding someone who is lost to their destination, and intervening when one person or group is bullying another.
5. Aiding *people who are grieving* the death of a dear one or the loss of their social position is, for example, consoling them, listening to their concerns, helping them with daily errands, and guiding them to reimagine their future.
6. Helping the *poor and needy* is accomplished by giving them material aid in a respectful and appropriate manner, encouraging them to get in touch with their good qualities, and helping them to see their value as human beings no matter what their outer circumstances may be.
7. Offering assistance to *those who need a place to stay*, such as the poor, Dharma practitioners, travelers, and stray animals involves thinking of appropriate places where they will be comfortable and safe.
8. Benefiting *people who want to be in harmony* is accomplished by teaching them good communication skills, encouraging them to forgive, speaking of the benefits of reconciliation, and so forth.
9. Assisting *those who want to follow the path* includes aiding those who want to make offerings, to study the Dharma, or to go on pilgrimage. It may also entail helping people who want to learn the Dharma to meet qualified spiritual mentors and attend teachings.
10. Helping *sentient beings who are acting negatively or are about to do so* may entail preventing them from doing that action or explaining the drawbacks of such actions. We may offer spiritual counsel to those who are on the verge of following a wrong path by steering them toward a virtuous path. Other times we have to take a firm stand to stop someone who is harming others. Taking special interest in a child who is bullying others can help that child see ways to connect with others—which is what they want to do—in a way that will bring happy results.

11. There are *those who can only be helped by a demonstration of supernormal powers*. If all else fails to stop someone's destructive actions or to prove the validity of the Dharma, supernormal powers can be used if one has them.

These eleven groups coincide with the groups of people in the last category of auxiliary precepts of engaged bodhicitta. The difference is that the precepts specify to abandon not helping them whereas the perfection of ethical conduct emphasizes paying special attention to helping them.

Other sentient beings to help are those who trust and are attracted to you, by showing them the Dharma; those who are praiseworthy, by pointing out their good qualities and actions; and those who want to learn the Dharma, by practicing the four ways of attraction (see chapter 4). As much as possible, try to act in accordance with others' wishes and needs as long as their wishes are not harmful to yourself or others. However, do not use others' wishes—"my friends asked me to go to the movies"—as a means to rationalize being distracted from Dharma practice or acting in detrimental ways.

### *Bodhisattvas' Practice of Ethical Conduct*

Motivation is most crucial when practicing ethical conduct. Seeking a good reputation, praise, power, or offerings corrupts virtuous actions. Even though you may look like the epitome of virtue, if your motivation is not virtuous your actions amount to nothing more than using others to fulfill your worldly desires. Remaining humble is essential. In the *Heap of Jewels*, Bodhisattva Surata advises (R 245):

The wise persuade others to do good;  
fools are always for evil.  
It is better to be scolded by the wise  
than to be praised by fools.

When practicing ethical conduct, avoid being arrogant because of the purity of your conduct. Some people become proud thinking that they are especially holy or that they are the only ones who purely keep the Vinaya.

Such arrogance increases self-grasping, whereas ethical conduct is meant to decrease it. We must be vigilant not to let pride sabotage our efforts to abandon harming others, accumulating virtue, and benefiting others. For this reason, *Ārya Maitreya's King of Unshakable Resolves* (*Āryamaitripraṇidhānarāja*) says:

By having the flawless ethics of the Dharma law,  
pure ethical conduct,  
and ethical conduct without conceit,  
may I complete the perfection of ethical conduct.

An excellent way to eliminate arrogance and purify our ethical conduct is to abandon all grasping of I and mine by meditating on emptiness. The *Heap of Jewels* states (CTB 195):

Kāśyapa, some monastics have proper ethics; they abide restrained by the prātimokṣa ethical code. Their rites and spheres of activity are perfect, and they view even coarse and subtle transgressions with concern. They thoroughly assume and train in the precepts and possess pure activities of body, speech, and mind. Hence their livelihood is thoroughly pure, but they propound a self. Kāśyapa, they are the first of those seeming to have proper ethical conduct which in fact is faulty... Furthermore, Kāśyapa, even though some monastics thoroughly assume the twelve qualities of training,<sup>8</sup> they view them with the apprehension [of inherent existence]. Abiding in grasping at I and mine, Kāśyapa, they are the fourth of those whose ethics appear to be proper but are faulty.

As with generosity and the other perfections, the perfection of ethical conduct is of two types: mundane and supramundane. Candrakīrti points out the difference between them (MMA 26):

If there is any apprehension of the three—

forsaken by whom, what, and with regard to whom—  
such ethical conduct is described as being a mundane perfection.  
That empty of attachment to the three is supramundane.

The unpolluted wisdom that does not grasp the inherent existence of the sphere of three makes a bodhisattva's practice of ethical conduct supramundane. The sphere of three is (1) *by whom*, the person or agent who abandons the destructive action, (2) *what*, the object that is abandoned—that is, the destructive action, and (3) *with regard to whom*, the person who was not harmed—that is, the field with regard to whom the destructive action is abandoned. This wisdom is sometimes called “objectless” wisdom or wisdom realizing the unapprehendable because it does not apprehend true existence and instead realizes the opposite, the emptiness of true existence of all persons and phenomena.

In conclusion, Nāgārjuna says (MPU 333):

Bodhisattvas' upholding of ethical precepts is not done on account of fear, nor is it done out of stupidity, or doubt, or confusion, or out of a private quest for their own nirvāṇa. The upholding of ethical precepts is carried out solely for the sake of all beings, for the sake of success in the Buddha's path, and for the sake of gaining all the excellent qualities of buddhahood... This is what is meant by the perfection of ethical conduct... [In addition] if bodhisattvas' practice is based on the unfindability of either misdeed or non-misdeed, it is at this time that it qualifies as the perfection of ethical conduct.

He continues by explaining that because sentient beings are not findable under ultimate analysis, misdeeds and precepts aren't findable either. “Findable under ultimate analysis” means that when we search for exactly what a sentient being, misdeed, precept, or any other phenomenon is, we cannot isolate an inherently existent essence that is it. Everything depends on other factors that compose it. When we scrutinize an action of lying to find out exactly what it is, we see that although it depends on the motivation

to deceive, the person who is lying, the false statement, the process of uttering the lie, and the other person understanding what was said, we cannot isolate one of these components and say, “This is the action of lying.” However, although the action of lying cannot be found with ultimate analysis, it does exist dependently. We can’t say that there was no misdeed on the conventional level.

In addition, Nāgārjuna explains (MPU 333): “It is on account of the existence of the misdeed of killing that the corresponding ethical precept exists. If there were no misdeed of killing, there would be no corresponding ethical precept either.” That is, the misdeed and the precept exist in mutual dependence. Because one exists, so does the other. Here, too, we find that things do not exist independently, but exist dependently on the conventional level.

## REFLECTION

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Contemplate the proper way to live ethically and keep precepts.

1. Living ethically is the right thing to do, so refrain from being conceited; there’s nothing to be arrogant about for living this way.
2. Don’t cling to the idea of a self, an I who is living in a wholesome way. Such clinging could easily lead to arrogance, which brings complacency, from which your ethical conduct could degenerate.
3. Keep precepts with self-respect and love for sentient beings, not out of fear.
4. Live ethically motivated by the aspiration to attain buddhahood, not a desire for your own nirvāṇa.
5. Rejoice in your merit and wise decisions.

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*The Perfection of Fortitude*

The Sanskrit term *kṣānti*, translated as fortitude, patience, or forbearance, refers to the ability to calmly endure discomfort, suffering, and pain. As the antidote to anger, fortitude is the ability to remain resolute and calm no matter what situation we encounter. Life is full of difficulties: people criticize or even beat us, we lose our job, our reputation suffers, we get sick or are injured, relationships change, those we love die, and we will too. Fortitude enables us to meet all these situations with a calm mind, free of upset and anger.

With fortitude difficulties become milestones in our practice. Rather than retreat, we face the challenge. And challenges there will be—this is *samsāra*. In difficult situations there are always choices. They may not include all the choices we prefer, but we have met the Buddha's teachings and know the methods to subdue the afflictions. As Śāntideva reminds us (BCA 4.28, 29, 36ab):

Although enemies such as hatred and craving  
have neither arms nor legs,  
and are neither courageous nor wise,  
how have I, like a slave, been used by them?

For while they dwell within my mind  
at their pleasure, they cause me harm.  
I patiently endure them without any anger,  
but this is an inappropriate and shameful time for patience.

Therefore as long as this enemy [the afflictions] is not slain with  
certainty before my very eyes,  
I shall never give up exerting myself toward that end.

Life presents us with many opportunities to practice fortitude. Worldly people abhor this, but for bodhisattvas who want to practice the perfection of fortitude, it is a cause of delight. Why? To become buddhas, bodhisattvas need to perfect their practice of fortitude, and to do that they need difficult people and problematic situations. Usually others are kind and there aren't many chances to practice fortitude. So when such opportunities come their

way, bodhisattvas greet them with delight and meet the challenge they present. In that way, misery has a hard time touching bodhisattvas because they don't allow anger, resentment, vengeance, and belligerence to inhabit their minds.

### *The Unsuitability and Disadvantages of Anger*

Anger, resentment, grudge-holding, spite, and so on are emotions that frequently arise in us when our desires are frustrated or when something interferes with our happiness. Although anger seems like a natural response to these situations, that doesn't mean it is a productive one. In fact, anger has many disadvantages, which Candrakīrti points out in his *Supplement* and Śāntideva notes in *Engaging in the Bodhisattvas' Deeds*. Getting angry at someone who has harmed us does not cure our pain or stop the harm. Anger may give us a false sense of power, but that provides little benefit and could lead to greater harm; if we retaliate, the other party will not lie still but will escalate the conflict.

In addition, anger makes us miserable in this life and motivates us to act in detrimental ways that bring suffering in future lives. It is contradictory to say that we do not want to suffer and then willingly create the causes for suffering. The harm someone does to us now is due to our previous destructive karma. If we react to this harm with violent words or actions, we create the karmic cause for more suffering in the future, which is exactly what we do not want.

While the disadvantages of anger toward an ordinary sentient being are many, those of being angry at a bodhisattva are far harsher: great destructive karma is accumulated, great virtue is destroyed, and one must wear the armor—that is, engage in the six perfections—from the beginning of the bodhisattva path.

Both Candrakīrti and Śāntideva speak of the detrimental effects of one bodhisattva becoming angry at another bodhisattva. This could be a case of projecting either real or imaginary faults; it could also be that the angry bodhisattva does not recognize the other person as a bodhisattva, or even if he does, his mind is overpowered due to being habituated with anger. The angry bodhisattva is one who is on the path of accumulation or preparation—that is, he is still an ordinary being who has not realized emptiness

directly. Ārya bodhisattvas no longer manifest anger, so this cannot apply to them.

If a higher bodhisattva becomes angry with a lower bodhisattva, it destroys the merit accumulated over one hundred eons through practicing generosity and ethical conduct, making offerings and paying homage to the buddhas, and so forth. In addition he must train in the six perfections for as many eons as he had moments of hatred, harm, and obstinacy toward the other bodhisattva.

If a lower bodhisattva who has not received a prophecy of her awakening becomes angry at a higher bodhisattva who has received a prophecy,<sup>9</sup> even though she does not express the anger physically or verbally, she must wear the armor from the beginning for as many eons as times she held an angry thought. This means, for example, if a bodhisattva who is almost ready to go from the great path of accumulation to the path of preparation becomes angry at a prophesied bodhisattva, she will not progress to that higher path for as many eons as there were moments of anger and she must train in the path from the beginning of the path of accumulation. In addition, she creates the cause to be born in the hells for as many eons as moments of hatred she felt. The *Compendium of All the Weaving (Sarvavaidalyasamgraha)* says that confessing these faults three times a day for seven years will prevent the ripening of this negative karma, but still ten eons must pass before the bodhisattva is able to progress to the next path.

If a bodhisattva becomes angry at a bodhisattva of equal spiritual attainment, he creates the cause to be born in the hells for as many eons as moments he held hatred for the other bodhisattva. Furthermore, many eons of virtue are destroyed.

If the results of anger toward a bodhisattva are so severe for bodhisattvas, they are much greater for us ordinary beings. When someone who is not a bodhisattva becomes angry at one who is, the virtue created over one thousand eons is undermined. Since we are not always able to identify who is a bodhisattva and who is not, it is to our advantage to restrain our anger toward all beings.

If a bodhisattva becomes angry at a non-bodhisattva, the disadvantages are not as great. For example, the *Lion's Roar of Maitreya Sūtra*



(*Maitreyamahāsinhanāda*) says that if a bodhisattva holds animosity toward the number of ordinary beings living in many world systems, and rebukes or strikes them, he does not have to wear the armor from the beginning of the path. Nevertheless, if an ordinary being becomes angry at another ordinary being, their virtue is undermined.

In the *Questions of Upāli Sūtra* (*Upāliparipṛcchā*) the Buddha said that he does not see the same detrimental effects from other nonvirtues as he does from anger. Anger inhibits the virtue included in the collection of merit. It seems that it does not destroy the virtue from cognizing selflessness, but Tsongkhapa says that this needs to be analyzed further.

The purpose of explaining the disadvantages of anger, especially when it is directed at a bodhisattva, is not to threaten us with suffering or to enforce a hierarchy in which we cannot disagree with a bodhisattva without being punished. The extremely harmful effects of anger described above are a natural result of being hostile toward someone who has dedicated their existence to attaining awakening for the benefit of all sentient beings. The law of karma and its effects is a natural law, like the laws of nature that indicate a barley sprout will grow from a barley seed when the right conditions are present. No one is punishing or threatening us. To the contrary, these teachings were given with compassion, to make us aware of potential harm so that we could avoid it.

With this knowledge, we should do our best to avoid animosity, resentment, belligerence, hatred, and all other forms of anger toward any sentient being and especially toward bodhisattvas. If we hold ill will toward any sentient being, we are the ones who will suffer. What has happened to our mind when we see those who are working to benefit all sentient beings—including us—as enemies? Clearly our mind is in a confused state; such a mental state cannot create the causes for happiness.

Candrakīrti summarized other defects of anger and benefits of fortitude (MMA 34–35):

It creates an ugly body, leads to the unholy,  
and robs discrimination that knows right and wrong.  
Through non-fortitude (anger), one is quickly cast into a bad  
migration.

Fortitude creates qualities opposite to those explained above.

Through fortitude comes beauty,  
dearness to the holy, skill in discriminating  
between the right and wrong, birth afterward as a human or god,  
and the extinguishment of nonvirtues.

Just as a person is unattractive when angry during this life, anger creates the cause to be ugly and repugnant to others in future lives. Let alone be able to benefit others, we will find it difficult to have friends. “The unholy” refers to nonvirtue; anger inclines us toward destructive actions. Anger also makes it difficult to listen to others and to think clearly, which, in turn, impedes our ability to discriminate what to practice and what to avoid. Many people find themselves in prison due to acting under the influence of malice: anger blurred their discrimination between wholesome and unwholesome actions and they engaged in actions that they wouldn’t have, had they been thinking clearly. Unfortunate rebirths follow from negative karma as well. Once born in such a rebirth, generating virtuous karma becomes difficult, and that presents many obstacles to taking a fortunate rebirth in the future.

Cultivating the ability to remain calm in the face of suffering and harm leads to the opposite effects. Others find us attractive, we will be close to holy beings, our discriminating wisdom will be keen, future rebirths will be fortunate, and nonvirtues will be eliminated. Understanding this, let’s practice the antidotes to anger by cultivating fortitude.

The perfection of fortitude is of three types: (1) fortitude that is undisturbed by harm from others, (2) fortitude of voluntarily accepting suffering, and (3) fortitude of certitude about the Dharma.

### *The Fortitude That Is Undisturbed by Harm from Others*

Anger makes us unhappy. No one is happy when they are angry. Given this, it’s quizzical that we tend to hold on to our anger and even bolster it by ruminating on the event that provoked it. It would be much better to release the anger and return to a balanced mental state. Śāntideva tells us (BCA 6.3, 5, 6):

My mind will not experience peace  
if it fosters painful thoughts of hatred.  
I shall find no joy or happiness;  
unable to sleep, I shall feel unsettled.

By it, friends and relatives are disheartened;  
though drawn by my generosity, they will not trust me.  
In brief, there is nobody  
who lives happily with anger.

Hence the enemy, anger,  
creates sufferings such as these;  
but whoever assiduously overcomes it  
finds happiness now and hereafter.

An American journalist once asked me, “Given the devastation in Tibet and the trauma to your life after 1959 when communist Chinese forces took control of Tibet, how come you aren’t angry?” I responded that if I were angry, I couldn’t eat or sleep well; I couldn’t think clearly, and my happiness would vanish. I think she was puzzled by my reply; many government leaders would have taken the opportunity to speak about the horror of their suffering and to harshly criticize the opposition. But I could not think of even one benefit of being angry at the communist Chinese.

The first type of fortitude involves not retaliating when others harm us, those dear to us, or our possessions. The *Prātimokṣa Sūtra* says:

Fortitude is the first and foremost path.  
The Buddha regarded this as supreme in his teachings.  
One who has left the household life  
yet annoys others is not called a renunciant.

To abandon retaliating, seeking vengeance, blaming, criticizing, and holding grudges is indeed an austerity for a mind that selfishly sees our own happiness as foremost. In fact, we are unhappy and miserable when anger

rules our mind, and in turn, our actions make others unhappy. For these reasons, cultivating fortitude brings peaceful liberation from the scourge of anger.

Practicing fortitude challenges us to avoid judging others, abandon becoming angry at whatever we do not like, and look at others' harmful actions in a new light. This does not mean ignoring or rationalizing others' harm, misdeeds, or mistakes. Rather, we look inside ourselves and investigate why anger arises. Instead of believing that anger is the only way to react to situations we don't like or speech we disagree with, we question our anger and research what button was pushed so we can begin to handle such circumstances. Dealing with the situation with a clear, calm mind is more effective.

Some people doubt, "Isn't it justified to become angry at someone who harms us or those we care about?" Distinguishing between an action and the person who does the action is essential. While we can say an action is harmful, wrong, or inappropriate, saying that the person who did it is evil and despicable is mistaken. That person has the potential to become a buddha. They wish to be happy and to overcome suffering. Their mistakes and destructive actions do not negate their good qualities. In fact, once their harmful behavior stops, they may later become our friend. The real troublemaker is the afflictions that make them act in harmful ways. Those afflictions harm them as much as, if not more than, they harm us.

We can censure an action without hating the person who did it. For example, we Tibetans fight the injustice of the Chinese communists, but I am not against them as human beings, even those who are ruthless. I cultivate genuine compassion for them, although I still oppose their actions. It is possible to point out a person's harmful behavior or negative qualities and at the same time respect them as a human being. By acting in this way, there is no danger of creating negative karma. As always, our motivation is key. Speaking out of hatred or desire for revenge is wrong. However, if we know that by not speaking out their destructive behavior will continue and we remain silent, that is also wrong. It is incumbent on us to release destructive thoughts and emotions and strive to communicate clearly with the other person.

The Buddha recommended that, because we cannot be sure who is a bodhisattva and who is not, avoiding criticizing anyone is the best policy. In that light, Mao Zedong can be seen as a bodhisattva; I view him in my own mind on a private level in that way and do not hate him. But in terms of Tibet and the well-being of the Tibetan people, I cannot say Mao's policies were good—they destroyed our religion and our country! There is no conflict between these two views. In fact, when I consider the karmic results he will experience as a result of the harm he caused us Tibetans as well as the Chinese people, I can only feel compassion.

Some people believe that practicing fortitude and being compassionate means our external actions must always be passive and pleasing. That is incorrect. In certain circumstances, passive behavior can be harmful—for example, not interceding to stop harm when it is possible to do so with a good motivation. Refraining from anger does not mean we don't protect ourselves or that we allow another person to do dreadful actions. The point is that it is not necessary to be angry in order to divert harm. We should use our creative abilities to think of solutions to problems rather than flying into a rage.

“Righteous anger,” as people usually think of it, doesn't mean that our anger has suddenly become virtuous. If it did, since we always believe our view is correct, then all our anger would become virtuous! The problem, however, is that everyone else in the situation thinks that their view is correct, which makes everyone's anger virtuous!

If we discern the difference between our internal emotions and external actions, we'll see that it's possible to internally feel compassion for someone who is harming us or others, yet externally act in an assertive manner to quell the harm. There is no malice in our mind. In certain situations, the skillful way to benefit others could involve acting aggressively, motivated by such “righteous anger.” It is extremely important, however, to ensure that no malevolence or spite pollutes our motivation, for if it did, we would have succumbed to actual anger, which is an affliction. “Righteous anger” is not biased toward our own side, and we should not use “righteous anger” as an excuse to mask a very real sense of hostility inside ourselves.

The fierce-looking tantric deities exemplify the possibility of forceful actions done with compassion. They also symbolize taking strong action against our own anger and negative emotions. That doesn't mean suppressing or repressing our anger or feeling guilty for having anger. Rather, they symbolize wisdom that recognizes the disadvantages and dangers of our own anger and wrath and wants to overcome them.

When any of the usual antidotes fail to quell our anger, a skillful method to deal with it is to generate ourselves as a fierce deity (if we have the proper empowerment) and be aggressive toward our own anger. When doing this, it's important to remember that our anger is not us; the force is directed toward the anger plaguing our mind, not toward us as a human being. Once the anger has been subdued, we can choose whatever is the best way to communicate with the other persons(s). We may choose to use forceful speech, but it is backed by compassion, not malice. Transforming the energy of anger in such a way is a technique unique to Vajrayāna.

In the Pāli canon, the Buddha advised Śakra, the lord of the gods, when he asked the Buddha, “Whose killing do you approve?” (SN 11.21):

Having slain anger, one sleeps soundly; having slain anger, one does not sorrow;  
the killing of anger with its poisoned root and honeyed tip:  
this is the killing the ariyas praise for having slain that, one does not sorrow.

In the same text (SN 11.22) the Buddha tells the story of a grotesque *yakṣa* (nature spirit) who sat on the seat of Śakra. Horrified by this audacity, the other gods threw malicious criticism at the *yakṣa*. But with each nasty word spoken, the *yakṣa* did not budge, but grew more and more handsome. Finally Śakra himself came, and kneeling before the *yakṣa*, he put his palms together reverentially and humbly introduced himself. As Śakra uttered each word of the introduction, the *yakṣa* became uglier and more grotesque until he disappeared on the spot. It's truly amazing what kindness can accomplish.

When someone harms us and then, realizing his error, sincerely apologizes, it is crucial that we forgive him and do not hold a grudge.

Continuing to remind the person of his error or secretly wishing for harm to befall him runs counter to the bodhisattva spirit. Nursing a grudge also may impair our physical health and our mental well-being, not to mention creating destructive karma. The Buddha says (SN 11.24):

There are two kinds of fools: one who does not see a transgression as a transgression; and one who, when another is confessing a transgression, does not pardon him in accordance with the Dhamma... There are two kinds of wise people: one who sees a transgression as a transgression; and one who, when another confesses a transgression, pardons him in accordance with the Dhamma.

Forgiveness—letting go of anger—is an important quality that leads to our own and others’ well-being. The more we practice fortitude, the easier it will become to release grudges and feel tranquil in our hearts about events that previously caused us pain.

As for other antidotes to counter anger, please refer to those that Buddhaghosa proposed in chapter 1 of *In Praise of Great Compassion*, which are almost identical to those Śāntideva spelled out in chapter 6 of *Engaging in the Bodhisattvas’ Deeds*. Also refer to the section on transforming adversity into the path in chapter 10 on mind training in *In Praise of Great Compassion*. Please read Śāntideva’s text as well as *Healing Anger* and *Working with Anger*, which are commentaries on it.

Reading will give you new ideas of how to look at situations, but change comes through applying those ideas in your meditation practice. Recalling previous situations in which your anger flared up and then applying these new perspectives familiarizes you with them. Slowly these new perspectives will become a natural way to view interactions with others, and you’ll find that you get angry less often and even when you do, you can resolve it in your mind more quickly. This requires practice—there are no shortcuts and you can’t hire someone else to change your mind—so with an awareness of the benefits, work with your mind.

## REFLECTION

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Fortitude (patience) is the ability to remain undisturbed in the face of harm or suffering. It does not entail being passive. Rather, it gives the clarity of mind necessary to choose with wisdom whether to act or not to act.

1. If someone points out a fault you have or accuses you of doing something you didn't do, there's no reason to get angry. Acknowledge your faults and mistakes, just as you acknowledge having a nose if someone points that out. On the other hand, if someone blames you for something you didn't do, it's as if they said you have horns on your head. There's no reason to be angry over an accusation that is untrue; simply give them the correct information.
2. Bring to mind a recent situation where you and another were in conflict. Examine how you got involved in the situation. This has two parts:
  - What actions did you do recently to prompt the disagreement? Examining this helps to understand why the other person is upset.
  - Recognize that unpleasant situations are due to your having harmed others earlier this life or in previous lives. Seeing this as the principal cause, learn from past mistakes and resolve to act differently in the future.
3. Examine the disadvantages of anger and grudge holding.
4. Recognize that the other person's unhappiness and confusion is making him harm you. Since you know what it's like to be unhappy, empathize and have compassion for him.

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*The Fortitude of Voluntarily Accepting Suffering*

Physical and mental pain will arise in our lives—it's a natural occurrence for beings like us in saṃsāra. There is no escaping it, but Dharma practitioners can take these experiences into the path by practicing the fortitude of voluntarily accepting suffering. This does not entail gritting our



teeth while repressing our anger and fear, but rather actively transforming the situation and using it to develop positive qualities.

For example, when experiencing the physical pain from illness or injury or the mental pain from injustice or betrayal, remember that this pain is the result of causes—the destructive karma you created. The bacteria, virus, car, weapon, or other person is the cooperative condition; if we hadn't created the principal cause—harming others motivated by the self-centered attitude—the painful result would not have occurred. This is not blaming the victim or saying that someone with a severe illness caused themselves to be ill; saying such things is certainly not compassionate! Rather, it means that actions done in a previous life can bear results in this life. The fact that you have good health care and skilled health care professionals who help you is a result of virtuous karma created in previous lives.

Our karma doesn't make others behave the way they do; it doesn't make them harm us. Their afflictions cause them to harm others, and they are responsible for those actions. We suffer in a certain situation because our previously-created karma ripens at that time, but that karma is not what made others harm us. Our karma causes our suffering in a situation, but others' afflictions cause their actions. Do not have a fatalistic attitude toward karma, thinking that events are predetermined. You can and should act to prevent harm or intervene while harm is occurring, but don't do that motivated by anger.

If we respond to suffering with anger, our actions create the causes to experience pain again in the future. If we refrain from anger, the previous destructive karma is exhausted and constructive karma from practicing fortitude is created. Understanding this helps us to accept our present experience and to be more conscientious and mindful of our actions in the future. In addition, considering that this destructive karma could have ripened in a series of horrible rebirths, undergoing a much smaller suffering in this life becomes acceptable.

It is possible to willingly and even happily bear suffering. For example, a woman in labor willingly bears the pain because she wants the baby. Someone who is ill voluntarily bears injections or even surgery, knowing that it will bring about healing. We have the capacity to bear suffering patiently without becoming angry or resentful because we know that doing

so will prevent future suffering and will enable us to progress on the path to awakening, a state free from all duḥkha whatsoever.

Usually we think that suffering has no benefit at all. However, although we definitely should not deliberately bring misery to ourselves, when it does arrive unasked, contemplating its benefits helps us to avoid increasing our suffering by falling into anger and despair. For example, suffering can strengthen our determination to be free from saṃsāra because we understand that as long as we're in saṃsāra, such suffering will occur. Suffering also can dispel conceit and make us a kinder and humbler person. While crushing our arrogance isn't necessarily pleasant, it is beneficial—as we're happier and have better relationships when we don't consider ourselves above others.

Undergoing misery also opens our hearts in compassion to others who are in similar situations. We understand them better, and sharing a common experience, we feel closer to them. We begin to care about their suffering as much as we care about our own, and in our heart we begin to understand that suffering is to be eliminated; it doesn't matter whose it is.

When practicing the Dharma, on occasion we may have to go through hardship while relinquishing habitual harsh speech or other bad habits and not acting according to our dysfunctional emotional habits. We may be very attached to certain things, thinking that we *must* have them. When we begin to let go of such craving, mental uneasiness may arise. At other times we may lack food, clothing, shelter, or companions. It is important to be able to face such hardship and strengthen our mind by continuing to practice the Dharma. With the fortitude of voluntarily accepting suffering, we accept the short-term difficulties of this life without despair because we have a higher aim and purpose. Our determination is strong, as Śāntideva counsels (BCA 6.9,10):

Whatever befalls me,  
I shall not disturb my mental joy;  
for having been made unhappy, I shall not accomplish what I wish,  
and my virtues will decline.

Why be unhappy about something

if it can be remedied?

And what is the use of being unhappy about something  
if it cannot be remedied?

The last verse makes so much sense, but we need to stop and reflect on it during times of stress, strife, and other problematic events. If we can do something about a painful situation, let's do it. There's no reason to complain, blame, or be upset and angry. On the other hand, if there's nothing we can do to remedy the situation, let's accept it, maintain a balanced mind, and turn our attention to something useful where we can contribute to the well-being of others.

## REFLECTION

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1. Contemplate the benefit you can derive from voluntarily accepting suffering:
  - Your understanding of the disadvantages of saṃsāra will increase and, along with that, so will your renunciation of saṃsāra's suffering and your aspiration to be free from saṃsāra.
  - You will understand the experience of others who are suffering so your compassion will increase.
2. Ask yourself, "Can I do something about it?" If you can, anger is out of place because you can improve the situation. If you can't, anger is useless because nothing can be done.
3. Reflect that karma that could have brought long-lasting and intense suffering in an unfortunate rebirth is now ripening as something that you can easily accept and endure.

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### *The Fortitude of Certitude about the Dharma*

Understanding the vast and profound meanings of the Dharma is not easy, but cultivating the fortitude of gaining certitude about the Dharma—also

called the fortitude of definitely thinking about the Dharma—makes it easier. This fortitude gives us the ability to happily continue to learn and practice for however long it takes in order to fathom the Dharma’s deep and detailed meanings.

Meditation on emptiness challenges the very root of our self-grasping ignorance, which puts up a fight when its sovereignty is challenged. It is said that when one first has a glimpse of the emptiness of true existence, fear arises in the mind and one wants to withdraw from that experience. It is important at this time not to capitulate to the fear and to continue meditating on emptiness.

The fortitude of practicing the Dharma brings appreciation for the bodhisattvas’ activities and strengthens the wish to become bodhisattvas ourselves. Fear and resistance may arise all along the path because the Dharma challenges our dearly held but afflictive assumptions, preconceptions, and prejudices. It takes fortitude not to retreat into habitual emotions and behavior that are the very source of our misery, and instead to arouse courage and continue to practice.

By cultivating the fortitude of practicing the Dharma, we will learn, reflect, and meditate on the teachings, and by doing so we gain certainty in the meaning of the teachings. This conviction is gained through reflecting on the qualities of the Three Jewels, of the path, and of the awakened state; by contemplating the selflessness of persons and of phenomena; and by delving into the meaning of the profound and vast scriptures. In this way, our confidence in the Dharma will grow, enabling us to integrate it in our lives.

While the fortitude of not being disturbed by others’ harm can only be practiced when someone harms us, the fortitude of practicing the Dharma can be practiced at other times—for example, when we don’t feel like doing the practices we have promised to do, when a teaching is going on for a long time, or when we are studying a difficult passage or concept in the scriptures. At such times, the fortitude of voluntarily accepting hardship and of practicing the Dharma is useful to get us over the bumps in the road.

In the *Bodhisattva Grounds*, Asaṅga specified eight objects to cultivate certitude on:

1. The *object of faith and confidence* is the excellent qualities of the Three Jewels.
2. The *object to be realized* is the emptiness of persons and phenomena.
3. The *object of aspiration* is the magnificent powers of the buddhas and bodhisattvas, such as the power of the superknowledges, the six perfections, and the innate power.
4. The *object to be adopted* is the causal virtuous actions and the resultant attainments.
5. The *object to be abandoned* is the causal misdeeds and their resultant obstacles and duḥkha.
6. The *object of meditation that is the goal to attain* is awakening.
7. The *object of meditation that is the means for attaining the goal* includes the training paths engaged in with bodhicitta.
8. The *object of further practice through learning and reflection* is the twelve branches of scriptures—all the teachings and meanings contained in them.

*Engaging in the Bodhisattvas' Deeds* explains the fortitude of definitely thinking about the Dharma as contemplating the impermanent nature and lack of self-power of the causes of duḥkha. For example, although we don't wish to fall ill, sickness arises as a result of causes and conditions. Similarly, although people don't think "I want to be angry" and anger doesn't think "I will arise," when the causes and conditions come together anger arises in our mind. All the destructive actions we and others do under the influence of afflictions likewise don't think "We will arise"; rather, they come into being because of causes and conditions. They have no self-power.

For example, someone rear ends our car at a stoplight. Did the car think "I will hit the vehicle in front of me"? Did the driver have that intention? When we become angry and shout at the other driver because our car is dented, do we think "I'm going to become as angry as possible"? When the other driver becomes angry because he was shouted at and blamed for something that was an accident, did he have the intention "I will get angry

too”? All of these components of the situation arose as a result of causes and conditions. None of them arise under their own power. All of them are transient; as soon as their causal energy is exhausted, they too will end.

Perhaps it’s easier contemplating this in terms of a toddler. Does a young child have the intention to cry and create a fuss? It happens due to causes and conditions—the external situation and the internal state of the child’s mind. When big children—whom we call “adults”—create their version of a fuss, it similarly arises due to causes and conditions. Like the fussy toddler, adults too are under the control of their afflictions, and afflictions arise due to other conditions.

As we gradually build up the fortitude born from reflecting on the Dharma—“Dharma” meaning either reality or the teachings—we become able to tolerate things that we could not tolerate before. Then when a situation occurs in our life, we remember what we have learned before and apply it. For example, our spiritual mentor instructed us on the impermanent nature of all conditioned things. Then, when a dear one dies, we remember that teaching and, applying it to this situation, we accept our friend’s death and calm our mind. In other words, this fortitude provides us with deeper resources to draw upon as we go through life, deepen our understanding of the Dharma, and work to benefit others.

The fortitude of the nonarising of phenomena (*anutpattika-dharma-kṣānti*) is the direct realization of emptiness and pertains to the fortitude of certitude about the Dharma. The *King of Concentration Sūtra* (*Samādhirāja Sūtra*) says (SR 6.8, 10):

But if a person maintains a fortitude that is great,  
even were they cut up, for ten million eons,  
into tiny pieces as numerous as the Ganges sands,  
their mind will never regress.

Their fortitude being for the selfless nature of phenomena,  
those who perceive selflessness have no afflictions.  
They know that all phenomena are like space.  
That, therefore, is what is termed “fortitude.”

This fortitude also becomes the perfection of wisdom.

### *Distinguishing Factors of the First Three Perfections*

Regarding the perfections of generosity, ethical conduct, and fortitude, Candrakīrti said (MMA 39):

The Sugata praised mainly the three practices of generosity, and so forth [ethical conduct and fortitude] for householders.

These are also the collection of merit, the cause of a buddha's form body.

To become a buddha, we need to create the causes for both a buddha's body and a buddha's mind. The first three perfections pertain principally to the collection of merit and are the predominant causes of a buddha's form body. Of course, bodhisattvas also accumulate the collection of wisdom on the first three grounds and integrate wisdom of the ultimate nature with these three perfections by contemplating that the agent engaging in the perfection, the action of that perfection, and the object or recipient of that action are empty of inherent existence. The buddha's form body is of two types: the enjoyment body in which a buddha teaches ārya bodhisattvas in the highest pure land and the emanation body in which a buddha appears in an ordinary form to us ordinary sentient beings.

The perfections of generosity, ethical conduct, and fortitude are easier than the later three perfections for householders to practice. Householder bodhisattvas live active lives in society, and since the first three perfections involve interacting with sentient beings, they are more suitable for householders. Monastic bodhisattvas tend to have a less active life in terms of directly relating to people, so the more introspective practices of meditative stability and wisdom, which are undertaken with joyous effort, are more compatible with their lifestyle. Of course all bodhisattvas—be they householders or monastics—practice all six or ten perfections and attain the same full awakening.

# 3

## Living as a Bodhisattva: The Remaining Seven Perfections

THE SIX PERFECTIONS can be expanded to become ten because the sixth perfection, wisdom, is said to also include the four perfections of skillful means, unshakable resolve, power, and pristine wisdom. Having spoken of generosity, ethical conduct, and fortitude in the previous chapter, we will now turn to the remaining seven perfections: joyous effort, meditative stability, wisdom, skillful means, unshakable resolve, power, and pristine wisdom.

### *The Perfection of Joyous Effort*

The perfection of joyous effort is a mind that takes delight in developing virtuous qualities. It does not refer to effort in general, because people may make great effort to accomplish nonvirtuous aims and that is definitely not included here!

Joyous effort is extremely important because it enables us to engage in difficult work or sustained Dharma practice and bring it to fruition. By assessing an activity well before committing to do it, and then once committed, carrying it through to completion, our confidence will increase and become stable. In addition, practices or tasks that were previously difficult will become easier because we are now familiar with them, and with sustained joyous effort, we will be able to accomplish them. Joyous effort enables our spiritual development to progress smoothly as we gradually gain realizations of the path. As Candrakīrti said (MMA 41ab):

All attainments follow after effort,



the cause of the two collections of merit and wisdom.

Once our goal of buddhahood is clearly understood, we have more energy to attain it. When it is not very clear, laziness easily sneaks in. To remedy this, think about the qualities of awakening and the possibility to attain it. This will inspire our effort to fulfill the two causes of full awakening, the collections of merit and wisdom.

The joyous effort that takes delight in mental transformation and the bodhisattvas' practices enables us to easily fulfill the two collections. Because these two are the essential causes to attain the truth body and form body of a buddha, joyous effort is said to be the source of all auspicious attainments.

At initial stages of practice, your ability to practice is naturally weak, but with repeated practice your capacity will increase. When it becomes strong, you will look back at your original state and see that what initially seemed almost impossible has now become possible and you have accomplished what you did not think you could. Your inner capabilities have grown through the passage of time because you made effort.

For example, at the beginning, engaging in just one practice on the method side of the path—let's say subduing your anger through the practice of fortitude—may seem almost inconceivable; let alone doing a practice in which method and wisdom are combined, by contemplating that you, your anger, the action of being angry, and the person you're angry at are empty of inherent existence but exist dependently. However, as you joyfully put energy into cultivating one good quality, then another, and another, you will eventually be able to do a practice of combined wisdom and method. Each new quality will increase your capacity, and because you remain steadfast and continue to practice, your progress will increase exponentially and realizations will automatically dawn.

A mind with joyous effort is very confident, and bodhisattvas cultivate three types of confidence:

(1) With *confidence in action*, they are prepared to act alone without others' help. This confidence enables bodhisattvas to do solitary retreat and to engage in vast actions to benefit sentient beings without feeling insecure.

This confidence additionally boosts them to complete whatever projects, studies, or retreats they begin.

(2) With *confidence in their capacity* to work for others, bodhisattvas engage in beneficial activities without self-doubt or hesitation. This confidence arises from understanding, “Other sentient beings are under the influence of afflictions and can’t accomplish their own welfare. I’ve seen the harm of afflictions and won’t let myself be influenced by them, so I am capable of working for the benefit of sentient beings.” With firm confidence in their abilities, bodhisattvas are mindful, and by monitoring their mind, they make sure they act in accord with the Dharma.

(3) With the *confidence to oppose afflictions*, bodhisattvas are determined not to allow themselves to fall under the sway of afflictions. Highly motivated to progress on the path, they combat afflictions whenever they arise.

The stages of the path literature speaks of three types of the perfection of joyous effort:

(1) *Armor-like joyous effort* is enthusiasm for learning, reflecting, and meditating on the Dharma that enables you to do these three without falling prey to the laziness of procrastination, the laziness of pursuing meaningless activities, and the laziness of discouragement. Armor-like joyous effort is bold so that bodhisattvas take a long-term viewpoint and make the determination to dedicate themselves for eons to benefit even one sentient being.

(2) With the *joyous effort of acting constructively*, we so deeply aspire to benefit sentient beings that our mind is energetic and delighted to engage in virtuous actions—both those done in meditation and those accomplished by directly relating to sentient beings.

(3) The *joyous effort of benefiting sentient beings* supports us to reach out and help others in need, in particular the eleven groups of sentient beings mentioned in the ethical conduct that benefits others.

The *Ornament of Clear Realizations* speaks of three types of joyous effort that counteract the three types of laziness spoken of in the above section on armor-like joyous effort:

(1) The *joyous effort of not becoming fatigued* opposes the *laziness of sleep, lethargy, and procrastination*. Contemplating death wakes us up to appreciate the opportunity afforded by our present precious human life and dispels the mind that thinks there's plenty of time to practice Dharma later and thus wants to sleep and lounge around now.

(2) The *joyous effort of not being attached to destructive or frivolous actions* counteracts the *laziness attached to worldly activities* that centers around the happiness of only this life. We are so busy nowadays and are easily distracted by the hustle and bustle of our lives. There's so much to do—career opportunities, exciting people to meet, beautiful places to visit, adventures to have, new digital devices to explore. But in terms of practicing the Dharma, laziness rules because we have no time. What are we busy doing? Thinking about how to get what we want, how to get even with the people who have harmed us, how to get our way, how to win an argument. There is plenty of time to ruminate and to worry, but we can't make time to learn their antidotes. Remembering the disadvantages of cyclic existence jolts us out of this complacent distraction.

(3) The *joyous effort of thoroughly upholding the path* is the counterforce to the *laziness of discouragement*. Discouragement arises by thinking, "I am incapable of practicing the Dharma and will never succeed," "The path is too difficult. It's impossible to accomplish," or "The goal of awakening is too high. I can't attain that." Although these discouraging thoughts seem so real and truthful, if we examine them, we discover that they are false. It's important to monitor this kind of self-talk and refute its nonsensical arguments. It's just another manifestation of the self-centered attitude that sabotages our confidence and abilities.

Discouragement destroys joyous effort. It may arise for several reasons. Sometimes we want to develop a certain skill or to help others, but our work does not turn out as we wished or planned. This happens to me too. But when I recall my motivation, my confidence returns. I began with a sincere desire to benefit. Regardless of what others may say, my motivation was genuine, and knowing that gives me courage and inner strength. If my motivation is pure, even though my activities may not succeed as I would have liked, I still feel satisfied. If I try my best and act with integrity and kindness, even if I fail, it doesn't matter. On the other hand, if my

motivation is not sincere and truthful, then even if others praise me and I become famous, inside me discomfort and self-doubt will still be present. If that happens, I have to back up and establish a genuinely compassionate motivation.

It's very important not to dwell in the laziness that is a sense of inferiority, thinking that we're incapable. To overcome this, reflect on the fact that you have the buddha nature—the potential to become a fully awakened, omniscient buddha. Your buddha nature can never be taken away. Also reflect on the marvelous situation of freedom and fortune that you have attained. Your precious human life provides enough time to practice as well as the proper conditions to do so. By reflecting on this, your despondency will lift.

## REFLECTION

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1. Which of the three types of laziness do you fall prey to most often?
2. Which types of joyous effort are the antidotes to bolster your strength?
3. Imagine a situation where you apply one or more of the types of joyous effort to overcome that laziness.
4. By imagining this repeatedly, you'll develop the confidence to be able to do it. Make a strong determination to follow up on this.

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In *Engaging in the Bodhisattvas' Deeds*, Śāntideva speaks of cultivating four powers to counteract the laziness that inhibits joyous effort. If you suffer from laziness, look into these:

(1) Generate *appreciation of and interest in virtue*. These come through comparing the results of nonvirtue and the results of the bodhisattva deeds. Understanding that the bodhisattva path is long and may entail formidable deeds such as giving away our body in charity, we appreciate and aspire to engage in these practices in the future. But we can approach these activities gradually and do them when we are mentally and physically ready. When we are fully prepared, we will not experience physical pain due to our merit

and will not experience mental distress due to our wisdom. Śāntideva shares the vision of what we will be able to do as high level bodhisattvas (BCA 7.28):

As their bodies are happy due to their merit and  
their minds are happy due to their wisdom,  
even if they remained in saṃsāra for the sake of others,  
why would the compassionate ones ever be upset?

(2) With *steadfastness* we are self-confident and continue whatever virtuous activities we have begun until they are completed. This self-confidence is not unrealistic, inflated arrogance, but comes from an inner awareness of our buddha nature and the opportunities provided by this precious human life. Śāntideva encourages us (BCA 7.59):

Whoever seizes self-confidence in order to conquer the enemy of  
arrogance—  
they are the self-confident ones, the victorious heroes [vanquishing  
afflictions].  
In addition, whoever definitely conquers the spread of this enemy,  
arrogance,  
completely [wins] the fruit of a buddha, fulfilling the wishes of the  
world.

When your mind is realistic and clear-sighted before starting a virtuous activity, you'll be able to restrain impulsivity and carefully assess if you possess the ability, time, knowledge, and other conditions necessary to complete the task. If you do not, then do not commit yourself at this time.

If you start a virtuous practice or project and discontinue it in the middle, neither you nor others will receive the beneficial results that come from completing it. In addition, you will feed the habit of leaving things undone, a habit that will have deleterious effects in this life as well as future lives. If you begin an activity and then see that continuing it would involve acting contrary to your precepts, then back away. Otherwise, carry through whatever you begin.

However, if an unexpected circumstance arises and you are unable to complete the task, notify everyone who is depending on you to finish it. Remembering that others will need to make other plans if you're unable to complete the project, inform them as soon as possible and help them find a replacement.

Steadfastness also includes being firm and counteracting afflictions as they arise, without giving up in despair. Śāntideva recommends (BCA 7.60–62):

If I find myself amidst a crowd of disturbing conceptions,  
I shall endure them in a thousand ways.  
Like a lion among foxes,  
I will not be affected by this disturbing host.

Just as people will guard their eyes  
when great danger and turmoil occur,  
Likewise, I shall never be swayed by the disturbances within my  
mind,  
even at times of great strife.

It would be better for me to be burned,  
to have my head cut off and to be killed,  
rather than ever bowing down  
to those ever-present disturbing conceptions.  
So likewise, in all situations, I should do nothing other than what is  
fit.

Sometimes our mind proliferates with distorted conceptions. Seeing their faults, we remain firm in applying the antidotes. If we cannot do that while in the situation, we excuse ourselves, calm our mind, and then return to work out the situation with those involved.

Being steadfast in the face of dangers, such as the afflictions that can send us to unfortunate rebirths if we give them leeway, we can subdue them. While it may seem easier to give in to the afflictions in order to stop

our internal discomfort, in the long-term this is not advisable. Knowing that the storm of afflictions will eventually subside, we avoid making any bad decisions while under their influence. We remain committed to following the correct path to happiness.

(3) With *joy* we consistently and continuously act according to bodhicitta. Just as an elephant scorched by the midday sun in India plunges into a cool pool, with the same joy bodhisattvas are filled with joyous energy when it comes to creating virtue. Rather than impatiently anticipating the goal, they enjoy the process of creating the causes for full awakening. Śāntideva says (BCA 7.64–65):

Although [worldly] people work in order to be happy,  
it is uncertain whether or not they will find it.  
But how can those whose work itself is joy  
find happiness unless they do it?

If I feel that I never have enough sensual objects,  
which are like honey smeared on a razor's edge,  
then why should I ever feel that I have enough  
merit which ripens in happiness and peace?

The image of honey on a razorblade is strong. Who would ever lick such honey, even if it were the most delicious in the world? But following attachment to sensual objects is like doing this; it simply brings problems in this life and creates nonvirtuous karma that ripens in future lives. Remembering our long-term cherished goal of buddhahood, we maintain a joyful mind that doesn't get distracted.

(4) *Rest* is important to maintain a balanced body and mind so that you will be able to benefit sentient beings over a long period of time. When you are tired after engaging in virtuous activities, take a break, rest, and begin again when you feel refreshed. By resting at appropriate times before your joy has dissipated, you'll be refreshed and have great joy and enthusiasm when it is time to begin again.

Some people push themselves to practice, doing this and that virtuous activity until they are so exhausted that they stop doing any Dharma

practice at all. This is not wise. We should practice joyfully because we see the benefits of the Dharma, not because we think we “should” or because we are trying to show what good disciples we are. With joyous effort, our capacity will gradually increase. Becoming wisely sensitive to what our body and mind need at any particular time, we will gratefully rest and relax when necessary.

However, if you push yourself to the point of exhaustion, the delight in virtuous activities will evaporate and your joyous effort will vanish. It is essential to be skillful and rest before becoming completely drained, so that you can continue practicing over a long period of time. Learning to become a balanced person by knowing when to take a break and when to continue will prevent the difficulties that come with burnout.

Having completed a virtuous activity or project, rejoice in the merit created and the benefit others have received, and then take a break and rest. In that way, you will be able to engage in subsequent activities with enthusiasm. Śāntideva counsels (BCA 7:67):

When my strength declines, I should leave whatever I am doing  
in order to be able to continue it later.

Having done something well, I should put it aside  
with the wish [to accomplish] what will follow.

## REFLECTION

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Contemplate the four powers to counteract the laziness that inhibits joyous effort. Think of how to integrate these in your life.

1. Generate *appreciation of and interest in virtue*, which come from comparing the results of nonvirtue and the results of the bodhisattva deeds.
2. Cultivate *steadfastness* that gives you the self-confidence to continue whatever virtuous activities you have begun until they are completed. This self-confidence is not unrealistic arrogance but is practical. It



comes from an inner awareness of your buddha nature and the opportunities provided by this precious human life.

3. With *joy* consistently and continuously act with bodhicitta.
4. After you have completed a project or when you need a break, take time to *rest* and refresh yourself so you can engage in more virtuous actions and beneficial projects with renewed enthusiasm.

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### *The Perfection of Meditative Stability*

In the perfection of meditative stability, concentration or one-pointedness of mind is developed through the nine stages of sustained attention that culminate in serenity (*śamatha, samatha*). One-pointedness is the ability to focus one-pointedly on a chosen object of meditation with mental stability and clarity. The ability to do this exists within us right now, but it is undeveloped. By learning the correct methods to cultivate one-pointedness and practicing them our concentration will increase. The benefits of doing this are great: By focusing more clearly and consistently on virtuous meditation objects without being disrupted by restlessness and laxity, the various meditations we do will more swiftly bring results. For example, by sustaining concentration on impermanence or emptiness, we will be able to break through the ignorance that grasps permanence and inherent existence. By strongly focusing the mind on the experience of compassion, it will become integrated in our mindstream and will arise more easily in the future.

The practice of serenity and the higher meditative absorptions of the form and formless realms are found among both Buddhists and non-Buddhists. However, in the perfection of meditative stability, it becomes a bodhisattva's practice because it is based on refuge in the Three Jewels, motivated by bodhicitta, and aimed at actualizing the wisdom realizing emptiness in order to attain full awakening.

In general, āryas' supramundane path consciousnesses resemble mundane dhyānas in that they contemplate their object with full, single-pointed absorption and their dhyānic factors (investigation, analysis, joy,

bliss, and one-pointedness) are as intense as those in the mundane dhyānas. However, they differ from the mundane dhyānas in several significant ways. First, the way they affect the defilements differs. Mundane dhyānas temporarily repress the coarse defilements but do not eliminate their seeds whereas supramundane path dhyānas forever uproot their respective level of defilements and their seeds. Second, their result in terms of rebirth differs. Mundane dhyānas lead to rebirth in the form realm, and the practitioner continues to cycle in saṃsāra; supramundane path dhyānas result in nirvāṇa, perfect freedom from saṃsāra. Third, they differ in terms of their balance of concentration and wisdom. In the mundane dhyānas, concentration is dominant and wisdom is used to analyze the faults of the lower levels of dhyāna and the benefits of the higher level, so that the practitioner will seek the higher level. In the supramundane path dhyānas, concentration and wisdom are balanced. Concentration focuses on emptiness and wisdom realizes it.

To attain serenity, a practitioner must observe ethical conduct, be pure in her habits and behavior, and have joyous effort to continue to cultivate serenity. Once serenity has been attained, a bodhisattva uses it to cultivate insight into emptiness. Through such training, the union of serenity and insight observing emptiness is attained, marking the beginning of the Mahāyāna path of preparation. From there she progresses through the remaining bodhisattva paths to buddhahood.

The higher training in concentration and the perfection of meditative stability were elaborately discussed in the previous volume, *Following in the Buddha's Footsteps*, chapters 6–10. Here is a summary of a few important points.

Residing in an isolated and peaceful place, living a simple lifestyle with few distractions, and being content with what you possess facilitate the development of concentration. While living in the city, you may like to do some serenity meditation every day—that will help your concentration—but do not expect to develop quick or complete results in that milieu. The Buddha described a wide variety of possible meditation objects, so consult your spiritual mentor regarding an appropriate object and then listen to teachings from your spiritual mentor on how to reduce the five hindrances of sensual desire, malice, lethargy and sleepiness, restlessness and regret,

and deluded doubt. Also learn the methods to overcome the five faults—laziness, forgetting the meditation object, restlessness and laxity, nonapplication of the antidote, and overapplication of the antidote—by employing the eight antidotes—faith, aspiration, effort, pliancy, mindfulness, introspective awareness, application of the antidotes, and equanimity.

Serenity involves cultivating a mind that can abide one-pointedly on an object. In addition, the mind perceiving that object must be fresh and clear. The two principal hindrances to concentration are mental restlessness, which impedes the stability of the mind—its capacity to remain one-pointedly on the object—and laxity, which impedes the clarity and freshness of the mind. Restlessness arises when the mind is distracted outward toward objects of attachment, and laxity occurs when the mind is withdrawn inside too much.

Detailed instructions describing how to counteract these and other hindrances and how to progress through the nine stages of sustained attention are found in the great treatises. After completing the nine stages of sustained attention, mental pliancy, physical pliancy, physical bliss, and mental bliss are attained, each depending on the preceding one. Based on those, serenity and a mind of the first dhyāna are attained. Practitioners can now choose whether to attain the higher meditative absorptions of the form and formless realms through the mundane path or to contemplate the sixteen aspects of the four truths and unite serenity and insight to attain the supramundane path. The mundane path leads to rebirth in those meditative states that are still within cyclic existence. The supramundane path leads to liberation and full awakening. Almost all Buddhist practitioners choose the supramundane path because they aim for liberation and awakening.

## REFLECTION

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1. Set up a daily meditation practice. Begin with fifteen minutes and gradually increase the time when you are ready.
2. Instructions on how to set up sessions are in chapter 6 of *The Foundation of Buddhist Practice*. Do analytical meditation, for example

meditating on the reflections found in this and other volumes of *The Library of Wisdom and Compassion*. Alternatively, do stabilizing meditation using either the image of the Buddha or the breath as your meditation object, as described in chapters 6 and 7 of *Following in the Footsteps of the Buddha*.

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### *The Perfection of Wisdom*

Buddhism emphasizes the development of wisdom, intelligence, and knowledge. This does not mean we must have a high IQ or a college degree to learn the Dharma or to be liberated from cyclic existence. Rather we must be open-minded, have the ability to learn and analyze clearly, be sincere in our spiritual aspirations, and have created sufficient merit. Some people who are neither brainy nor clever have the necessary focus, power, and effort for spiritual advancement. By following their teachers' instructions and practicing properly, they accomplish high levels of the path. Our intelligence and ability to understand can be increased in this life through learning, thinking, and meditating. It is not the case that we are born with a certain level of intelligence that cannot be improved, expanded, and deepened.

The value of developing wisdom is incalculable. In his *Hundred Verses of Wisdom (Prajñāśataka)*, Nāgārjuna says (LC 212):

Wisdom is the root of all good qualities  
seen and not yet seen.  
To achieve both of these,  
embrace wisdom.

Āryaśūra praises wisdom in the *Compendium of Perfections (Pāramitāsamāsa)*, LC 216):

The ten powers of the sugata, most excellent of strengths,  
all superior activities without parallel,  
and all other collections of virtues in their entirety

arise based on wisdom as their cause.

The arts and the best treasures in all worlds,  
the variety of sacred learning that is like an eye,  
protections, awarenences, mantras, and so on,  
the different attributes of the teachings that set these forth,

the multitude of enumerations and the doors to liberation,  
all such types of service to the world  
that display the great power of the bodhisattvas—  
all arise from the power of wisdom.

With compassion, Āryaśūra then points out what hinders us from cultivating wisdom so that with joyous effort we will work to free ourselves from these impediments (LC 218):

Laziness, indolence, and reliance on bad friends,  
being governed by sleep, no feeling for discernment,  
no interest in the Sage's most sublime wisdom,  
inquiring under the influence of false pride,

lacking the faith to rely on learned persons  
due to attachment to self from feelings of inadequacy,  
the great poison of false concepts that are wrong views—  
these are the causes of confusion.

It's clear why preferring to lie around and do nothing and oversleeping impede the development of wisdom. Contemplating death and impermanence remedies this. Relying on bad friends who encourage us to join them in worldly activities distracts us from what is important. Thinking about the disadvantages of saṃsāra overcomes this. Not having interest in cultivating wisdom, not seeking out qualified spiritual mentors, and the pride of thinking that we already know something when we actually do not—these three prevent us from attending teachings and studying. Contemplating the benefits derived from wisdom will overcome these.

Belittling ourselves and telling ourselves that we can't learn or cultivate wisdom stops us from even trying. To counteract this, remember your buddha nature and the opportunities afforded by your precious human life.

Use the above methods to chip away at and finally abolish these hindrances. Then engage in the three types of the perfection of wisdom:

(1) The *wisdom understanding the ultimate*, emptiness, abolishes all obscurations.

(2) The *wisdom understanding the conventional* involves learning five fields of traditional knowledge—logic, grammar and poetry, medicine, the arts, and self-knowledge. To communicate with and teach others, we must have knowledge of worldly topics so that we can teach the Dharma using contemporary language and examples. By understanding grammar and poetry we can express ourselves well; with knowledge of medicine we will be able to assuage sentient beings' physical suffering in this life; with knowledge of the arts and sciences we'll arouse others' interest in self-knowledge. Today bodhisattvas may also want to learn communication and mediation skills, computer science, neuroscience, psychology, cultural anthropology, sociology, physics, biology, and other topics. In short, bodhisattvas learn whatever is useful for benefiting sentient beings.

(3) The *wisdom understanding how best to work for the benefit of sentient beings* is skilled in the diverse ways to benefit sentient beings. With it, bodhisattvas reach out to all beings to help them with both worldly and spiritual concerns. This wisdom is effective in working with the eleven types of beings mentioned in the ethical conduct of benefiting sentient beings.

The wisdom understanding the ultimate is emphasized because it is the key to awakening and the only way to free ourselves and others from saṃsāra. This perfection of wisdom is an ārya bodhisattva's direct perceiver of emptiness that is supported by the method side of the path (bodhicitta). While those who have not entered the bodhisattva path may gain nondual wisdom and actualize the paths of śrāvakas or solitary realizers, theirs is not the perfection of wisdom, which arises only after generating bodhicitta. This wisdom will be the principal topic of future volumes of the *Library of Wisdom and Compassion*.

The Buddha explained sixteen aspects of the four truths. Of the four aspects of the truth of duḥkha, two are emptiness and selflessness. The meaning of these has different interpretations according to the four tenet systems—the Vaibhāṣika, Sautrāntika, Yogācāra (Cittamātra), and Madhyamaka. Here we will follow the Madhyamaka view, and among its two branches—Svātantrika and Prāsaṅgika—we will explain the latter. Through combining the method aspect of the path (exemplified but not limited to the aspiration to be free from saṃsāra, compassion, and bodhicitta) and the wisdom aspect of the path (the realization of emptiness and selflessness according to the Prāsaṅgika view), we will attain full awakening, which does not abide in either cyclic existence or the pacification of saṃsāra that is an arhat’s nirvāṇa. Maitreya says in the *Ornament of Clear Realizations* (LC 2.19):

Through wisdom you do not abide in cyclic existence.

Through compassion you do not abide in [an arhat’s] peace.

The Madhyamaka, or Middle Way, texts explain ultimate truth—the emptiness or lack of inherent existence—and describe how realizing emptiness acts as the main and final counterforce that eliminates grasping inherent existence.

Interestingly, scientists are now reaching similar conclusions about the ultimate nature of phenomena. For example, physicists studying quantum theory are sometimes hesitant to use the term “absolute reality” because it connotes that things exist independently, from their own side. Through investigation, scientists have been unable to find such independent or inherent existence, because everything exists in dependence on the observer and a multiplicity of other factors. Instead of saying “absolute reality,” they now say “probability.” It will be interesting to see in which ways Buddhist reasoning and meditative experience and scientific investigation will approach the same point. But whether scientists will meditate on the view of the emptiness of inherent existence and attain awakening remains to be seen!

*The Three Understandings*

The three understandings (three wisdoms) are those arisen from learning (studying or hearing), reflecting (thinking, contemplating), and meditating. They come into play with respect to all Dharma topics and are especially important when we seek to realize emptiness. These three are the mental factor of wisdom (*prajñā*) and are developed progressively, beginning with the understanding arisen from learning, progressing to the understanding arisen from reflection, and finally the understanding arisen from meditation. When advancing to the next one, however, we do not abandon the previous understandings but continue to develop them. The example of cultivating the understanding of emptiness clarifies how this works.

The *understanding arisen from learning* comes through hearing and/or studying teachings, for example on emptiness. In the case of someone who is newly cultivating the understanding of emptiness, the understanding arisen from hearing is essential to developing the later wisdoms; we must first learn about emptiness before we can think or meditate on it. Here we hear the reasonings that prove that all phenomena lack inherent existence. We learn the three criteria of a syllogism—the property of the subject, pervasion, and counter-pervasion—and begin to counteract doubts by gaining a general understanding of them. After some time, we will gain a correct assumption of the meaning of emptiness.<sup>10</sup> For example, we hear the syllogism “Consider the I, it is empty of inherent existence because it is a dependent arising.” The property of the subject is that the I is a dependent arising; the pervasion is that whatever is a dependent arising is necessarily empty of inherent existence; the counter-pervasion is that whatever is not empty is necessarily not dependent arising.

In the case of someone who has previously understood emptiness, hearing teachings on it can trigger the previous understanding or spark a new understanding to arise in her mind. In that latter case, the understanding arisen from learning can induce a reliable cognizer of emptiness as in the story of the monk who realized emptiness while listening to his spiritual mentor’s discourse on it.

The *understanding arisen from reflection* is present when an inferential reliable cognizer of emptiness is generated based on ascertainment of the three criteria of a correct syllogism. This understanding is very powerful. Practitioners continue to meditate on emptiness based on this inferential



understanding, and when they attain serenity focused on emptiness, the *understanding arisen from meditation* is present. This understanding comes from meditative experience and enables practitioners to develop deep familiarity with emptiness, such that the realization of emptiness arises easily in their minds. As they continue to practice, they reach a point when the analysis of the nature of existence induces special pliancy and serenity. At this time, the union of serenity and insight on emptiness is attained. According to the *Ornament of Clear Realizations*, a fully qualified insight observing emptiness and a union of serenity and insight observing emptiness are synonymous, and they mark the beginning of the path of preparation.

Depending on her level of spiritual development, one person may have these three understandings present in her mind at different times. For example, during and after listening to teachings, the understanding arisen from hearing is present. If the practitioner has already thought a great deal about emptiness, the understanding arisen from reflection may also be present at that time. Otherwise, it is developed when she debates and discusses the Dharma and gains a correct inference of emptiness. Based on that inference, she cultivates single-pointed meditation on emptiness and gains deep familiarity with it. This is the understanding arisen from meditation.

### *Space-Like and Illusion-Like Meditation on Emptiness*

Meditation on emptiness on the ārya paths is of two kinds. The first is *space-like meditation*, which is āryas' actual meditative equipoise on emptiness. This is preceded by gaining the correct view of the Middle Way, free from the extremes of absolutism and nihilism. Absolutism is the view that all phenomena exist inherently; nihilism is the view that phenomena are totally nonexistent or that the law of karma and its results is nonexistent. Space-like meditation on emptiness is the wisdom realizing the selflessness of persons and phenomena in nondual meditative equipoise.

The second type of ārya meditation on emptiness is *meditation on the illusory nature of phenomena*, which is cultivated subsequent to sessions of space-like meditation. Through it comes the wisdom understanding that

although things appear to exist inherently, they do not. Like illusions, phenomena do not exist in the way they appear.

The selflessness of persons and the selflessness of phenomena is usually explained in the context of space-like meditation. Since the selflessness of persons is easier to realize, it is explained first. Although the term “self” often refers to the person—the mere I that exists dependently—in the term “selflessness,” “self” means inherent existence, the object of negation, which does not exist at all. The object of negation in the context of the selflessness of persons is the independent or inherent existence of the person, that is, a person existing from its own side, without depending on its basis of designation—the body and mind—or on the mind designating it. Since no such inherently existent person exists, the object of negation is totally nonexistent, and the wisdom realizing emptiness knows the emptiness of the person.

Before refuting the existence of an inherently existent I, we must first have a sense of what the ignorance grasping an inherently existent I holds as existent. If such an I did exist, what would it be like? To our innate self-grasping ignorance, the I appears as inherently existent, existing under its own power. There seems to be a real ME, a person who is independent of all factors, such as parts and its causes and conditions. It seems to exist independent of the mind perceiving it. An inherently existent I stands alone, with an essence that is seemingly unchanging and indestructible.

But if we reflect using reasoning, we find that even though the I appears to exist inherently, it cannot exist in that way. It is dependent on other factors. I depend on my body and mind, on the causes and conditions that produced me; I do not exist under my own power as a self-enclosed entity. Thus, a discrepancy exists between the way the I appears and the way it exists. By using reasoning, this discrepancy is brought to light and the existence of an inherently existent I is refuted.

Realizing emptiness is not a matter of repeating to ourselves, “The I is empty of inherent existence.” We must examine how the I actually exists. If it existed inherently, it would not depend on anything, but we know the I depends on its causes and conditions and is constantly changing.

After gaining insight that the inherently existent I that ignorance apprehends is actually nonexistent, we focus our mind one-pointedly on the

mere absence of independent existence of the I. Concentrating on the absence of an independent I is not focusing on nothingness or blankness. We must know the difference between the emptiness of inherent existence and nothingness and keep the mind alert, with clear and strong focus on emptiness. If we are unable to maintain such mindfulness on the emptiness of inherent existence but let our mind slip into focusing on mere nothingness, we may think we are meditating on emptiness, although we are not. Such incorrect meditation on emptiness does not eradicate afflictions, and getting stuck in such a view is dangerous.

To do space-like meditation on emptiness, analyze to discover the emptiness of inherent existence and then focus one-pointedly on it. Atiśa says (LP 56):

Therefore the Subduer also has said  
that the great ignorance of conceptuality  
makes us fall into the ocean of cyclic existence.  
Resting in nonconceptual stabilization,  
space-like nonconceptuality manifests clearly.

In this context, “conceptuality” refers to inherent existence. Space-like nonconceptuality is free of both the grasping at inherent existence and the appearance of inherent existence. The emptiness of inherent existence is clear, open, and limitless like space. The mind meditating on emptiness is very spacious; it is not cluttered by the appearances of inherently existent objects and is free from discursive conceptualizations of “this and that.” There is a sense of tremendous expansiveness and the bliss of freedom from the constraints of self-grasping ignorance.

Meditating on the selflessness of phenomena is similar to meditating on the selflessness of persons—the object of negation (inherent existence) is the same—but the base now is all phenomena other than persons. Because all phenomena—be they impermanent or permanent—depend on the parts that compose them, they do not exist independently. Being dependent, they are empty of independent or inherent existence. For example, the mind is dependent on a continuity of tiny moments of consciousness. Atoms are composed of ever-smaller particles. Emptiness, too, is merely designated by

mind and depends on parts. It is not an independently existent absolute that either permeates all phenomena or exists in another dimension. Emptiness is here, right now. In dependence on the emptiness of the table, the emptiness of the chair, and so on, the generality “emptiness” is designated. In dependence on the person, the emptiness of the person exists.

When we do not examine and analyze, things appear to have an independent intrinsic nature from their own side. For example, when meditating on the Buddha, how does he appear? To the innate, non-analytical mind, the Buddha appears as something solid, independent, and objective. Similarly, when meditating on the suffering of sentient beings, sentient beings appear to exist from their own side without depending on anything else. It seems there are sentient beings “out there,” unrelated to our mind. This is how things appear to our normal, innate mind that operates in daily activities. This mind does not analyze how things exist. Rather, things appear inherently existent to it, and ignorance accepts this appearance as true.

However, if we investigate the real nature of the Buddha, no independently existent Buddha can be found. The Buddha exists dependently. He depends on causes and conditions, parts, and the mind that designates the term “Buddha” to his aggregates. As you repeatedly investigate how the Buddha or any other object exists, the object of negation will become clearer, and you will be able to refute it. Combining this insight with serenity, the mind then remains one-pointedly focused on the absence of inherent existence. Speaking of how bodhisattvas actually exist, the *King of Concentration Sūtra* says (SR 6.17–19):

Just as when a person has a child born to him  
and gives the child a name, saying, “This is his name!”  
but that name cannot be found anywhere,  
and that name did not come from anywhere,

in that way the name “bodhisattva” is given,  
but if one seeks for this bodhisattva,  
that name will not be found anywhere.  
One who knows that is a bodhisattva.

The bodhisattvas do not believe in the existence of a self any more than that a fire can burn in the middle of the ocean. Since they have developed the aspiration for awakening they do not have the view that there is a soul within.

In generating the correct view of emptiness, we investigate how persons and phenomena exist using ultimate analysis. That is, we search for the ultimate mode of existence of an object. What is this object really? Through such examination, the inherent existence of the object is not found. This non-finding of an inherently existent object by reasoning analyzing the ultimate does not contradict the conventional existence of the object, because we were investigating the object's ultimate mode of existence, not its conventional existence. In general, with inherent existence refuted, all that remains is a mere nominally existent object, a conventionality. Ultimate analysis does not refute existence; it only refutes inherent existence. It is obvious from our experience that things exist and have their various functions in the world. They exist through the power of imputation.

After meditators arise from space-like meditation on emptiness, the false appearance of inherent existence arises as a result of the latencies of ignorance. Meditators recognize this appearance is false and is like an illusion in that things appear one way but exist in another. This illusion-like meditation on emptiness is done while meditators go about their daily activities such as eating, walking, talking, and so forth. The Buddha says (SR 9.6):

Bodhisattva mahāsattvas should know that all phenomena are like illusions. They should know that all phenomena are like dreams, like mirages, like echoes, like optical illusions, like the [reflection of the] moon on water, like hallucinations, like reflections, and like space.

Illusion-like meditation helps to avoid getting carried away by all the seemingly attractive and repulsive things that bodhisattvas encounter, and in that way counteracts attachment and anger. Mindfulness of the illusion-like

nature reinforces their realization of emptiness and facilitates entering into meditative equipoise on emptiness in future formal meditation sessions.

Whether we practice Pāramitāyāna or Vajrayāna, whether we are on the śrāvaka, solitary realizer, or bodhisattva path, the realization of emptiness is necessary to complete that path. Since śrāvakas and solitary realizers meditate on emptiness to eliminate afflictions and attain liberation, they do not need to accumulate the vast amount of merit that bodhisattvas do. Bodhisattvas' vast accumulation of merit acts as a solid support for cultivating the wisdom realizing emptiness and enables that wisdom to eliminate even the subtle cognitive obscurations from the mind.

Various tenet systems have different views on the selflessness that has to be realized to eliminate the afflictive obscurations. Some systems do not assert a selflessness of phenomena, and claim that afflictive obscurations can be eliminated merely by realizing the selflessness of persons. In actuality, only by following the Madhyamaka view of the emptiness of inherent existence of both persons and phenomena can we generate the kind of wisdom that is capable of removing both the afflictive and cognitive obscurations.

Similarly, all four classes of tantra emphasize the need to generate the correct view of emptiness. In the practice of deity yoga, practitioners meditate on nondual profundity and clarity. Clarity refers to generating themselves as the deity and having a clear visualization of this. At the same time, they meditate on the profound nature of the deity—its emptiness of inherent existence. In this way they have the clear appearance of themselves as the deity and simultaneously reflect that the deity is empty. Based on this and other practices unique to Vajrayāna, it is possible to make manifest an extremely subtle mind that is then used to realize emptiness. The ensuing wisdom becomes a powerful counterforce that removes the afflictions and their latencies forever.

## REFLECTION

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1. Think of your car (bicycle, subway car, or any other vehicle). Does it appear to be a car by nature—that is, is there something in the object that makes it a car and not a turkey?

2. If it indeed exists in that manner, you should be able to find and draw a line around what is the car. The car must be either identical with one of its parts or with the collection of parts, or completely separate from them. There is no third choice.
  3. Look at each part of the car and investigate if it is a car.
  4. It is tempting to think the collection of parts is the car, but that would be like having a collection of non-apples and thinking it is an apple.
  5. Conclude that the car cannot exist as an inherently existent thing. That absence of inherent existence is its empty, space-like nature.
  6. Nevertheless, when you don't analyze, a car appears and you can drive it. It appears but is empty of inherent existence. That is its illusion-like nature.
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### *Serenity and Insight*

The ability to concentrate and to discern and investigate things are innate qualities of our mind. We already have some ability to pay attention to and to focus on a chosen object. When we enhance this mental factor of concentration, it can lead to serenity and the deep states of meditative absorption of the form and formless realms. Similarly, we already have some ability to discern various characteristics. When increased and refined, this leads to insight and wisdom. Mindfulness, introspective awareness, and effort are needed to do this, and because these mental factors and the mental factors of concentration and wisdom are conditioned phenomena, it is possible to develop and enhance them through practice.

In general, serenity and insight are common to all ancient Indian traditions. What makes them unique in Buddhism is that they are cultivated following the teachings and guidance of the awakened Buddha, his teachings (the Dharma), and his disciples (the Saṅgha) who have realized the nature of reality. In addition, they are directed toward realizing

selflessness and eliminating both the afflictive and the cognitive obscurations.

Both serenity and insight are needed to generate meditative equipoise that realizes selflessness. Serenity brings stability and deep meditative concentration, while insight probes, investigates, and ascertains the ultimate nature of phenomena. Without serenity we are unable to focus single-pointedly on emptiness, and without insight we are unable to discern emptiness clearly. A union of the two is needed to realize emptiness directly and to empower that realization so that it can overcome our mental defilements.

Serenity (*śamatha, samatha*) is a concentration (*samādhi*) arising from meditation and accompanied by the bliss of mental and physical pliancy (*praśrabdhi, passaddhi*) in which the mind abides effortlessly and without fluctuation, for as long as we wish on whichever virtuous object it has been placed. Serenity is cultivated through the higher training in concentration, and for those following the bodhisattva vehicle by the practice of the perfection of meditative stability.

Serenity is necessarily the mental factor of concentration, but all concentrations are not necessarily serenity, because the mental factor of concentration is also found in the nine sustained attentions preceding the attainment of serenity. Of the two types of meditation—stabilizing (*sthāpyabhāvanā*) and analytical (*vicārabhāvanā*)—serenity is necessarily stabilizing meditation.

Insight (*vipaśyanā, vipassanā*) is a wisdom of discerning or analytical discrimination (*so sor rtog pa'i shes rab*) of phenomena conjoined with special pliancy induced by the power of analysis. It is an analytical wisdom that may be either conceptual or nonconceptual, and it may be either mundane or supramundane. The next several chapters speak specifically about how to cultivate supramundane insight that is focused on emptiness and leads to liberation and awakening.

Insight is a special “seeing.” It is a mental factor that thoroughly analyzes phenomena and clearly distinguishes their features. Developed by practitioners of all three vehicles—the Śrāvaka, Solitary Realizer, and Bodhisattva Vehicles—insight is necessarily a wisdom consciousness. Of the two types of meditation, it is analytical meditation.



In general, serenity and insight are mental factors that are mutually exclusive; that is, there is nothing that is both of them. Concentration and wisdom are also distinct mental factors. But the higher training of concentration does not refer to just the mental factor of concentration. That is, when “concentration” is used with other words or in other phrases it may refer to a specific meditative state. For example, the *Heart Sūtra* (*Prajñāpāramitāhṛdaya Sūtra*) recounts that the Buddha was meditating on the “concentration of the countless aspects of phenomena called Profound Illumination.”

While serenity and insight are lofty mental states that have specific attributes, various virtuous mental states may fall under the general category of one or the other. Tsongkhapa explains (LC 3:14):

However, concentrations that at least involve single-pointedness on a virtuous object are classified with serenity; virtuous cognitions that distinguish an ultimate or conventional object are classified with insight.

Although these mental states may not be full-fledged serenity or insight, by cultivating them over time they will become so.

A practitioner who seeks liberation and has generated the union of serenity and insight in his or her mind is called a “yogī” or “yoginī.” In some Dharma centers, anyone who attends a meditation retreat is called a “yogī.” Perhaps this is done to inspire people to become actual yogīs, but if misunderstood, it could be misleading. The realizations of actual yogīs greatly exceed our own understanding.

Serenity must be generated before insight, even though someone may have an inferential realization of emptiness before attaining serenity. Tsongkhapa says (LC 3:95–96):

If you do not first establish in your mindstream the concentration of serenity explained previously, it is not possible for the actual knowledge of insight, which is focused on either the ultimate nature or the diversity of all phenomena, to arise...

In summary, you must first develop serenity and then on this basis, you may proceed on a graduated path up the peak of cyclic existence by means of insight bearing the aspect of grossness and peacefulness; or you may proceed along the five paths to liberation or omniscience by means of insight bearing the aspect of the reality of selflessness. This constitutes the general seal of the Conqueror’s teachings, so no yogī can depart from it.

Without serenity, neither mundane nor supramundane insight can be attained. Mundane insight traverses the four dhyānas of the form realm and the four formless realm absorptions. Here a practitioner progresses by contemplating the peacefulness of the next level of meditative absorption and the grossness of their present level. This insight—which is common to Buddhists and non-Buddhists alike—leads to the peak of cyclic existence, the highest stage of saṃsāra, but not to liberation. While these meditative absorptions are very pleasing and it is tempting to rest in them without cultivating insight, all Buddhist teachers warn us against this. In his *Praise in Honor of One Worthy of Honor (Varṇāhavarṇastotra)*, Mātṛceṭa says (LC 3:95):

Those opposed to your (the Tathāgata’s) teachings  
are blinded by affliction.  
Even after venturing to the peak of cyclic existence,  
duḥkha occurs again, and cyclic existence is maintained.  
Those who follow your teachings—  
even if they do not achieve actual dhyāna—  
turn away from cyclic existence,  
while under the steady gaze of the eyes of Māra.

Even if the Buddha’s disciples do not immediately attain dhyāna, they bear in mind the disadvantages of cyclic existence and enrich the determination to be free from it in their minds. As they continue to practice, they will attain access concentration<sup>11</sup> to the first dhyāna as well as the other dhyānas

that they can then conjoin with insight. This supramundane insight is focused on emptiness and leads to liberation and awakening.

### *The Importance of Insight*

Direct realization of emptiness is necessary to remove both the afflictive and the cognitive obscurations and to attain liberation and full awakening. Although the aspiration to be free from saṃsāra, bodhicitta, and concentration are necessary qualities to gain awakening, they are not sufficient for its attainment. Only the wisdom gained from insight into emptiness has the power to cut ignorance, the root of saṃsāra. While learning about selflessness and cultivating the right view, we may use antidotes specific to each affliction to pacify it temporarily. However, these antidotes do not have the ability to remove an affliction from its root, nor does the antidote for one affliction necessarily overcome another. For example, meditating on love or patience can temporarily subdue anger, but it cannot completely eliminate the seed or potential for future anger from the mindstream. In addition, meditating on love or patience does not counteract attachment, just as meditating on the unpleasant aspects of the object—the antidote to attachment—does not lessen our anger.

Concentration and serenity are necessary to enhance all other Dharma practices. However, they are not uniquely Buddhist practices and may be gained by those of other faiths. Concentration and serenity alone cannot bring liberation because they are not combined with the wisdom realizing the emptiness of inherent existence and thus cannot cut the ignorance that grasps inherent existence. Our mind may be very peaceful and blissful while in a concentrated state because disturbing attitudes and negative emotions have been temporarily suppressed. However, because their seeds have not been removed from our mindstream, once our meditation ends, these afflictions can and will surface again.

We may gain many good qualities and even superknowledges as a result of concentration, but the danger exists of seeing these qualities as an end in themselves, which could possibly cause us to become arrogant. Such pride is a huge obstacle on the path. To avoid these pitfalls, before practicing serenity we must clearly understand that the purpose of doing so is to use it

as a basis for generating insight into emptiness, and that insight and wisdom are the qualities that will liberate us from the two obscurations.

In the past, and even today, some people believe that blank-minded meditation leads to liberation. They advocate clearing all thoughts—be they correct or incorrect, beneficial or harmful—from the mind and abiding in contentless state. Such a state, however peaceful it may be, is neither liberation nor realization of emptiness. Why? Nothingness is not the meaning of emptiness, and focusing the mind single-pointedly on it is not the realization of the lack of inherent existence. Although nonconceptual meditation on nothingness temporarily suppresses afflictions so that they are not manifest at that moment, it has not eliminated the seeds or the latencies of afflictions from the mindstream. The person is still exposed to the vagaries of saṃsāra.

A person may have extraordinary meditative experiences, such as seeing deities or knowing their previous rebirths, but still not be free from cyclic existence. Although such events are wonderful, we should not be overly impressed with them, for as long as we have not cleansed all afflictions and their seeds from our mindstream through consistent meditation on the correct view of reality, we are not beyond saṃsāra. Many a practitioner has cultivated the dhyānas and the absorptions of the formless realm only to have their afflictions reappear later because self-grasping ignorance still exists in their mindstream. One may have samādhi on the conventional nature of the mind—its clarity and cognizance—but lack direct perception of its ultimate nature and thus still be trapped in saṃsāra. These days, when many people claim spiritual realizations and advertise such in the media, the point cannot be emphasized enough: only insight on the emptiness of inherent existence can eliminate the cause of saṃsāra from its root.

## REFLECTION

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1. Why is realizing emptiness directly important?
2. Why is blank-minded meditation or meditation on nothingness not meditation on emptiness?

3. What is serenity? What is insight?
  4. Why is it important to combine serenity and insight?
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### *The Perfection of Skillful Means*

Skillful means are essential for achieving our own purposes as well as for benefiting others, and for that reason they must be perfected. In some Mahāyāna sūtras, such as the *Lotus Sūtra (Saddharmapuṇḍarīka Sūtra)*, “skillful means” indicates the way in which, motivated by compassion, buddhas and bodhisattvas adapt their teaching method and their own behavior according to the needs and capacities of different sentient beings. In other Mahāyāna sūtras, such as the *Sūtra of the Perfection of Wisdom in 8,000 Lines (Aṣṭasāhasrikāprajñāpāramitā Sūtra)*, skillful means applies to bodhisattvas’ ability to attain deep states of concentration without getting waylaid by attachment to rebirth in the form and formless realms and to their ability to see all phenomena as empty without abandoning sentient beings.

In *Bodhisattva Grounds*, Asaṅga describes two groups of skillful means:

(1) To accomplish all the qualities of a buddha within themselves, bodhisattvas practice the skillful means of:

1. looking upon all sentient beings with compassion,
2. knowing the ultimate nature of all conditioned phenomena,
3. desiring the pristine wisdom of unsurpassed awakening,
4. not abandoning saṃsāra by looking upon all sentient beings with compassion,
5. taking rebirth in saṃsāra with an unafflicted mind that knows the reality of conditioned phenomena and is motivated by great compassion,
6. spurring their own enthusiasm to fulfill their desire to attain full awakening.

(2) To ripen all other living beings, bodhisattvas cultivate the skillful means to:

1. cause even the smallest virtuous roots in living beings to ripen into immeasurable results by teaching sentient beings how to transform small actions into great virtue,
2. cause living beings to accomplish great roots of virtue without undue hardship—for example, by teaching them to rejoice in the virtues of all beings,
3. eliminate anger in those who dislike the Buddha’s doctrine—for example, by encouraging them to be tolerant of people who practice the Dharma even if they themselves do not wish to practice it,
4. encourage those who have a neutral attitude toward the Buddha’s doctrine to enter into it,
5. ripen the mental continuums of those who have entered into the doctrine,
6. cause those whose minds and roots of virtue are ripened to attain liberation.

### *The Perfection of Unshakable Resolve*

The Sanskrit term *praṇidhāna* (T. *smoṅ lam*) is often translated as “prayer” by Tibetan translators and as “vow” by Chinese translators. This is an unshakable resolve—something more than a wish, an aspiration, or a prayer—to do particular great deeds for the benefit of sentient beings. In other words, this perfection is about making strong resolutions that we act on for the benefit of sentient beings. It is not about making prayers to the Buddha or taking ethical vows. The Medicine Buddha made twelve unshakable resolves, Amitābha Buddha made forty-eight, Samantabhadra made ten,<sup>12</sup> Mañjuśrī made 141 resolves,<sup>13</sup> and so on. Of the ten unshakable resolves of Samantabhadra, seven comprise the seven-limb prayer that is found in many practices. In the *Array of Stalks Sūtra*, another three are added to become ten resolves:

1. Pay homage and respect to all buddhas.

2. Praise all the buddhas.
3. Make abundant offerings.
4. Confess misdeeds and destructive actions.
5. Rejoice in one's own and others' merits and virtues.
6. Request the buddhas to turn the Dharma wheel.
7. Request the buddhas to remain in the world.
8. Follow the teachings of the buddhas at all times.
9. Accommodate, benefit, and live harmoniously with all living beings.
10. Dedicate all merits and virtues universally to all sentient beings.

Bodhisattvas make unshakable resolves to accomplish activities for sentient beings that cannot be actualized, at least not in the near future—for example, resolving to go to the hell realms to benefit even one sentient being or promising to lead all sentient beings from saṃsāra's duḥkha. Making such unshakable resolves is not a useless pursuit, nor is it fantasy. Rather, it strengthens bodhisattvas' determination to be of whatever benefit they possibly can to whichever sentient being is in need, regardless of the difficulties it may entail for them personally. As ordinary beings who have limited physical and mental abilities, we have to assess what we can actually do before acting. Nevertheless, making such wonderful unshakable resolves, even if they seem unrealistic, expands the scope and strength of our mind so that gradually and steadily we will be able to increase our capacity to be of benefit to others.

Bodhisattvas cultivate unshakable resolves and extraordinary aspirations to benefit all sentient beings. In his *Differentiation of the Three Vows*, Sakya Paṇḍita says that bodhisattvas have two types of aspirations: those that can be accomplished and those that cannot. For example, in *Engaging in the Bodhisattvas' Deeds*, Śāntideva aspires for many outcomes that cannot actually occur (BCA 10.2, 10.41):

May all beings everywhere  
plagued by sufferings of body and mind,  
obtain an ocean of happiness and joy  
by virtue of my merits.

May no living creature suffer,  
commit evil, or ever fall ill.  
May no one be afraid or belittled,  
with a mind weighed down by depression.

And Samantabhadra makes these unshakable resolves in the “King of Prayers” in the *Flower Ornament Sūtra* (*Avataṃsaka Sūtra*):

Purifying the power of all polluted actions,  
crushing the power of disturbing emotions at their root,  
defusing the power of interfering forces,  
I shall perfect the power of the bodhisattva practice...

Limitless is the end of space,  
likewise, limitless are living beings,  
thus, limitless are karma and afflictions.  
May my aspiration’s reach be limitless as well.

Generating such unshakable resolves and magnificent aspirations is valuable because it enhances our determination to transcend our present hindrances. Such resolve gives us great courage to overcome self-centeredness and integrate bodhicitta with our mind. In addition, when we are in the position to help someone directly, we won’t hesitate out of laziness or lack of confidence.

Aspirational prayers and unshakable resolves set our intention and clarify our aims. It’s important to dedicate the merit from working to actualize them for the same aims. By doing so, the merit won’t be exhausted until we attain full awakening. The Buddha said in the *Sūtra Requested by Sāgaramati* (*Sāgaramatipariṣcchā Sūtra*):

Just as a drop of water that falls into the great ocean  
will never disappear until the ocean itself runs dry,  
merit totally dedicated to supreme awakening  
will never disappear until supreme awakening is reached.



## *The Perfection of Power*

The ninth perfection is the perfection of power. This is the strength to not be overcome by afflictions and other obscurations. Abhayākaragupta's commentary on the *Ornament of Clear Realizations* (*Abhisamayālaṃkāra*) entitled *Ornament for the Subduer's Intention* (*Munimatālaṃkāra*) speaks of thirteen kinds of power that bodhisattvas perfect:

1. The power of thought is the power of no longer indulging in the afflictions, because they have been abandoned.
2. The power of superior thought is to train well in the pristine wisdom of the bodhisattva grounds.
3. The power of retention is to remember all the Dharma teachings they have heard or read.
4. The power of meditative stability is the ability to remain in deep concentration without being distracted, no matter what they are doing.
5. The power of perfect endowments is knowing distinctly the behavior of each sentient being in the countless realms.
6. The power of fulfillment is to be able to fulfill all their aims.
7. The power of self-confidence is being skilled in distinguishing and examining all the Buddha's qualities.
8. The power of unshakable resolve is not to give up engaging in the activities of all the buddhas.
9. The power of perfection is to completely ripen the Buddha's qualities within themselves and sentient beings by teaching them, and not to give up deeds to benefit sentient beings.
10. The power of great love is to not relinquish the supreme effort to protect all sentient beings without being biased.
11. The power of great compassion is to eliminate all suffering of all sentient beings without being biased.
12. The power of ultimate reality is to actualize within themselves the experience of the ultimate reality that is like an illusion.

13. The power of being blessed by all the tathāgatas refers to approaching the pristine wisdom of omniscience by all means.

As part of the “King of Prayers: The Extraordinary Aspiration of the Practice of Samantabhadra” in chapter 40 of the *Flower Ornament Sūtra*, the bodhisattva Samantabhadra spoke of actualizing ten powers and overcoming the power of adverse factors:

May I achieve the power of swift, magical emanation,  
the power to lead to the Great Vehicle through every approach,  
the power of always beneficial activity,  
the power of love pervading all realms,  
the power of all-surpassing merit,  
the power of supreme knowledge unobstructed by discrimination,  
and through the powers of wisdom, skillful means, and samādhi,  
may I achieve the perfect power of awakening.

Purifying the power of all contaminated actions,  
crushing the power of disturbing emotions at their root,  
defusing the power of interfering forces,  
I shall perfect the power of the bodhisattva practice.

Contemplating these powers of ārya bodhisattvas gives us a glimpse of the qualities we will gain by practicing the Mahāyāna path. Creating the causes for such powers and using them to benefit ourselves and others will bring us great satisfaction, confidence, and exuberance to practice.

## REFLECTION

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1. Contemplate the various types of powers that bodhisattvas perfect. Imagine what it would be like to have each one.
  2. Aspire to create the causes to one day attain these powers and use them to work for the well-being of all sentient beings.
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## *The Perfection of Pristine Wisdom*

In some cases the words “wisdom” (*prajñā*) and “pristine wisdom” (*jñāna*) are synonymous, while in other contexts their meanings differ.<sup>14</sup> In the context of the perfections, Asaṅga differentiates wisdom and pristine wisdom in *Bodhisattva Grounds*:

That knowing the presentation of all phenomena as they are is the perfection of pristine wisdom. The wisdom that engages in apprehending the ultimate is the perfection of wisdom. That engaged in apprehending the conventional is the perfection of pristine wisdom. These are the particularities of the two.

In the first sentence, “all phenomena” refers to the diversity of phenomena and connotes conventional truths. These are the objects of the perfection of pristine wisdom. In the second sentence, “ultimate” refers to emptiness, and the wisdom engaged in directly perceiving it is the wisdom of meditative equipoise on emptiness, also called the “perfection of wisdom.” The perfection of wisdom is defined as an exalted knower that is conjoined with a union of serenity and special insight that serves as the means for proceeding to or remaining in nonabiding nirvāṇa.<sup>15</sup> “The conventional” in the following sentence refers to the method or the vast aspect of the path.

In summary, reflect on the meaning and purpose of each of the ten perfections as presented by the *Ten Grounds Sūtra* (*Daśabhūmika Sūtra*, DBS 143):

In each successive moment, this bodhisattva carries on the complete implementation of the bodhisattva’s ten pāramitās and the ten grounds’ practices. And how is this the case? This is because this bodhisattva mahāsattva takes the great compassion as foremost in each successive moment and because, as he cultivates all of the excellent qualities of the Buddha, he dedicates it all to the realization of the Tathāgata’s wisdom.

As for his cultivation of the ten pāramitās:

The bodhisattva's bestowing on all beings all roots of virtue he cultivates in pursuit of the path to buddhahood constitutes the perfection of generosity.

His ability to extinguish all heat associated with the afflictions constitutes the perfection of ethical conduct.

His taking kindness and compassion as foremost and refraining from harming any being constitutes the perfection of fortitude.

His insatiable striving to acquire ever more supreme roots of virtue constitutes the perfection of joyous effort.

His maintaining an unscattered mind dedicated to cultivating the path even as he constantly progresses toward omniscience constitutes the perfection of meditative stability.

His realization of acquiescent fortitude of the eternal nonproduction of all phenomena constitutes the perfection of wisdom.

His bringing forth of countless expressions of wisdom constitutes the perfection of skillful means.

His aspiration to develop the supreme wisdom constitutes the perfection of unshakable resolve.

His ability to remain invulnerable to obstruction or ruination by any followers of non-Buddhist paths or by any demons constitutes the perfection of power.

His accomplishment of knowing the characteristic features of all phenomena in accordance with reality constitutes the perfection of pristine wisdom.

### *Ultimate Bodhicitta*

Many texts refer to the “two bodhicittas”—conventional bodhicitta and ultimate bodhicitta. The former is actual bodhicitta, the altruistic intention that is a primary mind held by two aspirations—the aspirations to work for the well-being of sentient beings and to attain full awakening in order to do so. This is the bodhicitta spoken about so far in this chapter.

Ultimate bodhicitta is the wisdom directly realizing emptiness. While it is called “bodhicitta,” it is not actually bodhicitta. Bodhi means “awakening” and citta means “mind,” so bodhicitta is the mind of awakening. Ultimate bodhicitta is the direct perceiver of the emptiness of awakening. Its observed object is awakening, and it realizes the emptiness of awakening. Conventional bodhicitta also focuses on awakening, but it aspires to actualize it for the benefit of all sentient beings. Nāgārjuna wrote a beautiful work entitled *Commentary on Bodhicitta*. Its main topic is ultimate bodhicitta, so there is much discussion of emptiness. As an aside, toward the end of the work, conventional bodhicitta is taught.

Ultimate bodhicitta can be understood in two ways, the way in common with the Sūtra Vehicle and the way unique to the Tantric Vehicle. In the Sūtra Vehicle, it is the mind that is a union of serenity and insight that directly perceives emptiness and is conjoined with conventional bodhicitta. In highest yoga tantra, the fundamental innate clear-light mind that is focused on emptiness is called “ultimate bodhicitta.”<sup>16</sup> Its object is the subtlest object, emptiness, and the mind is the subtlest subject, the fundamental innate clear-light mind. In both the Perfection Vehicle and the Tantric Vehicle, the object of ultimate bodhicitta—the emptiness of inherent existence—is the same; the difference is in the subject—the mind realizing it.

In the *Treatise on the Middle Way*, Nāgārjuna speaks of the pacification of elaborations. Bodhi is the state in which all elaborations have been pacified. In the Sūtra Vehicle, these elaborations are the appearance of inherent existence, whereas in highest yoga tantra, elaborations are not only the appearance of inherent existence but also the white appearance, the red increase, and the black near-attainment. These are three levels of mind that are subtler than our sense consciousnesses and waking mind but are coarser than the subtlest mind—the fundamental innate clear-light mind.

Subtler than these three appearances is the fundamental innate clear-light mind. This subtle innate clear-light mind exists in all beings and is the basis of all coarser levels of mind. The coarser minds such as our sense consciousnesses and everyday mental consciousness emerge from it and dissolve back into it. When coarser minds are active, the subtlest innate clear-light mind is dormant. In Tantra, advanced practitioners who

understand emptiness can activate this subtlest mind and use it to apprehend emptiness.

In Tantra, ultimate bodhicitta—the subtlest innate mind that is absorbed nondually in emptiness—is not only free from the appearance of subject and object, the appearance of conventional phenomena, and the appearance of inherent existence but is also free from the white, the red increase, and the black near-attainment appearances. Here ultimate bodhicitta is the fundamental innate clear-light mind that directly perceives emptiness.

Because the subtle innate clear-light mind pervades all coarser states of mind and because it is their basis, it is said to exist at all times. Still, according to Tantra, these coarser states of mind must dissolve and the subtle innate clear-light must manifest alone and realize emptiness for it to be called “ultimate bodhicitta,” the final cause of awakening.

A meditator is first able to make this mind manifest on the completion stage of highest yoga tantra, immediately before the arising of the impure illusory body. It is also manifest on the following levels, the meaning clear light and the union of clear light and illusory body. Although the Sūtra Vehicle does not speak of this subtle innate clear-light mind, the topic of buddha nature (*tathāgatagarbha*) in the Sūtra Vehicle hints at it and leads practitioners to then explore Tantra.

The *Guhyasamāja Root Tantra* says:

One’s mind is primordially unborn;  
it is in the nature of emptiness.

Interpreted from the viewpoint of the Sūtra Vehicle, this means that the mind has been empty of inherent existence from beginningless time. There has never been a time when it has inherently existed. Thus it is not the case that realizing emptiness changes the nature of the mind from inherently existent to non-inherently existent. Rather, the wisdom mind of ultimate bodhicitta realizes what has always been the ultimate nature of the mind.

In the unique Tantric interpretation of these lines, “primordially unborn” means that the mind—specifically the innate clear-light mind—is primordially devoid of all coarser states of mind. This subtlest mind

changes moment by moment, is pure from adventitious grosser minds, and travels to awakening.<sup>17</sup>

Regardless of whether ultimate bodhicitta is spoken of from a Sūtra or Tantra perspective, it is a wisdom that directly realizes emptiness. But not every wisdom directly realizing emptiness is ultimate bodhicitta, because for a wisdom to become ultimate bodhicitta, it must be complemented by conventional bodhicitta. Thus the wisdom nondually perceiving emptiness in the mindstream of a śrāvaka or solitary-realizer learner is not called “ultimate bodhicitta”—although it is a true path and the wisdom of an ārya—because it is not complemented by conventional bodhicitta.

### *Conclusion*

The Buddha said there is no second door to liberation—only the wisdom realizing emptiness can remove all obscurations. To have a deep understanding of emptiness, in addition to studying and meditating on the stages of the path (*lamrim*), we should study and reflect on the view as propounded in the four philosophical tenet systems. By practicing the stages of the path, we will develop a proper motivation for studying and meditating on emptiness and will accumulate the merit necessary to realize it. By studying the tenet schools, we will be challenged to think deeply about the nature of reality. The understanding of emptiness we gain from this will in turn help our meditation and practice of lamrim. Thus I recommend that lamrim and tenets be taught together in Dharma centers and monasteries.

A big difference exists between having an intellectual understanding of a Dharma topic and gaining realization or experience of it. Intellectual understanding is not sufficient. Whatever we understand we should put into practice and try to integrate into our daily life so that it transforms our mind and heart. That is the purpose of spiritual practice.

I suggest that you spend some time reflecting on the meaning of each of these perfections and then examine how to apply them in daily life. Reading about these wondrous thoughts and deeds is inspiring, but even better is embodying them in the way you live. Contemplate when and how you can

practice the ten perfections. Then resolve to do your best to put them into practice.

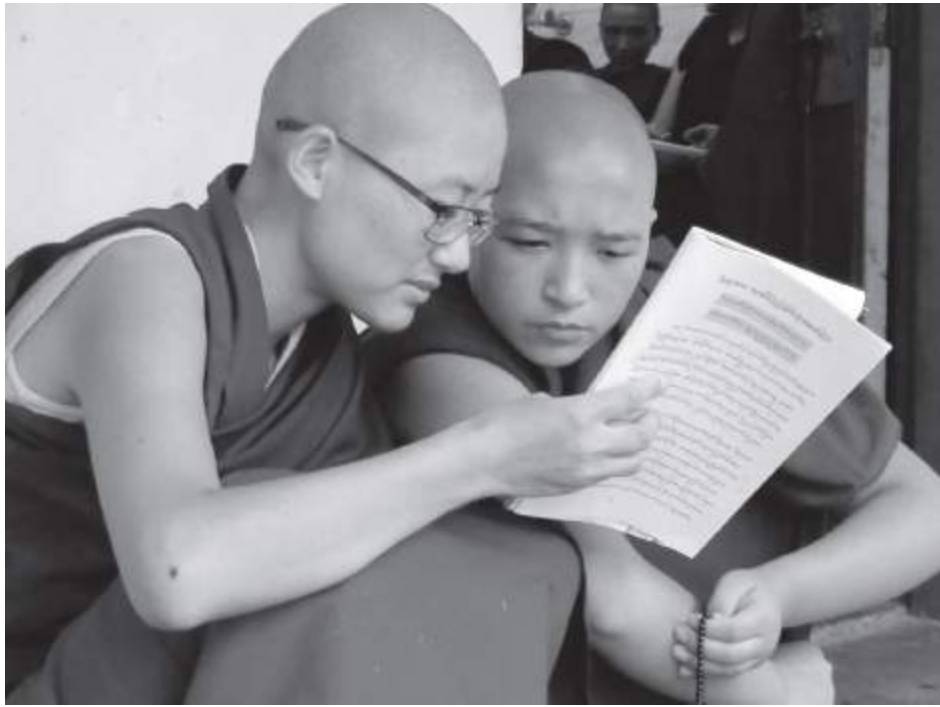
As ordinary beings, we select role models and fashion our goals and behavior by their example. Since we aim to cultivate compassion and make a positive contribution to society and to all sentient beings, I recommend taking ārya bodhisattvas as our role models. Maitreya describes bodhisattvas (RGV 1.70–71):

Though they are beyond all worldly matters,  
these [bodhisattvas] do not leave the world.  
They act for the sake of all worldly beings  
within the world, unblemished by its defects.

As a lotus will grow in the midst of water,  
not being polluted by the water's [faults],  
these [āryas] are born in the world,  
unpolluted by any worldly phenomenon.

Contemplating their attitudes and actions inspires and uplifts us. It will take time to become like them, but can we think of anything more valuable to do?





## 4 | Sharing the Dharma

THE BODHISATTVA PRACTICE IS based on benefiting others. As many scriptures in both the Pāli and the Sanskrit canons attest, “The gift of the Dharma is the highest gift.” The Dharma can be shared with others in a variety of ways. The way we live and conduct ourselves in everyday interactions is a subtle but powerful way to arouse people’s interest in the Buddha’s teachings. The behavior of a person who is humble, courteous, and loving touches the hearts of those who come in contact with them. Someone who speaks the truth without backing away is also a strong force for good in the world.

The most obvious way of sharing the Dharma is by giving teachings. However, teaching the Dharma is a great responsibility that must be approached gradually, with the correct motivation, and skillfully. In addition, not everyone is inclined to be a teacher. Some people prefer to lead meditations, counsel others using Dharma principles, or be socially engaged with projects that directly benefit others in this life. This can range from working in an animal shelter to aiding the elderly and infirm to volunteering in a homeless shelter. Each of us must discover our individual talents and inclinations and share the Dharma accordingly. The Buddhist community needs people to share the Dharma through a wide range of activities. No matter which way we choose, it is essential to respect others who show their love and compassion in different ways.

The Tibetan, Pāli, and Chinese scriptures all speak of four ways of attracting people in order to benefit them; these are also called the four all-embracing virtues.

*Four Ways of Gathering Disciples in Tibetan Buddhism*

Learning and practicing the Dharma for our own benefit alone is limited: we are only one person. Sharing what we have learned with others so that they will benefit is important, especially for those aspiring to become buddhas. To do this, in addition to working on our own practice, it is necessary to establish good relationships with others. In Tibetan Buddhism, the process of attracting people so that they will be interested in learning the Dharma is traditionally described by the four ways of gathering or assembling disciples (*samgrahavastu*, *saṅgahavatthu*). These four are directed toward building suitable conditions to be able to teach the Dharma and lead others on the path.

The six perfections are taught from the viewpoint of how to attain awakening ourselves, whereas the four ways of gathering disciples are given from the perspective of how to lead others on the path to awakening. The four are (1) being generous and giving material aid, (2) teaching the Dharma according to the capacity of the disciples, (3) encouraging them to practice, and (4) acting congruently and living the teachings through example.

The first, *being generous*, involves helping others materially by supplying them with what they need. Others will be attracted by our generosity and that opens the door for us to teach them the Dharma. Also, giving them things ensures that those who are impoverished have the material requisites—food, shelter, clothes, and medicine—necessary to learn the Dharma. Without these basic needs being fulfilled, sincere disciples will be unable to practice. The Vinaya speaks directly to this by saying that the preceptors who give monastic ordination are responsible for not only teaching the Dharma to their monastic students but also providing them with food and shelter.

But more broadly, being generous entails giving what others need. When there are natural disasters, endemic poverty, or outbreaks of diseases, Buddhist organizations such as temples, monasteries, and Dharma centers can step forward and assist as they are able. There are now some Buddhist charity organizations that do this, and I encourage their good work.<sup>18</sup> This indicates to the public that as Buddhists we don't just talk about generosity and kindness but we also act in that way.

Of course, generosity begins at the individual level. Whether we give to charity organizations or give a Dharma book to a friend who has questions about life, whether we give food to a beggar or small gifts to children, generosity opens our heart, benefits others, and, because we are Buddhist, attracts others to the Dharma.

Some religions have used material generosity as a way to convert people to their faith. As Buddhists, this should never be our motivation. If sentient beings have needs and we can fulfill them, we should do that, without any expectation that they become Buddhist. However, if they are then attracted to us and wish to learn what we practice, we should fulfill their wish and teach them the Dharma.

The second way to gather disciples is to *teach the Dharma in a way that appeals to them*. This may involve various ways of speaking and different topics, depending on the situation. For example, when talking with strangers in a public place, ask about what interests them in order to make their acquaintance. When a friend who has just undergone a breakup or someone who is grieving the death of a dear one approaches you, speak in a way that consoles them and broadens their perspective. When you encounter those in difficult circumstances, give advice pertinent to their problem and teach them Dharma methods that will help them in that situation.

When someone asks Dharma questions, respond as best you can; and when they request teachings, teach what you are capable of teaching. This is the gift of the Dharma. It is said that this excels all other gifts because through learning the Dharma, others become capable of creating the causes for fortunate rebirths, liberation, and full awakening. Without bias, teach anyone who is sincere—common people and intellectuals, the poor and the rich, female and male, ordained and lay. Teach only the Dharma that you know well and can explain without error. It's also important to teach when the other person's mind is ripe and the circumstances are suitable—that is, to discern their disposition and interest and teach them accordingly to lead them on the path to virtue.

There is nothing better than to speak about and listen to the Buddha's teachings. The scriptures speak of twenty benefits of teaching the Dharma. For example, when we teach with a pure heart and good motivation, then as

the students' intelligence and understanding increase, a corresponding increase in our understanding will occur as well. Natural sounds are neutral, and much of our ordinary speech triggers afflictions, whereas the Buddha's teachings lead us from all duḥkha. Instead of chatting to enhance our ego or for amusement, let's use language for beneficial purposes.

The third is to *encourage others* to practice the Dharma they have learned. This entails guiding and supporting others on the path. To do this requires great patience and diligence. Sometimes people will appreciate the help you give, other times they may turn their back even though you have guided them for a long time. Cultivate the ability to accept all responses patiently, knowing that sentient beings are under the influence of afflictions. With compassion, remain open should their mental states change, and with forgiveness, welcome them if they sincerely want to return.

Fourth, *act in ways congruent with what you teach*. Being a good example inspires others to practice and increases their faith in the Three Jewels. They feel inspired and want to learn and practice the Dharma more. If you are in the role of a meditation guide, a Dharma instructor, or a spiritual mentor, it is essential to embody the Dharma in your actions. Practicing what you preach and living your life according to the Buddha's teaching—that is, doing what you instruct others to do—is essential in order to be worthy of others' trust and to be able to continue to benefit them.

There have been a few scandals as a result of the improper behavior of Dharma teachers. This may occur because the teacher's practice lacks depth and their Dharma knowledge is only intellectual. It may occur because teachers become infatuated with the devotion of their students or don't apply antidotes to the afflictions. There are no "days off" when a Dharma teacher can forget about the Buddha's teachings and act like a worldly person. Whatever the reason, it is essential to act with conscientiousness, mindfulness, and introspective awareness. Then people will develop genuine appreciation and respect. If the teacher says one thing and does another, how can the student respect him or her? Without earning the students' respect, a spiritual mentor cannot lead others on the path and creates the cause for their own suffering and unfortunate rebirth.

## *Four Ways of Sustaining Favorable Relationships in the Pāli Tradition*

The four ways of sustaining favorable relationships (note the difference in translation of the same Pāli and Sanskrit term) appear several times in the Aṅguttara Nikāya of the Pāli canon. Here is one passage describing them (AN 9.5):

There are four ways of gathering disciples: (1) by giving, (2) by friendly and endearing speech, (3) by encouraging acts and beneficent conduct, and (4) by acting impartially, in a way equal [to one's words]. Among gifts, the best is the gift of the Dhamma. Among types of endearing speech, the best is repeatedly teaching the Dhamma to one who is interested in it and listens with eager ears. Among types of beneficent conduct, the best is when one encourages, settles, and establishes a person without faith in the accomplishment of faith, an unethical person in the accomplishment of virtuous behavior, a miserly person in the accomplishment of generosity, and an unwise person in the accomplishment of wisdom. Among types of impartiality or equality, the best is that a stream-enterer is equal to a stream-enterer, a once-returned is equal to a once-returned, a nonreturner is equal to a nonreturner, and an arahant is equal to an arahant. This is called the power of sustaining favorable relationships.

The above passage is oriented toward leading others to the Dharma. In the first two ways of gathering disciples we find the famous quotation, “The best gift is the gift of the Dharma.” Of all the things to give to others, the Dharma alone will lead them out of duḥkha and to joy. Giving the Dharma of course does not preclude giving other necessities of life, especially to support those who sincerely want to practice the Dharma. In the third way, to encourage others to practice, we arouse, instill, and strengthen their good qualities, helping their mental, verbal, and physical actions become virtuous. Finally, whatever our level of practice and realizations, we should act equal to that. Becoming complacent or arrogant so that our actions are

not equal to our words or our actions are not equal to our level of practice disillusions others and is the opposite of establishing and sustaining productive Dharma relationships. “Impartiality” also refers to treating others as we would like them to treat us—in other words, establishing a feeling of closeness that is free from all feelings of superiority or inferiority.

These four apply to whatever type of relationship we would like to establish and sustain with others. The *Commentary to the Aṅguttara Nikāya* says (AN n.687):

Some people are to be sustained by a gift, so a gift should be given to them. Others expect endearing speech, so they should be addressed with pleasant words. Beneficent conduct is talk on increasing goodness; these people should be told, “You should do this, you shouldn’t do that. You should associate with this person, not with that person.” Impartiality is being the same in happiness and suffering. This means sitting together with them, living together, and eating together.

One day Hatthaka of Āḷavī, one of the Buddha’s foremost lay disciples, together with over five hundred lay followers, went to meet the Buddha. The Buddha asked Hatthaka how he sustained such a large group of lay followers, to which Hatthaka cited the four ways of sustaining favorable relationships as taught by the Buddha (AN 24.24).

### *Four All-Embracing Bodhisattva Virtues in Chinese Buddhism*

In Chinese Buddhism the four ways of attracting are known as the four all-embracing (bodhisattva) virtues:

(1) To *be generous* necessitates counteracting selfishness and extending ourselves to others. Generosity takes three forms. The first is giving material and financial support. Even if we do not have many possessions or a lot of money ourselves, we can still share and give something. A generous heart is free and comfortable, whereas a miserly heart is tight and fearful. Second is giving sentient beings confidence and freedom from fear, worry,

and anxiety. This may take the form of reassuring a child afraid of the dark, a student worried about passing exams, or a person fearing for their life due to illness or assault. Giving them confidence can also be done by instructing them in a particular skill or field of knowledge. Third is teaching living beings the Dharma of the Three Baskets. Of course, to give this to others, we must know it well ourselves; otherwise we run the risk of teaching wrong views that can harm people for a long time to come. However, we can share what we do understand and also let people know how much we have benefited from studying and practicing the Buddha's teachings.

(2) *Affectionate speech* includes speaking politely to others, consoling them, and giving them wise advice, without forcing our ideas on them. Bodhisattvas respect others and listen carefully to what they say. They praise, encourage, and comfort others, and always think about how to influence others so that they will grow in virtue. As with practicing generosity, genuinely affectionate and friendly speech will attract people to us so that we will be able to teach and guide them in the Dharma, which will help them in the long term.

(3) *Conducting ourselves in a profitable way* entails keeping our body, speech, and mind in line with the Dharma. Such behavior inspires those around us, no matter what field we work in. For example, one bodhisattva spent most of his life repairing roads, building bridges, and carrying things for the elderly without ever losing heart in the face of difficulty. Social welfare projects run by Buddhist individuals or organizations show the public that we care and that our compassion is not merely at the level of words. Acting in ways that directly benefit others attracts them to us and thereby to the Dharma. Bodhisattvas extend help to others impartially and maintain an attitude of equal care and concern for all, no matter how someone acts in return. This opens the door for bodhisattvas to engage with people from all social classes, races, religions, ethnic groups, sexes, and so on. It also enables them to work continuously for others because they do not delight in praise and appreciation or become discouraged due to blame and criticism.

(4) *Cooperating with others* and adapting ourselves to what benefits them involves providing them with a good example of how to live ethically and with kindness. For example, while being employed in an office or



factory, we work together with others without straying from our ethical values. At parties we are friendly and have a good time without drinking or taking drugs. Living in accord with our precepts can occur naturally. We don't draw attention to it, but others observe and it makes them think. This can exert a powerful influence on others who usually go along with the crowd without first examining the effects of their actions. Seeing someone who is happy without being egocentric could attract them to the Buddha's teachings or inspire them to live in accordance with the values of their own religion. In either case, they will create virtue and avoid nonvirtue.

Practicing the four all-embracing virtues benefits us, the people we interact with, and society in general. These four are methods used by bodhisattvas to inspire others' interest in the Dharma and persuade them to learn and practice it.

## REFLECTION

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Practicing the four ways of attracting others so that we can teach them the Dharma and inspire them in goodness is prudent advice for relating to others, no matter what the situation. Those who aspire to spread the Dharma to new regions and to sustain it where it already exists should take these four to heart.

1. Being generous opens the door to establishing good relationships.
2. Speaking pleasantly in a way that connects with others and being friendly and caring about them establishes a good relationship.
3. Encouraging others to conduct themselves in a wholesome way helps them take a good direction in life. One way to do this is by teaching the Buddhadharma and creating conditions in which others can practice. Another is by living an exemplary life yourself.
4. Behaving according to your words and living according to the Dharma shows others that you are trustworthy, consistent, and wise in your decisions. Cooperating with others and living in accord with your precepts and ethical values not only inspires them but also ensures that

you do not harm them by being hypocritical and uncontrolled in your behavior.

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### *Suggestions for Western Dharma Teachers*

In addition to the four ways of attracting others that are found in the scriptures, I would like to offer some suggestions specifically for Westerners who teach the Dharma. Although what follows applies to Asian teachers as well, Westerners do not have centuries-long lineages of Buddhist teachers in their own culture to look to as examples.

I appreciate the enthusiasm of Western teachers and acknowledge how much they have done to spread the Buddhadharma, to benefit sentient beings, and to decrease suffering. As Buddhism spreads in your countries, more of you will become teachers. Nevertheless, Buddhism is new in the West, and you do not yet have a culturally suitable role model to follow for being a Dharma teacher or for a proper teacher-student relationship. You must proceed slowly and carefully. You are pioneers now, and over time such role models will naturally evolve.

Before instructing others, it is essential to cultivate your own understanding under the guidance of a qualified spiritual mentor. Listen to teachings, study hard, and relate what you learn to your life. In this way your level of understanding will grow from just gathering information to critical reflection that impacts your life and your choices. With a stable understanding derived from years of study and practice as well as humble awareness that there is much more to learn, you will be able to explain the Dharma well. Otherwise, as Dharmakīrti said, how can you explain something to others that is just words to yourself? If you can speak from experience and deep understanding, your words will make a difference to others.

Western teachers have asked me: What qualities must we cultivate to become a reliable spiritual mentor to others? Who and how should we teach? The Buddha gave a vast variety of teachings; which ones are most suitable for us to teach? How do we work with students without becoming emotionally entangled with them? How do we ensure that we remain

balanced so that our practice progresses? I will respond to these thoughtful questions below.

### *Qualities to Develop*

Chapter 4 of *The Foundation of Buddhist Practice* described the qualities students should look for in prospective Dharma teachers. These qualities remain the same, no matter the country, culture, or person. You must try to develop those same qualities in your practice and apply those same standards to yourself to become a qualified teacher. Skimping on the development of your good qualities while expecting to be treated as a spiritual master won't do.

Before beginning to teach, you must have mental stability derived through your Dharma practice, so that your life is calmer. Students see teachers as role models who have the possibility to help them. If the teacher is a happy and peaceful person, they will admire her and want to learn from her. If she is distracted and anxious, students will wonder whether Dharma practice actually subdues the mind. In addition, if the teacher is always preoccupied, disorganized, and stressed, she won't have time to pay attention to students' needs or to teach them in a serious, consistent manner.

If you wish to teach the Dharma, you must examine to what extent you possess the ten qualities of a Mahāyāna spiritual mentor: look closely at your ethical conduct, meditative experience, understanding of emptiness, and knowledge of the scriptures. To what extent do you care about the well-being, temporal and ultimate, of the students? Are you irascible, surly, and quick to anger, such that students are afraid to approach you? Are you content and patient, or do you constantly complain about one thing or another? It's important to be conscientious and with mindfulness and introspective awareness monitor our attitudes and behavior in order to benefit and not harm the people who sincerely turn to us for help.

Do not be satisfied with knowing only one meditation technique, one scripture, or one tantric practice, but for the benefit of others, strive to overcome your limitations and expand your knowledge. In his *Great Treatise*, Tsongkhapa says (LC 3:349–50):

Each Mahāyāna scripture—from summaries to [the most extensive texts]—gives a great many teachings on the profound meaning, but also leaves many things out. So you must draw points that are not taught [in certain texts] from [other] texts that do teach them, and you must draw points that are not [taught] extensively [in certain texts] from [other texts] where they are [taught] extensively. You should understand that this is true for the category of the vast [bodhisattva deeds] as well.<sup>19</sup> A partial [path], in which either the profound or the vast is missing cannot be considered [complete]. This is why it is often said that one [must be] skilled in all vehicles in order to be a spiritual mentor who is fully qualified to teach the path.

You must be able to discern the difference between an intellectual understanding of the teachings, which is comparatively easy to gain, and realization and experience of them, which is more difficult to cultivate and requires years of continuous practice. Do not be infatuated with a few blissful or unusual meditative experiences and think that you have become a great sage qualified to teach the masses. Rather, continue to see yourself as a student. After all, until you attain full awakening you are the Buddha's disciple. Once in a while you may temporarily be in the role of teaching the Dharma. Improving the state of your mind is your principal occupation, not becoming a famous teacher or building a big Buddhist organization with yourself at the head.

Social status, wealth, or charisma are not qualities that make a good Dharma teacher. Rather, it is the ability to show someone what to practice and what to abandon; a teacher must practice such instructions themselves.

### *Motivation*

Be aware of the audience's buddha nature and feel honored to share the Dharma. When you teach, you must embody the Dharma. You are not just relaying information. Recite the text clearly and explain it with compassion. Always cultivate a motivation of compassion, care, and concern for the students. The Buddha comments (SN 16.3):

A monastic teaches the Dhamma to others with the thought “Oh, may they listen to the Dhamma from me! Having listened, may they gain confidence in the Dhamma! Being confident, may they show their confidence to me!” Such a monastic’s teaching of the Dhamma is impure.

This person ostensibly wants others to gain confidence in the Dharma, but he is not necessarily wishing for the students to understand or practice and receive the benefit of doing so. This person lacks humility and does not respect the Buddha and Dharma. His principal wish is more to receive offerings, reputation, and status.

Some religious leaders, both Buddhist and non-Buddhist, use religion as a way to procure money or to earn a living. Doing this not only harms the teacher, it also damages the faith of others, causing them to turn away from spiritual teachings that could benefit them. For this reason, Dharma teachers and leaders must continuously check their motivation to make sure one of the eight worldly concerns has not crept in.

In the above passage, the Buddha was speaking to monastics, who were the principal teachers of the Dharma at the time. Nowadays many lay practitioners—who have families and children to support—also teach, making the issue of earning one’s livelihood through offerings from teaching the Dharma even more delicate. This requires a great deal of thought and care, so that one’s motivation remains pure while sharing the Dharma with others.

Someone with the correct motivation genuinely respects the Dharma and recognizes that she has the good fortune to share it with others. Her wish is for others to learn, understand, practice, and realize the Dharma. She teaches with compassion and sincere concern that wishes the students to be free from cyclic existence. The Buddha says (SN 16.3):

A monastic teaches the Dhamma to others with the thought “The Dhamma is well expounded by the Blessed One, directly visible, immediate, inviting one to come and see, applicable, to be personally experienced by the wise. Oh, may they listen to the Dhamma from me! Having listened,

may they understand the Dhamma. Having understood, may they practice accordingly!” Thus he teaches the Dhamma to others because of the intrinsic excellence of the Dhamma; he teaches the Dhamma to others from compassion and sympathy, out of tender concern. Such a monastic’s teaching of the Dhamma is pure.

Sincerity is an important quality to have when teaching the Dharma. The statue of the Buddha—emaciated when he was fasting for six years—illustrates his inner strength and determination. He was sincere and willing to undergo hardship to accomplish his spiritual aims. We are followers of this great master, but sometimes we do not listen to his advice. Some people use the Buddha’s name and his teachings for their own personal gain, without taking them seriously. This is sad. It is better to remain a nonbeliever than to distort the Buddha’s teachings or use them to become famous or wealthy. That would be more honest. Some so-called Buddhists are hypocrites. They present themselves as followers of Buddha Śākyamuni, but live and think differently than he did.

If we are sincere, what others say does not matter. For example, some people say I’m a living Buddha; others think I’m almost like a devil. I always remember that I’m a simple Buddhist monk. If I’m honest, even though others do things against me, gradually the truth of the situation will become clear. If we are cunning and manipulative, we may seem to be successful for a while, but when we die we will have to face what we have done. No one can help us at that time, even the Buddha. Our future is in our own hands, so we must check our motivation and our actions well.

To be a Dharma teacher you must not only know the Dharma well and teach with a compassionate motivation, you must also be humble. Generally speaking, people in the West who are educated, wealthy, or powerful tend to be proud. Although their knowledge may be limited, their confidence is often inflated. If a teacher knows a lot about Buddhism but practices little, pride may easily arise. Therefore do not become so busy teaching that you neglect your own practice. If your practice is successful, you will become more modest and thus more suitable to teach others.

Dharma teachers must also cultivate deep patience. Because students are under the influence of afflictions and karma, they will make mistakes. They will not always practice what you instruct or follow your advice. Sometimes they may act out their emotional needs. Be careful to act wisely in these situations and be patient with students when they do not meet your expectations. Do not give up on others; remember that this is an excellent opportunity to increase your compassion.

As teachers become more well-known and popular, they should become more humble. If you become arrogant, demanding, or controlling, it is a sure sign that you have neglected your Dharma practice. Śāriputra once described the awe-inspiring qualities of the Buddha while the Buddha sat humbly listening. Afterward, Venerable Udāyi, who witnessed this, marveled (DN 28.20):

It is marvelous how content the Blessed One is, how satisfied and restrained, when being endowed with such power and influence he does not make a display of himself! If the wanderers professing other doctrines were able to discern in themselves even one of such qualities, they would proclaim it with a banner!

However many people may gather around you to learn the Dharma, remember that your first job is that of a practitioner, a disciple. Maintain a good relationship with your teachers and practice as they instruct. For the purpose of instilling humility and of not being spoiled by praise or fame, bow to the Three Jewels and to the lineage of teachers as well as reflect on impermanence before sitting on the Dharma seat.

### *How to Teach*

Promoting Buddhism in a non-Buddhist society with the idea to convert people is not right. Religion should not be forced on anyone. However, when people want to learn about Buddhism, our responsibility is to teach them or refer them to teachers. Some people will find the Buddhist approach more suitable and will naturally grow in the Dharma. Others will find other religions or no religion at all more fitting for their minds.

When people are new to Buddhism, teach them the qualities to look for in a spiritual mentor. Encourage people to be responsible and wise when they select their teachers. Do not tell them that they should become your student.

When I teach, I first think about my own experience. For example, before teaching the four truths, I consider the fact that I am impermanent and then explain impermanence according to my own experience. I do not pretend to be Avalokiteśvara or drop hints that would lead people to believe that I have high realizations. Similarly, when teaching about the afflictions and the methods to combat them, I first think about the way I deal with anger or face attachment and give myself as an example when explaining afflictions and their antidotes. In that way, while teaching others, I do analytical meditation at the same time. This way of teaching is very useful. However, this is not the case when making presentations on the high levels of the path, because I cannot talk about those based on my own experience. We must be honest when we teach. If we pretend to have realizations that we do not have, teaching will not benefit us and at best will be of limited benefit for others.

When you do not know the answer to a student's question, clearly say so. Evading the question, humiliating the person who asked, or making up an answer to avoid losing face are damaging to both the teacher and the student. Later, ask your teachers to explain these unclear points, discuss them with Dharma friends, and research them in the scriptures.

When you encounter difficulty, seek the help and guidance of others, and do not think that simply because you have the name "teacher" you should know everything. In addition, seek the advice of your teachers and the support of Dharma friends to handle difficulties that arise when working with students.

Although Tibetan custom is to be humble and say one does not know something even when one does, in some cases this is not wise. It could discourage students because they would think the teachings are just stories and lack a living tradition of realized practitioners. If we have some knowledge or experience, we should tell others that we gained this through continuous practice. For example, if we used to have a very bad temper, but that has lessened through our Dharma practice, people will be encouraged



to hear that. My style is to express openly the little experience I have on a topic so students do not think Dharma is merely an academic pursuit. In that way, they will be inspired to practice and develop realizations themselves.

However, we should not publicly say that we have insight into emptiness or have generated bodhicitta. Nor is it advisable to state that we have attained single-pointed concentration or tantric realizations. For monastics, lying about one's Dharma realizations is a root downfall, which means one is no longer a monastic. Boasting about one's realizations even when it is true is also a transgression, but a lesser one.

In general, it is better to tell students of your own internal struggles—that confronting anger, attachment, doubt, and so on requires persistence. Describe how you use the Dharma to purify and transform your mind. This level of discussion of your personal practice is permitted and advantageous. However, when doing this, avoid going to an extreme and turning a teaching situation into a tale about your emotions.

I avoid giving prescriptions to others as if the same advice did not pertain to me. Rather, I include myself—for example, saying, “When we get angry...” This reminds students that I am sincere and honest and expect the same from them.

In the sūtras, we read many dialogues that occurred between the Buddha and his disciples. The Buddha didn't simply lecture while his disciples listened passively. This system of questions and answers is good for both the teacher and the students. Ask the students questions and encourage them to be broadminded and creative when exploring various topics. In Tibetan monasteries it is said the most learning occurs in the debate yard—that is, students must discuss with one another. Sometimes they must struggle to understand a difficult point; in the end this gives them confidence. Learning the Dharma is not about remembering facts and concepts; it is about learning how to think properly, how to assess the state of our mind and improve it.

Don't expect yourself to answer everyone's questions. A hundred students will produce a hundred questions and a hundred problems. Today you answer one question and tomorrow another one arises because of that answer. Although the Buddha lived for eighty years, he was not able to answer all his disciples' queries. Even all the sūtras, treatises, and

commentaries in the Kangyur (the Buddha's teachings) and the Tengyur (the major Indian commentaries) cannot quench all queries. But if you know the structure of Buddhadharma through having a deep understanding of the four truths, you will be able to investigate and find the answer. For this reason, encourage students to discuss and debate the teachings so that they learn to think for themselves and gain clarity on complex issues through using their own wisdom.

In this way, invigorate students so that they develop faith on the basis of reason, inquiry, and analysis. Dharma students in the West are educated and intelligent. They must use their analytic abilities to develop understanding, and consequently trust and confidence, in the Buddha's teachings. Blind faith is not our objective in teaching them. If such faith were sufficient to attain nirvāṇa, the Buddha and the great Indian sages would not have explained the Dharma and analyzed the nature of reality in such detail.

## REFLECTION

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Cultivating certain virtuous qualities is essential for those who wish to share the Dharma. Reflect on these well and take them to heart.

1. You must study the Dharma and put it into practice under the guidance of qualified Buddhist spiritual mentors.
2. Cultivate the qualities that the Buddha set forth for the various types of spiritual mentors (see *The Foundation of Buddhist Practice* for these).
3. Keep good ethical conduct. Don't tell yourself that because you're in a teaching role you are exempt from ethical precepts.
4. Constantly check your motivation so that it doesn't degenerate into seeking reputation, offerings, and service from others. If your motivation degenerates, so will your behavior, and then everything good you have done will become moot in the face of the scandals you have brought on.

5. Remember that until attaining full awakening, you are always the student of the Buddha. Once in a while, according to conditions, you may perform the role of a teacher, but it is only a temporary role and is not who you are. Don't construct an identity around it.
6. Cultivate deep patience, fortitude, and compassion. Don't expect people to respect you. Remember you are the servant of others.
7. Teach only what you know and understand. If you don't know the answer to a student's question, say that. Then research the answer and reply to the student later.
8. Do not look to students to fulfill your emotional needs and do not try to fulfill theirs. You are not their therapist, the loving parent they never had, or their best friend. Your job is to teach and encourage them in the Dharma with kindness and compassion.
9. Be careful not to change the explanation of the path so that it corresponds to what you like or what feels comfortable to you.

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### *The Essence of the Dharma and Its Cultural Forms*

The following sections were compiled from discussions His Holiness had with Western teachers. When I (Chodron) read them to His Holiness, he was concerned that people could mistakenly think he was setting a policy for the Buddhist world. This is not at all the case. Some people who are not familiar with Tibetan society incorrectly believe that the office of the Dalai Lama is similar to that of the Pope. They think that His Holiness can dictate policy to all Buddhists, or at least to all Tibetan Buddhists. This is far from the truth. Buddhism has never had the type of hierarchy found in the Catholic Church, and while there may be various national or international Buddhist organizations within each Buddhist tradition, they each have their own policies and internal rules. While some groups or organizations tend to rely more than others on the advice of a leader, the Buddha established the monastic saṅgha as a type of democracy where the voice of each fully

ordained monastic could be heard and where decisions were made by consensus.

Thus while His Holiness offers his ideas about cultural adaptation, Dharma centers, and teachers, he is not setting down rules or telling all Buddhists how to conduct their lives or the internal affairs of their temple, center, or monastery. If common policies are to be established, he insists it must be done by a gathering of representatives of the concerned parties.

Returning to His Holiness's words: The actual Dharma Jewel—the true cessations of *duḥkha* and its causes and the true paths that exist in the mindstreams of *āryas*—does not depend on culture and is the same for all realized beings, no matter when or where they lived. However, the teachings that we study and learn, as well as the rituals and customs in Buddhist communities, were taught in the cultural context of ancient India and passed down for centuries in Asian cultures. This Dharma does not and cannot exist independently of culture because it is shared by and influenced by many people in a particular place.

Distinguishing the Buddha's teachings from cultural overlays is not as easy as it may appear for either Asians or Westerners. Many Asian teachers are not aware of the extent to which their culture has mixed with Buddhism over the centuries, and vice versa. Few Western students are aware of their own cultural preconceptions and assumptions and how these influence their understanding of the Dharma and Buddhist practices. Buddhism is new in the West and many questions exist regarding how and what to adapt to Western cultures while maintaining the authenticity of the path. For these reasons, time, care, and education are needed rather than quick change.

People who accept a new idea or religion, such as Buddhism, should take the essence and adapt it to their own culture. Sometimes I visit places where Western Zen practitioners have Japanese furniture and Western Tibetan Buddhist practitioners have Tibetan furniture. This makes me uncomfortable. Of course, if they like that type of furniture in their homes, that is one thing, but they should not feel that adopting Asian culture or customs is necessary for practicing Buddhism. I often joke with my Western students that even if they wear Tibetan clothes, speak the Tibetan language, and eat *tsampa*, they are not Tibetan; they still have a big Western nose!

Reform and adaptation of Buddhist customs and rituals are possible and necessary, but we must understand the Dharma well in order to not discard the essence. Some people believe they understand the Buddha's teachings well when in fact they are following their own opinions and preferences. Making up your own brand of teachings and claiming that it is Buddhism is extremely dangerous for both the individual and those he teaches. This happens when people do not correctly understand the Buddhadharma and yet assert themselves to be authentic teachers. Therefore, studying the sūtras and the great treatises, as well as contemplating their meaning and putting them into practice, are essential. People who teach and guide others must be rooted in what the Buddha taught. This is extremely important. The Tibetan master Tsongkhapa always cited quotations from well-known Indian Buddhist texts and commentaries when making reforms. In this way he maintained the authenticity of what he taught.

We must differentiate between what is essential in the Buddhist traditions and what is not, and then be sure to preserve the former. Cultural aspects that arise as a product of society change with time and need not be maintained. The essence to preserve is that which directly leads to liberation and awakening and is useful in daily life.

The four truths, the two truths, the eightfold path of the āryas, rebirth, karma and its effects, and the nature of the mind are not concepts made up by the Buddha. They reflect the nature of reality and the process through which a person can be perfected. Whether people are from Asia or the West, whether they live in ancient times or the present, all people have the same basic human nature, human suffering, and human potential. Since Dharma teachings address these, there is no need to change them. If such teachings were omitted, one would no longer be teaching the basis, path, and result described by the Buddha.

Buddhism came from India, and by adapting to the circumstances and culture in Tibet, it came to be called "Tibetan Buddhism." Such a process will occur in the West as well, although since many Western cultures exist—Spanish, American, French, and so on—a uniform "Western Buddhism" will not exist. Even within one country, there will be many different Buddhist traditions. Although such adaptation is important, it needs to be well-thought-out and evolve over time. We cannot legislate, "This is

Western Buddhism and this is not.” Neither Asian teachers nor Western students alone can adapt the forms: a joint effort is needed. Qualified Asian teachers are the source of the tradition and sincere Western practitioners will adjust the expression of the teachings to a new culture. Then profound and reliable new forms of Buddhism will develop.

### *Propagating the Dharma*

I pray for the Buddhadharma to flourish in the ten directions; however, I do not aim to propagate the Dharma to everyone. If someone sincerely requests teachings, it is our duty to explain the Dharma to them. Billions of people, who have different dispositions and interests, live on this planet. For some, Buddhism is effective; for others, another religion is a better fit. This was true at the time of the Buddha as well.

The main aim of Buddhism is to benefit others, not to convert people to Buddhism. You should think about how to benefit others with the Dharma, not how to spread your tradition and gain the greatest number of followers. Dharma practice is more than building a Buddhist center, although some teachers seem to have the opposite priority. Great masters in the past did not have big institutions, big hats, or high titles, yet they had deep experience of the Dharma. Nowadays people look for great titles, high thrones, and big temples, and some gurus comport themselves in a pompous manner. This is a sad situation.

Sometimes we are a bit idealistic and think that if the Buddha himself were alive now, all seven billion people on this planet would become Buddhists. But even during the Buddha’s time, the entire population didn’t follow the Buddhadharma! If someone feels that Buddhism is not logical or suitable for them, trying to convince them is foolish. Instead, pray that they find a path that will benefit them.

Westerners tend to be very sensitive; sometimes a small incident or slight provocation causes great upset. You need to develop great patience to bring Dharma to the West and set up centers, temples, and monasteries. As long as we are in saṃsāra and haven’t attained liberation, there will be difficulties. Even if the Buddha were alive and gave teachings today, he would not be able to resolve all of these problems.

Buddhadharma must be preserved in terms of the individual and the society. As individuals we preserve the Dharma through our study and practice. Teachers and students engaging in Dharma discussions together also constitute preserving the Dharma on the level of the individual.

To preserve Buddhadharma on the societal level, we need to work together in groups. In the Buddha's time, as well as today, the preservation of the Dharma in society depends on the saṅgha, the monastic community that practices the Vinaya. The Vinaya lists over a hundred rites and activities of the saṅgha, from ordination to the manner of expelling someone from the community. These are based on a *saṅghakarman*, a group decision made by the consensus of a saṅgha. One individual alone does not have the power to make these decisions or do these practices. Therefore establishing and supporting Buddhist monasteries in the West is important.

Nowadays lay practitioners in the West go to Dharma centers to learn and practice. Decisions in these communities should be made only after discussion by the whole community. When conclusions regarding certain topics are reached through discussion, write them up as guidelines for the community. Of course, as a community changes and grows, some of these guidelines will need to be altered. This too can be done following discussions in the group.

At present, many Buddhist centers exist even in a single city in the West. Each tradition and even each teacher within a tradition has his own center. I would like to see some nonsectarian Buddhist centers with teachings from all traditions. Of course, the method to actualize this ideal in practical terms requires further thought. I can imagine a single Buddhist temple in a city, with statues of Buddha Śākyamuni for the Theravāda; Padmasambhava, Sakya Paṇḍita, Tsongkhapa, and either Gampopa or Milarepa for the four Tibetan traditions; Mañjuśrī for Zen practitioners; and Tārā as a balance for women. Familiarizing people with all these figures could reduce sectarianism. On the other hand, if you prefer simplicity, a temple with simply a Buddha statue will suffice, and various Buddhist groups in the area could meet there.

Some monasteries in India and some Dharma centers in the West have many beautiful Buddha images and religious objects. At times I wonder if they are in competition with one another to display their wealth. I also

wonder if the practitioners' understanding of the Dharma is as elaborate as their buildings. I prefer that the richness of the Dharma be in our heart, not outside ourselves in the environment, and therefore encourage simplicity in the décor of monasteries, Dharma centers, and retreat centers.

We should follow Milarepa's example: he had just an empty cave. Nearby lived a lama who gave teachings to large crowds. He sat on a large throne with ornate parasols all around. One day, Milarepa's sister came and said to Milarepa, "Your way of practicing is very strange and sad. You have nothing, just an empty cave; you live like a beggar. Other lamas have many disciples. They teach a lot and enjoy many luxurious items offered by their disciples. How stupid you are!" To this, Jetsun Mila responded, "I could do elaborate shows but have no time for them because the most important practice is to check our inner world, our mind."

If people wish to build elaborate monasteries and temples, that is fine. I don't oppose it. However, the donors should know that offering money to support the health and education of monastics within the monasteries will bring results that are equally as good as offering funds for statues or temple decorations. I encourage donors to make offerings to monasteries where genuine studies take place, not to monastics who do not study or meditate. Although donors still get a good result from making offerings to them because they hold precepts, the funds are better used to support those who are sincerely trying to improve their mind through study and practice.

The sūtras say that one who offers gold and jewels to the Buddha—or to a Buddha statue that represents the buddhas—accumulates great merit. But the Vinaya Sūtra says that if a monastic is sick and has no one to look after them and no money, then selling ornaments from a buddha statue to buy medicine is permissible. After the person recovers, the money should be repaid. Here the Buddha demonstrates his deep concern for practitioners. If someone has extra money and doesn't have any other way to use it, buying ornaments for Buddha statues is fine. However, if people are in need, preference should be given to them and the money offered to improve their situation.

Traditionally Tibet did not have many secular schools, and what schools there were prior to 1959 were owned by the government or by the wealthy.



So Tibetans did not have the custom of donating money to construct and operate schools and health clinics. Today we need to change this.

Although the Buddha's teachings are based on compassion, some people are more concerned about their own upper rebirth and liberation and less with others' welfare. Therefore they think chiefly of creating merit by offering to the Three Jewels. However, those who practice bodhicitta should be more concerned with benefiting sentient beings than with creating merit for themselves, and thus they should support schools, healthcare facilities, old-age homes, and other social services, as well as help genuine practitioners have the food, clothing, shelter, and medicine they need to continue their Dharma practice.

### *What to Teach in the West*

Teachers should teach people what is suitable according to their level, interest, and disposition. For example, although emptiness is the essence of the Dharma and understanding it is crucial for awakening, it should not be taught to everyone. People need a firm foundation in conventional truths—such as karma and its effects and the nature of saṃsāra—so that they do not misunderstand the teachings on emptiness and think that nothing exists or that “there's no good and no bad because everything is empty.” Nāgārjuna says in *Treatise on the Middle Way* (MMK 24.11):

By a misperception of emptiness  
a person of little intelligence is destroyed,  
like a snake incorrectly seized  
or a spell incorrectly cast.

For this reason, the bodhisattva ethical restraints warn against teaching emptiness to people who are not prepared. They need first to gain firm understanding of the conventional world by studying karma and its effects, the disadvantages of saṃsāra, and love and compassion.

Practical teachings, such as the stages of the path to awakening and mind training, are more effective for a general audience in the West than the sophisticated philosophical texts studied in monastic universities. Most non-

Buddhists come to the Dharma to seek help in calming their afflictions and creating better relationships with people in their life. What you teach should reflect this need.

As students grow in the Dharma, gradually introduce more topics, remembering to teach according to their level. They may initially have resistance to certain topics, so answer their questions and, if they have objections, encourage them to put those topics on the back burner for the time being and return to them later. Don't change the Dharma teachings by saying the Buddha didn't teach a particular topic simply because the students initially find it difficult to understand. When students are ready to hear more advanced topics, teach them, but explain them initially in an easy-to-understand manner without a lot of complicated language. The meaning of the Buddha's teachings should be accessible to everyone, not just to a learned minority.

Nevertheless, study of the philosophical texts can deepen students' understanding of the Dharma and help their meditation practice. This level of study should be available for Westerners who find it valuable, and I hope that Westerners will continue the tradition of this deep philosophical study that Indian and Tibetan sages have found beneficial for so many centuries. I also hope that Westerners can invigorate traditional debate by bringing Western concepts onto the debating courtyard. For example, practitioners could debate Buddhist versus scientific views of the nature of mind, Buddhist and Judeo-Christian views of creation and causality, and soul versus selflessness. This would be extremely valuable for Buddhists, scientists, and followers of other faiths.

The Buddhist approach must be based on fact and investigation. The Buddha himself and the Indian masters have made that clear. If we find anything in the Buddha's words that does not comply with reality, we should not accept it literally. In the Abhidharma, there are statements saying that the world is flat and Mount Meru is at the center of the universe. If it were necessary to accept this literally in order to be a Buddhist, then I would not be considered a Buddhist! These statements of the structure of the universe were incorporated from the prevailing worldview in society during the time of the Buddha. They are not the Buddha's unique teachings and liberation from saṃsāra does not depend on accepting them.

The sequence of the stages of the path to awakening as taught in Tibetan Buddhism needs to be reconsidered when Dharma is introduced to non-Buddhists. Teaching beginners about relying on a spiritual master confuses them. This topic comes at the beginning of Tibetan texts because the traditional Tibetan audience for those texts is Buddhist. Such an audience already has some knowledge and belief in topics such as rebirth, karma, and the Three Jewels. In some cases, the audience for this teaching consisted of practitioners who were about to receive tantric empowerment. Clearly, how the teachings are given to trained Tibetan monastics who grew up in a Buddhist culture is different from the presentation for Western spiritual seekers who are not Buddhist and simply want to learn the basic Buddhist approach and begin a meditation practice. To help the latter group, beginning with the four truths and the two truths (conventional and ultimate) is more skillful. In this way, newcomers will build a firm foundation in the Dharma and gradually come to understand more difficult subjects.

How extensive should a teaching be? On the one hand, simplicity and brevity keep students focused on the important points. Because they can understand and practice what they learn, they don't feel lost. On the other hand, if the teaching is too concise, the students may lose sight of the wider picture and be unable to understand certain points in their proper context.

Sentient beings have so many distorted thoughts and disturbing emotions that one teaching or one practice cannot address all of them. One day this thought is more active, so we need one practice. Another day another is stronger, and a different antidote is needed. Our mind is complicated, and transforming it requires practices that are sophisticated and complex. By understanding this, we will appreciate the various levels on which the Buddha taught and will be able to reconcile the diverse interpretations of his teachings.

The main factor for transforming our minds is reflection on the four truths, the two truths, loving kindness, and altruism. Without reflecting first on these points, the benefit of watching our breath or visualizing tantric deities is limited. Similarly, simply saying to ourselves that things are impermanent is not enough to change our entrenched misconceptions. We must analyze and use reason to convince ourselves. For this reason, I

recommend that newcomers as well as seasoned students continually engage in analytical meditation on these teachings.

Some Westerners have asked if skipping the preliminary practices such as prostrations, Vajrasattva mantra, refuge, maṇḍala offering, and guru yoga in order to proceed directly to the higher practices would be an acceptable adaptation in the West. The purpose of the preliminaries is to make the mind more receptive so that meditation will bring realizations. If our mind is obscured, doing the preliminaries will remove obstacles and create conducive conditions so that we can gain realizations of the path and integrate the Dharma in our mind and life. If someone has already done sufficient purification and accumulation of merit in the past and is able to attain realizations without doing the preliminaries, that is fine. But if they cannot, doing these practices is highly recommended.

### *Teaching according to the Audience*

A good teacher will be aware of the interests, dispositions, and Dharma background of the audience and will explain various points in a variety of ways in order to meet the audience's needs. For example, sometimes I speak to non-Buddhists who are curious about Tibet and the Dalai Lama. In this case, I emphasize secular ethics and the importance of compassion, forgiveness, and harmony. I describe patience, kindness, seeing the best qualities in others, and self-confidence that is directed in a positive way. Sometimes I bring in scientific findings to reinforce a point—for example, citing studies that have shown that a mother's compassion is critical for the proper development of the child's brain and that patients' trust in the doctor speeds their recovery. In the talks I include some antidotes for disturbing emotions. By applying these, they will see the positive effects of the Dharma on their lives and relationships. I also explain that basic human nature is gentle, kind, and compassionate. The reasons given to support these beliefs are based on common daily experiences, so I do not speak about rebirth, karma, nirvāṇa, or buddhahood. In this way, these people will hear ideas that will help them to live a good life now and receive a good rebirth in the future. Thinking about good values sets a foundation for them to become better people and better citizens of this world.

A second type of audience has keen interest in Buddhism but does not know about or understand some of the basic beliefs or assumptions on which the path to awakening is based, such as rebirth, countless sentient beings, and infinite eons. Most non-Buddhists did not grow up with these notions. Therefore a more academic approach is better for these people. Explain the two truths, the four truths, rebirth and karma, and the structure of the path. Talk about dependent arising and the way to apply it to many fields and disciplines. Then let them reflect. Time is needed to think about these topics and to gain some certainty. It does not happen quickly after hearing one explanation or reading one book. After hearing and reflecting upon teachings for a while, some people will begin to think that future lives are possible. They will accept this way of thinking, develop genuine interest, and continue studying. On this basis, then teach them how to practice the Buddhadharma.

A third audience consists of people who have some idea of rebirth, karma and its effects, and the four truths. They accept the existence of saṃsāra and nirvāṇa; they have heard a little about emptiness and dependent arising and are eager to learn more. The usual Buddhist approach is suitable for these people. We can teach a Dharma text or explain a topic from the perspective of the Buddhist worldview.

When teaching Buddhism to these people, teach the four truths, the three higher trainings, and the four immeasurables; do not explain the visualization of deities and maṇḍalas as found in Vajrayāna. Many people are exposed to Vajrayāna too soon. Some people are put off by it because they lack a proper foundation of the Buddhist worldview. Others started visualizing deities and reciting mantras, but because their understanding of the path is vague, they don't understand the purpose of such practices or the correct way to do them. The Buddha began by teaching his disciples the four establishments of mindfulness and the thirty-seven harmonies with awakening. He did not begin with guru yoga, which comes in a particular context and is only one part of the path.

Tantra is an advanced practice, and to do it people must receive empowerments. Since this cannot be received from a book, they must seek a living spiritual master with a valid lineage to give the empowerment. From this perspective, guru yoga becomes important. Tantric practice

comes later in a practitioner's development, after sufficient preparation. Empowerments and tantric teachings are not for everyone who attends a Dharma center. They should not be among the initial topics a newcomer is exposed to.

Many Westerners who want to explore Buddhism grew up with faith in God. It is not wise to teach them deity and protector practices at the beginning, for they easily project notions of God onto these Buddhist figures, seeing them as external, truly existent beings. They then may have blind faith in them or, conversely, may feel guilty or fearful if they act negatively, thinking the protectors will punish them. According to Buddhism, we are our own master, as the teaching on the twelve links of dependent origination shows. Only introduce devotional practices when the people have received sufficient preparation, and then explain them well so that people gain the proper understanding.

The Buddha as well as the great Indian masters taught according to the students' mental dispositions and interests, and we should do the same. For example, they presented diverse philosophical tenets according to the students' aptitude. What and how they taught was also influenced by the conditions in society at that time. For this reason, if we look carefully, we will discern differences in how the Indian and the Tibetan masters guided their disciples on the path, due to the differing circumstances in which they lived. In ancient India, non-Buddhist teachers and their teachings had a strong influence in society. Thus Indian sages such as Nāgārjuna, Āryadeva, Dignāga, Dharmakīrti, Candrakīrti, and Śāntideva emphasized reasoning as the way to distinguish correct beliefs from incorrect ones.

In Tibet, on the other hand, the situation was different. From the time Buddhism came to Tibet, there have been no strong rival philosophical systems. Although Bön, an indigenous spiritual tradition, pre-dates Buddhism in Tibet, Bön practitioners gradually adopted many elements from Buddhism. Points that were debated extensively in India were automatically accepted in Tibet. The Vajrayāna, which was not practiced publicly in India, became popular in Tibet, where it was taken for granted that almost everyone would participate in certain permissory rituals (T. *rjes snang*) qualifying them to do the practices of such deities as Avalokiteśvara or White Tārā. Also, in the latter centuries of Indian Buddhism, Buddhism

was largely confined to the monastic universities; the laypeople in the villages mostly followed Hinduism or Jainism. In Tibet, Buddhism spread throughout the country—with the exception of a small Muslim population—and was practiced in the home. Because of this difference in society, the approach Tibetan masters used in guiding their students differed from that of Indian masters. While monastics follow a rigorous program of study, reflection, and meditation, lay followers do devotional practices and daily recitations of prayers.

Since Buddhism is new in the West, and a multiplicity of philosophical, religious, scientific, and psychological views exist in Western countries, it is best for us Buddhists to return to the way of the Indian masters. According to these sages, first one studies, and on the basis of correct understanding, one comes to have faith. In other words, Western students should not be encouraged to have devotion for the teachings or the teacher from the very beginning. Instead, they should be encouraged to learn, investigate, and reflect upon the teachings. Through their own examination, they will see the validity of the teachings and the faith they subsequently generate will be based on knowledge, not blind belief.

I tell people who attend my Dharma talks not to think of me as their guru, but simply as a spiritual friend. Of course, later if someone takes monastic precepts, the bodhisattva vow, or tantric empowerment from me, it's a different situation. Devotion to the Buddha or to a teacher is not simply saying, with big eyes, "The Buddha and my teacher are so wonderful!" Therefore I encourage people new to Buddhism to listen, think, and assess the validity of the Dharma for themselves. They should practice what they learn and experience it themselves. On that basis, they will know that the Buddha's teachings benefit them and will develop genuine interest in the Dharma. Through this, they will naturally admire the Buddha and respect the person who explains the teachings to them. Guru yoga comes later, after ten, fifteen, or even twenty years.

Teach only what you have conviction in. For example, I have doubts about the geographical location of the hells as described in the *Treasury of Knowledge*, so I do not include this topic in my teaching. In addition, do not teach everything you have learned, but only those things with which you have had experience and which will benefit the audience.

If your teacher asks you to instruct a group, you may do so. If some people ask you to teach, ask permission from your spiritual mentor. Do not set yourself up as a teacher without permission. At each step, as you assume more responsibility for instructing others, consult your teacher. For example, if someone requests you to give refuge, check with your teacher, receive their approval, and then request them to instruct you on the proper way to conduct the refuge ceremony and give the five lay precepts. Should someone request you to give the bodhisattva vow, make sure that you keep the bodhisattva precepts well. Know the difference between aspiring and engaging bodhicitta and be familiar with the ceremonies for each. If you are not familiar with this or if you do not know the eighteen root and forty-six auxiliary transgressions well, it is better to refer the person to your teacher or another practitioner who will bestow the bodhisattva vow.

If you are requested to give a tantric empowerment, check with your tantric spiritual mentor. Make sure you have received that empowerment and have completed the requisite retreat and fire pūjā. Giving an empowerment and guiding students in tantric practice are big responsibilities, so you may wish to refer people to your teachers for these. As Buddhism evolves in the West, the empowerment texts will be translated into various languages. Then you can learn how to perform empowerments properly and ensure that the rituals are complete.

As time goes on, sincere and wise Western practitioners will write texts and ceremonies in their own language and a body of literature will gradually build up. To ensure that this process proceeds well, those of you who are first-generation Buddhist teachers in the West must be very conscientious.

Asian teachers should try to be aware of Westerners' specific problems so they can adapt their teaching methods. Learning about Western culture and values will help them to avoid teaching in an inappropriate way that results in misunderstanding or disappointment.

It is not skillful for Asian teachers to teach Western audiences as if they were speaking to Asian Buddhists. If an Asian teacher displays a culturally chauvinistic attitude toward Western practitioners, the Westerners should simply not pay attention. However, Westerners too should avoid cultural



arrogance, thinking that because some of their societies are more advanced technologically they can improve everything they come in contact with.

For both Asians and Westerners, the establishment of teachers' training programs would be helpful. These programs should emphasize teaching skills as well as communication, mediation, and counseling skills. For teachers who are not familiar with government regulations, learning how to observe those is also important so that the Dharma center, temple, or monastery conducts all affairs—be it constructing a new building, remodeling an old one, or procuring visas for teachers or monastics—according to the law.

### *Translations and Rituals*

The texts and sādhanas we chant are designed to assist us in visualization and meditation. The purpose of reciting the words is to contemplate their meaning. Without knowing the meaning of the words you chant, the value of your recitation declines sharply. Therefore, unless you know Tibetan, you should do your recitations in your own language. In that way, you will understand what the text says and will be able to visualize and meditate accordingly. Mantras, however, are recited in Sanskrit; we believe there is a special blessing from doing this.

In general, we Tibetans do not pronounce Sanskrit correctly. When I hear some Indian scholars, especially those in Varanasi University, recite the Sanskrit mantras and texts, I find it very touching and inspiring. Some of the melodies are truly remarkable; we Tibetans cannot recite this way. Maybe in a previous life I was a lazy disciple of a great Indian master, and that is why I feel so attracted to this chanting.

At the moment, translation terms and translation styles vary considerably from one translator to another. To standardize translation terms, scholars and practitioners could meet and gradually come to a consensus. Asian scholars cannot decide this. Much thought is required to select appropriate terms, and this selection should be done by those knowledgeable in the language and in the meaning of the Buddha's teachings.

Of course, each translator has his or her own style and getting a group of translators to agree on standard terms would be quite an undertaking! Let's see how the situation evolves. It could be that everyone will employ their own terms and styles, and gradually over time most people will gravitate toward one.

Westerners do not need to use Asian names or religious titles such as "lama." Much confusion can arise from not properly understanding the meaning of such Asian words, and because no uniform way of acquiring Tibetan titles exists, people with different levels of qualities use the same title. If it is beneficial to use a title at all, a Western one that conveys the correct connotation would be better.

If Westerners would like to have Buddhist ceremonies for births, rites of passage to adulthood, marriage, and funerals, meetings can be held to create them. Simple ceremonies for Buddhists of all traditions would be good. However, if a Buddhist marriage ceremony is created and its performance involves fully ordained monastics, care must be taken not to cause an infraction of the precept prohibiting monks and nuns from matchmaking. Monastics could perform an offering ritual with the couple and their dear ones in attendance, enabling the couple to create merit as an auspicious way to begin their marriage. However, it would be more appropriate if a lay Buddhist performed the actual marriage ceremony.

### *Many Ways to Benefit Sentient Beings*

In addition to teaching, counseling, giving precepts, and enhancing our own Dharma practice, there are many ways to benefit sentient beings. These include chanting protective scriptures and mantras, performing offering ceremonies, reciting words of truth, enabling sentient beings to contact holy objects, and recollecting the Buddha. All of these rely to some extent on the power of the Three Jewels to bless and inspire our minds, and all Buddhist traditions engage in these in one way or another.

Followers of the Pāli tradition often recite the *Protective Discourses*, or *Paritta Suttas*. Followers of the Mahāyāna chant the names or mantras of Amitābha Buddha, Medicine Buddha, Chenrezig (Kuan Yin), and other bodhisattvas. They also do pūjās (offering ceremonies) to create merit and

eliminate obstacles. Both traditions meditate on recollection of the Buddha (*Buddha-anusmṛti*, C. *nien-fo*) and recite words of truth.

Because results arise dependent on many factors, the effects of these practices are undoubtedly contingent on the motivation of the practitioners and their mental states and level of concentration when doing the practice. These more devotional practices work in a psychological and mysterious way—mysterious meaning that our rational mind and present level of knowledge are not fully able to grasp the dependently arising way these causes bring their effects.

### *Chanting Protective Scriptures and Mantras*

Protective discourses (*paritrāṇa*, *paritta*) express basic Dharma principles. Chanting and hearing them reminds people of these principles so that they can practice them in their daily lives. Monastics from the Pāli tradition often recite them to teach the Dharma as well as to create auspiciousness and receive blessings for new activities, such as blessing a new residence, opening a business, and beginning a marriage. The *Jewel Sutta* (*Ratana Sutta*, Sn 2.1) expresses the qualities of the Three Jewels, the *Sutta of Great Blessings* (*Mahāmaṅgala Sutta*, Sn 2.4) teaches how to live a good life, the *Sutta on Loving-Kindness* (*Mettā Sutta*, Sn 1.8) focuses on developing a kind and caring attitude toward others. All three sūtras promote harmony in society and faith in the Three Jewels.<sup>20</sup>

Using the example of the *Jewel Sutta*, we see how protective discourses inspire and bless the mind. This sūtra was taught at Vaiśālī, when the city was undergoing great hardship due to famine, evil spirits, and the plague. The citizens, who were from the Licchavi clan, invited the Buddha and Saṅgha to come, hoping they could remedy the situation. To remedy this harm, prevent future harm, and increase the safety and well-being of all, the Buddha taught this sūtra on the qualities of the Three Jewels<sup>21</sup> with a heart of loving-kindness and compassion for the spirits causing the difficulties, for the devas living in the area, and for the human beings experiencing hardship. Through the power of his reciting this and of the citizens contemplating its meaning and generating faith in the Three Jewels, the demons causing the havoc fled. Good conditions were restored to the city,

its citizens took refuge, and the town later became a stronghold of the Dharma.

In the present day, the sūtra is often recited for similar purposes and brings similar results. Reciting the verses connects our minds to the qualities of the Three Jewels. This draws the spiritual power (P. *ānubhāva*) of the Buddha, Dharma, and Saṅgha into our mind. This spiritual power comes from the Buddha's practice—his accomplishment of the ten perfections and his complete cultivation of the thirty-seven harmonies with awakening—and the results of this practice—the ten powers of a tathāgata, the four fearlessnesses, and his wisdom and compassion. It also arises from the Dharma—true cessations and true paths—and from the Saṅgha and its marvelous qualities. By calling these qualities to mind, devotion, confidence, and trust arise in our mind, and we are imbued with inspiration. That transformation of our mind is the blessing.

### *Words of Truth*

With that virtuous state of mind, we then declare words of truth (*satyavacana*, *saccavacana*). In this case, with loving-kindness and compassion, we generate the strong wish for the happiness, well-being, safety, and security of ourselves and others. One way of explaining this is that our mind becomes a channel for the blessing power of the Three Jewels—a power that arises due to their virtuous qualities. By reflecting on their qualities, we draw their spiritual energy into our mind and then express it in a strong determination for the welfare of self and others. Another way of explaining it is that our mind becomes transformed into virtue by reflecting on the wonderful qualities of the Three Jewels, and the power of that virtuous mind is expressed in the determination of truth. In both cases, spiritual power arises due to the virtues of the Three Jewels and the transformation that has occurred in our mind; in both cases, the result is compassionate wishes for the well-being of self and others.

Initially, our words of truth may not have much power because our mind is not yet strong in the Dharma. However, as we continue to practice—living ethically, being generous, generating loving-kindness, listening to and reflecting on the Buddha's teachings—the power of our declaring words of truth increases. In the case of the Buddha, it increased to such an

extent that the evil spirits at Vaiśālī could not endure the force of his virtue and realizations and left the town. The healing of Vaiśālī was not due to the Buddha’s magical powers or to his being omnipotent, because the Buddha is neither omnipotent nor a performer of magic. The effect a buddha can have on us sentient beings and the world is dependent on our mental states and our karma.

Found in both the Pāli and Sanskrit traditions, words of truth are spoken with a strong virtuous intention motivated by love and compassion. They are not a promise to do an action, but a statement of fact. The truth of this fact assures the occurrence of an event. Often the person who utters words of truth appeals to natural forces to validate their statements. For example, after attaining supreme awakening under the bodhi tree, the Buddha declared his attainment and, putting his right hand on the ground, asked the earth goddess to validate its truth. She appeared and did so.

Another example of a paritta in which words of truth are uttered occurs in the *Aṅgulimāla Sutta* (MN 86), in which the terrifying bandit and murderer was subdued and converted by the Buddha. After he was ordained as a monk but before he became an arhat, Aṅgulimāla was on alms round when he saw a woman giving birth to a deformed child. Overwhelmed with compassion, he thought, “How beings are afflicted!” He told the Buddha what he saw, and the Buddha instructed him to return and say to the woman, “Sister, since I was born with the noble birth [that is, when he became an ārya], I do not recall that I have ever intentionally deprived a living being of life. By this truth, may you be well and may your infant be well!” Aṅgulimāla did as instructed—what an amazing, truthful, and compassionate declaration this was, made by someone who had murdered 999 people! By the force of this truth spoken by a virtuous monastic, both the mother and child were healed. Nowadays people recite the same words of truth found in the scriptures. In Theravādin countries, Aṅgulimāla’s words of truth are often recited by a monk when a pregnant woman is ready to give birth.

The power of words of truth depends on the sincerity, compassion, and truth of the person who utters them. Knowing this, it is essential to pay special attention to the state of our mind when reciting words of truth. The *Questions of King Milinda* (*Milindapañha* 4.1.42) relates an event that

occurred when the Ganges overflowed its banks and a city was threatened. The king brought many sages to the site, but the water continued to rise even after each one declared words of truth. The prostitute Bindumatī heard of the danger to the city and went to the riverbank, where she uttered words of truth. Much to everyone’s surprise the waters subsided. The townspeople questioned how she could do this, to which she replied, “Since I have been in this profession, I have never distinguished between my clients. I treat them all equally, without discrimination based on their caste, physical appearance, or wealth. I used this truth as the basis for my words of truth.”

The *Sivi-Jātaka* (*Jātaka* 499) recounts how King Sivi gave both his eyes to the god Śakra, who, disguised as a blind brahmin, tested the king’s determination to give what was most dear to him by requesting his eyes. To illustrate the purity of his motivation in giving both his eyes, the king spoke words of truth, by which one eye was restored. When the king again spoke words of truth, saying, “A greater joy and more delight that action did afford. If these my solemn words be true, may the other eye be restored!” his second eye was restored.

In the *Smaller Amitābha Sūtra*, the Buddha uttered words of truth several times. The first time he said:

Śāriputra, as I perceive that such blissful benefits are matters of great importance, I pronounce these words of truth: Good men and good women of pure faith who hear Amitāyus Buddha’s name of inconceivable merits and also learn of the Pure Buddha Land of Great Bliss (Sukhāvatī) should all receive [the teaching] with faith, arouse aspiration, practice the method as prescribed, and attain birth in that buddha land.

The buddhas of the ten directions then uttered the words of truth:

Sentient beings should all receive in faith this gate of the Dharma concerning praise of the inconceivable merits of the buddha land and protection by all buddhas.

As stated by the Buddha in the sūtra itself, the purpose of these words of truth are to “urge sentient beings to receive this teaching in faith, in order to guide and benefit them and give them peace and bliss.”

In Tibetan Buddhism, words of truth are expressed when making offerings to the Three Jewels:

By the power of the truth of the Three Jewels, the power of the inspiration of all the buddhas and bodhisattvas, the great might of the completed two collections [of merit and wisdom], and the power of the intrinsically pure inconceivable sphere of reality, may [these offerings] become suchness.

Throughout history, Tibetan masters have written words of truth. In the last century, Jamyang Khyentsé Chökyi Lodrö wrote “The Sage’s Powerful Words of Truth,”<sup>22</sup> and His Holiness the present Dalai Lama composed “Words of Truth,” a prayer for the freedom of the Tibetan people.<sup>23</sup>

### *Offering Ceremonies*

In Mahāyāna countries, people often request monastics to conduct offering ceremonies in order to create merit that is dedicated for a specific purpose in addition to dedicating for the full awakening of all sentient beings. The Medicine Buddha pūjā is done to remedy illness, and the Green Tārā pūjā is performed to counteract obstacles and hindrances or to bring success when beginning a new project. The *Amitābha Sūtra* and Amitābha’s name are recited to help the recently deceased to be born in Sukhāvātī pure land. Kuan Yin’s name is often recited for this purpose, and in Tibetan Buddhism people recite and contemplate the *Guru Pūjā* and other sādhanas to create merit for many different occasions, ranging from beginning a marriage to wishing someone to be born in a pure land in their next life.

### *Holy Objects*

Just hearing Dharma words that express goodness or seeing Dharma objects sets good latencies on sentient beings’ minds, even if they lack the ability to understand them. These latencies will ripen in their having a connection

with the Dharma in the future. For this reason, many spiritual mentors encourage their students to make statues of various buddhas and bodhisattvas, to circumambulate stūpas, and to recite mantras, sūtras, and other Dharma texts.

In the *Path of Purification*, Buddhaghosa tells the story of a frog who was in the vicinity when the Buddha was teaching on the banks of the Gaggara Lake. While the frog was hearing the Buddha speak the Dharma, a cowherd put a stick on the frog's head and crushed it. The frog was born in the Celestial Realm of the Thirty-Three (Trāyastriṃśa, Tāvatiṃsa). Seeking the cause of this wonderful rebirth, he saw that it was due to having heard the Buddha's voice. With gratitude, the former frog went to pay respects to the Buddha, who again taught him the Dharma, whereby he became a stream-enterer.

The Nālandā tradition tells the story of Sthiramati (Sāramati), a great Abhidharma scholar, who in his previous birth was born a pigeon that often perched outside Vasubandhu's cave. There he heard Vasubandhu recite the entire Abhidharma. In his next life, the pigeon was born as a boy in the area. He ordained as a monastic and became a renowned Abhidharma scholar due to having had the seeds of this topic planted in his mindstream when he was a pigeon.

In the pure-land practice, just hearing the name of Amitābha can have a powerful effect on a person's mindstream, causing merit created in previous lives to ripen. Ou-i says:<sup>24</sup>

No matter what your station in life, all you have to do is hear the Buddha's name and the good roots you have accumulated over many eons immediately ripen, and all forms of negativity and perversity are transformed into virtues.

However, Ou-i continues by clarifying that for inspiration and wisdom to arise, the reciters must have refuge in the Three Jewels, meditate on the bodhicitta aspiration, and maintain ethical conduct:

Merely hearing the name of Amitābha [without faith and vows] may become a long-term causal basis [for one's



awakening], but it cannot be called the wisdom that comes from hearing. Reciting the Buddha's name is a matter of being mindful of the Buddha's name from moment to moment—thus it is the wisdom that comes from reflecting [on what you have heard].

Although what we are exposed to may influence us in subtle and profound ways, we don't want to remain ignorant and leave our spiritual progress to such rare occasions as serendipitously hearing the Dharma. Practice is essential.

### *Recollections of the Buddha*

The formal recollection of the Buddha entails reflecting on the Buddha's qualities one by one. This recollection is much deeper and has more impact on the mind than reciting sūtras quickly. Done in a meditative manner, it can lead to samādhi.

The Pāli and Sanskrit traditions both speak of the recollections of the Buddha, Dharma, Saṅgha, ethical conduct, generosity, and deities.<sup>25</sup> In the Sanskrit tradition, recollection of Amitābha Buddha or Akṣobhya Buddha generates faith in these buddhas and increases our aspiration to be born in their pure lands. They also inspire us to generate the qualities of the holy beings, such as compassion.

### *Areas of Caution*

Buddhism is new to the West; it is still in the process of finding its footing in Western culture. As such, there are many areas where caution is needed.

First, students may have unrealistic projections on and expectations of Dharma teachers. Many people tend toward a black-and-white way of thinking, with little appreciation for gray areas. If they admire someone, they praise him or her to the skies. This can lead to idolizing Dharma teachers and having unrealistic expectations of them. To avoid this, when you teach, make it clear from the beginning that you are an ordinary practitioner, not a superhuman.

When a student seeks guidance, the teacher should respond and help. But if there is danger—for example, that the student will become emotionally attached to the teacher or overly dependent on the teacher’s guidance—then for the benefit of all parties the teacher should keep some distance. Each case must be looked at individually; a general statement can’t be made that will apply to all situations.

Once a woman who attended teachings told me she loved me. I responded, “Nāgārjuna said, ‘Like the earth, water, wind, and fire, medicinal herbs, and trees in the wilderness, may I always be an object of enjoyment for all beings, just as they wish,’ so if you want to think of me like that, it’s okay.” I didn’t let what she said affect my mental attitude or behavior toward her. Another time a Russian lady said she wanted to marry me. To her I said, “Do not think like that. I’m a monk and will remain one!”

I have had the experience of people coming to me, publicly and privately, thinking “The Dalai Lama will bless me.” It is not wise for them to think like this. I can’t do this. Sometimes people think “The Dalai Lama will heal me.” This way of thinking is also dangerous, for both the teacher and the student. The teacher may be tempted to act as if he had some extraordinary ability, and the student may worship the teacher instead of practicing the teachings. Personally, I am skeptical of those who claim to heal diseases; I make sure not to present myself in that way. To avoid misleading others or becoming inflated myself, even when people look with devotion and ask, “Are you awakened?” I always reply, “I am a simple Buddhist monk. No more, no less.”

Second, there may be the temptation to dilute the Buddha’s teachings in order to make them acceptable to a larger number of people. In other words, a teacher may have faith in a certain teaching but not teach it because he or she is concerned that students will not find them pleasing and will stop attending the Dharma center. Although you should teach according to people’s dispositions, it is harmful to leave out certain aspects of the Dharma because you are more concerned with the number of students than with the purity of the teachings. As I mentioned before, our purpose is not to celebrate that many people call themselves Buddhist. We are not out to win converts or to become well-known teachers. Our purpose is to benefit sentient beings.

Third, a teacher may have deep doubt about some points and omit these teachings or say that the Buddha didn't really mean that or teach that. Simply because certain points do not agree with our opinions, we cannot say that the Buddha never taught them or that they are not part of the Buddhist worldview. Especially when teaching others, a person cannot dismiss parts of the teachings that he does not agree with and still say he is explaining the entire path of the Buddhadharma. To do so is very dangerous, because without extensive learning, thinking, and meditating, we are unable to properly discriminate what is correct and what is not. We could easily fall into picking and choosing from various teachings, putting them together, and inventing a spiritual path that agrees with our ideas. Not only would this harm us but it would also cheat students and lead to the degeneration of the Buddha's teachings in our world.

Fourth, a teacher may become emotionally dependent on his or her students. When you are in the position of teaching the Dharma, be conscientious about how you present yourself. Learn to work with your emotions and your wish for companionship by applying the mind training teachings. Don't expect your students to take care of you emotionally and don't draw them into fulfilling your personal needs for validation, appreciation, or love. Try to emulate the great practitioners such as Milarepa, who, due to their renunciation, have great love for sentient beings. Because their compassion is free from attachment, everyone is their friend. Such a practitioner has no needs arising from attachment and prefers no companions. Of course such people are rare, but we must emulate these good examples. Maybe this year we cannot be like that, but next year or after ten or fifteen years, we too can cultivate this kind of attitude.

Lay teachers should also have appropriate friends with whom they can discuss their emotions and their difficulties. Their students should not be put in the position of having to support the teacher emotionally or solve the teacher's personal problems.

Fifth, a teacher and student may be sexually attracted to each other. Due to afflictions and karma, we now have this body that tends toward attachment—including sexual desire—and anger. When the body is weak, anger comes more easily; when it is well, more sexual desire arises. Even if you control the sexual desire, on subtle levels attachment still persists.

Much depends on your practice. Even though you may not be able to eliminate your sexual desire, if you have enough conviction and spiritual strength, you will remain balanced and not get distracted from your spiritual goals and the precepts that will guide you to them. I include myself on this level.

The layperson's precepts do not prohibit sexual relations, so there is more danger of lay followers misusing sexuality. Therefore it is best for lay teachers to be married upāsikās or upāsakas and to live according to the five precepts, which include abandoning unwise or unkind sexual behavior. Monastic teachers must be celibate. Both monastic and lay teachers must avoid touching students inappropriately—in a sexual manner or in a manner that someone could misinterpret to be sexual in nature.

Another area of caution is the tendency for the eight worldly concerns to pollute your mind. For example, I was reading the works of Tsukang Lama Rinpoché, a respected and learned practitioner, and noticed that his way of explaining the process for taking refuge was the same as I use. On the one hand I was happy, knowing that I wasn't teaching my own fabrication and that there was sound basis in the writing of an authentic sage. Meanwhile, in one corner of my mind was the thought of the eight worldly concerns, "I want all the credit for this excellent explanation. If other people read Tsukang Lama's book, they'll think that I copied my explanation from him and my reputation as the originator of this explanation will be lost!"

The Tibetan tradition emphasizes the threefold process of listening to the teachings, reflecting on their meaning, and meditating to integrate them into our lives. Thus practitioners need to balance responsibilities of teaching others with their own practice. When I teach, my daily meditation is shortened because of time constraints, but at the same time the Dharma becomes more effective in my mind because I am thinking deeply about it. Also, when students ask questions, I must reflect on the meaning of the Dharma in order to answer them properly.

If a teacher is sincere and dedicated to helping others without concern for fame, problems will not arise. But if a teacher has great status yet lacks the corresponding spiritual realizations, there is the danger of creating an image to protect oneself. For that reason, I advise those who teach the

Dharma to spend a few months each year focusing on their personal practice and a few months teaching others. They must have time to develop their own practice and deepen their understanding to effectively teach others.

In conclusion, teaching the Dharma is a wonderful opportunity to share what is precious, to help others, and to create boundless merit. However, we must approach it seriously and responsibly so that we create benefit, not damage, for ourselves and others.

### *Respect for the Dharma*

The Dharma is our real refuge; the Dharma is the object of our highest respect. Śākyamuni Buddha is the product of the Dharma Jewel, which is the true paths and true cessations of duḥkha and its causes. The resultant awakening that he attained is so magnificent that since we venerate and admire it, we should also esteem its causes, the Dharma teachings. To indicate this, before the Buddha taught the Perfection of Wisdom sūtras, he himself arranged the seat on which he sat when giving these teachings.

Similarly, to show respect for the path to liberation, when five hundred arhats gathered after the Buddha's parinirvāṇa at the First Council to recite the teachings they had heard the Buddha give, they stacked their saffron upper robes to make a throne on which the reciter would sit. Such veneration was accorded not to the person but to the teachings that explained the true paths and true cessations. Similarly, nowadays a teacher sitting on a throne or high seat to teach indicates that the teaching he or she gives is worthy of admiration and reverence.

To signify the preciousness of the Dharma teachings and to prevent arrogance, before sitting on the Dharma seat, the teacher makes three prostrations to the seat as well as to the lineage of teachers and to the Dharma teachings. While sitting down, the teacher recites a verse from the *Diamond Sūtra (Vajracchedikā)* to recall the transient and empty nature of phenomena:

A star, a visual aberration, a flame of a lamp,  
an illusion, a drop of dew, or a bubble,

a dream, a flash of lightening, a cloud—  
see conditioned things as such.

Recalling the insubstantial nature of the world helps the teacher to sustain a pure motivation for teaching, one that is not defiled by worldly concerns, such as the wish to receive offerings, praise, reputation, or a large and devoted following.

The danger of arrogance arising when one sits on a high seat is real. In Tibet some lamas succumbed to what I call the “high-throne syndrome,” competing to see who had the highest throne and was thus the highest lama. To counteract this, the Fifth Dalai Lama stipulated that the thrones of the lamas in the audience should all be exactly the same height. However, some clever attendants of one lama managed to slip a slate under the cushion of their teacher’s throne. After a while, when all the others’ cushions had compressed because lamas were sitting on them, the lama sitting on the seat with the slate underneath appeared higher than the others. He and his disciples shined with pride.

### *Buddhadharma in Asia*

Buddhism contains vast and profound teachings that are set forth in detail. It is scientific and logical. But in many Buddhist countries the people do not seriously study the Dharma; for them Buddhism is just part of the tradition and culture of their country. They engage in ancestor worship, perform the practices of folk religions, and pray to the Buddha and to worldly gods without distinguishing between them. As the younger generation reexamines these old traditions, they sometimes discard Buddhism along with ancestor worship and turn to other religions. Considering oneself a Buddhist simply because it is part of one’s family tradition without understanding it does not have much meaning to them. If someone introduces a new and different religion, it may seem more attractive, and that person may adopt the new faith. Of course, this is their personal decision, but it is sad that this is done because they were ignorant of the Buddha’s teachings.

As with Westerners, people in Asia and in Asian communities in the West would benefit greatly from more Dharma study as a prelude to practice. Buddhists should conduct seminars on Buddhism in these places so that people have accurate information about the religion of their family. Initially, an informative approach could be used, giving a general explanation to raise interest. For example, the teacher could explain Buddhist beliefs in a more academic way, describe Buddhism as it is found in various countries, have courses on comparative religion, or speak of the relationship of Buddhism to science. In this way, people will receive correct information about the Buddha's teachings. With this general knowledge, some will want to learn more, and at that point, more explanation about how to practice should be given.

Two types of people take an interest in religion. One type wants help for this life and protection from harm. These people are not interested in and do not think much about the philosophy behind a religion. They simply accept what they are told. Some Asian Buddhists unfortunately have this attitude. Another type of person thinks more about human nature and investigates the nature of the mind, the purpose of life, and what happens after death. They are looking for a deeper explanation. When such a person studies the Buddha's teachings, they will be attracted to them. By employing their analytical abilities, they will find answers in the Buddhadharma. They will also find a practical method for transforming the mind from negative states to positive ones. This is the proper way for people to be Buddhists, for their faith and practice is based on understanding.

I am happy to note that when I visit Chinese Buddhist communities—for example, in Taiwan—more people are showing interest in studying the Buddhadharma. Still, more needs to be done along this line. For example, in my visit to Taiwan in 2001, about eight thousand people attended the four days of teachings, but nearly twice as many attended the last two days when I gave the Avalokiteśvara empowerment. Nevertheless, I am glad that more people in traditionally Buddhist countries see the importance of study and understand that Buddhism involves transforming our own disturbing emotions, not seeking blessings from an external teacher or deity.

Buddhism can coexist with the Confucian values found in Asia. For example, Confucius instructed people to respect their elders and parents.

The Buddha gave similar advice when he spoke to ordinary people, and he encouraged monastics to respect those senior in ordination. Respecting those more experienced and wiser than we are is good advice that everyone should follow.

However, if we ask, “According to Confucius, why do we respect elder people?” people may not know how to answer. For that reason, some young people think, “The elderly managed when they were young, and they can manage alone now too. Young plants grow, and the old plants will go. That is part of nature.” With that attitude, they neglect their parents. But explaining the reason for helping elders according to the Dharma does not allow for such self-centered thinking. Instead, we see that the elderly want happiness and not suffering just like everyone else. If we serve and help them, they will be happy, and we will accumulate merit. We are sentient beings with consciousness, and our minds continue on to future lives. To create the causes for happiness in future lives, we need to keep pure ethical discipline and not harm others. Thus helping others benefits them and ourselves, and brings happiness now as well as in future lives.

### *Dharma Centers*

The purpose of having Dharma centers, retreat facilities, and temples is to benefit sentient beings by giving them correct information about the Buddhadharma, meditation instruction, and access to qualified spiritual mentors and Dharma friends who can support them on the path. We need to remain true to this purpose and resist measuring success by the size of our institutions, the number of followers, or the beauty of our altars.

Buddhism has three parts: (1) Buddhist science, (2) Buddhist philosophy and metaphysics, and (3) Buddhist religion or spirituality. Buddhist science has to do with our theories about particles, the levels of mind, the process of cognition, and so on, whereas Buddhist philosophy focuses on impermanence, emptiness, and interdependence. Buddhist religion deals with awakening and the path to attain it. Although Buddhist religion is only for Buddhists, Buddhist science and philosophy can be shared with non-Buddhists. These are academic topics that can be taught in Dharma centers to Buddhists, non-Buddhists, and nonbelievers alike. We



present the Buddha, Nāgārjuna, and the great Indian masters as astute philosophers and professors at Nālandā University. One time I gave a Buddha statue to a close friend who was not a Buddhist and told him to regard the Buddha as a great thinker and philosopher. Twenty-six centuries ago, the Buddha was one of the chief philosophers who debated with many other philosophers and dispelled their untenable views. My friend appreciated this perspective.

Dharma centers can serve a variety of people in society: those who are interested in Buddhist science and philosophy, those who seek a method to calm their mind, and those aspiring for liberation and awakening.

### *Dharma Events, Dharma Teachers, and Finances*

It is better if resident Buddhist teachers at Dharma centers are not involved with the finances of the center. They must concentrate on teaching while the members manage the center's finances. Neither the teacher nor the members of the Dharma center should be influenced by benefactors who make large donations. Sometimes it happens that sincere practitioners who do not have a lot of money are denied teachings or access to the teacher, while those with funds are honored and respected. This is wrong. When wealthy students wave promises of sponsorship in front of teachers, monastics, or members of a Dharma center with the thought to gain special attention, teachings, or privileges, we should ignore this behavior and treat them as we would everyone else.

Traditionally, Dharma teachings are freely offered, and students, knowing that their teachers need food, shelter, clothing, medicine, and travel expenses, offer their support according to their ability. This custom is not well-known in the West, where people are used to being charged a specific amount for an event. This, however, goes against the spirit of generosity and can lead to holding Dharma events with the motivation to make money.

Nevertheless, given the reality of the situation, teachers may at times be forced to charge for teachings to cover the expenses involved—rent, travel, and food—but they should clarify with the students that the minimum is being charged and that it is just for what is needed. At the same time, we

should educate Westerners that giving freely from our heart, not in payment for receiving teachings, is part of our practice of generosity, or *dāna*.

Sometimes when I teach in the West, the organizers use this as an opportunity to raise funds. They also give me a large offering, which I either give back to the Dharma center or to worthwhile projects. I do not need these offerings. The Indian government kindly gives me a modest stipend, which is sufficient for my needs. I encourage the organizers of the teachings to give the offerings to those in need instead. Even though the organizers or I donate such funds to good causes, my preference is that my Dharma teachings not be used for fundraising. Organizers should estimate the cost of the event based on past experience and not charge more than is necessary to cover these expenses. In this way people who cannot afford costly tickets will not be turned away from the teachings. In addition, the teachings should be made accessible to a wider audience so that people who are physically challenged, have minimal income, or are deprived of educational opportunities are able to attend my talks. Now I do not accept any offering from the organizers of my teachings in the West. Instead, at the conclusion of teachings I ask them to announce the income and expenditures to the audience, including where they will donate any surplus income.

The Buddha instructed monastics on the cultivation of modest needs and desires and inner contentment. He advised them to avoid a lifestyle of either extreme luxury or asceticism. This advice should apply equally to lay practitioners, especially if they teach the Dharma. It is crucial that we ensure that whatever income we receive is not from wrong livelihood.

Supporting oneself by teaching the Dharma becomes a complex issue for lay teachers, especially those who need to provide for their family. It raises many questions: Are Dharma students responsible for supporting a lay teacher's family? How much is enough to support a family, especially in Western culture where children want designer clothing and the latest digital devices? This subject needs much thought and discussion.

Some lamas go to Taiwan, Singapore, or the West to teach or give empowerments in order to raise funds for their monasteries. Teaching the Dharma only with the thought of raising money is not correct. Those who need to raise funds for their monastery should be straightforward. Instead of

simply asking an audience for offerings for a nebulous purpose, they should show people the architectural designs, the estimated budget, and an outline of the various phases of the project. With everything clearly presented and well-organized, they can then explain, “This is the project. This is the amount we need to complete it. We appreciate whatever you are able to contribute.” Do not make people feel obliged to give; give them the space to be moved by a generous thought so that they feel inspired to contribute and give an amount that feels comfortable.

Profit from the sale of Dharma materials is a sensitive issue. In Tibet this issue is taken so seriously that it is said you should avoid eating at the home of a person who lives on the proceeds from selling Dharma books and statues. In addition, giving the proceeds from selling Dharma books and statues to a monastic community to buy food or clothing is not appropriate. If possible, avoid using this money to pay fees to attend teachings. Perhaps the money could be used for charitable works or given to a hospital or school, but best is to use it to print more Dharma materials. Motivation is extremely important. For example, using money from selling Dharma books to stay at a center so that you have a place to live is not appropriate. But if your motivation is to spread the Dharma teachings and you need money to live on and to run the Dharma center, then perhaps it is all right.

# 5

## The Ten Perfections in the Pāli Tradition

THE *Basket of Conduct* (*Cariyāpiṭaka*)<sup>26</sup> tells the story of the Buddha's previous life as King Sivi, when he desired to give his eyes to someone who asked. The god Śakra, lord of the devas, wanted to test this desire and so appeared as a decrepit, blind old man who asked the king for his eyes. With great joy, King Sivi immediately had a doctor remove his eyes to give to the old man. After doing this, he uttered these words (CP 1.8.15–16):

While I was desiring to give, while I was giving, and after the gift had been given by me, there was no contradictory state of mind; it was for the sake of awakening itself. The two eyes were not disagreeable to me nor was I disagreeable to myself. Omniscience was dear to me; therefore I gave the eyes.

Such is the pure motivation of a bodhisattva.

### *The Pāramīs*

In addition to the Pāli texts mentioned in the previous chapter, *A Treatise on the Pāramīs*, written by the great Pāli commentator Dhammapāla around the sixth century, explicitly explains how to engage in the ten bodhisattva practices. This text is found at least twice in the Pāli commentarial literature: once in a commentary to the *Basket of Conduct* and a slightly shorter version in a subcommentary to the *Brahmajāla Sutta* (DN 1). Dhammapāla drew on the *Chronicle of Buddhas* (*Buddhavaṃsa*) for his description of the bodhisattva aspiration, the eight qualities for its success in attaining buddhahood, and the enumeration of the ten perfections. He

drew on the *Jātakas*,<sup>27</sup> the *Path of Purification*, and other Pāli sources for other material included in his treatise. While the presentation of selflessness, wisdom, and the structure of the path in *A Treatise on the Pāramīs* accords with the presentation in the Pāli canon, some passages in the text were adopted from the Sanskrit treatise the *Bodhisattva Grounds* (*Bodhisattvabhūmi*)<sup>28</sup> by Asaṅga and included in Dhammapāla's treatise.<sup>29</sup>

The audience Dhammapāla had in mind is indicated by the first sentence of his treatise:

We now undertake a detailed explanation of the pāramīs for clansmen following the suttas (P. *suttantikas*) who are zealously engaged in the practice of the vehicle to great awakening (P. *Mahābodhiyāna*), in order to improve their skillfulness in accumulating the collections (requisites) for awakening.

Here “suttantikas” does not refer to followers of the Sautrāntika tenet system but to Theravāda practitioners who aspire for full awakening and seek instruction in the sūtras on how to attain it. Dhammapāla's treatise fills out the instructions they need. “Mahābodhiyāna” does not refer to Mahāyāna as a school but to the vehicle (*yāna*) or mind leading to the noble spiritual goal of great awakening (*mahābodhi*) aspired to by bodhisattvas.

Just as in the Sanskrit tradition, the ten perfections are the collections (requisites, *sambhāra*) needed to attain the full awakening of a buddha. They are also good qualities to cultivate no matter which of the three paths we follow, and in the Pāli tradition are not considered unique practices reserved only for bodhisattvas. Theravāda practitioners of all inclinations practice these ten, the difference being that bodhisattvas have to practice them more intensely and for a longer period of time in order to attain their spiritual goal. Buddhaghosa comments (Vism 1.33), “The virtue of the pāramīs done for the deliverance of all beings is superior.” In this way, he praises the Buddha for having completed the bodhisattva path and having become a *sammāsaṃbuddha*, a fully awakened buddha.

It is said that by practicing the perfections all merit and goodness comes about. Disciples in Theravāda countries frequently praise their teachers for

their great accumulation of perfections. These ten are generosity (P. *dāna*), ethical conduct (P. *sīla*), renunciation (P. *nekkhamma*), wisdom (P. *paññā*), joyous effort (P. *virīya*), fortitude (P. *khanti*), truthfulness (P. *sacca*), determination (P. *adhiṭṭhāna*),<sup>30</sup> love (P. *mettā*),<sup>31</sup> and equanimity (P. *upekkhā*).

After Sumedha (the person in the previous continuum of Śākyamuni Buddha) first generated bodhicitta, he examined the factors that would bring about buddhahood and found that they were the ten perfections. At that time, he gave a concise explanation of each (BCA 119–20, 124–25, 129–30, 134–35, 139–40, 144–45, 148–50, 154–55, 159–60, 164–65):

(Generosity) As a full jar overturned by whatever it may be discharges the water completely and does not retain it there, so, seeing supplicants—low, high, or middling—give a gift completely like the overturned jar.

(Ethical conduct) As a yak, if her tail is caught in anything, does not injure her tail, but goes to death there, so, fulfilling the ethical habits in the four planes,<sup>32</sup> protect ethical conduct continuously like the yak [does] her tail.

(Renunciation) As a person who for long has lived painfully afflicted in a prison does not generate attachment there, but seeks only freedom, so do you see all becomings (rebirths in *saṃsāra*) as a prison. Be one turned toward renunciation for the utter release from becoming.

(Wisdom) As a monastic seeking alms, do not avoid low, high, or middling families [but go in successive order] to acquire sustenance. Then by questioning discerning people [about what is virtuous and what is not] at all [possible] times, go on to [practice] the perfection of wisdom and attain full awakening.

(Joyous effort) As a lion, the king of beasts, whether he is lying down, standing, or walking, is not of sluggish energy but always exerts himself, so you too firmly exert energy in every becoming.

(Fortitude) As the earth endures all that is thrown on it, both pure and impure, and shows no repugnance (or) approval, so you too have fortitude toward all respect and disrespect.

(Truthfulness) As Osadhi is balanced<sup>33</sup> for devas and mankind in [all] times and seasons and does not deviate from her course, so you too must not deviate from the course of the truths.

(Determination) As a mountain, a rock, stable and firmly based, does not tremble in rough winds but remains in precisely its own place, so you too must be constantly stable in resolute determination.

(Love) As water pervades with coolness good and evil people alike and carries away dust and dirt, so you too develop love for friend and foe equally.

(Equanimity) As the earth is indifferent to the impure and the pure thrown on it and avoids both anger and attachment, so you too must be balanced always in the face of the pleasant and unpleasant.

Etymologically, “pāramī” could mean “supreme,” referring to the supreme qualities bodhisattvas develop on their way to buddhahood. Or, similar to the Sanskrit, “pāramī” could mean “to go beyond,” indicating that bodhisattvas’ practices enable them to reach far beyond saṃsāra. The ten perfections in the Pāli and Sanskrit traditions are not exactly the same. Generosity, ethical conduct, fortitude, joyous effort, and wisdom are identical in their terms, whereas determination (*adhiṭṭhāna*) in Pāli and resolve (*praṇidhāna*) in Sanskrit are different terms, but the description of that perfection in both traditions is similar. Bodhisattvas need strong resolve and determination to complete the path and to benefit sentient beings. The other four perfections differ in their terms and in their meaning: in Pāli, renunciation, truthfulness, love, and equanimity; in Sanskrit, meditative stability, skillful means, power, and pristine wisdom. However, both traditions teach these eight excellent qualities as part of the overall presentation of the path to liberation and full awakening.

Dhammapāla says that when seen according to their nature, the ten perfections become six: generosity, ethical conduct, fortitude, joyous effort, meditative stability, and wisdom—the six perfections listed in the Sanskrit tradition (TP 12).

The perfection of renunciation, as the going forth into homelessness, is included in the perfection of ethical conduct; as seclusion from the hindrances in the perfection of meditative stability; and as a generally wholesome quality, in all six pāramīs.

One part of the perfection of truthfulness—its aspect of truthful speech or abstinence from falsehood—is included in the perfection of ethical conduct, and one part—its aspect of truthful knowledge—in the perfection of wisdom. The perfection of love is included in the perfection of meditative stability, and the perfection of equanimity in the perfections of meditative stability and wisdom. The perfection of determination is included in all.

The order of the ten perfections indicates a sequence of practice. Buddhaghosa explains the progression from one perfection to the next (Vism 9.124):<sup>34</sup>

For the Great Beings' minds retain their balance by giving preference to beings' welfare (love) by dislike of beings' suffering (compassion), by desire for the various successes achieved by beings to last (empathic joy), and by impartiality toward all beings (equanimity). And to all beings they (1) give gifts that are a source of pleasure without discriminating thus: "It must be given to this one; it must not be given to this one." And to avoid doing harm to beings they (2) undertake the precepts of ethical conduct. They practice (3) renunciation<sup>35</sup> for the purpose of excelling in ethical conduct. They cleanse their (4) wisdom for the purpose of nonconfusion about what is good and bad for beings. They constantly arouse (5) effort, having beings'



welfare and happiness at heart. When they have acquired heroic patience through supreme energy, they have (6) fortitude with beings' many kinds of faults. They (7) do not deceive when promising, "We shall give you this; we shall do this for you." They have unshakable (8) determination for beings' welfare and happiness. Through unshakable (9) love they place others first. Through (10) equanimity they expect no reward. Having thus fulfilled the [ten] pāramīs, these [divine abidings] then perfect all the good states classed as the ten powers, the four kinds of fearlessness, the six kinds of knowledge not shared [by śrāvakas], and the eighteen unique qualities of the Awakened One.<sup>36</sup> This is how they bring to perfection all the good states beginning with generosity.

Unlike in the Sanskrit tradition, Pāli sages did not develop a schema of bodhisattva grounds that correlate to each of the perfections. Also, they assert that even when Gautama was an advanced bodhisattva just prior to attaining awakening under the bodhi tree, he had not yet abandoned the fetters abandoned by a stream-enterer. He traversed all four stages of stream-enterer, once-returner, nonreturner, and became a buddha arahant during one meditation session while seated under the bodhi tree. In the Pāli presentation, the bodhisattva path is open to anyone who wishes to practice it. However, it is especially crucial for those who are to become wheel-turning buddhas—buddhas who will teach the Dhamma when it is not yet present in a particular world system.

Dhammapāla's treatise speaks of the perfections in a comprehensive way in sixteen sections:

1. their definition
2. the reason for calling them pāramīs
3. their number
4. their sequence
5. their characteristics, functions, manifestations, and proximate causes
6. their condition

7. their defilement
8. their cleansing
9. their opposites
10. how to practice them
11. how to analyze them
12. how to synthesize them
13. how they are accomplished
14. time needed to accomplish them
15. their benefits
16. their results

We'll begin by looking at how to practice the ten perfections. The characteristic they all share is that they function to benefit others. They are all motivated by the aspiration to attain buddhahood and are done with a mind unpolluted by craving, conceit, and wrong views. Great compassion and skillful means are their proximate causes and accompany each of them. Here "skillful means" (*upāyakauśalya, upāyakosalla*) refers to the wisdom "that transforms giving (and the other nine virtues) into requisites of awakening." Without compassion and skillful means, the perfections would be mere virtuous activities. Dhammapāla does not define the meaning of "wisdom" in this context any further.

### *Generosity*

Generosity is the giving of ourselves and our belongings. Based on nonattachment and the relinquishing of miserliness, generosity enables us to willingly give our possessions, body, and life for the well-being of others. In terms of the object given, there are three types of generosity: the giving of material possessions, the giving of fearlessness, and the giving of Dharma.

Regarding being *generous with material possessions* or money, bodhisattvas give whatever is needed to whomever needs it. They give even if not asked, and they give a suitable amount, not just a little so that the other person will leave them alone. They give without expecting to receive

a gift, praise, or fame in return, and when there is not enough to go around, they distribute it equitably among all those in need. Things that can cause harm or that can stimulate afflictions to arise in the other person's mind—for example, weapons, intoxicants, poisons, pornography, dangerous chemicals, and amusements that can lead to lack of conscientiousness—are not given. If a person is sick, they do not give food and drink that could hinder recovery or increase the illness, even if the sick person requests it. In other words, they give only what is conducive for the other's well-being, especially in the long term. They give what is appropriate to the recipient—for example, they do not give monastic robes to householders or lay clothes to monastics.

Should bodhisattvas notice that they are becoming attached to a particular object, they immediately find someone to give it to. When asked for something, bodhisattvas contemplate the disadvantages of clinging to things: destructive karma is created to acquire and protect them, they spark quarrels and disputes, they cause worry, possessiveness, and inevitably grief because everything is left behind at death. Instead they see the person asking as a close friend who is helping free them from bondage to these items, someone who is giving them the opportunity to practice the perfection of generosity.

In addition to giving external possessions, bodhisattvas give their own body. They may do this by serving others or, if needed, by giving parts of their body. But they give their own body only when it will be used well; they do not give it to someone who is mentally unstable or sociopathic. If they hesitate to give their body, they should think that if people in need of the various parts of a medicinal tree—the root, trunk, branches, leaves, and fruit—were to come and take them, the tree would not complain, “You're taking my belongings!” Similarly, since this body is in the nature of *duḥkha* and since they have entrusted their body to the service of others, there is no sense of clinging to it, thinking, “This is mine, this am I, this is my self.” Contemplating in this way, they give whatever is required with a joyful heart, knowing that through relinquishing attachment and giving generously, they will attain full awakening.

The *generosity of fearlessness* involves offering protection to those who are frightened, lost, or in danger. Aiding others in this way calms their mind

and shields them from physical suffering. One of the *Jātaka* tales (407) recounts the story of one of the Buddha's previous lives as a bodhisattva who was a monkey. As the leader of a group of 80,000 monkeys, he saved them from the brutality of the human king, even though he was being tormented by another monkey, who was a previous incarnation of Devadatta. Witnessing the monkey-bodhisattva's willingness to sacrifice his body and life to save the other monkeys and his virtuous actions done for the sake of others, the king was inspired to change his ways, to rule his kingdom with compassion and justice, and to do kind deeds to benefit others.

*Giving the Dharma* is to give correct Dharma teachings that lead to well-being and peace in this life and future lives, and to liberation and awakening. In this way bodhisattvas enable sentient beings who have not met the Dharma to meet it and mature the minds of those who are already practicing. Bodhisattvas give discourses on the vehicles of the śrāvakas, solitary realizers, or bodhisattvas in accordance with the dispositions of those in the audience.

Bodhisattvas do not give out of fear, shame, coercion, or obligation. They do not give unwillingly or by inconveniencing others and causing them problems. They give respectfully, with their own hands, a pleasant expression on their face, and kind words from their hearts. After they have given they do not pride themselves on their generosity, nor do they regret having given. They behave amicably, without drawing attention to their generous action or the gift.

When giving, bodhisattvas reflect on the symbolism of the gift. For example, when giving beverages, they think, "May I cease the thirst of sensual attachment," and when they give medicines, they think, "May I give sentient beings nirvāṇa, which is free from aging, sickness, and death." When they give monasteries and beautiful natural environments, they aspire, "May I and all others attain the dhyānas."

While giving, bodhisattvas recall the impermanence of the possessions and their life. They consider their possessions as things that are shared in common with others. They give with no sense of loss, not being concerned that now they will lack what they need. Bodhisattvas dedicate the result of

their generosity to the happiness and peace of all beings and to their awakening.

To whom should we give? The wanderer Vacchagotta told the Buddha that he heard some people say that gifts should be given only to the Buddha and his disciples because great merit is created by doing this, but gifts should not be given to other teachers and their disciples because little merit is created by doing this. The Buddha replied that he had been misrepresented, and he clarified (AN 3:57):

Vaccha, anyone who prevents another person from giving alms causes obstruction and impediment to three people: he obstructs the donor from doing a meritorious deed, he obstructs the recipient from having the gift, and prior to that, he undermines and harms his own character... Even if one throws away the rinsings from a pot or cup in a village pool or pond, wishing that the living beings there may feed on them—even this would be a source of merit, not to speak of giving a gift to human beings.

However, I do declare that offerings made to the virtuous bring rich fruit, whereas not so much those made to the unethical.

The Buddha then continued to explain that the virtuous are those who have abandoned the five hindrances—sensual desire, malice, lethargy and sleepiness, restlessness and regret, and doubt—and who possess ethical conduct, concentration, wisdom, liberation, and the knowledge and vision of liberation of one perfect in training. The merit created by giving depends on both the intention of the donor and the ethical purity of the recipient. For example, an act of generosity done with humility, respect, and kindness by someone who abandons the ten nonvirtues creates more merit than the same gift given by someone who does not maintain ethical conduct or someone who gives with indifference. Furthermore, giving to those intent on accomplishing the path and those who have realized the path creates more merit than giving to someone who hunts or exterminates insects. This does not mean, however, that we should neglect the poor and needy and give

only to spiritual practitioners. We should help whomever we can. In addition, we should not discourage people who want to give to good causes or worthy people.

### *Ethical Conduct*

Ethical conduct is pure and blameless physical and verbal conduct. Based on personal integrity and consideration for others, it is restraint from destructive actions and engagement in beneficial actions.

Contemplating the benefits of ethical conduct encourages us to practice it. It cools the fires of anger and greed, prepares the mind to attain higher states of meditative absorption, is the path leading to the awakenings of all three vehicles, and brings about the fulfillment of our wishes. Abiding in ethical conduct prevents guilt, remorse, and anxiety. It averts fear and reproach from others and is the basis for rejoicing in our own merit and goodness. It is a contribution to world peace, for others feel safe around a person who abandons even the wish to harm others. Good ethical conduct cannot be stolen by thieves or embezzled by manipulators; it is the basis for having a fortunate rebirth that enables us to continue practicing the Dharma.

Restraint from destructive actions is the best protection from being harmed ourselves; it is more effective than thousands of warheads and the best bodyguards. While ethical conduct governs actions of body and speech, it gives sovereignty over our mind. It is said that those with pure ethical conduct exude the “fragrance of virtue,” which makes them more attractive to others, and thus more effective in benefitting them, than any perfume. The *Dhammapada* counsels (110):

Better it is to live one day  
virtuous and meditative  
than to live a hundred years  
unethical and uncontrolled.

If afflictions arise in the mind threatening their virtue, bodhisattvas ask themselves, “Didn’t you resolve to attain awakening for the benefit of all beings?” Then they remind themselves, “I cannot be successful in mundane

affairs, let alone attain supramundane states, without ethical conduct. I should always behave well and safeguard my ethical conduct, otherwise others won't want to be around me. If I want to benefit others and lead them on the paths of the three vehicles, I must teach the Dharma. But someone with dubious ethical conduct cannot be trusted; to be trustworthy I must have a pure character. In addition, to guide others, I should have attainments such as the dhyānas and wisdom, and these are founded upon pure ethical conduct. Therefore I should protect my ethical conduct as a hen does her eggs.”

Bodhisattvas wish for others to live ethically so that they will have temporal and ultimate happiness. Thus they teach others and model themselves on four activities to purify ethical conduct:

1. Purifying inclinations for nonvirtue. Some people have strong personal values and goals and naturally have revulsion toward nonvirtue. Having personal integrity, they purify their inclinations for nonvirtue. Other people are more inclined to see the harmful effects of their nonvirtuous actions on others, and with consideration for others, purify those inclinations.
2. Taking precepts. Taking lay or monastic precepts helps bodhisattvas maintain their ethical conduct.
3. Not transgressing their precepts. Cultivating mindfulness and introspective awareness regarding their actions of body, speech, and mind helps bodhisattvas to establish themselves in virtue by not transgressing their precepts.
4. Purifying any transgressions that do occur. They invoke their sense of integrity and consideration for others and purify any transgressions using the proper means to do so.

There are two types of ethical conduct, that of restraint from negativity and that of enacting virtue—that is, abandoning what should not be done and doing what should be done. Regarding the first, having great confidence in the law of karma and its effects and considering the karmic results of their actions before doing them, bodhisattvas abandon the ten nonvirtues. This frees them from all their disadvantages, and they receive

the benefits of fulfilling the ten virtues. For example, because bodhisattvas do not harm others physically, all beings feel safe around them. In addition, their meditation on love excels without obstacles, and they are healthy, live long, and are free from the pain of hatred and animosity. By abandoning lying, their speech becomes authoritative and others trust them, thus facilitating instructing sentient beings and guiding them on the path. By abandoning disharmonious speech, they have companions and assistants who are harmonious among themselves and who help them to spread the Dharma. By exercising mindfulness and introspective awareness, bodhisattvas restrain their sense faculties, have honest and right livelihood, and are thoughtful in their use of requisites such as food, clothing, shelter, and medicine.

Regarding the second type of ethical conduct, enacting virtue, bodhisattvas respect their spiritual mentors and those worthy of respect, offer service to them, and care for them during illness and old age. They appreciate advice and instructions of the wise and rejoice in the merit of others. With gratitude for those who have helped them, they benefit and honor the worthy ones in return.

Furthermore, bodhisattvas care for the ill and injured, comfort the grieving, and give wise advice to the reckless, thereby directing them toward wholesome actions. Bodhisattvas aid the elderly, the blind, the deaf, and those who are physically or mentally challenged. They help those without faith to cultivate it, teach the lazy how to be energetic, and instruct those plagued by the five hindrances in the means to dispel them. Bodhisattvas rehabilitate those whose ethical conduct has degenerated, those who have succumbed to addictions, and those whose criminal behavior has harmed themselves and their families. Bodhisattvas are there to offer help when others experience misfortunes such as natural disasters, poverty, or social disorder. In short, in whatever way their companionship, knowledge, or abilities can benefit others, they employ these without hesitation.

Being judicious, bodhisattvas are accessible to others, but only at the right time, in a suitable place, and in an appropriate situation. They neither push their help and advice on others nor refuse to offer them when needed. In guiding others to virtue, bodhisattvas behave only in ways that increase



others' good qualities and virtuous actions. They never abuse, harm, or humiliate others, or lead them to act harmfully. When with others, bodhisattvas do not antagonize them by praising those they resent or criticizing those they hold dear. They encourage others to continue cultivating their good qualities and virtue.

When hearing of the wondrous deeds and spiritual accomplishments of previous bodhisattvas, they do not become discouraged, restless, or alarmed, but reflect, "Those great beings were once human beings like me, too. They attained their great abilities by training in the perfections and fulfilling the collections. I will train as they did and attain the same realizations and abilities to benefit others." In this way, bodhisattvas generate faith and encourage themselves.

Bodhisattvas conceal their virtues and good qualities and reveal their faults. They are content, do not complain, and are not conceited or manipulative. They are honest and direct, yet tactful. Seeing the disadvantages of the afflictions, they counteract them and do not let them interfere with their ethical conduct. Avoiding complacency, they continue to train in a balanced way that brings success, without discouragement or pushing themselves.

Buddhaghosa details the practice of ethical conduct in the first chapter of the *Path of Purification*. Although his explanation is specifically directed to those seeking the awakening of a śrāvaka, they also pertain to bodhisattvas' practice of the perfection of ethical conduct. The difference is that bodhisattvas' ethical conduct is motivated by bodhicitta and the merit from this practice is dedicated for full awakening. Dhammapāla concludes (TP 10):

They dedicate it only for the purpose of becoming an omniscient buddha in order to enable all beings to acquire the incomparable adornment of ethical conduct.

### *Renunciation*

Renunciation is founded on realizing the unsatisfactory nature of everything in saṃsāra. Based on a sense of spiritual urgency (P. *saṃvega*), practitioners

abandon attachment to sense pleasures and to existence in any realm of saṃsāra. Renunciation protects bodhisattvas from extreme asceticism, involvement in the afflictions of others, and indulging in sense pleasures.

To generate renunciation—the determination to be free from cyclic existence—bodhisattvas reflect on the dangers of sensual pleasures, the distractions of the householder’s life, and the benefits of the left-home life of monastics. The Buddha spoke about this often (MN 27.12):

Household life is crowded and dusty; life gone forth is wide open. It is not easy while living in a home to lead the holy life utterly perfect and pure as a polished shell.

In response to a king who questioned why he left his wealthy and prestigious family to practice the Dharma as a monastic, the Buddha’s disciple Raṭṭhapāla replied (MN 82.42):

Sensual pleasures, varied, sweet, and delightful,  
in many different ways disturb the mind.  
Seeing the danger in these sensual ties  
I chose to lead the homeless life, O King.

As fruits fall from the tree, so people too,  
both young and old, fall when this body breaks.  
Seeing this too, O King, I have gone forth.  
Better is the monastic’s life assured.

Bodhisattvas see that work and family life lead to numerous entanglements that occupy time and stimulate afflictions to arise uncontrollably. They know the deceptive nature of sense pleasures (TP 10):

Sense pleasures, like a drop of honey smeared over the blade of a sword, give limited satisfaction and entail abundant harm. They are fleeting like a show perceived in a flash of lightning, enjoyable only through a perversion of perception like the adornments of a madman, a means of vengeance like

a camouflaged pit of excrement, unsatisfying like a thin drink...subject to the duḥkha of change like the enjoyment of a festival, inwardly burning like the fire in the hollow of a tree, intensifying thirst like a drink of salt water, and giving little satisfaction like a necklace of bones.

Seeing the disadvantages of living immersed in and preoccupied with sense pleasures, bodhisattvas contemplate the benefits of renunciation, simplicity, and solitude, and request monastic ordination. Then, living in ethical conduct, they establish themselves in three of the traditions of āryas—contentment with robes, alms food, and shelter—and in this way they attain the fourth āryan tradition—delight in meditation. Although meditative stability is not listed as a separate perfection, it is subsumed under renunciation. The first level of renunciation leads to monastic ordination and pacification of the mind through ethical conduct. The second level of renunciation leaves behind the afflictions of the desire realm to attain the dhyānas.

The thirteen ascetic practices<sup>37</sup> that the Buddha set out for some of his disciples and the forty meditation objects for the cultivation of concentration and serenity<sup>38</sup> are discussed under the topic of renunciation. These are found in the *Path of Purification* (Vism 2.1) and should be practiced as explained there, the only differences being that here they are practiced with the bodhicitta motivation by those aspiring for the full awakening of buddhahood, and they are conjoined with compassion and the skillful means of wisdom.

## *Wisdom*

Wisdom understands the general and specific characteristics of phenomena. It illuminates phenomena and banishes ignorance and confusion; it arises based on concentration and knowledge of the four truths.

Wisdom purifies all other virtues and perfections, enabling them to serve as the causes for the omniscient mind of a buddha. Wisdom enables bodhisattvas to give even their own bodies and frees ethical conduct from afflictions such as craving. Wisdom recognizes the dangers of immersion in

sensual pleasures and the householder's life; it knows the benefits of monastic ordination, meditative stability, and nirvāṇa. Wisdom properly directs joyous effort, enabling it to accomplish all virtues, and it enables bodhisattvas to be patient with others' wrongdoings and inappropriate or offensive behavior. One who has wisdom speaks truthfully, has firm determination, cares for the welfare of all beings with love, and maintains equanimity when serving and guiding them. Wisdom enables bodhisattvas to remain equanimous while still abiding with the continuous vicissitudes of cyclic existence.

To cultivate the wisdom arising from learning, bodhisattvas fully study the five aggregates, twelve sources, eighteen constituents,<sup>39</sup> four truths, twenty-two faculties, twelve links of dependent origination and its cessation in their forward and reverse orders, four establishments of mindfulness, and classifications of phenomena such as the virtuous and nonvirtuous, and so forth. Bodhisattvas also learn worthy fields of secular knowledge that could be useful in benefiting sentient beings: science, writing, and so forth. Bodhisattvas learn through studying, listening to teachings, memorizing, and asking questions. They are ingenious in developing ways to lead others on the path and provide the temporal conditions others need in order to better themselves and their situation.

Bodhisattvas then cultivate the wisdom arising from thinking by reflecting on the specific characteristics of those phenomena, such as the aggregates, that they have studied.

Following that, they engage in the preliminary portion of the wisdom arising from meditation, which is included in the mundane kinds of full understanding (*P. pariññā*), beginning with discernment of the general and specific characteristics of the aggregates. The general characteristics are the three characteristics that all things share—impermanence, *duḥkha*, and not-self. In this regard, bodhisattvas understand all internal and external phenomena as follows: This is mere name and form, which arise and cease according to conditions. There is no agent or actor here. They are impermanent because they change in every moment; they are in the nature of *duḥkha* because they oppress sentient beings by coming and going. They are not-self because they cannot be mastered or controlled.

Through this understanding bodhisattvas abandon attachment and lead others to do so too. They mature sentient beings' minds in the paths of the three vehicles, helping them to attain the meditative absorptions, deliverances, concentrations, attainments, and mundane direct knowledges. They continue doing this until reaching the peak of wisdom and the qualities of the Buddha are in sight.

The wisdom of meditation may be spoken of in two ways. The first is the mundane superknowledges and their auxiliaries. These are the first five superknowledges—supernormal powers, divine eye, divine ear, knowledge of others' minds, and the knowledge of recollecting past lives.<sup>40</sup> The second is the five purifications—purification of view, purification by overcoming doubt, purification by knowledge and vision of what is and is not the path, purification by knowledge and vision of the way, and purification by knowledge and vision, which is the supramundane knowledge of the four ārya paths.<sup>41</sup> These topics have been explained for those following the śrāvakas' path to arhatship. As before, bodhisattvas should do them with the motivation of bodhicitta and to make these the collections or requisites for full awakening. Learning, thinking, and meditating should be imbued with compassion and the skillful means of wisdom and dedicated for the awakening of all sentient beings.

Bodhisattvas develop insight up to and including purification by knowledge and vision of the way. They must wait to attain purification by knowledge and vision because this pertains to the four ārya paths that realize nirvāṇa in stages. However, bodhisattvas must first complete the requisites for awakening—the perfections—before entering the ārya paths so that their realization of nirvāṇa coincides with their full awakening. Thus before entering the ārya paths, bodhisattvas must balance their development of compassion and skillful means on the one hand and wisdom on the other, and only when the perfections are complete do they enter the ārya paths and attain full awakening.

### *Joyous Effort*

Joyous effort involves employing our body and mind to willingly and happily work for the well-being of sentient beings. Free from laziness,

restlessness, and hounding ourselves with unrealistic expectations, joyous effort is untiring. Without energy, accomplishing even worldly goals is not possible, let alone actualizing our spiritual aspirations. With joyous effort we will happily practice the path for our own and others' welfare, without becoming discouraged or exhausted. With indefatigable effort, we will undertake liberating all sentient beings from saṃsāra and will not give up.

Bodhisattvas reflect, "Have I accumulated the collections today? What have I done to benefit sentient beings today?" In this way, they remember their heartfelt spiritual aspirations and encourage themselves to energetically act upon them. Bodhisattvas willingly take upon themselves the suffering of all beings and rejoice in their merit and virtues. They frequently recall the Buddha's great qualities and abilities and do all actions motivated by bodhicitta. In this way, day by day, they accumulate the requisites for buddhahood.

In addition, bodhisattvas seek remedies for sentient beings' suffering from hunger, thirst, loneliness, oppression, cold, heat, separation from loved ones, sickness, injury, poverty, warfare, betrayal, and so forth. Whatever happiness they experience—from enjoyable environments and companions, to the blissful meditative absorptions, to the happiness they gain from helping others—all these they wish for all beings to experience as well.

Bodhisattvas frequently meditate on the duḥkha experienced by sentient beings in all saṃsāric realms and generate compassion, which instigates their joyous effort to reach out and help. Speaking especially of bodhisattvas who have actualized levels of concentration, Dhammapāla describes how they meditate on compassion (TP 10):

[Bodhisattvas] contemplate the whole world of sentient beings immersed in the great suffering of saṃsāra, with the sufferings of afflictions and karma at its base. They see the beings in hell experiencing violent, racking, agonizing pain uninterruptedly over long periods as they are cut up, dismembered, split, pulverized, and roasted in scorching fires; the great suffering of animals owing to their mutual hostility as they fight, harass, and kill one another, or fall into captivity at the hands of others; the suffering of the

various hungry ghosts who go about with their bodies aflame, consumed and withered by hunger, thirst, wind, and sun, weeping and wailing as their food turns into vomit and pus.

They contemplate as well the suffering experienced by human beings, which is often indistinguishable from the suffering in the unfortunate realms: the misery and ruin they encounter in their search [for means of sustenance and enjoyment]; the various punishments they meet, such as the cutting off of their hands, and so forth; ugliness, deformity, and poverty; affliction by hunger and thirst; being vanquished by the more powerful, pressed into the service of others, and made dependent upon others; and when they pass away, falling into the hell, hungry ghost, or animal realms.

They see the celestial beings of the desire realm being consumed by the fever of lust as they enjoy their sense objects with scattered minds; living with the fever [of passions] unextinguished like a mass of fire stoked with gusts of wind and fed with a stock of dry wood; without peace, dejected, and dependent on others. They see form and formless realm gods after a long lifespan in the end succumb to the law of impermanence, plunging from their heights back down into the round of birth, aging, and death, like birds swooping swiftly down from the heights of the sky or like arrows shot by a strong archer descending in the distance. Having seen all this, bodhisattvas arouse a sense of spiritual urgency and suffuse all beings universally with love and compassion.

Needless to say, meditating in this way will arouse us to practice the perfections without cowardice, hesitation, or self-indulgent laziness, and with joyous effort to attain full awakening for the benefit of all beings. Such energy brings incredible spiritual courage and power to enact the glorious bodhisattva deeds. Thus from the time of generating the initial aspiration for full awakening until the time we become fully awakened buddhas, we

should reflect on the benefits of joyous effort and permeate our practice of the perfections with it.

### *Fortitude*

Fortitude is the ability to endure hardship and suffering. With fortitude, we do not give up on beings no matter how they treat us. Fortitude regarding the Dharma involves accepting Dharma concepts that our wisdom has not yet completely penetrated. Unlike blind faith, this fortitude trusts the Buddha's word because we have already benefited from practicing some of the Buddha's teachings. With fortitude we continue to investigate the teachings, knowing that time is needed to fully understand them. Fortitude in the Dharma prevents restlessness.

Acceptance and tolerance contribute to fortitude, for fortitude accepts the desirable, the undesirable, and emptiness. Fortitude vanquishes anger, the destroyer of happiness and merit. Fortitude and patience are the basis for a pleasant personality and a good reputation, which enables us to benefit others. People with little fortitude are demanding and continually unhappy. They create a lot of nonvirtuous karma due to harsh speech and spiteful actions, and they consume much time in complaining and being disagreeable.

There are many ways to think to prevent ourselves from becoming angry, resentful, or belligerent when others harm us. Dhammapāla suggests contemplating these.<sup>42</sup>

- Although this suffering arises from the harmful deeds of others, this body of mine is the field for that suffering, and the karma that made me take it was created by me alone.
- What am I angry at? The hair on his head? His nails? Bones (and other body parts)? The feeling aggregate? Discrimination aggregate? Miscellaneous factors aggregate? Consciousness aggregate?
- This suffering will consume my destructive karma so that it no longer obscures my mind.
- This person who is harming me is my teacher because she enables me to accomplish the perfection of fortitude.



- Although this person is harming me now, in the past he has been my friend and benefactor and has given me great help.
- All beings are like my young children. How can I be angry at their misdeeds done through unknowing?
- The harmful action, the one who did it, and the one to whom it was done—all these have ceased at this very moment. They are past. With whom, then, should I be angry? And who is becoming angry? Since all phenomena are not-self, who can harm whom?
- This harm is showing me the suffering nature of saṃsāra. How I wish others and myself were free from it! I must work toward that end.
- It is the nature of the sense faculties to encounter pleasant and unpleasant objects. I must maintain equanimity.
- The Buddha looks at all these beings as dear ones. How can I hate someone the Buddha loves?
- Nothing beneficial ever comes from anger: Due to it, my good qualities and happiness decline. I cannot sleep or eat well.
- Anger is the real enemy because it destroys all that is good, perpetrates harm, and spreads negativity.
- Enemies are the result of angry thoughts and preconceptions. To free myself from enemies, I must relinquish anger.
- Anger destroys my ethical conduct and merit. Without these how can I fulfill my bodhisattva aspiration? And until I do that, all sentient beings will be immersed in duḥkha.
- Mere phenomena alone exist, devoid of self or of anything pertaining to a self. They arise and pass away due to causes and conditions. They do not come from anywhere, they do not go anywhere, they are not established anywhere. There is no agency in anything whatsoever.

By applying whichever way of thinking works best at any particular moment, release anger and cultivate fortitude and compassion for your own and others' benefit.

A deep understanding of conditionality and impermanence is also effective for releasing anger, even in difficult or terrifying situations. Someone who has done intensive meditation on the various components that make up an experience can dissect an event or experience into its parts and see that each component arose dependent on its causes and that each one is also transient, arising and passing away in the briefest moment. Śāriputra says in the *Greater Discourse on the Simile of the Elephant's Footprint* (MN 28.8):

If others abuse, revile, scold, or harass a monastic, he understands thus: “This painful feeling born of ear-contact has arisen in me. That is dependent, not independent. Dependent on what? Dependent on contact.” Then he sees that contact is impermanent, that feeling is impermanent, that discrimination is impermanent, that miscellaneous factors are impermanent, and that consciousness is impermanent. And his mind...acquires confidence, steadiness, and decision.

The Buddha said that to retaliate when abused, criticized, insulted, or even beaten is not the practice of his disciples. Therefore, whether or not we have erred, guarding the mind against anger when accused is an important practice. One way to do this is to examine the conditioned and conditioning factors involved in the experience. For example, first you recognize a painful feeling that comes from hearing unpleasant words. That feeling is not a given; it arises due to conditions. In this case, there was contact—the coming together of the auditory consciousness and the sound by means of the auditory sense faculty—all of these being conditioned and impermanent factors that played a role in the arising of that painful feeling. The contact arises and passes away in a micro-moment; there is nothing enduring about it at all. Similarly, the auditory consciousness that heard the sounds, the conditioning factors that interpreted their meaning, the mental consciousness that understood them, and the discrimination that this person is an enemy—all of these are conditioned, dependent phenomena. Being conditioned, they are impermanent; when their cause ceases, they too cease. They cannot endure on their own or by their own power.

Being impermanent, all these factors are also unsatisfactory, and being both impermanent and unsatisfactory, they are not suitable to be considered mine, I, or my self. That is, none of those factors is a self that is being insulted or criticized. There is no person who is being criticized and no person who is feeling hurt due to being criticized.

If we are beaten or physically attacked, we should recall (MN 28.9): “This body is of such a nature that contact with fists, clods, sticks, and knives assail it.” Even if we did not go looking for violence, it may happen that we were caught in the middle of it. At this time we should remember that this is the nature of physical existence and cultivate love toward the assailant. Remembering that the Buddha would not want us to respond with wrath or self-pity is also effective in warding off harmful emotions that otherwise could arise in us.

The *Āṅgulimāla Sutta* relates a beautiful example of practicing fortitude by seeing suffering as a ripening of our karma and thereby accepting and feeling happy about the situation. After Āṅgulimāla, the detested and feared bandit and murderer, was subdued and ordained as a monastic by the Buddha, he attained arhatship. One day while he was on alms round, the townspeople saw him and scornfully threw things at him and struck him. Bleeding, with his alms bowl shattered and his robes torn, Āṅgulimāla approached the Buddha, who advised him, “Bear it, brahmin! You are experiencing here and now the results of deeds because of which you might have been tortured in hell for many years, for many hundreds of years, for many thousands of years.”

Taking that advice to heart, Āṅgulimāla accepted his situation and generated love and compassion for those who tormented him. He then said (MN 86.18):

Who checks the evil deeds he did  
by doing virtuous deeds instead,  
he illuminates the world  
like the moon freed from a cloud...

Let my enemies hear discourse on the Dhamma,  
let them be devoted to the Buddha’s teachings,

let my enemies wait on those good people  
who lead others to accept the Dhamma.

Let my enemies give ear from time to time  
and hear the Dhamma of those who preach fortitude,  
of those who speak as well in praise of kindness,  
and let them follow up that Dhamma with kind deeds.

For surely then they would not wish to harm me,  
nor would they think of harming other beings,  
so those who would protect all, frail or strong,  
let them attain the all-surpassing peace.

The Buddha gave excellent advice for dealing with painful, pleasant, and neutral feelings when he spoke to sick patients at an infirmary. In daily life we often blindly react to these three feelings, but when we are ill or injured, painful feelings occupy our attention. Without mindfulness and introspective awareness at that time, we easily fall prey to anger and aversion toward the unpleasant feelings and to craving for pleasant, or at least neutral, feelings. The Buddha advises (SN 36.7):

When a monastic dwells thus, mindful and introspectively aware, diligent, ardent, and resolute, if there arises in him a painful feeling, he understands thus: “There has arisen in me a painful feeling. Now that is dependent, not independent. Dependent on what? Dependent on just this body. But this body is impermanent, conditioned, dependently arisen. So when the painful feeling has arisen in dependence on a body that is impermanent, conditioned, dependently arisen, how could it be permanent?” He dwells contemplating impermanence in the body and in painful feeling; he dwells contemplating vanishing, contemplating fading away, contemplating cessation, contemplating relinquishment. As he dwells thus, he abandons the underlying tendency to

aversion in regard to the body and in regard to painful feeling.

The Buddha makes similar points regarding how to contemplate pleasant feelings so as to give up the underlying tendency to sensual desire and how to contemplate neutral feelings in order to abandon the underlying tendency to ignorance.

This is excellent advice to follow whenever we do not feel well or whenever the mind is unhappy or filled with painful feelings. First, be aware that a painful feeling is present. Instead of thinking, “I don’t like this. It shouldn’t happen to me. I want it to go away,” turn your attention to the feeling itself and contemplate it. A painful physical feeling does not exist independent of all other factors. Among other factors, it depends on having a body. The body itself is transient and dependent. It depends on the various physiological systems that compose it. It arose dependent on ignorance, karma, and the consciousness taking rebirth. The body is conditioned by karma as well as by environmental factors. Painful feelings that arise in such an impermanent, conditioned body cannot be permanent. These feelings, too, are conditioned and dependently arise. They are impermanent—arising and vanishing in each split second. Furthermore, the painful feelings are not I or mine; they are not a substantial self, nor do they belong to such a self. What is “mine” about these feelings?

To be balanced in your attitude toward all feelings, do this contemplation when you experience pleasant or neutral feelings as well. Wanting to overcome painful feelings yet craving to indulge in pleasant ones will not bring wisdom or liberation. All feelings in saṃsāra are marked by the three characteristics of impermanence, duḥkha, and not-self.

When meditators with strong concentration and wisdom contemplate in this way, they naturally begin to contemplate vanishing, fading away, cessation, and relinquishment. That is, they use the wisdom gleaned in meditation to reduce and eventually abandon the underlying tendency to aversion. Then all their future pleasant, painful, or neutral feelings will be experienced with nonattachment. The Buddha says (SN 36.6):

The wise one, learned, does not feel

the pleasant and painful [mental] feeling.  
This is the great difference between  
the wise one and the worldling.

For the learned one who has comprehended Dhamma,  
who clearly sees this world and the next,  
desirable things do not provoke his mind;  
toward the undesired he has no aversion.

For him attraction and repulsion no more exist;  
both have been extinguished, brought to an end.  
Having known the dust-free, sorrowless state,  
the transcender of existence rightly understands.

### *Truthfulness*

Truthfulness is speaking without deception. To benefit sentient beings, they must trust us, and being honest enables them to do so. Not only do we train ourselves to be patient when confronted with others' wrongdoings, abuse, and ungrateful actions, we must remain true to our word to benefit them. Through speaking truthfully and acting according to our word, we do not abandon sentient beings, and they will come to see that we are reliable. Being truthful builds the foundation for all good qualities and opens the door to be able to enact the welfare of all beings.

Bodhisattvas speak what is true, whether others react by helping or harming them. This is true not only in ordinary affairs but in teaching the Dharma as well. They teach the Dharma skillfully and according to the inclination of the audience, but they do not alter the Buddha's words so that others will like them. Thus sentient beings can trust that when bodhisattvas teach they are receiving the actual Dharma, not something adjusted or made up in order to win their favor and receive more offerings.

With truthfulness bodhisattvas accept the empty nature of beings. Not being deceived about the true nature of phenomena, they complete all the collections and requisites for awakening and accomplish the bodhisattva path.

The *Basket of Conduct* (CP 3.9) relates the story of the Buddha's previous life as a bodhisattva who was born as a quail. As a tiny chick, he was completely dependent on his parents for food and protection. However, when a forest fire approached, they were forced to abandon him for fear of their own lives. Terrified and without any ability to fly away, the chick reflected on the power of the Dharma and remembered the strength of the truth as demonstrated by previous buddhas. The baby quail made a declaration of truth, whereby the fires receded and he was saved.<sup>43</sup>

### *Determination*

Determination is the unshakable resolve to fulfill our promise to liberate sentient beings and to perfect the ten perfections. It gives us the courage to remain steadfast in the practice, even when afflictive mental states attempt to sway us to do the opposite. As long as we are in saṃsāra, afflictions will arise and interfere with practicing the perfections. With determination and energy we must remain constant, doing what we know is right.

The *Temiya Jātaka* tells the story of the Buddha's previous life as a bodhisattva born as the much-longed-for son of the king and queen of Kasi. As an infant, one day he heard his father sentence some robbers to a harsh punishment, and that caused him to remember a past life in which he had been a king and had acted similarly. Subsequent to that life, he had been born in the hell realm due to the harmful karma he had created. Temiya desperately did not want to rule a kingdom again and followed the advice of a goddess who counseled him to pretend to be dumb and incapable. This he did for sixteen years, and while his parents knew this was a pretense and did everything they could to break his resolve, he was determined not to assume the throne. Finally at wits end, his parents ordered a charioteer to take him to a cemetery and club him to death. Temiya remained resolute, thinking (CP 3.6.17–18):

I did not break that resolute determination that was for the sake of awakening itself. Mother and father were not disagreeable to me, nor was self disagreeable to me.

Omniscience was dear to me; therefore I resolutely determined on that itself.

When Temiya told the charioteer his wish to become an ascetic, the charioteer wanted to join him in spiritual pursuits. But first he returned to tell Temiya's parents, the king and queen, what had happened. They came to Temiya's hermitage, where he taught the Dharma to them and their retinue, after which all of them renounced and became ascetic spiritual practitioners.

### *Love*

Love is the aspiration to give happiness to all sentient beings and create the conditions whereby they will be happy. Free from resentment or expectation, love lies behind our determination to fulfill the aspiration to awakening and to complete the practices of the perfections. Someone who is self-centered lacks genuine love; they harm others and have many enemies in this life and are not happy in future lives. Someone lacking in love and compassion cannot lead all beings to nirvāṇa. The Buddha says (AN 11.16):

When the liberation of the mind by love is developed and cultivated, frequently practiced, made your vehicle and foundation, firmly established, consolidated, and properly undertaken, eleven blessings may be expected. What eleven?

You sleep peacefully; you awaken peacefully; you see no bad dreams; you are dear to human beings; you are dear to nonhuman beings; you will be protected by devas; fire, poison, and weapons cannot injure you; your mind becomes easily concentrated; your facial complexion will be serene; you will die unconfused; and if you do not penetrate higher, you will be reborn in the Brahmā-world.

To illustrate the peace that love brings, the *Basket of Conduct* tells the story of the Buddha's previous life as Sāma, a lad who lived in the forest, taking care of his blind parents (CP 3.13):



When in a wood I was Sāma...I brought the lions and tigers in the forest to love. Surrounded by lions and tigers, by leopards, bears, buffaloes, and by spotted deer and wild boar, I lived in the wood. No one was frightened of me, nor did I fear anyone. Sustained by the power of love, I delighted in the forest then.

Bodhisattvas think, “It is good to wish for the happiness of others, but that alone will not provide them with happiness. I must act with love and employ joyous effort to accomplish the welfare of others.” Bodhisattvas also reflect that sentient beings are the incomparable, supreme field of merit with which they can cultivate virtue and fulfill the collections. In that way, they always maintain a mind that cherishes sentient beings and never abandons them. With an unbounded heart they reach out to give happiness to others. To do that, they must eliminate sentient beings’ pain, misery, and their cause—the afflictions. In this way, compassion, which is a principal cause of buddhahood, arises and expands in their minds.

### *Equanimity*

Equanimity is impartiality with respect to the desirable and pleasing and the undesirable and displeasing. It is an inner attitude that doesn’t oscillate according to either the people or the objects we encounter. Remaining equanimous, bodhisattvas are able to continue to practice no matter what comes their way. Equanimity enables us to benefit sentient beings impartially, not sliding into attachment for those who benefit, praise, and give us offerings, and not falling into animosity for those who don’t fulfill our expectations or wishes or who inflict harm on us. Without equanimity our mood resembles a yo-yo that constantly goes up and down.

The mind is reactive to the external environment and controlled by the sense objects in it. This lack of balance impedes developing concentration, disturbs ethical conduct, and obstructs acting in ways that benefit sentient beings. Without equanimity, we cannot complete the perfections well, and we find difficulty in dedicating the virtue from practicing the perfections for the awakening of all sentient beings. But imbued with equanimity, we can

face whatever comes in a balanced way, free from worry and fear regarding our life. Equanimity overcomes discontent, and being unconcerned about either the praise or the insults of others, bodhisattvas' determination to serve them never flags. In short, equanimity supports the practice of all the perfections.

The *Basket of Conduct* relates the story of the Buddha's previous life as a bodhisattva who, being impoverished, lay down in a cemetery and piled up bones to use as a pillow. Wondering who he was, some children approached. Some of them gave him gifts, others cruelly ridiculed him. Toward them all, the bodhisattva maintained equanimity.

### *The Sequence of the Perfections*

There are several reasons to explain why each perfection follows its preceding one; a summary of them will suffice. To develop our understanding of the perfections, it is helpful for us to reflect and see additional connections among them. In most cases, the preceding or subsequent perfection helps to perfect or purify the one immediately before or after it.

Generosity is first because (1) it is comparatively easy to practice, and (2) all beings—religious and nonreligious—respect and practice it.

Ethical conduct follows because (1) although generosity benefits others, ethical conduct stops us from harming them, and (2) generosity is the cause of wealth, and to enjoy that wealth in the most suitable conditions a fortunate rebirth is needed. Ethical conduct is the principal cause for good rebirth.

Renunciation comes next because (1) although ethical conduct entails having good physical and verbal conduct, renunciation involves good mental conduct, (2) one who has renunciation can develop the dhyānas without difficulty, and (3) after abandoning harmful physical and verbal actions, we should abandon mental obsessions.

Wisdom is spoken of now because (1) in the absence of the dhyānas, wisdom is difficult to develop, and (2) skillful means, which is wisdom in working for others' welfare, arises as a result of meditation focused on their well-being.

Joyous effort follows because (1) bodhisattvas undertake wonderful deeds to benefit sentient beings on the basis of understanding their emptiness with wisdom, and (2) joyous effort follows upon the careful consideration and understanding involved in wisdom.

Fortitude comes next because (1) it can balance the energy produced by joyous effort so that restlessness is calmed, (2) those with joyous effort must also persevere to accomplish their spiritual aims, (3) bodhisattvas must patiently endure hardships while joyously working to benefit sentient beings, and (4) bodhisattvas who energetically aid sentient beings do not crave award or acknowledgment as they cultivate fortitude with respect to the Dharma.

Truthfulness is mentioned now because (1) truthfulness sustains the resolve to practice fortitude, (2) while fortitude endures the harms of others, truthfulness keeps the bodhisattva's promise to benefit them, (3) bodhisattvas remain steady with fortitude when confronted with abuse, and with truthfulness they do not give up on others, and (4) this shows the truth of the wisdom that was developed through the fortitude understanding the emptiness of sentient beings.

Determination follows because (1) whereas truthfulness is nondeceptive speech, determination is commitment to fulfill the bodhisattva practices without wavering, (2) after gaining the truthfulness of wisdom knowing things as they really are, bodhisattvas have strong determination to complete the requisites (collections) for awakening.

Love is mentioned next because (1) it sustains and supports the determination to work for the welfare of sentient beings, (2) after making a strong determination to work for others' welfare, love provides for their well-being, and (3) undertaking activities to benefit sentient beings proceeds well only with an unshakable determination.

Equanimity is next because (1) when bodhisattvas are actively working to benefit sentient beings with love, they must remain equanimous to any harm or insults they receive, (2) equanimity evolves from love, and (3) bodhisattvas remain equanimous and impartial even to those who wish them well and treat them well.

The perfections are defiled by afflictions, preconceptions, and mental proliferations. They are cleansed by applying the antidotes to the afflictions.

When contemplating the perfections, it is helpful to reflect: What afflictions do I need to particularly guard against when practicing each perfection? What are the antidotes to that affliction? How can I energize mindfulness and introspective awareness to recognize the afflictions and apply their antidotes?

### *How to Accomplish the Perfections*

The perfections can be related to other categories of phenomena as a way of helping to penetrate the meaning of each and to understand the relationships among them. The ten perfections are related to the four foundations of truth, relinquishment, peace, and wisdom.<sup>44</sup>

1. Bodhisattvas practice the *foundation of truth* by acting in accordance with what they have vowed and understood. Through this they maintain their practices of generosity, ethical conduct, and so on.
2. They practice the *foundation of relinquishment* by giving up the opposite of each perfection—for example, relinquishing stinginess, unethical behavior, and so on.
3. They practice the *foundation of peace* by pacifying obstacles to each perfection—for example by abandoning ignorance, anger, attachment, and fear toward recipients and objects of generosity, by pacifying physical and verbal misconduct, and so on.
4. They practice the *foundation of wisdom* by applying each perfection at the proper time, place, in a suitable manner, and so forth.

The perfections are actualized by four methods:

1. Enthusiastically accumulating the collection of merit for the sake of full awakening by practicing the perfections without discouragement or lack of interest.
2. Engaging in them completely with respect and esteem.
3. Doing them uninterruptedly with perseverance.
4. Continuing to do them over a long time without stopping part way.

To develop the inner strength to complete the path, bodhisattvas offer themselves and their possessions to the buddhas—for example, when they receive something, they immediately resolve to share it with others and use only what remains for themselves. Having done that, they may still encounter four shackles that impede their generosity. Fortunately there are counterforces that break these shackles:

(1) Lacking the habit of giving in the past. When a bodhisattva has something to give and a potential recipient is nearby but he does not immediately think to give it, he counteracts this by thinking, “This complacency is due to my lack of familiarity with generosity in the past. In order to overcome this, I will give now, and give with delight.” In this way, he trains himself and develops the habit of giving with joy.

(2) Having only poor-quality goods to give. If a bodhisattva has only substandard objects to offer, she reflects, “The lack of good items to offer is due to my not having practiced generosity in the past. Therefore, even though what I have is poor quality, I will give it so that in the future excellent items will come my way and I can practice generosity with them.”

(3) Being attached to the good qualities of the object. When a bodhisattva is reluctant to give because he finds the object very attractive, he admonishes himself, “You vowed to attain the most excellent state of awakening. For that noble purpose, you need to give excellent and beautiful gifts. Now that you have the chance to do this, do it!”

(4) Feeling a sense of loss or worry after giving. If a bodhisattva worries about suffering from not having the object or feels the pang of loss from giving even though she has enough, she thinks, “Possessions are transient. There is no way I can own this forever, so I should use it to create merit and give it now. Because I was stingy in the past, now my belongings are depleted; I do not want to create more karma like this. Therefore, whatever I have, be it a lot or a little, I will give so that I can perfect the quality of generosity.”

In all four instances, the bodhisattva then gives generously, openhandedly, and with delight. In this way he destroys the four shackles to giving. Similarly, whenever he faces a hindrance in completing any of the other perfections, he thinks in whatever way is helpful to dispel it, for most of the hindrances are in the mind.

Sometimes bodhisattvas will encounter difficulties in their practice of the perfections: they may be deprived of means of support, be insulted or abused, face physical illness or injury, or feel low-spirited and exhausted. At this time, they reflect, “I have given myself to the buddhas for the sake of the awakening of all beings. Whatever comes, comes.” In this way they trust the Three Jewels and have confidence in the law of karma and its effects. They do not succumb to fear or worry and remain unshaken and determined to continue on the bodhisattva path. Dhammapāla concludes:

In brief, the destruction of self-centeredness and the development of love for others are the means to accomplish the pāramīs.

By contemplating sentient beings as their precious children or relatives, bodhisattvas increase their love, compassion, and affection. Having subdued their own ignorance, attachment, and animosity, they mature others’ minds with the four ways of gathering disciples—generosity, loving speech, encouragement, and acting congruently. These were described according to both traditions in the chapter “Sharing the Dharma.” With these four ways of gathering disciples, bodhisattvas cause sentient beings to enter and then reach the end of whichever of the three vehicles they choose. Bodhisattvas treat all beings as equal to themselves in importance, and emotionally they remain stable under all circumstances, be they pleasant or unpleasant, helpful or harmful. After they become buddhas, their ability to benefit others and lead them on the path is perfected due to having practiced these four ways of gathering disciples while they were bodhisattvas.

Bodhisattvas can be grouped according to which factor is prominent in them. In some bodhisattvas wisdom is predominant, in others faith, and in others energy is principal. These bodhisattvas attain full awakening, respectively, in four countless and a hundred thousand great eons, eight countless and a hundred thousand great eons, and sixteen countless and a hundred thousand great eons. Since full awakening is attained by the power of wisdom, those bodhisattvas inclined toward wisdom proceed more rapidly.

The three types of bodhisattvas all receive predictions of their awakening directly from a buddha. When they first generate bodhicitta, the length of time they will practice to fulfill the perfections and attain full awakening is not part of their aspiration. However, they perfect the perfections in the amount of time that corresponds to their respective type. It is not possible for them to attain full awakening quicker than that time period because it takes that length of time for their knowledge to mature and for them to accumulate the collections for full awakening. Just as fruit ripens after the length of time required for its growth and not sooner, so too a bodhisattva's mind ripens in the length of time required for their type.

### *Benefits and Results of Practicing the Perfections*

The benefits of practicing the perfections are countless. In Theravāda countries today, practicing them is highly respected, so much so that people who aspire for arhatship engage in ten wonderful practices similar to the perfections.

However, doing these practices with the motivation of bodhicitta and sealing them with the understanding of not-self make these practices unique. Rather than being ordinary generosity that leads to wealth in future lives, those factors make the bodhisattvas' perfections causes for full awakening. Other benefits that accrue to bodhisattvas are that they become like kind and compassionate parents of all beings. They are worthy of offerings and reverence and become supreme fields of merit. Humans and nonhumans hold them dear and they are protected by deities. Bodhisattvas cannot be harmed by wild animals and will have excellent conditions in whatever rebirth they take. They become energetic, mindful, concentrated, and wise. Their afflictions are tamed so they are easy to get along with, easy to admonish, and are hospitable and cooperative. Bodhisattvas' manifest malice, jealousy, competitiveness, hypocrisy, miserliness, stubbornness, and arrogance have greatly decreased.<sup>45</sup> Needless to say, they have many friends and helpers, and as a result of their compassion, others treat them well. Their presence in an area prevents danger and disasters. Even when bodhisattvas are born in unfortunate realms, they are not oppressed by suffering, but instead their sense of spiritual urgency increases as they

transform all experiences into methods that increase their resolve to attain buddhahood.

More benefits of bodhisattvas' perfections are:

They have a *long life* in whatever state of existence they are born, and as a result, they can accumulate many virtuous qualities, deepen their meditation, and bring to fruition many virtuous actions to benefit sentient beings.

By having an *attractive form*, bodhisattvas attract others to them and inspire confidence and reverence in those who value and respond to attractive forms.

Bodhisattvas are born in *excellent families*, who steer them to the Dharma when they are still children. Being from families that are well-known and well-respected in society, bodhisattvas can guide those who are attached to social status.

Bodhisattvas have *sovereignty* in their lives. They are influential and have many helpers who assist them in accomplishing their virtuous works, especially in enacting the four ways of gathering disciples and using the Dharma to subdue those who are rash and unrestrained.

Bodhisattvas have *credibility*. Because they are trustworthy and reliable, sentient beings value their advice and direction and give them authority. This enables them to protect others from making unwise or brash decisions and to steer them to increase their virtuous qualities.

As dedicated practitioners, bodhisattvas have the *greatness of spiritual power*. Because their minds have been transformed into the Dharma, bodhisattvas cannot be conquered or subjugated by others, but instead subdue them through their noble qualities.

Not all bodhisattvas will have the above conditions in every birth, but those who seek to benefit sentient beings through these noble qualities gain them as results of their great accumulation of merit and wisdom. Through these accomplishments, bodhisattvas' practice of the perfections increases and they become more capable of guiding others in the Dharma of the three vehicles and have more opportunities to do so.

In understanding these benefits, we should not expect each and every bodhisattva to display them. For example, it is incorrect to think, "That



person does not have an attractive form, so he must not be a bodhisattva” or “That person is from a lower social class, so he cannot be a bodhisattva.” Bodhisattvas manifest in whatever ways can benefit sentient beings, according to their karma. So bodhisattvas may appear as lepers, homeless people, refugees, or people who are physically challenged. They do this in order to benefit others. Since we do not know who is and isn’t a bodhisattva, we should avoid judging and discriminating against others but instead view all sentient beings as teachers. After all, we can learn important things from interacting with and listening to everyone.

The benefits of practicing the perfections can be found in the Pāli sūtras. In the *Sutta on the Wonderful and Marvelous* (*Acchariyaabbhuta Sutta*, MN 123), the Buddha asks Ānanda to describe the Tathāgata’s wonderful and marvelous qualities, and in the *Sutta on the Great Passing* (*Mahāparinibbāna Sutta*, DN 16.3.15–20) the Buddha speaks of eight causes of the great trembling of the earth, six of them related to events in the Buddha’s life. The *Jātakas* and the *Buddhavaṃsa* mention other benefits of practicing the perfections. While many of the stories of the Buddha’s previous lives in the *Jātakas* sound like legends and folktales, the points that they illustrate can be applied to our lives. On a deeper level, these stories illustrate the level of commitment to compassion and to fulfilling the perfections that bodhisattvas have; pondering them will inspire us to think and act in that way.

The result of bodhicitta and the bodhisattvas’ perfections is buddhahood, with the magnificent form body (*rūpakāya*) that possesses the thirty-two marks and eighty signs of a great person<sup>46</sup> and the truth body (*dharmakāya*),<sup>47</sup> glorious with its wondrous qualities such as the ten powers, the four fearlessnesses, the six kinds of knowledge not held in common with others, the eighteen unique qualities of a buddha,<sup>48</sup> and so forth. The qualities of a buddha are too numerous to ever finish describing. Dhammapāla concludes his treatise:

And it is said: If a buddha were to speak in praise of a buddha, speaking nothing else for an eon, the long eon would end but the praise of the Tathāgata would still not be finished.

## Part II. The Three Vehicles and Their Fruits

HAVING BEEN INTRODUCED to the bodhisattva perfections in both the Sanskrit and Pāli tradition, we'll now turn to the paths and fruits of the three vehicles. The paths are consciousnesses that are developed in stages as we boost our concentration and deepen our understanding and realization of the ultimate truth. Knowing these enriches our practice in multiple ways. Our understanding of the Three Jewels will expand, especially our understanding of the progressive practices of the Saṅgha Jewel and their specific result. But we cannot understand these without increasing our understanding of the Dharma Jewel—the true paths and true cessations. And since the final result of the path is supreme buddhahood, our appreciation of the abandonments and realizations of the Buddha Jewel will also grow. With this, our feeling when we take refuge in the Three Jewels will be transformed and our faith in their ability to guide us on the path will increase exponentially.



# 6

## Breakthrough to Nirvāṇa: The Pāli Tradition

LEARNING ABOUT THE PATHS and fruits of the three vehicles gives us a road map of the practices that we must engage in and the results that will come about according to the vehicle we enter. This will guide us in our practice and will enable us to check our progress on the path. Of course, conferring with our spiritual mentor is undoubtedly necessary, but this road map is helpful to keep us going straight on the path.

In addition, as we learn the paths and fruits of our chosen spiritual vehicle, we will begin to imagine gaining those realizations and qualities. Such imagination is important in Dharma practice since it inspires us to engage with joyous effort in the practices to cultivate these realizations and qualities. In addition, while we engage in Dharma practice, imagination will spark small glimpses of those realizations and qualities, which further fuels our effort to create the causes to attain them. In short, learning the paths and grounds not only plants seeds in our minds but also affects how we think about the paths and grounds now.

The remainder of this chapter will present the paths and fruits of Fundamental Vehicle practitioners from the viewpoint of the Pāli tradition. The next chapter will cover the same material from the perspective of the Sanskrit tradition.

### *The Three Vehicles*

The oldest Pāli sūtras speak of three types of individuals who attain awakening: a fully awakened buddha (*samyaksambuddha*, *sammāsambuddha*), a solitary realizer (*pratyekabuddha*, *paccekabuddha*), and a śrāvaka (P. *sāvaka*). All of them were seen as having attained the same awakened state of nirvāṇa, although each of them had different

characteristics. A fully awakened buddha realizes awakening without a teacher in his last life. He teaches the Dharma to others and begins a dispensation (*śāsana, sāsana*)—that is, he turns the Dharma wheel in a time when the Buddhadharmā is not present in the world. A solitary realizer attains awakening without the aid of a teacher, does not generally teach others verbally,<sup>49</sup> and does not begin a dispensation. A śrāvaka attains awakening through following the guidance of a teacher. All three have realized the fourfold path knowledge (P. *magga ñāṇa*)—that is, they have realized the four truths and are arhats.

With the passage of time, each of the three became known as practitioners of different vehicles. Practitioners of the Pāli tradition continued to follow the early sūtras, thus aiming for the śrāvaka awakening that they speak of. Nevertheless, the bodhisattva ideal was revered in the *Buddhavaṃsa*, a later text that was added to the Sūtra Piṭaka. This text also spoke of the bodhisattva's great aspiration (*ābhinīhāra, abhinīhāra*) and put forth ten perfections practiced by a bodhisattva, and the *Jātaka* tales illustrate a bodhisattva's practice of the perfections. Meanwhile, practitioners in some of the other early schools, such as the Sarvāstivāda and the Mahāsāṃghika, came to speak of three vehicles leading to awakening that were differentiated by the difficulty and length of practice.

As time went on, in addition to the characteristics described above, new terms came about to describe these three types of individuals and their respective states of awakening. A buddha attains full awakening (P. *sammā-sambodhi*) and is all-knowing. Here “all-knowing” does not mean a buddha knows everything, but that he could know anything if he turned his mind to it. A buddha has eradicated all defilements as well as latencies (habitual tendencies, *vāsanā*). Practitioners with a strong motivation to attain full awakening are called *sammā-sambodhisattas*. Those with a virtuous aspiration to attain a solitary realizer's awakening (P. *pacceka-bodhi*) are known as solitary realizer bodhisattvas (P. *pacceka-bodhisattas*), and those aspiring to attain śrāvaka awakening (P. *sāvaka-bodhi*) are known as śrāvaka bodhisattvas (P. *sāvaka-bodhisatta*).<sup>50</sup> All three practice the āryan eightfold path and attain the path that realizes the four truths.

A commentary on the *Buddhavaṃsa* speaks of *arhat-bodhi* (the awakening of a śrāvaka arhat) and *sabbaññu-bodhi* (the awakening of a

buddha). Present-day Theravāda practitioners regard the perfections as practices done by all three types of practitioners because they bring about qualities that are requisites for awakening. However, someone aspiring for a buddha's awakening cultivates the perfections both for a longer period of time and in more depth than practitioners aspiring to become śrāvaka or solitary realizer arhats.

### *Dhyānas and the Destruction of Pollutants*

Several modes of progressing to liberation exist and a general map is given here, but as with any map, there are smaller roads that are not shown. Similarly, there are a diversity of ways of progressing through the four stages of liberation—stream-enterer (*srotāpanna*, *sotāpanna*), once-returner (*sakṛdāgāmin*, *sakadāgāmi*), nonreturner (*anāgāmin*, *anāgāmi*), and arhat (P. *arahant*).

The dhyānas and formless realm absorptions are states of deep mental tranquility in which the defilements are temporarily suppressed but not eradicated. The Pāli commentaries say that a meditator who has developed access concentration (P. *upacāra samādhi*), which is prior to attaining the first dhyāna, can develop insight wisdom and then gradually progress through the stages of stream-enterer, once-returner, and nonreturner to attain arhatship. These are called “dry-insight arhats” (P. *sukkhavipassaka*) because their minds are not moistened and softened by the deep concentration of the dhyānas. The Sarvāstivāda Abhidharma, followed in the Tibetan tradition, speaks of similar arhats.

Those who go beyond access concentration and gain the first dhyāna can use that as the basis to attain the destruction of pollutants. They do not need to cultivate any levels of concentration beyond that. However, some meditators also develop the second, third, and fourth dhyānas and then use the latter to attain the destruction of pollutants. When describing how he attained the destruction of all pollutants, the Buddha said he attained the fourth dhyāna and then realized the three higher knowledges: recollection of previous lives, knowledge of the death and rebirth of sentient beings, and knowledge of the destruction of all pollutants.

Each level of dhyāna gives power, precision, and clarity to the mind, and the mind of the fourth dhyāna in particular is described as being “purified, bright, unblemished, free from imperfections, malleable, wieldy, steady, and attained to imperturbability.” This mind is free from the imperfections of the minor corruptions and minor defilements and can be molded according to the meditator’s needs. It doesn’t waver and is completely still.

To actualize the knowledge of the destruction of all pollutants, meditators first cultivate insight wisdom (P. *vipassanā pañña*) by meditating on the three characteristics—impermanence, duḥkha, and not-self. Based on a meditation practice such as the four establishments of mindfulness, they refine their mindfulness, and with the practice of dhyāna, the mind has become very sharp, clear, and pliant. They direct their mind to the factors of their experience—the five aggregates, six sense sources, and so on—as they are occurring. What is within the realm of awareness of this highly trained and focused meditative mind is far beyond what we can discern with our ordinary awareness. These meditators investigate the factors of their body and mind at a microscopic level, directly witnessing their subtle impermanence as they arise and pass away in the briefest moment. Seeing that everything in their present experience is arising and passing away, they know that the mind is just a process of events that are arising and passing away. What is taken to be the mind is actually a stream of events—feelings, discriminations, various miscellaneous factors, and consciousnesses—and each of them no sooner comes into being than they cease. This is the realization of the first characteristic, subtle impermanence.

The meditators then realize that whatever is impermanent—especially their cherished body and mind—cannot be relied upon for security and is not a basis for lasting happiness. This is the realization of the second characteristic, duḥkha, which the commentaries define as “oppression due to arising and passing away.”

Furthermore, whatever arises and passes away and is made of constituents is not a solid, stable self. It is not I, it is not a true self—the third characteristic. The meditators now directly perceive the entire field of

their experience in terms of these three characteristics of saṃsāric existence.

This insight wisdom, which contemplates things as they really are, serves to weaken the underlying tendencies of the defilements that have been together with the mind since beginningless time. Insight wisdom brings “specific-factor abandonment”—that is, it temporarily overcomes a particular misunderstanding or wrong conception.

As insight wisdom matures and when practitioners’ faculties are ripe, the mind momentarily turns away from all conditioned phenomena and realizes the unconditioned, ultimate peace that is not impermanent and unsatisfactory. When they have a clear realization of this, they gain the true understanding of four truths and know: this is duḥkha, this is the origin of duḥkha, this is the cessation of duḥkha, this is the path to the cessation of duḥkha. At arhatship, this clear realization is called “knowledge of the destruction of the pollutants,” which also knows: these are the pollutants, this is their origin, this is their cessation, this is the path leading to their cessation. With the wisdom of a clear realization that knows nirvāṇa directly, the defilements are eradicated in “eradication abandonment.” This clear realization is a sudden experience in that meditators see what they have never before seen—nirvāṇa, the unconditioned, the deathless. This experience is a total transformation of consciousness. In general, practitioners arrive at this through the gradual practice of the three higher trainings. However, the sūtras tell of some people who encounter the Buddha or an accomplished disciple and attain the path and fruit just by hearing a discourse, without prior practice in that life. However, they undoubtedly cultivated the three higher trainings in previous lives.

According to the Pāli commentaries, clear realization occurs at a single moment. A practitioner penetrates the third truth, nirvāṇa, as the object of their meditation, and simultaneously realizes the other three truths by way of their function. Through the realization of nirvāṇa they fully understand the five aggregates, the six sources, and so on as the truth of duḥkha, and they abandon some defilements that are the cause of duḥkha. Through their own experience they know that cultivating the eightfold path is the way to the cessation of duḥkha.<sup>51</sup>



With the experience of the wisdom of a clear realization, the destruction of the fetters (*saṃyojana*) begins. With the first realization of nirvāṇa, the first three fetters—view of a personal identity, deluded doubt, and view of bad rules and practices—are eradicated and the disciple becomes a stream-enterer. With the weakening of two more fetters—sensual desire and malice—the disciple becomes a once-returner. With the eradication of those two additional fetters, all five lower fetters have been removed and the disciple becomes a nonreturner. With the destruction of the remaining fetters—desire for existence in the form realm, desire for existence in the formless realm, conceit, restlessness, and ignorance—and the three pollutants (of sensual desire, existence, and ignorance), the disciple attains arhatship. In the *Greater Discourse at Assapura* (*Mahāassapura Sutta*), the Buddha describes this experience (MN 39:21):

When he knows and sees thus, his mind is liberated from the pollutant of sensual desire, from the pollutant of existence, and from the pollutant of ignorance. When it is liberated there comes the knowledge: “It is liberated.” He understands: “Birth is destroyed, the holy life has been lived, what had to be done has been done, there is no more coming to any state of being.”

Just as if there were a lake in a mountain recess, clear, limpid, and undisturbed, so that a person with good sight standing on the bank could see shells, gravel, and pebbles, and also shoals of fish, swimming about and resting, he might think: “There is this lake, clear, limpid, and undisturbed, and there are these shells, gravel, and pebbles, and also shoals of fish, swimming about and resting.” So, too, a monastic understands as it actually is: “This is duḥkha... This is the origin of duḥkha... This is the cessation of duḥkha... This is the way leading to the cessation of duḥkha...” He understands: “Birth is destroyed, the holy life has been lived, what had to be done has been done, there is no more coming to any state of being.”

## *Direct Knowledge, Full Understanding, and Realization*

Direct knowledge (*abhijñā*, *abhiññā*), full understanding (P. *pariññā*), and realization (*sākshāt-kriyā*, *sacchi-kiriyā*) are terms that are often found together but have slightly different meanings. Understanding their specific meanings and limits fine-tunes our understanding of the path to liberation.

*Direct knowledge* is insight wisdom that knows the specific or unique characteristics of an object as well as its general or common characteristics. Specific characteristics are what distinguish one object from another. For example, the specific characteristics of a bird are its attributes that enable us to distinguish it from a table. But both a bird and a table also share some common characteristics: they are impermanent, unsatisfactory, and not-self. Direct knowledge is possessed by both learners—stream-enterers, once-returners, and nonreturners—and arhats.

Direct knowledge leads to understanding, and understanding is enhanced along the path until it culminates in the full understanding of an arhat. What is to be fully understood? In his first teaching, the Buddha talked about how to engage in each of the four truths. True *duḥkha* is to be fully understood, true origin is to be abandoned, true cessation is to be realized, and true path is to be cultivated. The object that we want to fully understand is true *duḥkha*, which is in essence the five aggregates. The process of cultivating understanding begins as ordinary beings, progresses during the stages of stream-enterer, once-returner, and nonreturner, and culminates in full understanding at arhatship.

*Understanding* implies having extensive knowledge, but knowledge does not mean simply knowing terms and concepts. It is gained by investigation, contemplation, and gradually building up an expansive and deep understanding, specifically of conditioned phenomena such as the five aggregates. The five aggregates must be fully understood to attain liberation; a partial understanding will not suffice.

*Realize* is to see “with your own eyes” or to witness. While understanding and knowledge are developed gradually in the course of practicing the path, realization is seeing in a markedly different way than before. When knowledge and understanding of the five aggregates reach completion, the clear realization of *nirvāṇa* occurs and the practitioner sees

what had not been previously seen—the unconditioned—and enters a totally new “world” that is free of phenomena conditioned by ignorance and craving. Here nirvāṇa is the object of realization. By fully understanding the nature of the five aggregates, practitioners can see nirvāṇa, which is beyond the five aggregates. The realization of nirvāṇa does not occur without causes such as the knowledge and understanding gained previously as well as practice and meditation. Like full understanding, complete realization is the province only of arhats. With stream-entry the realization of nirvāṇa is partial. Stream-enterers must continue to sharpen their insight to see the impermanent, unsatisfactory, and selfless nature of conditioned phenomena more clearly. By developing their faculties, nirvāṇa appears more clearly to their mind. The quality of that realization increases as they progress to the levels of once-returner and nonreturner, and it culminates with complete realization of nirvāṇa at arhatship.

The *Path of Purification* says that at each point of clear realization at the four stages, the four ways of engaging with the four truths occur whereby meditators fully understand duḥkha, abandon its origin, realize true cessation, and cultivate the true path. At the lower levels, these four ways of engaging occur to some extent and are completed at the time of becoming an arhat.

Insight knowledge knows the three characteristics and can arise without having previously attained dhyāna. None of the ārya paths or fruits are the result of concentration alone; they are the outcome of insight and the cultivation of wisdom. One who follows the vehicle of insight can begin meditation to attain insight even without attaining serenity, by meditating with mindfulness on mental and physical phenomena, such as done in the four establishments of mindfulness. After cultivating insight knowledge over time, path knowledge—the knowledge of nirvāṇa—arises with the clear realization of nirvāṇa. When nirvāṇa is the object of the meditator’s mind, mental factors such as equanimity and love, which relate to sentient beings, are not manifest. Only nirvāṇa is perceived.

### *The Four Pairs of Āryas*

The four types of āryas are stream enterers, once-returners, nonreturners, and arhats. In relation to each, there are two phases—one in which the person is practicing to attain the corresponding fruit, which they are certain to attain in that life, and a second phase in which they have attained it. The Pāli commentaries call these two phases the “path” (*mārga*, *magga*) and the “fruition” (*phala*). In the Sanskrit tradition, they are called “approachers” and “abiders.” The Buddha speaks highly of these holy beings (AN 8.59):

These eight persons are worthy of gifts, worthy of hospitality, worthy of offerings, worthy of reverential salutations, the unsurpassed field of merit for the world. What eight? The stream-enterer, the one practicing for the realization of the fruit of stream-enterer; the once-returner, the one practicing for the realization of the fruit of once-returner; the nonreturner, the one practicing for the realization of the fruit of nonreturner; the arahant, the one practicing for arahantship.

These eight āryas are differentiated based on the strength of their faculties (faith, effort, mindfulness, concentration, and wisdom), the defilements they have eradicated, and the number and type of rebirths remaining before they attain arhatship. When asked if there were monks and nuns who had attained arhatship, the Buddha responded that there were not just one hundred or five hundred, but many more who in this life entered upon and dwelt in the liberation of mind, liberation by wisdom that is unpolluted.<sup>52</sup> In general, liberation of mind (P. *cetovimutti*) is the result of serenity, and liberation by wisdom (P. *paññāvimutti*) refers to wisdom and is the result of insight. When the two are conjoined and described as unpolluted, they are the result of the eradication of pollutants by an arhat’s supramundane path.<sup>53</sup>

All of us begin as uninstructed ordinary beings. Then we encounter the Dharma and listen to teachings, undertake ethical conduct, begin meditating, and gradually develop wisdom. As we do so, we become a virtuous ordinary person (P. *kalyāṇaputhujjana*) who aspires for stream-entry. Four factors are important to actualize this aspiration and generate

extensive, vast, profound, unequalled, great, abundant, quick, buoyant, joyous, swift, sharp, and penetrative wisdom:

1. *Associating with superior persons* is to be near a qualified teacher and Dharma friends who are intent on liberation and will spur us on to study and practice.
2. *Hearing the true Dharma* is essential before embarking on the practice of the path. We must know what the path is, what potential detours and roadblocks there are, how to work around them, and so on.
3. *Appropriate and wise attention* enables us to focus on what is important in a way that helps us to see the three characteristics.
4. *Practicing in accord with the Dharma* indicates that only by integrating the Dharma with our lives and our minds will realizations come about.

Practitioners enter the path to **stream-enterer** when, having diligently practiced insight, their wisdom faculty becomes strong enough to break through mundane reality. Their meditation on the three characteristics—especially again and again seeing that there is no findable self—leads to a radical elimination of the notion of self, to the point where they cannot hold any mistaken view of self at all. Whereas prior to this they have seen with insight the aggregates are not mine, not I, and not my self, at the time of breakthrough any idea of a substantial self is forever uprooted. Their wisdom now reaches beyond insight to seeing (vision, P. *dassana*) nirvāṇa as well as realizing the four truths. Their minds go beyond perceiving conditioned phenomena and they briefly experience the unconditioned, the deathless state, nirvāṇa. Simultaneous with this clear realization of the unconditioned, they eradicate the first three fetters and their seeds, thereby becoming stream-enterers.

The first three fetters are the view of a personal identity, deluded doubt, and the view of bad rules and practices. The *view of a personal identity* grasps at a self that can be identified with the five aggregates.<sup>54</sup> Since a stream-enterer has directly seen the truth of the Dharma, he no longer harbors *deluded doubt* concerning it. Having seen the truth, a stream-enterer

knows that liberation is possible only by following the three higher trainings and no longer possesses the *view of bad rules and practices*.

According to the Abhidharma concept of the “cognitive process,” the stream-enterer’s momentary breakthrough to nirvāṇa is followed by a few mind-moments that also experience nirvāṇa. This is the fruition; it enjoys the results of the path, experiencing the peace of nirvāṇa right after those three fetters have been eradicated. For example, the path is like a person who is shackled breaking free from the chains, and the fruition resembles the freedom he feels just afterward. Stream-enterers are so called because they have entered the stream of the Dharma, the stream of the supramundane eightfold path. They have attained the clear realization of the Dharma (P. *dharmābhisamaya*) and the vision of the Dharma (P. *dharmacakkhupaṭilābha*). This clear realization is called “the arising of the Eye of Dharma” because they see the Dharma as the truth of the Buddha’s teaching.

Because of this realization, a stream-enterer will never do any of the five heinous actions: killing his mother, killing his father, killing an arhat, causing a schism in the saṅgha, or maliciously drawing blood from a buddha. Stream-enterers observe ethical conduct well: Lay stream-enterers keep the five precepts and monastic stream-enterers keep monastic precepts. While they may still commit transgressions such as harsh speech, they never conceal their transgressions and confess and make amends as soon as possible.

Stream-enterers have four defining characteristics: unshakable confidence in the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Saṅgha, and firm commitment to observe at least the five precepts. Because they have seen nirvāṇa directly, all doubt about the path, the teacher, and those who have experienced the truth has been removed. Their confidence and faith in the Three Jewels are immoveable and arise as a result of their direct experience of the Dharma. Their confidence in the law of karma and its effects is also firm, and thus they are committed to keep whatever level of precepts they have taken. Stream-enterers who are householders may marry and be attached to their families, and they may enjoy praise, compete in business deals, and become angry when criticized. Nevertheless their afflictions are weaker than those of ordinary people who are not āryas.

The Buddha says that monastic āryas are far better off than wheel-turning monarchs who have great power in this life and a luxurious life as devas in the next. Even though monastic āryas maintain themselves with lumps of alms food and wear rag-robles, they are free from rebirth in unfortunate states and possess the four defining characteristics mentioned above. Sovereignty over the four continents—one of the powers of a wheel-turning monarch—is worthless in comparison to obtaining those four qualities.

The wisdom eye of a stream-enterer has been opened, and she is irreversibly headed for liberation. Having had direct insight into reality, she will never regress on the path and will never lose her understanding of the Dharma even when she dies; the Dharma is now part of the fabric of her being. She will be reborn as a human being or a deva a maximum of seven times before attaining nirvāṇa and can no longer be born in the unfortunate realms or as a demi-god. While this first direct realization of the unconditioned is not sufficient to eradicate all defilements and must be enhanced through cultivating the seven awakening factors, a stream-enterer has made an irrevocable shift. To illustrate this, the Buddha once asked monastics to compare the little bit of soil under his fingernail with all the soil on the Earth. Similarly, he said, the duḥkha that remains for those who have gained the Eye of Dharma is very small compared with the former mass of duḥkha that has been destroyed.

After a path and its fruits have been attained, the yogī engages in subsequent periods of meditation called “fruition attainment” (P. *phala-samāpatti*) during which nirvāṇa is again perceived and experienced, but the understanding is not yet deep enough to attain the next path. For example, after attaining both the path and fruition of stream-enterer, a person may again meditate on nirvāṇa and reexperience the fruit of stream-enterer without again having to attain the path of a stream-enterer. Nevertheless, her understanding may not yet be deep enough to progress to the path of a once-returner.

Some stream-enterers may attain arhatship in that very life, as did Śāriputra, Maudgalyāyana, Ānanda, and many others. Otherwise, they will be reborn as humans or devas in saṃsāra, but never in unfortunate realms. Stream-enterers with sharp faculties will take only one more rebirth, those

of middle faculties will take two to six rebirths, and those of dull faculties will take at most seven more rebirths before attaining final nirvāṇa.<sup>55</sup>

Someone who has attained stream-entry in this life may not want to stop there and may seek to become a **once-returner**. Accordingly, she continues to practice, enhancing her samādhi and insight. When her faculties mature to a certain point and her seeing of nirvāṇa deepens, she attains the path and fruit of once-returner and then comes back to normal consciousness as a once-returner. At this point her sensual desire and malice have been substantially reduced, although not totally eliminated. The three poisons of attachment, anger, and confusion have also been reduced.

A once-returner will be reborn in the desire realm at most only one more time. The Pāli commentaries say there are several types of once-returner. In one case, the person is a human being who becomes a once-returner. He takes rebirth as a deva and attains final nirvāṇa as a deva. A second case is someone who becomes a once-returner as a human, is reborn in the human realm, and attains nirvāṇa in that rebirth as human. A third possibility is a deva who becomes a once-returner, is reborn as a human, and attains nirvāṇa as a human being. In a fourth scenario, a deva becomes a once-returner, is reborn again as deva, and attains nirvāṇa in the deva realm. In a fifth case, a human being becomes a once-returner, is reborn as a deva, is reborn again as a human, and attains nirvāṇa in the human realm. As we can see, there are several permutations. Someone with ripe faculties can actualize stream-enterer and once-returner in rapid succession in the same human life.

A once-returner with sharp faculties and good supporting conditions then aspires to become a **nonreturner** and practices intensely for this. Having deepened his samādhi to the point of mastering one of the four dhyānas or one of the first three formless absorptions, he now turns his mind to examine the state of samādhi itself and sees that it is made up of various factors, all of which can be included in the five aggregates (or four aggregates if it is a formless absorption). With insight wisdom, he sees that all these factors, however sublime, are still impermanent and in the nature of duḥkha. They are substanceless and selfless; they cannot be held on to or identified as self. The sūtras themselves do not specify whether he must emerge from the meditative absorption in order to engage in the above



examination. Seeing the meditative absorptions as being marked with the three characteristics is important to eradicate the desire for rebirth in these realms. No matter how sublime these states may be, holding even the slightest ignorant desire to remain in them inhibits the attainment of liberation.

Extending the insight of the three characteristics from the meditative absorption to all conditioned phenomena, he sees all of them as impermanent, unsatisfactory, and not-self. When his faculties reach a particular level of maturity, his mind goes beyond conditioned things and touches the unconditioned, nirvāṇa. Those with very ripe faculties who can relinquish all attachments can attain arhatship then and there, whereas those whose faculties are not as sharp cannot yet let go of all attachments and thus become nonreturners.

While on the path of a nonreturner, a person completely eradicates sensual desire and malice. When she is successful, she experiences the fruit of nonreturner and is never again born as a human or a desire-realm god. If she does not attain nirvāṇa in that life, she may be reborn in a pure abode—one of five special levels of the fourth meditative stabilization where only nonreturners take birth.<sup>56</sup> A nonreturner born there is born spontaneously, without conception or gestation in the womb, and will attain final nirvāṇa in that pure abode. Although the pure abodes are connected with the fourth dhyāna, nonreturners who have not attained the fourth dhyāna may still be born there.

Some cases are recorded in the sūtras of people who are ordinary beings with no attainment. They meet the Buddha, hear his discourses, and due to the ripeness of their faculties developed in previous lives, they seem to go directly to nonreturner. The commentary says they pass through stream-entry and once-returner in brief instants, thus becoming nonreturners quickly. While we would all like to think that we have such sharp faculties and will have quick attainments, we should note that such cases are due to someone having practiced very diligently in previous lives. Such occurrences are rare nowadays.

If a nonreturner wishes to attain arhatship in this life, she again cultivates insight, progresses through the stages of insight realizations, and gains a clear realization of nirvāṇa once again. At this point, she attains the

path approaching arhatship and eradicates the five higher fetters: desire for existence in the form realm; desire for existence in the formless realm; the conceit of “I am,” which is a subtle conceit of being an existing I; restlessness, which is present in any mind that is not liberated; and ignorance.

Having eliminated these five fetters, she abides in the fruit of arhatship. She is totally free from saṃsāra and lives in the experience of nirvāṇa. This is called nirvāṇa with remainder, because the polluted physical and mental aggregates remain. When she passes away from that life, she attains the final goal, nirvāṇa without remainder, and has actualized the end of the path.

Both monastics and lay followers can practice the path and attain the fruit of stream-enterers and once-returners. Some of those lay followers continue to live at home in a couple relationship. The Buddha speaks of them as (MN 73:12) “lay followers...clothed in white, enjoying sensual pleasures, who carry out my instruction, respond to my advice, have gone beyond doubt, become free from perplexity, have gained intrepidity, and become independent of others in the Teacher’s dispensation.”

Although the sūtras do not specify this, it seems that yogīs practicing to become nonreturners would be celibate. To become nonreturners they must overcome sensual desire, and for this celibacy is necessary. Lay followers who attain the fruit of nonreturner can still live at home, but they would abide in celibacy because their sensual desire has been eliminated. After they pass away, these nonreturners may then be born in a pure abode where they attain arhatship.

The scriptures record some instances of lay followers attaining arhatship, but they are either just about to die or they ordain as monastics very soon after becoming arhats. Because arhats have severed all craving, they have no interest in a householder’s lifestyle.

THE FOUR ĀRYAS

DISCIPLE	FETTERS JUST ABANDONED	REMAINING REBIRTHS	WHO CAN ATTAIN THIS
Stream-enterer	View of a personal identity, deluded doubt, view of bad rules and practices	Seven at most; all will be either as a human or a deva	Someone who has first realization of nirvāṇa, unshakable faith in the Three Jewels, firm commitment to observe at least the five precepts; lay followers (who may or may not be celibate) and monastics
Once-returner	None, but sensual desire and malice are reduced, as are attachment, anger, and confusion	One more birth in the desire realm	Lay followers (who may or may not be celibate) or monastics
Nonreturner	Sensual desire and malice	No more birth in the desire realm, born in the form realm and attain arhatship there	Monastics or lay followers who are celibate
Arhat	Desire for existence in the form realm, desire for existence in the formless realm, conceit, restlessness, ignorance	None—while alive, they abide in nirvāṇa with remainder; after they pass away, they attain nirvāṇa without remainder	Male and female monastics; some lay followers have attained arhatship but they either were on the brink of death or became monastics shortly after becoming an arhat

The Pāli commentaries say that it is possible for someone to become a stream-enterer, once-returner, nonreturner, and arhat without having attained dhyāna. Dhyāna meditation is said to moisten and relax the mind; thus these practitioners are said to become “dry-insight” arhats.<sup>57</sup>

There are several ways in which arhats are distinguished from ordinary beings. Contemplating these inspires our effort to practice because we see

that we too can attain the same results. Speaking of an arhat, the Buddha says (MN 140:28):

Formerly, when he was ignorant, he experienced covetousness, attachment, and sensual desire...he experienced anger, malice, and hatred...he experienced ignorance and confusion. Now he has abandoned them, cut them off at the root, made them like a palm stump, done away with them so that they are no longer subject to future arising. Therefore a bhikkhu possessing (this peace) possesses the supreme foundation of peace, for this is the supreme noble peace, namely, the pacification of sensual desire, hatred, and confusion.

Arhats do not worry about whether they will lose their temper or become depressed when they encounter hardship. They are not apprehensive about not getting what they want, nor do they succumb to the jealousy of others. They do not handle difficulties by drinking and drugging, or by shopping and gambling. They still encounter people who insult them, mock them, and pressure them to act in destructive ways, but because their minds are free from defilements, they do not fall prey to these influences and maintain their independence.

There are different types of arhats. As noted above, some have not attained dhyāna, while others have attained the dhyānas and have developed the five supernormal powers, which are considered mundane knowledges that depend on samādhi. Samādhi makes the mind powerful, malleable, and agile, so that when meditators generate the intention to develop supernormal powers, such as multiplying their body, they will be able to successfully develop them. Meditators who have attained the dhyānas can also use this powerful mind of samādhi to gain the divine ear, know others' minds, recollect previous lives, or develop the divine eye that knows how other sentient beings die and are reborn according to their karma. The Buddha followed this path of samādhi, developing these supernormal powers before attaining arhatship.

Someone with samādhi at the levels of the dhyānas may aspire (MN 6:19), “May I, by realizing for myself with direct knowledge, here and now enter upon and abide in the liberation of mind, liberation by wisdom that is unpolluted with the destruction of the pollutants.” This refers to a mental state that is a liberation of mind just like the dhyānas and formless absorptions, but it differs in that it is also a liberation by wisdom. This wisdom destroys all pollutants and thus brings ultimate liberation. Such a person becomes an arhat and is never again born in cyclic existence.

Having eliminated all defilements, arhats are incapable of doing nine actions (AN 9:7): killing, stealing, engaging in sexual activities, deliberately lying, storing up or hoarding things to use later, and making bad decisions because of sensual desire, anger, confusion, or fear. In addition, arhats’ minds cannot be moved by seeing either the most enticing or the most horrific objects of the five senses or of the mental consciousness. Their minds remain steady, peaceful, and calm, free from fear, personal distress, clinging, or repulsion. Knowing all these to be impermanent, they contemplate their disappearance and are unperturbed.

In addition, arhats have ten powers that prove they have destroyed all pollutants: (1) they have seen all things as they really are with correct wisdom as impermanent and thus do not crave them; (2) they have seen all sensual pleasures as they really are with correct wisdom as similar to a pit of burning charcoal and thus are not enticed by them; (3) their minds are inclined toward seclusion, delight in renunciation, and disinterest in things that are a basis for pollutants; and (4–10) their four establishments of mindfulness, four right strivings, four bases for spiritual power, five spiritual faculties, five spiritual powers, seven awakening factors, and eightfold path have been well developed.

## REFLECTION

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1. In your practice, how can you increase the four factors to actualize your aspiration for liberation and gain great wisdom by (1) associating with a qualified teacher and Dharma friends, (2) hearing true Dharma teachings, (3) cultivating appropriate and wise attention, and (4) practicing in accord with the Dharma?

2. Review the four pairs of āryas: the paths and fruits of stream-enterer, once-returner, nonreturner, and arhat. What fetters have they eliminated? How many future lives in saṃsāra will they have? What are their special features?
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### *Those Who Have Work to Do with Diligence and Those Who Do Not*

Usually the Buddha talks about four types of disciples—stream-enterers, and so forth—based on their current level of development on the path. However, in the *Kīṭāgiri Sutta* (MN 70), the Buddha speaks of seven kinds of disciples, subsuming them into two main categories: those who have completed the path and have no more work to do with diligence, and those who have work to do on the path with diligence. The first group, *those who have no more work to do with diligence*, are arhats, which are of two types: those liberated in both ways (P. *ubhatobhāgavimutta*) and those liberated by wisdom (P. *paññāvimutta*). Arhats are bhikkhus (MN 70:12):

with pollutants destroyed, who have lived the holy life, done what had to be done, laid down the burden, reached the true goal, destroyed the fetters of existence, and are completely liberated through final knowledge.

Arhats have destroyed the pollutants of sensual desire, attachment to existence in saṃsāra, and ignorance. They have lived the holy life (*brahmacarya*) as monastics perfected in ethical conduct and have attained the ārya path. Having laid down the burden of the defilements, when they pass into nirvāṇa without remainder, they also lay down the burden of the polluted body. They have reached the true goal of the path—liberation by destroying all fetters that could lead to continued existence in saṃsāra. Having attained the final knowledge of the four truths and realized nirvāṇa directly and fully, they have attained the liberation that was their spiritual goal. Having done the “work” of practicing the path and attaining the goal

with diligence, they are not capable of being negligent. Arhats are called *asekhas*—those who require no-more-learning or training on the path.

*Arhats liberated in both ways* are liberated from the physical body because of having gained the formless absorptions; they are also liberated from the mind-body (*nāma-kāya*)—the four unliberated mental aggregates—by the path of arhatship. The Buddha lauds them as the most excellent type of arhat because their faculties of wisdom and concentration are both strong. Their wisdom has destroyed the pollutants, and their concentration dwells in the formless absorptions just prior to attaining arhatship, freeing them from the limitations of both desire-realm and form-realm consciousnesses. Because they have attained the fourth dhyāna, which is the basis for developing the superknowledges, most of these arhats have also cultivated supernormal powers, the divine ear, knowledge of others' minds, recollection of past lives, and the divine eye prior to having attained the sixth superknowledge—knowledge of the destruction of the pollutants.

There are different degrees of arhats liberated in both ways. The lowest degree has attained arhatship based on the meditative absorption of infinite space, the first formless absorption. Others have attained arhatship depending on the absorptions of infinite consciousness, nothingness, and neither-discrimination-nor-nondiscrimination (the three remaining formless absorptions).

The most excellent is the one who has gone beyond the four dhyānas and the four formless absorptions to attain the cessation of discrimination and feeling (*samjñā-vedayita-nirodha*, *saññā-vedayita-nirodha*)—also known as the *absorption of cessation (nirodha-samāpatti)*<sup>58</sup>—which is an extremely refined state that only nonreturners and arhats can attain. Proficient in all four dhyānas and four formless absorptions prior to attaining liberation, these meditators can go up and down through various meditative absorptions whenever they want and dwell in them for as long as they wish. They know with insight wisdom—which is the special cause for the cessation of discrimination and feeling—that all these meditative absorptions do not go beyond being impermanent, duḥkha, and not-self. Beginning with the first dhyāna, they enter into that meditative absorption, master it, and after emerging from it, contemplate and know with the eye of insight that it is in the nature of the three characteristics. After meditating in



this way up to neither-discrimination-nor-nondiscrimination, they go back to the absorption in nothingness, dwell in it for some time, emerge from it and contemplate it as impermanent, unsatisfactory, and selfless. They then set a determination to go into cessation of discrimination and feeling and to remain in that state for a certain period of time. After that they enter neither-discrimination-nor-nondiscrimination for a few moments and then their discrimination and feeling ceases and they are in the cessation of discrimination and feeling.

*Arhats liberated by wisdom* destroy their pollutants by seeing with wisdom, although they do not attain the formless absorptions. Although their samādhi is not as strong as the arhats liberated in both ways, the Buddha does not urge these arhats to attain those absorptions, because they have already attained liberation.

In short, although all arhats have destroyed their pollutants by wisdom, they are dissimilar in other respects. One of these is the level of samādhi through which they attain liberation. Those liberated by wisdom could have attained any of the four dhyānas or they could have attained only access concentration and become “dry-insight arhats,” their minds not softened by the moisture of dhyāna.<sup>59</sup>

In contemporary Theravāda circles, some meditation masters emphasize attaining dhyāna first, then developing insight. Others teach a system of meditation that focuses on insight and also increases concentration, but not to the level of dhyāna. This is because the investigation and analysis necessary for insight meditation is not conducive for the depth of calm and stability necessary to attain dhyāna. For example, the four establishments of mindfulness do not highlight the attainment of dhyāna, although some of the methods in it can be used to do so. Its emphasis is the cultivation of insight wisdom, which does not require dhyāna.

Disciples in the second group—*those who still have work to do with diligence*—have reached at least the path to stream-enterer. They are *sekhas*—trainees or learners—because they are still learning and training in order to gain realizations. When they reside in a conducive environment, associate with wise Dharma friends, and balance the five faculties (faith, effort, mindfulness, concentration, and wisdom), they will attain the final goal of arhatship. These disciples are of five types—body-witnesses (P.



*kāyasakkhi*), ones attained to view (P. *ditṭhippatta*), ones resolved through faith (P. *saddhāvimutta*), Dharma followers (P. *dhammānusāri*), and faith followers (P. *saddhānusāri*). They are distinguished principally by their dominant faculty. The first three have reached at least the fruit of stream-enterer.

*Body-witnesses* possess some or all of the formless absorptions, and some degree of the pollutants have been removed by seeing with wisdom. When these ārya disciples gain wisdom strong enough to destroy all pollutants, they become arhats liberated in both ways. As a general group of āryas, they are more admirable because their faculties of both wisdom and concentration are strong. Among body-witnesses, there are those who have attained the fruit of stream-enterer, the path to once-returner, the fruit of once-returner, the path to nonreturner, the fruit of nonreturner, and some are on the path to arhatship. The body-witnesses proceed to arhatship by cultivating insight wisdom in relation to the formless absorptions.

*Ones attained to view* have destroyed some degree of pollutants by seeing with wisdom. They have not attained the formless absorptions. They have reviewed, investigated, and analyzed the Buddha's teachings with wisdom and have understood the four truths. The principal difference between the ones attained to view and the arhats liberated by wisdom is that the former have eliminated only a portion of their pollutants, while the latter have removed all of them. It is not guaranteed, however, that when the ones attained to view attain liberation they will become arhats liberated by wisdom. It could be that they make effort and gain some or all of the formless absorptions between now and then, and thus become arhats liberated in both ways. Among ones attained to view are the same individuals as above, ranging from ones who have attained the fruit of stream-enterer to ones on the path to arhat.

*Ones resolved through faith* (or ones liberated by faith) have not attained the formless absorptions although some of their pollutants have been destroyed by seeing with wisdom. In this way they resemble the ones attained to view. However, wisdom is the dominant faculty for the ones attained to view and they emphasize investigation and analysis of the teachings, whereas faith is the dominant faculty for the ones resolved through faith and they are motivated to practice because their faith is

“planted, rooted, and established in the Tathāgata.” Their strong devotion and love for the Buddha spurs them on the path. They may become arhats liberated by wisdom, or if they make effort to gain the formless absorptions, they may become arhats liberated in both ways. The ones resolved through faith include the same six types of individuals as above.

The last two types of the ārya disciples are both on the path leading to stream-enterer.<sup>60</sup> *Dharma followers* have not gained the formless absorptions and their pollutants have not yet been destroyed by seeing with wisdom. But due to having learned, thought about, and meditated on the Buddha’s teachings, they accept them, are eager to practice, and have cultivated all five faculties. When they attain the fruit of stream-enterer, Dharma followers will become ones attained to view.

*Faith followers* also lack the formless absorptions, and their pollutants have not yet been destroyed by wisdom. However, they have sufficient faith, devotion, and love for the Buddha, which motivates them to practice, and they have cultivated all five faculties. When they attain the fruit of stream-enterer, faith followers will become ones resolved through faith.

The main difference between the Dharma followers and faith followers is the faculty to which they are inclined. Both have all five faculties, which include faith and wisdom. To be on the path to stream-entry, both must have heard teachings on the three characteristics and so forth, and have cultivated insight and wisdom, and both must have faith in the Buddha.

Both Dharma followers and faith followers are incapable of creating karma that would cause them to be born in an unfortunate rebirth, and both are guaranteed to attain the fruit of stream-enterer before they pass away. When their insight wisdom reaches the point where the clear realization of the unconditioned occurs, they have direct knowledge of the four truths and become stream-enterers. Faith followers and Dharma followers accept the teaching due to either faith or rough investigation, whereas those attained to view and those resolved through faith are stream-enterers who know and see the Dhamma directly through their own experience.

The following chart summarizes the key points regarding the seven types of disciples as presented in the *Kīṭāgiri Sutta*.

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## REFLECTION

1. Review the seven types of disciples and their relationships to one another (see the chart on the facing page).
  2. What are the benefits of becoming an arhat liberated in both ways?
  3. Why would a practitioner wish to become a dry-insight arhat?
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## SEVEN TYPES OF DISCIPLES

TYPE OF DISCIPLE	LEVEL ON PATH	FORMLESS ABSORPTIONS	POLLUTANTS DESTROYED BY WISDOM	DOMINANT FACULTY	SPECIAL FEATURE	WORK WITH DILIGENCE
Ones liberated in both ways	Arhat	Yes	All	Wisdom and concentration, maybe faith	Liberated from physical body and mind-body	No
Ones liberated by wisdom	Arhat	No	All	Wisdom	May have any of the four dhyānas or be dry-insight arhats	No
Body-witnesses	Fruit of stream-enterer to path to arhat	Yes	Some	Wisdom and concentration, maybe faith	Will become arhats liberated in both ways	Yes
Ones attained to view	Fruit of stream-enterer to path to arhat	No	Some	Wisdom	Have investigated and analyzed the Buddha's teachings with wisdom	Yes
Ones resolved through faith	Fruit of stream-enterer to path to arhat	No	Some	Faith	Faith in the Buddha is planted, rooted, and established	Yes
Dharma followers	Path to stream-enterer	No	None	Wisdom	Have reflective acceptance of the Buddha's teachings, will become ones attained to view	Yes
Faith followers	Path to stream-enterer	No	None	Faith	Have sufficient faith in and love for the Buddha, will become ones resolved through faith	Yes

### *Purification and Knowledge*

An overview of the path that points out the stages of insight knowledge that are cultivated prior to realizing nirvāṇa is a helpful guide to know how our mind will develop and how to access that development as we progress. Although the following section is concise and contains a lot of terminology, it provides a clear way to discern the steps of the path to arhatship. The seven purifications spoken of below form the structure for Buddhaghosa's

pivotal work, the *Path of Purification* (*Visuddhimagga*), which explains them elaborately by relying on the commentarial tradition.<sup>61</sup>

Wisdom is the direct antidote that frees us from *samsāra*. To describe how to cultivate it, Buddhaghosa gives the analogy of a tree—its soil, roots, and trunk. The soil is the object of analysis, and the seven purifications comprise the roots and trunk.

The *soil* in which wisdom will grow is wisdom's field of examination: the five aggregates, twelve sense sources, eighteen elements, twenty-two faculties, four truths, and dependent origination.<sup>62</sup>

Just as *roots* of the tree ground it and make it stable, so too do the first two purifications form the foundation for wisdom: (1) the purification of ethical conduct (P. *sīla-visuddhi*)<sup>63</sup> and (2) the purification of mind (P. *citta-visuddhi*).<sup>64</sup>

Just as from the *trunk* of a tree grow the branches, leaves, flowers, and fruit, so too do many qualities of the *āryas* grow from wisdom, including the next five purifications.<sup>65</sup> (3) purification of view (P. *diṭṭhi-visuddhi*), (4) purification by overcoming doubt (P. *kaṅkhāvitarāṇa-visuddhi*), (5) purification by knowledge and vision of what is the path and what is not the path (P. *maggāmaggañānadassana-visuddhi*), (6) purification by knowledge and vision of the way (P. *paṭipadāñānadassana-visuddhi*), and (7) purification by knowledge and vision (P. *ñānadassana-visuddhi*). The seven purifications are practiced in order, each one depending on the preceding ones. The first six are mundane, the last is supramundane.

1. *The purification of ethical conduct* is the higher training of ethical conduct. There are four factors to accomplish:

- (1) The ethical conduct of restraint by the *prātimokṣa* entails taking and living by the precepts: the eight one-day precepts, five lay precepts, precepts of a novice monastic, precepts of a training nun, and precepts of a fully ordained monastic. These precepts function to prevent us from physical and verbal nonvirtuous actions. To do this, we must work with the mind that motivates these nonvirtues. Taking precepts is not sufficient; we need to use them as guidelines to train our speech and physical actions and do our best to keep them well.

- (2) The ethical conduct of restraining the sense faculties involves practicing mindfulness and introspective awareness so that the mind does not get entangled in having attachment for attractive sense objects and aversion toward unattractive ones.
- (3) The ethical conduct of pure livelihood is to receive the requisites to stay alive in an honest and nonharmful way.
- (4) The ethical conduct of proper use of requisites is for a monastic to use the four requisites—food, clothing, shelter, and medicine—after reflecting on their purpose, shedding attachment to them, and dedicating for the welfare of the donors.

2. *The purification of mind* is the higher training of concentration. This involves subduing the five hindrances by the two types of concentration: access concentration and absorption concentration, which includes the four dhyānas and the four formless absorptions.

Practitioners may cultivate insight in two ways. Some follow the vehicle of serenity and attain access concentration, the dhyānas, or the formless absorptions and then use that meditative absorption as the base for generating insight. Here, the meditator emerges from the absorption, sees the factors of that absorption in terms of the five aggregates, understands their conditions, and then examines them to see that they are marked by the three characteristics. The purification of mind for these people is whatever degree of concentration they have developed from access concentration on up.

Others follow the vehicle of pure insight, do not cultivate concentration specially, but go directly to observing the mental and physical process of their own experience with mindfulness. Here concentration is developed on the ever-changing physical and mental events, producing a level of concentration called “momentary concentration,” which is comparable in strength to access concentration. Momentary concentration is the purification of mind for practitioners who follow the pure insight approach. They have “dry” insight in that it is not moistened by the calm of the dhyānas.

The five following purifications are included in the higher training of wisdom.

3. *The purification of view* begins the process of cultivating wisdom by discerning the characteristics, functions, manifestations, and proximate causes<sup>66</sup> of the five aggregates. Through doing this, meditators discern that what is called a person is a collection of interdependent mental and physical factors. This purifies the wrong view of a monolithic permanent self. This purification is also known as the analytical knowledge of mind and matter.

4. *Purification by overcoming doubt* discerns the conditions of mind and matter. Building on the purification of view, it discerns the conditions for mind and matter in the past, present, and future and eliminates doubts concerning them. By meditating on dependent origination, meditators view the present collection of mental and physical aggregates as dependently arisen, conditioned phenomena. They understand that their body-mind complex did not come into being through the work of an independent Creator, is not a manifestation of a primal or permanent cosmic substance, and did not appear causelessly. This purification is also called “the knowledge of discerning conditions,” because the understanding of conditionality is primary here.

5. *Purification by knowledge and vision of what is the path and what is not the path* is the next step. During this and the purification by knowledge and vision of the way, ten insight knowledges occur, the knowledges of (1) comprehension, (2) arising and passing away (with two phases, [a] initial and [b] mature), (3) dissolution, (4) fearfulness, (5) danger, (6) disenchantment, (7) liberation, (8) contemplation, (9) equanimity toward formations, and (10) conformity.

Knowledge of comprehension (1) and the first phase of the knowledge of rising and passing away (2a) both occur during the purification by knowledge and vision of what is and is not the path. The remaining knowledges occur during the purification by knowledge and vision of the way.

Now that meditators have discerned the mind and matter of the three realms—desire, form, and formless—and their conditions, they prepare to cultivate the knowledge of comprehension by thinking of the three realms in terms of the five aggregates. All matter—be it past, present, or future, internal or external, near or far, coarse or subtle, inferior or superior—is

subsumed in the form aggregate. Similarly, all the feelings in the three realms are consolidated in the feeling aggregate, all discriminations in the discrimination aggregate, all the other diverse mental factors in the miscellaneous factors aggregate, and all consciousnesses in the consciousness aggregate.

- (1) *The knowledge of comprehension.* To cultivate the knowledge of comprehension, meditators apply the three characteristics to the five aggregates. The aggregates are characterized by impermanence in that they disintegrate when they arise and do not keep the same identity in the next moment. They are marked with *duḥkha* in that, being momentary, they do not give any security or constancy. They lack a self because they are without an inner core or identity. Meditators apply the three characteristics to the five aggregates in specific periods of time, first a longer time—for example, the body of this lifetime is impermanent—then in increasingly shorter periods of time—for example, the feelings of this year are unsatisfactory and the discriminations of this month are not a self. Finally they see that in every split second, the body, feeling, discrimination, miscellaneous factors, and consciousness are transient, unsatisfactory, and not-self. They apply this same contemplation to the continuity of the aggregates as well as to individual moments of each aggregate.
- (2a) *Knowledge of arising and passing away (initial phase).* The knowledge of arising and passing away is developed by contemplating that conditioned things arise and pass away. Both their arising and their ceasing depends on the presence or absence of their respective conditions. They contemplate this not in a theoretical or conceptual manner but by observing the very moment in which arising and passing away occur. In each split second everything is arising and passing away, giving way to the next moment that will arise and cease.

The knowledge of arising and passing away happens in two phases. In the first, as the meditation deepens, ten imperfections of insight (P. *vipassanā-upakkilesa*) may arise in the meditators'

minds: (1) an aura of light radiating from their body; (2) joy, (3) pliancy, (4) and bliss in a way not previously experienced; (5) stronger resolution; (6) exertion in practice; (7) more mature knowledge, (8) stable mindfulness, (9) immovable equanimity, and (10) subtle enjoyment, clinging, and attachment to these experiences. This last factor is why they are called “imperfections”: the mind is relating to the first nine in an incorrect way. These “imperfections” indicate that one’s meditation is going well; but difficulties arise if, because of these experiences, meditators assume they have attained a superior stage of insight—a path or fruition of stream-enterer, and so forth—when they haven’t.

Those who lack discernment will mistakenly think that they have attained the supramundane path and fruit. Leaving insight meditation aside, they will instead enjoy these experiences without recognizing their attachment to them. This is clearly poisonous for their progress on the path.

Someone with discernment will see these experiences as natural byproducts of insight and recognize the disadvantages of being attached to them. Reflecting that they too are impermanent, unsatisfactory, and not-self, they relinquish attachment to them and continue with insight meditation.

Purification by knowledge and vision of what is the path and what is not the path is the ability to discern that these ten imperfections, no matter how fascinating they may be, are not the path to liberation and that insight meditation into the three characteristics is the correct path to liberation. This purification is instrumental in keeping meditators on the right track so that they will be able to actualize their spiritual goal.

6. *Purification by knowledge and vision of the way* occurs after having eliminated the ten imperfections as obstacles to practice. Meditators now proceed to generate nine insight knowledges with regard to the three characteristics. Together, these nine insight knowledges constitute the purification by knowledge and vision of the way.



- (2b) *Knowledge of arising and passing away (mature phase)*. Having overcome the ten imperfections of insight, the knowledge of arising and passing away continues to develop, becoming clearer and more stable.
- (3) *Knowledge of dissolution*. Once the knowledge of arising and passing away is strong, meditators focus only on the phase of dissolution, cessation, and vanishing. This brings home the fact of impermanence on a much deeper level because they see the conditioned things of saṃsāra are in a continual process of disintegration. Clearly there is no stability or anything trustworthy in them; they are wholly unsatisfactory, and because they are only ceasing, how can a self exist in them?
- (4) *Knowledge of fearfulness*. Continuing to contemplate that all conditioned things in the past, present, and future are constantly in the process of disintegration, meditators see them as fearful. This fear is not an emotional fear that rejects the world because the world is “bad” or because they have an unhealthy fear of relating to people or to the world. Rather, this is a healthy fear that is concerned about becoming attached to these things and remaining stuck in saṃsāra as a result. Because this fear can sometimes initially manifest in an unbalanced way, a teacher’s help is crucial at this point.
- (5) *Knowledge of danger*. Recognizing all conditioned things are fearful, meditators now know with certainty that conditioned things have the nature of duḥkha and lack any core of a real self. They also know that safety exists only in the unconditioned, which is free from the unpredictability and insecurity of things that are continuously arising and vanishing. This knowledge brings appreciation for nirvāṇa.
- (6) *Knowledge of disenchantment*. Seeing the danger of being attached to and seeking happiness from conditioned things that are unable to provide well-being, meditators becomes disenchanted and disillusioned with them. Their delight in saṃsāric phenomenon—no

matter the realm—ceases. Meditators now clearly see the disadvantages of clinging to existence in the desire, form, or formless realms.

- (7) *Knowledge of desire for liberation.* Now the momentum of turning away from saṃsāra and turning to nirvāṇa increases, and the meditators have a strong motivation to be liberated from and to escape from the world of conditioned existence. This is not a psychologically immature wish to escape from difficulties but a wise motivation to seek liberation by clearly knowing what actually can provide peace.
- (8) *Knowledge of reflective contemplation.* Knowing that liberation from conditioned things requires clearly seeing them as marked by the three characteristics, meditators review and again examine these things in light of their impermanence, unsatisfactory nature, and selflessness. This is an expansive way of applying the three characteristics to all conditioned things.
- (9) *Knowledge of equanimity toward formations.* Seeing that there is nothing in any conditioned thing whatsoever that is suitable to be I or mine, meditators leave aside both attraction and repulsion toward those things and abide in equanimity. This mental state is one of great relief that comes from the cultivation of proper wisdom regarding the five aggregates.
- (10) *Knowledge of conformity.* This knowledge arises in the desire-realm consciousness that precedes the consciousness of the change of lineage that leads to the supramundane path. It is called the “knowledge of conformity” because it conforms to the truth of the previous insight knowledge and of the supramundane path that will follow.

7. *Purification by knowledge and vision* is the only supramundane purification of the seven, according to Buddhaghosa. This purification is knowledge of the four supramundane paths: those of stream-enterer, once-

returner, nonreturner, and arhat. Preceding the breakthrough to the supramundane path are some moments of transition from purification by knowledge and vision of the way as the mind “changes lineage,” in that it goes from being a mundane mind with conditioned phenomena as its objects to a supramundane mind with *nirvāṇa* as its object.

When the meditator is engaged in insight meditation just prior to the arising of absorption of the supramundane path and the purification by knowledge and vision, the *bhavaṅga* consciousness stops and there are a few moments of insight consciousness that focus on either impermanence, *duḥkha*, or not-self. On the perfection of the knowledge of equanimity toward formations and the knowledge of conformity to the truths, “insight leading to emergence” arises. This is the culmination of insight that occurs just before the first moment of the supramundane path. This insight gives way to the supramundane path that emerges from conditioned phenomena by taking *nirvāṇa*, the unconditioned, as its object, and that emerges from mundane consciousness by eliminating a portion of defilements.

This last moment of insight is called the “change of lineage consciousness,” and it is the proximate cause for the supramundane path. It marks the transition from being an ordinary being to being an *ārya*. Although the change of lineage consciousness is like the path in that its object is *nirvāṇa*, it is unlike the path in that it cannot dispel the defilements that obscure seeing the four truths. This transition consciousness precedes each of the four paths. Just before it transitions to the path of stream-entry, it is called “change of lineage.” Before it transitions to the paths of once-returner, nonreturner, and arhat, it is called “cleansing” because it marks the transition to the next higher path knowledge.

The path consciousness<sup>67</sup> performs four functions: (1) fully understanding (P. *pariññā*) *duḥkha*, (2) abandoning (P. *pahāṇa*) the origin of *duḥkha*, (3) realizing (P. *sacchikiriyā*) *nirvāṇa*, and (4) cultivating (P. *bhāvana*) the *āryan* eightfold path. Each path consciousness performs these four functions, and when the corresponding level of defilements has been reduced or eradicated, that path consciousness is followed by a fruition consciousness. After each fruition consciousness, a reviewing knowledge (P. *paccavekkhanañāṇa*) looks back and reflects on the path, fruit, and *nirvāṇa*, and often, but not always, on the defilements that have been

abandoned and those that are yet to be abandoned. There is a tremendous sense of satisfaction, relief, and joy at this time, and meditators continue to practice until they reach the fruit of arhatship. The knowledge of the four supramundane paths has been accomplished and the final goal, nirvāṇa, has been attained.

In the *Relay Chariots Sutta*, Śāriputra asked the bhikkhu Puṇṇa Mantāniputta if the holy life was lived under the Buddha for the sake of the seven purifications, to which Puṇṇa Mantāniputta responded in the negative, explaining that the holy life was lived for the sake of final nirvāṇa without clinging. Here “final nirvāṇa without clinging” refers either to the fruit of arhatship that none of the four types of clinging can grasp or to nirvāṇa, the unconditioned, that does not exist due to conditions. None of the seven purifications themselves are final nirvāṇa without clinging, but final nirvāṇa without clinging cannot be attained without them. Puṇṇa Mantāniputta then gave the analogy of the king going to a faraway city on urgent business by means of a series of seven relay chariots. By means of the first chariot he arrives at the place of the second, by means of the second he arrives at the place of the third, and so on until by means of the seventh chariot he arrives at his final destination. We cannot say that the king arrived at his destination by means of the last chariot or any of the other chariots individually. Each chariot was taken for the sake of reaching the next one but all had the final destination in mind. So too, each of the seven purifications will take us to the subsequent one until we reach our final destination of nirvāṇa. In short, none of the purifications are goals in and of themselves, and no single purification is sufficient to realize final nirvāṇa without clinging. But when the seven are practiced in order, each one building on the previous one, we will arrive at our spiritual destination.

### *Occasions for Attaining Liberation*

Pāli sūtras mention five occasions or “spheres of liberation” (P. *vimuttāyatana*) that can trigger the breakthrough to liberating insight: when hearing the Dharma, teaching the Dharma to others, reciting sūtras and scriptures, reflecting on the Dharma, and meditating.

While doing any of these five activities, a practitioner may have a direct grasp of the teachings, which leads to experiencing delight and joy, which in turn bring pliancy and concentration. Of these, joy, pliancy, and concentration are awakening factors. The description of the seven awakening factors says these are preceded by mindfulness, investigation of phenomena, and effort, which lead to the direct grasp of the teachings. A mind with these awakening factors that is thus concentrated sees things as they really are, and as the Buddha often said, a concentrated mind leads to a realistic vision of things according to the four truths. Such clear insight leads to disenchantment regarding the five aggregates and dispassion, which triggers the process of eliminating ignorance, anger, attachment, and other afflictions. This process culminates in liberation.

Clearly liberation is attained not from just listening to teachings, teaching others, reciting sūtras, and so forth. Rather, these five are occasions for the ripening of previously created causes in the mindstreams of mature practitioners who have cultivated the three higher trainings. The ripening of these causes produces a breakthrough to nirvāṇa.

### *Four Kinds of Persons Who Attain Arhatship*

The Buddha speaks of four kinds of persons who attain arhatship, differentiating them according to the strength of their five faculties and based on their inclination toward serenity or insight (AN 4:169). The path where serenity is prominent is seen as one without intentional exertion, due to the smoothness and tranquility of the dhyānas. The path in which insight is prominent is considered one with intentional exertion because practitioners meditate on topics that lead directly to disenchantment and dispassion.

The first are practitioners who attain nirvāṇa in this life through intentional exertion. They meditate on the unattractiveness of the body, the repulsiveness of food, dissatisfaction with the saṃsāric world, impermanence, and death. These meditations require effort in that they open our eyes to the terrifying reality of saṃsāric existence. The sobering effect they have on the mind leads to disenchantment with saṃsāra and releases their deep attachment to conditioned phenomena. They depend on the five

powers of a trainee—faith, integrity, consideration for others, effort, and wisdom—and because their five faculties are strong, they attain nirvāṇa.

The second are those who attain nirvāṇa with the breakup of the body through intentional exertion. They do the same meditations mentioned above and depend on the same five powers. However, because their five faculties are comparatively weak, they attain nirvāṇa after death, presumably being a nonreturner when they die.

#### FOUR KINDS OF PERSONS

TYPE OF PRACTITIONER	PRACTICE WITH INTENTIONAL EFFORT	SERENITY OR INSIGHT IS PROMINENT	DEPEND ON FIVE POWERS OF TRAINEES	STRENGTH OF FACULTIES	ATTAIN NIRVĀṆA
1	Yes	Insight	Yes	Strong	In this life
2	Yes	Insight	Yes	Weak	After death
3	No	Serenity	Yes	Strong	In this life
4	No	Serenity	Yes	Weak	After death

The third are practitioners who attain nirvāṇa in this very life without intentional exertion. Living secluded from sensual pleasures and from nonvirtuous mental states, they attain the four dhyānas. They depend on the five powers, and because their five faculties are very strong, they attain nirvāṇa in this life.

The fourth are ones who attain nirvāṇa with the breakup of the body without intentional exertion. They too live secluded from sensual pleasures and from nonvirtuous mental states and attain the four dhyānas. They depend on the five powers of a trainee, but their five faculties are weak and they attain nirvāṇa after death.

*Liberation of Mind, Liberation by Wisdom*

In many sūtras we come across the phrase “liberation of mind, liberation by wisdom.” For example, in the *Discourse to Potaliya* the Buddha says (MN 54:24):

Having arrived at that same supreme mindfulness whose purity is due to equanimity, by realizing for himself with direct knowledge, this ariya disciple here and now enters upon and abides in the liberation of mind, liberation by wisdom that are unpolluted with the destruction of the pollutants.

The liberation of mind, liberation by wisdom is the ultimate liberation that comes through the destruction of the pollutants. According to the Pāli commentaries, here “mind” refers to an arhat’s samādhi and “wisdom” to an arhat’s wisdom. When these two liberations are joined together and are unpolluted, they signify the liberation attained with the destruction of pollutants by the supramundane path of an arhat.

The mind is very pure due to the eradication of defilements and very bright due to the light of wisdom. Arhats can live and act in the world without being controlled by the defilements. They make choices and decisions without being sabotaged by the defilements. They no longer crave the attractive objects they encounter; they no longer become upset or angry when things do not happen the way that they wish. They are not troubled by confusion about what is virtuous and to be practiced and what is nonvirtuous and to be abandoned. Having realized the selfless nature of all phenomena, they have cut through the web of proliferations and become a sage at peace (*P. muni santo*).

Ānanda asks the Buddha why some monastics gain liberation of mind and some gain liberation by wisdom (MN 64:16). This is a curious question, because usually arhatship is referred to as liberation of mind, liberation by wisdom, the two not being separated out.

The Buddha replies that the difference is in their faculties. That is, arhats who are inclined toward concentration are said to have liberation of mind because they developed great skill in the various samādhis and attain supernormal powers. Other arhats have greater aptitude for understanding,

analysis, and wisdom, and gain liberation by wisdom. However, they come to the same point. The Buddha's two chief disciples, Śāriputra and Maudgalyāyana, both attained arhatship through cultivating serenity and insight, but Śāriputra is known for his amazing ability in analysis and is said to have attained liberation by wisdom, while Maudgalyāyana was foremost in supernormal powers and is said to have attained liberation of mind.

### *Nirvāṇa and the Arhat*

Nirvāṇa's nature is undifferentiated, endless ultimate reality, the deathless unconditioned that is completely outside the limits of the conditioned world.<sup>68</sup> Nevertheless, according to its basis (the situation of the person who has attained nirvāṇa), it can be distinguished into nirvāṇa with remainder and nirvāṇa without remainder. The Buddha states (Iti 44):

What, monastics, is the nirvāṇa element with remainder? Here a monastic is an arahant, one whose pollutants are destroyed, who has lived the holy life, done what had to be done, laid down the burden, reached his own goal, utterly destroyed the fetters of existence, one completely liberated through final knowledge. However, his five sense powers remain unimpaired, by which he still experiences what is agreeable and disagreeable, still feels pleasure and pain. It is the destruction of sensual desire, hatred, and confusion in him that is called the nirvāṇa element with remainder.

Nirvāṇa without remainder occurs at the time an arhat passes away. The Buddha explains (SN 12:51):

With the breakup of the body, following the exhaustion of life, all that is felt, not being delighted in, will become cool right here; mere bodily remains will be left.

While an arhat is still alive, his nirvāṇa is the nirvāṇa with the remainder of the five polluted aggregates. When someone who will become



an arhat in that life is born, his aggregates were produced under the influence of ignorance and craving and are the polluted aggregates of a being who is not free from saṃsāra. After he attains liberation, he still has the same aggregates as at the time of birth; those aggregates are the “remainder.” He has nirvāṇa with remainder (*sopadhiśeṣa-nirvāṇa*, *sopādisesa-nibbāna*) of the polluted aggregates until he passes away from that life. Because of this, he experiences pleasure and pain, but contemplating these feelings as impermanent, conditioned, and dependently arisen, he does not hold to or delight in them. Thus he does not react to them with attachment, anger, or confusion, nor does he generate more karma that will cause rebirth. Still, he must decide, choose, and act within the limits of his situation.

At the time of death, his nirvāṇa is nirvāṇa without remainder (*anupadhiśeṣa-nirvāṇa*, *anupādisesa-nibbāna*) because the polluted aggregates have been left behind and no new polluted aggregates will be taken up since ignorance and craving have been totally abandoned. The literal meaning of “nirvāṇa” is to go out, as in a fire being extinguished, and this is precisely what happens to feelings at the time of an arhat’s death.<sup>69</sup> With the end of that life, there is no further rebirth, and the person is said to have become “nirvāṇa-ized” in nirvāṇa without remainder. In the commentaries nirvāṇa with remainder is called “the extinguishment of the afflictions” (P. *kilesa-parinibbāna*), and nirvāṇa without remainder is the extinguishment of the aggregates (P. *khandha-parinibbāna*).

Nirvāṇa is the state of extinguishment. Parinirvāṇa does not mean nirvāṇa after death. It is the event of passing away or extinguishment undergone by one who has attained nirvāṇa during his or her lifetime. The question of what happens to an arhat at the time of nirvāṇa without remainder, which is parinirvāṇa, has been the topic of discussion for centuries. Some people may assume that since there are no more polluted aggregates, the conventional person ceases to exist and only blank nothingness remains. However, no sūtra says that that is the case. Instead, nirvāṇa is always said to be a reality (*dharma*), a source (*āyatana*), an element (*dhātu*), and a state (*pada*).

As ordinary beings, we are used to thinking of people in terms of their aggregates and see them as real, substantial beings who are findable in

relation to their aggregates. But what happens when craving and ignorance have ceased and no new aggregates are taken because there is no cause for them? Let's look at what the sūtras say.

Godhika was a bhikkhu who became an arhat just before he died. Together with a group of monks, the Buddha went to the place where Godhika had died. Pointing to a cloud of swirling smoke, the Buddha explained to the monks (SN 4:23):

This is Māra, the Evil One, searching for the consciousness of the clansman Godhika, wondering: “Where now has the consciousness of the clansman Godhika been established?” However, monastics, with consciousness unestablished, the clansman Godhika has attained final nirvāṇa.

The commentary explains that Māra was looking for Godhika's rebirth-consciousness, but since he had passed away having ceased craving, his rebirth-consciousness was unestablished—that is, it lacked a cause for it to arise. After passing away, it is said that an arhat's consciousness is not established anywhere, meaning it has no connection with or attraction to any conditioned mode of existence. The commentary also says that “the cause for the non-establishment of consciousness was precisely the cause for his parinirvāṇa.”

Some passages in the *Suttanipāta* are interesting in this regard. In *Upasīva's Questions (Upasīvamānavapucchā)*, the Buddha says (Sn 5.6):

As a flame blown out by a gust of wind ceases and cannot be reached by conception, in the same way the Sage (*muni*), released from name and body, ceases and cannot be reached by conception...

Of him who has gone to cessation there is no measure, there is nothing in terms of which they could speak about him. When all dhammas have been uprooted, all the ways of speech have also been uprooted.

These passages indicate not only that the experience of nirvāṇa is beyond words and concepts, but also that nirvāṇa itself cannot be adequately explained with words.<sup>70</sup>

At the Buddha's time, people asked many spiritual leaders what happens to a tathāgata after death, and these leaders gave diverse responses. Those who believed in an everlasting self or soul that was separate from the aggregates asserted that a tathāgata ascended to an eternal state or merged with an eternal cosmic substance from which everything arises and into which everything returns. The Materialists, who believed the person was the body, asserted that a tathāgata disappeared into nonexistent oblivion when the body was given up.

The Buddha disagreed with these positions because they were based on the false assumption of a real person. Thus when the wanderer Vacchagotta asked the Buddha whether the Tathāgata is reborn, is not reborn, both, or neither, the Buddha replied that none of the four alternatives applied (MN 72). Had Vacchagotta not clung to the self and thought, "The aggregates of an arhat cease at death because when the pollutants have been destroyed, there is no cause for the reappearance of polluted aggregates in the future," that would not have been a wrong view. However, Vacchagotta was operating on the belief that a substantial being, a substantial tathāgata, was being destroyed at death. Such a substantial tathāgata never existed. In other words, it is like asking, "Does a turtle trim his moustache, not trim it, both trim it and not trim it, or neither trim it or not trim it?" Such a question cannot be answered because there is no moustache on a turtle to start with!

In response to Vacchagotta's confusion, the Buddha asked him: If a fire in front of him were extinguished, would he know that the fire was extinguished? If so, where did the fire go—to the north, south, east, or west? None of those choices apply because there is no fire that has gone anywhere. Similarly, a tathāgata has abandoned the five aggregates by which someone talking about him might describe him. However, the Buddha did not say the Tathāgata was nonexistent; he simply said the Tathāgata was beyond what our ordinary conceptual mind covered with ignorance can understand: "The Tathāgata is deep, immeasurable, hard to fathom like the ocean."

Within contemporary Theravāda, some say that after an arhat dies, there is nothing. There is not a self or soul that is annihilated; the arhat's previous existence with the five aggregates was a process and the process has come to an end. After that, nothing can be pointed to. Others say that nirvāṇa is the unborn reality. The process or the stream of consciousness continues until the passing away of the arhat, after which that stream of consciousness enters into nirvāṇa. There is no continuation in an individual form and no consciousness that continues in nirvāṇa. Nirvāṇa is the unconditioned, eternal reality, and the consciousness merges with that.

Others see both of the above positions as inadequate and say that nirvāṇa cannot be eternal because it is beyond time. Nirvāṇa is the unconditioned, unborn, deathless. It is not nonexistent. It is the timeless, imperishable, stable reality. When someone realizes this reality, the destruction of defilements and release from conditioned existence occurs. Nirvāṇa itself, however, is neither the destruction of defilements nor the release from conditioned existence because both of those are conditioned events that occur in time. These two events are stages in the full actualization of unconditioned nirvāṇa.

### *Tathāgatas and Arhats*

How does the Buddha fit in the four stages of awakening? What are the similarities and differences between a tathāgata and an arhat? This topic is discussed in both the Pāli and Sanskrit traditions. The following is according to the Pāli tradition.

A Buddha is an arhat, as shown in all the praises recited to the Buddha. Arhats, too, are said to have attained full awakening. This shows that the Buddha and arhats have realized the same truths. On the other hand, only a tathāgata is a perfectly awakened buddha. When asked about the difference between a perfectly awakened buddha and a monastic arhat, the Buddha says (SN 22:58):

The Tathāgata, the Arahant, the Perfectly Awakened One is the originator of the path unarisen before, the producer of the path unproduced before, the declarer of the path undeclared

before. He is the knower of the path, the discoverer of the path, the one skilled in the path. And his disciples now dwell following that path and become possessed of it afterward.

This is the distinction, the disparity, the difference between the Tathāgata, the Arahant, the Perfectly Awakened One and a bhikkhu liberated by wisdom.

The Tathāgata is the Teacher who first discovered the path in our world and declared it to all those who were interested in hearing. His disciples, also called “śrāvakas” because they listen to his teachings, follow that path and actualize it in their own continuums.

It appears that the practices done by those who become buddhas are the same as those who become arhats. In describing how all the tathāgatas of the past, present, and future become awakened, Śāriputra says, with the Buddha’s approval (SN: 47:12):

Whatever Arahants, Perfectly Awakened Ones arose in the past [or future or present], all those Blessed Ones first abandon the five hindrances, defilements of the mind that weaken wisdom; and then, with their minds well established in the four establishments of mindfulness, they develop correctly the seven awakening factors, and thereby they awaken to the unsurpassed perfect awakening.

This is the same path the Tathāgata expounds in the Pāli sūtras, through which so many of his disciples attain arhatship. On the other hand, some sūtras point out distinct qualities of a tathāgata that the arhats do not share. For example, the *Greater Discourse on the Lion’s Roar* (MN 12) speaks of the ten powers of a tathāgata, the four kinds of self-confidence, and other qualities that are unique to a tathāgata. In the *Sutta on the Wonderful and Marvelous* (MN 123) Ānanda explains many marvelous and unique qualities about the Tathāgata’s previous lives and his birth and activities in this life that his arhat disciples do not have. So clearly there is a difference in attainment and capability between the two. Therefore there must be a

difference in the path they practice, because unique causes are necessary to produce a unique result.

It is interesting that despite the Buddha obviously possessing qualities that not one of his disciples possessed completely, and despite the fact that the Buddha's activities far outweighed those of his disciples in terms of the benefit they had for sentient beings, in the earliest texts of the Pāli canon no one is recorded as having asked the Buddha how he attained his unique state by practicing the bodhisattva path.<sup>71</sup> It is indeed strange that no one had the aspiration to become exactly like the Teacher, even though he was known as having been a bodhisattva and one that became perfectly awakened. It is only in later centuries that the bodhisattva path was expounded in the Pāli tradition.

In the Pāli canon, we get to know the Buddha as a human being. We see his daily habits, his way of explaining the Dharma according to the dispositions and interests of the various people he encounters. We see him being open and friendly to a host of different people—brahmins and ascetics, the wealthy and the impoverished, the free and those enslaved. We observe how he handles disputes among his followers, how he deals with people who slander him or are contemptuous, how he reacts to those who praise him and shower him with gifts and to those who distort the Dharma he teaches. In the sūtras we see the exceptional inner qualities that manifest in his daily activities, which he imbues with the greatness of a mind at peace and endowed with wisdom and compassion.

The Tathāgata knows duḥkha, has abandoned its origin, has actualized its cessation, and has perfectly cultivated the path. His mind is all-knowing and clearly sees all that is. His speech is completely reliable: as he describes something, that is how it is. As he counsels us to do, he does that as well; he is free from all hypocrisy. With compassion he fearlessly teaches the Dharma to all those who wish to hear it.

## 7 | Fundamental Vehicle Paths and Fruits: The Sanskrit Tradition

**B**ODHICITTA AND THE WISDOM realizing emptiness are like the two wings of a bird that carry us to full awakening. Combining bodhicitta and wisdom gives us inner strength and stable self-confidence. Thinking of Śāntideva, the great scholar-adept, every day I aspire as he did (BCA 10.55):

For as long as space endures,  
and for as long as sentient beings remain,  
until then may I too abide  
to dispel the misery of the world.

When we follow Śāntideva's example and generate this noble determination, we totally dedicate our body, speech, and mind for others. This gives our existence profound meaning. We feel that every minute of our life is purposeful. I don't have this full experience, but I have enthusiasm to practice in order to generate it. Meanwhile, through my daily practice, some inner peace and satisfaction have arisen, so my talk isn't entirely empty words.

### *Realization of the Four Truths*

The four truths of āryas are the principal objects of meditation on the path to arhatship and buddhahood, and realizing their sixteen aspects is essential.<sup>72</sup> The order in which the four truths are presented—duḥkha, its origin, the cessation of duḥkha and its origin, and the path to that cessation

—is done from the perspective of realizing them. Contemplation of the four aspects of each truth is the means to deepen our understanding of that truth. By contemplating duḥkha we understand our present situation—that is, we, our aggregates, and the environment around us are impermanent, unsatisfactory in nature, empty, and selfless. Then we inquire into the origins of this unsatisfactory state and understand that it is produced by causes such as craving, polluted karma, and their root, ignorance. There is no external or permanent creator.

The question then arises, “Is there a possibility to end duḥkha and its causes?” This brings us to contemplate true cessations and to understand that nirvāṇa exists; it is a state of supreme peace that is irreversible. Knowing this, we become eager to know the unmistakable path to attain true cessation and learn of the three higher trainings of ethical conduct, concentration, and wisdom. The wisdoms realizing selflessness and emptiness have the power to definitively destroy the ignorance that is the root of saṃsāra and to bring nirvāṇa.

This is the order in which to contemplate the four truths and their sixteen aspects to gain a comprehensive understanding of them. Contemplation on true duḥkha and true origins leads to a strong feeling of renunciation of cyclic existence and contemplation on true cessations and true paths stimulates a strong wish to attain liberation.

After generating renunciation and the aspiration to attain liberation, the primary meditation to do is the one to realize selflessness. This involves meditation on impermanence and duḥkha as well, for these support and reinforce insight into selflessness. As Dharmakīrti says in the *Commentary on (Dignāga’s) “Compendium of Reliable Cognition,”* “From impermanence arises the understanding of duḥkha, and from duḥkha arises the understanding of selflessness.” Deepening of the understanding of selflessness is reflected primarily in the progression of the five paths, each of which is able to remove subtler layers of obscurations. No matter whether we follow the Śrāvaka, Solitary Realizer, or Bodhisattva (Mahāyāna) Vehicles, we need to gain the wisdom realizing the sixteen aspects of the four truths.

According to how they define ignorance, the four tenet systems have different understandings of the meanings of selflessness and emptiness in



the context of the sixteen aspects of the four truths. Non-Buddhists see that conditioned phenomena are unreliable and untrustworthy and postulate the existence of a permanent, unitary, independent self that is separate from the conditioned psychophysical aggregates. For the Vaibhāṣika and Sautrāntika systems, emptiness is the lack of such a transcendental self as asserted by non-Buddhists, and selflessness is the absence of a self-sufficient substantially-existent self that is different from the aggregates. Realizing these constitutes the wisdom realizing the selflessness of persons.

According to the Yogācāra and Svātantrika systems, the principal meditation object for śrāvakas and solitary realizers who seek arhatship is the selflessness of persons<sup>73</sup>—which they accept as the lack of a self-sufficient substantially-existent person—and for bodhisattvas who seek buddhahood it is the selflessness of phenomena as defined by each of those systems. For these systems the direct realization of its principal meditation object marks the attainment of the path of seeing of that vehicle.

The Prāsaṅgika system has unique assertions concerning both the object of negation in the meditation on emptiness and selflessness and the entry point to the path of seeing. Here the object of negation is the inherent existence of all persons and phenomena; to attain the path of seeing of any of the three vehicles, its practitioners must directly realize the emptiness of inherent existence of persons and phenomena.

Dharmakīrti praised the Buddha as a reliable teacher because he taught the four truths. Since he didn't hold the Prāsaṅgika view, the four truths he praised are the coarse four truths, which do not include the selflessness of phenomena and which assert the selflessness of persons to be the lack of a self-sufficient substantially-existent I. Nāgārjuna, on the other hand, praised the Buddha for his teaching of emptiness that leads to the relinquishing of all views of the inherent existence of both persons and phenomena and the realization of the subtle four truths.

According to Nāgārjuna's view, the view held by the Prāsaṅgikas, direct perception of the coarse four truths occurs prior to the path of seeing of any of the three vehicles. Realization of the subtle four truths occurs at the time of entering the path of seeing. The demarcation of entering the path of seeing of all three vehicles is the direct realization of the emptiness of inherent existence of both persons and phenomena.

To be free from saṃsāra, Prāsaṅgikas say we must realize the four truths perfectly as they are in reality. This means to realize that they are empty of inherent existence, empty of existing from their own side or by their own character. Śrāvakas, solitary realizers, and bodhisattvas all meditate on the emptiness of inherent existence of the four truths. The Buddha says in the *Sūtra on the Miserliness of One in Trance (Dhyāyitamuşṭi Sūtra, CTB 163)*:<sup>74</sup>

Mañjuśrī, he who sees all conditioned things are unborn thoroughly knows duḥkha. He who sees all phenomena as without origin has abandoned the origins of duḥkha. He who sees them as utterly passed beyond sorrow has actualized cessation. He who sees all phenomena as totally unborn has cultivated the path.

### *Three Vehicles: The Paths of Method and Wisdom*

Learning the systematic progression that practitioners of the three vehicles—śrāvakas, solitary realizers, and bodhisattvas—experience as they progress on their respective paths to their spiritual goals enables us to understand how the awakening of each vehicle is attained. The three types of practitioners were spoken of in the early sūtras, but the paths and grounds through which they progress to their respective awakenings were set out later, in the Abhidharma texts that arose in the centuries following the Buddha’s parinirvāṇa. The authors of these early texts developed elaborate systems of classifications of afflictions and defilements, and together with that they laid out paths and grounds that lead to their abandonment. Commentators on the Mahāyāna sūtras later laid out the bodhisattva paths and grounds.

Tibetan scholar-adepts synthesized the material in these Indian treatises, composing a genre of texts called “grounds and paths” (T. *sa lam*). These texts contain definitions of the progressive stages of the path and describe practitioners’ meditation objects, the defining characteristics of their realizations, and the practices they do between meditation sessions.

Although the grounds and paths texts are very technical and solicit many debates, studying them gives us a roadmap for spiritual development. They contain information that will help us to practice correctly, without taking unnecessary detours or becoming distracted by seemingly unusual meditation experiences. Having accurate knowledge derived from descriptions in the sūtras prevents us from having unrealistic expectations that lead to disappointment or wasted time.

Knowledge of the grounds and paths is also useful as a measuring stick that lets us know where we are. This keeps us humble and prevents the conceit thinking we are more advanced than we are. Because it makes us immune to further progress, conceit is a huge obstacle on the path. People who overestimate their attainments may also harm others by mistakenly teaching topics they believe they have experienced in meditation but in fact have not.

People may sometimes have strong or unusual experiences in meditation. Having heard certain terminology, but not really knowing what it means, they think they have attained particular realizations or levels of the path. By knowing the layout of the grounds and paths, we'll be able to distinguish a strong experience we have had once from a stable consciousness that is an actual path. When we have a stable experience, we'll be able to see if it has the other attendant characteristics that demarcate a certain level of the path. For example, we may sometimes have a strong experience of compassion in our meditation. This is excellent and to be cherished. Knowing that it is possible for us to experience such a state of mind is very encouraging. However, this one experience does not mean that we have attained the Mahāyāna path of accumulation and are now a bodhisattva. Entering the Mahāyāna path of accumulation requires not only a continuous feeling of renunciation of cyclic existence but also the altruistic aspiration to attain awakening that spontaneously arises whenever we see sentient beings. These are stable realizations, not brief experiences.

A man once came to me and announced that he had experienced direct insight into emptiness and was convinced he had attained the Mahāyāna path of seeing. I had to inform him that the attainment of this path also entailed other qualities, such as the ability to manifest in a hundred bodies

and to go to one hundred pure lands to make offerings to the buddhas. Unfortunately, he was unable to accomplish these feats.

While the grounds and paths texts are an excellent guide, nothing can replace a close relationship with an experienced spiritual mentor. Having meditative experiences themselves, they are able to question us and guide us wisely. They will offer suggestions to fine-tune our understandings or will bring us back on track if we have come to incorrect conclusions in our meditation.

As mentioned previously, the compassionate Buddha taught three vehicles, according to the inclinations and interests of various sentient beings—the Śrāvaka Vehicle, Solitary Realizer Vehicle, and Bodhisattva Vehicle. Each vehicle leads to its respective awakening—a śrāvaka's awakening, a solitary realizer's awakening, and the full awakening of a buddha. Those who actualize these vehicles differ in terms of their aspirations, the amount of merit they accumulate, the length of time they practice, and the other qualities they develop. According to the Prāsaṅgikas, all of them realize the emptiness of inherent existence, the selflessness of persons, and the selflessness of phenomena. Furthermore, according to most Mahāyāna tenet systems, all beings will eventually follow the Bodhisattva Vehicle and attain the full awakening of buddhahood. Some beings initially enter the Śrāvaka or Solitary Realizer Vehicle and, after becoming an arhat, begin the Bodhisattva Vehicle. Others enter the Bodhisattva Vehicle from the outset.

The śrāvakas (literally, hearers, disciples) are so called because they listen to teachings from the Buddha, practice them, and after attaining their result—the awakening of a śrāvaka—they cause others to hear about their attainment. They are also called śrāvakas because they hear the Buddha's teachings on the path and result of buddhahood and teach it to those who have the Mahāyāna disposition. However, they do not practice this path or actualize its results themselves.

Solitary realizers (*pratyekabuddha*, *paccekabuddha*) are so called because during their last life in saṃsāra they generate realizations on their own without depending on the instructions of a living master and during a time when no buddha is turning the Dharma wheel. Solitary realizers are also called “middling realizers of suchness” because they surpass the

śrāvakas by accumulating merit for a hundred eons, whereas śrāvakas can complete their path in a minimum of three lifetimes. Although they may have compassion, it is not the great compassion of bodhisattvas. Although they have a similitude of the two collections of merit and wisdom, they are not the two collections of bodhisattvas that lead to buddhahood. Bodhisattvas are so called because they have the bodhi mind, the aspiration for full awakening.

Each of the three vehicles has the five paths of accumulation, preparation, seeing, meditation, and no-more-learning.<sup>75</sup> Each of the five paths that comprise one of the three vehicles is called by the name of that vehicle—for example, there is the śrāvaka path of accumulation, the solitary realizers’ path of meditation, the Mahāyāna or bodhisattvas’ path of preparation, and so on. The five paths in each vehicle are differentiated in terms of the power of wisdom. That is, the five paths of each vehicle are distinguished by the power of insight into emptiness and the purification of the mind that it brings.

The three vehicles are differentiated in terms of the method aspect of the path. Śrāvakas’ and solitary realizers’ method practices are supported by renunciation of saṃsāra; bodhisattvas’ method practices are supported by bodhicitta. Practitioners of each vehicle must accumulate different degrees of merit by practicing the method aspect of their vehicle in order to support those increasingly powerful levels of wisdom.

### *Path, Ground, and Clear Realization*

Learning some vocabulary is helpful. A path (*mārga*) is an exalted knower that is conjoined with uncontrived renunciation. Path, ground (*bhūmi*), and clear realization (breakthrough, *abhisamaya*, T. *mngon rtogs*) are generally equivalent.<sup>76</sup> “Path” does not refer to an external walkway or to a doctrinal path. Rather, a path is so called because it is a consciousness that leads us out of saṃsāra and to awakening. A path is called a “ground” because like the earth, the ground is the basis for the growth of good qualities and the basis for release from afflictive obscurations and cognitive obscurations. A clear realization is a consciousness that is a path because just as an external path leads a person to their destination, a clear realization leads a

practitioner to a higher spiritual realization. The term “vehicle,” as in Fundamental Vehicle and Mahāyāna (Universal Vehicle), refers to a consciousness. Just as vehicles bear weight and take us somewhere, these consciousnesses bear the weight of sentient beings’ welfare—either our own or that of all beings—and carry us to arhatship and buddhahood.

According to the Sanskrit tradition, practitioners on all of the five paths of any of the three vehicles have path consciousnesses and clear realizations. However, in the Pāli tradition, a clear realization is a consciousness that clearly observes reality and understands existence as it actually is; it is a path wisdom that directly perceives the truth and so is a supramundane path. In the Pāli tradition, the truth is *nirvāṇa*; in the Nālandā tradition, the truth refers to emptiness, and in particular the emptiness of a mind that is forever free from all defilements. Since those defilements have been eliminated in the sphere of emptiness, *nirvāṇa* is that emptiness.

In the Pāli tradition, a clear realization is a breakthrough experience in the sense that, until that point, our understanding has not been complete, but now the obstacles preventing direct perception of the truth have been pierced and wisdom perceives the truth directly, nonconceptually, intimately. “Clear realization” is used in a technical sense on two occasions. The first is the initial clear realization of the Dharma (P. *dharmabhisamaya*), which is the initial direct seeing of *nirvāṇa*. This clear realization transforms a person from someone on the path into a stream-enterer, an *ārya*. It is equivalent to obtaining a vision of the Dharma (P. *dharmacakkhupatilabha*), to seeing the truth. The second is the full realization of the Dharma, the total eradication of conceit and the other fetters, which establishes one as an arhat. Here “clear realization” is synonymous with penetration, which refers to the four functions of a supramundane path: to understand *duḥkha*, to abandon its origin, to realize its cessation, and to cultivate the path to that cessation. The immediate cause of the clear realization of *nirvāṇa* is insight wisdom, which gives rise to the path wisdom that realizes *nirvāṇa* directly.

Each of the three vehicles has five paths. There are many common features of the five paths in all three vehicles, and there are many differences as well. The five paths of the Śrāvaka and Solitary Realizer Vehicles are similar, whereas the five paths of the Bodhisattva Vehicle have

some features in common with the Fundamental Vehicle paths and some marked differences. For example, bodhisattvas' motivation of bodhicitta and the fruit of the full awakening of buddhahood stand in contrast to śrāvakas' and solitary realizers' motivation of renunciation of saṃsāra and their fruit of arhatship.

### *Approachers and Abiders*

The presentation of the Fundamental Vehicle paths and results in the previous chapter was according to the Pāli tradition. We'll now look at the same topic from the viewpoint of the Sanskrit tradition. In accord with the general presentation of this series, these topics are explained according to the Prāsaṅgika system.<sup>77</sup>

Fundamental Vehicle āryas form four pairs of realized beings—the approacher and abider for stream-enterer, the approacher and abider for once-returner, the approacher and abider for nonreturner, and the approacher and abider for arhat. Each of these four pairs has two phases: the path and the fruit. During the path phase, one is an approacher (*pratipannaka*, *paṭipannā*) and practices to attain the fruit that is certain to be attained in that very life. During the fruit phase, one has succeeded in diminishing or overcoming that stage's corresponding fetters and becomes an abider in the fruit or result (*phalasthita*, *phalaṭṭhā*). These eight āryas may be monastics or lay practitioners. The lower tenet systems, Pāli tradition, and Prāsaṅgika system have slightly different descriptions concerning some details regarding the eight approachers and abiders.

Just as when we wash clothes the grosser dirt comes out first, while the deeper intransigent dirt requires more scrubbing and more soap, so too grosser grades of self-grasping are eliminated first and gradually the subtler grades are eliminated. There are eighty-one grades of self-grasping ignorance and its corresponding afflictions and their seeds: Each of the nine levels of saṃsāra—the desire realm, the four levels of the form realm (the first through fourth dhyānas), and the four levels of the formless realm (limitless space, limitless consciousness, nothingness, and peak of saṃsāra)—has nine grades of self-grasping. The nine grades range from gross to subtle according to the strength of self-grasping: great-great, middle-great,

small-great; great-middle, middle-middle, small-middle; great-small, middle-small, and small-small.<sup>78</sup> The antidotes that eradicate these grades of afflictions begin with the small-small, middle-small, and so on up to the middle-great and the great-great: the small-small antidotes overcome the grossest afflictions, and the great-great antidotes eliminate the small-small afflictions. That is, the smaller antidotes are sufficient to counteract the gross afflictions, while greater antidotes are needed to overcome the subtle, more deeply entrenched afflictions. This is similar to needing a stronger cleaning agent to remove subtle stains, while a weaker soap will do for the gross dirt.

According to the general Sanskrit tradition, while abandoning the first six of the nine grades of ignorance and afflictions that are related to the desire realm, Fundamental Vehicle practitioners are approachers to once-returner. When they have fully abandoned those six grades of ignorance, they become abiders in the fruit of once-returner.<sup>79</sup> Approachers to nonreturner are abandoning the seventh through ninth grades of desire-realm ignorance by an uninterrupted path. Abiders in the fruit of nonreturner have attained the liberated path that has abandoned these three grades. Nonreturners receive their name because they are no longer born in the desire realm.

Then the tenth through eighty-first grades of ignorance and afflictions of the form and formless realms are also abandoned by the uninterrupted paths of the path of meditation. The practitioners abandoning them are approachers to arhat; when they have been abandoned, those āryas become abiders in the fruit of arhat. According to Prāsaṅgikas, in general the eighty-one grades are eliminated in nine steps, whereby all the great-great afflictions are abandoned at once, the middle-great afflictions at once, and so on.

INNATE AFFLICTIONS ABANDONED ON THE PATH OF MEDITATION



REALM	LEVEL	AFFLICTIVE OBSCURATIONS BEING ABANDONED	
Afflictive obscurations of the desire realm	Great	Great-great	1
		Middle-great	2
		Small-great	3
	Middle	Great-middle	4
		Middle-middle	5
		Small-middle	6
	Small	Great-small	7
		Middle-small	8
		Small-small	9
Afflictive obscurations of the form realm	First dhyāna	10–18	Each of the afflictions on the left has nine grades from great-great to small-small.
	Second dhyāna	19–27	
	Third dhyāna	28–36	
	Fourth dhyāna	37–45	
Afflictive obscurations of the formless realm	Infinite Space	46–54	
	Infinite consciousness	55–63	
	Nothingness	64–72	
	Peak of saṃsāra	73–81	

Fundamental Vehicle practitioners have a variety of ways in which they proceed on the path to liberation. This involves the topic of the twenty saṅghas, which engenders much discussion. Below is a simplified presentation of how Fundamental Vehicle practitioners progress to liberation.<sup>80</sup>

*Simultaneous eliminators* completely overcome all great-great afflictions of the three realms at once, all the middle-great afflictions at once, and so on to the small-small afflictions of all three realms. Because they work at abandoning afflictions of the peak of saṃsāra—which are usually abandoned by nonreturners—just after becoming an abider in stream-enterer, they become approachers to arhat very quickly and do not become once-returners or nonreturners. Thus simultaneous eliminators are either abiders in the fruit of stream-enterer who are seeking to become

abiders in the fruit of arhat by leaping over the fruits of once-returner and nonreturner, or they are abiders in the fruit of arhat, having leapt over the fruits of once-returner and nonreturner.

Such practitioners progress using a preparation of the first dhyāna called the “capable preparation” (*anāgamyā*), which is a mind of the form realm. They become “dry” or “unadorned” arhats, because they haven’t attained even the first dhyāna by a worldly path of meditation. Their minds have not been moistened by meditative absorption. Although dry arhats have eradicated the afflictive obscurations, they have not abandoned the obscurations to absorption (T. *snyoms ’jug gi sgrib pa*) that prevent attaining meditative absorption. “Adorned” arhats have also accomplished all eight meditative absorptions, the absorption of cessation (T. *’gog pa’i snyoms ’jug*) as well as alternating dhyāna meditation (T. *bsam gtan spel sgom*) where they have the ability to alternate meditative absorption on polluted and unpolluted paths and in this way overcome the obscurations to concentration. Simultaneous eliminators are sharp-faculty disciples because they can overcome all afflictions in just nine steps. Being of sharp faculties, they could easily gain the meditative absorptions of the dhyānas and formless realms and become an adorned arhat.

*Gradual attainers* proceed serially through all eight stages of approachers and abiders and abandon all the grades of afflictions step-by-step. In general, they are approachers to stream-enterer during the last uninterrupted path of the path of seeing and become abiders in the fruit of stream-enterer at the last liberated path of the path of seeing. They first “abandon” the great-great grade of desire-realm afflictions by a worldly path that suppresses those afflictions and then abandon this grade of afflictions by a supramundane path of meditation. The worldly path suppresses some grades of afflictions by meditating on the grossness of the lower state and the peacefulness of the next higher one, while the supramundane path completely abandons afflictions by meditating on emptiness. Only the afflictions of the nothingness level of the formless realm and below can be abandoned by a worldly path; the afflictions of the peak of saṃsāra of the formless realm cannot be abandoned in this way because there is not a higher worldly level of meditative absorption that can

suppress these afflictions. Those on the path of meditation who are in the process of actualizing once-returned or nonreturner are gradualists.

*Leapers* bypass some of the fruits. Some leapers have suppressed the first six of the eighty-one grades of afflictions—which are desire-realm afflictions—by the worldly path before entering the path of seeing. They become approachers to once-returned and abiders in the fruit of once-returned, respectively, during the last uninterrupted path and last liberated path of the path of seeing. Other leapers have suppressed all nine desire-realm grades of afflictions by the worldly path and attained an actual dhyāna before entering the path of seeing. They are approachers to nonreturner when they attain the path of seeing and become abiders in the fruit of nonreturner upon attaining the last liberated path of the path of seeing.

## REFLECTION

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Review: Yogīs on the Fundamental Vehicle paths may proceed in several ways.

1. Simultaneous eliminators completely overcome all great-great afflictions of the three realms at once, all the middle-great afflictions at once, and so on to the small-small afflictions of all three realms.
2. Gradual attainers proceed serially through all eight stages of approachers and abiders and abandon all the grades of afflictions step-by-step.
3. Leapers bypass some of the fruits.

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### *Eight Grounds of the Fundamental Vehicle*

Fundamental Vehicle grounds are divided into the eight lesser grounds of śrāvakas and the grounds of solitary realizers. Here the term “realizers” refers to consciousnesses.

(1) *Grounds of lineage* are the four levels of the śrāvakas' path of preparation, which are clear realizations of common beings who are definite in the lineage of śrāvakas—that is, they will follow the Śrāvaka Vehicle to arhatship without changing vehicles. These practitioners have a union of serenity and insight observing emptiness that, as an inference, is a conceptual realization.

(2) Realizers of approachers to stream-enterer are called “the *grounds of the eighth*” by counting backward from the ground of an arhat—that is, starting with abiders in the result of arhat.

(3) Realizers of abiders in the fruit of stream-enterer are the *grounds of seeing* that first realize emptiness directly. Approachers to stream-enterer are in the process of abandoning the acquired afflictions by means of the uninterrupted path of the path of seeing. When they attain the liberated path of the path of seeing, they have eliminated the acquired afflictions and become abiders in the fruit of stream-enterer.

(4) Realizers of abiders in the fruit of once-returner are called “*grounds of diminishment*” because a once-returner has abandoned most, but not all, desire realm afflictions. Once-returners are so called because they will be reborn in the desire realm only one more time before attaining arhatship.

(5) Realizers of abiders in the fruit of nonreturner are *grounds of freedom from desire*, because that person has abandoned attachment to desire-realm afflictions. They are called “nonreturners” because, having eliminated the first nine of the eighty-one grades of afflictions, which are conjoined with the desire realm, they can never again be reborn in the desire realm due to afflictions and polluted karma.

(6) Realizers of approachers to once-returner, nonreturner, and arhat are *grounds of realizing completion*. These are śrāvakas' grounds that aren't included in the other grounds. While Fundamental Vehicle practitioners have an uninterrupted path that is abandoning the first six grades of desire-realm afflictions, they are approachers to once-returner. When they have abandoned them, they pass to a liberated path of the path of meditation and become abiders in the fruit of once-returner.

When they have an uninterrupted path that is abandoning the last three grades of desire-realm afflictions, they are approachers to nonreturner, and when those afflictions have been abandoned, they pass to a liberated path

and become abiders in the fruit of nonreturner. While abandoning the afflictions of the form and formless realms, they are approachers to arhat, and when those afflictions have been totally abandoned they become abiders in the fruit of arhat.

(7) *Grounds of śrāvakas* are realizers of abiders in the fruit of arhat. This is the path of no-more-learning of the Śrāvaka Vehicle in which all afflicted obscurations have been completely and forever eradicated. As liberated beings, these arhats are no longer bound in saṃsāra and will no longer take rebirth under the control of afflictions and polluted karma.<sup>81</sup>

(8) Realizers of solitary realizer āryas are *grounds of solitary realizers*, practitioners of the “middle” vehicle.

The eight grounds may be condensed into two: grounds of śrāvakas and grounds of solitary realizers. The most prominent classification of śrāvakas is of the four approachers and the four abiders. Although the framework of the eight approachers and abiders is not explicitly mentioned in terms of solitary realizers in the canonical scriptures, it may be applied to them.

### *Five Paths of the Fundamental Vehicle*

Readers who are unfamiliar with the grounds and paths will encounter many new terms as well as seemingly complex schemas in this and the next chapter. At first these may seem dry and technical, but as you become more familiar with them you will appreciate the spiritual roadmap that they constitute. Later, when you study a grounds and paths text in depth with a teacher and classmates with whom you can discuss the material, the background you gain here will come in handy.

The five Fundamental Vehicle paths are the śrāvaka and solitary realizer paths of accumulation, preparation, seeing, meditation, and no-more-learning.

The Fundamental Vehicle **path of accumulation** (*sambhāramārga*) is a clear realizer of the doctrine—“doctrine” here referring to the words of the scriptures. The śrāvaka and solitary realizer practitioners enter their respective paths of accumulation when they have developed full, unshakable renunciation of cyclic existence and a firm determination to attain liberation. This path is called “accumulation” because at this stage

practitioners accumulate a great amount of hearing the doctrine and because they begin to accumulate the merit and wisdom that will lead to the goal of that vehicle. There are three stages of the path of accumulation: small, middle, and great. Before being able to enter the path of accumulation, wrong views of nihilism—such as rejecting karma and its effects and rebirth—and of absolutism—such as asserting a soul (self) or a permanent creator—must be deactivated.

The Fundamental Vehicle **path of preparation** (*prayogamārga*) is a clear realizer of the meaning—that is, of emptiness. When yogīs first attain a concentration that is a union of serenity and insight focused on emptiness, they enter the path of preparation. This path is so called because this profound conceptual realization prepares yogīs for the direct, nonconceptual perception of emptiness on the path of seeing. The path of preparation has four stages: heat, peak, fortitude, and supreme mundane dharma. The first three stages are subdivided again into small, middle, and great. However, the supreme mundane dharma path of the Fundamental Vehicle lasts only one small moment that completes an action and so is not subdivided.

The Fundamental Vehicle **path of seeing** (*darśanamārga*) is a clear realizer of the truth, the emptiness of inherent existence. Practitioners enter this path when they first develop a direct, nonconceptual perception of emptiness. At that time, they begin abandoning the objects of abandonment—in this case the acquired self-grasping and its corresponding afflictions, and their seeds. There are two clear realizers on this path, each of which has subdivisions.

1. The *pristine wisdom of meditative equipoise* (*samāhitajñāna*) of the path of seeing realizes emptiness directly and nonconceptually with a concentration that is the union of serenity and insight. It is a realizer for which dualistic appearances with respect to emptiness vanish. It has three types:
  - An *uninterrupted path* (*ānantaryamārga*) is the actual antidote to the acquired self-grasping (grasping true existence) as well as acquired afflictions and their seeds. It consists of eight forbearances, which are minds that realize the emptiness of the

object (the four truths) and of the subjects (the minds meditating on the four truths). The eight forbearances occur simultaneously. Whatever is an uninterrupted path of the path of seeing is all eight forbearances. Due to the meditator's prior meditation on the antidotes, movement toward the wisdom *directly* realizing emptiness, which is the antidote, and movement toward the elimination of the last moment of self-grasping and its seeds to be abandoned by that level of that path occur at the same time. By the simultaneous arising of the antidote and the elimination of that grade of self-grasping, the uninterrupted path is attained, and that grade of self-grasping and afflictions can no longer be generated in that person's mindstream. However, she has not yet completely and forever abandoned them.

An uninterrupted path is so called because it leads the meditator uninterruptedly to liberation from those specific afflictions and their seeds. It is not that the afflictions and the uninterrupted path exist at the same time and battle each other, because an unpolluted mind and a polluted one cannot exist simultaneously.

- A *liberated path* (*vimuktimārga*) directly follows an uninterrupted path and is a wisdom that has definitely abandoned and is completely free of the acquired self-grasping. The liberated path consists of the eight knowledges, which also meditate on the emptiness of the object (the four truths) and the emptiness of the subject (the mind meditating on the four truths). The eight knowledges occur simultaneously and follow the eight forbearances. The uninterrupted path is compared to kicking the thief out of your house, and the liberated path is analogous to locking the door so he can never reenter.

Vaibhāṣikas say that these sixteen happen in a sequence—a forbearance followed by its knowledge, then another forbearance and its knowledge, and so on—whereas the Prāsaṅgikas say that the eight forbearances occur simultaneously, followed by the eight knowledges, which also

occur simultaneously. This is because the Prāsaṅgikas say that when one has direct realization of the emptiness of one phenomenon, one simultaneously directly realizes the emptiness of all phenomena.

- A *pristine wisdom of meditative equipoise that is neither an uninterrupted path nor a liberated path* occurs between the liberated path of the path of seeing and the first uninterrupted path of the path of meditation. Here yogīs strengthen their realization of emptiness until it becomes strong enough to become the uninterrupted path of the path of meditation. This occurs seamlessly in the same meditation session of meditative equipoise on emptiness.
2. The *pristine wisdom of subsequent attainment (prṣṭhalabdha-jñāna)* of the path of seeing is the subsequent clear realizer of someone who has arisen from a liberated path. This wisdom does not realize emptiness directly. Conventional phenomena again appear at this time and one accumulates merit in order to attain higher paths. This pristine wisdom is of two types:
- The *pristine wisdom concerned mainly with the method aspect of the path* supports other virtuous activities. This would be, for example, meditation on renunciation and the aspiration to attain liberation for oneself.
  - The *pristine wisdom concerned mainly with the wisdom aspect of the path* is, for example, contemplating that all phenomena are like illusions, appearing to exist from their own side but not existing in that way.

The Fundamental Vehicle **path of meditation** is a Fundamental Vehicle subsequent clear realizer. Practitioners enter this path when they attain the first uninterrupted path of the path of meditation by generating a pristine wisdom directly realizing emptiness that has the power to uproot one round



of innate self-grasping. It has two divisions: the pristine wisdom of meditative equipoise and the pristine wisdom of subsequent attainment.

1. The *pristine wisdom of meditative equipoise* is a subsequent clear realizer that perceives emptiness without any dualistic appearance. It has three subdivisions: uninterrupted paths, liberated paths, and pristine wisdoms of meditative equipoise that are neither of the two.
  - *Uninterrupted paths* are wisdoms that are the actual antidotes to the innate self-grasping that is its object of abandonment.
  - *Liberated paths* are the wisdoms that are directly liberated from the innate self-grasping that is the corresponding object of abandonment as the uninterrupted path that induces it. Each uninterrupted path flows seamlessly to become its corresponding liberated path in the same meditation session.

Just as the grades of ignorance and afflictions number eighty-one, so do the uninterrupted paths of the path of meditation number eighty-one. Here the small-small paths of each level eliminate the great-great grades of self-grasping of each level, the middle-small paths overcome the middle-great self-grasping, and so on, until the great-great paths eliminate the small-small grades of self-grasping.

The eighty-one grades of innate afflictions are abandoned in nine steps. All nine small-small paths occur simultaneously, overcoming all nine grades of great-great self-grasping ignorance. All nine middle-small paths eliminate all nine middle-great grades of ignorance and so on until all nine great-great paths overcome all nine grades of small-small ignorance.

There are nine uninterrupted paths on the path of meditation, the last one being the vajra-like concentration, but there are only eight liberated paths on the path of meditation, because the vajra-like concentration eradicates the final levels of self-grasping and brings the path of no-more-learning, which is totally free from all self-grasping, afflictions, and their seeds.

All uninterrupted paths and liberated paths realize emptiness directly. Progressing through the nine cycles of uninterrupted paths and liberated paths of the path of meditation is akin to repeatedly washing a cloth, each time removing a more strongly entrenched level of dirt until all dirt is finally abolished. As yogīs abandon more grades of self-grasping ignorance, the ignorance gets weaker and the strength of one’s assent to the appearance of true existence also declines until at the path of no-more-learning they are forever eradicated.

Śrāvaka āryas progress through the path of seeing and path of meditation in various ways, depending on whether they are simultaneous eliminators, leapers, gradual attainers, or gradual eliminators.<sup>82</sup>

- *Pristine wisdoms of meditative equipoise that are neither of the two* are, for example, the pristine wisdoms realizing emptiness that precede each uninterrupted path in the same meditation session.
2. The *pristine wisdom of subsequent attainment* is a clear realizer that does not realize emptiness directly. It arises after a liberated path while the yogī is engaged in daily life activities, as does the pristine wisdom of subsequent attainment of the path of seeing. It is of two types:
- The *pristine wisdom concerned mainly with the method aspect of the path* supports other virtuous activities. This could be, for example, yogīs’ thought to attain nirvāṇa for their own personal benefit.
  - The *pristine wisdom concerned mainly with the wisdom aspect of the path* is, for example, the pristine wisdom that directly realizes subtle conventionalities that appear like illusions in that they appear one way but exist in another.

The Fundamental Vehicle **path of no-more-learning** is a clear realizer of emptiness that has completely abandoned self-grasping ignorance, afflictions, and their seeds. This has two subdivisions:

1. The path of no-more-learning that is a method type of realizer is, for example, the intention of an arhat to enter meditative equipoise on nirvāṇa and not arise again.
2. The path of no-more-learning that is a wisdom type of realizer is, for example, a pristine wisdom of an arhat that directly realizes conventionalities as empty, like illusions.

These five paths can be condensed into two: the paths of ordinary beings (the paths of accumulation and preparation) and the paths of āryas (the paths of seeing, meditation, and no-more-learning). Fundamental Vehicle āryas consist of the eight approachers and abiders. Practitioners who attain the uninterrupted path of the path of seeing are approachers to stream-entry. When they attain the liberated path of the path of seeing and have fully abandoned the acquired afflictions, they are known as abiders in stream-entry. A stream-enterer is so called because they have entered the stream of Dharma flowing to liberation.

Approachers to and abiders in once-returner and nonreturner and approachers to arhat are on the path of meditation. Abiders in the fruit of arhatship are on the path of no-more-learning.

Śrāvakas and solitary realizers who are definite in their lineage abandon the self-grasping of both persons and phenomena by meditating on the emptiness of true existence of persons and phenomena. Śrāvakas accumulate merit for three lifetimes to attain arhatship; solitary realizers accumulate merit for one hundred eons to reach their goal. They use compact reasonings to realize emptiness, unlike bodhisattvas who realize emptiness by meditating on elaborate, multifaceted reasonings. Bodhisattvas who practice the Sūtra Vehicle accumulate merit for three countless great eons in order to gain full awakening. In general the paths of śrāvakas and solitary realizers are similar, as explained above; both groups have practitioners of modest and middling faculties who may take longer or shorter times to become arhats.

The Svātantrika Madhyamaka system and below say that first arhats attain a nirvāṇa with remainder and then nirvāṇa without remainder because when arhats attain nirvāṇa, they still have the remainder of their body produced under the influence of afflictions and karma. When they pass

away, they separate from the remainder of the polluted body and attain nirvāṇa without remainder. Vaibhāṣikas and Sautrāntikas say that at this time the continuum of the person is severed. The Yogācārins and Mādhyamikas assert one final vehicle, saying that arhats will eventually enter the Mahāyāna and attain buddhahood.

Prāsaṅgikas identify “remainder” differently, saying it refers to the appearance of true existence. When arhats directly realize emptiness in meditative equipoise, their wisdom realizing emptiness lacks the remainder of the appearance of true existence. This is a nirvāṇa without remainder. After emerging from meditation, however, the appearance of true existence returns during the time of subsequent attainment; at that time arhats have a nirvāṇa with remainder. Thus Prāsaṅgikas say that first arhats attain a nirvāṇa without remainder followed by a nirvāṇa with remainder.

In its description of the śrāvaka path, the Pāli tradition does not use the schema of the five paths, but it does use the names of four of the five paths to refer to similar stages of development. In the later commentaries, “collection” (P. *sambhāra*) is used to refer to accumulations or requisites a practitioner must assemble for the attainment of liberation. In the Abhidharma, “seeing” (P. *dassana*) is used to indicate the path of a stream-enterer, and “meditation” (P. *bhāvanā*) is used to refer to the paths of once-returned, nonreturner, and arhat who cultivate or familiarize themselves with the view attained with the experience of stream-entry. “No training” (P. *asekha*), which refers to arhatship or buddhahood, is the last ground (P. *bhūmi*). It is called a “ground,” not a “path” (P. *magga*), because it marks the end of cultivation. Here we see four terms—accumulation, seeing, meditation (familiarization), and no (more) training—referring to the same stages of development in both the Pāli and Sanskrit traditions.

## REFLECTION

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Review what occurs with each of the five paths of Fundamental Vehicle paths:

1. The path of accumulation is attained upon gaining firm renunciation of saṃsāra and firm determination to attain nirvāṇa.

2. The path of preparation is attained when first having the union of serenity and insight on emptiness.
  3. The path of seeing is attained upon realizing emptiness directly and nonconceptually for the first time.
  4. The path of meditation is attained when one's meditation on emptiness is strong enough to eradicate innate afflictions.
  5. The path of no-more-learning is arhatship, when all afflictions and their seeds have been forever overcome.
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### *Solitary Realizers*

Śrāvakas meditate principally on the four truths and can attain a śrāvaka's awakening (liberation) in three lifetimes. Solitary realizers practice similar to śrāvakas, but their principal object of meditation is dependent origination, and they accumulate merit and practice for at least one hundred eons. Because of their great accumulation of merit, in their last lifetime in saṃsāra they can attain a solitary realizer's awakening (liberation) without relying on a teacher.<sup>83</sup>

There are two types of solitary realizers: community-based and rhinoceros-like. To learn the Dharma, all of them initially receive teachings from a buddha or Buddhist master. On that basis, they begin to practice and to accumulate merit and wisdom. Those on the penultimate learner path before they become arhats make three prayers when they are dying: (1) may I be reborn in a land where there is no buddha or bodhisattva performing the various activities, such as teaching the Dharma; (2) may I be able to teach the Dharma through the gestures of my body, without speaking; and (3) in my last existence, may I attain nirvāṇa without relying on the instructions of a master. These prayers are actualized, and in their last life in saṃsāra they live in a very solitary way. The meaning of "solitary realizer" is self-realized because they are able to achieve realizations in their last life without depending on a master. Both śrāvakas and solitary realizers benefit sentient beings through teaching them the Dharma.

According to some scholars, *rhinoceros-like solitary realizers* who are definite in their lineage practice the collection of merit as a disciple of a buddha for a hundred great eons on the path of accumulation, and then in one lifetime attain the path of preparation on up to arhatship without depending on a buddha or another teacher.

Community-based solitary realizers are of two types: The *great-assembly solitary realizers* attain all the fruits except arhatship in the presence of a buddha, and in their last lifetime attain the fruit of arhatship without depending on a buddha or another teacher. The *lesser-assembly solitary realizers* attain the first three of the four levels of the path of preparation—heat, peak, and fortitude—in the presence of a buddha and then attain the remaining paths and the fruits alone in their last lifetime.

While most śrāvaka and solitary realizer practitioners enter the path of accumulation and traverse the remaining paths of their respective vehicles and attain arhatship, some of them may choose to transfer to the Mahāyāna before becoming arhats. Those that generate bodhicitta can transfer to the Mahāyāna path from the heat and peak stages of the path of preparation of their respective vehicle. They then enter the Mahāyāna path of accumulation because as bodhisattvas they must accumulate the great merit necessary to attain buddhahood.

Those that do not generate bodhicitta follow their given path until attaining arhatship.<sup>84</sup> These arhats take a mental body and abide in the personal peace of nirvāṇa for a long while. It is said that at some point the Buddha will “arouse” them from their meditative equipoise on emptiness and encourage them to work for the benefit of all sentient beings and attain full awakening. They will generate bodhicitta and enter the Mahāyāna path of accumulation. Those arhats who have meditated on the four immeasurables extensively have an easier time doing this than those who have not. There is much discussion on how these arhats-cum-bodhisattvas accumulate merit. For example, to engage in the first four perfections requires having a body that lives in the world with ordinary sentient beings. Given that, why and how would those who have already accomplished their goal of arhatship take such a body?

*The Variety of Dispositions and Faculties*

As we know, sentient beings are not all alike, and eliminating the defilements through Dharma practice does not entail that we become replicas of some predetermined idea of a holy being. We have different inclinations (*āśaya, āsaya*), habits (*carita, cāritta*), dispositions (*adhimukti, adhimutti*), and levels of faculties (*indriya*). Thus the way people practice, the path they follow, and what they emphasize in their practice will vary. As a skillful teacher, the Buddha can lead all beings, no matter their personal differences.

Regarding the path to arhatship, the Pāli tradition says that some people are more inclined toward a path based on faith and devotion, while others prefer to base their practice on investigation and wisdom. While all arhats are similar in having removed all afflictions and their seeds, some are *liberated in both ways*—that is, they have attained a meditative absorption of the formless realm that liberates them from the material body and liberating wisdom that frees them from saṃsāra. Other arhats are *liberated by wisdom*; of these some have attained a dhyāna and others are “dry arhats” who have attained access concentration only. Furthermore, some arhats have supernormal powers and others do not. Some have six superknowledges, others do not. Regarding the five faculties—faith, effort, mindfulness, concentration, and wisdom—arhats may differ in terms of which faculty was stronger when they practiced the path.

The Pāli sūtras tell us about arhats with different specialties. In the *Greater Discourse in Gosinga* (MN 32), when asked what kind of monastic would illuminate or beautify the Gosinga forest, the Buddha’s foremost disciples—all of whom were arhats except Ānanda—each had a different idea. Most of their ideas were consistent with their own special proclivity. Ānanda, the Buddha’s attendant who had heard many teachings, suggested a monastic who had learned much through hearing teachings, had memorized and recited those teachings, had investigated and practiced them, and finally had penetrated them to realize them. Having done this, his ideal monastic then teaches others so that their underlying tendencies will be eradicated and they will attain liberation. Revata, on the other hand, suggested someone who delights in solitary meditation and who actualizes both serenity and insight while living alone. Anuruddha proposed someone who had attained the divine eye, while Mahākāśyapa recommended a

monastic who engages in ascetic practice, wearing only rags and eating only alms food. Mahāmaudgalyāyana put forth monastics who discuss and debate the technical aspects of the teachings, while Śāriputra advocated a monastic who has mastery of his own mind and can abide in whatever meditative absorption he wished without clinging to I and mine. The Buddha praised each of their ideas, and he himself suggested someone who had strong resolution to attain awakening.

Likewise, those who are drawn to the bodhisattva path have different faculties. Those whose faculty of faith is strong and faculty of wisdom weaker generate bodhicitta first, enter the bodhisattva path of accumulation, and then realize emptiness in order to attain the path of preparation. Those whose faculty of wisdom is stronger first realize emptiness inferentially, and by this they are convinced that attaining liberation and awakening is indeed possible. Only then do they apply themselves to gain the full realization of renunciation and bodhicitta and enter the bodhisattva path of accumulation. On the path of accumulation they accumulate the merit necessary to progress to the path of preparation. They also perfect their serenity if they hadn't attained it previously.

Owing to the difference in their faculty of wisdom, modest-faculty bodhisattvas gain the signs of irreversibility (*avaivartika* or *avinivartanīya*) with respect to awakening and abandon all thoughts seeking liberation for themselves alone on the eighth ground, whereas middle-faculty bodhisattvas gain this on the path of seeing, and sharp-faculty bodhisattvas gain it on the path of preparation. All these bodhisattvas attain buddhahood, but their practice on the path differs according to their abilities. It is said, however, that our faculties and abilities can be sharpened, so putting ourselves in one or another category as if it were fixed is not wise.

Of practitioners who are trying to generate bodhicitta, those who are inspired more by faith and devotion prefer to meditate on the seven cause-and-effect instructions, while those whose faculty of wisdom is stronger initially generate bodhicitta by meditating on equalizing and exchanging self and others.

Although all buddhas are the same in having eradicated the two obscurations and attained omniscience, we connect to them in different ways. Medicine Buddha is the personification of healing because, as a



bodhisattva, he made unshakable resolutions to cure disease. Avalokiteśvara is the personification of compassion because of the way he practiced compassion as a bodhisattva. Although each buddha has all the means to lead us to full awakening, depending on the form in which that buddha manifests, we will be more attracted to one or another due to our dispositions and inclinations.

Knowing this, it is important to respect ourselves and others while we practice as ordinary beings, when we attain the ārya path, and after we manifest the result. Some people enter the śrāvaka path, others the solitary realizer path, still others the bodhisattva path. Some people attain arhatship and then begin the bodhisattva path, others enter the bodhisattva path directly. If we can enter the bodhisattva path directly without first becoming a śrāvaka or solitary realizer arhat, that would be best because we will be able to attain full awakening and benefit sentient beings more quickly. But if we cannot, practicing to become an arhat is wonderful. What is most important is that we assist one another as we all progress.

Many topics arise in the explanation of the bodhisattva paths and grounds. You may frequently want to refer to the following outline as you read the next several chapters.

## THE FIVE MAHĀYĀNA PATHS

### 1. *Bodhisattva Path of Accumulation*

1.1 Small phase

1.2 Middle phase

1.3 Great phase

### 2. *Bodhisattva Path of Preparation*

2.1 Heat stage

2.2 Peak stage

2.3 Fortitude stage

2.4 Supreme mundane dharma stage

### 3. *Bodhisattva Path of Seeing*

### 3.1 *Pristine wisdom of meditative equipoise*

#### 3.1.1 Uninterrupted path

#### 3.1.2 Liberated path

3.1.3 Pristine wisdom of meditative equipoise that is neither an uninterrupted path nor a liberated path

### 3.2 *Pristine wisdom of subsequent attainment*

3.2.1 Pristine wisdom concerned mainly with the method aspect of the path

3.2.2 Pristine wisdom concerned mainly with the wisdom aspect of the path

## 4. *Bodhisattva Path of Meditation*

### 4.1 *Pristine wisdoms of meditative equipoise*

#### 4.1.1 *Uninterrupted paths*

4.1.1.1 Uninterrupted paths that abandon the innate afflictive obscurations

4.1.1.1.1–6 Uninterrupted paths of the second through seventh grounds that abandon the six grades of self-grasping, their afflictions, and seeds

4.1.1.1.7 Uninterrupted path of the initial part of the eighth ground that abandons the three small grades of innate self-grasping, their afflictions, and seeds

4.1.1.2 Uninterrupted paths that abandon the cognitive obscurations

4.1.1.2.1 Uninterrupted path of the later part of the eighth ground

4.1.1.2.2 Uninterrupted path of the ninth ground

4.1.1.2.3 Initial uninterrupted path of the tenth ground

4.1.1.2.4 Final uninterrupted path of the tenth ground

#### 4.1.2 *Liberated paths*

4.1.2.1 Liberated paths of the second ground through the initial part of the eighth ground

4.1.2.2 Liberated paths of the second part of the eighth ground, the ninth ground, and the initial liberated path of the tenth ground

4.1.3 *Pristine wisdoms of meditative equipoise that are neither uninterrupted paths nor liberated paths*

### 4.2 *Pristine wisdoms of subsequent attainment*

4.2.1 Pristine wisdoms concerned mainly with the method aspect of the path

4.2.2 Pristine wisdom concerned mainly with the wisdom aspect of the path

5. *Mahāyāna Path of No-More-Learning (Buddhahood)*



# 8

## The Paths of the Bodhisattva

### *Five Mahāyāna Paths*

In many ways, the Bodhisattva Vehicle (Mahāyāna or Universal Vehicle) is similar to the Fundamental Vehicle. Like the Fundamental Vehicle, it also has five paths—the Mahāyāna paths of accumulation, preparation, seeing, meditation, and no-more-learning. The paths of the Bodhisattva Vehicle are usually called Mahāyāna (Universal Vehicle) paths rather than bodhisattva paths because the path of no-more-learning is possessed by a buddha, not a bodhisattva.

Like the Fundamental Vehicle, the Mahāyāna paths of seeing and meditation are classified into the pristine wisdoms of meditative equipoise and the pristine wisdoms of subsequent attainment. These, in turn, are divided into the same branches as the Fundamental Vehicle paths, so for the details about these, please refer to the preceding chapter. In this chapter, we'll discuss the ways in which the bodhisattva paths and grounds differ from those of the Fundamental Vehicle. On the bodhisattva paths of seeing and meditation, bodhisattvas also traverse the ten bodhisattva grounds (*bhūmi*). In traversing their paths and grounds, bodhisattvas abandon not only the afflictive obscurations, as do Fundamental Vehicle practitioners, but also cognitive obscurations, resulting in the attainment of full awakening, or buddhahood, with qualities surpassing those of arhats. Nevertheless, the object of meditation of both vehicles' uninterrupted and liberated paths is the same—the emptiness of inherent existence.

Among practitioners who aspire for buddhahood, those of sharp faculties settle the correct view of emptiness before generating bodhicitta. Although at this time they have not entered the path of accumulation, their inference of emptiness has a powerful impact on other areas of their

practice. It strengthens their refuge, increases their determination to be free from saṃsāra, and motivates them to cultivate strong compassion for all sentient beings—the great compassion observing the unapprehendable that Candrakīrti spoke of in the homage to the *Supplement*.<sup>85</sup>

Several different grounds and paths (T. *sa lam*) texts are used in Tibetan monasteries. One of the most common is from the Svātantrika Madhyamaka perspective. However, here we will rely on the grounds and paths text by the Mongolian scholar-adept Losang Tayang (1867–1937), *A Brief Presentation of the Grounds and Paths of the Perfection Vehicle, Essence of the Ocean of Profound Meaning*, that is written according to the Prāsaṅgika perspective.<sup>86</sup> Losang Tayang’s method of setting out the bodhisattva grounds and paths according to the Prāsaṅgikas accords with that of Jamyang Shepa and Ngawang Palden but differs from that of Losang Chökyi Gyaltsen.

### *Bodhisattva Path of Accumulation*

Based on great compassion and the great resolve, when the bodhicitta of bodhisattva-aspirants becomes spontaneous, they enter the path of accumulation and become actual bodhisattvas. Those who freshly enter the bodhisattva path do so when they have gained genuine and spontaneous bodhicitta, such that whenever they see any sentient being, their spontaneous thought is “I want to attain full awakening in order to lead this being from duḥkha and bring him or her to the bliss of full awakening.” At present, although we admire the bodhisattva path and even generate contrived bodhicitta in our minds, we are not yet actual bodhisattvas. Those beings who have spontaneous bodhicitta are truly admirable.

All Mahāyāna tenet systems, except the Yogācāra Scriptural Proponents, assert one final vehicle. That is, all sentient beings—including Fundamental Vehicle arhats—will eventually enter the bodhisattva path and become buddhas. These arhats enter the Universal Vehicle on the bodhisattva path of accumulation. Although they have already realized emptiness and removed all afflictive obscurations, they must still create great merit in order to progress through the bodhisattva paths and grounds. The path of accumulation is so called because during this time bodhisattvas

newly or freshly entering the path—that is, those who haven’t previously attained arhatship—accumulate a great deal of merit, hear many teachings on the bodhisattva practice and on emptiness, and clarify their understanding of emptiness in order to progress to the path of preparation. Before entering the path of accumulation all bodhisattvas have overcome the wrong views of nihilism—such as rejecting karma and its effects and rebirth—and of absolutism—such as asserting a soul (self) or permanent creator.

Henceforth some bodhisattvas practice the Pāramitāyāna—the Perfection Vehicle—in which they fulfill the collections of merit and wisdom in three countless great eons to become buddhas. Others follow the Tantrayāna, where if they practice properly, the time is much shorter.

In both cases, they proceed to buddhahood by cultivating method and wisdom. The Buddha succinctly laid out the path in the *Heart Sūtra* when he spoke the perfection of wisdom mantra, *tadyathā gate gate pāragate pārasaṃgate bodhi svāhā*. *Tadyathā* means “it is thus,” *gate* means “having gone,” *pāragate* is “having thoroughly gone,” *pārasaṃgate* is “having thoroughly and completely gone,” *bodhi* means “awakening,” and *svāhā* means “may it be so.” This is explained in terms of the person who is going, that to which they are going, that from which they are going, and the means in dependence upon which they are going.

Who is going? The I that is merely designated in dependence on the mindstream is the person who is going. That from which we are going is saṃsāra, the state of being under the power of ignorance, afflictions, and polluted actions. That to which we are going is the resultant truth body, the everlasting cessation of duḥkha, its origins, and their latencies. That by which we are going is a path that is a union of method and wisdom.

By saying *gate*, the Buddha tells us to go to the other shore. From our point of view, saṃsāra is the near shore and nirvāṇa is the far shore. By saying these five—*gate, gate, pāragate, pārasaṃgate, bodhi*—the Buddha encourages and instructs us to go, go, thoroughly go, thoroughly and completely go, and (go) to full awakening. These five represent, respectively, the bodhisattva paths of accumulation, preparation, seeing, meditation, and no-more-learning.

The path of accumulation is a clear realizer of the doctrine—“doctrine” here referring to the words of the scriptures gained mainly by hearing and contemplating the teachings. The bodhisattva path of accumulation is similar to the Fundamental Vehicle path of accumulation, but bodhisattvas continue to strengthen their bodhicitta and collect a great amount of merit before passing to the bodhisattva path of preparation.

While on the path of accumulation, bodhisattvas have states arisen from meditation, but they do not yet have states arisen from the union of serenity and insight realizing emptiness. It is called “the path of accumulation” because during this time, they accumulate the conditions to gain the union of serenity and insight into emptiness arisen from meditation.<sup>87</sup> These bodhisattvas accumulate merit through engaging in the method aspect of the path with the bodhicitta motivation and accumulate wisdom by consistent meditation on emptiness.

The bodhisattva path of accumulation has three phases: small, middle, and great. *On the small phase*, bodhisattvas do not necessarily have the correct view of emptiness. In addition, their bodhicitta is not stable; it could degenerate if those bodhisattvas are not careful. This stage is like a sick person who has taken the medicine, but it’s uncertain if he will be cured. Referring to the twenty-two types of bodhicitta, the bodhicitta of small-phase bodhisattvas is like the earth.<sup>88</sup> Just as the earth is the basis for and provides nourishment for all that grows, this bodhicitta is the basis on which all the excellent qualities of the bodhisattva path will arise in the future.

*On the middle phase*, their bodhicitta will not degenerate. It is like gold—a precious substance buried under the ground for a long time. However, these bodhisattvas must still create a great deal of merit before gaining the path of preparation.

*On the great phase*, bodhisattvas’ bodhicitta and excellent qualities grow like the waxing moon. Having the concentration called “the stream of Dharma,” they are able to emanate many bodies that travel to various pure lands to listen to teachings from many buddhas.<sup>89</sup> Never forgetting the teachings they hear, these bodhisattvas also listen to Dharma discourses from supreme emanation bodies. Bodhisattvas who have not previously



gained the correct view of emptiness attain it on either the second or third phase of the path of accumulation.

### *Bodhisattva Path of Preparation*

The path of preparation is a clear realizer of the meaning—here “meaning” refers to emptiness. For “new” bodhisattvas—those who entered the Bodhisattva Vehicle directly—the demarcation of entering the path of preparation is having the union of serenity and insight on emptiness. Here their understanding of emptiness becomes more experiential because it is derived from insight and because they now attain a new concentration that is a clear conceptual realization of emptiness.

Bodhisattvas who had previously become Fundamental Vehicle arhats attain the bodhisattva path of preparation when they accumulate the requisite two collections of merit and wisdom on the path of accumulation necessary to advance to the bodhisattva path of preparation. This requisite is the same for those bodhisattvas until they reach the eighth ground because in order to eradicate the cognitive obscurations on the pure grounds—the eighth, ninth, and tenth grounds—they must first accumulate merit and wisdom for two countless great eons. For all bodhisattvas, the first great countless eon of merit is accumulated on the paths of accumulation and preparation, the second on the first to the end of the seventh ground, and the third on the three pure grounds.

On the path of preparation, bodhisattvas familiarize themselves with emptiness and further cultivate the method side of the path through altruistic activities. Within the path of preparation are four stages—heat, peak, fortitude, and supreme dharma—where their realization of emptiness continues to deepen and their awareness of emptiness becomes subtler and clearer. They continue to meditate using various reasonings to refute inherent existence and establish emptiness. Having correctly established the view, they then meditate on emptiness with the union of serenity and insight. The conceptual appearance of emptiness is gradually worn away, and conceptual elaborations and dualistic appearances begin to fade.

The four stages of the path of preparation are posited according to the gradual decrease of dualistic appearances during meditative equipoise on

emptiness and the new ability to suppress the four manifest forms of self-grasping. Yogīs suppress the manifest self-grasping of afflictive and pure objects on the first two stages and the manifest self-grasping of subjects—the consciousnesses realizing emptiness—on the last two stages. At each stage, their conceptual cognition of emptiness becomes clearer. Each of these four stages has three phases—small, medium, and great—because bodhisattvas must create a great amount of merit on the path of preparation to advance to the bodhisattva path of seeing.

The *heat stage* is so called because one is approaching the fire of the direct realization of emptiness that burns up the afflictions.

The *peak stage* is so called because one’s roots of virtues can no longer be damaged by anger and wrong views. Yogīs newly attain a concentration that is a deeper conceptual realization of emptiness.

The *fortitude stage* is so called because these bodhisattvas can “bear” emptiness without fear. From this point onward, they have certainty that they will never again be born in an unfortunate rebirth. Although the karmic seeds for such rebirths are still on their mindstream—they are not eliminated until the path of seeing—the conditions for them to ripen are now incomplete. However, these bodhisattvas do not have complete control of the rebirth process. This ability is gained on the first ground; thereafter they can take any rebirth they wish.

In the first two stages of the path of preparation, there is the appearance of subject and object during meditative equipoise on emptiness and the meditator can ascertain them. Now, although the appearance or image of emptiness is still present, it has diminished to such an extent that she no longer ascertains it. However, she does ascertain emptiness.

The *supreme mundane dharma stage* is so called because it is the highest mundane state. These bodhisattvas are still common beings (*prthagjana*, *puthujjana*), but upon attaining the path of seeing, they will become āryas. The veil of the conceptual appearance of emptiness is very thin, and the sense of a subject—a mind realizing emptiness—cannot be ascertained. They are on the verge of breaking through the veil of the conceptual appearance to realize emptiness directly.

## *Bodhisattva Path of Seeing*

The *Ornament of Clear Realizations* says that the physical support—that is, the body—of those who enter the bodhisattva path of seeing directly without having first attained arhatship in the Śrāvaka Vehicle is the body of a human being<sup>90</sup> or the body of any of the six classes of desire-realm gods. Form- and formless-realm gods have weak renunciation of saṃsāra, and because of their attachment to the peacefulness of their meditation they are unable to attain the bodhisattva path of seeing. It is said that some form-realm gods can attain the first three levels of the bodhisattva path of preparation, but not the fourth because that leads directly to the path of seeing. The mental support—that is, the sphere (*avacara*) of consciousness—needed to attain the bodhisattva path of seeing is an actual dhyāna.<sup>91</sup>

When all dualistic appearances—of subject and object, of conventional truths, and of inherent existence—dissolve, yogīs in meditative equipoise on emptiness on the supreme mundane dharma phase of the path of preparation transition to the bodhisattva path of seeing. Their insight into emptiness is now direct and nonconceptual. The mind and emptiness are fused, like water poured into water, with no appearance of subject and object. As ārya bodhisattvas, these yogīs are not subject to the duḥkha of birth, aging, sickness, and death. Although they will take rebirth, it is no longer under the control of the ignorance, afflictions, and polluted karma that would give rise to this saṃsāra duḥkha. These bodhisattvas now eliminate the acquired afflictions.

The bodhisattva path of seeing is a clear realizer of the truth, emptiness; it encompasses the first bodhisattva ground and has two clear realizers: the pristine wisdom of meditative equipoise and the pristine wisdom of subsequent attainment of the path of seeing.

1. The *pristine wisdom of meditative equipoise* realizes emptiness directly and nonconceptually with a concentration that is the union of serenity and insight. That pristine wisdom has no dualistic appearance whatsoever. It has three types: an uninterrupted path, a liberated path, and the pristine wisdom of meditative equipoise that is neither.

- An *uninterrupted path* (*ānantaryamārga*) is an exalted wisdom of the Mahāyāna path of seeing that is the actual antidote to acquired self-grasping and acquired afflictions. This uninterrupted path consists of the eight forbearances, which are synonymous with one another. This uninterrupted path leads the meditator without any interlude to liberation from the acquired afflictions. It is not that the afflictions and the uninterrupted path exist at the same time and battle each other, because an unpolluted mind and a polluted one cannot exist at the same time. Rather it is like the dawn of a new day: the approaching of radiant sunlight and the approaching of the cessation of darkness are simultaneous.
- A *liberated path* (*vimuktimārga*) directly follows the uninterrupted path and is a pristine wisdom of meditative equipoise of a Mahāyāna path of seeing that has definitely abandoned and is completely free of acquired self-grasping and acquired afflictions to be eliminated on that path. Due to the power of the antidote—the pristine wisdom of meditative equipoise—those afflictions can never again appear in the mind. Attaining a liberated path and actualizing a true cessation are simultaneous. The reality (emptiness) of the mind free from those objects of abandonment on that path is a true cessation.
 

Just as the eight forbearances, which comprise the uninterrupted path, occur simultaneously and abandon the acquired afflictions, the eight knowledges, which comprise the liberated path, occur simultaneously and are the knowledge that the acquired afflictions have been abandoned. This liberated path realizes the emptiness of both subject and object with respect to the four truths.<sup>92</sup>
- The *pristine wisdom of meditative equipoise that is neither an uninterrupted path nor a liberated path* is, for example, the pristine wisdoms of meditative equipoise of the bodhisattva path of seeing of someone who had previously become a

Fundamental Vehicle arhat. As arhats these practitioners have already abandoned all the afflictive obscurations that are the objects of abandonment of the first seven grounds. So until they reach the eighth ground, they do not have any new uninterrupted paths or liberated paths, although they still engage in meditative equipoise on emptiness. Rather, they focus on accumulating the merit necessary to support their pristine wisdoms on the pure grounds that will eradicate the cognitive obscurations.

2. The *pristine wisdom of subsequent attainment of the path of seeing* is the clear realizer of someone who has arisen from a liberated path. This wisdom does not realize emptiness directly. Conventional phenomena again appear at this time, and these yogīs engage in virtuous activities to accumulate merit in order to attain higher paths. This pristine wisdom is of two types: the pristine wisdom concerned mainly with the method aspect of the path and the pristine wisdom concerned mainly with the wisdom aspect of the path.
  - The *pristine wisdom concerned mainly with the method aspect of the path* is, for example, bodhicitta that supports virtuous activities, such as the practices of the perfections of generosity, ethical conduct, and fortitude.
  - The *pristine wisdom concerned mainly with the wisdom aspect of the path* is, for example, the wisdom contemplating that all phenomena are like illusions in that they appear to exist from their own side but do not exist in that way. Derived from the realization of emptiness, this wisdom knows that although phenomena do not inherently exist, they function in the conventional world.

On the path of seeing, bodhisattvas completely overcome acquired afflictions. Their innate afflictions are weakened so that without these gross impediments, their great compassion easily expands and intensifies. However, if the influence of the realization of emptiness wanes,

bodhisattvas on the first seven grounds may still experience manifest afflictions. These afflictions are weak, do not disturb their mind or create karma, and are easily neutralized by bodhisattvas' wisdom and compassion. Ārya bodhisattvas create only unpolluted karma.

Fundamental Vehicle learner āryas may still experience the unpleasant results of previously created destructive karma. Ārya bodhisattvas, however, experience neither physical nor mental suffering because of the power of their wisdom and compassion.

Since the virtuous karma ordinary beings create is considered polluted and is not a direct cause of awakening, the question arises: What happens to the seeds of this virtuous karma when the person becomes an ārya? They are gradually transmuted into seeds of unpolluted karma as the power of ārya bodhisattvas' realizations and excellent qualities increases.

In the following chapters that describe the practice of ārya bodhisattvas, you will see the power and capability of their great compassion and wisdom. This gives us confidence that our compassion and wisdom, when continuously cultivated, will likewise expand exponentially.

### *Bodhisattva Path of Meditation*

The bodhisattva path of meditation is a bodhisattva subsequent clear realizer. Bodhisattvas transition to the path of meditation when they have accumulated enough merit and their wisdom is powerful enough to begin eradicating the innate afflictions. "Meditation" in Tibetan has the same verbal root as "to familiarize," so this is called "the path of meditation" because yogīs are mainly familiarizing themselves with the emptiness directly realized by the path of seeing. The bodhisattva path of meditation is of two types: pristine wisdoms of meditative equipoise and pristine wisdoms of subsequent attainment.

1. The *pristine wisdoms of meditative equipoise* are a bodhisattva's subsequent clear realizers in which all dualistic appearances regarding emptiness have vanished. Here, too, there are three types: uninterrupted paths, liberated paths, and pristine wisdoms of meditative equipoise that are neither.

A. An *uninterrupted path* is a pristine wisdom of meditative equipoise that is the actual antidote to whichever of the two obscurations—afflictive obscurations and cognitive obscurations—is its object of abandonment. Uninterrupted paths of the bodhisattva path of meditation are of two types: those that abandon innate afflictive obscurations and those that abandon cognitive obscurations.

(1) *Uninterrupted paths that abandon the innate afflictive obscurations* are, in turn, divided into seven. The first six are the uninterrupted paths of the second through seventh grounds on which the six grades of innate self-grasping and its corresponding afflictions and their seeds are eradicated. These six grades are the great-great through the small-middle grades of innate afflictions of the three realms.

The seventh uninterrupted path occurs on the initial part of the eighth ground. For bodhisattvas who did not enter the Fundamental Vehicle first, this uninterrupted path eradicates the three small grades of innate self-grasping, their afflictions, and their seeds simultaneously, in one moment. Having pacified coarse striving and exertion, this uninterrupted path is very powerful because it can abandon in a short time the self-grasping and afflictions that could not be abandoned during many prior eons. In that way it is like a ship that sails with difficulty in channels, but once it reaches the open ocean can quickly traverse great distances. The *Ten Grounds Sūtra* says (EOM 18):

O Children of the Conqueror, it is like this:  
For example, until it reaches the great ocean,  
a great ship that goes on the great ocean must  
be forcibly moved and made to go. As soon  
as it reaches the great ocean, it is carried by  
billows of wind. It goes without needing to be  
moved forcibly. It [traverses] effortlessly that

which one could not traverse even in a hundred years by means of the previous forcible moving and going.

O Children of the Conqueror, similarly, one who has thoroughly accumulated the collection of roots of virtue of a bodhisattva and achieves well the Mahāyāna, having reached the ocean of the deeds of bodhisattvas, by means of a spontaneous pristine wisdom obtains in one brief period a measure of all-knowing pristine wisdom that he could not have obtained even in one hundred thousand eons of those previous forcible deeds.

When these bodhisattvas attain the liberated path of the initial part of the eighth ground, they have totally eradicated the root of saṃsāra and have attained a nirvāṇa that is the complete exhaustion of the afflictive obscurations. They are similar to arhats who are free from desire regarding the three realms of saṃsāra. The *Ten Grounds Sūtra* says, “Here, just at this time, he passes thoroughly beyond sorrow.” Candrakīrti’s *Supplement* says (EOM 18–19):

Because an awareness that is without desire does not abide together with faults, on the eighth ground those defilements are thoroughly pacified along with their root, the afflictions, are extinguished, and [one] is unsurpassed in the three realms. However, [one] is not [yet] able to attain all the fortunes of buddhas, limitless like the sky.



Although these bodhisattvas are now similar to arhats, they are not non-learners, because they haven't attained the path of no-more-learning of any of the three vehicles. Bodhisattvas that previously attained arhatship in the Fundamental Vehicle are non-learners because they attained the path of no-more-learning in the Fundamental Vehicle. However, they are not non-learners of any of the three vehicles because they are now in the Bodhisattva Vehicle.

- (2) *Uninterrupted paths that abandon cognitive obscurations* are divided into four. The uninterrupted path of the later part of the eighth ground and the uninterrupted path of the ninth ground, respectively, abandon the great and middle cognitive obscurations. The initial and final uninterrupted paths of the tenth ground, respectively, abandon the coarse and subtle small cognitive obscurations.
- B. *Liberated paths* are directly freed from either of the two obscurations that are the object of abandonment of the uninterrupted path that induced it. There are ten liberated paths from the second to the tenth grounds. The liberated path that corresponds to the last uninterrupted path of the path of meditation is the first moment of buddhahood. Thus on the path of meditation, there are eleven uninterrupted paths and ten liberated paths.
- C. The *pristine wisdoms of meditative equipoise that are neither an uninterrupted path nor a liberated path* are, for example, the pristine wisdom of meditative equipoise in the continuum of an ārya bodhisattva who is about to attain the third through the tenth grounds. These pristine wisdoms occur between one liberated path and the next uninterrupted path. During this time, yogīs collect merit and continue to enhance their wisdom realizing emptiness. Their meditative equipoise on emptiness

prepares them to attain the next uninterrupted path, and when their wisdom is strong enough to eliminate the next level of afflictions and their seeds, they seamlessly, without arising from meditation, pass into the next uninterrupted path. The actual transition from one ground to the next and from the tenth ground to the path-of-no-more-learning occurs during meditative equipoise. Similarly, the transition from the supreme mundane dharma stage of the path of preparation to the first ground occurs during meditative equipoise.

2. The *pristine wisdoms of subsequent attainment* are a bodhisattva's subsequent clear realizers that do not directly realize emptiness. These are of two types:
  - A. The *pristine wisdom concerned mainly with the method aspect of the path* supports other virtuous activities such as the practices of the perfections of generosity, ethical conduct, and fortitude. It also includes the three mental engagements of aspiration, dedication, and rejoicing. Aspiration creates the roots of virtue, dedication makes them inexhaustible, and rejoicing increases them.<sup>93</sup>
  - B. The *pristine wisdoms of subsequent attainment that are wisdom types of realizers* are exalted knowers that realize emptiness through a conceptual appearance. When yogīs arise from meditation realizing emptiness, they don't forget what they realized. The impact of that realization stays with them and influences how they perceive the objects they use in daily life. As long as their minds are informed by this realization, although people and things appear to them as inherently existent, they know that this appearance is false and that these objects are like illusions.

While on the paths of seeing or meditation, before progressing to the next uninterrupted path a yogī repeatedly generates the pristine wisdom of subsequent attainment and the pristine wisdoms of meditative equipoise that

are neither. This is done because it takes time for practitioners' merit and wisdom to become strong enough to induce the next uninterrupted path. Depending on the acuity of their faculties and other conditions, they may be on a particular path for several months, years, lifetimes, or for the good part of a countless great eon. During this time, they eat, sleep, talk to people, and do other activities in their daily lives, all the time practicing bodhicitta and virtuous actions to accumulate merit. They repeatedly meditate on impermanence and emptiness with the pristine wisdoms of meditative equipoise that are neither. Only after accumulating merit and wisdom for a long time do bodhisattvas generate the next uninterrupted path. After meditating with this new uninterrupted path and its liberating path that eradicate the next grade of afflictions, they again practice for extended periods of time meditating with the pristine wisdom of subsequent attainment and the pristine wisdoms of meditative equipoise that are neither.

On the second to the seventh grounds of the bodhisattva path of meditation, progressively more subtle levels of the innate afflictions are abandoned. When their minds are still influenced by the realization of emptiness they had in meditative equipoise, they see all phenomena as like illusions. However, if the influence of their realization of emptiness wanes, ārya bodhisattvas may still experience manifest afflictions, but they are weak, do not create karma, and are easily suppressed.

The uninterrupted path of the initial half of the eighth ground eradicates the subtlest afflictive obscurations, and its liberated path marks the full abandonment of all acquired and innate afflictions and their seeds from the root. Eighth-ground bodhisattvas resemble arhats in terms of having eliminated all afflictive obscurations and being entirely free from cyclic existence. Bodhisattvas, however, have many special qualities that śrāvakas and solitary realizer arhats lack.

#### OBJECTS ABANDONED ON THE BODHISATTVA PATHS AND GROUNDS

BODHISATTVA PATH	BODHISATTVA GROUND	OBJECTS BEING ABANDONED AND OBJECTS COMPLETELY ABANDONED
Path of seeing	1 UIP and LP	Acquired afflictions
Path of meditation	2 UIP and LP	Great-great innate afflictive obscurations

Path of meditation	3 UIP and LP	Middle-great afflictive obscurations
Path of meditation	4 UIP and LP	Small-great afflictive obscurations
Path of meditation	5 UIP and LP	Great-middle afflictive obscurations
Path of meditation	6 UIP and LP	Middle-middle afflictive obscurations
Path of meditation	7 UIP and LP	Small-middle afflictive obscurations
Path of meditation	8 initial UIP and LP	Great-small, middle-small, small-small afflictive obscurations
Path of meditation	8 initial LP	Liberated from saṃsāra
Path of meditation	8 later UIP and LP	Great cognitive obscurations
Path of meditation	9 UIP and LP	Middle cognitive obscurations
Path of meditation	10 initial UIP and LP	Coarse small cognitive obscurations
Path of meditation	10 later UIP	Subtle small cognitive obscurations
Path of no-more-learning		Buddhahood

UIP = Uninterrupted path

LP = Liberated path

## REFLECTION

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1. What are the entry points for each of the five bodhisattva paths?
2. What is the function of each of these pristine wisdoms on the bodhisattva path of meditation?
  - *Pristine wisdoms of meditative equipoise*
    - Uninterrupted paths
    - Liberated paths
    - Pristine wisdoms of meditative equipoise that are neither uninterrupted nor liberated paths
  - *Pristine wisdoms of subsequent attainment*
    - Pristine wisdoms concerned mainly with the method aspect of the path
    - Pristine wisdoms of subsequent attainment that are wisdom types of realizers

3. Imagine what it would be like to gain these pristine wisdoms and the freedom they bring. Develop a strong determination to do so for the benefit of all beings.

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The Yogācāra-Svātantrikas, Sautrāntika-Svātantrikas, and Prāsaṅgikas have different ways of describing the bodhisattva paths of seeing and meditation. This is related to what they consider to be afflictive obscurations and cognitive obscurations.

*Yogācāra-Svātantrikas* say grasping the coarse and subtle self of persons are afflictive obscurations, and grasping the coarse and subtle self of phenomena are cognitive obscurations. The coarse self of persons is a permanent, unitary, independent self and the subtle is a self-sufficient substantially-existent person. Grasping the coarse self of phenomena—grasping the perceiving subject and perceived object as being of different substantial entities—is the coarse cognitive obscurations, and grasping the true existence of phenomena is the subtle cognitive obscurations. For bodhisattvas who enter the bodhisattva path freshly, the path of seeing abandons acquired afflictive obscurations and acquired cognitive obscurations and their seeds. Depending on the bodhisattva path of seeing (which encompasses the first ground), bodhisattvas actualize a true cessation of acquired obscurations. The remaining nine grounds of the bodhisattva path of meditation abandon the innate afflictive obscurations and innate cognitive obscurations simultaneously. Both obscurations have been completely removed at buddhahood.

*Sautrāntika-Svātantrikas* say grasping the coarse and subtle self of persons are afflictive obscurations, and grasping the self of phenomena are cognitive obscurations. Like the Yogācāra-Svātantrikas, they say the coarse self of persons is a permanent, unitary, independent self and the subtle is a self-sufficient substantially-existent person. Unlike Yogācāra-Svātantrikas who assert a coarse and subtle self of phenomena, Sautrāntika-Svātantrikas assert only one level of grasping the self of phenomena—grasping both persons and phenomena as truly existent. For bodhisattvas who enter the bodhisattva path freshly, acquired afflictions are eliminated by the path of seeing. Unlike Prāsaṅgikas who assert that first all afflictive obscurations

are abandoned on grounds one through seven and then cognitive obscurations are abandoned on the three pure grounds, Sautrāntika-Svāntrikas assert that cognitive obscurations are abandoned on all ten grounds. All afflictive obscurations are abandoned by the beginning of the eighth ground and all cognitive obscurations have been abandoned at the path of no-more-learning, buddhahood.

*Prāsaṅgikas* assert that afflictive obscurations are the self-grasping ignorance of persons and phenomena, afflictions, and their seeds. Cognitive obscurations are the latencies of self-grasping ignorance and the subtle dualistic appearances that they cause. As described above, all afflictive obscurations are abandoned by the beginning of the eighth ground, and only at that time do bodhisattvas begin to eliminate cognitive obscurations. All self-grasping ignorance and afflictions, which are afflictive obscurations, must be eliminated prior to eliminating cognitive obscurations. This is because before removing the latencies of the afflictions, the afflictions themselves must be eliminated, just as before eliminating the smell of onions in a pot (cognitive obscurations), the onions themselves (afflictive obscurations) must be removed.

### *Three Special Times*

Although all bodhisattvas have sharp faculties compared with other practitioners, among themselves they may be of sharp, medium, or modest faculties. The path of preparation (especially the heat stage), the path of seeing, and the eighth ground come up repeatedly as times that special events may occur for bodhisattvas, depending on their level of faculties.

Signs of irreversibility (*avaivartika* or *avinivartanīya*) consist of forty-four signs, such as having stopped manifest self-grasping and not engaging in worldly talk. The forty-four signs illustrate that these bodhisattvas have an internal, stable realization of method and wisdom; they are now on an irreversible course to full awakening and will proceed directly to buddhahood. They no longer fear that self-interest or the aspiration for only their own liberation will hold them back from full awakening. The *Ornament of Clear Realizations* says that sharp-faculty bodhisattvas gradually receive signs of irreversibility on the four stages of the path of

preparation, middle-faculty bodhisattvas receive signs of irreversibility on the path of seeing, and modest-faculty bodhisattvas receive signs on the eighth ground.<sup>94</sup>

Previously it was said that after the middle level of the path of accumulation, one's bodhicitta does not degenerate. Wouldn't that mean that bodhisattvas are irreversibly on the path to full awakening at that time? Although those bodhisattvas do not reverse course from full awakening, they have not yet attained the *signs* of irreversibility because they still haven't generated the confidence that they will not succumb to any self-centered thought that would seek their own liberation. Attaining the signs of irreversibility occurs at one of the three times mentioned above.

According to a commentary on the *Ornament of Clear Realizations*, these three points on the path also correspond to the time when the respective bodhisattvas attain the fortitude of the nonarising of phenomena. Having unwavering conviction that all phenomena lack inherently existent arising or production, and developing fortitude and acceptance with respect to emptiness, bodhisattvas can now meditate on emptiness without hesitation. It is called "fortitude" because it supports bodhisattvas on the path, preventing them from backsliding into self-preoccupation and seeking only their personal liberation. Bodhisattvas realize that there are no inherently existent sentient beings to lead to nirvāṇa and no inherently existent bodhisattvas or buddhas who are leading them. All persons and phenomena, by their very nature, are free from inherent existence; all existents in saṃsāra and nirvāṇa are originally unborn and nonarisen and are empty of inherently existent birth, arising, and production.<sup>95</sup>

The Perfection of Wisdom sūtras and the *Ornament* say that at these three points of the path, the respective bodhisattvas may also receive a prophecy of their awakening from the Buddha. A prophecy occurs when a particular wheel-turning buddha indicates directly or indirectly the time in the future when this bodhisattva will attain full awakening.

There is some discussion about when the self-centered attitude seeking one's own liberation is overcome or no longer manifests. By one account, it may occur at these three times, according to whether a bodhisattva has sharp, medium, or modest faculties.

We can see why these and other occurrences may happen at these three times on the path: attainment of the union of serenity and insight on emptiness marks the beginning of the heat stage of the path of preparation; the first direct, nonconceptual realization of emptiness marks the beginning of the path of seeing; and the complete extinguishment of the afflictive obscurations marks the beginning of the eighth ground.





# 9 | Bodhisattva Grounds

## *Special Qualities of Each Ground*

The Śrāvaka Vehicle has eight grounds and the stages of the four pairs of approachers and abiders of stream-enterer, once-returner, nonreturner, and arhat, whereas the bodhisattva path is divided into ten bodhisattva grounds. These ten commence on the path of seeing and continue through the end of the path of meditation. Nāgārjuna tells us (RA 440):

Just as eight grounds are explained  
in [the texts of] the Śrāvaka Vehicle,  
so too, the ten grounds of bodhisattvas  
are taught in the Mahāyāna.

Candrakīrti's autocommentary to the *Supplement* defines a bodhisattva ground (CTB 131):

When a bodhisattva's unpolluted wisdom, conjoined with compassion and so forth, is divided into parts, each part is called a "ground" because it is a base for good qualities.

These grounds are all ultimate bodhicitta—an ārya bodhisattva's wisdom directly and nonconceptually realizing emptiness conjoined with compassion. This wisdom of meditative equipoise on emptiness is unpolluted by either ignorance or its latencies. In post-meditation time, the minds of bodhisattvas on the first seven grounds are polluted by ignorance, its seeds, and its latencies because ignorance may still manifest and phenomena appear truly existent. On the eighth ground and above,

ignorance and its seeds have been abolished and bodhisattvas' minds in post-meditation are polluted only by the latencies of ignorance. In this respect they are similar to arhats who have removed the afflictive obscurations but still have the cognitive obscurations.

Candrakīrti's definition of a bodhisattva ground is a general one. Ārya bodhisattvas do not nonconceptually realize emptiness every moment, but their minds are always conjoined with that realization. Although they are not explicitly conjoined as they are in meditative equipoise, since ārya bodhisattvas' wisdom realizing emptiness has not degenerated or been forgotten in post-meditation when they interact with others, their minds are always conjoined with ultimate bodhicitta.

Although the ten grounds are chiefly defined by their wisdom of meditative equipoise on emptiness, not every consciousness of an ārya bodhisattva is a ground. Ārya bodhisattvas' love, compassion, and first nine perfections also occur on the ten grounds, but they are not the wisdom directly realizing emptiness. Nor are ārya bodhisattvas' sense consciousnesses or their mental consciousnesses remembering past events considered grounds. Grasping true existence may arise on the first seven grounds, but it is quickly subdued and does not overwhelm their minds. Some manifest afflictions may also occur, although they are usually transmuted into a bodhisattva practice. An example is a bodhisattva's desire that manifests when they want to produce children who will benefit others.

Another example is that of a ship captain who was an ārya bodhisattva. Knowing that someone aboard the ship was going to kill the other five hundred passengers, with compassion he killed that man to prevent him from harming others and from creating the destructive karma of killing. Some scholars say that although his causal motivation was compassion, in order to actually take a life, there must have been a moment of anger or hatred at the time of doing the act; otherwise he wouldn't have been able to take a life. However, this is a topic of debate, with other scholars saying that if the preparation, action, and conclusion of the action were all done with compassion, no affliction was present. Still others say that on the first two grounds, bodhisattvas may have a little anger at the moment of doing the action, but on the third ground and above they would not because they have attained a surpassing practice of fortitude.

In any case, afflictions do not harm ārya bodhisattvas. It is like someone who has recovered from an illness, but slight remnants of the virus remain in their body without adversely affecting them.

Ārya bodhisattvas' unpolluted wisdom of meditative equipoise is nondual wisdom. Here "nondual" does not mean free from the two extremes of absolutism and nihilism, as it does when speaking of ordinary beings developing the right view. Instead, it means that the subject and object appear undifferentiable, not as two separate, distinct entities, that there are no appearances of veiled truths, and that there is no appearance of inherent existence. As bodhisattvas ascend the ten grounds, this wisdom purifies their minds of first the afflictive obscurations and then the cognitive obscurations. Once these pollutants have been removed, the continuity of the clear-light mind remains and buddhahood is attained.

Although ārya śrāvakas, like ārya bodhisattvas, have realized emptiness directly, their wisdom is not a bodhisattva ground due to several distinguishing factors. Ārya bodhisattvas' wisdom realizing emptiness is conjoined with great compassion and bodhicitta and possesses twelve special characteristics. In addition, ārya bodhisattvas' wisdom directly realizing emptiness arises from having meditated on emptiness during the bodhisattva paths of accumulation and preparation using a wide variety of reasonings to get at the meaning of emptiness.

Ārya bodhisattvas' one unpolluted wisdom of meditative equipoise on emptiness is divided into parts—its earlier and later moments—forming the ten bodhisattva grounds. Just as the earth is the foundation of life, each ground is the basis of certain qualities. The division of this one seamless wisdom is made due to differences in four features: the number of sets of twelve good qualities, the degree of their majesty of power, the surpassing practice of a particular perfection, and the fruitional rebirth they take. The grounds are not differentiated in terms of how they realize emptiness or the emptiness that is their object of observation.

However, there is a difference in the ten grounds in terms of seeing the true cessations that are gradually gained by eradicating the various grades of obscurations. All these true cessations are emptinesses of a mind that has overcome a certain portion of obscurations. To a mind directly perceiving these emptinesses there is no difference in the experience of perceiving the

emptiness of inherent existence. However, because the mind that is the basis of each true cessation is progressively cleansed, it is said that the emptiness of that mind is also progressively cleansed as more true cessations are gained. In other words, the successive uninterrupted paths of the ten grounds have increased power and greater ability to overcome subtler defilements. As a result, the successive liberated paths that they bring about have more true cessations and increased freedom from defilements. First-ground bodhisattvas directly realize the true cessation they have attained, but not the true cessations of the higher bodhisattvas, and the higher bodhisattvas directly realize the true cessations previously attained as well as the true cessation gained on their ground. Nāgārjuna describes this as a gradual process similar to the moon gradually waxing full. *In Praise of the Dharmadhātu (Dharmadhātustava 75–76)* says:

Just as the crescent moon  
is seen to increase day by day,  
similarly, those abiding on the grounds also  
are seen to increase in stages.

On the fifteenth day of the waxing moon  
the moon becomes complete.  
Similarly, on the completion of the grounds  
the truth body is fully manifest.

The following four features enable us to discern the division of this one seamless ultimate wisdom into the ten grounds:

(1) The *number of sets of twelve good qualities* a bodhisattva possesses increases. In one instant, a first-grounder can see a hundred buddhas, receive the blessing of a hundred buddhas, go to a hundred buddha lands, illuminate a hundred lands, vibrate a hundred world systems, live for a hundred eons, see the past and future of a hundred eons with wisdom, enter into and arise from a hundred concentrations, open a hundred doors of Dharma, ripen a hundred sentient beings, emanate a hundred bodies, and be surrounded by a hundred bodhisattvas. These twelve good qualities arise

just after the first-grounder arises from the meditative equipoise on emptiness.

The number of these sets of twelve increases with each ground. On the second ground a bodhisattva possesses one thousand sets of twelve good qualities; on the third ground, one hundred thousand; on the fourth ground, one billion; on the fifth ground, ten billion; on the sixth ground, one trillion; on the seventh ground, one sextillion; on the eighth ground, the number of atoms of a billion worlds; on the ninth ground, the number of atoms of ten sextillion worlds; and on the tenth ground, the number of atoms of an inexpressible number of an immeasurable number of buddha lands.

(2) The *degree of power increases*. Each successive ground has greater power to purify the various levels of obscurations and to advance to a higher path. The first ground abandons the acquired afflictions. The second through the seventh grounds sequentially abandon the great-great up to the small-middle rounds of afflictions. The first part of the eighth ground abandons the great-small, middle-small, and small-small rounds of afflictions. The eighth, ninth, and tenth grounds abandon the cognitive obscurations, and on the first moment of the Mahāyāna path of no-more-learning all obscurations have been totally abandoned.

(3) On each ground, bodhisattvas develop a *surpassing practice of a particular perfection*: generosity, ethical conduct, fortitude, joyous effort, meditative stability, wisdom, skillful means, unshakable resolve, power, and pristine wisdom. This occurs chiefly due to the power of wisdom that enables bodhisattvas to overcome manifest obstacles to that perfection and attain a superior level of its practice. Accomplishing this refines their body, speech, and mind. While bodhisattvas continue to practice that perfection—for example, joyous effort—on prior and subsequent grounds, on one particular ground they attain a special competence in it. In addition, all the other perfections become more excellent on each subsequent ground, even though they may not become surpassing on that ground.

(4) On each successive ground, bodhisattvas have *the choice to take higher rebirths* in which they have more power to benefit sentient beings. They do not take these rebirths because they seek fame, riches, or power, but to be able to influence an ever-growing number of beings in a positive way.

While the object and aspect of each of these wisdoms is the same, each ground should be understood not only as the unpolluted wisdom of meditative equipoise but also as the features it possesses in post-meditation. Due to the variances of these four features, the ability of the unpolluted wisdom of each ground differs. The *Ten Grounds Sūtra* says (CTB 136):

Just as the wise cannot express or see  
the trail of any bird across the sky,  
so none of the grounds of the Conqueror's heirs  
can be expressed. Then how can one listen?

However, [differences between these ultimate grounds] are  
explained in terms of gradual progression of a mere portion of  
those [grounds]:  
by way of love, compassion, and aspirational prayers,  
and not in terms of objects of activity of the mind.

Any description of each ground falls short of the actual experience of it; ultimate bodhicitta cannot be adequately expressed in words. We differentiate the grounds based on the four features above and in terms of the actualization of a new true cessation not present in the previous ground. These new true cessations come about due to the eradication of a certain portion of obscurations by the uninterrupted path of each ground. Due to this, the clarity of the mind's perception of emptiness increases, and with that increased clarity, the yogī's wisdom becomes capable of eliminating a new level of obscurations on the next ground. This progressive development of qualities and cleansing of the mind continues until nonabiding nirvāṇa, in which all obscurations have been forever eradicated, is attained.

## REFLECTION

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1. In general, the ten bodhisattva grounds are one unpolluted wisdom of meditative equipoise on emptiness conjoined with compassion that is divided into its earlier and later moments.

2. This wisdom is divided into the ten grounds due to differences in four features: the number of sets of twelve good qualities, the degree of their majesty of power, the surpassing practice of a particular perfection, and the fruitional rebirth they are capable of taking.
  3. The grounds are not differentiated in terms of how they realize emptiness or the emptiness that is their observed object. However, in addition to the four features mentioned above, they also differ according to the obscurations that have been overcome and the true cessations attained.
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There are several ways to contemplate the qualities of the bodhisattvas on the ten grounds. One is to do so in terms of thinking of the qualities of the Saṅgha Jewel that we take refuge in. Doing this helps us to understand their abilities to protect us from saṃsāra and guide us on the path such that our faith in the ārya bodhisattvas and buddhas increases and becomes stable.

Another way to contemplate the qualities of the Saṅgha Jewel is by seeing them as the qualities we have the ability to develop and will attain as we gradually practice the path and ascend the bodhisattva grounds. This gives us great inspiration and self-confidence to practice now because we have a clearer vision of the kind of person we can become and how we can contribute to the well-being of others.

The verses below that commence the description of each ground are from Nāgārjuna's *Precious Garland* (RA 441–61). As you read the qualities and realizations of these remarkable bodhisattvas, let your mind soar and imagine what having these realizations would be like. Be aware that these are not just qualities that others possess; they are also qualities that you are capable of cultivating and bringing to completion. The *Ten Grounds Sūtra* describes the practices undertaken and perfected on the ten grounds that culminate in full awakening. The following quotations from this sūtra are from the Chinese canon.

### *First Ground, the Joyous*

The first of these is called “the Joyous”



because these bodhisattvas experience great joy  
since the three fetters have been eliminated  
and they have been born into the tathāgata family.

Through the maturation of that [ground],  
the perfection of generosity becomes supreme,  
they are able to make a hundred worlds quake,  
and they become the Great Lord of Jambudvīpa.

First-grounders are called “the Joyous” (*pramuditā*) because they have eliminated the portion of afflictions to be abandoned on the path of seeing—all acquired afflictions and most notably the acquired forms of three fetters: view of a personal identity, view of bad rules and practices, and deluded doubt. Vasubandhu in the *Treasury of Knowledge* explains why these three are specifically mentioned (CTB 141):

Not wishing to go, mistaking  
the path, and doubting the path  
obstruct progress to liberation.  
Therefore the three are indicated.

If we want to go from Dharamsala to San Francisco, we must first have the wish to go there, then we must learn the correct route, and finally we have to clear all doubts about going and the route we’ll take. Similarly, to attain awakening we must first eliminate the acquired form of the view of a personal identity, which hampers our aspiration to attain awakening. Afraid of losing the I and mine that the view of a personal identity clings to so strongly, we hesitate and back away even though we have the opportunity to practice the path.

Because of our immature understanding of selflessness, this fear often manifests as laziness, busyness, or a multitude of excuses that justify our resistance to learning and practicing the Dharma. Once we have overcome this and our aspiration to attain awakening is healthy and strong, we need to find and follow the correct path to accomplish our spiritual aim. Doing this necessitates overcoming the view of bad rules and practices that holds bad

conduct and incorrect practices as supreme. Otherwise, there is great danger of following a wrong path that will lead us not to awakening but to the unfortunate realms.

When we find the correct path, our certainty may be weak, in which case dispelling the vacillating mind of doubt is essential to practice the path effectively. If doubt remains in our mindstream, our efforts to practice will be like sewing with a two-pointed needle, making progress impossible. The acquired form of these three fetters is abandoned on the first ground, while the innate levels of these afflictions are eliminated on the second through seventh grounds.<sup>96</sup>

The coarse form of the view of a personal identity grasps the I and mine to be a self-sufficient substantially-existent person, and based on that ignorance, coarse afflictions arise. The subtle form of the view of a personal identity grasps the I and mine to be an inherently existent person, with subtle afflictions arising from this ignorance. On the second through seventh grounds, different levels of both the coarse and subtle forms of the view of a personal identity and the afflictions associated with them are gradually abandoned. At the beginning of the eighth ground, they have been completely overcome.

First-ground bodhisattvas obtain a mental body.<sup>97</sup> The causes of a mental body are unpolluted karma<sup>98</sup>—the mental factor of intention that is the subtle effort supporting the motivation to assume a mental body—and the base of latencies of ignorance,<sup>99</sup> which is the cognitive obscurations that give rise to the subtle dualistic view. Here we see that in both Sūtra and Tantra, bodhisattvas attain a similitude of a buddha's form body before attaining buddhahood.

First-grounders are said to outshine śrāvaka and solitary realizer arhats by way of lineage. The analogy is given of a monarch's child and a senior government minister. The minister may be wise and powerful now but can never become the monarch, whereas although young, the monarch's child is of royal lineage and will one day ascend the throne. In the same way, although at this moment Fundamental Vehicle arhats are free from saṃsāra and first-grounders are not, these bodhisattvas will definitely become buddhas. At present first-grounders do not outshine Fundamental Vehicle arhats by way of their wisdom, since the arhats are liberated from saṃsāra,

whereas they are not; however, these bodhisattvas outshine the arhats by way of lineage. Through generating great compassion, great resolve, a great collection of merit, and conventional and ultimate bodhicitta, first-grounders have entered the lineage of a Tathāgata Monarch of Doctrine and will not fall back to the Śrāvaka Vehicle. One day they will become fully awakened buddhas.

First-ground bodhisattvas have attained a surpassing practice of generosity. They joyfully give their possessions, wealth, and even their bodies without any attachment or sense of loss. While bodhisattvas on the paths of accumulation and preparation can freely give their possessions and wealth, they experience mental discomfort when they think of giving their bodies and they fear the physical pain of doing so. Although ordinary bodhisattvas on the path of preparation may still give their bodies, they do so with more effort and less joy than first-ground bodhisattvas, who are completely delighted.

The ripening result is that first-grounders can choose to be born as the Great Lord of Jambudvīpa, the southern continent where we presently reside according to the ancient Indian view of the cosmos.

In the *Ten Grounds Sūtra*, Vajragarbha Bodhisattva speaks of the joy of a first-ground bodhisattva (DBS 46–48):

I have joyful thoughts due to having turned away from and  
abandoned all worldly states;

I have joyful thoughts due to entering the uniform equality of all  
buddhas;

I have joyful thoughts due to departing far from the grounds of  
the common person;

I have joyful thoughts due to drawing close to the grounds of  
knowledge;

I have joyful thoughts due to severing all vulnerability to  
entering any of the wretched destinies;

I have joyful thoughts due to becoming a refuge for all beings;

I have joyful thoughts due to drawing near to and seeing all  
buddhas;

I have joyful thoughts due to being born into the domain of the buddhas;

I have joyful thoughts due to entering the ranks of all bodhisattvas;

and I have joyful thoughts due to leaving behind the fear of all circumstances that would cause hair-raising terror.

Why is it that when this bodhisattva mahāsattva gains the Joyous Ground, all types of fearfulness are immediately left far behind? In particular, they are: the fear of failing to survive; the fear of a bad reputation; the fear of death; the fear of falling into the wretched destinies; and the fear of the awesomeness of great assemblies...

It is because this bodhisattva has abandoned any perception of a self. He does not even covet his own body. How much less does he covet whatever things he happens to use. As a consequence, he has no fear of failing to survive.

His mind does not cherish any hope of receiving offerings or reverence from anyone, but instead thinks, “I should make offerings to beings of whatever they require.” Therefore he has no fear of a bad reputation.

He has abandoned any view conceiving of the existence of a self. Because he has no perception of the existence of a self, he has no fear of death.

He also thinks, “When, after I have died, I am reborn, I most certainly will not take rebirth somewhere apart from the buddhas and bodhisattvas.” As a result, he has no fear of falling into wretched destinies.

He thinks: “The object of my bodhicitta and that in which I delight have no equal anywhere, so how could anything be superior to it?” Consequently, he has no fear of the awesomeness of great assemblies...

Children of the Buddha, these bodhisattvas take great compassion as foremost and possess a profound and vast

resolve that is solid. Thus they redouble their diligent cultivation of all roots of goodness.

### *Second Ground, the Stainless*

The second ground is called “the Stainless” because [bodhisattvas’] tenfold activities of body, speech, and mind are stainless, and they naturally adhere to those [ethical activities].

Through maturation of that [ground] the perfection of ethical conduct becomes supreme; they become glorious rulers with the seven treasures, wheel-turning monarchs, beneficent to beings.

Through its maturation they become monarchs that rule all four continents, and they gain expertise in turning beings away from unethical behavior.

Second-ground bodhisattvas are called “the Stainless” (*vimalā*) due to their extremely pure ethical conduct; they restrain from engaging in the ten nonvirtuous actions and any other unethical behavior even in their dreams. Although first-grounders have no transgressions, second-grounders have attained a surpassing practice of ethical conduct and naturally abide in the ethical codes they have adopted without any difficulty. Not only do they abandon all naturally negative actions, but they also keep their precepts faultlessly, thus abandoning all actions proscribed by the Buddha. As a result they have no regret or remorse due to committing transgressions. In addition, they engage in all actions that comprise proper ethical conduct. For monastics this entails following all activities that the Buddha prescribed for monastics.

It is said that those with pure ethical conduct have the “scent of pure morality”—a delightful fragrance around them—and a peaceful radiance that comes from their having abandoned cruelty and harmful intent. Sometimes we meet people whose calm and compassionate energy

immediately puts us at ease; we trust and feel safe around them because we sense that they have no intention to harm us or anyone else. This comes from subduing the actions of their body, speech, and mind by abiding in pure ethical conduct. Candrakīrti says that these bodhisattvas are serene and radiant like an autumn moon. Their serenity derives from restraining their senses and their radiance comes from having a clear body. In addition, they do not grasp their ethical conduct or precepts as inherently existent, differentiating their practice from that of ordinary beings whose minds are immersed in ignorance. Likewise, if they do the twelve austere practices, they aren't polluted by conceit because they don't see themselves or these practices as inherently existent.<sup>100</sup> The *Heap of Jewels Sūtra* distinguishes such bodhisattvas from other bodhisattvas whose ethical conduct appears flawless but is polluted by ignorance (CTB 195):

Kāśyapa, some monastics have proper ethical conduct; they abide restrained by the prātimokṣa ethical code. Their rites and spheres of activity are perfect, and they view even coarse and subtle transgressions with concern. They thoroughly assume and train in the precepts and possess pure activities of body, speech, and mind. Hence their livelihood is thoroughly pure, but they propound a self. Kāśyapa, they are the first of those seeming to have proper ethical conduct that in fact is faulty.... Furthermore, Kāśyapa, even though some monastics thoroughly assume the twelve austere practices, they view them with apprehension [of inherent existence]. Abiding in the grasping of I and mine [as inherently existent], Kāśyapa, they are the fourth of those whose ethical conduct appears to be proper but is faulty.

These bodhisattvas may choose to take birth as monarchs who rule all four continents of our world system and who possess the seven treasures that we present in the maṇḍala offering—the precious wheel, jewel, queen, minister, elephant, horse, and general—that symbolize worldly power. By using this power with wisdom, these bodhisattvas lead their followers on the path.

Although the ripening results of ārya bodhisattvas may seem to be saṃsāric rebirths, they are not; they are produced by unpolluted virtue created on the bodhisattva path. This is similar to the Buddha’s signs and marks arising as the ripening results of the unpolluted paths of the ten grounds.

### *Third Ground, the Luminous*

The third ground is [called] the Luminous because the light of peaceful wisdom arises, the concentrations and superknowledges have arisen, and attachment and anger have completely ceased.

Through the maturation of that [ground], they practice supreme fortitude and joyous effort; they become the celestials’ skilled great lord who averts all sensual desire.

The third ground is called “the Luminous” (*prabhākarī*) because with great fortitude that is not concerned for their body or life, these bodhisattvas seek the transmitted Dharma and share the light of the Dharma with others. The third ground receives its name because the fire of wisdom burns brightly, emitting a light that consumes all dualistic elaborations during meditative equipoise on emptiness. In addition, just as a copper-colored light appears in the sky just before sunrise, in the times of subsequent attainment a red-orange light appears, heralding the upcoming cessations of defilements. This light does not appear to the mind in meditative equipoise on emptiness, although a light appears to be shining on them when they are in this meditative state. When they arise from meditation, the copper-colored light appears to their wisdom of subsequent attainment like the radiance of red-orange light at dawn.

On this ground, bodhisattvas gain the surpassing practice of fortitude. Their practice of fortitude is supramundane because it sees the three—themselves as the one practicing fortitude, the action of practicing fortitude, and the person or suffering that is the object of their fortitude—as empty of

inherent existence yet arising dependently, like reflections. Their anger and resentment are not suppressed or repressed, but have been dissolved as a result of their practice of fortitude. No matter how severely someone criticizes, rebukes, or beats them, their minds are not disturbed by anger. Instead they have deep compassion for the person who has harmed them. Wouldn't it be wonderful to have this ability?

In addition, third-grounders do not blame others for their problems, nor do they hold grudges seeking to retaliate for previous harms. Even if someone were to torture them by slowly cutting away their flesh, these bodhisattvas would have great compassion for their torturers, knowing that they will experience extreme suffering as a result of their nonvirtuous action.

In the *Supplement*, Candrakīrti discusses the way a third-ground bodhisattva who has achieved the surpassing practice of fortitude deals with suffering and harm (MMA 29):

Though another, unjustifiably disturbed by anger,  
cuts from his body flesh and bone  
bit by bit for a long time, he generates  
strong fortitude toward his mutilator.

This example of practicing fortitude is rather extreme, and fortunately few people find themselves having to undergo such torture. Nevertheless, the example is useful to illustrate this bodhisattva's degree of fortitude and know that we can attain the same through practice.<sup>101</sup>

In this situation, the bodhisattva had not acted in a way to provoke such strong anger in the attacker. In addition, the harm is extreme—the flesh is being cut from the bodhisattva's body slowly, not quickly; it is being cut one bit at a time, not all at once; and the cutting lasts a long time. Most of us would react with fear or anger, but this bodhisattva has transformed his mind so thoroughly that these emotions do not arise in him. Instead he has fortitude and compassion for the perpetrator, knowing that this person's mind is overcome by tremendous ignorance and confusion and that he is creating the cause to experience intense suffering in the hell realms.



Although first- and second-ground bodhisattvas are not disturbed when their bodies are cut, the depth of the fortitude and compassion of the third-grounder is greater, and thus he attains surpassing fortitude. This bodhisattva is totally free from self-centeredness and truly cherishes others. Thus he is focused more on the situation of the other person—the other’s confused state of mind and future suffering—than on his own.

The surpassing fortitude of third-grounders is also due to their realization of emptiness. Candrakīrti said (MMA 30):

For a bodhisattva who sees selflessness,  
*who* is being cut by *whom*, at *what time*, and in *what manner*?  
Because he sees all phenomena as resembling reflections,  
he will endure [all such harms].

In other words, this bodhisattva sees all the elements of the harm—herself as the one being cut, the person cutting her, the method of cutting, and the time the cut is made—as being empty of inherent existence and existing similar to illusions in that they do not exist in the way they appear. This wisdom protects her mind from anger and enables her to bear the suffering without physical or mental pain.

When it is said that a particular perfection becomes surpassing on a certain ground, it doesn’t mean the other nine perfections don’t also improve at that time. They do. It is simply that the particular perfection is refined in a more notable way.

Third-grounders also excel in the higher training in concentration and develop special abilities to enter into and arise from the four dhyānas of the form realm and the four meditative absorptions of the formless realm quickly and easily. The mental control and concentration necessary to do this are difficult-to-attain feats. These bodhisattvas have also attained the four immeasurables and five superknowledges that advance their practice and enable them to benefit others in a superior way due to their profound concentration. By the power of their concentration, these bodhisattvas have suppressed the manifest afflictions of the three realms and greatly diminished the fetters of sensual desire, attachment to the form and formless realms, and ignorance.

Third-grounders have abandoned the attachment and anger to be abandoned on the third ground; further levels of these afflictions will be abandoned on higher grounds.

These bodhisattvas may choose to be born as the great lord of the Heaven of the Thirty-Three, as Indra, or as other powerful gods. In these forms, they work to benefit others.

## REFLECTION

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1. Imagine practicing the perfection of generosity the way a bodhisattva does. Although you may not be capable of practicing it as a bodhisattva does now, imagining it will open your mind and expand your heart.
  2. Similarly, imagine practicing the perfections of ethical conduct and fortitude as those ārya bodhisattvas do.
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### *Fourth Ground, the Radiant*

The fourth is called “the Radiant”  
because the radiance of true wisdom arises,  
and [bodhisattvas] distinctively develop  
all the harmonies to awakening.

Through the maturation of that [ground]  
they become the celestial ruler in the abode of the Suyāma [deities].  
They become skilled,  
destroying the source of the view of a personal identity.

The fourth ground is called “the Radiant” (*arciṣmatī*) because during both meditative equipoise and subsequent attainment, these bodhisattvas radiate the light of true wisdom. This light is far superior to that of the third ground and arises owing to their increased wisdom of the subtle points of the thirty-seven harmonies to awakening: the four establishments of mindfulness, four supreme strivings, four bases of spiritual power, five faculties, five powers,

seven awakening factors, and eightfold path of the āryas. The thirty-seven harmonies were extensively explained in *Following in the Buddha's Footsteps* and are wonderful practices that propel bodhisattvas on the path.

In addition, fourth-grounders attain the surpassing practice of joyous effort. This comes about because on the third ground they attained a special pliancy generated from their higher training in concentration, which they use on the fourth ground to totally eliminate all forms of laziness. These bodhisattvas are delighted to create virtue and are not impeded by laziness. Since discouragement, self-criticism, and low self-esteem—which are all forms of laziness—create big hindrances for us, it is important to note that these wrong consciousnesses can be abandoned and replaced by joyous effort and strong self-confidence.

The view of a personal identity grasps the I and mine to be an inherently existent person, and based on this, afflictions arise; its source is self-grasping ignorance. On the second through seventh grounds, progressive levels of ignorance, view of a personal identity, and the afflictions associated with them are gradually abandoned. At the beginning of the eighth ground, they are completely overcome. Here on the fourth ground, the level of ignorance that is the source for its corresponding level of view of a personal identity and afflictions is abandoned.

The ripening result is to choose to take birth as the ruler of the Suyāma Heaven, the third of six desire-realm heavens.

Regarding the qualities of fourth-ground bodhisattvas, the *Ten Grounds Sūtra* discusses the mental and personal qualities bodhisattvas gain by cultivating the path (DBS 108–9):

[To leave behind wrong views, attachment, and actions], the bodhisattva mahāsattvas dwelling on the Radiant Ground confront all of the attachments related to the view imputing the existence of a true self in association with the body. These include the attachment to the existence of self, attachment to the existence of a being, and attachments to the existence of a person, an entity possessed of a lifespan, a knower, a perceiver in association with clinging to the five aggregates, the twelve sense sources, or the eighteen

constituents. They observe that whatever arises in this connection, including whatsoever is contracted or extended, is withdrawn or set forth, or is caused to emerge or sink away is all carried forth by discursive thought's perception of something deemed to be a refuge or an individual territory worthy of affectionate attachment, or something worthy of being valued as precious. Consequently they completely sever all of these attachments.

[To gain mental and personal qualities by cultivating the path] this bodhisattva then redoubles his vigor in the factors constituting requisites for the path that are developed through wisdom and skillful means. In accordance with what he cultivates, his mind becomes ever more gentle, harmonious, tractable to use, mentally inexhaustible, inclined to seek increasingly superior qualities, possessed of increased wisdom, devoted to rescuing all beings in the world, compliant with teachers, respectful in receiving teachings, and compliant in practice with what has been taught.

At this time, this bodhisattva is cognizant of kindnesses received, knows to repay kindnesses, has a mind that becomes ever more inclined to congeniality and goodness, dwells happily together with others, is possessed of a straight mind, is possessed of a pliant mind, is free of any form of deviousness, implements the practice of right meditative concentration, is free of arrogance and is consequently easy to engage in discussion, complies with teaching instructions, and realizes the intent of those who speak to him. It is in just such a manner that he becomes completely equipped with the good mind, the pliant mind, the quiescent mind, and the patient mind.

### *Fifth Ground, the Indomitable*

The fifth is [called] the Indomitable,

since one cannot be subdued by any demons,  
and one gains expertise in knowing  
the subtle meaning of the āryas' truths and such.

Through the maturation of that [ground]  
they become the celestial ruler of Tuṣita  
and refute all the tīrthikas' (non-Buddhists') beliefs  
concerning the efficacy of austerities.

The fifth ground is called “the Indomitable” (*sudurjayā*) because these bodhisattvas cannot be overcome by māras—worldly demons and ill-intentioned gods. They attain the surpassing practice of meditative stability that enables them to enter and emerge from the dhyānas and formless-realm absorptions. Doing this requires great mental skill and flexibility, for these meditative states are much more refined than our ordinary state of mind. These bodhisattvas can enter the first dhyāna and after a while emerge from it and immediately enter a higher meditative absorption, remain there for a time, and then emerge quickly and easily enter into a lower level of meditative absorption. This increase in ability from the fourth ground results from their having eliminated more grades of afflictions, created more merit, and strengthened their concentration.

Their wisdom that realizes the four truths has increased, and this brings greater ability to refute non-Buddhist assertions that claim the practice of extreme asceticism is necessary to overcome desire. These bodhisattvas can also easily overcome the wrong views of non-Buddhists regarding duḥkha, its origin, its cessation, and the path to that cessation. In this way they greatly benefit the holders of wrong views by directing them to the correct and efficacious path to liberation.

All phenomena are included in the two truths: veiled (conventional) and ultimate. Of the four truths of the āryas, true duḥkha, true origins, and true paths are conventional truths, and true cessations are ultimate truths, emptinesses. The four truths are set forth in order to show that true duḥkha and true origins are thoroughly afflictive phenomena to be abandoned, and true cessations and true paths are pure phenomena to be assumed. Unlike the essentialists who say that reliable cognizers directly realize only

impermanent phenomena, Mādhyamikas assert that permanent phenomena, such as emptiness and true cessation, can be directly realized by reliable cognizers. Both emptiness of inherent existence and true cessations are directly realized in meditative equipoise, and the attainment of nirvāṇa involves directly realizing emptiness and selflessness. This is a stark difference between the essentialists—Yogācārins and below—and Mādhyamikas. Think about it—one says the ultimate nature of all phenomena can be seen directly by a reliable cognizer, the other says it cannot.

The object of negation—the inherent existence of all phenomena—does not exist at all; its negation is an ultimate truth. Nāgārjuna says in *Praise of the Dharmadhātu* (*Dharmadhātustava* 1–2):

Homage and obeisance to the dharmadhātu.  
When it is not thoroughly understood,  
one wanders in the three existences,  
although it does in fact abide in all sentient beings.

Just this is the truth body  
and the nirvāṇa that is the purity  
from having purified that which serves  
as the cause of saṃsāra.

Here “dharmadhātu” means emptiness. The empty nature of all phenomena is covered by defilements, the chief of which is the ignorance grasping inherent existence. When we don’t understand the emptiness of inherent existence, we take rebirth again and again in the three realms of saṃsāra. The emptiness of the mind is purified when the mind, which is the base of that emptiness, is purified. That is, when all obscurations are eradicated from the mind, the emptiness of the mind becomes a nirvāṇa and a truth body—specifically the nature truth body, the emptiness and true cessation of a buddha’s mind.

There are two objects of negation: objects negated by reasoning and objects negated by the path. Inherent existence, which has never existed and will never exist, is an *object negated by reasoning*; inherent existence can

be disproven by reasoning. The defilements that obscure the mind and are the cause of saṃsāra are *objects negated by the path*; that is, the path removes these obscurations from the mind such that they can never reappear. These defilements are knowable phenomena, existents. Since they have not entered the nature of the mind, they are adventitious and can be eliminated. If these objects of negation could not be overcome, practicing the path would be useless.

In summary, the Buddha's mind has dual purity. From beginningless time it has been empty of inherent existence. In addition, when the adventitious defilements are eradicated by the path realizing emptiness, the mind is purified of adventitious defilements too. The purification of each grade of defilement of the mind is a true cessation. The complete purification of both objects of negation from the mind is nonabiding nirvāṇa and the truth body.

The compassion of fifth-grounders becomes indomitable as well. The *Ten Grounds Sūtra* (DBS 119–20) says:

At this time, the bodhisattva's great compassion for beings becomes ever more supreme and directly manifest, and he is then able to bring forth the light of great kindness. Having acquired the power of wisdom such as this, he never forsakes any being and always strives to acquire the Buddha's wisdom. He contemplates all past and future conditioned phenomena in accordance with reality...

He then thinks: "Common people and other beings are all so very strange. Because of their ignorance and afflictions, they take on a countless and unbounded number of bodies that have been destroyed, are now being destroyed, and will be destroyed in the future. In this way, they are forever subject to births and deaths. They are unable to bring forth thoughts of renunciation for the body, but rather ever increase the mechanisms for producing bodies subject to suffering. They are always swept along in the waters of the stream of cyclic births and deaths wherein they are unable to go against its current. They take refuge in the abode of the

five aggregates and are unable to abandon it. They do not fear the poisonous snakes of the four great elements and are unable to extricate the arrows of their own pride and views. They are unable to extinguish the blazing fire of their attachment, animosity, and confusion, are unable to destroy the darkness of ignorance and afflictions, and are unable to dry up the great sea of their cravings and attachments.

“They do not seek to encounter the great ārya and guide who possesses the ten powers. They always follow along with resolute intentions influenced by māras and, within the city of cyclic births and deaths, they are for the most part diverted by bad ideation and mental discursion. Such suffering, solitary, and poverty-stricken beings have no one to rescue them, no one to shelter them, and no one possessed of the ultimate path. There is only myself, this one person, who, with no comparable companions, will proceed to cultivate and accumulate merit and wisdom.

“I will then use these provisions to cause all these beings to dwell in a state of utmost purity and then continue on in this until they are caused to acquire the Buddha’s unimpeded power of wisdom with respect to all phenomena.”

The strength of fifth-grounders’ compassion propels them to increase their wisdom in order to fulfill their resolve to liberate all sentient beings. The ripening result of a fifth-grounder is having the choice to be born as the ruler of Tuṣita, the fourth heaven of the desire realm. This is not the Tuṣita where Maitreya Buddha abides.

### *Sixth Ground, the Approaching*

The sixth is called “the Approaching” because they approach the qualities of a buddha and are enhanced by the attainment of cessation through uniting insight and serenity.



Through the maturation of that [ground],  
they become lord of the Celestials Who Delight in Emanations.  
Unsurpassable by the śrāvakas,  
they eliminate arrogant pride.

The sixth ground is called “the Approaching” (*abhimukhī*) because these bodhisattvas are approaching awakening. They attain a surpassing practice of the perfection of wisdom, as well as superior wisdom knowing the twelve links of dependent origination. Combining this wisdom with the surpassing practice of meditative stability on the fifth ground, they attain a powerful union of serenity and insight focused on emptiness that enables them to eradicate afflictions and their seeds.

People who attain serenity before entering a path practice worldly insight, which sees the disadvantages of lower levels of meditative absorption and the advantages of higher levels. By meditating in this way, they can attain higher levels of absorption. Such practice is also done by non-Buddhists. Buddhists who have realized emptiness by means of an inferential cognizer before entering a path have the wisdom arising from reflection on emptiness but not the wisdom arising from meditation on emptiness. They do not have a union of serenity and insight on emptiness. It is only after they enter a path and attain the union of serenity and insight on emptiness that marks entry into the path of preparation that they gain the wisdom arising from meditation on emptiness. At the sixth ground their union of serenity and insight and their wisdom arising from meditation on emptiness are much stronger and clearer than on the path of preparation. Now they have direct perception of emptiness, greater merit, and their concentration and wisdom are more refined.

The first six grounds correlate with development in the three higher trainings. On the first ground they excelled in generosity, which is the foundation for the three higher trainings. On the second ground, they gained surpassing ethical conduct, which includes the higher training in ethical conduct. On the third ground, their dexterity in concentration increases, advancing the higher training in concentration. On the fourth, fifth, and sixth grounds, bodhisattvas develop the higher training in wisdom: on the fourth ground, they become skilled in the wisdom of the coarse and subtle

aspects of the thirty-seven aids to awakening; on the fifth ground they increase their competence in the wisdom of coarse and subtle aspects of the four truths of āryas; and on the sixth ground they cultivate great knowledge in the wisdom of the forward and reverse orders of the twelve links of dependent origination.

From the first ground onward, ārya bodhisattvas have attained the absorption on cessation (*nirodha-samāpatti*), a very refined state in an ārya's continuum in which coarse feelings and discriminations associated with the subtle mental primary consciousness have ceased. Upon attaining the sixth ground they directly see the emptiness of dependent arising and attain the uncommon absorption on cessation due to gaining a surpassing perfection of wisdom. They can remain for a long time in deep absorption on emptiness in a way that they could not on previous grounds. Here "cessation" means emptiness, and it is a pure emptiness in which all objects of negation—from self-sufficient substantial existence up to inherent existence—have been ceased in that they do not appear to a mind of meditative equipoise on emptiness. This absorption in cessation is unique because it is supported by a superior union of serenity and insight and the surpassing perfection of wisdom.

By the power of their perfection of wisdom, sixth-grounders directly perceive the equality of saṃsāra and nirvāṇa. That is, they directly perceive that the impure world of saṃsāra and pure nirvāṇa are equal in that they are both empty of inherent existence. They move toward the end of all pollutions, yet the motivation "I will bring all other beings to awakening with me" remains vivid in their minds. Although the "end of pollutions" (the perfect end) usually refers to the ability to place the mind on suchness for as long as one wishes, here it indicates the uncommon absorption of cessation, which is deep meditation on emptiness.

Although it may be tempting for them to remain in that meditative absorption and not emerge for a long time, their great compassion and bodhicitta will not allow them to do that. Wishing to protect sentient beings who are drowning in the ocean of saṃsāra, they instead deliberately take birth in the desire realms. They have total mastery in appearing as ordinary beings in many different forms in order to work for the welfare of sentient beings.

When they emerge, in post-meditation times true-grasping may arise, but only rarely and weakly. Everything they encounter appears to them to be like a reflection in a mirror—it appears truly existent but they know that appearance is totally false.

These bodhisattvas also acquire the three doors to liberation, and understanding these three correctly, their compassion does not flag as they continue to create the causes for supreme awakening. While doing that, they consciously “take rebirth in saṃsāra”—that is, they generate manifestations that benefit sentient beings who circle in saṃsāra. This illustrates that these bodhisattvas know that although all phenomena lack inherent existence, they exist conventionally as dependent arisings (DBS 140–42).

At this time, pursuant to his reflections on the twelve links of causes and conditions, the bodhisattva contemplates and observes the nonexistence of self, nonexistence of beings, nonexistence of any entity possessed of a life, nonexistence of any person, the absence of any inherently existent nature, and the transcendence of any agent of actions, any director of actions, or any subjective entity. He observes that, because they belong to a multiplicity of subsidiary causes and conditions, they are devoid of anything at all that exists. When he contemplates in this manner, he then acquires the direct manifestation of *the emptiness door to liberation* (*śūnyatāvimokṣamukha*). Due to perceiving the cessation of these phenomena so that they no longer demonstrate any continuity of existence, he acquires what is known as the direct manifestation of *the signlessness door to liberation* (*ānimittavimokṣamukha*). Having realized both of these things, he then no longer feels any pleasure in taking on rebirths with the sole exception of doing so to implement the mind of great compassion in the transformative teaching of beings. He then acquires the direct manifestation of *the wishlessness door to liberation* (*apraṇihitavimokṣamukha*). When the bodhisattva cultivates these three doors to liberation, he abandons any mark of others or a self,

abandons any mark of any agent of actions or anyone who undergoes experiences, and abandons any mark of either existence or nonexistence.

His mind of compassion thus progressively increases. As a result of his emphasis on the importance of the mind of compassion, he becomes diligent in the practice of joyous effort. Thus, whichever factor facilitating awakening he has not yet brought to complete fulfillment, he then wishes to bring to complete fulfillment...

Children of the Buddha, so it is that the bodhisattva realizes the manifold faults of conditioned dharmas and realizes that they are devoid of any inherently existent nature, that they exist apart from any characteristic of solidly established durability, and that they are neither produced nor destroyed. Even so, he becomes conjoined with the great kindness and great compassion, refrains from forsaking beings, and then immediately acquires the direct manifestation of the light of unimpeded perfection of wisdom.

Having acquired just such wisdom, he proceeds to completely perfect the cultivation and gathering together of the causes and conditions for acquiring the unsurpassed, complete, and perfect awakening (*anuttarasamyaksambodhi*), and yet, even in doing so, refrains from abiding in the midst of conditioned phenomena. He contemplates the nature of conditioned phenomena as characterized by quiescent cessation and yet refrains from abiding in this either. This is because he wishes to completely perfect the factors leading to the unsurpassable awakening.

Sixth-grounders cannot be surpassed by Fundamental Vehicle arhats in terms of intelligence, and from the seventh ground onward bodhisattvas outshine these arhats through the power of their wisdom. Due to the excellent qualities of sixth-ground bodhisattvas—their surpassing practice

of the perfection of wisdom, their inability to be surpassed by Fundamental Vehicle arhats in terms of intelligence, and their proximity to the seventh ground when they will outshine Fundamental Vehicle arhats through their wisdom—these bodhisattvas overpower the arhats’ “arrogance.” Of course arhats have already abandoned arrogance, so this points to the differences between arhats’ self-oriented complacency with having attained liberation and ārya bodhisattvas’ continued enthusiasm that will lead them to buddhahood.

The ripening result is having the choice to take birth in the Heaven of the Celestials Who Delight in Emanations, the fifth desire-realm heaven.

## REFLECTION

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The first six grounds correlate with development in the three higher trainings.

1. Bodhisattvas excel in generosity, which is the foundation for the three higher trainings.
  2. They gain surpassing ethical conduct, which includes the higher training in ethical conduct.
  3. Their dexterity in concentration increases, advancing the higher training in concentration.
  4. They become skilled in the wisdom of the coarse and subtle aspects of the thirty-seven aids to awakening.
  5. They increase their competence in the wisdom of coarse and subtle aspects of the four truths of āryas.
  6. They cultivate great knowledge in the wisdom of the forward and reverse orders of the twelve links of dependent origination. Grounds 4–6 pertain to the higher training in wisdom.
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## *Seventh Ground, the Far Advanced*

The seventh is [called] the Far Advanced because the number [of excellent qualities] has advanced far, since on this [ground] they enter moment by moment into the equipoise of cessation.

Through the maturation of that [ground], they become the powerful ruler of the celestials. They become a great leader of knowledgeable teachers, knowing the realizations of the āryas' [four] truths.

The seventh ground is called “the Far Advanced” (*dūraṅgamā*) because these bodhisattvas’ surpassing perfection of skillful means in meditation and their intelligence has advanced far from the previous ground. In each instant they are adept at absorbing into and arising from the equipoise of cessation in which all elaborations of true existence have ceased. While in meditative equipoise on emptiness, the minds of seventh-grounders are nondually fused with emptiness, and a moment later they are able to emerge from that meditation in which only emptiness, the ultimate truth, appears, and immediately perceive conventionalities in all their numerous varieties. Then in another instant, they are able to reimmerse their minds in nonduality. Although Fundamental Vehicle arhats realize the same emptiness as bodhisattvas, they are not able to do this.

On the first ground bodhisattvas outshine śrāvakas in terms of lineage because their wisdom is supported by bodhicitta and the method aspect of the bodhisattva path. Although first-grounders are not equal to Fundamental Vehicle arhats in terms of afflictions that have been overcome, they later attain full awakening, whereas arhats remain in the personal peace of nirvāṇa. On the seventh ground, bodhisattvas outshine Fundamental Vehicle arhats through the power of their wisdom due to their unique ability to enter into and arise from meditative equipoise on emptiness in each moment. While first-grounders are like the monarch’s young children, seventh-grounders resemble educated and competent youths who will soon ascend the throne. The *Ten Grounds Sūtra* says (DBS 285): “On this seventh

ground, it is because of the power of their actual practice that these bodhisattvas cannot be overcome by any śrāvaka or solitary realizer learner,” and, “Now, on this ground, the bodhisattva achieves superiority [over Fundamental Vehicle arhats] due to the power of his own knowledge.”

When these bodhisattvas become buddhas, they will actualize the perfect cessation in which they will remain in meditative equipoise on emptiness forever and simultaneously engage in multifarious activities to benefit sentient beings. This is a remarkable and unique quality of buddhas, for whom meditative equipoise on emptiness and subsequent attainment are not contradictory and occur simultaneously in one consciousness. Seventh-ground bodhisattvas have advanced far on the path that will culminate in their ability to do this (DBS 159–60, 162).

The bodhisattva abiding on this seventh ground has for the most part gone beyond the multitudes beset by desire and the other afflictions. One who resides on the seventh ground is not designated as possessed of afflictions nor is he designated as entirely free of the afflictions. Why is this so? It is because he does not generate any of the afflictions that he is not designated as possessed of afflictions. However, because he desires to acquire the Tathāgata’s knowledge and he has not yet fulfilled his aspirations, he is not yet designated as entirely free of afflictions, either...

As he abides on the Far-Advanced Ground, he becomes able to enter: the bodhisattva’s samādhi of skillful investigative contemplation, the skillful consideration of meanings samādhi, the mind-augmenting samādhi, the distinguishing of the treasury of meanings samādhi, the selection of phenomena in accordance with reality samādhi, the secure abiding in solidly established roots samādhi, the gateway to knowledge and spiritual superknowledges samādhi, the Dharma realm samādhi, the Tathāgata’s benefit samādhi, the treasury of many different meanings samādhi, and the samādhi leading neither toward saṃsāra nor toward

nirvāṇa. In this way, he completely acquires hundreds of myriads of bodhisattva samādhis whereby he is able to carry out the purifying cultivation of this ground.

Having acquired these samādhis, due to thoroughly purifying wisdom and skillful means and due to deep realization of the great compassion's power, this bodhisattva then becomes one who has passed beyond the grounds of śrāvaka and solitary realizer learners and progressed toward the ground of the Buddha's wisdom...

It is beginning with the sixth ground that the bodhisattva mahāsattva has the ability to enter quiescent cessation. Now, even as he abides on this ground, he is able, even in each successive thought, to enter into quiescent cessation while nonetheless still refraining from entering final realization of quiescent cessation. This is what is known as the bodhisattva's perfection of the inconceivable karma of body, speech, and mind wherein he courses in the sphere of ultimate reality and yet still refrains from entering the final realization of ultimate reality [nirvāṇa].

Although these bodhisattvas could enter their own personal quiescent cessation of nirvāṇa, due to compassion for sentient beings, they do not.

Their ripening result is having the choice to become leaders of the gods in the Heaven Controlling Others' Emanations, the sixth and highest of the desire-realm heavens. Due to their powerful wisdom of the four truths and their surpassing perfection of skillful means, seventh-grounders become great leaders and knowledgeable teachers. The *Ten Grounds Sūtra* (DBS 289) says, "Although he has deep fondness for nirvāṇa, he still manifests bodies in saṃsāra."

## REFLECTION

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1. First-ground bodhisattvas outshine śrāvaka and solitary realizer arhats by way of lineage, just as a royal child outshines a senior government minister. The minister may be wise and powerful now but the child will



become the monarch one day. Unlike arhats, bodhisattvas have great compassion, great resolve, bodhicitta, and a huge accumulation of merit.

2. On the seventh ground, bodhisattvas also outshine Fundamental Vehicle arhats in terms of their wisdom. They have overpowered the arhats' "arrogance" in that, unlike arhats who seek self-complacent nirvāṇa, ārya bodhisattvas seek buddhahood. Also, the quality of their concentration and ultimate bodhicitta exceeds those of arhats.
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# 10 | Three Pure Bodhisattva Grounds

## *Eighth Ground, the Immovable*

The eighth is the youth's ground, the Immovable, because, free of conceptions, they are unshakable. The range of their physical, verbal, and mental activities is inconceivable.

Through the maturation of this [ground], they become a Brahmā who rules a thousand worlds; they are unsurpassed by the śravakas and solitary realizers in determining the meaning of the Dharma.

The eighth ground is called “the Immovable” (*acalā*) because these bodhisattvas are not moved by self-grasping ignorance or the self-centered attitude. Their minds are completely purified of afflictive obscurations and all grasping true existence has been extinguished. Eighth-grounders have completely abandoned all acquired and innate afflictions and their seeds; saṃsāra is forever finished for them. They have a mental body that has similitudes of a buddha's signs and marks and is the nature of mind. They are now intent on completing the two collections of merit and wisdom to attain buddhahood and commence eradicating cognitive obscurations. At the eighth ground, even bodhisattvas with modest faculties have abandoned the latencies of self-centeredness that seeks only their own liberation. Since their minds are no longer moved by self-centeredness or by afflictions, the eighth ground is called “the Immovable,” and the bodhisattvas on it have the ultimate fortitude with respect to suchness.

Although eighth-grounders overcome all afflictive obscurations, sentient beings are still drowning in saṃsāra. To draw these bodhisattvas out of their peaceful meditative equipoise on emptiness, buddhas radiate light rays and remind them of their previous aspirations and the importance of actualizing their spiritual goal of full awakening. They counsel these bodhisattvas to bring forth the qualities of buddhas such as buddhas' pure physical signs, and measureless wisdom, skillful means, pure lands, and speech. The buddhas then bestow on eighth-ground bodhisattvas "many doors into the generation of the causes and conditions associated with the development of wisdom."

As a result these bodhisattvas can manifest countless bodies with which they cultivate the bodhisattva path, and with countless voices they express wisdom in limitless places of rebirth and in immeasurable pure lands where they teach countless sentient beings and make offerings and serve innumerable buddhas. They manifest or emanate bodies in various saṃsāric realms motivated by their fervent aspirations and great compassion. In this way, eighth-grounders collect merit and wisdom in order to attain buddhahood and gain the buddhas' unsurpassable wisdom, compassion, and ability to benefit sentient beings.

The eighth, ninth, and tenth grounds are called "the pure grounds" because all afflictive obscurations have been forever abandoned. On the eighth ground, they have attained the yoga of the equality of saṃsāra and nirvāṇa. Now all true-grasping and all afflictions and their seeds have been eradicated forever from their mindstreams, and there is no true-grasping during the time of subsequent attainment either. Before this, their wisdom directly realizing the emptiness of true existence of both saṃsāra and nirvāṇa was manifest during meditative equipoise, but coarse exertion was necessary to prevent true-grasping from arising during subsequent attainment. Although coarse exertion for bodhisattvas is subtle compared with the exertion of ordinary beings, they still must exert effort to bring emptiness to mind to prevent manifest self-grasping from arising.

Having mastery over nonconceptual wisdom, they abide in the meditative concentration and absorption of the total pacification of all duḥkha and striving. This means they are free from coarse striving, so very little effort is needed to enter meditative equipoise on emptiness, and in

post-meditation all their activities are supported by the realization of suchness. Although they could enter personal nirvāṇa, all self-centered thought has been erased from their mindstreams, so there is no inclination to abide in liberation for their own welfare alone.

With the dawning of the eighth ground, all true-grasping and its seeds have been cut from the root and can never manifest again. On the three pure grounds, during subsequent attainment everything automatically appears as empty of true existence and like an illusion. The two truths appear simultaneously to their minds during post-meditation time, but not directly. Only buddhas can directly perceive the two truths at the same time. At the eighth ground, coarse exertion is no longer required to see things as illusion-like. For this reason, there is a big difference in the experience of illusion-like appearances for bodhisattvas on the impure grounds and those on the pure grounds.

On the first ground, bodhisattvas began making special unshakable resolves or vows. Now, due to the breadth and depth of their physical, verbal, and mental activities, these unshakable resolves are extremely potent. We can get an inkling of the vastness of these bodhisattvas' aspirations to benefit sentient beings and their activities to actualize these aspirations by reading the "King of Prayers: The Extraordinary Aspiration of the Practice of Samantabhadra." If we begin to make such aspirations now as ordinary beings, later as bodhisattvas we will be able to actualize them.

As explained in the *Ten Grounds Sūtra*, eighth-grounders attain the ten masteries (*vaśitā*) through which they manifest in various bodies to benefit sentient beings.<sup>102</sup> (1) With mastery over lifespan, they live as long as they wish. (2) With mastery over the mind, they remain in concentration for as long as they wish and enter and emerge from meditative absorptions as they wish. (3) With mastery over necessities, they acquire the requisites for life without effort, can materialize physical objects, and can adorn entire world systems with ornaments. (4) With mastery over karma, they experience the ripening of their karma as they wish. (5) With mastery over rebirth, they are reborn wherever they wish. (6) With mastery over unshakable resolve, they show awakening wherever and whenever they wish and display a universe filled with buddhas. (7) With mastery over aspirations, they fill worlds with

buddhas and fulfill the aspirations of all beings. (8) With mastery over emanations, they manifest emanations in all buddha lands and can manifest whatever sentient beings need. (9) With mastery over pristine wisdom, they show the Tathāgata's powers, fearlessness, unshared qualities, signs and marks, and complete awakening. (10) With mastery over the Dharma, they illuminate all Dharma doors devoid of extremes and give all necessary teachings without obstacle.

By means of the ten masteries and the mental body, these bodhisattvas emanate and display various bodies to sentient beings, and by working for their welfare, eighth-grounders advance in the two collections. The ten masteries are correlated with the six perfections; the first three are the result of generosity, the fourth and fifth are the result of ethical conduct, the sixth is the result of fortitude, the seventh is the result of effort, the eighth is the result of meditative stability, and the ninth and tenth are the result of wisdom. The ten masteries are also included in the twenty-one types of pristine wisdom mentioned in the *Ornament of Clear Realizations*.

Eighth-ground bodhisattvas are well established in ten types of power (STG 331): (1) the power of the pure mind through abandoning all afflictions, (2) the power of the resolute intentions through the mind's training in the pristine wisdoms of the bodhisattva grounds and its never departing from the path, (3) the power of the great compassion through never forsaking beings, (4) the power of the great kindness through rescuing the inhabitants of all worlds, (5) the power of the *dhāraṇīs* through never forgetting Dharma they have heard, (6) the power of eloquence through distinguishing and selectively choosing from among all abilities of the Buddha, (7) the power of the superknowledges through coursing in innumerable different worlds, (8) the power of unshakable resolve through never abandoning any bodhisattva practice, (9) the power of the perfections through cultivating and accumulating all qualities of the Buddha, and (10) the sustaining power of the Tathāgata through skillful development of the knowledge of all modes. Because these bodhisattvas have acquired powers of knowledge such as these, they remain free of fault in any of their endeavors.

Śrāvaka and solitary realizer arhats cannot surpass eighth-ground bodhisattvas in terms of their understanding the meaning of the Dharma and

ability to explain it to sentient beings. Both arhats and eighth-grounders are similar in having eradicated the afflictive obscurations. However, the bodhisattvas are far advanced in that they have the special method side of the path that excels in bodhicitta and the ten perfections. This enables them to fulfill the collections of merit and wisdom and attain buddhahood, something arhats cannot do. However, if the arhats overcome the subtle self-centered attitude that seeks only their own liberation, they can generate bodhicitta through either the seven cause-and-effect instructions or equalizing and exchanging self and others. They then enter the bodhisattva path of accumulation, and by accomplishing the bodhisattva paths and grounds, they will attain buddhahood.

Eighth-ground bodhisattvas have the choice to take birth as Brahmā who rules a thousand worlds. This gives them tremendous ability to influence a vast number of sentient beings and lead them on the path.

## REFLECTION

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1. Think of the abilities of the bodhisattva saṅgha refuge by reviewing the ten sovereign masteries and the ten types of power. In doing so, let your faith in the Saṅgha Jewel soar.
2. Reviewing these same qualities, think that you have the ability to develop them and imagine the good you will be able to do for sentient beings when you have these.
3. As you learn of the excellent qualities of the ninth- and tenth-ground bodhisattvas, stop and reflect on them as you did with the two points above: by increasing your confidence and trust in the Saṅgha Jewel and by increasing your confidence that you too can attain these qualities and benefit sentient beings as these great bodhisattvas do.

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### *Ninth Ground, Excellent Intelligence*

The ninth, like a regency,  
is called “Excellent Intelligence,”

since by attaining true awareness,  
[these bodhisattvas] have excellent understanding on this [ground].

Through the maturation of this [ground],  
they become the lord of a million worlds;  
they are unsurpassed by arhats and such  
regarding qualms in the minds of beings.

The ninth ground, Excellent Intelligence (*sādhumatī*), is so called because these bodhisattvas have exceptional ability to explain the Dharma and eliminate the doubts and misconceptions of sentient beings. They possess a special practice of four perfect knowledges: the individual perfect knowledge of phenomena that knows the specific characteristics of each phenomenon, the meanings to be expressed, the words that are terms, and the self-confidence that comes from knowing the concordant causes of things. Although ninth-grounders' ability is not the same as that of the buddhas, they are extremely skilled in teaching sentient beings according to their dispositions and can easily resolve others' qualms and inspire them on the path. Fundamental Vehicle arhats cannot surpass them in this regard. Their unimpeded knowledge of the Dharma and eloquence in speaking make them inspiring and skilled teachers. For example, to enable disciples in a great assembly to understand the Dharma, they may employ a single utterance, use many different sorts of voices, remain silent and only emanate radiant light, cause all their hair pores to express the sound of the Dharma, make things in the universe resound with the Dharma, or cause a single sound to suffuse everywhere in the world. In this way they can perform the work of the Dharma for the benefit of sentient beings.

These bodhisattvas have exceptional knowledge that is in accord with reality concerning karma and karmic actions; the characteristics of afflictions and entangling difficulties; and sentient beings' realms, minds, faculties, beliefs, resolute intentions, latent tendencies, characteristics associated with births, habitual karmic propensities, and so on.

The ninth-ground bodhisattvas are extremely astute in guiding sentient beings and will adapt the teachings and their style of teaching in order to best communicate the Dharma to sentient beings (DBS 205).

The bodhisattva dwelling on this ground knows all such characteristics in beings' different practices and, adapting to what will cause them to gain liberation, then provides them with the corresponding causes and conditions. This bodhisattva knows those factors appropriate to the teaching of beings, knows those factors conducive to the liberation of beings, and, knowing these in accordance with reality, he then teaches the Dharma for their sakes.

He knows in accordance with reality the characteristics of those with affinity for the Śrāvaka Vehicle, the characteristics of those with affinity for the Solitary Realizer Vehicle, the characteristics of those with affinity for the Bodhisattva Vehicle, and the characteristics of those with affinity for the ground of the Tathāgata. He then adapts to the causes and conditions of these beings and teaches the Dharma for their sakes.

He adapts to the differences in their minds, adapts to the differences in their faculties, and adapts to the differences in their predilections, and then teaches the Dharma for their sakes. So too, he adapts to their bases in practice and their bases in wisdom and then explains the Dharma for their sakes. He knows the bases for all courses of action and, adapting specifically to those, he teaches the Dharma accordingly.

He adapts to beings' realms and the particular entangling difficulties they have deeply entered and teaches the Dharma for them accordingly. He adapts to their rebirth destinies, adapts to the births they have taken on, adapts to their afflictions, and adapts to the permutations in their habitual karmic propensities and therefore teaches Dharma accordingly. He adapts to whichever vehicle would conduce to liberation and therefore teaches Dharma accordingly.

The eagerness and joy with which a ninth-ground bodhisattva seeks the Dharma and then shares it with others is truly amazing. For example (DBS



211):

He redoubles the intensity of his vigor in acquisition of the light of knowledge such as this even to this degree: Suppose that on the tip of a single hair there existed great assemblies as numerous as the atoms in an ineffable number of ineffably many world systems wherein buddhas residing in the midst of each of those assemblies were expounding Dharma for beings' sakes. Suppose as well that each buddha therein adapted his discourse on Dharma to the minds of however many beings were present therein, thereby causing each and every one of those beings to acquire in his own mind however countless many dharmas he was setting forth.

Suppose also that, just as this circumstance held for any one of those buddhas, so too did it also hold for all the buddhas residing in all of those great assemblies discoursing on Dharma. And suppose too that, just as this circumstance obtained on this one single hair point, so too did it also hold for all such places throughout the worlds of all the ten directions. Even in a circumstance such as this, he is accordingly able to bring forth just such a commensurately immense power of recall that, in but a single mind-moment, he is able to absorb all of the Dharma light received from all those buddhas and still not forget even a single sentence.

A ninth-ground bodhisattva also serves all buddhas and sentient beings with such enthusiasm and delight.

The ripening result is the choice to take birth as a Brahmā lord of a million worlds.

### *Tenth Ground, the Cloud of Dharma*

The tenth is the Cloud of Dharma  
because [bodhisattvas] rain down the holy Dharma,  
and these bodhisattvas are anointed

with rays of light by the buddhas.

Through the maturation of that [ground],  
they become the celestial ruler of the pure land,  
masters of inconceivable objects of wisdom,  
supreme among great lords.

The tenth ground, the Cloud of Dharma (*dharmameghā*), receives its name from an analogy: from clouds rain falls and causes crops to grow. Likewise, from the billowing clouds of the tenth-ground bodhisattvas' pure mind, the rain of Dharma teachings falls on sentient beings and the crops of virtue grow in their minds. The *Ten Grounds Sūtra* (DBS 235) tells us:

He is able, simultaneously and in but a single mind-moment, to reach everywhere without exception throughout all those worlds as numerous as or even greater than the above-described number of atoms and, in accordance with beings' dispositions, he rains down the sweet-dew Dharma rain of the good Dharma, extinguishing the smoke and flames of beings' ignorance-generated afflictions. It is for this reason that this is known as the Dharma Cloud Ground.

The remaining defilements obscuring the minds of tenth-ground bodhisattvas are very thin; they are almost buddhas. These bodhisattvas enter many samādhis at the same time, experiencing each one distinctly and knowing the differences in their functions. These bodhisattvas have knowledge of the tathāgatas' secrets and the interpenetration of eons and have gained countless liberations. They have measureless samādhis, dhāraṇīs, and superknowledges as well as unlimited memory.

Tenth-ground bodhisattvas in their last lives before attaining buddhahood require no manifest effort to motivate them to teach the Dharma or to work for the welfare of sentient beings. This is a result of having "previously planted intentions" in the past when they engaged in bodhisattvas' activities with effort while repeatedly setting the intention to be able to effortlessly and spontaneously work to benefit sentient beings. As

a result, now these bodhisattvas perfectly, spontaneously, and with minimal effort continually work for the benefit of sentient beings throughout all space. Fatigue and self-centeredness do not interfere with their vast activities. They teach sentient beings in accordance with their interests, capacities, and dispositions and emanate bodies with which they can benefit others. Through conduct suitable to the mentality of each sentient being, they engage in innumerable activities to subdue sentient beings' minds and lead them on the path.

In terms of the numbers of sentient beings they teach and in terms of their awakened activities, these tenth-ground bodhisattvas are equal to the Tathāgata. However, they are still impeded from seeing both ultimate and conventional truths simultaneously, so they are unable to remain in meditative equipoise on emptiness and simultaneously teach sentient beings. They continue their practice until they break through the last of the cognitive obscurations so that they can, at the same time, see phenomena as they actually are (their ultimate nature) and work for sentient beings (by relating to them on the conventional level).

On the pure grounds—the eighth, ninth, and tenth grounds—bodhisattvas counteract the residual latencies of the afflictions and the subtle dualistic appearance they cause as well as the taints that prevent them from seeing both the ultimate and conventional truths simultaneously with one consciousness. The last cognitive obscurations are removed by the vajra-like concentration at the end of the tenth bodhisattva ground. At that time, the buddhas confer an empowerment, and in an elaborate rite of initiation, a tenth-ground bodhisattva ascends a huge lotus throne. Magnificent sparkling offerings grace the entire space, and he or she is surrounded by all buddhas and ārya bodhisattvas. The buddhas emanate splendid and awe-inspiring radiant beams of light from the hair curls on their foreheads. The light beams circle around the worlds, display the spiritual powers of the buddhas, and extinguish all suffering in the unfortunate realms, and then gather together and enter the crown of the tenth-ground bodhisattva.<sup>103</sup> Thereupon he receives the great wisdom empowerment and enters the realm of the buddhas where he has completely developed the buddhas' ten powers and joins the ranks of the buddhas. All remaining defilements on his mind and all cognitive obscurations have been

completely eradicated and he becomes a fully awakened buddha on the Mahāyāna path of no-more-learning. Now with one consciousness he can directly perceive all conventional and ultimate truths simultaneously.

At this time, the empty nature of his mind becomes the nature truth body of a buddha; his mind becomes the omniscient wisdom truth body. He no longer has mental bodies produced by the base of latencies of ignorance and unpolluted karma; instead he has a buddha's form body that manifests spontaneously and effortlessly wherever, whenever, and in whatever form is necessary to work for the welfare of sentient beings. The extremely subtle wind, which is one undifferentiable entity with that mind, manifests as the form bodies of a buddha—an enjoyment body that teaches ārya bodhisattvas in the pure lands and emanation bodies, such as Śākyamuni Buddha, that ordinary sentient beings perceive.

The ripening result is birth in the Akaniṣṭha pure land, where these bodhisattvas will experience the empowerment described above and attain full awakening. Tenth-ground bodhisattvas may also create their own pure land in which they attain full awakening. They do this because awakening cannot be attained in the desire realm according to the Perfection Vehicle, although it can according to the Tantra Vehicle.

Whereas the Perfection Vehicle describes ten bodhisattva grounds, scriptures in the Tantra Vehicle set forth varying numbers of grounds—thirteen, fourteen, sixteen, and so forth—although there is not a big difference in meaning between these ways of counting. The demarcations of the paths in Tantrayāna differ due to its practices and special meditative techniques.

### *Summary of the Ten Grounds*

These ten are renowned  
as the ten bodhisattva grounds.  
The buddhas' ground is different—  
in all ways immeasurably vast.

Although the qualities of the bodhisattvas of the ten grounds are countless, the *Ten Grounds Sūtra* (DBS 248–49) summarizes them by comparing the

ten grounds to:

a large and precious *maṇi* jewel that by virtue of possessing ten characteristic aspects is able to bestow all manner of precious things on beings. What then are those ten? They are:

First, it comes forth from the great sea;  
second, it is enhanced by the refinements of a skillful artisan;  
third, it is made ever more refined;  
fourth, it is rid of defilements;  
fifth, fire is used in its refinement;  
sixth, it is adorned with a multitude of precious jewels;  
seventh, it is strung with precious thread;  
eighth, it is placed atop a tall pillar composed of lapis lazuli;  
ninth, its light rays radiate in the four directions;  
tenth, it rains down the many sorts of precious things in response to the king's wishes.

In his bringing forth the precious jewel of the resolve to realize bodhi (bodhicitta), the bodhisattva mahāsattva is also possessed of ten characteristic aspects. What then are those ten? They are:

First, from the point of bringing forth that resolve, he pursues the practice of giving and abandons miserliness;  
second, he cultivates the observance of the moral precepts and practices the *dhūta* austerities;  
third, through the dhyāna absorptions, liberations, and samādhis, he is caused to become increasingly refined in his marvelousness;  
fourth, he brings forth purity in his path practices;

fifth, he trains himself in skillful means and spiritual superknowledges;  
sixth, he creates adornments based on the profound dharma of causes and conditions;  
seventh, whatever he does is strung together with all the different sorts of profound skillful means and wisdom;  
eighth, he is placed high atop the pillar of the spiritual superknowledges and masteries;  
ninth, he contemplates the actions of beings and then emanates the light of extensive learning and wisdom;  
tenth, all buddhas bestow on him their consecration of his knowledge, at which time he becomes able to carry out for all beings the works of a buddha and then falls in among those counted as possessed of omniscience.

### *Do Bodhisattvas Take Birth in Cyclic Existence?*

Bodhisattvas on the first two paths—the paths of accumulation and preparation—are reborn under the influence of afflictions and polluted karma. However, ārya bodhisattvas, who have the direct perception of emptiness on the path of seeing and above, do not take birth in saṃsāra under the control of afflictions and karma. Afflictions are mental factors that disturb the mind. Ārya bodhisattvas have afflictions and their seeds in their mindstream until the beginning of the eighth ground. However, their afflictions are weak and don't fulfill the meaning of the term “afflictions.” Thus the craving and clinging that arise so easily in the minds of ordinary beings at the time of death do not arise in their minds, and any karmic seeds that could bring rebirth in saṃsāra are unable to ripen. It is said that ārya bodhisattvas intentionally “take birth in saṃsāra” by the power of fervent aspirations and compassion. The *Sūtra Requested by Sāgaramati* claims:

Although the [ārya] bodhisattvas are completely free from being reborn through the power of karma and afflictions, their birth in cyclic existence is due to great compassion.

An ordinary bodhisattva on the phase of supreme dharma on the path of preparation attains the uninterrupted path of the path of seeing and becomes an ārya. The continuum of the person is the same from one path to another, but the physical base—the body—of an ārya bodhisattva isn't considered a product of afflictions and karma; it is a mental body. What enables the polluted body of a bodhisattva on the path of preparation to transform into the mental body of an ārya bodhisattva? It is ultimate bodhicitta and the bodhicitta that is the purity of the extraordinary great resolve. Śāntideva tells us (BCA 1.10):

It is like the supreme gold-making elixir,  
for it transforms the unclean body we have taken  
into the priceless jewel of a buddha-form.  
Therefore firmly seize the bodhicitta.

When sharp-faculty bodhisattvas attain the path of seeing, due to the force of their great resolve and bodhicitta, their bodhicitta transforms into the bodhicitta that is the purity of the extraordinary great resolve. These ārya bodhisattvas definitely obtain a mental body, which arises from unpolluted karma—the intention to assume such a body—and the subtle latencies of ignorance. This body is not one entity with the mind, even though it is said to be in the nature of mind in that it is not made of atoms and lacks physical impediment. The mental body of sharp-faculty bodhisattvas on the first seven grounds is free of physical pain, although it is not free from the pervasive duḥkha of conditioning. Their bodies look similar to ours, and they show the aspect of sickness, aging, death, and so forth. If these bodhisattvas manifest in the animal, hungry ghost, or hell realm to benefit sentient beings there, they are merely assuming that appearance and are not beings of that realm.

Bodhisattvas with modest faculties definitely attain a mental body at the eighth ground, but if they exert effort, they can attain one on the first through seventh grounds. Only Fundamental Vehicle arhats and pure ground bodhisattvas effortlessly obtain a mental body.

For ārya bodhisattvas, “birth in cyclic existence” refers to taking a mental body in a process analogous to the way ordinary beings take rebirth

in saṃsāra. In the case of ordinary beings, spurred by the links of craving and clinging that arise while actively dying, karmic seeds ripen and beings take rebirth with the polluted aggregates of a saṃsāric realm as a result of self-grasping ignorance and polluted karma. (“Polluted” means under the influence of ignorance.) In an analogous fashion, spurred by fervent aspirations and great compassion, pure ground bodhisattvas take rebirth in mental bodies as a result of the base of latencies of ignorance and unpolluted karma. The base of latencies of ignorance refers to latencies of ignorance, which are cognitive obscurations that give rise to the subtle dualistic view. Together with unpolluted karma, they are the cause for arhats and pure ground bodhisattvas to take a mental body.

To explain this analogy: Latencies of ignorance are cognitive obscurations. In general, they cause subtle dualistic appearances—the false appearance of true or inherent existence. All sentient beings who are not in meditative equipoise on emptiness have the mistaken appearance of true existence. In ordinary beings, it arises from true-grasping and its latencies, but for śrāvaka and solitary realizer arhats and pure ground bodhisattvas (known as the three kinds of persons), the mistaken appearance of true existence arises solely from the latencies of ignorance. The base of latencies of ignorance specifically refers to manifest cognitive obscurations in the form of subtle dualistic appearances. It is called a “ground” because it has provided the basis for the continuity of afflictions since beginningless time. The base of latencies of ignorance is distinguished from latencies of afflictions because, together with unpolluted karma, it is a cause or basis for the three kinds of beings to take a mental body.

In the above analogy, the base of latencies of ignorance involved in the rebirth of the three kinds of persons is like the first link of ignorance that causes the second link of karmic formations. Analogous to these polluted karmic formations is unpolluted karma, which is karma unpolluted by ignorance and afflictions and formed by the circumstances of the latencies of ignorance. Unpolluted karma is the karma created by Fundamental Vehicle arhats and pure ground bodhisattvas when they engage in various activities in post-meditation time—for example, when they practice generosity, ethical conduct, and fortitude. This karma is never nonvirtuous and leads out of saṃsāra. It is mental action and is the substantial cause of



the mental body; it is also the subtle intentional force that creates the mental body and the speech of the three kinds of persons. When engaging in activities in post-meditation time, unpolluted karma is the subtle intention that the three kinds of beings generate for their physical, verbal, and mental actions because they have cognitive obscurations.

The mental body that arises and is caused by unpolluted karma as the substantial cause and the base of latencies of ignorance as a cooperative cause is analogous to the polluted body taken by ordinary beings. The mental body is not obstructed by physical objects and cannot be seen or known by beings on levels lower than the three kinds of persons. The ceasing of a mental body is analogous to old age and death under the power of afflictions and polluted karma. It is important for ārya bodhisattvas to take a mental body, because without it there's no way for them to benefit sentient beings directly.

Although they have the appearance of ordinary beings who are born, fall ill, age, and die, ārya bodhisattvas are not under the influence of afflictions and karma. To the eyes of us ordinary beings, the mental bodies of these bodhisattvas look like those of other beings born in our realm. In fact, we may know ārya bodhisattvas but not recognize them as such. To benefit ordinary beings, they may act like us, but their motivations are always altruistic. Whether or not we benefit from these ārya bodhisattvas appearing among us is up to us. We must create the causes to meet them and to be receptive to their guidance by making ourselves suitable vessels to receive their help. Any resistance we may have—which is a product of self-centered thoughts and afflictions—hinders this, so we must do our best to apply the antidotes to these.

Although ārya bodhisattvas remain in the world owing to their great compassion for sentient beings, they are not tainted by the world's chaos and negativity. As a result of their vast collection of merit, ārya bodhisattvas do not experience physical suffering, and as a result of their profound wisdom they do not experience mental pain. At the time of death, they do not have fear, craving, and clinging as ordinary beings do; their minds remain peaceful and undisturbed. Similar to lotuses that are born in the mud but are untainted by it, ārya bodhisattvas are born in the world but are not sullied by its afflictions and suffering. They are not under the

control of afflictions and can choose the type of rebirth they take. They befriend sentient beings, and possessing the method and skill to benefit us, they lead us on the path to supreme awakening.

The *Sūtra Requested by Sāgaramati* speaks of eight causes that motivate ārya bodhisattvas to take birth in our world. They aspire to (1) continue to collect merit and wisdom, (2) happily care for other sentient beings who are suffering, (3) meet the Buddha in another life, (4) without discouragement, cause sentient beings to mature in their understanding of the Dharma, (5) enthusiastically preserve the Buddha's holy Dharma by becoming holders of the transmitted and realized Dharma, (6) joyfully work for the welfare of others in any way possible, (7) not separate from a mental state that is close to the Dharma, and (8) not discard any activity associated with the ten perfections motivated by bodhicitta.

Taking birth with these motivations, ārya bodhisattvas are born only in the desire and form realms. Beings born in the formless realm do not have physical bodies and are submerged in their captivating states of concentration, making it impossible for bodhisattvas to directly benefit them. Just as polluted afflictions bind sentient beings to rebirth in saṃsāra, these eight motivations are sometimes called “afflictions” in that they bind ārya bodhisattvas to take rebirth in saṃsāra in order to benefit sentient beings.

In short, although it is sometimes said that bodhisattvas relinquish their own awakening in order to benefit others, this means that if it were most beneficial for bodhisattvas not to become awakened, they would do so out of great compassion for others. However, clearly they can benefit others much more when all obscurations have been eradicated from their mental continuums and all good qualities have been developed completely. Thus they work diligently to attain the full awakening of a buddha.

### *How Bodhisattvas Practice*

How do ārya bodhisattvas practice? Chapter 40 of the *Flower Ornament Sūtra* entitled “On Entering the Inconceivable State of Liberation through the Practices and Unshakable Resolves of the Bodhisattva Samantabhadra” gives us a glimpse of ten unshakable resolves that form the basis of the

bodhisattva Samantabhadra's practice. As mentioned earlier, these are: pay homage and respect to all buddhas, praise the tathāgatas, make abundant offerings, repent misdeeds and destructive actions, rejoice at one's own and others' merits and virtues, request the buddhas to turn the Dharma wheel, request the buddhas to remain in the world, follow the teachings of the buddhas at all times, accommodate and benefit all living beings, and dedicate all merit and virtues to the full awakening of all beings.

In particular, with his ninth unshakable resolve Samantabhadra tells how to dedicate our lives to benefiting sentient beings. Here he speaks to the youth Sudhana, who is searching for the teachings leading to supreme awakening:

Sudhana, to accommodate and benefit all living beings is explained like this: throughout the oceans of worlds in the ten directions exhausting the Dharma Realm and the realm of empty space, there are many different kinds of living beings. That is to say, there are those born from eggs, the womb-born, those born by transformation, as well as those who live and rely on earth, water, fire, and air for their existence. There are beings dwelling in space, and those who are born in and live in plants and trees. This includes all the many species and races with their diverse bodies, shapes, appearances, lifespans, families, names, and natures. This includes their many varieties of knowledge and views, their various desires and pleasures, their thoughts and deeds, and their many different deportments, clothing, and diets.

It includes beings who dwell in different villages, towns, cities, and palaces, as well as gods, dragons, and others of the eight divisions, humans and nonhumans alike. Also there are footless beings, beings with two feet, four feet, and many feet, with form and without form, with thought and without thought, and not entirely with thought and not entirely without thought. I will accord with and take care of all these many kinds of beings, providing all manner of services and offerings for them. I will treat them with the same respect I

show my own parents, teachers, elders, arhats, and even the tathāgatas. I will serve them all equally without difference.

I will be a good doctor for the sick and suffering. I will lead those who have lost their way to the right road. I will be a bright light for those in the dark night, and cause the poor and destitute to uncover hidden treasures. The bodhisattva impartially benefits all living beings in this manner.

Why is this? If a bodhisattva accords with living beings, then he accords with and makes offerings to all buddhas. If he can honor and serve living beings, then he honors and serves the tathāgatas. If he makes living beings happy, he is making all tathāgatas happy. Why is this? It is because all buddhas, tathāgatas, take the mind of great compassion as their substance. Because of living beings, they develop great compassion. From great compassion bodhicitta is born; and because of bodhicitta they accomplish supreme, perfect awakening.

It is like a great regal tree growing in the rocks and sand of barren wilderness. When the roots get water, the branches, leaves, flowers, and fruits will all flourish. The regal bodhi-tree growing in the wilderness of birth and death is the same. All living beings are its roots; all buddhas and bodhisattvas are its flowers and fruits. By benefitting all beings with the water of great compassion, one can realize the flowers and fruits of the buddhas' and bodhisattvas' wisdom.

Why is this? It is because by benefitting living beings with the water of great compassion, the bodhisattvas can attain supreme, perfect awakening. Therefore, bodhi belongs to living beings. Without living beings, no bodhisattva could achieve supreme, perfect awakening.

Good person, you should understand these principles in this way: When the mind is impartial toward all living beings, one can accomplish full and perfect great compassion. By using the mind of great compassion to accord with living beings, one perfects the making of

offerings to the tathāgatas. In this way the bodhisattva constantly accords with living beings.

Even when the realm of empty space is exhausted, the realms of living beings are exhausted, the karma of living beings is exhausted, and the afflictions of living beings are exhausted, I will still accord endlessly, continuously in thought after thought without cease. My body, speech, and mind never weary of these deeds.

### *Essential Points*

I would now like to draw together and review some of the essential points concerning the paths and grounds of the three vehicles. Śrāvaka, solitary realizer, and bodhisattva āryas all directly perceive the emptiness of both persons and phenomena. Nevertheless, due to certain factors, their respective awakenings and the results attained on their respective paths of no-more-learning differ. The differences between the final attainment of bodhisattvas and the final attainment of śrāvaka and solitary realizer arhats depend on special factors bodhisattvas cultivate on the path.

- *Motivation of bodhicitta.* Before entering the path of any of the vehicles, a person must train in the proper motivation and aspiration. Those who enter the Śrāvaka and Solitary Realizer Vehicles have firm renunciation of saṃsāra and strong aspiration for liberation. In addition to firm renunciation and aspiring for the liberation of all sentient beings, those who enter the Bodhisattva Vehicle have stable and spontaneous bodhicitta, seeking full awakening for the benefit of all sentient beings.
- The *vast collection of merit* they create by following the method side of the bodhisattva path and their trainings in the ten perfections. For bodhisattvas, the method side of the path includes the bodhicitta motivation and the perfections of generosity, ethical conduct, and fortitude. These three perfections are not direct antidotes to cyclic existence and cultivating them alone will not overcome self-grasping ignorance, the root of cyclic existence. However, through

them, bodhisattvas accumulate merit that supports the direct realization of emptiness and makes that wisdom strong enough to counteract cognitive obscurations.

- Their use of *elaborate, multifaceted reasonings to realize emptiness*. Bodhisattvas approach the refutation of inherent existence from many angles, whereas śrāvakas and solitary realizers use compact reasonings. Whenever we have detailed reasons for something, our understanding is more powerful. For example, we cultivate elaborate reasons for being angry, “This person harmed me; he harmed my friends; he helped my enemies; he harmed me in the past, in the present, and he will harm me in the future too.” Due to all these (erroneous) reasons, our anger becomes very forceful and not easily waylaid. Similarly, bodhisattvas refute inherent existence by meditating with many detailed reasonings—dependent arising, the seven-point analysis, the four extremes of arising, and so forth. They examine the emptiness of causes and effects, parts and wholes; agent, action, and object; and past, present, and future. Such investigation contributes to the strength of their wisdom, enabling it to cleanse the cognitive obscurations from their minds.
- Their *abandoning cognitive obscurations as well as afflictive obscurations*. Those on the śrāvaka and solitary realizer paths meditate on the selflessness of persons and phenomena to eliminate the afflictive obscurations from their mindstream. When they have completely removed these, those śrāvaka and solitary realizer arhats abide in nirvāṇa. However, the cognitive obscurations remain. Those on the bodhisattva path abandon both afflictive and cognitive obscurations in order to attain full awakening.
- Their *cultivation of the path for three countless great eons*. Because bodhisattvas seek to abandon both obscurations, they must accumulate merit for a long time—three countless great eons if they follow the Perfection Vehicle (Pāramitāyāna). Those following the Śrāvaka Vehicle accumulate merit for three lifetimes, and solitary realizers accumulate merit for one hundred great eons. Skilled and diligent bodhisattvas who follow the Vajrayāna may attain full awakening in this very lifetime due to its skillful method for

accumulating vast merit and its techniques for accessing the subtlest mind. To enter the Vajrayāna with its sophisticated meditation techniques requires powerful bodhicitta that motivates them to attain awakening quickly as well as the willingness to exert strong effort in practice.

All of these factors play a role in bodhisattvas' attainment of full awakening or nonabiding nirvāṇa, where they abide neither in saṃsāra nor in the personal peace of their own nirvāṇa. From this description, two conclusions can be drawn. First, to free ourselves from saṃsāra and to attain the awakening of any of the three vehicles, realization of the emptiness of inherent existence is essential. Second, bodhisattvas' great deeds and their collection of merit, accumulated over eons, distinguish them from śrāvakas and solitary realizers and enable them to attain full awakening.

Here it is useful to recap the ways in which bodhisattvas outshine śrāvakas and solitary realizers. A first-ground bodhisattva is said to outshine śrāvaka and solitary realizer arhats by way of lineage. The analogy is given of a royal child and a senior government minister. Although still young, the child is of royal lineage and will one day ascend the throne and become the monarch. In the same way, although a first-ground bodhisattva is not yet free from saṃsāra, she will definitely become a buddha. While she does not outshine arhats by way of her wisdom at this point, she does outshine them by way of lineage due to her great compassion, great resolve, bodhicitta, and huge accumulation of merit. Doing all actions with a special type of bodhicitta called "the purity of the extraordinary great resolve," she accumulates great merit.

Seventh-ground bodhisattvas' skill in meditation is tremendous: while in meditative equipoise on emptiness, their mind is nondually fused with emptiness, and a moment later they are able to come out of that state and perceive conventionalities. Then in another instant, they are able to again immerse their mind in nonduality. Due to this ability, they outshine śrāvakas and solitary realizers not only by way of lineage but also by way of wisdom, due to the quality of their concentration and ultimate bodhicitta.

Although the differences in the resultant state of an arhat attained by those following the Fundamental Vehicle and the state of a buddha attained

by those following the Mahāyāna are noticeable, as Buddhist practitioners we respect all āryas, arhats, and buddhas. Certainly all of them are much more spiritually advanced than we are at present. Although all sentient beings will eventually enter the Mahāyāna and attain full awakening, depending on our proclivities and the teachers we encounter we may initially enter different vehicles.

Emphasizing the bodhisattva path and result is not done to disparage those who seek arhatship. Their practice and goal are indeed admirable. However, since I accept one final vehicle and that all sentient beings have the buddha nature and will eventually become buddhas, I encourage people, if they are so inclined, to enter the Bodhisattva Vehicle directly.

The wisdom realizing emptiness serves as the condition for attaining all three types of awakening—that of a śrāvaka arhat, solitary realizer arhat, and buddha. But to attain the omniscient mind of a buddha, in addition to the direct realization of emptiness, the skillful means of a bodhisattva are required.

The moment someone generates genuine spontaneous bodhicitta, she becomes a bodhisattva. In contrast, even śrāvaka and solitary realizer āryas who have directly realized emptiness and arhats who are free from cyclic existence are not bodhisattvas, because they lack bodhicitta.

To generate bodhicitta, not just ordinary compassion is needed but a powerful compassion in which we ourselves are committed to bring all sentient beings out of saṃsāric duḥkha. To generate such potent compassion that has taken the responsibility of liberating all sentient beings, two factors are necessary. We first need to see sentient beings as endearing and feel close or connected to them. Without this sense of closeness, the great compassion that wishes them to be free of all duḥkha can't arise. Second, since great compassion focuses on suffering sentient beings and wishes them to be free, we also need to understand duḥkha deeply. To develop insight into others' duḥkha, we must first focus on our own, understanding and confronting our experiences of the duḥkha of pain, the duḥkha of change, and the pervasive duḥkha of conditioning. This brings us back to understanding the four truths, the framework for all the Buddha's teachings.

I make a point of bringing us back to the four truths so that we understand the path to awakening in its entirety. In this way, we will see all



the teachings are interrelated and want to practice all of them. We will not simply verbally admire the paths and grounds of a bodhisattva, but will relate them to our daily practice. To do this, it is essential to apply the teachings to our own lives. Therefore, after we learn and practice the teachings of the initial capacity disciple, we must delve deeply into the four facts seen as true by āryas—duḥkha, its origins, its cessation, and the path to that state of true freedom.

### *Tantric Paths and Grounds*

Bodhisattvas with especially strong bodhicitta, who feel the duḥkha of sentient beings is totally unbearable, want to attain buddhahood as quickly as possible. With this motivation they seek a fully qualified tantric spiritual master, receive empowerment, and keep the ethical restraints and commitments they have taken during the empowerment. They may begin by receiving empowerment into and doing the practices of action tantra, and then proceed to performance tantra, yoga tantra, and highest yoga tantra. In highest yoga tantra they first practice the generation stage, followed by the completion stage. Due to lacking the motivation of bodhicitta, śrāvakas and solitary realizers do not enter the tantric path. However, after attaining arhatship, generating bodhicitta, and following the bodhisattva path, they may later enter the Vajrayāna.

Pāramitāyāna and Vajrayāna bodhisattvas meditate on the same emptiness—there is no difference in subtlety with respect to their object of meditation. However, the mind realizing emptiness is more subtle in Tantra—it is the fundamental innate clear-light mind.

While authors writing from the Pāramitāyāna viewpoint describe that vehicle as a full path to awakening, according to the tantric teachings at some point bodhisattvas must enter the Tantrayāna in order to make manifest the fundamental innate clear-light mind and use it to realize subtle emptiness. Having done that, they will attain the vajra-like concentration in the Tantric Vehicle, which is the final uninterrupted path prior to the attainment of buddhahood.

On the Pāramitāyāna path, bodhisattvas are said to accumulate merit for three countless great eons. We may think that this is far too long—we just

don't have the energy or the will to practice for such an extended period of time. Hearing that in Vajrayāna it is possible to attain awakening in this lifetime, we may think, "That's much better. I'll do that." But to succeed, we need to have full renunciation, uncontrived bodhicitta, and a realization of emptiness. Taking that into consideration, we see that there's no shortcut to investing time and energy in practice. Bodhisattvas will do whatever is necessary to benefit sentient beings, and thus if it takes eons to attain awakening, they are willing to do that. Considering that we have wasted much more time in cyclic existence, three countless great eons isn't such a long time to practice to end cyclic existence. It is such inner strength and determination that makes bodhisattvas exceptionally suitable vessels for highest yoga tantra and enables them to succeed on that path.

It is not very practical to think about time as we study and practice the Dharma; that only makes us anxious and discontent. In fact, attaining our noble spiritual goals is done more quickly if we focus on studying and practicing the path than if we are preoccupied with how long it takes to attain the resultant buddhahood. Pushing ourselves to hurry and take shortcuts makes the path slower, like the story of the tortoise and the hare. The Tibetans have their version of this story too.

A man from eastern Tibet was going to Lhasa on horseback. On the way he met an old lady and asked her how long it takes to get to Lhasa. She replied, "If you go slowly, it takes one week. If you go very fast and run there, it takes twenty-five days." Thinking that she didn't know what she was talking about, the man galloped ahead, getting his horse to run as fast as it could. Of course the horse got exhausted, as did the man, and they had to stop for long rests. In the end, it took him twenty-five days to arrive in Lhasa. After he got there, he asked Lhasa residents how long it takes to get from that place to Lhasa, and they confirmed, "If you go slowly, it takes a week." Let's practice steadily, without pressure or anxiety and attain awakening quickly.

### *Gradual Path versus Sudden Awakening*

Do we train gradually or is awakening attained suddenly? This topic has intrigued scholars and practitioners in all Buddhist traditions.

The Nālandā tradition that heralds from the great monastic university in ancient India, and is now followed largely in Tibetan Buddhism, in general favors the gradual approach, although as noted below there are those advocating a sudden approach. The Pāli tradition, too, in general favors gradual and systematic training. In the *Kīṭāgiri Sutta*, the Buddha says (MN 70:23):

How does there come to be gradual training, gradual practice, gradual progress? Here one who has faith (in a teacher) visits him. When he visits him, he pays respect to him. When he pays respect to him, he gives ear. One who gives ear hears the Dhamma. Having heard the Dhamma, he memorizes it. He examines the meaning of the teachings he has memorized. When he examines their meaning, he gains a reflective acceptance of those teachings. When he has gained a reflective acceptance of those teachings, zeal springs up in him. When zeal has sprung up, he applies effort. Having applied effort, he scrutinizes. Having scrutinized, he strives. Resolutely striving, he realizes with the [mind-]body the ultimate truth (nibbāna) and sees it by penetrating it with wisdom [of the supramundane path].

This succinct passage has great meaning, for it instructs us exactly how to proceed in order to accomplish our goal of liberation. Counteracting our ignorant ways that are entrenched in misconceptions, craving, and clinging is not a quick or easy process. It requires proper external conditions, such as a qualified spiritual mentor, and proper internal conditions, such as our own sincerity, faith, diligence, and effort.

As with both the Pāramitāyāna and Vajrayāna, the Pāli training begins with forming a relationship with a teacher who is capable of instructing and guiding us. We must not take the teacher or teachings for granted and expect them to come to us. Rather, we exert energy to visit our teacher. When we visit, we empty ourselves of arrogance and the desire to prove ourselves or impress someone else, and pay respect to our teacher. Then we listen to the Dharma teachings, not once but many times. Remembering

what we have heard and read is important so that we can contemplate its meaning and gain the right understanding. Examining the meaning of the teachings takes time because we do not necessarily grasp the Buddha's intention at first. In addition, there are many teachings and we need to reflect on all of them and see how they fit together and complement one another to form a complete path.

By means of this process, we gain a reflective or conceptual acceptance of the teachings. The Pāli word *khanti* (S. *kṣānti*) may be translated as acceptance, patience, fortitude, tolerance, or forbearance. It connotes being willing and able to accept what is difficult to accept for the sake of a worthwhile purpose. This is similar to the practice of the perfection of fortitude for practicing the Dharma, which necessitates accepting the doctrine of emptiness that the ignorant mind resists.

Having gained intellectual acceptance, with zeal and enthusiasm we apply effort to investigate and analyze not only the meaning of the teachings but also the nature of phenomena. That scrutiny produces its own momentum as we begin to experience for ourselves the truth of the Dharma. Striving is needed to continue with investigation and analysis, because the defilements are stubborn. But when all the factors of the path come together, by means of refined wisdom that was cultivated diligently and with care, we will realize experientially (“with the body”) the supreme or ultimate truth—*nirvāṇa*.

Master Sheng-yen (1930–2009),<sup>104</sup> a wise and respected Chan (Zen) master from Taiwan, and I have discussed the notion of gradual versus sudden awakening from the viewpoint of our respective traditions. It seems that in Chan Buddhism, “awakening” refers to having direct perception of emptiness. Although we may occasionally use “awakening” in that way in the Tibetan tradition, more often than not we use the term to refer to the end point of the path, for example the awakening of a *śrāvaka* or a solitary realizer, or the full awakening of a buddha.

When we understand the descriptions of the path in both the Nālandā tradition and Chan tradition in light of this difference in usage, there does not seem to be a big gap. To paraphrase what Master Sheng-yen told me: “As we read in the *sūtras*, at the time of the Buddha, many people attained awakening suddenly, after the Buddha had spoken only a few words or gave

a short teaching to them. However, Zen stories of people suddenly realizing emptiness after being hit or scolded by their teacher apply only to highly accomplished and exceptional students. Not everyone is capable of sudden awakening, and those who are not must begin with the basics of Dharma practice.

“Although those with sharp faculties and good karma may attain awakening quickly or suddenly, they still have to practice after their first experience of awakening because they are not yet free from all afflictions. Only at buddhahood is one free from all defilements.

“Aside from those exceptional disciples with sharp faculties, everyone else practices a gradual path to amass the necessary factors, such as virtue and all the abilities of great bodhisattvas, before their awakening. Although sudden awakening is possible, it is not easy; it is not like getting something for nothing. People must still keep pure precepts and cultivate bodhicitta, concentration, and wisdom. Concentration and wisdom are said to be attained simultaneously. Chan requires great effort although it doesn’t follow any fixed sequential method of practice.”

In Tibetan Buddhism, some texts mention a sudden or instantaneous approach that isn’t limited to the structure of gradual practice. I read one Kagyü text that explicitly explained Mahāmudrā as a sudden path, stating that those who understand it in a gradual way are afflicted. In Sakya writings we find mention of the “simultaneity of realization and liberation,” and the Dzogchen practice found in Nyingma also speaks of this. But even in these paths, practitioners engage in preliminary practices (T. *sngon ’gro*) to purify their mind and create merit. They also engage in a preliminary practice called “seeking the true face of mind,” which is similar to the four-point analysis to realize emptiness. And needless to say, they must study and practice the fundamental Buddhist teachings.

In the Gelug tradition, Tsongkhapa accepts the notions of simultaneity and instantaneous liberation. However, he points out that what appears to be sudden realization is actually the culmination of many causes accumulated over time finally coming together and resulting in liberation. For example, in ancient times one king saw a painting of the Wheel of Life and instantly understood its meaning and gained high realizations. The final, momentary event of seeing the painting was a catalyst for this to happen. However, the

actual causes for his realization had been accumulated for a long time. Similarly, one of the Buddha's first five disciples realized emptiness immediately after listening to one teaching on the four truths. He had already renounced cyclic existence, accumulated great merit, and developed single-pointed concentration.

Similarly, although we say Milarepa attained awakening in that very lifetime, that was not his first exposure to the Dharma. He had engaged in serious Dharma practice for many previous lifetimes. As a result of his strong effort, determination, proper reliance on his spiritual mentor, and correct practice of Vajrayāna, he completed the collections of merit and wisdom and attained awakening in that very life.

Some highest yoga tantra literature contains statements about “spontaneous” or “instantaneous” attainment of awakening. These statements must be understood in relation to cases of exceptional people who have a great collection of merit and uncommon mental acuity due to having attained advanced levels of realization in their previous lives. But for people like us, there is not much hope for this, and in the long run practicing a gradual path will bring quicker results.

When a spaceship is launched, it appears to be moving upward very easily, but actually this is dependent on the hard work and effort of many generations of scientists. Over a long period of time, these people have analyzed and investigated every aspect and part of the spaceship. So many causes and conditions have to assemble for the spaceship to be launched.

Similarly, gradual accumulation of causes and conditions is needed for internal mental and spiritual development. Although the entire meaning and power of the path is brought together in the highest yoga tantra, we must begin at the elementary level and gradually master many methods in order to build up our merit and wisdom.

While numerous people work together to produce a spaceship, internal spiritual development requires our own effort. It is in our hands. We cannot hire anyone to practice the path for us, nor can we take a vacation and expect the work to continue without our participation. But isn't that good news? By putting forth effort ourselves, we can and will gain realizations; we don't need to wait for someone else to do it for us and we needn't please an external being to receive boons. Having found this precious human life,

we should make use of it to learn, reflect, and meditate on the Buddha's teachings so that we can gain the same clear realizations that he did. Whether or not we attain awakening in this life, consistently familiarizing ourselves with the practices will make our lives meaningful.

## 11 | Buddhahood: The Path of No-More-Learning

THROUGHOUT the *Library of Wisdom and Compassion* series, we have spoken about the aspiration to attain the full awakening of a buddha. What are the special qualities of a buddha? What do buddhas do to fulfill their determination to benefit sentient beings effectively? These are difficult questions to answer precisely because we are not buddhas and do not know with direct perception what a buddha experiences. However, by studying, reflecting, and meditating on the path and the content of the sūtras, we can infer the excellent qualities of buddhahood.

Although the qualities of tenth-ground bodhisattvas are expansive and unimaginable, they are not able to benefit sentient beings in the same way as buddhas. Huge differences still remain between tenth-ground bodhisattvas and buddhas. For example, the former require some effort to motivate their activities of body, speech, and mind in service of others. They are not able to see the two truths simultaneously with one consciousness, which prevents them from being in meditative equipoise on emptiness and at the same time teaching and benefitting sentient beings.

Normal conventions do not necessarily apply to awakened beings. Our usual ideas about time and space do not hold in buddhahood. An eon can be condensed into just a single moment, and a single moment can be expanded into an eon. As written in Milarepa's biography, he could fit into a yak's horn without the horn becoming larger or him becoming smaller.

Reviewing the chapters on refuge,<sup>105</sup> where the qualities of the Buddha, Dharma, and Saṅgha are described in detail, will give us an idea of the awakened state that we seek to actualize. In this chapter, we will look at more specific aspects of buddhahood, including the buddha bodies, the



relationship among buddhas, what buddhas perceive, their awakening activities, and the inseparability of a buddha's body, speech, and mind.

### *The Buddha Bodies*

The buddha bodies were explained in *Following in the Buddha's Footsteps* in the context of the Three Jewels that are our objects of refuge. Now we will go into more depth about them, seeing them as the result of the Bodhisattva Vehicle. Buddhahood is the state of having removed all defilements from the mind and having developed all excellent qualities. Each buddha has four buddha bodies—"body" meaning collections of qualities. We may speak of two, three, four, or five buddha bodies, depending on how many subdivisions of the basic two bodies—the truth and form bodies—are listed. To review, here is the overall layout of the buddha bodies:

(1) The *truth body (dharmakāya)* has the nature of the perfect abandonment of all defilements and the perfect realization of all excellent qualities. It is of two types:

1. The *wisdom truth body (jñāna dharmakāya)* is the omniscient mind of a buddha, which has three principal qualities. With *knowledge (jñāna)* buddhas know all phenomena; with *compassion (anukampā)* they seek to benefit sentient beings without hesitation; and with *power or ability (T. nus pa)* from their own side they lack all impediments to exercising their skillful means.
2. The *nature truth body (svabhāvika dharmakāya)* is of two types:
  - The *naturally pure nature truth body* is the emptiness of inherent existence of a buddha's mind.
  - The *adventitiously pure nature truth body* is a buddha's true cessations of afflictive obscurations (*kleśāvaraṇa*) that bind us to saṃsāra, and cognitive obscurations (*jñeyāvaraṇa*) that prevent us from knowing ultimate and veiled truths simultaneously with one consciousness.

(2) The *form bodies* (*rūpakāya*) are forms in which a buddha appears in order to enact the welfare of sentient beings. These are of two types:

1. An *enjoyment body* (*saṃbhogakāya*) is the form that a buddha manifests in his or her Akaniṣṭha pure land to teach ārya bodhisattvas.
2. *Emanation bodies* (*nirmāṇakāya*) are the forms a buddha manifests that are perceivable by ordinary beings. These are of three types:
  - A *supreme emanation body*—for example, Śākyamuni Buddha—turns the Dharma wheel.
  - An *ordinary emanation body* manifests in diverse appearances of various people or things.
  - An *artisan emanation body* subdues sentient beings' minds through showing certain worldly skills.

The dharmakāya is the fulfillment of a buddha's own purpose, in the sense that it is the complete perfection of the mind. Form bodies are the fulfillment of others' purpose because a buddha manifests these in order to benefit others.

There is another way to look at the aims or purposes of bodhisattvas: They aspire to actualize both the truth bodies and form bodies that purport to serve their own purpose. But now serving their own purpose becomes a means to fulfilling the purpose of others. This is likened to a thirsty traveler seeking water. The final purpose is to procure water to quench their thirst; the cup to drink it in is a means to fulfill that final purpose. For bodhisattvas, the water they seek is the buddhahood of all other sentient beings. Their own buddhahood is incidental. Stop and think about that for a moment. What would it be like to have such a motivation yourself? It would be completely transformative, wouldn't it? For this reason, Śāntideva marvels (BCA 11, 13, 26):

Bodhicitta is like the supreme gold-making elixir,

for it transforms the unclean body we have taken  
into the priceless jewel of a buddha-form.  
Therefore firmly seize this bodhicitta.

All other virtues are like plantain trees;  
for after bearing fruit, they simply perish.  
Yet the perennial tree of bodhicitta  
unceasingly bears fruit and thereby flourishes without end.

This intention to benefit all beings,  
which does not arise in others even for their own sake,  
is an extraordinary jewel of the mind,  
and its birth is an unprecedented wonder.

Together the wisdom dharmakāya and the nature dharmakāya are the last two of the four truths in their complete or final aspect: the wisdom dharmakāya being the final true path and the nature truth body being the final true cessation. These are one nature and different isolates—that is, one cannot exist without the other, yet they are nominally different. Candrakīrti says (MMA 11.17):

Through having burned completely the dry firewood of knowable  
objects,  
that pacification is the truth body of the conquerors.  
It is without arising and without cessation  
and [thus] the mind has stopped, whereby [the dharmakāya] is  
actualized by the [enjoyment] body.

At the beginning of the eighth ground all afflictive obscurations—the afflictions and their seeds—have been eradicated by the pristine wisdom of meditative equipoise that directly and nonconceptually realizes emptiness. The cognitive obscurations—the latencies of the afflictions and the subtle dualistic view—still cover the mind; they are the “dry firewood of knowable objects” that are burned by the vajra-like concentration (*vajropamasamādhī*) at the end of the tenth ground. Here “knowable

objects” refers to the cognitive obscurations, because cognitive obscurations cause all knowable objects to appear to the mind dualistically, as inherently existent. When these obscurations have been pacified by this wisdom of meditative equipoise the final true cessation is actualized. This wisdom is free from inherently existent arising and ceasing and it has destroyed all latencies of grasping inherently existent arising and ceasing. This pacification—the cessation of cognitive obscurations—is the nature dharmakāya, and the wisdom realizing it is the wisdom dharmakāya. “The mind has stopped” doesn’t mean the mind has become nonexistent. Rather, “mind” refers to all conceptual minds and conceptual mental factors. Since they have been completely pacified, there is no dualistic appearance of inherent existence, and the nonconceptual pristine wisdom and suchness are experienced undifferentiably, like water poured into water. Ultimate reality—suchness—is not known in the manner of dualistic appearance. Thus, on the conventional level, it is said that the truth body is actualized or attained by the enjoyment body of that buddha. Candrakīrti says (MMA 11.18):

This body of peace arises like a wish-granting tree;  
and like a wish-fulfilling jewel it does not engage in  
conceptualization.

Until [all] beings are free it remains eternal as a resource for the  
world;

it appears to those [bodhisattvas] who are free of conceptual  
elaborations.

Buddhas newly attain supreme awakening in the aspect of the enjoyment body in the pure land of Akaniṣṭha. The enjoyment body is a body of peace in that it is free from the turbulence of conceptual minds. It appears only to ārya bodhisattvas and remains eternally for the benefit of sentient beings until saṃsāra ends. Although buddhas do not engage in conceptualization, thinking “I shall benefit this sentient being,” like a wish-granting tree and a wish-fulfilling jewel, they effortlessly work for the welfare of sentient beings.

Candrakīrti says (MMA 11.44):

Again you, who possess the unmoving [truth] body, descend to the three realms of existence.

Your emanations come [from Akaniṣṭha], are born, and teach the wheel of peace and awakening.

In this way you compassionately guide to nirvāṇa all beings of the world

who are ridden with deceitful conducts and are bound by numerous snares of expectations.

The unmoving body is the dharmakāya that does not move from meditative equipoise on emptiness. Simultaneous with the attainment of awakening, a person attains the dharmakāya, the enjoyment body that appears in Akaniṣṭha, and the emanation body. When buddhas manifest as a supreme emanation body, such as Śākyamuni Buddha in the desire realm, they display the twelve deeds.

Emanation bodies do not get tired, frustrated, or discouraged by sentient beings' ignoring their help or even denouncing it. Rather, they continue to benefit each sentient being in accord with that sentient being's disposition and temperament. When we think about it, this is truly remarkable, isn't it? We may try to help someone in a small way, but if that person criticizes us, we become angry, fed up with their lack of appreciation for our effort, and quit.

Having this brief introduction to the buddha bodies, we'll now look at them in more depth.

### *Wisdom Dharmakāya*

The wisdom dharmakāya is the ultimate true path, the omniscient mind of a buddha, the final pristine wisdom that directly and nonconceptually realizes all existents. Eternal, it never discontinues or relapses to a state of defilement. As a mind that apprehends different objects each moment, a buddha's mind is impermanent.

Buddhas possess all true cessations and all wisdom—the wisdom knowing ultimate truths, which knows phenomena's actual mode of being, suchness, and the wisdom knowing conventional truths, which knows the

varieties of phenomena. Their wisdom knowing ultimate truths also knows conventional truths, and their wisdom knowing the varieties of phenomena also knows their actual mode of being. Buddhas' wisdom dharmakāya includes both wisdoms, which are inseparable and one nature with their abandonment of both obscurations. All their consciousnesses are omniscient and cross-functional. For example, their visual consciousness can perceive sounds, smells, tastes, as well as tactile and mental objects.

The *Ornament of Clear Realizations* speaks of twenty-one kinds of dharmakāya wisdom possessed by buddhas. Some of these wisdoms are practiced by bodhisattvas and those who haven't entered the path and are brought to fruition at buddhahood. Most of the practices to gain these wisdoms have been described in previous volumes; this is a good opportunity to review your understanding of them.

1. Thirty-seven harmonies with awakening (see chapters 11–14 in *Following in the Buddha's Footsteps*).
2. Four immeasurables (see chapter 1 in *In Praise of Great Compassion*).
3. Eight liberations (see chapter 8 in *Footsteps*).
4. Nine serial absorptions (see chapter 8 in *Footsteps*).
5. Ten totalities (*kaṣiṇa*): by single-pointed meditation on one or another of the ten kaṣiṇas (earth, water, fire, air, blue, yellow, red, white, space, and consciousness), its specific characteristic can be transferred to other phenomena. For example, the hardness of earth can be transferred to water so the meditator can walk on it, or the quality of space can be given to earth so a buddha can walk through a mountain.
6. Eight dominants. Four of these dominate or control shape: (1) perceiving themselves as embodied, buddhas have control over large forms; (2) perceiving themselves as physically embodied, they have control over small physical forms; (3) perceiving themselves as being disembodied, they have control over large forms; and (4) perceiving themselves as disembodied, they have control over small forms. Here “perceiving themselves as embodied or disembodied” means they are visible or invisible to others. Four dominate or have

power over color: Perceiving themselves as disembodied, buddhas can control the four colors of external phenomena—blue, yellow, white, and red. By perceiving themselves as disembodied or having an indestructible form, they perceive material objects without the solid reality that we believe them to have. They can change big into small and small into big, performing many miraculous feats.

7. Concentration without defilement is the ability to not act as an object provoking others' afflictions. Before śrāvakas enter a village for alms, they examine with their superknowledge if their presence will provoke others' attachment or anger. If so, they do not enter the village. Buddhas, to the contrary, go everywhere and benefit others by teaching the Dharma and employ all means to prevent afflictions from arising in the minds of others.
8. Exalted knower of aspirations. Śrāvakas must enter the fourth dhyāna when they wish to know something. Buddhas' exalted knowers are much vaster and have five unique qualities: (1) they know things effortlessly and spontaneously; (2) free from afflictive obscurations, they know phenomena without attachment; (3) free from cognitive obscurations, they know phenomena without any impediment; (4) they know all phenomena all the time without interruption; and (5) they can simultaneously answer all questions of each sentient being even if they are asked at the same time in different languages.
9. Six superknowledges (see chapter 8 in *Footsteps*).
10. Four individual perfect knowledges: (1) with perfect knowledge of the doctrine, they know all words of all aspects of the Dharma without confusion; (2) with perfect knowledge of the meaning, they know all the meanings expressed by those words; (3) they have perfect knowledge of how to teach, including all languages of sentient beings; and (4) they have perfect knowledge that is limitless intelligence and ability.
11. Four complete purities. Buddhas have: (1) purity of bodily existence, with mastery of assuming, abiding, and relinquishing a body; (2) purity of objects in that they emanate and transform the five sense objects; (3) purity of the mind that is the ability to enter

and leave countless concentrations in each moment; and (4) purity of knowledge that is mastery over emptiness.

12. Ten masteries (*vaśitā*). These are listed in the explanation of the eighth ground.
13. Ten powers of a tathāgata (*tathāgatabala*, T. *de bzhin gshegs pa'i stobs*); see chapter 2 in *Footsteps*.
14. Four fearlessnesses or self-confidences (see chapter 2 in *Footsteps*).
15. Three behaviors without concealment: buddhas have no need to conceal their actions because all their physical, verbal, and mental activities are virtuous.
16. Three establishments of mindfulness: buddhas have equanimity toward (1) those who want to listen and do so respectfully, (2) those who do not want to listen, and (3) those with a mixture of both attitudes.
17. Absence of forgetfulness and negligence: buddhas never forget or neglect the well-being of sentient beings, nor do they ever forget anything, no matter how long ago it occurred.
18. Complete destruction of latencies: unlike arhats, buddhas have abandoned all latencies of afflictions and all dysfunctional behavior.
19. Great compassion for all sentient beings that knows the situation of each sentient being, their disposition, who is receptive to the Dharma, and so forth, and helps accordingly (see *In Praise of Great Compassion*).
20. Eighteen unique qualities of a buddha (see chapter 2 in *Footsteps*).
21. Three exalted knowers: the exalted knowers of all aspects (omniscience), the knower of paths (of bodhisattvas), and the knower of bases (practices for śrāvakas and solitary realizers). An alternative explanation is that buddhas know all phenomena; they know the cause, nature, and result of the paths of śrāvakas, solitary realizers, and bodhisattvas (this knowledge is shared by bodhisattvas); they know that all phenomena of the base—the aggregates, sources, constituents, and so forth—are empty (this knowledge is shared by śrāvakas).



Of the twenty-one kinds of dharmakāya wisdom, the ten powers, four fearlessnesses, eighteen unique qualities, three behaviors without concealment, three establishments of mindfulness, complete destruction of latencies, and great compassion are qualities possessed only by buddhas. The ten strengths and four individual perfect knowledges are shared by bodhisattvas. All the others are shared by buddhas, bodhisattvas, solitary realizers, and śrāvakas.

Another way of classifying the wisdoms of the wisdom dharmakāya is into the five pristine wisdoms. In tantra, each of these is correlated with a specific dhyāna buddha, aggregate, wisdom, affliction, color, direction, symbol, empowerment, lineage, and element.<sup>106</sup>

A more concise way of speaking of the wisdom dharmakāya is in terms of (1) the omniscient knower that realizes suchness—emptiness, the ultimate truth—and (2) the omniscient knower that realizes the varieties of phenomena—conventionalities. Although both of these wisdoms perceive all existents, they are classified in terms of their primary object. Clearly knowing all sentient beings' previous actions as well as their present dispositions and interests, buddhas know how to best benefit each being. Due to their great compassion and bodhicitta motivation, without having to think about what to do they naturally act to benefit sentient beings according to their receptivity. They do this through manifesting form bodies that effortlessly perform awakened activities.

## REFLECTION

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1. Contemplate the twenty-one kinds of the pristine wisdom of buddhas, knowing that they use these to guide you to full awakening. Know that the bodhisattvas are developing these wisdoms and are also using them to help you. With this knowledge, take refuge in the Three Jewels.
2. Contemplate the twenty-one kinds of the Buddha's pristine wisdom and think that these are the qualities you will have upon attaining buddhahood. Feel uplifted knowing that you have the potential to cultivate and perfect these.

3. Make a strong resolve to engage in the practices to develop these wisdoms.
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### *Nature Dharmakāya*

The nature dharmakāya is so called because it is emptiness, the ultimate nature of the mind. It is the natural state of the mind because it is permanent and unaltered by causes and conditions. Although the nature of ordinary sentient beings' minds is undefiled and pure by nature, it is still covered by adventitious defilements. When sentient beings attain buddhahood, these defilements have been forever eliminated. This indicates a double purity: the natural purity, which is the emptiness of the mind, and the purity of adventitious defilements, which is the true cessation that came about by cultivating the path and removing defilements. The naturally pure nature dharmakāya is the emptiness of a buddha's mind that has been empty of inherent existence from beginningless time. The adventitiously pure nature dharmakāya is the emptiness of a buddha's mind that has newly eliminated all adventitious obscurations. The *Sublime Continuum* speaks of four attributes of the nature dharmakāya (RGV 85):

Because [the purified buddha nature] is the *truth body* [of all buddhas and it is] the *tathāgata*,  
it is [also] the [ultimate] *truth of āryas* as well as the ultimate nirvāṇa.

Thus [since those are just variants in name], just as the sun and [its] rays [are indivisible, the truth body that is the *final nirvāṇa* and its] qualities are indivisible [in nature].

Hence there is no [fully qualified] nirvāṇa aside from buddhahood.

1. The nature dharmakāya is the *truth body* because this ultimate purity exists indivisible from the potential for the arising of a buddha's qualities in the continuums of sentient beings. That is, in the

naturally pure buddha nature in the continuum of sentient beings—the mind’s emptiness, its suchness—there exists the potential to transform into a buddha’s dharmakāya. This “dharmakāya” is present in the buddha essence (*tathāgatagarbha*) of each sentient being. Although the naturally abiding buddha nature in the continuums of sentient beings may be called the “dharmakāya,” it is not the actual dharmakāya. However, when it is purified by applying antidotes—the collections of merit and wisdom—the defilements are totally eradicated and it becomes the ultimate dharmakāya of a buddha, the actual nature dharmakāya of a buddha.

2. It is the *tathāgata* because it is the emptiness of a buddha’s mind that directly perceives its own ultimate nature. This ultimate nature is the naturally pure buddha nature that is now free from all defilements.
3. The nature dharmakāya is the *āryas’ ultimate truth* because it is the ultimate nature of all phenomena. Unlike veiled truths, it is not false or deceptive and exists in the way it appears. It is empty and it appears empty to the mind directly perceiving it.
4. It is *nonabiding nirvāṇa* because it is an abandonment brought about by applying the antidotes to the defilements. Even though the naturally abiding buddha nature has been quiescent by nature since beginningless time—the defilements have never penetrated its nature—the defilements must still be removed. Nonabiding nirvāṇa is free from the extremes of saṃsāra and self-complacent nirvāṇa. The special meditative concentration that is the union of serenity and insight serves to stop saṃsāra by eliminating the defilements, and great compassion prevents self-complacent nirvāṇa by leading the yogī to full awakening.

With the attainment of buddhahood, our naturally abiding buddha nature—the suchness of our mind with defilements—becomes the nature dharmakāya, and our transforming buddha nature—all conditioned phenomena that have the capacity to transform into a buddha’s wisdom truth body—sheds all defilements and completes all excellent qualities to become the wisdom dharmakāya. The totally pure state, the nature

dharmakāya of a tathāgata, is immutable. The *Sublime Continuum* describes the nature dharmakāya in terms of four characteristics—permanent, stable, peaceful, and unalterable—that make it free from four characteristics of saṃsāra—birth, death, sickness, and aging, respectively.

The nature dharmakāya is *permanent*. While ordinary beings are born in saṃsāra due to ignorance and polluted karma, and ārya bodhisattvas take birth in saṃsāra due to the base of latencies of ignorance and unpolluted karma, the dharmakāya of a tathāgata does not take *birth* in either of these ways. A tathāgata’s dharmakāya is unending—this is the meaning of “permanent” in this context. With its double purity, it is free from both (1) the twelve links of dependent origination fueled primarily by the afflictive obscurations, and (2) the twelve links of unafflicted dependent origination fueled by the base of latencies of ignorance and unpolluted karma, and supported by cognitive obscurations. There is no birth or death in the dharmakāya; it is permanent.

Being permanent, the nature dharmakāya of a buddha is not produced by causes and conditions, but it is attained by effort and fulfilling the two collections. The principal purifying factor that transforms the natural buddha nature into a buddha’s nature body is the wisdom directly perceiving emptiness complemented by the method aspect of the path—bodhicitta and the other perfections. While the unconditioned qualities of a buddha are not produced, they do come into existence in dependence on other factors. The conditioned qualities of a buddha are produced by causes and conditions and are impermanent phenomena.

The Tathāgata’s dharmakāya is *stable* because it is the final, unfailing refuge for sentient beings. Because it possesses natural purity and purity of all adventitious defilements, it abides continuously, without end, and is thus a stable refuge for beings lost in saṃsāra. In the dharmakāya, there is no *death* due to afflictions, and there is no death by the “inconceivable transformation” of the ceasing of a mental body. Therefore it is stable.

The dharmakāya is *peaceful* because it is naturally free from the two extremes of superimposition and deprecation, and in this sense it is nondual. Dwelling in suchness without conceptuality, it is naturally peaceful and also pacified of all adventitious defilements. It is not harmed by the *sickness* of

afflictions and karma or by the nonafflictive latencies of ignorance. For this reason, too, it is peaceful.

The dharmakāya is *unalterable* because it is not affected by either afflictive or nonafflictive phenomena—such as polluted and unpolluted karma—and therefore doesn't undergo *aging*. Being unconditioned, it isn't subject to change and destruction due to the ripening of either polluted or unpolluted karma.

Buddhas are totally free from the extremes of saṃsāra and nirvāṇa. In an *ultimate sense*, this means that they do not grasp at either saṃsāra or nirvāṇa as inherently existent, nor do these appear inherently existent to buddhas.

In a *conventional sense*, freedom from the extreme of saṃsāra means that buddhas and ārya bodhisattvas do not see birth in saṃsāra as something to be totally abandoned in the same way that śrāvakas and solitary realizers do. While ārya bodhisattvas eradicate the causes of rebirth in saṃsāra from their own minds, they appear in saṃsāric worlds in order to benefit sentient beings and lead them to liberation and full awakening. Freedom from the extreme of nirvāṇa means they do not view personal nirvāṇa as the complete attainment, as do śrāvakas and solitary realizers. This is because buddhas and ārya bodhisattvas seek full awakening, nonabiding nirvāṇa. Buddhas have the means to stop these two extremes: through wisdom they have destroyed afflictions and polluted karma and do not fall to the extreme of saṃsāra, and through great compassion and bodhicitta they have overcome the wish to abide in the personal peace of nirvāṇa and do not fall to the extreme of personal nirvāṇa.

To be considered the nonabiding nirvāṇa—the unique state of a buddha that is beyond both saṃsāra and personal nirvāṇa, all the countless and inconceivable excellent qualities must be purified and complete in every aspect.

While śrāvakas and solitary realizers have also attained nirvāṇa, theirs is not the nonabiding nirvāṇa of buddhas, because it has yet to abandon every single adventitious defilement by the application of counterforces. In addition, śrāvaka and solitary realizer arhats do not have the limitless wisdom and pristine wisdom of buddhas. Nor have they developed their transforming buddha nature to its fullest by generating all the inconceivable

qualities of fully awakened ones. Absorbed in meditative equipoise on emptiness, they are not inclined and do not have the ability to manifest the two form bodies to benefit sentient beings.

## REFLECTION

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1. Review and contemplate the four attributes of a nature dharmakāya: truth body, tathāgata, āryas' ultimate truth, and nonabiding nirvāṇa.
  2. Review and contemplate the four characteristics of the nature dharmakāya: permanent, stable, peaceful, and unalterable.
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### *Form Bodies*

The pristine wisdom of the dharmakāya appears as the two form bodies—the enjoyment body and emanation bodies. Some people say that form bodies are mere other-appearances to sentient beings—that is, they exist in the continuums of sentient beings who see them but do not exist in the buddhas' continuums. They think that when someone becomes fully awakened, he or she is free from all elaborations, whereas form bodies, because they appear to sentient beings, are involved with elaborations. They assert that since form bodies cannot be included in buddhas' completely purified continuums, they must be in sentient beings' continuums, which are not free from elaborations. It is like the reflection of the moon in water: the moon is not in the water but the reflection is. Similarly, form bodies are within the sentient beings who see them.

Others refute this idea, saying that an awakened buddha can't be in the minds of sentient beings. If a buddha were, it would mean that bodhisattvas created the cause to attain buddhas' form bodies, but the buddhas' form bodies that are the final results of their practice were in the continuums of sentient beings. That contradicts the law of karma and its effects, in which the person who creates the cause is the one who experiences the effect.

Furthermore, saying the form bodies are in sentient beings' continuums would mean that we were once undefiled buddhas and later became defiled

sentient beings. This is impossible because once the defilements have been completely eradicated, there is nothing that can cause a pure mind to become impure. The other alternative is that we are already buddhas, but if that were the case, ignorant buddhas would exist, and that is also not possible.

The Sakya tradition says that the resultant qualities of a buddha are in the clear-light mind of sentient beings as potential. We are not yet awakened, but we have the potential to become so.

When realized beings have actually seen their meditational deities, what are they seeing? Having a vision of a form body of a buddha is very mysterious and not easily explained.

A buddha's two form bodies are not made of material such as atoms and molecules. They are not appearances in the minds of disciples but exist as part of a buddha's continuum. Buddhas appear in forms that can skillfully relate to the various sentient beings, according to their differing levels of mental purity, dispositions, and interests.

### *The Enjoyment Body*

An *enjoyment body* (*saṃbhogakāya*) is defined as “a final form body possessing the five certainties.” It is the form a buddha takes in order to teach ārya bodhisattvas in the pure land. An enjoyment body is so called because with it a buddha brings enjoyment of the Dharma to the assembly of āryas; there is communal enjoyment of the Dharma. Each buddha has an enjoyment body that appears to ārya bodhisattvas in a pure land to teach them the Mahāyāna doctrine. In this way the enjoyment body of a buddha directly accomplishes the benefit of ārya bodhisattvas and indirectly accomplishes the benefit of ordinary beings by radiating emanation bodies. Amitābha Buddha in the Sukhāvatī pure land is an example of an enjoyment body. Mañjuśrī, Tārā, Avalokiteśvara, and other deities are also enjoyment bodies.

The body of the person who is an enjoyment body is a nonmaterial vajra body that has the nature of pristine wisdom. It lacks flesh, blood, empty spaces, and so forth, and is not born from an embryo. In each pore a buddha displays countless bodies of buddhas surrounded by bodhisattvas, gods, demi-gods, and humans.

Enjoyment bodies have five certainties, qualities that an enjoyment body is certain to have: (1) the certainty of *abode* is that it resides only in Akaniṣṭha;<sup>107</sup> (2) the certainty of *body* is that it is adorned with the clear and complete thirty-two signs and eighty marks of a buddha; (3) the certainty of *retinue* is that an enjoyment body is surrounded only by ārya bodhisattvas; no other sentient beings have the purity of mind or karma to receive teachings directly from an enjoyment body; (4) the certainty of *Dharma* means that enjoyment bodies teach only the Mahāyāna Dharma; and (5) the certainty of *time* shows that enjoyment bodies remain eternally, as long as cyclic existence is not emptied of sentient beings.

In ancient Indian culture, these thirty-two physical signs indicate a great person. In the Pāli sūtras, they are also mentioned as signs of a buddha. From a Mahāyāna perspective, they are found in both enjoyment bodies and supreme emanation bodies. In the context of supreme emanation bodies, they are part of the conventional appearance of a buddha as a human. Buddhas appear in this way to disciples in order to guide them on the path to higher rebirth and highest goodness. The thirty-two signs and eighty marks are ripenings, but they are not ripened results, because ripened results are neutral (unspecified), whereas the thirty-two signs are virtuous.

The thirty-two signs are presented from the perspective of their causes and indicate a great person. The eighty marks are presented from the perspective of being results and reveal the person's inner qualities. The list below is from the *Ornament of Clear Realizations* and was taken from the Prajñāpāramitā Sūtras. Another list is from the *Sūtra Requested by the Precious Daughter (Ratnadārikā Sūtra)* and is also found in the *Sublime Continuum*. The causes for each sign give us an idea of virtuous activities to engage in.

1. On the sole of each foot and palm of each hand is the impression of a thousand-spoke wheel. Although a buddha's feet do not touch the ground, and thus do not harm sentient beings that may be underneath, they leave the imprint of a wheel when he walks. The cause for this sign is greeting and escorting our spiritual mentors and selflessly offering service to others.



2. The soles of the feet are as smooth and level as the underside of a tortoise's shell, so they are always firmly planted. The causes for this are firmly living in accord with the transmitted and realized Dharma and safeguarding the three types of ethical restraints: the prātimokṣa precepts that restrain physical and verbal negativities; the samādhi restraints arising from single-pointed concentration that keep the mind from wandering, restlessness, and laxity; and the unpolluted restraint that arises from realizing emptiness and restrains the mind from afflictions.
3. A web of white light connects the fingers and toes. Rings can pass through the web, and the fingers retain their individual movement. This arises from practicing the four ways of gathering disciples.
4. The skin is unwrinkled and smooth like a baby's skin. This comes from generously providing others with nourishing food and drink, not just giving them what we don't like or don't want ourselves.
5. Seven parts of the body are rounded and slightly raised—the tops of each hand, foot, shoulder, and the back of the neck. This derives from giving others not only physical nourishment but also other pleasing and usable objects, such as shelter and clothes.
6. The root of the fingernails and toenails are extremely long. This comes from saving the lives of animals about to be slaughtered.
7. The heels of the feet are broad. The cause for this is compassionately going out of our way to help others, save their lives, or make them comfortable.
8. The body is very straight and is seven cubits tall (usually people's height is about four cubits). This arises from totally abandoning killing any sentient being.
9. The elbows and kneecaps don't protrude. This is from intensely engaging in the six perfections.
10. The bodily hairs grow up. This arises due to engaging in constructive practices and inspiring others to do the same.
11. The calves are well-rounded, like the legs of an antelope. This sign derives from admiring and mastering medicine, other sciences, arts, and crafts, and using these skills to benefit others.

12. The arms are extremely long. This is a result of never sending beggars away empty-handed.
13. The private organ is recessed and remains concealed. This is caused by strictly keeping the pledges of secrecy and safeguarding the confidential words of others.
14. The skin is luminous and golden. This comes from offering soft and comfortable seats to others.
15. The skin is fine and unblemished, like purified gold. The cause for this is accommodating those needing lodging and always providing excellent housing.
16. The body hair curls clockwise with never more than one hair growing from each pore. This is a result of completely abandoning mental wandering, busy work, and bustling confusion.
17. The white treasure-like strand of hair on the mid-brow curls very tightly clockwise. When pulled, it extends a huge distance, and when released, it tightly recoils. This arises from respectfully serving all superiors—parents, teachers, elders, abbots, and so forth—venerating them as a crown jewel. It also arises from helping others achieve upper rebirths.
18. The upper torso becomes progressively broader, like that of a lion. This arises from never humiliating or looking down on others regardless of their power, status, wealth, and so forth. It also comes from not scolding others privately or publicly and not belittling others' beliefs or religious traditions.
19. The tops of the shoulders are round and well-connected to the neck, and the network of veins isn't visible. This comes from freely giving praise and encouragement to all others, not just to friends.
20. The area between the collarbone and the shoulder is round, fleshy, and full, without any hollow depression. This derives from giving others medicine and healthy food.
21. No matter what is eaten, it always tastes delicious. This comes from nursing the sick, old, and infirm, and especially caring for those who others find repulsive.

22. The body is stately and well-proportioned, like a full-grown peepul (bodhi) tree. The cause is building public gardens and parks for others' enjoyment and encouraging others to do the same.
23. The crown protrusion is made of radiant flesh; it is round and circles clockwise. At a distance, it seems to be four finger-widths high, but upon close scrutiny, its height cannot be measured. This is a result of visualizing our spiritual master on the crown of our head, visiting temples and monasteries, and practicing in them.
24. The tongue is extremely long and is able to extend to the top of the head, ears, and chest. This arises from speaking kindly to others, encouraging them, and treating them as gently as an animal licking her young.
25. The voice is melodious like that of an ancient song-sparrow, flowing without effort. It also resembles Brahmā's voice and temporarily relieves the suffering of those who hear it. This derives from communicating the Dharma in the individual language of each sentient being.
26. The cheeks are round and full like those of a lion. This comes from completely abandoning idle talk.
27. The eyeteeth are more brilliantly white than other teeth. The cause is offering special praise to the buddhas and bodhisattvas and showing them great respect.
28. The teeth are all of equal length. This arises from abandoning the five wrong livelihoods and always earning our living honestly.
29. The teeth are perfectly straight and properly aligned with no gaps between them. This comes from speaking the straight truth for three zillion eons, being honest, and not being devious or crooked with others.
30. There are forty teeth, with an equal number in upper and lower jaws. The cause is abandoning divisive language and working for unity and harmony among all.
31. The black and white portions of the eyes are clear and distinct, with no red or yellow discoloration. This comes from looking at others

with compassionate eyes, working for their welfare, and generating equal concern for all whether their suffering is great or small.

32. The eyelashes are beautiful and long, like those of a bull, with each hair distinct. This arises from regarding others without attachment, anger, or confusion, and striving to gain full wisdom to be able to discriminate between virtue and nonvirtue.

### *Emanation Bodies*

*Emanation bodies (nirmāṇakāya)* are the forms buddhas compassionately assume to benefit ordinary beings whose mindstreams are more polluted and whose karma does not allow them to engage directly with an enjoyment body. Seeing sentient beings drowning in saṃsāra's duḥkha, a buddha's enjoyment body manifests various emanation bodies in saṃsāra's impure realms without moving from the dharmakāya's meditative equipoise on emptiness. Emanation bodies do not have the five certainties and manifest in the realms of saṃsāra in order to guide sentient beings by assuming a form similar to the beings in that realm. They then teach disciples who have not yet entered the path of any of the three vehicles whatever will benefit, be it topics from the Fundamental Vehicle or topics from the Mahāyāna or Vajrayāna.

Both the enjoyment body and emanation bodies of a buddha are impermanent phenomena that change moment by moment. Among the different types of impermanent phenomena, they are considered persons, which are abstract composites. An enjoyment body is eternal and remains forever. Emanation bodies appear and are withdrawn according to their opportunity to benefit sentient beings. They manifest spontaneously and effortlessly according to the dispositions, interests, and receptivity of sentient beings. Emanation bodies appear in sentient beings' realms for as long as they can benefit those particular sentient beings. A buddha may radiate many emanation bodies in various parts of the universe simultaneously. They may even appear as inanimate objects. After serving their purpose, or when sentient beings' have consumed the karma to benefit from them, they absorb back into the enjoyment body.

There are three types of emanation bodies: supreme emanation bodies, ordinary emanation bodies, and artisan emanation bodies. Śākyamuni

Buddha is an example of a *supreme emanation body*, so called because in that form the Buddha first turned the wheel of Dharma in our world, where previously the Buddhadharma was not in existence. Supreme emanation bodies perform the twelve deeds of a buddha and have the thirty-two signs and eighty marks of a great person.

The twelve deeds of supreme emanation bodies occur in the desire realm among human beings. In other realms and worlds, beings are either subject to such overwhelming suffering or experience such grand and stable pleasure that it is difficult for them to turn their minds to the Dharma. In our world, great disparity among sentient beings exists: some are rich, others poor; some live long, others do not. Due to this combination of suffering and happiness and the instability of both, it is easier for us to generate renunciation. For this reason, Śākyamuni Buddha enacted the twelve deeds here. The list of twelve deeds differs slightly in various texts; the following is from the *Sublime Continuum*. Although Śākyamuni Buddha was already fully awakened before performing the twelve deeds, he appeared in ordinary form so that his life would be an inspiring example for us to contemplate and follow.

1. He reigned in the blissful realm of Tuṣita, Maitreya Buddha's pure land, which is located in the outskirts of the Tuṣita celestial realm. Descending from the blissful land of Tuṣita is the first deed.
2. He enters his mother's womb.
3. He is born.
4. He masters the sciences and arts and is skilled in various sports.
5. He marries and enjoys sensual pleasures, family, and royal life. Although it is not mentioned here, he enters the city on four occasions, seeing a sick person, an old person, and a corpse, which brings him face to face with the tragedy of saṃsāric existence. Upon seeing a wandering mendicant during the fourth excursion, he has the idea that there is a way out of saṃsāra and wants to pursue it.
6. Longing for release from the tormenting cycle of birth and death, he leaves the palace and renounces his princely life, clothes, and appearance to live as a wandering renunciant.

7. Together with a small group of other renunciants, he engages in severe ascetic practices for six years.
8. Seeing that torturing the body does not purify the mind, he leaves behind the ascetic lifestyle, meditates under the bodhi tree, and makes a strong resolve to attain full awakening there.
9. Facing the demons of ignorance, anger, and attachment in his own mind, he overcomes the hosts of Māra—that is, all external and internal impediments to full awakening.
10. At dawn, he attains perfect supreme awakening.
11. He turns the Dharma wheel, teaching sentient beings the paths to higher rebirth, liberation, and full awakening.
12. He passes away, entering parinirvāṇa.

The twelve deeds occur in the time of subsequent attainment, but without moving from the dharmakāya. In bodhisattvas, subsequent attainment and meditative equipoise do not occur at the same time, but in buddhahood they do without any impediment, just as the sun and the sunshine occur simultaneously.

*Rebirth or ordinary emanation bodies* appear in various forms to guide us, for example appearing as wise and compassionate spiritual mentors who guide us on the path by giving teachings, ordination, and so forth. By appearing in the aspect of an ordinary being in any of the three realms, emanation bodies can communicate easily with ordinary beings. A buddha's manifestations as a bridge, blanket, or other material object are included in this category. *Artisan emanation bodies* are, for example, the appearance the Buddha assumed as a musician in order to subdue the conceit of a violinist and turn him toward the Dharma path. Ordinary emanation bodies and artisan emanation bodies do not necessarily have the clear and complete signs and marks and their physical appearance is usually indistinguishable from that of ordinary sentient beings of that realm.

However we count a buddha's bodies, the motivation for actualizing them is to benefit all sentient beings, and the path to actualize them is a complete path of method and wisdom. Reflecting on the qualities of fully awakened buddhas will inspire us to practice the path leading to buddhahood. It will also deepen our refuge and trust in our Teacher,

Śākyamuni Buddha, and in all the buddhas who guide and inspire us along the path.

### *Buddha, Ārya Buddha, and Sentient Being*

The eighth chapter of Maitreya’s *Ornament of Clear Realizations* distinguishes between buddha and ārya buddha. *Buddha* is an excellent quality arisen from the fulfillment of the collections of merit and wisdom that are its causes. Buddha is synonymous with “resultant dharmakāya” and has four divisions—nature dharmakāya, wisdom dharmakāya, enjoyment body, and emanation body. Each of these is buddha. Since one of these—the nature dharmakāya—is permanent, that makes buddha permanent. (In philosophy, if one member of a category is permanent, even though other instances of that category are impermanent, the category itself is considered permanent.) Buddha is not a person. In general, a buddha’s thirty-two signs, hands, feet, and so forth are buddha, because they are a buddha’s physical qualities. The twenty-one unpolluted wisdoms in the continuum of an ārya buddha are also buddha.

*Ārya buddha*, on the other hand, refers to a person who is fully awakened—for example, an enjoyment body or emanation body. An ārya buddha is necessarily a buddha, but buddha is not necessarily an ārya buddha. Understanding the relationship between buddha and ārya buddha through four points is helpful.

- There is something that is buddha, but not an ārya buddha—for example, the nature truth body.
- There is something that is both an ārya buddha and buddha—for example, Śākyamuni Buddha.
- There is nothing that is an ārya buddha but not buddha.
- There is something that is neither—for example, a sentient being.

An ārya buddha is not a sentient being, although all other āryas—stream-enterers, once-returners, nonreturners, arhats, and bodhisattvas—are sentient beings. “Sentient being” literally means “having mind.” Here “mind” refers to a mind with defilements, so “sentient being” refers to a

person with defilements. All persons except ārya buddhas fall into this category.

When we speak more casually, “the Buddha” refers to Śākyamuni Buddha, and “a buddha” refers to an ārya buddha. The naturally pure nature dharmakāya is directly perceived only by āryas. The adventitiously pure nature dharmakāya and the wisdom dharmakāya are directly perceived only by ārya buddhas. The enjoyment body is directly perceived by ārya bodhisattvas. The supreme emanation body is directly perceived by sentient beings with pure karma. The other emanation bodies are directly perceived by all sentient beings.

A buddha is said to be an omniscient one, whose mind is omniscient (*sarvajñatā*). “Omniscient mind” refers only to the mental consciousnesses of a buddha, not to his or her sense consciousnesses or any other aspect of a buddha. However, buddhas’ sense consciousnesses and all parts of their physical bodies are said to be omniscient in that they know all phenomena directly.

### *What Buddhas Perceive*

Unlike buddhas, ārya bodhisattvas are unable to simultaneously nonconceptually and directly cognize the two truths. They must alternate knowing one and then the other, perceiving emptiness directly during meditative equipoise on emptiness and knowing conventionalities in the time of subsequent attainment. However, they are able to cognize the two truths simultaneously, but with different consciousnesses. During the time of subsequent attainment after arising from meditative equipoise on emptiness, ārya bodhisattvas engage in their daily life activities and teach emptiness to their students. At that time, they apprehend veilings—the students, books, the room, and so forth—with their sense consciousnesses, and simultaneously cognize emptiness conceptually with their mental consciousness. Although veilings appear truly existent to them, because their minds are informed by their prior direct realization of emptiness, they see these things as like illusions—as falsities because they appear truly existent although they are not. Ārya bodhisattvas’ minds are relaxed; they



do not get embroiled in reactive emotional responses to inherently existent things.

Ārya bodhisattvas have obscurations to perceiving all knowable objects simultaneously. In contrast, buddhas directly perceive all ultimate truths and veiled truths simultaneously with one consciousness. Buddhas never emerge from meditative equipoise, and for them meditative equipoise and subsequent realization become one entity; they no longer need to alternate between the two to know all phenomena. This ability is unique to a buddha. All awakening activities of a buddha—the chief of which is their speech that teaches the Dharma to sentient beings—proceed effortlessly.

Buddhas have removed all impediments to knowing all existents. An omniscient mind explicitly knows all phenomena; all phenomena appear clearly and without confusion to a buddha's mind.

Free of all cognitive obscurations, buddhas do not have mistaken appearances. How then do they know veilings, which are falsities? What an omniscient mind knows from its own perspective differs from what it knows from others' perspectives. When unpolluted phenomena such as buddhas' signs and marks appear to sentient beings, they appear truly existent although they are not. This is not due to the signs and marks having arisen because of the latencies of ignorance, but due to sentient beings' minds being polluted by the latencies of ignorance. In other words, the mistaken appearances are due to the subject, the perceiving consciousness, not the object being perceived. From buddhas' perspective, these pure phenomena do not appear as false; buddhas have no mistaken appearances from their own perspective.

In contrast, the appearance of things such as the table and book that appear truly existent in the perspective of sentient beings is an appearance to buddhas only from the perspective of their appearing to sentient beings. While truly existent tables do not exist, the appearance of them to sentient beings does exist. For example, someone with vitreous floaters has the appearance of falling hairs. While the falling hairs do not exist, the appearance of them to that person does.

Since these mistaken appearances are existent phenomena, they must appear and be known by buddhas. They appear to buddhas' pristine wisdom of varieties not because buddhas have mistaken appearances from their own

perspective. Rather, they perceive what sentient beings perceive, which are mistaken appearances. There is a big difference between sentient beings having the appearance of true existence because their minds are under the influence of ignorance and/or its latencies and buddhas having the appearance of true existence because these appearances are existent phenomena, and being omniscient, buddhas perceive them. From their own side, buddhas experience only purity. From the perspective of the pristine wisdom of varieties all phenomena appear as empty and selfless; they do not appear as truths, but as falsities.

Buddhas have two types of pristine wisdoms (*jñāna*): the exalted knower that cognizes things as they are that perceives emptiness, and the exalted knower that cognizes the varieties of phenomena that perceives all conventionalities. These two pristine wisdoms are inseparably one nature; both are omniscient and both know all ultimate and veiled truths directly. They are differentiated with respect to their objects. The pristine wisdom that cognizes things as they are knows emptiness—the ultimate truth—nondually. The pristine wisdom knowing varieties knows the diversity of phenomena—veiled truths—dualistically by means of their appearance to sentient beings.

A buddha's exalted knower that cognizes things as they are also perceives veilings, but *to the perspective of that exalted knower* veilings do not appear and are not seen. Similarly, the Buddha's exalted knower that cognizes the varieties also perceives emptiness, but *to the perspective of that exalted knower* emptiness does not appear and is not perceived. The exalted knower of things as they are is the fruition of meditative equipoise on emptiness, and the exalted knower of varieties is the result of meditation on illusion-like appearances in the subsequent realization time.

We may wonder: "If veiled truths are true for a mind influenced by ignorance, how can they exist for a buddha, whose mind is not influenced by ignorance in the least? Do conventional truths—the world, sentient beings, houses, and so forth—cease to exist at buddhahood because a buddha does not see them as true?" Veiled truths exist at buddhahood. A buddha perceives what we sentient beings perceive—veiled truths—but does not perceive them in the same way that we do. A buddha perceives them as false.

People who say that knowledge of the varieties of phenomena exists only in the continuums of sentient beings and that buddhas perceive only emptiness and not veilings disparage the buddhas' omniscience and their pristine wisdom of varieties. Similarly, saying that buddhas don't perceive conventionalities because the multifarious phenomena are nonexistent deprecates the buddhas' omniscience and their pristine wisdom of varieties. In addition, some hold the erroneous notion that pristine wisdom realizing the ultimate mode of existence, emptiness, does not exist in a buddha's continuum because meditative equipoise on emptiness abides just on a non-finding (of inherent existence), and if you find the non-finding, then the non-finding must be truly existent. These people disparage both pristine wisdoms.

In summary, in the insight section in his *Middle-Length Stages of the Path*, Tsongkhapa explains that in addition to perceiving ultimate truths, buddhas perceive impure and pure conventionalities, which appear to the exalted knower of varieties. Pure conventionalities are those that are not polluted by ignorance and its latencies. These include a buddha's speech, the qualities of a buddha's mind, and the thirty-two signs and eighty marks of a buddha's body, all of which are produced by a buddha's virtue, not by ignorance or its latencies. Impure veiled truths are those that are polluted by ignorance and the latencies of ignorance, for example all true *duḥkha* such as the aggregates of sentient beings in *samsāra* and the environments we live in.

When pure phenomena such as a buddha's signs and marks appear to sentient beings, they appear to exist from their own side, even though they do not exist in that way. This is due to the latencies of ignorance obscuring sentient beings' minds that make everything appear inherently existent. When these pure phenomena appear to a buddha's mind, they appear purely, without the appearance of inherent existence.

Buddhas experience only purity. If they experienced what is an impure thing to sentient beings, such as a foul smell, they would still experience it as pure. It's not that impure things don't appear to buddhas at all. They appear to them because buddhas perceive what appears to sentient beings. Although both pure and impure phenomena appear to buddhas, they experience only purity.

Impure phenomena appear to a buddha's exalted knower of varieties, but only from the viewpoint of their being appearances that exist for sentient beings. Nevertheless, a buddha's mind is nonmistaken, even though it perceives the mistaken appearance of inherently existent phenomena in the minds of sentient beings. From their own perspective, buddhas do not experience the impure phenomena that are true *duḥkha* and true origins of *duḥkha*.

Dual appearance or dual perception is of three types: (1) the appearance of veilings, (2) the appearance of subject and object as separate, and (3) the appearance of inherent or true existence. Buddhas have the appearance of veiled phenomena and the appearance of subject and object, so we can say they have dual appearance. However, they do not have *mistaken* dual appearances because they lack the aspect of the mind that mistakenly perceives or apprehends phenomena as truly existent.

Saying that the Buddha has pure appearance does not mean that he perceives impure things as pure or that his having pure appearances makes impure things pure. The Buddha still perceives sentient beings and our *duḥkha*. Sentient beings and their *duḥkha* don't cease to exist at buddhahood, but how they are perceived changes.

How we perceive and experience things depends on the state of our mind—from their side phenomena do not inherently exist as this or that. During a famine in India during the Buddha's time, the saṅgha had nothing to eat. A horse trainer offered to the monastics the only thing he had—grain husks. To the monastics it tasted terrible. Ānanda, the Buddha's attendant, started weeping thinking that he had failed to serve the Buddha well because the Buddha was eating such dreadful fare. However, the Buddha quelled Ānanda's sorrow by pulling out a piece of the husk that was stuck in his teeth and giving it to Ānanda to eat. When Ānanda put it in his mouth, he was amazed because it tasted delicious, unlike anything he had ever experienced before. He realized that due to the purity of the Buddha's mind, how the Buddha experienced things encountered in daily life was totally unlike the experience of ordinary beings.

When buddhas teach, although they use words to communicate with their audience, they do not have conceptions. Conceptual consciousnesses involve obscuration; they are mistaken consciousnesses that do not know

their objects directly but get at them only by means of a conceptual appearance. Buddhas, however, have abandoned both afflictive and cognitive obscurations and thus have neither mistaken minds nor obscurations; thus they have no conceptions whatsoever. They also do not impute any objects, so when we say that things exist by being merely designated by term and concept, it is sentient beings' minds that are doing the designating, not buddhas.

I once asked the late Gen Nyima-la, "How does a buddha see an object without that object appearing truly existent?" He responded that we cannot explain this, because here we are talking about the uncommon field of experience (T. *spyod yul las 'das pa*) of a buddha that only a buddha can know. Of course we can talk about what buddhas perceive and how they perceive it, but it is not easy to gain a clear mental picture of what this means. We can say that buddhas see things as merely designated, but if we really think about this, it is very difficult to imagine what seeing something as merely designated would be. This is similar to the difference between talking about and directly perceiving emptiness. We ordinary beings can talk about emptiness as the mere absence of the object of negation, but unless our mind is intimate with emptiness, we don't really have an idea of what emptiness is. We may talk a lot about nonduality, but do we even have a correct assumption, let alone an actual experience, of nonduality?

We have many discussions about what the Buddha perceives and how. Does he perceive veiled truths—phenomena that appear true to the mind of ignorance? Or does he perceive nominal truths—phenomena that exist by being merely designated? How do the buddhas see their own omniscient minds? To answer these, the only alternative is to become a buddha ourselves, and then through our own experience we will know how a buddha perceives things. Otherwise, we are just poking our nose here and there and talking about things that are not within our own reach!



## 12 | Buddhahood: The Buddhas' Awakening Activities

**T**HE *Sublime Continuum* describes the buddhas' awakening activity (*samudācāra*) by which all buddhas work to benefit each sentient being spontaneously, continuously, and without partiality.

A buddha's awakening activity is spontaneous in that it requires no effort on the part of the buddhas. Because their minds are free from all obstructions, they know each sentient being's dispositions, aspirations, thoughts, and tendencies. They know which of the three vehicles each sentient being aspires to as well as the teachings and trainings of each vehicle so that they are able to instruct and guide that sentient being to upper rebirth, liberation, and full awakening. In addition, the buddhas effortlessly and intuitively know the suitable place, time, and manner to teach and train each sentient being, and manifest accordingly. All this is done without error and without having to ponder what to do. Without thought or intention, the reflection of the moon appears on dewdrops, ponds, and in countless containers that hold calm and clear water. Similarly, when sentient beings are ready to be led on the path, the Buddha's awakening activities spontaneously manifest. The *Sublime Continuum* says (RGV 4:3–4):

For whom? How? By which training?  
Where? And when? Since conceptual thought  
regarding such [questions] does not occur,  
the *Muni* (Buddha) always [acts] spontaneously.

The temperaments of the disciples,

which of the many means for each,  
which training at what place and time:  
[the buddhas are not mistaken as to any of] these.

Awakening activity is also continuous and flows forth uninterruptedly. Having excellent qualities unmatched by others, buddhas have perfected the three higher trainings and the six perfections and possess profound wisdom. Having completed the two collections of merit and wisdom, they are able to ripen the minds of all sentient beings and have mastered all vehicles and paths to arhatship and buddhahood. As a result of these immaculate and extensive causes, they have attained complete and perfect awakening and can see that each and every sentient being possesses the treasure-like potential to become a buddha that is shrouded by clouds of afflictions and defilements. To overcome these adventitious defilements, the buddhas' awakening activity continuously flows.

### *Nine Similes for Awakening Activity*

The *Adornment with the Light of Pristine Wisdom Entering the Domain of the Buddha Sūtra* (*Sarvabuddhaviṣayāvātārājñānālokālamkāra Sūtra*) speaks of nine similes that help us understand how the buddhas' awakened activities function. Elaborated on in the fourth chapter of the *Sublime Continuum*, the similes reveal the awakening activities of the Buddha's body, speech, mind, body and speech together, pristine wisdom, secrets of the Tathāgata's mind, secrets of his speech, secrets of his bodies, and compassion. Although we speak of the Buddha below, what is said applies to all buddhas.

(1) *The form of the god Indra illustrates the display of the illusory manifestations of the Tathāgata's body.* If the surface of the earth were to transform into polished and immaculate lapis lazuli, the reflection of Indra, his palace, and his entourage would appear on it. People who saw this would aspire to become like Indra, and to actualize that wish they would create virtue and abandon nonvirtue. As a result they would be born as Indra.



Although these people do not understand that they are perceiving only the reflection of Indra, not Indra himself, still the reflection, which is without intention, has a positive effect on them and aids them in attaining a higher rebirth. Similarly, due to the firm powers of faith, effort, mindfulness, samādhi, and wisdom, ārya bodhisattvas, whose minds are pure and polished like lapis lazuli, can see in their minds the appearance of the Buddha with thirty-two signs and eighty marks. Although the Buddha didn't think "I'm going to benefit sentient beings in this world," and although the Buddha did not move from the stillness of the dharmakāya, he emanates countless illusion-like forms that appear to the minds of those who have created the cause to perceive them.

When the supreme emanation body of the Buddha appears in the world, people are not aware that this is an appearance of his pristine wisdom. They may even cling to his body, mistakenly thinking it is made of atoms. These appearances of the Buddha are the Buddha; it would be a mistake to say they are not. It would also be mistaken to think they are made of coarse material. Nevertheless, all those who see them receive enormous benefit. Relying on beholding his form, all Mahāyāna followers are inspired to practice well and will come to generate bodhicitta and see their inner dharmakāya with their own pristine wisdom.

Although we do not think that this is the appearance of our own mind, it is a dependent arising relying on both the Buddha and our merit. Like the appearance of Indra reflected in the lapis lazuli ground, these appearances of the Buddha reflected in the ground of our virtuous mind should not be viewed as either existent or nonexistent—that is, they are neither truly existent nor totally nonexistent. Nevertheless, these appearances function to inspire us to become buddhas, and as a result, bodhicitta grows in our mind. We then engage in studying, thinking, and meditating on the Dharma and in practicing the bodhisattvas' compassionate deeds. Following the Mahāyāna path, we will realize the clear light—the true nature of the mind—and through this we will attain the ultimate result we long for, the truth body of a fully awakened buddha.

The Buddha does not leave the state of dharmakāya to radiate out this appearance. It happens naturally when all the causes and conditions come together. From the Buddha's side, his completion of all the abandonments

and realizations of a buddha give him the ability to benefit others effortlessly. From our side, our faith, merit, bodhicitta, meditation, and practice of the six perfections make us receptive vessels. When ārya bodhisattvas, who have created all these causes, see the enjoyment body in their pure minds, it becomes a cause contributing to their attainment of full awakening.

(2) *The celestial drum illustrates the Tathāgata's speech expressing the holy Dharma.* In the God Realm of the Thirty-Three, a celestial drum is suspended in the sky. A product of the gods' past virtuous karma, without effort (it is not beaten by anyone), without origin (such as being produced by the vocal cords, tongue, and lips), without thought (of a thinking mind), without vibration (of any physical basis), and without intention (to make a sound), the drum produces the meaningful sound of the four seals: all conditioned things are impermanent; all polluted things are in the nature of duḥkha, all phenomena are selfless, and nirvāṇa is peace.<sup>108</sup> This sound awakens the gods from their indulgence in sense pleasures and alerts them to the impending attacks of the jealous demi-gods, and in this way enables them to maintain peace.

In the same way, the Buddha effortlessly teaches all sentient beings who have sufficient virtue, without generating the motivation or energy to do so and without thinking about who to teach and what to teach them. The Buddha's speech expresses the Dharma in accordance with sentient beings' various levels of aspirations and capacities, without effort, origin, thought, physical basis, or intention. In this way, the Buddha answers sentient beings' spiritual questions, dispels their doubt, and instructs them in what to practice and abandon. By hearing the teachings and putting them into practice, sentient beings are able to overcome their afflictions, subdue their suffering, and attain the peace of nonabiding nirvāṇa. In the meantime, hearing the Buddha's speech enables them to have favorable rebirths in order to continue their Dharma practice.<sup>109</sup>

Just as someone who lacks good hearing cannot hear the subtle sounds of a drum, sentient beings whose merit and wisdom are minimal are oblivious to the subtle meaning of the Dharma teachings. Those with good hearing who listen attentively can hear the sound of the drum clearly. What we are able to take in and benefit from depends on our merit and wisdom as

well as the effortless speech of the Buddha. While the Buddha's teachings are always available, we must study and put them into practice, thereby purifying our minds and creating the conditions to be able to hear and understand the teachings in the future.

It is said that all virtue of any sentient being anywhere depends on the Buddha's awakened activity of giving teachings and guidance. Of all the various types of awakening activities of the buddhas, their speech is principal, for teaching us the Dharma is the primary way that they lead us to liberation and awakening. As that is the case, we should rely on the Buddha's speech. Doing so will enable those who have not attained a path to attain one and those who have entered the path to deepen their understanding and progress through the paths and grounds to full awakening (RGV 4:43).

Any cause of happiness for worldly beings and gods,  
in whichever sphere of the world without exception,  
briefly spoken, fully depends upon this melody [of the Buddha's  
teachings]  
that pervades all the worlds, not forsaking one.

(3) *Clouds illustrate the all-pervading nature of the Tathāgata's mind of compassion and wisdom.* In hot Indian summers, monsoon clouds continuously and effortlessly pour down rain that nourishes the rice paddies and produces abundant crops. In a similar way, in the unpolluted space of emptiness from the clouds of the dharmakāya, stirred by the wind of love and compassion, effortless and uninterruptedly the Buddha rains down the impeccable Dharma, bringing about a harvest of virtue in the minds of sentient beings.

Just as the rain water is pure but acquires different tastes and qualities depending on the type of land it falls on, the Dharma will take on the taste of the Śrāvaka, Solitary Realizer, or Bodhisattva Vehicle depending on the mind, dispositions, and aspirations of those to be tamed. While the nectar of the Dharma is of a single taste—nirvāṇa—it assumes a different flavor depending on the vessel into which it is poured.

When the monsoon rain falls, human beings are delighted because it will nourish their fields; peacocks are indifferent because rain neither helps nor hinders their activities; and hungry ghosts are unhappy because it appears as hail to them. Similarly, the three dispositions of sentient beings respond in different ways to the Dharma rain. Those who have cultivated conviction and confidence in the Mahāyāna are nourished by the rain, those who are uninterested are neither happy nor unhappy, and those who have wrong views and are hostile to the Mahāyāna doctrine are unhappy.

The clouds do not think “I will cause benefit or harm,” they simply allow the rain to fall. Some people take shelter and enjoy the rainfall, mindful of the crops that will flourish, but insects may dislike the downpour. Similarly, the cloud of the Buddha’s compassion lets fall the rain of the Dharma without the notion “I will purify the negativities and afflictions of those with faith in the Mahāyāna” or “I will ripen the seeds of wrong views in those who are antagonistic to it.” Whether sentient beings benefit or not from the buddhas’ activities in the short term depends on their situation, but the buddhas’ awakening activities are always conducted with compassion to benefit sentient beings in the long term.

Buddhas fully understand the implications of being born in cyclic existence with its three types of duḥkha. Because they realize the danger of sentient beings remaining apathetic toward the dire situation they are in, from the cloud of compassion they shower the Dharma upon us continuously and in accordance with our dispositions and karma. Sentient beings who have some discriminating wisdom see the nature of saṃsāra and nirvāṇa and leave behind all hankering for the former and seek the latter. Having cultivated faith based on understanding the path in previous lives, in this life they again follow the Buddhist path and understand that duḥkha is to be known, its origin is to be abandoned, and its true cessation is to be actualized. With that in mind, they gladly practice the path that leads to the fruit they desire. This is what we too must do. With that in mind, in the *Guru Pūjā*, we request teachings with this verse:

Please let fall a rain of vast and profound Dharma from a  
hundred thousand billowing clouds of wisdom and

compassion, to nurture, sustain, and propagate a garden of kunda flowers for the benefit and bliss of all limitless beings.

(4) *The god Brahmā illustrates the illusory emanations of the Tathāgata's body and speech.* Without departing from the Brahmā Heaven, the Great Brahmā effortlessly sends out illusory manifestations of himself to the desire-realm gods. Seeing these manifestations, they want to emulate Brahmā and forsake their attachment to the delights of the desire realm to create the causes to be born as a Brahmā god.

In the same way, without departing from the dharmakāya—the omniscient mind that dwells in emptiness yet knows all conventionalities at the same time with one consciousness—the Tathāgata effortlessly emanates a multitude of illusion-like forms in all realms of saṃsāra to benefit the beings who have the karmic fortune to encounter them. By meeting a supreme emanation body that performs the twelve deeds, sentient beings are inspired to emulate him and so observe the law of karma and its effects and practice renunciation, bodhicitta, and the correct view.

Brahmā's ability to emanate these manifestations is due to aspirational prayers he made in previous lives to benefit the gods. In addition, in previous lives, the gods aspired to see Brahmā and created the merit for this to happen. In this way the situation of their seeing his illusory emanations now occurs. Similarly, by the power of aspirational prayers made by the Buddha when he was a bodhisattva and the power of the virtue created by sentient beings who want to meet and practice the teachings, now these sentient beings are able to see the illusion-like emanation body of the Buddha. These emanations effortlessly flow forth from the Buddha's truth body when the causes and conditions assemble for sentient beings to benefit from them. Thus Śākyamuni Buddha appeared in our world, and like all supreme emanation bodies, he performed the twelve deeds.

(5) *The sun illustrates the Tathāgata's mind radiating the light of pristine wisdom.* When the sun shines, lotuses blossom and display their beauty, while kumuta flowers close. Yet the sun does not praise one or criticize the other, nor is the sun encouraged by the former and discouraged by the latter. In the same way, the sun of the Tathāgata sheds its rays of the sacred Dharma on the beings to be trained, without any thought or

judgment, just with the wish to be of benefit. The lotus of wisdom unfolds in those with merit who are receptive to the Dharma, while the kumuta-flower minds of those who are obscured close.

The radiant sun will be reflected in whatever upturned vessels are filled with water. The acuity and brilliance of the reflections depend on the clarity of the water. In the same way, numberless form bodies are reflected in the vessels of various disciples. Depending on the degree to which their minds have been purified of defilements, the clarity of the reflection will differ. Like vessels that are upside down, those whose minds are disinterested in or even hostile to the Buddhadharma are temporarily immune to the reflections of the Buddha's wisdom.

In the clear, open sky, the sun rises and shines its rays first on the highest mountain peaks, then on the medium-sized mountains, and finally on the hills. Likewise, in the space of the nature truth body, the sun-like omniscient mind of the Buddha arises and with its wisdom illuminates the minds of sentient beings: first those with great merit, then those with medium merit, followed by those of least merit. In this way the Buddha leads sentient beings who are subject to great suffering in unfortunate births to take a human birth. He illuminates with wisdom the minds of human beings immersed in wrong views, enabling them to attain freedom from saṃsāra. And his brilliant sun of wisdom propels arhats and bodhisattvas to full awakening. Just as the sun dispels darkness and stimulates growth, so too does the awakening activity of the Buddha's wisdom spontaneously dispel the darkness of ignorance and stimulate the growth of realizations within sentient beings' minds.

(6) *A wish-fulfilling gem illustrates the secret aspect of the Tathāgata's mind.* Just as a wish-fulfilling jewel is continuously present and without exertion grants riches to those beings in its field of activity according to their wishes, the Buddha continuously shares the teachings, fulfilling the spiritual aspirations of all those who rely on him. A wish-fulfilling jewel lies deep underground or in the ocean and is very hard to find. It has no intention or thought to give one thing to one person and another thing to another, but when people are near this jewel and pray to it, it fulfills each and every one of their wishes—whatever it may be—spontaneously and fully. In the same way, sentient beings with different dispositions seek

teachings and practices according to their aspirations and interests, and the Buddha fulfills their spiritual needs completely.

From its side, a wish-fulfilling jewel doesn't discriminate whose wishes it grants and whose it doesn't; that depends on whether a person is near the jewel and prays to it or not. Similarly, from the Buddha's side, he guides all sentient beings equally, whether those people have faith in his teachings or not. Whether people receive his guidance or not depends on their receptivity, sincerity, merit, and eagerness to learn.

Once a person finds a wish-fulfilling jewel, he or she cares for it meticulously, never being careless or taking it for granted. Similarly, the pure Dharma teachings are difficult to encounter during our countless saṃsāric rebirths and in the vastness of our universe. This is especially the case for those with little merit and strong mental poisons. Once finding the precious teachings, we must treasure them as being more valuable than a wish-fulfilling jewel, for they can end the suffering that a jewel can never touch (RGV 4:73).

As a precious gem, which is free from thought, fully bestows  
the desired riches on others, doing so without effort,  
the Buddha always stays for others' sake, as merited by each,  
and as long as existence lasts, doing so without any effort.

(7) *An echo illustrates the secret aspect of the Tathāgata's speech.* The cave that reflects a sound has no intention of making an echo and exerts no energy to do so. The echo abides nowhere; it isn't like the sound of a conch that exists externally, and it's not like a thought that exists internally. Nevertheless, while appearing as various sounds, an echo communicates a meaning according to the perception of those who hear it. Likewise, the sound of the buddhas' speech appears in various tones but it takes meaning in the minds of disciples in accordance with their perceptions—their individual perspectives and dispositions. The Buddha is free from effort or thought to teach a specific topic to a specific individual. Like the echo, the source of the Buddha's speech cannot be located, even though it arises due to causes and conditions.

(8) *Space illustrates the secret aspect of the Tathāgata's bodies.* Uncreated space is not a material thing. As the absence of obstructing contact, it does not appear, it has no form, and it is not an object of our senses. There is no way for us to hold on to it or point out where it is. And yet appearances of beings and their environments arise in space and these appearances are high and low and consist of a variety of colors. While space appears in these ways, this is not its actual nature. Similarly, the infinite illusory appearances, emanations, and manifestations of the Buddha appear but cannot be pinpointed anywhere. All the illusion-like appearances of the Buddha, such as his twelve deeds, appear because of the aspirations and temperaments of disciples. While manifesting in forms that arise and cease, the ultimate Buddha is not subject to arising and disintegration. Nevertheless it pervades everywhere, endures forever, and allows all excellent qualities to exist until all beings are freed from cyclic existence.

(9) *The earth illustrates the awakening activity of the Buddha's compassion.* All flowers and fruit, as well as everything that sustains us, grow from or exist within the earth. Although the earth has no intention to grow plants or yield minerals, it does so without any exertion. Without thought, seeds germinate, plants take root, and trees and bushes grow, providing nourishment for the earth's denizens. In the same way, the fully awakened Buddha does not think "I must benefit these sentient beings," but when sentient beings rely on him, the seeds of our good qualities sprout and soon the flowers and fruits of realizations and the two collections flourish. In this way, due to great compassion, the Buddha is the source and support of sentient beings' spiritual growth.

Maitreya explained the Buddha's awakening activity through these nine similes because it is hard for us to conceptualize how the Buddha's awakening activity functions. We are so habituated to every activity requiring thought, planning, effort, and evaluation that we find it puzzling to consider that the Buddha's awakening activities can occur without these. His being able to do so is a result of the innumerable causes he created as a bodhisattva before attaining awakening. These causes include the vastness of his spiritual realizations and the magnitude of his dedication prayers. The depth of his compassion and the urgency with which he cultivates the wisdom that will abolish all defilements and perfect all good qualities are of



such an intensity that the Buddha's ability to benefit sentient beings never dissipates and continues spontaneously and without interruption until the end of saṃsāra.

As seen through these similes, the benefit we receive from the Buddha's awakened activities also depends on the causes we have created. Our karma and the Buddha's awakening activities are of equal strength in bringing results. If we have strong virtuous karma, we can receive the Buddha's awakening influence and make great progress in our spiritual practice. If our virtue is weak and our nonvirtuous karma strong, the Buddha's awakening activity cannot override the force of our negativities. However, as we direct our energy away from destructive thoughts and actions and toward constructive ones, we create the space in which the Buddha's awakening activity can reach and touch us. Our wish to change our ways and make ourselves into a receptive vessel is often fueled by the weariness of constantly experiencing dissatisfaction or misery. It may also be sparked by seeking meaning in our lives. A strong impetus for making changes in our lives may be meeting a qualified spiritual mentor.

The nine similes are presented in a particular order. Although each simile resembles the Buddha's awakened activities in a certain aspect, it does not resemble them in another aspect. Each subsequent simile eliminates the way in which the previous simile does not correspond to the Buddha's awakened activities.

1. The Buddha's body is similar to the reflection of Indra in the smooth lapis lazuli surface in that countless illusory physical manifestations of the Buddha are displayed in sentient beings' minds. It is dissimilar in that Indra's reflection is voiceless and cannot turn the Dharma wheel, whereas the Buddha can.
2. The Buddha's speech is similar to the great celestial drum teaching the four seals in that the Buddha's speech turns the Dharma wheel and gives teachings to sentient beings. However, the great drum doesn't benefit everyone in all directions and is not able to fulfill the welfare of sentient beings for all time, whereas the Buddha's benefit pervades all worlds for all time.

3. The Buddha's awakened mind is similar to a vast cloud whose rain ripens crops in all directions in that the Buddha's mind matures disciples by means of its compassion and wisdom. Nevertheless, the cloud does not eliminate harmful or worthless factors, whereas the rain of Buddha's compassion and wisdom eliminates the sufferings of sentient beings and the afflictions and karma that cause them.
4. The Buddha's awakened body and speech are similar to Brahmā in that just as Brahmā eliminates the worthless factors of attachment to sense gratifications, so does the endless display of the Buddha's body and speech. However, Brahmā doesn't benefit sentient beings extensively or continuously, nor does he enable sentient beings to experience ultimate happiness. In contrast, the Buddha's physical and verbal activities continuously lead sentient beings to final, complete fulfillment and joy.
5. The Buddha's radiant light of pristine wisdom is similar to the radiating light of the sun that ripens all crops in that the radiating light of the Buddha's pristine wisdom continuously ripens the crops of realizations in disciples. However, the sun shines on crops only during the daytime, not continuously, and it does not overcome darkness everywhere. The radiating light of the Buddha's pristine wisdom shines on all sentient beings everywhere without interruption and overcomes the darkness of ignorance.
6. The secrets of the Buddha's mind are similar to a wish-granting jewel that, by means of its brilliance, continuously eliminates darkness at all times. Similarly the mysterious aspect of the Buddha's mind radiates the light of nonconceptual pristine wisdom forever, without end. Nevertheless, compared to the mysteries of the Buddha's mind, a wish-granting jewel is more readily present. It can be found with the nāgas and in the sea. However, it is hard and rare to find the Buddha, for the Awakened One cannot appear to sentient beings who lack the karmic fortune to encounter him. In addition, to accomplish the mysteries of the Buddha's mind necessitates collecting merit and wisdom for three countless great eons.
7. The secrets of the Buddha's speech are similar to an echo, which is difficult to pinpoint because it cannot be found. Likewise, the

mysteries of the Buddha's speech that give the excellent teachings are also hard to find. Nevertheless, an echo occurs due to causes and conditions, whereas the Buddha's nature body is self-arising, uncreated, and does not appear due to causes and conditions.

8. The secrets of the Buddha's body are similar to space, which does not arise from causes and conditions and is uncreated, but which appears as a variety of things. Similarly, the mysteries of his body display countless illusion-like manifestations. However, space is not a basis for virtue, whereas the Buddha is the basis of all purified virtuous qualities.
9. The Buddha's awakened activities are like the earth that is the basis supporting everything in that his awakened activities are the basis for all goodness and virtue and for whatever is best for ordinary beings and āryas. The awakening activities of all buddhas is the basis on which the sacred Dharma arises. The Dharma is the three vehicles, the paths that lead us beyond saṃsāra to personal nirvāṇa and nonabiding nirvāṇa; the śrāvakas, solitary realizers, and bodhisattvas all depend on it. Based on the Buddha's awakening, the path of the ten virtues, which are the cause of happiness in the desire realm, arises; the four dhyānas and four immeasurables, which constitute the happiness in the form realm, arise; and the four formless absorptions also arise. Thus all worldly happiness of the three saṃsāric realms depends on the awakening of the Buddha and the Dharma he taught.

### *Twenty-Seven Awakening Activities*

The awakening activities of all the buddhas are classified into twenty-seven types. They are pure qualities of the wisdom dharmakāya, meaning that they arise depending on the wisdom dharmakāya. The wisdom truth body appears to sentient beings as the enjoyment body and emanation bodies in order to work for their welfare. These awakening activities operate spontaneously and without interruption to set sentient beings in the realizations of the path. "Setting" does not mean a buddha physically or mentally places realizations in sentient beings; that is impossible because

each of us must train our own mind. Rather, “setting” indicates that the buddha’s wisdom dharmakāya knows our dispositions and interests, and the two form bodies display the awakening activities by explaining the Dharma in a way that each of us can understand at our present level. Through hearing and practicing the teachings, we gain understandings that set us on the next level.

Although these twenty-seven awakening activities are delineated in terms of bodhisattvas who have entered the path, each buddha works for the welfare of all sentient beings in all realms of saṃsāra. Initially buddhas instruct us in the preciousness of a human life with its freedoms and fortunes, as well as in impermanence and death, to set us in understanding the importance of engaging in Dharma practice.

In each line below, “them” indicates the specific disciples on the various paths and grounds that a buddha is setting on this level. The buddhas give similar instructions to others who are at lower as well as higher levels.

Gyaltsab’s *Ornament of the Essence (Rnam bshad snying po rgyan)*, a subcommentary on *Ornament of Clear Realizations*, explains the twenty-seven awakening activities in two ways: according to Vimuktisena (sixth century) and Haribhadra (eighth century). The following is according to Vimuktisena:

SETTING TRAINEES ON THE PATH OF ACCUMULATION	
1	Setting them in the excellent attitude, the intention to attain liberation rather than seeking higher rebirths in saṃsāra.
2	Setting them in the maturing of others’ continuums by teaching them the four ways to gather disciples so that they will gather and benefit their own disciples.
3	Setting them in the wisdom that realizes the four truths so they realize that true duḥkha and true origins are afflictive factors to be abandoned and true cessations and true paths are pure factors to be adopted, and that none of these exist inherently.
SETTING TRAINEES ON THE PATH OF PREPARATION	
4	Setting them in the intention of others’ welfare, the realization of the exact meaning of the mode of abidance.
5	Setting them in the method to complete the qualities of a buddha in their own continuums by completing the practice of the six perfections.
6	Setting them in the basis of accomplishing the welfare of self and others by practicing the paths of the ten virtues, which forms a good foundation for accomplishing the two welfares.
7	Setting them in the pure view, the realization of the emptiness of inherent existence

	with a mundane wisdom arisen from meditation.
SETTING TRAINEES ON THE PATH OF SEEING	
8	Setting them in new and direct realization of the emptiness in which the elaborations of inherent existence have been extinguished.
SETTING TRAINEES ON THE PATH OF MEDITATION	
9	Setting them on the second and third grounds through the perfections of ethical conduct and fortitude and understanding that all phenomena in these grounds are mere imputations.
10	Setting them in the fourth, fifth, and sixth grounds through the wisdoms knowing the thirty-seven harmonies with awakening, the four truths, and dependent origination conjoined with the realization of emptiness.
11	Setting them in the seventh ground through the perfection of skillful means so they will ripen other sentient beings' minds.
SETTING TRAINEES ON THE EIGHTH GROUND	
12	Setting them in the knower of paths that directly knows the śrāvaka, solitary realizer, and bodhisattva paths.
13	Setting them in the extinction of manifest grasping at true existence.
14	Setting them in the attainment of awakening that is imputed "Buddha Jewel," which is so called because eighth-grounders, like buddhas, do not need coarse effort to work for the benefit of sentient beings.
15	Setting them in the application of the pure land so they purify their own buddha field in which they will attain full awakening.
SETTING TRAINEES ON THE NINTH GROUND	
16	Setting them in the definite attainment of buddhahood so they will have the ability to set others in definitely attaining buddhahood without falling to the Śrāvaka or Solitary Realizer Vehicles.
17	Setting them in accomplishing the immeasurable welfare of sentient beings in a huge number of world systems.
SETTING TRAINEES ON THE TENTH GROUND	
18	Setting them on the about-to-be-attained tenth ground by their accomplishing the special excellent qualities of relying on the buddhas, hearing the excellent Dharma, making offerings, and so forth in a huge number of world systems.
	Setting them in increasing realization. <sup>110</sup>
19	Setting them in completing all virtues, which are the branches of awakening.
20	Setting them in directly seeing that coarse and subtle actions do not go to waste.
21	Setting them in seeing the complete four truths.
22	Setting them in abandoning the four errors of seeing the impermanent as permanent, the impure as pure, and so forth.
23	Setting them in the realization of the mode—the absence of grasping true existence—which is the basis for generating the four errors.
24	Setting them in the completion of the completely pure that realizes the equality of all phenomena in being empty of true existence.
25	Setting them in the completion of the two collections that are the causes of awakening.

26	Setting them in the realization of the equality of conditioned saṃsāra and unconditioned nirvāṇa in being empty of true existence.
SETTING TRAINEES IN THE RESULT OF THE PATH—THE PATH OF NO-MORE-LEARNING	
27	Setting them in the nonabiding nirvāṇa of a tathāgata.

## REFLECTION

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1. Contemplate that at this moment there are buddhas who are trying to set you in Dharma understandings. You are not alone on the path; the more you make yourself a receptive vessel, the more the buddhas' awakening activities can affect you.
  2. What can you do now to make yourself more receptive to the Buddha's awakening activities?
  3. Think that when you attain buddhahood, you will spontaneously and effortlessly be able to work for the benefit of sentient beings through enacting the twenty-seven awakening activities. How would it feel to be able to do this for sentient beings?
  4. How can you begin to benefit others right now?
- 

### *Ānanda Settles His Doubts*

Despite knowing the Buddha's marvelous awakening activities, if you nevertheless wonder if the Buddha possesses the capability to liberate all beings, this story from Nāgārjuna's *Exegesis on the Great Perfection of Wisdom Sūtra* will assuage your doubts.<sup>111</sup>

Ānanda once thought to himself, "In the past, at the time of Burning Lamp Buddha, the world was a fine one, the lifespan of the people was long, and they were easy to teach and bring across to liberation. Now, in the time of Śākyamuni Buddha, the world is an evil one, the lifespan of the people is short, and they are difficult to teach. Will the

Buddha nonetheless go ahead and enter nirvāṇa even though the Buddha’s work will not have been completed?”

It was early in the morning when [Ānanda] expressed this concern to the Buddha. The sun had already risen. At that very time the Buddha then entered into the sunrise samādhi. Just as when the sun rises, its light illuminates all of Jambudvīpa, so, too, it was with the body of the Buddha. His hair pores all sent forth light that universally illuminated worlds throughout the ten directions as numerous as the grains of sand of the Ganges.

Each of the rays of light put forth a seven-jeweled thousand-petalled lotus blossom. Atop each blossom, a buddha was seated. Each one of those buddhas sent forth an incalculable number of light beams. On each ray of light was a seven-jeweled, thousand-petalled lotus blossom. Atop each blossom a buddha was seated.

All these buddhas universally filled up worlds throughout the ten directions as numerous as the grains of sand of the Ganges, and each of them carried forth with the teaching and transforming of beings. In some cases they spoke Dharma. In some situations they remained silent. In some cases they were walking along. In some circumstances they engaged in displays of the superknowledges wherein they transformed their bodies and made water or fire pour forth from them. In manners such as these they employed all sorts of skillful means whereby they crossed over to liberation beings throughout the ten directions who were immersed in the five realms of rebirth.

Due to receiving assistance from the awesome spiritual power of the Buddha, Ānanda was able for a time to completely observe these phenomena. The Buddha then withdrew his manifestation of the fulfillment of spiritual power and then arose from samādhi, asking of Ānanda whether or not he had seen these phenomena and whether or not he had heard these phenomena.

Ānanda replied, “Having received the assistance of the Buddha’s awesome spiritual power, I have indeed seen and I have indeed heard.”

The Buddha asked, “Given that the Buddha possesses powers such as these, is he able to bring the Buddha’s work to ultimate completion or is he not?”

Ānanda replied, “Bhagavān, even in a case where beings filled up worlds throughout the ten directions as numerous as the grains of sand of the Ganges, if the Buddha were to employ powers such as these for just a single day of his life, he would still certainly be able to completely implement the work of the Buddha.”

Ānanda exclaimed, “This is a matter such as I have never experienced before. Bhagavān, the Dharma of the buddhas is immeasurable, inconceivable, and ineffable.”

### *Individuals Acting in Unison*

In the *Ornament of the Mahāyāna Sūtras (Mahāyānasūtrālaṃkāra)*, Maitreya speaks of individual sentient beings becoming awakened using the similes of the sun’s rays illuminating the world and rivers flowing into a great ocean. These similes help us understand what happens to the individual at the time of full awakening and the relationship of the individual buddhas to each other. Maitreya says (10:3–4):

Just as the immeasurable rays of the sun all intermingle (mix  
together, merge)  
in the sun’s corona,  
always engaged in the same activity,  
that of illuminating the world,  
likewise in the stainless dhātu,  
innumerable buddhas intermingle, engaged in the same deeds,  
illuminating pristine wisdom.

Later in the same chapter he says (10:84–87):



As long as rivers have not merged in the ocean,  
they have different locations and separate waters,  
are small and have different activities,  
providing only slight support for aquatic life.

Once they merge into the ocean, their location is one,  
and their water has become one great body.  
They act as one and provide support  
for great quantities of aquatic life.

As long as they have not become buddhas,  
they have separate bases<sup>112</sup> and intellects,  
little realization, and do separate deeds,  
able to provide for the welfare of only a few sentient beings.

When they enter buddhahood their forms  
and realizations are not different;  
all of their deeds converge into one and they provide forever  
for the welfare of great hosts of beings.

These verses illustrate the great advantage of attaining buddhahood. As sentient beings, we have different bodies and minds that are all under the control of afflictions and polluted karma, our understanding of the Dharma is small, and each of us acts separately. In sum, we are able to benefit only a few others.

However, when sentient beings attain buddhahood, each of them has an omniscient mind. These omniscient minds are not different in the sense of one having higher realizations and another lower. Each of them perceives all phenomena without impediment, and in that way they are the same. Similarly, there is no difference in the capacity of each buddha to perform awakened deeds to benefit sentient beings. When any buddha acts to benefit a sentient being—for example, when Mañjuśrī radiates awakening deeds—it is all the buddhas acting in unison. There is no difference in the awakened deeds of all the buddhas. What Mañjuśrī does to help sentient beings is the

same as what Tārā, Chenrezig, Yamāntaka, and all other buddhas do. We can't say this is the awakened deed of Mañjuśrī but it's not the awakened deed of the other buddhas.

When water from many rivers flows into the ocean, although all the molecules of water have the same qualities, they do not become one molecule. They remain distinct molecules, and a buddha is able to differentiate them, "This molecule is from the Ganges; that molecule is from the Brahmaputra." Nevertheless, they function in union to support aquatic life, and in this sense they cannot be differentiated. Water from both the Ganges and the Brahmaputra contribute to the Indian Ocean, but once they intermingle with other water molecules in the ocean, we can't tell which water molecule is from which river and all of them perform the same function.

Since there are already countless buddhas benefiting sentient beings, why is it important for us to become buddhas? Before becoming buddhas, each of us had different relationships with various sentient beings. Because of these different karmic links formed when we were sentient beings, it may be easier for us after we attain buddhahood to guide a specific sentient being to awakening. This indicates that each buddha has his or her own mental continuum, although their awakened activities flow forth in unison with other buddhas.

Another indication that buddhas have individual mindstreams is that when they were bodhisattvas on the path they expressed different unshakable resolves that they would accomplish as buddhas. For example, due to the strong unshakable resolve that Amitābha Buddha made while he was a bodhisattva, he was able to establish Sukhāvātī pure land as a buddha. As a result of the strong unshakable resolves made by each of the thirty-five buddhas, they are able to aid sentient beings with purifying specific destructive karma.

In the *Treasury of Knowledge*, Vasubandhu says that all buddhas are the same in three aspects: (1) their attainment of the dharmakāya, the state of full awakening; (2) their completion of the two collections of merit and wisdom; and (3) their activities directed toward the benefit of sentient beings. However, to benefit sentient beings in the most suitable and extensive way, they appear differently in the world in three ways: (1) they

have different form bodies, (2) the lifespan of their supreme emanation bodies differ, and (3) the size and appearance of the bodies that they emanate are different.

The mindstreams of sentient beings do not become one at the time of attaining full awakening. According to the Vajrayāna, the combination of the subtlest wind, which becomes the enjoyment body of that buddha, and the subtlest mind, which becomes the dharmakāya of that buddha, is the basis of designation of that particular buddha. A buddha, like all sentient beings, has five aggregates; however, a buddha's aggregates are pure, whereas those of sentient beings are not. A buddha's five aggregates act as the basis of designation of that buddha. Nevertheless the buddhas who are merely designated in dependence on a set of aggregates do not have a reified sense of I and mine and instead relate to I and mine as mere designations that fulfill a purpose conventionally.

### *Questions about the Buddha*

As we learned in the chapters about refuge and the Three Jewels in *Following in the Buddha's Footsteps*, buddhas have many unique features that are not shared with ordinary beings or even with other āryas. Here we'll look at some questions that arise about the qualities and abilities of buddhas.

Does a buddha create karma? A buddha's awakening activity is action (*carya*), but it is beyond polluted and unpolluted karma. Polluted karma is created by those who have not directly realized emptiness, and unpolluted karma is created by āryas who still have latencies of ignorance and other cognitive obscurations. The āryas who are arhats and pure-ground bodhisattvas take a mental body that arises due to the base of latencies of ignorance and unpolluted actions, all of which a buddha has abandoned. Because of having this mental body, bodhisattvas of the pure grounds cannot act in completely spontaneous ways, whereas all of a buddha's activity is spontaneous and effortless. For this reason, the mental body is called "the subtle māra of the aggregates," a negative force that buddhas have overcome. In contrast, a buddha's body is not a mental body like that.

The purified subtlest winds have become an enjoyment body that is the nature of that buddha's wisdom mind.

Buddhas have no conceptual consciousnesses and perceive all phenomena directly and nonconceptually. How do they identify objects without conception? Identifying objects occurs due to the mental factor of discrimination, which is one of the five omnipresent mental factors that accompany all consciousnesses. Buddhas also have this mental factor. In sentient beings, discrimination accompanies nonconceptual minds such as visual direct perceivers, where it discerns one color from another, for example. It also accompanies conceptual mental consciousnesses. In higher-level mental functions, discrimination plays an important role in determining the attributes of an object and in discerning the value of one idea over another. Although buddhas no longer have such conceptual consciousnesses, discrimination functions in their mental consciousnesses—which are all nonconceptual—to identify objects.

Discrimination performs a similar function in other nonconceptual consciousnesses of āryas as well. For example, the uninterrupted path of the path of seeing is a nonconceptual mental consciousness that realizes emptiness directly. It does not think, “This is emptiness,” because the mind and emptiness are nondual, like water mixed in water. Nevertheless the mental factor of discrimination in this mind identifies emptiness correctly.

In the state of full awakening, there is no conceptual thought, so there is no sense of I and mine. That doesn't mean there are no designations of I and mine, because the Buddha himself said “I'm walking” and “in my past life, I was so-and-so.” Prāsaṅgikas say that buddhas use names and labels to accord with conventional reality so that they can communicate with sentient beings, not because they have conceptual thoughts.

### *The Buddhas' Three Mysteries*

Candrakīrti says the qualities of a tenth-ground bodhisattva are beyond the cognition and comprehension of ordinary beings and are inexpressible in language. If the qualities of a tenth-grounder are like this, needless to say the resultant stage of buddhahood is beyond our ability to express in language or to know through our limited conceptual mind.

The inexhaustibility of the Buddha's three mysteries—the awakened body, speech, and mind—is spoken of primarily from the tantric perspective. These three mysteries of the Buddha are inseparable; they are one nature, and the ultimate source for attaining them is the subtlest wind-mind that we have at present. Because our current subtlest mind and subtlest wind are one nature, they can be transformed into the inseparable body, speech, and mind of a buddha. The subtlest wind is the mount that consciousness rides on. The subtle wind manifests as our voice, which is an expression of or the tone of that wind. At the time of attaining buddhahood, the subtlest wind becomes a buddha's speech as well as a buddha's form bodies; the subtlest mind becomes the wisdom truth body, and its emptiness becomes the natural stainless purity of a buddha's nature truth body. A buddha's body, speech, and mind are one nature but nominally different.

To effect a buddha's activities, body, speech, and mind must be unified, and to bring that about, the complete unmistakable path as shown in highest yoga tantra must be practiced. How does a buddha's inseparability of body, speech, and mind come about? The coarse bodies and minds of ordinary beings are different natures. Although the continuity of the mental consciousness continues after death, the coarse body ceases. The sense consciousnesses, such as the visual consciousness, that depend on the brain, also cease. At the time of death, the coarse consciousnesses—the sense consciousnesses and coarse mental consciousness—absorb into the subtlest clear light. This extremely subtle mind is without beginning or end and is inseparable from the subtlest wind. This subtlest wind-mind is inexhaustible in that it continues on forever. When its continuity is purified by means of tantric practices, it transforms into the body, speech, and mind of a buddha.

When advanced practitioners of highest yoga tantra emerge from meditation on the actual clear light and spontaneously generate a pure illusory body on the completion stage, that pure illusory body and the actual clear-light mind are one nature; they are now free of all afflictive obscurations. As these advanced yogīs continue to practice, they eliminate the cognitive obscurations and become buddhas. At that time, their truth bodies and form bodies are inseparable and are one nature. The subtlest wind that became the pure illusory body is the substantial cause for a buddha's body. The radiance of the subtlest wind becomes a buddha's

speech. The subtlest clear light, which became the actual clear light, is the substantial cause for a buddha's mind. A buddha's body, speech, and mind are the inexhaustible source of benefit for all sentient beings, because through them a buddha manifests, teaches, and leads us to full awakening.

These three are called “mysteries” or “secrets” because the inseparability of a buddha's body, speech, and mind is very different from the obvious and coarse body, speech, and mind of ordinary beings, which are not one nature and separate after death. They are also called “mysteries” because they are difficult to understand with our conceptual minds. Only buddhas fully understand and experience them.

### *Seeing the Buddha*

People may speak of “seeing the Buddha,” but what does that really mean? The *Flower Ornament Sūtra* says:<sup>113</sup>

Even if, across the course of a hundred thousand eons,  
one constantly gazed at the Tathāgata,  
he would still not be relying on the genuine meaning  
in his contemplation of the World's Protector.

This person, so seizing on appearances,  
simply increases the scope of his net of foolishness and delusion  
and ties himself up in the prison of births and deaths  
wherein, entirely blind, he fails to see the Buddha at all.

If, in deeply contemplating all phenomena,  
one sees that they are devoid of any inherent existence,  
sees that as befits their characteristic arising and ceasing,  
they are mere utterances of false names,  
sees that all phenomena undergo no production at all,  
and sees that all phenomena undergo no destruction at all—  
if one is able to comprehend them in these ways,  
then all buddhas will always appear directly before him.

The nature of phenomena is fundamentally empty and peaceful, and as such, has nothing one can grasp and nothing one can see. The emptiness of any inherent nature is just the Buddha and is such as one cannot assess through thought.

If one realizes that all phenomena are in their essential nature just thus, this person then will not become defiled by and attached to the afflictions.

When the common person observes any phenomenon, he simply follows the permutations in its characteristic signs, fails to completely comprehend that phenomena are utterly signless, and on account of this, then fails to perceive the Buddha.

The *Muni* has gone beyond the three periods of time, has completely perfected all of the characteristic signs, abides in nonabiding, is universally present everywhere and yet unmoving.

In this volume we have learned about the six and ten perfections as well as how śrāvakas, solitary realizers, and bodhisattvas progress along the paths of their respective vehicles. In addition, since all sentient beings will become fully awakened buddhas, the qualities, realizations, and awakening activities of the buddhas have been explained. But don't think that just because buddhahood has been described that the *Library of Wisdom and Compassion* is nearing its end. In this volume the perfection of wisdom was briefly introduced, but there is a lot more to learn about selflessness, emptiness, the two truths, and the mind that realizes these. In addition, the tantric path must be explained, since it is also a major branch of the Mahāyāna. So there are several more volumes of the *Library of Wisdom and Compassion* to come!





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# Notes

1. The *Mahāprajñāpāramitā Upadeśa* is Nāgārjuna’s extensive commentary on the *Twenty-Five-Thousand-Line Perfection of Wisdom Sūtra*. Translated into Chinese by Kumārajīva in 402–5, this text has been popular and influential in China throughout the centuries and is the central text of the Sanlun (Madhyamaka) school in China. Étienne Lamotte does not attribute this exegesis to Nāgārjuna but thinks it was written by a monk of the Sarvāstivāda or Mūlasarvāstivāda school from northwest India. Unfortunately, the text was not translated into Tibetan.
2. The root text says:

Then there are its twenty-two aspects:  
Similar to the earth, gold, the moon, and fire,  
a treasure, jewel mine, and the ocean,  
a vajra, mountain, medicine, and guide,  
  
a wish-fulfilling jewel, the sun, and a song,  
a king, a treasury, and a great highway,  
an excellent horse, and a spring of water,  
sweet-sounding music, a river, and a cloud.

See *In Praise of Great Compassion*, 56, 157, and 163–69 for details on the twenty-two types of bodhicitta, each of which is correlated with a level of the bodhicitta path and has an accompanying feature that enhances it.

3. Of the ten nonvirtues, three are done physically: killing, stealing, and unwise sexual behavior; four are verbal: lying, creating disharmony with our speech, harsh speech, and idle talk; and three are mental: coveting, ill will or maliciousness, and wrong views.
4. The meaning is the virtue created by generosity is ours; the merit will ripen in good conditions in future lives. But whatever we do not give because of our miserliness, we must leave behind at death. Neither it nor the virtue from giving it away is ours.
5. See chapters 10–12 in *The Foundation of Buddhist Practice* for more about karma and its effects.
6. See chapter 7 in *Approaching the Buddhist Path* for the text of the “Eight Verses of Thought Transformation” and His Holiness’s commentary on it.
7. Monastics may not take lower levels of prātimokṣa precepts such as the eight one-day prātimokṣa precepts, but they can take the eight Mahāyāna precepts.
8. Twelve ascetic practices taught by the Buddha, as laid out in the Dharmaguptaka Vinaya, which concern *shelter* (staying in a forest, beneath trees, in a charnel ground, or in an open area

without a roof); *sleeping* (sleeping sitting up cross-legged, using grass as a mattress); *food* (going on alms, eating only one meal a day, not taking a second helping, not omitting any house when on alms round); and *clothes* (wear robes made from discarded material, have only one set of the three robes).

9. Depending on their faculties and aptitude, at different points on the path bodhisattvas will receive signs that they will definitely not relapse to lower levels. For those with high faculties, this occurs on the path of preparation, for those of middle faculties on the path of seeing, and for those of lesser faculties on the eighth ground. One of the signs they receive is either meeting a buddha or having a vision of a buddha who prophesies the circumstances of that bodhisattva's awakening.
10. See chapter 2 in *The Foundation of Buddhist Practice* for more about syllogisms and reliable cognizers.
11. Access concentration in the Pāli tradition is equivalent to the capable preparation in the Sanskrit tradition. See chapters 8 and 9 in *Following in the Buddha's Footsteps* for more about access concentration and the capable preparation.
12. Found in the "King of Prayers: The Extraordinary Aspiration of the Practice of Samantabhadra," in the *Array of Stalks Sūtra (Gaṇḍavyūha Sūtra)*, which is included in the *Flower Ornament Sūtra*.
13. Found in the "Pure Conduct" chapter of the *Flower Ornament Sūtra*.
14. For example, in the paths and grounds texts, they are generally synonymous, while in Tantrayāna they are not.
15. Asaṅga's explanation does not divide the perfection of wisdom and the perfection of pristine wisdom into fixed categories. As mentioned above, the last four perfections are branches of the perfection of wisdom, and as noted in the description of the perfection of wisdom, one type of the perfection of wisdom knows conventional truths such as the five fields of knowledge.
16. The fundamental innate clear-light mind that is focused on emptiness is the ultimate meaning of "ultimate bodhicitta" in Tantra. The secret meaning of "bodhicitta" is the subtle drops of the male and female, which are neither conventional nor ultimate bodhicitta.
17. Does the subtle innate clear-light mind of sentient beings transform at the time of awakening or not? There are two positions: Some say that it does not transform when awakening is attained. They give the analogy of ice and water. Although ice melts and changes into water, the nature of water and ice is the same. Similarly, in terms of the nature of their subtle innate clear-light minds, there is no difference between sentient beings and buddhas. Others say that the subtle innate clear-light mind of sentient beings transforms when they become buddhas. This is because the subtle innate clear-light mind of sentient beings is not yet free from cognitive obscurations and does not yet possess all the qualities of a buddha.
18. The Tzu Chi Foundation, founded by the Chinese nun Dharma Master Cheng Yen, is an international organization that reaches out to refugees, victims of natural disasters, and many others. Buddhist Global Relief, founded by the American monk Bhikkhu Bodhi, directs its efforts toward resolving hunger across the globe. The Bodhicitta Foundation, begun by the Australian nun Ayya Yeshe, serves the Dalits in India and women and children in developing countries.
19. "The vast" refers to the method aspect of the path, especially the bodhisattva deeds that collect merit. "The profound" refers to the wisdom aspect of the path, especially the wisdom realizing emptiness and the collection of wisdom.

20. These sūtras most likely existed in other schools among the early eighteen schools in India. For example, a version of the *Ratana Sutta* is found in the *Mahāvastu*, a text in the Lokottaravāda school. A comparative study of the Pāli and Sanskrit versions can be found at <https://www.ancient-buddhist-texts.net/Buddhist-Texts/C1-Ratanasutta/Ratanasutta.htm>.
21. Some verses from the *Jewel Sutta* were explained in chapter 1 of *Following in the Buddha's Footsteps*.
22. [http://www.lotsawahouse.org/powerful\\_words\\_of\\_truth.html](http://www.lotsawahouse.org/powerful_words_of_truth.html).
23. <http://www.tibet.com/DL/truth.html>.
24. *Mind-Seal of the Buddhas: Patriarch Ou-i's Commentary on the Amitābha Sūtra*, trans. J. C. Cleary (San Francisco: Sūtra Translation Committee of the United States and Canada, 1997), 103–4. Chih-hsu Ou-i (1599–1655) was a distinguished Pure Land master.
25. The recollections of the Buddha, Dharma, and Saṅgha are described in chapter 2 of *Following in the Buddha's Footsteps*.
26. This text is from the Khuddaka Nikāya in the Pāli canon. Together with the *Buddhavaṃsa* and *Apadāna*, it is considered a later text.
27. Found in the Khuddaka Nikāya and also in the Chinese and Tibetan canon, this is a collection of stories of Śākyamuni Buddha's previous lives as both a human being and animal. Popular in traditional societies, these stories illustrate valued qualities such as generosity and ethical conduct.
28. The *Bodhisattvabhūmi* is the fifteenth chapter of the *Yogācārabhūmi*. The Tibetans attribute it to Asaṅga, whereas the Chinese attribute it to Asaṅga's teacher, Maitreya.
29. Bhikkhu Bodhi said the sections from the *Bodhisattvabhūmi* that Dhammapāla included were those on the practice of the perfections, the four shackles to giving, and the special accomplishments resulting from the practice of the perfections. However, nothing from Mahāyāna philosophy—for example, the three buddha bodies, the emptiness of inherent existence, one final vehicle—was included.
30. *Adhiṭṭhāna* originally meant “foundation” or “basis” in Pāli but later came to mean “determination.” The Sanskrit equivalent, *adhiṣṭhāna*, acquired yet another meaning—“blessing” or “transformation into magnificence” (T. *byin rlab*), referring to the Buddha's spiritual power that inspires and transforms the minds of practitioners so they will gain Dharma realizations. Perhaps this meaning of *adhiṣṭhāna* derives from it being seen as a foundation or support that sustains bodhisattva practitioners. In its usage in Vinaya, *adhiṣṭhāna* refers to determining, mentally resolving, or designating that these robes are one's monastic robes. Sometimes it has been mistranslated in English as “blessing the robes,” and people mistakenly think that some special power of the Buddha is absorbed into the robes. However, the action is more prosaic: we are determining that these particular robes are our set of robes.
31. *Mettā* is sometimes translated as “loving-kindness.”
32. These four are keeping the prātimokṣa precepts, controlling our senses so they don't wander, procuring our daily requisites or livelihood in a completely pure way, and relying only on the requisites permitted for a monastic to use in daily life.
33. Osadhi is a “bright star”—it is actually the planet Venus—that is balanced in the sense that it does not deviate from its course. This is analogous to the chief disciples not deviating from the truth.
34. The translator, Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli, gives as an endnote to this passage, “For 10 powers and 4 fearlessnesses, see MN 12. For 6 knowledges see *Paṭisambhidāmagga* i, 12lf. For 18 states of

awakened one, see *Cariyāpiṭaka* Commentary.”

35. In general, “renunciation” in the Pāli tradition refers to relinquishing attachment to sense pleasures, which usually leads someone to leave the household life and take up the homeless life of a monastic.
36. According to Mingun Sayādaw (<http://homepage.ntlworld.com/pesala/Nibbana/html/fruit.html>), these are (1) having no hindrance with regard to knowledge of the past, (2) having no hindrance with regard to knowledge of the present, (3) having no hindrance with regard to knowledge of the future, (4) being preceded by wisdom in all physical actions, (5) being preceded by wisdom in all verbal actions, (6) being preceded by wisdom in all mental actions, (7) having no falling off in intention, (8) having no falling off in energy, (9) having no falling off in concentration, (10) having no falling off in wisdom, (11) having no falling off in teaching the Dhamma, (12) having no falling off in emancipation, (13) not indulging in joking and laughter, (14) not making blunders, (15) having nothing that cannot be gauged by wisdom, (16) having nothing that needs to be attended in a hurry, (17) never being negligent, and (18) not undertaking anything without due reflection. These are the same in the Sanskrit tradition.
37. The thirteen ascetic practices (*dhutaṅga*) are the practices of the (1) refuse-rag wearer who wears robes made from discarded or torn cloth and does not accept ready-made robes offered by lay followers; (2) triple-robe wearer who possesses and wears only three robes without having any additional allowable robes; (3) alms-food eater who consumes only food collected on alms round and does not accept food brought to the monastery or offered at lunch *dāna* by a lay follower; (4) house-to-house seeker who goes to all houses on alms round and not only to wealthy households or those chosen for special reasons; (5) one-sessioner who eats one meal a day and does not take food offered before midday; (6) bowl-food eater in whose bowl all the food is mixed together; (7) later-food refuser who does not accept any more food after he has shown that he is satisfied, although lay followers want to offer more; (8) forest dweller who does not live in a town or village but in a secluded place; (9) tree-root dweller who lives under a tree without the protection of a roof; (10) open-air dweller who dwells in the open with only a tent made of his robes; (11) charnel-ground dweller who lives in or near a charnel ground, graveyard, or cremation ground; (12) any-bed user who is content with any place he is given to sleep; and (13) sitter who stays only in the postures of walking, standing, and sitting without ever lying down.
38. These are the ten *kaṣiṇas*, the ten impurities, the ten recollections, the four immeasurables, the four formless states, the one perception, and the one analysis.
39. The twelve sources are a way of classifying phenomena according to the type of object and the faculty facilitating its perception. The eighteen constituents are a way of categorizing phenomena according to the object, faculty, and perceiving consciousness. See chapter 3 of *The Foundation of Buddhist Practice*.
40. See chapter 8 in *Following in the Buddha's Footsteps* for more on the superknowledges.
41. See *Vism* chapters 18–22 for more on the five purifications.
42. The antidotes to anger that Dhammapāla proposes are very similar to the ones Śāntideva teaches in chapter 6 of *Engaging in the Bodhisattvas' Deeds*.
43. A declaration of truth is a statement of fact spoken with a strong virtuous intention motivated by love and compassion. The truth of this fact assures the occurrence of an event. In this case, the chick's mind was transformed into virtue by reflecting on the marvelous qualities of the Three Jewels. The power of that virtuous mind was expressed in the declaration of truth and resulted in the chick escaping the fire.

44. The four foundations are also found in the *Sutta on the Exposition of the Elements (Dhātuvibhanga Sutta, MN 140.11)*.
45. According to the Pāli tradition, bodhisattvas only become āryas when they take their seat under the bodhi tree and attain the four paths and fruitions in immediate succession. According to the Sanskrit tradition, they become āryas at the path of seeing and at that time they are free from manifest malice, jealousy, competitiveness, hypocrisy, miserliness, stubbornness, and arrogance.
46. These physical signs of a buddha are spoken of in the Pāli canon. The Pāli tradition says the thirty-two signs are found in the treatises of the brahmins, although strangely, they are not found in the Vedas and their ancillary texts that have come down to us in the present day. In any case, the presence of these signs were the way that many brahmins determined that the Buddha was a great man (P. *mahāpurisa*). See the *Brahmāyu Sutta, MN 91:9*. In another sūtra (SN 47.11), the Buddha says a great man is one who has a liberated mind gained through practicing the four establishments of mindfulness.
47. Here the truth body refers to all the magnificent qualities of the fully awakened ones. It does not refer to the Buddha's subtle form body as explained in the Mahāyāna.
48. According to the Prajñāpāramitā Sūtras, these are six unique behaviors: a buddha has no mistaken physical actions, verbal actions, lack of mindfulness, unequipoised mind, discordant appearances, or indifference of not investigating individual characteristics of phenomena; six unique realizations: a buddha has undeclining aspiration, joyous effort, mindfulness, concentration, wisdom, and complete liberation; three unique awakening activities of body, speech, and mind; and three unique pristine wisdoms that know everything in the past, present, and future. See chapter 2 of *Following in the Buddha's Footsteps*.
49. According to several Pāli commentaries and narrative texts, solitary realizers teach others ethical conduct and concentration meditation practices. They ordain and take disciples. But they don't convey the essence of their realization—that is, they don't lead others to final liberation. See the commentary to the *Suttanipāta (Sn)*, the chapter on the *Rhino Horn Sutta*.
50. Those called bodhisattvas in any of the three vehicles are not yet āryas. They become āryas only with the attainment of stream-entry. For fully awakened buddhas and solitary realizers, the passage through the four ārya levels occurs in one session. Once śrāvakas become stream-enterers, they are no longer considered bodhisattvas. Bodhisattva status pertains only to the period prior to actual attainment.
51. According to the Sarvāstivādins and Vaibhāṣikas, this is a sequential process of sixteen moments, while in the Pāli tradition, it occurs in one single moment.
52. The person who questioned the Buddha spoke from the perspective of standard Buddhist doctrine that says lay practitioners do not attain arhatship and continue to lead the household life. Although it is possible for lay practitioners to attain arhatship—the merchant's son Yasa and the courtesan Khemā did so—they do not remain as lay practitioners afterward. Immediately after becoming arhats, they either pass away (like the Buddha's father) or they seek monastic ordination (like Yasa and Khemā). There are no accounts in the Pāli canon of a layperson attaining arhatship and continuing to live the lay life.
53. The *Greater Series of Questions and Answers (Mahāvedalla Sutta, MN 43)* describes several kinds of liberation of mind: the neither-painful-nor-pleasant liberation of mind is the fourth dhyāna; the immeasurable liberation of mind is the meditative attainment of the four immeasurables; the liberation of mind through nothingness is abiding in the meditative absorption on nothingness; the liberation of mind through emptiness is insight into the emptiness of self in persons and things; and the signless liberation of mind is the attainment of

fruition (nirvāṇa is the signless element in which all signs of conditioned phenomena are absent). The liberations of mind of the four immeasurables, nothingness, and emptiness are considered mundane. However, the commentary also explains that there are different types of these three liberations, some that are the four paths and four fruits. In a monastic whose defilements have been destroyed, the liberations of mind of the four immeasurables, nothingness, emptiness, and the signless liberation refer to the fruition attainment of arhatship, which is also called the “unshakable liberation of mind” (P. *akuppa cetovimutti*). Here immeasurable, nothingness, emptiness, and the signless are all names for nirvāṇa, the object of that fruition attainment.

54. According to the Prāsaṅgika system, the view of a personal identity is a form of self-grasping ignorance. Prāsaṅgikas assert that ignorance actively grasps at inherent existence, the opposite of reality, and since the view of a personal identity grasps the inherent existence of I and mine, it is a form of ignorance. Thus they say that both ignorance and view of a personal identity, in both their acquired and innate forms, are totally eradicated at arhatship or upon a bodhisattva attaining the eighth ground.

According to the Pāli tradition, the view of a personal identity holds that one or another of the aggregates is a self, whereas ignorance is obscuration that does not clearly know the four truths. Eradicating the view of a personal identity when attaining the fruit of stream-enterer does not remove all deluded notions of I and mine; the conceit “I am” remains and is eliminated only with the attainment of arhatship. The conceit “I am” and the spontaneous notion of I remain in the stream-enterers, once-returners, and non-returners. These graspings of I may still arise in them, threatening to give rise to pride or conceited self-love, but these āryas are able to recognize them as afflictive and dispel them. While such thoughts may arise, they cannot crystallize into a view of a substantial, findable self as held by the view of a personal identity. In the *Khemaka Sutta* (SN 22:89), Bhikkhu Khemaka states that he does not regard anything among the five aggregates as self or as belonging to self. Nor does he regard anything among the aggregates as “This I am.” However, he admits he is not an arhat because the residual conceit “I am,” the desire “I am,” and the underlying tendency “I am” in relation to the aggregates have not yet been uprooted. By repeatedly contemplating the rising and ceasing of the five aggregates, these deeper layers of grasping at self are totally eradicated. The *Khemaka Sutta* says:

Suppose there was a cloth that had become soiled and dirty, and the owners gave it to a laundryman. With various kinds of lye and soap he washes out the dirt, yet there is still a remainder of smell. By mixing it with various kinds of fragrance he makes that disappear. In the same way, although rightly contemplating these five aggregates of clinging as not-self and not belonging to a self, still the learned ariya disciple has not yet abandoned the conceit “I am” in relation to these five aggregates of clinging, the desire [related to the notion] “I am,” and the underlying tendency toward “I am”; he has not yet fully understood it, not yet become separated from it, not yet vomited it out.

55. Svātantrikas say these stream-enterers will be reborn in the desire realm no more than three more times; Prāsaṅgikas say no more than one time.
56. Although only nonreturners are reborn in the pure abodes, there is no pervasion that all nonreturners are reborn there.



57. A qualm is raised here. Nonreturners have eliminated the fetters of sensual desire and malice, which are two of the five hindrances that impede attaining the dhyānas. It would seem that someone who has eliminated those two fetters would therefore have also attained at least the first dhyāna. Also, since nonreturners may be born in the pure lands in the fourth form realm, it would seem that they should have attained dhyāna. According to certain sutras, dhyāna is a condition to become a nonreturner.
58. See chapter 8 in *Following in the Buddha's Footsteps* for more about this meditative state.
59. In the Chinese āgama counterparts to SN 12:70, the monks who become arhats explicitly deny having attained any of the dhyānas when they say they are liberated by wisdom. The *Mahāvibhāṣā* commentary to that sūtra explains that arhats liberated by wisdom have not necessarily attained full dhyāna, although they have access concentration (*sāmantaka, upacāra samādhi*).
60. For more on Dhamma followers and faith followers see SN 25:1.
61. The seven purifications are also mentioned in the *Relay Chariots Sutta* (*Rathavinīta Sutta*, MN 24). They are included in the list of nine factors of the effort for perfect purity (P. *pārisuddhi-padhāniyaṅgāni*) in the *Expanding Decades Sutta* (*Dasuttara Sutta*, DN 34.2.2), where the purities of wisdom and liberation are added to make nine factors.
62. See Vism chapters 14–17.
63. See Vism chapters 1 and 2.
64. See Vism chapters 3–13.
65. See Vism chapters 18–22 for more on the following five purifications.
66. A proximate cause of a mental state is the immediately preceding mental state that gave rise to it without any intervening mental state. It is a cause whose result arises in immediate succession to it.
67. A path consciousness resembles an uninterrupted path in the Nālandā tradition, and a fruition consciousness is comparable to a liberated path.
68. For more about nirvāṇa from the viewpoints of both the Pāli and Sanskrit traditions, see chapter 11 of *Saṃsāra, Nirvāṇa, and Buddha Nature*.
69. For the etymology of a few of the other synonyms for nirvāṇa, see Vism 8:247.
70. Looked at from another perspective, could these perhaps intimate that nirvāṇa is free from the conception of “inherent existence”?
71. Included in the Khuddaka Nikāya is the *Chronicle of Buddhas* (*Buddhavaṃsa*), which most scholars believe was written during the first and second centuries BCE and is a late addition to the Pāli canon. Here Śāriputra asks the Buddha how he attained buddhahood, and the Buddha relates the story of his encounter as the ascetic Sumedha with the past Buddha Dīpaṅkara.
72. See *Saṃsāra, Nirvāṇa, and Buddha Nature* for a detailed description of the four truths.
73. The exception to this is that Yogācāra-Svātantrikas say that the principal meditation object for solitary realizers is the nonexistence of subjects and objects as different substantial entities.
74. From the *Sūtra on the Miserliness of One in Trance* (*Dhyāyitamuṣṭi Sūtra*), as cited in the twenty-fourth chapter of Candrakīrti's *Clear Words*.
75. See *Following in the Buddha's Footsteps*, 449, for a brief explanation of the five paths.
76. According to Bhikkhu Bodhi, the etymology for the Pāli word *abhisamaya* is *abhi* = superior; *sam* = together, but also functions as a simple intensifier; *aya* = going, but sometimes has the sense of “to know.” The etymology according to the Sanskrit tradition is *abhi* = toward, over;



*sam* = together with; *i* = to understand. In general, it means a coming together of a knower and an object to be known. The Tibetan *mngon* = clear; *rtogs* = realization and could refer to liberation, so a clear realization is a path that leads to liberation.

77. See EOM, *A Brief Presentation of the Grounds and Paths of the Perfection Vehicle, Essence of the Ocean of Profound Meaning (Phar phyin theg pa'i lugs kyi theg pa gsum gyi sa dang lam gyi rnam par bzhag pa mdo tsam du brjod pa zab don rgya mtsho'i snying po)* by Losang Tayang (Rje btsun Blo bzang rta dbyangs), trans. Jules Levinson.
78. You may want to review chapter 8, especially 226–27, in *Following in the Buddha's Footsteps*, which speaks about the various grades of ignorance and afflictions.
79. The mental basis of a practitioner refers to the sphere of consciousness he or she possesses in meditation. See *Following in the Buddha's Footsteps*, 212, for more about this topic. The mental basis of approachers to stream-enterer and approachers to once-returners is a preparation of the first concentration and not an actual dhyāna. This is because these practitioners have not yet eliminated the five hindrances to concentration and thus have not attained an actual dhyāna.
80. Also see chapter 8 of *Following in the Buddha's Footsteps*.
81. Nevertheless, śrāvaka and solitary realizer arhats will experience aging, sickness, and death under the influence of karma because their body is true duḥkha.
82. See chapter 8 of *Following in the Buddha's Footsteps* for more about these four.
83. Although in English these practitioners are referred to by one term, “solitary realizers,” in Sanskrit and Tibetan they may be referred to as *pratyekabuddha* (self-buddha, T. *rang sangs rgyas*) or *pratyekajina* (self-victor, T. *rang rgyal*).
84. The manuals of individual monasteries may have different explanations of when this transference can occur.
85. See chapter 5 of *In Praise of Great Compassion*.
86. In his introduction to the text Losang Tayang (aka Losang Dadrin) says, “Within the Mahāyāna there are two [vehicles], the causal Perfection Vehicle and the effect Vajra Vehicle. I will express briefly a presentation of the grounds and paths of the three vehicles in the system of the first [of those], the Perfection Vehicle, in accordance with the uncommon mode of assertion of the glorious Prāsaṅgikas, the great thoroughly nonabiding Mādhyamikas.” See EOM.
87. Some people say these bodhisattvas have attained serenity before entering the path of accumulation; others say that if they have not already attained it, they do so during the path of accumulation.
88. For more on analogies for the twenty-two types of bodhicitta, see chapter 4 of *In Praise of Great Compassion*.
89. See chapter 8 for more on the concentration of the stream of Dharma and how to attain it.
90. Human beings born in the Northern Continent (according to ancient Indian cosmology), hermaphrodites, and neuters are not able to enter the bodhisattva path of being in that lifetime.
91. Śrāvakas and solitary realizers can attain their path of seeing with access concentration—a preparation for an actual dhyāna. Bodhisattvas, on the other hand, have definitely attained the fourth dhyāna by meditating on aspects of peace and grossness on the path of preparation.
92. This is according to the Prāsaṅgikas. Vaibhāṣikas assert that each fortitude is followed by its own knowledge. That is followed by the next fortitude and its knowledge, and so on.
93. See Karl Brunnhölzl, *Groundless Paths: The Prajñāpāramitā Sūtras, The Ornament of Clear Realization, and Its Commentaries in the Tibetan Nyingma Tradition* (Boston: Snow Lion Publications, 2012).

94. For a sharp-faculty bodhisattva, twenty of the forty-four signs of irreversibility occur on the path of preparation: eleven on the heat stage, six on the peak stage, two on the fortitude stage, and one on the supreme mundane dharma stage.
95. Some texts limit the realization of the fortitude of nonarising of dharmas to the bodhisattva path of seeing or the eighth bodhisattva ground. However, as a realization of the truth of emptiness, it can also be applied to the Fundamental Vehicle path of seeing.
96. Although the Pāli tradition does not differentiate between acquired and innate levels of afflictions, it says that these same three afflictions are abandoned by stream-enterers.
97. This is the view of Tsongkhapa and Kedrup Gelek Palzang. Gyaltsab Darma Rinchen says that bodhisattvas on the first through seventh grounds can attain a mental body if they exert effort, but only śrāvaka arhats and pure-ground bodhisattvas effortlessly obtain a mental body.
98. In this context “unpolluted karma” refers to the mental factor of intention free from the influence of afflictive obscurations.
99. Base (ground) of latencies of ignorance has the same meaning as latencies of ignorance. When speaking of latencies of ignorance, we are also speaking of the latencies of all afflictions.
100. The Buddha prescribed the twelve austere practices—which concern shelter, bedding, food, and clothing—for disciples with great attachment. There are various versions of these twelve, and some texts say there are thirteen practices. They are to stay in the forest, beneath trees, in a charnel ground, or in the open air; to sleep sitting cross-legged, not lying down, using grass as a mattress; to eat by going for alms, having one meal a day without going for another helping, and eating from one’s alms bowl; and to wear robes made from discarded material, having only one set of three robes (five for nuns).
101. Another doubt may arise: At the path of seeing, some bodhisattvas make strong effort and attain a mental body that is not produced by afflictions and polluted karma but through prayers and virtue. How is it possible to cut the body of these bodhisattvas when they no longer have gross physical bodies like ours? To the perspective of ordinary beings, an ārya bodhisattva’s mental body appears to be an ordinary body that can be cut into pieces.
102. Some scholar-adepts say that eighth-grounders are nearing the ten masteries and completely attain them at buddhahood, because the set of ten masteries is one of the twenty-one kinds of dharmakāya wisdom possessed by buddhas.
103. Some people may wonder if descriptions of such elaborate ceremonies are to be taken literally considering that the transition from the last uninterrupted path as a sentient being to the liberated path of buddhahood occurs in meditative equipoise on emptiness. I (Chodron) think that the point is for us to pause and contemplate what attaining full awakening means, rejoice that bodhisattvas in the past, present, and future will attain it, and be energized to do the same ourselves.
104. Master Sheng-yen established Dharma Drum Mountain as well as several other associated institutions for the propagation of the Dharma. He invited His Holiness to give several days of teachings in New York City in 1998. At the conclusion of this, the two had a public dialogue during which the following topics about Chan Buddhism and the Nālandā tradition were discussed. See H. H. the 14th Dalai Lama and Venerable Chan Master Sheng-yen, *Meeting of Minds: A Dialogue on Tibetan and Chinese Buddhism* (Taiwan: Dharma Drum Publications, 1999).
105. See *Following in the Buddha’s Footsteps*, chapters 1 and 2.
106. The place of each buddha in a maṇḍala may differ according to the maṇḍala. Vairocana’s and Akṣobhya’s elements are exchanged in some versions.

107. Various places are called Akaniṣṭha. This particular one is a pure land outside of saṃsāra that is not made of coarse matter. Each buddha establishes their own Akaniṣṭha pure land that has arisen due to their great collections of merit and wisdom.
108. See chapter 1 in *The Foundation of Buddhist Practice* for more about the four seals that make a teaching Buddhist.
109. In Chinese temples and monasteries, when the Dharma drum is sounded in the early morning to arouse the monastics, they imagine that all sentient beings from the hell realms to the god realms hear the Dharma that alleviates their suffering.
110. This is a branch of setting trainees on the tenth ground although it is not listed as one of the twenty-seven awakening activities. It has eight branches itself (19–26) that count among the twenty-seven.
111. Nāgārjuna, *Exegesis on the Great Perfection of Wisdom Sūtra*, in *Nāgārjuna on the Six Perfections*, trans. Bhikṣu Dharmamitra (Seattle: Kalavinka Press, 2009), 523–25.
112. “Basis” most likely refers to the body in this context. However, one geshé suggested that it could refer to the emptiness of the mind. In the Perfection of Wisdom sūtras and the *Ornament of Clear Realizations* “basis” often refers to the emptiness that is the basis for accomplishing the path.
113. From chapter 14, “The Praise Verses on Sumeru’s Summit,” in the *Mahāvaiṣṭhīya Buddhāvataṃsaka Sūtra* as translated into Chinese in 699 by Śikṣānanda in T10n0279\_p0081c07–22. From unpublished manuscript provided by courtesy of the translator, Bhikṣu Dharmamitra.

## Glossary

*Abhidharma*. A field of study and its texts that contain detailed reworkings of material in the Buddhist sūtras according to schematic classifications.

*absolutism* (eternalism, permanence, *śāśvatānta*). The belief that phenomena inherently exist.

*access*. See preparatory stages for a dhyāna.

*access concentration* (P. *upacāra samādhi*). Pāli tradition: a level of concentration that prepares the mind to enter the next actual dhyāna. It is comparable to a preparation (*sāmantaka*) in the Sanskrit tradition.

*actual dhyāna* (T. *bsam gtan gyi dngos gzhi*). A more refined dhyānic concentration attained upon completing its preparatory stages.

*afflictions* (*kleśa*). Mental factors that disturb the tranquility of the mind. These include disturbing emotions and wrong views.

*afflictive obscurations* (*kleśāvaraṇa*). Obscurations that mainly prevent liberation; afflictions and their seeds.

*aggregates* (*skandha*). The four or five components that make up a living being: form (except for beings born in the formless realm), feelings, discriminations, miscellaneous factors, and consciousnesses.

*analytical meditation* (*vicārabhāvanā*, T. *dpyad sgom*). Meditation done to understand an object.

*arhat* (P. *arahant*, T. *dgra bcom pa*). Someone who has eliminated all afflictive obscurations and attained liberation.

*ārya* (P. *ariya*). Someone who has directly and nonconceptually realized the emptiness of inherent existence; someone who is on the path of seeing, meditation, or no-more-learning.

*ārya buddha*. A person who is fully awakened, such as an enjoyment body or emanation body.

*awakening activity* (*samudācāra*, T. *'phrin las*). A buddha's spontaneous, continuous, and impartial activity that helps bring all sentient beings to higher rebirth, liberation, and full awakening.

*basis of designation*. The collection of parts or factors in dependence on which an object is designated.

*base of latencies of ignorance*. Cognitive obscurations that give rise to the subtle dualistic view. Together with unpolluted karma, they are the cause for arhats and pure-ground bodhisattvas to take a mental body; latencies of ignorance.

*bhavaṅga*. A deep, underlying consciousness that accounts for the continuity of mind.

*bodhicitta*. A main mental consciousness induced by an aspiration to bring about others' welfare and accompanied by an aspiration to attain full awakening oneself. Its arising in an uncontrived manner marks entry into the Mahāyāna.

*bodhisattva*. Someone who has genuine, uncontrived bodhicitta.

*bodhisattva ground*. A consciousness in the continuum of an ārya bodhisattva characterized by wisdom and compassion. It is the basis for the development of good qualities and for the eradication of obscurations to full awakening.

*Bön*. An indigenous spiritual tradition in Tibet.

*buddha*. All aspects of a buddha. It includes the four buddha bodies.

*Buddhadharma*. The teachings of the Buddha.

*clear realization / clear realizer* (breakthrough, *abhisamaya*, T. *mngon rtogs*). A path, an exalted knower. According to the Pāli tradition, it is a supramundane path.

*cognitive obscurations* (*jñeyāvaraṇa*). Obscurations that mainly prevent full awakening; the latencies of ignorance and the subtle dualistic view that they give rise to.

*collections* (requisites, *sambhāra*, T. *tshogs*). A bodhisattva's practice of method and wisdom that lead to full awakening. Śrāvakas and solitary realizers create the two collections, but they are not fully qualified ones.

*collection of merit* (*puṇyasambhāra*). A bodhisattva's practice of the method aspect of the path that accumulates merit and is the main cause for a buddha's form body.

*collection of wisdom* (*jñānasambhāra*). A bodhisattva's practice of the wisdom aspect of the path—a Mahāyāna exalted knower that focuses on the ultimate truth, emptiness, and is the main cause for a buddha's truth body.

*concentration* (*samādhi*). A mental factor that dwells single-pointedly for a sustained period of time on one object; a state of deep meditative absorption; single-pointed concentration that is free from discursive thought.

*concomitant* (T. *mtshungs ldan*). Accompanying or occurring together in the same mental state.

*consciousness* (*jñāna*). That which is clear and cognizant.

*conventional existence* (*saṃvṛtisat*). Existence.

*conventional truth* (veiled truth, *saṃvṛtisatya*). All phenomena except ultimate truths.

*counterpart sign* (P. *paṭbhāga-nimitta*). The meditation object of a dhyāna consciousness; a conceptual object that arises on the basis of an object that is form.

*cyclic existence (saṃsāra)*. The cycle of rebirth that occurs under the control of afflictions and karma.

*death (maraṇabhava)*. The last moment of a lifetime when the subtlest clear-light mind manifests.

*defilement (mala, T. dri ma)*. Either an afflictive obscuration or a cognitive obscuration.

*deity (iṣṭadevatā, T. yi dam)*. A manifestation of the awakened mind that is meditated on in Tantra.

*dependent arising (pratītyasamutpāda)*. This is of three types: (1) causal dependence—things arising due to causes and conditions, (2) mutual dependence—phenomena existing in relation to other phenomena, and (3) dependent designation—phenomena existing by being merely designated by terms and concepts.

*desire realm (kāmadhātu)*. One of the three realms of cyclic existence; the realm where sentient beings are overwhelmed by attraction to and desire for sense objects.

*deva*. A being born as a heavenly being in the desire realm or a being born in the form or formless realms.

*dhyāna (P. jhāna)*. A meditative absorption in the form realm.

*dualistic appearance*. The appearance of subject and object as separate, the appearance of inherent existence, the appearance of conventional phenomena.

*duḥkha (P. dukkha)*. Unsatisfactory experiences of cyclic existence.

*duḥkha of change*. Mundane happiness and pleasure that are unstable and change into pain or discomfort.

*duḥkha of pain*. Evident physical and mental pain.

*Dzogchen*. A tantric practice emphasizing meditation on the nature of mind, practiced primarily in the Nyingma tradition.

*eight liberations* (*vimokṣa*, *vimokkha*, T. *rnam thar*). Eight concentrations that are the mind's temporary release from defilements. They are brought about by mastering certain meditative skills.

*eight worldly concerns* (*aṣṭalokadharmā*). Attachment or aversion regarding material gain and loss, fame and disrepute, praise and blame, pleasure and pain.

*eighteen constituents*. A way of categorizing phenomena according to the object, faculty, and perceiving consciousness. See chapter 3 in *The Foundation of Buddhist Practice*.

*eighteen unique qualities of a buddha*. Eighteen distinctive qualities of a buddha that are not shared by arhats.

*emanation body* (*nirmāṇakāya*, T. *sprul sku*). The buddha body that appears as an ordinary sentient being or as an inanimate object to benefit others.

*emptiness* (*śūnyatā*). The ultimate nature of persons and phenomena; the lack of inherent existence, true existence, and so forth.

*enjoyment body* (*saṃbhogakāya*, T. *longs sku*). The buddha body that appears in the highest pure lands to teach ārya bodhisattvas.

*establishments of mindfulness* (*smṛtyupasthāna*, *satipaṭṭhāna*, T. *dran pa nyer bzhaḡ*). One of the seven sets of practices comprising the thirty-seven harmonies with awakening. It focuses mindfulness on the body, feelings, mind, and phenomena.

*exalted knower* (*jñāna*, T. *mkhyen pa*). A realization of someone who has entered a path. It exists from the path of accumulation to the buddha ground.

*fetters* (*saṃyojana*). Factors that keep us bound to cyclic existence and impede the attainment of liberation. The five lower fetters—view of a personal identity, deluded doubt, view of bad rules and practices, sensual desire, and malice—bind us to rebirth in the desire realm. The five higher fetters—desire for existence in the form realm, desire for existence in the formless realm, arrogance, restlessness, and afflicted ignorance—prevent a nonreturner from becoming an arhat.



*five dhyānic factors.* Investigation (*vitarka, vitakka*), analysis (*vicāra, vicāra*), joy (*prīti, pīti*), bliss (*sukha*), and one-pointedness of mind (*ekāgratā, ekaggatā*).

*five hindrances* (*āvaraṇa, T. sgrib pa*). Hindrances that interfere with attaining serenity: sensual desire (*kāmacchanda*), malice (*vyāpāda, byāpāda*), lethargy and sleepiness (*styāna-middha, thīna-middha*), restlessness and regret (*auddhatya-kaukrīya, uddhacca-kukkucca*), and deluded doubt (*vicikitsā, vicikicchā*).

*form body* (*rūpakāya*). The buddha body in which a buddha appears to sentient beings; it includes the emanation and enjoyment bodies.

*form realm* (*rūpadhātu*). A realm in saṃsāra in which the beings have subtle bodies; they are born there by having attained various states of concentration.

*formless realm* (*ārūpyadhātu*). The realm in saṃsāra in which sentient beings do not have a material body and abide in deep states of concentration.

*fortitude of the nonarising of dharmas* (*anutpattika dharmakṣānti, T. mi skye ba'i chos la bzod pa*). A special realization of emptiness and nonduality by bodhisattvas that makes them irreversible on the path to full awakening.

*four buddha bodies.* These are the nature dharmakāya, wisdom dharmakāya, enjoyment body, and emanation body.

*four fearlessnesses.* The Tathāgata is completely confident and lacks all fear in declaring that (1) he is fully awakened regarding all phenomena, (2) he has destroyed all pollutants, (3) he has correctly identified all obstructions to be eliminated on the path, and (4) when practiced, his teachings lead to the complete destruction of duḥkha.

*four seals* (*caturmudrā*). Four views that make a philosophy Buddhist: all conditioned phenomena are transient, all polluted phenomena are duḥkha, all phenomena are empty and selfless, nirvāṇa alone is true peace.

*four truths of the āryas (catvāry āryasatyāni).* The truths of duḥkha, its origin, its cessation, and the path to that cessation.

*four ways of gathering or assembling (saṃgrahavastu, saṅgahavatthu, T. bsdu ba'i dngos po).* This is (1) being generous and giving material aid, (2) explaining the Dharma according to the listeners' disposition, (3) encouraging them to practice, and (4) acting congruently and living the teachings through example.

*full awakening (samyaksambodhi).* Buddhahood; the state where all obscurations have been abandoned and all good qualities developed limitlessly.

*fundamental innate mind of clear light (T. gnyug ma lhan cig skyes pa'i 'od gsal gyi sems).* The subtlest level of mind.

*Fundamental Vehicle.* The vehicle leading to the liberation of śrāvakas and solitary realizers.

*god.* See deva.

*grasping inherent existence (svabhāvagraha).* For Prāsaṅgikas: grasping persons and phenomena to exist by its own entity without being posited through the force of an internal mind; grasping persons and phenomena to exist from their own side, independent of all other phenomena.

*grasping true existence (true-grasping, satyagrāha).* For Prāsaṅgikas: grasping persons and phenomena to exist objectively through their own entity without being posited by thought.

*ground (bhūmi).* A path. Ten bodhisattva grounds span the bodhisattva paths of seeing and meditation.

*guru yoga.* Joining the qualities of our body, speech, and mind with those of a spiritually advanced spiritual mentor.

*harmonies with awakening (bodhipākṣya-dharma, bodhipakkhiya-dhamma).* Thirty-seven practices condensed into seven sets that lead to liberation and awakening.

*hell being (nāraka)*. A being born in an unfortunate realm of intense physical pain due to strong destructive karma.

*highest yoga tantra (anuttarayogatantra)*. The most advanced of the four classes of tantra.

*hungry ghost (preta)*. A being born in one of the unfortunate realms who suffers from intense hunger and thirst.

*ignorance (avidyā)*. A mental factor that is obscured and grasps the opposite of what exists. There are two types: ignorance regarding ultimate truth and ignorance regarding karma and its effects.

*impermanent (anitya, anicca)*. Momentary; not remaining in the next moment.

*inferential cognizer (anumāna)*. A mind that ascertains its object by means of a correct reason.

*inferential realization*. An infallible conceptual cognizer that arises in direct dependence on a correct reason or a consequence as its basis. This mind is a reliable cognizer.

*inherent existence (svabhāva)*. For Prāsaṅgikas, it means existence without depending on any other factors; independent existence. Such existence does not exist.

*insight (vipaśyanā, vipassanā, T. lhag mthong)*. A wisdom of thorough discrimination of phenomena conjoined with special pliancy induced by the power of analysis.

*insight knowledge (P. vipassanā-ñāṇa)*. Mundane (P. *lokiya*) knowledge of the three characteristics gained through insight. It leads to supramundane (P. *lokuttara*) path knowledge that realizes the four truths and nirvāṇa.

*insight wisdom (P. vipassanā-paññā)*. Wisdom of the three characteristics gained through insight.

*introspective awareness (saṃprajanya, sampajañña)*. An intelligence that causes one to engage in activities of body, speech, or mind heedfully.

*karma*. Intentional (volitional) action; it includes intention karma (mental action) and intended karma (physical and verbal actions motivated by intention).

*karmic seeds*. The potencies from previously created actions that will bring their results.

*knowable objects* (*jñeya*, T. *shes bya*). Existents, phenomena.

*latencies* (*vāsanā*). Predispositions, imprints, or tendencies.

*liberated path* (*vimuktimārga*, T. *rnam grol lam*). A wisdom that directly follows an uninterrupted path and has definitely abandoned and is completely free from the objects of abandonment of that path.

*liberation* (*mokṣa*, T. *thar pa*). A true cessation that is the abandonment of afflictive obscurations; *nirvāṇa*, the state of freedom from cyclic existence.

*liberation of mind by love* (P. *mettā cetovimutti*). A mind genuinely wishing all beings to be happy that has temporarily abandoned the five hindrances, especially anger and malice, through the force of concentration.

*Madhyamaka*. A Buddhist tenet system that asserts there are no truly existent phenomena.

*Mahāmudrā*. A type of meditation that focuses on the conventional and ultimate natures of the mind.

*maṇḍala offering*. A spiritual practice in which we offer the universe and all the beautiful objects in it, imagined in their pure form, to the holy beings.

*meditative equipoise on emptiness*. The mind of someone on a path who is focusing single-pointedly on the emptiness of inherent existence. On the paths of accumulation and preparation, it is conceptual; on the ārya paths, it is nonconceptual.

*mental body*. The body taken by arhats and pure-ground bodhisattvas caused by the base of latencies of ignorance and unpolluted karma.

*mental consciousness (mano-vijñāna)*. A primary consciousness that knows mental phenomena in contradistinction to sense primary consciousnesses that know physical objects.

*mental factor (caitta)*. An aspect of mind that accompanies a primary consciousness and fills out the cognition, apprehending particular attributes of the object or performing a specific function.

*mind (citta)*. That which is clear and aware; the part of living beings that cognizes, experiences, thinks, feels, and so on. In some contexts it is equivalent to primary consciousness.

*mindfulness (smṛti, sati)*. A mental factor that brings to mind a phenomenon of previous acquaintance without forgetting it and prevents distraction to other objects.

*mindstream (cittasaṃtāna)*. The continuity of mind.

*momentary (kṣaṇika)*. Not enduring to the next moment.

*monastic*. Someone who has received monastic ordination; a monk or nun.

*nature truth body (svabhāvika dharmakāya)*. The buddha body that is the emptiness of a buddha's mind and the true cessations in the mindstream of that buddha.

*nihilism (ucchedānta)*. The belief that our actions have no ethical dimension; the belief that nothing exists.

*nimitta*. The sign or mental image that is the object for cultivating serenity. It is of three types: the preliminary, learning, and counterpart nimittas.

*nine stages of sustained attention (navākārā cittasthiti, T. sems gnas dgu)*. Stages of concentration on the way to attaining serenity.

*nirvāṇa*. The state of liberation of an arhat; the purified aspect of a mind that is free from afflictions.

*nirvāṇa with remainder (sopadhiśeṣa-nirvāṇa, sopādisesa-nibbāna)*. (1) The state of liberation when an arhat is still alive and possesses the

remainder of the polluted aggregates, (2) an arhat's nirvāṇa in which things appear to be truly existent in post-meditation time.

*nirvāṇa without remainder (anupadhiśeṣa-nirvāṇa, anupādisesa-nibbāna).*

(1) The state of liberation when an arhat has passed away and no longer has the remainder of the polluted aggregates, (2) an arhat's meditative equipoise on emptiness where there is no appearance of true existence whatsoever.

*nonabiding nirvāṇa (apraṭiṣṭha-nirvāṇa).* The nirvāṇa of a buddha that does not abide in either saṃsāra or the personal peace of a śrāvaka's or solitary realizers's nirvāṇa.

*nonexistent (asat).* That which is not perceivable by mind.

*nonreturner (anāgāmin, anāgāmi, T. phyir mi 'ong pa).* A Fundamental Vehicle ārya who has eliminated the five lower fetters.

*object (viśaya, T. yul).* That which is known by an awareness.

*object of negation (praṭiśedhya, T. dgag bya).* A nonexistent that sentient beings erroneously grasp as existent. It is negated or refuted by reasoning.

*observed object (ālambana, ārammaṇa, T. dmigs pa).* The basic object that the mind refers to or focuses on while apprehending certain aspects of that object.

*once-returner (sakṛdāgāmin, sakadāgāmi, T. lan gcig phyir 'ong pa).* A Fundamental Vehicle ārya who has abandoned three of the lower fetters and significantly reduced sensual desire and malice and who will be born in the desire realm at maximum only one time before attaining nirvāṇa.

*one final vehicle.* The belief that all beings—even śrāvakas who have become arhats—will eventually enter the Mahāyāna and become buddhas.

*ordinary being (pṛthagjana, puthujjana, T. so so skye bo).* Someone who is not an ārya.

*path (mārga, magga, T. lam)*. Sanskrit tradition: an exalted knower that is conjoined with uncontrived renunciation. Pāli tradition: a consciousness of an ārya that realizes the four truths.

*path knowledge (P. magga-ñāṇa)*. A supramundane path that knows nirvāṇa.

*path of accumulation (sambhāramārga, T. tshogs lam)*. First of the five paths. It begins when one aspires for liberation day and night for a śrāvaka path or when one has spontaneous bodhicitta for the Mahāyāna path.

*path of meditation (bhāvanāmārga, T. sgom lam)*. The fourth of the five paths. This begins when a meditator begins to eradicate innate afflictions from the root.

*path of no-more-learning (aśaikṣamārga, T. mi slob lam)*. The last of the five paths where a trainee attains the final goal of their vehicle: arhatship or buddhahood.

*path of preparation (prayogamārga, T. sbyor lam)*. The second of the five paths. It begins when a meditator attains the union of serenity and insight on emptiness.

*path of seeing (darśanamārga, T. mthong lam)*. The third of the five paths. It begins when a meditator first has direct, nonconceptual realization of the emptiness of inherent existence.

*permanent (nitya, nicca, T. rtag pa)*. Unchanging, static. It does not mean eternal.

*permanent, unitary, independent self*. A soul or self (*ātman*) asserted by non-Buddhists.

*permissory ritual (T. rjes snang)*. A meditative ceremony in which the recipient receives the inspiration of an awakened deity's body, speech, and mind and is qualified to do the practice of that deity.

*person (pudgala)*. A being designated in dependence on the four or five aggregates.

*pervasive duḥkha of conditioning.* Taking the five aggregates under the influence of afflictions and polluted karma. This is the basis of the duḥkha of pain and the duḥkha of change.

*pliancy* (tranquility, *praśrabdhi*, *passaddhi*). A mental factor that enables the mind to apply itself to a constructive object in whatever manner it wishes and dissipates mental or physical rigidity.

*polluted* (*āsrava*, *āśava*). Under the influence of ignorance or its latencies.

*Prāsaṅgika.* The Buddhist philosophical tenet system that asserts that all phenomena lack inherent existence both conventionally and ultimately.

*prātimokṣa.* The various sets of ethical precepts for monastics and lay followers to uphold in their pursuit of liberation.

*preliminary practices.* (1) Meditating on important initial stages of the path, such as preciousness of a human life with freedom and fortune, death and impermanence, karma and its effects, and the defects of saṃsāra. (2) In the context of tantra, practices that purify negativities and collect merit, such as taking refuge, reciting the names of the buddhas and prostrating to them, making offerings, reciting the mantra of Vajrasattva, guru yoga, and so on.

*preparatory stages for a dhyāna* (access, preparations, *sāmantaka*, T. *bsam gtan po'i nyer bsdogs*). Stages of meditation that prepare the mind to enter an actual dhyāna.

*primary consciousness* (*vijñāna*). A consciousness that apprehends the presence or basic entity of an object. There are six types of primary consciousness: visual, auditory, olfactory, gustatory, tactile, and mental.

*pristine wisdom of meditative equipoise* (*samāhitajñāna*, T. *mnyam bzhag ye shes*). A clear realization that perceives emptiness directly and nonconceptually with a concentration that is the union of serenity and insight.

*pristine wisdom of subsequent attainment* (*prṣṭhalabdha-jñāna*, T. *rjes thob ye shes*). A subsequent clear realization of someone who has arisen from a liberated path.



*proliferations* (*prapañca*, *papañca*, T. *spros pa*). Mental fabrications ranging from anxious thoughts to grasping true existence.

*pure lands*. Places created by the unshakable resolve and merit of buddhas where all external conditions are conducive for Dharma practice.

*realization* (T. *rtogs pa*). An awareness that eliminates superimpositions on an object and is able to induce ascertainment of it. It may be inferential (conceptual) or direct (nonconceptual).

*realized Dharma*. The realizations in a person's mindstream.

*sādhana*. The means of achievement expressed in a tantric text or manual that details the steps of visualization and meditation in the practice of a deity.

*samādhi*. See concentration.

*samsāra*. (1) Constantly recurring rebirth under the control of afflictions and polluted karma. (2) The five aggregates of a person who has taken rebirth in this way.

*Sautrāntika*. A Fundamental Vehicle tenet system that asserts that functional things are ultimate truths and phenomena that are imputed by thought are conventional truths.

*self* (*ātman*). A person or inherent existence.

*self-grasping* (*ātmagrāha*). Grasping inherent existence.

*self-sufficient substantially-existent person* (T. *gang zag rang rkya thub pa'i rdzas yod*). A self that can be identified independent of the aggregates. Such a self does not exist.

*sentient being* (*sattva*). Any being that has a mind and is not a buddha.

*serenity* (*śamatha*, *samatha*). Sanskrit tradition: concentration arisen from meditation that is accompanied by the bliss of mental and physical pliancy in which the mind abides effortlessly without fluctuation for as long as we wish on whatever virtuous object it has been placed. Pāli

tradition: one-pointedness of mind; the eight attainments (meditative absorptions) that are the basis for insight.

*six perfections (ṣaḍpāramitā)*. The practices of generosity, ethical conduct, fortitude, joyous effort, meditative stability, and wisdom that are motivated by bodhicitta.

*solitary realizer (pratyekabuddha)*. A person following the Fundamental Vehicle who seeks liberation and emphasizes understanding the twelve links of dependent arising and who aspires to spend their last lifetime in saṃsāra without depending on a teacher.

*sphere of three*. The agent, object, and action.

*śrāvaka* (hearer, disciple, P. *sāvaka*). Someone practicing the Fundamental Vehicle path leading to arhatship who emphasizes meditation on the four truths.

*stabilizing meditation (sthāpyabhāvanā, T. 'jog sgom)*. Meditation to focus and concentrate the mind on an object.

*stages of the path to awakening (T. lamrim)*. A systematic presentation of the path to awakening found in Tibetan Buddhism.

*stream-enterer (srotāpanna, sotāpanna, T. rgyun zhugs)*. A Fundamental Vehicle practitioner who has eliminated the first three fetters of the five lower fetters: view of a personal identity, deluded doubt, view of bad rules and practices.

*substantial cause (upādāna-kāraṇa)*. The cause that becomes the result, as opposed to cooperative causes that aid the substantial cause in becoming the result.

*subtle latencies*. Latencies of ignorance and other afflictions that are cognitive obscurations that prevent simultaneous nonconceptual cognition of the two truths.

*subsequent attainment (prṣṭha-labdha)*. Post-meditation time when āryas do practices to create merit and meditate on other topics aside from meditative equipoise on emptiness.

*superknowledge* (*abhiññā*, *abhiññā*, T. *mngon shes*). Direct, experiential knowledge, of six types: (1) supernormal powers, (2) divine ear, (3) knowledge of others' minds, (4) recollection of past lives, (5) divine eye (includes knowledge of the passing away and rearing of beings and knowledge of the future), and (6) the destruction of the pollutants. The sixth is attained only by liberated beings.

*supernormal powers* (*rddhi*, *iddhi*). The first of the six superknowledges, gained in deep *samādhi*: to replicate one's body, appear and disappear, pass through solid objects, go under the earth, walk on water, fly, touch the sun and moon with one's hand, go to the Brahmā world, and so forth.

*supramundane* (transcendental, *lokottara*, P. *lokuttara*). Pertaining to the elimination of fetters and afflictions; pertaining to āryas.

*tathāgata*. A buddha.

*ten powers*. The ten powers are knowing (1) what is worthwhile and worthless, (2) the ripening result of all actions, (3) the path leading to various rebirths, (4) the temperaments and (5) aspirations of sentient beings, (6) their faculties, (7) meditative stability, and (8) past lives, (9) sentient beings passing away and being reborn, and (10) liberation and full awakening.

*tenets* (*siddhānta*). A philosophical principle, belief, or system.

*thought* (*kalpanā*). Conceptual consciousness.

*three characteristics*. Impermanence, *duḥkha*, and no-self.

*three kinds of persons*. Śrāvaka and solitary realizer arhats and pure ground bodhisattvas. They are grouped together because all have eradicated the afflictive obscurations.

*three realms* (*tridhātuka*, *tedhātuka*). Desire, form, and formless realms.

*transmitted (scriptural) Dharma*. The words and meanings of the Buddha's teachings in the form of speech and scriptures.

*true cessation (nirodhasatya)*. The cessation of a portion of afflictions or a portion of cognitive obscurations. It can also refer to the cessation of all afflictive obscurations, cognitive obscurations, or both obscurations.

*true existence (satyasat)*. The objective existence of phenomena through their own entity without being posited by thought. True existence does not exist.

*truth body (dharmakāya)*. The buddha body that includes the nature truth body and the wisdom truth body. Sometimes it refers only to a buddha's omniscient mind.

*twelve links of dependent origination (dvādaśāṅga-pratītyasamutpāda)*. A system of twelve factors that explains how we take rebirth in saṃsāra and how we can be liberated from it.

*twelve sources*. A way of classifying phenomena according to the type of object and the faculty facilitating its perception. See chapter 3 of *The Foundation of Buddhist Practice*.

*twenty-two faculties (indriya)*. Six are sense faculties: sight (*cakṣus*), hearing (*śrotra*), smell (*ghrāna*), taste (*jihvā*), touch (*kāya*), mind (*manas*). Three are physical faculties: male organ (*puruṣendriya*), female organ (*strīndriya*), vital organ (*jīvitendriya*). Five are feeling faculties: sensation of pleasure (*sukha*), pain (*duḥkha*), mental happiness (*saumanasya*), mental suffering (*daurmanasya*), equanimity (*upekṣā*). Five are spiritual faculties: faith (*śraddhā*), energy (*vīrya*), mindfulness (*smṛti*), concentration (*samādhi*), wisdom (*prajñā*). Three are faculties of understanding the truths: thinking "I shall know the unknown" (*anaññāta-ñassāmīt-indriya*), gnosis (*aññ-indriya*), one who knows (*aññātā-vindriya*).

*two truths (satyadvaya)*. Ultimate truths and veiled (conventional) truths.

*ultimate nature*. The ultimate or deepest mode of existence of persons and phenomena.

*ultimate truth (paramārthasatya)*. The ultimate mode of existence of all persons and phenomena; emptiness.

*unfortunate realms (apāya)*. Unfortunate states of rebirth as a hell being, hungry ghost, or animal.

*uninterrupted path (ānantaryamārga, T. bar ched med lam)*. A wisdom that abandons the objects of abandonment of that path.

*union of serenity and insight*. Absorption in which the bliss of mental and physical pliancy has been induced by analysis.

*unpolluted (anāsrava)*. Not under the influence of ignorance.

*unpolluted karma*. The mental factor of intention that is the subtle effort supporting arhats' and pure-ground bodhisattvas' motivation to assume a mental body.

*Vajrasattva*. A meditation deity whose practice is associated with purification of destructive karmic seeds and other defilements.

*veiled truths (conventional truths, samvṛtisatya)*. Objects that appear true to ignorance, which is a veiling consciousness; objects that appear to exist inherently to their main cognizer although they do not exist that way.

*veilings*. Conventionalities.

*view of a personal identity (view of the transitory collection, satkāyadṛṣṭi, sakkāyaditṭhi)*. Grasping an inherently existent I or mine (according to the Prāsaṅgika system).

*Vinaya*. Monastic discipline; a body of texts about monastic life, discipline, and conduct.

*wind (prāṇa, T. rlung)*. One of the four elements; energy in the body that influences bodily functions; subtle energy on which levels of consciousness ride.

*wisdom truth body (jñāna dharmakāya)*. The buddha body that is a buddha's omniscient mind.

*Yogācāra (Cittamātra)*. A philosophical tenet system asserting that objects and the consciousnesses perceiving them arise from the same substantial

cause, a seed on the foundation consciousness, and that the mind is truly existent.

## Recommended Reading

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THE DALAI LAMA is the spiritual leader of the Tibetan people, a Nobel Peace Prize recipient, and an advocate for compassion and peace throughout the world. He promotes harmony among the world's religions and engages in dialogue with leading scientists. Ordained as a Buddhist monk when he was a child, he completed the traditional monastic studies and earned his geshe degree (equivalent to a PhD). Renowned for his erudite and open-minded scholarship, his meditative attainments, and his humility, Bhikṣu Tenzin Gyatso says, "I am a simple Buddhist monk."



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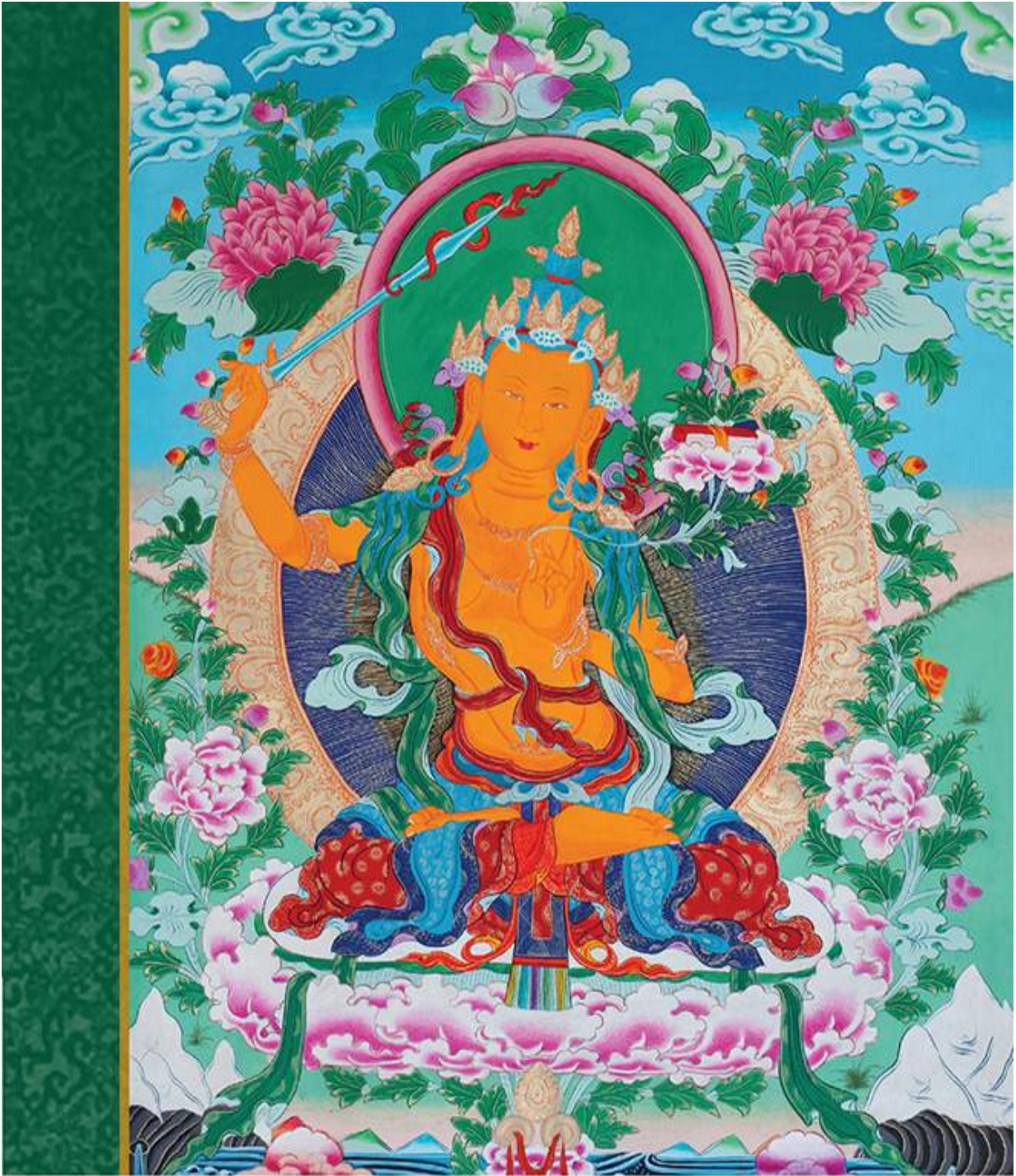


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Engaging in this investigation with His Holiness will challenge our deepest-held beliefs and uproot false ways of viewing ourselves and the world that are so habitual we don't even notice them. Get ready to be challenged and intrigued, for realizing the nature of reality has the power to cut our defilements at the root and free us from cyclic existence forever!

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## Preface

MANY OF THE PRACTICES we do on the path to awakening are to prepare us to study, contemplate, meditate on, and realize the nature of reality, for this is the realization that has the power to cut our defilements from their root. So in the *Library of Wisdom and Compassion*, we now arrive at this topic. Although His Holiness has sprinkled his discussion of emptiness—the absence of inherent existence—throughout previous volumes, in this and the next two volumes he delves deeply into this topic, presenting it from a variety of approaches. This first of the three volumes on emptiness, *Searching for the Self*, focuses on identifying our erroneous views and directing us to the actual mode of existence of all persons and phenomena. Doing this will challenge some of our deepest-held beliefs—some false ways of viewing ourselves and the world that are so habitual that we don't even notice them. Get ready to be challenged and intrigued!

## *How This Book Originated*

The *Library of Wisdom and Compassion* has been many years in the making. As relayed in the prefaces of previous volumes, the idea for such a series began in the early 1990s when I requested His Holiness the Dalai Lama to write a short text that Tibetan lamas could use when teaching the Buddhadharma to Westerners and other non-Tibetans. His Holiness responded that we should write something longer first, gave me a transcript of one of his teachings, and sent me off to work.

In interviews with him over the ensuing years, the focus and scope of the series became clearer. The following is some of His Holiness' advice:

Our main aim is to help practitioners of the Pāli and Sanskrit traditions have a better understanding of each other's teachings and practice; a better understanding between the two traditions will bring closer contact, which will not only benefit individual practitioners but also enable the Buddhadharma to exist longer. In addition, it will enable Buddhist leaders from all traditions to speak in one voice about important issues in the world, such as climate change.

Except for minor differences, the Vinaya practice in all traditions is basically the same; the Vinaya and prātimokṣa are emphasized in both the Fundamental Vehicle and the Mahāyāna. The thirty-seven harmonies with awakening are also held in common. After reading this book, Theravāda practitioners will have clearer understanding that Mahāyāna practitioners also engage in these practices and Mahāyāna practitioners will know that Theravāda practitioners meditate on immeasurable love and compassion.

The Pāli tradition is the foundation of the Buddhadharma. Although there may be some people who think Vinaya is old-fashioned, that is a wrong view. The Buddha established the Vinaya, so deprecating the Vinaya and the value of monastic life is similar to dismissing the Buddha's wisdom and denigrating the path to

awakening. It would be good to have more explanation in this series about the Theravāda tradition, especially its Vinaya practice—how ordination is given, the three monastic practices (*poṣadha*, *varṣā*, *pravāraṇā*)—and its practice of samādhi, insight, and the thirty-seven harmonies with awakening.<sup>1</sup> I know that some practitioners in Theravāda countries are very accomplished and some monks are considered arhats.

When I meet monks from Sri Lanka, Thailand, Burma, and so forth, we discuss Vinaya, the thirty-seven harmonies, the four truths, and so forth—Buddhist teachings that all of us share. When I meet Japanese tantric practitioners, we discuss tantra. But when Japanese tantric practitioners and Sri Lankan Buddhist monks meet, aside from the practice of refuge in the Three Jewels, they can discuss only a few common practices. That is sad. I would like us Buddhists to understand one another better.

I also try to create closer understanding between Buddhists, Hindus, Christians, Muslims, and Jews. Theistic religions' emphasis on faith in God, the creator, helps people to live better. When they think that they are created in God's image, that God is like a protective father, and that everything is in God's hands, it helps them develop single-pointed faith. Such faith reduces self-centeredness and supports them in abandoning harm and extending forgiveness, kindness, and generosity to others. Based on pinpointing self-centeredness, anger, greed, fear, jealousy, and so forth as destructive emotions, we can understand and respect practitioners of theistic religions.

In the Tibetan community, some people stress their identification with a particular Tibetan tradition, "I'm Nyingma, you are Gelug; I am Sakya, you are Kagyu." Doing this in a discriminatory way is silly. By seeing our commonalities, I hope we Tibetans will overcome old divisions and that these misconceptions will not spread to Western, Chinese, and other practitioners of Tibetan Buddhism.

With this in mind, we'll explore the Buddha's teachings on the nature of reality. Although there are many educational systems in the world, each with its own methodology, here we follow the Nālandā tradition of India. In some educational systems today, teachers explain topics to students who are expected to remember all the information. They then take tests on the material to see if they have memorized it properly. Students are not necessarily taught how to think about the material or to question the ethical value of exploring a certain field of knowledge.

In the Nālandā tradition, our motivation for education is to increase our ability to contribute to the well-being of others and to progress on the path to full awakening. Here a teacher's role is to put forth varying ideas and help students to investigate them one by one, stating their qualms and debating the issues. Teachers don't give students all the answers, but present different viewpoints and questions that the students discuss and debate among themselves. This functions to increase students' discriminating wisdom and their ability to think clearly. They learn what is true by refuting wrong ideas and establishing correct reasons.

The first book His Holiness and I did, *Buddhism: One Teacher, Many Traditions*, as well as the previous six volumes of the *Library of Wisdom and Compassion*, establish many of the common points shared among the prominent Buddhist traditions (there are many Buddhist traditions and ways of practice—too many for us to include in this series). Now we will turn to the cultivation of a special kind of wisdom: the wisdom that realizes selflessness and emptiness. This wisdom has the power to free us from saṃsāra forever.

In learning about selflessness and emptiness, you will encounter new words, definitions, and ideas. You may wonder: If reality is empty of all false ways of existence, why do we need so many complicated words and concepts to explain it? Shouldn't reality be simple to understand and easy to realize?

Once seen directly, emptiness probably seems obvious and easy to understand, but for the minds of us ordinary beings that are obscured by wrong views and disturbing emotions, discerning reality is not at all simple. If emptiness were easy to realize, we would have done so long ago and would have already become buddhas by now. But this is not the case. If emptiness were obvious, we would already have the correct view and would know how to meditate on emptiness correctly. This too is not the case. People have a variety of views, and even within one person there exist many contradictory ideas and perceptions.



Look at ourselves, for example: Do all our perceptions and conceptions about reality form one logical, consistent philosophy, or do they sometimes contradict each other, leaving us confused?

The Indian and the Tibetan texts dealing with emptiness contain many debates that employ reasoning and critical analysis. This may cause us to wonder: Why is so much time and energy spent refuting others' wrong views? Shouldn't we be meditating instead? Reasoning and debate are tools that expose our own misconceptions. Although the texts ostensibly appear to refute others' distorted views, we may hold some of those very misconceptions and wrong views ourselves. Logic and reasoning are not employed for the egotistic goal of being the victor in a debate. Rather, they are employed to disprove the distorted views we cling to so strongly and ignite the light of wisdom in our minds.

Meditation on emptiness isn't the simple activity of closing our eyes, emptying all thoughts from our mind, and waiting for reality to magically appear to our consciousness. In minds that are crowded with wrong views and distracted by attachment to only the happiness of this life, there is no room for reality. We must clear away the wrong conceptions by means of reasoning and analysis so that we can see the ultimate nature that already exists in ourselves and in all phenomena around us.

For these reasons, we must continually cultivate enthusiasm and interest to understand emptiness deeply as well as to comprehend the words and concepts that lead to such understanding. Then we must meditate one-pointedly on emptiness to gain insight into emptiness, and then familiarize ourselves with that realization of reality to eradicate all afflictions and defilements in our mental continuum. I encourage you to be enthusiastic to study, reflect, and meditate on this topic for a long time.

## *Overview of the Book*

This volume begins with an introduction by His Holiness in which he places our study of reality within the framework of a compassionate motivation to benefit sentient beings. Since the value of whatever we undertake depends on our motivation, cultivating a motivation to contribute to the welfare of all beings places our study of emptiness in a beneficial context.

Chapter 1 explains why realizing emptiness is important and describes the qualities to develop to understand it correctly. Chapter 2 speaks of the Buddhist sages whose teachings are the most reliable for us to follow. It culminates with a praise His Holiness wrote that introduces us to the seventeen great scholar-adepts of the Nālandā tradition followed in Tibetan Buddhism. Then in chapters 3, 4, and 5 we explore assertions of both Buddhist and non-Buddhist philosophical tenet systems. This topic is vast, so only the important positions regarding the topics of the present volume—selflessness and emptiness—are spoken of here. Although initially this material may seem replete with new terms and ideas, as you progress in your study and practice to develop insight into emptiness, you will see the value of learning these because they point out some of our own incorrect ideas and direct us to views that are more reasonable.

Chapter 6 provides some of the epistemological material that helps us to understand both cognizing subjects and cognized objects, and chapter 7 fleshes out some of the mental states involved in both our ignorant and accurate cognitions. Chapter 8 discusses inherent existence and other fantasized ways of existence that comprise the objects of negation—what we seek to disprove when meditating on emptiness—and chapter 9 establishes the Middle Way view that has abandoned the extremes of absolutism and nihilism. The view of absolutism superimposes false ways of existence, whereas the nihilistic view negates what does in fact exist. Chapter 10 looks more closely at the extreme of absolutism, as this is the view that we ordinary sentient beings usually cling to.

Chapter 11 speaks of the two extremes as presented in the Pāli tradition and the three characteristics of impermanence, *duḥkha*, and not-self that counter the absolutist views. Chapter 12 goes into some of the many arguments presented in the Pāli tradition that help to overcome clinging to a false notion of the I. Although the arguments to support selflessness in the Sanskrit tradition are expounded in the upcoming volume 8 of the *Library of Wisdom and Compassion*, readers who are already familiar with these will see the similarities with arguments found in the Pāli sūtras.

The coda is designed for people who have studied the tenet systems in the Tibetan tradition as well as for followers of the Pāli tradition who want to learn more about their own Abhidharma system. Many Tibetans believe that modern-day Theravāda corresponds to the Vaibhāṣika and/or Sautrāntika systems as these systems are explained in the Tibetan tradition. However, this is not the case;

although the Pāli tradition shares many commonalities with these two systems, there are some important differences. In addition, this coda orients the reader to some of the foundational, canonical ideas informing the Tibetan treatises on the nature of reality, selflessness, and emptiness. Being aware of the development of the Abhidharma provides background for the refutations in Nāgārjuna's *Treatise on the Middle Way*.

When His Holiness said he wanted me to include the perspective of the Pāli tradition in the *Library of Wisdom and Compassion*, his office gave me a letter requesting Theravāda monks to give me teachings and allow me to stay in their temple. Thus I spent two weeks studying and practicing with Ajahn Anan at Wat Marp Jan in Thailand. This was followed by studying Bhikkhu Bodhi's lengthy series of teachings on the Majjhima Nikāya and meeting with him to ask questions. This led to reading about the Pāli Abhidharma, participating in a vipassana retreat, and discussing the Dharma with Western monks and nuns whom I met at our annual Western Buddhist Monastic Gatherings. Having taught the Dharma in Singapore for almost two years, I also got to know some monks from that tradition, participated in panel discussions with them, and was invited to speak at their temples. This study and engagement with the Pāli tradition has helped my own Dharma practice considerably.

## *Please Note*

Although this series is coauthored, the vast majority of the material is His Holiness's teachings. I researched and wrote the parts about the Pāli tradition, wrote some other passages, and composed the reflections. For ease of reading, most honorifics have been omitted, but that does not diminish the great respect we have for the excellent sages, practitioners, and learned adepts. Foreign terms are given in italics parenthetically at their first usage. Unless otherwise noted with "P." or "T.," indicating Pāli or Tibetan, respectively, italicized terms are Sanskrit, or the term is the same in Sanskrit and Pāli. When two italicized terms are listed, the first is Sanskrit, the second Pāli. For consistency, Sanskrit spelling is used for Sanskrit and Pāli terms in common usage (nirvāṇa, Dharma, arhat, and so forth), except in citations from Pāli scriptures. Tibetan terms can be found in the glossary. The term *śrāvaka* encompasses solitary realizers, unless there is reason to

specifically differentiate them. To maintain the flow of a passage, it is not always possible to gloss all new terms on their first usage, so a glossary is provided at the end of the book. “Sūtra” often refers to Sūtrayāna and “Tantra” to Tantrayāna—the Sūtra Vehicle and Tantra Vehicle, respectively. When these two words are not capitalized, they refer to two types of scriptures: sūtras and tantras. “Mahāyāna” or “Universal Vehicle” here refers principally to the bodhisattva path as explained in the Sanskrit tradition. In general, the meaning of all philosophical terms accords with the presentation of the Prāsaṅgika Madhyamaka tenet system. Unless otherwise noted, the personal pronoun “I” refers to His Holiness.

## *Appreciation*

My deepest respect goes to Śākyamuni Buddha and all the buddhas, bodhisattvas, and arhats who embody the Dharma and with compassion teach us confused beings who seek happiness but are ignorant of the means to create the causes for it. I also bow to all the realized lineage masters of all Buddhist traditions through whose kindness the Buddhadharma still exists in our world.

This series consists of many volumes. For their aid in this seventh volume, I want to express my gratitude to His Holiness’s translators—Geshe Lhakdor, Geshe Dorji Damdul, and Mr. Tenzin Tsepak. I am grateful to Geshe Dorji Damdul, Geshe Dadul Namgyal, and Bhikṣuṇī Sangye Khadro for checking the manuscript, and to Samdhong Rinpoche, Geshe Yeshe Lhundup, and Geshe Dhamchoe Gyaltsen for clarifying important points. Geshe Thupten Jinpa’s help was always welcome, and Dr. Yakupitiyage Karunadasa and Stephen Wainwright kindly checked the coda. I also thank Bhikkhu Bodhi for his clear teachings on the Pāli tradition and for generously answering my many questions. He also kindly looked over the sections of the book on the Pāli tradition before publication. The staff at the Private Office of His Holiness kindly facilitated the interviews, Sravasti Abbey supported me while I worked on this volume, and Mary Petruszewicz skillfully edited this book. I thank everyone at Wisdom Publications who has contributed and continues to contribute to the successful production of this series. All errors are my own.

Bhikṣuṇī Thubten Chodron

Sravasti Abbey

## Abbreviations

- ADK *Treasury of Knowledge (Abhidharmakośa)* by Vasubandhu. In *Abhidharmakośa of Ācārya Vasubandhu: English Translation from the French by Dr. Leo M. Pruden*. Edited by Lokananda C. Bhikkhu (Delhi: Buddhist World Press, 2018).
- ADKB *Treasury of Knowledge Autocommentary (Abhidharmakośabhāṣya)* by Vasubandhu. In *Abhidharmakośa-Bhāṣya of Vasubandhu: The Treasury of the Abhidharma and Its Commentary*. 4 vols. Translated into French by Louis de La Vallée Poussin. Annotated English translation by Gelong Lodrö Sangpo (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2012).
- ADS *Abhidharmasamuccaya: The Compendium of the Higher Teaching (Philosophy)* by Asaṅga. Translated into French by Walpola Rahula. English translation by Sara Boin-Webb (Fremont, CA: Jain Publishing, 2015).
- AN *Aṅguttara Nikāya*. Translated by Bhikkhu Bodhi in *The Numerical Discourses of the Buddha* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2012).
- BCA *Bodhicaryāvatāra* by Śāntideva. Translated by Stephen Batchelor in *A Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life* (Dharamsala: Library of Tibetan Works and Archives, 2007).
- BV *Commentary on Bodhicitta (Bodhicittavivarāṇa)* by Nāgārjuna. Translated by Geshe Thupten Jinpa.
- CS *The Four Hundred (Catuḥśataka)* by Āryadeva. Translated by Ruth Sonam in *Āryadeva's Four Hundred Stanzas on the Middle Way* (Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion Publications, 2008).

- CTB *Compassion in Tibetan Buddhism* by Tsong-ka-pa. Translated and edited by Jeffrey Hopkins (Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion Publications, 1980).
- DAE *Dependent-Arising and Emptiness: A Tibetan Buddhist Interpretation of Madhyamika Philosophy*, by Elizabeth Napper (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 1989).
- DN Dīgha Nikāya. Translated by Maurice Walshe in *The Long Discourses of the Buddha* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 1995).
- EES Tsong-kha-pa Lo-sang-drak-pa's *Extensive Explanation of (Candrakīrti's) "Supplement to (Nāgārjuna's) 'Treatise on the Middle': Illumination of the Thought*. Translated by Jeffrey Hopkins and Anne C. Klein. Unpublished manuscript.
- EMW *Emptiness in the Middle Way School of Buddhism: Mutual Reinforcement of Understanding Dependent-Arising and Emptiness: Dynamic Responses to Tsong-kha-pa's "The Essence of Eloquence: IV,"* by Jeffrey Hopkins. Edited by Kevin Vose (Dyke, VA: UMA Institute for Tibetan Studies, 2019).
- FEW *Tsong-kha-pa's Final Exposition of Wisdom*. Translated by Jeffrey Hopkins (Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion Publications, 2008).
- HSY *How to See Yourself as You Really Are*, by His Holiness the Dalai Lama. Translated by Jeffrey Hopkins (New York: Atria Books, 2006).
- Iti *Itivuttaka*. In *The Udāna and the Itivuttaka*. Translated by John D. Ireland (Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 2007).
- LC *The Great Treatise on the Stages of the Path: Lam Rim Chen Mo*, by Tsong-kha-pa, 3 vols. Translated by the Lamrim Chenmo Translation Committee. Joshua Cutler, editor in chief. Guy Newland, editor (Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion Publications, 2000–2004).
- LS *Praise to the World Transcendent (Lokatistava)* by Nāgārjuna.

Translated by Thupten Jinpa, 2007.  
<http://www.tibetanclassics.org/html-assets/WorldTranscendentHym.pdf>.

- MMA *Supplement to “Treatise on the Middle Way” (Madhyamakāvatāra)* by Candrakīrti.
- MMK *Treatise on the Middle Way (Mūlamadhyamakakārikā)* by Nāgārjuna. From *Ocean of Reasoning by rJe Tsong Khapa*. Translated by Geshe Ngawang Samten and Jay L. Garfield (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).
- MN Majjhima Nikāya. Translated by Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi in *The Middle-Length Discourses of the Buddha* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 1995).
- MP *Maps of the Profound: Jam-yang-shay-ba’s Great Exposition of Buddhist and Non-Buddhist Views on the Nature of Reality*, by Jeffrey Hopkins (Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion Publications, 2003).
- NT *The Nature of Things: Emptiness and Essence in the Geluk World*, by William Magee (Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion Publications, 1999).
- OR *Ocean of Reasoning by rJe Tsong Khapa*. Translated by Geshe Ngawang Samten and Jay L. Garfield (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).
- P. Pāli.
- PV *Commentary on the Compendium of Reliable Cognition (Pramāṇavārttika)* by Dharmakīrti.
- RA *Precious Garland (Ratnāvalī)* by Nāgārjuna. Translated by John Dunne and Sara McClintock in *The Precious Garland: An Epistle to a King* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 1997).
- SN Saṃyutta Nikāya. Translated by Bhikkhu Bodhi in *The Connected*



*Discourses of the Buddha* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2000).

- Sn *Suttanipāta*. Translated by Bhikkhu Bodhi in *The Suttanipāta* (Somerville, MA: Wisdom Publications, 2017).
- SRR *Self, Reality, and Reason in Tibetan Philosophy: Tsongkhapa's Quest for the Middle Way*, by Thupten Jinpa (New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2002).
- ŚS *Seventy Stanzas (Śūnyatāsaptati)* by Nāgārjuna. *Nāgārjuna's Seventy Stanzas*, by David Ross Komito (Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion, 1987).
- T. Tibetan.
- Vism *Visuddhimagga* by Buddhaghosa. Translated by Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli in *The Path of Purification* (Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 1991).
- VV *Refutation of Objections (Vigrahavyāvartanī)* by Nāgārjuna. In *The Dispeller of Disputes: Nāgārjuna's Vigrahavyāvartanī*. Translation and commentary by Jan Westerhoff (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).
- YDB *The Yogic Deeds of Bodhisattvas*, by Geshe Sonam Rinchen. Translated by Ruth Sonam (Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion Publications, 1994).
- YS *Sixty Stanzas of Reasoning (Yuktiṣaṣṭikākārikā)* by Nāgārjuna. Translated by Geshe Thupten Jinpa. <https://www.tibetanclassics.org/html-assets/SixtyStanzas.pdf>.

## Introduction

WHenever I speak with people, I think of myself as a member of their family. Although we may be meeting for the first time, in my eyes you are already a friend. When we share together, I don't think of myself as a Buddhist, a Tibetan, or as the Dalai Lama. I think of us as one human being speaking with another.

When we interact, I hope that you will think of yourself as a human being rather than as an American, Asian, European, African, or member of any particular country, ethnic group, gender, political party, age group, or religion. These conventional identities and loyalties are secondary, and sometimes they interfere with our connecting with and understanding one another. If you and I find common ground as human beings, we can communicate well; my being a monk, Buddhist, Tibetan, or man are peripheral in comparison to my nature as a human being.

Being human is our fundamental commonality; it is the foundation we will always share. Each of us is born as a human being, a fact that doesn't change until we die. Everything else—whether you are educated or uneducated, young or old, rich or poor, black, white, yellow, or red—is secondary.

In truth, you and I already know each other profoundly as human beings who share the same basic goals. All of us seek happiness and do not want suffering. Everyone, no matter where we live, is engaged in various projects because we are motivated by the desire to be happy. This is natural, and there is nothing wrong with it. However, we must keep in mind that too much involvement in the superficial aspects of life will not solve our bigger problems of discontentment and suffering. And too much self-centeredness will not make us fulfilled. Love, compassion, and concern for others are the real sources of happiness. When we cultivate these in abundance, we will not be disturbed by even the most uncomfortable circumstances. If we nurse resentment, jealousy, and hatred, however, happiness will elude us even if we live in the lap of luxury. So if we really want to be happy, we must widen the sphere of our love. This is both religious thinking and basic common sense.

Look at it this way: We are born helpless. We own nothing and cannot take care of ourselves. Without the kindness of our parents or another caregiver, we could not survive, much less prosper. Because the minds of small children are very delicate, their need for kindness is particularly obvious, but adults need kindness too. If someone greets me with a smile and expresses a genuinely friendly attitude, I appreciate it very much. Although I might not know that person or even understand their language, my heart instantly feels relaxed. On the other hand, if kindness is lacking, even if I'm with someone from my own culture whom I have known for many years, I feel an icy chill between us. Kindness and love—a real sense of sisterhood and brotherhood—are very precious. They make community possible and therefore are an essential part of any society.

On the last day of a visit to Los Angeles, the geshe and his students who organized the teachings, my staff, and security were walking to the hotel elevator on the way to the airport. I saw the maid who had taken care of my room and went over to thank her. To everyone's surprise, she reached up and gave me a quick kiss on the cheek. Everyone around was not sure how to respond; I think they were a little uncomfortable, thinking the kiss on my cheek was inappropriate, so they just kept silent. But after we got into the elevator, I told them that was a sweet kiss—the maid was just expressing natural human affection—and they relaxed.

As small children, we depend on the kindness of others. In old age, we again depend on the kindness of others. Between childhood and old age we falsely believe that we are independent beings who are in control, but this is not so. Human society exists because it is impossible to live in complete isolation. Especially with the present structure of society, a global economy, specializations in particular fields of study, and the pervasiveness of technology and industry, we are more dependent on one another than at any other time in human history. Interdependent by nature, we must live together. Since this is unavoidable, we must have concern for one another. The aim of society must be the compassionate betterment of everyone from one lifetime to the next; this endeavor must include all living beings on this planet, not just human beings.

As you gain more appreciation for both the kindness intentionally bestowed on you by others and the unintended kindnesses reflected in the goods and services you depend on daily, you will automatically want to repay that kindness—or pay it forward—by contributing to a healthier society so others will benefit.

By benefitting others, you will improve your own lot too. Without appreciation of kindness, society breaks down.

When people in need are ignored, abandoned, or exploited for political or economic reasons, it reveals what is lacking in us human beings: although we are intelligent and powerful enough to destroy the planet, we lack genuine kindness and love for one another. There is an Indian saying: “When an arrow has struck you, there is no time to ask who shot it or the type of arrow it was.” Similarly, when we encounter human suffering, we must respond with compassion rather than question the political, national, religious, or racial identities of those we help. Instead of asking whether their country is a friend or foe, we must think, “These are human beings; they are suffering and their right to happiness is equal to our own.”

Consider, too, the animals who are being raised for slaughter, a number so great that the environment itself is harmed. These sad facts are the result of insufficient loving care. If humanity’s sense of compassion for others increased, not only would people in the world be happier but so would the countless animals whose lives we directly affect.

A better society is not something that can be legislated. Our common well-being depends on each of us as individuals cultivating peace, tolerance, forgiveness, love, and compassion in our own hearts and minds. Even if others don’t do this, we must. It is our personal contribution to world peace, and we must not back out with the limp excuse that others must be kind first, then we will return the kindness. Rather, we must go forward with optimism and determination and do what we know in our hearts is right.

With this awareness and an altruistic intention to benefit all beings, we will explore the nature of reality together. In doing so, we will examine a number of Buddhist and non-Buddhist assertions. This will prompt a lot of debate, where we compare and contrast different ideas and try to defend our own positions. The motivation for this is for all parties to develop their wisdom by closely investigating various philosophical assertions. Any dissecting of others’ views is not done out of hostility, the wish to take others down, or the intention to criticize people who hold views that differ from ours. Rather, through discussion and debate all of us will benefit.

Bhikṣu Tenzin Gyatso, the Fourteenth Dalai Lama

## Thekchen Choling



# 1 | The Importance of Realizing the Ultimate Nature, Emptiness

THE PREVIOUS VOLUMES of the *Library of Wisdom and Compassion* predominantly explored the method aspect of the path—the topics leading us to aspire to be free from saṃsāra and to generate bodhicitta and joyfully work for the liberation of all sentient beings. The ultimate nature of phenomena was explicitly spoken of from time to time because it underlies all these topics. The emptiness of inherent existence is the space in which all phenomena exist.

Now we will turn to make the ultimate nature—the emptiness of inherent existence—the chief object of our exploration. Emptiness is the ultimate mode of existence, and the wisdom realizing it directly is the only medicine that can cure saṃsāra and its duḥkha once and for all. This wisdom, coupled with bodhicitta, removes both afflictive and cognitive obscurations, enabling us to become fully awakened buddhas who are of great benefit to all beings.

## *Why Realizing Emptiness Is Important*

All of us share the wish to be happy and to overcome duḥkha. Upon close examination, it is evident that the situation in saṃsāra is utterly unsatisfactory. Its faults—especially birth, aging, sickness, and death, which we undergo without choice—continuously plague us in one rebirth after another. All the seeming pleasures of saṃsāra are transient and leave us dissatisfied. Chasing after them ensnares us in a cycle of excitement followed by disillusionment and depression. When we become fully aware of our predicament in saṃsāra and the danger of it continuing, strong aspiration for liberation and full awakening arises.

Ceasing saṃsāra entails eradicating its causes—afflictions and polluted karma—which are rooted in the ignorance grasping persons and phenomena as inherently existent. To identify this ignorance and the false object it grasps necessitates observing our mind closely, seeing how we easily assent to and grasp

as true the false appearance of everything existing under its own power, independent of all other factors. Correctly identifying this self-grasping ignorance that is the root of saṃsāra is extremely important, for without this we will not be able to eliminate it.

Having correctly identified self-grasping and its erroneous object, we must ascertain that such inherently existent persons and phenomena do not exist at all. Doing this involves refuting inherent existence, which is called the “object of negation” (*pratiṣedhya* or *niṣedhya*,<sup>2</sup> T. *dgag bya*), because we need to prove to ourselves that it does not and cannot exist. Through contemplating correct reasonings that refute inherent existence, a correct assumption regarding the emptiness of inherent existence will arise. There are many levels of correct assumption that are gained over time until a correct inference knowing emptiness is gained. This conceptual realization of emptiness is then combined with a mind of serenity to attain the union of serenity and insight on emptiness. Through familiarization with emptiness by meditating with the union of serenity and insight over time, the conceptual appearance of emptiness gradually fades away and profound wisdom increases until it directly perceives emptiness, the ultimate nature of reality.

Again, by meditating over time with the wisdom directly perceiving emptiness, the levels of afflictions and their seeds are gradually cleansed from the mindstream. Continued meditation gradually removes the cognitive obscurations—the latencies of ignorance and the factor of the appearance of inherent existence—from the mind. When this wisdom is complemented by faith, collection of merit, and bodhicitta, full awakening is on the horizon.

Thus if we seek true peace and if we take the Buddha’s teachings to heart, there is no other choice than to cultivate the wisdom realizing emptiness. Āryadeva’s *The Four Hundred* (CS 135cd–136ab, 288) tells us:

All afflictions are overcome  
through overcoming ignorance.  
When dependent arising is seen,  
ignorance does not arise.

It is the only doorway to peace;  
it destroys wrong views;

it [captures] the attention of all buddhas—  
this is called selflessness.

All existents—be they impermanent or permanent—exist depending on other factors. Being dependent, they lack an independent, inherent essence that makes them what they are. These dependent arisings' lack of inherent existence is their fundamental or final mode of existence. It is the object realized by all buddhas of the past, present, and future; it is the object of the meditative equipoise of all śrāvakas, solitary realizers, and bodhisattvas. Through it, nirvāṇa and full awakening are attained. The *King of Concentration Sūtra* (*Samādhirāja Sūtra*) says (MP 71):

If phenomena are individually analyzed as selfless  
and what has been analyzed is meditated on,  
that is the cause for attaining the fruit, nirvāṇa.  
Through any other cause one does not go to peace.

It is crucial to seek the correct antidote to ignorance. Although a variety of religious practices and philosophies benefit people, not all of them explain the correct view of the nature of reality. I have been to more than one Kumba Mela, a Hindu pilgrimage and festival held every twelve years at the confluence of the holy rivers Ganges, Yamuna, and the mythical Sarasvatī. It is one of the largest religious gatherings on the planet, attended by, among others, Hindu yogis who live in the Himalayas and meditate on the practice of inner heat (*candālī*). From the Buddhist perspective, although these yogis have great faith in their gurus and have renounced the pleasures of this life, they are not able to cut the root of self-grasping. Similarly, some of my Christian friends weep when they speak of their love of God, but they too aren't able to stop rebirth in saṃsāra.

Although we Buddhists learn and apply the antidotes to specific afflictions—such as meditating on impermanence to counteract attachment and on love to subdue anger—these antidotes alone cannot eradicate self-grasping ignorance. In *Clear Words* (*Prasannapadā*), Candrakīrti explains (FEW 37–38):

Among the extensive teachings in nine divisions—discourses and so  
forth—rightly proclaimed by the Buddha,



based on the two truths and corresponding to the forms of behavior of worldly beings,  
those spoken for the sake of removing attachment do not remove hatred,  
and those spoken for the sake of removing hatred do not remove desire.

Moreover, those spoken for the sake of removing arrogance and so forth do not overcome other defilements.  
Therefore, they are not very pervasive, and those teachings are not of great import.  
But those spoken for the sake of removing confusion overcome all afflictions,  
for the Conqueror said all afflictions thoroughly depend on confusion.

Attachment, anger, arrogance, jealousy, and so forth are problematic in our lives and applying the specific antidotes to them—contemplating impermanence, cultivating love, rejoicing in others' good fortune, and so forth—subdues them temporarily. However, their seeds still remain in our mindstream, ready to rise up in an instant as full-blown afflictions. To cut these off so they can never reemerge, eradicating them from the root is imperative. The only antidote capable of eradicating self-grasping ignorance (also called “confusion”) is the wisdom realizing the subtle selflessness of persons and phenomena. By realizing emptiness, we cease to assent to or grasp ignorance's false appearances. At that time, there is nothing that can act as a basis for us to give rise to afflictions such as attachment and anger.

### *What Is Emptiness?*

Emptiness is equivalent to suchness (*tattva*).<sup>3</sup> Candrakīrti describes it as the complete refutation of self-existence with respect to all internal phenomena (those conjoined with sentient beings' minds) and external phenomena (those not so conjoined).

Among Buddhists and non-Buddhists there are many different assertions regarding selflessness and suchness (emptiness). Those that are incorrect fall into two extremes: the extreme of nonexistence, deprecation, or nihilism where too much has been negated, and the extreme of absolutism, permanence, eternalism, or superimposition where not enough has been negated. In his commentary to the *Treatise on the Middle Way*, Buddhapālita says that in the first turning of the Dharma wheel, the Buddha presented selflessness as an antidote to counter distorted ways of viewing our aggregates as a self. However, the selflessness presented there is not the final understanding of selflessness, because not enough has been negated. Although the Yogācārins go a step further and reject the reality of the external material world, they still maintain the reality of the internal subjective consciousness. This, too, is a form of exaggerated views where not enough has been negated. Meanwhile Svātantrika Mādhyamikas, in their commentaries on Nāgārjuna's works, insist that phenomena possess some objectified basis on the conventional level. They, too, have fallen to the extreme of superimposition or absolutism. Materialists, on the other hand, say that the self and the world arise randomly without any causes, and people who misunderstand the Prāsaṅgika view say that according to that view nothing at all exists because ultimate analysis negates all existents. These people, who resemble scientific reductionists, also fall to the extreme of deprecation. The Middle Way view as presented by the Prāsaṅgikas avoids both these extremes by realizing the suchness that is the emptiness of inherent existence and still being able to establish conventional, dependent existence.

The view of superimposition exaggerates what exists by saying that dependent arisings exist inherently. This view is faulty because if things existed inherently, they would be independent of all other factors, such as causes and conditions, parts, and so forth. In this case, the person would be permanent because it would exist without depending on causes and conditions. Such an independent, permanent self would continue unchanged eternally after death.

The view of deprecation denies the existence of what does exist. This involves thinking that if phenomena do not exist inherently, they do not exist at all. Those who hold this view say that if the inherent existence of impermanent, dependently arising things were negated, then these things could not perform the function of creating effects. In that case, when the person dies, he or she would

become totally nonexistent, there being no continuity of the person and thus no rebirth.

Both extreme views are based on the premise that if phenomena existed, they must exist inherently, and if they don't exist inherently, then they don't exist at all. Those adhering to the view of absolutism say that since phenomena exist, they must exist inherently. Otherwise they would be totally nonexistent, and that is not acceptable. Those holding the view of deprecation assert that since phenomena don't exist inherently, they don't exist at all. People who fall to either of these extremes are unable to establish dependently arising phenomena. In his *Commentary on [Āryadeva's] Four Hundred*, Candrakīrti says (EMW 179):

Therefore, here (1) this [deprecation] is an erroneous view of nonexistence due to deprecating—as nonexistent—dependently arisen causes within the thoroughly afflicted (saṃsāra), and [phenomena] within liberation or the very pure, which are compounded [by causes and conditions] and are like illusions, and (2) a view of thingness (inherent existence) also is erroneous because an inherently existent nature does not exist. Hence, in this way those who propound that things have an inherent nature incur the fault that dependent arisings do not exist and incur the faults of the views of permanence and of annihilation.

The correct view is the view of the Middle Way that proclaims the dependent arising of all phenomena and their emptiness of inherent existence are complementary. This book will delve into emptiness and explain how emptiness and dependent arising come to the same point. It will also enable us to gain a correct understanding of emptiness and develop the tools to realize it in our meditation.

## *Emptiness, Its Nature, Its Purpose, and Its Meaning*

The nature of emptiness is the mere negation of grasping inherent existence; the purpose of teaching emptiness is to eliminate that grasping that lies at the root of

all afflictions and duḥkha; the meaning of emptiness is that all phenomena lack inherent existence and exist dependently.

The nature of emptiness is the absence of an objectified basis for grasping—anything in relation to which we could say “This is the self” or “This is such-and-such phenomenon.” In his *Commentary on Bodhicitta (Bodhicittavivaraṇa)*, Nāgārjuna says (BV 51–52):

The abiding of a mind that has no object  
is defined as the characteristic of space;  
[so] they accept that meditation on emptiness  
is [in fact] a meditation on space.

With the lion’s roar of emptiness  
all [false] pronouncements are frightened;  
wherever such speakers reside,  
there emptiness lies in wait.

“A mind that has no object” is a mind that does not grasp any phenomenon to have an objectified or inherently existent basis. As long as we believe there is an objectified basis—something that by its own nature *is* that object—grasping its inherent existence will arise. That this happens is confirmed by the fact that we so quickly react to people, objects, and events with attraction and rejection, based on believing they have their own inherent nature; they exist as self-enclosed, independent things just as they appear to. In *Sixty Stanzas of Reasoning (Yuktiṣaṣṭikākārikā)*, Nāgārjuna asks (YS 44):

Those who assert the conditioned things  
as being established in terms of ultimate reality,  
why wouldn’t the faults of permanence and so on  
not arise within their minds?

If the impermanent things that surround us in daily life existed independent of all other factors, they would be unable to change. Someone who asserts inherent existence should therefore believe conditioned phenomena are permanent, a view that our experience refutes, since we and everything around us is in constant flux.

To avoid these errors, it is crucial to analyze if the basis of objectification we believe exists is actually findable. When we search for an essence of things—a person, paycheck, or rainstorm—instead of finding an objectified basis, we find their emptiness of inherent existence. If we then search for the essence of that emptiness, we find in turn its emptiness. Seeking an essence, we find only essencelessness. This lack of an objectified basis applies when we search for the essence of persons, phenomena, and their emptiness.

At the end of our search for an objectified essence, all that remains is emptiness—the absence of inherent existence—which is like space. Space is defined only in negative terms; it is the absence of obstruction. Aside from this, nothing can be pointed to as being space. Similarly, when we search for the essence of any object with ultimate analysis, only emptiness—the absence of inherent existence—is found. In this way, the teachings on emptiness dismantle any basis for grasping, and the meditative equipoise on emptiness is called “space-like meditation.”

Essentialists—philosophers who assert that the person and aggregates truly exist—do not refute enough and leave an objectified basis for grasping inherent existence. Although some of them, such as the Yogācārins, negate an external world, by affirming the true existence of consciousness they too maintain a basis for grasping. Svāntarikas leave room for grasping because they accept inherent existence on the conventional level. Prāsaṅgikas—those who negate inherent existence both ultimately and conventionally—dismantle any basis of grasping.

In the *Treatise on the Middle Way* (*Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*), Nāgārjuna states that whatever is dependent arising is empty, and that holding phenomena as being dependently designated is the Middle Way view. In other words, he equates the meaning of emptiness with the meaning of dependent arising. Understanding this prevents falling to the two extremes. Such a view is like a lion’s roar that decimates all wrong views.

In the opening verses of chapter 24 of *Treatise on the Middle Way*, someone who misunderstands the meaning of emptiness thinks that Nāgārjuna’s refutation of inherent existence undermines both the Buddhadharma and mundane conventions. Not accepting the meaning of the Perfection of Wisdom sūtras, he accuses Nāgārjuna of being a nihilist (MMK 24.1–6):

If all these were empty [of inherent existence],

there would be no arising and no disintegration,  
and it would [absurdly] follow for you  
that the four truths of the āryas would not exist.

Since the four truths would not exist,  
knowing thoroughly, abandoning,  
meditating on, and actualizing [them]  
would not be logically feasible.

Since those would not exist,  
the four fruits also would not exist.  
When the fruits do not exist,  
abiders in the fruit would not exist;  
approachers also would not exist.

If those eight persons did not exist,  
the spiritual community would not exist.  
Because the four truths would not exist,  
the doctrine of the excellent also would not exist.

If the doctrine and spiritual community did not exist,  
how would the buddhas exist?  
If emptiness is construed in this way,  
the existence of the Three Jewels is undermined.

The existence of effects,  
what is not the doctrine, the doctrine itself,  
and all conventions of the world—  
all these are undermined.

The objector says that if everything is empty of inherent existence, nothing could arise and cease, and thus true duḥkha and true origins would not arise and could not cease. If that were the case, then true paths could not be cultivated and true cessations could not be actualized. In short, the four truths of āryas would not exist. If the four truths didn't exist, thoroughly knowing true duḥkha,

abandoning true origins, meditating on true paths, and actualizing true cessations would not be possible. If these weren't possible, the four fruits of stream-enterer, once-returner, nonreturner, and arhat would not be feasible, nor would the four approachers to these states and the four abiders in them. In that case, the Saṅgha Jewel and the Dharma Jewel would not exist, and if these did not exist neither would the Buddha Jewel. Cause and effect, the Dharma teachings, and all societal conventions would be negated. In short, the objector claims that emptiness is equivalent to total nonexistence and would undermine both the ultimate truth (true cessations and nirvāṇa) as well as all mundane conventions (true duḥkha, origins, path, and everything else in the world).

Nāgārjuna replies that this person has misunderstood the nature of emptiness, its purpose, and its meaning, and as a result his mind is proliferating with many pernicious misconceptions. Nāgārjuna then explains that the nature of emptiness is peaceful (quiescent) and not fabricated by the mental elaborations of inherent existence; it is the absence of all dualistic appearances. The purpose of realizing emptiness is to eliminate afflictions, polluted karma, and cognitive obscurations, and the meaning of emptiness is dependent arising.

Nāgārjuna then directly confronts the objector's points, saying that his understanding is completely backward, and the situation is the opposite of what he believes: the fact that all phenomena are empty of inherent existence allows all the functions and relationships of saṃsāra and nirvāṇa to exist. If phenomena existed independent of all other factors, they couldn't interact with other factors and thus couldn't arise, change, function, or cease (MMK 24.14):

For whom emptiness is feasible,  
all is feasible.

For whom emptiness is not feasible,  
all is not feasible.

Since phenomena are empty by nature, all the faults the objector accuses the Mādhyamikas of having actually accrue to him. Nāgārjuna confronts the objector with the undesirable consequence of his wrong views (MMK 24.20):

If all these were not empty [of inherent existence],  
there would be no arising and no disintegration,

and it would [absurdly] follow for you  
that the four truths of the āryas would not exist.

Because phenomena lack inherent existence, they exist dependently. True duḥkha arises dependent on its causes, true origins. These can be overcome by realizing true paths, which bring true cessations. True paths and true cessations are the Dharma Jewel, and the Saṅgha Jewel, which includes the eight approachers and abiders to stream-entry, and so on, and the ārya bodhisattvas, has actualized them. Since the Saṅgha Jewel is feasible, the Buddha Jewel is also possible. All mundane and supramundane realizations and attainments are feasible, as are cause and effect and all worldly conventions.

In this way, Nāgārjuna clarifies that the meaning of the Perfection of Wisdom sūtras' statements about emptiness are definitive and can be understood just as they are expressed. In addition, the above argument clears away all doubt regarding the existence of the Three Jewels and the four truths: because phenomena are empty and arise dependent on other factors, all phenomena in saṃsāra and nirvāṇa are feasible.

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## REFLECTION

1. Why is realizing emptiness important?
2. What is the purpose of realizing emptiness?
3. What are the disadvantages and inaccuracies of the view of superimposition and the view of deprecation?
4. Review Nāgārjuna's argument that because all phenomena are empty of inherent existence and exist dependently, the four truths as well as the Three Jewels and the path to full awakening exist.

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## *Suitable Vessels to Receive Teachings on Emptiness*

For teachings on emptiness to benefit us, we must be proper vessels. Scriptures contain warnings about the danger of teaching emptiness to those who are not



suitable vessels, and doing so transgresses a root bodhisattva percept. The chief danger is that an untrained person will misunderstand the teachings, mistake the emptiness of inherent existence for total nonexistence, and fall to the extreme of nihilism (deprecation), thinking that nothing exists or that actions do not bring results. It is especially deleterious if people disbelieve the law of karma and its effects and cease to care about the ethical dimension of their actions. Behaving recklessly, they create destructive karma, winning for themselves only an unfortunate rebirth.

Alternatively, by misunderstanding the teachings on emptiness, someone may think that emptiness is nonsensical, thus hardening their belief that all phenomena inherently exist. Abandoning suchness, they close the door to liberation by falling to the extreme of absolutism (superimposition). Such wrong views perpetuate duḥkha in saṃsāra for a long time to come. The Sakya scholar-adept Drakpa Gyaltsen (1147–1216) summarizes the disadvantages of incorrectly understanding emptiness in “Parting from the Four Clingings” (26):

There is no liberation for those who grasp at existence;  
there is no higher rebirth for those who grasp at nonexistence;  
those who grasp at both are ignorant;  
so place your mind freely in the nondual sphere.

Those who grasp inherent existence cannot realize emptiness; until they relinquish that view, they cannot attain liberation. Those who grasp nonexistence negate the law of karma and its effects and ignore the ethical dimension of their actions. As a result, fortunate rebirth eludes them. Those who hold both the view of absolutism and nihilism are confused and cannot progress on the path. The view of emptiness is the remedy of all these wrong views.

Āryadeva mentions the qualities of suitable disciples: they are open-minded and willing to hear new ideas, intelligent and able to discern the validity or error in those teachings, and earnest, having a sincere spiritual motivation. Some arrogant people erroneously think that they have understood the subtle meaning of emptiness. Teaching their wrong view to others, they not only harm themselves but also lead others astray.

Candrakīrti speaks of external signs that a teacher may look for to determine if a student is ripe to hear teachings on emptiness (MMA 6.4–5):

Upon hearing about emptiness even while an ordinary being,  
whoever gives rise repeatedly to great inner joy,  
tears flowing from utter joy moisten the eyes,  
and the hairs of the body stand on end,

they have the seed of the mind of complete buddhahood.

They are vessels for the teaching of suchness.

The ultimate truth is to be revealed to them.

In him, qualities that follow after that will arise.

People familiar with the doctrine of emptiness from past lives and those who have wisdom arisen from hearing and wisdom arisen from reflecting on emptiness may have these physical reactions when they hear teachings on emptiness in this life. However, weeping or one's bodily hair standing on end during teachings do not necessarily indicate that a person is a completely suitable vessel for learning about emptiness, because these physical signs could occur for a variety of reasons. On the other hand, the absence of these signs does not mean that those people are not suitable vessels to hear teachings on emptiness. People who have heard teachings on the stages of the path, have conviction in the infallibility of karma and its effects, and do not stray from their teacher's instructions should learn and study emptiness and will receive great benefit from doing so.

Maitreya's *Ornament of Clear Realizations* says that suitable vessels for teachings on emptiness are students who have made offerings to the Three Jewels, created roots of virtue, and are under the guidance of a qualified and virtuous spiritual mentor. A great collection of merit is needed before learning about emptiness to ensure that the student will adequately think about the teachings, reach correct understandings, and thus benefit from the teachings. Students of the Buddhadharmā must be willing to exert effort to examine the teachings on emptiness with unbiased wisdom and to persevere until they gain the correct view.

To make your mind receptive to emptiness, engage in practices to accumulate merit and purify negativities and develop a firm foundation in the Buddhist worldview and the four truths. In addition, cultivate humility and be willing to familiarize yourself with the foundational teachings, such as those on impermanence, duḥkha, and karma and its effects, without impetuously jumping

ahead to more advanced teachings. By studying and practicing the foundational topics, your confidence in the Dharma and in yourself as a Dharma practitioner will increase.

Try to learn and reflect as your spiritual mentor and the lineage masters instruct so that you are not the confused students Āryadeva speaks about: people who, not understanding the teachings, fault the Buddha for not explaining them well, think emptiness means that nothing whatsoever exists, or favor views that make them feel emotionally comfortable although those views are not supported by reasoning. I heard a story about a Buddhist monk who converted to Christianity. When a friend asked him why, he responded, “Buddhism explains things that are impossible for me to do, such as realize emptiness. But in Christianity, I just have to have faith and God will provide for everything. I can do that.”

Do not take the teachings about emptiness for granted. Following his awakening, the Buddha reportedly reflected:

Profound and peaceful, free from elaboration, uncompounded clear  
light—  
I have found a nectar-like Dharma.  
Yet if I were to teach it, no one would understand,  
so I shall remain silent here in the forest.

“Profound and peaceful” refers to the true cessation that is the focus of the first turning of the wheel of Dharma. “Free from elaboration” alludes to the content of the second turning of the wheel, and “uncompounded clear light” indicates the third turning of the wheel.<sup>4</sup> These teachings are precious, and fearing that no one would understand them, the Buddha almost didn’t teach. Receiving these teachings is a dependent arising, and making ourselves receptive students prior to receiving the teachings and enthusiastically investigating the teachings afterward create the cause for our spiritual mentors to instruct us on emptiness.

If we follow an intelligent approach to the Buddha’s teachings, diligently study them, and gain a correct understanding, the Buddhadharma will endure. But if we rely only on faith and worship the Three Jewels without valuing their realization of emptiness, how long will the Dharma exist in our world? If we can explain the Buddha’s philosophical views on the basis of reason and science,

people today will pay attention. Thus it is important to study the sūtras and the treatises, commentaries, and autocommentaries of the great Indian scholar-adepts. The classical Indian commentaries unlock the meaning of the terse root verses and enable us to discern the assertions of other tenet systems from those of our own.

When people who are suitable vessels hear teachings about emptiness, good qualities will arise in them. Candrakīrti says (MMA 6.6–7a):

After adopting an ethical code, they will always abide in ethical conduct.

They will practice generosity, cultivate compassion, meditate on fortitude,

and fully dedicate the virtue of these toward awakening for the sake of liberating migrators.

They will respect the exalted bodhisattvas.

Suitable disciples understand that emptiness and dependent arising are complementary, not contradictory. This increases and stabilizes their faith in karma and its effects, which is essential to avoid the extreme of nihilism. Convinced that realizing emptiness is the key to awakening, they are keen to learn, reflect, and meditate on emptiness from one life to the next without interruption. To ensure they have future lives with all the conducive conditions to do this, they create the causes for fortunate births by cherishing ethical conduct and purify any previously created causes so they cannot ripen. To prevent poverty from interfering with their ability to receive teachings and practice in future lives, they create the causes to receive life's necessities by practicing generosity.

Aware that realization of emptiness conjoined with compassion will bring full awakening, bodhisattvas cultivate compassion and bodhicitta to ensure that they will continually follow the Mahāyāna and attain buddhahood. To prevent anger from creating destructive karma, destroying virtue, and propelling them to an unfortunate rebirth, they practice fortitude. Practicing fortitude also brings a pleasant appearance, so they can meet more people, especially āryas who will instruct them. Knowing that familiarizing themselves with emptiness is the way to overpower afflictions and defilements, they learn, think, and meditate on emptiness as much as possible and cultivate serenity focused on emptiness. To

direct the merit from the above practices to full awakening, they dedicate it to attain buddhahood. Their respect for bodhisattvas increases exponentially because they understand that only buddhas and bodhisattvas can teach emptiness using a myriad of reasonings. To repay the kindness of the buddhas, they engage in the four ways of gathering disciples that give them the opportunity to instruct others on emptiness.

In short, suitable vessels do not erroneously think that the method aspect of the path, which includes compassion, bodhicitta, the collection of merit, ethical conduct, generosity, fortitude, and so on, is only to be practiced by those who have not understood emptiness. They know that although these practices are empty of inherent existence, they exist conventionally. They also contemplate the three—themselves as the agent, the actions engaged in, and the objects acted upon—as empty of inherent existence yet conventionally existent, and they dedicate their merit with that awareness. In this way, those who are suitable vessels practice both the method and the wisdom aspects of the path without deprecating either one.

The activities of listening to and teaching emptiness create great merit. The *Gift of the Precious Child Sūtra* (*Āryasatpuruṣ Sūtra*) says (EES 21):

Mañjuśrī, whoever listens [even] with doubt to this rendition of the teaching [on emptiness] generates much greater merit than a bodhisattva who, lacking skillful means, practices the six perfections for a hundred thousand eons. This being so, what need is there to say anything about a person who listens without doubt! What need is there to say anything about a person who imparts the scripture in writing, memorizes it, and also teaches it thoroughly and extensively to others!

Even though someone lacks skillful means—that is, doesn't understand emptiness—and has doubt about it, he plants powerful seeds for liberation on his mindstream by listening to teachings about emptiness. If this is the case, a person who has full confidence in the teachings on emptiness creates that much greater merit. Needless to say, someone who teaches it without error creates extensive merit.

Why does someone who copies or memorizes a scripture create great merit? After all, nowadays we can easily photocopy or digitize Dharma texts without

having a virtuous thought! It takes a long time to copy a scripture by manually writing it, and dedicating so much time and effort to writing it meticulously increases our respect for its contents. Copying it slowly provides time to contemplate the scripture's meaning, and memorizing it entails repetition, which is conducive to contemplation. These activities of writing, memorizing, and reciting the scriptures connect us with the precious teachings. Because of this familiarity, when we later hear or read teachings the meaning impacts us more deeply. For this reason, monastics in Tibetan monasteries memorize and recite the scriptures beginning when they are young children.

Contemplating emptiness can prevent unfortunate rebirth. The *Treasury of the One Thus Gone Sūtra* (*Tathāgatakośagarbha Sūtra*) says (EES 21):

A living being—who, possessing all these [ten great nonvirtues], enters into the doctrine of selflessness and has faith and belief that all phenomena are from the beginning pure—does not take a bad rebirth.

For example, someone has committed a powerful destructive action that will result in an unfortunate rebirth in the next life. Embracing the teachings on emptiness, he generates tremendous faith and respect toward them and with great enthusiasm tries to understand these teachings. Even if he isn't able to understand them fully, having a good understanding can prevent an unfortunate rebirth in the next life.

Many benefits accrue from instructing others on emptiness. However, teaching emptiness should not be done haphazardly, and much care is required. Two principal requirements are necessary: First, a pure motivation, one that is genuinely concerned about the students and wants them to attain awakening is required. This motivation must also be free from the eight worldly concerns, such as seeking material or financial gain, praise, fame, pleasure, or services. Second, the ability to explain the correct meaning of emptiness without error is essential. This requires years of study, contemplation, and meditation.

If, lacking these two requirements, someone gives an erroneous explanation on emptiness or even a correct explanation with an afflictive motivation, his speech becomes the nonvirtue of idle talk. Incorrectly explaining emptiness to someone new to the Dharma is especially grievous because people tend to take to heart the first teachings they hear and, as a result, may hold a distorted view of

emptiness for a long time. If an incorrect explanation is given to someone who has studied philosophy, at least that person has the opportunity to use reasoning and discern that it is incorrect. A correct explanation given with a motivation of compassion free from attachment to the happiness of this life is an excellent gift to a student and an excellent offering of our practice to the Buddha.

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## REFLECTION

1. What are the qualities of a suitable student to hear teachings on emptiness?
  2. What benefits do suitable students accrue from learning about emptiness, and what benefits do qualified teachers gain by teaching the doctrine of emptiness?
  3. How can you help yourself become a suitable student who will reap these benefits?
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## *Prerequisites for Insight*

Insight and the wisdom realizing emptiness must be specifically cultivated. They will not arise by themselves or by meditating on other unrelated topics such as compassion or serenity. Nevertheless, contemplating other aspects of the path supports our understanding of emptiness. For example, meditating on the defects of saṃsāra or on bodhicitta will increase our joyous effort to learn and meditate on emptiness.

For the practice of insight to flow smoothly, certain prerequisites must be complete. In his *Middle Stages of Meditation (Bhāvanākrama II)*, Kamalaśīla speaks of three causes to prepare to meditate on emptiness and cultivate insight: relying on a knowledgeable and experienced spiritual mentor, hearing and studying the teachings under his or her guidance, and properly contemplating what was taught.

The first prerequisite—choosing and relying on a qualified spiritual mentor—was discussed in chapters 4 and 5 of *The Foundation of Buddhist Practice*. The second prerequisite is fulfilled by listening to your spiritual mentors' teachings on emptiness as explained in authoritative sūtras, commentaries, and treatises. The

Buddha said that one who hears another will be released from aging and death. “Hears another” indicates that the profound view of emptiness is generated by first hearing its meaning from an external spiritual mentor and thinking about the meaning to ensure we have understood it correctly. Without hearing an unmistakable explanation of emptiness from a qualified spiritual master, the profound view will not be generated in your mind no matter how powerful your concentration, how many books you read, how strong your faith in the guru and Three Jewels is, or how many retreats you have done.

To gain a correct understanding of the definitive meaning of emptiness, rely on the treatises of great sages, such as Nāgārjuna. Since distorted understandings of emptiness abound, take care to follow the wise and to develop wisdom in accord with their explanations.

Having heard and studied correct explanations of emptiness, settle the view by contemplating it deeply. A correct inferential understanding of emptiness is an essential prerequisite to cultivating insight on emptiness. Simply saying “All phenomena are empty” does not mean you have understood emptiness. Doing stabilizing meditation for years on your idea of emptiness, without having discerned the correct view, does not generate insight realizing emptiness. Therefore, the upcoming chapters and volumes contain a detailed explanation of how to determine the correct view of emptiness, followed by how to generate insight into emptiness.

Hearing and studying bring the wisdom arising from hearing; contemplating what you have learned and discussing and debating it with others induce the wisdom arising from thinking. By employing complete forms of reasoning, examine how the person exists and decisively conclude that a truly existent self—the object of negation—does not exist. Then meditate to unite serenity and insight and gain the wisdom arising from meditation. With this integrate your understanding of emptiness with your mind to effect deep transformation.



## 2 | The Nālandā Tradition

**B**UDDHISM IN INDIA was the result of the Buddha's three turnings of the Dharma wheel in which he established the basic principles of his teaching. During the first turning, he explained the four truths—how we enter the cycle of existence under the control of afflictions and polluted karma, and how to free ourselves by practicing the path and achieving cessation. Although the Buddha said this, we need to explore whether it is actually possible to cease saṃsāric duḥkha and attain liberation. The Buddha discouraged blind belief and instead encouraged investigation by reasoning and logic.

The Nālandā tradition, which began in India, is named after Nālandā University near Rajgir. This tradition, which stresses the use of reasoning and logic, was later transmitted to Tibet, Mongolia, China, Korea, Japan, and Vietnam. It takes as a starting point the Buddha's advice to his followers, "As the wise test gold by burning, cutting, and rubbing it, so, bhikṣus, should you accept my words—after testing them, and not merely out of respect for me." The Nālandā masters took him at his word and scrutinized his teachings, classifying them into those that were definitive and those requiring interpretation.

The Nālandā tradition has brought great benefit to the world. People in the East and in the West are practicing Buddhadharma, and scientists have interest in it. In the East in general, people have great faith in Buddhism and many recite prayers and the *Heart Sūtra*. But when I ask them what the meaning of the *Heart Sūtra* is, they don't know. To preserve Dharma, people have built many monasteries and temples filled with beautiful statues on the altar, but teaching the meaning of the Dharma is most important so that people will understand and practice the teachings and benefit from doing this. This is the true way to preserve the Buddhadharma.

To show the importance of the Nālandā tradition and my gratitude toward the great masters who comprise it, I wrote a homage expressing my admiration for seventeen Nālandā masters entitled "Illuminating the Threefold Faith: An Invocation of the Seventeen Great Scholar-Adepts of Glorious Nālandā."

Although a praise to eight great Indian masters already existed, this praise to the seventeen masters includes other sages whose writings we rely on. They are some of the major scholar-adepts whose views we will examine in the following chapters. Although not all of them lived at Nālandā University, Nālandā's way of study and practice was present in the other large Buddhist universities. Each of these masters specialized in a particular area of the Buddhadharma and all were knowledgeable and realized practitioners of the three higher trainings—the higher trainings of ethical conduct, concentration, and wisdom.

### *Illuminating the Threefold Faith: An Invocation of the Seventeen Great Scholar-Adepts of Glorious Nālandā*<sup>5</sup>

1. Lords of Lords, arisen from the compassionate wish to benefit wandering beings,  
you have attained sublime protection, abandonment, and realization,  
and liberate sentient beings through teaching dependent arising.  
I bow to you, Conqueror, Sun among Teachers.
2. I call to mind esteemed Nāgārjuna, who, as the Conqueror prophesied,  
introduced the Middle Way of the Universal Vehicle and was skilled in clarifying  
the meaning of suchness, free of extremes, as intended in the Mother of Conquerors (Perfection of Wisdom sūtras),  
through the profound, logical presentation of dependent arising.
3. I call to mind the Bodhisattva Āryadeva,  
his principal spiritual child, the most learned and accomplished,  
who traversed the ocean of Buddhist and other philosophies,  
who is the glorious crowning jewel among all holders of Nāgārjuna's treatises.

4. I call to mind esteemed Buddhapālita,  
who clarified the ultimate meaning of dependent arising—the  
thought of Ārya [Nāgārjuna],  
essential point of the profound, existence as mere designation and  
name—  
and has ascended the utmost state of accomplishment.
5. I call to mind Ācārya Bhāvaviveka, erudite master  
who introduced a philosophical view  
that refutes such extremes as truly existent production  
while accepting commonly verified knowledge and external objects.
6. I call to mind Candrakīrti, who promulgated the complete path of  
Sūtra and Tantra,  
who was skilled in expounding the profound and vast Middle Way,  
in which appearance and emptiness eliminate the two extremes  
through dependent arising and the merely conditional [nature of  
things].
7. I call to mind the Bodhisattva Śāntideva,  
skilled in teaching a host of fortunate disciples  
the truly marvelous path of great compassion  
through versatile means of reasoning, profound and vast.
8. I call to mind the great Abbot Śāntarakṣita,  
who introduced the nondual Middle Way to suit disciples' mental  
dispositions,  
was well versed in differentiating the reasonings of the Middle Way  
and reliable cognition,  
and disseminated the teaching of the Conqueror in the Land of  
Snows (Tibet).
9. I call to mind esteemed Kamalaśīla,  
who thoroughly explained the stages of meditation on the Middle  
Way view, free from extremes,

and the union of serenity and insight according to Sūtra and Tantra;  
he flawlessly clarified the Conqueror's doctrine in the Land of  
Snows.

10. I call to mind esteemed Asaṅga,  
whom Maitreya inspired and looked after,  
who was adept in disseminating all Mahāyāna discourses,  
and revealed the vast path and, as the Conqueror prophesied, blazed  
the trail of Yogācāra.
11. I call to mind esteemed Ācārya Vasubandhu,  
who, by maintaining the system of the *Seven Treatises of  
Abhidharma*, and the nonduality [of Yogācāra],  
clarified the philosophies of Vaibhāṣika, Sautrāntika, and  
Vijñānavāda;  
foremost safe, renowned as a second Omniscient One.
12. I call to mind esteemed Dignāga,  
the logician who gave us the discerning insight of fine discrimination  
by thoroughly opening one hundred doors of logic  
to reveal the system of the Buddha's scriptures through empirical  
reasoning.
13. I call to mind esteemed Dharmakīrti,  
who fathomed the vital points of Buddhist and non-Buddhist modes  
of logic,  
granted conviction in the vast and profound paths of Sautrāntika  
and Yogācāra through reasoning,  
and was adept in expounding the marvelous ways of Dharma.
14. I call to mind esteemed Vimuktisena,  
who interpreted the Perfection of Wisdom that came from the  
Asaṅga brothers  
in accordance with the Middle Way, free from the extremes of  
existence and nonexistence,

and who lit the lamp illuminating the meaning of the *Ornament [of Clear Realization]*.

15. I call to mind esteemed Haribhadra,  
who clarified the three Mothers,<sup>6</sup> supreme Perfection of Wisdom  
scriptures,  
in line with Maitreyanath's pith instructions,  
and who the Conqueror prophesied would expound the meaning of  
the Mother.
16. I call to mind esteemed Guṇaprabha, excelling in stability and  
learning,  
who integrated the intentions of a hundred thousand categories of  
Vinaya,  
and in accordance with Mūlasarvāstivāda,  
thoroughly and unmistakably explained the prātimokṣa.
17. I call to mind esteemed Śākyaprabha, ideal Vinaya holder,  
master of the treasure of the three trainings'<sup>7</sup> qualities,  
who, to ensure the longevity of the flawless Vinaya teachings,  
thoroughly explained what the vast scriptures meant.
18. I call to mind Jowo Atiśa, kind Lord  
who caused the Sage's teaching to flourish in the Land of Snows,  
who expounded doctrines vast and profound—complete teaching of  
the Conqueror—  
in the context of paths of persons of three capacities.<sup>8</sup>
19. Making such invocations with an unflinchingly pure mind  
to you, exceedingly fine sages, ornaments for the world,  
and sources of stupendous, elegant teachings,  
inspire me to ripen my mind so that I may attain liberation.
20. Through understanding the meaning of the two truths, the ground  
reality of how things are,

- I ascertain by way of the four truths just how beings arrive in and  
leave saṃsāra;  
thus valid cognition engenders a firm faith in the Three Jewels.  
Inspire me to be enduringly grounded in the path to liberation.
21. Inspire me to master renunciation, the mind intent on liberation—  
total pacification of duḥkha and its causes;  
and the uncontrived bodhicitta rooted in compassion,  
the boundless yearning to protect wandering beings.
  22. Inspire me to gain conviction with effortless ease  
in the profound points of all paths of the Perfection Vehicle and  
Vajrayāna,  
by listening to, contemplating, and meditating on  
the meaning of the commentaries of the great pioneers.
  23. May I, in successive births, perfectly obtain a human life endowed  
with the three trainings,  
and serve the doctrine as the great pioneers did  
by safeguarding and promoting scriptures and insights  
through explanation and practice.
  24. May all Saṅgha communities be strengthened by noble, learned  
practitioners  
who devote their time to hearing, contemplation, teaching, and  
practice  
and have totally given up wrong livelihood;  
may the entire world be forever adorned with such beings.
  25. Due to these invocations may I traverse all grounds and paths of  
Sūtra and Tantra  
and quickly attain the state of an Omniscient Conqueror  
who spontaneously fulfills the two purposes;  
may I work for sentient beings as long as space endures!

## Colophon

*Thus the foremost sages of the Noble Land of India mentioned above have composed numerous excellent, meaningful treatises and grant insight to those who think critically about the profound and vast teachings of the Fully Awakened Supramundane Victor, the Buddha. To this day, even after nearly 2,550 years have passed, those treatises survive intact for us to study, contemplate, and meditate on. Therefore, I am grateful to those masters who were the cream of sages and aspire to follow them in my practice with unflinching faith.*

*At the present time, when the world has made great progress in the fields of science and technology and we are distracted and preoccupied by the hustle and bustle of our lives, it is extremely important that followers of the Buddha have faith based on an understanding of what he taught. These texts were composed by such renowned masters as the Six Ornaments and Two Supremes, as well as by Buddhapālita and Ārya Vimuktisena, and others, who analyzed his teachings closely with unbiased and inquisitive minds seeking the reasons [that underlie] them and who developed faith supported by an understanding of those reasons. For those reasons, these excellent texts concerning the profound and vast are indispensable. With this in mind, I commissioned a new thangka painting depicting the seventeen scholar-adepts of Nālandā. I added nine other masters of the vast and profound lineages to [those portrayed in the] traditional painting of the Six Ornaments and Two Supremes.*

*Consequently, I was moved to compose an invocation with wholehearted respect for these supreme sages, and some of my aspiring Dharma friends encouraged me. This is how it came about that I, the Śākya Bhikṣu Tenzin Gyatso, who am in the back row of those studying the works of these sages, have developed unfeigned conviction in the superb work of these sublime masters and have composed this text “Illuminating the Threefold Faith,” an invocation of the seventeen great and renowned sages of Nālandā.*

*It was completed at Thekchen Chöling, Dharamsala, Kangra District, Himachal Pradesh, India, on the 1st day of the 11th month of the Iron Snake year in the seventeenth Tibetan “rabjung” [sixty-year cycle], corresponding to 15th December 2001 of the western calendar, 2,545 years, according to the Theravāda system, after the Buddha passed away.*

*May Peace Prevail.<sup>9</sup>*

## *Commentary on “Illuminating the Threefold Faith”*

The verses of praise begin with the Buddha, who, because of his unique philosophical position, is unparalleled in speech. Next is Nāgārjuna (1), who explained the perfection of wisdom teachings, elucidated dependent arising, and was the trailblazer of the Madhyamaka system. Āryadeva (2) was his disciple, as was Buddhapālita (3), who clarified the Prāsaṅgika view. Then comes Bhāvaviveka (4), another student of Nāgārjuna,<sup>10</sup> who disagreed with some of Buddhapālita’s assertions by maintaining that things have some objective existence on the conventional level. This prompted a debate among Madhyamaka philosophers that has lasted many centuries.

Candrakīrti (5) emphasized the importance of explaining all phenomena as dependent arisings to avoid the two extremes of nihilism and absolutism. This is the basis for understanding appearance and reality. Candrakīrti also explained the entire teaching of Sūtra and Tantra. Then comes Śāntideva (6), the author of *Engaging in the Bodhisattvas’ Deeds*, the most profound and extensive explanation of bodhicitta. In my childhood, I had some interest in bodhicitta but felt it would be very difficult to achieve. I admitted as much to my tutor Tagdrag Rinpoche, who advised me not to feel discouraged and confided that he had some experience of bodhicitta. After going into exile, I received teachings on Śāntideva’s text from Khunu Lama Rinpoche and, as a result, came to understand that if I make an effort, I too could feel some closeness to bodhicitta.

Next is Śāntarakṣita (7), to whom we are grateful for establishing the tradition of study in Tibet based on reason and logic. He also ordained the first monks in Tibet, instituting the monastic community there. As the abbot of Nālandā, he began the Yogācāra-Madhyamaka system, which united the Madhyamaka tradition of Nāgārjuna and Āryadeva, the Yogācāra tradition of Asaṅga and Vasubandhu, and the logical and epistemological thought of Dignāga and Dharmakīrti. He is followed by his student Kamalaśīla (8), who wrote the *Stages of Meditation*, an important text that instructs us in proper meditation techniques as well as the cultivation of bodhicitta by the seven cause-and-effect instructions.<sup>11</sup>

Asaṅga (9) was founder of the Yogācāra, or Cittamātra (Mind Only), school. Vasubandhu (10), his younger brother, specialized in Abhidharma. Vasubandhu was originally a proponent of the Fundamental Vehicle, but later adopted the



Universal Vehicle (Mahāyāna). Asaṅga knew that his younger brother was very intelligent and was concerned he might misuse his intelligence to deprecate the Mahāyāna, so he sent a messenger to Vasubandhu saying that he was seriously ill and asking Vasubandhu to come and help.

Arriving at Asaṅga's dwelling, Vasubandhu inquired about the cause of his brother's sickness, to which Asaṅga responded that he had a serious illness of the heart that arose because of Vasubandhu. He went on to explain that because Vasubandhu had discredited and defamed the Mahāyāna, Asaṅga was concerned that Vasubandhu would fall to an unfortunate rebirth. This pained him so much that, as a result, he had a heart ailment that might prove fatal. Alarmed, Vasubandhu asked his brother to teach him the Mahāyāna. Listening to Asaṅga's exposition, Vasubandhu applied his penetrating wisdom to gain conviction in the Mahāyāna teachings and meditated on them.

Vasubandhu then became worried that he might take an unfortunate rebirth as a result of previously deprecating the Mahāyāna. Confessing his error to Asaṅga, Vasubandhu considered cutting out his tongue to atone for his destructive speech. Asaṅga told him that that would not purify his negative speech and instead counseled, "Previously you skillfully used your speech to criticize the Mahāyāna. Now you must use it to wisely and effectively propound the Mahāyāna." Vasubandhu then went on to write several texts from the Yogācāra viewpoint.

Vasubandhu's student, Dignāga (11), was a master of logic. He was followed by another logician and epistemologist, Dharmakīrti (12). Both of them used reasoning to demonstrate the truth of the Buddha's teachings, and Dharmakīrti in the second chapter of his *Commentary on Reliable Cognition* used reasoning to prove the Buddha is a reliable authority. Although Vimuktisena (13) was Vasubandhu's disciple, he explained the perfection of wisdom from the Madhyamaka point of view.

Haribhadra (14) too was a celebrated commentator on the perfection of wisdom. Many students in the monasteries today memorize his commentary, *Clear Meaning*. I remember a group of nuns from Kopan Monastery in Nepal who had memorized it, and I commented to them that they had surpassed me by doing so.

Guṇaprabha (15) and Śākyaprabha (16) were both masters of Vinaya, the monastic discipline. Finally, Atiśa (17) was the kind spiritual mentor who caused

the Conqueror's teaching to flourish in the Land of Snows during the time of the second dissemination. The first dissemination began when Śāntarakṣita and Guru Padmasambhava brought Buddhism to Tibet in the eighth century, but it was severely curtailed and damaged under the reign of King Langdarma (r. 838–41). Atiśa was invited to Tibet to revitalize the Buddhadharma there.

The praise concludes, “May I be inspired to mature my mindstream and attain liberation. May I be inspired to establish the root of the path to liberation. May I be inspired to perfect an uncontrived awakening mind of bodhicitta. May I be inspired to quickly and easily develop conviction about the profound paths of the perfection of wisdom and the Vajrayāna.” May we work with joyous effort to accomplish these aims.

In the colophon I stressed the importance of examining and analyzing the Buddha's teachings with an unbiased and inquisitive mind. Don't be satisfied simply with performing rituals and reciting prayers, but try to understand the Buddha's teachings on the two truths and the four truths of the āryas. Haribhadra said there are dull and intelligent followers of the Buddha; the intelligent question and investigate what they have heard and read, whereas the dull accept the teachings on faith. If you follow the Nālandā tradition and rely on reasoning and logic, the Buddha's teachings will last long in the future; but if you simply fall back on having faith, that is unlikely to happen.

Training in the Nālandā tradition with its extensive use of reasoning and logic is compatible with the scientific method. For almost forty years I have engaged in dialogue with modern scientists to our mutual benefit. Both science and Buddhism emphasize investigation to discover the truth.

The Buddha's teachings of course developed further in Tibet. King Songtsen Gampo (c. 604–49) adopted an Indian model to create a system for written Tibetan. When Śāntarakṣita (725–88) came to Tibet in the eighth century at the king's invitation, he encouraged the translation of Buddhist literature into Tibetan so that Tibetans could study in their own language and set up a translation department at Samye Monastery.

Dignāga's and Dharmakīrti's extensive writings on logic and epistemology were translated into Tibetan. Later Tibetan scholars such as Chapa Chokyi Senge (1109–69), the abbot of Sangphu, and Sakya Pandita (1182–1251) elaborated on these themes.

Marpa Lotsawa (1012–97) transmitted many tantric teachings from India to Tibet, and his disciple Milarepa (1052–1135), who is said to have attained full awakening in that very life, was one of Tibet’s greatest meditators. Tsongkhapa (1357–1419) was a brilliant scholar and meditator. The accomplished logician Gyalsab Dharma Rinchen set out to challenge Tsongkhapa. Attending one of Tsongkhapa’s teachings in a state of inflated confidence, he took a seat next to Tsongkhapa on the throne. Ignoring him, Tsongkhapa continued to teach. Hearing Tsongkhapa’s profound presentation, Gyalsab took off his hat, and he then conceded Tsongkhapa’s superiority by sliding off the throne and sitting at Tsongkhapa’s feet. Although Tsongkhapa had visions of meditation deities—Mañjuśrī in particular—he emphasized study of the classical texts. He never used his mystical experiences to validate his understanding of the teachings, but relied on extensive reasoning.

Among the dedication verses at the end of his *Great Exposition on the Stages of the Path* (*Lamrim Chenmo*), Tsongkhapa wrote:

In regions where the supreme, precious teaching has not spread,  
or where it has spread but then declined,  
with my heart deeply moved by great compassion,  
may I illuminate this treasure of happiness and benefit.

Taking this to heart, I have tried to serve humanity and feel that I have not let the Buddha down.

## *Reliable Guides and Explanations*

The Buddha explained the ultimate nature differently according to the dispositions, interests, capacities, and needs of the particular audience. To help us discern the Buddha’s definitive meaning, we should rely on his sagacious followers. The Buddha clearly prophesized a sage named Nāgārjuna, who, by employing reasoning, would destroy the two extremes of existence (absolutism) and nonexistence (nihilism). Nāgārjuna’s many texts—the most important of which is *Treatise on the Middle Way*—speak extensively about emptiness. His student Āryadeva wrote *The Four Hundred* to supplement his teacher’s treatise.

After introducing some preliminary topics, Āryadeva critically examines the tenets of non-Buddhist as well as Buddhist tenet systems that do not see emptiness and dependent arising as complementary. *Commentary on “Treatise on the Middle Way”* (*Buddhapālita-Mūlamadhyamakavṛtti*) by Buddhapālita (470–550) is a short but profound text that stresses that it is not possible to reify functioning things beyond their being merely conditioned—that is, aside from being produced by causes and conditions, there is no inherent essence in functioning things. In his *Heart of the Middle Way* (*Madhyamakahr̥daya*) and its extensive autocommentary *Blaze of Reasoning* (*Tarkajvālā*), Bhāvaviveka (c. 500–570) develops his own unique interpretation of Nāgārjuna. Śāntideva’s *Engaging in the Bodhisattvas’ Deeds* delves deep into the meaning of emptiness.

Atiśa, the scholar-adept who brought the New Transmission of teachings to Tibet, recommended that, of the plethora of Indian sages who wrote about emptiness, we follow the texts of Candrakīrti. Atiśa praised Candrakīrti as someone who correctly understood the thought of Nāgārjuna, and therefore of the Buddha. In his *Introduction to the Two Truths* (*Satyadvayāvatāra* 15–16ab), Atiśa says:

Through whom should emptiness be realized?  
Through Candrakīrti, the student of Nāgārjuna,  
who was prophesized by the Tathāgata  
and who saw truth, the reality.  
Through the quintessential instructions transmitted from him,  
reality, the truth, will be realized.

The great masters of all four Tibetan Buddhist traditions agree that the Prāsaṅgika view as explained by Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti is the most sublime, although they may call it by different names and describe it somewhat differently. I recommend that you hear, read, study, reflect, and meditate on the works of the above sages. Relate their teachings to your own perceptions, conceptions, and emotions and examine how you perceive and conceive things. Then you will notice the impact that even a small understanding of emptiness has on your mind.

Until the time of Rendawa Zhonnu Lodro (1349–1412), the Sakya master who was one of Tsongkhapa’s closest teachers, the Middle Way view was not widely known. It seems that people did not place special emphasis on the Middle

Way, or perhaps did not have a special interest in it, even though Nāgārjuna's teachings were present in Tibet. While the Middle Way view was taught as one feature of the broader Sūtra practice and was seen as necessary for Tantric practice, emptiness was not emphasized as a major subject for study and meditation, and in the early centuries of Buddhism in Tibet, not many treatises elucidated and analyzed its subtle nuances.

Because of Rendawa's special interest in the Middle Way view, people began to understand its importance, and from that time onward studying it became a prominent aspect of Buddhism in Tibet. Rendawa's student, Tsongkhapa, was likewise highly interested in emptiness and wrote extensively on it. Masters from other Tibetan Buddhist traditions began to write on it as well. In fact, the topic of emptiness became so popular at that time that people said, "In Tibet, when you teach, teach emptiness; when you meditate, meditate on emptiness; when you travel, reflect on emptiness."

I talk about emptiness a lot; I'm compelled to do so because without emptiness, nothing works. The realization of emptiness is the only thing that will overcome self-grasping ignorance. Without it, bodhicitta can't be truly effective and we can't progress through the five paths to awakening. Understanding emptiness enables us to know that liberation is possible and to prove the existence of the Three Jewels. The ability to study, contemplate, and meditate on emptiness makes our human life meaningful. As our understanding of emptiness increases, we naturally will see the greatness and kindness of the spiritual mentors who teach it.

For these reasons, the study and practice of works by Nāgārjuna, Āryadeva, Buddhapālita, Bhāvaviveka, and Candrakīrti, as well as the commentaries by Tsongkhapa and other Tibetan luminaries, is of foremost importance. People from the West and other countries are intelligent and can understand emptiness when it is taught to them. Skillfully introducing suitable vessels to the doctrine of the emptiness of inherent existence encourages them to use their intelligence and cultivate wisdom and leads them on the right path.

The philosophers and yogis of India valued poetry, and many of their compositions were written in verse. This allows for diverse interpretations of the words and meanings, which have been debated for centuries. Some of these sages wrote autocommentaries on their metered root texts, whereas others wrote the short root text and left it to others to expand the meaning in commentaries. As a

result, there is a wealth of literature that approaches the subject matter from a variety of perspectives.

Sometimes we may wish that the Buddha and the Indian sages would tell us the “one right meaning” of their words that we can latch on to and that will pacify our uneasiness about ambiguity. But the purpose of the Buddha and the sages was to provoke us to think and to sharpen our ability to investigate and test the teachings with reasoning. As a result of that lengthy process, we will gain firm and clear wisdom that goes beyond intellectual knowledge.

While learning the various tenet systems, you will encounter many points of debate. The purpose of the debates is not philosophical argument. Simply proving one’s intellectual prowess and refuting others’ views does not lead to liberation. Rather, the debates help to clarify your own views. When Prāsaṅgikas refute Svātantrikas’ view of emptiness, look inside yourself and see if you hold the Svātantrika view and subtly grasp inherent existence. In meditation, investigate how things actually exist, and examine the view of each tenet system to determine which is the most profound and comprehensive. This is a challenging process that requires much reflection. Having found the correct view, meditate and realize it.

I encourage you to study a variety of Indian commentaries as well as the sūtras that they explain. Some people believe that studying just the debate manuals written by their own monastic college is sufficient to know a subject. They say this out of great respect for the lineage, thinking that the previous masters were so astute that they figured everything out. They see their job as students as simply imbibing and duplicating in their own minds what the main master from their monastic college taught. Some people may even go so far as to think, “I only need to study what my own teacher taught because he or she is the Buddha and knows everything.” These narrow viewpoints limit the individual’s perspective and cause the tradition to stagnate. All of us need to learn, investigate for ourselves, and use our own intelligence to understand the teachings. Studying widely and looking at a topic from a variety of angles sharpens our faculties and expands our comprehension. It also breathes new energy into our debates and into the tradition as a whole.

### 3 | Introduction to the Philosophical Tenet Systems

**I**N HIS *Commentary on Bodhicitta* (BV 70), Nāgārjuna tells us:

A happy mind is tranquil indeed;  
a tranquil mind is not confused.  
To have no confusion is to understand the truth;  
by understanding the truth one attains freedom.

The main purpose of discussing selflessness, emptiness, and insight is to see reality so that we can attain the freedom and peace of liberation and full awakening and help others do the same. To do this, we must investigate the process through which our unwanted *duḥkha* comes about and how to reverse it. In *Samsāra, Nirvāṇa, and Buddha Nature*, we traced the origin of *duḥkha* to karma—our intentional actions—and from karma back to afflictions such as attachment, anger, jealousy, arrogance, and so on. The root of all afflictions is the ignorance that grasps persons and phenomena to exist inherently—that is, as able to set themselves up and exist under their own power independent of all other factors.

This ignorance can be eradicated by the wisdom that perceives phenomena as they actually are, as empty of inherent existence. The way to generate this wisdom is the topic of this and the next two volumes. As we embark on this exploration of how our mind misapprehends the way phenomena exist, let's be curious and open to consider ideas we may not have heard before. In addition, let's continually maintain a sincere motivation to question, analyze, and learn in order to support our long-term goal of buddhahood.

By realizing the truth of how persons and phenomena actually exist, our mind will become tranquil and free from the pain of ignorance. Beyond fear, anxiety, and insecurity, an unruffled mind imbued with great compassion and wisdom is capable of benefiting others, especially by guiding them to *nirvāṇa* and full awakening.

Our inquiry into the nature of reality begins with a general overview of the assertions of Buddhist and ancient Indian non-Buddhist philosophical tenet systems. These systems developed as a result of learned adepts questioning, “Who am I?” and “How do things exist?” In these tenet systems, they lay out what they believe is the source of unwanted *duḥkha* and the wisdom that will undercut that source.

Having heard that the Madhyamaka (Middle Way) view is considered supreme, we may want to immediately jump to it rather than plod through learning other tenet systems first. However, there is great value in studying these other systems, because we may discover that we hold views similar to theirs. In that case, we need to examine if our views are correct. Another benefit of studying other systems is that by taking their positions and trying to defend them, we come to see where they lack evidence and reason, and in that way, gradually sharpen our wisdom and refine our own view.

### *The Value of Studying the Tenet Systems*

During his forty-five years of teaching the Dharma, the Buddha instructed a vast variety of people who had different mental capacities and dispositions. A skillful teacher, he taught whatever would be most effective for guiding a particular person from his present level to awakening. For this reason, the Buddha’s method of explaining the ultimate nature—emptiness or selflessness—varied according to his audience. Since emptiness is the opposite of how we ordinarily perceive things to exist, the Buddha had to prepare people so that they would understand its meaning correctly without distorted conceptions or extreme views. He taught people the correct view in stages, according to their aptitude at that time. When speaking to some people, the Buddha negated a permanent, unitary, and independent self. To others, he refuted a self-sufficient substantially existent person but affirmed the person’s inherent existence, while to another group he negated the inherent existence of both persons and phenomena. To some people the Buddha taught truly existent external objects and to others he explained that external objects exist but lack true existence. If we do not understand the Buddha’s skill in teaching people according to their aptitude, we risk thinking that the Buddha was either confused or that he contradicted himself.



In ancient India, Buddhist practitioners who followed a diversity of sūtras lived in close proximity to one another and debated and discussed the views put forth in these sūtras. Over time, practitioners who had common assertions loosely identified as a group and, later, as proponents of a system of thought. In this way, the names Vaibhāṣika, Sautrāntika, Yogācāra, and Mādhyamika came to identify groups of people with similar views. Although these four systems are not an exhaustive treatment of all Buddhist tenets, they are a helpful tool for understanding the principal ideas that were popular in Buddhist India and the diversity of thought in what was called “Buddhism.” Knowledge of these four systems is integral to much of Tibetan Buddhist thought and will help you understand the writings of Buddhist sages throughout history.

While these groups are often called “philosophical systems” or “schools,” they did not propound a rigid catechism of tenets that all their proponents adhered to. Not everyone in one system lived in the same place in India, and if someone wanted to study the tenets of a particular system, they did not have to go to a specific monastery to do so. People with various beliefs lived together and debated among themselves as well as with non-Buddhists. Monastics in a single community did the Vinaya ceremonies together: their differing tenets did not interfere with the harmony of the saṅgha.

The Buddha did not announce that he was teaching a particular tenet system; the idea of tenet systems arose later among the Indian sages and became more systematized in Tibet. In his *Heart of the Middle Way* and its autocommentary *Blaze of Reasoning*, Bhāvaviveka extensively explains the tenet systems. Two Indian masters—the second Āryadeva (eighth or ninth century) in *Compendium of the Essence of Wisdom (Jñānasārasamuccaya)* and Jetāri (c. 940–980), a pandit from Vikramaśīla, in *Sugatamatavibhaṅgakārikā* and its extensive autocommentary—wrote about the Indian tenet systems. Āryadeva presented Buddhist as well as non-Buddhist systems, whereas Jetāri explained the four main Buddhist systems. In their works, both of these masters suggested that these tenet systems form a progressive series that gradually leads a student to the most accurate view of the basis, path, and result.<sup>12</sup> Śāntarakṣita (725–88), who wrote *Compendium of Principles (Tattvasamgraha)*, a huge compilation of the views of Buddhist and non-Buddhist tenets, recommended studying the lower and higher tenet systems. His student Kamalasīla elaborated on that in his commentary to that text.

Tibetan masters agreed with this presentation of progressive tenet systems and composed a genre of texts concerning philosophical tenets (*siddhānta*). These texts are widely taught in Tibetan monasteries and now in Dharma centers and monasteries outside Tibet and India. Among contemporary scholars in the four Tibetan traditions—Nyingma, Kagyu, Sakya, and Gelug—there are some differences in presentations of the tenet systems, although the overall meaning and presentation is similar.<sup>13</sup> Tibetan scholars filled out certain tenets in each system, adding definitions and, in some cases, inferring what followers of a particular system would say about a topic. For example, a Buddhist system in India may not have explicitly asserted inherent existence, but by examining its tenets scholars inferred that it did. This is because asserting partless particles, a foundation consciousness (*ālayavijñāna*), or a mental consciousness that carries the karmic seeds is done within the assumption that phenomena inherently exist.

Tibetan philosophers also contributed to the development of the systems by elaborating on the assertions of their Indian predecessors. For example, the Yogācāra system described in current tenet texts is more detailed than the presentations in Asaṅga's and Vasubandhu's treatises, which themselves fleshed out the meaning of sūtras such as the *Sūtra Unraveling the Thought* and the *Descent into Lanka Sūtra*. Later Tibetan and Chinese masters described various types of latencies and elaborated on other topics that were not spelled out in these sūtras and treatises. For that reason, Tibetan and Chinese assertions about Yogācāra differ in some aspects.

The doxographical approach in which later sages classify the statements of prior sages into systems has both advantages and shortcomings. Regarding the benefits, it allowed Tibetans to organize and systematize the enormous amount of Buddhist literature that came to Tibet into a comprehensible form. It enables us to easily identify the important points of each tenet system and see how they interrelate to other points to form a cohesive system. Setting up tenet systems in a certain order was done to gradually lead disciples to what is considered the highest and most accurate view. Together, the presentations of these systems form a pedagogical tool that helps students become acquainted with the major views that they will examine in more depth and meditate on as their Dharma practice progresses.<sup>14</sup>

Regarding the shortcomings, by strictly classifying various positions into one system, the diversity of viewpoints and debates within each system is obscured,

and the tenets of each system become codified, although they weren't like that in ancient times. In addition, interestingly, the author of each tenet text belongs to the tenet system that they acclaim to be the highest.

One other result of establishing tenet systems that has both benefits and drawbacks is that it allows an author to set up straw men to refute positions that they disagree with and to clarify the position of their own system. These artificial debates can be very helpful for students' understanding, even when they are not historically accurate. For example, Bhāvaviveka reputedly held certain beliefs that later scholars severely rebuked, but since he had died centuries before the tenet texts were compiled, he had no opportunity to affirm that he actually held those positions or to defend them if he did.

In this volume, we will focus on the organization of the tenets systems according to the Gelug tradition. In general, they are four in number: the Vaibhāṣika, Sautrāntika, Yogācāra, and Madhyamaka. The order of the schools should not be seen as the historical sequential development of Buddhist thought, and the views of a codified system may not always coincide with the actual beliefs of their so-called founders or chief proponents. Sometimes the tenets in a particular system are those of scholars with similar but not identical views to the founder, some tenets may be inferred from what that system's chief proponent said, and some assertions are elaborations on what the proponent said. Nevertheless, by presenting an amalgamation of different tenets into what appears to be a summary of religious doctrine for each school, Tibetan scholar-adepts could differentiate and clarify the subtle points regarding emptiness according to the Prāsaṅgika view, as they understood it, by refuting the tenets of the lower schools.

Theravāda is not included in the four tenet systems described in Tibetan tenet texts, although most of its tenets may be found among the four tenet schools. Buddhism spread to Sri Lanka in the third century BCE. Since Sri Lanka was far from the large Buddhist monastic universities in northern India, Buddhism there developed in a comparatively isolated way and later came to be called the "Theravāda tradition." It is incorrect to equate the Theravāda with the Vaibhāṣika or Sautrāntika schools.<sup>15</sup> There is no mention in the Pāli commentaries or subcommentaries (*ṭīkā*) of the four tenet systems as mentioned in classical India and later formulated in Tibet.

Tsongkhapa, whose followers began the Gelug tradition, lived at a time when the ultimate nature of phenomena was widely discussed and debated. From circa 800 to 1000, Śāntarakṣita's Yogācāra-Svātantrika Madhyamaka views were prominent in Tibet and were considered the most accurate presentation. After Patsab Nyima Drak (1055–1145?) and others began to translate Candrakīrti's works, Śāntarakṣita's view was questioned and no longer seen as the pinnacle view in the period between 1100 and 1400. With Dolpopa Sherab Gyaltzen's (1292–1361) presentation of other-emptiness, more debates arose. Tenet texts became invaluable aids as Tibetans debated these various views.

You may wonder why there are so many different views of emptiness and just want someone to tell you which one is right. Or you may learn the tenet systems according to one tradition and then get confused on discovering that another tradition has a different explanation. I sympathize with your bewilderment, and I also believe this diversity of views makes Buddhism very rich. Each tenet system presents a model of the world according to its unique perspective on conventional and ultimate truths. We are challenged to understand how the assertions of each system form a cohesive whole and to investigate deeply using reasoning to determine which system makes the most sense to us. Our minds will become more flexible because we'll also understand that various systems and traditions may each define the same word differently. This forces us to study other views instead of criticizing them based on our misunderstanding of the meaning of their words and concepts.

Many of the writings of later masters were in response to the assertions of earlier masters. Studying the tenet systems and knowing a little about the history of Buddhist philosophy shows us the context in which different positions arose and various masters wrote their treatises. For example, Nāgārjuna's radical refutation was largely in response to the substantiality propounded by the Sarvāstivādins. Dignāga's and Dharmakīrti's writings emerged in a climate of intense debate between Buddhists and non-Buddhists. Bhāvaviveka's assertions countered those of Buddhapālita, while Candrakīrti defended Buddhapālita's position and refuted that of Bhāvaviveka.

Study of the various tenet systems prompts us to investigate the nature of reality more deeply, instead of assuming that the superficial appearances to our mind are true. Each system presents a progressively more refined view, and while that of the Prāsaṅgikas is considered the most accurate, that does not mean that it

is the best view for everyone at this moment. The assertions of other Buddhist systems may be more suitable for a particular individual at this time. As you study the tenet schools, see which one is the most comfortable for you right now and adopt that one. As time goes on, you can refine your view. How do you discern which system to accept? Investigate which system challenges you and helps you do away with mistaken grasping without destroying your faith in conventional existence, the law of karma and its effects, and the importance of practicing the method aspect of the path.

To those new to the study of tenets, the terminology may seem daunting, and you may be inclined to dismiss tenets as intellectual machinations that have little to do with life. But if you look closer, you'll find that when you understand the terminology better, these teachings can aid in understanding your mind, uncovering and dispelling erroneous conceptions, disarming disturbing emotions, and penetrating the nature of reality.

For example, Buddhists refute the view held by many non-Buddhists that the person is essentially permanent but superficially impermanent. Initially we may not understand what this means, but if we think about it we will see that sometimes we view people as having an unchanging essence but also as changing over time. We have to ask ourselves if a person can have both a fixed nature and a transient nature. Are there two selves—one that is permanent and the other that changes with time? In this way, we flesh out our misconceptions and familiarize ourselves with seeing people and things more in accord with the way they exist.

If you are new to tenets, in the first reading, become familiar with the words. In the second reading, remember the concepts. In subsequent readings, investigate the meaning. When you have understood the tenets systems well, meditate on their views to gain insight into how things exist.

Two of my students who engaged in a long retreat were working hard to understand emptiness, so I suggested several great works for them to read. At that time there were not as many books on emptiness in English as there are now, and most were written by scholars for scholars. One day they came to see me and said that they felt burdened by all the reading and wanted to meditate more and study less. I told them about Asaṅga, who was a third-ground bodhisattva when Maitreya instructed him to keep studying. To make sure they understood my point, I held up three fingers and said firmly, “third ground.” As they were leaving, I told them they didn't need to read every Madhyamaka book, but at

least to continue studying Nāgārjuna, Candrakīrti, and Tsongkhapa. They looked relieved and years later returned to report the progress they had made in understanding emptiness.

## *Buddhist Tenet Systems and Their Sages*

We begin with a brief outline of the Buddhist tenet systems and the Indian sages that expounded them, and in the next chapter we will explore their views on the nature of reality.

The Fundamental Vehicle tenet systems are:

1. Vaibhāṣika, which may be subdivided into three branches according to their location: Kashmiri, Aparāntaka, and Magadha.
2. Sautrāntika, which has two branches: (1) Scripture Proponents, who follow Vasubandhu's *Treasury of Knowledge*, and (2) Reasoning Proponents, who follow Dharmakīrti's *Seven Treatises on Reliable Cognition*.

The Mahāyāna (Universal Vehicle) tenet systems are:

1. Yogācāra (Cittamātra, Mind Only), which has two branches: Scripture Proponents and Reasoning Proponents.
2. Madhyamaka (Middle Way), which has two branches: (1) Svātantrika Madhyamaka (Autonomist), which has two subdivisions: Yogācāra-Svātantrika Madhyamaka and Sautrāntika-Svātantrika Madhyamaka, and (2) Prāsaṅgika Madhyamaka (Consequentialist).

The Vaibhāṣikas follow the tenets expressed in the *Great Detailed Explanation* (*Mahāvibhāṣāśāstra*), a treatise written by Arhat Nyepe and other arhats. It condenses the meaning of the Seven Abhidharma Treatises that only Vaibhāṣikas consider to be the words of the Buddha. Other well-known Vaibhāṣikas are Vasumitra, Dharmapāla, Buddhadeva, and Saṅghabhadra.

Vasubandhu (c. 316–96) wrote the famous *Treasury of Knowledge* (*Abhidharmakośa*). Although he is reputed to hold Yogācāra views, this text is



associated with the Vaibhāṣika school. He later wrote a commentary on it, the *Explanation of the Treasury of Knowledge* (*Abhidharmakośabhāṣya*), which is studied by both the Vaibhāṣikas and the Sautrāntika Scripture Proponents.

The great sage Dharmakīrti (c. 600–660) studied with Īśvarasena, a disciple of Dignāga (c. 480–540). Dharmakīrti wrote *Seven Treatises on Reliable Cognition*, which are said to explain the positions of the Sautrāntikas and Yogācāra, although it seems that Dharmakīrti himself was a Yogācāra Reasoning Proponent. Sometimes great sages gave explanations that differed from their own personal beliefs because those were the views more suitable for their disciples.

Historically, the Mahāyāna tenet systems began with Nāgārjuna, the great Indian sage (c. second century CE) who discovered and then propagated the Perfection of Wisdom sūtras in India. This magnificent scholar and practitioner wrote six great treatises on emptiness, the most significant of which is *Treatise on the Middle Way* (*Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*, also known as *Root Wisdom* or *Fundamental Wisdom*),<sup>16</sup> in which he set forth what came to be known as the Madhyamaka view of emptiness as explained in the Perfection of Wisdom sūtras. Nāgārjuna's spiritual heir Āryadeva (c. 170–270), who understood Nāgārjuna's thought completely, further explained this view in his work *The Four Hundred* (*Catuhśataka*).

Asaṅga (c. 310–90) was himself a Mādhyamika, but he elaborated on and extensively taught the Yogācāra view and thus was known as the “great charioteer” of this view. This view must have been present in Nāgārjuna's time because Nāgārjuna refuted it in his *Commentary on Bodhicitta* (*Bodhicittavivaraṇa*). When explaining the Yogācāra view, Asaṅga refuted the existence of external objects and asserted that an object and the consciousness apprehending it had the same substantial cause. Asaṅga also wrote an Abhidharma commentary, the *Compendium of Knowledge* (*Abhidharmasamuccaya*), from the Yogācāra viewpoint.

By the eighth century in India, Madhyamaka, Yogācāra, and the logico-epistemological views of Dignāga and Dharmakīrti were among the prominent philosophical views. The great sage Śāntarakṣita (c. 725–88) synthesized these three, creating the Yogācāra-Madhyamaka system (later known as the Yogācāra-Svātantrika Madhyamaka in Tibet), which was the last major development in Indian Buddhist thought before Buddhism in India was destroyed in the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries. When Buddhism first went to Tibet,

Śāntarakṣita's view was seen as the highest explanation of Madhyamaka because he was the first abbot ordaining monks in Tibet as well as the first prominent teacher of Buddhist philosophy there.

Since Nāgārjuna and Āryadeva did not clarify whether external objects existed, Bhāvaviveka (500–570) refuted the Yogācāra view of no external objects and established that external objects exist conventionally. Śāntarakṣita asserted that external objects do not exist conventionally and that the mind ultimately lacks inherent existence. Śāntarakṣita's student, Kamalaśīla (c. 760–815), further explained this view. Other prominent followers of the Yogācāra-Svātantrika system were Vimuktisena, Haribhadra, Jetāri, and Lavapa. Because Bhāvaviveka accepted that external objects exist conventionally, his system became known as the Sautrāntika-Svātantrika Mādhyamika. Jñānagarbha was a proponent of this system, although Tibetans usually identify him as Yogācāra-Svātantrika Madhyamaka.

Another branch of Madhyamaka is the Prāsaṅgika Madhyamaka. Buddhapālita (c. 470–540) wrote a commentary on Nāgārjuna's *Treatise on the Middle Way*, using many consequences in support of Nāgārjuna's view. Objecting to the way in which Buddhapālita refuted the Sāṃkhya view of arising from self, Bhāvaviveka asserted that phenomena exist by their own character and have inherent existence on the conventional level.

Candrakīrti (600–650) supplemented and expanded Nāgārjuna's explanations, asserting that external objects exist conventionally and that all phenomena lack inherent existence. He also asserted that syllogisms are not necessary and consequences are sufficient to establish the correct view.<sup>17</sup> Although Candrakīrti asserted some tenets that seem to accord with the Vaibhāṣika and Sautrāntika schools—such as the existence of external objects conventionally (which is accepted by both Fundamental Vehicle schools) and the nonexistence of apperception<sup>18</sup> (which is accepted by Vaibhāṣikas)—his reasons derive from his views on emptiness, which differ from the reasons used by the lower systems. Candrakīrti did not always agree with Dignāga's and Dharmakīrti's system of logic and epistemology and set out other tenets that formed part of the Prāsaṅgika-Madhyamaka system in Tibet.

Although Candrakīrti's writings were infrequently studied during his lifetime or for two or three centuries afterward, he later became known as the chief upholder of the Prāsaṅgika view; Bhāvaviveka was the chief upholder of the



Svātantrika view. Śāntideva (eighth century) also expounded the Prāsaṅgika-Madhyamaka view. However, this distinction into two branches of Madhyamaka only occurred later in Tibet, at the time of Tsongkhapa, so it is in retrospect that the Indian masters are designated as being Svātantrika Mādhyamikas or Prāsaṅgika Mādhyamikas. The names of these systems derive from their preferred manner of establishing the correct view—Bhāvaviveka by using autonomous syllogisms (*svatantra-prayoga*) and Buddhapālita and Candrakīrti by using consequences (*prasaṅga*). However, the actual reason for the division into two systems was Bhāvaviveka's acceptance that phenomena exist by their own character conventionally.

Although Mādhyamikas later refuted specific assertions in the two *Knowledges*,<sup>19</sup> it does not appear that they wrote their own Abhidharma texts. Rather, apart from specific assertions in the two *Knowledges* that contradicted Madhyamaka tenets, the Prāsaṅgikas accepted these texts. Examples of the portions they refuted are the definition of the ignorance that is the root of cyclic existence and the wisdom needed to eradicate it.

From India, the Yogācāra and Madhyamaka systems spread to North and East Asia. In China the Yogācāra view became very popular, although the Madhyamaka view still exists among some Chinese Buddhists. The Prāsaṅgika view was widespread in Tibet, and all Tibetan traditions follow it, although the vocabulary they use to explain it may differ.

Atiśa (982–1054), a prominent teacher who brought the teachings to Tibet during the second dissemination of Buddhism in Tibet, mainly referred to Bhāvaviveka's texts *Heart of the Middle Way* and *Blaze of Reasoning*. Although Atiśa recommended that people follow Candrakīrti's view, it was only during the time of the Kadam geshe that Patsab Nyima Drak began to translate Candrakīrti's *Supplement to the Middle Way* (*Madhyamakāvatāra*), *Clear Words*, and *Commentary on the Bodhisattva Yogic Deeds of the Four Hundred* (*Bodhisattvayogācāracatuḥśatakaṭīkā*) from Sanskrit into Tibetan. Patsab gave the first draft of the translation of the *Supplement* to the Kadam Geshe Sharawa to comment on. Although Sharawa did not understand Sanskrit, he pointed out certain passages that needed to be checked. When Patsab compared these comments to the original Sanskrit, he saw that he indeed needed to revise those sections. For this reason, Patsab praised Sharawa's understanding of the Middle Way.

The admiration went the other way too. Sharawa publicly praised the revised translation and expressed gratitude for Patsab Lotsawa's contribution in bringing Candrakīrti's work to Tibet. The Tibetan translators who worked from the original Sanskrit texts were very learned and courageous people. They remained faithful to the original Sanskrit and developed a consistent vocabulary, resulting in modern scholars praising the accuracy of their translations. Of course the philosophical language they used was too complex for the average reader, but their efforts enabled serious students to connect to the thought of the past, to great Indian sages, and to the Buddha himself.

Patsab taught the followers of the Kadam school, which originated with Drömtönpa, Atiśa's foremost Tibetan disciple. The Kadampas influenced the teachings of the New Transmission traditions in Tibet—the Sakya, Kagyu, and Gelug traditions. Unless otherwise noted, the explanation of emptiness given in the subsequent chapters is according to the Prāsaṅgika-Madhyamaka view as presented by the great masters of the Nālandā tradition in India.

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## REFLECTION

1. What is the purpose of studying the tenet systems?
  2. Review the four principal tenet systems and the scholar-adepts who are their proponents.
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## 4 | Overview of Buddhist and Non-Buddhist Tenet Systems

TIBETAN TENET TEXTS begin by briefly covering non-Buddhist tenet systems and then introduce Buddhist systems, beginning with those propounding a coarse view and progressing to those with more refined views of both conventional and ultimate truths.

### *The Worldly Person and the Yogi*

Some of the tenet systems that flourished in ancient India exist today, others do not. Meanwhile new views have appeared. In this chapter, I will mention some of the most important ones. These summaries of non-Buddhist and Buddhist tenet systems are brief and, for the purpose of this book, will focus on their view of ultimate reality. They will give you a foundation for the explanations and discussions in later chapters and volumes and spark your interest in the nature of reality. There are several excellent books on the tenet systems that have been translated into English; please study them for a more comprehensive view.<sup>20</sup>

When beginning to study the tenet systems, some people comment that some of their assertions are nonsensical and think that there is no need to spend much time refuting these views because their defects are so obvious. However, there are several reasons to study and refute these views. First, some of these erroneous views may exist unnoticed within our minds. Only by stating them clearly and examining their validity do we ferret out our own misunderstandings. Second, we may meet people who hold these views. By understanding these views and their refutations, we can help others gain the correct view of reality. Third, those who propound these “silly” views are sophisticated people, not fools. If they came here to teach us, we may very well be convinced by their views. Since our intelligence is limited, it behooves us to develop it, lest we listen to a proponent of incorrect tenets and adopt them ourselves.

Our purpose is to attain full awakening in order to liberate ourselves and others from saṃsāric duḥkha. To do this, we must cut the self-grasping ignorance that is the root of saṃsāra by realizing the ultimate nature of reality. This is our reason for learning philosophy. Śāntideva distinguishes two types of people—worldly people, or those who are not philosophically inclined, and yogis, who rely on philosophical analysis. Here “yogi” does not necessarily refer to a meditator but to someone who grounds their understanding of the world in a philosophical perspective. The Tibetan word for yoga is *naljor* (T. *rnal 'byor*), which means to join or unite one’s mind with a chosen virtuous object; “yogi” and “yoginī” refer to an individual who is familiar with a specific virtuous object and fuses his or her mind with it. In a way, this could apply to modern education too, where a diligent student tries to gain mastery over the field—to fuse her mind with it. Such a person does not relate to the world in a naïve way.

Perspectives of worldly beings are undermined by yogis, and among yogis, those who are more advanced philosophically undermine those whose tenets are more superficial. Science is a discipline of inquiry, and although the scientific method and the philosophical method differ, both use critical analysis. So, according to Śāntideva’s definition, scientists could be called a type of “yogi” because they engage in investigation and analysis, and some of their findings undermine ordinary appearances. For example, worldly beings see the world composed of discrete objects that are seemingly solid. Scientists know there is more space than mass in these objects. They know that our ordinary perception of the world is a projection, and that reality is more complex than what appears to our senses.

To introduce some of the vocabulary used in tenet systems: in general, “phenomena” refers to all existents. But when speaking of the “self of phenomena” and the “selflessness of phenomena,” it refers to all phenomena other than persons, specifically the aggregates (form, feeling, discrimination, miscellaneous factors, and consciousness) that are the basis of designation of a person. The lack of inherent existence of the I is the selflessness of persons (*pudgalanairātmya*); the lack of inherent existence of the aggregates is the selflessness of phenomena (*dharmanairātmya*).

The basis of designation (basis of imputation) is the collection of parts in dependence on which the designated or imputed object is designated. For example, a car is designated in dependence on the collection of its parts—the

engine, wheels, axle, and so forth—which is its basis of designation. Similarly, a person or I is designated in dependence on its basis of designation, the five psychophysical aggregates.

The word “self” has multiple meanings, depending on the context. Sometimes “self” refers to the person or I. At other times it refers to the object of negation—the nonexistent object fabricated and grasped by ignorance—as in the terms “self-grasping ignorance,” “self of persons,” “self of phenomena,” and “selflessness.” While all Buddhist systems say the object of negation is self, how they define “self” varies. It may be self-sufficient substantial existence, the subject and object being substantially different, true existence, ultimate existence, inherent existence, and so forth.

Similarly, the Tibetan word *'dzin* may be translated as “grasp”<sup>21</sup> or as “apprehend.” While we mistakenly grasp inherent existence, we can accurately apprehend a table. In the context of investigating the ultimate nature, we speak of self-grasping ignorance, ignorance, or self-grasping. For the Prāsaṅgikas these terms come to the same point.

It is easy to confuse the meaning of a word in one system with its definition in another. For example, Prāsaṅgikas understand “ultimate truth” as the final mode of being of persons and phenomena, the actual way they exist. For Vaibhāṣikas “ultimate truth” does not refer to the ultimate mode of existence of phenomena. Rather, an ultimate truth is an object that when physically broken up into parts or mentally dissected, the awareness apprehending it is not cancelled. Thus they say that directionally partless particles and temporally partless moments of consciousness are ultimate truths, whereas tables and people are not.

Just because two terms or phrases contain similar words does not mean that the word has the same meaning in both of them. For example, for Prāsaṅgika-Mādhyamikas, an ultimate truth does not ultimately exist, and a consciousness apprehending a rabbit’s horn (which does not exist) is a reliable cognizer with respect to its appearing object (the appearance of a rabbit’s horn), but it is not a reliable cognizer. These puzzling uses of words will be clarified later.

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## REFLECTION

1. Review some of the basic vocabulary used in the study of emptiness, such as phenomena, aggregates, basis of designation, self, ultimate truth, selflessness, dependent arising, and so on.
  2. Remember the meaning of each term.
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## *Non-Buddhist Tenet Schools*

Non-Buddhist schools are sophisticated philosophical systems. Although the brief description below does not do justice to them, it gives you some idea of their approaches to saṃsāra, its origin, liberation, and the path. In later chapters, we will examine some of their assertions in more detail. Most non-Buddhist tenet systems assert an independent creator and/or a permanent cosmic principle from which the world originates. Since the person we see is transient and ephemeral, these schools also assert a permanent self—an *ātman* or soul—that is separate from body and mind and endures from one life to the next.

Vaiśeṣikas (Particularists) and Naiyāyikas (Logicians) assert an inherently existent self that is separate from the mind and the body with its physical senses. The self is a real, findable, all-pervasive entity. A practitioner realizes this self by purifying the mind through rituals and fasts and thereby ceases to create either destructive or constructive karma. The self then separates from the body and, not taking another rebirth, is thereby liberated.

Sāṃkhyas (Enumerators) assert that the consciousness is a permanent self. They also assert a fundamental nature or primal substance (*prakṛti, pakati*) that is unborn, unchanging, and partless. This fundamental nature is a cause of other phenomena but itself has not been produced by anything. It is similar to the idea of a universal substance out of which everything is created and which thus pervades all phenomena. Saying that everything already exists in the fundamental nature yet still arises from it, Sāṃkhyas assert that things are produced from themselves—that is, they already exist within the cause.

Theistic Sāṃkhyas say that the creator Īśvara together with the fundamental nature create phenomena. Saṃsāra occurs because one does not understand that everything—including the misery of saṃsāra—is a manifestation of the fundamental nature. When one realizes this, all manifestations absorb back into

the fundamental nature and conventional phenomena no longer appear to the yogi's mind. The self now abides alone; this is liberation.

Mīmāṃsakas (Analyzers or Ritualists) state that defilements abide in the nature of the mind and therefore are impossible to eradicate fully. Many people nowadays have a comparable view, saying, for example, that we human beings are inherently selfish and true altruism is impossible. A somewhat similar view is to say that our mental states arise from or in the brain and that our genetic makeup determines our habitual mental states. Anger, for example, is therefore programmed into us on a genetic or physical level and is impossible to eliminate.

Mīmāṃsakas say omniscience is impossible because phenomena are infinite, so a person could never know them all. This view is also shared by some people today who state that it is impossible for ordinary beings to become omniscient because only a creator God is capable of that; others say because the human brain is finite, it cannot know all of infinity.

Some Nirgranthas (Jains) advocate a path of asceticism that consumes all karma. One is then born in a place that resembles the Christian concept of heaven, where one is free from saṃsāra. In almost every culture there have been groups that assert ascetic practices or extreme physical hardship as the path to heaven or liberation. Some walk across fire; others go naked in freezing weather. Some engage in self-flagellation or extreme fasting. When I was teaching in Mundgod, South India, in 2002, I saw some Indians whipping themselves. I don't know if they were doing this to attain liberation or for some other reason; in either case, a crowd would gather around to stare at them.

From a Buddhist viewpoint, most of the non-Buddhist schools fall to the extreme of absolutism. The Cārvākas (Materialists), however, tend toward the extreme of nihilism, because they assert that only things we can directly perceive with our senses exist. They do not accept inference as a reliable way to know objects. Although they do not reject that a seed produces a sprout because that causal relationship is evident to our senses, they do reject causality that is not evident to the senses, such as the law of karma and its effects and the causality involved in rebirth. Believing that neither the person nor the mind continues after death, they deny the existence of past and future lives because the rebirth process isn't knowable with our physical senses. Instead they assert that the mind is a byproduct of the body, and/or the body and mind are one entity. Since the body no longer functions after death, they believe the mind also ceases. This view

is similar to scientific reductionism, in which only things perceivable by the senses or measurable by scientific instruments are said to exist.

To this, some people add the belief that many elements of our personality are controlled or heavily determined by genetics. Such a view can leave people feeling disempowered, as if their mental or physical state were predetermined. It also discounts the fact that everything depends on multiple causes and conditions and that we can make choices in our lives.

## *Buddhist Tenet Systems*

Vaibhāṣika and Sautrāntika are considered Fundamental Vehicle tenet systems, while Yogācāra and Madhyamaka are Universal Vehicle (Mahāyāna) tenet systems. However, a practitioner of one vehicle may follow the tenet system of the other vehicle. A Fundamental Vehicle practitioner who seeks arhatship may hold the tenets of any of the four tenet systems. Similarly, a practitioner of the Universal Vehicle may follow any of the four tenet systems. In addition, someone may change the tenet system they follow, and a follower of any of the tenet systems may change their practice vehicle.

The tenet systems vary in terms of their definition of the ignorance that is the root of saṃsāra and the conceived object of that ignorance. They also differ in terms of their assertions regarding selflessness, afflicted obscurations, and cognitive obscurations.

When observing your mind, you may discover that you hold some non-Buddhist views that you hadn't recognized before. As a child you may have learned that there is a creator God who himself was not created but who created the universe and the beings in it. Prayers to God may have comforted you as a child. You may have learned that you have an immutable soul that is the essence of who you are. Although you may have already come to disbelieve such things intellectually, those beliefs may have been deeply imprinted in your mind, and when crises loom they are emotionally appealing. You may know the words of Buddhist tenets but find that deep inside your mind you have non-Buddhist views.

In your study and exploration of the tenet systems, first think as the Vaibhāṣikas do—many of their assertions make sense to us. After a while, if you



see some weaknesses in them, adopt the Sautrāntika tenets. If these later become unsatisfactory, explore the Yogācāra assertions. If that system makes sense to you, stay with it. If not, delve into the Yogācāra-Svātantrika or Sautrāntika-Svātantrika Madhyamaka systems, which are fascinating. But if you find logical inconsistencies in them, look into the Prāsaṅgika view. Whatever system you settle on, use reasoning to clearly evaluate its assertions.

## *Vaibhāṣika*

All Buddhist tenet systems (schools)—and many non-Buddhist systems as well—speak of ultimate truths and conventional truths and ultimate and conventional existence, although what they mean by these terms varies widely. Vaibhāṣikas<sup>22</sup> define an ultimate truth as a phenomenon that if physically or mentally separated into parts, the consciousness apprehending it does not stop. Directionally partless particles (the smallest unit of matter), partless moments of consciousness (the smallest units of consciousness), and unconditioned space are examples of ultimate truths because they cannot be further subdivided physically or mentally and thus do not lose their identity under any circumstances. Tables and people, on the other hand, are conventional truths because when broken up into parts, they are no longer recognizable as tables and people. Mind in general is an ultimate truth and substantially existent because when it is broken into smaller moments, it can still be apprehended because each of those small moments is mind.<sup>23</sup>

Vaibhāṣikas also differentiate substantially established (*dravyasiddha*), which refers to all phenomena, and substantially existent (*dravyasat*). They say all knowable objects are substantially established because they have their own entity that is not dependent on thought. Since phenomena are divided into the two truths, ultimate truth is equivalent to substantially existent, and conventional truths are equivalent to imputedly existent.

According to the Svātantrikas and below, all imputedly existent phenomena need to have substantially existent phenomena as their basis of imputation. Imputedly existent phenomena are called “self-isolates” (T. *rang ldog*) and substantially existent phenomena are called “illustration isolates” (T. *gzhi ldog*). The self-isolate person is the general person, the I that we think of when we say

“I’m happy” or “I’m cold.” It is imputed on the aggregates. This imputedly existent self has the characteristics of the aggregates—for example, both are impermanent. When the person is mentally separated into parts—the five aggregates—the consciousness apprehending the I ceases. This self-isolate self is the self on which self-sufficient substantial existence is negated when meditating on selflessness.

But when Vaibhāṣikas look more closely and ask just what this self is, they point to something substantially existent, such as the mental consciousness, the collection of aggregates, or each individual aggregate. This is the illustration-isolate person that is found when the person is searched for. Most Vaibhāṣikas consider the illustration-isolate person to be the mere collection of the physical and mental aggregates that are a person’s basis of designation. However, some Vaibhāṣikas say that each of the five aggregates is a person, and others assert that the mental consciousness is the person. In short, the self-isolate self is imputedly existent and is not substantially existent; the illustration-isolate self—in this case, the mental consciousness and so forth—is substantially existent.

Vaibhāṣikas speak only of the selflessness of persons. The coarse selflessness of persons is the lack of a permanent, unitary, and independent person; the subtle selflessness of persons is the nonexistence of a self-sufficient substantially existent person (the meaning of these terms will be explained below). They do not assert a selflessness of phenomena.

All Buddhist and non-Buddhist schools that speak of karma must account for how karma goes from one life to another. Kashmiri Vaibhāṣikas say that the continuum of the mental consciousness carries it, whereas the other Vaibhāṣikas assert that acquisition (*prāpti*) or non-wastage (*avipranāśa*), which are abstract composites, prevent the loss of the result of an action. Acquisition is likened to a rope that ties up goods and non-wastage is like an IOU, a voucher, or a seal that ensures a lender will not experience the loss of what he has loaned.

According to Vaibhāṣikas, when a buddha or arhat dies, his or her consciousness discontinues. Thus they do not speak of four buddha bodies, nor do they accept the existence of pure lands created by buddhas. In addition, they say that the Buddha is not omniscient—that is, he does not effortlessly know all phenomena simultaneously—but is all-knowing in that when he consciously directs his mind toward something, he can know it individually.

Usually “thing” (*bhāva*) is defined as that which is able to perform a function and is equivalent to products and impermanent phenomena. Vaibhāṣikas, however, say “thing” refers not just to impermanent phenomena but to all phenomena because even permanent phenomena perform functions. For example, permanent space performs the function of allowing things to exist in it. This is the only Buddhist system that asserts this.

## *Sautrāntika*

Sautrāntikas define the two truths differently from Vaibhāṣikas. For Sautrāntikas an ultimate truth is a phenomenon that is able to bear reasoned analysis in terms of having its own mode of existence without depending on imputation by terms and concepts. Ultimate truths are real objects that don’t depend on the mind imputing them. Ultimate truths are equivalent to things, products, truly existent phenomena, the impermanent, and specifically characterized phenomena (phenomena that are ultimately able to perform a function). In speaking of ultimate truths in this way, Sautrāntikas emphasize the importance of functionality and being directly perceivable. Tables, persons, and mindstreams are ultimate truths, whereas in the other tenet schools they are considered conventional truths.

According to Sautrāntikas, conventional truths are phenomena that exist only by being imputed by a conceptual consciousness; they are not able to ultimately perform a function. They are equivalent to permanent phenomena, uncompounded phenomena, false existents, and generally characterized phenomena (phenomena that are ultimately unable to perform a function). They are known only by conceptual consciousnesses. These include conceptual appearances, unconditioned space, and true cessations.

Sautrāntikas assert directionally partless particles and temporally partless moments of consciousness. Sautrāntika Scripture Proponents, like Vaibhāṣikas, say these are ultimate truths because they cannot be further divided, whereas Sautrāntika Reasoning Proponents say they are ultimate truths because they are ultimately able to perform a function. However, some people say that only Sautrāntika Scripture Proponents assert partless particles and that Sautrāntika Reasoning Proponents, who follow Dharmakīrti, do not.

In the Sautrāntika system “imputedly existent” (*prajñaptisat*)<sup>24</sup> and “imputed” have different meanings. To say an object is “imputedly existent” means that to identify it depends on identifying something else. A person, Tashi, is imputedly existent because he can be identified only by perceiving his body, voice, or mind. Similarly, a forest is identified by apprehending many trees. “Imputed,” on the other hand, refers to whatever is established by being merely imputed by thought without having its own objective nature. An example is permanent space.

To say something is substantially existent means that to identify it doesn’t depend on identifying something else. Here “substantially existent” means self-sufficient in that the object doesn’t depend on another object for it to be identified. Cars and stars are known in this way. We see them directly with our eyes. The mind and mental factors are likewise substantially existent because, according to the Sautrāntikas, apperception—a type of self-perceiving consciousness—directly perceives them. To know anger in our own mind, we don’t need to perceive something else first, whereas to know an hour—which is not substantially existent—we have to first perceive the change in another object.

In *Succinct Guide to the Middle Way* (*Dbu ma’i lta khrid phyogs bsdebs*), Tsongkhapa says (SRR 76):

Thus the meaning of substantial reality and nominal [imputed] reality is the following: When a thing appears to the mind, if it does so in dependence on the perception of another phenomenon that shares characteristics different from said object, then the object is said to be nominal reality. . . . That which does not depend on others in such a manner is said to be substantially real.

Self-sufficient substantial existence is the same as substantially existent for Sautrāntikas up to and including Svātantrikas. In and of itself, substantial existence is not an object of negation. However, a self-sufficient substantially existent person is. The self-isolate person is imputedly existent; it is not a self-sufficient substantially existent person, which is the object of negation when Svātantrikas and below refute the subtle self of persons. A self-sufficient substantially existent person does not exist.

When a self-sufficient substantially existent person is negated, the selflessness of person is realized. The absence of being a self-sufficient substantially existent person can be realized with respect to any phenomenon. If the base is the person, then the person not being a self-sufficient substantially existent person is realized. If the base is a phenomenon other than the person, then that phenomenon not being an object of possession of a self-sufficient substantially existent person is realized. For this reason, all schools that assert the absence of a self-sufficient substantially existent person as the subtle selflessness of persons agree that any phenomenon can be the base of the selflessness of persons. Prāsaṅgikas agree with this, except for them it is called the “coarse selflessness of persons.”

Sautrāntikas, like Vaibhāṣikas, assert only a selflessness of persons, not a selflessness of phenomena.<sup>25</sup> According to Sautrāntikas, the appearing object of a direct perceiver—including direct perceivers that are uninterrupted paths and liberated paths on the paths of seeing, meditation, and no-more-learning—must be an impermanent object. Selflessness, however, is a permanent phenomenon. Thus they say that these path consciousnesses, which are yogic direct perceivers, do not directly realize selflessness. Rather, they directly perceive the aggregates and indirectly know that the aggregates lack a self-sufficient substantially existent person.

The common assertion of almost all Buddhist tenet systems is that the selflessness of persons is the absence of a self-sufficient substantially existent person and of an I that makes the aggregates mine—the possessor of the aggregates. “Self-sufficient” (T. *rang rkya ba*) means that the person is different from the mental and physical aggregates. However, that is not the case; the person and the aggregates are related: the aggregates are one nature with the person, and because of that we can identify the person by cognizing their body, speech, or mind. Here a substantially existent person would be perceivable without anything else appearing to the mind. That means that without apprehending the body, speech, or mind of a person, we could still perceive a person. That clearly is not the case. To cognize a person, at least one of the aggregates needs to appear. Because a person can be identified only by perceiving some other phenomenon, such as the body, a person is dependent on and related to the aggregates. Thus, the person exists imputedly, not substantially.

The lower Buddhist tenet systems, Svātantrika Madhyamaka and below, negate self-sufficient substantial existence on the general self—the self that is

imputed on the aggregates. The general self has the characteristics of the aggregates in that the person walks, talks, knows things, and feels emotions just like one or more of the aggregates does. It is the self that we refer to in everyday conversation when we are not analyzing what the I is.

A person is not substantially existent because his or her body, speech, or mind must be identified in order to identify the person. The person also is not self-sufficient because it is not the controller of the body and mind. However, the person appears to be self-sufficient substantially existent: the I appears to be independent of the body and mind and to control them like a master who tells the servants what to do. The I says, “Walk outdoors,” directing the body to walk. The I states, “I will think about this later,” telling the mental aggregates what to do. The body and mind seem to depend on the person who orders them about, and the person appears to be different from the aggregates. A yogi, however, realizes that the person does not exist self-sufficiently; it is not an independent controller of the body and mind because it depends on the aggregates. Since there is no self-sufficient person, nothing can be possessed by such a person, so both the I and the mine lack self-sufficient substantial existence.

In short, a self-sufficient substantially existent person is one that appears to be different from the aggregates but is also the controller of the body and mind. It appears to be the self-sufficient substantially existent owner and user of the aggregates that are grasped as mine. This sense of I is false because the I depends on the aggregates and does not exist separate from them. There is no person that authoritatively bosses the body and mind around, even though we sometimes feel there is.

Although the lower systems negate a self-sufficient substantially existent person, they say that the person does exist and point to a personal identity—an illustration of the person—that is the person. Many of these schools say that the mental consciousness is the personal identity because the mental consciousness goes from one life to the next. Others say the collection of the aggregates, the continuity of consciousness, or a foundation consciousness is the personal identity. All of these schools say that the personal identity substantially exists. In the case of saying the mental consciousness is the personal identity, the mental consciousness substantially exists because its appearance to a consciousness doesn't depend on another phenomenon appearance. The mental consciousness appears and is cognized without being imputed, and for this reason it is

substantially existent. Although the mental consciousness is a composite of different mind moments, it is not imputed because all those mind moments are of a similar type (that is, they are all moments of mind). In short, while the lower systems negate the substantial existence of the person, they assert that the personal identity—such as the mental consciousness or the collection of the aggregates—is substantially existent. The personal identity does not have all the characteristics of the person. For example, the mental consciousness does not have physical characteristics although the person does.

Objects of possession of the self include the body and mind as well as external objects such as chairs and cups. To meditate on the lack of self-sufficient substantial existence in relation to these objects, we reflect that they are not objects of possession of a self-sufficient substantially existent person.<sup>26</sup> However, the body and mind themselves are substantially existent because they can be identified without another phenomenon first appearing to the mind.

Regarding the second meaning of substantial and imputed existence described above, Asaṅga, in his *Compendium of Ascertainments* (*Nirṇayasamgraha*), says:

Anything whose definition (or characteristic) is designated without relating to others and without depending on others, in short, is to be known as *substantially existent*. Anything whose definition is designated in relation to others and dependent on others, in short, is to be known as *imputedly existent*, not substantially existent.

This explanation is accepted by all Buddhist schools. For the lower schools, the substantial existence mentioned here is the subtle object of negation in the meditation on the selflessness of persons. Prāsaṅgikas, however, say that this meaning of substantial existence is coarse and that the selflessness of the lower schools does not negate enough, because the person is also empty of inherent existence.<sup>27</sup>

In short, according to the view common to all four tenet systems, the view of a personal identity grasps an independent or self-sufficient substantially existent I in our own continuum. Here “independent person” does not refer to an inherently existent person, which is the unique object of negation of the Prāsaṅgika Madhyamaka school. Rather it indicates a person who is the owner or



the enjoyer of the psychophysical aggregates. Just as a king rules over his subjects, this I rules over the body and mind, which are subservient to it. The I seems to be independent of the aggregates, like the boss of the body and mind.

A clear indication that we have this feeling of an independent I is, for example, when we see someone with an attractive body or an intelligent mind, we think, “If it were possible to exchange my body with his and my intelligence with hers, I would readily agree.” Here, the I seems to be separate and independent from the body and the mind. It appears to be their owner, and this owner can benefit by exchanging its body for a more attractive one or its mind for a more intelligent one. Such an independent, self-sufficient substantially existent I does not exist; when searched for, it cannot be found as one of the aggregates or separate from the aggregates.

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## REFLECTION

1. What would a directionally partless particle be like? Why doesn't such a thing exist?
  2. What are the two ways that Sautrāntikas use the terms “substantially existent” and “imputedly existent”?
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## *Yogācāra (Cittamātra)*

Yogācārin are defined as proponents of Buddhist tenets who use reasoning to refute external objects and assert that dependent phenomena are truly existent. The Yogācāra school<sup>28</sup>—also called Cittamātra (Mind Only), Vijñānavāda, and Vijñaptivāda—has two branches: Yogācāra Scripture Proponents who mainly follow Asaṅga and Yogācāra Reasoning Proponents who principally follow Dignāga and Dharmakīrti. The main sūtras Yogācārin refer to are the *Sūtra Unraveling the Thought [of the Buddha]* (*Samdhinirmocana Sūtra*) and the *Descent into Laṅkā Sūtra* (*Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra*). In addition, the Yogācāra Scripture Proponents rely on Asaṅga's *Compendium of the Mahāyāna* (*Mahāyānasamgraha*) and Vasubandhu's *Thirty Stanzas* (*Triṃśikā*) and the commentary on it by Sthiramati (c. 510–70).



Following Asaṅga's *Five Treatises on the Grounds*,<sup>29</sup> Yogācāra Scripture Proponents assert eight consciousnesses: the five sense consciousnesses, mental consciousness, plus a foundation consciousness (*ālayavijñāna*) and an afflicted consciousness (*kliṣṭamanas*). The foundation consciousness is a neutral, undefiled, enduring mental consciousness that exists throughout one's life and into future lives. It is the storehouse for all latencies and karmic seeds. Because it is stable and exists while one is awake, asleep, and in the intermediate state between births, it is able to carry karmic seeds and other latencies from one life to the next. For this reason, the foundation consciousness is said to be the person. The afflicted consciousness views the foundation consciousness and, not seeing its nature, mistakenly holds it to be a self with a self-sufficient substantially existent nature.

Yogācāra Reasoning Proponents adhere to Dharmakīrti's *Seven Treatises on Reliable Cognition*.<sup>30</sup> They assert the usual six consciousnesses (visual, auditory, olfactory, gustatory, tactile, and mental consciousnesses) that cognize their corresponding objects (forms, sounds, etc.) through their associated sense faculties (eye, ear, etc.), as do the other tenet schools, and assert that karmic seeds and latencies are deposited on and carried by the mental consciousness. Thus they assert the mental consciousness to be the person.

The Yogācāra Scripture Proponents have a unique way of presenting phenomena and their deeper mode of existence. All conventional things that we interact with on a daily basis—books, trees, and so forth—arise due to the latencies placed on the foundation consciousness. Although these things appear to be external objects unrelated to our minds, this is a false appearance. In fact, they arise from the same latency as the consciousness that perceives them, and they exist simultaneously with their perceiving consciousness. This is very different from other systems that assert external objects and say that the consciousnesses perceiving them are caused by the object and its corresponding sense faculty. In other words, according to these Yogācārins, the flower and your mind perceiving it arise from the same latency on the foundation consciousness. There is some similarity between these Yogācārins and scientific views regarding the lack of objectively existent external matter. More discussion on this topic between Buddhists and scientists would be interesting.

Yogācārins hold the second turning of the Dharma Wheel and the teachings of the Perfection of Wisdom sūtras to be interpretable and the third Dharma

Wheel to be definitive. To explain the teaching propounded in the second turning, “All phenomena are empty of inherent existence,” they developed the classification of three natures (*trisvabhāva*) and then described the meaning of naturelessness (*niḥsvabhāva*) for each of them. All knowable objects have these three natures.

1. The dependent or other-powered nature arises depending on the power of others, specifically the latencies that produce them. Because the dependent nature arises from causes, it does not last more than a moment.
2. The imputed or imaginary nature includes our imputations and concepts about things. These do not exist by their own characteristics but exist for thought. Unconditioned space is an example of the existent imaginary nature and a self of persons is an example of the nonexistent imaginary nature.
3. The consummate or thoroughly established nature is twofold: (1) the emptiness of external objects—that is, the emptiness of subject and object arising from different substantial entities, and (2) the emptiness of an object existing by its own characteristics as the referent of its name. In short, the consummate nature is the nonexistence of the imaginary nature in the dependent nature.

A flower, for example, is a dependent nature because it is dependent on the latencies that produced it. Although the flower appears to us to be “out there,” separate from the mind perceiving it, this is false. Its being a separate entity from the consciousness perceiving it is its imputed nature. Negating this type of existence in terms of the flower is the flower’s consummate nature.

Each nature is natureless in its own way:

- Dependent natures are *production natureless* (*utpatti-niḥsvabhāvatā*) because they arise from causes that are a different nature than themselves and do not arise from causes that are the same nature as themselves. (To be one nature, two phenomena must exist at the same time, whereas a cause and its effect are sequential.) They are also *ultimate natureless* (*paramārtha-niḥsvabhāvatā*) because the ultimate nature is the ultimate

object of meditation that brings about the purification of obscurations, and dependent natures are not this.

- Imputed or imaginary natures are *character natureless* (*lakṣaṇa-niḥsvabhāvatā*) because they don't exist by their own characteristics. Existent imaginaries such as unconditioned space exist only by the force of conception.
- Consummate natures are *ultimate natureless* (*paramārtha-niḥsvabhāvatā*) because they are the ultimate nature of phenomena that is perceived by the ultimate purifying consciousnesses and do not exist as the self of phenomena.

A *conventional truth* is an object found by a reliable cognizer that is a correct knower distinguishing a conventionality. Dependent natures—such as a table, person, and emotions—and existent imaginaries—such as permanent space—are conventional truths. Conventional truths are falsities in that they appear to be external objects that are different entities than the consciousnesses perceiving them. They do not exist in this way because the object and the perceiving consciousness arise from the same substantial cause, a latency on the foundation consciousness.

An *ultimate truth* is an object found by a reliable cognizer that is a correct knower distinguishing an ultimate—emptiness, consummate phenomena, selflessness, and suchness.

Yogācāra defines true existence as being established by way of its own uncommon objective mode of existence without being posited by conceptuality. Dependent natures—especially the mind—and consummate natures are truly existent. They have their own objective mode of existence that does not depend on being imputed by thought. Imaginaries do not truly exist because they are merely imputed by conception.

For Yogācārins, the selflessness of persons is the lack of a self-sufficient substantially existent person. They also assert selflessness of phenomena from four approaches, which come to the same point: (1) an object's emptiness of existing by its own characteristics as the referent of a term, (2) an object's emptiness of existing by its own characteristics as the object clung to by a conceptual thought, (3) an object's emptiness of being a different entity from the consciousness perceiving it, and (4) an object's emptiness of being external to the mind. Some

scholar-adepts condense these four into two approaches to the selflessness of phenomena: (1) an object's emptiness of existing by its own characteristics as the referent of term and concepts, and (2) an object's emptiness of being an external object and a different entity from the consciousness perceiving it.

When on the dependent nature (for example, a flower) the imaginary natures (the flower's existing by its own characteristics as the referent of a name, and the flower and its apprehending consciousness being distinct entities) are negated, that is the consummate nature (emptiness, the ultimate reality).

If dependent natures did not exist by their own characteristics, arising and ceasing would not be feasible and dependent phenomena would not exist. Similarly, if the consummate did not exist by its own characteristics (*svalakṣaṇa*), it would not be the ultimate nature of phenomena.

Vaibhāṣikas and Sautrāntikas assert substantially existent partless particles that do not have any directions (such as east, west, front, and back) and partless moments of mind that do not have earlier and later parts. Yogācārins call this into question, saying that while it may be hard to further subdivide something physically, all particles must have directional parts and sides because physical particles meet side by side to form larger objects. Without directional parts, these particles could not join together to form coarser objects, such as a chair. Instead, all the particles would merge into one another and occupy the same space, becoming one particle. Similarly, moments of mind that lack parts, such as a beginning, middle, and last part, would conflate into one moment, and a continuum could not exist. Mādhyamikas agree with Yogācārins' refutation of partless particles and partless moments of mind.

Studying the Yogācāra view is a good steppingstone that broadens our view and facilitates understanding Madhyamaka views later. Vaibhāṣika and Sautrāntika schools speak only of the selflessness of persons, whereas Yogācāra adds the selflessness of phenomena. In doing so, it spurs us to examine not only how the person exists but also how the aggregates, which are the basis of designation of the person, exist. In asserting that there are no external objects and that phenomena and their apprehending consciousnesses are one nature, Yogācāra draws us into examining the role the mind plays in the existence of phenomena. Although subject and object being one nature is refuted by the Prāsaṅgikas, contemplating the Yogācāra view enables us to see that the appearances of objectively existent external objects to our sense consciousnesses are false and that

things exist in relation to the mind. This approach reduces clinging to attractive and repulsive objects because these are seen as illusory; they are not objective external objects as they appear to be but are one nature with the mind perceiving them.

Furthermore, the Yogācāra assertion that phenomena are empty of existing by their own characteristics as the referent of terms stimulates us to explore the role of language and concepts in the existence of phenomena. Understanding these two Yogācāra approaches to the selflessness of phenomena prepares us for the Madhyamaka view.

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## REFLECTION

1. Why do some Yogācārins assert a foundation consciousness? What is its function?
  2. What is their belief about external objects? Does that view make sense to you?
  3. Review the three natures and their non-natures.
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## *Madhyamaka*

Mādhyamikas are holders of Buddhist tenets who assert that all phenomena do not truly or ultimately exist. They are of two types: Svātantrikas and Prāsaṅgikas, the differences between them being the topic of much discussion. Contrary to the Yogācārins, Mādhyamikas assert there is no difference between the mind and the external world in that both are empty of true existence—neither has its own mode of being. When Mādhyamikas say that the mind is unborn, they mean that the mind arises, abides, and ceases, but not ultimately or truly. These functions occur dependent on other factors.

Although a clear distinction is made between Svātantrika Madhyamaka and Prāsaṅgika Madhyamaka in contemporary tenet texts, this was not so in India or in the early years of Buddhism in Tibet. It seems to be a distinction made by Tibetans that was widely accepted by the fourteenth century.

## *Svātantrika Mādhyamaka*

Differences exist between the two types of Mādhyamikas in several areas, most prominently in how they assert the object of negation. By seeing how the Svātantrikas define conventional existence, we can understand their object of negation, which is the opposite of that. Conventional existence depends on objects being merely posited through the force of appearing to a nondefective awareness. Ultimate existence (*paramārthasiddhi*), which is negated, is the opposite of this. Ultimate existence is without being posited through the force of appearing to a nondefective awareness. If things existed ultimately, they would exist from their own side by their unique mode of being. Ultimate existence is equivalent to true existence (*satyasat*), existence as its own reality (*samyaksiddhi*), and existence as its own suchness (*tattvasiddhi*).

To conventionally exist, two factors are necessary: the object must be posited through the force of appearing to a nondefective awareness, and it must also exist inherently. For Svātantrikas “posited” means an object is designated by a consciousness through appearing to it. Since the object also exists inherently, the consciousness to which it appears is unmistakable regarding its inherent existence. This nondefective awareness to which an object appears inherently existent can be either a conceptual thought or a nonconceptual perception. In both cases, that awareness is not mistaken with regard to its engaged object.

Both Prāsaṅgikas and Svātantrikas assert that all existents are posited<sup>31</sup> by terms and concepts. However, Prāsaṅgikas add that they are *merely* designated by terms and concepts—“merely” indicating that they do not inherently exist—whereas Svātantrikas do not add “merely” and instead assert that all phenomena exist inherently on the conventional level. That is, Svātantrikas assert that conventionally, phenomena exist by their own characteristics (*svalakṣaṇasiddhi*), inherently exist (*svabhāvasiddhi*), and exist from their own side (*svarūpasiddhi*), although they do not exist ultimately, truly, or perfectly on the conventional level. On the ultimate level, they lack all of the above modes of existence.

To get a glimpse of this difference, observe your mind when meditating on emptiness. You may deeply investigate how the I exists and find only its emptiness of true existence. But part of the mind objects, saying that there must be something that really is me conventionally. You agree that phenomena exist by being designated, but still feel that there must be something in the object that makes it what it is. If there weren't, then either things wouldn't exist at all or they

would become whatever your thought imputes them to be. Thus they must have some degree of inherent existence conventionally.

Seeing that functioning things each have their own unique potential to bring their results, Svātantrikas say that when searched for with ultimate analysis—analysis that investigates what an object really is and its deeper mode of existence—phenomena cannot be found and are empty of true existence. But on the conventional level they must have some degree of inherent existence, otherwise any cause could produce any effect. For this reason, Svātantrikas assert that things do exist by their own characteristics but not *solely* by their own characteristics, for they also need to be posited through the force of appearing to a nondefective awareness. That is, things do not exist by their own characteristics except when they are designated by mind through the force of appearing to a nondefective awareness. There is something from the side of the object that supports what it is. That, in combination with being posited by a nondefective mind, is the way phenomena exist. The appearance of inherent existence to the sense consciousnesses is not false, for things inherently exist conventionally.

A conventional truth is an object found by a conventional reliable cognizer—that is, by a direct perceiver or inferential cognizer not affected by an internal or external cause of error, an awareness that is not erroneous with respect to its apprehended object. An ultimate truth is an object found by a reliable reasoning consciousness analyzing the ultimate. An ultimate truth, such as emptiness, is realized nondualistically by an unpolluted awareness—that is, by the pristine wisdom of meditative equipoise.

There are two main subdivisions of the Svātantrika school: Yogācāra-Svātantrika and Sautrāntika-Svātantrika. Like Yogācārins, Yogācāra-Svātantrikas say that there are no external objects and that all phenomena are the same nature as the mind cognizing them because they arise from the same substantial cause, a latency on the mind. The appearance of things as separate entities from their reliable cognizing consciousness is a false appearance. Also, like Yogācārins, they assert apperception (*svasaṃvedana*). Apperception is a consciousness that is nondualistically aware of the consciousness it observes and experiences. Simultaneous with the consciousness it is observing, apperception is one nature with that consciousness and enables us to remember cognizing an object.<sup>32</sup> Yogācāra-Svātantrikas differ from the Yogācārins in that they do not assert that the mind is truly existent. Nor do they assert a foundation consciousness (the



eighth consciousness) or an afflicted consciousness (the seventh consciousness). Instead, they say that the mental consciousness carries the karmic seeds and the latencies that create the appearance of the external world.

The Sautrāntika-Svātantrikas do not accept a foundation consciousness, an afflicted consciousness, or apperception; they accept external objects. They assert that external objects exist by their own characteristics conventionally.

Although Yogācārins' identification of the object of negation differs from the Prāsaṅgikas, the two are similar in that both say the object of negation appears to sense consciousnesses. Svātantrikas, on the other hand, say the object of negation appears only to the mental consciousness, because they accept inherent existence on the conventional level.

The main difference between Svātantrikas and Prāsaṅgikas is that, in brief, by refuting true existence and ultimate existence, Svātantrikas avoid absolutism, and by asserting that phenomena inherently exist conventionally, they avoid nihilism. Prāsaṅgikas, on the other hand, refute true existence, ultimate existence, and inherent existence on both the ultimate and conventional levels. They assert nominal existence, meaning that phenomena exist by being merely designated.

### *Prāsaṅgika Madhyamaka*

Of the various Buddhist tenet systems, Prāsaṅgika has the complete understanding of emptiness. It is this view that we will closely examine in upcoming chapters. Prāsaṅgikas assert that things are empty of inherent existence—that is, they are not self-enclosed entities that exist independent of all other factors; they do not exist under their own power, from their own side, or by their own characteristics because they depend on other factors.

Phenomena exist by being merely imputed or designated by mind. “Merely” excludes their being inherently existent. Although phenomena depend on their basis of designation, they are not their basis of designation and cannot be found within it. Neither can they be found separate from it. For example, a person exists by being merely posited by mind in dependence on its basis of designation, the five aggregates. But a person is not any of the aggregates, nor is it the collection of aggregates; and it does not exist separate from the aggregates. Although a person is not findable when we search for it with wisdom analyzing the ultimate nature, it does exist conventionally. We say “I’m walking” or “I’m thinking,” and others



understand what is meant. Although phenomena lack a findable essence, they still function. In fact, if they had an inherent, independent essence, they couldn't function at all. They would be frozen phenomena, unable to interact with the things around them. Establishing phenomena's functionality and their lack of inherent existence as being compatible is challenging, but the great Prāsaṅgikas such as Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti have succeeded in doing that.

Unlike the lower schools, the Prāsaṅgika considers all of the following as equivalent: substantial existence, existence by its own characteristics, inherent existence, existence from its own side, true existence, ultimate existence, objective existence, and so forth. Prāsaṅgikas refute all of them on all phenomena across the board. Nevertheless, phenomena do exist: they exist conventionally by being merely designated by mind. The fact that they arise dependently does not contradict the fact that they are empty of inherent existence. In fact, dependent arising and emptiness of inherent existence come to the same point.

As Candrakīrti explained in the *Supplement*, objects are known from two different perspectives. Those known by worldly conventions without critical examination of how they exist are conventional truths. The fact that these objects are not found under ultimate analysis is their ultimate truth. These two perspectives—of worldly conventions and of ultimate reality—are the bases of differentiating the two truths—the conventional and ultimate truths.

An object found by a conventional reliable cognizer perceiving a false knowable object is a conventional truth. A conventional truth is the object of a mistaken cognizer. It is that with respect to which a conventional awareness comes to be a reliable cognizer distinguishing a conventionality. What does it mean to say that conventional truths are false objects known only by mistaken consciousnesses? They are *false* in that they appear truly existent although they are not. They are known by *mistaken consciousnesses* in that inherent existence appears to these consciousnesses although inherent existence does not exist. They are *truths* in the perspective of a veiler—the veiler being the ignorance grasping inherent existence. However, they *are not true* because they do not exist as they appear to the principal consciousness perceiving them. When subjected to ultimate analysis, they cannot be found.

An ultimate truth is an object with respect to which a reasoning consciousness comes to be a reliable cognizer distinguishing the ultimate and which is found by that reliable cognizer. Ultimate truths are found by a

nonmistaken consciousness, consciousnesses that know objects' deeper mode of existence. Ultimate truths are emptinesses; they are true in that they exist as they appear to the mind directly perceiving them. To this mind, emptiness appears without the dual appearance of subject and object and without the appearance of inherent existence.

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## REFLECTION

1. How do Svātantrikas define ultimate truth and conventional truth?
  2. How do Prāsaṅgikas define these?
  3. What does it mean when Prāsaṅgikas say that things exist by mere designation?
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## 5 | Comparing Assertions

EACH TENET SYSTEM has its own definitions of conventional and ultimate truths and its own notions of what selflessness and the object of negation are. Although keeping all of these clear in your mind, let alone understanding what they mean, is initially daunting, as you study and reflect on this material, it will become clearer. The chart below summarizes the definitions of the two truths and gives a short explanation according to each system.

### CONVENTIONAL AND ULTIMATE TRUTHS

SYSTEM	CONVENTIONAL TRUTH	ULTIMATE TRUTH
Vaibhāṣika	A phenomenon that if separated into parts physically or mentally, the consciousness apprehending it ceases (that is, the perception of it ceases); for example, a pot.	A phenomenon that if physically or mentally separated into parts, the consciousness apprehending it does not stop; for example, directionally partless particles, temporally partless moments of consciousness, and unconditioned space.
Sautrāntika (Reasoning Proponents)	A phenomenon that exists only by being imputed by a conceptual consciousness; for example, unconditioned space. It is also a phenomenon that is not able to ultimately perform a function.	A phenomenon that is able to bear reasoned analysis in terms of having its own mode of existence without depending on imputation by terms or conceptual consciousness; for example, a table. It is a phenomenon that is able to ultimately perform a function.
Yogācāra	An object found by a prime cognizer that is a correct consciousness distinguishing a conventionality. It is a conventional object of observation suitable to generate afflictions; for example, a computer.	An object found by a prime cognizer that is a correct knower distinguishing an ultimate. It is a final object of observation of a path of purification; for example, the emptiness of a person.
Svātantrika Madhyamaka	An object that is realized dualistically by a direct reliable cognizer that directly realizes it; for example, a shoe. It is an object found by a conventional reliable cognizer (that is, a direct perceiver or inferential cognizer not affected by an internal or external cause of error).	An object that is nondualistically realized by a direct reliable cognizer explicitly cognizing it; for example, the emptiness of true existence of a bank.
Prāsaṅgika Madhyamaka	An object with respect to which a conventional consciousness becomes a reliable cognizer distinguishing the conventional and	An object with respect to which a reasoning consciousness becomes a reliable cognizer distinguishing the ultimate and which is found by

<p>which is found by that reliable cognizer; for example, a bicycle. It is an object found by a conventional reliable cognizer perceiving a false knowable object.</p>	<p>that reliable cognizer; for example, the emptiness of inherent existence of an apple, the unfindability of a pot in its basis of designation.</p>
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In the Vaibhāṣika and Sautrāntika systems, the two truths are different sets of unrelated objects. In the Yogācāra and Madhyamaka systems, the two truths are one nature and nominally different. For Vaibhāṣikas, a cup and the partless particles that compose it are unrelated, and for Sautrāntikas, phenomena that perform functions and those that do not are unrelated. Yogācārins say there are no phenomena external to the mind, whereas all the other systems except Yogācāra-Svātantrika Mādhyamikas assert external objects. For Mādhyamikas, the cup is a conventional truth and the cup’s emptiness of inherent existence is an ultimate truth. The cup and its emptiness are one nature because they exist simultaneously, and if one exists, so does the other. However, they are nominally different because they are not the same thing and can be distinguished conceptually.

### *Levels of Selflessness of Persons*

After first hearing or reading these various views, we may wonder what all the fuss is about and why there are so many categories and definitions. The purpose of studying tenets is not to make us confused—although it may initially seem to have that byproduct! Rather, it is to help us figure out how things exist, and eliminate the ignorance that is the root of saṃsāra.

Throughout the ages people have questioned, “Who am I?” Arriving at the correct answer to this question is crucial because our concept of self lies at the center of our worldview, and everything we encounter is referenced in terms of ourselves. Be it a person, an idea, or an event, our primary concern is how it will affect Me. Depending on this, we act, creating karma that will influence our future experiences. If our initial concept of self is incorrect, everything that follows will also be erroneous.

The tenet systems have different ways of defining the object of negation—what does not exist that we mistakenly grasp as existent. How a system identifies the object of negation influences how it identifies the self-grasping that holds that object of negation as true and the selflessness that is realized by understanding that the object of negation does not exist. The sequence of the tenet schools is arranged in terms of the depth of their understanding of these issues. By progressively understanding each level of the object of negation, the self-grasping that holds it as true, and the realization that knows that object of negation to be nonexistent, we approach an ever more subtle understanding of reality—how persons and phenomena actually exist.

As each successive level of selflessness is realized, one part of grasping a false self is chipped away. Nevertheless, each of the lower systems leaves something that can act as a basis for further grasping. All Buddhist schools refute the existence of a permanent, unitary, and independent self, the coarsest mistaken notion of self. They then refute a self-sufficient substantially existent person. However, the lower schools leave the inherent existence of the person and all other phenomena untouched. Only by refuting this do we arrive at a full understanding of reality. After fleshing out the residual grasping not refuted by the lower systems, we see the subtlety of the Prāsaṅgika view.

Beginning with the coarsest, the following are the different levels of self of persons that are objects of negation.

### *Permanent, Unitary, and Independent Self*

The first level of the object of negation is a permanent (unchanging), unitary (partless, monolithic), and independent (autonomous) self or soul (*ātman*). This is an unchanging soul or absolute self that continues after death. The person and the aggregates are of two completely different natures: the aggregates are impermanent—the body dies, the mind changes—but the person is permanent. The relationship between the self and the aggregates is like a person carrying a burden. An independent soul or self “picks up” a set of aggregates at the beginning of each rebirth and “sets them down” at death. This unchanging self continues throughout the entire series of saṃsāric rebirths. The mind grasping this is the misconception of a permanent, unitary, and independent self or soul. Most non-Buddhist religions assert such a self, whereas all Buddhist tenet schools refute it.

### *Self-Sufficient Substantially Existent Person*

The next level of the object of negation to establish the selflessness of persons is a self-sufficient substantially existent person. Here, the I and the aggregates appear to be different and exist separately. Grasping a self-sufficient substantially existent person does not regard the I as being designated to the aggregates. The person is like a shepherd, and the mind and body are like the sheep that the shepherd controls. The shepherd and sheep are distinct; the shepherd is in charge and the sheep follow his directions. Here the aggregates appear to be dependent on the I, but the I directs the aggregates and appears to be independent of them. We may feel this when we don't want to get out of bed in the morning and think, "Okay, body, time to get up!" or "I'll try to be more mindful." Realizing the nonexistence of such a person counteracts grasping a self-sufficient substantially existent person.<sup>33</sup>

Grasping a self-sufficient substantially existent person has both acquired and innate forms. Acquired grasping comes about from studying incorrect philosophies, whereas the innate grasping has existed beginninglessly and is carried from one life to the next. Almost all proponents of Buddhist tenets assert the lack of a self-sufficient substantially existent person.<sup>34</sup> The acquired grasping is abandoned at the path of seeing, whereas for bodhisattvas, the innate grasping and the afflictions that arise due to it are abandoned beginning on the fourth ground. They are completely eradicated on the eighth bodhisattva ground. The explicit mention of grasping a self-sufficient substantially existent person being abandoned on the fourth ground has the purpose of asserting that there are innate levels of this grasping and the afflictions it engenders that are the portion of the afflictions to be abandoned on the fourth ground. Similarly, another portion of the innate grasping of a self-sufficient substantially existent person and the afflictions it engenders are to be abandoned on each of the subsequent grounds up to the eighth.

If a self-sufficient substantially existent person existed, then whatever we wished for in terms of our aggregates would happen because a self-sufficient substantially existent person could control the aggregates. If we wished to exchange our polluted body for the body of a buddha with its thirty-two signs and eighty marks, our wish would immediately come true. If we wished to exchange our confused mind for the omniscient mind of a buddha, that, too, would happen.



The mode of apprehension of the innate grasping of a self-sufficient substantially existent person holds the person to be the controller of the aggregates. This is the self that is negated in the common four truths—the four truths accepted by all the Buddhist schools. Coarse true duḥkha arises from its origin, grasping a coarse self—a self-sufficient substantially existent person. True cessation is the nirvana brought about by abandoning the coarse afflictions that arise from grasping a self-sufficient substantially existent person. The true path realizes the absence of such a self. This is the coarse selflessness. It is called “coarse” because in comparison to grasping an inherently existent person and the selflessness of an inherently existent person, it is coarse.

The uncommon four truths are those propounded by the Prāsaṅgika Mādhyamikas, and they center around inherent existence. True duḥkha is the aggregates produced by true origins, which are the afflictions and karma created by grasping inherent existence. The true path refutes inherent existence on both the person and all other phenomena. The nonaffirming negation that the true path realizes is the emptiness of inherent existence. This is subtle emptiness.

### *Inherently Existent Person*

The subtlest degree of the object of negation regarding the person is its inherent, ultimate, or true existence. The false I appears to set itself up and exist under its own power, without depending on any other factors such as causes and conditions, parts, or being designated by term and concept.

Prāsaṅgikas say the I exists *by being merely imputed or designated by name and concept in dependence on the aggregates*. Sautrāntikas say the I is *imputed to the aggregates* and doesn't exist independent of them. But what they mean by this differs from the Prāsaṅgika meaning. Sautrāntikas assert that in order to identify a person, the body, voice, or mind of the person must be perceived; Prāsaṅgikas agree with that but go deeper, saying that the existence of the person depends not only on causes and conditions and parts (the aggregates) but also on the mind that conceives and designates the person.

Only Prāsaṅgika Mādhyamikas assert the inherent existence of the person as an object of negation. They say the lack of a self-sufficient substantially existent person is the coarse selflessness of persons and realizing this alone cannot remove the afflicted obscurations. Why? Because someone could realize with a direct



perceiver that there is no self that is the controller of the aggregates but still grasp a self that exists independently, from its own side, truly, and inherently. Only by identifying this subtle object of negation and then refuting it can we realize the deepest level of selflessness of the person.

Of the two types of afflictions—the innate afflictions that go from one life to the next and the acquired afflictions that we learn from false philosophies—holding a permanent, unified, and independent self is an acquired affliction. We learn this view when we are taught that there is a permanent, unified, and independent soul. Grasping a self-sufficient substantially existent person has both innate and acquired aspects, as does grasping the inherent existence of persons and phenomena. Acquired afflictions and views are easier to overcome, whereas innate afflictions and views require more effort and time to eradicate.

### *Levels of Selflessness of Phenomena*

The Yogācāra and Madhyamaka systems also assert grasping a self of phenomena. That is a type of ignorance. The nonexistence of such a self of phenomena is the selflessness of phenomena. Yogācārin speak of two basic misconceptions or grasping regarding phenomena. One is grasping the subject and object of a cognition to be different entities. The other is grasping phenomena to exist by way of their own character as the referent of terms and conceptual thoughts about them. The emptiness of these two objects of negation, according to the Yogācārin, is the selflessness of phenomena.

Mādhyamikas say the true existence or ultimate existence of phenomena is the object of negation of the selflessness of phenomena. The emptiness of true or ultimate existence of phenomena is the selflessness of phenomena, according to this school.

Within the Madhyamaka school, there are further distinctions. Svātantrika Mādhyamikas define true or ultimate existence as existing without being posited through the force of appearing to a nondefective awareness—that is, to a consciousness that is not mistaken with respect to its engaged object that appears inherently existent. This awareness has no superficial causes of error, such as a defective sense faculty or the mental consciousness holding erroneous views. Phenomena's objective existence, without their being posited by the force of

appearing to a nondefective consciousness, is the object of negation for Svātantrikas. The emptiness of such true or ultimate existence of phenomena is the selflessness of phenomena. Nevertheless, Svātantrikas hold that phenomena are indeed established inherently and by their own characteristics on the conventional level because there must be something inherently findable conventionally that is the object; if there were not, anything could be anything.

Prāsaṅgika Mādhyamikas put forth the subtlest view of selflessness, the final thought of the Buddha, as described by such luminaries as Nāgārjuna, Buddhapālita, Candrakīrti, and Śāntideva. They assert that inherent existence—a findable, independent nature that exists without depending on being designated by term and concept—is the object of negation of meditation on emptiness. This false object appears to our senses, deceiving the mental consciousness so that it grasps phenomena to exist in this manner. The absence of phenomena's existing inherently, in their own right, from their own side, and by their own characteristics is the deepest meaning of emptiness.

All of these schools have their sources in Buddha's word, as found in the sūtras. The Buddha set forth these varying views as skillful means. To help us understand their meaning, they are classified as interpretable (provisional) and definitive teachings, to be explained below. To understand emptiness properly, study of the definitive teachings is necessary.

**SELF, THE OBJECT OF NEGATION: THE SELF REFUTED ON PERSONS AND PHENOMENA**

TENET SYSTEM	COARSE SELF OF PERSONS	SUBTLE SELF OF PERSONS	COARSE SELF OF PHENOMENA	SUBTLE SELF OF PHENOMENA
Vaibhāṣika	Permanent, unitary, and independent self	Self-sufficient substantially existent person	-	-
Sautrāntika	Permanent, unitary, and independent self	Self-sufficient substantially existent person	-	-
Yogācāra	Permanent, unitary, and independent self	Self-sufficient substantially existent person	-	Subject and object as different entities; external phenomena; phenomena existing by their own characteristics as the basis of names; phenomena existing by their own characteristics as the basis of conceptions
Yogācāra-Svātantrika Madhyamaka	Permanent, unitary, and independent self	Self-sufficient substantially existent person	Subject and object as different entities; external phenomena	True existence of persons and phenomena
Sautrāntika-Svātantrika Madhyamaka	Permanent, unitary, and independent self	Self-sufficient substantially existent person	-	True existence of persons and phenomena
Prāsaṅgika Madhyamaka	Self-sufficient substantially existent person	Inherently existent person	-	Inherent existence of phenomena

## REFLECTION

1. What are the qualities of a permanent, unitary, and independent person?
  2. Did you learn a view comparable to this as a child?
  3. If so, what do you think of that view now? Does a permanent soul or self exist?
- 

### *What Is the Middle Way?*

Each tenet school has its own way of explaining the basis, path, result, object of negation, and Middle Way view. In future chapters, some of these differences will be explored to flesh out the Prāsaṅgikas' unique interpretation of the Middle Way view. The Middle Way is valued because it is free of the extremes of absolutism and nihilism; the former superimposes a way of existence that phenomena don't have—inherent existence—and the latter deprecates the way phenomena do exist. The extreme of absolutism is also called “the extreme of permanence,” since if phenomena existed inherently, functioning things would have a permanent essence. A person, for example, would be permanent and unable to change, making awakening impossible. The extreme of nihilism is also called “the extreme of annihilation,” since if phenomena existed in that manner, the continuum of functioning things would be totally severed when those things disintegrated. For example, when a person dies, there would be no mental continuum or rebirth in the case of ordinary beings.

Someone may be philosophically nihilistic or ethically nihilistic. A philosophical nihilist thinks that phenomena do not exist; an ethical nihilist deprecates the law of karma and its effects and believes that our actions do not have an ethical dimension that influences our future lives. Many people who initially are philosophically nihilistic become ethically nihilist, whereas those who are ethically nihilistic may or may not be philosophically nihilistic. In the following sections, nihilism chiefly refers to philosophical nihilism.

As you read each school's assertion in the statements below describing how it avoids the two extremes and establishes the Middle Way, think deeply: Which assertions feel most comfortable at first glance? Which makes the most sense when you apply reasoning?

Cārvākas avoid absolutism by saying that no phenomenon exists beyond what is perceived by our senses. They avoid nihilism by saying that all phenomena are manifest to our senses.

Sāṃkhyas avoid absolutism by asserting that phenomena are manifestations of the fundamental nature. They avoid nihilism by stating that the fundamental nature—a real substance from which all phenomena manifest—is unchangeable.

Sāṃkhyas are absolutists in that they hold that the cause continues to exist at the time of its result. Vaibhāṣikas avoid this extreme of absolutism by asserting that a cause must cease for its effect to arise. They avoid nihilism by saying that an effect arises after the cessation of its cause—after the bud ceases, the flower arises. They also avoid nihilism by saying that past and future are substantial entities (T. *rdzas*). The past of an object exists after its present existence, and the future of an object exists before its present existence. For Vaibhāṣikas, everything is substantially established (T. *rdzas su grub pa*).

Sautrāntikas avoid absolutism by asserting that conditioned phenomena disintegrate moment by moment; things change and transform into something else in each new moment. They also avoid absolutism by saying that permanent phenomena, such as unconditioned space, are not substantial entities. They avoid nihilism by asserting that the continuity of most products—such as the self and the six elements—isn't severed and exists continuously. In this way, the self continues from one life to the next. They also say that objects exist by their own characteristics as referents for terms and concepts—that is, there is something in a table that makes it suitable to be called a “table” and for our mind to think of it as a table. Furthermore, they assert that external objects are composed of partless particles and are truly existent.

Yogācārins avoid absolutism by asserting that dependent phenomena do not exist by their own characteristics as the referent of words and thoughts. They also avoid absolutism by asserting that imaginary phenomena are not truly existent. They avoid nihilism by saying that dependent and consummate phenomena are truly existent. If they weren't, they would not exist at all.

Svātantrika Mādhyamikas avoid absolutism by saying that nothing truly or ultimately exists without being posited by the power of appearing to a nondefective awareness. They avoid nihilism by asserting that all phenomena exist inherently and exist by their own characteristics conventionally. If they did not, they would not exist. That is, things exist from the side of the object

conventionally; this appears to a nondefective awareness that posits the phenomena. In that way, phenomena exist.

Prāsaṅgika Mādhyamikas say that what Svātantrikas assert to avoid nihilism makes them fall to the extreme of absolutism. Prāsaṅgikas avoid this fault by asserting that all phenomena are not established from their own side or under their own power either ultimately or conventionally. When sought among their bases of imputation, phenomena cannot be found. They avoid nihilism by asserting that phenomena exist conventionally by being merely designated by terms and concepts in dependence on their bases of designation. Although things exist as mere designations, they are still able to perform functions. If they didn't exist in this way, either they would be permanent or they wouldn't exist at all.

## HOW EACH TENET SYSTEM ESTABLISHES ITS MIDDLE WAY VIEW

TENET SYSTEM	HOW IT AVOIDS ABSOLUTISM	HOW IT AVOIDS NIHILISM
Cārvāka (non-Buddhist)	Phenomena do not exist beyond what is perceivable by our senses.	All existents are manifest to our senses.
Sāṃkhya (non-Buddhist)	Phenomena are manifestations of the fundamental nature—a real substance from which all phenomena manifest.	The fundamental nature is unchanging.
Vaiśhāṅika	(1) All products are impermanent and disintegrate moment by moment. (2) For an effect to arise, its causes must cease.	(1) An effect arises after the cessation of its causes. (2) All phenomena are substantially established.
Sautrāntika	(1) Conditioned phenomena disintegrate in each moment; things momentarily disintegrate and transform into something else. (2) Permanent phenomena such as unconditioned space are not substantial entities.	(1) The continuity of many products, such as the self, isn't severed and exists continuously. (2) Objects exist by their own characteristics as referents for terms and concepts.
Yogācāra	(1) There is no external matter composed of partless particles. (2) Dependent phenomena do not exist by their own characteristics as the referent of words and conceptual consciousnesses. (3) Imaginary phenomena are not truly existent.	(1) Dependent and consummate phenomena are truly existent. (2) Ultimate truths are ultimately established and exist inherently.
Svātantrika Madhyamaka	Phenomena do not truly or ultimately exist without being posited by the power of appearing to a nondefective awareness.	All phenomena are established from their own side, exist by their own characteristics, and exist inherently on the conventional level.
Prāsaṅgika Madhyamaka	All phenomena do not exist from their own side, under their own power, or inherently. They lack inherent existence even conventionally.	Phenomena exist conventionally by being merely designated by terms and concepts in dependence on their basis of designation.



You may have noticed that what one school asserts as its way of avoiding the extreme of negating too much (nihilism), the next school says is actually the extreme of adding too much (absolutism). Thinking about the views of these schools in progressive order gradually leads our mind to the correct view. Although each successive tenet system negates the unique position of the lower ones, understanding the views of the lower tenet systems serves as the basis to understand the views of the higher systems. As we gradually accept the positions of the higher systems, we must be careful not to denigrate the lower ones.

After you finish reading and reflecting on this volume and the next two volumes on emptiness, you may want to come back to this section. Chances are you will see much deeper meaning in it then.

### *Gradually Leading Us to the Correct View*

The Buddha is a skillful teacher who leads us through a sequence of objects of negation and assertions regarding the Middle Way view in order to counteract our distorted views and ignorance. He does this by explaining a steady progression away from substantial, true, and inherent existence and toward dependent, imputed existence. A short summary will illustrate how he did this.

Vaibhāṣikas say that ultimate truths substantially exist because the awareness knowing them isn't cancelled when they are physically broken or mentally divided into parts, whereas conventional truths imputedly exist in that they cannot be perceived when mentally or physically broken into smaller parts. Nevertheless, all of these are substantially established because they have their own autonomous entity that is not dependent on conceptuality.

Sautrāntikas take this a step further, saying that ultimate truths, which are impermanent, functioning things, are substantially existent because they perform functions, and conventional truths are not because they are imputed by term and thought; but all are truly existent because they exist in reality in just the way they appear.

Yogācārins take yet another step, saying that dependent and consummate phenomena are truly existent because they are not merely imputed by the consciousness apprehending them and exist by their own uncommon mode of existence. Imaginaries are imputed by conception. But all of these inherently exist



in that they have their own mode of being and are findable when the object to which the term is attributed is sought.<sup>35</sup>

Svātantrikas go further, saying that no phenomena truly exist because they don't exist without being posited through the force of appearing to a nondefective mind, but they do exist inherently on the conventional level because they appear to a nondefective mind.

At the end, Prāsaṅgikas say that no phenomenon inherently exists but everything is merely imputed because it exists by being merely designated by term and concept. For them, substantially existent implies something exists as it appears, whereas “imputedly existent” means that it is dependent on being designated by term and concept and does not exist as it appears. Emptiness exists as it appears to a direct perceiver and is therefore true, but it is not truly existent.

The Buddha also presented a progression of objects of negation, examining first how the person exists and then how phenomena exist. He began by first refuting the existence of a permanent, unitary, and independent self, a view held by many non-Buddhists. This view is acquired—it is fabricated by our intellectual mind through incorrect philosophical speculation—and is comparatively easy to refute. Innate afflictions that go from one life to another are more deeply rooted and difficult to remove.

Having refuted a permanent, unitary, and independent self, we are ready to look deeper, so the Buddha introduces the notion that there is no self-sufficient substantially existent person. This is an innate view and is the prominent object of negation of the lower schools for the selflessness of persons. By refuting this, one layer of grasping and the afflictions that depend on it are released.

We also need to be aware of the Buddhist essentialists' assertions regarding substantial existence and imputed existence. In their view, a person is imputedly existent because it cannot be identified without some other phenomena—in this case the aggregates—appearing to the mind. The aggregates, however, are substantially existent because they can be known directly. In general, essentialists speak about two types of cognizers: conceptual cognizers and nonconceptual direct perceivers. This gets us thinking about the role of conception and how unconditioned phenomena come into existence by imputation. These points are developed in the Sautrāntika tenet school.

Incorrect graspings and misconceptions abound. We may hold the idea that smallest partless particles compose larger forms and forms can be reduced to such

particles. However, if particles were directionally partless, it would be impossible for them to join together to form larger objects. If they had no sides, either they would merge and become one or they could not touch. In either case, a larger composite would not be created. The Yogācāra school and above refute such particles.

To counteract grasping things as being external, objective, and unrelated to the mind apprehending them, the Buddha teaches the absence of external objects and teaches that the apprehending mind and the apprehended object arise from the same seed on the foundation consciousness.<sup>36</sup> In teaching this object of negation, the Buddha helps us to see that the mind and the object it apprehends are not unrelated to each other. This view is useful because seeing that objects of our attachment and anger are in the nature of the mind dramatically reduces the intensity of our afflictions.

The Buddha also taught that things do not exist by their own characteristics as the referent of terms. Here he challenges us to investigate the relationship between an object and the term imputed to it. We see that terms are useful as conventional devices to communicate with other people, but that the relationship between an object and its name is dependent upon the mind. A name does not exist from its own side in the object.

The Buddha then teaches that phenomena come about in a collaborative manner: something exists from the side of the object, but it also depends on being designated by a nondefective awareness. An object's inherent nature appears to a nondefective awareness and is also posited by mind. Although objects are unfindable when searched for with a reasoning consciousness analyzing the ultimate nature, conventionally they have their own inherent nature. In that way, anything can't be called anything; each object has something in it that warrants its receiving a certain name. This is the Svātantrika view.

By working through all these views, our mind has loosened its belief in many incorrect notions of existence. Yet it still holds on to one bit of security—that conventionally phenomena have an inherent nature and there is something in each phenomenon that exists independent of other factors. Without this, we fear that nothing exists at all. Now the Buddha cuts away even this grasping by saying that all phenomena exist by being merely designated by term and concept. Everything depends on the imputing mind to exist, even the mind itself. Contrary to the Yogācārins, who say that the mind truly exists, the Prāsaṅgikas

assert that the mind exists by being merely designated. Contrary to the Svātantrikas, who say that all phenomena have their own inherent nature conventionally, Prāsaṅgikas say they lack such a findable nature both ultimately and conventionally.

Just as a tangled ball of yarn cannot be untangled quickly by pulling at just one place, our mind cannot instantaneously drop all misconceptions and grasping at once. After all, the mind has held these erroneous views from beginningless time! The guidance of a skillful teacher, the Buddha, is needed to gradually lead us to the correct view through the progression of the four tenet systems.

Why is negating a permanent, unitary, and independent self not enough? Because we still hold on to the self as a controller of the aggregates, and many afflictions arise due to this grasping.

While refuting a self-sufficient substantially existent person helps to reduce the strength of the coarse afflictions, it nevertheless is insufficient to eradicate all afflictions. This is because grasping at the basis of the self—the mental and physical aggregates—as inherently existent still remains. Without negating the inherent existence of the aggregates, we will continue grasping the inherent existence of the I imputed in dependence on them.<sup>37</sup> This grasping leads to attachment and anger. Grasping at agreeable objects as inherently existent, we seek to procure and protect them, and attachment arises. Grasping at disagreeable objects as inherently existent, we want to destroy them or distance ourselves from them, and anger arises. Even though we may have realized the lack of a self-sufficient substantially existent person, subtler afflictions that grasp inherent existence<sup>38</sup> still exist in our mindstream.

Viewing objects as existing by way of their own character as the referent of their terms and seeing external phenomena as being unrelated to the perceiving mind, we believe that things exist objectively “out there.” This sets the stage for attachment, anger, and other afflictions to arise. Dismantling these views, as the Yogācārins do, reduces our emotional reactivity to external objects.

But negating the objective existence of the external world is not sufficient because it doesn’t stop grasping the true existence of the internal mind and mental states. We continue to be fixated on truly existent emotions and perceptions. The Mādhyamikas counteract this by negating true existence across the entire spectrum of phenomena, internal and external. However, the way the Svātantrika Mādhyamikas do this is not sufficient; they leave a degree of objective

reality by saying that phenomena exist from their own side. They still hold on to an objectified locus in phenomena that makes them what they are. As long as we hold on to anything whatsoever as existing from its own side, we cannot cut the root of cyclic existence and will continue to grasp the aggregates, and thus the person, as inherently existent. This, in turn, perpetuates afflictions. Nāgārjuna says (YS 51–52ab):

As long as there is an [objectified] locus,  
one is caught by the twisting snake of the afflictions.  
Those whose minds have no [objectified] locus  
will not be caught.  
How could the deadly poison of the afflictions fail to arise  
in those whose minds possess an [objectified] locus?

As long as we consider phenomena and persons as having an objectified locus that is their true essence, afflictions will continue to arise. Only when the full meaning of selflessness is realized directly can that basis for self-grasping ignorance be cut. Thus Prāsaṅgikas take the Madhyamaka refutation a step further than Svātantrikas by saying there is not the tiniest bit of an objectified locus in any phenomena and that things exist by being merely designated in dependence on their basis of designation. Here, “merely” excludes inherent existence. In this view, there is nothing left to grasp because inherent or objective existence is negated on all external and internal phenomena, including the person and the mind. Everything is empty of inherent existence and yet exists nominally and dependently.

A similar understanding is growing among scientists. Newtonian science took for granted an objective external world that exists separate from the observer. The findings of quantum physics cast doubt on this and make it difficult to ground reality in objective matter. Some scientists are considering that perhaps things are not completely separate and unrelated to the perceiver after all.

Although you see the inconsistencies in the tenets of the lower schools, you may initially feel uneasy with the Prāsaṅgikas’ radical idea of emptiness. Go slowly and continue to deepen your understanding of that system. In time, your inquiry and analysis will deepen your understanding.

Personally speaking, I'm inclined to the Prāsaṅgika view of emptiness; it helps avert attachment, anger, and other afflictions and at the same time confirms that we human beings have a common, shared world that arose due to causes and conditions.

In short, all Buddhists agree that ignorance is dispelled by wisdom, but tenet systems differ on what the object of that ultimate wisdom is. The layout of the tenet systems articulates the various diversions we could easily fall into as well as the correct direction to follow when eliminating ignorance and cultivating wisdom. To understand emptiness, question how the people and environment and even your self exist. Reflect on the mechanism with which we construct our self-identity and the world around us, and how ignorance reifies these. In this process, you will counteract wrong views and familiarize yourself with correct ones.

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## REFLECTION

1. Why does each tenet system want to portray itself as the Middle Way? What is it the middle between?
2. Review how each tenet system asserts itself as the Middle Way.
3. How does the sequence of tenet schools from lowest to highest lead students to the actual Middle Way view?
4. What are the advantages of provisionally adopting the view of each tenet school beginning with the Vaibhāṣika, investigating it and noticing both its strong and its weak points, and then progressing to the next tenet school and doing the same?

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## *Definitive and Interpretable*

As we know, the Buddha gave a variety of teachings to different audiences in the forty-five years after attaining awakening. In doing so, he took into consideration their dispositions and interests because his ultimate intention was to lead them to fully realize the emptiness of inherent existence, banish all saṃsāric duḥkha, and attain full awakening. Nāgārjuna comments that the Buddha gave seemingly

contradictory statements to different audiences in order to skillfully lead the variety of listeners to nirvāṇa (MMK 18.8):

Everything is real, and is not real;  
both real and unreal;  
neither unreal nor real—  
this is the Lord Buddha's teaching.

On some occasions the Buddha said that the aggregates are like a burden and the person is the carrier of that burden, implying that the person is separate from the aggregates. To another group he said there is no permanent, unitary, independent self that is different from the aggregates. Sometimes he said the self is self-sufficient substantially existent; at other times he said a self-sufficient substantially existent person does not exist. In some sūtras, he stated that external phenomena do not exist but the mind truly exists, and in still others, he negated the true existence of all phenomena.

Aware of the Buddha's compassion and skill as a teacher, we are left with the task of discerning the definitive (*nītārtha*, *nītattā*) and the interpretable or provisional (*neyārtha*, *neyyattā*)<sup>39</sup> with respect to the meaning (subject matter) and the scriptures. In terms of the meaning, we must discern whether the subject matter that is expressed is to be understood definitively or provisionally, and in terms of scriptures—the words and means of expression—we must also distinguish definitive and interpretable. This issue is important because our philosophical understanding impacts our meditation, and meditation on the correct view is essential to cut the root of saṃsāra.

Each philosophical tenet system has its own criteria for discerning what is the Buddha's teaching and what is not. The way they do this reflects their unique understanding of the object of negation, selflessness, and ultimate truth.

Some Vaibhāṣikas and Sautrāntikas assert that all statements of the Buddha can be taken literally and are definitive and that no sūtra passage requires interpretation. They accept as literal and definitive sūtras explaining that conditioned phenomena are impermanent, that things conditioned by ignorance are duḥkha in nature, and that selflessness is the lack of a self-sufficient substantially existent person. In this context “sūtra” does not necessarily refer to whole texts but to passages, or even a few words, spoken by the Buddha.



Some later Vaibhāṣikas assert there are both definitive and interpretable meanings. Citing the Perfection of Wisdom sūtras as interpretable, they say the Buddha did not really mean that all phenomena have no inherent nature; rather, he was refuting non-Buddhist assertions concerning the fundamental nature and production from self.<sup>40</sup> In the same vein, some Sautrāntikas accept the Perfection of Wisdom sūtras as the Buddha's word but say these sūtras cannot be taken at face value and require interpretation. For example, they assert that when the Buddha said that products do not exist, he was referring to their disintegration in each moment.<sup>41</sup>

Only in the Yogācāra and Madhyamaka systems do we see a well-defined method to differentiate definitive and interpretable teachings of the Buddha. The Yogācārins assert that definitive sūtras are those whose explicit teachings can be accepted literally—for example, the *Sūtra Unraveling the Thought* (*Samdhinirmocana Sūtra*). Interpretable sūtras are those whose explicit teachings cannot be accepted literally—for example, the *Heart Sūtra* (*Prajñāpāramitāhṛdaya Sūtra*). Because Yogācāra Scripture Proponents say dependent phenomena and consummate natures truly exist and exist by their own characteristics, whereas imaginaries do not, they assert as definitive the sūtras that assert a foundation consciousness, explain their view of the three natures, and whose literal content refutes external objects.

Yogācārins base their way of distinguishing definitive and interpretable meanings and sūtras on the *Sūtra Unraveling the Thought*, which says the first and second turnings of the Dharma wheel are interpretable and the third is definitive. The first turning is interpretable because there the Buddha said that all phenomena exist by their own characteristics; the second turning is interpretable because there the Buddha said that no phenomenon exists by its own characteristics. The third turning of the Dharma wheel is definitive because there the Buddha clearly laid out which phenomena exist by their own characteristics and which do not.<sup>42</sup> Expressed in another way, the first turning presents the selflessness of persons but not the selflessness of phenomena, because it doesn't refute that phenomena exist by their own characteristics as bases of names and concepts. The second turning literally sets forth the non-true existence of all phenomena but doesn't differentiate that some phenomena truly exist and others do not. The third turning differentiates the true existence of dependent and consummate natures and the non-true existence of imaginaries.

Yogācārins differentiate words and meanings as definitive or interpretable by discussing the four reliances and the four reasonings. They differentiate the sūtras as definitive and interpretable through the four thoughts and four indirect intentions. An in-depth study of these four sets of four and the reasons that both groups of Yogācārins employ them to differentiate definitive and interpretable sūtras and meanings reveals a great deal about their view of emptiness.<sup>43</sup>

Mādhyamikas refer to the *Teaching of Akṣayamati Sūtra* (*Akṣayamatīnirdeśa Sūtra*) to discern definitive and interpretable. It says (MP 809):

What are definitive sūtras? Which require interpretation? Sūtras setting forth the establishment of conventionalities are called “requiring interpretation.” Sūtras setting forth the establishment of the ultimate are called “definitive. . . .”

Those sūtras teaching [about various objects] by way of various words and letters are called “requiring interpretation.” Those teaching the profound, difficult to view, and difficult to realize are called “definitive.” Those teaching, for instance, [the inherent existence of] an owner when there is no [inherently existent] owner and teaching those objects indicated by various words [such as] self, sentient being, life, nourisher, being, person, progeny of Manu, child of Manu, agent, and experiencer are requiring interpretation.

Those sūtras teaching the doors of liberation—the emptiness of things, signlessness, wishlessness, no activity, no production, no creation, no sentient being, no living being, no persons and no controller—are called “definitive.” This is called “reliance on definitive sūtras and non-reliance on those requiring interpretation.”

The sūtras requiring interpretation are those whose subject matter is the diversity of conventionalities, such as everyday objects. Those that are definitive speak about the absence of inherent existence of those objects, saying “no sentient being” and so forth. For Prāsaṅgikas, the interpretable may or may not be taken literally, but its main subject matter is not the final mode of existence, emptiness.

An example of a sūtra whose meaning is not to be taken literally is the one where the Buddha said that one’s mother and father are to be killed. He said this



to help relieve the crippling grief and remorse of someone who had killed his own parents. Clearly, this cannot be taken at face value but needs to be interpreted and understood in context. In this case, the Buddha was referring to killing not biological parents but the second and tenth of the twelve links of dependent origination—formative action and renewed existence. By “killing” these, saṃsāra ceases and nirvāṇa is attained.

Similarly, in the *Guhyasamāja Tantra*, the Buddha says that the Tathāgata is to be killed, and by killing the Tathāgata, one will attain supreme awakening. Obviously this cannot be taken literally but must be understood in a tantric context as controlling the life and vitality (T. *srog tshol*). The winds in the body are related to the mind. When the winds are uncontrolled, distractions arise. By controlling the winds through the practice of life and vitality, distractions are stopped. With much practice, this meditation stops the functioning of the coarse winds and coarse consciousnesses, enabling the extremely subtle mind to manifest. Meditators then employ this mind to realize emptiness, purify the mind of all defilement, and attain full awakening.

An example of a sūtra whose meaning is literal but whose subject matter is not the final mode of existence is a sūtra explaining the lack of a self-sufficient substantially existent person. While the person does lack such a mode of existence, that is not its final, deepest nature. Similarly, the statement “forms are impermanent” is literally correct, but impermanence is not the ultimate nature of forms. The meaning of both these statements is provisional.

The Buddha’s sūtras on the twelve links of dependent origination—“from ignorance polluted actions arise”—are also interpretable. A cause produces an effect on the conventional level. On the ultimate level both the cause and effect are empty of true existence. Because there is a deeper meaning—the emptiness of inherent existence—to be understood, these sūtras are provisional.

According to the Svātantrikas, sūtras of definitive meaning are those that explicitly teach the ultimate truth as their main topic and can be understood literally. Such sūtras are definitive because the ultimate can be established by a reliable cognizer and cannot be interpreted to be other than the ultimate. Sūtras that cannot be taken literally or that mainly teach conventionalities require interpretation.

According to Prāsaṅgikas, definitive scriptures are those whose main and explicit subject matter is the emptiness of inherent existence. They are called

“definitive” because they teach the emptiness of inherent existence—the subtle selflessness of all existents, the ultimate truth beyond which there is no more profound meaning to be discovered—and refute the elaboration of inherent existence. Within the sphere of reality, all phenomena become undifferentiable in that their ultimate nature is equally free of inherent existence. A sūtra’s meaning is said to be definitive when it cannot be interpreted to mean other than the deepest mode of existence, emptiness, which is the final view to be settled and the final nature of phenomena. Passages of definitive meaning cannot be interpreted to mean other than what is expressed because their meaning has been validly proven and realized.

Sūtras of interpretable meaning mainly and explicitly discuss conventionalities—all phenomena other than emptiness, such as sentient beings and karma—and describe how these arise, function, and cease. These sūtras are considered interpretable because they require interpretation to know the final mode of existence of conventionalities. Prāsaṅgikas say that conventionalities are falsities because they appear one way and exist in another. For example, money appears to exist “out there,” with its own inherent value, while in fact it is merely designated in dependence on paper and ink. It has worth only because we have attributed value to it. Interpretable sūtras do not challenge the seeming inherent existence of phenomena.

The word “interpretable” or “provisional” implies “to be led to” or “to be drawn out.” That is, provisional scriptures lead to understanding the final mode of existence. Their meaning must be drawn out because it is not the ultimate nature. The process of interpretation leads the literal meaning of the sūtra around to a different meaning, one that is emptiness.

In the *Heart Sūtra*, Avalokiteśvara speaks inspired by the blessing of the Buddha, “There is no eye, no ear . . . .” He is not refuting the existence of eyes, ears, and other conventionalities. If he did, someone could say that if eyes and ears did not exist, his words were also nonexistent, in which case they could not prove his point. Earlier in the sūtra Avalokiteśvara said, “the emptiness of inherent existence of the five aggregates also.” That qualification of “no inherent existence” is to be carried over to the other negations in the sūtra, such as “no eye, no ear . . . .,” so the meaning is that there is no inherently existent eye, no inherently existent ear, and so forth. Therefore the *Heart Sūtra* is definitive.

Since Svāntrikas negate inherent existence only ultimately but accept it conventionally, they say statements such as “all phenomena are empty of inherent existence” cannot be accepted literally and are interpretable. For it to be definitive, this statement would have to be qualified to read “all phenomena are *ultimately* empty of inherent existence.” The *One Hundred Thousand Stanza Perfection of Wisdom Sūtra* has the qualification “ultimately” and thus is considered definitive, whereas the *Heart Sūtra* lacks this qualification and is said to be interpretable.

To review: both Svāntrikas and Prāsaṅgikas accept that the *Heart Sūtra* mainly and explicitly teaches emptiness. However, for Svāntrikas it is an interpretable sūtra because it is not acceptable literally. This is because the sūtra literally states that the aggregates and so forth are empty of inherent existence, whereas Svāntrikas assert that they are empty of inherent existence only on the ultimate level but not conventionally. For Prāsaṅgikas, the sūtra is definitive because phenomena do not exist inherently on either the ultimate or conventional level, and this emptiness is phenomena’s final mode of existence.

While Svāntrikas say there are instances of both interpretable and definitive meanings in the second turning of the Dharma wheel, Prāsaṅgikas say sūtras of the second wheel are definitive because all phenomena lack inherent existence both ultimately and conventionally. In addition, Prāsaṅgikas carry over the qualification “no inherent existence” that is found in one sūtra to all sūtras of the same class. For them, the second turning of the Dharma wheel consists of definitive sūtras, and there are instances of definitive passages in the first and third turnings of the Dharma wheel where emptiness is explicitly taught.

The *Sūtra Unraveling the Thought* and the *Teaching of Akṣayamati Sūtra* employ different criteria to discriminate definitive and interpretable teachings of the Buddha. If we were to determine what is definitive and what is interpretable only according to what a sūtra says, there would still remain the question of what makes that sūtra authoritative. If citing another sūtra were required to validate the first sūtra, we would soon have an infinite regression. Thus we cannot rely entirely on scripture to make this differentiation, and since the Buddha is not here now, we cannot ask him. We must use reasoning and analysis to discern what is definitive. When a sūtra statement concerning the ultimate nature is subjected to critical analysis and does not contradict reasoning, it is said to be definitive. If a statement does not pertain to the ultimate nature—or even if it does, if it is not

supported by reasoning—it requires interpretation. With this in mind, Nāgārjuna wrote the *Treatise on the Middle Way*, where his primary approach was reasoning.

In summary, according to the Prāsaṅgikas, interpretable and definitive can refer to either a scripture or its meaning. Scriptures that speak mainly and explicitly about the emptiness of inherent existence are definitive because emptiness is the final mode of being of all phenomena and understanding it leads directly to liberation. All other topics are provisional because they are not the deeper nature of reality and lead to liberation only indirectly. Passages that speak of emptiness are definitive, even when the term “inherently” is used as a qualification in some but not all occasions in that scripture.

All of the Buddha’s teachings lead to liberation. Interpretable teachings indirectly steer us toward the correct view, and definitive teachings directly point out the ultimate nature of reality. For that reason, we should respect both sūtras of definitive meaning and those of interpretable meaning. Deprecating provisional sūtras would be an error because following their teachings—especially those concerning bodhicitta and renunciation of saṃsāra—leads us toward the realization of the emptiness of inherent existence. As a follower of Nāgārjuna and a Madhyamaka practitioner, I respect and revere the *Sūtra Unraveling the Thought*, which presents an alternative explanation on the meaning of emptiness, even though my faith and conviction are directed toward the teachings on dependent arising and emptiness expressed in the Perfection of Wisdom sūtras.

Similarly, we should respect the teachings of other religions because they benefit sentient beings and are therefore valuable. Nevertheless, our faith, conviction, and practice should be directed toward the tradition and path that we follow. In the following chapters, when explaining the ultimate truth, I will rely upon the definitive teachings of the Prāsaṅgika Madhyamaka system, which is considered the supreme, definitive view.

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## REFLECTION

1. Why did the Buddha teach a diversity of views, some of which seemingly contradict each other?
2. Why is differentiating definitive and interpretable sūtras important to our Dharma practice?

3. What do Yogācārinś consider definitive and interpretable sūtras?
  4. What do Prāsaᅅgikas consider definitive and interpretable sūtras?
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## *Proving the Definitive Meaning*

We cannot simply claim that the definitive teachings as understood by the Prāsaᅅgikas are supreme, but must offer some logical proof that all phenomena are empty of inherent existence that others can verify for themselves. When engaging with the world, we have the sense that things exist out there, independent of our perception or conception. But when we search for the actual object—the real referent of our words—we cannot find something that exists from its own side or under its own power. If phenomena possessed inherent existence, they would have an objective basis that grounds their reality. However, when we closely examine the nature of things, we see that their identities depend on factors other than themselves. If they were not dependent on other factors and were self-enclosed entities in and of themselves, they could not impact one another. In that case, causes could not produce effects.

A similar reasoning used in quantum physics can apply to material phenomena. To our naïve everyday perception, the flower in front of us seems to be “out there,” something different from me. I can touch it and see it. It is there in front of me, waiting for me or someone else to come along and see it. But when you examine “What exactly is that flower?” and start reducing the flower to its constitutive elements on the molecular level and then to subatomic particles, we come to a point where there are simply subatomic particles without any difference between organic and inorganic phenomena. When you deconstruct even the notion of subatomic particles, nothing can be found. This approach from quantum physics is helpful to deconstruct the solidity of the objects that we perceive.

Yogācārinś apply the process of deconstruction to the external material world, but stop there. They still reify the internal world of experience and maintain the view that it is truly real. Mādhyamikas continue the examination and extend the same type of analysis to our inner mental world of experience and consciousness. The mind is immaterial, so we can't examine its spatial dimensions. It is a

continuum, and when deconstructed there is only a series of minute temporal points; there is nothing to identify as a mindstream.

The Yogācāra rejection of the external world of matter can almost be seen as a kind of nihilism. Because they cannot find an objective basis of the material world, they negate the external, material world even conventionally. Mādhyamikas, however, do not ground their notion of reality on some kind of objective basis. The reality and existence of things is understood only within the framework of conventional day-to-day experience. From that perspective, both the mental world of experience and the external world of material phenomena exist. Mādhyamikas do not make one more or less real than the other.

The essentialists—those who assert true existence—use the principle of dependent arising as the premise to argue that phenomena possess a real, specific, true nature. For them, dependent arising is proof of true existence. Nāgārjuna responds by saying that the reason they use to prove true existence—dependent arising—actually proves the exact opposite—emptiness. The fact that things arise from causes and conditions and depend on other factors shows that they do not possess any truly existent nature of their own.

According to the essentialists, if things didn't truly exist, they wouldn't exist at all. Nāgārjuna retorts that in a system that does not accept emptiness, there is no way to establish the existence of karma and its effect, the four truths, dependent arising, and so on. If all phenomena were not empty of true existence, none of these things would be tenable; they could neither arise nor cease. In contrast, in a system that upholds the emptiness of true existence, all these phenomena are possible.<sup>44</sup> In fact, emptiness and dependent arising come to the same point. In this way, Nāgārjuna demonstrates through reasoning that the meaning of the Perfection of Wisdom sūtras cannot be interpreted otherwise but is definitive. He also shows that the sūtras that disagree with this require interpretation and cannot be understood literally.

How, then, do we understand sūtras that contain statements such as “everything is mind only”? Nāgārjuna explains that they were spoken to allay the fears of some disciples; in *Precious Garland* he said (RA 394–96):

Just as a language teacher makes [some students]  
read from a diagram of the alphabet,  
likewise, the Buddha taught the Dharma

in accord with his disciples' abilities.

To some, the Dharma he taught is  
for the purpose of stopping negativity.

To some, it is aimed at the practice of virtue.

And to some, he taught one that is based on duality.

To some, the Dharma he taught is not based on duality,  
and to some, he taught a profound Dharma that terrifies the timid.

Its essence is wisdom and compassion,  
and it is the means to attain full awakening.

As these verses show, the Buddha teaches the Dharma according to the aptitude, receptivity, and needs of the specific disciples. In general he begins by teaching ethical conduct—abstaining from destructive actions and engaging in constructive ones. Then he teaches the most basic level of no-self. When disciples are prepared, he teaches them the Yogācāra presentations of the nonduality of subject and object. Finally, to those of advanced mental faculties, the deepest meanings of emptiness and bodhicitta are revealed. This skillful method of introducing students to teachings requiring interpretation first, followed by teaching on the definitive meaning when they are receptive to it, protects students from falling into nihilism by misunderstanding emptiness.

Tsongkhapa himself struggled to maintain the balance between negating inherent existence on all phenomena and at the same time maintaining the everyday reality of cause and effect. In the earlier part of his life, he held a view that considers everyday reality to be a mere illusion and the meditation on emptiness to be constituted by disengagement from phenomena. Just as reality is indescribable and indefinable, in the same way the meditation on emptiness is one of nonjudgment and disengagement, he thought. Later in his life Tsongkhapa refuted this view and realized that although phenomena are empty of inherent existence, they function in the world and exist conventionally like illusions.

### *Avoiding Confusion*

We may easily mistake the meaning of words when reading Madhyamaka texts on emptiness. For example, sometimes both “things” (*bhāva*) and “non-things”

(*abhāva*) are negated. Here, “thing” refers to inherent existence, and “non-thing” to total nonexistence. In this case Mādhyamikas are refuting the two extremes. They are not saying all impermanent and permanent phenomena don’t exist at all.

Similarly, sometimes Madhyamaka texts negate existence and nonexistence. We may become confused because these are a dichotomy and if one is negated, the other must be asserted. However, in this context “existence” means inherent existence and “nonexistence” refers to total nonexistence. Refuting “existence” and “nonexistence” undermines the two extremes.

## *The Three Doors of Liberation*

Definitive sūtras speak of the three doors of liberation (*vimokṣa, vimokkha*). These are selflessness seen from three perspectives: the entity, cause, and result of conditioned phenomena. The first, *emptiness* (*śūnyatā, suññata*) door of liberation, is the lack of inherent existence of the entity or nature of any phenomenon—for example, a sprout or a person. Meditation on this leads to realization that the entities of phenomena lack inherent existence, and this leads to the pacification of grasping the entities of phenomena as inherently existent.

The *signless* (*ānimitta, animitta*) door of liberation is the emptiness that is the absence of inherent existence of the cause of anything—for example, the emptiness of a seed in relation to the sprout. Meditation on this leads to the realization that causes do not inherently exist and this pacifies grasping the causes of a conditioned thing to be inherently existent. Here “sign” means cause.

The *wishless* (*apraṇihita, appaṇihita*) door of liberation is the lack of inherent existence of the effects of any phenomenon. Meditation on this leads to the realization that effects do not inherently exist and frees us from the effects of saṃsāra. “Wish” means the objects that are wished for, both those in saṃsāra and in nirvāṇa, and the wishlessness is their lack of inherent existence. There are no inherently existent objects to be sought, hoped for, or attained. Although we seek the cessation of duḥkha and its causes and the attainment of the path and cessation, none of these exist from their own side, and neither do we.

The three doors of liberation can be understood in multiple ways. First, emptiness is the emptiness of a phenomenon, let’s say an apple. Signlessness is the lack of inherent existence of its causes and conditions—the apple seed, water,



fertilizer, and so forth. Wishlessness is the lack of inherent existence of its results—applesauce or an apple pie. These too do not exist inherently.

The three doors of liberation can be contemplated in terms of saṃsāra and nirvāṇa: the entity, causes, and effects of saṃsāra lack inherent existence. Nirvāṇa is permanent and its entity is empty. The true paths that are causes of the attainment of nirvāṇa are impermanent, and they too lack inherent existence. The nature of both saṃsāra and nirvāṇa are empty. The causes of our saṃsāra—afflictions and polluted karma—are empty of inherent existence, as is the wisdom that brings about nirvāṇa. The wise do not try to eliminate inherently existent afflictions or attain inherently existent nirvāṇa, for they know these do not exist. Nor do the wise conceive of an inherently existent person who practices the path and later becomes an inherently existent buddha. Meditation on each of the three doors of liberation leads us to realize the emptiness of inherent existence and pacifies grasping at inherent existence.

In addition to things, their causes, and effects being empty, the relationship between these—the activity of arising from causes and the activity of producing effects—are also empty.

The three doors of liberation are related to other topics. They include the eight profound meanings stated in the *Heart Sūtra* when Avalokiteśvara says:

Śāriputra, like this all phenomena are merely empty, having no characteristics. They are not produced and do not cease. They have no defilement and no separation from defilement. They have no decrease and no increase.

*Empty, having no characteristics* speaks of the emptiness door of liberation: phenomena lack both an inherently existent general nature and an inherently existent specific nature. A lamp's general nature is, for example, its impermanence, and its specific nature is its function to light up an area. The four characteristics—*not produced and do not cease, no defilement and no separation from defilement*—pertain to the signless door of liberation because they speak of the cause (and effect) of the thoroughly afflictive, saṃsāra, and the thoroughly pure, nirvāṇa. The cause and effect in terms of saṃsāra are true cause and true duḥkha; the cause and effect in terms of nirvāṇa are true path and true cessation. The remaining two—*no decrease and no increase*—speak of the wishless door of liberation. The faults

that we wish to decrease and the excellent qualities we want to increase lack inherent existence.

The three doors of liberation are also related to the basis, path, and result. Grasping the basis of our saṃsāra—the five aggregates, eighteen constituents, ignorance, afflictions, and so forth—as inherently existent blocks the emptiness door to liberation. Realizing the emptiness of these opens the emptiness door to liberation.

Holding the path to freedom as having inherently existent signs or characteristics blocks the signless door to liberation. Realizing that they lack such signs of inherent existence and using this realization to cease craving and clinging to an inherently existent path opens the signless door to liberation.

Believing the results of liberation and full awakening to be inherently existent blocks the wishless door to liberation. Abandoning the wish to attain inherently existent liberation or awakening opens the wishless door to liberation.

In addition, the three doors can be related to the sixteen aspects of the four truths. The explanation of this is slightly different in the *Ornament of Clear Realizations* and the *Treasury of Knowledge*. The *Ornament* explains that the three doors are paths of antidotes. Paths of antidotes are exalted knowers that are able to destroy the superimpositions that are their objects of negation, in this case the superimposition of inherent or true existence. In the mindstreams of ārya bodhisattvas, the door of emptiness relates to the last two aspects of true duḥkha: empty and selfless. It is an antidote to the view of self because it directly realizes the absence of a permanent, unitary, independent self (empty) and the absence of a self-sufficient substantially existent self (selfless). The door of signlessness is the pristine wisdom that directly realizes the four aspects of true cessation—cessation, peace, magnificence, and definite emergence—and the four aspects of true paths—path, suitable, accomplishment, and way of deliverance. As such, it is an antidote to grasping inherent existence. The door of wishlessness is the antidote to the wish for birth in the three realms of saṃsāra. It is the pristine wisdom that directly realizes the lack of inherent existence of the first two aspects of true suffering—impermanence and duḥkha—and of the four aspects of true origins—cause, origin, strong producer, and condition.

Although three doors of liberation are mentioned, in fact the view of emptiness—the absence of inherent existence—is the door to liberation that takes priority over the others. When we know that all phenomena lack self—

inherent existence—and employ that wisdom to extinguish craving for things, we no longer crave for or apprehend signs of inherent existence in anything. The *Requisites for Awakening (Byang chub kyi tshogs)*<sup>45</sup> explains (LC 3:194):

Because [phenomena] do not inherently exist, they are empty.  
Further, because [phenomena] are empty, what use are signs?  
Inasmuch as they have overcome all signs,  
why would the wise wish [for such phenomena]?

The aspiration for liberation, bodhicitta, faith, and ethical conduct are among the many qualities needed to attain awakening, but the realization of the three doors of liberation are the incomparable cause for awakening because they cut the root of saṃsāra completely.

The three doors of liberation are also explained in the Pāli tradition. The liberations are ārya paths that realize nirvāṇa—the signless, wishless, and empty doors of liberation. These three are one nature but are differentiated depending on the aspect of nirvāṇa they focus on. Signlessness sees nirvāṇa as being free from the signs of conditioned phenomena. Wishlessness sees nirvāṇa as completely devoid of clinging and desire. The emptiness door of liberation sees nirvāṇa as empty of a self or any kind of substantial identity.

Because there are three liberations, there are three doors of liberation (*vimokṣamukha, vimokkhamukha*) through which one leaves the world and enters liberation. These three doors correspond to insight into the three characteristics. Insight into impermanence is the door to the signless liberation because it removes all signs of conditioned phenomena—specifically the aggregates—so that the undeclining, undisintegrating nature of nirvāṇa can shine forth. By knowing impermanence, we know all conditioned things to be limited and circumscribed by their arising and ceasing. They do not exist before they arise, and they do not go beyond disintegrating. The signless element is nirvāṇa in which all signs of conditioned things—such as their arising and ceasing—are absent.

Insight into duḥkha is the door to wishless liberation, since directly knowing the unsatisfactory nature of conditioned phenomena stops any wish or desire for them. Contemplation of duḥkha leads to a sense of urgency to be free from conditioned things and the mind enters into nirvāṇa viewed as the wishless

element. The wishless element is nirvāṇa because in nirvāṇa there is no desire, greed, or clinging that wishes for conditioned existence.

Insight into selflessness is the door to empty liberation, since it reveals that no conditioned phenomenon has a substantial identity and therefore it is unreasonable to think nirvāṇa, the unconditioned, is encumbered by a solid identity. Contemplating that conditioned things are not I or mine leads to seeing them as foreign, and the mind enters into nirvāṇa viewed as the empty element, which derives its name because it is empty of self.

In all three cases, the correct understanding of the conditioned cuts through mental fabrications to reveal the unconditioned, nirvāṇa. Thus the way to realize the unconditioned is through understanding the conditioned correctly—as impermanent, duḥkha, and not self. Nirvāṇa is not some isolated, absolute entity; rather it is realized by seeing with wisdom conditioned phenomena as they really are.

## *Nāgārjuna's Homage*

Like the three doors of liberation, Nāgārjuna's homage to the Buddha in *Treatise on the Middle Way* explores the emptiness of causes and their effects:

I prostrate to the perfect Buddha,  
the best of all teachers,  
who taught that that which is dependent arising  
is without ceasing, without arising,  
without discontinuation, without permanence,  
without coming, without going,  
without difference, without identity,  
and peaceful—free from [conceptual] fabrication.

Here Nāgārjuna identifies emptiness as the absence of eight characteristics of conditioned things: ceasing, arising, discontinuation, permanence, coming, going, difference, and identity. These eight absences are not qualities of an absolute or permanent entity that neither arises from causes nor produces effects. Rather, they pertain to the very things that conventionally have causes and

effects, that come and go, that are the same (identical) or different, and so on. Conditioned phenomena and their eight characteristics all exist conventionally, but ultimately cannot be found by analytical wisdom.

In what sense do things arise? How can we understand causation? In his text, Nāgārjuna explains that on the conventional level, when we say something arises from something else—for example, peach trees arise from peach seeds—we do so in the context of everyday convention. We do not examine whether the peach tree arises from a cause that is identical to itself, a cause that is inherently distinct, both, or causelessly. We simply observe a peach tree growing from a peach seed and say, “This thing arises from that thing.”

But when we move beyond the limits of conventional truths and search for some kind of inherent, objective arising or production of the peach tree, we have to consider what kind of cause could produce an inherently existent peach tree. Such a cause has to be either identical to its effect or completely distinct and unrelated to it. The non-Buddhist Sāṃkhyaś assert the former, saying the result is already in the cause at the time the cause exists. Buddhists refute this, saying that if the result is present in the cause while the cause exists, then a fully formed adult elephant would exist in the womb in a mother elephant, and a peach tree with leaves and branches would exist in a peach seed. The alternative is that an effect arises from a cause that is completely unrelated to it. In that case, the adult elephant would have no relationship at all to the embryo in the mother elephant and a peach tree would be totally unrelated to the seed from which it grew.

On the conventional everyday level, there is no problem with talking about causes and effects being different. We know the elephant embryo and the adult elephant are not the same thing but are causally related to each other. But when we search with ultimate analysis, asking “How exactly does an effect arise from a cause? At what specific moment does the cause become the effect?” the process of production becomes amorphous.

Nāgārjuna presents two arguments to refute that an effect arises from a cause that is inherently different and other than it. The first points out that the very idea of “other” presupposes something that has its own unique, inherent nature that is unlike anything else. But if something does not possess its own self-nature—if it is not an inherently existent thing—then how can we posit something that is different from it? If something is not inherently real, how can we posit

something that is inherently other than it? This is one way in which the notion of an objectively real difference between self and other is undermined.<sup>46</sup>

Nāgārjuna's second argument states that the very idea of arising becomes untenable if we assert that cause and effect are inherently different or inherently other. A cause precedes its effect, and the effect follows its cause. But when we look at the activity of something arising, we see that two processes are occurring simultaneously: the ceasing of the cause and the arising of the effect. When the effect is arising the cause is ceasing; when the cause is ceasing the effect is arising.

The cessation of the cause is an activity of the cause, and the arising of the effect is an activity of the effect. While the seed is ceasing, the sprout is arising. If these two simultaneous activities existed inherently, the two agents that are doing these two activities—the seed and the sprout—should also exist at the same time. But this is impossible because the seed must cease for the sprout to arise. Such faults appear if we assert inherently existent causes and effects. Through these two arguments, Nāgārjuna undermines any notion of something arising from another thing that is a totally unrelated other.

Commenting on Nāgārjuna's homage, Candrakīrti says that these eight attributes of dependent phenomena are negated from the perspective of unpolluted wisdom—the āryas' wisdom of meditative equipoise that directly and nonconceptually realizes emptiness. This wisdom is free of subject-object duality and free of conceptual fabrications. The only content or object of that wisdom is the emptiness of inherent existence; veiled truths do not appear to this nonconceptual wisdom. For that reason, Candrakīrti says that the negation of the eight characteristics of dependent phenomena has to be understood from the perspective of emptiness, not on the conventional level. While conventionally things arise and cease, are identical or different, come and go, these activities do not exist on the ultimate level, nor do the agents of these activities exist in the perspective of the wisdom realizing the ultimate nature.

Understanding this is important. Dzogchen contains the practice of searching for the nature of mind—what the mind is, where it comes from, what its shape and color are, and so on. This is a skillful way to lead beginning meditators to approach understanding the nature of mind, for they come to understand that the mind has no form, no shape, no color; it cannot be touched or smelled or tasted. These meditators have not realized the ultimate nature of the mind, which is the absence of inherent existence; they have only realized the

mind's lack of conventional qualities such as color and shape. We have to clearly distinguish the conventional and ultimate natures of the mind and understand that realizing the ultimate nature of the mind involves negating its (fabricated) inherent existence, not its form or location.

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## REFLECTION

1. What are the three doors of liberation? How are they similar? How are they different?
  2. What was the Buddha's purpose in teaching them?
  3. What are Nāgārjuna's two arguments refuting inherently existent causes and effects?
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## 6 | Cognizing Subjects and Cognized Objects

AS MENTIONED BEFORE, a direct perceiver of emptiness has the power to cleanse our mind from all defilements. Generating this kind of wisdom mind involves gaining the correct understanding of the meditation object—in this case emptiness—as well as the types of minds that can perceive it, be they conceptual consciousnesses or direct perceivers. These are the topics of the present chapter.

### *The Steps to Understand Emptiness*

Practitioners gradually pass through several stages of knowledge while progressing from ignorance to the correct realization of emptiness. We begin with wrong awareness, progress to doubt inclined to the right understanding, followed by correct assumption, then inference, and finally a direct perceiver of emptiness.

We ordinary people have a wrong awareness that grasps both persons and other phenomena to exist inherently; this is the opposite of how they actually exist. This erroneous mind doesn't disappear by itself; the first step to removing it is to listen to correct teachings on emptiness. Contemplating these teachings arouses doubt. Doubt inclined to the wrong conclusion rejects emptiness, but if we continue to study and reflect on emptiness, it will gradually give way to doubt that thinks phenomena may or may not be empty. After more study and reflection, doubt inclined to the right conclusion thinks, "I'm not sure, but phenomena lacking inherent existence makes sense." Continuing to learn and discuss, you reach a correct assumption that phenomena lack inherent existence. Although you are now going in the right direction, your understanding is shallow, and the reasoning proving emptiness is not adequately clear to your mind. You know the words to explain emptiness and intellectually you may believe that all phenomena are empty of inherent existence because they are dependent arising, but it doesn't impact your mind very much.



The step of correct assumption may last a long time, as you must continue to learn, question, and analyze in order to refine your understanding of emptiness. After some time you will gain the correct understanding of emptiness and have a correct inference, which irrefutably knows through valid reasoning that all persons and phenomena lack inherent existence. Inference is a conceptual consciousness that realizes emptiness by means of a conceptual appearance of emptiness. This realization, which may occur before or after entering a path, has a powerful effect on the mind; it shakes how you view the world because you understand that the world and the sentient beings in it don't exist the way they appear to.

Practitioners who have not already developed concentration at the level of serenity now put effort into that. When cultivating serenity, their object of concentration can be any of the objects explained in the scriptures.<sup>47</sup> After gaining serenity, they continue to meditate, alternating analytic and stabilizing meditation on emptiness. As time goes on, emptiness becomes more and more familiar to their minds, to the point where, by engaging in minimal analysis, the analysis itself leads to pliancy and serenity. They then meditate on emptiness with a mind that is the union of serenity and insight; this marks the beginning of the path of preparation. Through continual meditation, emptiness becomes clearer until eventually the conceptual appearance is worn away and they directly and nonconceptually perceive emptiness. At this point, they enter the third path, the path of seeing. Though a conceptual consciousness and a direct perceiver are very different, the former can lead to the latter, since in this case they are both mental consciousnesses and have the same apprehended object, emptiness.

Now the process of eliminating the afflictions begins, starting with the acquired afflictions, which are eliminated at the beginning of the path of seeing. Through familiarization with the view of emptiness on the fourth path, the path of meditation, the innate afflictions are eradicated. Those following the paths of śrāvakas and solitary realizers reach the fifth path, the path of no-more-learning of their vehicles, when all afflictive obscurations have been uprooted. Those following the bodhisattva path abandon all afflictive obscurations at the eighth bodhisattva ground on the Mahāyāna path of meditation. They attain the Mahāyāna path of no-more-learning, buddhahood, when the cognitive obscurations have been completely overcome.<sup>48</sup>

*Realization of emptiness* can refer to a range of mental states, from a correct inference to a nonconceptual direct perceiver. Both of these mental consciousnesses are reliable cognizers that know emptiness correctly. Realization does not occur suddenly in a flash to a completely unprepared person. The rare practitioners who experience sudden awakening have done considerable practice in many previous lives and left strong imprints on their mindstreams for understanding emptiness. When these imprints ripen in this life, it may appear that their realization is “sudden,” but in fact it was cultivated gradually over many lifetimes.

*Awakening* has different meanings according to various Buddhist traditions. Zen masters explained to me that in their tradition, awakening includes the first glimpse of emptiness, which is a conceptual realization. Awakening is neither a final attainment nor a stable realization, and when the person arises from meditation on emptiness, dualistic appearances and afflictions appear again. A long time may pass before having another glimpse of emptiness. Only when their realization of emptiness is stable, direct, and nonconceptual do they begin the process of removing afflictions from the root.

In the Theravāda tradition, awakening has four stages: stream-enterer, once-returned, nonreturner, and arhatship. A practitioner becomes a stream-enterer upon having the direct perceiver of nirvāṇa.<sup>49</sup> This introductory realization is deepened and integrated into their minds during the stages of once-returned and nonreturner and finally becomes the stable and profound realization of an arhat.<sup>50</sup>

In the Tibetan tradition, gaining the realization of emptiness does not mean one is awakened. “Awakening” refers to having attained the path of no-more-learning of whichever vehicle one follows. Although texts speak of the awakening of a śrāvaka or solitary-realizer arhat, in the Sanskrit tradition, in general “awakening” refers to buddhahood.

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## REFLECTION

1. Contemplate the steps to realize emptiness with a direct perceiver, beginning with a wrong view, progressing to doubt and then correct assumption, followed by inference and finally direct perceiver.

2. What changes occur from one step to the next?
  3. What does it mean to realize emptiness? What minds do that?
  4. What are the various meanings of “awakening”?
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## *The Process of Cognition*

In any process of cognition, there is the subject—the consciousness that apprehends—and the object—what is apprehended. When examining how things exist, identifying the varieties of subjects and objects and differentiating the accurate from the mistaken is crucial. Some background regarding Buddhist ideas of cognition will be helpful to do this. In addition to the following sections, we recommend reviewing chapters 2 and 3 in *The Foundation of Buddhist Practice*, the second volume of the *Library of Wisdom and Compassion*.

### *Subjects—Consciousnesses Knowing an Object*

Among subjects—the minds that know or experience an object—there are nonconceptual consciousnesses (*nirvikalpaka*) and conceptual consciousnesses (*kalpanā*). Nonconceptual consciousnesses know their objects without the medium of a conceptual appearance (generic image, *artha-sāmānya*), while conceptual consciousnesses know their objects by means of a conceptual appearance.<sup>51</sup> In general, direct perceivers are knowers that are free from conceptuality (*kalpanā-apodha*) and nonmistaken (*abhrānta*). There are three kinds of direct perceivers that are nonconceptual consciousnesses: (1) Sense direct perceivers (visual, auditory, olfactory, gustatory, tactile, and mental direct perceivers). These are, for example, the visual consciousness apprehending yellow and the auditory consciousness apprehending a melodious sound. (2) Mental direct perceivers—for example, clairvoyance and clairaudience. (3) Yogic direct perceivers—mental consciousnesses, developed through meditation, that directly know more subtle phenomena, such as impermanence and emptiness. This is the Sautrāntika view; Prāsaṅgikas gloss “direct” as meaning not dependent on a reason, and so consider the second moment onward of inferences to be direct perceivers even though they are conceptual.

Conceptual consciousnesses are mental consciousnesses that know their object indirectly, by means of a conceptual appearance. These consciousnesses think, imagine, plan, remember, visualize, impute, designate, learn ideas and concepts, and so forth. Often, for a conceptual appearance to arise, first a sense consciousness perceives raw sense data directly. A conceptual consciousness gives a name to that object, and the name and concept are mixed with what we see. The appearing object to the conceptual consciousnesses is a conceptual appearance of that thing, not the actual object. It may be a visual image when we remember something we saw, or it may be an image of a sound, tactile sensation, feeling, abstract object, and so forth.

One conceptual consciousness may give rise to another one. When planning where to put a table in a room, we imagine it being against the wall, in the middle of the room, turned this way or that. Each one is a new conceptual appearance known by a new moment of consciousness.

For example, a visual direct perceiver directly sees the blue color of the sky. Later when we remember the sky's color, we do not see it directly. Instead a conceptual appearance of blue appears to our mental consciousness. This conceptual appearance is not the actual blue color, yet it appears to be the same as the blue color. For this reason, conceptual consciousnesses are considered mistaken, even though they may understand their object properly. The conceptual appearance is only an approximation of the blue we saw, a mixture of each moment of the shades of blue we saw in the sky that forms a conglomerate general image of the blue sky.

Imagining an apple is very different than actually tasting one. A conceptual consciousness does not perceive the distinct qualities of a particular apple; rather an abstract aspect of an apple that seems to be an apple appears to our mind. When we eat an apple, we directly perceive its color, shape, smell, taste, and tactile qualities by means of our sense direct perceivers.

All the qualities of a flower do not appear simultaneously to a conceptual consciousness in the same way they do to a direct perceiver. While the color, shape, impermanence, and so forth of a flower appear simultaneously to a visual direct perceiver, a conceptual consciousness must think about each of these traits one by one. Conception knows the qualities of the flower individually and indirectly; it does not perceive the flower and its attributes as clearly as a direct perceiver does.

Both sense consciousnesses and conceptual consciousnesses (thoughts) may be either erroneous (*viparyāsa*) or nonerroneous (*aviparīta*). A visual consciousness correctly seeing the color of a flower in a garden and an inferential cognizer of emptiness are nonerroneous. Seeing flowers in the sky under the influence of drugs and asserting a permanent, unified, and independent soul are erroneous. A reliable visual consciousness and an inferential understanding of not-self discounts these.

Although direct perceivers know their objects more vividly than conceptual consciousnesses, both types of consciousness have their roles. Many of the advances human beings have made are due to our ability to think and reason, which involve conceptuality. Learning the Dharma involves conceptual consciousnesses; auditory direct perceivers hear the sound of words, but conceptual consciousnesses attribute meaning to them, enabling us to discuss and exchange ideas. Before attaining a yogic direct perceiver of emptiness, it is necessary to hear or read teachings, study, think about, and discuss or debate our understanding of emptiness. These activities all involve conceptual consciousnesses. Only by meditating over time with a correct conceptual understanding of emptiness will we be able to diminish the conceptual appearance of emptiness and perceive emptiness directly. To make this point, the *Kāśyapa Chapter Sūtra* gives the analogy of a fire created by two sticks rubbed together that in turn burns the sticks:<sup>52</sup>

Once the fire has arisen, the two sticks are burned. Just so, Kāśyapa, if you have the correct analytical intellect, an ārya's faculty of wisdom is generated. Through its generation, the correct analytical intellect is consumed.

If the stick of correct thought rubs against the stick of wrong thought, the fire of wisdom will arise and consume both thoughts. The stick of correct thought is needed to start the fire, but once the fire begins, it is no longer needed and is destroyed. Although thought is initially necessary to learn the correct view of reality, the union of serenity and insight that directly perceives emptiness goes beyond thought.

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## REFLECTION

1. What is a conceptual appearance?
  2. What is the difference between how a conceptual consciousness knows an object and how a direct perceiver knows it?
  3. Consider your day. Make examples of direct perceivers and conceptual consciousnesses knowing objects.
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### *Objects—Phenomena Known by a Consciousness*

One perception or conceptual consciousness has different types of objects. Knowing these enables us to better understand the process of cognition and is essential for comprehending the relationship between emptiness and dependent arising. Among the various types of objects are appearing objects, observed objects, apprehended objects, and conceived objects. The presentation below is according to the Sautrāntika system; Prāsaṅgikas agree with it unless otherwise noted.

The **appearing object** (*pratibhāsa-viṣaya*) is the object that appears to that consciousness. The appearing objects of sense direct perceivers include color, shape, sound, smell, taste, texture, temperature, and so forth.

The appearing object to a conceptual consciousness is a conceptual appearance of the object. Conceptual appearances are considered permanent phenomenon. A conceptual consciousness is mistaken with respect to its appearing object because the conceptual appearance of a table appears to be a table, although it is not. For this reason, thought consciousnesses, which are always conceptual, are mistaken with respect to their appearing object because they mistake a conceptual appearance of the object for the actual object.

The **observed object** (*ālambana*) is the basic object that the mind refers to or focuses on while apprehending certain aspects of it. It is equivalent to the focal object (*viṣaya*).<sup>53</sup>

The **apprehended object** (object of the mode of apprehension, *muṣṭibandhaviṣaya*) of a consciousness is equivalent to its **engaged object** (*pravṛtti-viṣaya*) and its **object of comprehension** (*prameya*). This is the main

object with which the mind is concerned, the object that the mind is getting at. This is the object that is apprehended. For direct perceivers, the appearing object and the apprehended object are the same. For a conceptual consciousness thinking about a table, the appearing object is a conceptual appearance of a table, and the apprehended object is a table. This mind is mistaken with respect to its appearing object because it knows the object via a conceptual appearance, but is not erroneous with respect to its apprehended object. According to the Prāsaṅgikas, an ignorant mind grasping the table as truly existent is erroneous with respect to both its appearing and its apprehended object because the table is not inherently existent. Although a casual visual consciousness seeing the table is not erroneous with respect to its apprehended object, the table, it is mistaken with respect to that object because it appears truly existent.

The **conceived object** (*adhyavasāya-viṣaya*) is the principal object of a conceptual consciousness. The appearing object of a conceptual consciousness thinking about a flower is the conceptual appearance of a flower; its conceived object is the same as its apprehended object—a flower.

Let's apply these different types of objects to a common situation. Jane and her friends go out to an Italian restaurant and order lasagna. Although we may think of eating as a single experience, actually a lot is going on. When the plates of lasagna are served to them, they see the red of the sauce, the white of the noodles, and the green of the salad with their visual consciousness. These are the observed objects of their visual consciousness. The smell of the lasagna is the observed object of their olfactory consciousness. The various tastes are the observed objects of their gustatory consciousness and the smoothness of the noodles is the observed object of their tactile consciousness. The consciousnesses directly perceiving these attributes are reliable sense direct perceivers, and their apprehended objects are the same as their observed objects—the color and shape for the visual consciousness, the taste for the gustatory consciousness, and so on.

A week later Jane and her friends return to the same restaurant. While looking at the menu and thinking about what to order, they remember the lasagna they ate the previous week. The color and shape, taste, and so on of the lasagna are known through conceptual consciousnesses. The appearing object of the taste is a conceptual appearance of the taste that appears to the mental consciousness knowing the taste of the lasagna. The apprehended object is the



taste of the lasagna, and because this is a conceptual consciousness, its conceived object is also the taste of the lasagna.

It may happen that some exaggeration slips in. If Jane is very hungry, when she remembers the qualities of the lasagna from last week, the mental factor of distorted attention exaggerates its delicious taste, appealing smell, and colorful appearance. As a result of this exaggeration, attachment arises. Attachment is a conceptual consciousness; it is erroneous because the lasagna appears to be really fantastic, although it is not.

Not everything that appears to a sense consciousness is its appearing object. When a visual consciousness sees a table, the subtle impermanence of the table—its quality of changing moment by moment—also appears to that consciousness, but since impermanence is a subtle object, the visual consciousness cannot apprehend it. Thus subtle impermanence appears to that visual consciousness, but it is not its appearing object; the table is. If the person later thinks about subtle impermanence and correctly infers its existence, their mental consciousness apprehends it via a conceptual appearance; the conceptual appearance of subtle impermanence is the appearing object of that thought, and subtle impermanence is its apprehended object. If, through meditation, they remove the veil of the conceptual appearance, they will know subtle impermanence with a yogic direct perceiver. At that time subtle impermanence is both the appearing and apprehended objects of that consciousness. For view of the personal identity, according to the Prāsaṅgikas the observed object is the I and mine in your own continuum, and the apprehended object is an inherently existent I and mine.

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## REFLECTION

1. What is a conceptual appearance?
2. As you go about your day, be aware when you are directly perceiving an object and when you are thinking about it.
3. What is the difference in your experience between knowing an object with a direct perceiver and knowing it with a conceptual consciousness by means of a conceptual appearance?
4. Does your mind go from a direct perceiver to a conceptual consciousness of the object quickly? Do you sometimes think you're directly perceiving an object when you're actually



thinking about it?

5. What are the benefits and disadvantages of a direct perceiver? What are the benefits and disadvantages of a conceptual consciousness?

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Of our many conceptual consciousnesses during the day, some are useful and some aren't. The conceptual mind involved in reading this book enables you to learn ideas that will lead you to deeper understanding and wisdom. But the mind ruminating about a problem or judging other people's seeming faults easily turns the mind to nonvirtue. On these occasions, observe that although the object is not actually present, the conceptual mind has been so drawn into it that attachment, anger, or another destructive emotion easily arises. This accounts for many of our distractions during meditation.

These terms and distinctions among subjects and objects may initially seem confusing, but becoming familiar with them will clarify your understanding of the object of negation in the meditation on emptiness. The following chart encapsulates some of the key elements regarding objects according to the Sautrāntika system, which accepts inherent existence.

## CONSCIOUSNESSES AND THEIR OBJECTS

CONSCIOUSNESS	OBSERVED OBJECT	APPEARING OBJECT	APPREHENDED OBJECT	CONCEIVED OBJECT
Visual consciousness perceiving blue	Blue	Blue	Blue	—
Memory or thought of blue *	Blue	Conceptual appearance of blue	Blue	Blue
Thought of a permanent self (wrong conceptual consciousness of a nonexistent) * ^	Self	Conceptual appearance of a permanent self	Permanent self	Permanent self
Visual consciousness perceiving moving scenery when riding in a vehicle (wrong consciousness) ^	Scenery	Moving scenery	Moving scenery	—
Conception of a rabbit's horn (wrong consciousness) * ^	Rabbit's ear	Conceptual appearance of a rabbit's horn	Rabbit's horn	Rabbit's horn
Thought apprehending truly existent aggregates (wrong consciousness)* ^	Aggregates	Conceptual appearance of truly existent aggregates	Truly existent aggregates	Truly existent aggregates
Visual consciousness of an adult apprehending the reflection of a face in a mirror	Reflection of a face	Face	Reflection of a face	—
Conceptual mental consciousness knowing the reflection of the face in the mirror as a face is false *	Reflection of a face	Conceptual appearance of a reflection of a face	Nonexistence of a real face in the mirror	Nonexistence of a real face in the mirror

\* Thought consciousnesses are mistaken with respect to their appearing object because they confuse the actual object with the conceptual appearance of it.

^ Wrong consciousnesses are erroneous with respect to their apprehended object because they do not apprehend or know it correctly.

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## REFLECTION

Identifying the objects of the various types of consciousness you have during the day helps you determine the type of minds that know an object and thus to assess if those cognizers are accurate.

1. When gazing at a garden and enjoying the colors of the flowers, what is the appearing object to your visual consciousness? What is the apprehended object?
2. Close your eyes and think about the flowers. Be aware that a conceptual appearance of the flowers appears to your mind, not the actual flowers. How does that differ experientially from seeing the flowers directly?
3. When you find yourself becoming irritated, stop and investigate, “What is the appearing object? What is the apprehended object?” If you’re remembering an incident in the past, be aware of how anger arises even though the incident is not happening now.
4. Look at one of the dishes on your lunch plate. Close your eyes and imagine its taste.
5. Taste that food. Is the conceptual appearance of the taste to your conceptual consciousness the same as the actual taste? Was it better or worse?

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Applying these teachings to your daily life can be fun and will enhance your understanding of your outer and inner environment. It brings the teachings home and enables you to understand them through your personal experience.

Let’s now bring inherent existence into the discussion and speak from the viewpoint of the Prāsaṅgika system. The objects of consciousness are basically the same, but whether they are considered mistaken or erroneous differs.

In the Prāsaṅgika system, all phenomena mistakenly appear to be inherently existent to all sense and mental consciousnesses of sentient beings, except for an ārya’s meditative equipoise on emptiness. The appearance of an inherently existent table, inherently existent taste, inherently existent sound, and so forth to the five sense consciousnesses is false, and those consciousnesses are mistaken

with respect to their appearing objects because these things appear inherently existent although they are not. From the viewpoint of the Svātantrikas and below, the appearance of inherent existence is an accurate appearance. For them those sense consciousnesses are not mistaken with respect to either their appearing object or their apprehended object because inherently existent objects exist.<sup>54</sup>

Prāsaṅgikas say a visual consciousness apprehending yellow is mistaken with respect to its appearing object because the yellow *appears* to exist inherently although it does not exist in that way. Nevertheless, this visual consciousness realizes its apprehended object, yellow, and is a direct reliable cognizer of yellow. Regarding conceptual mental consciousnesses, there are those that do not grasp inherent existence and those that do. In the case of the former, the appearing object is the conceptual appearance of inherently existent yellow to a consciousness remembering the yellow you saw yesterday. The apprehended object and conceived object are yellow. That mind is mistaken in two ways: first, it conflates the conceptual appearance of yellow with the color yellow; second, yellow appears inherently existent although it is not. However, that consciousness is not erroneous because it knows yellow and can differentiate it from blue, red, and other colors.

But let's say you saw the perfect color yellow to paint your house and start thinking with attachment about how beautiful your house will be and how much your neighbors will admire it. This conceptual mind grasps that yellow color as inherently existent. It is mistaken with respect to its appearing object because it's a conceptual consciousness and because its object appears inherently existent. It's also erroneous with respect to its apprehended object because it grasps inherently existent yellow although inherently existent yellow does not exist. Similarly, a mind grasping the I as inherently existent is mistaken with respect to its appearing object because the I appears to exist inherently although it does not, and it is an erroneous consciousness because an inherently existent I does not exist at all. This means that attachment, anger, jealousy, arrogance, and so on—which all depend on grasping inherent existence—are erroneous consciousnesses.

Although all minds have apprehended objects, their apprehended objects do not necessarily exist—for example, a permanent self apprehended by the mental consciousness grasping the self as permanent. When we pull the corner of our eye while looking at the moon, a double moon is both the appearing object and the

apprehended object of that visual consciousness, even though a double moon does not exist.<sup>55</sup>

Let's look again at Jane's lasagna dinner. While she was eating, the appearing object, observed object, and apprehended object of her visual, olfactory, gustatory, and tactile consciousnesses were the color and shape, smell, taste, smooth texture, and warmth of the lasagna. However, these appear to exist inherently, and thus these sense consciousnesses are mistaken. Jane may or may not grasp these objects as inherently existent. If she doesn't, her mental consciousness is still mistaken because the taste and so forth appear to exist inherently, but that conceptual consciousness is not erroneous because it doesn't hold them as inherently existent. But if Jane is very attached to delicious lasagna and starts planning how she can take some extra orders of lasagna home, then her mental consciousness is erroneous because attachment is based on self-grasping ignorance. In addition, since attachment is based on distorted attention that exaggerates or projects unfounded good qualities on an object, that mind is also erroneous. Note the difference between appearing inherently existent and being grasped as inherently existent. Also note that sense consciousnesses do not grasp inherent existence although inherent existence appears to them. Only the mental consciousnesses grasp inherent existence.

## CONSCIOUSNESSES AND OBJECTS ACCORDING TO THE PRĀSAṄGIKAS

CONSCIOUSNESS	OBSERVED OBJECT	APPEARING OBJECT	APPREHENDED OBJECT	CONCEIVED OBJECT
Visual consciousness perceiving truly existent blue	Blue	Truly existent blue *	Blue	—
View of a personal identity	I and mine in one's own continuum	Conceptual appearance of truly existent I and mine *	Truly existent I and mine in one's own continuum ^	Truly existent I and mine in one's own continuum ^
Wisdom directly realizing emptiness of a truly existent I and mine	I and mine in one's own continuum <sup>36</sup>	Emptiness of true existence	Emptiness of true existence	—
Wisdom conceptually realizing the emptiness of a truly existent I and mine in one's own continuum	I and mine in one's own continuum	Conceptual appearance of the emptiness of a truly existent I and mine *	Emptiness of I and mine in one's own continuum	Emptiness of I and mine in one's own continuum

\* These consciousnesses are mistaken.

^ These consciousnesses are erroneous with respect to their apprehended objects.

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## REFLECTION

1. When there is not a strong emotion in your mind and you think "I'm reading this book," what kind of consciousness is that? What are its appearing and apprehended objects? Are either of them mistaken or erroneous?
2. When you feel guilty or angry at yourself, is that a direct perceiver or a conceptual consciousness?
3. Do you appear truly existent at that time?
4. Do you grasp a truly existent I that is bad because you made a mistake?

5. Is that an accurate or erroneous mental state?

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## *Syllogisms and Consequences*

Reasonings—especially syllogisms and consequences—are important when delving into the meaning of emptiness. Please refer to chapter 2 of *The Foundation of Buddhist Practice* to review the parts of a syllogism and the three criteria necessary to prove the thesis. A person who is receptive and understands the three criteria will understand the thesis because they know (1) the reason applies to the subject, (2) the pervasion (whatever is the reason must be the predicate), and (3) the counterpervasion (whatever is not the predicate must not be the reason).

In the syllogism, “Consider the subject, the I; it is empty of true existence because it is a dependent arising, like a mirage,” the thesis that is understood is that the I is empty of true existence. To understand this, we must establish the three criteria in our mind. The world contains many people who know that things arise dependent on causes and conditions. All of us know that flowers grow from seeds, but we still hold flowers to be truly existent. To disprove true existence by the above syllogism, we must first clarify the meaning of dependent arising, specifically understanding causal dependence—how the I depends on causes and conditions that have the ability to produce it. The I also depends on parts: the body and mind of the person. This establishes the first criterion, the presence of the reason in the subject of the syllogism—the person is a dependent arising.

Then we clarify the meaning of the predicate—empty of true existence. What constitutes true existence? What would it look like if the self were truly existent? After that, we check the pervasion: Is whatever arises dependently necessarily empty of true existence? With analysis, we discover that yes, if something arises dependently, it necessarily lacks true existence.

To test the counterpervasion, we examine if whatever is the opposite of the predicate is necessarily the opposite of the reason—that is, is whatever is not empty necessarily not a dependent arising? Here, too, the response is yes, if something is not empty of true existence, it cannot arise dependently. Now we



can draw the conclusion that the self is indeed empty of true existence because of being a dependent arising.

This brief description may sound intellectual and dry, but when we are aware of how things appear to us and how we grasp them as truly existent, these reasonings challenge our deeply held assumptions and beliefs as well as our ordinary cognitions. We must go slowly, preparing ourselves properly by being aware of how things appear to us and how we apprehend them. We must also understand the various terms, their meanings, and their relationships in order to investigate if a syllogism is correct.

Sometimes a person holds a wrong view very strongly, and their confidence in this view needs to be dislodged before they can generate a correct understanding. This is done by presenting the person with a consequence—a statement in which his beliefs contradict each other. Consequences operate as a *reductio ad absurdum* by showing internal inconsistencies in the other's view. For example, the ancient brahmins strongly believed the sound of the Vedas was permanent. To show them the fallacy of this belief, we present the consequence, "Sound is not a product of causes because it is permanent." This person already knows that sound is a product of causes, and now he is faced with the fact that it can't be if it is permanent. This makes him reflect if sound is indeed permanent or not.

The Svāntrikas and below not only assert that the self is inherently existent but also support that belief by giving the reason that it is a dependent arising. To them, dependent arising indicates inherent existence, and they assert that if phenomena didn't exist inherently, they wouldn't exist at all. To cause them to doubt their adherence to inherent existence, Prāsaṅgikas may present them with the consequence, "The self is not a dependent arising because it exists inherently." Because these Buddhists believe that the self is a dependent arising, they feel uncomfortable saying that it cannot be dependent because it exists inherently. That makes them examine their belief that the I inherently exists.

Prāsaṅgikas say that the dissonance provoked by this consequence will cause those who are receptive yet still adhere to inherent existence to understand that the I is empty without having to state the syllogism: Consider the self; it is empty of inherent existence because it arises dependently. Seeing the undesirable consequence of their previous view, someone who already has some doubt about that view will abandon it and gain a right understanding. However, when a person strongly holds a wrong view, a consequence followed by a syllogism is



necessary to help him gain the right understanding. The consequence is used to disprove the wrong view, and the syllogism is used to establish the correct one.

To be receptive to a consequence, someone must have certain qualifications. Although she has a wrong view, she is open-minded and willing to investigate that view. A person who accepts that a sprout inherently exists, but understands the two pervasions that whatever arises dependently is empty of inherent existence and whatever is not empty of inherent existence does not arise dependently, is on their way to a correct understanding. When hearing the consequence—the sprout is not a dependent arising because it inherently exists—she will feel uncomfortable asserting inherent existence because she knows the sprout is a dependent arising.

A person who is completely closed-minded is not receptive, and presenting them with a consequence will bring either resistance or a blank look. Likewise a person who is cynical or stubborn and has no wish to think deeply or reconsider his opinions is not receptive. Consequences and syllogisms do not move the minds of such people, so it is better not to waste time debating with them.

Sages advocate that we begin to contemplate emptiness by examining the nature of things that are commonly known as deceptive in the world, such as mirages, dreams, reflections, hallucinations, and holograms, because it is easier to see that they don't exist as they appear. We can later apply this to other phenomena where understanding the discrepancy between how something exists and how it appears is more difficult.

A mirage appears to be water, but it is not; its appearance is false. This appearance arises depending on sand, sunshine, the angle at which it strikes the sand, our distance from the sand, and so forth. Understanding that the silvery sparkle on the sand falsely appears to be water is not an understanding of the mirage's lack of inherent existence, although it is a step in that direction.

From there, we move to the syllogism: Consider a person; he does not inherently exist because he arises dependently, like a mirage. Contemplating that the water in the mirage is a false appearance helps to understand the thesis of the syllogism, that the person does not inherently exist.

## 7 | The Importance of Realizing Emptiness

### *Who Am I?*

The Buddha counseled us to recognize true duḥkha, abandon true origins of duḥkha, actualize true cessations, and cultivate true paths. Because this is done by a person, the self, questions relating to the existence and nature of the self become important. The self is the agent who experiences suffering and happiness, engages in constructive and destructive actions, practices the path, and attains nirvāṇa. What is the nature of this being—this self or I? This was an important issue for both Buddhist and non-Buddhist schools in ancient India and continues to be so today. Many philosophical systems have arisen on this topic.

When we examine the causal process of happiness and duḥkha, it is evident that these experiences arise in relation to multiple causes and conditions—both internal factors such as our sense faculties and our way of interpreting events, and external factors such as sense objects. What is the nature of these factors that give rise to our experiences of pain and pleasure? Do they actually exist? In what way do they exist? This, too, was the focus of major reflection in ancient India.

In our own experience, when we ask “What is this I?” we notice an innate, natural, instinctual sense of self. If our hand is hurt, we automatically say, “I am hurt.” Although our hand is not us, we instinctively identify with that experience and feel “I am hurt.” Here the sense of I arises in relation to our body.

The sense of I also arises in relation to the mind. When there is a grumpy mood, we say, “I am grumpy,” and when delight is present, we exclaim, “I am delighted.”

However, this I isn’t completely identifiable with our body, because if we could exchange our old, wrinkled, sick body with a fresh, youthful, healthy body, we would do so. In the depth of our heart we feel that there is a self who would benefit from this exchange. Similarly, if we were given the opportunity to exchange our afflictive, ignorant mind with a buddha’s fully awakened one, we would eagerly do this. This suggests that we do not completely identify with our

mind either. This willingness to exchange our mind for another person's mind indicates a belief in the depth of our heart that there is a separate person, an I, who would benefit from this exchange. On one hand, the sense of I arises in relation to our body or our mind; on the other hand, we do not completely identify with either our body or mind.

In our naïve, ordinary sense, there is a feeling of self, of a being who is intricately involved with the body and mind and is the master who can control them. Yet the I feels independent of both the body and mind, with its own distinct identity. In the case of those who believe in rebirth, this sense of a separate self extends across lifetimes with an independent self taking birth in one life and then another. Even those who do not believe in multiple lives think the same person experiences childhood, adolescence, adulthood, and old age. Although the body and mind constantly change, we have the sense of an I that endures over time when we say, "I was young and now I'm old." We believe there is a person that holds the continuums of body and mind over time.

Because of the problematic identity of the self, many non-Buddhist schools posit a self or soul (*ātman*) that has an absolute status; it is unchanging, unitary, and autonomous. Buddhist schools in general reject the notion of such a self, soul, or eternal principle. They espouse that the self or person is dependent on its mental and physical aggregates, and only on the basis of the continuum of the physical and mental aggregates can we say that the person exists through time. When the body and mind become old, we say that the person becomes old. Aside from the body and mind, we cannot find an autonomous person that ages.

The Buddha was clear that the conception of a permanent, unified, and independent self is a metaphysical construct, an artificial conjecture that exists only in the minds of people who have intellectually thought about it. Our innate sense of self does not feel that we exist in this way. While unliberated sentient beings have an erroneous innate sense of a real self, this conception of self as unchanging, monolithic, and autonomous is not it.

In addition, our naïve sense of the self being a master over the body and mind is also false. The self does not exist as an independent controller or master of the aggregates. In this way, the Buddha rejected self-existence and embraced selflessness—"not-self," as translated by Pāli translators. Various tenet systems contain different assertions concerning the meaning of selflessness, the self that is

negated, and the conventionally existent self that is born, dies, practices the path, and attains liberation.

The *Heart Sūtra*, a popular Mahāyāna sūtra, speaks of realizing the emptiness of *even* or *also* the five aggregates, depending on the translation. This indicates the wide range of phenomena that are empty. The five aggregates on which a person depends are empty of inherent existence. Since they are empty, so too is the person that depends on them. Since the I is empty of inherent existence, the mine is also empty of inherent existence. Just as the aggregates and the self are empty because they are designated in dependence on their parts, so too all other conditioned phenomena are also empty. Because all conditioned phenomena are empty, all unconditioned or uncompounded phenomena that are necessarily imputed in relation to conditioned things are also empty. Finally, even emptiness, the ultimate nature of all phenomena, is empty of inherent existence. Just as sentient beings in saṃsāra are empty of inherent existence, so too are buddhas who dwell in nonabiding nirvāṇa.

Does this mean nothing exists? Does this mean that when we sit in the hot sun, the person getting sunburned is nonexistent? Of course not! Although persons and other phenomena cannot be found when analyzed, someone who experiences and what is experienced still exist.

Understanding the nature of reality is challenging. How do we identify and refute what doesn't exist and still establish what does? In response, ancient Indian philosophical traditions developed various theories. Some accept the concept of an eternal soul or self; others assert a primordial substance out of which everything arises. Buddhists reject such notions. Meanwhile, some Buddhist schools accept the selflessness of persons and phenomena, although others do not accept a selflessness of phenomena. Among the Buddhists that accept the selflessness of both persons and phenomena, some accept true existence and others do not. Among those who reject true existence, some maintain some notion of inherent existence conventionally, whereas others reject inherent existence even conventionally. For this reason, there is a great deal of discussion about the nature of reality.

## *The Root of Saṃsāra*

In general, two types of ignorance exist: ignorance that does not understand karma and its effects, and ignorance that misunderstands the ultimate nature (self-grasping ignorance). Although both cause cyclic existence, the self-grasping ignorance is the *root* of cyclic existence. This ignorance is not just the lack of wisdom regarding the final nature; it is an active misconception of it. The way ignorance apprehends persons and phenomena is totally opposite to the way they exist; it apprehends the opposite of what the wisdom realizing the ultimate nature perceives. While ignorance grasps phenomena as inherently existent, wisdom perceives them to be empty of inherent existence. This ignorance is the first of the twelve links of dependent arising. In *Seventy Stanzas on Emptiness* (VV 64–65), Nāgārjuna explains:

That which conceives things produced  
from causes and conditions to be real (inherently existent)  
was said by the Teacher (Buddha) to be ignorance.  
From it, the twelve links [of dependent origination] arise.

Through knowing well that things are empty  
because of seeing reality, ignorance does not arise.  
That is the cessation of ignorance,  
whereby the twelve links cease.

Nāgārjuna asserts that the root of saṃsāra is the ignorance grasping inherent existence and the antidote that eliminates it is the direct realization of the emptiness of inherent existence. Because this ignorance is of two types—grasping a self of persons and grasping a self of phenomena—there are two types of selflessness: the selflessness of persons and the selflessness of phenomena. Here “person” refers to the beings of the six classes (gods, demi-gods, humans, animals, hungry ghosts, and hell beings), as well as to āryas, arhats, bodhisattvas, and buddhas. The person is the one who wanders in saṃsāra, cultivates the path, and attains liberation and awakening.

Meanwhile, Candrakīrti says the view of a personal identity (*satkāyadr̥ṣṭi*) is the root of saṃsāra (MMA 6.120):

Seeing with his mind that all afflictions and defects  
arise from the view of a personal identity . . . .

Since Candrakīrti identifies the view of a personal identity as the root of saṃsāra and Nāgārjuna identifies the ignorance grasping true existence as the root, are there two roots? No, these two are not considered two separate roots of saṃsāra, for they apprehend their objects in the same erroneous way—as existing inherently, truly, or independently. The difference between them is that ignorance is the mistaken superimposition of a self of persons and phenomena, whereas the view of a personal identity superimposes inherent existence on our own I and mine, not on other people or phenomena.<sup>57</sup> Tsongkhapa says (FEW 56–57):

The view of a personal identity is the root of all other afflictions. If it were something other than ignorance, there would be two discordant roots of saṃsāra; therefore, both [grasping the inherent existence of persons and of phenomena] should be taken as ignorance.

Ignorance must be eliminated in order to attain nirvāṇa. Only the wisdom directly realizing emptiness has the power to eradicate this ignorance because it refutes the existence of the object ignorance holds as true—inherent existence, existence from its own side, existence by its own characteristics, and so on. While loving-kindness, meditation on impermanence, and other meditations are useful in counteracting specific afflictions and are necessary to attain awakening, they cannot eradicate ignorance. Thus gaining the correct view of emptiness and realizing it nonconceptually is of crucial importance.

In the *Precious Garland*, Nāgārjuna explains that the self-grasping of phenomena—specifically the aggregates—is the cause of the self-grasping of persons (RA 35):

As long as there is grasping at the aggregates,  
so long the grasping at I will exist.  
Further, when grasping at I exists,  
there is action, and from it there also is birth.

Based on grasping the body and mind as inherently existent, grasping the I that exists in dependence on them as inherently existent arises.<sup>58</sup> Thus the self-grasping of phenomena is the root of *all* afflictions. However, we cannot say the same about the view of a personal identity, for it is the effect, not the cause, of the

self-grasping of phenomena. Nevertheless, both graspings must be eliminated to attain liberation.

Self-grasping of persons pertains to grasping both ourselves and others to be inherently existent. Grasping ourselves to exist inherently is the view of a personal identity (as I and mine). Sometimes “view of a personal identity” is translated as “view of the perishing aggregates.” This translation undercuts two erroneous views. First, by saying the aggregates are perishing, it negates the idea of an unchanging soul and emphasizes that the person and aggregates are momentarily impermanent. Second, “aggregates” indicates plurality, which negates the notion that the person is one indivisible monolithic unit and affirms that the person depends on the collection of its physical and mental aggregates.

The view of a personal identity is an afflictive “wisdom”: it is an ascertaining consciousness that misapprehends its object. According to the Prāsaṅgikas, the observed object of the view of a personal identity is the mere I, the conventionally existent person. The apprehended and conceived objects are a truly existent I, and this consciousness is erroneous with respect to them because it grasps a truly existent I, which does not exist at all, as existent.

Yogis begin by examining how the self exists. Could the self that they think and feel exists objectively, the self that is the object of self-grasping ignorance, exist? By investigating with reasoning how the self exists, they conclude that it cannot truly exist. The mind that erroneously grasps an objective self cannot be manifest at the same time as the wisdom that sees the nonexistence of an objective self, because those two minds are contradictory. Wisdom has the power to overcome ignorance because wisdom is a correct mind, whereas ignorance is erroneous. By repeated familiarization with the wisdom realizing the emptiness of an objective self, self-grasping, the afflictions that depend on it, and their seeds are gradually eliminated and saṃsāra is brought to an end.

### *How Ignorance Grasps Its Object*

Ignorance grasps persons and phenomena as inherently existent—that is, as existing from their own side, independent from all other factors. This view is erroneous because, in fact, everything exists dependent on other factors,

including imputation by thought and name. The *Questions of Upāli Sūtra* (*Upālipariṣcchā Sūtra*) says:

Here the various mind-pleasing blossoming flowers  
and attractive shining supreme golden houses  
have no [inherently existent] maker at all.  
They are posited through the power of thought;  
through the power of thought the world is imputed.

Although all phenomena exist by being imputed, designated, or posited by the mind, ignorance apprehends them as existing in exactly the opposite way—as existing under their own power, with their own inherent nature. According to the Prāsaṅgika Mādhyamikas, the observed object of the self-grasping of phenomena is phenomena such as our eye, leg, house, emotions, and so forth. The observed object of the self-grasping of persons is the mere I, the person that exists conventionally, the dependently designated self, the I that is observed when we generate the mere thought “I.” This I is bound in saṃsāra; it cultivates the path and will attain liberation.

The conceived object and apprehended object of the two self-grasplings is inherent existence—an inherently existent I, inherently existent aggregates, and so forth. Let’s say you have intense anger toward Tashi. If you examine your mind, you’ll notice the idea that Tashi is an objective person who is the target of your displeasure. The conceived object of this self-grasping is an inherently existent Tashi. At that time, pause and reflect, “Who or what exactly is Tashi? Is he his body? His mind? A soul that is completely separate from his body and mind?” If Tashi existed inherently as he appears to, you should be able to find who Tashi really is. And if you did, the conceived object of ignorance would exist and ignorance would be a reliable cognizer. But the more you search for the “real” Tashi, the more it becomes evident that you cannot isolate something that is him. In fact, the opposite occurs: you can’t find a real Tashi that you’re mad at, and the intensity of your anger decreases.

Self-grasping ignorance is a deceptive mind that has tricked us since beginningless time. It has two levels: innate (*sahaja*) and acquired (*parikalpita*). All beings revolving in saṃsāra have innate ignorance, the root of saṃsāra. Acquired ignorance comes from learning incorrect philosophical or



psychological theories. Acquired ignorance depends on engaging in incorrect analysis, whereas innate ignorance grasps its object without any analysis. Phenomena appear inherently existent and, assenting to that appearance, innate ignorance grasps them as existing inherently. To combat ignorance, investigation and analysis are essential. We must use our intelligence to examine how ignorance holds its object and whether things exist in the way ignorance apprehends them to exist. Only through rigorous analysis can we become convinced that phenomena do not exist the way they ordinarily appear to us and that their actual mode of existence is not something reified, objective, and “out there,” unrelated to the mind. There is another way of existing, but it is not apparent to our obscured, distracted mind.

Ignorance is the source of all other afflictions. In *The Four Hundred*, Āryadeva says (CŚ 135):

Just as the tactile sense [pervades] the body,  
likewise confusion is present in all [afflictions].  
Therefore, by overcoming confusion  
one will also overcome all afflictions.

Here confusion (*moha*) is synonymous with ignorance. The tactile sense faculty pervades all parts of the body, while the other sense faculties—visual, auditory, olfactory, and gustatory—exist in specific areas: the eyes, ears, nose, and tongue, respectively. The tactile sense is analogous to innate ignorance that pervades and lies at the root of the other afflictions, whereas the other sense faculties resemble the other afflictions that depend on ignorance. Afflictions such as anger and attachment have their own specific functions that do not overlap with each other, although they both are informed by ignorance. The other afflictions do not function on their own but exist in dependence on innate ignorance.

By eliminating ignorance, all the afflictions that depend on it are stopped, just as by uprooting a tree, its branches and leaves die. In the *Treatise on the Middle Way*, Nāgārjuna says (MMK 18.4):

When thoughts of I and mine  
are extinguished in regard to internal and external things,  
the appropriators [of the aggregates—afflictions and karma] will stop;

and through its extinguishment, birth will be extinguished.

“Thoughts of I and mine” refers to the wrong view of a personal identity that grasps I and mine. When this is extinguished, afflictions and polluted karma cease. Without afflictions and polluted karma, birth in saṃsāra—the eleventh of the twelve links of dependent origination—cannot occur.

Āryas still create karma, but not the karma that leads to rebirth in saṃsāra. Their unpolluted karma results in liberation and awakening. Ārya bodhisattvas are “born”—that is, they manifest—in our world by the force of wisdom and compassion, not ignorance.

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## REFLECTION

1. What is the view of a personal identity?
  2. How is it similar to and how does it differ from self-grasping ignorance?
  3. What is the root of saṃsāra? What does it mean to be the root of saṃsāra?
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### *The Development of Afflictions in Daily Life*

Although afflictions often arise quickly in our mind, seeming to come out of nowhere, they develop through a sequential process. To have the notion of I, one or more of our mental or physical aggregates must appear. Based on this appearance, a valid sense of I arises. This I exists by being merely designated in dependence on the aggregates. Observing this mere I, ignorance erroneously grasps it to exist inherently. That grasping is the view of a personal identity grasping I (*ahaṃkāra*).

Based on that, the view of a personal identity grasping mine (*mamakāra*) arises when we think, “This is *my* body. These are *my* thoughts.” The object of the grasping at mine is the sense of “myness,” the I that makes things mine; it is not the body or the thoughts themselves. Grasping the body or thoughts to be

inherently existent is self-grasping of phenomena, not self-grasping of persons. Tsongkhapa says (FEW 43):

. . . the observed object of an innate awareness thinking “mine” is that very “mine.” It should not be held that your own eyes and so forth are the observed object.

The body, intelligence, table, and so forth are *examples* of “mine” because in ordinary language we say, “This body is mine. This table is mine.” But the observed object of grasping “mine” is the mine that is the owner, and not the body, intelligence, or table.

Once the I is grasped as inherently existent, attachment, anger, and other destructive emotions quickly follow, because we want to give this I pleasure and protect it from pain. These mental factors arise very quickly, one right after the other. If our mindfulness is sharp, we can observe this process and thwart it. Otherwise, these afflictions control us.

Grasping the inherent existence of I and mine are erroneous minds. They are not present every time we use the conventions “I” and “mine.” When we casually and calmly say “I’m walking” or “This is my book,” grasping I or mine is not present. This way of apprehending I and mine differs greatly from the self-grasping that is present when we arrogantly think “*I am famous,*” or greedily say “This is *mine.*”

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## REFLECTION

1. Observe how you relate to people and your surroundings when afflictions are present in your mind; for example, when you crave a certain food, crave love, or are very angry or upset.
2. Observe how you relate to the same people and objects when afflictions are not manifest in your mind.
3. Reflect that this difference is due to the presence or absence of the self-grasping ignorance that underpins all afflictions. Get a sense of how things appear to you when grasping true existence is and is not present.
4. Reflect that this true-grasping is an erroneous mind as well as the source of all afflictions and make a determination to uproot it.

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## *Inappropriate Attention and Distorted Conceptions*

Based on ignorance, distorted conceptions (inappropriate attention, *ayoniśo-manaskāra*) superimpose attractiveness or ugliness on objects that we believe to truly exist. Other types of distorted conceptions project permanence on impermanent things, purity on impure things, and pleasure on things that are unsatisfactory by nature.

When we apprehend an object that appears attractive, we become attached to it; when we apprehend an object that appears disagreeable, we generate aversion; and when we apprehend a neutral object, we remain indifferent. These and other disturbing emotions depend on ignorance and do not operate separately from it.

Both virtuous attitudes and afflictions arise depending on this mental factor of attention. Appropriate attention leads to virtuous attitudes and emotions—such as compassion and equanimity—while inappropriate attention (distorted conception) produces disturbing ones, such as animosity and arrogance. A practitioner who cultivates the appropriate attention that sees saṃsāric pleasures as impermanent and unsatisfactory and views nirvāṇa as blissful will easily generate the determination to be free. Someone who habitually interprets others' actions as suspicious and malicious will go through life with fear, mistrust, and anger. Since distorted conception misinterprets sense data, projects and exaggerates positive or negative qualities, imputes motivations on others, and so on, it's important to monitor our mind vigilantly.

The observed object of both love and attachment is sentient beings. Appropriate attention sees sentient beings as kind, subject to duḥkha, and possessing buddha nature. From it, empathy, love, and compassion arise. Inappropriate attention sees sentient beings as permanent and desirable, which leads to clinging to them. In both cases, sentient beings appear truly existent. Both love and attachment are *mistaken* consciousnesses in that sentient beings appear truly existent to them. However, love is not a *wrong* or *erroneous* consciousness because conventionally it sees sentient beings in a realistic manner. Attachment, anger, and other afflictions are erroneous consciousnesses because they view their objects in a distorted way, based on distorted conception

projecting qualities such as permanence, beauty, ugliness, pleasure, and suffering on them.

Here we see the difference between two types of *innate awarenesses* (T. *blo lhan skyes*): those that are conventionally correct and those that are not. With the first, their objects exist conventionally and cannot be refuted by reasoning. These include minds of love and forgiveness, consciousnesses apprehending apples or persons, and reasoning examining impermanence. With the second, their objects can be refuted by reasoning and do not exist even conventionally. These include attachment, anxiety, resentment, and true-grasping.

Virtuous mental factors and conventional reliable cognizers are not abandoned by the wisdom realizing emptiness, because distorted conception doesn't operate on them. Our understanding of emptiness and dependent arising will purify them of the influence of distorted conception and ignorance, which enables them to operate more fully and to develop completely.

## *Conceptualizations and Elaborations*

This leads us to the topic of conceptualizations and elaborations, which also spur the arising of afflictions. Nāgārjuna said (MMK 18.5):

Through ceasing karma and afflictions there is nirvāṇa.

Karma and afflictions come from conceptualization.

These come from elaborations.

Elaborations cease by [or in] emptiness.

In the first line, Nāgārjuna defines nirvāṇa as the complete cessation of karma and afflictions resulting from the application of the antidote, the wisdom realizing emptiness. How does nirvāṇa, the state of true freedom, come about? By ceasing the first-link ignorance, its branches (the afflictions) cease, as do second-link formative actions (karma). In this way, resultant rebirth in saṃsāra comes to an end. Where do afflictions and karma come from? Conceptualizations (*vikalpa viparyāsa*) involving distorted concepts in which we focus on the imagined attractive or unattractive aspects of objects. Conceptualizations are fueled by elaborations (mental fabrications, proliferations, *prapañca*, *papañca*), which here

principally refers to the ignorance grasping inherent existence. The cessation of these four—karma, afflictions, conceptualizations, and elaborations—is nirvāṇa.

The fact that different people have very different reactions to the same object demonstrates that afflictions arise from our own subjective conceptualizations, not from the side of the object. We cannot account for the arising of attachment on the basis of that object being desirable or attractive in and of itself. Nor can we account for the arising of anger on the basis of the object being objectively distasteful or threatening, because one object can arouse various emotions in different people as well as opposite emotions in the same person at different times. For Jeff football is interesting, for Lucy it is boring. When Sarah is hungry, she craves food, but after she has eaten her fill, the same food is unappetizing. This shows that our subjective conceptualizations and interpretations are powerful conditions that give rise to these emotional reactions.

When speaking of an object being attractive or unattractive, we must see it in relation to a specific person or group of people. “This person is attractive” actually means “I find them attractive.” “This place is repugnant” actually indicates “To me it is disgusting.” The qualities of attractiveness and unattractiveness are dependent on the perspective of the individual experiencing them. Our subjective conceptualizations are the main factors that give rise to our emotional reactions.

We can see this clearly by observing the people we encounter in our daily lives. Some individuals are very self-centered, referencing all objects and events to themselves. A short phrase or small event misinterpreted by their inappropriate attention can instantly trigger strong emotional reactions in these people.<sup>59</sup> They cannot tolerate what they perceive to be criticism and flare up in anger when hearing words that are not offensive to all others. We also know people that are more relaxed and not very self-centered. We can tease them, and they laugh and aren’t offended. They admit their faults and weaknesses without trying to conceal them. An individual’s conceptualizations and interpretations determine how they experience a person, object, or situation. Their emotional reactions arise primarily from these, not from the objects themselves.

A speaker at a conference I attended told me that people who excessively use the first person pronouns I, me, and mine have a greater risk of having a heart attack. Another scientist explained that when we develop hostile feelings toward someone, 90 percent of the negativity we see in that object is our own mental projection. Although this scientist is not a Buddhist, his view resonates with the

Buddhist explanation of how afflictions arise. The Buddha pointed out that the attractiveness and unattractiveness that provoke the arising of attachment and anger are predominantly a function of our own, often erroneous, conceptualization. We tend to see a person, object, or situation as either 100 percent attractive or 100 percent repugnant, whereas few, if any, things are like that.

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## REFLECTION

1. Remember a disturbing situation in your life. Recall what you were thinking and feeling. Examine how your attitudes created your perception and experience.
  2. Examine how your attitude affected what you said and did in the situation. How did your behavior either calm or agitate the situation?
  3. Was your attitude realistic? Was it seeing all sides of the situation or was it viewing things through the eyes of “me, I, my, mine”?
  4. Consider other ways you could have viewed the situation and how that would have changed your experience of it.
  5. Determine to be aware of how you’re interpreting things that happen in your life and to cultivate beneficial and realistic ways of looking at things.
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Conceptualizations come from *elaborations*, the chief of which is grasping persons and phenomena as inherently existent. The word “elaborations” has various meanings according to the context, and there are several types of elaborations.

- The elaboration of inherent existence is the object of negation.
- The elaboration of grasping true or inherent existence (T. *bden ’dzin gyi spros pa*) is the root of saṃsāra and the chief culprit.
- The elaboration of afflictive states of mind is derived from grasping inherent existence.
- The elaboration of dualism is subject and object appearing to be separate (T. *gnyis snang gi spros pa*).

- The elaboration of the appearance of inherent existence (T. *bden snang gi spros pa*).
- The elaboration of conventionalities (T. *kun rdzob kyi spros pa*) is the multiplicity of conventional truths. In the perspective of a direct cognizer of emptiness, conventional truths do not exist because they are not the ultimate nature. However, conventionally they exist.
- The elaboration of the object (T. *chos chan gyi spros pa*) concerns an object and its properties—for example, emptiness is a property or attribute of a person; arising and ceasing are characteristics of impermanent phenomena. This kind of relationship exists to a conceptual mind; to a direct perceiver of emptiness, only emptiness appears.
- The elaboration of conceptuality (T. *rtog pa'i spros pa*) refers to any concept or thought that knows its object by means of a conceptual appearance.
- The elaborations of the eight extremes are inherently existent arising and disintegration, annihilation and permanence, going and coming, and sameness and difference. These also are objects of negation.
- The elaboration of the coarse winds and minds (*rlung sems rags pa'i spros pa*), spoken of in Tantra, includes all winds and minds except the fundamental innate clear light mind and the subtlest wind that is its mount.

Nāgārjuna describes emptiness as the total dissolution of all elaborations. Some elaborations do not exist because they are opposite to the ultimate nature of reality—for example, the elaborations of inherent existence and the elaborations of the eight extremes. These elaborations are objects of negation that are refuted by reasoning. Other elaborations exist—for example, the elaboration of conventionalities, the elaboration of the object, and the elaboration of conceptuality. Although these elaborations exist, they too are not the ultimate nature of reality.

None of these elaborations—be they existent or nonexistent—are present in āryas' meditative equipoise on emptiness. It is by the non-seeing of elaborations that āryas in meditative equipoise are said to realize emptiness directly. That does not mean, however, that the valid characteristics of dependently arising



phenomena are to be negated or that they do not exist conventionally. Rather, they are not perceived by āryas in meditative equipoise when the mind is totally fused, single-pointedly and directly, with emptiness. However, they *do* conventionally exist in dependently originated phenomena.

Therefore, we need to distinguish between emptiness, which is the ultimate nature of reality, and *having the nature of* emptiness. Conventional phenomena, such as our parents, the table, and the government, are not emptiness, but they have the nature of emptiness in that they are empty of inherent existence. In the perspective of the meditative equipoise that perceives emptiness directly and is totally fused with emptiness, these conventional phenomena do not exist because they are not perceptible to someone in that meditative equipoise.

To review the causal sequence of saṃsāra: the elaboration of grasping inherent existence gives rise to distorted conceptions—erroneous thought processes—which, in turn, provoke afflictions. Afflictions lead to the creation of actions that bring rebirth in saṃsāra and its attendant duḥkha. To give a rough analogy, self-grasping ignorance and its elaborations are like the unscrupulous boss of a company producing faulty products; conceptualizations and distorted concepts are like the salespeople who exaggerate the qualities of the product; afflictions are like our signing the contract; and karma is all the actions we take afterward.

What ends this chain of events? The realization of the emptiness of true existence. Bringing an end to elaborations involves dismantling all grasping of an objectified basis (T. *yul gyi ngos nas yod pa*) of persons and phenomena, all grasping of persons and phenomena as having an inherent, independent essence.

Emptiness is free from all such elaborations, and the direct realization of emptiness gradually eradicates all grasping of any objectified basis that could serve as the basis for grasping inherent existence. This involves negating all inherent existence and inherent characteristics even on the conventional level.

In general, conceptualizations and conceptuality (*kalpanā*)<sup>60</sup> are synonymous and refer to thought—a mind that knows its object via a conceptual appearance.<sup>61</sup> In Nāgārjuna’s verse above, “conceptualizations” has a negative connotation, but in the conventional world, thoughts can be helpful. After all, learning and reflecting on the Buddha’s teachings takes place in the context of language and thought. There are different types of conceptualizations; some are helpful on the path and others are not. Some examples of conceptualization are:

- Virtuous conceptualizations. The wisdom understanding emptiness on the levels of learning, thinking, and the initial phase of meditating is conceptual. It does not know emptiness directly but is an essential step to realize emptiness directly. Understandings on the method side of the path—including the aspiration to attain liberation, love, compassion, and bodhicitta—are all conceptual consciousnesses in sentient beings. Only in the continuum of buddhas are these nonconceptual.
- Conceptualizations involving distorted conceptions. These include the four distorted conceptions seeing the impermanent as permanent, the foul as pure, the unpleasant as pleasant, and that which lacks a self as having one.<sup>62</sup>
- Discursive thought or discursiveness, which is an impediment to developing serenity.
- Afflictions. All afflictive views and emotions are conceptualizations. They do not see their objects correctly and are erroneous.
- The conception, or grasping, of true existence (T. *bden 'dzin gyi rnam rtog*). As the root of saṃsāra, this is the most detrimental type of conceptualization.
- The conception of ordinariness (T. *tha mal pa'i rnam rtog*) is found in the context of Tantra.

The various meanings of “conceptualization” and “conception” challenge us to be aware of the various contexts in which these terms are used. Certain types of conceptions are helpful and necessary on the path to buddhahood. However, at the culmination of the path all conceptions must be transcended, for buddhas know all phenomena directly and nonconceptually.<sup>63</sup>

According to the Tibetan translation of Nāgārjuna’s verse, the cessation of elaborations—especially grasping inherent existence—is brought about *by* emptiness. Here the instrumental case is used, indicating that elaborations are ceased *by* the wisdom that realizes emptiness. Ignorance *grasps* the inherent existence of all phenomena, whereas the wisdom realizing emptiness *negates* the inherent existence of phenomena and perceives its opposite—the emptiness of inherent existence. Both ignorance and wisdom focus on the same object, but they relate to it in a dramatically opposed manner.

While giving an oral commentary on the *Treatise on the Middle Way*, Khunu Lama Rinpoche, a great Buddhist master as well as a Sanskrit scholar, explained that in Sanskrit this final line can be read in the locative case as well—that is, elaborations cease *within* emptiness. This latter reading has profound meaning because all elaborations and defilements arise within the empty nature of the mind. The ultimate creator of all phenomena of both saṃsāra and nirvāṇa is the mind. All afflictions are created by mind and must finally be cleansed within the nature of the mind itself. At the time a meditator has a nondual experience of emptiness, all elaborations and defilements dissolve back into that reality—into the emptiness of the mind. The emptiness into which all afflictions have been extinguished through the antidote of wisdom is the true cessation of duḥkha and its origins; it is nirvāṇa. In this sense, all elaborations are extinguished in the sphere of reality.

The result—buddhahood—is also a state of mind. The mind plays a tremendously important role in the process of purification and perfection. The *Sublime Continuum* (*Ratnagotravibhāga Śāstra*, *Uttaratantra Śāstra*) states that all pollutants of the mind are adventitious—they can be separated from the mind—and all the awakened qualities of the Buddha’s omniscient mind exist as potentials in the minds of sentient beings.

A statement in Sakya literature says that within the basis, which is the causal mind-basis-of-all,<sup>64</sup> all phenomena of saṃsāra and nirvāṇa are complete. The mind-basis-of-all is, in some sense, the fundamental innate mind of clear light. At the level of ordinary beings, this foundation consciousness is called the “causal continuum.” Within that causal continuum, all phenomena of saṃsāra are complete in the form of their natural characteristics, all phenomena of the paths and grounds are complete in the form of their qualities, and all awakened qualities of the Buddha’s omniscient mind are complete in the form of their potentials. This beautiful and comprehensive picture summarizes the essence of the Sakya approach to the basis, path, and result.

The Nyingma’s Dzogchen, the Mahāmudrā of the Kagyu, the Sakya Lamdre’s view of the union of profundity and clarity, and the Gelug understanding of *mind isolation* according to the Guhyasamāja Tantra—in all of these, the emphasis is on realizing the ultimate nature of the mind. Although in meditative equipoise there is no difference between the mind’s emptiness and the emptiness of external objects, contemplation on the emptiness of mind is emphasized in meditative

practices in all four traditions of Tibetan Buddhism because it has such a dramatic impact on the mind of the practitioner.<sup>65</sup>

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## REFLECTION

1. Recall an event that disturbed you.
  2. Try to identify the fundamental elaboration—self-grasping—that arose and grasped the people and elements of the situation to exist objectively “out there.”
  3. What were the distorted conceptions, such as seeing impermanent things as permanent, that arose?
  4. What other distorted conceptions (inappropriate attention) were active in interpreting the elements of the event?
  5. What affliction(s)—such as attachment, anger, jealousy, arrogance, and so forth—arose?
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## *Ceasing Saṃsāra*

Self-grasping ignorance is an erroneous mind. Since its conceived and apprehended objects—the self (inherent existence) of persons and the self of phenomena—do not exist, cultivating the wisdom that sees things as they actually are reduces and eventually completely eradicates it. Candrakīrti outlines the process whereby yogis enter into emptiness and actualize liberating wisdom by first refuting the conceived object of the view of a personal identity (LC 3:120–21):

Yogis who wish to enter reality and who wish to eliminate all afflictions and faults examine the question, “What does this saṃsāra have as its root?” When they thoroughly investigate this, they see that saṃsāra has as its root the reifying view of a personal identity, and they see that the self is the object observed by that reifying view of a personal identity. They see that not observing the self leads to eliminating the reifying view of a personal identity, and that

through eliminating that, all afflictions and faults are overcome. Hence, at the very beginning they examine only the self, asking, “What is the self that is the object of grasping self?”

Tsongkhapa confirms the necessity of refuting the conceived object of self-grasping (FEW 56–7):

. . . without rejecting the object of the grasping of a self of persons, a realization of selflessness cannot occur. . . . Furthermore, because the two graspings of self operate mainly within observing functioning things—persons and phenomena—you need to delineate that just those bases, with respect to which the error is made, do not exist in the way that they are grasped.

Having identified the object of negation, yogis go about refuting it. By familiarizing their minds with the direct realization of emptiness, they eradicate the acquired and innate afflictions, and the entire structure of saṃsāra begins to crumble. The *Sūtra on the Secreties of the Tathāgata* says (FEW 56):

Śāntimatī, it is like this. For example, when the roots of a tree are cut, all the branches, leaves, and twigs dry. Śāntimatī, similarly, when the view of a personal identity is pacified, all [root] afflictions and auxiliary afflictions are pacified.

Although not all the Buddha’s teachings directly speak of selflessness, they directly or indirectly lead to this realization. The elimination of wrong views and afflictions cannot be accomplished simply by making aspirational prayers. We must cultivate the wisdom that directly opposes their false and erroneous perspectives. Just abiding in a state of nonconceptuality and non-mentation does not eliminate these obscurations. Although defilements may not arise in a nonconceptual state, there is nothing in the nonconceptual content of that experience that contradicts or reduces their power.

Disturbing elaborations are overcome by realizing that inherent existence does not exist at all. This is accomplished by the probing awareness (*yuktijñāna*) analyzing the ultimate. Probing awarenesses are of two types: (1) conceptual (inferential) probing awareness that realizes emptiness in dependence on a

reason, and (2) the nonconceptual pristine wisdom of an ārya's meditative equipoise that directly and nonconceptually perceives emptiness. The latter probing awareness is not actively analyzing emptiness, but having previously done in-depth analysis, it has given rise to a union of serenity and insight focused on emptiness.

Both types of probing awareness harm the elaboration of inherent existence, but the pristine wisdom of an ārya's meditative equipoise on emptiness eradicates the elaboration of conceptuality because it perceives emptiness directly, not through the medium of a conceptual appearance. This meditative equipoise is free from the elaboration of dualistic appearance, because that wisdom and its object (emptiness) are experienced as undifferentiable, like water poured into water. Conceptual probing awareness, however, still has the appearance of subject and object; this wisdom has eliminated only a portion of elaborations.

Many people associate conceptual knowledge with intellectual knowledge, but in Buddhadharma, analysis is not about intellectual acrobatics and juggling a proliferation of words. It involves a process of observing how things appear to the mind, how ignorance grasps them to exist, and then investigating whether or not things actually exist in that way. A conceptual probing awareness realizing emptiness contradicts belief in inherent existence and has a powerful effect on our mind.

## *Emptiness Is a Nonaffirming Negative*

To identify the apprehended object—the object realized—by the wisdom realizing emptiness, we must understand nonaffirming negatives (*prasajya-pratiṣedha*) and how they differ from affirming negatives (*paryudāsa-pratiṣedha*). An affirming negative negates one thing while asserting another. In the expression “an unhappy event,” happiness is negated, but an event is asserted. A nonaffirming negative, on the other hand, is a simple negation: it excludes something without implying anything else. An example is “no sugar.” Here, sugar is negated and nothing else is implied or asserted in its place.

Nonaffirming negatives are absences; as such, they are permanent phenomena. Most essentialists say that permanent phenomena cannot be known by direct perceivers, be they sense, mental, or yogic direct perceivers.

Mādhyamikas, however, say that the emptiness of true existence can be directly perceived by a yogic direct perceiver.

According to Mādhyamikas, the apprehended object of the wisdom realizing emptiness is a nonaffirming negative. It is simply the negation of inherent existence. Other than that mere negation, nothing else is apprehended or affirmed. Although we are used to thinking in terms of affirmative or “positive” phenomena that we can point to and see, emptiness is the mere refutation of inherent existence. Here “positive” and “negative” don’t refer to virtue and nonvirtue; these terms indicate that something is put forth in an affirming or negating way. Making a positive statement, “There is a chicken,” influences the mind in one way—it starts to think about all the attributes of the chicken and what it does. But “There is no elephant here” leaves us with the simple negation of an elephant.

The purpose of cultivating the correct view of emptiness is to undermine any objectified basis—any inherently existent phenomenon—that can give rise to afflictions such as greed, anger, and so on. Being able to refute inherent existence and focus on that simple negation has liberating power.

For example, if you are afraid that a snake is in your bedroom, and your friend searches everywhere in the room and, not finding a snake, tells you “There is no snake here,” just that simple statement has the power to dispel your fear. However, if your friend says, “There is no snake, but I saw a scorpion,” your fear is not quieted. Similarly, the wisdom realizing emptiness knows just the absence of inherent existence—it has dismantled any objective basis that you could hold on to and doesn’t project anything else. Realizing a nonaffirming negative can have a strong impact on your mind. Consider people who walked past the twin towers of the World Trade Center in New York every day and suddenly one day the towers are no longer there. Those people know the absence of the towers.

As a simple negation that implies nothing in its place, emptiness is said to resemble empty space. Unconditioned space, which is the mere negation of physical obstruction, is also a nonaffirming negative. Although both emptiness and space are mere negations that don’t affirm something in their place, they are not the same. Space is the mere negation of physical obstruction, and emptiness is the mere negation of inherent existence. The two must be differentiated in meditation. Apprehending the latter leads to liberation; apprehending the former does not.



The Second Dalai Lama explains that just the phrase “free from elaboration,” or “without elaboration,” is a nonaffirming negative. Those words negate the elaboration of inherent existence but do not establish anything positive in its stead. During meditative equipoise on emptiness, only this nonaffirming negative appears to the mind, and that mind knows emptiness nondualistically. At that time there is no grasping true existence of emptiness, nor is there the thought “This is emptiness.” The perception of emptiness energizes the mind, giving it power and strength. This is completely different from a weak mind that focuses on nothingness. Meditating on nothingness does nothing to harm self-grasping ignorance, whereas an invigorated mind realizing emptiness contradicts ignorance.

In my own case, although I lack a direct realization of emptiness and haven’t had even a meditatively derived realization,<sup>66</sup> by repeatedly analyzing if phenomena exist the way they appear and by reflecting on the reasons disproving inherent existence, sometimes an unusual experience occurs. Although these experiences may be brief, within that state of meditation, there is no grasping.

As with a direct perceiver of emptiness, the apprehended object of an inference realizing emptiness is also a nonaffirming negative—the emptiness of inherent existence, the ultimate truth. Whereas the appearing object of a mind directly perceiving emptiness is emptiness itself, the appearing object of an inferential realization of emptiness is the conceptual appearance of emptiness in which emptiness appears mixed with the conceptual appearance of emptiness. There is debate whether the object that is the base of emptiness—the person, the body, the mind, and so forth—also appears to an inferential realization of emptiness. Most scholar-adepts think that it does not.<sup>67</sup> It definitely does not appear to a direct perceiver of emptiness.

## *Realizing the Selflessness of Persons and Selflessness of Phenomena*

Because there is a multiplicity of phenomena, there is a multiplicity of phenomena to grasp as inherently existent. These can be subsumed in two: grasping the person as inherently existent and grasping other phenomena as



inherently existent. The significance of this division is to emphasize the distinction between the subject—the person who is bound in saṃsāra and attains liberation—and the object—the aggregates that are the basis of designation of the person and other phenomena that a person uses or enjoys. Because grasping is twofold, selflessness is also twofold: the selflessness of persons and the selflessness of phenomena. Tsongkhapa clarifies (FEW 40):

... the mode of grasping inherent existence—the object of negation—is to grasp [that objects] are not posited through the force of beginningless conceptuality but are established objectively, by their own entity. The conceived object of that grasping is called self or inherent existence. The nonexistence of that with a person as the substratum is called the selflessness of persons, and the nonexistence of that regarding [other] phenomena, such as an eye, ear, and so forth as the substratum, is called the selflessness of phenomena. Hence, we can implicitly understand that grasping inherent existence with respect to persons and [other] phenomena are the self-grasplings of the two selves.

Vaibhāṣikas and Sautrāntikas confine themselves to refuting only the self of persons, which they say is a self-sufficient substantially existent person. However, by refuting this, a practitioner decreases clinging to oneself, but not to the aggregates and other objects. In the Yogācāra and Madhyamaka systems, selflessness applies both to the person and other phenomena. Realizing the selflessness of both has a stronger impact because it dismantles grasping both the subject and object of the afflictions as inherently existent. When attachment arises for an object—let's say a new device—there is the component of the subject, “*I want this*,” and the object, “*This device is wonderful!*” Both the subject of the affliction—I—and the object of the affliction—the device—appear to exist in and of themselves, and ignorance grasps them as existing in this way. The understanding of emptiness gained through deconstructing the false appearance of both subject and object has a powerful effect on the mind.

To attain arhatship or buddhahood, the realization of both selflessnesses is necessary. A yogi begins by focusing on the most serious troublemaker, the view of a personal identity in his own continuum—grasping an inherently existent I and mine—and investigates if the I exists in this way. If it does, it should be either

identical to the aggregates or totally separate and unrelated to the aggregates. Through analysis we understand that both options are impossible and conclude that an inherently existent I does not exist. If the I does not exist inherently, neither can the aggregates that are the basis of designation of that I. For example, if a cart is burned, its parts—the wheels, axle, and so forth—are burned. If inherent existence is refuted on the I, it is also refuted on the mine—what is possessed by the I, for example, the five aggregates.

The conventional self that exists is merely designated in dependence on the aggregates, which are its basis of designation. This conventional self or mere I is the base on which ordinary beings project and grasp inherent existence. The self and the aggregates have the relationship of appropriator and appropriated, or “clinger” and “clung to.” That is, the self “takes,” “appropriates,” or “clings to” the mental and physical aggregates, and the aggregates are what are taken, appropriated, or clung to by the self. While this language may give us the idea that there is a real self that exists by itself and later takes on the aggregates, this is not the case. Rather, the terms “appropriator” and “appropriated” indicate a mutually dependent relationship. We cannot posit an I that is the appropriator without positing aggregates that are appropriated, and vice versa.

Because Vaibhāṣikas and Sautrāntikas do not assert a selflessness of phenomena and believe the aggregates exist inherently, they realize neither the selflessness of phenomena nor the subtle selflessness of persons. Because they believe the aggregates to exist inherently, they will continue to hold the self designated in dependence on them to also exist inherently. This occurs because the mode of apprehension of the self-grasping of phenomena and self-grasping of persons is the same: they both grasp inherent existence.

Yogis first realize the selflessness of persons followed by the selflessness of phenomena. Because the I is an abstract composite imputed in dependence on the aggregates, realizing that it doesn't exist independently or under its own power is easier than realizing the aggregates are empty of such existence. However, to realize the emptiness of the person, strong self-grasping of the aggregates cannot be manifest in our mind. If someone strongly grasps the aggregates as inherently existent, they won't question whether the person, which is imputed in dependence on those aggregates, exists inherently.

The awareness that inferentially realizes the emptiness of persons and the awareness that inferentially realizes the emptiness of phenomena are not the same

consciousness, because these conceptual consciousnesses have different objects. Although the consciousness realizing the selflessness of persons does not realize the selflessness of phenomena either explicitly or implicitly, through its force it can induce a consciousness that does realize the emptiness of phenomena such as the aggregates. That is, although the mind realizing the emptiness of the person does not think “The aggregates are empty,” it can induce a mind realizing this when attention is turned to the aggregates. Tsongkhapa says (CTB 175):

If a selflessness of phenomena is established by a reliable cognizer in terms of one phenomenon, then when you analyze whether or not another phenomenon inherently exists, you can realize its non-inherent existence on the basis of your previous reasoning.

This applies to inferential reliable cognizers of emptiness that arise through reasoning, not direct reliable cognizers. When you have an inferential reliable cognizer of the emptiness of one phenomenon, just by turning your mind to another phenomenon and wondering how it exists, you can realize its emptiness as well because you’ve already understood the reasoning. This does not mean that at the precise moment you realize the emptiness of the person, you also realize the emptiness of the aggregates. Rather, after realizing the emptiness of the person, when you consider the aggregates, you immediately realize their emptiness. For example, when you realize there is no elephant in this room, you don’t simultaneously realize there is no elephant’s trunk here. But when you turn your mind to consider the elephant’s trunk, you immediately know that it is nonexistent because an elephant in this room is nonexistent. Similarly, you realize there are no inherently existent aggregates of a person because there is no inherently existent person to begin with. The *King of Concentration Sūtra* says (YDB 194):

Through one all are known  
and through one all are seen.

Āryadeva agrees (CŚ 191):

[One who sees] the emptiness of one phenomenon  
is said [to see] the emptiness of all.

That which is the emptiness of one [phenomenon]  
is the emptiness of all.

Āryadeva affirms that an inferential cognizer of the emptiness of the I immediately generates an inferential cognizer of the emptiness of other phenomena merely by directing the mind to those things while holding the question “Is this inherently existent or not?” The inherent existence of each and every phenomenon does not need to be refuted individually. If that were the case, it would be impossible to realize the emptiness of all countless phenomena.

If we taste one drop of ocean water, we know the rest is salty. The emptiness of inherent existence is the ultimate mode of existence of all phenomena. It doesn’t appear in different ways, as do blue and red. Emptiness is like the space in different receptacles: we speak of the space inside a pot and the space inside a cup separately, but when we apprehend the space inside the pot, we know what the space inside a cup looks like. Similarly, by knowing the emptiness of inherent existence of Susan, we’ll know the emptiness of Trinley by merely directing the mind to him. The process of reasoning that induced the initial cognition of Susan’s emptiness doesn’t need to be repeated. The *Sūtra Requested by Gaganagañja* (*Gaganagañjaparipṛcchā Sūtra*) says (YDB 194):

Whoever through one phenomenon knows through meditation  
that all phenomena are inapprehensible like illusions and mirages—  
hollow, deceptive, and ephemeral—  
will before long reach the essence of awakening.

This verse corroborates the same principle when it comes to knowing all phenomena are like illusions in post-meditation time. By tasting one drop of honey in a bottle, you thereby know that the remaining honey is sweet.

Unlike realizing emptiness inferentially, when meditators directly perceive the emptiness of one phenomenon, they simultaneously realize the emptiness of all phenomena. As the ultimate nature of all phenomena, the emptiness of each thing appears the same to the mind of meditative equipoise directly perceiving emptiness.

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## REFLECTION

1. What is a nonaffirming negation? Why do masters insist that the ultimate truth is a nonaffirming negation?
  2. What is the self of persons according to the four tenet systems? What is the self of phenomena?
  3. What are the selflessness of persons and selflessness of phenomena? Are they emptiness?
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### *Characteristics of Reality*

Although the full experience of suchness—the way things really are—is beyond words and concepts, it can be expressed through language and thought. This description doesn't impute false characteristics on reality; it simply uses conventional terms to describe them. Nāgārjuna mentions five characteristics of the way things really are (MMK 18.9):

Not understandable from another [person], void, and  
not captured by verbal phantasms,  
not conceptualized, without distinctions;  
that is the characteristic of things as they really are.

1. The way things really are *cannot be fully understood* by depending on another person's teachings or description of it. Reality has to be realized by our own purified wisdom. A person with the visual impairment of vitreous floaters sees falling hairs where there are none. Someone who doesn't have this appearance can tell him that there are no falling hairs, and through that, the person with vitreous floaters knows the hairs aren't real. However, he doesn't know their absence in the same way that the person without this visual impairment does. When the visual impairment is resolved, he will know by his own experience that there are no falling hairs.

Similarly, ordinary beings can hear a correct explanation of the way

- things really are and in that way understand the ultimate by means of a conceptual appearance. However, they do not understand it the way āryas who directly perceive emptiness do. When their wisdom shatters their ignorance, ordinary beings become āryas and realize emptiness directly by themselves.
2. The way things really are is *devoid* of false appearances. Just as vitreous floaters do not exist in the eyes of someone without that visual impairment, likewise reality is devoid of inherent existence.
  3. Reality is *not expressed by verbal fabrications*; it cannot be fully captured by words.
  4. It is *without* the distraction of *conceptualizations* and thought.
  5. It is *without distinctions*; all phenomena equally lack inherent existence. Ultimately there is no individuality; reality cannot be differentiated into separate objects.

Words and concepts may give us an idea of the way things really are, and in that way we can intellectually understand the ultimate nature. However, we must never mistake words and concepts for the actual experience of emptiness. Nor should we dismiss the benefits that derive from conceptual analysis of the ultimate nature in helping us to gain direct experience.

## *The Object of Attainment*

Between our present mind and our future buddhahood lie two obscurations: the afflictive obscurations (*kleśāvaraṇa*) and the cognitive obscurations. The afflictive obscurations are the afflictions—wrong views and disturbing emotions that cause saṃsāra and their seeds. The cognitive obscurations (*jñeyāvaraṇa*) are the aspect of the mind that continues to mistakenly perceive all internal and external phenomena dualistically (T. *gnyis snang 'khrul pa'i cha*)—that is, as inherently existent—as well as the latencies that cause this dualistic aspect (T. *gnyis snang 'khrul pa'i bag chags*). Cognitive obscurations are not consciousnesses. The aspect that continues to perceive inherent existence is a quality that is concomitant with the consciousness, whereas the latencies are the cause of these dualistic perceptions or appearances.<sup>68</sup>

Nirvāṇa is the passing beyond sorrow—the extinguishment of duḥkha and its origins, the afflictive obscurations. This is liberation, the object of attainment for śrāvakas and solitary realizers. For bodhisattvas the object of attainment is nonabiding nirvāṇa (*apratiṣṭha-nirvāṇa*), the elimination of both the afflictive and cognitive obscurations. The purified emptiness, or suchness, of the mind in which all defilements have been extinguished is both the object of attainment—the *dharmakāya* (nature truth body) of a buddha—and the object of meditation. This is called “nonabiding nirvāṇa” because having eliminated afflictive obscurations, a buddha does not abide in saṃsāra, and having additionally eliminated the self-centered attitude and cognitive obscurations, a buddha does not abide in personal peace.

The afflictions that cause saṃsāra, the actions they motivate, the aggregates we take as a result of those actions, the person who performs the actions and experiences their results, and the results that person experiences all appear to ordinary beings to have their own inherent nature. However, they do not exist in this way; they are false, like a hologram that appears to be a person but is not.

Since these things do not have their own inherent nature or essence, what is the actual nature of phenomena that we seek to realize? This is nonabiding nirvāṇa, the extinguishment of grasping at I and mine with respect to all internal phenomena—the sense faculties, body, mind, and mental factors—and external phenomena—forms, sounds, and other sense objects—that is rooted in grasping inherent existence and its seeds. This is attained by removing all mistaken appearances of phenomena as inherently existent through familiarizing ourselves with their emptiness of inherent existence. Nonabiding nirvāṇa is the emptiness of a buddha’s mind, the purified state of the natural buddha nature, the nature *dharmakāya*. Nonabiding nirvāṇa possesses two purities: the natural purity that is the mind’s primordial emptiness of inherent existence and its purity from adventitious defilements—its final true cessation—that is attained by practicing the path.

What happens to the seeds of polluted karma when someone becomes an arhat or a buddha? According to the upper tenet systems—the lower tenet systems have a different idea—the seeds of nonvirtuous karma in the mindstream of someone who has become a śrāvaka or solitary realizer arhat or an eighth-ground bodhisattva have become powerless and no longer exist; nothing

nonvirtuous remains in their mindstreams. Seeds of previously created virtuous karma become unpolluted seeds of virtuous karma.





## 8 | Objects of Negation

CORRECTLY IDENTIFYING the object of negation—the false mode of existence that ignorance grasps as real—is the most important step when meditating on emptiness. If we do not properly identify the object of negation, we may meditate on selflessness and think we have realized emptiness, but in fact we may understand only the lack of a self-sufficient substantially existent person, not the full emptiness of the person. Alternatively, we may have an experience of vacuity and mistake this for the emptiness of inherent existence.

It is wise to banish all romantic ideas that the ultimate nature of all phenomena will automatically appear to you in a flash as an amazing experience that will instantly free you from all duḥkha forever. Instead let's deepen our understanding of ignorance and what it grasps as true so that our meditation on emptiness will bear fruit.

### *Objects Negated by the Path and Objects Negated by Reasoning*

Objects of negation are of two types: those negated by the path and those negated by reasoning. “Negated” has different meanings in these two phrases. Regarding objects negated by the path, “negated” means abandoned or eradicated; but when speaking of objects negated by reasoning, “negated” means disproved or refuted.

*Objects negated by the path* are mental obscurations, which can be subsumed in the afflictive obscurations and cognitive obscurations. Afflictive obscurations primarily interfere with attaining liberation, and cognitive obscurations primarily hinder attaining the omniscience of a buddha. The objects negated by the path are existent phenomena. If they weren't, sentient beings would not have to work to eliminate them.<sup>69</sup>

*Objects negated by reasoning* are nonexistents that we erroneously believe exist. The chief of these is inherent existence. Although the ignorance that grasps inherent existence, which is a mental factor, exists, its conceived and apprehended object—inherent existence—has never existed. Grasping inherent existence is a consciousness and is an object negated by the path, whereas its conceived object—inherent existence—is an object negated by reasoning. When inherent existence is negated, the awareness grasping it gradually weakens and ceases.

If inherent existence existed, it could not be refuted by reasoning. We cannot prove as nonexistent things that in fact exist. Even though inherent existence does not exist at all, refuting it is essential because to eliminate the erroneous consciousness that grasps it, we must first disprove the object that consciousness apprehends.

Why is self-grasping ignorance a wrong consciousness? Why is the object it apprehends nonexistent? If things existed inherently, as ignorance apprehends them, when we searched for what they really are we would be able to find something. When we analyze what the name “apple” actually refers to—what the inherent nature or true essence of the apple really is—it should become clearer. Among the parts of the apple—the skin, pulp, and core—we could point to something that is indeed the apple. However, instead of the apple becoming clearer to our mind when we analyze it, the apple seems to vanish.

Ignorance apprehends phenomena as existing independent of all other factors. If ignorance apprehended things correctly, then everything would exist in its own self-enclosed manner, unrelated to everything else. However, when we examine how things exist, it becomes apparent that they are dependent—on their causes and conditions, on their parts, and even on the mind that conceives them and gives them a name. Something that is dependent cannot be independent—the two are contradictory. Thus ignorance is a wrong consciousness.

Refuting inherent existence is not like erasing writing on a white board; we are not making something that exists nonexistent. Instead, it is like proving that the bogeyman—a mythical creature fabricated by adults to frighten children to be good—doesn’t exist; we realize that something we believed existed has, in fact, never existed. When we realize the bogeyman doesn’t exist, we stop being afraid of him; we see that he never existed at all and that all along our ignorance had blindsided us and we were terrified of a monster that didn’t exist. Similarly, when

we realize inherent existence does not exist, we gradually stop being under the control of our ignorant grasping that it does exist.

Refuting inherent existence and establishing the emptiness of inherent existence is not destroying something that exists. Everything has always lacked inherent existence. No one made phenomena empty of inherent existence; that has always been their ultimate nature. We understand this truth for the first time upon refuting inherent existence. Furthermore, realizing emptiness does not create something new that didn't exist before, such as constructing a bicycle. It's like removing the cataract-like mental obscurations so that you can see clearly.

We may wonder: "Why are so many words needed to prove that a nonexistent doesn't exist? If it exists, we cannot refute it, and if it does not exist, we don't need to refute it; so of what use are all these refutations and proofs?" Let's look at the example of the bogeyman again. Although the bogeyman doesn't exist, a child who believes he does trembles in fear. If we hold the child's hand and take him around the house to look for the bogeyman, when we can't find him anywhere, the child will understand there is no bogeyman and his fear will vanish.

The mind is very powerful and misconceptions can make us terrified when there is nothing to fear. Ignorance has blindsided us into believing that the I and all other phenomena exist inherently, and as a result our attachment and anger, having grown out of ignorance, have caused us eons of *duḥkha* in *saṃsāra*. When we refute and familiarize ourselves with the nonexistence of the object of this grasping, ignorance gradually ceases, the afflictions arising from it gradually cease, polluted karma is no longer created, and our *saṃsāra* comes to an end.

Words alone do not overcome true-grasping, but they can teach us how to do this. Although the words of the teachings also lack inherent existence, they can function to generate the understanding in our minds that inherent existence does not exist. Here it becomes evident that attaining liberation or awakening doesn't involve going somewhere else; it is a matter of changing our mind.

In addition to our innate grasping, the mind is home to a plethora of acquired wrong views. Some of these wrong views are held by non-Buddhists, others by adherents to the lower Buddhist tenet systems. All of them are rooted in grasping inherent existence. For example, in asserting the existence of a permanent, unitary, independent self, non-Buddhists do not begin by apprehending the self as permanent or perceiving it as one monolithic whole.

Rather, they grasp the self as existing from its own side. By not recognizing that the inherent existence apprehended by this innate grasping does not exist, they then make up beliefs to explain how karmic seeds can go from one life to the next. The notion of a permanent self that is one partless whole and is independent of causes and conditions is one such fabricated belief.

Proponents of the lower Buddhist tenet systems recognize the fallacies of that belief, so they instead assert that a foundation consciousness or the mental consciousness is the self. In this way, self-grasping constantly seeks a way to make itself prevail and feel secure.

Because of our deep-seated belief in inherent existence, we cling to people and things that appear to be attractive from their own side, have aversion to disagreeable people who appear hateful in and of themselves, are arrogant about our seemingly inborn talents, and become jealous of those who have opportunities we do not. If we were to correctly identify the grasping consciousness that is the root of all these disturbing emotions and refute its conceived object, all other wrong views would be gradually destroyed. The antidote for each individual affliction—for example, meditating on the ugly aspects of an object to counteract attachment and on fortitude to subdue anger—temporarily overcomes only that disturbing emotion and does not damage the others. Using these antidotes is comparable to cutting down one obtrusive branch and then another, with new ones growing from the trunk. Realizing the emptiness of inherent existence and familiarizing our mind with it over time is like uprooting a poisonous tree; nothing more can grow from its trunk.

## *The Importance of Correctly Identifying the Object of Negation*

Correctly identifying the object of negation by reasoning is essential for our meditation on emptiness to be effective. Śāntideva affirms (BCA 9.139ab):

Without having identified the object [of negation] that is imputed,  
the absence of that object cannot be apprehended.

The word “emptiness” in Buddhism designates something completely different from the word’s ordinary meaning. The emptiness is not like the emptiness of our stomach or the emptiness of our bank account. It is a mode of existence that is the absence of incorrect ways of existence that ignorance projects on persons and phenomena; in the context of the Prāsaṅgikas, this is inherent existence, which is synonymous with existence by its own characteristics, existence from its own side, and so on.

The first step in refuting inherent existence is to have an idea of what it would be like if it in fact existed. This process is called “identifying the object of negation.” For example, to expel a thief from your house, you must first know what he looks like.

Even great masters such as Tsongkhapa initially had difficulty in identifying the subtlest object of negation. His early writings such as *The Golden Rosary* (*Legs bshad gser phreng*) show that like many of the early Tibetan Buddhists, he believed that since nothing can be found when analyzed with reasoning, nothing exists conventionally. He thought that sages assert dependent arising and conventionalities only when talking to others—that is, discussion of conventionalities is done for the sake of others, not because oneself asserts their existence.

By asking questions to Mañjuśrī, the Buddha of wisdom, Tsongkhapa later saw the error in that view. In the “Three Principal Aspects of the Path,” he emphasized that if we think emptiness is an independent, absolute truth such that dependent arisings and emptiness are incompatible, then we have not understood emptiness correctly. As long as dependent arising and emptiness are seen as alternating realities that do not converge, we lack the correct view.

Identifying the object of negation—inherent existence—is a subtle process that takes time, especially since conventionally existent phenomena and inherent existence appear to us completely mixed. Teasing these apart is delicate; it is easy to veer toward negating too much or not negating enough. Tsongkhapa reminds us (LC 3:126):

Just as, for example, to ascertain that a certain person is not here, you must know the person who is not here, so in order to ascertain the meaning of “selflessness” and “lack of [inherent] nature,” you must also identify well that self and nature that do not exist. This is

because, if the conceptual appearance of that which is to be negated does not appear well, then also the negative of that will not be unmistakably ascertained.

To catch a terrorist, we have to know what he looks like. If we have no idea whether he is tall or short, fat or thin, our efforts to locate him will not bring any results. Similarly, if we have no conceptual image of what inherent existence would be like, it will be hard to tell it does not exist. Of course we could say the words “There is no inherent existence,” but that would be like saying “There is no terrorist here” when the terrorist is standing next to us but we don’t recognize him. If we refute too much or not enough, if we negate the wrong object, or if we remain in blank-minded meditation, our efforts will not bring the desired result of liberation or awakening. For this reason, proper identification of the object of negation is crucial.

Changkya Rolpai Dorje (1717–86), a sage from eastern Tibet, says that some dialecticians, people skilled in philosophical debate, insist on consistency and are obsessed with giving a rational account of everything. They claim to be intelligent scholars and good practitioners, but they leave intact the solidity of what they perceive in front of them. They think the object of negation is something external that can be identified without questioning the way the I appears in the everyday functioning of the ignorant mind. It seems as if they are negating something with horns that is completely unrelated to their own apprehension of I. This is because they haven’t correctly identified the inherent existence that appears to them in their daily perceptions and thoughts as being the object of negation. Changkya says:<sup>70</sup>

Among today’s thinkers, there seem to be  
some caught in the web of words:  
“self-substantial,” “ontologically real,” and so on.  
They only invent monsters  
with horns to negate, leaving intact  
our vivid, coarse, apparent world.

It is crucial to recognize that the solid, concrete, objective reality of an object appearing to us is the very object of negation. Doing this can be unnerving

because it involves challenging our everyday, habitual perceptions. The object of negation must be tied to the way we see ourselves. If it isn't, negating an inherently existent I won't have any effect on us. When our meditation on emptiness is successful, we discover that how we have been thinking of ourselves and all other phenomena from beginningless time until now has been completely wrong. We do not exist in the way we thought we did. At that time, it's almost as if we are no longer able to posit the self. It seems as if things barely exist—they do not have their own essence but exist dependently, like illusions.

Nāgārjuna identifies emptiness as the meaning of dependent arising, thus pointing out the necessity of not only negating inherent existence but also establishing dependently arising conventional truths. In other words, the object of negation is not all existence whatsoever, only inherent existence. In the case of persons, the I exists in dependence on the body and mind. This I meditates, eats, creates karma and experiences its results, practices the path, and attains awakening, and it does all these without existing under its own power. This sense of I is a valid innate conception; on its basis we seek happiness and not suffering. This valid sense of I is not the object of negation, and negating it would lead to the extreme of nihilism. Grasping the reified I is the troublemaker, and its conceived object is the object of negation. Identifying it takes time and finesse.

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## REFLECTION

1. What are objects negated by the path and objects negated by reasoning?
  2. Why is correctly identifying the object of negation important in order to realize emptiness?
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### *What Is Not the Object of Negation*

In *The Four Hundred*, Āryadeva says (CŚ 398):

If things existed inherently,  
what good is it to perceive emptiness?



Seeing by way of conceptions binds;  
this is refuted here.

The first two lines warn that if phenomena existed inherently, inherent existence would be the nature of phenomena and could not be refuted. In that case, emptiness could not be realized. “Conceptions” refer to conceptions of inherent existence that superimpose existence from their own side onto persons and phenomena.

Of the three types of phenomena—evident, slightly obscure, and very obscure—emptiness is a slightly obscure phenomenon.<sup>71</sup> Ordinary beings cannot initially directly apprehend slightly obscure phenomena with their sense consciousnesses. They can initially be known only through reasoning, by means of an inference. Only after correctly ascertaining the emptiness of true existence conceptually, and then repeatedly meditating on it until the conceptual appearance of emptiness is worn away, can ordinary beings realize emptiness directly and become āryas. If all conceptual consciousnesses—even inferences that are correct conceptions of emptiness—were erroneous, then teachers and students could not use conceptual consciousnesses to teach and listen to explanations on emptiness. Cultivating the correct view of emptiness would then be impossible.

Not all conceptual consciousnesses grasp true existence. A mental consciousness envisioning the layout of a building and the mind designing a scientific experiment do not necessarily grasp true existence, and their apprehended objects are not objects of negation. If we are not clear about this point—that the object of negation is the conceived object of self-grasping ignorance, not the objects of all conceptual consciousnesses—we may spend a long time doing blank-minded, nonconceptual meditation that doesn’t engage with any object whatsoever, mistakenly believing that it will lead to liberation.

The object of negation being discussed here is not wrong objects learned through the study of faulty philosophies. The conceptual consciousnesses holding those objects are acquired afflictions and are not the root of saṃsāra. Although refuting directionally partless particles, apperception, a permanent creator, a primal substance, one universal mind, and so forth are steppingstones to gain the correct view of emptiness, refuting these does not discredit the conceived object of innate ignorance. However, when we correctly negate the conceived object of

ignorance, all the false objects posited by non-Buddhists and the lower Buddhist tenet systems are negated, and the process of gradually uprooting all incorrect conceptions begins. Just as uprooting a noxious weed decimates its stalks, leaves, and flowers, uprooting the root of saṃsāra damages all the wrong conceptions and afflictions that grow from the innate self-grasping ignorance.

Furthermore, the object of negation is not the object of sense consciousnesses or of mental direct perceivers. Training ourselves to think that the inherently existent things that appear to our senses do not exist is a skillful method to help us recognize the mistaken quality of our sense perceptions. However, this does not directly refute the object of negation. Objects apprehended by the five sense consciousnesses are not the object of negation because the object of negation is apprehended, conceived, and grasped by a conceptual mental consciousness grasping inherent existence. It is the *conceived object* of this erroneous *mental* consciousness that grasps true existence that is to be refuted by reasoning. This reasoning consciousness is a special mental consciousness, a pristine wisdom (*jñāna*) that is either an inference or a direct mental reliable cognizer. Emptiness is not perceivable by the sense consciousnesses. Only a special type of mental consciousness—the pristine wisdom of meditative equipoise—can perceive emptiness directly. Tsongkhapa said (LC 3:212):

Therefore, the awarenesses whose mode of apprehension is to be eradicated by reasoning are only conceptual mental consciousnesses, and moreover, are the two graspings of self [of persons and of phenomena] or those conceptual consciousnesses that mistakenly superimpose further attributes on objects imputed by those two graspings of self.

## *The Valid Sense of I*

Before refuting the inherent existence of the I, it is important to differentiate the valid sense of I and the view of a personal identity, and their objects. This will clarify how the view of a personal identity reifies the valid I by superimposing inherent existence on it. It will also help us discern the object of negation and the valid I that exists.<sup>72</sup>

The psychophysical aggregates are the basis of designation of the self; they are the basis of our innate sense of self. The notion “I” comes about as a result of some experience; it arises in relation to one of our aggregates. We say “I’m sick” when our lungs are tight and “I’m full” when our stomach is full. We comment “I’m happy” or “I’m sad” in relation to the feeling aggregate. “I’m clever” and “I know what’s going on” are said referring to our aggregate of discrimination, and “I’m angry” or “I have compassion” come in reference to the aggregate of miscellaneous factors. We say “I’m thinking” in dependence on the mental consciousness and “I’m hearing” in dependence on the auditory consciousness. In short, the thought “I” arises only in relation to our body and mind.

At these times, we’re not thinking “I am my body,” “I am my feelings,” or “I am the one who is thinking.” Rather, there’s just the sense of a conventionally existent I. This is a valid mind apprehending the mere I, the I that is merely designated in dependence on the aggregates. The I *appears* inherently existent to this valid I-apprehending mind; however, that mind does not *grasp* the I to exist inherently.

Self-grasping arises after this. Something may happen in our environment that triggers it, or internally we may think of a troubling or desirable situation. At that time, the appearance of an inherently existent I becomes more vivid—the I seems to have its own essence and exist under its own power, independent of all other factors. It seems that there is a real I that is being threatened or wants something very badly. This I is the apprehended and conceived object of the view of a personal identity. At this time, the view of a personal identity, which is a form of self-grasping ignorance, has arisen, and it grasps that independent I.

It’s at this point that the trouble begins, because based on this self-grasping, afflictions such as craving, belligerence, conceit, and so forth arise. Sometimes a virtuous mind arises supported by the view of a personal identity—for example, when we have faith in the Three Jewels or experience compassion for a homeless person. In either case, polluted karma is created and the ripening of the karmic seeds will perpetuate saṃsāra. However, the experience in saṃsāra will be happy or suffering depending on if the causal karma was virtuous or nonvirtuous.

## *Inherent Existence*

Ignorance superimposes inherent existence on both persons and other phenomena. What is inherent existence? We cannot define what it is because it doesn't exist. However, we can talk about what it would be like if it did exist. As we closely examine our own perceptions and thoughts, we'll gradually be able to identify how inherent existence *appears* to our mind and how ignorance *grasps* this appearance as true. Several ways of describing the object of negation follow. As you ponder them, you will see that they revolve around a common theme. In his *Commentary on the "Four Hundred,"* Candrakīrti says (LC 3:213):

“Self” is an essence of things that does not depend on others; it is an inherent nature.

Commenting on the statement that all phenomena are without their own power—that is, they cannot set themselves up—and therefore there is no self, Candrakīrti points to four terms equivalent to self (LC 3:212):

This refers to existing essentially (T. *rang gi ngo bo*), inherently (T. *rang bzhin*), autonomously (T. *rang dbang*), and without depending on another (T. *gzhan la rag ma las pa*).

These terms have varying English translations, but their meanings come to the same point:

- Inherent, intrinsic, or essential existence (*svabhāvasiddhi*, T. *rang bzhin gyis grub pa*): existence able to set itself up (T. *tshugs thub tu grub pa*).
- Existence by its own entity (*svarūpasiddhi*, T. *rang gi ngo bo nas grub pa*): having its own inherent nature.
- Existence by its own power, autonomous existence (T. *rang dbang du grub pa*): a phenomenon appears to its apprehending consciousness as not depending on others—that is, not dependent on merely being posited by conceptuality—and it is taken to exist in that way. A phenomenon has a mode of abiding that is able to set itself up by its own entity right with the object. Its nature has an essence, its own unique mode of existence.
- Existence without depending on another (T. *gzhan la rag ma las pa*): existence without depending on merely being posited by conceptuality.

Ignorance apprehends persons and phenomena as if they existed as self-enclosed phenomena without being posited by a conventional consciousness. Tsongkhapa says (LC 3:212–13):

What exists objectively in terms of its own essence without being posited through the power of a subjective mind is called “self” or “inherent nature.” . . .

In the case of reification by ignorance, there is, with regard to objects, be they persons or other phenomena, a grasping (T. *bzung*) that those phenomena have ontological status—a way of existing—from their own side (T. *rang gi ngos nas*), without being posited through the force of an awareness. The conceived object that is thus apprehended by that ignorant grasping, the independent ontological status of the phenomena, is identified as a hypothetical self or inherent nature.

If the conceived and apprehended objects of the innate self-grasping ignorance existed, they would exist from their own side, in and of themselves, under their own power, and without being posited by a conventional consciousness. Self is something that has its own essence and is able to set itself up. Self-enclosed, it does not depend on anything else. It exists by its own entity, truly, ultimately, and independently. Self refers to any nature or state that objects could have in which they do not rely on anything.

The ignorance that grasps such a self is erroneous because nothing can be established independent of the power of thought. Although things appear to exist “out there” objectively, and we assent to that appearance and grasp them as truly existent, that view is incorrect because phenomena do not exist in that way.

My guru, Kyabje Ling Rinpoche, described the object of negation to be the basis of designation and the designated object appearing undifferentiable. In other words, the object of negation is the designated object mixed with the basis of designation or inside the basis of designation. In the case of the view of a personal identity, it is an I that seems independent but still mixed with the aggregates.

The object of negation has also been described as what exists beyond what is merely designated by concept and term. That is, the conventional object—for example, the I—exists by being merely designated by concept and term, but

ignorance grasps as existent something that goes beyond that—an I that has its own mode of being, its own independent essence.

Another description of the object of negation in terms of the I is: the meditator has already negated that the aggregates are the I, but an I that appears to be independent of the aggregates still seems to exist from the side of the aggregates.

Tsongkhapa says (FEW 40):

. . . the mode of apprehending true existence—the object of negation—is to conceive [that objects] are not posited through the force of beginningless conceptuality but are established objectively by way of their own entity.

In *Seventy Stanzas on Emptiness* (*Śūnyatāsaptati*), Nāgārjuna says that ignorance grasps dependently arising phenomena as having a final reality of their own. Nāgārjuna uses causal dependent arising to reject the object of negation: things having a final reality of their own (ŚS 64–65):

The Buddha said:  
grasping that things truly arise  
from causes and conditions is ignorance,  
and from that, the twelve links [of dependent origination] arise.

When you realize that things are empty,  
you see properly and are not confused.  
That stops ignorance,  
and from that, the twelve links stop.

All conditioned phenomena are empty because they arise by the power of causes and conditions. The coarse form of causal dependence is not difficult to understand: we get an education so that we can work and earn a living. We save for the future so that we will have enough to live on when we are unable to work. Even animals understand this level of causality: they know that if they eat they will not feel hungry!

What allows for a cause to produce a result? Anything that is a cause is impermanent by its very nature, changing in each and every moment. Thus its

arising is sufficient for it to disintegrate. As it ceases, something new arises—its result. If causes or results existed from their own side, they would have their own unchanging essence, would not be affected by other factors, and could not change. If things existed inherently, they would be frozen, unable to be influenced by causes and conditions. If the environment were an objective entity, it would not be influenced by carbon dioxide levels, earthquakes, and the increase in human population.

In the chapter “Questions from Upāli” in the *Ratnakūṭa Sūtra*, the Buddha clearly states that causes are not being emptied by means of emptiness—that is, causes are not negated or made nonexistent by emptiness. Rather, causes themselves are empty. As long as we assume that phenomena have some kind of objective reality of their own and think that not finding the conventional phenomenon when we search for its true essence is the meaning of emptiness, we have not arrived at the full understanding of emptiness. Rather, the basis of designation of a term has no inherent existence. For example, the basis of designation that has been designated “truck”—the wheels, axle, hood, and so forth—is totally devoid of inherent reality. There is not a findable, inherently existent truck in that collection of parts. Nevertheless, we can drive the merely designated truck.

Āryadeva explains ignorance and the object it grasps by explaining its antidote (CS 136):

When dependent arising is seen,  
ignorance will not occur.  
Thus every effort has been made here  
to explain precisely this subject.

By identifying the wisdom of dependent arising as the antidote to ignorance, Āryadeva points out that ignorance grasps phenomena as devoid of dependence and as having an independent reality of their own. This is another way to express the object of negation.

In summary, a self of persons or phenomena would be something that existed objectively, apart from being posited by mind. Although things are designated in dependence on their basis of designation, they are not their basis of designation. There is nothing in any of the five aggregates or in the collection of the aggregates

that is a person. However, a person exists; we know that from our own experience. The only way a person can exist is by being merely designated in dependence on the aggregates that are its basis of designation.

As we contemplate this, we get the sense that a person does not exist under their own power or from their own side. However, when we observe how things appear to us, they do not appear to be dependent on conceptuality; they appear to exist from their own side, objectively. This is the object of negation: that aside from our conception and name of an object, there is something in the basis of designation that is that object.

Since inherent existence does not exist at all, only hypothetical definitions and descriptions of it can be given. A coiled rope appears to be a snake, and we may think it is one. But when we analyze to find the snake on that base, no snake is found. Similarly, the person appears to be an inherently existent, independent entity, but when we analyze to find this real person, it is not found.

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## REFLECTION

1. Describe the I that is the object of negation in the meditation on the emptiness of the person.
2. Describe the conventional I that exists.
3. Why is it important to differentiate between those two?

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## *Self of Persons*

Having seen how a valid sense of I arises and how self-grasping quickly solidifies it, making it seem to inherently exist, let's look at the various levels of misconception and grasping concerning the I. Some of these wrong conceptions are acquired due to incorrect ways of thinking in this life, whereas others are innate and have been with us from beginningless time. Understanding the various levels of wrong conceptions and their erroneous objects helps us identify the ignorance that is the root of saṃsāra and the object of negation that it grasps.



Regarding the I, the erroneous conceptions grasping it, from the coarsest to the subtlest, are (1) the misconception of the person as permanent, unitary, and independent from causes; (2) grasping the I to be self-sufficient substantially existent; and (3) grasping the I to exist inherently.

Each of these errs in how they view the relationship of the I and the aggregates and superimposes a false mode of existence on the self. Although what is superimposed does not exist, there are different levels of superimpositions; some are subtler and more difficult to identify than others. They are like layers of an onion peeled away until nothing remains. We will begin examining the coarsest, since it is the easiest to recognize and to negate.

### *Permanent, Unitary, and Independent Self*

The first, grasping at a permanent, unitary, independent self (*ātman*), is an acquired wrong view that holds the self and the aggregates to be totally separate and unrelated to each other in that they have contradictory characteristics: the self is seen as permanent, whereas the aggregates are impermanent; the self is one, whereas there are many aggregates, and so forth. “Permanent” means the self is unchanging; it neither arises nor passes away. “Unitary” means that the I does not depend on parts; it is one monolithic object. “Independent” signifies that it does not depend on causes and conditions. The self is like a porter and the aggregates are the burden he carries; the two are completely different entities. This view does not arise in our minds innately; it is acquired by studying erroneous philosophical views. All Buddhist schools refute the existence of such a self.

How did the view of such a self come about? We notice that, from birth until the present, our body has grown and our mind has matured. But our sense of self feels constant. We say “When I was in my mother’s womb” with the feeling that we are the same person now as then. Since people in ancient India accepted rebirth, they said that there must be something that goes from one life to the next and carries the karmic seeds. They concluded that a permanent self maintains the continuity of the person. Although the body and mind consist of parts, the self must be a unitary whole. Furthermore, while the body and mind are subject to causes and conditions, the self that transmigrates is beyond that; it is independent.

Most non-Buddhist religions have a similar idea of a permanent, unitary, and independent soul. Some people believe that a soul—the unchanging essence of a person—goes to heaven or hell after death. Some believe the soul remains in an undecided state until just before the Day of Judgment when it will be reunited with the body. Others believe this self is immutable and does not experience birth and death, although the aggregates change. This permanent self is trapped in the aggregates, where it suffers from creating karma and experiencing its result. Liberation is attained when the self transcends conditioned existence and either reunites with its creator or dwells in eternal bliss.

You may have been taught a similar view of the self or soul as a child, or you may have absorbed such a view simply through cultural conditioning. Because this conditioning is deep, portions of it may remain in your mind, and you may unconsciously think you have a soul that is your unchanging essence in this life and beyond. It is helpful to identify this belief in the mind and then investigate if it is possible for such a self or soul to exist.

Related to this conception of an unchanging self is the notion of an external, permanent creator of sentient beings and the universe. Buddhists employ several reasonings to negate the possible existence of such an independent creator:

- A permanent creator cannot create because creation involves change from what was to something new, and a permanent creator is fixed.
- If the creator succeeded in creating, it would be impermanent. As an impermanent thing, the creator would arise from causes and conditions and produce results. This contradicts the basic notion of an independent creator.
- Why did the creator create? It must have had a motivation, in which case it is not independent of causes and conditions but is influenced by them.
- Some people say the creator is permanent but is temporarily impermanent while it creates. But something cannot be both permanent and impermanent, because these are contradictory qualities. Also a permanent creator cannot change to become an impermanent one and then change again to become unchanging.

*Self-Sufficient Substantially Existent Self*

The next level is grasping a self-sufficient substantially existent I, of which exist an acquired form and an innate form. Here the I appears to stand on its own, as if it could be identified without one or more of the aggregates having to be identified by the mind. The relationship between a self-sufficient substantially existent person and the aggregates is like that of a controller and the controlled—the person is the controller and the aggregates are what the person controls.

Here, the aggregates are seen as different from the person, yet having concordant characteristics with the person. This is noticeable when we think “My body falls ill so often. I wish I had the body of a deva.” It seems as though the I could exchange its body for another, more preferable body, as if the body were a commodity that is different from the person possessing it. An example of seeing the person and the mind as different occurs when thinking, “My mind is full of afflictions. I wish I had the mind of a buddha!” The self seems to be the possessor of the mind, and the mind is like merchandise that can be exchanged. Holding the self and aggregates to be different in this way is grasping a self-sufficient substantially existent person. This is the self that the lower schools assert to be the object of negation when realizing the selflessness of persons.

Grasping a self-sufficient substantially existent person is present when we say “I can lose weight anytime I want,” as if the I were the boss of the body that is overweight and the mind that likes to snack. Sometimes we may think “I can stop drinking, no problem,” or “I’ll be able to remain single-pointed on the object of meditation once I make up my mind to do so.” In these cases, it seems as if the I is the mental consciousness that rules over the body and mind, which are its subjects.

How does grasping a permanent, unitary, independent self differ from grasping a self-sufficient substantially existent self? The non-Buddhists who assert the existence of a permanent, unified, and independent self assert that the I and the aggregates are different natures and have discordant characteristics. Different natures means two things can exist at different times and different places. Discordant characteristics means that some of their characteristics are dissimilar. For example, non-Buddhists believe the I is permanent, partless, and independent, whereas the Buddhists who refute a self-sufficient substantially existent person consider the person to be impermanent, composed of the aggregates that are its parts, and dependent on causes and conditions. In short, seeing the self as a self-sufficient substantially existent person does not entail

seeing the person and the aggregates as having discordant characteristics, whereas the conception of a permanent, unified, and independent self does.

Although the lower schools—the Svātantrikas and below—believe that they are refuting the subtle self-grasping of persons, according to the Prāsaṅgikas, they are not. The Prāsaṅgikas differentiate two levels of innate self-grasping of persons—innate self-grasping of a self-sufficient substantially existent person and innate self-grasping of an inherently existent person. They say that the lower systems refute only a self-sufficient substantially existent person while leaving grasping an inherently existent I intact.<sup>73</sup>

Tsongkhapa asserts that grasping the self-sufficient substantial existence of the I exists in the minds of both those whose awarenesses have and have not been affected by tenets; this means that it has an acquired form that is learned in this lifetime and an innate form that comes from previous lives. However, grasping the person and the aggregates to have discordant characteristics—as in conceiving the self to be permanent, unified, and independent—exists only in the minds of those who have learned incorrect philosophies. This indicates that it is an acquired, not an innate, affliction (FEW 245):

Apprehension that persons are substantially existent in the sense of being self-sufficient also exists among those whose awarenesses are not affected by tenets, but apprehension that persons exist as other than the [mental and physical] aggregates in the sense of having a character discordant with them does not exist among those whose awarenesses are not affected by tenets.

In the *Supplement*, Candrakīrti says that at the fourth ground ārya bodhisattvas eliminate the ignorance that is a coarse self-grasping. This ignorance is the innate self-grasping of a self-sufficient substantially existent person; it is considered coarse in comparison to the ignorance grasping an inherently existent person.

Realizing the lack of a self-sufficient substantially existent person is similar to the meditation having the aspect of grossness and peacefulness—which is common to both Buddhists and non-Buddhists—in that it temporarily suppresses the manifest afflictions explained in the two Knowledges (the *Treasury of Knowledge* and *Compendium of Knowledge*). But it cannot suppress even the

manifest afflictions dependent on grasping inherent existence that are considered afflictive obscurations by the Prāsaṅgikas, let alone uproot any afflictions, be they those explained in the two Knowledges or those asserted by the Prāsaṅgikas. Since grasping the inherent existence of persons and phenomena is the root of saṃsāra, practitioners who have realized the lack of a self-sufficient substantially existent person are still far from cutting the root of saṃsāra and attaining liberation. Here we see not only the benefits of realizing the lack of a self-sufficient substantially existent I—its temporary suppression of manifest coarse afflictions—but also its limitations in that it does not free us from saṃsāra.

However, the meditation realizing the absence of a self-sufficient substantially existent person and the meditation having the aspect of grossness and peacefulness do differ in that the former is capable of suppressing the manifest afflictions up to and including the fourth formless realm, whereas the latter can suppress manifest afflictions only up to the third formless realm.

The Svātantrikas and below assert that the person is imputedly existent in that one of the aggregates must be known in order to identify the presence of a person. For example, we see a person's body or hear their voice, and in that way know a person is there. They refute a self-sufficient substantially existent person who can be known without first knowing one of the aggregates.

Unlike the Prāsaṅgikas, the lower schools assert something that is the person—that is, something that is findable when we investigate what the person is. Some of these schools say the mental consciousness is found and is the person; others say the collection of aggregates is the person. In their systems, the mental consciousness and the aggregates are substantially existent, so although they say the self-isolate person—that is, the person in general—is imputedly existent, the illustration-isolate person—what is found when the person is searched for (the mind or the collection of aggregates)—is substantially existent. In the refutation of the self-sufficient substantial existence of a person, the substantial existence of the self-isolate person is negated, not the illustration-isolate person, which is substantially existent.

While refuting a permanent, unitary, and independent self and a self-sufficient substantially existent self are steppingstones to the realization of the emptiness of inherent existence of persons and phenomena, these are not the conceived objects of the innate ignorance that is the first link of dependent origination. By accepting that the mental consciousness, the collection of

aggregates, or so on is the person, Svāntrikas and below do not accept that the I is merely designated in dependence on the collection of aggregates, and thus they do not negate an inherently existent person.

To understand the lack of a permanent, unitary, independent self and a self-sufficient substantially existent I, it is not necessary to first realize the emptiness of inherent existence or the selflessness of phenomena. However, the direct, nonconceptual realization of the emptiness of inherent existence completely overcomes all the other misconceptions and graspings.

### *Inherently Existent Self*

The third level of erroneous grasping is grasping the self as inherently existent. Prāsaṅgikas negate inherent existence on both the person and other phenomena such as the aggregates. We may learn an acquired form of grasping the inherent existence of the person by studying incorrect tenets, but the innate form is more insidious; it has kept us chained in saṃsāra since beginningless time. It exists in animals, babies, and all ordinary beings, whether or not they know language or hold philosophical tenets.

How does the innate self-grasping ignorance view the relationship of the self and the aggregates? Innately, we do not conceive the I and the aggregates to be unrelated, as shown in the examples of saying “I’m sick” when our stomach hurts and “I’m thinking” when the mind is thinking. Seeing the self and the aggregates as totally different is an acquired view.

We also do not innately see the person and the aggregates as completely the same, as shown by the examples of being willing to exchange our body or mind with that of another person. If our ordinary innate mind saw the self and the aggregates as completely the same, these thoughts would not arise. Therefore, seeing the I and the aggregates as identical is also an acquired view.

When we say “*I*’m sick,” our sense of self is identified with the body, although there is not the thought “I am my body.” Similarly, when we say “*I* don’t want to be reborn in unfortunate states,” the sense of self is closely related to the mind, although we’re not thinking, “I am my mind.” These are not the subtle innate self-grasping. The Fifth Dalai Lama clarifies (HSY 133):

Sometimes the I will seem to exist in the context of the body.  
Sometimes it will seem to exist in the context of the mind.

Sometimes it will seem to exist in the context of feelings, discriminations, or other factors. At the end of noticing a variety of modes of appearance, you will come to identify an I that exists in its own right, that exists inherently, that from the start is self-established, existing indistinguishably with mind and body, which are also mixed like milk and water. This is the first step, ascertainment of the object of negation in the view of selflessness. You should work at it until deep experience arises.

The sense of self does not arise in a vacuum but is based on the body and mind. After “I” has been validly designated in dependence on the body and mind, grasping that I as inherently existent may arise. The subtle self-grasping of the person takes the mere I as its observed object, not the body or mind. That is, the observed object of the view of a personal identity is the conventionally existent I, and the view of a personal identity erroneously apprehends it as inherently existent.

The innate view of a personal identity grasps the self as mixed in with the aggregates yet able to stand on its own. As the Fifth Dalai Lama said above, the self appears blended with the aggregates but still distinct from them. When we are in physical danger, we easily experience a strong sense of I focused on the body: “I’m going to get hurt.” When we think of all the destructive karma we have accumulated, we may experience a strong sense of I based on the mind: “I’m going to be born in an unfortunate birth.” The way the I appears in both of these situations is not the subtlest object of negation, because the I appears identified with one of the aggregates, whereas the I that is the subtlest object of negation appears mixed with the aggregates but still a self-enclosed entity.

As mentioned above, the mere I, the conventional I that exists—not the aggregates—is the observed object of the view of a personal identity. This view thinks “I” and holds that I to exist by its own characteristics. Its conceived object, which is the object of negation, is an inherently existent I that does not exist at all. However, its observed object, the mere I, is not refuted, for it exists conventionally. It is the self that creates karma, is reborn, and becomes a buddha.

The notions of a permanent, unified, and independent self, a self-sufficient substantially existent person, and an inherently existent person differ in terms of how they view the relationship of the I and the aggregates. The non-Buddhists

who grasp a permanent, unified, and independent self assert the I and aggregates are different natures and totally unrelated. Buddhist essentialists—from the Vaibhāṣikas up to and including the Svātantrika Mādhyamikas—refute a permanent, unified, and independent self as well as a self-sufficient substantially existent person. Here the self is the controller of the aggregates, such that the aggregates depend on the person but the person does not depend on the aggregates. Prāsaṅgika Mādhyamikas refute the previous two notions of the person as well as an inherently existent person. An inherently existent person is one in which the I and the aggregates are neither completely the same nor totally unrelated. The I is mixed in with the collection of the body and mind but exists in its own right and is able to stand on its own. Prāsaṅgikas are the only ones who refute all three wrong views of the self.

Only the Prāsaṅgikas negate an inherently existent self; the lower Buddhist schools proclaim that the I must have some inherent essence from its own side because if it didn't, it would be only an arbitrary name. There must be some objective nature or essence that allows us to have a sense of identity as the doer of actions and the experiencer of results. The Prāsaṅgikas, however, refute even this, saying the I exists merely nominally.

In other words, all Buddhist systems agree that the I is dependent on the aggregates, but everyone except the Prāsaṅgikas states that when the I that travels from one life to the next is sought within the aggregates, something can be found that is the person. Unlike the Prāsaṅgikas, the lower systems do not understand that because the I is dependent, it lacks inherent existence. In fact, they believe that the I must inherently exist or it would not exist at all.

In your meditation, be aware of the various ways in which self-grasping can grasp the person. Try to identify if you grasp a permanent, unified, and independent I; at other times see if you can detect grasping a self-sufficient substantially existent person. Also be aware of when you grasp an inherently existent person. Becoming familiar with the above descriptions of these three will help you to do this. However, it takes time to identify these wrong views of how the person exists, so be patient.

In the meditation on emptiness, identifying the appearance of an inherently existent I is the first and most difficult step. It doesn't work to sit down and say to yourself, "What is my conception of the I?" That is like asking a thief to stand up



and declare his activities. He won't do it. Yet without having a clear idea of the false self we naively believe exists, how can we realize its emptiness?

As beginners it's difficult to identify the inherently existent I that is the object of negation. Start with observing your sense of I when you feel a strong emotion. For example, one day a group that I (Chodron) was teaching had an interview with His Holiness. When we entered the room, His Holiness greeted each of us individually and then a monk directed us to a row of seats in a semi-circle. Since I was first, he indicated to me to move down the row to make room for the others. Following directions, I went to the last chair, and when the monk told us to be seated I sat down. His Holiness finished greeting people and then approached me, and leaning over, gently said, "I think that's my chair." How embarrassed I was! The object of negation was showing itself in living color!

To identify the object of negation, one corner of our mind must discreetly and unobtrusively observe how the sense of I manifests in our lives. We may have any or all of the above notions of the self at different times during the day. So we must quietly observe how the I appears to exist in various situations—for example, when we are unjustly blamed or when we are highly praised. What is the sense of I when we crave to have something? When we criticize ourselves? When others ignore us or shower us with attention? When someone says our name?

When we observe the sense of I that exists when a strong emotion is present, how do we differentiate the apprehended objects of coarse and subtle self-grasping in our own experience—coarse self-grasping of persons being grasping a self-sufficient substantially existent person and subtle self-grasping of persons being grasping an inherently existent person? Most of our glaring anger, for example, probably involves grasping the self as self-sufficient substantially existent in addition to grasping the self as inherently existent. Grasping inherent existence is the source of all afflictions. It may lead to grasping a self-sufficient substantially existent person, which then gives rise to the manifest affliction. However, it is extremely difficult to tease apart the conceived objects of the two types of self-grasping in our actual experience.

In your practice, first identify and then refute a permanent, unitary, and independent I by reflecting that it is impossible for a permanent, unitary, independent self to exist. Since this is a coarse notion of self created by incorrect philosophies, it is comparatively easy to disprove. The idea of a self-sufficient substantially existent person is more subtle, and the idea of an inherently existent

person is the subtlest and therefore the most difficult to identify and refute. If you refute the existence of an inherently existent self, all other graspings of self are automatically overcome.

Once you have identified how the false, inherently existent I appears, investigate if such an I can actually exist. Here, reasoning and analysis are critical. Inquire how the I exists until you are convinced that it cannot exist inherently. At that time, rest the mind in the absence of such an inherently existent self.

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## REFLECTION

1. When you were a child, were you taught that there is a permanent soul and a permanent creator?
2. Review the reasons that disprove these. Do the reasons make sense to you? Does one part of your mind still find attractive or comforting the idea of a permanent creator of the universe and the permanent soul that is your essence?
3. Review the characteristics of a permanent, unitary, independent self, a self-sufficient substantially existent person, and an inherently existent person.
4. Can you identify in your experience when you are grasping at any of these?

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### *Grasping Mine*

The view of a personal identity involves grasping both I and mine as inherently existent. Just as casually saying “I’m walking” does not involve grasping the inherent existence of I, casually thinking “my body” or “my mind” is not grasping mine to be inherently existent. However, when a strong destructive emotion such as attachment or anger arises, grasping inherently existent I or mine is involved. At that time we think, “Don’t you treat *me* like that!” “This is *mine*,” or “*My* child was admitted to a prestigious school.”

Grasping mine implicitly grasps the I. The view of a personal identity grasping mine arises in relation to things that belong to us—our body, mind, possessions, and so forth. However, these things are not its observed object; it focuses only on the sense of mine—the feeling of “myness” or ownership<sup>74</sup>—not on the things that are mine. Technically speaking, mine is neither a person nor a

phenomenon in the context of the division of persons and phenomena as the basis of the two selflessnesses. It is just the sense of mine. However, implicit in thinking “mine” is the notion of a person. For that reason, grasping mine as inherently existent is part of the self-grasping of persons, and within that, the view of a personal identity.

The body, mind, and possessions are illustrations of things that are mine, but they are not the mine that is the observed object of the view of a personal identity. Grasping the body and mind as inherently existent is grasping the self of phenomena, whereas grasping the body and mind as inherently mine is grasping the self of persons. Grasping mine takes our body, mind, and other external things and views them as mine while holding that mine to exist inherently. We think, “These are *my* eyes. This is *my* house. These emotions are *mine*.”

In the above examples, grasping inherent existence is involved, whereas casually clarifying ownership—for example, saying “Is this pen yours or mine?”—does not involve self-grasping.

Not all grasping of a self of persons is the view of a personal identity. The view of a personal identity refers just to grasping one’s own self, whereas grasping a self of persons applies to grasping any person as inherently existent. When we grasp Tashi, Sally, and Fluffy the cat as inherently existent, this is self-grasping of persons but not the view of a personal identity.

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## REFLECTION

Observe what happens when you superimpose inherently existent “my” or “mine” on someone or something.

1. Recall an object in a store before you bought it—for example, a car on the showroom floor. If it were damaged, would you be disturbed?
2. What would your reaction be if it were damaged after you purchased it, once it became “mine”? You park your new car and do an errand. When you return, it has a big dent in the side.
3. Consider your expectations when you think of *my* child (spouse, parent, or sibling). Do you hold those same expectations and judgments for another person’s child? They are both children. Why does the term “my” change your feelings and judgments so drastically?

4. What would happen if you left the designation “my” aside and just looked at people and things without imputing ownership?
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## *Self of Phenomena*

When inherent existence is superimposed or projected onto persons, it is called “self of persons”; when it is superimposed onto the psychophysical aggregates and other phenomena, it is called “self of phenomena.” The terms “self-grasping of persons,” “self-grasping of phenomena,” “selflessness of persons,” and “selflessness of phenomena” are given accordingly.

Non-Buddhist tenet systems generally do not talk about the selflessness of phenomena. Vaibhāṣikas and Sautrāntikas speak of the selflessness of persons, but not the selflessness of phenomena. Yogācārins and the Svātantrika Mādhyamikas speak of both, but they assert that realizing the selflessness of persons is sufficient to attain liberation, whereas realizing both the selflessness of persons and of phenomena is necessary to attain full awakening. How they define the self and selflessness of phenomena differs from the Prāsaṅgikas. Understanding their assertions helps us get at the more subtle Prāsaṅgika view.

To review, Yogācārins speak of four approaches to grasping a self of phenomena: (1) grasping the subject and object of a perception to be different substantial entities, (2) grasping phenomena to exist by their own characteristics as the referents of names and terms, (3) grasping external objects, and (4) grasping phenomena to exist by their own characteristics as the basis adhered to by thoughts. All four come to the same point, although they have different approaches. Realizing the absence of all four is realizing the selflessness of phenomena according to the Yogācārins. Their ideas will be explained in more depth in a future volume.

Svātantrikas speak about grasping phenomena as truly existent, ultimately existent, or existent as its own reality. To them, these three mean a phenomenon exists exclusively as self-instituting without being posited by the force of appearing to a nondefective consciousness. “Nondefective consciousness” means a consciousness that is not erroneous with respect to its engaged object. For example, it does not have superficial causes of error, such as faulty sense faculties, being in a moving vehicle, or holding wrong views. Svātantrikas say that

phenomena exist inherently and are posited by the force of appearing to a nondefective awareness, but ignorance grasps them as existing without being designated by a nondefective awareness.

Svāntarikas negate true existence and ultimate existence—as their school explains the meaning of these terms—but they hold that phenomena are indeed established by way of their own character and exist inherently on the conventional level. For Prāsaṅgikas, “true existence,” “inherent existence,” “existence from its own side,” “ultimate existence,” “substantial existence,” and so forth are synonyms. However, these terms have different meanings according to the lower tenet systems, so when discussing the assertions of each system, it is necessary to clarify the meaning of the terms we use.

All of the above terms refer to the object of negation of the Prāsaṅgikas. For them, inherent existence is something that can set itself up and exists without being merely designated by name and concept. For example, when we look at a building, it seems to exist objectively, independent of our mind. When we think of the CEO of a company or the president of a country, they seem to have some inherent power or quality that makes them that. We forget that “CEO” or “president” is merely a name that has been temporarily designated to a person as a result of societal consensus.

Prāsaṅgikas say that all phenomena exist by the force of mind—by being merely designated by mind in dependence on a basis of designation. However, things appear to the six consciousnesses to exist by their own nature, to have their own inherent essence or true reality. Innate ignorance assents to these false appearances and grasps phenomena to exist inherently as they appear.

All four Buddhist tenet systems have their source in Buddha’s word, although they differ in which sūtras they consider definitive and interpretable. A skillful teacher, the Buddha set forth different views of emptiness according to the capabilities of his audience in order to lead us gradually to the subtlest and most complete view. In the next volume, we will explore the ways he sets forth for refuting the various objects of negation.

## *The Heart Sūtra*

The *Heart Sūtra* concisely expresses the meaning of all the Perfection of Wisdom sūtras in its four famous and profound phrases: “Form is empty. Emptiness is form. Emptiness is not other than form. Form is not other than emptiness.” The meaning of these four phrases illustrates the noncontradictory nature of emptiness and dependent arising. The key to understand this is to avoid negating too much or too little in the meditation on emptiness.

The sūtra uses form as an example; its fourfold approach applies to the other aggregates—feelings (discriminations, miscellaneous factors, and consciousnesses) are empty. Emptiness is feelings (and so forth). Emptiness is not other than feelings (and so forth). Feelings (and so forth) are not other than emptiness. These four phrases concern all impermanent phenomena, which together comprise the five aggregates. They can also be applied to permanent phenomena, thereby including all existents.

Observing what is negated and what is affirmed in this passage from the *Heart Sūtra* will give us a better idea of what is and isn't the object of negation. While it is easy to say that inherent existence is negated and the conventional world of dependent arising is affirmed, we ordinary beings are not skilled in actually doing this.

### *Form Is Empty*

Although some translators render this first phrase as “form is emptiness,” this is incorrect. Form is not emptiness because form is a conventional truth and emptiness is an ultimate truth, and what is one truth cannot be the other. Emptiness is an attribute of form; it is form's ultimate nature. Said in another way, form's emptiness is form's lack of inherent existence.

“Form is empty.” When we perceive form, it appears as if form itself constitutes its own ultimate reality. If the form we perceive is its ultimate reality—if form were inherently existent—then when we subject form to critical analysis that seeks its true or ultimate reality, form should be able to withstand that analysis. The reasoning analyzing the ultimate should be able to identify something that definitely is form. However, this is not the case. Form is unfindable through such an analytic process. This doesn't mean form doesn't exist. Rather, it is empty of the inherent existence that our ignorance erroneously projected on it. Form does not exist in its own right; it doesn't exist under its own

power, independent of other factors. This emptiness of inherent existence of form is the ultimate nature of form.

Form arises due to the assembly of its causes and conditions. Because form is dependent on other factors, it does not exist independently. Dependent and independent existence are mutually exclusive, and because independent existence is synonymous with inherent existence, form is empty of inherent existence. It has never and will never exist inherently because its very nature is dependent.

### *Emptiness Is Form*

What then is form? The *Heart Sūtra* says, “Emptiness is form.” This doesn’t literally mean emptiness is form; it indicates that what we call “form” is a dependent arising and is utterly empty of independent existence. Because it arises dependent on other factors, it lacks inherent existence. Its emptiness of inherent existence allows for form to arise dependent on other factors that are not it. A form arises from a multiplicity of causes and conditions, and in turn it becomes a cause or condition for other things. A form is part of a vast interconnected array of interdependent functioning things that exist within emptiness, within their being empty of true existence.

When the sūtra says “form is empty; emptiness is form,” the meaning is “emptiness, therefore form; form, therefore emptiness.” In other words, because form is empty, the only way it can exist is dependently. It is not possible for something that is not empty to exist. And because form’s emptiness exists, form exists. Form and form’s emptiness depend on each other. They are mutually dependent.

The *Kāśyapa Chapter Sūtra* from the *Heap of Jewels Sūtra* (*Ratnakūṭa Sūtra*) lists many ways in which something can be empty. One is “other-emptiness,” as in the temple being empty of monastics. The temple being empty of monastics is other-emptiness because the basis of emptiness, the temple, is empty of some other thing, the monastics. But the manner of being empty in “form is empty” is self-emptiness—empty of self-nature. Emptiness of self-nature does not mean form is devoid of form. Form is form, and the reality of form being form is not rejected. Rather, form is devoid of an inherent nature; it is empty of being an inherently existent form. Emptiness does not imply nonexistence. Rather, the fact

that things are empty of inherent existence allows for them to arise dependent on causes and conditions. Emptiness and dependent arising are compatible.

We may think that form has some sort of objective existence or existence from its own side and that it is now being made empty of objective existence. In the *Perfection of Wisdom Sūtra in 25,000 Lines*, the Buddha states, “Form is not made empty by emptiness. Form itself is empty.” In the chapter “Questions from Upāli” in the *Ratnakūṭa Sūtra*, the Buddha clearly states that causes are not made empty by emptiness, nor are they being negated by emptiness. Rather, causes themselves are empty. That means that there is no objectified basis that is the referent of the term “form” or “cause.” All phenomena are totally devoid of any inherent reality in and of themselves.

“Emptiness is form” indicates the conventional existence of form. The expression “the dawning of emptiness as the meaning of dependent arising” is the meaning of “emptiness is form.” That is, the fact that phenomena lack inherent existence indicates that they exist conventionally. Conversely, the expression “the dawning of dependent arising as the meaning of emptiness” is the meaning of “form is empty.”<sup>75</sup> Because phenomena arise dependently, they lack inherent existence.

The conventional reality of form is that it is a dependent arising. It comes into being as a result of causes and conditions. In a dependently arising world, the law of causality is feasible, and cause and effect can be posited. Form’s nature as a dependent arising is possible only because it is empty of inherent existence. “Emptiness is form” tells us that form arises within the emptiness of inherent existence; the ultimate nature of all phenomena, emptiness, is the basis that allows for the form and everything else to exist. The world of diverse objects is an expression or manifestation of emptiness. If emptiness were not phenomena’s ultimate nature—if phenomena existed inherently—they would be frozen in time and unable to arise or function because they would be independent of all other factors, such as causes and conditions. Dependent arising is possible only in a world that is empty of inherent existence, and the emptiness of inherent existence is possible only in a world that exists dependently.

Emptiness is not an absolute reality like Brahmā, God, or a cosmic energy or primal substance that is an underlying reality at the heart of the universe out of which the world of multiplicity arises. Emptiness is not an independent reality



somewhere far away out of which the diversity of phenomena arise. Emptiness is right here, right now. It is our very nature and the nature of everything around us.

From the Madhyamaka viewpoint, emptiness is the absence of the elaboration of inherent existence. It is not an emptiness that is totally devoid of any basis, because emptiness can be understood only in relation to individual phenomena. Emptiness depends on a conventionally existent phenomenon whose ultimate nature it is.

Emptiness is a nonaffirming negation; it is not an affirmative phenomenon that we can find. It is not an independent, absolute reality because it depends on phenomena whose ultimate nature is empty. We can speak only of the emptiness of specific objects; emptiness is not an external, independent, absolute energy.

Since emptiness can only be known in relation to individual phenomena, if an individual thing ceases, its emptiness also ceases. Although that emptiness is not a product of causes and conditions, because the basis upon which it is understood no longer exists, the emptiness of that thing also no longer exists. When the cup breaks into pieces, the emptiness of the cup no longer exists. However, since the pieces exist, the emptiness of the pieces exists.

Depending on the conventional object we choose as the basis of our meditation on emptiness, our meditation may be more or less powerful. When we meditate on emptiness in deity yoga, the basis of our meditation is a pure object—the form of a deity—and we meditate on its emptiness. In Mahāmudrā and Dzogchen, the mind is the basis of meditation, and we focus on its emptiness. Meditating on the emptiness of the mind, the I, or the form of a deity will have a stronger impact on us than meditating on the emptiness of a candle.

### *Emptiness Is Not Other Than Form, and Form Is Not Other Than Emptiness*

All of the Buddha's teachings were given within the framework of the two truths—conventional (veiled) and ultimate. These two sentences indicate the relationship between the two truths. Although understanding the nature of reality in terms of the two truths was common to many systems of thought in ancient India, both Buddhist and non-Buddhist, the subtlest explanation speaks of them not as two separate independent entities, but as two aspects of one phenomenon.

Conventional truths—which include form and the other four aggregates—are the truths of everyday worldly conventions. This is the level of reality that is ascertained by mere appearance to our ordinary consciousnesses. Conventional truths are not established by the reasoning analyzing the ultimate, nor are they in the purview of that wisdom. They constitute the world of multiple and diverse phenomena. Ultimate truths, on the other hand, are those arrived at through a reasoned analysis of the ultimate. When we search for the deeper mode of existence of phenomena, we find their emptiness of inherent existence. This is their suchness (*tattva*), their ultimate mode of existence, the ultimate truth.

“Emptiness is not other than form” indicates that the emptiness of form is form’s ultimate nature. It is not separate and unrelated to form. Emptiness does not exist apart from the individual objects that are empty. Emptiness cannot be independent from the basis on which it is ascertained.

Similarly, “form is not other than emptiness” means that form and other veiled truths exist within the reality of emptiness and are in the nature of emptiness. Form—and veiled truths in general—and its emptiness cannot be separated: if one exists, so does the other; if one ceases, so does the other. The two truths are inseparable. They are one nature but nominally different.

We must contemplate the emptiness of feelings and so forth as well as the emptiness of form. When the *Heart Sūtra* says “perfectly looking at the emptiness of inherent existence of the five aggregates also,” the word “also” indicates the person who is designated in dependence on the five aggregates. That person—I, me—is also empty of inherent existence. In your practice, it is helpful to think, “I am empty; emptiness is me. Emptiness is not other than me; I am not other than emptiness.” Such meditation will have a powerful effect on your mind.

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## REFLECTION

1. Think of a form such as your body. It feels very solid, as if it were independent of causes and conditions and existed objectively from its own side.
2. Does your body exist in the way it appears? Is it independent of causes such as the sperm and egg of your parents?
3. Focus on the thought: My body exists only because the causes of it existed. If those causes didn’t exist, my body wouldn’t exist. When the causes for each moment of the body cease, a

new moment of the body will arise; then it too will cease.

4. This understanding contradicts the feeling that the body is an independent entity that will always be there. Your body is impermanent and empty of inherent existence.

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The tradition coming from the Nyingma master Mipham (1846–1912) presents these four lines in the *Heart Sūtra* as “the four approaches to understanding emptiness.” Here the four lines are related to the refutation of the four alternatives:

*Form is empty* indicates that all phenomena are empty of inherent existence. This counteracts the extreme of existence (the extreme of absolutism), which holds that phenomena are their own ultimate reality (that they exist inherently).

*Emptiness is form* indicates that within emptiness, form and other dependent arisings appear. While phenomena are empty, they also exist dependently; emptiness must be understood in terms of dependent arising. This counteracts the extreme of nonexistence (the extreme of nihilism).

*Emptiness is not other than form* indicates the union of dependent arising and emptiness, the union of conventional appearances and their emptiness. Far from being unrelated, emptiness and dependently arising phenomena exist in relation to each other. This annuls the extremes of both existence and nonexistence, both absolutism and nihilism.

*Form is not other than emptiness* shows that dependent arising and emptiness—appearances and emptiness—are compatible and complementary. This line presents the total elimination of all conceptual elaborations and enables us to transcend the extreme of neither-existence-nor-nonexistence.

The Sakya Lamdre (Path and Fruition) tradition has a similar fourfold approach to emptiness: appearances are established as empty; emptiness is dependent arising; emptiness and appearance are a unity; this union of emptiness and appearance is beyond expression or language.

Usually the wisdom realizing emptiness is presented as the antidote to both grasping inherent existence and the extreme of absolutism, and the understanding of dependent arising as the counterforce to both total nonexistence and the extreme of nihilism. However, if our understandings of emptiness and dependent arising have correctly penetrated the depths, these two understandings will work in the reverse order as well. Understanding emptiness will help us transcend the

extreme of nihilism. The fact that phenomena are empty indicates that they are not totally nonexistent; they are empty of just inherent existence. Understanding the appearances of dependently arisen phenomena enables us to transcend the extreme of absolutism; because phenomena exist dependently, they cannot exist inherently. This reverse way of opposing the two extremes is profound and is unique to the Prāsaṅgika approach.



## 9 | The Middle Way View

AS A SKILLFUL TEACHER, the Buddha taught people according to their varying aptitudes and dispositions in order to lead them to the correct realization of the ultimate nature. These teachings evolved to become the philosophical tenet schools in ancient India. Some key points the proponents of these systems discussed were the object of negation and the view of selflessness. We will begin this chapter with a review and overview of the positions of the various Buddhist philosophical schools on these and other topics and then show the Madhyamakas' and, within that, the Prāsaṅgikas' unique assertions of the Middle Way.

For some readers, understanding the meaning of so many terms may initially be daunting. But just as a young science student gradually becomes familiar with scientific terms until they seem very natural to him, so too will you become familiar with these philosophical terms.

### *Settling the Object of Negation and the View of Selflessness*

Meditation on emptiness involves ensuring that the apprehended object is a nonaffirming negative that is the negation of inherent existence. The lower Buddhist tenet systems meditate on the selflessness that is the refutation of a self-sufficient substantially existent person. Although nothing else may be affirmed after negating a self-sufficient substantially existent person, that is not the deepest object of negation. It is like a person who wants to have a clean floor thinking “there are no pebbles on the floor” while neglecting to see the dirt there.

Among the various philosophical systems, different assertions exist regarding the observed and conceived objects of the self-grasping of persons. The observed object—the conventional I—is the basis on which self-grasping of persons superimposes a false way of existence and therefore misapprehends the I. The conceived object is a false person that self-grasping apprehends instead. The tenet

systems also have different definitions of the self-grasping of persons and the self-grasping of phenomena, as well as what constitutes obscurations to be abandoned to attain liberation and awakening.

Sammitīya Vaibhāṣikas say the observed object of the self-grasping of persons is all five aggregates, Yogācārins state it is the foundation consciousness, and Sautrāntikas and Svātantrika Mādhyamikas say it is the mental consciousness. According to Prāsaṅgikas, it is the mere I—the I that exists by being merely designated.

Most systems say the conceived object of the view of a personal identity and of the innate self-grasping of persons is a self-sufficient substantially existent self. Prāsaṅgikas explain that that is the coarse object of negation, whereas an inherently existent self is the actual conceived object to be negated.

Vaibhāṣikas and Sautrāntikas do not speak of self-grasping of phenomena. Yogācārins present four approaches related to self-grasping of phenomena: (1) grasping the subject and object of a perception to be different substantial entities, (2) grasping phenomena to exist by their own characteristics as the referents of names and terms, (3) grasping external objects, and (4) grasping phenomena to exist by their own characteristics as the basis adhered to by thoughts. They accordingly assert four formulations of the selflessnesses of phenomena: (1) the absence of duality of subject and object, (2) the absence of phenomena existing by their own characteristics as referents of names and terms, (3) the absence of external existence, and (4) the absence of phenomena as existing by their own characteristics as the basis adhered to by thoughts.

Svātantrika Mādhyamikas say the self-grasping of phenomena grasps phenomena as ultimately existent. For them ultimate existence and inherent existence are different, and they negate inherent existence only on the ultimate level. Also, the lack of ultimate or true existence of persons for Svātantrika is considered a selflessness of phenomena, not of persons. This is because, unlike the Prāsaṅgikas, Svātantrikas differentiate the self of persons and the self of phenomena not so much by the basis of negation—the person or other phenomena—but by the object of negation. The self of persons is a self-sufficient substantially existent person, whereas the self of phenomena is the ultimate existence and true existence of all phenomena, including persons. Prāsaṅgika Mādhyamikas, on the other hand, differentiate the selflessness of persons and the selflessness of phenomena in terms of the basis—the person or phenomena other

than the person. They assert that ultimate existence and inherent existence are synonymous and say the object of negation for both selflessnesses is ultimate, true, and inherent existence.

These two branches of Madhyamaka also differ in their assertions of the selflessness of phenomena: the Svātantrikas state it is their absence of ultimate existence, whereas Prāsaṅgikas propound a selflessness of persons and phenomena that are the absence of inherent existence of persons and phenomena, respectively. In chapter 5, see the chart of the object of negation—the self refuted on persons and phenomena by each tenet system. Their coarse and subtle selflessnesses of persons and phenomena are the nonexistence of their corresponding object of negation.

Below is a chart regarding what each system asserts as coarse and subtle afflictive and cognitive obscurations. All Buddhist systems agree that overcoming afflictive obscurations is necessary to attain liberation, and all Mahāyāna tenet systems agree that eradicating cognitive obscurations brings full awakening. However, they differ on what they assert the afflictive and cognitive obscurations to be. This depends on how they define selflessness, which in turn accords with their varying assertions regarding the object of negation in the meditation on selflessness. As you explore the assertions of the tenet systems concerning many topics, you will see how their assertions regarding the object of negation influence their other assertions to a great extent.

All schools except Prāsaṅgika say that to attain liberation, realizing only the selflessness of persons—which for them is the absence of a self-sufficient substantially existent person—is necessary. Yogācārins and Svātantrikas assert that to attain full awakening, realizing the selflessness of phenomena as they define it is also necessary. Prāsaṅgikas disagree, proclaiming that the attainments of liberation and full awakening both entail realizing the selflessness of persons and of phenomena, which are the absence of inherent existence. For them, the two self-graspings do not differ in terms of how they grasp the person or phenomena, because both grasp inherent existence.

## AFFLICTIVE AND COGNITIVE OBSCURATIONS



	COARSE AFFLICTIVE OBSCURATIONS	SUBTLE AFFLICTIVE OBSCURATIONS	COARSE COGNITIVE OBSCURATIONS	SUBTLE COGNITIVE OBSCURATIONS
Vaibhāṣikas and Sautrāntikas	Conception of a permanent, unitary, independent self	Grasping a self-sufficient substantially existent person, afflictions it produces, and their seeds	none	none
Yogācārin	Conception of a permanent, unitary, independent self	Grasping a self-sufficient substantially existent person, afflictions it produces, and their seeds	none	Grasping self of phenomena and its latencies (grasping phenomena to exist by their own characteristics as the referents for names; grasping phenomena to exist by their own characteristics as the basis adhered to by thoughts; grasping subject and object as different entities; grasping external existence)
Yogācāra-Svātantrika Mādhyamikas	Conception of a permanent, unitary, independent self	Grasping a self-sufficient substantially existent person, afflictions it produces, and their seeds	Grasping subject and object as different entities, grasping external objects	Grasping self of phenomena as truly existent and its latencies

Sautrāntika-Svātantrika Mādhyamikas	Conception of a permanent, unitary, independent self	Grasping a self-sufficient substantially existent person, afflictions it produces, and their seeds	none	Grasping phenomena as truly existent and its latencies
Prāsaṅgika-Mādhyamikas	Grasping a self-sufficient substantially existent person, afflictions it produces, and their seeds	Grasping inherent existence of persons and other phenomena, afflictions it produces, and their seeds	none	Latencies of ignorance, subtle dualistic appearance, latencies for grasping the two truths as different entities

Vaibhāṣikas and Sautrāntikas do not speak of cognitive obscurations but differentiate a buddha's awakening from that of an arhat by saying that in addition to afflictive ignorance, buddhas also overcome nonafflictive ignorance. Afflictive ignorance mainly impedes liberation and consists of grasping a self-sufficient substantially existent person; the three poisonous minds of confusion, attachment, and anger; and their seeds. Nonafflictive ignorance mainly impedes the attainment of the all-knowing of a buddha. This ignorance has four aspects: the ignorance of the profound and subtle qualities of a buddha; ignorance due to the object being far away; ignorance due to distant time; and ignorance due to the object's nature, such as the result of a specific karma that a certain individual has created.

How do we determine which tenet system has the most profound and accurate view? Reasoning is the essential key. We must determine which views hold up when scrutinized with logic and which ones crumble. Something "feeling right" is not sufficient, because to our ignorance, grasping inherent existence feels right! Referring to the sūtras as well as the treatises and commentaries by the great Indian and Tibetan scholar-adepts is extremely helpful, but solely banking on them is not sufficient. We must apply reasoning as the true test of their accuracy. We must be able to negate what does not exist and at the same time establish what does exist.

## *Correctly Identifying the Object of Negation to Avoid the Two Extremes*

Discerning the subtle and coarse objects of negation is not an easy process. Because we are so used to believing that persons and phenomena exist in the way they appear, we ordinary beings generally don't think that is anything to question. Imagine if you can, people born wearing sunglasses: they would be so used to seeing everything as dark that they wouldn't realize there was anything wrong with their perceptions. Similarly, the cognitive obscurations have covered our minds since beginningless time; we have never cognized anything else but inherent existence, so we naturally believe everything exists objectively— independent of our mind. As a result we attribute all our problems and suffering to other people or to external conditions, and we believe all happiness comes from obtaining whatever external object, person, or circumstance that appears desirable and attractive to us.

From beginningless time, we have endeavored to procure everything that we believe will bring us happiness and fight off everything that threatens or interferes with that happiness. Has this strategy worked? If it had, we would no longer be experiencing saṃsāric duḥkha and would instead experience the bliss of nirvāṇa. But this isn't the case. Now is the time to try a different strategy: to examine our mind and see the way it misapprehends and misconceives how the self, other people, and things in our environment exist; to refute the objects of our erroneous consciousnesses; to banish all misapprehensions, erroneous grasping, and false appearances; and to establish realistic and beneficial views.

The crucial first step to gain the correct view of the ultimate nature is to accurately identify the subtlest object of negation—the inherent existence that appears to our mind and that we grasp as true. If we do not have a clear idea of what inherent existence would be like if it existed, we will be unable to investigate it and perceive its absence, and the realization of selflessness, the nonaffirming negative that is the negation of inherent existence, will elude us.

Someone who fails to properly identify the subtlest object of negation, inherent existence, will fall to either the extreme of absolutism (also called “the extreme of existence,” “permanence,” or “eternalism”), or to the extreme of nihilism (the extreme of nonexistence or annihilation). Adhering to an absolutist view, some people do not negate enough, and grasping inherent existence will

continue its dreadful antics in their lives. Adhering to a nihilistic view, other people negate too much and lose faith in the functioning of cause and effect. Some go so far as to insist that nothing exists. Holding such a view, they give themselves permission to ignore ethical conduct, which leads to unfortunate rebirths and continued wandering in saṃsāra in addition to sufferings in this very lifetime.

By negating too much, those who fall to the extreme of nihilism rule out inherent existence plus some more. Because they have not properly identified the object of negation, they mistakenly negate dependently arisen phenomena in addition to whatever they think inherent existence is. By denying the conventional existence and functioning of karma and its results, they abandon the basis for good ethical conduct. This is much more harmful than falling to the absolutist extreme because it leads its proponents to rationalize their destructive actions and the degeneration of their ethical conduct. Someone with an absolutist view may still grasp karma and its effects as inherently existent, but at least they will respect the fact that their actions have an ethical dimension that brings the results of happiness and suffering and will try to live ethically.

Someone who holds an absolutist view, even if they think they have the correct view, has also not properly identified the object of negation. Instead of negating inherent existence, they leave it untouched and refute something else. As a result, their saṃsāra continues on unobstructed.

Although absolutism and nihilism are posited as two opposite extremes, they are in fact based on similar premises. Proponents of both extremes believe that if something exists, it must exist inherently, and if something is empty of inherent existence, it must not exist at all. Those falling to the extreme of absolutism dare not negate inherent existence because they fear that it would mean nothing at all exists. Thus they assert inherent existence. Those falling to the extreme of nihilism think that they have negated inherent existence although they have not. Unable to accept dependent arising as complementary to emptiness, they deny dependent arising and therefore state nothing exists.

Although almost every society contains people who fall to either of the two extremes, at the time of Nāgārjuna in the second century, many Indian philosophers tended toward absolutism. Some of them negated something that had no relation to the actual cause of duḥkha and in its place asserted a path that does not challenge self-grasping ignorance at all. Others accepted inherent

existence, even though they refuted something coarser such as a permanent, unitary, independent self or a self-sufficient substantially existent person. To lead these people on the correct path, Nāgārjuna's texts focused on refuting the absolutist views of inherent existence.

Several centuries later, many Tibetan philosophers believed that they held the Madhyamaka view, but these so-called Mādhyamikas had in fact adopted nihilistic views. Some said that the ultimate truth could not be perceived and was not a knowable object; others thought that conventional truths did not exist but were only spoken about to help others. For this reason, the teachings of Rendawa, Tsongkhapa, and others emphasized the refutation of nihilism as well as of absolutism and established the Middle Way. They rejected both total nonexistence and inherent existence. It is interesting to note, however, that both nihilists and absolutists make the same mistake of thinking that if things lack inherent existence, they don't exist at all and that if they exist, they must inherently exist. This demonstrates that both do not correctly identify the object of negation.

When discussing these views, let's remember that we are not simply refuting other people's wrong conceptions; we must examine our own mind and ferret out our own erroneous views and refute them. If we focus on pointing out the flaws of others' views without recognizing the errors in our own, we will remain in saṃsāra, far from liberation and full awakening.

### *Confusing Existence with Inherent Existence and Emptiness with Nonexistence*

Both so-called Mādhyamikas, who negate too much, and absolutists, who do not negate enough, do not see dependent arising and emptiness as complementary. Confusing existence with inherent existence and confusing emptiness with total nonexistence, they fall to the two extremes of absolutism and nihilism. They think that if something is empty of inherent existence, it is totally nonexistent, and if it exists, it must inherently exist. As a result, neither so-called Mādhyamikas nor absolutists can establish cause and effect within emptiness. Nor can they see cause and effect as like illusions because they do not understand

that things mistakenly appear inherently existent. Instead they believe that if things appear to inherently exist, they must inherently exist.

People deal with this quandary in different ways. Nihilists deny the existence of dependently arisen veiled truths, whereas absolutists abandon the emptiness of inherent existence, assert something else as the ultimate truth, and fall to the extreme of absolutism. Until people relinquish the tenet systems that have such views, they will continue to confuse existence with inherent existence and emptiness with total nonexistence.

Dependent arising counteracts the extreme of nihilism, for although things are empty, they still exist dependently. Emptiness opposes the extreme of absolutism because, being empty, phenomena do not inherently exist. In the Prāsaṅgika system, it works the other way around too: dependent arising counteracts the extreme of absolutism and emptiness counteracts the extreme of nihilism. This is explained in more detail in the next volume of the *Library of Wisdom and Compassion*. Phenomena exist only nominally, by being merely designated by term and concept.

Saying that functioning things are unreal does not mean that they lack the ability to perform functions. “Unreal” means they lack inherent existence. They are unreal in the sense that a reflection of a face in a mirror is unreal: it appears to exist in one way but exists in another. A reflection appears to be a real face but is empty of a face.<sup>76</sup> In spite of its being false, a reflection still functions: by perceiving it, we wash our face. Similarly, although phenomena falsely appear as inherently existent, they arise from causes and conditions and perform their specific functions.

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## REFLECTION

1. How does a tenet school's assertion regarding the object of negation influence how they define the afflictive obscurations and the cognitive obscurations?
  2. In what ways are the absolutists and nihilists similar?
  3. What is happening in someone's mind when they confuse existence with inherent existence? When they confuse emptiness with nonexistence?
-

## *Madhyamaka's Unique Quality*

Madhyamaka means Middle Way. This Middle Way view that eschews both absolutism and nihilism is difficult to detect. Tsongkhapa says in the *Middle Exposition of the Gradual Path* (FEW 80):

The difficult point is that one must, from the depths, be able to induce ascertainment with respect to the negation of an inherent nature, without residue—establishment by way of [the object's] own nature—and be able to posit those very persons and so forth lacking inherent existence as the accumulators of actions, experiencers of effects, and so forth. A composite of these two hardly occurs. Hence the Madhyamaka view is very difficult to find.

Both the so-called Mādhyamikas and the essentialists fail to see the Mādhyamikas' unique quality: that being empty and arising dependently are noncontradictory and mutually supportive.

Buddhadharma speaks of the basis, path, and result. The basis is what we begin with; in this context it is the two truths, which encompass all existents. The paths are the realizations cultivated in our minds. The result is nirvāṇa. For Mahāyāna practitioners the result is full awakening, the state of having the two buddha bodies: the truth body (*dharmakāya*) and the form body (*rūpakāya*).

Attaining the two buddha bodies depends on practicing a path of inseparable method and wisdom. Method refers to the collection of merit by practicing the first five perfections. Method practices involve working with conventional truths, such as sentient beings and virtuous actions. The method aspect leads primarily, but not exclusively, to attainment of the form body. Wisdom refers primarily to the collection of wisdom, specifically the wisdom realizing emptiness. Wisdom practices involve realization of the ultimate truth—the way things actually are. The collection of wisdom leads primarily to a buddha's truth body.

Correct understanding of conventional truths involves ascertaining the functionality of cause and effect. This entails becoming convinced from the depths of our hearts, not just intellectually, that desired effects—from fortunate rebirths to awakening—come from virtuous causes, and undesired effects—from bad rebirths to obstacles on the path—arise from destructive causes.

Correct understanding of ultimate truths stems from studying the definitive texts and ascertaining through reasoning and analysis that each and every phenomenon lacks even the tiniest bit of inherent existence. This conviction must be profound, not simply words that we mouth.

In addition, understanding that the two truths are noncontradictory and mutually supportive is an essential aspect of the Middle Way view. Because phenomena arise dependently and exist only nominally, they do not exist under their own power or from their own side. They are empty of inherent existence. Being empty of inherent existence, they arise dependent on other factors—causes and conditions, parts, and the mind that conceives and names them.

Only the Madhyamaka view can fully explain the two truths in a complementary manner. Those who negate too much or too little confuse inherent existence with existence, and confuse non-inherent existence with total nonexistence. Therefore they mistakenly believe that if phenomena exist, they must exist inherently, otherwise they would not exist at all; and if phenomena lacked inherent existence, they would be totally nonexistent. For someone who has realized the Middle Way view, however, emptiness dawns as the meaning of dependent arising, and dependent arising dawns as the meaning of emptiness. Knowing this, they appreciate the Buddhadharmā and respect the Buddha as the teacher of such a marvelous doctrine. Nāgārjuna concludes the *Refutation of Objections* by saying (VV 71–72):

For those to whom emptiness is possible,  
everything is possible.

For those to whom emptiness is not possible,  
nothing is possible.

I bow down to the Buddha,  
the unequaled, supreme teacher,  
who taught that emptiness and dependent arising  
hold a single meaning in the Middle Way.

Mādhyamikas are unique in being able to accept the suitability of saṃsāra and nirvāṇa, arising and cessation, bondage and release, and so forth within their being empty of inherent existence. In fact, they say that if these things were not



empty of inherent existence, they could not exist or function at all. Nāgārjuna affirms (MMK 36):

Those who deny emptiness,  
which is dependent arising,  
undermine all  
mundane conventions.

Someone who denies that phenomena are empty also disavows dependent arising, because emptiness and dependent arising are one nature. They are complementary and support each other. By undermining dependent arising, that person also rejects all dependently arisen worldly conventions, such as saying “Put this on the table” or “Who called?”

A person who denigrates emptiness and seeks to establish inherent existence runs into the difficulty of how to establish cause and effect, and the triad of agent, object, and action. If these existed inherently, none of them could function because inherently existent things don't rely on other factors: effects cannot arise from their causes without depending on them; an agent couldn't commit an action with an object without the three depending on one another.

Furthermore, if phenomena weren't empty and therefore weren't dependent, then sentient beings could not be born or die because birth and death depend on causes, or once born they would never die because there would be no cause of death.

Things are produced in dependence on concordant causes—causes that have the potential to produce those results. They are not produced in a confused manner by unrelated causes or by no cause at all. An inherently existent cause cannot produce a result; it needs conditions for the result to come forth. A seed alone cannot give rise to a sprout; it must depend on water, fertilizer, and the correct temperature. If it existed as a self-enclosed entity and had its own inherent essence, it could never produce a sprout, even if the other three conditions were present. These are the kind of logical conundrums that come about if we say that dependently arisen phenomena are not empty.

If things existed inherently, from their own side and under their own power, they would have an essence that was findable under analysis. After searching for this essence by examining all of the object's parts, we would be able to identify it.

For example, if we looked through all the parts of a car to find the real car, we would find something that was the essence of the car. But whether the parts of the car are piled in a disorderly heap or arranged to form the shape of the car, we still could not identify one part or the collection of parts to be the essence of the car. And even if we could, such an independent object could not be influenced by other factors, such as their causes and conditions, and therefore could not function or change. In short, for something to exist and function it must depend on other factors, which means it must lack an independent essence.

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## REFLECTION

1. People often worry about the economy, but what is the economy? Can you identify one thing that is the real economy or the essence of what the economy really is?
  2. The economy has many factors: banks, human beings, the stock market, individuals' spending habits, interest rates, production of goods, supply and demand, governmental rules, international trade, and so on. It is influenced by a multitude of conditions, such as viruses, wars, natural disasters, climate change, politics, and so on.
  3. None of those factors alone are the real economy, and if they were a collection of unrelated parts, they wouldn't be the economy.
  4. In addition, each aspect of the economy could not function unless the majority of them were present and functioned together. All these aspects depend on one another.
  5. Can the economy be changed? Who invented it?
- 

By seeing that dependence and emptiness come to the same point, we avoid the extremes of absolutism and nihilism as well as the extremes of permanence and annihilation and the extremes of real and unreal. Here, *permanence* means a cause continues to exist in its effect, and *annihilation* means that the continuity of the cause is completely severed when it ceases. People holding the view of permanence say that each person has a permanent soul that is not produced and does not cease. It goes from one life to the next without changing. Those holding the view of annihilation fear that at the time of death, the continuity of the person is destroyed: the person ceases to exist and becomes nothingness. The argument for the beliefs of permanence and annihilation is this: If the I existed

inherently, it would be independent of causes and conditions and would therefore be permanent. In that case, we should be able to see the I before it was produced and after it ceased. Since this is not the case and such a self cannot be found, the I would become nonexistent at death.

Another set of extremes is thinking that things either have a real essence and exist with their own independent nature or that they lack a real essence and are therefore unable to perform functions. Understanding the inseparability of dependent arising and emptiness negates these two extremes, because things exist and perform functions precisely because they lack an independent nature of their own. This is the beauty of the Madhyamaka system.

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## REFLECTION

1. Observe your present mood. Does it feel very solid and real? Try to identify exactly what it is.
  2. Did it arise without a cause or were there events, memories, or other thoughts that caused it?
  3. Is that mood permanent and unchanging? Is it exactly the same as when you began this reflection?
  4. Does it have its own immutable essence, or is it like a cloud that forms and then dissolves?
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## *Samsāra and Nirvāṇa Are Empty and Dependent*

Let's return to the opening verses of chapter 24 of Nāgārjuna's *Treatise on the Middle Way*, which we discussed in the first chapter. This begins with Buddhist essentialists raising an objection to Nāgārjuna's teachings, particularly his principal point that no phenomenon exists inherently or by its own characteristics (*svalakṣaṇa*). The essentialists give a lengthy challenge: If nothing has its own specific characteristics, then nothing has any reality of its own. In that case, making distinctions between specific characteristics that are unique to each object and general characteristics that are shared by several objects would be impossible because there would be no basis for that distinction. When speaking

of characteristics, we must assume an entity, a thing that possesses these characteristics. If nothing has inherent existence, there would be no entity that had any of these characteristics. In that case, we wouldn't be able to account for any functions, such as the arising and ceasing of functioning things. The essentialists continue by presenting a lengthy argument that begins with saying that if arising and disintegration are not tenable, then the existence of the four truths, the Three Jewels, and all worldly conventions are undermined.

Nāgārjuna begins his rebuttal to this serious objection by saying that the essentialists do not understand emptiness, its purpose, and its meaning. The purpose of teaching emptiness is to eliminate the afflictions. This is done by undermining any objectified basis that could serve as a basis for grasping—that is, there is no inherent essence possible in phenomena that would enable grasping them as existing by their own characteristics. In that case, there is nothing in phenomena to be grasped as inherently attractive or repugnant. When one sees this reality, there is no longer a support for attachment, anger, or other afflictions to arise.

Within the fact that all phenomena of saṃsāra and nirvāṇa are empty of inherent existence, their existence and functioning can still be established. Duḥkha arises dependent on the assembly of specific causes and conditions. Because dependent arising exists, production from causes and conditions exist, and therefore duḥkha can arise. If dependent arising did not exist, duḥkha would be independent of causes and conditions and, being permanent, it could neither arise nor cease. In that case we would never get a cold even if we were surrounded by people coughing and sneezing, or if we had a cold, we could never recover. However, as a dependently created phenomenon, a cold, like all duḥkha, does not exist under its own power and is empty of inherent existence. Thus when the causes for duḥkha cease, duḥkha also ceases.

Because duḥkha exists, its causes exist, its cessation exists, and the paths leading to those extinguishments of duḥkha exist. Thus the four truths are established. Since the four truths exist, knowing true duḥkha, eliminating true origins, actualizing true cessations, and cultivating true paths also exist. Because these exist, the fruits of the path exist. These fruits, which are successive levels of realization, are stream-enterer, once-returner, nonreturner, and arhat.<sup>77</sup> Since these exist, practitioners who have attained them (abiders) exist, as do people

who are approaching those attainments (approachers). These approachers and abiders are part of the Saṅgha. Thus the Saṅgha Jewel exists.

Since the four truths exist, the Buddha's doctrine—the Dharma Jewel, which consists of true cessations and true paths—exists. Since the Saṅgha Jewel and the Dharma Jewel exist, the Buddha who has completed the path also exists. Thus the Three Jewels exist as reliable objects of refuge for those wandering in saṃsāra.

Reflecting deeply on the above argument will lead us to a profound understanding of the Buddhadharma based on the reasoning that all phenomena lack inherent existence and exist dependently. We can then establish the existence of virtuous and nonvirtuous actions and their results—happiness and misery, respectively. All phenomena of the thoroughly afflictive class (those having to do with saṃsāra) and all phenomena of the very pure class (those leading to or being nirvāṇa) can be established. These 108 groups of afflictive phenomena and pure phenomena<sup>78</sup> are either conventional truths or ultimate truths. Thus the two truths exist. In this way, we see that things being empty is what allows for them to exist conventionally and to function. Such understanding makes our refuge in the Three Jewels irrefutable and increases our joyous effort in practicing the Dharma.

In Nāgārjuna's homage in the *Treatise on the Middle Way*, he states that dependent arisings are empty of inherent existence and lack eight characteristics: In terms of characteristics, they are without cessation and arising. In terms of time, they are without annihilation and permanence. In terms of mobility, they lack coming and going. In terms of number, they lack being distinct (multiple) and identical (one and the same). Although these eight characteristics exist on the conventional level, they do not inhere in things as their ultimate nature. Phenomena have characteristics conventionally, but they do not exist by their own intrinsic characteristics in terms of their ultimate nature. From the perspective of the direct realization of emptiness, these characteristics do not exist and do not appear to āryas' minds that are single-pointedly and directly perceiving emptiness.

Because things arise in dependence on other factors such as their causes, parts, and the mind that conceives and designates them, they do not exist under their own power and cannot set themselves up. Lacking any independent essence or nature, they are empty of inherent existence. Something that arises dependently cannot exist inherently. If something were inherently existent, it could not be a dependent arising; it could not arise due to causes and conditions,

and therefore it could not function. Since our daily experience confirms that functioning things arise and change into something else, they clearly are dependent and thus lack existence from their own side.

People and things appear to us to have a real essence of their own. A person that we are fond of appears to be a real person, existing right there in front of us. We don't think that they exist simply because the causes for them exist. Rather, they appear to have a real essence, a concrete personality that makes them so loveable. Similarly, someone who has harmed us appears to have their own intrinsic personality that makes them despicable. They, too, don't appear to depend on causes and conditions. We don't consider their family's dynamics, the influence of the society around them, or the karmic seeds that accompanied them into this life.

This accounts for our perplexed reaction when someone acts "out of character." We thought they had a fixed, independent character, and this new behavior or trait doesn't fit with it. We don't think that a person is composed of many different attitudes, views, and emotions, and many of them contradict one another. Societal attitudes toward those who have been convicted of performing harmful deeds demonstrate this. A person is now an inherently existent criminal; in their very nature they are corrupt and irredeemable. We don't want anything to do with them even if we speak about having compassion for them. We don't consider that causes and conditions in their family and society helped to create the person they are now, or if we do admit to damaging influences when they were children, we think they are inherently defective individuals.

Sometimes we even consider ourselves in such a harsh light, especially when we feel shame or guilt. Shame arises based on seeing ourselves as intrinsically damaged and incapable, as if that were our permanent nature and we came into this life that way independent of causes and conditions. Not only do we seem to be inherently existent, so does the shame. We don't consider that this self-image arose due to causes and conditions, that it is a projection of our mind based on ignorance.

By familiarizing ourselves with the doctrine of dependent arising, we can overcome these wrong ideas about ourselves and others. This frees us to understand that each and every living being has the buddha nature and is to be respected and appreciated.

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## REFLECTION

1. In your daily life, observe how you think about yourself and others.
  2. Do you see yourself and others as fluid individuals changing in each moment, or do you see yourself and others as having fixed personalities that are who you really are?
  3. Which view is accurate?
  4. How does your feeling about yourself and others change when you alter your view?
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Phenomena are simultaneously empty of inherent existence and dependently existent. The fact that these two are mutually supportive does not mean things switch back and forth between being empty of inherent existence and existing dependently. A sweater arises dependent on its substantial cause—wool—and conditions such as the people who made it and the implements they used to do so. Being created in this way, the sweater does not exist under its own power; nor does it have an independent nature of “sweaterness”—there isn’t a sweater in the wool, the people, or the implements. The sweater came into being because of the functioning of many things that are not sweaters. Because it arose dependent on other factors, it is empty of having its own independent nature. Because a conditioned phenomenon such as a sweater is empty, it will disintegrate and one day become a rag. If it were not empty, it would be static and nothing could influence it, in which case it could neither arise nor cease, or exist for that matter.

If we were to put this in the form of a syllogism as explained in chapter 6, it would be:<sup>79</sup> Consider the sweater; it is empty of inherent existence because it is a dependent arising. *Sweater* is the subject, *empty of inherent existence* is the predicate, *the sweater being empty of inherent existence* is the thesis to be proven, and *dependent arising* is the reason. The *application of the reason* is: the reason (dependent arising) applies to the subject (sweater)—that is, the sweater is a dependent arising. The *pervasion* is: whatever is the reason (a dependent arising) necessarily is the predicate (empty of inherent existence). That is, whatever is a dependent arising necessarily is empty of inherent existence. The *counter-pervasion* is: Whatever is the opposite of the predicate (empty of inherent existence) necessarily is the opposite of the reason (dependent arising). That is, whatever isn’t empty of inherent existence is necessarily not a dependent arising. Someone must ascertain all three criteria—the application of the reason to the

subject, the pervasion, and the counter-pervasion—to realize that the sweater is empty of inherent existence.

The point—whether we explain it as a syllogism or in ordinary language—is that emptiness and dependent arising are mutually inclusive. Whatever arises dependently is empty; whatever is empty arises dependently. Examples such as a sweater or a football are useful to understand this, but our reflection becomes more interesting when we apply this reasoning to a problem, such as our anger at someone's criticism, and see it as being both empty and arising dependently.

Neither the so-called Mādhyamikas who negate too much nor the essentialists who negate too little can reconcile dependent arising and emptiness, although they deal with this difficulty differently. Those who negate too much sacrifice conventional truths and dependent arising in order to hold their view that emptiness means total nonexistence. Essentialists relinquish emptiness in order to assert the inherent existence of dependent arisings.

The essentialists use the reason of dependent arising to refute emptiness by saying that whatever is a dependent arising must exist inherently; thus, it cannot be empty of inherent existence. Those who negate too much, on the other hand, say that because things are empty, they lack any existence whatsoever; thus dependent arisings do not exist. In this way, both fail to understand the profound view of the Middle Way that the Buddha expounded.

Wrong conceptions, ignorance, and the seeds of ignorance obscure us from understanding emptiness. For example, if we look closely at our body, it is clear that it is composed of filthy substances. We may not like to hear this, but our experience validates this. No one thinks the excrement our body produces is lovely, and no one falls in love with another person's intestines. However, in our ordinary view, we consider our own and others' bodies as desirable and become attached to them. If our mind is so obscured that such disparity between reality and our thoughts exists in a comparatively simple example such as this, needless to say, our mental obscurations make understanding the Middle Way view very difficult.

Avoid being proud, thinking that you are wiser than the ignorant people who negate too little or too much. Many of these people are knowledgeable, have strong faith in the Three Jewels, and practice well. The non-Buddhist teachers as well as Buddhist sages such as Asaṅga, Dharmakīrti, Bhāvaviveka, and so forth



are not fools. If you engaged them in a debate, they could very well convince you of their views!

## *Mādhyamikas Are Not Nihilists*

Having the correct view is essential if we want to meditate on emptiness. Without a proper understanding, we will not negate enough or will negate too much, leaving the Middle Way beyond our reach. Falling to the extreme of nihilism is especially dangerous. Nāgārjuna cautions (MMK 24.11):

By a misperception of emptiness  
a person of little intelligence is destroyed,  
like a snake incorrectly seized  
or like a spell incorrectly cast.

Someone misperceives emptiness and falls to the extreme of nihilism by adopting incorrect reasonings. For example, to identify what a pot actually is, they investigate with ultimate analysis to see if the pot is one with or different from its parts. They see that a pot cannot be found in or among its parts—it is not the bottom, the sides, the inside, or the outside—and they conclude that a pot does not exist. They then investigate: Who am I, the one who analyzes? Here, too, they see that they are not their head, heart, legs, belly, or mind and conclude that they do not exist. Finally they think: If there is no person who analyzes, then no one exists who can determine phenomena as existent or nonexistent. Therefore phenomena are neither existent nor nonexistent.

Another way nihilists negate too much is by discounting reliable cognizers. “Reliable” means nondeceptive and implies that these consciousnesses apprehend their objects correctly. Since phenomena cannot be found under ultimate analysis, nihilists go overboard and think that since a reliable cognizer doesn’t apprehend objects, these things do not exist at all. Their confusion arises because they think reliable cognizers of the ultimate also perceive conventionalities. However, conventional truths are beyond the purview of consciousnesses analyzing the ultimate, so the fact that such consciousnesses don’t perceive them doesn’t mean they don’t exist. That would be like saying because the visual

consciousness didn't hear the music, the music doesn't exist. Music isn't within the purview of the visual consciousness! By erroneously rejecting reliable cognizers of conventional truths, these people deny conventional existence altogether.

The meaning of nihilism varies in different contexts. By negating conventional existence, some people say virtue and nonvirtue do not exist. They may say: "Everything is a dream; it does not exist in reality. Therefore there is no good and no bad." Such a person is nihilistic in the sense that they do not believe that constructive actions lead to happiness and destructive ones to suffering. In this way, they negate the functioning of karma and its effects.

Another type of nihilism is believing that a previously inherently existent person becomes totally nonexistent at the time of death. Nihilists believe an inherently existent person exists while alive, but the continuity of the person ceases altogether after death. With the cessation of the person, all karma ceases and no effects of their actions are experienced.

A third nihilistic view is denying the existence of past and future lives because we cannot see an inherently existent person coming from a previous life to this life or going from this life to the next. The non-Buddhist Cārvākas (Materialists) of ancient India were nihilists in this sense because they believed that only things that could be directly perceived by the physical senses exist. We meet some people with similar nihilistic views nowadays.

Asserting that rebirth does not exist because we cannot see it with our senses does not disprove the existence of rebirth. There is a difference between not perceiving something with our senses and perceiving its nonexistence. As ordinary beings our senses are incapable of perceiving everything that exists: eagles and cats see things we cannot; dogs detect odors we cannot. If our senses or if inference could prove the nonexistence of rebirth, we would have to accept that. However, they cannot. Saying that we do not perceive something does not establish its nonexistence. Many reasons in favor of rebirth exist; we have discussed some of them in previous volumes.<sup>80</sup>

Another nihilistic belief is that because the mind depends on the body, it is not possible to transform the mind because it is always bound by this material human body. The urge for self-preservation and self-protection is hardwired in our brain. We have no choice but to become hostile and aggressive or to flee in fear when in danger. These qualities as well as the self-centered attitude are in our

biological makeup, so the best we can do is mitigate their extreme forms, but freeing ourselves from them completely is neither desirable nor possible. I wonder how someone could prove that the mind is the brain or that the mind is an emergent property of the body.

In the context of discussing the Middle Way, nihilism specifically refers to believing that because phenomena are empty, conventional objects either do not exist or they do not bring the results that they do bring. Based on this view, more nihilistic views proliferate.

Nihilistic views prevent properly positing both conventional and ultimate truths and result in deprecating both. If we do not affix the word “ultimately” when doing ultimate analysis, we may think: A pot does not exist because it is neither one with nor different from its parts. The correct way to investigate is: A pot does not *ultimately* exist because it is neither one with nor different from its parts. Ultimate analysis does not examine the conventional existence of something; it determines if that thing exists on the ultimate level.

Essentialists erroneously think that because Mādhyamikas negate inherent existence, they are nihilists, for, according to essentialists, if phenomena do not inherently exist, they do not exist at all. Mādhyamikas disagree, saying that phenomena are empty of inherent existence, but are not empty of all existence whatsoever. They exist dependently. If they existed from their own side, they could not function at all because they would be independent of all other factors. But functioning things that exist merely on the nominal level are able to produce results because they depend on causes and conditions. The four truths and all the thoroughly afflictive phenomena of saṃsāra and the very pure phenomena of nirvāṇa exist because they are empty of inherent existence and exist dependently. In this way Mādhyamikas affirm conventional existence while negating inherent existence.

The theses and reasons that Mādhyamikas and nihilists put forth to prove their assertions differ considerably. Mādhyamikas do not assert total nonexistence, as nihilists do; they assert non-inherent existence. Whereas Mādhyamikas claim that past and future lives do not inherently exist because they arise dependent on causes and conditions, Cārvāka nihilists declare that past and future lives do not exist because we cannot see anyone coming from a past life to this life or going from this one to the next. Furthermore, Mādhyamikas say

that past and future lives are conventional truths, whereas nihilists say they are neither conventional nor ultimate truths because they do not exist at all.

Sometimes the words Mādhyamikas and nihilists use sound similar. For example, both say “phenomena do not inherently exist.” But what they mean by these words is different, for nihilists equate non-inherent existence with total nonexistence, while Mādhyamikas equate it with dependently arising existence.

In answer to the essentialists’ question “If nothing inherently exists, what is there?” Buddhapālita responds in *Buddhapālita’s Commentary on “Treatise on the Middle Way”* (DAE 399):

. . . time and so forth are established as mere entities that are mutually dependent designations, conventions of this and that with respect to individual appearances of things.

People veering toward nihilism will benefit from studying dependent arising, which reaffirms the conventional existence of phenomena. In addition, they should understand that emptiness is a phenomenon—it is an existent; it is not nothingness. Emptiness is a property of conventionally existent phenomena. All properties of a phenomenon are one nature with that phenomenon, and when that phenomenon exists, so do its properties. For people who understand this, saying that the table exists implies that its emptiness also exists, because these two are inseparable. When meditators realize emptiness directly, they do not fall to nihilism because they know that emptiness is a property of an existing phenomenon.

Someone who misunderstands the meaning of emptiness and refutes it creates the powerful destructive karma of abandoning emptiness, which leads to an unfortunate rebirth. Such karma may be created by thinking, “Emptiness means total nonexistence. Since everything is empty, nothing exists.” This is the extreme of nihilism. The karma of abandoning emptiness may also be created by thinking, “All these things appear so real, so they must inherently exist. Therefore emptiness cannot mean the lack of inherent existence.” This is the extreme of absolutism.

The disadvantages of holding such views are clear. If we think our *duḥkha* exists inherently, we see no way out of it. We become depressed and give up hope because the present situation seems so overwhelmingly real and unchanging. On the other hand, if we see our difficulties as empty of inherent existence, we see

that they arise dependent on other factors. If those causes are eliminated, the resultant duḥkha can be stopped, and if the causes of happiness are created, happiness will arise. With this view, we feel optimistic and make effort to cease the causes of our pain and create causes for happiness.

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## REFLECTION

1. Name some nihilistic views.
  2. How does holding one of the views influence someone's behavior and the karma they create?
  3. Refute each of the nihilistic views you listed.
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### *Emptiness Exists and Is Itself Empty*

Many early Mādhyamikas in Tibet—those who lived during the early phase of the second transmission of the Dharma to Tibet in the eleventh century—said that emptiness was ineffable and could not be perceived by the mind. Since emptiness cannot be perceived by mind, they thought it did not exist. They misunderstood the Perfection of Wisdom sūtras that clarified that emptiness exists (NT 42):

Whether the tathāgatas appear or not, the reality of phenomena just abides.

Citing a sūtra, Candrakīrti states in his *Autocommentary on the Supplement* (*Madhyamakāvatārabhāṣya*, NT 43):

Who could say that it [emptiness] does not exist? If it did not exist, for what purpose would bodhisattvas cultivate the path of the perfections? For what purpose would bodhisattvas initiate hundreds of efforts for the sake of realizing such a reality?

In *Clear Words*, Candrakīrti says (NT 44):

What is this suchness? The entity of suchness does not change and always abides. For that which is not produced in any way because of not being fabricated and because of not relying on another is called “the [ultimate] nature of fire” and so forth.

These quotations show that emptiness is an existent phenomenon. In *Clear Words*, Candrakīrti affirms that emptiness exists conventionally even though it is the ultimate nature of all phenomena. Initially, it may sound strange to hear that emptiness exists conventionally although it is the ultimate nature. Conventional existence is the only kind of existence there is. Ultimate existence is disproven because nothing can bear ultimate analysis. Because emptiness is not fabricated and is the ultimate nature of all phenomena, it always exists, whether the tathāgatas appear in our world or not.

If emptiness were nonexistent, then no one could cognize it, and thus it would be useless for bodhisattvas to cultivate the perfections—especially the perfections of meditative stability and wisdom—in an effort to realize it.

Since emptiness exists, what is its ultimate mode of existence? Is it related to us and our world, or does it exist separate from all phenomena as an inherently existent reality? Emptiness is not nothingness, nor is it merely a linguistic convention. It is a permanent phenomenon that is known by a reliable cognizer—in this case an ārya’s meditative equipoise directly and nonconceptually perceiving emptiness. It is our ultimate nature and the ultimate nature of all persons and phenomena around us.

Emptiness exists dependently. It depends on the reliable cognizer that knows it directly. It also depends on its parts. Emptiness is not a partless absolute reality that existed first and from it the universe and sentient beings arose. Emptiness has parts in the sense that there are many emptinesses—the emptiness of the moon, the emptiness of the table, the emptiness of the parts of the table, and so forth. Each thing has its own emptiness that comes into existence when that thing arises and goes out of existence when that thing ceases. The emptiness of the apple comes into existence simultaneously with the apple and it stops existing when the apple ceases.

The *Kāśyapa Chapter Sūtra* makes clear that emptiness should not be reified or seen as truly existent (OR 300):

That which is emptiness does not empty phenomena, because phenomena themselves are empty. That which is signlessness does not make phenomena signless, because phenomena themselves are signless. That which is wishlessness does not make phenomena wishless, because phenomena themselves are wishless. To so analyze, Kāśyapa, is called the middle path—in the correct analysis of phenomena. Oh Kāśyapa, I say that whoever analyzes emptiness by objectifying emptiness has fallen, fallen far from my teachings.

Saying that emptiness does not empty phenomena and so on indicates that the ultimate nature of phenomena itself is emptiness. It is not the case that phenomena that are not themselves empty are made empty by something else. Someone who objectifies emptiness and holds it to inherently exist as a reality separate from phenomena that are empty lacks the correct view. Similarly, reifying the view of emptiness and clinging to it also misses the point. This doesn't mean we can't think about or discuss emptiness. After all, teachers talk about emptiness when instructing their students. It means holding the view that emptiness exists inherently. Nāgārjuna says (MMK 13.8):

The victorious ones have said  
that emptiness is the elimination of all views.  
Anyone for whom emptiness is a view  
is incorrigible.

If someone negates true existence and then grasps the emptiness of true existence as truly existent, correcting his view will be difficult. This is like a sick person who took medicine that cured his illness. However, since the medicine was itself not digested completely, it remained in his stomach and made him sick again. In the same way, refuting the true existence of phenomena solves one set of problems by diminishing afflictions, but to turn around and grasp emptiness as truly existent makes one sick with afflictions once again.

Other people do not hold emptiness to be truly existent, but after negating the true existence of emptiness, they say that emptiness doesn't exist. These people confuse emptiness with total nonexistence and fall to the extreme of nihilism, whereas those who hold emptiness as truly existent fall to the extreme of absolutism.

## *Do Mādhyamikas Have Theses?*

Some scholars question whether Mādhyamikas have theses or not. Because Mādhyamikas completely negate inherent existence and because emptiness doesn't affirm anything in the wake of that negation, these scholars think that Mādhyamikas don't affirm any theses in a debate and that they focus solely on refuting others' views. These scholars believe that even if Mādhyamikas were to give any affirming statements about emptiness—such as “emptiness is the nature of all phenomena”—that would mean emptiness is truly existent, which would contradict Mādhyamikas' own beliefs that nothing exists truly. In the past, this radical way of thinking became an issue in Madhyamaka circles in both Tibet and China. It arose from misinterpreting some of Nāgārjuna's statements, for example from *Refutation of Objections* (VV 29):

If I had any thesis,  
then I would suffer from that fault.  
But as I have no theses,  
I am purely without fault.

When Nāgārjuna says he has no thesis, he says that from the ultimate perspective, where nothing can withstand ultimate analysis. From this perspective, there is no syllogism, no subject, no predicate, no reason, no thesis, or anything else. But that doesn't mean nothing exists. From the conventional perspective, all these things exist, and Nāgārjuna employs conventionally existent syllogisms and consequences to prove his assertions. In that way, he cannot be faulted. Non-ultimately existent words have the power to refute ultimate existence because those words exist and function, precisely because they are empty of ultimate existence. Not realizing that Nāgārjuna was speaking from the perspective of the ultimate, these scholars misinterpreted his words and thought he was saying Mādhyamikas had no theses at all.

Imagine Nāgārjuna debating with one of these scholars who saw everything as inherently existent on the topic of whether phenomena existed inherently or not. In response to everything the scholar said, Nāgārjuna would probably say, “no,” indicating that the subject, thesis, and reason of the scholar's argument did not exist from its own side. Not realizing that Nāgārjuna was speaking from the



perspective of the ultimate, the scholar would misunderstand and think that Nāgārjuna was a nihilist refuting all existence whatsoever.

We use a reflection of our face in a mirror to check our appearance, even though the appearance of the face is false and no face exists in the mirror. Similarly, we can realize the meaning of a syllogism in which each part lacks ultimate existence yet exists falsely or conventionally. A reflection of a face is not totally nonexistent, nor does it ultimately exist. It arises due to causes and conditions and is dependent, although it is false in that there appears to be a face in the mirror when there isn't. Similarly, the words of a thesis exist and function although they are not ultimately existent. When it is said that Mādhyamikas have no positions, it means they have no assertions in which they accept ultimately existent phenomena.

Essentialists say Nāgārjuna deprecates existence and is nihilistic. They fail to realize that Nāgārjuna did not say that things are empty of true existence because they cannot perform a function. He did not negate the ability of tables, diplomas, and emotions to perform their respective functions. Rather, he honored functionality and causality by saying that things are empty of true existence because they arise dependently.

Some people say Mādhyamikas assert the existence of things only from the perspective of others—that they speak of conventional objects only because others think they exist, but they do not affirm anything by speaking of conventional things. This is incorrect because Mādhyamikas assert theses for themselves.

If Mādhyamikas had no theses, they could not set forth consequences when refuting others' systems. This is because consequences show the fallacy of the opponents' theses, and by doing that, the right view is implied. By negating true existence, Mādhyamikas automatically prove non-true existence.

People who mistakenly believe that Mādhyamikas have no assertions even conventionally haven't properly identified the object of negation. These people refute the truly existent assertions of their opponents,<sup>81</sup> and then when they apply those same arguments to their own theses, they mistakenly think that they have refuted them as well. Because they have not been able to differentiate true existence from existence, they erroneously think that refuting truly existent assertions is the same as refuting all assertions whatsoever. The Mādhyamikas,

however, say that assertions, like all other phenomena, exist conventionally but not ultimately.

Since Madhyamaka is the Middle Way system, it must assert something. Its principal assertion is that nothing is truly existent, yet conventionally everything exists like illusions. Since Mādhyamikas reach this conclusion by refuting wrong views, there must be reliable cognizers that know the theses that are proven and the nonexistence of those that are refuted. Since Mādhyamikas also teach others, they must have theses.

### *Abandoning the Two Extremes*

How do Mādhyamikas abandon the two extremes? They refute absolutism by saying that things are empty of inherent existence and refute nihilism by asserting that they exist dependently. It can also be said that they avoid absolutism by accepting dependent arising and avoid nihilism by asserting that phenomena are empty. In this case, instead of going to the extreme of inherent existence, they assert dependent existence, and instead of going to the extreme of total nonexistence, they assert no inherent existence.

Just the words “dependent arising” refute the two extremes. “Dependent” refutes inherent or independent existence, the extreme of absolutism, and “arising” refutes total nonexistence and the extreme of nihilism. “Dependent” indicates phenomena are empty, “arising” indicates that they exist. Dependent arising means no inherent existence because phenomena arise depending on many factors that are not them. A pear exists dependent on many factors that are not that pear—the pear seed, water, fertilizer, sunshine, and the farmer—and a person exists dependent on a diversity of factors that are not that person, such as her parents.

Dependent arising also means to exist falsely. Existing falsely isn't nonexistence; it means that like illusions, dreams, and holograms, things appear one way but exist in another. They exist nominally, only on the level of appearances, because like clouds in the breeze, they lack any essence. They appear and exist dependent on causes and conditions, parts, and the mind that conceives and designates them. In this way, dependent arising refutes the extreme of nonexistence.

Things can be either inherently existent or non-inherently existent. There is no third choice. These two are a dichotomy, and if something is not one, it must be the other. By refuting inherent existence, non-inherent existence or the emptiness of inherent existence is automatically established.

Inherent existence has never existed. Realizing emptiness does not entail destroying an inherently existent object by making it empty. Because the object never existed inherently, its inherent existence cannot be destroyed. Rather, we are simply realizing that it was never there to start with. Emptiness is right here in every person and object around us. It is our very nature, yet it too is empty of inherent existence.

Grasping something as inherently existent is the extreme of absolutism, and thinking that thing was once inherently existent and now has become totally nonexistent is the extreme of nihilism. An example of the latter is thinking that at present a truly existent person exists—we see and speak with them—but after death there is no continuity of their mindstream and they become totally nonexistent.

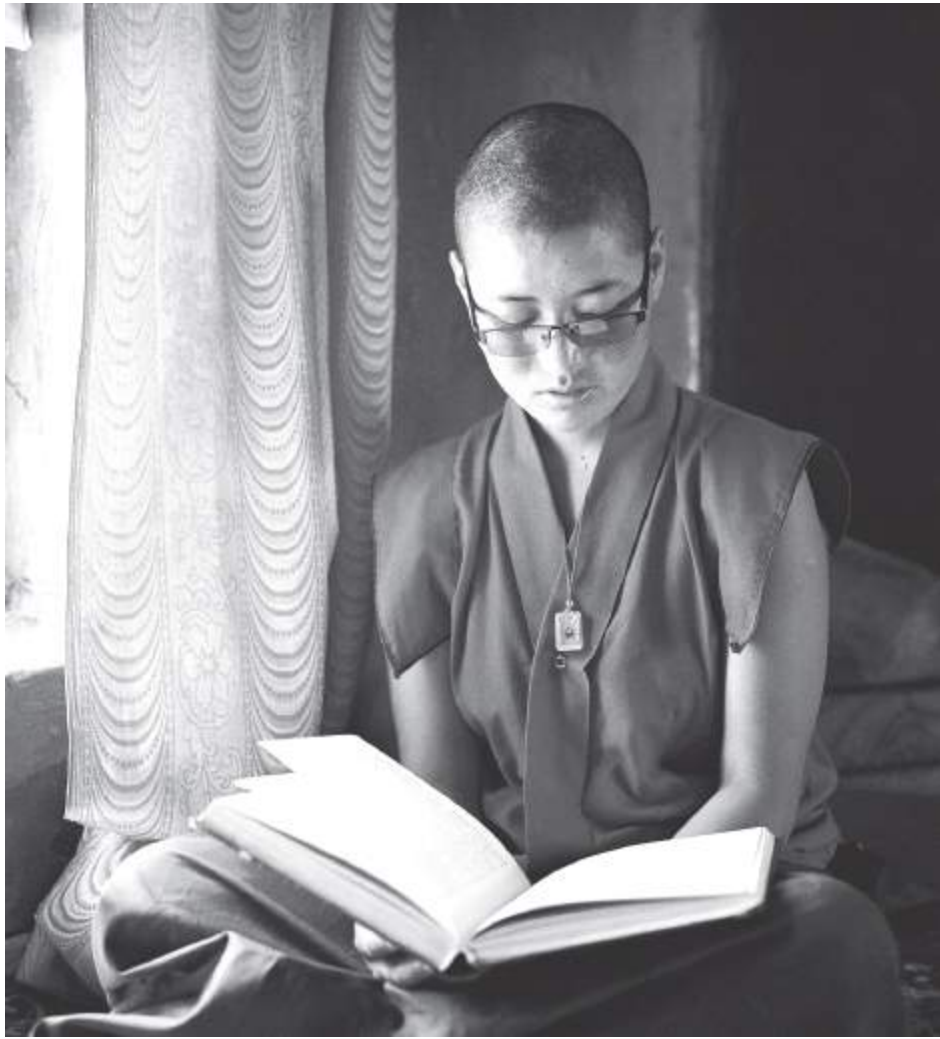
At present, because grasping inherent existence is firmly entrenched in our mind, we usually hold the extreme of absolutism, which lies behind the attachment, anger, and other afflictions that besiege us. Still, the danger of falling into nihilism is real. Sometimes we meet people who claim that everything is illusory and has no real existence so there is no need to observe the law of karma and its results. Others claim that since virtue and nonvirtue are merely designated, they are completely fabricated by the ignorant mind and thus ethical standards have no weight.

If we wish to develop the Middle Way view, the Buddha advised us to cultivate its causes by abiding in pure ethical conduct, relying on an excellent spiritual mentor, purifying our negativities, and accumulating merit and wisdom. To do this, we should follow definitive scriptures and the works of great sages such as Nāgārjuna, Āryadeva, and Candrakīrti to understand them. Then the Buddha directed us to study, contemplate, and meditate on emptiness and its compatibility with dependent arising.

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## REFLECTION

1. Do you see emptiness as some absolute thing that exists independently?
  2. Why is that view incorrect?
  3. Try thinking of emptiness as a quality of all persons and phenomena that is here right now.
  4. Reflect that although conventional truths and ultimate truths are contradictory, they exist together and are inseparable.
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## 10 | The Extreme of Absolutism

AMONG ALL THE TEACHINGS the Buddha gave, the teaching on dependent arising is the most profound. It is what marks the Buddha as an unexcelled teacher. Although the Buddha can be praised from many angles and for many of his spectacular qualities, Nāgārjuna, Tsongkhapa, and many other scholar-adepts praise him for revealing the profound message of dependent arising. I, too, have found the impact of his teachings on the compatibility of emptiness and dependent arising to be profound and feel the same reverence for the Buddha as an unsurpassable teacher. Every day I chant the homage to the Buddha from the *Treatise on the Middle Way* to reaffirm my deep spiritual connection to him and his teachings, especially to the teaching on dependent arising.

Because things are dependent, they cannot arise from an unchanging, independent entity or substance. If they did, we could never attain higher spiritual states because that entails change, and change depends on causes and conditions. Absolutist notions cannot stand up to scrutiny by reasoning because they are antithetical to the fact that everything exists by depending on other factors.

During India's classical period,<sup>82</sup> in the great monastic universities such as Nālandā in India, non-Buddhist and Buddhist sages debated with one another. This led to a rich exchange as these sages explored a broad variety of views, testing them with the rigor of reasoning and logic. The writings of many of the great Indian scholar-adepts consisted of analyzing the inconsistencies in many of the non-Buddhist systems as well as the lower Buddhist systems. In this chapter we'll look at a few of these, hopefully whetting your appetite to study such treatises as *Commentary on the "Compendium of Reliable Cognition"* (*Pramāṇavārttika*) by Dharmakīrti and *The Four Hundred* (*Catuḥśataka*) by Āryadeva as we ferret out these beliefs in our own minds and use reasoning to overcome them.

In this chapter we will examine some ideas held by those holding an absolutist position, beginning with some tenets of the lower Buddhist systems and then analyzing some non-Buddhist beliefs. Some of these assertions may be

similar to ones you may have learned either from your family, school, or another religion. This is an opportunity to reassess them in light of what you know now about dependent arising and, in doing so, clarify and refine your beliefs.

## *Buddhist Essentialists That Don't Refute Enough*

Like nihilists, Buddhist essentialists also fail to identify the object of negation properly. Although they may negate something, they have missed the mark—for example, by negating a superficial distorted view while leaving inherent existence untouched. Many philosophies fall to the extreme of absolutism because assenting to inherent existence agrees with our innate self-grasping. Asserting a real, unchanging essence that is the person and a permanent divine entity that is in control of the universe is much more emotionally satisfying for some people. Such views are comforting and protect from the fear arising from having limited control over our body, mind, other people, and our environment. All of these factors make us hesitant to challenge our accustomed views and assumptions.

To help us overcome these hindrances, the great masters recommend that prior to delving into emptiness, we engage in practices to purify negativities and accumulate merit. They also emphasize the importance of contemplating the four truths—especially the defects of saṃsāra and the afflictions that cause it—in order to generate renunciation of duḥkha and the aspiration to attain liberation. That strong aspiration for freedom, as well as bodhicitta, gives us the inner determination and strength to challenge the self-grasping ignorance that has imprisoned us since beginningless time.

An example of not negating enough is refuting only a permanent, unitary, independent self and not looking deeper. Although refuting such a self or soul is a necessary beginning, it only touches the surface of the object of negation. The concept of a permanent and eternal soul or self that exists after death and is the essence of a person is an acquired obscuration, one fabricated by incorrect philosophies, such as those propounded by non-Buddhist schools. Refuting only it does not eliminate the culprit causing all our problems. We are still far from realizing the emptiness of inherent existence.

The lower Buddhist schools negate a self-sufficient substantially existent person, but that too doesn't get to the root problem of grasping inherent

existence. They too have not identified the full object of negation, which is more subtle. It is worthwhile to spend time trying to identify the object of negation, inherent existence.

To refute inherent existence, we contemplate the unwanted consequences that would come about if persons and phenomena existed inherently. For example, the I would be permanent and unchanging; it wouldn't have components such as the body and mind and would be totally unrelated to the body and mind. Although these unwanted consequences would arise, they are not the meaning of inherent existence. That is, being permanent or independent from the aggregates is not the definition of inherent existence. Inherent existence is more subtle. Nevertheless, seeing the contradictory consequences that would arise if things existed inherently enables us to chip away at that wrong view.

Similarly, if something truly existed, it would have to be partless, but partless minute particles that are the building blocks of the universe and partless moments of mind do not exist—they are notions created by incorrect philosophies. Although they are to be negated, negating them does not destroy the root of our duḥkha, the innate self-grasping ignorance.

Refuting these coarser objects of negation is a steppingstone to realizing emptiness, but only realizing the emptiness of the conceived object of innate self-grasping ignorance will cut all afflictions. For example, if someone is afraid that a poisonous snake is in the room, telling him there isn't an elephant here doesn't calm his fears. Similarly, if someone clearly sees the untrustworthy nature of saṃsāra and wants to be free from it, but spends her time refuting only a permanent soul as asserted by non-Buddhists, partless particles as accepted by Vaibhāṣikas, external phenomena as refuted by Yogācārins, or inherent existence on the conventional level as accepted by the Svātantrikas, she is missing out.

Although some philosophies and psychologies may be comforting, we must persevere and recognize the actual source of saṃsāric duḥkha to eliminate it. In the spiritual supermarket of the modern age, so many beliefs exist. Many are much more glamorous than the Buddhadharma. They promise quick results and attract many followers. Although some of these beliefs may alleviate some problems, they do not identify the deep cause of suffering or show the method to overcome it. They may help the people who practice them live more peacefully in this life—and that is wonderful—but spiritual aspirants seeking liberation or full



awakening should not be satisfied with superficial remedies. They must persevere and correctly identify the object of innate ignorance and then refute it.

## *What Do Śrāvakas and Solitary Realizers Realize?*

How do we reconcile that the two Fundamental Vehicle tenet systems, the Vaibhāṣika and Sautrāntika, assert inherent existence with the fact that śrāvakas and solitary realizers who are Fundamental Vehicle practitioners attain arhatship? Not all Fundamental Vehicle practitioners follow Fundamental Vehicle tenet systems; similarly, not all Mahāyāna practitioners follow Mahāyāna tenet systems. Let's unpack the significance of this.

Prāsaṅgikas speak of the coarse and subtle four truths, the coarse being the presentation in the *Treasury of Knowledge* and the *Compendium of Knowledge*, and the subtle being the Prāsaṅgika presentation.<sup>83</sup> The principal differences between the two lie in their assertions regarding the object of negation and the root of saṃsāra. The non-Prāsaṅgika systems assert that the object of negation is a self of persons—specifically a self-sufficient substantially existent person—and the root of saṃsāra is grasping at such self of persons. In addition, the Yogācārins and Svātantrikas negate a self of phenomena, saying that grasping a self of phenomena is the *final* root of saṃsāra.

According to the coarse four truths, the first truth is the duḥkha arising from grasping at a self-sufficient substantially existent person. The second truth is grasping a self-sufficient substantially existent person, the afflictions arising from it, and the karma propelling rebirth created by them. The third truth is the cessation that is the abandonment of this grasping and the afflictions that arise due to it. The fourth truth is the wisdom path that counteracts this grasping and the afflictions stemming from it.

The presentation of the subtle four truths accords with the Prāsaṅgika view in which grasping the inherent existence of persons and phenomena, not grasping at a self-sufficient substantially existent I, is the origin of saṃsāra.<sup>84</sup> The object of negation is the inherent existence of both persons and phenomena. The other three truths are asserted accordingly.

Of the four attributes of true duḥkha in the presentation of the coarse four truths, the attribute of emptiness refers to the lack of a permanent, unitary,

independent self or I, and the attribute of selflessness is the lack of a self-sufficient substantially existent person. According to the Prāsaṅgikas, the path directly realizing coarse emptiness and coarse selflessness can temporarily stop the manifestation of the coarse afflictions, but cannot eradicate those afflictions. Although the manifest coarse afflictions may be temporarily suppressed, those practitioners will still take rebirth in saṃsāra by the force of grasping inherent existence and the afflictions and karma arising from it.

Someone may have directly realized the selflessness of a self-sufficient substantially existent person and still grasp the person and the aggregates as inherently existent. This practitioner has yet to realize the deepest mode of existence of persons and phenomena—their emptiness of inherent existence. Only the wisdom directly realizing this emptiness is capable of abolishing grasping inherent existence and the afflictions it generates. In the *Questions of Adhyāśaya Sūtra* (*Adhyāśayasamśōdana Sūtra*), the Buddha makes this point in a dialogue with a disciple (CTB 161):

“For example, during a magical display, a man sees a woman created by a magician and desire arises in him. His mind becomes ensnared with desire, and he is frightened and ashamed in front of his companions. Rising from his seat, he leaves and later considers the woman to be ugly, impermanent, unsatisfactory, and selfless. O child of a good lineage, what do you think? Is that man behaving correctly or incorrectly?”

“Blessed One, he who strives to consider a nonexistent woman to be ugly, impermanent, unsatisfactory, and selfless behaves incorrectly.”

The Blessed One said, “O child of a good lineage, you should similarly view those bhikṣus, bhikṣuṇīs, laymen, and laywomen who consider unproduced and unarisen phenomena to be ugly, impermanent, unsatisfactory, and selfless. I do not say that these foolish persons are cultivating the path; they are practicing in an incorrect manner.”

Here the Buddha emphasizes that if we contemplate nonexistent objects of attachment as ugly, impermanent, empty, and lacking a self-sufficient substantially existent I, we are missing the point. There’s no use contemplating the

impermanence and so forth of nonexistents; if we understood that these things did not exist to start with, our attachment to them would vanish. Meditating on the attributes of coarse true duḥkha is like discussing how to dispose of wilted flowers in a hologram or how to shave the moustache off a turtle when such flowers and such a moustache do not exist. To attain liberation, realization of the ultimate mode of existence—the emptiness of inherent existence of both persons and phenomena—is essential. Saying phenomena are unproduced and unarisen indicates that they are not inherently produced and do not inherently arise, although they are produced and arise conventionally.

In the *Sūtra on the Miserliness of One in Dhyāna* (*Dhyāyitamūṣṭi Sūtra*), the Buddha describes the disadvantages of not meditating on subtle selflessness by speaking of someone who, adhering to true existence, meditates on the coarse four truths and thinks, “I know duḥkha, have abandoned all fetters that are its origin, actualized cessation, and cultivated the path. I am now an arhat.” However, when he dies, he sees that he will be reborn in saṃsāra and doubts the Three Jewels, which causes him to be reborn as a hell being. Although this does not happen to everyone who mistakenly believes they have realized subtle emptiness, it does happen to some.

In the sūtra, the Buddha then explains how the four truths should be cognized to attain liberation (CTB 163):

Mañjuśrī, he who sees all products as not produced knows duḥkha thoroughly. He who sees all phenomena as without origin has abandoned the origin of suffering. He who sees them as utterly passed beyond sorrow has actualized cessation. He who sees all phenomena as totally unproduced has cultivated the path.

When the Buddha speaks in such seemingly enigmatic language, he means that one who sees all produced things as lacking inherent arising, all phenomena as lacking truly existent origin, and so forth knows how phenomena actually exist—they are empty of true existence. Only someone who directly realizes the absence of true existence of persons and phenomena can eliminate both the coarse and subtle afflictions as well as their seeds and attain liberation from saṃsāra. This applies equally to everyone, whether they are Buddhist or non-Buddhist and whether they follow the śrāvaka, solitary realizer, or bodhisattva path.

As Fundamental Vehicle practitioners, do śrāvakas and solitary realizers realize the emptiness of inherent existence and attain liberation, or do they meditate on the coarse four truths, in which case they remain far from liberation? Since Fundamental Vehicle arhats have attained liberation, they must have meditated on and realized the emptiness of inherent existence of persons and phenomena. For this reason deprecating the Śrāvaka and Solitary Realizer Vehicles by saying that they do not lead to liberation is a grave error, and doing this is a transgression of the fourteenth root downfall of the bodhisattva ethical code. The *Diamond Cutter Sūtra (Vajracchedikā)* agrees:<sup>85</sup>

[Buddha], “Subhūti, does a stream-enterer think, ‘I have attained the fruit of stream-enterer?’”

Subhūti replied, “Bhagavan, no, it is not so. Why? Bhagavan, because one does not enter into anything whatsoever; therefore, one is called stream-enterer. . . . Bhagavan, if that stream-enterer thinks ‘I have attained the result of stream-enterer,’ that itself would be grasping a self, a sentient being, a soul, a person.”

Subhūti responds similarly when the same question is asked about a once-returner, nonreturner, and arhat. Since someone who has directly realized the emptiness of inherent existence does not grasp the self of persons and phenomena, Fundamental Vehicle āryas have definitely realized the emptiness of the person (themselves as the attainers of stream-entry and so forth) and the emptiness of phenomena (the four truths, the fruit of stream-entry, and so forth). The emptiness and the two selflessnesses they realize are the same as those of Mahāyāna practitioners.

Furthermore, in his *Autocommentary on the Supplement* and in *Clear Words*, Candrakīrti sets forth more reasons to support his assertion that śrāvakas and solitary realizers meditate on and realize the emptiness of inherent existence. The *Sūtra of the Ten Grounds (Daśabhūmika Sūtra)* says that bodhisattvas outshine śrāvakas and solitary-realizer āryas by the power of their wisdom on the seventh bodhisattva ground.<sup>86</sup> If Fundamental Vehicle āryas did not realize the emptiness of inherent existence, bodhisattvas would outshine them on the first ground. However, first-grounders only outshine śrāvaka and solitary-realizer āryas in terms of their lineage.

Also, Nāgārjuna says in the *Precious Garland* (RA 35) that as long as there is grasping at the aggregates as truly existent, grasping at the person as truly existent remains. Since śrāvaka and solitary-realizer practitioners attain liberation, they must have realized the emptiness of true existence of the aggregates. The *Perfection of Wisdom Sūtra in 8,000 Lines* (*Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra*) says that those seeking śrāvakas', solitary realizers', and bodhisattvas' awakening should be trained in the perfection of wisdom.<sup>87</sup>

In short, all āryas of the three vehicles realize the same emptiness of inherent existence of persons and phenomena and eliminate the same self-grasping ignorance and the afflictions based on it. All of them realize the subtle four truths.

How do Fundamental Vehicle practitioners realize the subtle four truths and the selflessness of both persons and phenomena if their tenet systems assert that realizing the coarse selflessness of persons is sufficient to attain liberation? To support his position that practitioners of the Fundamental Vehicle realize the same subtle emptiness as the holders of Mahāyāna tenets, Candrakīrti explains that it is important to distinguish a proponent of a Fundamental Vehicle tenet system from a practitioner of the Fundamental Vehicle. Proponents of the Vaibhāṣika and Sautrāntika systems do not realize the emptiness of inherent existence because they accept the inherent existence of all phenomena. However, śrāvaka and solitary-realizer arhats have necessarily realized the emptiness of inherent existence as asserted by the Prāsaṅgikas.<sup>88</sup> This is because some sūtras in the Pāli canon speak of the emptiness of inherent existence. Penetrating the meaning of these passages, śrāvakas and solitary realizers realize suchness and attain liberation. We will examine some of these passages in *Realizing the Profound View*, volume 8 of the *Library of Wisdom and Compassion*.

## *The Fundamental Vehicle and the Universal Vehicle*

Bhāvaviveka says that if the selflessness of phenomena were taught in the Śrāvaka Vehicle, the teachings of the Universal Vehicle would be redundant and therefore useless. However, that doesn't mean he thinks all the Mahāyāna teachings would be senseless. As a scholar-adept, he knows that the Mahāyāna scriptures include much more than discussion of the selflessness of phenomena. They also explain

great compassion, the methods to cultivate bodhicitta, bodhisattvas' aspirations, bodhisattva grounds, perfections, the collections of merit and wisdom, the abilities of the Buddha's truth body and form body, and many other topics. To attain the full awakening of a buddha, studying, practicing, and actualizing the complete Mahāyāna teachings and practices are indispensable.

Nor does this mean that Bhāvaviveka thinks it would be useless for Mahāyāna scriptures to teach the selflessness of phenomena if it were taught in the Fundamental Vehicle. What then does he mean? Nāgārjuna says in *Praise to the World Transcendent* (LS 25):

Without entering signlessness  
there is no liberation, you have declared;  
so you presented this [signlessness]  
in its entirety in the Universal Vehicle [sūtras].

Signlessness—the emptiness of inherent existence, suchness—must be realized to attain liberation. Since śrāvakas and solitary realizers attain liberation, they must have this realization. But in the last two lines, by saying the Buddha presented signlessness in its entirety in the Mahāyāna sūtras, Nāgārjuna implies that it is taught briefly in the Fundamental Vehicle scriptures. What does he mean by this?

First, let's look at what Nāgārjuna does not mean: By saying “in its entirety,” he does not mean that bodhisattvas realize the emptiness of all phenomena but śrāvakas and solitary realizers realize the emptiness of only some phenomena. Like bodhisattvas, they cognize the emptiness of all phenomena.

In the Mahāyāna scriptures, the Buddha explains the selflessness of phenomena using numerous reasonings and approaches, such as those Nāgārjuna set out in his *Treatise on the Middle Way*. However, because of the different aptitudes of his followers, the Buddha did not use extensive reasonings to explain emptiness in the Fundamental Vehicle scriptures. Bodhisattvas want to benefit all sentient beings, so they must know and meditate on many and varied reasonings proving non-inherent existence, causing their minds to become very broad with respect to emptiness. The depth and force of a bodhisattva's realization of emptiness is greater due to the way they meditate on emptiness on the path.

Furthermore, owing to the difference in their spiritual goals, bodhisattvas cultivate the realization of the selflessness of phenomena fully while the śrāvakas

and solitary realizers do not. Here “fully” means that bodhisattvas’ realization of emptiness has the power to eliminate both afflictive obscurations and cognitive obscurations, resulting in their attainment of buddhahood. Because śrāvakas and solitary realizers seek to abandon only afflictive obscurations, meditation on the succinct meaning of the selflessness of phenomena is sufficient to meet their goal of liberation.

## *Examining Our Absolutist Beliefs*

When subjecting views and beliefs to critical analysis, we must remember that our purpose is to understand the ultimate nature, not to criticize or demean the people who hold these views. To do so would contradict the great love, great compassion, and bodhicitta that we practice on the method side of the path.

For many years I have studied, contemplated, and meditated on the Buddha’s teachings. I consider myself a staunch Buddhist because my confidence in the Buddha’s teachings derives not from blind faith but from reason. At the same time, I respect all spiritual and religious traditions, even though the authors of some Buddhist texts point out contradictions in their philosophies or practices. Over the years I have visited many mosques, churches, synagogues, and Hindu temples and become friends with a wide range of religious leaders and practitioners. By speaking to them as one human being to another, I can genuinely say that their teachings benefit them and their followers. I have felt deeply moved visiting the holy sites of other religions. From my own experience, I know it is possible to have strong and reasoned faith in one’s own spiritual tradition and still respect and appreciate other traditions.

When discussing and debating the nature of reality, our purpose is to examine our own deeply held beliefs and assumptions and to discern if they are accurate. We are challenging not only our personal beliefs but also the innate way we apprehend things and our innate feeling of who we are. The purpose of doing this is to free ourselves from duḥkha. It has nothing to do with proclaiming “I’m right and you’re wrong” or “My religion is best.” In fact, dogmatically clinging to our opinions indicates that our grasping inherent existence is quite strong!

The fundamental and most important theme in Buddhism is dependent arising. If we claim to follow the Buddha’s teachings, it is important that our

worldview is one in which our own existence as well as the origin of the universe is based on the principle of dependent arising. Inquiring into the origin of the world and the sentient beings in it without positing a permanent transcendent creator has been a prominent part of our Buddhist heritage stemming from ancient India.

Generally speaking, the diversity of world religions falls into two broad camps. One is theistic religions, in which the belief in a creator forms the primary foundation. The other is non-theistic religions, in which the concept of a creator does not form the foundation of the faith. Among non-theistic religions are Buddhism, Jainism, and one branch of the ancient Indian tradition, Sāṃkhya.

Within non-theistic religions, there are again two categories. The first are faiths that deny the concept of an all-mighty creator but accept the notion of an eternal self or soul, which is the True Self and is permanent, unitary, and independent of causes. The second are faiths that deny the existence of such a self or soul. Buddhism is the sole example of this, and this is the principal factor distinguishing Buddhism from other religions and philosophies.

Another way of classifying spiritual traditions is into those that accept liberation (*mokṣa*) and those that do not. Buddhism belongs to the first group. Within the spiritual traditions that accept liberation or salvation, there are those that consider liberation or spiritual freedom to be existence in an externally blissful heaven and those that understand liberation to be a mental state. Here Buddhism belongs to the second group, in which liberation is understood as the actualization of a state of mind that is free from all afflictive obscurations and is no longer reborn under their control.

As we examine some of the diverse philosophical and religious beliefs, please note that I do not hold a foregone conclusion that Buddhism is the best faith or that everyone should become Buddhist. As you know, I have always been a proponent of interfaith dialogue, harmony, and cooperation. Some of the beliefs we will examine exist in multiple religions and tenet systems. We will focus just on the absolutist beliefs without explaining the entire philosophical basis, path, and result of each religion or tenet systems that espouses them.

While doing this investigation, remember that “permanent” means something doesn’t change from moment to moment—it doesn’t mean that something exists eternally. Also, in all Buddhist systems except the Vaibhāṣika, a



functioning thing—sometimes called simply “thing”—is equivalent to product and is produced by causes and conditions.<sup>89</sup>

Something else to keep in mind during our examination are the three principles Asaṅga explained concerning causal dependent arising:

1. Conditioned, compounded phenomena must arise from causes and conditions; they cannot arise without them. Thus the world and the beings in it didn't come into being as a result of a prior intelligence or an external creator that exist outside the interplay of causes and conditions. Anything existing in that way cannot interact with other factors to produce something new. This reasoning will be explained below.
2. The world and the beings in it did not arise from a permanent cause. Not only do conditioned things depend on causes and conditions, but the causes and conditions must also be impermanent. A permanent cause cannot produce results because causes must undergo change in order to produce their results.
3. The world and the beings in it did not arise from a discordant cause. Not only are causes impermanent, but they must also produce concordant results. A result can be produced only by causes that have the potential to produce it, and a cause can produce only results that it has the capacity to produce. Spinach seeds produce spinach, not daisies; tulips grow from tulip bulbs, not from light bulbs. Because the potential to produce a certain result exists within a cause, a cause cannot produce just anything in a random fashion. Similarly, a result cannot be produced by just any cause; its production requires its specific causes and conditions.

Many Buddhist sages throughout the centuries have refuted a permanent creator; prior intelligence; a permanent, unitary, independent self or soul; a permanent primal substance out of which everything is created; directionally partless particles; and other absolutist notions. All these ideas rely on the premise that all phenomena must have a stable and permanent basis, otherwise they could neither exist nor function. Buddhist sages state just the opposite: that anything that is permanent, partless, and independent of causes and conditions cannot function; it cannot interact with other things or be influenced by them.

## *A Creator or Prior Intelligence*

In ancient India, as in contemporary times, various views regarding an external, independent creator existed. From the Buddhist viewpoint, many contradictions arise by asserting such a creator. However, from the viewpoint of those accepting a creator, the creator exists even though Buddhists do not accept it. Similarly, Buddhists accept karma and its results even though others may not think this is correct. If we approach a non-believer, she may say neither a creator nor karma exists! Different assertions appeal to different people, and given this situation, it is important to be tolerant and accepting of these differences. Belief in a creator can benefit the followers of theistic religions by encouraging them to keep good ethical conduct, develop love and compassion for others, and practice generosity and forgiveness. However, as Buddhists we must use reason when discerning our own beliefs; we can't say that something exists just because we believe in it.

Some topics such as subtle impermanence or emptiness can be accepted by believers and non-believers, scientists, and those of other faiths. However, some people find it uncomfortable to apply the implications of subtle impermanence and emptiness to their spiritual beliefs. But participants in debates on such topics in ancient India were eager and willing to examine these issues. They were open to change their assertions and beliefs if they were disproven. The arguments below were addressed to such people as well as to Buddhist practitioners. The Buddha and his followers refuted ideas such as an independent creator because they contradict dependent arising, impermanence, and emptiness.

The Buddha encourages us to take responsibility for the state of our mind and the actions we engage in. The Buddhist path is not about worshiping or propitiating external beings, but about cleansing our minds of wrong beliefs and cultivating more realistic and beneficial beliefs and mental states.

Religious systems that accept an external creator do not seem to be based on a detailed analysis of whether or not there is independent existence. Rather, the idea of a creator is an attempt to explain the origin and functioning of the world and the experiences of sentient beings. Since the universe is extensive and causal relations are complex, people think that only a preceding magnificent intelligence could have created it. Dharmakīrti formulated what he considered to be the reasons some spiritual traditions at his time asserted a creator. To express it in the form of a syllogism: consider the external world and the sentient beings in it; they

were created by a preceding intelligence because (1) things function in an orderly manner, (2) they have forms, and (3) they bring effects.

Some believe that the universe and sentient beings are an effect of a well-planned act, the product of an external agent, creator, or prior intelligence. This creator is said to be permanent and doesn't change moment by moment, it is self-arisen and doesn't depend on causes and conditions, and it is omnipotent (all-powerful) and omniscient (all-knowing). Buddhist sages respond to such beliefs with the following rebuttals:

- A permanent being cannot create because for creation of something new to occur, the cause must cease for the result to arise.
- A permanent being cannot be omniscient because it perceives different objects in each moment. If the cognized objects change moment by moment, so too must the being or the mind knowing them. An unchanging mental state cannot perceive different objects.
- A creator who is self-arisen and has come into being without causes cannot exist because nothing can arise without causes. A creator that does not depend on causes cannot exist because it would be permanent and subject to the faults above.
- If nothing existed before creation, what caused creation to occur? From nothing, how can something arise? Causeless production does not exist.
- The creator would be both the cause of rice growing in a rice paddy and the non-cause—that which does not generate a result—of rice growing in that same rice paddy when it lay dormant. If rice grew, the creator would be its cause; if the rice did not grow, the creator would be responsible for that too. That means the creator would change from being a cause to being a non-cause, which contradicts the assertion that the creator is permanent.
- Once the creator made something, that object could not change or cease. Since the creator is permanent, its creations would also be permanent. The creator created human beings, but those beings would be permanent and unchanging.
- A permanent creator could not stop creating. It would create the first moment of the table, the second moment of the table, and so on. Since a

- permanent creator could not stop creating the next moment of the table, the table would exist forever.
- Some people may say that from the beginning everything existed in the creator in a fully developed form and that the process of creation simply made it manifest. This is similar to the belief of the Sāṃkhya, who assert that even at the time of a cause (the primal substance and the creator), the result (the universe and sentient beings) exists, but we do not see the result at that time because it has yet to manifest. This assertion leads to many contradictions—for example, that cause and result would exist at the same time. But results cannot exist at the same time as their causes, and causes must cease for their results to arise.
  - If a creator existed independently, under its own power, it would exist inherently. In that case, we should be able to find the creator when we search with reasoning analyzing the ultimate. But if we try to identify exactly what this creator is, what can we point to? Nothing exists under its own power. Everything exists dependently, by being merely designated by mind.

To sidestep the above difficulties, some people assert the creator or prior intelligence is impermanent. Buddhists respond:

- If the creator is impermanent, it must have been created by causes. What were the causes of such a creator or intelligence? Who or what created it?
- A creator that depends on causes and conditions is not all-powerful because it cannot control all causes and conditions; it is under the control of causes and conditions.
- A creator that is dependent on causes would have an intention or motivation that would cause it to create. What intention motivated it to create the world and sentient beings? What internal or external factor provoked the creator to change from an inactive state to one that actively creates the world and sentient beings?
- If an independent and perfect being exists, why did it create the world and the sentient beings in it? Why would a perfect and all-powerful being create a world with turbulence and suffering?

- What proof is there that the creator was omniscient from the beginning? If you say the complexity of the world and the human body could only have been created by an omniscient and omnipotent creator, you are assuming that such things could only arise due to the conscious, intentional effort of a creator or prior intelligence to create them. However, other systems of causality—biology, physics, chemistry, karma and its effects, and so on—could account for that.

In *Engaging in the Bodhisattvas' Deeds*, the eighth-century sage Śāntideva adamantly refuted the possibility of a permanent creator. He asked: If the creator were unchanging and independent, what could make it produce anything? If nothing existed before the creator made the world and all phenomena were created by the creator, what spurred the creator to create the world? If there were other causes and conditions, they would be the cause of the world. This is so because once those conditions came together, creation would occur and the creator would have no power to stop it.

But if there were no other conditions sparking creation, the creator would have no power to produce effects. If the creator's desire to create sparked creation, then the creator is not independent because it is under the power of its desires. Śāntideva repeatedly brings us back to the same fundamental points: functioning things arise due to causes and conditions; these causes and conditions are impermanent and have to cease to produce their effects; effects arise due to concordant causes—not just anything can produce anything.

Personally speaking, I believe that the notion of a creator came about primarily to promote human beings' good qualities. Because many people feel comfortable with the idea of a creator in whose hands their fate rests and to whom they can appeal for aid, that belief continues.

Believers see the creator and their relationship with it in a variety of ways. Some people say everything is in God's hands and happens according to his will. They must simply surrender to him. Others believe human beings must also help by acting morally. Salvation will come to those who properly follow God's teachings.

Some Jews explained to me that God is ultimate reality, but each individual also has responsibility to conduct themselves in a moral way. These Jews and Christians do not believe that absolutely everything is up to God. Rather, God

created human beings, but human beings have the responsibility to create a happier world. A co-partnership between God and human beings exists. So in that sense, they may say human beings are a “small creator”!

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## REFLECTION

1. Review Asaṅga’s three principles of causal dependence.
  2. Make examples of the three principles in your life.
  3. Apply these principles to the idea of an independent creator and contemplate the refutations of such a creator.
  4. How does this influence your ideas about yourself and the universe?
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## *The Origin of the Universe*

Many philosophies and cultures have proposed ideas about the origin of the universe. Here we will briefly touch on two: that of the Sāṃkhyas, one of the oldest schools of Indian philosophy, and that of modern scientists.

The Sāṃkhya system states that the physical world is a manifestation of primal matter (*pradhāna*), which is the subtle undifferentiated total of all material elements in their unmanifest state. When it manifests as various objects, it is called the “material principle” (*prakṛti*). This primal nature has six characteristics: it is the agent of actions; it is unborn and permanent; it is unitary and partless; it is only an object and is not consciousness; it pervades all objects be they animate or inanimate; and it is unmanifest and is a balance of three qualities—activity, which allows things to arise; lightness, which makes them increase and endure; and darkness, which causes them to disintegrate and cease. Some Sāṃkhyas are nontheistic, whereas others say that when the primal matter is spurred by the god Īśvara, it gives rise to the world.

The notion of primal matter resembles what some people today call a cosmic substance or a cosmic radiance from which everything manifests. They say it is a

positive phenomenon that exists independent of all else, but from which the world is created.

Examining the idea of the primordial nature without going into the details of the Sāṃkhya system, we can see logical inconsistencies. Something that is permanent is not a cause and therefore cannot act; something that is partless can't give rise to the diversity of phenomena. In the contemporary view of everything arising from a cosmic substance, similar contradictions arise: If the cosmic substance is permanent, it cannot produce all phenomena; if it is impermanent, what triggers it to manifest the diversity of phenomena? And what determines what phenomenon it becomes?

According to Asaṅga's three points regarding causal dependence, searching for an absolute beginning before which nothing whatsoever existed is futile, and positing an external, absolute creator as the origin of the universe is untenable.

Alternatively, many contemporary scientists propose that a Big Bang marked the origin of the universe. Buddhism shares with science the appreciation for empirical evidence and reason to prove theories. Most Buddhists are willing to accept valid scientific discoveries about the origin of this universe. However, if the Big Bang is regarded as an absolute beginning to the universe before which nothing existed, such an assertion presents logical difficulties because nothingness cannot act as a cause from which conditioned things arise.

Similarly, should someone assert a permanent substance out of which the universe was created when the Big Bang occurred, there are also logical contradictions. Permanent phenomena do not come into existence dependent on causes, they are not affected by conditions, and they cannot produce results. If such a permanent substance existed, nothing—not even the Big Bang—could affect it, and thus it could not produce the elements of our universe.

However, if the Big Bang is not posited as an absolute beginning and if a permanent substance is not posited as the cause of the universe, then there is the opportunity to investigate what could have existed before the Big Bang that acted as conditions for the Big Bang to occur. The view of causal dependence opens the door to the arising of the universe due to impermanent causes that are concordant with the resultant universe that has come into being.

Ancient Buddhist scriptures speak of the existence of many universes. Each universe goes through four periods, each lasting for twenty eons: the periods of its evolution, abiding, destruction, and vacuity. While one universe may be evolving,

others are abiding, others are being destroyed, and in place of some is a dormant, vacuous state before evolution begins anew. It would be interesting to see if scientific investigation came to the same conclusion.

## *Self and Soul*

Many religions espouse the existence of an indestructible soul that is the essence of a person. Because it is permanent, not made of parts, and not created by causes, this self or soul does not cease and remains unchanging forever. It is the person—what the word “I” ultimately refers to; it is what a person really is. The soul goes from life to life, or goes from this life to heaven or hell, depending on the beliefs of a particular religion. For non-Buddhist religions that accept the law of karma and its effects, a permanent soul is the stable basis that carries karmic seeds from one life to the next. The thought of such an everlasting soul brings a feeling of security and stability to those who fear the I becoming nonexistent at death.

In ancient India, all non-Buddhists asserted the existence of the ātman, whereas the Buddha, by analyzing what this self could be if it existed, concluded that its existence was not possible. He investigated:

- A permanent person could not be born in saṃsāra. The person could not attain nirvāṇa or awakening because that would involve the person changing from a sentient being to a liberated one.
- If the I were a fixed and permanent soul, a person would be unable to change; everything about them would remain the same. However, we see that people change. Learning from our experiences entails change, as does experiencing pain and pleasure.
- If the person were permanent, mental and emotional growth could not occur, and we would be unaffected by helpful or harmful influences.
- A permanent person could not act because action involves change. This would make preparing for future lives and liberation impossible, because creating their causes could not occur.
- If the soul were unaffected by causes and conditions, then destructive actions would not bring suffering and constructive actions would not



bring happiness. Furthermore, purification practices would have no effect.

Looking at the second quality of a self, being a partless unity, that too can be negated by reasoning.

- If the person were partless, we wouldn't have two components—a body and a mind.
- We could not say, "One part of me wants to vent my anger but another part of me doesn't want to harm myself and others."
- An infant who grew into a toddler, child, adolescent, adult, and senior citizen could not be referred to by the same name or be considered the same person because that would entail having parts.

Regarding the third quality, being independent of causes:

- Someone would experience suffering and happiness randomly or without any cause.
- There would be no cause for someone to be born.
- Once born, neither illness nor severe injury could cause death.

Some non-Buddhists in ancient India asserted that the self was a permanent, functioning thing—that is, the self is permanent but the body and mind are impermanent. Sometimes we may think that we have an unchanging essence but superficially we change and are influenced by causes and conditions. That is, we feel that we have a solid, permanent core, but we are also influenced by the circumstances around us. Our mind changes and the body ages, but inside we are a permanent self. In that case:

- Nothing can be both permanent and impermanent at the same time because those two qualities are contradictory.
  - A person would have two opposite natures or would be two people—one that doesn't change and the other that does.
  - If the person were permanent, the body and mind would also have to be permanent because they are the component parts of an unchanging I.
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## REFLECTION

1. Contemplate the various statements that refute a permanent soul and a fixed origin of the universe.
  2. Can you disprove any of those statements?
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### *Misunderstanding Buddha Nature*

The Mahāyāna teaches that each sentient being has the buddha nature (*gotra*), an aspect of the person that can never be removed and is the potential enabling them to become fully awakened buddhas. Some people may misconstrue this to be a soul or self—a permanent essence of a person, or an inherent purity that exists independent of any other factors. They may think of the buddha nature as a truly existent, already awakened essence that they simply have to realize has always been there. For people raised in a theistic religion, this idea may be especially appealing due to its familiarity.

However, this view of buddha nature contains logical inconsistencies. Asserting a truly existent awakened essence would contradict several Buddhist principles: being independent of all other factors, it would not exist by being merely designated by mind. In addition, people could mistakenly think that because they have an inherently pure essence that they are already buddhas but haven't yet awoken to that fact. But if that were the case, we would be ignorant buddhas, which is an oxymoron. An ignorant buddha cannot exist because buddhas have eliminated the two obscurations. Furthermore, if we were already buddhas, we wouldn't need to practice the Dharma in order to gain realizations because we would already have them.

Why, then, do some Buddhist masters say that we are already buddhas? This may be a skillful method that speaks to some people and encourages them to practice the Dharma. It gives a sense of self-confidence and increases enthusiasm on the path. However, such a statement should not be taken literally.

According to Maitreya, the author of *Sublime Continuum* (*Ratnagotravibhāga, Uttaratantra*), and Asaṅga, who composed a commentary on it,<sup>90</sup> our buddha nature has two aspects: (1) The *natural buddha nature* is the

emptiness of our mind. This emptiness is permanent and is a nonaffirming negative. (2) The *transforming buddha nature* includes all those aspects of mind whose continuity will go on to full awakening—for example, our compassion and the clear and cognizant nature of mind. This is impermanent and is developed and refined by Dharma practice.

In the contemporary spiritual marketplace, some people speak of our “higher self” or “true self.” The description is rather amorphous, but it seems that this higher self is a pure essence that is our true nature. It has always been within us and we just need to discover it. This idea is similar to a mistaken view of buddha nature. Although people may espouse this idea as a way of encouraging others to feel they have an innately good essence, such a personal essence would be permanent and truly existent—qualities that have already been refuted.

Care must be taken not to be enchanted by mystical-sounding words that no one actually understands or can define. Try to correctly identify the root of *duḥkha*—self-grasping ignorance—and its conceived object—true existence—by relying on definitive sūtras such as the Perfection of Wisdom sūtras and commentaries by Nāgārjuna, Candrakīrti, and others. Then cultivate the wisdom realizing the emptiness of true existence and employ it to counteract self-grasping ignorance. By proving to ourselves that true existence cannot possibly exist, our ignorance, and consequently our *saṃsāra*, will cease.

Some people develop the above misunderstanding about buddha nature further, saying a buddha who is already inside us is replete with the signs and marks of a buddha. They claim a buddha’s nonmistaken mind that knows reality is already within each of us. It is independent and wasn’t created by causes and conditions; it has existed from beginningless time and is naturally awakened. It is the ultimate truth and an independent, positive phenomenon that truly exists. They conclude that to cut the root of *duḥkha* it is not necessary to eliminate the elaborations of true existence by realizing emptiness. Realizing and perceiving this truly existent ultimate truth is the way to end *saṃsāra*. This, too, is an absolutist view in which true-grasping is left comfortably alone.

Prāsaṅgikas counter that meditating on a positive, truly existent phenomenon does not eliminate the ignorance grasping true existence. Thinking that such meditation is the key to cutting the root of *duḥkha* is like a person who is afraid of a poisonous snake in the east saying to himself, “There is a tree in the west.” This does nothing to eliminate his false idea or his fear. Knowing what the

snake would look like if it existed, he must search in the east and discover that no snake is there. Only then will his fear be extinguished.

Prāsaṅgikas explain that the ultimate truth, emptiness, is a nonaffirming negative; it is the absence of true existence. Nothing else is affirmed. Emptiness is realized by negating true existence on its bases—conventionally existing objects. Emptiness, too, does not exist from its own side. It is a dependent phenomenon and relies on its bases, phenomena that are empty. It too exists by being merely designated.

### *Causes and Effects, Permanent and Impermanent*

Buddhist philosophy firmly supports Asaṅga's three principles of causality. However, some ancient Indian schools disagree. The Vaiśeṣikas assert smallest particles that are the building blocks of the universe. These particles are not produced, but themselves join together to produce other objects. This idea is similar to that of some scientists who search for the smallest subatomic particle that is permanent (which means it must be unproduced) and forms the basis for all other atoms. Vaiśeṣikas say these smallest particles are permanent even though they are causes but not effects. Buddhists respond that these particles must undergo change to produce larger objects. Anything that changes must be impermanent, and whatever is impermanent is the result of causes and conditions.

Vaiśeṣikas also claim that the smallest particles are directionally partless, to which Buddhists reply: How can they coalesce to form larger objects? If they have no sides, then when two particles meet, they would merge into each other and could not produce something larger. If they joined one next to the other, then they would have parts—one side connected to the particle on its left, the other side connected to the particle on its right. If a particle didn't have a left side, right side, and middle, it would be invisible and couldn't join to any other particles.

Vaidāntikas say time is a cause but not an effect. It is a cause because depending on the season (time), a seed will either grow or not grow into a sprout. Time is the key factor allowing the seed, water, and fertilizer to produce a sprout. Buddhists respond that time must also be an effect because without there being

an effect, we cannot establish something as a cause. Something being a cause depends on it having the possibility of producing an effect. If not, tomato seeds would not be the cause of tomato plants.

Questioning your deeply held beliefs or intuitions may not be an activity that you are accustomed to doing, and it may initially be uncomfortable. Nevertheless, clearing away confusion and establishing the truth brings confidence and mental peace. Challenging the incorrect acquired views you have learned is a first necessary step that prepares you to challenge the innate erroneous views that are the real source of saṃsāra. Although many of the arguments above do not focus on refuting inherent existence, they lay the foundation for doing so. Without these foundational understandings, the refutations of inherent existence will be difficult to comprehend.

In short, repeatedly contemplate Asaṅga's three principles for causality and observe how they apply to your life and what you see around you. Also contemplate these points: a permanent phenomenon cannot produce anything; causes must cease for their results to arise; permanent functioning things cannot exist; and any impermanent thing is both an effect of its cause and the cause for a future effect in that it has the potential to give rise to an effect. Āryadeva reminds us that anything that functions—be it a person, a tree, a cause, or an effect—cannot be permanent, unitary, and independent (CŚ 202):

There is not anywhere any [functioning] thing  
that ever exists without depending.  
Thus never is there anywhere  
anything that is permanent.

Philosophical texts often use the example of seeds and sprouts to explain causality and the lack of inherent existence, because they are easy to understand. As your comprehension increases, apply these principles of causality to other topics such as your body, mind, feelings, emotions, situations you encounter, and so on. Doing this will encourage the habit of questioning assumptions. Use them to deepen your understanding of the twelve links of dependent origination. When meditating on emptiness, do not leave your usual beliefs and sensibilities to one side and meditate on some external, exotic nothingness that is unrelated to how you perceive and conceive of yourself and the people and things around you.

Rather, become aware of your subtle, long-held beliefs and with rigor and honesty examine if they are correct or not.

## *Buddhism and Other Religions*

At the initial level of spiritual practice, the teachings of all religions are similar. They stress reducing anger and increasing love, compassion, and forgiveness, abandoning actions that harm others, and cultivating self-discipline, ethical conduct, and contentment. Although each faith has a slightly different approach to cultivate these qualities, the goal of developing them is the same. For this reason, I think that beginning practitioners can be half Christian and half Buddhist, or half Jewish, Muslim, or Hindu and half Buddhist. But just as all students learn to read and write at the beginning of their education and later specialize in a particular field, so too spiritual practitioners may initially do a general practice but later must clarify their beliefs so they can go deeper in one path. Although someone may initially practice another religion together with some aspects of Buddhism, when the view of the ultimate nature of reality becomes more important in their practice, they must investigate and decide which view seems more reasonable to them.

Each religion must retain its distinctive qualities. Because human beings have a variety of dispositions, the existence of many religions serves an important purpose in that it enables individuals to find a path that is suitable for them. The question is not “Which religion is best?” but “Which religion is most suitable for me?” The value of a particular medicine is determined by its effectiveness in curing one’s own particular illness. An antibiotic is best for someone suffering from a bacterial infection, but it doesn’t help a person with a broken foot. Therefore, instead of proclaiming one or another religion as best for everyone, we should identify the one that is most fitting for our disposition and interests.

Religious harmony does not and should not depend on saying that the theory and goal of all religions are the same. When we haven’t even accomplished the final aim of our own faith, how can we say the goals of other faiths are the same? We should explore the richness of diverse philosophies, notice their similarities and differences, and respect the practitioners of all of them.

Several decades ago, I visited Montserrat, the home of the Black Madonna, near Barcelona. There I met a Catholic monk who so far had spent five years as a hermit in the mountains behind the monastery. He consumed only bread and water, and when I asked him what he had been practicing, he responded, “Meditation on love.” As he said this, his eyes sparkled with joy, and when I looked into his eyes, there was some special feeling there. I admire and respect him greatly.

A few years after that, I (Chodron) visited Montserrat and with two or three friends found our way to this hermit’s abode. We arrived completely unexpectedly, and he welcomed us in. On an altar in the center of the room was a kata (a Tibetan ceremonial scarf) and an image of One-Thousand Armed Chenrezig. We meditated in silence with him for a while before departing. It was clear that his meditation practice was profound and that he and His Holiness had a strong spiritual connection.

Many years ago, I (Dalai Lama) was with Father John Main, a Catholic priest who was my friend. We were sitting together in a room in Canada—Father John, a musician, another person, my translator, and me. Father John prayed and chanted as the musician played spiritual hymns, and tears began to roll down his cheeks. He was having a very powerful experience that arose from his extremely strong faith.

Someone with strong single-pointed faith and belief can have a vision of the divine being of their faith. From a Buddhist perspective, this divine being could be an emanation of a highly realized bodhisattva or buddha. To benefit particular people, a buddha or bodhisattva may teach about another divine being because that doctrine is suitable for the dispositions of those particular people. A buddha or bodhisattva may even emanate as a religious figure of another faith, and a follower of that faith could have a vision of that figure.

Buddhist scriptures contain accounts of the Buddha manifesting in different forms to benefit particular sentient beings. To tame an arrogant musician, he manifested as a violinist who played sublimely. To give a practitioner the opportunity to overcome prejudice arising from attachment to appearances, he manifested as a leper who needed help crossing a river. Because the Buddha’s purpose is to benefit sentient beings and gradually lead all of them to full awakening, he may emanate as the teacher of a non-Buddhist path to instruct a person who is a proper vessel for that teaching. Through such skillful means, the

Buddha leads others by teaching them a doctrine that suits them most at that moment, even if it is not the Buddha's ultimate thought or his ultimate teaching.

## *Awakening and Other Spiritual Traditions*

Is it possible to attain awakening by following other religions? This depends on the tenets of that faith and how it sets forth the basis, path, and result. How does it define duḥkha, its cause, the final goal, and the path to that goal? According to the Buddhadharmā, attaining liberation and awakening depend on eliminating the cause of duḥkha, the ignorance grasping inherent existence, by cultivating the correct view of emptiness and the nonconceptual wisdom that realizes it. If other spiritual paths identify the cause of duḥkha as ignorance grasping inherent existence and have the correct view of emptiness that is taught as the antidote to it, then that path will lead to liberation and awakening. But if a spiritual tradition does not correctly point out the conceived object of the self-grasping ignorance and cannot explain the correct view of emptiness that disproves it, it would be extremely difficult to attain liberation and awakening by practicing that path.

Proponents of many religions and philosophies, as well as proponents of many Buddhist tenet systems, accept inherent existence. Meditation according to those systems does not overcome subtle ignorance and therefore cannot lead to liberation or awakening because the view of selflessness is incomplete. Similarly, people who accept an independent soul and a permanent creator will resist the idea of the emptiness of inherent existence. As long as they hold their present views, they will be unable to gain a correct inference of emptiness let alone a direct realization of it.

Take the case of a Yogācārin who holds the strong philosophical view that other-powered phenomena and thoroughly established phenomena exist inherently. He may meditate on selflessness according to that view, but he could not realize emptiness as described by the Prāsaṅgikas. Although understanding the Yogācāra view of emptiness can be a helpful step in the right direction, that person will first need to relinquish the Yogācāra view in order to gain the correct view of emptiness as explained by the Prāsaṅgikas. If this is the case for Buddhists who hold the tenets of lower systems, needless to say it would be so for those



holding the views of non-Buddhist paths that accept a permanent, external creator or an inherently existent substance from which everything arises.

Can heaven as described in Christian teachings be attained through Buddhist practice? I don't think so. When the goal of practice is different, the method to attain it will also differ. Nevertheless, both religions encourage ethical behavior and encourage followers to engage in virtuous actions that lead to happy results.

Our conceptual framework and worldview greatly influence what we experience in meditation. If we believe in a creator, realizing emptiness will be difficult, because the qualities of a creator—permanence, omnipotence, independence of causes and conditions—are antithetical to the doctrine of emptiness. Similarly, doing a meditation technique that originated in Buddhism while holding the beliefs of another religion will not bring insights that accord with the Buddha's teachings. I (Chodron) heard of a rabbi who practiced Zazen in a retreat. The principal conclusion he reached from his meditation was that God existed. Although that benefited him in practicing his own religion, it was not the same conclusion someone doing Zazen within a Buddhist framework would come to.

Nowadays many people are interested in Buddhist meditation. Catholic monks teach Zazen, and scientists and therapists teach mindfulness meditation. Although this benefits people, it is highly unlikely that these people will gain realizations of the Buddhist path by doing these practices, since their worldview includes notions of a permanent creator or lacks any notion of selflessness. In addition, the meditation techniques themselves have been changed to accommodate a secular perspective. It's wonderful that non-Buddhists benefit from those meditation practices, but the results will differ from meditation techniques taught by the Buddha and Buddhist masters.

When the Buddha was alive, he talked about spiritual practice and philosophy with a wide diversity of people who had an equally broad diversity of views. As many sūtras in the Pāli Nikāyas show, the Buddha went to great lengths to point out distorted views and describe right views. In the eightfold path of the āryas, right view comes first, followed by right intention. This order emphasizes the importance of finding the right view of both the law of karma and its effects and of selflessness, and cultivating the right intention to attain the results of the path taught by the Buddha.

Can someone who is unfamiliar with the doctrine of emptiness nevertheless realize it quickly and easily? There are accounts of a few exceptional practitioners realizing the ultimate nature during a teaching on emptiness by a high lama and a few stories of practitioners attaining liberation shortly after realizing emptiness, but this is extremely rare. King Indrabhūti (Indrabodhi) from Oḍḍiyāna is one such example; he realized emptiness and was liberated simultaneously. However, he was not an ordinary person. He had cultivated the path and experienced the wisdoms arising from hearing, contemplation, and meditation in many previous lifetimes.

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## REFLECTION

1. All religions are designed to benefit sentient beings by teaching ethical conduct, love, compassion, forgiveness, and so forth; thus it is important to respect all faiths.
  2. One religion will not fulfill the needs of all sentient beings. People must choose a faith that helps them the most. Thus it is important to respect all religious practitioners as well as all non-believers.
  3. Although we respect other religions and their practitioners, we can still discuss and debate our beliefs with a friendly attitude.
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## *Free Will and Predetermination*

The issue of free will and predetermination has plagued Western philosophers for centuries. Do we have choice or are the events in our lives predetermined? Interestingly, this topic was not among the topics of interest that Indian and Tibetan Buddhist sages debated. There is no mention of this issue in scriptures that I know of. Perhaps that is because the theme of dependent arising permeates the Buddha's teachings, deflecting such questions early on.

The potential to make choices is always present. Our taking a fortunate or unfortunate rebirth is in our hands. Although ignorance prevents us ordinary beings from choosing the specific body we will take in our next rebirth, we make

conscious choices during our lives to engage in constructive or destructive actions, which are the principal causes of the type of rebirth we will have.

Actions done in our previous lives influence the type of body we are reborn into: that of a human being, animal, and so forth. The rebirth we take gives us some options, but circumscribes other choices: as human beings we have the potential to engage in complex intellectual pursuits that are not available to someone born as an animal. On the other hand, birds can flap their wings and fly, whereas humans cannot. Our previous karma may cause us to be reborn with a healthy body or one prone to illness, and these physical circumstances will limit our choices to some extent. Our previously created karma causes us to be reborn in one country rather than another; then the ongoing conditioning of this life takes over as the culture of the country where we grow up influences the way we think, our opportunities as a man or woman, and the religion we encounter and follow.

The habitual emotional and thought patterns cultivated in previous lives influence the ones we have today. They also condition our inclinations, interests, likes, and dislikes. None of these things are predetermined in the sense of being fixed and inflexible. On the other hand, past actions and thoughts influence present ones. Some children are naturally compassionate toward their playmates and animals from a young age, whereas other children are chronically unhappy and disgruntled. Of course, their upbringing, education, and societal conditioning in this life can alter these tendencies, either increasing or decreasing their strength.

We lack total freedom to do anything we want at any particular moment. Although it would be helpful to speak Chinese, I cannot choose to speak it fluently five minutes from now because I haven't created the causes to be able to do that.

While the conditions we are born into may circumscribe our choices, the key lies in how we respond to those conditions. This is where our choice lies. While a difficult situation may be the result of the ripening of previous destructive karma, we still have the choice to respond to it with fear, indignation, and anger, or with acceptance, compassion, and wisdom. As we practice the mind-training teachings and the meditations on the stages of the path, our worldview will broaden, and we will see that our emotional states and physical and verbal responses to situations are not fixed. We don't have to react to every criticism by becoming

defensive. It is not compulsory that we become jealous whenever someone has something we want. Take, for example, a situation described in *The Thirty-Seven Practices of Bodhisattvas* (VV 14):

Even if someone broadcasts all kinds of unpleasant remarks  
about you throughout the three thousand worlds,  
in return, with a loving mind,  
speak of his good qualities—  
this is the practice of bodhisattvas.

We may have a habitual response to criticism, one coming from previous lives and nourished in this life, to retaliate when someone broadcasts unpleasant remarks about us to many people. But a choice exists. Do we criticize, humiliate, or ruin the reputation of the other person? Or do we contemplate that being criticized is not the end of the world and could have some benefits that we don't see now? Do we understand that the other person is suffering and behave in a kind manner with him? Depending on the choice we make, we will experience either happiness or suffering now and in future lives.

The critical point is whether we realize that we have choice and choose to exercise it. Mindfulness and introspective awareness help us to slow down and become more observant of our thoughts and feelings and to cultivate new habits of choosing our emotional, verbal, and physical responses to situations.

The Buddha knows that the outcome of harsh speech will be unpleasant. He also knows that the karmic seed from insulting or ridiculing others can be purified and instructs us in the four opponent powers for purification. The choice of whether to engage in these four and purify the karmic seed lies with us.

It is said that the Buddha sees the future. Must the future be predetermined for him to do so? No, it does not. The future is what has the potential to arise but has not yet arisen. Present circumstances influence future possibilities. But if present causes and conditions change, what happens in the future will change as well. It may seem to our limited knowledge that all the conditions point to a specific future outcome, but conditions may arise that we don't know about now. In short, we don't know the future until it happens.

That the Buddha has the clarity of mind to see the complex interaction of causes and conditions in the future does not mean future events are

predetermined or independent of other factors. We know the sun will bring daylight to the Earth tomorrow, but that does not mean it is predetermined. It depends on the rotation of the Earth, the cloud cover, weather patterns, and so forth.

# 11 | Pāli Tradition: Abandoning the Two Extremes

## *Wisdom*

The higher training in wisdom is the third of the three higher trainings, the first two being ethical conduct (*śīla*) and concentration (*samādhi*). Although there are many types of wisdom (*prajñā, paññā*), here our concern is with the wisdom that directly leads to nirvāṇa.<sup>91</sup> The Pāli commentarial tradition distinguishes two types of wisdom involved in the attainment of nirvāṇa: insight wisdom (P. *vipassanā-paññā*) and path wisdom (P. *magga-paññā*). Insight wisdom understands the three characteristics. It is cultivated gradually and leads to path wisdom. Path wisdom realizes nirvāṇa and comes with a clear realization seeing the deathless, nirvāṇa.<sup>92</sup> Insight wisdom is considered mundane because it has to do with analyzing the three characteristics of conditioned phenomena that are polluted, whereas path wisdom is supramundane because it is focused on the unconditioned, nirvāṇa.

In the context of the eightfold path, wisdom is right view. Because there are two types of right view—right view that is based purely on intellectual understanding and right view based on direct experience of the four noble truths—there are also two corresponding forms of wisdom. Intellectual wisdom is cultivated by listening to teachings and thinking deeply about them in order to arrive at the correct understanding of them. Although this wisdom is conceptual, it is very powerful. Experiential wisdom is direct penetration of the truth—nirvāṇa and the four truths—in our own experience.

Both forms of wisdom are important because experiential wisdom arises on the basis of a correct conceptual understanding. We must cultivate and employ correct discrimination, investigation, and analysis on the conceptual level to shatter false conceptions before experiential wisdom knowing the truth can arise. Some of these false conceptions are so much a part of our ordinary outlook that

we do not recognize them as false and simply accept them unquestioningly. By studying and reflecting on the Buddha's teachings, we must learn to identify these false conceptions and develop correct conceptions.

This point is important, because some people mistakenly believe that all conceptual processes are useless and that wisdom is an intuitive experience that arises suddenly, seemingly without cause. This, however, is not the case. Cultivation and practice are necessary. Many intuitions and experiences in meditation may occur, but we lack any reliable means to check if they are trustworthy. This underlines the importance of practicing under the guidance of a wise and experienced teacher and of having a conceptual understanding of the path derived through study of the sūtras and other scriptures.

An experience in meditation is one thing; what we think it was after we arise from meditation is another. After the meditation session, our conceptual mind is functioning; it interprets and imputes meaning to the experience. If this is done incorrectly, harmful consequences may ensue. We may become arrogant, thinking we have attained something we have not. Or we may be disappointed, wondering why the wonderful experience cannot be replicated in future meditations. Or we may be frustrated because we thought this experience should have eliminated certain afflictions and problems in our lives only to discover that they remain. These difficulties arise not because of the meditation experience but because of our mistaken interpretation of it afterward. For these reasons, having correct conceptions and proper guidance from experienced teachers is important to prevent going astray.

## *Penetrating the Four Truths*

Penetrating and seeing the four truths comes about through the development of wisdom, which is based on concentration. First the mind must be focused and brought to a state of unification with single-pointed concentration. Such concentration makes the mind a powerful tool for investigating the nature of our experiences and existence.

Theravādin masters have diverse ideas on the degree of concentration needed to do insight meditation. Some say the attainment of full samādhi is not necessary, that even a relatively new practitioner can begin doing insight

meditation.<sup>93</sup> Others say that one of the dhyānas is necessary for insight meditation. Still others say that some concentration must be cultivated, even if it is not full dhyāna. They direct their students to begin by practicing mindfulness to make the mind more focused until eventually it can remain without distraction on the constantly changing series of ever-changing moments of body and mind. Although they do not develop mindfulness that leads to the appearance of the sign (P. *nimitta*)—a mental image that arises in stabilizing meditation and is then used as the meditation object to attain single-pointed concentration—their concentration is sufficient to begin insight meditation.<sup>94</sup>

Insight wisdom practiced with a mind of samādhi examines the five aggregates that compose the person—the body, feelings, discriminations, miscellaneous factors, and consciousness.<sup>95</sup> This wisdom comes to see and to experience that this seemingly solid, monolithic body is actually a stream of material events that are arising and ceasing in each moment. Insight wisdom is directed to feelings, discriminations, and miscellaneous factors and experiences them as continuously arising and passing away. As insight deepens, experiencing everything in the first four aggregates as arising and passing away is superseded by perception of everything in the body and mind as disintegrating and dissolving moment by moment.

Insight then proceeds to investigate consciousness, where ignorance hides in its most subtle forms. When wisdom investigates consciousness, it too is revealed as nothing more than impersonal moments of mind that continuously arise and vanish. As the mind becomes more fine-tuned to impermanence, all five aggregates are seen as disintegrating, dissolving, and vanishing in each moment. Nothing substantial remains in the collection of aggregates.

Since the five aggregates are continuously ceasing, they are known as unable to bring lasting happiness and are therefore unsatisfactory. Being impermanent and unsatisfactory, they are unsuitable to be an everlasting blissful self. There is nothing in them to grasp as being I, mine, or my self.

In the *Mindfulness of Breathing Sutta* (*Ānāpānasati Sūtra*, MN 118), the last four aspects illustrate the path preceding and leading up to the breakthrough to the unconditioned. These four are contemplating impermanence, contemplating fading away, contemplating cessation, and contemplating relinquishment. When contemplating impermanence, meditators observe changes in the rhythm, frequency, and texture of the breath. Going deeper, they see that each phase of



the breath—the beginning, middle, and end of the in-breath and the out-breath—changes continuously. Wisdom then examines the rest of the body, seeing that it, too, is in constant, unstoppable flux. Similarly, feelings, discriminations, primary consciousnesses, and mental factors arise and pass away in each moment. As wisdom and concentration become more refined, the process of arising and passing away is seen directly, more subtly, and more rapidly.

As meditation continues, the phase of arising recedes into the background, and the phase of disintegrating becomes more prominent. In evermore tiny microseconds the five aggregates are seen as disintegrating. This progresses to simply being aware of their cessation, the continuous stream of cessations of the body-mind complex in all of its aspects. The last stage, relinquishment, is giving up attachment to and identification with the five aggregates as a self. What we cling to as I and mine is just a collection of impermanent, impersonal factors that are continuously ceasing. There is nothing within or among them to be grasped as I or mine.

The meditator continues contemplating the five aggregates as impermanent, unsatisfactory, and not-self, making the mind more and more familiar with these truths. As insight deepens, it comes to a point where wisdom presses up against the boundaries of the conditioned and then breaks through the façade of conditioned phenomena. At this time, the meditator attains realization of the unconditioned, *nirvāṇa*. Penetration into the four truths in the path moments occurs in a sudden flash, a single breakthrough into all four truths simultaneously. However, this does not mean that all four truths are perceived simultaneously. According to the commentaries, the supramundane path and fruit take *nirvāṇa* (true cessation) as their object, not the other three truths. However, the path-consciousness is said to penetrate all four truths simultaneously. While it directly perceives only its object, the third truth, it penetrates the other three truths in terms of its function.

After arising from the experience of the path and fruition, meditators experience the five aggregates in a totally different way. Not clinging to the aggregates as I and mine, they fully understand the first noble truth—that the five aggregates are unsatisfactory in nature. They have lessened ignorance and craving to some extent, thus abandoning a portion of the true origin of *duḥkha*. Because the *āryan* eight path factors were present when realizing the third truth, they know the true path, the fourth truth.

Just for a moment the clouds of ignorance disperse, supramundane wisdom shines forth, and the third truth—true cessation of duḥkha and its origins—is seen clearly. Simultaneous with seeing true cessation, the other three noble truths are also seen and understood as being just empty, insubstantial, impermanent phenomena. Wisdom understands that ignorance and craving keep us bound in saṃsāra and that the path of wisdom leads to the cessation of duḥkha and its origin—this is the unconditioned, nirvāṇa. This breakthrough, which lasts only a short while, in which all four truths are known directly and simultaneously as they really are, establishes one as a stream-enterer. Meditators then continue to practice, gradually eradicating defilements, and experience nirvāṇa more deeply, passing through the stages of once-returner and nonreturner until arhatship is attained.

## *Subduing Defilements*

Afflictions have plagued us and caused us misery since beginningless time. Although it would be wonderful if they would disappear by themselves, this is not possible. Just like a shrewd enemy, they hide where we do not expect them to and appear at times when we thought they would not. To overcome them, we must be more clever than they are. To do this, we must study them well, know their habits, detect their weak points, and then, with wisdom, destroy them.

Defilements—afflictions, hindrances, fetters, and so on—have different degrees of strength and intensity at different times. For this reason, certain antidotes are more appropriate according to the strength of the defilement, and different degrees of abandonment are brought about by these antidotes. By being aware of this, we will understand why the three higher trainings and the insight wisdom and path wisdom they develop are essential for liberation.

The three general degrees or stages of defilements, going from coarse to subtle, are:

(1) *Expressed defilements* are motivating forces for our physical and verbal behavior and are expressed through the actions of our body and speech. The coarsest level of defilements, expressed defilements, are usually strong and contribute to the creation of nonvirtuous karma. Living with ethical conduct—specifically taking and keeping precepts—restraining the senses, and practicing

the seven virtuous actions of body and speech are effective ways to counter these defilements. For example, to impress others, Sam lies about his abilities. Attachment to reputation is the defiled motivation expressed through his verbal destructive action. Recognizing the disadvantages of uncontrolled speech and wanting to prevent it in the future, Sam takes the precept to avoid lying. Should a similar situation arise in the future, keeping this precept will deter him from lying. Observing precepts is *specific factor abandonment*.

Alternatively, Sam could remember that lying is nonvirtuous and stop himself from doing it because he aspires for a good rebirth. He could also practice sense restraint by not paying so much attention to gossip in the office. This level of abandonment is useful but is not stable because afflictions easily arise and overwhelm the mind, motivating us to express the defilements in our mind through speech and action.

(2) *Manifest and active defilements* are those present in the mind that haven't yet erupted into nonvirtuous physical or verbal actions. These are the defilements that were present when Sam was worrying about his reputation and seeking to impress others. Reflecting on one of the antidotes to attachment, such as mindfulness of death, will temporarily relax the attachment. This is a rudimentary form of abandonment called "factor substitution." Actual abandonment by factor substitution is substituting the defilement with insight knowledge that directly opposes the defilement. This is likened to abandoning darkness by turning on a light. Grasping permanence is abandoned by understanding impermanence; wrong views about karma and its effects are abandoned by meditation on conditionality.

Another way to prevent attachment from manifesting and being active in the mind is through cultivating deep states of concentration, such as access concentration or one of the dhyānas. Such deep concentration temporarily suppresses, but does not eradicate, the hindrances. The underlying tendencies still remain and, once the person comes out of meditation, manifest afflictions may arise. They don't necessarily arise again in the same life; skilled yogis can suppress the defilements so they don't arise, but they remain operative at the level of underlying tendencies (*anusāya, anusaya*). Nevertheless, *suppression abandonment* gives the mind some repose and prevents coarse afflictive emotions from disturbing the mind.

(3) *Latent defilements* are underlying tendencies (*P. anusaya*) that are ingrained and innate. Only wisdom has the ability to cut the continuity of the underlying tendencies of afflictions. This wisdom is of two types. The first is insight wisdom, which is cultivated while meditating on the three characteristics. It weakens, but does not eliminate, the underlying tendencies. However, when all the conditions come together and a practitioner's faculties are mature,<sup>96</sup> the wisdom of clear realization arises and eradicates the defilements in such a way that even traces of them no longer exist in the mind. *Eradication abandonment* is the abandoning of defilements that are the true origin of *duḥkha* by destroying them completely so that they can never occur again. This is accomplished by the four supramundane paths and occurs in the mental continuums of the four types of āryas.<sup>97</sup>

#### DEFILEMENTS, ANTIDOTES, AND TYPES OF ABANDONMENT

LEVEL OR DEGREE OF DEFILEMENT	MINIMAL ANTIDOTE	ABANDONMENT
<b>Expressed defilements</b> are expressed by bodily or verbal action.	Ethical conduct: precepts, sense restraint, practicing virtue, etc.	Specific factor: observing a precept stops the expression of a defilement in our actions.
<b>Active or manifest defilements</b> are active as thoughts and emotions in the mind.	1. Factor substitution 2. Concentration: access-concentration or full dhyāna concentration	1. Specific factor: using a particular antidote to deal with a particular hindrance 2. Suppression abandonment: using dhyāna concentration to suppress all hindrances
<b>Latent defilements or underlying tendencies</b> are defilements lying dormant deep within the mind, ready to become manifest when stimulated.	Wisdom: 1. insight wisdom weakens the latent tendencies 2. wisdom of clear realization (path wisdom) eradicates them	1. Specific factor abandonment occurs through insight wisdom 2. Eradication abandonment occurs through the wisdom of clear realization.

Just as a child does not begin her schooling in university, we do not begin the path by generating insight wisdom or path wisdom. Starting at the beginning by adhering to precepts and ethical values is a practical and effective method to stop the physical and verbal expression of defilements. From there we progress to generating concentration as the way to suppress manifest defilements. Continuing to practice, we generate path wisdom that is capable of uprooting them completely. To whatever degree we are capable of abandoning defilements, to that degree our mind will be more peaceful.

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## REFLECTION

1. Make examples of expressed defilements in your life. What is the minimal antidote to apply to them? Imagine applying those antidotes to calm your mind.
  2. Do this for active (manifest) defilements and latent defilements (underlying tendencies).
  3. What are the three abandonments? How can you develop them?
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## *The Importance of Realizing Selflessness*

The importance of realizing selflessness to attain nirvāṇa becomes evident as we examine the four truths. When asked what constitutes the truth of duḥkha, we point to the five aggregates that are called *sakkāya* (S. *satkāya*), the collection of aggregates subject to clinging. Our psychophysical aggregates are not free from clinging and are under the control of clinging.<sup>98</sup> *Sakkāya* is often translated as personality or personal identity. In the Tibetan term *'jig tshogs*, *'jig* means to perish or decay, and *tshogs* means collection and refers to the collection of perishing aggregates.

Our life is an interplay of the five aggregates. Through the sense faculties in the body meeting sense objects, consciousness of the world arises together with contact, discrimination, feeling, intention, and other mental factors, all of which are true duḥkha. How do these five aggregates that constitute the person come into being? What is their origin? Craving is the chief source. Normally we think

that first we exist, then we crave. Although from one perspective that is true, from another perspective because craving exists, the five aggregates come into being and we exist. In the *Discourse on the Six Sets of Six*, the Buddha says that the origin of the five aggregates is regarding any of the aggregates as “this is mine; this I am; this is my self”—three sentences that appear frequently in the sūtras. The conception or grasping that any part of this body-mind complex is mine, I, or my self is a decisive cause that perpetuates saṃsāra. We usually don’t think that thoughts have such power, but they do. The thoughts grasping the ideas of “mine,” “I,” and “my self” have the ability to propel this cycle of rebirth.

Three graspings (*grāha*, *gāha*) lie behind these three afflictive thoughts: craving, conceit, and wrong views. In particular, craving supports the thought “this is mine,” because craving wants to possess the aggregates or whatever else it sees as desirable. Conceit lies behind the thought “this I am,” because conceit holds the I to be a solid and independent entity.<sup>99</sup> Wrong views underlie the idea “this is my self,” because views formulate philosophical stances of what I truly am and what my real nature is, thus constructing a view of the self. The three graspings drive this round of existence from life to life. The perishing aggregates are true duḥkha, and these three graspings are true origins.

Because we do not understand the five aggregates as they are—as impermanent, unsatisfactory, and selfless—ignorance and craving continue and much misery is experienced. When we do not understand the six sense objects (the external sources), the six sense faculties (the internal sources), consciousness, contact, and feeling, we become enmeshed in craving for all these factors that play a role in cognition and experience. For example, we meet a person and experience pleasure being with him. Immediately the mind becomes attached to the sights, sounds, fragrances, tastes, tactile sensations, and mental images of that person. Attachment also arises for our sense faculties—the eye, ear, nose, tongue, tactile, and mental faculties—that enable consciousness to perceive him after contact has occurred. Attachment arises not only for those consciousnesses and contacts but also for the pleasant feelings. Not seeing feeling as it actually is becomes particularly disturbing to our well-being because craving and other afflictions arise in direct response to feelings. Experiencing pleasure, we want more and better. This craving propels us to do this and that, go here and there, continually looking for happiness from external people and objects. In the *Great Sixfold Base Sūtra*, the Buddha warns (MN 149.4):

When one abides inflamed by sensual desire, fettered, infatuated, contemplating gratification [that we hope to receive from external people and things], then the five aggregates subject to clinging are built up for oneself in the future; and one's craving—which brings renewal of being (rebirth in saṃsāra), is accompanied by delight and sensual desire, and delights in this and that—increases. One's physical and mental troubles increase, one's physical and mental torments increase, one's physical and mental fevers (longing) increase, and one experiences physical and mental suffering.

Craving fixates on all the factors involved in producing feeling, and we find ourselves in the grip of attachment, bound by attachment, confused in our infatuation, and continually thinking of the gratifying pleasure we hope to receive from objects of the senses. When we do not receive the pleasure we crave, unhappiness and anger set in. A restless mental state, disturbed by either longing or animosity, can affect our physical health. This is suffering we experience here and now as a result of craving. In addition, craving perpetuates saṃsāra by propelling a new set of aggregates to arise in the future birth. That future birth, in turn, is the basis for the arising of further craving for the objects of the senses, sense faculties, consciousnesses, contacts, and feelings that manifest in that lifetime.

Meditation on the above explanation is effective for energizing our Dharma practice. Do this by considering many examples of this process as it occurs in your own life. The clearer you see the reality of your situation in saṃsāra, the greater will be your determination to be free from it. In addition, understanding the dependent arising of objects, sense faculties, consciousness, contact, and feeling in your daily experiences sets the stage for insight meditation.

To disband these five aggregates and attain liberation, we must challenge the three afflictive thoughts “This is mine. This I am. This is my self.” This is done by seeing all factors of the body-mind complex as they really are—that is, by regarding them as “this is not mine; I am not this; this is not my self.” The eightfold path converges on this meditation in which right view is applied to all factors of our saṃsāric existence, which are subsumed in the five aggregates and the twelve sources.<sup>100</sup> When we know with right insight that they are not mine, not I, and not my self, it becomes possible to stop certain defilements from arising



in active form. Seeing the impermanence, unsatisfactory nature, dependent existence, and selflessness of these factors prevents craving for pleasure, craving to be free from pain, and craving for neutral feelings not to subside.<sup>101</sup>

Meditation on all the various parts of the aggregates as “this is not mine; this I am not; this is not my self” is another way of formulating the true path. To see the three characteristics entails the cultivation of insight wisdom. As insight wisdom gradually becomes stronger and more penetrative, the path wisdom of an ārya arises, and one catches a glimpse of nirvāṇa. Through path wisdom and direct knowledge, the fetters and pollutants are eliminated step by step on the ārya path, until ignorance is completely eradicated and the four truths are fully seen as they are. The eradication of these three distorted conceptions, the three graspings that lie behind them, and the five aggregates that result from them is true cessation. The meditation bringing about this cessation is the true path.

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## REFLECTION

Observe the three graspings in your own experience.

1. Craving supports the thought “this is mine.” Notice how craving wants to possess the aggregates, possessions, people, reputation, and so on. It divides the world into what is desirable and what isn’t. How does craving influence your life?
2. Conceit lies behind the thought “this I am.” Notice how there is conceit even when thinking “I”—there is pride just in existing.
3. Wrong views underlie the thought “this is my self.” Do you get tangled up in a proliferation of thoughts about what you are and what your real nature is?

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## *Cultivating Wisdom and Gaining Realization*

Wisdom is cultivated in stages, first by restraining the natural tendencies to react to pleasant feelings with attachment, to respond to painful ones with aversion, and to remain ignorant about the nature of neutral feelings. With this background, practitioners observe the nature of feelings, and after doing that over time, they will be able to penetrate their nature more deeply and clearly. Through



this process, the underlying tendencies—latent dispositions that enable manifest afflictions to arise when the causes and conditions are present—are gradually weakened, until the point is reached when insight is strong and profound enough to cut off those tendencies altogether.

What does it mean to penetrate or understand the nature of feelings? Here feelings are used as an example of the many things to penetrate and understand, such as the five aggregates, six sources, the constituents, and so forth.

First we cultivate mindfulness and train in identifying the feelings in our own experience. Through training in mindfulness, we become able to identify even subtle happy and unhappy feelings when they arise. The following schema of gratification, danger, and escape is often applied to mindfulness of the five aggregates, six sources, and the elements as well. We first become aware of the gratification or pleasure we receive from contact with sense objects. Then we contemplate the danger of being attached to these feelings and how that perpetuates our saṃsāra. Upon realizing how this traps us in saṃsāra, we generate the wish to escape from attachment to feelings.

The *origin* (P. *samudaya*) of feelings is their causes and conditions. This is understood by tracing the causal process of contact occurring through the meeting of consciousness and the object by means of the sense faculty, and contact then leading to the generation of feelings. The *disappearance* (P. *atthangama*) of feelings is their cessation when their conditioning factors cease. When contact does not occur, feelings do not arise.

*Gratification* (P. *assāda*) refers to the pleasure and joy we derive from feelings, even when this involves the creation of misery. For example, we sometimes indulge in unhappy feelings because that gives us the “pleasure” of feeling sorry for ourselves. We delight in pleasant feelings because they anesthetize our deep-rooted dissatisfaction, in the same way that an alcoholic delights in the next drink that masks—and perpetuates—his unhappiness.

The *danger* or *drawbacks* (P. *ādinava*) of feelings is that they are impermanent, unsatisfactory, and subject to change. Feelings are dangerous when we ignorantly react to them, perpetuating bondage in saṃsāra. Pleasant feelings bring attachment, unpleasant feelings breed anger, and neutral feelings lead to apathy and confusion. These disturbing emotions continue to run our lives, create destructive karma, and ensure rebirth in saṃsāra.

*Escape* (P. *nissaraṇa*) entails relinquishing attachment and desire for these feelings, which is accomplished through mindfulness and wisdom. Escape is the antidote that remedies the danger, and at its fullest is nirvāṇa.

When the sense faculties, objects, consciousnesses, contacts, and feelings are known as they really are, we are not inflamed with sensual desire. That allows for space to contemplate their danger and disadvantages—in particular their being impermanent, unsatisfactory, and subject to change. Such contemplation leads to the vanishing of physical and mental troubles and the arising of physical and mental bliss. Knowing and seeing things as they really are is the practice of wisdom and brings about the ending of craving, the cessation of the five aggregates subject to clinging, and liberation from saṃsāra.

This practice embodies the entire eightfold path. A practitioner who has contemplated the three characteristics and knows and sees things as they are has right view. Her intention—her motivation and purpose—is right intention. The effort she makes in that contemplation is right effort. Her mindfulness of the sense object, sense faculty, consciousness, contact, and feeling arising from contact as they really are—as impermanent, unsatisfactory, and selfless—is right mindfulness. The absorption of mind in that contemplation is right concentration. At the highest level of insight wisdom, just before she attains the ārya path, these five factors of the eightfold path are active. The other three factors—right speech, right action, and right livelihood—have been purified before entering into insight meditation and do not need further development at this moment. When the practitioner breaks through to the supramundane path and becomes an ārya, all eight path factors are present simultaneously, each playing its own role in eradicating the defilements. As the practitioner continues to develop the eightfold path of the āryas, all the other factors of the thirty-seven harmonies with awakening simultaneously come to fulfillment.

## *Calming Reactivity to Feelings*

Reactivity to physical and mental feelings of pleasure, pain, and neutrality creates disturbance in our lives here and now and interferes with the cultivation of serenity and insight. We cannot endure discomfort, let alone pain, and constantly seek pleasure and comfort. Such attachment and aversion dominate our lives.

Learning to calm these reactions and maintain equanimity toward whatever feeling arises in our mind is a necessary step to cultivate both serenity and insight.

To do this, followers of many religions are encouraged to adopt some form of ascetic practice. But how useful are such practices for purifying the mind and progressing on the path? The Buddha noted that when someone who is undeveloped in body experiences a pleasant feeling, she enjoys the pleasure with attachment and craves more. When someone who is undeveloped in mind experiences a painful feeling, it invades the mind and persists, the mind becoming overwhelmed with aversion toward that feeling. However, when someone who is developed in body experiences a pleasant feeling, the mind does not become obsessed with it and does not crave more, and when someone who is developed in mind experiences a painful feeling, the mind does not become overwhelmed with aversion toward that feeling.

*Development of body* means that the person has developed insight. With insight, she understands that any pleasant feeling is impermanent, unsatisfactory, and not-self. With this wisdom she loses interest in these feelings. *Development of mind* indicates samādhi: when deep concentration is present, painful feelings cannot invade and overwhelm the mind because the practitioner is able to withdraw the mind from those feelings.

The Buddha's life story tells us that after his renunciation he engaged in ascetic practices for six years. The *Greater Discourse to Saccaka* (MN 36) relates that during that time three similes occurred to him. First, fire cannot arise from a wet, sappy stick in water. Similarly, practitioners who do not live physically withdrawn from sense pleasures cannot internally suppress their attachment to them. When they experience pain, they also are not able to gain realizations because the pain and their aversion to it overwhelm the mind, rendering them unable to concentrate or reflect on the Dharma. Even when they do not experience pain, they are still incapable of knowledge and vision because they are overwhelmed by distraction.

The stick lying in water symbolizes enjoying sense pleasures while seeking awakening. The stick being wet and sappy inside is analogous to the sensual desire that has not been internally subdued by samādhi. These practitioners cannot attain awakening, no matter whether they engage in ascetic practices or not. They suffer from two obstructions: physically they are immersed in sense pleasures and

internally their desire has not been stilled. Thus for them, ascetic practices are futile.

In the second simile, the wet, sappy wood is on dry land; however, it still cannot produce fire. This is analogous to practitioners who live physically withdrawn from sense pleasures but whose desire for these pleasures has been neither abandoned nor suppressed internally. When they experience painful feelings by engaging in ascetic practices, they are incapable of knowledge and vision and supreme awakening. Even when they do not experience painful feelings, they are incapable of awakening. These people have met one condition by living physically withdrawn from sense pleasure, but their sensual desire is not stilled because they do not know how to train the mind, or if they do know, they do not practice it. In this case, too, whether or not they do ascetic practices, they cannot attain awakening.

The third simile is a dry sapless stick on dry land; this stick is capable of producing fire. Similarly, practitioners who are physically withdrawn from sense pleasures and have internally suppressed sensual desire are capable of attaining awakening whether or not they experience painful feelings. They have met both conditions: they are physically withdrawn from sense objects and their minds are stilled. So whether or not they engage in ascetic practices, they will be able to attain awakening.

From this we may conclude that engaging in ascetic practices is not the key to attaining awakening. Physically distancing ourselves from sense pleasures by living a modest lifestyle and mentally removing our mind from sensual desire by cultivating samādhi will benefit us. Samādhi is the basis for insight to arise, and insight uproots the deep tendencies in our mind for sensual craving. Samādhi enables a practitioner to temporarily abandon or to suppress afflictions by means of entering deep states of concentration. Insight gives the ability to abandon afflictions so they will never return.

Those non-Buddhists who engage in painful ascetic practices seek to tame their attachment and aversion. However, the method they employ does not work. Other non-Buddhists are instructed by their teachers not to see forms with their eyes, nor hear sounds with their ears, and so forth (MN 152). If not seeing, not hearing, and so forth were the way to avoid responding to sense objects with attachment, aversion, and apathy, the Buddha commented that then the blind and deaf would have excelled in developing their mental faculties.

At this point in the sūtra, Ānanda requests the Buddha to explain the supreme development of the faculties—the development of the mind—in the āryas’ discipline. In his reply, the Buddha assumes that practitioners are already practicing restraint of the sense faculties (P. *indriyasamvara*) by restricting contact with sense objects so that the mind doesn’t get carried away by its reactions to them. The next step in developing the faculties is to establish insight while perceiving the object. This is done by understanding (MN 152.4):

There has arisen in me what is agreeable, there has arisen what is disagreeable, there has arisen what is both agreeable and disagreeable. But that is conditioned, gross, dependently arisen; this is peaceful, this is sublime, namely equanimity.

Here practitioners notice that liking, disliking, or apathy has arisen toward the perceived object and counteract that by focusing on other attributes of the object—the fact that it is conditioned, gross, and dependently arisen. Through this, the equanimity of insight is established and, by dwelling in that, they release attraction, aversion, and apathy. This is the supreme development of the faculties in āryas’ discipline.

When seeing a form, hearing a sound, and so forth (up to cognizing a mental object), how does a disciple in higher training (someone who has entered the path) practice? If liking, disliking, or apathy arise in her mind, she recognizes it as a hindrance and, turning her mind away from these reactions, she reestablishes the equanimity of insight.

The Buddha proceeds by explaining how arhats practice when agreeable, disagreeable, or neutral feelings arise when contacting sense objects. Note that here he speaks of arhats who have perfected these methods. In other instances, the Buddha teaches them to ordinary practitioners as methods to abandon attachment, anger, and ignorance in training. These are:

(1) Perceiving the unrepulsive in the repulsive is to meditate on love toward a person we find disagreeable or to contemplate a person or object as simply a collection of impersonal parts or elements. Doing this brings the mind to a neutral state that is open, receptive, and has arisen through implementing a virtuous Dharma method.

(2) Perceiving the repulsive in the unrepulsive is to contemplate the body of an attractive person as foul or to understand an attractive object as impermanent.

(3) Perceiving the unrepulsive in both the repulsive and the unrepulsive is to apply the first two methods to both repulsive and unrepulsive objects.

(4) Perceiving the repulsive in both the unrepulsive and the repulsive is to apply the first two methods to both repulsive and unrepulsive objects.

(5) By avoiding both the repulsive and unrepulsive, abide in equanimity, mindful and fully aware. This abandons joy and sorrow in reaction to objects of the six senses and allows us to abide in equanimity.

The Buddha closes this sūtra with heartfelt encouragement (MN 152.18):

What should be done for his disciples out of compassion by a Teacher who seeks their welfare and has compassion for them, that I have done for you, Ānanda. There are these roots of trees, these empty huts. Meditate, Ānanda, do not delay, or else you will regret it later. This is my instruction to you.

By teaching us with compassion, the Buddha has done what he could to lead us out of saṃsāra and to nirvāṇa. Now we must practice. Since we do not know when death will come, we should not delay, because dallying on the path will only bring regret and pain later on.

## *Unique Qualities of the Buddha's Teaching*

The teachings on conditionality (causal dependence) and selflessness are unique aspects of the Buddha's doctrine. In the *Shorter Sutta on the Lion's Roar* (MN 11), the Buddha emphasizes the necessity of uprooting all views of self, especially the views of existence (absolutism, P. *bhavadiṭṭhi*) and of nonexistence (nihilism, P. *vibhavadiṭṭhi*). Only by the thorough cultivation of true knowledge (*vijjā*) are ignorance (*avijjā*) and all forms of clinging eliminated, resulting in the attainment of nirvāṇa.

The *Held by Views Sūtra* discusses the views of existence and nonexistence (Iti 2.22).

Held by two kinds of views, some devas and human beings hold back and some overreach; only those with vision see.

And how, monastics, do some hold back? Devas and humans enjoy existence, delight in existence, are satisfied with existence. When Dhamma is taught to them for liberation from existence, their minds do not enter into it or acquire confidence in it or settle upon it or become resolved upon it. It is in this way, monastics, that some hold back.

How, monastics, do some overreach? Now some are troubled, ashamed, and disgusted by this very same existence and they rejoice in [the idea of] nonexistence, asserting: “In as much as this self, good sirs, when the body perishes at death, is annihilated and destroyed and does not exist after death—this is peaceful, this is excellent, this is the real!” It is in this way, monastics, that some overreach.

How, monastics, do those with vision see? Herein a monastic sees what has come to be as having come to be. Having seen it thus, he practices the way for disenchantment, for dispassion, for the cessation of what has come to be. It is in this way, monastics, that those with vision see.

Here the Buddha speaks of three types of people. The first, those who hold back, are confined and limited by their wrong views. Not knowing any other type of existence, they enjoy saṃsāra and delight in its pleasures. Some people who crave for saṃsāric existence develop a view of it that gives intellectual support to their craving. Other people just assume there is a permanent soul or a substantial self that continues after death; they want to go on existing forever. Some seek rebirth specifically as a deva or human being with great wealth, reputation, family, and power.

The second are people overreach. Some are disgusted with life, are in great pain, or despair about the state of the world. At the time of death, they crave for nonexistence in order to terminate their misery. Others enjoy life but think that the mind is just a property of the brain and that the self ceases at the time of death. Both of these ideas assume that when the body dies the consciousness and the person become nonexistent. They see the cessation of all existence at the time of death as peaceful and do not consider or prepare for future lives.

The third alternative is the one the Buddha presents; these people see with correct vision of wisdom and insight. They see “what has come to be as having come to be”—they see that five aggregates have arisen through conditions. Because the five aggregates are controlled by ignorance and karma, they become disenchanted with them, cease to crave them, and attain freedom from them by overcoming their causes. This cessation is not the absolutism of those who hold back or the nihilism of those who overreach, but is the Middle Way of the Buddha that upholds dependent origination in saṃsāra and its cessation.

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## REFLECTION

1. Some people hold back from the Dharma because they are completely wrapped up and infatuated with this life and the external world with its desirable people and attractive experiences. They find Dharma uninteresting.
  2. Some people overreach because they cannot find harmony with people and the world. They are depressed and discouraged and see death or nonexistence as the peace they seek. They are unable to make effort in the Dharma or dislike doing so.
  3. Those who see with vision see the world and beings in it with wisdom, as they are, and seek liberation.
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## *Relinquishing Wrong Views*

Wrong views must be relinquished to generate correct views. Many wrong views are based on philosophical machinations, and clinging to them brings misery here and now and impedes the ability to think clearly. In the *Net of Brahmā Sūtra* (DN 1), the Buddha outlines sixty-two wrong views to renounce. In the *Shorter Series of Questions and Answers* (MN 44), Bhikkhunī Dhammadinnā outlines twenty wrong views of self to be given up. In the *Discourse on the Simile of the Snake*, the Buddha talks about various views of permanence, pointing out their disadvantages; for example (MN 22.18):

. . . someone thinks thus: “Alas, I had it! Alas, I have it no longer! Alas, may I have it! Alas, I do not get it!” Then he sorrows, grieves,



and laments; he weeps, beating his breast, and becomes distraught.

Holding this view, we think our possessions are permanent, everlasting, and not subject to change. When we later lose a cherished possession or relationship, we exclaim in distress, “Alas, I had it! Alas, I have it no longer!” and are distraught with grief and often with anger or depression as well. The mind vacillates, being attached to those things when we have them and lamenting when we lose them. Or, as indicated by thinking “Alas, may I have it! Alas, I do not get it!” we crave desirable things we don’t have, and when our wishes or longing are stifled, we mourn in distress. On the other hand, someone who does not hold a view of permanent possessions, status, or relationships is not subjected to these emotional vacillations that are rooted in craving.

Someone may hold an extreme absolutist view thinking that at death our individual self will continue on unchanged and exist eternally, or thinking our soul will merge with the universe and in that way be permanent and everlasting. When people who cling to such views encounter the Buddha’s teachings, they easily misinterpret them, thinking the Buddha is saying that at death they will be annihilated and cease to exist altogether. They then become terrified and agitated and reject the Dharma. Clinging to this wrong view has obscured their wisdom.

Is it possible to hold any doctrine of self without experiencing unfortunate repercussions? The Buddha challenges the monastics (MN 22.23):

Monastics, you may well cling to that doctrine of self that would not arouse sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, and despair in one who clings to it. But do you see any such doctrine of self?

After the monastics reply that they do not, the Buddha agrees. Although not said directly, the implication is that holding any wrong view leads to clinging to that view, and when a wrong view is clung to and cherished, misfortune will eventually come. That misfortune may not arise immediately or in an obvious way. In fact, some people may derive satisfaction and security from their wrong views, and other people may restrain from destructive behavior due to them. However, in the long term these views will lead to disappointment, justification for harmful actions, rejection of correct views, and continued existence in saṃsāra.

Several sūtras in the *Suttanipāta* contain passages about giving up even the subtlest clinging to views.

Those who hold rules (precepts) to be the highest thing,  
thinking purity comes from [practice of] self-restraint,  
take up rites and observe them [dutifully],  
[thinking] “if we learn this, then we’ll learn purity”—  
[these] self-proclaimed experts are bound for rebirth.

When someone is deficient in rules and rituals,  
having failed to perform some act, he trembles,  
he yearns and longs for purity here,  
like one who has left home [but] lost the caravan.

So renounce rules and rituals,  
all actions that bring praise and blame;  
without yearning [for] “purity, impurity!”  
[a person] should live free, not grasping at peace.

When a person in the world, abiding in views,  
esteems something especially “the highest,”  
then he says that all others are inferior;  
in this way he is not beyond disputes.

The person who holds opinions, defining [things] for himself,  
comes to further quarrels in the world;  
[only] when a person renounces all opinions  
does he make no quarrel with the world.<sup>102</sup>

Clinging to views—be they views concerning precepts, rituals, or philosophical topics—takes us far from the purpose of the Dharma into egotistic thinking. Arrogance flares up and we are lost in comparing ourselves with others, thinking we are best because we hold the correct views and others are inferior because they hold foolish views. We find ourselves in disputes with others, desperately endeavoring to be victorious in debates in a frantic attempt to prop up our self-esteem. This is not the path to nirvāṇa.

Relinquishing clinging to views doesn’t mean we don’t believe in anything, are afraid to join a discussion, or ignorantly vacillate between views. We need to

learn to think clearly without attachment or confusion. Right views in the eightfold path can be supported by reason.

The *Sutta to Pasūra* speaks of the disadvantages of clinging to views and discourages doing so. It also advises how to reply to someone who is intent on arguing about views for the sake of praise and recognition (Sn 4.8):

“Only here is there purity”—that’s what they say. “No other doctrines are pure”—so they say. Insisting that what they depend on is good, they are deeply entrenched in their personal truths.

Seeking controversy, they plunge into an assembly, regarding one another as fools. Relying on others’ authority, they speak in debate. Desiring praise, they claim to be skilled. . . .

Those who, grasping at views, argue and say “Only this is truth,” to them you should say when talk begins, “There are none here to reply to you in strife.”

Among those who live above confrontation, not pitting view against view, whom would you gain as opponent, Pasūra, among those here who are grasping no more?

The *Aṭṭhakavagga* and the *Pārāyanavagga*, small collections of some of the earliest sūtras, are found in the *Suttanipāta*. These sūtras seem to anticipate Nāgārjuna’s emphasis on not clinging to precepts and practices and even to the most cherished philosophical views that we are certain will lead us to awakening. Nāgārjuna’s instruction isn’t simply to abandon clinging to views in the sense of not demanding “my view is right, yours is wrong,” but to release clinging to the view of grasping inherent existence. He warns us against holding the reified extreme of absolutism that grasps inherent existence as well as the annihilating view of nihilism that negates what in fact exists.

Unwilling to assent to any view of inherent existence, Nāgārjuna says that the emptiness of inherent existence itself is also empty. In place of the wrong views of absolutism and nihilism, he asserts that although all phenomena—even emptiness itself and his own views—lack inherent existence, they still exist and function, and therefore adopting the correct view is important. In the culminating verse of *Treatise on the Middle Way*, he says (MMK 27.30):

I prostrate to Gautama,

who, through great compassion,  
taught the exalted Dharma  
that leads to the relinquishing of all views.

Some people have misinterpreted Nāgārjuna's words, thinking that Mādhyamikas only refute others' views but do not have any of their own. This is not correct; Mādhyamikas have positions and make assertions. Nāgārjuna explains that Mādhyamikas' assertions as well as refutations of wrong views are empty of inherent existence, yet exist dependently.

Although there are some similarities between Madhyamaka and some passages in the *Suttanipāta*, they are not the same. Nāgārjuna explains in detail how to realize emptiness, which is the antidote to all views, whereas the *Suttanipāta* does not. However, as a collection of short sūtras it gives us points to contemplate, and some of its sūtras speak of emptiness or of non-grasping. In the *Sutta on Violence*, the Buddha instructs (Sn 4.15.949–51):

Dry out that which is past,  
let there be nothing for you in the future.  
If you do not grasp at anything in the present,  
you will go about at peace.

One who, in regard to this entire mind-body complex,  
has no cherishing of it as “mine,”  
who does not grieve for what is nonexistent,  
truly suffers no loss in the world.

For him there is no thought of anything as  
“This is mine” or “This is another’s.”  
Not finding any state of ownership,  
and realizing “nothing is mine,” he does not grieve.

In short, not clinging to anything in saṃsāra, be it sense objects, people, or views, is the key to liberation. Whether someone asserts grasping a self-sufficient substantially existent person or grasping inherently existent phenomena as the

final grasping to be relinquished, everyone agrees that embellishing reality with our wrong conceptions leads to duḥkha.

## 12 | Pāli Tradition: Cultivating Insight Knowledge

THE PĀLI AND SANSKRIT TRADITIONS share many of the same analytical methods to realize selflessness. Some differences in approach exist too. According to the Pāli tradition, the realization of the three characteristics of conditioned phenomena—impermanence, duḥkha, and selflessness or not-self—is worldly insight knowledge because these three are characteristics of true duḥkha, the phenomena of saṃsāra. Realization of the three characteristics is prerequisite to penetrating nirvāṇa—the unconditioned, the ultimate. The supramundane wisdom that knows nirvāṇa is employed over the ārya stages of stream-enterer, once-returner, and nonreturner, and culminates in arhatship.

In the Sanskrit tradition, understanding impermanence and duḥkha is accomplished by conventional reliable cognizers. The various tenet systems have different views of what selflessness is, according to how they describe the object of negation. In the Prāsaṅgika system, selflessness is equivalent to emptiness; it applies to all persons and phenomena, and direct, nonconceptual realization of selflessness is an ārya path that, when fully developed, leads to liberation or full awakening.

In both traditions, wisdom is praised for unlocking the door to nirvāṇa, the state of actual peace. Therefore, the Buddha and Buddhist sages encourage us to treasure wisdom and do our best to cultivate it. The Buddha counsels (AN 1.77–81):

Insignificant, monastics, is the loss of relatives, wealth, and fame; the loss of wisdom is the greatest loss.

Insignificant, monastics, is the increase of relatives, wealth, and fame; the increase of wisdom is the greatest.

Therefore, monastics, you should train yourselves thus, “We will increase in wisdom.”

Cultivating insight wisdom entails understanding our experiences and ourselves, the person experiencing them. To understand ourselves, it is necessary to understand the five aggregates that compose the person, and this is done by comprehending their common characteristics—impermanence (*anitya, anicca*), unsatisfactoriness (*duḥkhatā, dukkhatā*), and selflessness, or not-self (*anātman, anattā*)—and comprehending how the aggregates relate to the self who is experiencing and clinging to them. Mindful observation of the aggregates sets the stage for insight analyzing their nature and the nature of the person.

### *Schemas to Use and Phenomena to Examine*

In the sūtras the Buddha repeatedly uses certain schemas of phenomena as the objects on which to develop insight wisdom and path wisdom. These include, but are not limited to, the three characteristics; the four truths; dependent origination; gratification, danger, and escape; and disenchantment (*nibbidā*), dispassion (*virāga*), and liberation (*vimutti*).

The principal schema to cultivate insight wisdom is the three characteristics of conditioned phenomena in saṃsāra: impermanence, duḥkha, and selflessness. The Buddha often uses these three to help disciples come to three conclusions about conditioned phenomena: they are not mine, they are not I, and they are not my self.

The schema of the four truths is employed to examine each phenomenon in terms of its specific nature, its arising, its cessation, and the path to its cessation. This is also the pattern used to contemplate dependent origination. In one sūtra, Śāriputra describes each of the twelve links of dependent origination, the conditions for its arising, and the conditions for its cessation, and prescribes the eightfold path as the means to cease saṃsāra. This schema highlights the conditioned nature of things—that nothing is an isolated event, separate from other things. Rather our life is part of a complex interconnected web in which one thing conditions another, which, in turn, conditions another. Understanding this opposes the misconception of independent existence and impacts the way we view ourselves and our relationship to people and things.<sup>103</sup>

While analyzing the arising and ceasing of each link, it comes to light that the process of rebirth continues without a substantial self that is reborn.

Conditionality *itself* is what makes the continuity from one life to the next occur: no soul, independent self, or controlling self is required. For example, New York City exists, and whether we think about it or experience it directly, it appears to us to be one city. Yet upon examination, we find many neighborhoods, buildings, people, and activities there. From one day to the next, each of these different elements continues on, becoming something new in each passing day. Do any of these constantly changing elements that constitute the city need a real, findable New York City to make them continue? No. Is there a findable thing that is New York in any of these elements individually or in their collection? No. If the name “New York” were removed, would everything fall apart? No. Similarly, the flow of the aggregates continues without there being a findable self that makes all these parts cohere.

Another schema the Buddha employs is that of gratification, danger, and escape. Gratification refers to the attraction sentient beings have for polluted objects and the enjoyment they derive from them, danger refers to the unpleasant consequences stemming from afflicted involvement with them, and escape refers to the peace of nirvāṇa that is free from them.

In addition, the Buddha employs the schema of disenchantment, dispassion, and liberation with respect to each conditioned thing in saṃsāra. Disenchantment is the sense of revulsion toward saṃsāra, dispassion is the fading away of desire for polluted objects, and liberation is attaining the path and experiencing nirvāṇa. Alternatively, disenchantment is the last stage of insight, dispassion is the attainment of the supramundane path, and liberation is the fruit of the path.

Other schemas can be used to examine the phenomena that compose the five aggregates. These include the twelve sources and eighteen constituents,<sup>104</sup> as well as the six types of consciousness, six contacts, six feelings, and six cravings taken together. The six elements—earth, water, fire, wind (air), space, and consciousness—are another formulation of phenomena included in the five aggregates.

Why are there so many ways to classify phenomena and so many schemas through which to examine them? Our ignorance is deep and approaching the same thing from different angles brings a more robust understanding. In addition, because people have different dispositions, an individual may find one or another schema or one or another way of grouping phenomena to be more useful for their meditation. In the next volume of the *Library of Wisdom and Compassion* you



will see different schemas applied to various topics and objects. Here we'll begin with the three characteristics.

## *The Three Characteristics*

Cultivating insight into the three characteristics enables us to look at the components of our being in a realistic way and thus is a central element of the path to liberation. It is recommended to meditate on these three on the basis of a general understanding of some of the prominent themes in the Buddha's teachings: conditionality, dependence, and how they pertain to the twelve links of dependent origination. This background prepares us to investigate each conditioned and dependent factor of our saṃsāric existence and to understand that all of them share three characteristics: they are impermanent, unsatisfactory, and selfless. Although they have these characteristics, ignorance clouds our mind and we see conditioned things as permanent, satisfactory, and having a self.

Ignorance functions in two ways. First, as mental darkness, it conceals and obscures the true nature of phenomena. Second, it creates false appearances or distortions in the mind so that we see things in a way that is opposite to what they actually are. The distortions operate on three levels: in our perceptions, thoughts, and understanding or views.

First, we *perceive* things incorrectly. Based on these incorrect perceptions, we *think* about them in a wrong way. Drawing our thoughts together, we create a narrative that interprets and *understands* our experience incorrectly. This results in constructing a philosophy that we then cling to, identify with, and defend. Needless to say, this has brought incredible misery to sentient beings throughout history. For example, Alfred perceives himself as a substantial being. When a colleague gives him some feedback about his work, he thinks the colleague is criticizing him. Ruminating on this, he understands that his job may be in danger if his boss hears about this criticism. He also notes that the colleague is from a particular country. Remembering incorrect information about that country that he heard as a child, he creates an "us versus them" philosophy whereby his country seems endangered by immigrants from the other country. Alfred then pledges to stop immigrants from entering his country by joining a vigilante group

that polices the border. Meanwhile, others who heard the feedback the colleague gave Alfred saw it as a helpful tip, not as criticism.

The Buddha spoke of four distortions, each of which occurs at the three levels above. These four are: (1) regarding what is foul as attractive, (2) regarding what is impermanent as permanent, (3) regarding what is unsatisfactory as the source of true happiness, and (4) regarding what is not self as self.

In a mind obscured by ignorance and confused by these four distortions, clinging, attachment, and other afflictions continuously operate. Ignorance gives rise to craving, which seeks to expand the territory of this supposed self so that it can control everything. We want this imagined self to continue in the future and be immortal. The four distortions sustain saṃsāra, distracting us by the lure of happiness in the world. The mind is caught up in illusions, which give rise to craving, conceit, and wrong views. In the meantime we frantically seek confirmation of our selfhood and remain perpetually frustrated as this eludes us. Only by turning the mind inward to investigate our experience with mindfulness and wisdom can these corroding activities and the duḥkha they bring be ceased.

The way to liberation lies in seeing that the three characteristics are the nature of all phenomena that constitute our body and mind. This leads us to stop identifying the aggregates as a substantial self—to see that they are not mine, not I, and not my self. By knowing the selflessness of these phenomena with correct wisdom and releasing the identification of the five aggregates as a self, craving and clinging cease as the mind becomes disenchanted, dispassionate, and liberated.

The first distortion—seeing what is foul as attractive and pure—applies particularly to the body. Although the body is a collection of elements and organs that are foul, we project attractiveness onto it. The antidote to this is meditation on the thirty-two parts of the body.

The antidote to the next three distortions is understanding the three characteristics of impermanence, duḥkha, and selflessness. The Buddha encourages us to understand the three characteristics by explaining six advantages of comprehending each of the three (AN 6:102–4):

When a monastic sees six advantages, it is enough for him to establish unlimited perception of impermanence in all conditioned things. What six? All conditioned things will appear to me as transient. My mind will not delight in anything worldly. My mind

will emerge from the entire world. My mind will incline to nibbāna. My fetters will be abandoned. And I come to possess supreme asceticism. . . .

When a monastic sees six advantages, it is enough for him to establish unlimited perception of dukkha in all conditioned things. What six? A perception of disenchantment will be established in me toward all conditioned things, as toward a murderer with uplifted dagger. My mind will emerge from the entire world, I will see nibbāna as peaceful. The underlying tendencies will be uprooted. I shall be one who has completed his task. And I shall have served the Teacher with loving-kindness.

When a monastic sees six advantages, it should be enough for him to establish unlimited perception of not-self in all conditioned things. What six? I shall be without identification (craving and views) in the entire world. Notions of “I” will cease in me. Notions of “mine” will cease in me. I shall possess knowledge not shared [with worldlings]. I shall clearly understand causes and the phenomena that arise from them. And I shall have clearly seen causally arisen phenomena.

When those who sincerely aspire to be free from saṃsāra contemplate these advantages, it will inspire and energize them to contemplate the three characteristics. But for those who are not yet convinced that lasting happiness is not to be found in saṃsāra, these advantages will appear uninteresting. To develop their minds, they should reflect again on the disadvantages of saṃsāra in terms of their own experience. In that way, a wish to be free from saṃsāra will arise and increase.

The three characteristics are intricately related to one another, and realizing them leads to the clear realization of a stream-enterer who directly knows nirvāṇa. The Buddha questioned his disciples regarding the three characteristics in *The Simile of the Snake Sūtra* (MN 22.26):

“Monastics, what do you think? Is material form permanent or impermanent?” “Impermanent, Venerable Sir.” “Is what is impermanent unsatisfactory or happiness?” “Unsatisfactory, Venerable Sir.” “Is what is impermanent, unsatisfactory, and subject

to change fit to be regarded thus: ‘This is mine, this I am, this is my self’?’—“No, Venerable Sir.”

The Buddha then continued to ask the same series of questions concerning feeling, discrimination, miscellaneous factors, and consciousness, to which the monastics gave the same reply. He then said that any kind of material form, feeling, discrimination, miscellaneous factor, or consciousness whatsoever—“past, present, or future, gross or subtle, inferior or superior, far or near—should be seen as it actually is with proper wisdom thus: ‘This is not mine, this I am not, this is not my self.’”

The same argument appears many times in the sūtras, especially in the *Book of Aggregates* in the *Connected Discourses* (SN 22–24). While the body is often used as an example because it comes first in the list of five aggregates, the same arguments should be applied to feelings, discriminations, miscellaneous factors such as emotions and attitudes, and consciousnesses.

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## REFLECTION

1. Contemplate the six advantages of understanding impermanence: All conditioned things will appear as transient. Your mind will not delight in anything worldly. Your mind will emerge from worldly worries. Your mind will incline toward nirvāṇa. You will abandon all fetters and you will come to possess supreme asceticism.
2. Contemplate the six advantages of understanding duḥkha: You will not be hooked or swept away by conditioned things. Your mind will emerge from the world and will see nirvāṇa as peaceful. The underlying tendencies will be uprooted. You will complete the task of attaining liberation and will have served the Teacher with loving-kindness.
3. Contemplate the six advantages of understanding not-self: You will be without craving and views. Notions of “I” will cease; notions of “mine” will cease. You will possess knowledge not shared with worldly people; you will clearly understand causes and the phenomena that arise from them. And you will clearly see causally arisen phenomena.

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### *Impermanence*

The Buddha describes subtle impermanence as “arising and passing away” or as “origination and disintegration.” Understanding arising or origination dispels the

misconception of nihilism, which believes that either things do not exist at all or the person completely discontinues after death, so that there is no continuity of karma and its effects. Understanding passing away or disintegration dispels the misconception of absolutism, according to which people and things have a substantial, permanent, eternal reality.

Occasionally, the sūtras speak about knowing feelings, discriminations, and thoughts “as they arise, as they are present, as they disappear” (MN 123.23), outlining three characteristics of the conditioned: arising, changing while abiding, and passing away. The Abhidharma formalizes this into the theory that at the micro level any conditioned phenomenon has three phases: the phases of arising, presence, and dissolution. These three points are without temporal duration. Change occurs not from the actual change of a persisting thing, but from the successive arisings of discrete phenomena in an unbroken sequence with imperceptible rapidity.

In meditation, it is more helpful to focus on the sūtra presentation of arising and passing away, and within those two, especially on dissolution or passing away, as that highlights impermanence in a very forceful way.

By beginning with the analysis of form’s impermanence, the Buddha appeals to the direct experience of our body. We know our body is constantly changing; we know it is aging and will eventually cease to exist. This is a comparatively gross form of impermanence, whereas the understanding of subtle impermanence frees us from the illusion of the body being permanent.

Subtle impermanence is more difficult to understand. Scientists tell us of the constant changes in subatomic particles, but since these are not visible to our ordinary perceptions and the physical objects around us seem to be stable, we assume that our five aggregates and the world around us are immutable and fixed. In fact, our body, feelings, and so on are dynamic processes in which every aspect of them is arising and passing away in each moment. Nothing is static, even though it may appear to be firm and unchanging because our perception is not sharp enough to detect the subtle changes occurring in each moment. The obscured mind puts together these unique moments of ever-changing existence and sees them as solid objects so that the ignorant mind can deal with the world. A stable, solid body is a mental image superimposed onto a stream of events in the same way that a spinning propeller is seen as a circle. The constant succession

of discrete acts of cognition or feeling appears as a monolithic event, just as the rapid change of frames in a film appears as a smooth continuum.

By practicing mindfulness and paying careful attention to the body and mental processes, we will gradually see that what appear as unified objects or events are momentary phenomena that are arising and passing away in a fraction of a nanosecond. This constant change occurs due to causes and conditions, which themselves are in constant flux. Similarly the elements that compose the body are actually dynamic processes that arise and cease in each moment. As mindfulness deepens, subtle impermanence is seen clearly, not in an intellectual or conceptual manner, but as direct experience.

To approach subtle impermanence, begin by examining your body. Is it the same from one year to the next? Is it the same from one month, week, day, hour, minute, and second to the next? Is it the same from one split-second to the next? Questioning in this way makes it clear that our body changes from split-second to split-second. Similarly, each part of our body and each atom of our body changes from one split-second to the next. Feelings, discriminations, miscellaneous factors, and consciousnesses also do not remain the same from one nanosecond to the next. Everything comes into existence, persists for the tiniest fraction of a moment, and then ceases; in fact, even in that split-second while it persists, it is changing. This is followed by something new that arises, persists for a changing fraction of a moment, and disintegrates. There is no way to stop this process: change is in the very nature of conditioned things.

The experience of a pleasant feeling is dependent on an object, the sense faculty, consciousness, and contact, but once the feeling arises, could it be permanent during the time it endures? Bhikkhu Nandaka, when instructing a group of five hundred bhikṣuṇīs, asked (MN 146.9):

Monastics, suppose an oil lamp is burning: its oil is impermanent and subject to change, its wick is impermanent and subject to change, its flame is impermanent and subject to change, and its radiance is impermanent and subject to change. Now would anyone be speaking rightly who spoke thus: “While this oil lamp is burning, its oil, wick, and flame are impermanent and subject to change, but its radiance is permanent, everlasting, eternal, not subject to change?”

To this the bhikṣuṇīs responded that such permanence is not possible. Anything that arises dependent on causes and conditions—even if it endures for a period of time—cannot itself be permanent and unchanging. It too perishes, and something new arises in each split-second of its continuity.

Our ordinary consciousness sees feelings as solid and substantial, but by directing our attention inward to our moment-to-moment experience, it is possible to realize the arising and ceasing of contact—the cause of feeling—in each split-second. As contact is seen—and it too is momentary and transient—so is the ceasing of each moment of feeling that has arisen based on that contact. By not understanding pleasant feelings as impermanent, sensual desire is ignited; by not understanding unpleasant feelings as impermanent, anger flares; and by not understanding neutral feelings as impermanent, confusion is activated. For this reason, the Buddha emphasizes understanding feelings with correct wisdom, because doing so prevents the arising of these afflictions and will eventually lead to their total eradication.

By increasing our mindfulness of each of the five aggregates, insight knowledge will arise that directly knows subtle impermanence. When this happens, it almost seems as if nothing is there, because whatever arises is gone in the next moment. The present cannot be stopped.

### *Unsatisfactoriness*

The *Path of Purification* says that duḥkha has the meaning of “oppression by rising and passing away.” In the passage from the *Simile of the Snake Sūtra* above, the Buddha points to the connection between impermanence and duḥkha by asking, “Is what is impermanent suffering or happiness?” Given that the five aggregates are transient and do not endure a second moment, they are unsatisfactory in nature; they are not secure, predictable, or dependable. The body may experience some temporary pleasure, but it is incapable of providing lasting, stable happiness that is invulnerable to changes in circumstances. Since our health and physical energy decline as we age, the body cannot be a source of true happiness.

Similarly, feelings are unsatisfactory by nature. Feelings are unstable—they are pleasant, then unpleasant; happy, then unhappy. The same unsatisfactoriness is found with discriminations, miscellaneous factors, and consciousnesses. In short, because the aggregates are under the control of afflictions and karma, they

are not beyond duḥkha. By releasing false assumptions about each of the five aggregates, we see that they have the nature of duḥkha and our false expectations and clinging to them cease.

### *Selflessness*

Selflessness (not-self) is the most difficult to glean of the three characteristics. To understand it, follow up on the first two characteristics and ask: Is what is impermanent and unsatisfactory fit to be regarded as “this is mine; this I am, this is my self”?

Underlying the answer is the ancient Indian idea of what is fitting to be regarded as I, mine, and my self, as well as our basic human notion of what we assume our true self to be. The ancient Indian conception of the self is a permanent, eternal, and intrinsically blissful self. The self is the master of the aggregates, able to accomplish what it wishes without depending on anything else. Clearly a self that is transient and under the influence of afflictions and polluted karma does not meet this description.

As for what we take to be our true self, impermanent things such as our five polluted aggregates that are bound up with duḥkha will not meet the mark because the self does not have ultimate mastery over these. Certainly we do not want to identify the polluted aggregates as being truly ours, truly what we are, or our true selves. Not finding something we can point to as our true selves puts in question the entire notion of whether such a true self exists.

The Buddha does not deny the conventional existence of the self. He used the word “I” when communicating with people. Conventionally and appropriately, the words “I,” “you,” “they,” and so forth are used to distinguish different people. The doctrine of not-self does not negate the existence of persons or of the designations used to refer to them. What is being refuted is a substantial ego entity, a permanent subject existing at the core of the psychophysical aggregates. The doctrine of not-self does not deny the existence of a person designated in dependence on the body-mind complex. It denies that the person exists as a self, as an enduring, substantial, independent entity. Saying the person exists is to say the five aggregates are present. Saying the person is selfless or that there is no self means the aggregates cannot be identified as self and do not contain a self. No



inner nucleus of selfhood can be found within or behind the conventional person composed of the five aggregates.

This is contrary to our ordinary way of thinking of ourselves. We think and feel that we are a self. We identify the body or mind as self or think a self stands behind the aggregates. According to our ingrained notion of “self,” the self has certain qualities. First, it appears to be an entity that endures through time. It might endure temporarily, coming into existence at birth and ceasing to exist at death. Or it might endure eternally, without ever ceasing after death. Second, the self is conceived to be one unified, indivisible whole that does not have parts. Third, the self seems to be self-sufficient and not dependent on causes and conditions. Fourth, it controls the aggregates. The self that is seen as our essence has mastery over itself. There should be no conflict between what we want ourselves to be and what we are.

Let’s examine the five aggregates and see if any of them fits this description of self. If such a self exists, we should be able to apply analysis to pin it down and find what it is. Conceiving a self can only be done in relationship to what is experienced, the five aggregates. While a number of different relationships between the self and the aggregates are possible, they can be subsumed in two. A real self should be either (1) the same as the aggregates—the self should be identifiable with some aspect of the body-mind complex—or (2) different from the aggregates—the self is separate from the aggregates and can be found as a distinct entity either inside the collection of the aggregates, behind them, or as their invisible owner.

In the *first option*, the aggregates would be the self. But do any of the aggregates have the four attributes that befits a real self?

- We think the self should be permanent, but the aggregates are impermanent. The body is a mass of physical processes, arising and passing away. The mind is a series of momentary events of awareness.
- We believe the self to be an indivisible whole, but there are five aggregates. Each of these aggregates in turn consists of a multiplicity of elements and events. Which one of the parts of the body would be the self? Which one of the moments of any of the four mental aggregates could be a single, unified self?

- We think the self is self-sufficient and independent of causes and conditions, yet the aggregates are conditioned and dependent on causes and conditions. The body arises from the sperm and egg of our parents, and it continues by depending on the nourishment provided by food. The mental processes arise from their own previous moments; they are influenced by the state of the body and arise reliant on the various sense faculties.
- We expect the self to be in control, but the aggregates are simply processes with no supervisor overseeing them. There is no one behind the mental processes controlling them or making them be a certain way. If there were a true essence, it should be able to bring the aggregates under its domination. But the five aggregates are not under the control of a findable self. If they were, then since the self doesn't want to suffer, it would be able to stop the body from aging and dying and stop the mind from experiencing painful feelings or having nonvirtuous intentions.

Although a true self should have these four attributes, the aggregates have none of them and in fact have four opposite attributes. The aggregates are insubstantial. The body is like a ball of foam, lacking any substance. Feelings are like bubbles, arising and breaking up very quickly. Discriminations are like a mirage, appearing but not being found when searched for. Miscellaneous factors are hollow like the trunk of a plantain tree. Consciousness is like a magical illusion, appearing but lacking any substance. There is no core in any of the aggregates. They are empty of any independent, substantial, or findable essence.

Similarly, the collection of the aggregates cannot be a self. If a self cannot be found in each aggregate individually, how could it be found in the collection of aggregates? For example, if a house has five rooms and there isn't a table in any of the rooms, a table certainly couldn't be found in the collection of the five rooms.

Nothing can be identified as self. Everything we take to be our self—any of the aggregates that we grasp to be I or mine—is not self. This fact contradicts our ingrained thought that centers around notions of “I,” “mine,” and “my self.” These notions are the source of *duḥkha*; cultivating insight wisdom enables us to break out of clinging to ideas of self.

According to the *second option*, the self would be findable distinct from the aggregates but would be contained within them or lying behind them. But when

we try to identify anything that the self does, such as walking or thinking, we can only see the aggregates doing those actions. There is no separate, substantial self to be found.

In short, when we analyze each aggregate, we find that it is impermanent, changing in every moment; it is in the nature of *duḥkha*, unable to bring stable happiness or security; it is not a substantial self, independent of causes and conditions; it is neither a controller self nor something controlled by such a self. Therefore, none of the aggregates are suitable to be considered “this is mine, this I am, this is my self.” The seeming presence of a self is an illusion.

That each aggregate is not mine, not I, and not my self counteracts three obsessions or graspings—craving, conceit, and wrong views—respectively. Understanding that the aggregates are not mine eliminates the obsession of craving, because craving thinks “this is mine” or “I want to make this mine.” The body, feelings, discriminations, miscellaneous factors, and consciousnesses are not the property of a substantial self. They are impersonal factors, each performing its own function without the help of a supervisory self. Since such a self does not exist, thinking that anything belongs to it is foolishness. Thus craving is relaxed.

Seeing that the aggregates are not I counteracts the fundamental conceit, the conceit “I am.” Based on the thought “I am,” other types of conceit and comparison manifest: I am superior to this person; I am equal to that one; I am inferior to this one. I am someone with such-and-such a position, therefore others should treat me with respect. My race, gender, nationality, socioeconomic class, or so on is higher than the others. Since the aggregates cannot be identified as I, how can we justify holding the conceit “I am”? Thus conceit is deflated.

So many views are based on the five aggregates—thinking the aggregates are the self, as in “my body is me, my feelings are me,” or thinking “I am the aggregates,” as in “I am my emotions, I am my thoughts, I am the thinker, the perceiver, the cognizer.” The Buddha described twenty types of view of a personal identity that lay out different relationships of the self and the aggregates that the confused mind interpolates. But seeing that the five aggregates are not our self neutralizes the multitude of wrong views. By understanding selflessness, we see that the aggregates are neither an independent self nor the possessions of such a self. In fact, the aggregates themselves are not independent things.

Knowing the aggregates in this way, as they actually are—as not I, mine, or my self—is seeing them with proper wisdom. The Buddha says (MN 22.28–29):

Seeing thus, monastics, a well-taught ariya disciple becomes disenchanted with material form, disenchanted with feelings, disenchanted with discriminations, disenchanted with miscellaneous factors, disenchanted with consciousness.

Being disenchanted, he becomes dispassionate. Through dispassion [his mind] is liberated. When it is liberated there comes the knowledge: “It is liberated.” He understands, “Birth is destroyed, the holy life (*brahmacarya*, *brahmacariya*) has been lived, what had to be done has been done, there is no more coming to any state of being.”

The knowledge and vision of things as they really are includes knowing the five aggregates in terms of all three characteristics. One who has done that has reached the final stages of insight meditation and becomes *disenchanted* with the aggregates. She sees through their appearance of being stable, bringing happiness, and being a self and thus loses fascination with them. She then attains the supramundane path and becomes *dispassionate* with respect to the aggregates, releasing the deep attachment to them. Through releasing clinging to the aggregates, the yogi attains the fruit of *liberation* and is now forever free from the pollutants—the primordial defilements of sensual desire, attachment to saṃsāric existence, and ignorance that have kept her trapped in saṃsāra since beginningless time. Emerging from meditation, the reviewing knowledge (*paccavekkhaṇañāṇa*) confirms that she has completed her mission and is now free from the cycle of rebirth. This is the knowledge and vision of liberation, the assurance that what had to be done has been done.

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## REFLECTION

1. Contemplate each of the five aggregates one by one as being impermanent, duḥkha, and not-self, as described above. Become disenchanted with them. Relinquish fascination with them and turn your mind to the Dharma.
2. Imagine attaining the supramundane path and becoming dispassionate toward the aggregates. Put your energy and attention toward perception of nirvāṇa.

3. Imagine escaping from saṃsāra and attaining liberation, freedom from rebirth under the control of afflictions and karma.
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## *Abandon What Is Not Yours*

After instructing his disciples to analyze the three characteristics and refute a true I and mine, the Buddha teaches a swift method for releasing grasping. In the *Discourse on the Simile of the Snake*, he advises (MN 22.40–41):

Therefore, monastics, whatever is not yours, abandon it; when you have abandoned it, that will lead to your welfare and happiness for a long time. What is it that is not yours? Material form is not yours. Abandon it . . . long time. Feeling is not yours. Abandon it . . . long time. Discrimination is not yours. Abandon it . . . long time. Miscellaneous factors are not yours. Abandon it . . . long time. Consciousness is not yours. Abandon it. When you have abandoned it, that will lead to your welfare and happiness for a long time.

Monastics, what do you think? If people carried off the grass, sticks, branches, and leaves in this Jeta Grove, or burned them, or did what they liked with them, would you think: “People are carrying us off or burning us or doing what they like with us?”

(Monastics): No, venerable sir. Why not? Because that is neither our self nor what belongs to our self.

(Buddha): So, too, monastics whatever is not yours, abandon it. When you have abandoned it, that will lead to your welfare and happiness for a long time.

Craving and clinging want to make almost everything into I or mine; we want to control and possess whatever is possible. Here the Buddha recommends abandoning grasping for what is not ours. Since there is no findable self, how could there be an established mine that possesses things? There is no [substantial] I that is the aggregates or that owns the aggregates. When craving and clinging for what is not ours—our body, feelings, discriminations, opinions, ideas, emotions, attitudes, plans, consciousnesses, and innermost sources of awareness—

have been relinquished, the mind abides in peace. This is a powerful teaching to remember at times when grasping I and mine afflicts us. Applying it brings instant relief.

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## REFLECTION

1. Think of a time when attachment to your body arose strongly—for example, you were sick and afraid of death, lying in the warm sunshine on the beach, injured and fearful of pain, or blissfully having a massage at a spa.
  2. Ask yourself, “Is this body I’m so attached to mine? Is it I? Is it my self?” Who possesses this body?
  3. When you can’t identify an I that owns the body, an I that is the body, and a self that is the body, relinquish the attachment to the body and feel freedom from craving.
  4. If your mind resists doing this or gets stuck while investigating, examine that defensiveness in the mind.
  5. Do this reflection for your feelings, discriminations, various emotions, and types of consciousness to see if you can locate mine, I, or myself.
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## *Insight Knowledge*

Insight knowledge (P. *vipassanā-ñāṇa*), which is equivalent to insight wisdom (P. *vipassanā-paññā*), is an essential step to liberation, one that must be cultivated carefully and correctly. The general procedure for meditation on the three characteristics that leads to insight was described earlier in this chapter. Direct seeing of the three characteristics is the knowledge and vision of things as they really are (*yathā-bhūta-ñāṇa-dassana*), a concentrated mind knowing the reality of things that leads to disenchantment, dispassion, and liberation.<sup>105</sup>

Many different objects can be investigated in a variety of ways with insight, but they can be synthesized into examining phenomena as dependently arisen and conditioned and thus seeing them as impermanent, *duḥkha*, and no-self. Because the nature of the aggregates and other phenomena is impermanent, unsatisfactory, and insubstantial, they cannot be a substantial self. Here a

meditator is not only negating a self-existing self but also changing the way she views the aggregates and phenomena in general. It is not the case that she leaves her ordinary perception of phenomena alone, accepting it as true. Rather, she comes to see that it is erroneous—what appears to be permanent, or to be one unified whole, or to exist independent of causes and conditions does not exist in those ways. Through seeing that the aggregates do not exist in the way she thought, she then negates their being a person who is truly there.

Now we will look at some of the methods the Buddha outlined in the sūtras that incorporate analysis of the three characteristics and cultivate insight. First is the method described in the *Discourse on the Six Sets of Six*, in which the six internal sources, six external sources, six classes of consciousness, six types of contact, six classes of feelings, and six kinds of craving are analyzed with insight. Because these arise and cease, the self that depends on them must also arise and cease. Since this is discordant with our conception of a substantial self, the existence of such a self is refuted.

Cultivating insight through analysis of the four great elements and the forms derived from them as taught in the *Greater Discourse on the Simile of the Elephant's Footprint* (MN 28) is another method, one that powerfully severs our identification with the body. The analysis of the derivative forms is especially interesting because Śāriputra ties all five aggregates together in the process of cognition, dissecting an instance of cognition into the five aggregates to show their dependent nature, conditionality, and selflessness.

In the *Greater Discourse to Mālunkyāputta* (MN 64), the Buddha analyzes the meditative absorptions in terms of the five aggregates, demonstrating how they too are impermanent, unsatisfactory, and selfless. In the *Discourse to the Man from Atthakanāgara* (MN 52), Ānanda investigates the meditative absorptions of the form and formless realms, showing them to be mentally conditioned and intentionally produced, and thereby not the self.

## *The Six Sets of Six*

In the *Discourse on the Six Sets of Six* (MN 148), the Buddha examines the components of the person to determine if they are a self and to develop the insight wisdom that leads to full realization.<sup>106</sup> He begins by setting out the

phenomena to be analyzed—the six sets of six phenomena or thirty-six factors: the six internal sources (six sense faculties), six external sources (six objects), six classes of consciousness, six types of contact, six classes of feeling, and six kinds of craving.

*The six internal sources* are the sense faculties—the eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind—that are the source or base for the arising of consciousness. The Buddha was not concerned with looking at the sense faculties anatomically or physiologically; his interest was in the conscious experience of sentient beings and how the faculties relate to the object and function to produce consciousness.

According to the Abhidharma, the five physical sense faculties are subtle material housed in the gross organs of the eye, ear, nose, tongue, and body. This subtle material is sensitive and responsive to its respective object—the eye to visible form, the ear to sounds, and so forth. The mental source is the mind as a sense faculty; the *bhavaṅga* or subliminal consciousness is at work here.<sup>107</sup> The mental faculty is not a physical organ such as the brain. At the time of the Buddha, there was no thought of there being a physical basis for the mind; only in modern times is brain activity seen as related to mental activity. These six sources are said to be internal because they belong to the continuum of the person. As part of the psychophysical organism, they are the doors through which objects and consciousness come together.<sup>108</sup>

*The six external sources* are external objects such as visible forms, sounds, smells, tastes, tactile sensations, and mental phenomena that are known by the six consciousnesses via the six internal sources.

*The six classes of consciousness* are the visual consciousness, auditory consciousness, olfactory consciousness, gustatory consciousness, tactile consciousness, and mental consciousness. Each consciousness arises dependent on its respective external and internal sources. The first five types of consciousness cognize raw sensory data, without necessarily understanding their meaning. For example, the eye sense source enables the visual consciousness to perceive red and white, but it does not know that the object is a stop sign. The mental faculty transmits the sensory data to the mental consciousness, which synthesizes the various moments of seeing red and white shapes and, drawing on past experiences, forms the idea and meaning of a stop sign. The activities of identifying objects, labeling them, and knowing their meaning are done by the mental consciousness.



Our experience seems to be one seamless whole, but with refined mindfulness, we will gradually see that it is made of individual moments of consciousness. Sometimes one of the six consciousnesses is more prominent, and a moment later another is. Sometimes a consciousness perceives one object, and a moment later it perceives another. Even when a consciousness appears to be seeing the same object for a period of time, there are actually fleeting mind-moments arising and passing away. The sense faculty and its object are likewise arising and passing away in each moment, although they too appear to be one thing.

As mindfulness becomes more refined, it is possible to distinguish the successive moments of hearing a sound followed by the mental cognition of it. Refined mindfulness brings the ability to distinguish between the moment of tasting at the bare sensory level and the mental consciousness that recognizes the taste as sweet. The precise moments of enjoying the taste and of wanting more of it also appear clearly to a mindful and concentrated mind. In this way, the flow of experience is known to be a series of moments arising and passing away.

Such awareness helps us distinguish the information that is actually entering through our senses from our mental elaborations of that raw data. This mindfulness notices the liking and disliking, the favoring and opposing, the grasping at I, mine, and my self—multiple elaborations of the conceptual mind that is distorted by underlying tendencies such as attachment, hostility, and ignorance.

*The six types of contact* are the meeting of the six consciousnesses with their respective objects by means of their respective sense faculties. Contact is simply the coming together of the nose faculty, a smell, and the olfactory consciousness, for example. Their coming together does not mean that they mix together, but that the object is known by the consciousness due to the functioning of the sense faculty. Contact is very brief and it instantly gives way to feeling, discrimination, and so forth. Then thoughts about the object pop into the mind, as do various emotions that trigger karmic actions.

Each of the six contacts can be of three types—contact bringing a pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral feeling. Although contact itself does not experience the object as pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral—that is the function of feeling—it is differentiated in terms of the feeling it will produce.

*The six classes of feeling* arise from the six types of contact that occur when the six consciousnesses meet the six objects by means of the six sources. Occurring with each moment of consciousness, feeling is the experience of the object as pleasurable, painful, or neutral. The transition from contact to feeling occurs so quickly that we ordinary beings do not perceive it.

*The six kinds of craving* are the thirst for the sense object that has arisen from the six feelings that came from the six types of contact of the six consciousnesses with the six objects by means of the six internal sources. The Buddha laid out the sequence (MN 148.9):

Dependent on the eye and forms, visual consciousness arises; the meeting of the three is contact. With contact as condition, there is feeling, with feeling as condition, there is craving.

He then spelled out the other five kinds of craving in a similar way, showing that the six sets of six all culminate in craving.

To break this chain, we must first understand how craving originates. In this context, the Buddha explains it slightly differently than in the presentation of the twelve links of dependent origination, although factors in the two presentations overlap. Dependent origination is not a fixed formula that always progresses in a predetermined order. It is a complex process with streams of causation working in different directions, intersecting one another. The twelve links show the progressive chain of links through which rebirth in saṃsāra occurs over a series of lifetimes. The presentation of the six sets of six shows the dependent origination of craving as it occurs in daily life, once a lifetime is already in process. Through this, we begin to see that the daily experiences we take for granted are the fuel for craving. By repeatedly welcoming craving into our minds and yielding to its seductive power, we suffer here and now and perpetuate our existence in saṃsāra as well.

Bill wakes up in the morning and smells freshly baked muffins in the kitchen. The nose faculty connects the aroma of the muffins with the olfactory consciousness and with contact, he smells the sweet fragrance. A pleasant feeling arises, and the mental consciousness discerns: “Yum, there are freshly baked muffins.” Craving rears its head, and the thought “I haven’t eaten freshly baked muffins in ages and want to eat these!” instantly arises. With a mental image of how delicious the muffins will taste, he goes to the kitchen and starts eating, but

his spouse tells him the muffins are for guests coming that evening. Disappointed because his desire has been frustrated, Bill gives in to a grouchy mood that sets him up to quarrel with his spouse.

In the process leading to the arising of craving, some links occur without choice: Dependent on the nose faculty and aromas, the olfactory consciousness arises. The meeting of these three is contact. All this happens in a continuous flow. When the sense source, object, and consciousness come together, we cannot stop contact. With contact as a condition, feeling automatically arises. Choice is present now—we decide how to respond to the feeling. When mindfulness is lacking, craving easily flows on from feeling. But when mindfulness, introspective awareness, concentration, and wisdom function even to a small degree, it is possible to interrupt this process and stop the arising of craving and its companions—anger, arrogance, jealousy, and so on.

In this life, craving leaves us dissatisfied, frustrated, and longing for something to fill the psychological void inside. Craving also motivates actions, which in turn lead to rebirth. Following rebirth comes the inevitability of aging and death, as well as sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, despair, and the whole mass of *duḥkha*.

Propelled by craving, the mind continually looks for excitement by contacting objects with the six senses. Craving operates in the mind to hold the sense faculties to the external objects, producing more contact. In discussing whether the sense faculties are the fetters for their respective objects or the objects are the fetters for their respective sense faculties, Śāriputra asks Koṭṭhita (SN 35.232):

Suppose, friend, a black ox and a white ox were yoked together by a single harness or yoke. Would one be speaking rightly if one were to say: “The black ox is the fetter of the white ox, the white ox is the fetter of the black ox?”

(Koṭṭhita): No, friend. The black ox is not the fetter of the white ox, nor is the white ox the fetter of the black ox. Rather the single harness or yoke by which the two are yoked together; that is the fetter there.

(Śāriputra): So too friend, the eye is not the fetter of forms nor are forms the fetter of the eye. Rather the desire and sensual

attachment that arise there in dependence on both; that is the fetter there.

Śāriputra then says the same regarding each sense source and its object. In other words, the fetter, yoke, and rope that tie sense faculty and object together is craving. Ārya wisdom, which is a product of the seven awakening factors, is the main tool to cut this craving. When it does, the sense faculties and their objects are still there; cognition and feeling occur but craving is no longer. Arhats still have eyes, ears, and so forth, and objects still exist. Arhats cognize these objects, but the delight and sensual desire that bind the mind to them through the sense faculties do not arise.

However, when unopposed, craving induces clinging and grasping. Grasping holds the five aggregates as “this is mine; this I am; this is my self.” What sustains craving, enabling it to wreak havoc in our lives? Ignorance. Wisdom is the antidote to ignorance, and the selfless nature of all phenomena that we ordinarily identify as mine, I, or my self is the object to be realized by wisdom. By seeing the aggregates as “this is not mine; this I am not; this is not my self,” wisdom stops craving.

In the sūtra, the Buddha proceeds to demonstrate how none of the thirty-six factors are mine, I, or my self. In doing so, he is not asserting that there is no self whatsoever, as the translation “no-self” may imply. Nor, by saying that these thirty-six factors are not the self, is he implying that something else is the self or that a subtle self exists behind or within the aggregates. Rather his aim is to break the identification of any of the aggregates or any part of one aggregate as the self.

The Buddha uses the word “self” as a valid conventional notion when referring to the person as the one who creates karma and experiences its result. He encourages people to purify themselves and to be responsible for their own actions. Speaking of the self in this way is not problematic; only when the self becomes an object of grasping or of metaphysical speculation must we question: What is this self?

### *Analysis of the Thirty-Six Factors as Not-Self*

Throughout history elaborate theories and philosophies about the self have been concocted. Some people assert “the self is ineffable and blissful,” “the self is love,” or “an eternal unitary self is reborn and attains liberation.” Other people who don’t examine or develop theories about the self simply have a natural grasping, “this is mine; this I am; this is my self,” based on the aggregates. Whenever anyone approached the Buddha with a theory about the true self and said that he had a self, the Buddha would ask the person what they identified as that self. The Buddha then inquired if that thing they are taking to be the self is permanent or impermanent. Once the person saw that it is impermanent, the Buddha led them to realize that what is impermanent is *duḥkha* by nature and cannot be a self.

Beginning with the first of the thirty-six factors and then using the same argument for each of the others, the Buddha says (MN 148.10):

If anyone says “The eye is self,” that is not tenable. The rise and fall of the eye are discerned, and since its rise and fall are discerned, it would follow: “My self rises and falls.” That is why it is not tenable for anyone to say “The eye is self.” Thus the eye is not self.

Very few people would actually think the eye source was the self. However, it is likely that we take the collection of the aggregates or the mental consciousness as the self. In any case, the structure of the argument presented for the eye is the same for all the other factors.

To review, before understanding why the eye and so forth are not the self, we have to know what is meant by “self.” What kind of self are we looking for? According to Indian thought at the time of the Buddha, the self was something everlasting, with stable and continual existence; it was what went from one life to the next, bringing karmic seeds along with it. Indian metaphysics aside, ordinary people have the sense of an I that is continual and enduring—a self that retains the same identity over time; a secure, reliable, continuous self, something that is truly me.

We don’t think of our self as coming into existence and going out of existence in every split-second, but that is exactly what a substantial self would have to do if the eye or any other factor in the five aggregates were the self. Why? If the eye were the self, the eye and the self would have the same characteristics. One characteristic of the eye is that it is composed of individual moments of the eye that are constantly coming into and going out of existence. In each split-second,

brief moments of the eye arise and pass away many times, producing new moments of the eye that similarly arise and pass away. If the eye were arising and passing away billions of times in each split-second, the self would have to be changing that quickly as well. However, such a transient self does not fit our feeling of a stable, enduring, everlasting self. Therefore the eye cannot be the self. Do this investigation with the mental consciousness or the collection of aggregates as the self, as these notions more typically arise in our mind.

If we insist that the mental consciousness is the self, which moment of mental consciousness is the self? The mental consciousness that exists at 6:00 is not the same as the mental consciousness that exists at 6:01, which in turn is different from the mental consciousness at 6:02 and 6:03. Which one of these mental consciousnesses would be the self? If one moment of the mental consciousness were the self, then when it ceases in the next split-second, the self would similarly cease. And just as a new mental consciousness arises in the next moment, a new self would also come into existence in each moment. A different self would exist in each fleeting moment. None of these options is possible if the self were permanent, everlasting, and maintained the same identity throughout time.

In short, to identify something as the self, it would have to be permanent and unchanging. Insight directly perceives that each of the thirty-six factors is impermanent. Therefore, none of them is the self. In other words, the thirty-six factors are not the self because they are characterized by subtle impermanence, whereas a self must be permanent.

In meditation, a practitioner takes each of the thirty-six factors and examines it, seeing if it could be a continuous self that retains its identity from one moment to the next. It is important to examine each factor individually. Simply understanding the argument for one factor and then jumping to the conclusion that none of the factors can be a self will not bring true insight. We need to analyze and investigate with careful and precise attention, deeply examining if anything can be identified as the self that we so deeply believe exists.

Directly seeing the subtle impermanence of any of the thirty-six factors requires mindfulness, concentration, and insight. Of course, we can get a sense of the impermanence of the eye or the mental consciousness by reflecting on their gross impermanence. We may also use reasoning to become familiar with their transient nature, or reflect on the constantly changing nature of subatomic particles based on scientific evidence. According to some physicists, many

subatomic particles are flashes of energy that appear and disappear. However, to arrive at a deeper level of understanding, deep mindfulness and concentration are needed to observe the arising and passing away of the aggregates and all their parts in progressively shorter periods of time. Meditators with strong mindfulness and deep samādhi perceive this as clearly as we see a pearl in the palm of our hand.

If a person identifies their body as the self, they must dissect the body mentally and investigate: Is the color of the body my self? Is the sound, smell, taste, tactile sensation, or mental image of the body who I am? Examining external objects is a way to investigate the concept of “mine.” We may think that this object is *mine* and want to retain continuous, permanent possession of it. But these external items also arise and disintegrate in each moment, and eventually even their continuum will cease. In that case, how could anything ultimately be mine? Everything that we cling to and take to be mine not only perishes in each split-second but eventually will be struck by gross impermanence. A treasured photograph changes in each moment and one day will crumble into bits or be destroyed by fire, water, or other means. What can truly be mine about such a passing phenomenon?

Similarly, if someone says that the eye consciousness is the self, that too is not tenable because that consciousness arises and passes away in each moment. Eye contact too occurs so quickly that it is unlikely that anyone would think that is their abiding self. Is the feeling generated through eye contact the self? This is not possible, because like all previous factors, a feeling does not endure as exactly the same thing in the second moment. Any and all feelings of pleasure, pain, or neutrality arise dependent on their conditions. Because the sense source, object, consciousness, and contact that were the causes for a particular feeling are also momentarily changing, so too is the feeling that is dependent on them.

Could craving be the self? To the extent that we enjoy craving and take it as the source of enjoyment, we might think craving is our true self. Some philosophers think that the will to live is our true identity; it is the self. But that will to live is just another name for craving, because we crave saṃsāric embodiment. But craving arises and passes away in each brief moment, making it unsuitable to be a secure, constant self.

While observing in meditation the arising and ceasing of the internal and external sources, consciousness, contact, feeling, and craving, turn your attention

to the meditating consciousness—the consciousness that is observing these momentary phenomena. Is that your self? It arises and passes away in the briefest of moments; there is nothing there that can be a true self or identity. When you analyze what you usually identify as self—the five aggregates or some part of them—you discover that it arises and ceases in each split-second. Because it is transient, it is not a basis for secure and true happiness; it is unsatisfactory by nature. Something that is impermanent and unsatisfactory is not suitable to hold as a self—a true, substantial, enduring basis of individual identity. The only possible conclusion from this analysis is that none of the aggregates is the self and that such a permanent, partless, substantial self that is a controller does not exist.

The Buddha repeatedly asked if any of these phenomena are the self to encourage us to investigate phenomena and to examine our notion of self. He didn't just say, "There is no self." Such a statement presents a foregone conclusion and stifles the inquirer from researching the issue themselves and reaching their own conclusion. The Buddha did not present selflessness as a metaphysical position that cannot be tested. Instead he explained the field of grasping—the five aggregates—and said these are what ignorance clings to as the self. He then encouraged us to search for and try to find anything that could plausibly be a substantial, everlasting self.

Through the above investigation, we see that impermanence is the foundation for understanding selflessness. With refined meditation, sharp-faculty meditators can see subtle impermanence and move directly to understanding selflessness. For other people, the Buddha used the fact of *duḥkha* to help them release their grasping at mine, I, and my self and to realize selflessness. Seeing that the aggregates have the characteristic of subtle impermanence and that whatever is impermanent is unsatisfactory, unpredictable, and bound up with *duḥkha*, they then reflect: Is it worthwhile to continue holding what is *duḥkha* in nature and bound up with suffering as I, mine, or my self? Or is this grasping to be relinquished in order to attain lasting happiness?

### *Understanding Selflessness by Means of the Elements*

In the *Greater Discourse of the Simile of the Elephant's Footprint* (MN 28), Śāriputra, the Buddha's disciple who was foremost in wisdom, explains not-self



with respect to material form. In doing so, he bases his analysis on the accepted outlook of his time in which material form was composed of the four primary or great elements (earth, water, fire, and wind) and forms derived from them (the six sense faculties and their objects). Understanding how form is related to the arising of consciousness, feeling, clinging, bondage, and liberation is conducive for realizing nirvāṇa.

In general, “form” refers to any material form, but in many contexts it refers to the body. The body is one of the five aggregates subject to clinging. It is the object of clinging, and it came into existence as a result of clinging. The form aggregate, as are the other four aggregates, is included in the first truth, true duḥkha. The form aggregate is of two types: the four primary elements and material form derived from them. Although the sūtras speak about the four primary elements, they mention derived forms but do not explain them in depth. That is done in the Abhidharma, where derived forms include the five sense faculties and the four objects—color, sound, smell, and taste. Tangibles are the four primary elements themselves.

The four coarse elements should not be thought of as things such as the ground, the ocean, a campfire, and the breeze on a windy day—but as four properties or aspects of material form. The earth element is the aspect of hardness, resistance, and mass. The water element is the aspect of fluidity and cohesion because things that are damp stick together easily. The fire element is the property of heat and maturation because warmth makes plants grow and fruit mature, and the wind element is the aspect of expansion, contraction, pressure, and movement. The four elements are conditions for one another and are inseparably bound together. They exist in dependence on one another.

Although all material things are a combination of all four elements, one among the four is usually predominant in a specific object. In the space around us, the wind element is predominant, but there are also particles of dust in the air. The earth element is stronger in the dust; however, there is a certain amount of water in it too. The water causes smaller particles to coalesce to form a dust mote. Blood is mostly the water element, but the cells in it contain the earth and fire elements; blood moves, indicating the presence of the wind element.

Understanding selflessness by means of the four elements involves reflecting on each element in detail by analyzing the internal and external elements to determine if they are mine, I, or my self, and seeing their subtle impermanence.

To use the earth element as an example: The earth element may be internal or external. The internal earth element includes parts of the body in which hardness and resistance are dominant qualities. In the list of thirty-two parts of the body found in the establishment of mindfulness of the body, the hair, nails, teeth, skin, muscles, bones, spleen, lungs, intestines, liver, and feces are among the parts of the body in which the earth element is predominant. The external earth element is found in things in others' bodies and in the environment that are characterized by hardness and resistance—vegetables, fruit, trees, buildings, an insect's body, and so on.

Both the internal and external earth elements are just earth element. When we think about it, there is not much difference between the two. We usually think “this body is mine,” or when we're in pain or need surgery, we think “this body is me.” In our mind there is a clear delineation between what is outside and therefore is not me, and what is inside and therefore me or mine. But the quality of hardness and resistance is the same in both places.

The distinction between the internal and external earth elements is not so clear. Our hair consists predominantly of the internal earth element, and we consider it part of us. But after cutting it, we throw it away and it becomes the external earth element. We no longer think of it as mine. Vegetables are the external earth element; they are not us or part of us. But after we eat them, they become part of the internal earth element of our body, and they are seen as mine or as part of me. When portions of the vegetables are eliminated as feces, we again consider that as the external earth element that is other than us.

In this way an interplay between the internal and external earth elements continuously occurs. Everything in our body that is hard and resistant began as the external earth element and later became the internal earth element of our body that we cherish and cling to. Then when the body dies, it is buried or cremated and the internal earth element is recycled in nature, becoming the external earth element. What we eat is made up of the earth element that used to be part of the bodies of sentient beings who lived on the planet millions of years before us.

Because of strong habit, mental fabrications, and grasping, the sense of I, me, mine, and my self become focused on the body. We judge people based on their body—their skin color, the shape of their eyes, their gender—and because of this some people are oppressed and others are privileged; some receive an education

and others do not. Human beings fight, torture, rape, and kill others due to grasping at the body as mine, me, and my self and holding others' bodies as other, different, and therefore suspect. In fact, all bodies are made of the same earth element, as are so many things in our environment. Which earth element is me and mine? Which is other? Which is impersonal in nature? Through deep analysis, we conclude that there is nothing in the body to cling to as being a person; there is nothing in the body that is I, mine, my self, or you, yours, your self. Proper wisdom understands this clearly. Śāriputra makes the point (MN 28.6):

Now both the internal earth element and the external earth element are simply earth element. And that should be seen as it actually is with proper wisdom thus: “This is not mine, this I am not, this is not my self.” When one sees it thus as it actually is with proper wisdom, one becomes disenchanted with the earth element and makes the mind dispassionate toward the earth element.

There is a useful distinction between what is conventionally considered oneself and what is external to oneself. Your arm is not the same as a stone. However, this does not imply the existence of a substantial self. The body is not the property of a substantial self.

Once we see both the internal and external earth elements for what they are and understand that the earth element is not mine, not I, not my self, disenchantment with the earth element and the body arises. There isn't anything spectacular about the earth element, is there? There isn't anything to be attached to in the qualities of hardness and resistance. Nothing about the earth element is me, mine, or my self. Being disenchanted, we become dispassionate and relinquish clinging to the earth element and the body; we cease to identify the body with the self.

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## REFLECTION

1. Be aware of and experience the inner earth element—the bones, muscles, inner organs, and so on in your body.

2. Be aware of the outer earth element—the ground, buildings, animals, and vegetation around you.
  3. Consider that the same earth element composes both your body, others' bodies, and things in your environment.
  4. Observe that when you eat, what was the outer earth element becomes the inner earth element as it assimilates into and forms your body. Watch the mind begin to consider what was the outer earth element and is now the inner earth element to be mine, I, or my self. Is it reasonable to consider it in this way?
  5. Observe that when you have a bowel movement, some inner earth element becomes outer earth element that you consider unrelated to you and even disgusting. But isn't it the same earth element? Is it now I, mine, or my self?
  6. What is I, mine, and my self?
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A second way to break down identification with the body and grasping the body as I and mine is to reflect on the impermanent nature of the earth element. According to ancient Indian cosmology, a universe evolves, exists, dissolves, and becomes nothing. This happens due to imbalance in the four elements. For example, there will be a time at the end of an eon when water swallows up the external earth element, which then vanishes under it. Since the great earth element, which seems so reliable, stable, and permanent, will end one day, what can be said about this body, which exists only for a comparatively short time? This body is always disintegrating and most unreliable. What in it could possibly be I, mine, or my self? Remember: in asking these questions, we are checking to see if the body can be a substantial I that is permanent, pleasurable, independent of causes and conditions, and the controller of the aggregates.

The two meditations above—seeing the internal and external earth element as they actually are with proper wisdom and seeing their subtle impermanence—should be applied to the other three elements—water, fire, and wind. In the body, the water element is prominent in bile, phlegm, pus, blood, sweat, tears, spit, mucus, urine, and other bodily fluids. The water element is found in liquids in the environment as well—in ponds, rivers, rain, aquifers, and oceans. When these liquids are drunk they become part of our body, and when they are expelled, the internal water element in our body is recycled and becomes part of the external water element.

According to Indian cosmology, at the end of an eon the external water element evaporates completely. Since this is the case, how much more so is the internal water element in our body short-lived and unreliable? Whether external or internal, the water element is impersonal, with nothing in it suitable to be considered mine, I, or my self.

The fire element is the heat in the body. Active in digestion and metabolism, the fire element promotes aging of the body. The external fire element heats our homes and burns them down. The internal wind element is apparent in the breath as well as in the subtle winds or qi that course through the limbs, causing them to move. According to Indian physiology, thought and intention activate the wind element, which is transmitted to the limbs, stimulating them to move. (The contemporary equivalent may be nerve currents.) The external wind element enables all movement—of clouds, ocean waves, and earthquakes. The internal and external elements of fire and wind are simply the impersonal fire element and the impersonal wind element. They are not suitable to be considered as I, mine, or my self.

Śāriputra clinches the argument concerning the selfless nature of the body by saying (MN 28.26):

Friends, just as when a space is enclosed by timber and creepers, grass and clay, it comes to be termed “house,” so too, when a space is enclosed by bones and sinews, flesh and skin, it comes to be termed “body.”

What we see as our body is nothing more than a space with bones as its structure; muscles, internal organs, and tissue filling it in; and skin holding it together. There is nothing in this collection of elements or in any part of it that is a real body. This being the case, there is nothing in it that could be a self or person.<sup>109</sup>

When meditating on the establishment of mindfulness on the body, in addition to scrutinizing all parts and aspects of the body with wisdom, bear in mind that it is composed simply of impersonal elements. Including the above explanation in your meditation will strengthen your understanding of the body and of not-self.

## *Understanding Selflessness by Means of Derived Forms*

In addition to the meditation on the four primary elements to realize selflessness, Śāriputra taught a meditation on the conditioned and dependent nature of forms derived from these elements. This meditation too is for the purpose of realizing the four truths and nirvāṇa. The eye faculty is used as an example, the argument being applicable to the other senses as well.

For a full visual cognition to arise, several factors must be intact—there must be the eye faculty, a visible form in range of the eye, and the mind placing attention on and engaging with that object. If any of these are lacking, a fully conscious visual cognition will not arise. The various aspects of a full visual cognition can be subsumed in the five aggregates. The visible form (the red color of a blossom), the eye faculty, and the person's body that houses that sense faculty are included in the form aggregate. The feeling aspect arising from that cognition (probably a pleasant feeling) is included in the feeling aggregate. Identifying the flower is the aspect of discrimination in that cognition; it is part of the aggregate of discrimination. Mental factors such as intention, attention, contact, mindfulness, and concentration that arise with that full visual cognition are included in the aggregate of miscellaneous factors. The visual consciousness (the basic entity that sees the flower) is included in the aggregate of consciousness. In this way, all five aggregates are present, functioning, and intertwined in this one act of cognition of the red color of a blossom.<sup>110</sup> Having explained this, Śāriputra then makes one of the most famous statements in the early sūtras (MN 28.38):<sup>111</sup>

Now this has been said by the Blessed One (the Buddha): “One who sees dependent arising sees the Dhamma; one who sees the Dhamma sees dependent arising.”

This statement underscores that understanding dependent arising is the key to understanding the entire Buddhist doctrine; it is the cardinal point to realize reality and the four truths; it is the most important factor to attain nirvāṇa. These five aggregates subject to clinging are dependently arisen: they repeatedly arise in dependence on the sense faculties being intact, a form being in range of the faculties, and the mind placing attention on that form. Depending on those

conditions, a cognition arises and together with it arise factors of all five aggregates.<sup>112</sup>

These five aggregates subject to clinging are the first truth, true duḥkha. The deeper significance of duḥkha is the fact that the five aggregates come into being through polluted conditions stemming from ignorance. Our internal world of experience and the external world that we apprehend and engage with all originate due to such polluted conditions. They are not reliable and stable; moreover, they are not mine, I, or my self.

Craving is one of the principal factors that bring the five aggregates into existence. Ordinary beings crave experiences through the five aggregates. Craving and clinging—elements that themselves are part of the five aggregates—perpetuate the arising of the five aggregates in one birth after another. In one life after the next, a new set of aggregates arises that, in turn, has all the elements necessary to create more sets of aggregates in future lives.

How do we bring this process to an end? Since the aggregates are dependent on conditions, when those conditions cease, compulsive rebirth also ceases. Because the origin of duḥkha is impermanent and conditioned, when these conditions are destroyed, the duḥkha that results from them cannot arise. The āryas' eightfold path that damages and eventually eradicates the origins of duḥkha is also conditioned, so it can be practiced and cultivated. Cultivating the path will eradicate the origin of duḥkha, leading us to the unconditioned, nirvāṇa, at which time true peace is found.

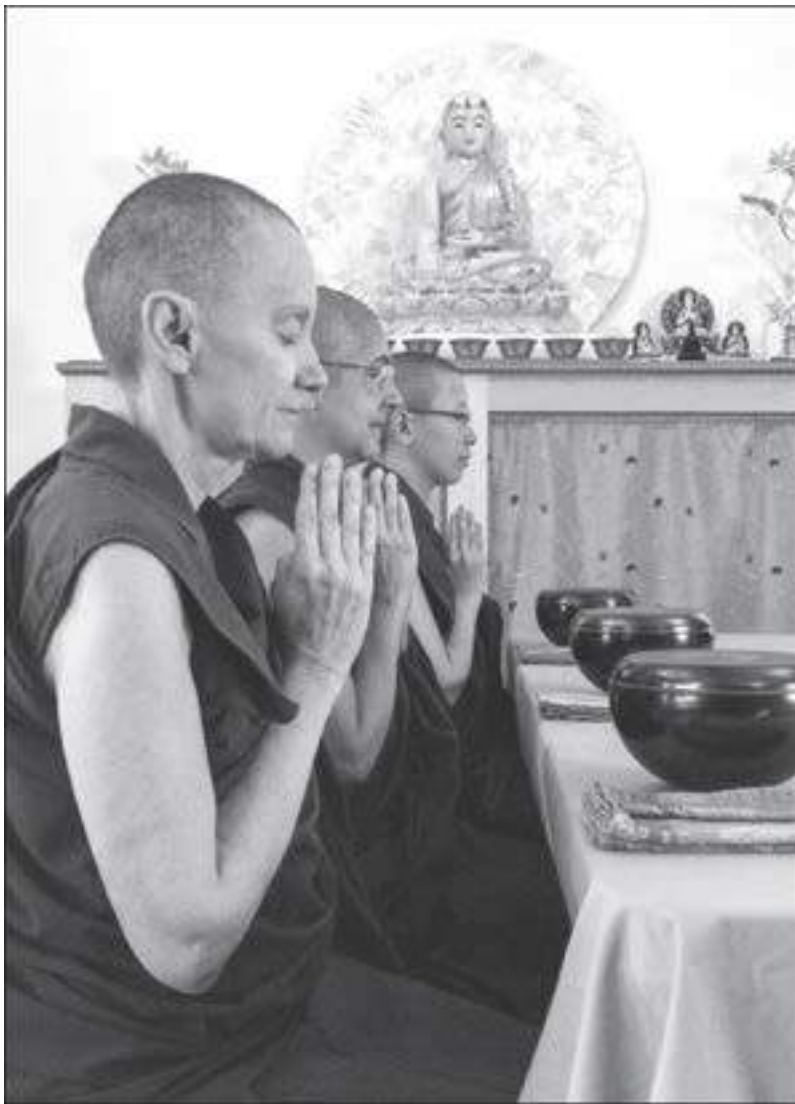
In this volume of the *Library of Wisdom and Compassion*, we have plunged into the topics of selflessness and emptiness that were mentioned in earlier volumes. We have learned some of the fundamental concepts regarding the ultimate nature and how it can be approached through the understanding of dependent arising. We have also begun to learn some of the reasonings and meditation methods employed to realize the ultimate nature. The next volume will delve into some of these numerous reasonings and meditation methods that lead to this realization.

By investigating both the Pāli tradition's and Sanskrit tradition's approach to the ultimate nature, we discover a basic unity in that both emphasize the analytical method and dependent arising as an important topic to analyze. We have also seen divergent views, specifically the Sanskrit tradition's explanation of the selflessness of phenomena in addition to the selflessness of persons explained

in the Pāli tradition, and the different levels of the object of negation in the meditation of the selflessness of persons.

Both the commonalities and differences point to the Buddha's skill as a teacher who makes his teachings suitable for a wide variety of disciples. We are incredibly fortunate to have encountered these teachings, to have the opportunity to learn and practice them, and to have the receptivity to trust and have faith in them. May all merit from our efforts be dedicated to the full awakening of all sentient beings.





## Coda: The Pāli Abhidharma

ONE PURPOSE OF the *Library of Wisdom and Compassion* is to familiarize Buddhists with the doctrine of other Buddhist traditions. Along this line, this coda will explain a few aspects of the Abhidharma as taught in the Pāli tradition. The Pāli explications of the dharmas that compose material objects are briefly presented so that people who are interested in tenet systems and who have studied Buddhist tenets can expand their knowledge.<sup>113</sup> Many Tibetans believe the Pāli tradition to be equivalent to the Vaibhāṣika or Sautrāntika tenet systems. Although it does share some similarities with these, there are some important differences.

Due to geographical distances and doctrinal issues, eighteen schools developed after the Buddha's parinirvāṇa. It seems that most of these had their own systems of Abhidharma. The Pāli Abhidharma developed in south India, Sri Lanka, and other Theravāda countries. The Sarvāstivāda Abhidharma developed in Kashmir and northern India. There were other Abhidharma systems as well among the eighteen early schools, but only texts from the Theravāda, Sarvāstivāda, and Dharmaguptaka schools are extant today.<sup>114</sup> Later masters in countries following the Pāli or Sanskrit tradition wrote subsequent Abhidharma texts.<sup>115</sup>

Although both the Pāli and Sarvāstivāda Abhidharma Piṭakas have seven canonical Abhidharma treatises, these seven are not the same. The themes in these two sets of seven treatises overlap to some extent, but in some instances their interpretations differ. Present-day Theravāda follows the Pāli Abhidharma, whereas the Abhidharma texts known in Tibetan Buddhism descend from the Sarvāstivāda and Mūlasarvāstivāda Abhidharmas.

The early Abhidharmikas who lived just after the Buddha probably shared similar ideas. In the third century BCE, Buddhism spread to Sri Lanka, where the Pāli Abhidharma developed. Sri Lanka is far from northern India where the Sarvāstivāda Abhidharma evolved. As time went on, some terms that were common to both Abhidharmas came to have slightly different meanings. For

example, the word “ultimate” (*paramārtha*, *paramattha*) was used by the early commentators in one way but it came to have a different meaning in the early Abhidharma, and even other diverse meanings in the Yogācāra and Madhyamaka tenet systems. Furthermore, the Sarvāstivāda and Pāli Abhidharmas differed in what they considered ultimate.

Unless otherwise mentioned, the views below are those of the Pāli Abhidharmikas. As we reflect on them, we will see that the Vaibhāṣika doctrine that arose from the Sarvāstivāda school differs from the Pāli system. In general, the Sarvāstivāda system tends more toward substantialist assertions than does the Pāli system. Please note that, as will be seen below, the notion that modern-day Theravādins hold Vaibhāṣika or Sautrāntika tenets is incorrect, although they do share some similar views.

## *Formulating a Philosophy Rooted in the Buddha’s Teachings*

When the Buddha taught the sūtras that were later systematized to form the Pāli canon, his teachings were practice oriented. He instructed people of diverse backgrounds, spiritual dispositions, and interests to live a good life in the present, to create the causes for good rebirths by observing the law of karma and its effects, and to attain liberation by practicing the three higher trainings. At that time, his teachings were not an organized theory about diverse phenomena or their mode of existence. Formulating such a philosophy from the Buddha’s teachings was the work of future generations, beginning with the Abhidharmikas.

The Abhidharma is one of the three baskets of the Buddha’s teachings. “Abhidharma” indicates a discipline or study of the Dharma. The word “dharma” has multiple meanings, including phenomena, the Buddha’s teachings, and the physical and mental elements into which all phenomena can be resolved. Of the three higher trainings, the Abhidharma is associated with the higher training in wisdom.

Theravāda scholars and practitioners have varying views regarding the origins of the Abhidharma: Some say it was first spoken by the Buddha and later related by Śāriputra. Others say it was composed by arhats and sages. However, all agree that the Abhidharma developed and was systematized after the Buddha’s

parinirvāṇa. The aim of the early Abhidharmikas was to discuss the underlying structure of the Buddha's teachings in a systematic way that would apply in all circumstances and help practitioners in their meditative practice, so they would attain awakening.

One way they did this was by forming lists of phenomena and matrixes to point out the unique characteristics of each phenomenon as well as its relationships with other phenomena. By doing this, they emphasized the Buddha's aim of helping us to understand that the world and the beings in it are not how we commonly think of them. Things are not permanent, pleasant, arising from an underlying metaphysical substance, or governed by a findable, real self. They are processes, not isolated objects. The people and objects we encounter in our daily life arise dependently and are interconnected and interlocking physical and mental phenomena, arising and ceasing in every instant due to their causes and conditions. By dissecting things into their components, the Abhidharmikas highlighted that a real self cannot be found.

While teachings on selflessness and emptiness in present-day Buddhist traditions began with the Buddha's sūtras, they were further elaborated by the Abhidharmikas. The theories and structures they developed, in turn, were later influenced by the philosophies of non-Buddhist schools as well as by Abhidharmikas from the other Buddhist schools. This led to new Abhidharma writings as well as to other treatises on wisdom and the nature of reality by later Indian sages such as Nāgārjuna and Dharmakīrti. There has been a great deal of interchange, debate, revision, and amplification of various theories articulated by the early Abhidharmikas. This history is not easy to untangle since not all the relevant texts are extant today. However, a cursory look will help us understand the evolution of the philosophies of today's Buddhist traditions.

For people who have studied in the Tibetan tradition, some of what you read below may not accord with the tenets texts that you have studied. Furthermore, within the Tibetan tradition, various subschools describe the assertions of ancient Indian philosophical schools differently. The willingness to hear other approaches is crucial.

## *The Early Abhidharmikas*

While deconstructive analysis has consistently been valued in Buddhism, in the early years it did not focus on the ontological status of objects, but on distinguishing the constituents of phenomena and their relationships with one another. As one of the seven awakening factors, the discrimination of states (*dharmapravicaya*, *dhammavicaya*) was highly valued in meditation and was used to develop right view, insight, and wisdom for the purpose of attaining awakening. It was employed to evaluate various mental states and practices and differentiate the virtuous ones to cultivate from the nonvirtuous ones to abandon. In this way, practitioners would live ethically and develop deep concentration.

Discrimination was also used to identify the actual constituents and structures of commonplace objects in order to eliminate attachment and animosity toward them. Furthermore, discrimination helped practitioners to see the interdependence among phenomena, which aided in realizing selflessness. In this way, they emphasized that the teachings on dependent arising are essential to attain liberation.

To fulfill these purposes, the Abhidharmikas drew on lists found in the sūtras. They examined questions such as “What are the afflictions, the pollutants, the auxiliary afflictions? In which of the three realms of existence—desire, form, and formless—are they found? Which ones are virtuous, nonvirtuous, or neutral?” This led to comprehensive analysis of mental states—the principal topic of the first chapter of the *Enumeration of Factors* (*Dhammasaṅgani*), the first book of the Pāli Abhidharma. The analysis of virtue and nonvirtue led to in-depth discussions on karma. The thirty-seven harmonies with awakening were analyzed to reveal the way to practice the path. As time went on, Abhidharma commentators spelled out the paths and stages of awakening and related them to various defilements that were reduced or eradicated on each path and at each stage.

The theories of the early Abhidharmikas who appeared just after the Buddha’s parinirvāṇa were rooted in three principal doctrines that the Buddha expounded:

1. Momentary impermanence. All conditioned phenomena arise and pass away each moment due to their causes and conditions.
2. Selflessness. There is no substantiality to either the person or the five aggregates that compose the person.

3. Dependent origination. Phenomena arise in dependence on other phenomena—their causes and conditions—and they exist in relation to other phenomena. There is no underlying substance out of which phenomena appear or are formed. Nor is there an absolute, external creator that created mind and matter.

By describing and analyzing phenomena, the Abhidharmikas engaged in two important activities: first, they analyzed phenomena in depth, clearly describing the unique character of each phenomenon; second, by analyzing phenomena into their component parts, they created more detailed lists of classifications of phenomena, and the relationships among these phenomena developed into what is called the “dharma theory.”

Beginning with categories of phenomena in the sūtras—the five aggregates, the twelve sources, the eighteen constituents—they analyzed each one and described its relationships to the others. They investigated how the five aggregates correspond to the twelve sources and eighteen constituents and which sources and constituents are included in each aggregate.

By analyzing phenomena into their smallest constituents, practitioners see that there is no underlying substance from which everything was created. This contradicts the assertions of non-Buddhist schools such as the Sāṃkhyas who say that all manifest objects are transformations of the fundamental nature (primal substance, *prakṛti*, *pakati*). It also invalidates the beliefs that everything is created from one unifying cosmic substance, that one universal mind underlies all that exists, and that everything is created by and will dissolve back into a permanent and absolute creator. By stating that everything in the world appears, changes, and ceases due to causes and conditions, Buddhism disproves theories of fatalistic predetermination or causeless, random arising.

By showing that the constituent parts of phenomena do not exist in isolation unrelated to anything else, Abhidharmikas emphasized causal relationships. Things have direct causes and cooperative conditions: wood is the direct cause of a table and the carpenter is its cooperative condition. Some phenomena are “co-nascent conditions” in that they arise together and mutually condition each other. In other words, if one is present, so is the other.

In the process of selecting the topics to discuss, the early Abhidharmikas also pointed out the major topics and teachings for Buddhists to explore and

understand. In this way, attention was drawn to our states of mind, the material world, realms of existence, karma and its results, the paths to and fruits of awakening, time, motion, and so on.

## *The Dharma Theory*

The dharma theory arose as a way to understand what is known and experienced in meditation and to point out to practitioners what to observe when they do practices such as the four establishments of mindfulness.<sup>116</sup> Since practitioners seek nirvāṇa and the path to nirvāṇa entails insight into the nature of the self, analysis of the components of the self is important. To see the world—our internal experience and external objects—correctly involves seeing the bare phenomena of which we and our world are composed.

The dharma theory centers around identifying the building blocks of our experience, the bare phenomena that compose our being and the world. These are conditioned phenomena that arise and cease in each moment. Describing how they interrelate to form other phenomena and later recombine to form yet other phenomena, the dharma theory shows that our belief that our mental states and the world around us consist of unified, “solid” phenomena is erroneous.

In particular the Abhidharma analysis demonstrates that what appears to be a continuous flow of consciousness is actually composed of different moments of mind, each of which consists of a primary mind and its concomitant mental factors. This marks the beginning of the systematization of Buddhist psychology, a psychology directed toward awakening and thus concerned with discerning defiled and undefiled mental states. The Abhidharma matrixes also illustrate that one mental factor can appear in different forms and with different names in various lists. We begin to investigate, for example, how malice, as one of the three nonvirtues, relates to anger, which is one of the three roots, and how anger relates to resentment, wrath, and so forth. Similarly, we understand mindfulness in an expansive way as the establishment of mindfulness, faculty of mindfulness, power of mindfulness, awakening factor of mindfulness, and right mindfulness.

The dharma theory evolved over time as new questions arose, as implications of the existing theory were examined, and as contradictions were discovered or resolved. In the Pāli tradition, this resulted in a series of Abhidharma texts,

lengthy commentaries, and subcommentaries that were later summarized into shorter texts. After that, more commentaries were written on these shorter texts.

The dharma theory is presupposed, although not clearly set forth, in the canonical Abhidharma texts. It is more fully developed in the commentaries that explore its implications. As more questions arose, other theories, such as the two truths and the division into substantial and imputed existence, were developed in response.

In the sūtras the Buddha proposed five groups into which phenomena, particularly those related to the self, could be analyzed: (1) body and mind (P. *nāma-rūpa*); (2) five aggregates (*skandha, khandha*); (3) six elements (*dhātu, dhātu*) of earth, water, fire, wind, space, and consciousness; (4) twelve sense sources (*āyatana, āyatana*); and (5) eighteen constituents (*dhātu, dhātu*).

The Buddha had a reason for speaking of each of these sets. Categorizing things into the five aggregates clearly differentiates between material (body) and mind. Meditation on the five aggregates enables practitioners to discover that there is no independent self to be found either within the aggregates or separate from them. The Buddha repeatedly says, “This is not mine; this I am not; this is not my self.” That is, none of the aggregates belongs to me, they do not correspond to I, and they are not my self. There are only impersonal physical and mental parts.

Classifying those same phenomena into twelve sense sources and eighteen constituents emphasizes the conditions necessary for perception and cognition to occur. Discriminating them in this way brings home the point that the mind is not a soul or an independent phenomenon, but is produced by causes and conditions.

These five sets are not distinct from one another; they overlap. Body and mind can be expanded to become the five aggregates—the body is the form aggregate and the mind consists of the four remaining aggregates. Body and mind and the five aggregates can be expanded into the six elements, with the body/physical aggregate including the elements of earth, water, fire, wind, and space, and mind (four mental aggregates) being condensed into the sixth element, consciousness. The five aggregates can be expanded to form the twelve sources, which can be further expanded into the eighteen constituents. None of these sets forms the final mode of analysis because each can be broken down into smaller parts.<sup>117</sup>



The dharma theory facilitates even more refined analysis when each dharma is seen as the smallest factor that can be identified. However, identifying the smallest particles of matter does not imply that these particles or dharmas are partless. There is no discussion of phenomena being composed of partless particles in the Pāli Abhidharma.<sup>118</sup> Rather, these dharmas are simply the smallest material units that can be identified. In this case, the form aggregate is broken down into twenty-eight form dharmas.

The Abhidharma focuses primarily on the mental factors that compose various types of consciousnesses. The primary consciousnesses and mental factors are important factors to examine to realize selflessness. In addition, knowing the various states of mind aids meditators when they cultivate concentration to gain meditative absorptions of the form and formless realms. These mental dharmas are more numerous than the material ones: the aggregates of feeling, discrimination, and miscellaneous factors together are composed of fifty-two mental factors (*caitta, cetasika*). The last aggregate, consciousness, is comprised of eighty-nine types.

In summary, the canonical Abhidharma defines, classifies, and shows the relationships among the dharmas. Consisting of many lists and matrixes, it aids practitioners to identify and understand the dharmas in their meditation. Abhidharma entails not only analysis to identify each dharma but also synthesis to show their interconnections. For example, the first book of the Pāli Abhidharma, the *Enumeration of Factors (Dhammasaṅgani)*, defines and classifies the mental factors among other things, whereas the last book, the *Foundational Conditions or Relations (Paṭṭhāna)*, lists the various types of conditional relationships among the dharmas. Analysis deconstructs phenomena to show there is no self and no underlying, primal, or fundamental substance (*prakṛti*) from which everything originates. Synthesis complements this, illustrating that the dharmas are not separate, isolated entities, but are dependent—the classifications and precise definitions are artificial categories delineated only for the sake of identifying and describing the dharmas. Our experience is in fact a complex web of interconnected relationships of dharmas.

According to the Pāli tradition, the material dharmas are elements of experience. They are spoken of as characteristics and functions, but not as particles. For example, the earth element is the property of solidity. It is the characteristic of hardness, and its function is to serve as a support or basis for the

other elements. The water element is the property of cohesion. It has the characteristic of flowing or fluidity, and it functions to bind other dharmas together.

The dharma theory of the Pāli Abhidharma is not based on a dichotomy between substance and qualities, for such a dichotomy could easily lead to the assumption of a substantial self (P. *attavāda*), which the Buddha emphatically denies. That is, a dharma is not an inherent quality of another dharma, and a dharma is not the substrata or substance out of which another dharma is produced. The dharmas themselves are conditions for other dharmas, as described by the set of twenty-four conditions that show the dependent arising of all dharmas both in terms of their temporal and spatial relationships.

The Sarvāstivāda Abhidharma speaks of the dharmas in a different way. They are isolated, partless particles, with their own-nature (*svabhāva, sabhāva*). This results in the Sarvāstivādin's assertion that the dharmas exist as ultimate and discrete entities in all three times—the past, present, and future—a position refuted by Nāgārjuna and later Mādhyamikas.

## *The Development of the Dharma Theory*

Doctrinal questions and controversies influenced the development of the dharma theory over time. According to the canonical Abhidharma, there was no enduring essence that was the person either inside the aggregates—and by extension inside the dharmas that compose the aggregates—or totally separate from the aggregates and the dharmas. However, some Buddhists—specifically the Puggalavādins—questioned how rebirth could occur and karma continue into future lives if there is no self. To resolve this conundrum, the Puggalavādins asserted that the person is real and ultimate. This was refuted in *Points of Controversy* (*Kathāvatthu*), one of the seven canonical Abhidharma texts that was said to have been written by Moggaliputta Tissa in the third century BCE.

When refuting that the person is real and ultimate, these later Abhidharmikas said that the dharmas and aggregates that compose the person are real and ultimate. But “real and ultimate” does not mean that they were distinct and absolute entities existing in their own right. Rather *ultimate* means that the dharmas are the final limit of our experience in that they cannot be further

reduced. However, there is no absolute substance that underlies them, no metaphysical entity from which they manifest and into which they later dissolve. Their being called “ultimate” does not contradict the early Abhidharma’s insistence that all things are impermanent and arise dependently due to causes and conditions. The dharmas are said to be *real*—meaning that they occur when their causes and conditions are present.

This makes evident that there are two levels of existents: Some, like the person, can be analyzed into their constituent parts. Others, like the dharmas, cannot be further analyzed because they are the elementary constituents of phenomena.

To understand the evolution of some of the ideas in the Abhidharma, it is helpful to look at a later Abhidharma text, the *Abhidhammattha Sangaha* by Anuruddhācariya, which has been widely used from the twelfth century onward, and see the way it categorizes phenomena and the reasons behind it. This text states that there are two kinds of realities: conventional (P. *sammuti*) and ultimate (P. *paramattha*).<sup>119</sup> They are differentiated based on whether they are referents of conceptual thought (P. *paññatti*) and conventional terms or have their own-nature (P. *sabhāva*). Conventional realities are referents of concepts and terms. Some examples of conventional realities are persons, human beings, animals, cups, tables, and trees. As designated objects and products of mental construction, they exist due to conception, are without own-nature, and are not irreducible components of existence.

Ultimate realities, on the other hand, have their own-nature and are the final, ultimate constituents of existence. When conventional realities are analyzed into their components, we discover the ultimate realities—the dharmas—that cannot be further reduced. For example, a person appears to be an ultimate reality, but when analyzed we find only the person’s components—the five aggregates. As a collection of impermanent mental and physical processes, a person is a conventional thing that exists only due to terms and concepts. While “person” is a conceptual construct that cannot be found when searched for, the dharmas, which are a person’s most elementary impermanent components, cannot be further reduced. Thus ontologically the dharmas are ultimate realities because they have their own-nature, and epistemologically they are the final objects of correct knowledge.

The meaning of the five aggregates being ultimate realities requires clarification. The coarse body, for example, is not an ultimate reality, for it can be reduced to the four primary elements. The primary elements, however, cannot be further reduced. They are subtle, and it is difficult for us ordinary people to actually perceive them. We have to investigate with mindfulness and appropriate attention to perceive the ultimate realities such as the four great elements. Because they are directly known with a subtler meditative consciousness, which is considered an ultimate or supreme knower, they are called “ultimate” or “supreme objects.”

Ultimate existents (ultimate realities) are of four types:

1. Mind (*citta, citta*) corresponds to the aggregate of consciousness. Included in mind are the minds of the desire, form, and formless realms. Mind is defined in three ways: an agent that cognizes an object, the instrument by means of which the mental factors cognize an object, and the activity of cognition. The first two definitions imply that mind is one thing and the action of cognizing is another. These definitions are given to overcome the distorted view that there is a permanent self or soul that is the agent or instrument of cognition. The third definition is the most accurate: mind is the process of cognizing and cannot be known apart from the action of cognizing; it is nothing other than the act of cognizing.
2. The mental factors include the aggregates of feeling, discrimination, and miscellaneous factors. The Abhidhamma lists fifty-two mental factors, which occur together with mind and perform diverse functions. The aggregates of feeling and discrimination are two of the mental factors. The other fifty are found in the aggregate of miscellaneous factors, which includes emotions, views, attitudes, moods, and other mental functions. The mental factors that accompany any mind arise and cease together with that mind, have the same object, and arise due to the same sense source.
3. Matter or form (*rūpa*) refers to the material dharmas and is the same in both the Abhidhamma scheme and the scheme of the five aggregates.
4. Nirvāṇa, the cessation of duḥkha and its causes, is the only unconditioned dharma. Neither created nor destroyed, nirvāṇa is

deathless and completely beyond the conditioned world and the bonds of time and space. Nirvāṇa is said to have its own-nature (Vism 16:72) because it is a dharma—it is not a designation and does not depend on conceptual constructs.

Of these four ultimate realities, the first three comprise all impermanent, conditioned things. The five aggregates can be subsumed in these first three—the form aggregate being matter, the aggregates of feeling, discrimination, and miscellaneous factors being mental factors, and the consciousness aggregate being mind. The fourth ultimate reality, nirvāṇa, is the unconditioned.

Here the aggregate of form does not mean the coarse body, which is a conventional reality, but the components of the body into which it is ultimately analyzed—the dharmas. Similarly, the aggregate of consciousness does not refer to the mind in general, which is a conventional reality, but to the fleeting moments of consciousness of which the mind is composed. Discerning the difference between the person, which is a conventional reality, and the five aggregates, which are ultimate realities, is an essential part of cultivating the wisdom of selflessness in the Pāli tradition. Understanding this is the goal of insight meditation and is an important step toward the realization of nirvāṇa.

## *Substance and Own-Nature*

The *Śāriputrābhidharma Śāstra*<sup>120</sup> appears to be the first Abhidharma text to use the expressions own-nature (self-nature) and other-nature. It says, “Self-nature contains self-nature; other-nature does not contain self-nature. Self-nature associates with self-nature; self-nature does not associate with other-nature.” This indicates that things with the same attributes belong to a self-nature group and those with different attributes belong to an other-nature group. Here this term delineates between different groups and has nothing to do with phenomena’s mode of existence.

In later Abhidharma śāstras self-nature gradually came to mean inherent nature. This connotation first appears in the *Abhidharma-vibhāṣā-śāstra* of the Sarvāstivāda school. It divides things into seventy-five basic constituents and regards these as the real essence of all things. They are indivisible, endowed with

their own unique nature, and real, while composites made from them are unreal. For example, the person is unreal, but its basic constituents are real—that is, they are substantially existent. The person, meanwhile, is imputedly existent and less real than the basic constituents. While the Sarvāstivādins believed they correctly understood the Buddha’s teachings on selflessness, in fact they established a Buddhist realism that contradicts the Buddha’s core teachings on no-self and emptiness. It seems their notion of substantial existence was the main target of Nāgārjuna’s Madhyamaka approach.

This doctrinal controversy, which also influenced the Theravāda dharma theory, centered around the Sarvāstivādin assertion that phenomena exist in the three times. It arose from the questions: Since things only exist in the present, how could a cause that is not existent (because it has already ceased in order to give rise to a result) produce a result? How could a result that is not existent (because it has not yet arisen) be produced by a cause that exists? To resolve this quandary, the Sarvāstivādins posited that phenomena substantially exist in the past, present, and future. This suddenly gave an ontological twist to the dharma theory, which until then had simply been a descriptive account of empirical experience. From the Theravāda viewpoint, this Sarvāstivāda assertion accorded an unnecessary, inherent nature to the dharmas.

Although the Pāli tradition rejected this assertion of own-nature and its implications, it still impacted the dharma theory as explained in Sri Lankan commentaries. Whereas the canonical Abhidharma did not give a formal definition of “dharma,” Sri Lankan Abhidharma commentators defined a dharma as that which holds or bears its own-nature. This does not, however, imply a duality between a dharma and its nature; a dharma is not a separate agent that holds its own-nature as an underlying substance. Rather, “own-nature” is used to mean “that which is not held in common by others”: each dharma is a fact of empirical existence that is not the same as other empirically discerned facts. “Own-nature” simply indicates the mere fact of being a dharma. It does not mean that there is an enduring substance supporting a dharma. If anything, equating dharma and own-nature means that there is only the constantly changing arising and ceasing of mental and material phenomena, each of which has its own unique characteristics.

An earlier Pāli canonical text, the *Path of Discrimination* (*Paṭisambhidāmagga*), found in the Khuddaka Nikāya and ascribed to Śāriputra,

says that the five aggregates are empty of own-nature (P. *sabhāvena-suñña*). If the aggregates lack own-nature, then surely the parts into which they can be analyzed must also lack own-nature. To reconcile this statement and the new definition of dharma as “that which bears its own-nature” without suggesting that dharmas exist in their own right, Pāli commentators supplemented the above definition with a new one: a dharma is that which is borne by its own conditions. That is, a dharma is not an autonomous agent but is something that depends on its conditions and is supported by its conditions. This definition emphasizes that dharmas do *not* exist in their own right and that “own-nature” does not mean inherent substance.<sup>121</sup> Dharmas occur due to appropriate conditions. Here we see that although the word “sabhāva” was incorporated into Theravāda Abhidharma thought, it was not interpreted to mean a substantial mode of being. Rather, it was the conditionally dependent nature of things.

### *Own-Characteristic*

Similarly, saying that a dharma is that which bears its own-characteristic (*svalakṣaṇa, salakkhaṇa*) does not mean that there is duality between a dharma and its characteristics. Definitions (characteristics) and definiendums (what is being characterized) are used for convenience in expression; they do not have ultimate meaning. Each dharma has its own distinguishing characteristics. For example, visibility is the specific characteristic of color. Saying the earth element is that which has the characteristic of solidity is provisional, not ultimate. In fact, solidity is the earth element.

Commenting on the title of the *Discourse on the Root of All Things*, the subcommentary explains the meaning of “things” (*dharma*):<sup>122</sup>

“They bear their own characteristics”: Although there are no dhammas devoid of their own characteristics, this is still said for the purpose of showing that these are mere dhammas endowed with their specific natures devoid of such attributions as that of a “being,” etc. Whereas such entities as self, beauty, pleasurable, and permanence, etc., or [fundamental] nature, substance, soul, body, etc., which are mere misconstructions due to craving and views, or



such entities as sky-flower, etc., which are mere expressions of conventional discourse, cannot be discovered as ultimately real actualities (P. *saccikatṭhaparamatthato*), these dhammas (those endowed with a specific nature) can. These dhammas are discovered as ultimately real actualities. Although there is no real distinction (between these dhammas and their characteristics), still, in order to facilitate understanding, the exposition makes a distinction as a mere metaphorical device. Or else they are borne, they are discerned, known, according to their specific nature, thus they are dhammas.

Saying dharmas have their own characteristics is done to show they have a specific nature and to distinguish them from distorted conceptions such as seeing that which lacks self as having self, seeing the foul as beautiful, seeing what is unsatisfactory in nature as pleasurable, and seeing what is impermanent as permanent. Having their own characteristics also indicates they are not created out of a primal substance or other metaphysical entities that are fabricated due to craving and views. Because they have their own characteristics, dharmas are different from sky-flowers and other such nonexistents that we imagine. This, then, is the meaning of saying that they are ultimately real actualities. It does not mean they exist by their own characteristics.

The basic characteristic of a dharma is not altered over time and cannot be transferred to another dharma. Even when it is in association with other dharmas, each dharma retains its own characteristic. Solidity or earth element remains solidity, even when associated with water or other elements.

Own-characteristics or specific characteristics are those unique to each dharma; they are the dharmas. The dharmas are the final limits of subtle analysis. They cannot be known individually with our senses. A group of them or a continuum of moments in the case of feelings and so forth is needed for cognition to occur. Likewise, specific characteristics are not directly cognized, although a group of them can be directly perceived as a conceptual object.

General characteristics (*sāmānya-lakṣaṇa*, *sāmañña-lakkhaṇa*) are characteristics, such as impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and not-self, that are common to all mundane dharmas. General characteristics are mental constructs imputed by mind to dharmas. Superimposed on the ultimate data of empirical



existence, general characteristics are known by inference. When yogis perceive a general characteristic such as impermanence, their yogic direct perceiver cognizes the dharmas that arise and cease. They know their impermanence indirectly. The sūtras speak of three general characteristics of conditioned things. These three general characteristics are not dharmas or discrete entities. They are mental constructs imputed on groups of phenomena: (1) arising: production (*utpāda*, *uppāda*), (2) passing away: ceasing (*vyaya*, *vyaya*), and (3) aging: alteration of that which exists (*sthityanyathatva*, *ṭhitassa aññathatta*).

A cup, for example, is an imputed object, a mental construct, that is nothing more than the collection of dharmas—solidity, cohesion, temperature, and so forth—of which it is composed. Our senses directly perceive white, solidity, smoothness, and by these means we know “here is a cup.” The dharmas are ultimate in that they can actually be experienced and perceived directly; they are sense data. Our mind puts the sense data together, creates a mental construct, and designates “cup.”

In general, “ultimate” means that which has reached the highest or the last. In this case, dharmas are ultimate in the sense that they cannot be further reduced through analysis, unlike the person, which is not real and ultimate. Dharmas came to be called not only “own-nature” but also “ultimate nature” (P. *paramattha-sabhāva*). For the Pāli tradition, these terms do not have substantialist implications. Rather, they emphasize that mental and material dharmas are elements of present experience; they are not seen as having a real nature that persists through the past, present, and future, as asserted by the Sarvāstivādins.

Similarly, saying that the dharmas have ultimate or objective existence (P. *paramatthato vijjamānatā*) means that they are the irreducible components of empirical experience. Saying that the dharmas are ultimately cognizable indicates that the contents of our cognition can be analyzed into these irreducible elements.

Both dharmas and designated objects (*prajñapti*, *paññatti*) are objects of knowledge. Even though imputed objects are artificially created by the mind and lack objective counterparts that are directly known by the senses, they are still knowable and thus are knowable objects. Here we come upon another meaning of the term “dharma” that is also found in the Abhidharma: phenomena,

existents. In this sense, all phenomena—both those that are ultimate realities and those that are mental constructs—are considered dharmas.

Two other traits also apply to dharmas: inseparability and conditioned origination. *Inseparability* means that in any given instance of material or mind, the dharmas of which it is composed are not separable from one another. In association like this, the dharmas form a unity. The primary mind and mental factors that are concomitant with it are inseparable in that neither can occur without the other. Together they form one cognizer. Similarly, the color, taste, smell, and hardness of an apple cannot be physically separated but occur together.

Although the dharmas are inseparable, they are distinguishable and can be cognized as if they were separate. Although the color, taste, smell, and texture of an apple are inseparable, these qualities are distinguished separately by the different sense cognizers. Mental dharmas, however, are much more difficult to distinguish separately. It is hard to differentiate feeling, intention, attention, and so forth in our experience.

Like inseparability, *conditioned origination* describes dharmas in terms of their associations with one another. There are five axioms of conditioned origination that are stated either explicitly or implicitly:

1. There is no absolute original cause or beginning of anything. There is simply the continuity of ever-changing, conditioned things.
2. Things only arise from their concordant causes; they cannot arise from causes and conditions that lack the ability to produce them.
3. Things do not arise from a single cause such as an absolute creator or a primal substance.
4. Things do not arise as isolated phenomena. Whenever change occurs due to causes, the effects are multiple.
5. Several causes and conditions produce several results. Many dharmas produce many other dharmas.

Dharmas arise in association with and at the same time as other dharmas. For example, a primary mind and its seven omnipresent mental factors<sup>123</sup>—contact, feeling, discrimination, intention, attention, one-pointedness, and psychic life—arise together. None of these—either the primary mind or any of the

concomitant mental factors—can arise alone without the others. Even one moment of mind is a complex phenomenon with many components.

Similarly, the smallest unit of matter is a cluster (P. *kalāpa*), a combination of eight material dharmas—the four primary elements of solidity (earth), cohesion (water), temperature (fire), and motility (air) and the four secondary elements of color, odor, taste, and nutritive essence (the ability to sustain life). Sound is not considered an inseparable secondary element because things do not continuously produce sound.

None of these eight can arise separate from the others. They are not located in different physical areas or at different times. The fact that the dharmas are inseparable and arise in combination with one another and yet are distinguishable as having their own unique characteristics illustrates the analytical and synthesizing approaches of the Abhidharma. Through analysis they are individually discerned, through synthesis they are seen as co-arising.

## *Designations and Concepts*

The dharma theory also enables us to distinguish distinct empirical entities from cognizing minds and imputed phenomena that are created by the conceptual mind. It helps us to understand the relationship between the dharmas and the objects we perceive in our daily lives. It also brings into question the extent to which objects correspond to the terms that refer to them.

Designations or imputations were first mentioned in the *Dhammasaṅgāṇi*, where the designation itself is the *paññatti* (S. *prajñapti*), and all dharmas (in the broad sense of all things) are the “pathway of designations”—that is, they are what is designated. Paññatti are the names, terms, and designations that express both ultimate existents—the dharmas—and the larger objects that are combinations of dharmas. Later commentators included in paññatti not only the names of things—be they objects real or nominal—but also the objects and meanings that correspond to them. This does not imply, however, that dharmas exist in dependence on designation and conceptualization by mind. The theory of paññatti was implied by the sūtras but was developed by the Abhidharmikas. “Person” became known as the conventional designation given to the collection of the dependently arisen, impermanent psychophysical aggregates. Similarly,

“cart” was the conventional name given to the collection of parts that formed a vehicle. However, the early Buddhist idea of conventional designation was not explained in contrast to ultimate or real existents such as the dharmas. This was done later by the Abhidharmikas in the Abhidharma Piṭaka.

There are two types of designations: (1) *Term-designations* (P. *nāma-paññatti*) are the names, words, or symbols that designate real or unreal things. These are established by worldly usage. An example is the word “cup.” (2) *Designated objects* (P. *attha-paññatti*) are the designated or conceptualized objects and meanings that correspond to the names, words, and symbols. These objects are mental constructs that come into being by the mind’s interpreting the appearances of the real elements in certain arrangements. An example is the cup.

Term-designations and object-designations are interdependent and refer to the same thing seen from two different angles: the verbalization that makes things known and what is made known (what is constructed by thought). It is important to note the difference between object-designations and dharmas. While dharmas can be conceptualized and made known by names and symbols, their existence is not dependent on them. Object-designations, on the other hand, do not exist unless conceptualization is involved.

The later commentaries explain designations in more depth. Designations lack corresponding reality and are things without their own-nature; this differentiates them from dharmas, which are the objective elements of existence. Designations are not ultimate existents and lack the attributes of arising, abiding, and disintegrating. They are not produced by causes and conditions; they do not have own-nature that is displayed while they are present. Whereas temporal distinctions such as past, present, and future apply to dharmas, they do not apply to designations. Designations are not included in the five aggregates, and they are neither conditioned (P. *saṅkhata*) nor unconditioned (P. *asaṅkhata*). Although they exist, designations are unreal and abstract. They lack objective existence and are “mind-dependent,” whereas dharmas exist by their own-nature (*svabhāvasiddhi*, *sabhāvasiddha*) and have their own distinct characteristics. Designations are conceptualized and exist only due to thought (P. *parikappasiddha*). As mental constructs superimposed on reality, designations give the illusion of being one object to things that are in fact complex assemblies of dharmas.

When wheels, axles, and planks are arranged in a certain fashion, “cart” is designated to them and they are conventionally known as a cart. But when analyzed into dharmas—their ultimate and irreducible components—there is no cart. When roots, trunk, branches, and leaves are arranged in a particular manner, they are commonly called “tree,” but when each part is examined there is no tree there. Similarly, together the five aggregates are called “person,” “I,” or “being,” but when analyzed into their ultimate components, there is no person there at all.

## *The Two Truths*

The ancient non-Buddhist Indian traditions that adhered to the notions of a “soul” or “Self” (*ātman*, *attan*) had a substantialist view of existence and saw time and space as absolutes. The Buddha and the Abhidharmikas refuted these views. To form a cohesive philosophy that could explain all existents free from the erroneous philosophical assumptions of non-Buddhists, the Abhidharmikas formulated the doctrine of the two truths. This doctrine was also influenced by the discussion of designations and concepts that developed as a result of the dharma theory.

While the doctrine of the two truths—conventional and ultimate truths—is first discussed by Abhidharmikas, not in the sūtras themselves, the distinction made in the sūtras between definitive (*nītārtha*, *nītattha*) and interpretable (*neyārtha*, *neyyattha*) sūtras appears to be a relevant antecedent. A sūtra in the Aṅguttara Nikāya says (AN 2.24):

Monastics, these two misrepresent the Tathāgata. Which two? One who explains a discourse whose meaning requires interpretation as a discourse whose meaning is definitive, and one who explains a discourse whose meaning is definitive as a discourse whose meaning requires interpretation.

The meaning of definitive statements has been drawn out and made clear. They express their meaning explicitly and can be taken as they are. Interpretable statements are indirect and their true meanings must be drawn out and revealed.<sup>124</sup> Buddhaghosa establishes a connection between definitive and

interpretable meanings and the two truths.<sup>125</sup> Here, it seems that the initial notion of the “two truths,” as well as the notion of “definitive and interpretable discourses,” served to help early Buddhists reconcile scriptural passages that appeared to be contradictory. As time went on, the doctrine of the two truths became a way of categorizing phenomena. The commentary to the *Kathāvatthu* states:<sup>126</sup>

The Awakened One, the best of all teachers, propounded two truths, conventional and ultimate; we do not see a third. A statement governed [purely] by agreement is true because of the world’s conventions. An ultimate statement is true in that it characterizes things as they are.

The two truths are conventional (P. *sammuti-sacca*) and ultimate (P. *paramattha-sacca*). *Sammuti* refers to convention and general agreement, so conventional truths are truths based on general agreement and societal conventions. Ultimate truths are explanations that use terms indicative of the real elements of existence—the dharmas—which do not depend on mental construction. Statements about ultimates are ultimate truths. Although the dharmas are said to be ultimate realities, they are not ultimate truths. Only dharmas are real, and what is not a dharma is not real. Both conventional and ultimate truths are paññattis, designations, because they must be conveyed through the symbolic medium of language.

In early Buddhism, there was no formulated doctrine of real existence. What was analyzed (the person, for example) was called “conventional,” but what it was analyzed into—the dharmas—were not called “ultimate.” Ultimate was used only to refer to the “supreme goal, supreme good,” nirvāṇa. Later paramattha acquired the meaning of “supreme meaning,” and then “ultimately existent.”

Later, in the Abhidharma, ultimate came to have the ontological meaning of that which really exists. In this way, the meaning of “ultimate” was expanded to include the dharmas. That is, “ultimate” came to denote real existence, the dharmas that have their own-nature. However, there is no mention of the dharmas being ultimate truths.

Thus it seems that the meaning of “ultimate” and “ultimate truth” changed over time with the addition of the Abhidharma and its commentaries. In the

sūtras, nirvāṇa is the supreme or ultimate truth because its nature is undeceptive. The Buddha says in the *Sūtra on the Exposition of the Elements* (MN 140.26):

For that is false, monastics, which has a deceptive nature, and that is true which has an undeceptive nature—nibbāna. For this, monastics, is the supreme [ultimate] truth of the ariyas, namely, nibbāna, which has an undeceptive nature.

The Abhidharma distinguishes between what is mentally constructed and what has its own-nature. Conventionally based things (P. *sanketa*) are things that come into being due to designations; they depend on mental interpretations that are superimposed on collections of dharmas. But dharmas are ultimate because they are real existents that can be directly known. A table, for example, is conventional because “table” is designated on the multitude of dharmas that are its components. “Table” does not refer to an objective phenomenon that corresponds to the term but is designated when the mind interprets a collection of dharmas in a certain way. The mind superimposes “table” on this collection; thus the table is a convention, a designation. Although the table is not an entity separate from its component dharmas, it is said to exist because according to our social conventions and agreements, it is regarded as a separate entity. The dharmas that compose it, however, have their own-nature that does not depend on convention; the dharmas are empirical reality. They exist dependent on causes and conditions but are not dependent on mental designation.

Some people mistakenly believe the Pāli tradition values ultimate truths more highly than conventional truths. To the contrary, Pāli scriptures explain that to sentient beings who could be guided to nirvāṇa by means of speech regarding the conventional, the Buddha spoke of the conventional. To sentient beings who could be led to nirvāṇa by means of speaking of the ultimate, he spoke of the ultimate. And to those who required a combination of the two, he spoke of both. Just as a person who is multilingual speaks to another person in the other’s native tongue to facilitate that person understanding his meaning, so too does the Buddha speak of conventions, ultimates, and both according to the most expedient method for guiding a particular being to arhatship. Neither method is superior to the other.

Furthermore, the commentary to the Aṅguttara Nikāya explains that whatever the Buddha says is true. For example, saying “The person exists” is true

speech regarding the conventional. Only if someone thinks there is a substantially existent person in the aggregates does this statement become false. If we try too hard to speak in terms of the ultimate, such as saying “The dharmas composing the five aggregates are walking down the street,” we fail to communicate well because we have disregarded the conventional usages of words. Both conventional and ultimate truths exist and are useful, and speech regarding the conventional and the ultimate likewise are useful. It is not necessary to rank one higher than the other. In fact, we could say that the two truths are two ways of presenting the truth, two ways of talking about our experience.

## *The Theory of Form*

While the principles outlined above apply equally to the mental and material dharmas, here we’ll look more closely at form (*rūpa, rūpa*), which is also referred to as material or matter.

The Pāli Abhidharma defines form as that which has the characteristic of being subject to physical change and disintegration. According to the Abhidharma theory of momentariness, one moment of material gives way to another. One moment of form disappears and another appears. The succeeding material is not the same as the immediately preceding material, principally due to the influence of infinitesimal changes in temperature.

The Sarvāstivāda Abhidharma, in contrast, defines form as having the characteristic of resistance or impenetrability. This emphasizes that form is located within space and can exist only where another form does not exist.

In the Pāli Abhidharma, four primary elements of form are delineated. Although these are called “earth, water, fire, and air,” they actually indicate qualities of material. To review, the earth element is solidity and resistance. The water element is fluidity and cohesion that binds the other elements together. Cohesion forms solidity into recognizable objects such as tables and trees. The fire element is heat. Cold is merely the absence of heat; it is not a distinct quality by itself. The air element is mobility, expansion and contraction, and fluctuation. These four are the natural forces of which material is composed. Being spatially and temporally inseparable, these four exist at the same time and in the same place, whether they are the smallest units of matter or components of huge



mountains. Thus every instance of form has some solidity, cohesion, heat, and mobility. Although these four are inseparable, they can be distinguished. But the fact that they can be spoken of differently does not mean they exist independently, unrelated to anything else. The interplay of the elements becomes the material objects we recognize.

The four elements have different characteristics, functions, and manifestations. Each one is influenced by the others but does not lose its individual characteristic. They can neither be condensed into one substance nor transformed into another element. The four primary elements arise and exist together; they are mutually co-arising and co-conditioning. *The Path of Purification* explains (Vism 11.109):

The earth element, which is held together by water, maintained by fire, and distended by air, is a condition for the other three primary elements by acting as their foundation. The water element, which is founded on earth, maintained by fire, and distended by air is a condition for the other three primary elements by acting as their cohesion. The fire element, which is founded on earth, held together by water, and distended by air is a condition for the other three primary elements by acting as their maintaining. The air element, which is founded on earth, held together by water, and maintained by fire is a condition for the other three primary elements by acting as their distension.

Each element is present in every instance of material. What differentiates various material objects is not the quantity of each element that composes it but its intensity. For example, although all four primary material elements are present in both metal and milk, the element of solidity is more intense in the metal and the element of fluidity more intense in milk.

Our tactile sense does not necessarily know all the elements simultaneously. This often has to do with what we pay attention to. If we put our hand in hot water, the experience of heat is foremost, although fluidity is certainly present. What our tactile sense perceives may depend on which element is prominent; if we step on a nail, solidity is prominent and becomes the object of mind, although the other three elements are also present.

Interestingly, the Pāli Abhidharma does not consider the water element to be a tactile object but an object of mind (P. *dharmāyatana*). When we touch water, its softness is due to the earth element and its temperature is due to the fire element. We cannot touch cohesion or fluidity directly. While Theravādins do not consider cold as a characteristic of the water element, the Sarvāstivādins do. Thus Sarvāstivādins consider the water element to be a tactile object because when touching it, we can experience its coolness.

The primary elements depend on one another to arise, whereas the secondary elements depend on and are supported by the primary ones, although they arise simultaneously with them. It is for this reason that they are considered secondary.

In the canonical Abhidharma, many types of form are mentioned. These are coalesced into fourteen secondary types of form in the commentaries:

- (1–5) The five physical sense organs or faculties—the organs of sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch. These are not the coarse organs, such as the eyeball or the ear, but a type of subtle, translucent matter located in these physical organs. Each faculty has its own field of perception: the eye faculty perceives colors, not sounds, and so forth.
- (6–9) The four types of sense data: color, sound, smell, and taste. Tactile objects are omitted because they consist of three of the four primary elements (solidity, temperature, and mobility). Only earth, temperature, and mobility are tactile objects. The water-element represents fluidity and viscosity and is not directly cognized by the sense of touch; it is known through a process of inference. This idea is limited to the Theravāda Abhidharma. Other Buddhist schools say that all the four great elements are objects of touch.<sup>127</sup>

In the canonical Pāli Abhidharma as well as in the Sarvāstivāda Abhidharma, both color and shape are considered objects of sight. However, in the Pāli Abhidharma formulated in Sri Lanka, only color is an object of sight. Shape cannot be directly perceived; we see a shape in dependence upon seeing the location of color. Therefore, shape is considered a mental construct that lacks an

objective counterpart. There are two views regarding sound, one of which says that it travels like waves in a series.

- (10–11) The two faculties of sex, which are subtle matter that differentiate male and female.
- (12) The material faculty of life, which maintains and stabilizes the sense faculties, the sexual faculties, and the physical basis of mind.
- (13) The nutritive quality of matter, the ability to nourish the biological form and to sustain life.
- (14) The physical basis of mind. This is not mentioned in the sūtras but is found in the *Paṭṭhāna*, the last book in the Pāli Abhidharma Piṭaka. It is a form that is the physical basis for the mind-source and the mental consciousness constituent. However, what it is precisely is not specified, although later commentators identified it with the heart (*hṛdaya*, *hadaya*). This refers not to the physical heart, but to a subtle matter located in or near it. Interestingly, while the other five physical sense faculties are also considered controlling faculties (*indriya*, *indriya*), the mental consciousness is not.

These fourteen plus the four primary elements are the eighteen concrete material elements that constitute actually existent material dhammas in the Pāli Abhidharma. An additional ten material elements are modes or stages of those eighteen. Some of these exist both internally and externally, as parts of living beings as well as in the inanimate environment. Others—the five physical sense faculties, the two faculties of sex, the material faculty of life, and the physical basis of mental activity—are only found in conjunction with living beings. Here we see that the Abhidharma examines both the physical components of living beings as well as their external environment, seeing all of them as dependently arisen, impermanent phenomena that lack a self or primal substance as their controller.

### *The Theory of Smallest Particles*

There is a lot of discussion about smallest particles of matter by both contemporary scientists and ancient Abhidharma scholars. However, this

discussion is absent in the Pāli canon; it was developed later in Sri Lanka and seems to have been influenced by the Buddhist schools in India, in particular the Sarvāstivāda and Vaibhāṣika schools.<sup>128</sup>

According to the Sarvāstivādas and Vaibhāṣikas, the *paramāṇu* (S. *paramāṇu*) is the smallest unit of material. It is without parts and has no spatial dimensions. The Vaibhāṣika master Saṅghabhadra says:<sup>129</sup>

Among the material elements susceptible to resistance, the smallest unit, which is not further amenable to division either by another material thing or by mind, is called the *paramāṇu*. Because it has no parts, it is called the smallest, just as the *kṣaṇa* (moment, instant) is considered the smallest unit of time, as it is not further divisible into semi-*kṣaṇas*.

A *paramāṇu* always arises and exists together with other *paramāṇus*, forming a unity or an aggregate called a *saṃghāta*. The *saṃghāta* is made of the four primary elements and four of the secondary elements. A *paramāṇu* is partless and lacks resistance because particles without spatial dimensions cannot have resistance.

According to Theravāda scholarship, the Sautrāntikas took issue with this, saying that the smallest particle cannot be without parts and resistance.<sup>130</sup> The Vaibhāṣikas replied that while a smallest particle lacks parts and resistance, since they don't occur in isolation but in combination with other smallest particles, when they form an aggregation they have resistance. The Sautrāntikas pointed out the fallacy in this, saying that if the smallest particle is partless and lacks resistance, then an aggregation must also be partless and lack resistance, for how could many things that individually lack resistance come to have resistance when they come together?

The Sautrāntikas also questioned how these partless particles can join together to form an aggregate. Do they touch one another or not? If they touch one another, then since they lack parts and spatial dimensions (for example, directional parts such as east, south, and so on) and resistance, then they should merge into one, in which case there would never be any coarse forms. If they touch one another partially, then they must have parts and directions, which contradicts the Vaibhāṣikas' own assertion. Furthermore, if partless particles

touched, they should exist for two moments, one in which they arise and the second during which they touch. This contradicts the commonly accepted assertion that all dharmas are momentary.

In response to this, the Vaibhāṣikas say that partless particles do not come into contact with one another but there is infinitesimal intervening space between them. The particles stay joined together due to the influence of the air element. But the Sautrāntikas questioned this as well: How could partless particles join together with space between them? They would have to have parts and resistance to do so.

The Theravādins say a paramāṇu is an infinitesimally small unit of material. Unlike the Vaibhāṣikas, they do not say this is the smallest unit of each of the primary elements. Instead, a paramāṇu refers to the smallest cluster that consists of the four primary and four secondary elements. To emphasize the smallness of this particle, one Pāli commentary said it is like “a particle of space.” The paramāṇu is called a “material cluster” (P. *rūpa-kalāpa*) to show that although it is infinitesimally tiny, it is an aggregation of material elements.

Theravādins speak of *kalāpaṅga*—a “limb of the group”—that is, a constituent material element of a *kalāpa* (smallest particle).<sup>131</sup> While the Vaibhāṣikas say the smallest particle is an instance of a primary element, according to the Theravādins the smallest particle is a conglomerate (*kalāpa*) of the four primary and four secondary elements. While logically one could say that the *kalāpaṅgas* were smaller than the *kalāpa*, since no *kalāpaṅga* exists in isolation, it is not said to be the smallest instance of a material. The *kalāpaṅgas* and *kalāpas* both have spatial dimensions—there is no talk of partless particles in the Pāli Abhidharma. The *Visuddhimargasannaya* of King Parakaramabahu II says:<sup>132</sup>

The intervening space between two smallest particles (*kalāpa*) has the function of delimiting the atom as “this is the lower side of the smallest particle and that is the upper side of the smallest particle.”

Theravādins assert that each smallest particle of material (*rūpa-kalāpa*) is separated from other smallest particles by an infinitesimally small space. Thus the smallest particles do not touch one another. The reason they cannot touch is that if they did, then they would have to be spatially inseparable like the *kalāpaṅgas*.

In that case two smallest particles would merge to form a bigger particle. If this continued, with more and more particles merging, the world would be one huge rūpa-kalāpa. So while the Vaibhāṣikas say the smallest particles cannot touch because they would merge and become one infinitesimally small particle, the Theravādins say they cannot touch because they would become one infinitesimally huge particle!

### *The Theory of Momentariness (Instantaneous Being)*

Parallel to a theory of the smallest unit of material is the theory of the smallest unit of time (*kṣaṇa*, *khaṇa*), a moment. While the rudiments of this theory can be traced to the canonical Abhidharma, it was fully developed in the Sri Lankan Abhidharma literature. As mentioned above, the sūtras spoke of three characteristics of the conditioned (AN 3.47): arising, passing away, and aging (arising, vanishing, and alteration while persisting), which are general characteristics. Later these three submoments of experience were called “arising,” “abiding,” and “disintegrating.”

Sarvāstivādins also had a theory of momentariness, which reflects this school’s substantialist tendencies. It was the first school to mention four characteristic marks of every mental and material dharma: arising, abiding, modification (*jarata*, *jaratā*), and passing away. They define a moment as the time in which all four of these accomplish their activities. A moment is the length of time it takes to cut a silk thread with a sharp knife, and sixty-four moments constitute the length of time of a finger snap.

Again, from the Theravāda perspective, Sautrāntikas refute this, saying that if these four occur serially, then a moment has four distinct phases, and therefore it is divisible and cannot be the smallest unit of time. But if these four occur simultaneously in one moment, then they would cancel each other out. The four characteristics cannot apply to a single momentary dharma, only to a series of momentary dharmas, which is an empirically observable thing. The Sautrāntikas assert that the four characteristics are a series, which itself is called “subsistence.” Something that is momentary cannot subsist or be modified because whatever arises perishes; there is no time for it to subsist or be modified.

Within Theravāda, there are diverse ideas about this. The sūtras often present two phases: arising and ceasing. Once a dharma arises, it is perishing; there is no time for it to abide.<sup>133</sup> Arising dispels nihilism, which says either that the person does not exist or that it ceases at death with no continuity. Ceasing dispels absolutism, which holds that things have a substantial permanent reality. This view harmonizes with meditative experience, especially when the phase of dissolution is emphasized to bring home the impermanence of conditioned phenomena.

Some Theravādins said that although something that arises will cease, there is an intermediate moment when that thing turns toward its own cessation. This moment, when it is faced with its own perishing, is called “abiding.” This moment of existence is necessary, for something cannot do two opposite activities—arise and cease—in the same moment.

However, some sūtras, such as the *Sutta of the Wonderful and Marvelous* (MN 123.23), speak of knowing things such as feelings, discriminations, and thoughts “as they arise, as they are present, as they disappear.” The Abhidharmikas formalized this to become the theory that conditioned dharmas arise, abide, and disintegrate. That is, each mental and physical dharma goes through three moments: a moment of origination, a moment of existence, and a moment of cessation. These are not three dharmas but one dharma that goes through three phases, arising in the first moment, abiding in the second, and ceasing in the third.

In ancient times there was much discussion about the theory of change. There are only two ways in which change can occur: partially or totally. Partial change means that while the entity remains the same, some qualities or parts of it change. This is counter to Buddhist ideas, for something cannot be both permanent and impermanent. There is no duality between substance and quality such that the former can remain static while the qualities arise and cease.

On the other hand, if there is total change, then the new thing is completely different. If something arises and then changes totally before it ceases, we cannot say that the same thing that arises also ceases, for a totally different thing would cease.<sup>134</sup>

This quandary led to the redefinition of change. Instead of change being the transformation of the same element from one stage to another, change was now seen as the replacement of one momentary dharma by another. Change is the



cessation of one element and the arising of another in its place. This is in contrast to the non-Buddhist substantialist view of there being a permanent underlying substance that remains the same in its subsequent moments but superficially changes.

The theory of momentariness caused the redefinition of change, and it also brought about the definition of motion. Just as a momentary dharma has no time to change but ceases immediately, similarly it has no time to move to another place. Movement is not one thing going from one place to another but a new momentary thing appearing in an adjacent place. Although we say a green pepper was moved from the cutting board to the frying pan, in fact it did not move. Rather a new instance of green pepper appeared at each moment in each infinitesimally small location along the route from the cutting board to the frying pan.<sup>135</sup>

## *The Theory of Time*

Just as Buddhism refutes the notion of an underlying primal substance, it also denies the existence of absolute time—that is, time as a real, all-pervading substance or container in which things exist and events occur. The Buddhist perspective is that time is a designation imputed by the conceptual mind in dependence on changes in arising and perishing dharmas. Past, present, and future are posited in relation to dharmas—in reference to a specific dharma, the past is what has arisen and ceased, the present is what has arisen but not yet ceased, and the future is the not yet arisen. Buddhaghosa says:<sup>136</sup>

Chronological time denoted by reference to this or that event is merely a conventional expression.

There is no permanent or absolute moment of time. Specifically, a particular primary consciousness—which has no content per se—arises simultaneously with its attendant mental factors—which fill it out and supply its content. A moment of time is designated to the duration of the combination of mental factors that are concomitant with a primary mind. Seventeen moments of a mental dharma is the



length of time a form exists, the mind moments changing at a much faster rate than material particles.

## *The Theory of Space*

Just as absolute time is rejected, so too is absolute space. Only one Buddhist school<sup>137</sup> adheres to the idea of real space: it says that space is omnipresent, infinite, eternal, and non-obstructive in that it does not obstruct the matter that exists in it and it is not obstructed or pushed away by matter. This space isn't just the lack of obstruction but something positive—a real element or substance that is the container in which everything exists and moves.

According to the Pāli tradition, which refutes the above theory, although space is sometimes listed in conjunction with and just after the four primary elements of earth, water, fire, and air, that does not mean it too is a primary element of material. When space and consciousness appear after the four primary elements (*mahābhūta*, *mahābhūta*), the group of six is called “elements” (*dhātu*, *dhātu*). Thus space and consciousness are not considered additional primary elements of matter.

The first book of the Pāli Abhidharma Piṭaka lists space as a secondary material element. In doing so, it shows that space exists only in reference to form, and in that sense it is a derivative of form. Nevertheless, space lacks independent existence and exists only as a concept. The *Kathāvatthu* describes a debate about the reality of space. Someone says that space is real and visible, citing the space that can be seen between two trees or the space in a keyhole. The *Kathāvatthu* refutes this, saying that what we are actually seeing is the color of the two trees. In dependence on this, we impute that there is space between them. Similarly, we see the color of the surrounding material of the keyhole and give the designation “the space of a keyhole.” This space is known via a conceptual process, not by direct perception. Thus it is dependent on the conceptual processes of the mind.

The Sautrāntikas also reject space as something real and define it as “the mere nonexistence of form, which has the characteristic of impenetrability or lack of resistance.” Saying that it is the “mere nonexistence of matter . . .” emphasizes that it is a mere negation. Space is not a substance that is the opposite of form, but a mere absence of the obstructibility of form. They agree with the Pāli tradition

that space exists imputedly (P. *kappana-siddha*) and does not exist by its own-nature (P. *sabhāvasiddha*). This explains the Buddha's refusal to answer a question non-Buddhists often posed to him about whether space was infinite or finite. Because it is created by conception, it cannot be said to be either.

## *The Evolution of Abhidharma*

The early Abhidharmikas in the first two centuries after the Buddha's parinirvāṇa probably lived in areas not so distant from one another, so their theories were fairly similar. But once Buddhism began to spread far and wide in South Asia, there was little communication among the various Abhidharma commentators, and thus there was more diversity in their assertions. As time went on, new issues that occupied the later commentators arose because of contact with non-Buddhist influences. At that time many philosophers and renunciants in India were involved in studying and developing theories about epistemology, ontology, and language, among other topics. Philosophical schools such as the Sāṃkhya, Jain, and Vaiśeṣika promoted ideas that challenged the Buddhists and stimulated them to formulate responses that concurred with general Buddhist doctrine. It was within this milieu that the Sarvāstivāda Abhidharma developed.

In early Abhidharma, the dharmas were seen as dynamic processes and conditioned events. Later, non-Buddhist schools in India began to discuss existence (*bhāva, bhāva*), own-nature (*svabhāva, sabhāva*), substance (*dravya, dabba*), imputation and designation, own-characteristics or specific characteristics, and general characteristics. These terms came to have a variety of meanings, and new concepts arose, leading to much debate, not only between Buddhists and non-Buddhists but also among Buddhist traditions and even within different sects of one tradition. In addition, the meanings of these words were constantly changing even within one sect!

For example, the term *dravya*, which after the rise of the Madhyamaka was equated with inherent existence, was previously used by the non-Buddhist philosopher Patañjali to indicate an individual object or an aggregation of qualities. Then it was juxtaposed with *guṇa* (qualities), and the Sāṃkhya said *dravya* had both an unchanging substrate as well as properties that changed. The

Vaiśeṣika had yet another meaning for *dravya*, and the Jains defined it as existence (*S. sat*), which possessed arising, abiding, and passing away.

In addition to the sets of phenomena noted above, Abhidharmikas also began new modes of classification, such as the twenty-two faculties (*indriya, indriya*).<sup>138</sup> Later the Sarvāstivādins delineated a fivefold taxonomy of phenomena: form, primary minds, mental factors, abstract composites (*S. cittaviprayuktasamskāra*), and unconditioned or permanent phenomena (*S. asaṃskṛta*). Like the sūtras, this classification differentiates form and mind. However, now mental factors—which the Sarvāstivāda list as forty-six in number—are distinguished from primary minds and given their own category. In addition, there are new categories of phenomena—abstract composites and unconditioned phenomena—that were not initially listed in the five aggregates, twelve sense sources, and eighteen constituents. Abstract composites are impermanent phenomena that are neither form nor mind. Unconditioned phenomena include not only nirvāṇa and unconditioned space but also other unchanging phenomena.

It is hard to know to what extent people previously had conceptualized such groups, and to what extent these new categories were the result of questions and debates that arose after the Buddha's life. Viewed from a historical perspective, these new developments in understanding the Buddha's teachings led to the creation of new classes of phenomena. Although the previous classifications into the five aggregates and so forth were useful to realize that there is no self among the components of the person, later there was more concern with ontology. Also, because more people had engaged in analysis over the years, more dharmas, each with its own distinctive name and function, were identified.

Previously dharmas were seen as impermanent processes and events that mutually condition one another. Adding the category of unconditioned phenomena changed that because permanent phenomena were said to have a function, which distinguished them as existents and as dharmas. But unlike conditioned phenomena, their function was not to produce an effect. For example, the function of unconditioned space was to give material objects a place to occur. According to the Sarvāstivāda Abhidharma text the *Great Detailed Explanation* (*Mahāvibhāṣā Śāstra*), space was a real entity, a dharma, not a designation (*prajñaptita*). Furthermore, the Sarvāstivādins said that all phenomena, be they conditioned or unconditioned, had a fixed inherent nature

(*svabhāva*) and existed substantially as real entities (*S. dravyatā*) in all three times —past, present, and future.

Meanwhile, the word *svabhāva* continued to change. In the canonical texts, own-nature was juxtaposed to other-nature and said to be the criterion by which dharmas are included in one category or another. In other words, dharmas and categories are defined by their *svabhāva*; they do not possess a separate nature but are constituted of and determined by their *svabhāva*. The Sarvāstivādas began the transition of the meaning of *svabhāva* from phenomena having their own-nature to their having an inherent nature.

## *Some Reflections*

I (Chodron) would like to offer some reflections, rudimentary as they are, so that we see the Buddha's teachings in the context of the circumstances in which they blossomed and how the change in those circumstances influenced the explanations of the teachings by future generations. Too often some of us see the Buddhadharma we are taught as immune to external influences such as culture, politics, the economy, science, and so forth. While this topic is very broad, I will just mention a few points.

At the time of the early Abhidharmikas and the early Indian Buddhist pandits of the Nālandā tradition, India had many sects of renunciants, each with its own doctrine. Their panditas and teachers engaged in a lively culture of debate, whereby the disciples of those who could not maintain their assertions in the face of reasoning converted and became followers of those who could. At the same time as each party defended their own system, they were being challenged to explain various points in more depth, leading to the evolution of beliefs and the expansion of topics to debate. The Buddhism that has come to us now is a product of that. Although the true Dharma does not change, its outward expression and some of the topics it deems important change with time.

Topics that were of great importance in Tibet in the seventh century, the fifteenth century, and at present are not necessarily the same ones discussed by the early Abhidharmikas or the ones of interest in contemporary Theravāda studies. One reason for this is that questions and debates appeared gradually over time.

Another is that certain topics were of more or less interest to people in different places and cultures. Let's look at some instances of this.

The Pāli Abhidharma does not speak of partless particles, a topic that is still widely refuted in contemporary Tibetan studies. In the Pāli Abhidharma, the four great elements are not spoken of as particles, but as qualities, and the combination of the four great elements and the four secondary qualities are considered the smallest units of form. From this viewpoint, these smallest units of form are interdependent and arise and cease due to causes and conditions; they have parts. The Sarvāstivādins, on the other hand, assert partless particles. The Yogācāra and Madhyamaka refutations of partless particles, therefore, are in response to the Sarvāstivādins, not the Pāli Abhidharmikas.

In the canonical Pāli Abhidharma texts and the Indian and Sri Lankan commentaries, there is no mention of phenomena being truly existent or non-truly existent. It seems that the term “true existence” came into use later.<sup>139</sup> Early on *svabhāva*—own-nature or intrinsic nature—meant that dharmas have their own conventional entity. Different sects, both Buddhist and non-Buddhist, had their own meanings for that term, many of which were ambiguous. The expressions “inherently existent” and “existent by their own characteristics” were not used.

The same is true for the early Sarvāstivāda Abhidharma, but because of their substantialist assertion that dharmas substantially exist in all three times, it seems they were more inclined to accept reified ways of existence. Thus, the Madhyamaka negation of inherent existence and existing by its own characteristics is especially in response to the views of the Sarvāstivādins and Vaibhāsikas.

In the early Pāli Abhidharma as well as the early Sarvāstivāda Abhidharma, the terms “selflessness of persons” and “selflessness of phenomena” are not found. The Pāli commentators explicitly stated that the aggregates are not the self and are not objects of use of a self, and they assumed that everything—persons and phenomena—existed dependently. They refuted assertions of non-Buddhist schools that people and phenomena are created by an external creator or that they are produced from an absolute substance that is their substrata—ideas that future generations said were acquired and not innate afflictive views. Instead, Pāli Abhidharmikas said a person is a designation on a collection of impersonal material and mental dharmas.<sup>140</sup>

Looking from a historical perspective, I find the evolving meanings and usages of words fascinating. There was no mention of ultimate and conventional in the early Abhidharmas. When the term “ultimate” was introduced in the Pāli Abhidharma, it was ascribed to the dharmas, meaning that they are the basic things out of which minds and matter are composed. Similarly, the meaning of “own-nature,” “own-characteristics,” and “specific and general characteristics” evolved over the centuries within each tradition. Nor is the term “object of negation” found in either the sūtras or Pāli commentaries.

It would be very interesting to research the evolving meanings of some of the prominent terms now used when investigating the deeper mode of existence of phenomena and to explore the new philosophical terms that have arisen over the centuries. This would be a great topic for a doctoral dissertation.

The Abhidharma began in order to formulate the Buddha’s teachings into a philosophy and a system for the purpose of furthering the Buddhist practitioners’ aspiration for liberation. It was used as an aid to meditation on not-self in that it analyzed complex mental and material phenomena so that practitioners could see there is no findable person in the aggregates and no primal substance in material. Because the Abhidharmikas also emphasized synthesis of the dharmas, their explanations also aided practitioners in understanding dependent arising.

As time went on, ontological issues arose and became prominent, especially with the introduction of the term and concept of *svabhāva/sabhāva*. While this term was not used by the Buddha in the sūtras and is rarely found in the Pāli canon in general, it became an important concept in post-canonical times. Furthermore, later scholar-adepts drew out the epistemological implications of the early Abhidharma, expounding on the various types of cognizers and how objects are known by them. Add to this the ideas found in the Perfection of Wisdom sūtras, and there is an abundance of theories to debate and to employ in meditation.

Many texts and topics studied in contemporary Tibetan Buddhism, such as paths and grounds (T. *sa lam*), have their roots in the early Abhidharma works that described the stages of realization of disciples (śrāvakas and solitary realizers). To these were added descriptions of the bodhisattva grounds from Mahāyāna sūtras, such as the *Sūtra of the Ten Grounds*. Indian sages such as Maitreya and Asaṅga elaborated on the paths and grounds of the three vehicles, and from all this material Tibetan scholars later developed the genre of texts

known as Paths and Grounds describing the paths and grounds of the three vehicles from the Svātantrika as well as the Prāsaṅgika viewpoints. These are included in the current monastic curriculum.

The Collected Topics texts (*Dudra*) and Mind and Awareness (*Blo rig*) texts studied in contemporary Tibetan monasteries also have their origins in these early Abhidharma texts. The scheme in which all phenomena are categorized into permanent (*nitya, nicca*) and thing (*S. bhāva*), the subcategories of these two, the classifications of the various types of causes and effects, and the systematization of the types of minds and mental factors all originate in the Abhidharma. The interrelationships among the minds and mental factors and the causes of cognition likewise follow from the early Abhidharma texts.

Having a historical perspective on the development of ideas within Buddhism helps us to understand the various theories and the great Indian sages who were their proponents. It also illustrates why certain issues were and continue to be so important. As Buddhist doctrines encounter Western philosophy, new questions and topics of discussion will emerge. How will these be dealt with using the richness of the scriptural tradition as a resource? The question of free will and predetermination—so prominent in Western philosophy—was not examined by the great minds of India, Sri Lanka, China, and Tibet. Why was this topic so uninteresting that it didn't even occur to them? How can Buddhist tenets be applied to discuss it now? Similarly, the question of the interdependence of brain and mind—a non-issue in ancient cultures—is another area where Buddhist philosophy will develop in modern times.

### *The Abhidharmikas and Later Indian Philosophers*

Because the Middle Way is studied in depth before the Abhidharma in the Tibetan monastic curriculum, and because the historical development of ideas in Buddhism is not emphasized in their education, practitioners in the Tibetan tradition may not see the connection between the development of the Abhidharma and the Middle Way as taught by Nāgārjuna.

In the Pāli sūtras, the Buddha does not assert inherent existence, nor does he deny it. Sometimes when the Buddha talks of not-self in the Pāli sūtras, he negates the aggregates being a person. At other times it seems that he is negating

the aggregates having their own inherent nature, although he does not use that terminology. In Pāli sūtras, the Buddha explains how phenomena are subject to constant arising and passing away. Can someone who has clear meditative and experiential insight with deep mindfulness of the continuous/constant passing away of the aggregates still assert that they have an inherent essence that exists from one moment to the next?

Antecedents to Nāgārjuna's thoughts and writings exist in the Pāli tradition, as they surely did in all early schools. The format as well as the content of Nāgārjuna's famous tetralemma that rejects arising from self, other, both, and causelessly is found in the Pāli sūtras, when in the *Book of Causation* (SN 12.17) the naked ascetic Kassapa asks the Buddha if suffering is created by oneself, another, both oneself and another, or fortuitously. The Buddha responded, "It is not so" to each option.

The idea that some phenomena are mental constructs imputed by the mind was initially spelled out in the early Abhidharma literature. The implications of this idea were drawn out by Indian masters and their Tibetan descendants. For many Indian masters, mental constructs are juxtaposed with "real" phenomena (which each school defines slightly differently), so that various phenomena are said to have different degrees or types of existence. In his *Treatise on the Middle Way*, Nāgārjuna examines many of the same topics as the Abhidharmikas—causality; motion; the sense sources; aggregates; elements; arising, abiding, and ceasing; essence; time; and becoming and destruction—and concludes that there are not different degrees of existence but that all phenomena equally exist by mere imputation.

Many of the topics explored by early Sarvāstivāda Abhidharmikas and unpacked by later commentators became the basis of the Madhyamaka critique. Of the various early Buddhist schools, the Sarvāstivāda were very substantialist. The meanings of many terms—for example, "own-nature" and "own-characteristics"—took on different meanings for different people and schools. In addition, these meanings changed over time, and new philosophical terms became popular. The writings of Indian Mahāyāna panditas responded to these old and new words and their diverse meanings. For example, later scholar-adepts questioned: What is the difference between an object having its own-nature and existing by its own-nature? Can an object have its own characteristics but not exist by its own characteristics? The various philosophical schools that developed



in India have their own definitions of these terms and their own positions on these questions.

Because Nāgārjuna lived for some time in North India, where the Sarvāstivādins and the Vaibhāṣikas were strong, he likely had more contact with these schools. Thus his refutation of inherent existence and existence by its own characteristics was directed at their assertions when he clarified the meaning of the Middle Way free from the two extremes.

Many of the topics that are presently issues of debate or issues of great importance in the Tibetan Gelug understanding of emptiness were not considered by the Pāli tradition or other early schools. For example, the Pāli tradition assumed that people had a common conventional understanding of the word “mine” and did not go into lengthy discussions about the meaning of “mine” in view of a personal identity grasping I and mine. In the same vein, in the Pāli canon the Buddha does not state that phenomena exist inherently, nor does he say that there is only the selflessness of persons and no selflessness of phenomena. None of these terms were in common usage until later, and even then, their meaning evolved over time as the great Buddhist thinkers explored different areas.

Although my knowledge is just in its infancy, if we approach the Pāli sūtras with a fresh mind, we will see tantalizing hints of Nāgārjuna’s philosophy in them. Similarly, when we approach the Abhidharma texts of the various early schools, we will see the development of ideas that led to Nāgārjuna’s refutation of the inherent existence of all phenomena. Some of the ideas found in the canonical Abhidharma and its later commentaries are ones that Nāgārjuna refuted, whereas others supported his refutation of inherent existence.

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## Notes

1. You'll find discussion of the Vinaya, samādhi, insight, and the thirty-seven harmonies with awakening in *Following in the Buddha's Footsteps*.
2. It seems that both these Sanskrit terms are not found in Buddhist Sanskrit literature.
3. This is according to the Prāsaṅgikas. For followers of the Tathāgatagarbha philosophy in China, "suchness" has a different meaning.
4. For more on the three turnings of the Dharma wheel, see chapter 9 of *Approaching the Buddhist Path*.
5. The three kinds of faith are admiring faith, aspiring faith, and believing faith. See chapter 9 of *Approaching the Buddhist Path*.
6. These are the three Perfection of Wisdom sūtras: the extensive sūtra in one hundred thousand lines (or verses), the middle-length sūtra in twenty-five thousand lines, and the condensed sūtra in eight thousand lines.
7. This refers to the three higher trainings in ethical conduct, concentration, and wisdom.
8. This refers to the initial, middle, and advanced levels of practitioners. See chapter 8 in *Approaching the Buddhist Path*.
9. Translated by the Venerable Geshe Lhakdor in Dharamsala, February 26, 2002; revised by Tenzin Wangdue, Nicholas Vreeland, and Jeremy Russell, December 2020.
10. Saying that someone is a student of Nāgārjuna doesn't mean that they met him directly during their lifetime, but that they followed his views.
11. For a full explanation of these, see chapter 3 of *In Praise of Great Compassion*.
12. Private correspondence, Geshe Dadul Namgyal, May 1, 2010.
13. In Gelug, the main tenet texts are *Great Exposition of Tenets* (*Grub mtha' chen mo*) by Jamyang Shepa; *Precious Garland of Tenets* (*Grub pa'i mtha'i rnam par bzhag pa rin po che'i phreng ba*) by Könchok Jigme Wongpo, Jamyang Shepa's incarnation; and *Ornament of the Mountain of Tenets* (*Grub mtha' lhun po'i mdzes rgyan*) by Changkya Rolpai Dorje. The main Nyingma tenet text, *Treasury of Tenets: Illuminating the Meaning of All Vehicles* (*Theg pa mtha' dag gi don gsal bar byed pa grub pa'i mtha' rin po che'i mdzod*), was written by Longchen Rabjam. Sakya Pandita's *Thorough Explanation of the Systems* (*Gzhung lugs legs par bshad pa*), also known as *Differentiation of Tenets* (*Grub mtha' rnam 'byed*), is the main Sakya tenet text, and Taktsang Sherab Rinchen, a Sakya scholar, wrote *Explanation of "Freedom from Extremes through Knowing All Tenets"* (*Grub mtha' kun shes nas mtha' bral grub pa zhes bya ba'i bstan bcos*). A popular Kagyu and Rime tenet text was written by Jamgon Kongtrul Lodro Taye and is included in his masterpiece, *Treasury of Knowledge* (*Shes bya kun la khyab pe mdzod*), *Book Six, Part Three: Frameworks of Buddhist Philosophy*.
14. For an excellent discussion of the purpose of the tenet schools in the Gelug tradition see Blumenthal, *Ornament of the Middle Way*, 227–32.
15. Please see chapter 4, "The Spread of the Buddhadharmā and Buddhist Canons," in *Approaching the Buddhist Path* for comments on the early meaning of the name Theravāda.

16. The other five treatises on emptiness that Nāgārjuna is said to have written are *Precious Garland of Advice for the King* (*Ratnāvalī*), *Refutations of Objections* (*Vigrahavyāvartanī*), *Seventy Stanzas on Emptiness* (*Śūnyatāsaptati*), *Sixty Stanzas of Reasoning* (*Yuktiṣaṣṭikākārikā*), and *Treatise Called the “Finely Woven”* (*Vaidalyasūtranāma*).
17. Nowadays the debate continues whether, according to the Prāsaṅgika system, a syllogism is necessary to generate the correct view.
18. Also called the “self-cognizing mind” (T. *rang rig*).
19. The two *Knowledges* are the *Treasury of Knowledge* by Vasubandhu and the *Compendium of Knowledge* by Asaṅga.
20. See Cozort and Preston, *Buddhist Philosophy*; Tenzin Yangzom, *Presentation of Buddhist Tenets by Jetsun Chokyi Gyaltzen: Tibetan, English, Mandarin*; Geshé Namgyal Wangchen, *Brief Presentation of the Fundamentals of Buddhist Tenets and Modern Science*.
21. Some translators have translated *’dzin* as “conception” and thus say “the conception of true existence.” This translation can be misleading because we usually consider conception a rather gross mind, whereas grasping true existence is an innate mind that is subtler.
22. Tibetan scholars say that all eighteen of the early Buddhist schools can be included under the heading of “Vaibhāṣika.” However, modern scholars and most Buddhists in other Asian countries do not agree. Many modern scholars believe that the Vaibhāṣikas were a branch of the Sarvāstivāda because the Vaibhāṣikas’ main text, the *Mahāvibhāṣā Śāstra* (*Great Detailed Explanation*), is a commentary on the final book of the Sarvāstivāda Abhidharma, the *Foundation of Knowledge* (*Jñānaprasthāna*).
23. The same is true of form in general. A car is an example of form. A car is a conventional truth and imputedly exists, but form in general is not because when form is physically or mentally broken into smaller pieces, form is still present.
24. “Imputedly existent” and “substantially existent” have different meanings according to the tenet system. They are being used here as follows:
  - Vaibhāṣikas: Something is imputedly existent because when it is broken into smaller pieces or moments of time, it can no longer be ascertained. Something is substantially existent when it can be identified even when broken into smaller pieces or moments of time.
  - Sautrāntikas up to Svātantrika Mādhyamikas: Something is imputedly existent when another object must be identified in order to identify it. It is substantially existent when it can be known directly, without another object being identified.
  - Prāsaṅgikas: All phenomena are imputedly existent because they exist by being merely imputed by term and concept. Substantial existence is equivalent to inherent existence and nothing exists in that way.

For a different description of substantial existent and imputed existent according to the Drepung Gomang *Collected Topics* text, see Perdue, *Debate in Tibetan Buddhism*, 758–71.

25. That the Vaibhāṣikas and Sautrāntikas don’t assert a selflessness of phenomena affects their tenets on other topics. For example, they accept that the five aggregates and the external environment truly exist and that the way they appear to direct perceivers is not erroneous—these things are truly existent as they appear to be. Since that is the case, the five aggregates and so forth are inherently polluted and can never be purified. Thus when arhats pass away and attain nirvāṇa without remainder, their polluted aggregates cease, as does the continuity of the person. For that reason, there are three final vehicles, and śrāvakas and solitary realizers will never enter the Mahāyāna and become buddhas. Since not everyone will become a buddha, their generating bodhicitta is not

necessary. Because the aggregates and environment are inherently polluted, the Buddha as well as highly realized yogis do not see them as pure. Because the continuity of the person and aggregates ends with the attainment of nirvāṇa without remainder, they do not accept the four buddha kāyas, which include the truth body, which is a buddha's omniscient mind, and the two form bodies through which buddhas benefit sentient beings and lead them on the path.

26. In describing this, Tsongkhapa quoted the ninth chapter of the *Autocommentary on the Treasury of Knowledge*.
27. According to Prāsaṅgikas, substantial existence comes to the same point as objective or inherent existence. Although Prāsaṅgikas accept that some things are imputed existents as described by Asaṅga, they assert many levels of imputation. The one described above is coarse, while the subtlest meaning of imputed existent is that all phenomena exist by being *merely* imputed by mind and term. “Merely” excludes it being inherently existent.
28. It is called “Yogācāra” because its followers practice four yogic grounds: the yogic grounds of realizing the selflessness of persons, observing mind only, observing suchness, and dwelling in nonappearance.
29. *Grounds of Yogic Practice (Yogācārabhūmi)*, *Compendium of Ascertainments (Nirṇayasamgraha)*, *Compendium of Bases (Vastusamgraha)*, *Compendium of Enumerations (Paryāyasamgraha)*, *Compendium of Explanations (Vyākhyānasamgrahaṇī)*. *Grounds of Yogic Practice* includes *Bodhisattva Grounds (Bodhisattvabhūmi)*, *Śrāvaka Grounds (Śrāvakabhūmi)*, and *Solitary Realizer Grounds (Pratyekabuddhabhūmi)*.
30. *Inquiry into Relations (Sambandhaparikṣā)*, *Ascertainment of Reliable Cognition (Pramānaviniścaya)*, *Commentary on Reliable Cognition (Pramānavārttika)*, *Drops of Reasoning (Nyāyabindu)*, *Drops of Logic (Hetubindu)*, *Proof of Other Minds (Saṃtānāntarasiddhi)*, and *Reasoning of Debate (Vādanyāya)*.
31. “Posit” can either have the meaning to designate, which is done by a conceptual consciousness, or to establish, which can be done by a conceptual or nonconceptual consciousness.
32. Apperception (*svasaṃvedana*, T. *rang rig*) is rejected by the Vaibhāṣikas, Sautrāntika-Svātantrikas, and Prāsaṅgikas because if it existed, the subject and object of a cognition would be confused. Furthermore, there would be an infinite regress of apperception. Some scholars say the Sautrāntika Scripture Proponents also reject apperception.
33. Jamyang Shepa (1648–1721/22) has a unique perspective on the self-sufficient substantially existent person, saying that there are both coarse and subtle versions. Unlike grasping the coarse self-sufficient substantially existent person, grasping a subtle self-sufficient substantially existent person views the person and the mind-body as related, but still sees the person as the boss and the mind and body as the employees that the person leads and directs. The I is in control and dominates the aggregates, bossing them around. Here the boss is a worker just like the employees, but is more important and powerful than them. We experience this object of negation when we feel that there is an I that is one of the aggregates; for example, when the mental consciousness appears to be the I that controls the other aggregates. Jamyang Shepa says that this is the object of negation in the meditation on the selflessness of persons for all non-Prāsaṅgika schools. Its nonexistence is the subtle selflessness of a self-sufficient substantially existent person.
34. The five Saṃmitiya subschools of the Vaibhāṣikas assert a self-sufficient substantially existent person.
35. Not all imaginaries are findable when we seek the object that their term refers to, because some imaginaries are nonexistent. However, as a class, imaginaries exist and are findable when the object to which the term “imaginary” is attributed is sought.

36. This applies to modest-faculty disciples. For sharp-faculty disciples, the Buddha may teach Prāsaṅgika tenets directly.
37. The sequence described in detail is: first the aggregates appear to inherently exist, and ignorance grasps them as inherently existent. This is self-grasping of phenomena. The I is designated on the basis of the aggregates, and it too appears inherently existent. Grasping the I as inherently existent follows. This is the self-grasping of persons. The aggregates and other items are seen as “mine,” which leads to attachment to *my* things. More afflictions ensue, polluted karma is created, and saṃsāra continues on.
38. Subtle afflictions that grasp inherent existence are a unique assertion of Prāsaṅgikas. Most of our daily life afflictions are coarse; they do not grasp inherent existence themselves but are supported by grasping a self-sufficient substantially existent person as well as grasping inherent existence.
39. In some cases the term “interpretable” is used, implying that we must interpret the meaning of a passage; at other times the word “provisional” is used, implying that the passage does not convey the final meaning. The Sanskrit term is the same in both cases.
40. MP 235.
41. See MP 268–69.
42. These Yogācārins say that when sharp-faculty disciples study the *Prajñāpāramitā Sūtras* of the second turning, they understand the Yogācāra explanation of the three natures and three non-natures without having to study sūtras of the third turning. However, modest-faculty Yogācāra disciples must study sūtras such as the *Sūtra Unraveling the Thought* to correctly understand the Yogācāra view of these topics.
43. See MP 315.
44. This argument is spelled out more elaborately in the first chapter in the section “Emptiness, Its Nature, Its Purpose, and Its Meaning.”
45. It seems this text is not available in Sanskrit or Tibetan, but exists in Chinese as a set of gāthās attributed to Nāgārjuna.
46. A rough example of the meaning here is saying “one” presupposes more than one. If we say there is one cup, someone knows there are not two cups.
47. See chapters 6 and 9 in *Following in the Buddha’s Footsteps* for more about objects of concentration in the Pāli and Sanskrit traditions.
48. For a more in-depth description of this process, see *Courageous Compassion*, chapters 8 onward.
49. The Sanskrit tradition would call this a direct perceiver of emptiness.
50. See *Courageous Compassion*, chapters 6 and 7, for more on the paths of the śrāvakas and solitary realizers.
51. See *The Foundation of Buddhist Practice*, 69–76.
52. Tsongkhapa, *The Great Exposition of Secret Mantra, Volume One: Tantra in Tibet*; commentary by the Dalai Lama; translation, editing, and explanatory material by Jeffrey Hopkins (Boulder, CO: Snow Lion, 2016), 214.
53. The observed or focal object can be understood in two ways: (1) It is the object that is the basis of observation of a particular characteristic. For example, for a mind perceiving the impermanence of a table, the table is the observed object and its impermanence is the aspected object (T. *rnam pa’i yul*). (2) It is the main object that the mind focuses on, such as the table.
54. The Yogācārins, however, consider consciousnesses that apprehend external objects or objects that are not the same nature as the consciousnesses perceiving them to be mistaken.



55. There are different opinions regarding this. Some people say that a single moon is the appearing object because it is what triggered the perception of a double moon, but other people say a single moon is not the appearing object because it is falsely perceived.
56. The observed object of this wisdom is the object whose mode of existence is analyzed and whose emptiness is realized. However, the observed object does not appear to that wisdom directly realizing emptiness; only emptiness itself appears and is apprehended by that wisdom. The wisdom directly realizing the emptiness of I and mine directly realizes the emptiness of all phenomena.
57. “Superimposition” (*samāropa*, T. *sgro btags*, *sgro ’dogs*) refers to imputing something that does not exist—for example, the self of persons or the self of phenomena. These superimpositions are objects of negation.
58. Candrakīrti says (MMA 1.3cd):

First, with the thought “I,” the beings cling to a self;  
then, with the thought “mine,” they become attached to things [such as the aggregates].

From Nāgārjuna’s verse in *Precious Garland*, it seems that grasping the aggregates as truly existent arises prior to grasping the I as truly existent, but Candrakīrti seems to be saying the opposite, that first grasping I arises, then grasping the aggregates and becoming attached to them as mine. How do we resolve this seeming contradiction?

Nāgārjuna is describing the process by which self-grasping I arises—it is underpinned by having grasped the aggregates as inherently existent. For example, based on grasping a sad feeling as truly existent, we say “I am sad” and grasp the I as truly existent. Candrakīrti is speaking of the view of a personal identity in which the observed object is I or mine, not the aggregates. He is not saying that the self-grasping of persons precedes the self-grasping of the aggregates, but that grasping the I as inherently existent precedes grasping mine as inherently existent. “Mine” is another way of looking at the person. Although the notion of “mine” is based on things such as the aggregates—we say “this body is mine”—it does not grasp them as inherently existent; it grasps the I that makes things mine as inherently existent.

59. This differs from flashbacks and panic attacks caused by previous trauma.
60. The word *rtog pa* is the Tibetan translation for two Sanskrit words. The first is *kalpanā*, which has the meaning of conceptuality as described here. The second is investigation (*vitarka*, *vitakka*), which is a mental factor that engages with its object in a coarse way. It is also helpful to distinguish *rtog pa* from *rtogs pa*, which means realization (*adbigama*).
61. The meaning of conceptual consciousness and conceptual appearance is discussed in *The Foundation of Buddhist Practice*, 69–76.
62. See *Samsāra, Nirvāṇa, and Buddha Nature*, 20–21 and 107–8, for more on distorted conceptions.
63. In the homage in *Commentary on (Dignāga’s) “Compendium of Reliable Cognition,”* Dharmakīrti pays homage to Buddha Śākyamuni by referring to him as “the one who has eliminated the net of conceptualizations.” Here conceptualizations can be interpreted in two ways—as distorted conceptualizations such as self-grasping, or as conceptualizations in general. In terms of the inferential realization of emptiness, a conceptual consciousness that is an asset on the path, as a meditator advances on the path, the veil of conceptuality gradually falls away and they see emptiness directly as it is. Such a nonconceptual realization has the power to eradicate afflictions completely. In the case of bodhicitta, it is said that a buddha’s bodhicitta is also nonconceptual.
64. In the Sakya tradition, the meaning of “mind-basis-of-all” is different than in the Yogācāra system.

65. In this context, the term “mind” is used in a general sense that covers all types of cognitive events, without distinguishing between *sems* (mind) and *rig pa* (pristine awareness).
66. Of the three, understanding emptiness by hearing, thinking, and meditating, His Holiness is referring to the latter. By repeatedly meditating with a correct understanding of emptiness, an experience of emptiness will naturally arise.
67. Some scholars say that when meditating on the ultimate nature of the I, the I and emptiness appear to the inferential realization, but only emptiness is apprehended, whereas others say the I does not appear to this mind.
68. The Tibetan word *snang ba* can be translated as both appear (appearance) and perceive (perception). Cognitive obscurations are qualities of the subject, the mind that is obscured. They are not the object that the mind perceives. The “appearance” of inherent existence is the object or content of the mind that continues to perceive phenomena as inherently existent.
69. Please see *Samsāra, Nirvāṇa, and Buddha Nature*, 259–61, for more explanation on the two obscurations, and chapter 5 for more about afflictions, their seeds, and their latencies.
70. From “Recognizing My Mother” by Changkya Rolpai Dorje in *Songs of Spiritual Experience*, trans. Thupten Jinpa and Jas Elsner (Boston: Shambhala Publications, 2000), 109.
71. For more on these three types of phenomena, see *The Foundation of Buddhist Practice*, 18.
72. For more about the valid sense of I, see Khensur Jampa Tegchok, *Insight into Emptiness*, ed. Thubten Chodron (Somerville, MA: Wisdom Publications, 2012), 86–92.
73. Jamyang Shepa says grasping a self-sufficient substantially existent person has two forms: (1) The coarse form grasps the person and the aggregates as having discordant characteristics. He says this is what the Svātantrika and below assert as the conceived object of innate self-grasping of persons. (2) The subtle form grasps the I and the aggregates as having concordant characteristics. He says grasping this self is the grasping that Candrakīrti says is extinguished on the fourth ground. For more about Jamyang Shepa’s presentation of the levels of the object of negation for the selflessness of persons and the type of self-sufficient substantially existent person refuted by the lower systems, see MP 651–54.
74. In the Gelug tradition, there is a debate about what “mine” refers to in the view of a personal identity. In both canonical and commentarial texts in the Pāli tradition, there does not seem to be a philosophical debate regarding the meaning of “mine.”
75. The meaning of “emptiness dawns as the meaning of dependent arising” will be explored in more depth in volume 8 of the *Library of Wisdom and Compassion*.
76. There is a subtler level of disparity in that the reflection itself mistakenly appears to exist from its own side. This is explained further in volume 9 of the *Library of Wisdom and Compassion*. However, now we are using the reflection of a face as an analogy.
77. Stream-enterers have the initial realization of selflessness and will become arhats within seven lives at the most. Once-returners will be reborn in the desire realm one more time before attaining arhatship, while nonreturners will not. Arhats (foe destroyers) have attained liberation. See chapter 1 in *Following in the Buddha’s Footsteps* and chapters 6 and 7 in *Courageous Compassion* for more on these four pairs of Saṅgha in the Fundamental Vehicle.
78. Of the 108 phenomena, fifty-three are from the afflictive class and fifty-five from the pure class. The fifty-three afflictive phenomena are: 1–5 five aggregates; 6–11 six sense faculties (eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, mental); 12–17 six consciousnesses that depend on the six sense faculties; 18–23 six objects of those six consciousnesses; 24–29 six contacts that arise due to the coming together of a sense faculty, consciousness, and object; 30–35 six feelings that arise dependent on the six contacts;



36–41 six elements (earth, water, fire, wind, space, consciousness); 42–53 twelve links of dependent origination.

The fifty-five phenomena of the pure class are: 1–6 six perfections; 7–24 eighteen emptinesses; 25 four establishments of mindfulness; 26 four supreme strivings; 27 four bases of spiritual power; 28 five faculties; 29 five powers; 30 seven awakening factors; 31 eightfold path of the āryas (note that 25–31 are the thirty-seven harmonies with awakening); 32 four truths of the āryas; 33 four dhyānas; 34 four immeasurables; 35 four formless absorptions; 36 eight liberations; 37 nine serial absorptions; 38 paths of insight (concentrations on the three doors of liberation); 39 five superknowledges; 40 four concentrations (going as a hero, sky treasury, stainless, and loftily looking lion); 41 four doors of retention (of patience, secret speech, words, meaning); 42 ten powers of a buddha; 43 four kinds of self-confidence (four fearlessnesses); 44 four sciences; 45 great love; 46 great compassion; 47 eighteen unshared qualities of a buddha; 48–52 five beings who actualize the paths (stream-enterers, once-returners, nonreturners, arhats, solitary realizers); 53–55 three knowers (knower of the base, knower of paths, exalted knower of all aspects).

79. See chapter 2 of *The Foundation of Buddhist Practice* for more about the importance of syllogisms and the three criteria.
80. See chapter 2 of *Approaching the Buddhist Path* and chapter 7 of *The Foundation of Buddhist Practice* for more about rebirth.
81. Truly existent assertions are assertions that the opponent claims exist truly.
82. India's classical period was approximately 320–543, during the Gupta Empire.
83. For more on the coarse and subtle four truths, see chapter 1 of *Samsāra, Nirvāṇa, and Buddha Nature*.
84. Chokyi Gyaltzen says impermanence, the first of the sixteen characteristics of the four truths, is momentariness. Because this is the same for all tenet systems, it cannot be divided into coarse and subtle, like the other fifteen attributes. Jamyang Shepa says there are both coarse and subtle impermanence.
85. <http://emahofoundation.org/images/documents/DiamondSutraText.pdf>, 4.
86. See chapter 9 of *Courageous Compassion*.
87. See Shenghai Li, “Candrakīrti's Āgama: A Study of the Concept and Uses of Scripture in Classical Indian Buddhism,” PhD diss., University of Wisconsin–Madison, 2012, 207–10.
88. Similarly, some Mahāyāna practitioners may hold Fundamental Vehicle tenets and not realize the emptiness of inherent existence, while others may hold Prāsaṅgika tenets and realize subtle emptiness.
89. Unlike other Buddhists, Vaibhāṣikas claim that functioning thing, existent, and knowable object are equivalent. They divide functioning things into those that are permanent and those that are impermanent. For them a functioning thing does not necessarily arise from a cause and produce a result. Unconditioned space is a permanent functioning thing because it performs the function of allowing movement to occur.
90. See chapters 12–14 of *Samsāra, Nirvāṇa, and Buddha Nature* for a more extensive explanation of buddha nature.
91. See chapter 11 in *Samsāra, Nirvāṇa, and Buddha Nature* for an explanation of nirvāṇa and its relationship to emptiness.
92. Nirvāṇa is called “the deathless” in the sense that once nirvāṇa has been attained, there is no more birth in saṃsāra, and without birth, there is no death.

93. For instructions on the development of concentration, serenity, and dhyāna, see chapters 4–10 in *Following in the Buddha's Footsteps*.
94. Because the level of concentration with which one embarks on insight meditation may differ, the level of concentration at the time of breakthrough to the unconditioned does as well. According to the *Visuddhimagga* and Abhidhamma, a meditator practices insight in a state of concentration that is not dhyāna. Other commentaries call this state *vipassanā-samādhi*. Then, when the meditator makes the breakthrough to the supramundane path, the mind naturally goes into a dhyānic state. For a meditator who proceeds by the path of “dry insight” (insight without prior attainment of dhyāna), the path and fruit will occur at the level of the first dhyāna, but if the meditator has previously attained dhyāna, the path and fruit will occur at the level of dhyāna attained (see *Vism* 21.112ff.).
95. This is predicated on meditation on the four establishments of mindfulness. For instruction on this practice, see chapters 12–14 in *Following in the Buddha's Footsteps*.
96. The expression “mature or ripe faculties” appears in both the Sanskrit and Pāli traditions, as does the differentiation of practitioners according to their faculties being either sharp or modest. In the Pāli tradition, faculties usually refer to the five faculties of faith, effort, mindfulness, concentration, and wisdom. In the living meditative tradition of the Theravāda, “mature faculties” often has the broader meaning of being ready to gain insight or realization or having enough pāramīs to attain realization. Here “pāramīs” refer to the merit created through the practice of the ten pāramīs of the Theravāda path, which everyone, not just those on the bodhisattva path, must fulfill to attain the clear realization of nirvāṇa.
97. In addition to the above three types of abandonment, there are two more. One is *subsiding abandonment*, which is the subsiding of the defilements at the four moments of fruition that follow the four supramundane paths; this abandonment occurs at the moment of becoming a stream-enterer, once-returner, nonreturner, and arhat. The second is *abandonment by escape*, which is nirvāṇa in which all conditioned phenomena have been abandoned.
98. In Tibetan these are referred to as the appropriated aggregates. I (Chodron) find the Pāli term more compelling.
99. The difference between the conceit “I am” and the view of the self is subtle. The view of self takes one or another of the five aggregates or the collection of the aggregates and grasps it to be the self. The subtle view of self arises in all beings, whether they know philosophy or not. Some people speculate on what the self really is and develop a variety of complex explanations that they grasp to be true. Developing philosophical stances is a coarser form of the view of self.  
The coarser form of conceit is pride, which can be based on the five aggregates, although it does not grasp them as our self. For example the pride thinking “I’m attractive” is based on the body, but it doesn’t grasp the body to be the self, and the pride thinking “I scored well on this test because I’m intelligent” is based on the mind, but doesn’t grasp the mind to be the self.  
The conceit “I am” is much subtler; it is the spontaneous idea that I exist. This idea “I exist” does not grasp one or another aggregate to be the self; it is simply the thought that a true, findable I exists. This idea arises even in stream-enterers, once-returners, and nonreturners who have eliminated the view of a personal identity. These āryas know the thought “I am” is false, whereas when an ordinary person thinks “I am,” they hold it as true and let it influence how they think and act.
100. The twelve sources consist of six external sense sources (forms, sounds, odors, tastes, tangible objects, and other phenomena) and six internal sense sources (eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mental sense faculties).

101. Sentient beings especially crave the neutral feeling in the meditative absorption of the fourth dhyāna and the four formless absorptions. This neutral feeling is so peaceful and satisfying that subtle attachment can arise for it, binding sentient beings in saṃsāra.
102. Steven Collins, *Selfless Persons* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 129–30.
103. See chapters 7 and 8 in *Saṃsāra, Nirvāṇa, and Buddha Nature* for an explanation of the twelve links of dependent origination.
104. The eighteen constituents encompass all existents, both permanent and impermanent. The eighteen are the six objects, six sense faculties, and six consciousnesses.
105. Knowledge and vision of things as they really are is one of eighteen types of insight knowledge.
106. Based on the early sūtras in the Pāli canon and their commentaries, Buddhaghōṣa in the *Path of Purification* set out the stages of insight knowledge (*vipassanā-ñāṇa*) in detail. Beginning with the early Abhidhamma schools and continuing through the arising of Mahāyāna, each Buddhist tradition worked out the process of developing insight in its own way.
107. Spoken of in the commentaries and the Abhidhamma, but not the sūtras, the bhavaṅga is a passive, underlying stream of consciousness from which active consciousness arises. It occurs in the absence of any cognitive process and serves to connect all active states of consciousness; it is not a permanent consciousness or self. It is included in the mental source because due to it, active mental consciousness arises. At the microscopic level of individual mind moments in the waking state, the mind could be going in and out of the bhavaṅga so quickly that we do not notice it. During sleep, the mind is in bhavaṅga for a longer time, emerging to dream and then returning to dreamless sleep in the bhavaṅga. The bhavaṅga is also present when fainting.
108. Sometimes it is said that the consciousness “goes out to the object.” This is speaking metaphorically and indicates that the consciousness is receptive and cognizes the object. It does not mean the consciousness leaves the body and goes to the place where the sight or sound is. At other times it is said that the object comes into the consciousness through the sense doors. This, too, is metaphoric and indicates that cognition of object by the consciousness occurs.
109. Applying Madhyamaka philosophy, the quotation above emphasizes the dependent nature of the body and its being designated in dependence on the basis of designation, the collection of elements. This paragraph speaks of both the selflessness of phenomena (the body) and selflessness of persons.
110. This is one of the few places that shows how the five aggregates arise through the six sense sources. Usually these two sets—the aggregates and the sense sources—are discussed separately. In this case, Śāriputra brings them together in a way that demonstrates their interdependent and related natures.
111. Interestingly, this statement does not seem to be said by the Buddha in any of the Pāli sūtras. But not everything the Buddha said was necessarily recorded and transmitted in a complete form throughout the centuries due to human error.
112. This is one way of describing the dependent arising of the five aggregates. The forward sequence of the twelve links of dependent origination is another way to explain the dependent arising of the five aggregates. There are other ways as well.
113. The Pāli Abhidharma, extant in the Theravāda tradition, explains many more topics than mentioned here, including consciousness, mental factors, cognitive processes, realms of rebirth, karma, the process of death and rebirth, matter, defilements, dhyānas and formless absorptions, meditation objects, conditionality, paths and results, and purification. The material covered in this coda is only a very thin slice of the Pāli Abhidharma.
114. The title of an Abhidharma work from the Dharmaguptaka school preserved in Chinese translation is equivalent to the Śāriputra-Abhidharma-Śāstra in Sanskrit.

115. See chapter 4 of *Approaching the Buddhist Path* for more about the Buddhist canons and the three baskets of teachings, of which Abhidharma is the third.
116. See chapters 12 and 13 in *Following in the Buddha's Footsteps* for an explanation of the four establishments of mindfulness.
117. In Vasubandhu's *Treasury of Knowledge*, the twelve sources and eighteen constituents include permanent phenomena such as unconditioned space and nirvāṇa. In the Pāli Abhidharma, the twelve sources and eighteen constituents include nirvāṇa, but there are no other permanent dharmas.
118. Vaibhāṣikas and Sautrāntikas assert partless particles (T. *rdul phran cha med*), whereas Yogācārins and Mādhyamikas refute their existence.
119. See Bhikkhu Bodhi, *Comprehensive Manual of Abhidharma*, 25–26, for more discussion of ultimate reality.
120. Yinshun, a great Chinese scholar-adept in the twentieth century, says this text is a very early Abhidharma text of the Sthaviravāda school. Most Western scholars say it is a Dharmaguptaka text. The Dharmaguptakas were a branch of the Vibhajyavādins, which came under the division of the Sthavira branch of the early Saṅgha (as contrasted with the Mahāsāṅghika), so there is no contradiction between what Yinshun says and the view of Western scholars.
121. It seems that for the ancient Pāli commentators, *sabhāva* (“own-nature”) has multiple meanings, some acceptable, others not. The same point was made by Mādhyamikas as well, as will be explained in a future volume.
122. *The Discourse on the Root of Existence (Mūlapariyāya Sutta and Its Commentaries)*, trans. Bhikkhu Bodhi (Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 2006), 38.
123. Tibetan texts on Mind and Awareness (*Blo rig*) list five omnipresent mental factors.
124. The topic of definitive and interpretable (provisional) teachings is emphasized in Tibetan Buddhism as well. See Robert A. F. Thurman, *The Central Philosophy of Tibet: A Study and Translation of Jey Tsonkhapa's Essence of True Eloquence* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991).
125. There is a parallel distinction in the explanation of the Prāsaṅgika-Mādhyamika. Emptiness of inherent existence, which is ultimate truth, is definitive, as are the scriptures that explain it. Conventional truths and the scriptures that explain them are interpretable or provisional.
126. The Cowherds, *Moonshadows: Conventional Truth in Buddhist Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 6.
127. The non-Theravāda schools consider cold as an attribute of water-element, but according to the Theravāda, cold is the relative absence of heat, which is represented by the temperature-element.
128. In general, scholars of history say the Vaibhāṣika was a later branch that developed out of the Sarvāstivāda school.
129. Y. Karunadasa, *The Buddhist Theory of Matter as Presented in the Theravāda Buddhism with Special Reference to the Abhidhamma*, PhD diss., University of London, 1963, 344–45.
130. According to the tenet systems presented in the Gelug branch of Tibetan Buddhism, Vaibhāṣikas and Sautrāntikas accepted partless particles, whereas Yogācārins and Mādhyamikas refuted their existence. However, some Gelug scholars say that one branch of the Sautrāntika do not accept partless particles.
131. Paramāṇu and kalāpa are the same thing. It is called *paramāṇu*, or atom, because it is the smallest. It is called *kalāpa*, or cluster, because although it is the smallest, it is a cluster or group of material elements.

132. Karunadasa, *Buddhist Theory of Matter*, 368–69.
133. This view is shared by the Yogācārins and Mādhyamikas. Whatever arises is perishing; there is no need for an external force to operate on it to cause its cessation. Arising due to causes and conditions alone is enough to ensure its immediate cessation. According to the Gelug tradition, the Sautrāntikas, Yogācārins, and Mādhyamikas say that the characteristics of a thing include three activities: the activities of arising, of abiding or persisting, and of ceasing. Vaibhāṣikas say they are separate agents that act on forms and so forth, causing them to arise, abide, and cease. Prāsaṅgikas assert that the arising, abiding, and ceasing of impermanent things occur simultaneously. A thing's arising is its being the new creation of what didn't exist; its abiding is its similarity to what preceded it; its aging is its being a different entity from the previous moment, and its ceasing (disintegrating) is its not lasting another moment.
134. These are the kind of conundrums that arise when we see phenomena as inherently existent. Prāsaṅgikas use them to refute inherent existence. See chapters 11 and 15 of Āryadeva's *The Four Hundred* for examples of this.
135. See MMK chapter 2 on "Coming and Going" for another perspective on movement. Tsongkhapa's commentary, *Ocean of Reasoning*, helps to explicate this.
136. In Y. Karunadasa, *The Theravāda Abhidhamma: Inquiry into the Nature of Conditioned Existence* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2019), 274.
137. Some Theravādins identify this school as the Kashmiri Vaibhāṣikas.
138. The term *indriya* is also used to refer to the five sense faculties as well as the group of five faculties in the thirty-seven harmonies with awakening.
139. I asked Bhikkhu Bodhi about this and in private correspondence, May 5, 2010, he wrote, "Interestingly, I just did a search for *saccasiddhi* (the Pāli equivalent of the Sanskrit term *satyasiddhi*, or true existence) in the Sixth Council Tripiṭaka CD. It shows three results. They all refer to the same passage in three different subcommentaries. But the meaning is quite different from *satyasiddhi* as 'true existence.' Here the meaning is 'success through truthfulness.' The text is explaining the order of the ten pāramīs in the Theravāda tradition and says that 'determination comes immediately after truthfulness because there is the success of truthfulness through determination. . . .When one is bound to truthfulness, one remains unshakable in accord with one's precepts regarding generosity, and so forth.'"
140. This differs from Prāsaṅgikas, who say that a person is *imputed in dependence on* the collection of aggregates. Did the ancient scholars think of the difference between "dependent on" and "in dependence on"? It seems such issues arose much later, as debaters asked more and more questions.





## Glossary

*absolutism* (eternalism or permanence, *śāśvatānta*, *sassata*). The belief that phenomena inherently exist.

*abstract composites* (*viprayukta-saṃskāra*). Impermanent phenomena that are neither forms nor consciousnesses.

*access concentration* (P. *upacāra samādhi*). The preparatory stage of the first dhyāna. Here the five hindrances have been suppressed but the five absorption factors are not yet firm.

*acquired afflictions* (*parikalpita*, T. *kun btags*). Afflictions learned in this life through contact with false philosophies and psychologies.

*acquisition* (*prāpti*, T. *'thob pa*). Asserted by Vaibhāṣikas, it is like a rope that ensures karma will go from one life to the next.

*affirming negation* (*paryudāsapratiṣedha*, T. *ma yin dgag*). A negation that is realized upon explicitly eliminating an object of negation and that projects another phenomenon in the wake of that negation.

*afflictions* (*kleśa*). Mental factors that disturb the tranquility of the mind. These include disturbing emotions and wrong views.

*afflictive obscurations* (*kleśāvaraṇa*, T. *nyon mongs kyi sgrib pa*). Obscurations that mainly prevent liberation; afflictions and their seeds.

*aging* (*sthityanyathatva*, *thitassa annathatta*). Alteration of that which exists.

*aggregates* (*skandha*, *khandha*). The four or five components that make up a living being: form (except for beings born in the formless realm), feelings, discriminations, miscellaneous factors, and consciousnesses.

*analysis* (*vicāra*, T. *dpyod pa*). A mental factor that examines an object in detail.

*analytical meditation* (*vicārabhāvanā*, T. *dpyad sgom*). Meditation done to understand an object.

*appearing object* (*pratibhāsa-viṣaya*, T. *snang yul*). The object that actually appears to a consciousness. The appearing object of a conceptual consciousness is a conceptual appearance of something.

*apperception* (*svasamvedana*, T. *rang rig*): a “secondary” consciousness that knows the main consciousness itself directly and nondualistically. Asserted by some tenet systems, it is negated by Prāsaṅgikas and others.

*apprehended object* (engaged object, *muṣṭibandhaviṣaya*, T. *'dzin stangs kyi yul*). The main object with which the mind is concerned—that is, the object that the mind is getting at or understands.

*arhat* (P. *arahant*, T. *dgra bcom pa*). Someone who has eliminated all afflictive obscurations and attained liberation.

*arising/production* (*utpāda*, *uppāda*, T. *skye ba*). The coming into being of an impermanent phenomenon that wasn't present before.

*ārya* (P. *ariya*). Someone who has directly and nonconceptually realized the emptiness of inherent existence.

*autonomous syllogism* (*svatantra-prayoga*, T. *rang rgyud kyi sbyor ba*). A syllogism in which the parties involved agree that all parts of the syllogism inherently exist; Svātantrikas' preferred form of reasoning.

*basis of designation* (basis of imputation, T. *gdags gzhi*). The collection of parts or factors in dependence on which an object is designated or imputed.

*bhavaṅga*. A passive stream of subliminal consciousness that exists during all occasions when a clearly cognizing consciousness is not present. It is described in the Pāli commentaries and Abhidharma but not in the sūtras.



*bodhicitta*. A main mental consciousness induced by an aspiration to bring about the welfare of others and accompanied by an aspiration to attain full awakening oneself.

*bodhisattva*. Someone who has spontaneous bodhicitta and is training to become a buddha.

*bodhisattva ground*. A consciousness in the continuum of an ārya bodhisattva characterized by wisdom and compassion. It is the basis for the development of good qualities and the basis for the eradication of ignorance and mistaken appearances.

*brahmacarya*. Pure conduct, especially sexual abstinence.

*character natureless* (*lakṣaṇa-niḥsvabhāvatā*, T. *mtshan nyid ngo bo nyid med pa*). A quality of imaginaries that do not exist by their own characteristics.

*characteristics* (*lakṣaṇa*, T. *mtshan nyid*). Attributes or features of an object.

*coarse afflictions*. Afflictions stemming from grasping a self-sufficient substantially existent person, as contrasted with subtle afflictions.

*cognitive faculty/sensory faculty* (*indriya*). The subtle material in the gross sense organ that enables perception of sense objects; for the mental consciousness, it is the previous moment of any of the six consciousnesses.

*cognitive obscurations* (*jñeyāvaraṇa*, T. *shes bya'i sgrib pa*). Obscurations that mainly prevent full awakening; the latencies of ignorance and the subtle dualistic view that they give rise to.

*collection of merit* (*puṇyasamḥāra*). A virtuous action motivated by bodhicitta that is a main cause of attaining the form body of a buddha.

*collection of wisdom* (*jñānasamḥāra*). A virtuous mental action motivated by bodhicitta that is a main cause of attaining the truth body of a buddha.

*common four truths.* The four truths accepted in common by the four Buddhist tenet systems. These center around coarse afflictions.

*comprehended object* (*prameya*, T. *gzhal bya*). That which is the object known or cognized by a reliable cognizer.

*conceived object* (*adhyavasāya-viṣaya*, T. *zhen yul*). The object conceived by a conceptual consciousness; it is the apprehended or engaged object of a conceptual consciousness.

*concentration* (*samādhi*). A mental factor that has the potential to dwell single-pointedly for a sustained period of time on one object; a state of deep meditative absorption; single-pointed concentration that is free from discursive thought.

*conceptual appearance* (*artha-sāmānya*, T. *don spyi*). A mental image of an object that appears to a conceptual consciousness.

*conceptual consciousness* (*kalpanā*, T. *rtog pa'i shes pa*). A consciousness that knows its object by means of a conceptual appearance.

*conceptual fabrications.* False modes of existence and false ideas imputed by a conceptual consciousness.

*conceptuality* (*kalpanā*, T. *rtog pa*). Thought.

*conceptualizations* (*vikalpa viparyāsa*, T. *rnam rtog*). Distorted thoughts that range from exaggerating the desirability or beauty of an object to grasping impermanent things as permanent, and so forth.

*concomitant* (T. *mtshungs ldan*). Accompanying or occurring together in the same mental state.

*conditionality* (causal dependence). Dependence on causes and conditions.

*confusion* (*moha*, T. *gti mug*). Ignorance.

*consciousness* (*vijñāna*, *viññāna*, T. *rnam shes*). That which is clear and cognizant.

*consequence* (*prasaṅga*, T. *thal 'gyur*). A form of reasoning that shows the other party the inconsistencies in their assertions; the form of reasoning widely used by the Prāsaṅgikas.

*conventional existence* (*saṃvṛtisat*). Existence.

*conventional truths* (veiled truth, *saṃvṛtisatya*, *sammuti-sacca*, T. *kun rdzob bden pa*). That which is true only from the perspective of ignorance. This includes all phenomena except ultimate truths.

*death* (*maraṇabhava*). The last moment of a lifetime when the subtlest clear light mind manifests.

*defilement* (*mala*, T. *dri ma*). Either an afflictive obscuration or a cognitive obscuration.

*definitive* (*nītārtha*, *nītattha*, T. *nges don*). Prāsaṅgikas: A sūtra or statement that mainly and explicitly teaches ultimate truths.

*dependent arising* (*pratītyasamutpāda*). This is of three types: (1) causal dependence—things arising due to causes and conditions, (2) mutual dependence—phenomena existing in relation to other phenomena, and (3) dependent designation—phenomena existing by being merely designated by terms and concepts.

*designation* (*prajñapti*, *paññatti*, T. *btags pa*). The object designated by term and concept in dependence on its basis of designation.

*desire realm* (*kāmadhātu*). One of the three realms of cyclic existence, where sentient beings are overwhelmed by attraction to and desire for sense objects.

*dhyāna* (P. *jhāna*). A meditative stabilization of the form realm.

*different* (*nānātva*, T. *tha dad*). Phenomena that are diverse; phenomena that are not identical.

*different nature*. Two things can exist at different times and different places.

*direct perceiver* (*pratyakṣa*, T. *mgon sum*). A nonmistaken awareness that is free from conceptuality. According to Prāsaṅgika: an awareness that is free from conceptuality.

*direct reliable cognizer* (*pratyakṣa-pramāṇa*). A new nondeceptive nonmistaken awareness that is free from conceptuality. According to Prāsaṅgikas, it is a nondeceptive awareness that knows its object without depending on a reason.

*discordant characteristics*. The characteristics of two objects that are not the same. For example, one object is permanent while the other is impermanent.

*distorted conception* (inappropriate attention, *ayoniśo-manaskāra*, T. *tshul bzhin ma yin pa'i yid la byed pa*). Distorted thoughts that project exaggerations and erroneous qualities on objects, leading to the arising of afflictions.

*dualistic appearance* (T. *gnyis snang*). The appearance of subject and object as separate or the appearance of inherent existence.

*duḥkha* (P. *dukkha*). The unsatisfactory experiences of cyclic existence.

*Dzogchen*. A tantric practice emphasizing meditation on the nature of mind, practiced primarily in the Nyingma tradition.

*eight worldly concerns* (*aṣṭalokadharmā*). Attachment to material gain, fame, praise, and pleasure and aversion to loss, disrepute, blame, and pain.

*eighteen constituents* (*dhātu*, T. *khams*). These are the six objects, six sense faculties, and six consciousnesses.

*elaborations* (proliferations, *prapañca*, *papañca*, T. *spros pa*). Ignorance and other mental fabrications that obscure the ultimate nature of phenomena, their emptiness.

*emptiness* (*śūnyatā*, T. *stong pa nyid*). The lack of inherent existence and true existence.

*engaged object* (apprehended object, *pravṛtti-viṣaya*, T. 'jug yul). The main object with which the mind is concerned.

*erroneous* (*viparyāsa*, T. *phyin ci log pa*). Wrong, incorrect, perverted.

*essentialists* (proponents of true existence, T. *dn̄gos por smra ba*). Buddhist and non-Buddhist philosophers following a non-Madhyamaka tenet system who assert that the person and aggregates truly exist.

*exalted knower* (*jñāna*, T. *mkhyen pa*). A realization in the continuum of someone who has entered a path. It exists from the path of accumulation to the buddha ground. Exalted knower, path, ground, pristine wisdom, and clear realization are mutually inclusive.

*existence by its own characteristics* (*svalakṣaṇa*, T. *rang gi mtshan nyid kyis grub pa*). Existence from its own side.

*existent* (*sat*). That which is perceivable by mind.

*fetters* (*saṃyojana*). Factors that keep us bound to cyclic existence and impede the attainment of liberation. The five lower fetters—view of a personal identity, deluded doubt, view of rules and practices, sensual desire, and malice—bind us to rebirth in the desire realm. The five higher fetters—desire for existence in the form realm, desire for existence in the formless realm, arrogance, restlessness, and ignorance—prevent nonreturners from becoming arhats.

*focal object* (*viṣaya*, T. *dmigs pa*). The main object the mind refers to or focuses on.

*form body* (*rūpakāya*). The buddha body in which a buddha appears to sentient beings; it includes the emanation and enjoyment bodies.

*form realm* (*rūpadhātu*). The saṃsāric realm in which beings have bodies made of subtle material; they are born there due to having attained various states of concentration.

*formless realm* (*ārūpyadhātu*). The saṃsāric realm in which sentient beings do not have a material body; they are born there due to having attained various states

of meditative absorption.

*foundation consciousness* (*ālayavijñāna*, T. *kun gzhi rnam shes*). A storehouse consciousness where all latencies and karmic seeds are placed. It carries this from one life to the next and is the self according to Yogācāra Scripture Proponents.

*four truths of the āryas* (four noble truths, *catvāry āryasatyāni*). The truth of duḥkha, its origin, its cessation, and the path to that cessation.

*free from conceptuality* (*kalpanā-apoḍha*, T. *rtog bral*). Without any conceptual appearances.

*full awakening* (*samyaksambodhi*). Buddhahood; the state in which all obscurations have been abandoned and all good qualities have been developed limitlessly.

*Fundamental Vehicle*. The vehicle of śrāvakas and solitary realizers, the path that leads to liberation.

*general characteristics* (*sāmānya-lakṣaṇa*, *sāmañña-lakkhaṇa*, T. *spyi'i mtshan nyid*). Characteristics, such as impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and not-self that are common to all functioning things.

*grasping inherent existence* (*svabhāvagraha*). Grasping persons and phenomena to exist truly or inherently. Synonymous with grasping true existence (Prāsaṅgika).

*grasping true existence* (true grasping, *satyagrāha*). Grasping persons and phenomena to exist with an intrinsic essence.

*hell being* (*nāraka*). A being born in one of the unfortunate classes of beings who suffer intense physical pain as a result of their strong destructive karma.

*hungry ghost* (*preta*). A being born in one of the unfortunate classes of beings who suffer from intense hunger and thirst.

*ignorance (avidyā)*. A mental factor that is obscured and grasps the opposite of what exists. There are two main types: ignorance regarding ultimate truth and ignorance regarding karma and its effects.

*illustration-isolate self* (T. *gang zag gzhi ldog*). What is found when the person is searched for.

*impermanence (anitya, anicca)*. Momentariness; not remaining in the next moment. Coarse impermanence is the ending of a continuum; subtle impermanence is something not remaining the same in the very next moment.

*imputedly existent (prajñaptisat, T. btags yod)*. (1) Vaibhāṣikas: Something that when it is broken into smaller pieces or moments of time can no longer be ascertained. (2) Sautrāntikas up to Svātantrikas: Something that can be identified only by identifying something else. (3) Prāsaṅgikas: Something that exists by being merely designated by term and concept.

*inappropriate attention*. See distorted conception.

*inference (anumāna, T. rjes su dpag pa)*. (1) A cognizer that knows its object through reasoning, (2) a conclusion reached through a syllogism on the basis of evidence and reasoning.

*inferential reliable cognizer (anumāna-pramāṇa)*. An awareness that knows its object—a slightly obscure phenomenon—nondeceptively, purely in dependence on a reason.

*inherent existence (svabhāvasiddhi, sabhāvasiddha, T. rang bzhin gyis grub pa)*. Existence without depending on any other factors; independent existence. For Prāsaṅgikas, to be negated both ultimately and conventionally.

*innate (sahaja, T. lhan skyes)*. Existing with the mind from beginningless time, something not acquired anew in this life.

*inner heat (candālī, T. gtum mo)*. A practice of highest yoga tantra to draw the winds inside.

*insight* (*vipaśyanā*, *vipassanā*, T. *lhag mthong*). A wisdom of thorough discrimination of phenomena conjoined with special pliancy induced by the power of analysis.

*insight knowledge* (P. *vipassanā-ñāṇa*). Mundane (*lokiya*) knowledge of the three characteristics gained through insight. It leads to supramundane (*lokuttara*) path knowledge that realizes the four truths and nirvāṇa.

*insight wisdom* (P. *vipassanā-paññā*). Knowledge of the three characteristics gained through insight and leading to stream-entry.

*interpretable* (*neyārtha*, *neyyattha*, T. *drang don*). A scripture or statement that speaks about the variety of phenomena and/or cannot be taken literally.

*investigation* (*vitarka*, *vitarka*, T. *rtog pa*). A mental factor that seeks a rough idea about an object.

*karma*. Intentional action of body, speech, or mind.

*karmic seeds*. The potency from previously created actions that will bring their results.

*knowable object* (*jñeya*, T. *shes bya*). That which is suitable to serve as an object of an awareness.

*latencies* (*vāsanā*). Predispositions, imprints, or tendencies.

*liberated path* (*vimuktimārga*, T. *rnam grol lam*). A wisdom directly realizing emptiness that has completely eradicated its corresponding portion of defilements.

*liberation* (*mokṣa*, T. *thar pa*). A true cessation that is the complete abandonment of all afflictive obscurations; nirvāṇa, the state of freedom from cyclic existence.

*liberation* (*vimukti*, *vimutti*, T. *rnam grol*). Sanskrit tradition: Complete freedom from saṃsāra; Pāli tradition: a conditioned event that brings nirvāṇa.



*Madhyamaka*: A Mahāyāna tenet system that refutes true existence.

*Mahāmudrā*. A type of meditation that focuses on the conventional and ultimate natures of the mind.

*manifest afflictions*. Afflictions active in the mind at the present moment (contrasted with seeds of afflictions).

*meditative equipoise on emptiness*. An ārya's mind focused single-pointedly on the emptiness of inherent existence.

*mental consciousness (mano-vijñāna)*. A primary consciousness that knows mental phenomena in contradistinction to sense primary consciousnesses that know physical objects.

*mental factor (caitta)*. An aspect of mind that accompanies a primary consciousness and fills out the cognition, apprehending particular attributes of the object or performing a specific function.

*mind (citta)*. The part of living beings that cognizes, experiences, thinks, feels, and so on. In some contexts it is equivalent to primary consciousness.

*mindfulness (smṛti, sati)*. A mental factor that brings to mind a phenomenon of previous acquaintance without forgetting it and prevents distraction to other objects.

*mindstream (cittasamṫāna)*. The continuity of mind.

*mistaken awareness*. An awareness that is mistaken in terms of its appearing object.

*momentary (kṣaṇika)*. Not enduring in the next moment without changing.

*monastic*. Someone who has received monastic ordination; a monk or nun.

*nature truth body (svabhāvika dharmakāya)*. The buddha body that is either the emptiness of a buddha's mind or the true cessations in that buddha's continuum.

*naturelessness* (*niḥsvabhāva*, T. *ngo bo nyid med pa*). The lack of a certain nature.

*negative* (*pratiṣedha*, T. *dgag pa*). An object (1) whose name eliminates an object of negation, or (2) that explicitly appears in a way that an object of negation has been negated. Equivalent with exclusion (*apoha*, T. *sel ba*), other exclusion (*anyāpoha*, T. *gzhan sel*), and isolate (*vyatireka*, *ldog pa*).

*nihilism* (*ucchedānta*, *vibhavadiṭṭhi*). The belief that our actions have no ethical dimension; the belief that nothing exists.

*Nirgranthas*. Jains; followers of Mahāvira, a contemporary of the Buddha.

*nirvāṇa*. The state of liberation of an arhat; the emptiness of a mind that has been totally cleansed of afflictive obscurations.

*nominal truths* (*vyavahārasatya*, T. *tha snyad bden pa*). See conventional truths.

*nominally different*. Two phenomena are nominally different when they are not the same thing and can be distinguished by conception.

*nonabiding nirvāṇa* (*apraṭiṣṭha-nirvāṇa*). A buddha's nirvāṇa that does not abide in either the extreme of cyclic existence or in the extreme of personal liberation.

*nonaffirming negative* (*prasajyapraṭiṣedha*, T. *med dgag*). A negative phenomenon in which, upon the explicit elimination of the object of negation by an awareness, another phenomenon is not suggested or established. A phenomenon that is the mere absence of an object of negation.

*nonconceptual consciousness* (*nirvikalpaka*, T. *rtog med shes pa*). A consciousness that knows its object directly, not by means of a conceptual appearance.

*nondeceptive* (*avisamvādi*, T. *mi slu ba*). Incontrovertible, correct; the way it appears to a reliable cognizer directly realizing it is in accord with the way it exists.

*nonduality*. The nonappearance of subject and object, of inherent existence, of conventional truths, and/or of conceptual appearances in an ārya's meditative equipoise on emptiness.

*nonerroneous* (*aviparīta*, T. *phyin ci ma log pa*). Correct, right.

*nonexistent* (*asat*). That which is not perceivable by mind.

*nonmistaken* (*abhrānta*, T. *ma 'khrul ba*). (1) Sautrāntikas: not mistaken with respect to a consciousness's appearing object. (2) Prāsaṅgikas: a consciousness without the appearance of inherent existence.

*non-thing* (*abhāva*, T. *dnegos med*). (1) Permanent phenomena; (2) phenomena that cannot perform a function.

*non-wastage* (*avipranāśa*, T. *chud mi za ba*). Asserted by Vaibhāṣikas, it is likened to an IOU, voucher, or seal that ensures karma will go from one life to the next.

*object* (*viśaya*, T. *yul*). That which is known by an awareness.

*object of negation* (*pratiśedhya* or *niśedhya*, T. *dgag bya*). What is negated or refuted.

*observed object* (*ālambana*, *ārammaṇa*, T. *dmigs yul*). The basic object that the mind refers to or focuses on while apprehending certain aspects of that object.

*one* (*ekatva*, T. *gcig*). A singular phenomenon; a phenomenon that is not diverse; identical.

*one nature*. Two phenomena that exist at the same time and do not appear separate to direct perception are one nature.

*ordinary being* (*prthagjana*, *puthujjana*, T. *so so skye bo*). Someone who is not an ārya.

*own-characteristics/specific characteristics* (*svalakṣaṇa, salakkhaṇa, T. rang mtshan, rang gi mtshan nyid*). The specific characteristics unique to each phenomenon. Things have their own characteristics, but they do not exist by their own characteristics.

*passing away* (*vyaya, vaya, T. 'jig pa*). Ceasing, disintegrating.

*path* (*mārga, magga, T. lam*). An exalted knower that is conjoined with uncontrived renunciation.

*path knowledge* (P. *magga-ñāṇa*). A supramundane path that knows the four truths and nirvāṇa.

*path of accumulation* (*sambhāramārga, T. tshogs lam*). First of the five paths. In the Śrāvaka or Solitary Realizer Vehicle, it begins when one aspires for liberation day and night; in the Mahāyāna, it begins when one has spontaneous bodhicitta.

*path of meditation* (*bhāvanāmārga, T. sgom lam*). The fourth of the five paths. This begins when a meditator begins to eradicate innate afflictions from the root.

*path of no-more-learning* (*aśaikṣamārga, T. mi slob lam*). The last of the five paths; arhatship or buddhahood.

*path of preparation* (*prayogamārga, T. sbyor lam*) The second of the five paths. It begins when a meditator attains the union of serenity and insight on emptiness.

*path of seeing* (*darśanamārga, T. mthong lam*). Third of the five paths. It begins when a meditator first has direct, nonconceptual realization of the emptiness of inherent existence.

*permanent* (*nitya, nicca, T. rtag pa*). Unchanging, static, not momentarily changing. It does not mean eternal.

*permanent, unitary, independent self.* A soul or self (*ātman*) asserted by non-Buddhists.

*person* (*pudgala*, T. *skya bo*). A living being designated in dependence on its four or five aggregates.

*pollutant* (*āsrava, āsava*). A set of three or four deeply rooted defilements: sensual desire, existence (craving to exist in a *samsāric* form), and ignorance. Some lists add view.

*polluted* (P. *āsava*). Under the influence of ignorance or its latencies.

*posit* (*vyavasthāna*, T. *bzhag pa*). To establish, determine, or postulate an object; to designate.

*positive* (affirmative, *vidhi*, T. *sgrub pa*). A phenomenon that is not realized by the conceptual consciousness apprehending it by explicitly eliminating an object of negation.

*Prāsaṅgika Madhyamaka.* A Mahāyāna tenet system that asserts that all phenomena lack inherent existence both conventionally and ultimately.

*prātimokṣa.* The different sets of ethical precepts for monastics and lay followers that assist in attaining liberation.

*primal substance* (fundamental nature, *prakṛti, pakati*, T. *rang bzhin*). A truly existent substance out of which everything is created, asserted by the non-Buddhist Sāṃkhya school.

*primary consciousness* (*vijñāna*). A consciousness that apprehends the presence or basic entity of an object; there are six types of primary consciousnesses: visual, auditory, olfactory, gustatory, tactile, and mental.

*pristine wisdom* (*jñāna*, T. *ye shes*). A realization in the continuum of someone who has entered a path.

*probing awareness* (reasoning consciousness, *yuktijñāna*, T. *rigs shes*). A consciousness using or having used reasoning to analyze the ultimate nature of an object. It can be either conceptual or nonconceptual.

*production natureless* (*utpatti-niḥsvabhāvatā*, T. *skye ba ngo bo nyid med pa*). A quality of dependent natures: they arise from causes that are a different nature than themselves and do not arise from causes that are the same nature as themselves.

*pure lands*. Places created by the unshakable resolve and merit of buddhas where all external conditions are conducive for Dharma practice.

*realization* (*adhigama*, T. *rtogs pa*). An awareness that eliminates superimpositions on an object and is able to induce ascertainment of a phenomenon. It may be either inferential or direct.

*reliable cognizer* (*pramāṇa*). A nondeceptive awareness that is incontrovertible with respect to its apprehended object and that enables us to accomplish our purpose.

*reviewing knowledge* (P. *paccavekkhaṇañāṇa*). In stream-enterers, once-returners, and nonreturners, it is a knowledge in post-meditation time that reviews the path, its fruition, the defilements abandoned, the defilements that remain, and nirvāṇa. Arhats have no reviewing knowledge of defilements that remain.

*samādhi*. See concentration.

*Sāṃkhya*. A school of Hindu philosophy that asserts a primal substance and that says effects exist in a nonmanifest state in their causes.

*samsāra*. The cycle of rebirth that occurs under the control of afflictions and karma.

*Sautrāntika*. A Fundamental Vehicle tenet system that asserts that functional things are ultimate truths and that phenomena that exist by being imputed by thought are conventional truths.

*Sautrāntika-Svātantrika Madhyamaka*. A Mahāyāna tenet system that accepts external objects and refutes inherent existence ultimately but not conventionally.

*self* (*ātman*, *attan*, T. *bdag*). (1) A person, (2) inherent existence, or (3) a permanent, unitary independent soul or self.

*self-grasping* (*ātmagrāha*). Grasping inherent existence.

*self-isolate person* (T. *gang zag rang ldog*). The general person, the imputedly existent person.

*selflessness of persons* (*puḍgalanairātmya*, T. *gang zag gi bdag med*). Prāsaṅgikas: the nonexistence of a self-sufficient substantially existent person is the coarse selflessness of persons, and the nonexistence of an inherently existent person is the subtle selflessness of persons.

*selflessness of phenomena* (*dharmanairātmya*, T. *chos kyī bdag med pa*). Prāsaṅgikas: the nonexistence of inherently existent phenomena other than persons.

*self-sufficient substantially existent person* (T. *gang zag rang rkya thub pa'i rdzas yod*). A person that can be identified without identifying its aggregates; a self that is the controller of the body and mind. Such a self does not exist.

*self-sufficient* (T. *rang rkya ba*). Being a different entity from its parts.

*sense direct reliable cognizers*. Incontrovertible awarenesses that know their objects—sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and tangible objects—directly by depending on a physical cognitive faculty.

*sentient being* (*sattva*). Any being with a mind, except for a buddha.

*serenity* (*śamatha*, *samatha*). Sanskrit tradition: concentration arisen from meditation that is accompanied by the bliss of mental and physical pliancy in which the mind abides effortlessly without fluctuation for as long as one wishes on whatever virtuous object the mind has been placed. Pāli tradition:

one-pointedness of mind; the eight attainments (meditative absorptions) that are the basis for insight.

*sign (nimitta)*. A mental image that arises in stabilizing meditation and is used to attain single-pointed concentration.

*signlessness (ānimitta, T. mtshan ma med pa)*. The emptiness that is the absence of inherent existence of the cause of any phenomenon.

*six perfections (ṣaḍpāramitā)*. The practices of generosity, ethical conduct, fortitude, joyous effort, meditative stability, and wisdom that are motivated by bodhicitta.

*slightly obscure phenomena (parokṣa)*. Phenomena that ordinary beings can initially know only through factual inference.

*solitary realizer (pratyekabuddha)*. A person following the Fundamental Vehicle who seeks liberation and emphasizes understanding the twelve links of dependent arising.

*śrāvaka (hearer, P. sāvaka)*. Someone who practices the Fundamental Vehicle path leading to arhatship and who emphasizes meditation on the four truths.

*stabilizing meditation (sthāpyabhāvanā, T. 'jog sgom)*. Meditation to focus and concentrate the mind on an object.

*substantial cause (upādāna-kāraṇa)*. The cause that becomes the result, as opposed to cooperative causes that aid the substantial cause in becoming the result.

*substantially existent (dravyasat, dabbasat, T. rdzas yod)*. (1) Vaibhāṣikas: An object that can be identified even when broken into smaller pieces or moments of time. (2) Sautrāntikas up to Svātantrikas: An object that can be known directly, without another object being identified. (3) Prāsaṅgikas: inherently existent.

*suchness (tattva, T. de kho na nyid)*. Emptiness, the way things really are.



*superimposition* (*samāropa*, T. *sgro btags*, *sgro 'dogs*). The imputing or projecting of something that does not exist—for example, a self of persons.

*supramundane* (transcendental, *lokottara*, *lokuttara*). Pertaining to the elimination of fetters and afflictions; pertaining to āryas.

*subtle afflictions*. Afflictions stemming from grasping inherent existence (contrasted with coarse afflictions).

*Svātantrika Madhyamaka*. A Mahāyāna tenet system that asserts that phenomena do not exist inherently on the ultimate level but do exist inherently on the conventional level.

*syllogism* (*prayoga*). A statement consisting of a subject, predicate, and reason, and in many cases, an example.

*tathāgata*. A buddha.

*tenet* (*siddhānta*, T. *grub mtha'*). A philosophical assertion or belief.

*tenet system/school*. A set of philosophical assertions regarding the basis, path, and result that is shared by a group of people.

*thesis* (*pratijñā*). What is to be proven—the combination of the subject and the predicate—in a syllogism.

*thing* (*bhāva*, T. *dngos po*). (1) Something that can perform a function, synonymous with product; (2) inherent existence.

*thought* (*kalpanā*). Conceptual consciousness.

*three characteristics*. Three qualities of conditioned phenomena: impermanence, *duḥkha*, and selfless (not-self).

*three criteria for existent phenomena*. It is known to a conventional consciousness; its existence is not invalidated by another conventional reliable cognizer; it is not invalidated by a mind analyzing emptiness.

*three criteria of a correct inference or syllogism.* Presence of the reason in the subject, pervasion or entailment, and counterpervasion.

*three realms (tridhātuka, tedhātuka).* Desire, form, and formless realms.

*true cessation (nirodhasatya).* The cessation of a portion of afflictions or all afflictions; the cessation of a portion of cognitive obscurations or all cognitive obscurations.

*true existence (satyasat).* Existence having its own mode of being; existence having its own reality.

*true grasping.* See grasping true existence.

*truth body (dharmakāya).* The buddha body that includes the nature truth body and the wisdom truth body.

*twelve links of dependent origination (dvādaśāṅga-pratītyasamutpāda).* A system of twelve factors that explains how we take rebirth in saṃsāra and how we can be liberated from it.

*twelve sources (āyatana, T. skye mched).* That which opens or increases the arising of consciousness. They consist of six external sense sources (forms, sounds, odors, tastes, tangible object, and other phenomena) and six internal sense sources (eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mental sense faculties).

*two truths (satyadvaya).* Ultimate truths and veiled (conventional) truths.

*ultimate analysis (T. don dam pa'i dpyod pa).* Analysis that examines what an object really is and its deeper mode of existence.

*ultimate natureless (paramārtha-niḥsvabhāvata).* A quality of consummate natures; the ultimate nature of phenomena that is perceived by the ultimate purifying consciousnesses.

*ultimate truth (paramārthasatya, paramatthasacca, T. don dam bden pa).* The ultimate mode of existence of all persons and phenomena; emptiness; objects

that are true and appear true to their main cognizer, a wisdom nonconceptually and directly realizing emptiness.

*uncommon four truths.* The four truths accepted only by Prāsaṅgika-Mādhyamikas. These center around subtle afflictions.

*underlying tendencies (anuśaya, anusaya).* Latent dispositions on the mind that enable manifest afflictions to arise when the appropriate causes and conditions are present. These are attachment to sensuality, anger, views, deluded doubt, arrogance, existence (in the three realms), and ignorance.

*unfortunate states (apāya).* Unfortunate states of rebirth as a hell being, hungry ghost, or animal.

*uninterrupted path (ānantaryamārga, T. bar ched med lam).* A wisdom directly realizing emptiness that is in the process of eliminating its corresponding portion of defilements.

*union of serenity and insight.* A path that consists of both serenity and insight and in which the bliss of mental and physical pliancy has been induced by analysis.

*unpolluted (anāsrava).* Not under the influence of ignorance.

*Vaibhāṣika.* A Fundamental Vehicle tenet system that accepts directionally partless particles and temporally partless moments of consciousness as ultimate truths and asserts truly established external objects.

*veiled truths (conventional truths, samvṛtisatya).* Objects that are true only to ignorance; objects that appear to exist inherently to their main cognizer, ignorance.

*view of a personal identity (view of the transitory collection, satkāyadrṣṭi, sakkāyaditṭhi).* Grasping an inherently existent I or mine (according to the Prāsaṅgika system).

*view of a personal identity grasping I* (*ahamkāra*, T. *ngar 'dzin gyi 'jig lta*). An afflictive view that holds the I to be inherently existent.

*view of a personal identity grasping mine* (*mamakāra*, T. *nga yi bar 'dzin pa'i 'jig lta*). An afflictive view holding what makes things mine as inherently existent.

*Vinaya*. Monastic discipline.

*wind* (*prāṇa*, T. *rlung*). One of the four elements; energy in the body that influences bodily functions; subtle energy on which levels of consciousness ride.

*wisdom truth body* (*jñāna dharmakāya*). The buddha body that is a buddha's omniscient mind.

*wishlessness* (*apraṇihita*, T. *smon pa med pa*). The ultimate nature of the effects of things.

*wrong or erroneous awareness* (*viparyaya jñāna*). A mind that is erroneous with respect to its apprehended object.

*Yogācāra* (*Cittamātra*). A Mahāyāna tenet system that accepts eight consciousnesses, including a foundation consciousness and an afflictive consciousness, and asserts the true existence of other-powered (dependent) phenomena but does not assert external objects.

*Yogācāra-Svātantrika Madhyamaka*. A Mahāyāna tenet system that does not assert external objects, asserts six consciousnesses, and refutes inherent existence ultimately but not conventionally.

*yogi/yoginī*. A meditator on suchness.

*yogic direct reliable cognizers*. Nondeceptive mental consciousnesses that know their objects by depending on a union of serenity and insight.

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**I**N THIS BOOK, beloved teacher Lama Zopa Rinpoche guides us through the most popular mantras in Tibetan Buddhism: Shakyamuni Buddha, Chenrezig, Manjushri, Tara, Medicine Buddha, Vajrasattva, and more.

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## EDITOR'S PREFACE

---

TWO AND A HALF thousand years ago, a man became enlightened. Prince Gautama, Siddhartha, the son of the king the Shakyas, became Shakyamuni, the “conqueror of the Shakyas,” usually just known as the Buddha, the Awakened One.

Read one way, the story of the Buddha is of a person like us and his search for the truth, which culminated in his enlightenment under the bodhi tree. Read another way, the Mahayana way, he was already enlightened, and his life was a teaching, showing us exactly what we must do to become like him. Both readings are the truth. How that is so is a quest we ourselves must undertake to discover what it means for us.

And that is the same with the countless buddhas there are in Tibetan Buddhism. Why not just one Buddha, Shakyamuni? What does the plethora of buddhas mean? What exactly are they and how do they relate to our spiritual journey? I remember, in France in the 1990s, a student asked one of the great lamas, “Are the buddhas real or imaginary?” In a wonderfully enigmatic answer, the lama replied, “Yes.” Which I took to mean that it’s up to us to work it out.

Buddha, deity, meditational deity, *yidam*—the terms are synonymous, all referring to the enlightened mind manifesting in a particular way to best benefit sentient beings. Thus, Chenrezig is the manifestation of the buddhas’ compassion, Tara is the manifestation of the buddhas’ enlightened activities, and so forth.

The many buddhas manifest according to the different propensities of different people. They are there to help us in whatever way we need, if we are able to open to them. Sometimes we need more compassion than wisdom; sometimes we need a more wrathful approach, other times a more peaceful one. We have a natural affinity for one or many buddhas. That does not mean

that one buddha is better than the others, but that one will resonate with us more.

Each buddha has a mantra. A mantra is a series of Sanskrit syllables that evoke the energy of that particular buddha. All sound has energy. It is said that every Sanskrit syllable creates a sacred vibration in the mind, and so each syllable of each mantra has the power to alter our psychic nervous system in subtly different ways. Some mantras run smoothly through the mind and invoke peace and contentment, some seem difficult to pronounce and have a markedly different effect. A mantra works in two ways: externally as a sacred sound that carries a blessing, and internally as a tool to transform our mind into one that is more compassionate and wise.

When we take an initiation into a particular deity, we are generally given a mantra commitment, such as saying a certain number of mantras of that deity every day. Although to our Westernized, individualistic mind, this might seem like an imposition at first, in fact it is the gift of liberation. If we get into the habit of saying mantras whenever the mind slips into a dull neutrality or into emotive overdrive—not only when we are doing a daily meditation practice but whenever we are going about our business—we can bring ourselves back to a peace and spaciousness that guards our mind from negativity. It is probably the most valuable mental tool we can have.

Generally, to practice a deity and say their mantra, we need an initiation given by a qualified teacher who is part of an unbroken lineage. There are some deities, however, who are so popular that their mantras are widely said by people whether they have had an initiation or not. Furthermore, even without an initiation, it is often permissible (and very beneficial) to do a simple version of that deity's practice. In such cases, it is generally said that rather than imagining yourself becoming the deity, as is often taught after initiation—you simply imagine them in front of you, and you receive the blessings of the deity.

By far the most popular mantra is that of Chenrezig (Avalokiteshvara in Sanskrit). There seems to be hardly a Tibetan person who doesn't constantly have OM MANI PADME HUM on their lips, and with non-Tibetans too, this is very popular. Chenrezig is compassion, which we all desperately need, so chanting his mantra is incredibly worthwhile.

Over the decades, Lama Zopa Rinpoche has given countless initiations and instructed his students to say many different mantras. For specific situations,

he gives very specific instructions, telling us which mantra will best protect or help us. For instance, for the recent coronavirus pandemic, to protect themselves and others from the virus, he requested his students to chant the Vajra Armor mantra, a powerful healing practice.

This book is a distillation of what Rinpoche has said of the most accessible deities and their mantras. These are the ones students of Tibetan Buddhism usually encounter first and practice longest, starting with Shakyamuni Buddha, the historical Buddha, the one who gave us the whole of Buddhism. Then, there is Chenrezig, the embodiment of compassion, Tibet's most beloved deity and closely associated with his Holiness the Dalai Lama, and Manjushri, the embodiment of wisdom. The entire path to enlightenment is encapsulated in compassion and wisdom, and so these two buddhas are extremely important. So too is Tara, embodying the buddhas' compassionate action. Then, after Medicine Buddha, the healing buddha, there are the mantras of the most effective purification practices, Vajrasattva and the Thirty-Five Confession Buddhas, and finally, the five powerful mantras Rinpoche often advises us to recite. Hopefully, this book will give you a feeling for the different deities and an appreciation of the power of the mantras—as well as the wish to use those mantras to transform your mind.

You might notice that there is not complete consistency in the way Tibetan terms are dealt with. Generally, Wisdom uses a simplified phonetic transcription that corresponds to the way the word sounds. However, because we have often used prayers from practices from Rinpoche's Foundation for the Preservation of the Mahayana Tradition, such as the prayers to the Twenty-One Taras, in those instances we have kept with the FPMT's system. Similarly, we write the Sanskrit terms without diacritics, except in one appendix, where Lama Zopa explains the differences in the sounds of the mantras in detail. When Sanskrit and/or Tibetan terms appear in brackets, we have not specified which is which, because the two languages look quite different, but generally if both languages are together, the Sanskrit comes first.

To compile this book I have used teachings stored in the Lama Yeshe Wisdom Archive that have been lovingly recorded, transcribed, and checked by a vast number of people, as well as the incredible books, booklets, and practices that have been created over the decades by the FPMT's Education Services, carefully following Lama Zopa's wishes so his students can practice the

authentic Dharma. I would like to thank Tom Truty of Education Services for his invaluable help in checking the mantras and practices within the book, offering more recent alternatives, and giving permission for us to adapt and use the appropriate practices that we have taken from the FPMT's vast treasure house. I would also like to thank everybody who contributed to this book, those at the LYWA, the FPMT, and the many at Wisdom Publications, all of whom are an inspiration to work with. One person I especially want to thank is Peter Iseli. When we decided this book deserved the most beautiful buddha images to enhance it, we turned to Peter, who has been creating beautiful images for Rinpoche and other Tibetan masters for decades, and Peter not only freely offered his superb paintings but even created two new ones for the book. I think you will agree, the result is wonderful.

I apologize for any errors found in this book; they are 100 percent mine. May this book be a tool to allow people to develop their positive qualities to the maximum degree in order to help others. May whatever merits gained from the creation of this book be dedicated to peace in this troubled world; to the long life, well-being, and fulfillment of the wishes of all our holy teachers, especially His Holiness the Dalai Lama and Lama Zopa Rinpoche; and to the flourishing of the Foundation for the Preservation of the Mahayana Tradition and of the Dharma throughout the world.

Gordon McDougall  
Bath, UK

# INTRODUCTION: THE POWER TO TRANSFORM THE MIND

---

## THE POWER OF MANTRAS

The Sanskrit word *mantra* (which is *ngag* in Tibetan) has two syllables: *man*, which means “mind,” and *tra*, which means “protect,” so a mantra is something that protects our mind.

The benefits of mantra recitation are vast. There are many stories about terrible diseases such as cancer being cured by mantras, or people or animals being helped to have a peaceful death and a positive rebirth through mantras being recited to them. But the supreme benefit of a mantra is its ability to transform our mind. When we recite a mantra such as Shakyamuni’s mantra, we are recalling the Buddha’s name over and over, helping us increase our closeness and devotion to the Buddha, and devotion is our real protection from suffering. By transforming our mind, it has the power to break negative habits and develop positive ones. As our mind changes, our ability to help others increases, so we are reciting mantras for others as well.

By linking us to the omniscient mind—the wisdom and compassion of the Buddha and all the enlightened beings—reciting a mantra invokes that great power, leading us from nonvirtue to virtue. The Buddha said,

Do not commit any nonvirtuous actions,  
perform only perfect virtuous actions,  
subdue your mind thoroughly—  
this is the teaching of the Buddha.<sup>1</sup>

The whole Buddhist path comes down to these two pieces of advice—to not harm others and to benefit them. In order to do that, we must subdue the mind, which means both collecting merit through doing only virtuous actions

and purifying any negative imprints on our mindstream from negative actions we have done in the past.

Reciting a mantra such as OM MANI PADME HUM, the mantra of Chenrezig,<sup>2</sup> is not only the most unbelievable purification—purifying defilements and negative karmas collected from not just this life but from beginningless rebirths—it also collects extensive merits.

In the West, when soccer players win, they throw their arms up in the air and run around. It's very intense. When I first saw this, I thought they were very angry because of the strong emotion. If they feel that strongly about winning a match, we should feel a billion times more strongly about being able to purify all that negative karma and accumulate all that merit, simply by reciting a mantra.

Westerners have asked me many times to explain how mantras work. This is a question that comes from the Western mind; it's not asked in Asia, certainly not among the Tibetans, because they have faith. When there is water, what does water do? It makes things wet; that is its nature. Fire has its own nature; its nature is to burn. Everything has its own nature. Mantras too have their own nature; their nature is to transform the mind. Any word we say affects another person's mind, making them happy or sad or angry or whatever. The power of the mantra comes from the sound, and that sound has the power to transform the mind into one of virtue.<sup>3</sup>

Thinking of mantras as just some Sanskrit sounds to be chanted is an extremely limited view of what they are; they are much more than that. The sound of a mantra has the power to protect us, holding our mind from nonvirtuous thoughts and fostering virtuous ones, thus allowing us to develop toward enlightenment. In the same way that the Dharma in general holds us, protecting us from suffering—*Dharma* literally means “that which holds”—mantras are mind protection. In *A Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life*, the great being Shantideva said,

Therefore, I should focus my mind correctly,  
and keep a careful watch over it.  
What good will it do to keep many vows,  
if one neglects the vow of watching over the mind?<sup>4</sup>

It is vital to remember Shantideva's advice. If we forget to protect our mind, what is the use of any traditional form of discipline? Even though we may do hundreds of other things, if we leave out this most important practice and leave the mind unprotected, we cannot stop our problems and achieve happiness, especially ultimate happiness. Everything comes from the mind; it is the source of all our suffering and all our happiness, so if we neglect to protect our mind, we cannot close the door to suffering or open it to happiness.

In the West, there are so many external rules: you can't do this, you can't do that. Sometimes I think there are too many rules. When we rely on external discipline, we can never solve our problems. The discipline has to come from our own mind. As a Buddhist, we might take certain vows to protect ourselves from committing any of the ten nonvirtuous actions,<sup>5</sup> but unless we protect our mind, those vows will be impossible to keep. As Shantideva said, what good will having vows be if we can't watch over our mind?

Modern Western life is full of distractions. Everywhere are objects of the senses to keep our mind busy, enticing us away from the Dharma. If you check you will see this is true. Being preoccupied with working for this worldly life, as so many people are, makes it extremely difficult to remember the necessity of Dharma practice and to find the time to practice it. Buddhism has many methods to overcome a distracted mind, such as meditating on impermanence and death<sup>6</sup> or on the disadvantages of the self-cherishing mind. When we are not meditating, however, what is the best method? Reciting mantras will keep our mind in virtue and protect it from nonvirtue.

## THE WAY MANTRAS SAVE US

We *must* at least recite mantras when we have the chance. I often say, If you have a mouth, you must use it for that. (Of course, if you don't have a mouth, that's okay.) That is the minimum practice. We must *at least* recite OM MANI PADME HUM to develop compassion toward all living beings. Even if we have little understanding of karma and can't see how the mind is affected by mantras, we should have faith in the benefits of reciting them, benefits like the limitless sky. Reciting mantras really does protect our mind.



Mantras are there to protect us in everything we do. If we have a daily meditation practice, there are mantras to be said with the preliminary practices before the main meditation. Specifically, when we set up the altar, in order to dispel obstacles that can cloud our mind, we must recite OM AH HUM as we fill the offering bowls with water and offer flowers.

There are mantras we should say at the beginning of the day, such as mantras for blessing our speech, our mala, and our feet to protect any beings we might step on. There are also multiplying mantras that increase the power of our recitation when we recite them.<sup>7</sup>

### *Mantras That Heal*

All mantras are mind protection; they heal our mind. By purifying the mind, by making the mind healthy, we can enjoy whatever success and happiness we want, now and in the future. There are some mantras, however, that are especially effective in healing sickness.

Probably the most common mantra is Chenrezig's OM MANI PADME HUM. We will later look at the Chenrezig mantra and how we can generate all-important compassion through it, but it is also extremely powerful for healing ourselves and others by transforming our minds into compassion toward all others, without distinction of race, nationality, gender, and so forth. We develop compassion without any barrier. Whether somebody likes us or not, whatever their beliefs, we only want them to have happiness and its causes and to be free from suffering and its causes. When we can take the full responsibility to ensure all others' happiness in this way, that is called great compassion and is the prerequisite to bodhichitta. Because our mind is free from the agitation of disturbing thoughts, we are naturally healthier in body and mind.

Another healing mantra is the mantra of Medicine Buddha: TADYATHA OM BHAISHAJYE BHAISHAJYE MAHA BHAISHAJYE BHAISHAJYE RAJA SAMUDGATE SVAHA. When we recite this mantra, we imagine that Medicine Buddha, the buddha of healing, is absorbed into us and into all living beings, and we receive all the blessings and power of Medicine Buddha's holy body, holy speech, and holy mind, all the qualities that enable us to help others. It heals our mind from all the disturbing emotional thoughts and makes it healthy—free, peaceful,

contented, and fulfilled. Medicine Buddha's mantra does much more than heal us of our sicknesses; it enables us to serve all others in all our future lives, bringing them perfect happiness, and, as a side effect, bringing ourselves perfect happiness.

The texts explain that a being we might have inadvertently killed, like an ant we stepped on, can be saved from the lower realms and can obtain a good rebirth if we simply recite Medicine Buddha's mantra over the body. It seems hard to believe. So, how does it work?

Since things are dependent arisings, everything depends on causes and conditions. If we think about it, we can see that the power of mantra comes from the inconceivable qualities and power of the Buddha, from his holy mind that is completely trained in compassion and embraces all sentient beings without exception. The Buddha has infinite times more compassion and love for us than we have for ourselves, and the power of the mantra comes through the power of Buddha's omniscient mind.

The power of the mantra also comes from the power of the mind of the person who recites it. Of course, if we have some realization, there is much more power in whatever activity we do for other sentient beings; it is much more meaningful. However, even if we are still very far from attaining any realization, reciting the mantra can still be effective depending on how much compassion and love we have toward that sentient being, as well as how much devotion we have in the mantra, the guru, and the Three Rare Sublime Ones: the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha.

Finally, there have to be conditions to do with the being itself: the dead or dying insect or animal. Not every sentient being has the karma to have somebody recite a mantra and blow over their body as they are dying so they can receive a good rebirth. When you think of the number of animals, worms, insects, and countless other forms of sentient beings who die all the time, the number who have the good karma to have somebody recite a mantra over them is incredibly rare, like stars in the daytime. Therefore, at that moment some very special positive karma is ripening, and it can definitely help them have a good rebirth.

Tara's mantra, OM TARE TUTTARE TURE SVAHA, is another very powerful mantra relied on by many people, including many healers and great meditators. Her mantra is effective to help us gain success very quickly in

whatever we want to do, allowing us to overcome our problems and heal ourselves and others.

There are many other mantras that have the power to heal sicknesses, such as the mantra of Vajrapani: OM VAJRAPANI HAYAGRIVA GARUDA HUM PHAT. This was the first mantra I gave to a cancer patient, and they completely recovered, showing how powerful that mantra is.

When we do practices to help heal others, we should use the practice of a deity<sup>8</sup> we have a strong karmic connection with, because our close relationship with the deity will bring success more quickly. We should feel that the deity has *omniscience*, infinite *compassion* for us and all other living beings, and perfect *power* to guide us. The healing power comes more from our faith than from visualizing the deity clearly or reciting the mantra correctly. This is the essence of the practice. Wisdom and compassion are important in all practices, but in healing practices involving deity meditation and mantra recitation, generating strong faith is paramount. This mind is the actual healer.

### *The Importance of Mantras at the Time of Death*

Because people in the West are usually very competitive, maybe we should make a competition between science and Buddhism. Which can help the most? The West has developed such incredible technologies. Now we can fly to the moon or send messages instantly all over the world, and we have limitless gadgets to make our lives more comfortable. There are huge advances in medicine, and many diseases that were fatal a few decades ago can now be cured. We can have a new heart if we want one, or even a new face.

None of these wonderful scientific advancements is at all capable, however, of helping us at the time of death. Nothing in science can save us from what awaits us after death. There has never been a machine made or a drug developed that has even slightly helped one person escape the terrible suffering of the lower realms. On the other hand, through putting into practice what we have studied of Buddhist philosophy, we can be ensured a rebirth in one of the fortunate realms, as a human or a god.

Similarly, when we are dying, if we just hear or remember the name of the Buddha—or of Vajrasattva, Chenrezig, Tara, or any of the other buddhas—let alone recite their mantras, we will be saved from the lower realms. Therefore

there is no question that if we remember the various subjects of the graduated path to enlightenment, the *lamrim*,<sup>9</sup> such as renunciation of samsara, the ultimate good heart of bodhichitta, and the right view of emptiness—if we can transform our mind into the Dharma—then a fortunate rebirth is assured.

Of course, if we have lived with a good heart, benefiting others with tolerance, patience, compassion, and loving-kindness, at the time of death—at *that* very important time, that important day, that important hour—the virtuous thoughts that we had during our life will help a great deal.

Unfortunately, because of fear and loss of capability, it is often very difficult to remember the Buddha or a mantra at the very moment of death. We are therefore very fortunate if we have a friend who can help us, someone to recite the mantra of whatever buddha we have an affinity with very loudly in our ear. For instance, say we have devotion to Tara. When our friend recites Tara's mantra, OM TARE TUTTARE TURE SVAHA, loudly in our ear, although our hearing faculty might almost be gone, something is absorbed, something goes inside. Our devotion to Tara fills our mind, making it very positive. In this way we are saved from the lower realms.

Even when the person who is dying has no knowledge of Buddhism, reciting a mantra and blowing in their ear is a great help. This is due to the power of the mantra. Besides reciting mantras, we should also pray with a bodhichitta motivation that they are never reborn in the lower realms but attain a perfect human rebirth<sup>10</sup> where they are able to meet the Dharma and progress along the path to enlightenment.

We can do this not just for dying human beings, but for animals as well: dogs, birds, flies—any being. Reciting a mantra such as Chenrezig's mantra and blowing in their ear has incredible power. It can even benefit a being already born in the lower realms, causing it to experience that state for the briefest period before being reborn in the upper realms.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF THE MOTIVATION

Each deity has a mantra, and which deity practice is best for us is determined by our individual karma and should be checked with a qualified lama. We should then receive the initiation into that deity practice or permission to

practice that deity,<sup>11</sup> which also includes an oral transmission<sup>12</sup> of the deity's mantra.

Because the transmission of the mantra comes down in an unbroken lineage, it carries the blessings of the deity and of all the highly qualified lineage lamas through to the guru we received the lineage from. The purpose of receiving the lineage of the blessing is to give more power to the meditation on the deity and the recitation of the deity's mantra.

Whatever the purpose of reciting the mantra—to heal another person or help them gain a good rebirth, to stop (or start) rain, to have success in our life, or any other reason—its success depends on our motivation. Of course, the additional factors of visualizing holy objects and reciting the mantras correctly increase the power of the practice, but they are secondary to the motivation we have.

When we say a mantra for just some mundane happiness, such as saying a White Tara mantra to ensure our health, the mantra can be effective, but because that action is only for the happiness of this life it is not a virtuous action. Because the motivation is nonvirtuous, the mantra recitation is nonvirtuous, whether it helps in the short term or not.

In *Precious Garland*, the great Indian scholar Nagarjuna said,

Desire, hatred, and ignorance, and the actions they generate are nonvirtues. Non-desire, non-hatred, and non-ignorance, and the actions they generate are virtues.<sup>13</sup>

Furthermore, Lama Atisha said:

If the root is poisonous, the branches and leaves will also be poisonous. If the root is medicinal, the branches and leaves are also medicinal. Similarly, if the root is attachment, hostility, or benighted ignorance, whatever one does will be nonvirtuous.<sup>14</sup>

While there are still benefits from reciting a mantra with a nonvirtuous motivation, there is a great difference when we do it with a positive motivation. When we dedicate each mantra recitation or each prostration to others, we collect merit like the limitless sky.

Therefore our motivation should be as vast as possible. Perhaps we say the mantra with the motivation to be saved from rebirth in the lower realms. Even though it is a Dharma motivation, because we are only working for the happiness of our next life, that attitude is very limited.

The motivation we should strive for is bodhichitta: we should recite the mantra to become enlightened in order to lead all other beings to enlightenment. To recite it with bodhichitta combined with a realization of emptiness is even better. In fact, when we have attained each of the three principal aspects of the path—concentration, wisdom, and bodhichitta—then we can effortlessly benefit sentient beings. But even without these realizations,<sup>15</sup> if we can live in pure morality as much as we are able to, when we attempt to benefit other beings, we will be successful.

Therefore, when we recite one Vajrasattva mantra or one *mala*<sup>16</sup> of OM MANI PADME HUM, we should feel in our heart that this is all for the benefit of other sentient beings. When we can do this with bodhichitta as our motivation—with the mind that wishes to attain enlightenment in order to lead all sentient beings to that state—each mantra we do has the same benefit as reciting one hundred thousand mantras. The purpose of emphasizing the bodhichitta motivation at the beginning of every meditation session, and repeating it again and again, is to remind ourselves to generate bodhichitta and therefore make the most of every mantra we recite.

Besides a positive motivation, having devotion is an important factor in the effectiveness of mantra recitation. Different Tibetan texts can spell mantras slightly differently. Some versions have a few extra syllables, some less. The great translator Lotsawa Paltsig wrote a short book about how to read Sanskrit, which many Tibetan lamas follow in order to pronounce mantras correctly. This book says that you create much negative karma if you recite Sanskrit mantras incorrectly. However, the benefits of reciting mantras are not entirely dependent on correct pronunciation. Although it is good to try to say the mantra as accurately as possible, the power of mantra comes more from faith than from how we recite it. When there is strong faith in the mantra, it will be effective, whether we say it correctly or not.

There is a story about a woman in a time of great famine who used to recite OM BALE BULE BUNDE SOHA to cook and eat stones. One day her son, a novice monk, overheard his mother reciting the mantra and told her that the

correct way to pronounce it was OM TSALE TSULE TSUNDE SVAHA. However, when his mother recited the mantra correctly, she could no longer cook the stones. Only when she reverted to her original recitation was she able to cook them again.

His Holiness Zong Rinpoche's previous incarnation told a story about someone with a big nose who came to ask for teachings from a lama in Kham. Busy, the lama brushed him off with "Your nose is like *rudraksha*." The monk must have had a big, rough nose like the big, rough beads of the malas that *sadhus*, Indian ascetic meditators, wear, which are made from rudraksha seeds. The monk, who didn't understand what the lama said, thought that he had received a mantra and faithfully recited every day, "Your nose is like rudraksha. Your nose is like rudraksha." Eventually he became able to heal many people by reciting this "mantra." Some years later when the lama had an infection in his throat, his attendant told him that there was a famous healer in the area, one who had helped many people, and the lama agreed to see him. When the monk came to see the lama, he recited, "Your nose is like rudraksha." Remembering what he had said in the past, the lama laughed so much that the infection burst and the pus came out, due to which he got better. That the monk became a famous healer by reciting "Your nose is like rudraksha" shows that his power to heal people mainly depended on his faith. It came from believing he had received a mantra from the lama, even though the lama had just said that to him as a joke.

## THE DIFFERENT DEITIES IN TIBETAN BUDDHISM

Some people may wonder why there are so many buddhas in Tibetan Buddhism, besides the historical Buddha. Shakyamuni Buddha is just one manifestation of the primordial enlightened energy, or *dharmakaya*—just another name, in the same way that one person can have many names or designations during a lifetime. Perhaps you had a name given to you by your parents, another by your friends—your nickname—another if you got married, and maybe another when your guru gave you an ordination name. These different identities are all you, but different aspects of you.



Similarly, there are many different aspects of the Buddha, wrathful and peaceful, male and female. When we achieve the holy omniscient mind, we achieve all the buddhas, all the enlightened holy beings. “Shakyamuni” is just a different name, given to distinguish one particular aspect of the enlightened mind from another.

At first it might seem confusing to have many different buddhas rather than just the historical Buddha. Why can't there just be one buddha, the Buddha? If we look at how our society works, we can easily see that we need different people with different abilities and qualifications to ensure its smooth running. If we want to help others by healing their bodies, we need to train as a doctor; if we want to heal their minds, we need to train as a psychiatrist or psychologist. When we have that qualification, people will trust us and come to us for help.

In sort of the same way, the different buddhas, which are all different aspects of the enlightened mind, are there to perform different functions and fulfill the manifold needs of sentient beings—one aspect alone is not enough. There are numberless sentient beings, and even to fulfill the wish of one of them requires more than one particular aspect.

Chenrezig is the embodiment of the Buddha's compassion, and to take refuge in Chenrezig is to take refuge in the Buddha. In the same way, Tara is the embodiment of the Buddha's enlightened compassionate activities, and there is no contradiction in taking refuge in Tara and taking refuge in the Buddha. Tara is incredibly beloved by the Tibetan people and there are many stories of people being saved from death by taking refuge in her, by calling her name when they were in great danger. One aspect of Tara, White Tara, is evoked for long life.

With all these particular aspects of the buddhas, the main purpose is to bring sentient beings to the highest state, the sublime happiness of enlightenment. Of course, from our side, we must do everything we can to develop wisdom and compassion and progress along the path by extensively listening, reflecting, and meditating on the path.



# 1. SHAKYAMUNI BUDDHA

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**A**S A YOUNG PRINCE, Siddhartha's life was as perfect as a life in samsara could be. His father, the king, received a prophecy that his son would either be a great king or a great sage, and because he was determined that Siddhartha would become king, he hid all suffering from him and totally immersed him in sense pleasures.

Despite his father trying to shield him from all suffering, there came a time as a young man when he saw four things in quick succession, one at each of the gates of the palace. First he saw an old person and he realized that we all have to age. Next he saw a sick person, something he had never seen before. Then he saw a dead body, and he understood that death comes to us all. This was a terrible revelation for a young man who had never seen the slightest suffering. At the fourth gate he saw a poor monk, a person who had none of the luxuries that Siddhartha had but nonetheless seemed incredibly happy. This was a like a light going on in a dark place for the prince. He saw all his palace life for the empty thing it was, and he knew that samsaric happiness was meaningless, something that only ever led to old age, sickness, and death. But he also knew there was a way out of this trap, if it could be found, and that it had something to do with the monk. This was the start of his spiritual quest.

Siddhartha chose the life of the ascetic, practicing with hardly any food in the most trying circumstances. He practiced concentration without moving, his whole body becoming like a tree, as if carved from wood, so much so that ants and insects made nests in his ears. After doing this for six years, he realized that austerity was as harmful as indulgence. When he was given milk and rice by a young girl, Sujata, his energy returned, and he went to the bodhi tree nearby to meditate. This led to that amazing night when he attained full enlightenment. Then he sought the companions from his ascetic days, finding them in Sarnath, near Varanasi in north India, where he gave his first teaching, the first turning of the Dharma wheel, on the four noble truths.<sup>17</sup> Then, for

over forty years he gave over 84,000 teachings and formed a great sangha around him, before passing away at Kushinagar.

The death of the Buddha was his last teaching to us, a lesson on impermanence. When it was time to die, he took off his robes, lay down, and said,

All causative phenomena are impermanent.

Work out your salvation with diligence.

This is the last teaching of the tathagata.<sup>18</sup>

Everything is transient, subject to change, not just on a gross level but moment by moment. And every impermanent phenomenon is unsatisfactory; it is suffering by nature. Therefore why should we be attached to something that by its very nature will only bring us dissatisfaction and suffering? This is the most important lesson the Buddha could leave us. Then he passed away, entering parinirvana.

After that, all the arhats assembled and wrote down what they had learned by heart of his teachings and this became the core of the Buddhadharmas we have today. From India, Buddhism spread to the other Asian countries and to Tibet, where it brought light to a dark country, and great teachers such as Padmasambhava, Lama Atisha, and Lama Tsongkhapa<sup>19</sup> helped make Buddhism an essential part of the Tibetan people's lives. In the West, before the middle of the last century, the teachings of the Buddha were almost unheard of, and so the causes of happiness and suffering were virtually unknown. Now the Buddha's teachings are widely available, from the basic lamrim teachings to the most advanced tantric practices with which we can attain enlightenment in one brief lifetime. None of this would have been possible without the achievements of the founder, Guru Shakyamuni Buddha.<sup>20</sup>

For followers of the individual liberation vehicle,<sup>21</sup> such as those in the Theravada countries like Sri Lanka and Thailand, the Buddha was like us and, by enacting the twelve deeds,<sup>22</sup> he attained enlightenment. From the Mahayana perspective, he had already become enlightened eons ago and the life he led as Siddhartha was an enactment in order to perfectly teach us what we must do if we want to likewise attain enlightenment. Furthermore, in this

form, in the *nirmanakaya*, or emanation body, he was able to form the sangha around him and teach the holy Dharma to his followers for more than forty years.

We owe everything to the Dharma and the holy beings who came after the Buddha, who kept the teachings completely pure, and that means we owe everything to the holy being called Shakyamuni Buddha. The enlightened being he became arose from the bodhisattva who practiced for three countless great eons in myriad bodies, and that bodhisattva came from bodhichitta, which in turn grew from the compassion he felt for sentient beings. If, since we have met the Buddhadharma, our wisdom has grown enough to discriminate what is right and to be practiced from what is wrong and to be abandoned, all this comes from Buddha's compassion.

## VISUALIZING SHAKYAMUNI BUDDHA

It is very good to visualize Guru Shakyamuni Buddha as clearly as possible, whether you are reciting the Shakyamuni mantra, doing a short meditation practice, or even an extended Shakyamuni *puja*.<sup>23</sup> Even though you might find the visualization too complex at first, don't worry. With time and practice it will come. Gradually, as the mind becomes more purified, the visualization becomes clearer. Even if you just have some sense that Guru Shakyamuni Buddha is there in front of you, that is an excellent start.

Straight in front of you, at about the height of the forehead and about a body's length away, visualize Guru Shakyamuni Buddha sitting on a throne. Everything is in the nature of light.

First visualize the beautiful throne, very large and square and adorned with many jewels. The throne is raised up by eight white snow lions, two at each corner. The snow lions look a little like Chinese lions, but with white fur and a green mane and tail. These are not statues but living, breathing animals. They are in reality manifestations of bodhisattvas, the holy beings who have attained bodhichitta. They also signify the wisdom of the Buddha, because of all animals, snow lions are the only ones that have absolutely no fear at all. This is shown by the droopy ears. All other animals must keep their ears pricked for danger, but the snow lion has no such need.



On the throne is a large, beautiful, open lotus, upon which is a sun and moon seat. These are very radiant, very bright, with the colors of the sun and moon respectively, but flat, like disks or cushions. These three objects, the lotus, sun, and moon, represent the attainment of the three principal aspects of the path, renunciation (the lotus), emptiness (the sun), and bodhichitta (the moon).

Seated on this is the omniscient mind of all the buddhas, manifested as Guru Shakyamuni Buddha, who has attained these realizations. You can see the Buddha as the absolute guru. The Buddha is in the aspect of a monk. You

should not see his body as something solid, like a bronze or plaster statue, but made of radiant golden light, representing his holy mind. Light rays radiate out from it. He wears the saffron robes of a monk. The robes don't actually touch his body. Our clothes cling to our body and always feel sort of uncomfortable, even if just a little, whereas the Buddha's robes float just free from his holy body. This is the power of his wisdom.

He is seated in a vajra or full-lotus position with the feet resting on the opposite thighs, soles upward. The palm of his right hand rests on his right knee, the fingers extended down and touching the moon cushion. This is called the earth-controlling *mudra*,<sup>24</sup> signifying that he has great control and that he is in touch with reality.

His left hand is in his lap in the meditation *mudra*, holding a bowl filled with nectar. The nectar is medicine capable of curing all the disturbing emotions, traditionally called the *maras*. It has the power to control death as well as purify the mind and body aggregates, caused by karma and delusion, from which all suffering arises. This bowl of nectar is not there to purify Guru Shakyamuni Buddha's delusions—he is already entirely free from them—but to purify ours. It is medicine for us.

His face is very beautiful, with smiling, compassionate, elongated eyes and a gentle look, just like a loving father, gazing at you and at the same time at all sentient beings. It is a face you can never tire of looking at, no matter how much you look, you can always look more, it is just so beautiful and so magnificent. Just seeing it brings incredible bliss. His look seems to tell you, "My child, if you want to be free from suffering, I will guide you."

He has long ears and reddish lips, and his hair is blue-black, with each hair individually curled to the right. At his forehead, between his eyebrows, there is a curl. It is unique in that it can be stretched out and it naturally curls again, like rubber. Every feature has significance, each part of the thirty-two major signs and eighty minor exemplifications of an enlightened being.<sup>25</sup>

Rays of light emanate out from every pore of the Buddha's holy body, touching every part of the universe. These rays are actually countless tiny emanations of the Buddha, going out to help all sentient beings and then dissolving back into his body.

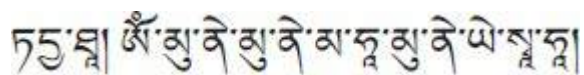


## THE MANTRA

### *The Meaning of the Mantra*

Shakyamuni Buddha's mantra is this:

TADYATHA OM MUNE MUNE MAHA MUNEYE SVAHA



The first word of the mantra is TADYATHA (pronounced *tie-yata*). This is the introduction to many mantras; it means “this contains,” and thus it tells us that what comes after contains the infinite knowledge of the Buddha's holy body, holy speech, and holy mind.

The second word, OM, contains the essence of all the Buddha's knowledge. By actualizing the paths of method and wisdom, all gross and subtle defilements cease, and our body, speech, and mind are purified, becoming the vajra holy body, vajra holy speech, and vajra holy mind of a buddha. This is signified by *a*, *o*, and *ma* respectively, the three syllables integrated into the one sound OM.

Next comes MUNE. Shakyamuni Buddha's name means “the subduer” (*muni*) of the Shakya clan and the word *muni* forms an important part of the Buddha's mantra. It used to be written in the mantra as “muni” but Kyabje Khunu Lama Rinpoche Tenzin Gyaltzen, the great bodhisattva His Holiness received many teachings from, clearly corrected this in a public teaching, saying it should be written and pronounced “mune.” He also said that the last MUNE, MUNEYE, should be pronounced “mun-i-ye.”<sup>26</sup>

MUNE is repeated three times, which relates to the graduated paths of the three capable beings—those of lower, middle, and higher capacity, who have the respective aims of a higher rebirth, nirvana, and enlightenment. This shows the route that the Buddha took over the three countless great eons until he became enlightened. It is the route we all must take.

The first MUNE, relating to the path of the lower capable being, signifies that the Buddha completely subdued attachment to this life's happiness. Through understanding subjects such as impermanence and karma, he was able to avoid rebirth in the lower realms and continue his spiritual journey.

The second MUNE relates to the path of the middle capable being; this is when the Buddha saw the shortcomings of the whole of samsara, even the highest attainment of the god realms, and having completely destroyed the false conception of the I, the principal ignorance that traps us in samsara, he attained liberation.

An arhat is free from samsara but not free from the dualistic mind and the subtle self-cherishing thought. MAHA MUNEYE, great control, the third MUNE, signifies the Buddha completely destroyed these and so overcame all duality between self and others and was able to fully see every single phenomenon. Like all the other bodhisattvas, when Guru Shakyamuni Buddha entered the Mahayana path by attaining bodhichitta, he worked ceaselessly for the happiness of others, overcoming even the most subtle of obscurations and becoming enlightened. This is the graduated path of the higher capable being.

Guru Shakyamuni Buddha's mantra contains the whole path, both the path of the individual liberation practitioner, which encompasses the paths of the lower and middle capable being, and the path of the bodhisattva (the Mahayana), which encompasses the path of the higher capable being. It also contains the result of the path, the two *kayas* or bodies of a buddha: the *dharmakaya*, or truth body—the result of the wisdom side of the path—and the *rupakaya*, or form body<sup>27</sup>—the result of the method side of the path.

Finally, SVAHA (pronounced *soha*) means “so it is,” the standard way to complete a mantra. It means basically, “May the blessings of Shakyamuni Buddha be rooted in my mind.” I'm not sure what the connotation of the word “blessing” is in the West, but be careful not to think of it as something bestowed on us from outside. It's a beautiful word, but to receive blessings means to attain the wisdom and compassion of the Buddha, something we must do for ourselves. SVAHA means establishing the root. That can be guru devotion or faith in refuge and in karma. From that root, everything else flows.

This mantra contains the entire Dharma, from guru devotion, the first teaching of the lamrim, to the most subtle explanations on emptiness. It is just a few syllables, but the meaning is as vast as space. Reciting this mantra has the power to purify thousands of eons of negative karma. It is that powerful. Therefore it is extremely good to recite it as much as possible, not only during a meditation session, but whenever possible. It can be done standing up, lying down, while walking, while waiting at a bus stop—anywhere, any time.

To be able to attain enlightenment quickly for the sake of all sentient beings, to free them from suffering as quickly as possible, depends on how quickly we can develop on the path, and that depends on the strength of our bodhichitta. To attain not just wishing bodhichitta but actual engaging bodhichitta—the mind that spontaneously, completely, and continuously works for the maximum benefit of all sentient beings—we need the most powerful and skillful means possible, and this mantra is a vital tool to obtaining this.

Don't think that reciting a mantra is something to do when there is nothing better to do. Even small actions can bring huge profit. Shopkeepers have thousands of things in their shop, big and small, expensive and cheap, but they value them all. They know that they might sell a big item occasionally, but they are always selling small things like candy. The tiny profit made from a bit of candy wouldn't even get a cup of tea, but by slow and constant accumulation they can make great profit from those small things. Similarly, we can make a big profit from reciting mantras every day, whereas we might only be able to go on a long retreat once every few years. And if we can recite the mantras with a bodhichitta motivation, we can make a *huge* profit out of even a few mantras.

### *The Benefits of the Mantra*

Reciting the Buddha's mantra has great benefits. Even if we have experienced many problems in this life, that does not mean that all of the nonvirtuous karma we have collected in all previous lifetimes has been used up and we no longer have to experience the suffering that is their result. Reciting this mantra, however, has the power to purify all that negative karma. Reciting it once has the power to purify the nonvirtuous karma produced by disturbing negative thoughts that we have collected in forty thousand previous lifetimes. If, by reciting it, we could stop even one negative karma ripening, making it impossible to bring a result, that would be wonderful, but here we are saying it purifies *all* negative karmas accumulated for forty thousand lifetimes!

What prevents us from attaining the ultimate happiness of nirvana and full enlightenment? We are blocked by our obscurations, triggered by our karma and delusions, so what we most need to do is eliminate those obscurations.



When we can do that, it becomes easy to attain all the realizations on the path. Because this was revealed by the Buddha, when we make a connection with him through reciting his mantra or his holy name (which we will look at with the Thirty-Five Buddhas), we establish within our mindstream the potential to destroy all our delusions.

Each time we recite the Buddha's mantra, it plants a seed, an imprint, which is left on the mental continuum, and which results, sooner or later, in being able to fully understand the teachings of the path. Understanding the full meaning of the mantra, we understand all the teachings of the Buddha. In that way, we are able to have the realizations of the path, and that gradually leads to enlightenment.

Even if we don't yet have realizations, with compassion we can use the Buddha's mantra to benefit ourselves or others. The fundamental thing is to have strong faith in whatever meditations or mantras we are using. Lama Tsongkhapa explained the essential importance of three factors: strong faith in the guru's instructions, some experience of emptiness, and the good heart, bodhichitta. To the extent that we have these qualities, we will be able to do whatever activities are needed to help and serve others.

Patients have recovered from heart attacks and other diseases by reciting Shakyamuni Buddha's mantra many thousands of times. A *geshe*<sup>28</sup> at one of our centers in Spain advised a student with serious heart problems to do this. The doctors thought she would die soon, but she recited the Buddha's mantra one or two hundred thousand times and visualized nectar coming and purifying her, and her heart returned to its normal size and she was cured.

Many problems can come from self-cherishing, attachment, and the other disturbing thoughts, which make actions become negative. For instance, when we harm other beings; they then become the conditions for harming us. The main cause of receiving harm, however, is our own ignorance, anger, and attachment, and the harmful actions we do to others because of these delusions. When we recite Guru Shakyamuni Buddha's mantra, we counteract all this.

HOW TO PRACTICE WITH SHAKYAMUNI BUDDHA'S MANTRA<sup>29</sup>

After sitting down and calming yourself with some breathing meditation, visualize Guru Shakyamuni Buddha in front of you (as described above).

Then, do some preliminary practices, such as saying the refuge prayer, the four immeasurable thoughts, and the seven-limb prayer.<sup>30</sup> You can also offer a mandala.<sup>31</sup>

Expand the visualization of the Buddha to include all sentient beings surrounding you.

Then think, “I have received this perfect human rebirth and have met both the infallible teachings and the infallible teachers who can lead me on the path to enlightenment, releasing me from all suffering and allowing me to attain ultimate happiness. This is not so with all these other kind mother sentient beings, who have been my mother countless times and have been so kind to me. In order to help them be free from their terrible suffering, I will do this meditation and attain the state of buddhahood myself.”

### *Purifying Delusions*

Request from your heart, “Please purify me and all sentient beings from the delusions, obscurations, sicknesses, and afflictions caused by external harmful spirits.”

Visualize a stream of *rays of white nectar* coming from Guru Shakyamuni Buddha’s heart, flowing into you, entering through the crown of your head. As it flows into you, repeat this prayer three times.

To the guru, founder, bhagavan, tathagata, arhat, perfectly completed buddha, glorious conqueror,<sup>32</sup> Shakyamuni Buddha, I prostrate, make offerings and go for refuge. Please grant me your blessings.

Now recite Guru Shakyamuni Buddha’s mantra, for one or more malas, or at least seven times.

TADYATHA OM MUNE MUNE MAHA MUNEYE SVAHA

As you recite the mantra, feel the radiant rays of white nectar slowly fill your body, completely purifying all your delusions. Feel they are pouring strongly into you, like when you stand under a strong shower. As soon as the rays touch and flow into your body, a sensation of infinite mental and physical bliss fills you.

Feel your body is completely full of radiant white light. Think, “All my delusions and sickness as well as all the afflictions caused by the external spirits are completely purified.”

### *Accumulating Merit*

Visualize a stream of *rays of golden nectar* coming from Guru Shakyamuni Buddha’s heart, flowing into you, entering through the crown of your head. This light is the essence of the Buddha’s holy body, holy speech, and holy mind. As your body fills with this light, feel infinitely blissful, mentally and physically. Again, say the mantra.

TADYATHA OM MUNE MUNE MAHA MUNEYE SVAHA

At the end of the mantra recitation, feel you are completely filled with the Buddha’s radiant golden light and you have attained the qualities of the Buddha’s holy body, holy speech, and holy mind.

Then, the snow lions dissolve into the throne, the throne dissolves into the lotus, and the lotus dissolves into the sun and moon. They dissolve into Guru Shakyamuni Buddha, who comes to the crown of your head, melts into light, and dissolves into your body. Feel that all wrong conceptions are completely destroyed, and everything becomes completely empty. Your mind becomes the blissful omniscient mind of the Buddha. Feel that you *are* the Buddha.

Light beams radiate from your holy body. At the tip of each light beam is a tiny Shakyamuni Buddha. All these Shakyamuni Buddhas enter and absorb into each and every sentient being, purifying all their sufferings and its causes,

delusion and negative karma. Then the light beams with Shakyamuni Buddhas at their tips return and absorb into you.

Rejoice by thinking, “How wonderful it is that I have enlightened all sentient beings.”

Finish by making this dedication.

By the merits of having done this meditation practice, may I attain the enlightened state of Guru Shakyamuni Buddha and lead all other sentient beings to that enlightened state.

## 2. CHENREZIG

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IN THE BLISSFUL WESTERN realm called Having Lotus,<sup>33</sup> there was a kind wheel-turning king, King Supreme Goodness,<sup>34</sup> who didn't have a son. He dedicated everything in his life to the Dharma, including his great wealth and all his activities. Every day the king would make an offering of a lotus flower taken from a nearby lake to the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha. One day the servant who went to pick the lotus saw growing from the lake a lotus stem with leaves as huge as an eagle's wings and an unopened bud in the center. When the servant reported this, the king said, "Inside that lotus bud there will definitely be a holy nirmanakaya that has taken spontaneous birth."<sup>35</sup>

King Supreme Goodness, his ministers, and the rest of his entourage went to the lake to see the lotus. When they opened the flower to check what was inside, they saw a sixteen-year-old youth with a radiant, white, holy body, adorned with the holy signs and exemplifications. He had a white scarf wrapped around his waist and an antelope skin over his left shoulder. (Antelopes are so compassionate that it is said an antelope will stand between a hunter and his prey and offer itself to the hunter in place of the other animal.) From his holy mouth, the youth exclaimed over and over, "How pitiful sentient beings in the six realms<sup>36</sup> are!" He kept repeating this.

The king and all his entourage prostrated to the youth, who was actually Chenrezig manifested in this form and taken birth in the lotus. The king then spread a special cloth on the ground, asked the boy to sit on it, and invited him to the palace, where he abided as an object of devotion for the king and all his family.

Thinking to benefit sentient beings, Chenrezig, in the aspect of this sixteen-year-old boy, generated bodhichitta. He then made requests to all the buddhas and bodhisattvas of the three times,<sup>37</sup> saying, "I will lead each and every single sentient being to peerless full enlightenment." He then added,

“Until I have done this, if any thought seeking my own happiness arises, may my head crack into ten pieces like an *azarka*.” (Perhaps this is some kind of fruit—the meaning is to crack into small pieces.)

When Chenrezig made this prayer, Amitabha, Buddha of Infinite Light, said, “I will help you accomplish your work for sentient beings.” Chenrezig’s holy body then emitted six beams, with one beam going to each of the six realms, where it worked to liberate sentient beings.

Later, Chenrezig went to the top of Mount Meru<sup>38</sup> and looked around with his wisdom eye. Even though he had liberated so many sentient beings from the six realms, when he looked, there still seemed to be the same number of them as before. So, he again sent beams to the six realms and liberated sentient beings. With his compassion and wisdom, Chenrezig liberated beings in this way three times, but still the sentient beings did not seem to become fewer in number. Chenrezig then thought, “It seems that this samsara has no end. Therefore I will abide in the blissful state of peace for myself.”

Because thinking this broke his bodhichitta commitment, Chenrezig’s head cracked into ten pieces. The pain was so unbearable that he screamed and wept. Amitabha then came and collected the pieces of Chenrezig’s shattered head from the ground, put the pieces together, and blessed them as eleven faces. (As you know, one form of Chenrezig has a thousand arms and eyes and eleven faces.) To end samsara, which is beginningless, Amitabha blessed all but one of the faces in a peaceful aspect to subdue sentient beings. For the sentient beings unable to be subdued by peaceful means, Amitabha blessed one face in a wrathful aspect. The face of Amitabha Buddha on the very top of the other heads signifies that Chenrezig achieved enlightenment by depending on the kindness of his guru, Amitabha, and even after enlightenment he still had great devotion for his guru.

After Amitabha Buddha had blessed him, Chenrezig prayed, “In order to work for sentient beings until samsara ends, may I have a thousand arms and a thousand eyes.” Right at that moment, the thousand arms and thousand eyes manifested. This is just one version of how Chenrezig came to have a thousand arms and a thousand eyes.<sup>39</sup>

Just as there are many manifestations of Chenrezig, there are many stories about him. In another one, Amitabha had a thought to benefit transmigratory beings. From his right eye, he sent a beam of white light, which transformed

into Chenrezig; and from his left eye, he sent a beam of blue light, which transformed into Tara.

## CHENREZIG LOOKS ON ALL SENTIENT BEINGS

In Tibet, we call the Buddha of Compassion *Chenrezig*, which is *Avalokiteshvara* in Sanskrit. For Tibetans, Chenrezig is in a male aspect, but that seems to be due to karma. A buddha will manifest in whatever way is most beneficial for sentient beings, as a male or a female, a child, an animal, a king, or a beggar. In China, the Buddha of Compassion is in the female aspect of Kuan Yin and in Japan she is called Kannon. Whatever the aspect, Chenrezig is the embodiment of the compassion of the numberless buddhas of the past, present, and future, here to guide and liberate us from all suffering and the causes of suffering, and to lead us to liberation and enlightenment.

Chenrezig is always guiding us. He is the special deity karmically connected to the people of the Snow Land, Tibet, and manifesting in the form of His Holiness the Dalai Lama. Guru Shakyamuni Buddha made predictions about the Dalai Lamas being Chenrezig and about how they would particularly guide sentient beings in Tibet, bringing them refuge and spreading the Dharma. Now, because His Holiness is vital to the people of the entire planet, Chenrezig is also the special deity for the whole world.

In the *White Lotus Sutra*, there is a story of a king called Golden Rim<sup>40</sup> who had a son named Unblinking Eyes.<sup>41</sup> Guru Shakyamuni Buddha predicted, “You, Unblinking Eyes, will pacify the delusions of sentient beings, liberating them from not only the lower realms but from samsara itself. Having generated the compassionate thought, you will achieve enlightenment and be called Chenrezig. You will draw many sentient beings into the Dharma and bring them to enlightenment. In particular, you will become the protector, the object of refuge, the savior, of the Snow Land. You will spread the Dharma like a shining sun in the Snow Land, this outlying land that no other buddha of the thousand buddhas of the fortunate eon<sup>42</sup> has been able to benefit.”

Chenrezig looks at all transmigratory beings with compassion and never gives up on anyone, no matter how evil they are. Because he is constantly looking at us and guiding us, he is given the particular name, *Chenrezig*, which

means “the one who continuously looks at the world with compassionate eyes.”<sup>43</sup>

King Songtsen Gampo and King Trisong Detsen of Tibet were manifestations of Chenrezig, as were the great scholars who translated the Dharma from Sanskrit into Tibetan. Showing unimaginable kindness, Chenrezig manifested in these various forms and then spread the Dharma in Tibet. Now that Tibetan Buddhism, which encompasses the entire Buddhadharma, has spread to the rest of the world, you can see that we are completely in the care of and completely guided by Compassion Buddha.

According to *The Flower Garland Sutra (Avatamsakasutra)*:

When the moon rises, numberless reflections appear wherever there is water in this world. That is how Chenrezig manifests. Effortlessly, naturally, Chenrezig manifests in all kinds of forms, even as medicine, a bridge, or water. Chenrezig, manifesting to sentient beings in whatever form benefits them, does inconceivable work for sentient beings.

There is only one moon, but when the moon rises, every body of water reflects it. The moon’s reflection comes effortlessly everywhere there is water, whether ocean, lake, river, or pond, even on a drop of dew. Since Chenrezig manifests as medicine, bridges, water, and other things, there is no doubt that Chenrezig manifests as our virtuous friend to guide us and give us the opportunity to learn Dharma. And Chenrezig manifests in the six syllables OM MANI PADME HUM to purify our negative karma and enable us to collect extensive merits, fulfilling all our wishes and bringing us to enlightenment in the quickest, easiest way.

## VISUALIZING CHENREZIG

### *The Many Different Aspects of Chenrezig*

A text by Gomo Rinpoche<sup>44</sup> begins with a verse of prostration to Chenrezig:

Your thousand arms signify a thousand wheel-turning kings;



Your thousand eyes signify the thousand buddhas of the fortunate  
eon;  
You manifest in whatever aspect is needed to subdue sentient beings:  
To you, pure Compassionate-Eyed One, I prostrate.<sup>45</sup>

While the four-arm Chenrezig is the simplest and most common form seen in Tibetan Buddhism, the thousand-arm, thousand-eye Chenrezig is also a very common aspect. But these two are not the only ones; there are many forms of Chenrezig within Tibetan Buddhism, such as the secret Chenrezig, Gyalwa Gyatso; or Chenrezig Singhanada, three-faced and two-armed, who protects from disease; Ganapati,<sup>46</sup> who protects from poverty; and Dzambhala, who grants wealth.

As the embodiment of all the buddhas' compassion, one aspect is simply not enough to lead all sentient beings—each with their different propensities and personalities—to enlightenment. Some beings are able to subdue their minds more quickly through the outer manifestations of Chenrezig with four arms, whereas for others the thousand-arm Chenrezig is more effective. It is said there are 108 names for Chenrezig, which means there are that many aspects. Depending on a sentient being's karma, the aspect that suits that being will manifest to help them generate compassion, wisdom, and all the other realizations of the path to enlightenment.

Chenrezig is special to so many sentient beings, and not only in countries where the Mahayana is the main form of Buddhism. Because compassion is the foremost attitude to develop, the Buddha of Compassion is naturally the most popular buddha, the one in most people's hearts. Whether they simply recite his mantra or undertake *nyungné* retreats,<sup>47</sup> through their connection with Chenrezig people are able to purify many eons of negative karma and accumulate a great deal of merit.



### *Four-Arm Chenrezig*

A form of Chenrezig we often see is white in color and has four arms. The first two arms are together at his heart, his hands in the prostration mudra and holding a wish-granting jewel; the second two arms are at the level of his shoulders, the right hand holding a crystal mala and the left a white lotus. His face is peaceful and smiling, and he gazes at us and all beings with infinite compassion. He wears exquisite silks and is beautified with jewel ornaments. He is seated in the vajra position on an open lotus and a white moon disk.

### *Thousand-Arm Chenrezig*

In a more complex manifestation of Chenrezig, he has a thousand arms, a thousand eyes, and eleven faces.

Unlike the four-arm Chenrezig, who is seated, the thousand-arm Chenrezig is standing on a lotus and moon disk. His two principal hands are together at his heart in the mudra of prostration, holding a wish-granting jewel. His next two right hands hold a crystal mala and a Dharma wheel, while the last one, without implement, is in the mudra of granting sublime realizations; his three left hands hold a lotus, a bow and arrow, and a vase. The other 992 hands are arranged in a circle around the body, all in the mudra of granting sublime realizations. In the palm of each of the thousand hands there is an eye.

He has eleven faces. The first three are white in the center, green on the right, and red on the left; the three above that are green in the center, red on the right, and white on the left; the three above that are red in the center, white on the right, and green on the left. Above that is a face in wrathful aspect, deep blue in color, and on the crown is Amitabha's beautiful holy face. The different colors of the faces signify the four actions of a buddha: pacifying (white), increasing (green), controlling (red), and wrathful (blue).

He is beautifully adorned with jewel ornaments and loose-fitting, divine clothes.



## THE MANTRA

There are different versions of the Chenrezig mantra, although the two you will mostly hear are the long mantra and the short, six-syllable mantra. The six-syllable mantra is very easy to recite. Even those not particularly interested in Buddhism, especially children, love to recite it. Because Chenrezig is the manifestation of all the buddhas' compassion, his mantra is everywhere in





free from all fears, and to fulfill all wishes.” Shakyamuni Buddha assented to his request.

Chenrezig then explained that in a former time, numberless eons before, a buddha called Kashyapa<sup>48</sup> descended in the world. After explaining the essence of this mantra of vast compassion, Kashyapa placed his golden-colored hand on Chenrezig’s crown and said, “Son of the buddhas, the essence of this mantra should be your mantra. Use it to bring great benefit and happiness to sentient beings in the future.”

If a sentient being who has much devotion to Chenrezig recites this mantra or always keeps it with them, at the time of their death, all the buddhas will come to wherever they are and guide them to whichever buddha’s pure realm they wish to be born in.

Chenrezig prayed,

If any sentient being who always recites this mantra is reborn in the realm of suffering transmigratory beings, may I never receive enlightenment.

If any sentient being who always recites this mantra is not born in a buddha’s pure land, may I never receive enlightenment.

If any sentient being who always recites this mantra does not achieve realizations of the various concentrations, may I never receive enlightenment.

If any sentient being who always recites this mantra does not have their wishes of this life fulfilled, may I never receive enlightenment.

If all the wishes of a person who always recites this mantra are not fulfilled, it cannot be called the heart mantra of the Great Compassionate One.

Chenrezig received enlightenment numberless eons ago, long before this world came into existence. Even though he prayed not to receive enlightenment if sentient beings who recited this mantra were born in the lower realms rather than the pure realms and so forth, he *did* receive enlightenment. That means the mantra does not betray—it has the power to bring all those benefits.

## *The Meaning of the Six-Syllable Mantra*

The six-syllable mantra of Compassion Buddha, OM MANI PADME HUM, contains the entire Buddhist path, including the paths of the four levels of tantra: kriya tantra, charya tantra, yoga tantra, and highest yoga tantra. These six syllables have the power to completely close the door of the six realms, meaning we will cease the continuity of taking birth in the six realms.

The main body of the mantra is MANI PADME. MANI, which means “jewel,” signifies the method side of the path to enlightenment—the development of bodhichitta, which is the jewel of our practice. PADME, which means “lotus,” signifies the wisdom side, the understanding of the nature of reality. Just as a lotus grows out of the mud yet is unstained by it, Chenrezig transcends the dualistic mind of ignorance, the concept of true existence, and directly perceived emptiness. In the illustrations of Chenrezig, you will see he holds a white lotus. Therefore these two syllables combined contain both the Hinayana and the Mahayana, with its two divisions of Paramitayana, or bodhisattva’s path, and Vajrayana, or tantric path.

Everything in Buddhism is contained within the base of the two truths: conventional truth and ultimate truth. MANI refers to conventional truth, which is also called all-obscuring truth because, although it is true on one level, it obscures the ultimate nature of reality, which is the ultimate truth. PADME refers to this ultimate truth.

So, MANI PADME contains the whole of the Buddhadharma: the base (the two truths), the path (method and wisdom), and the goal to be achieved (the rupakaya, or form body, and dharmakaya, or truth body of a buddha). MANI leads us to the rupakaya; PADME leads us to the dharmakaya.

The last syllable of the mantra is HUM. It establishes the root of the blessing in our heart and enables us to actualize the method and wisdom contained in MANI and PADME. It’s a bit like saying, “Hey!” when we are calling out to somebody, getting them to pay attention to us. By saying HUM, we are requesting the Buddha’s compassionate holy mind to pay attention to us and grant us this.

In our practice, we purify our ordinary body, speech, and mind, transforming them into the vajra holy body, the vajra holy speech, and the vajra holy mind of Compassion Buddha. This is signified by the OM, its three

sounds—*a*, *o*, and *ma*—signifying Compassion Buddha’s holy body, holy speech, and holy mind. In that way, we are able to do perfect work for all sentient beings. OM, which we have already looked at with Shakyamuni Buddha’s mantra, appears in many mantras and means just this.

Each of the six syllables has the power to stop us taking birth in any of the six realms: the hell, hungry ghost, animal, human, demigod, and god realms. Each of the six syllables destroys the continuity of the six root delusions: attachment, anger, ignorance, pride, doubt, and wrong view. Each creates the conditions to attain the six perfections of the bodhisattva: charity, morality, patience, perseverance, concentration, and wisdom.

Reciting the six-syllable mantra allows us to achieve the highest realizations and progress through the five paths necessary to attain enlightenment: the paths of merit, preparation, seeing, meditation, and no more learning, which is enlightenment.

This is just a fraction of what OM MANI PADME HUM means. It encompasses all the 84,000 teachings of the Buddha and integrates in one essence the intentions of all the buddhas of the ten directions.<sup>49</sup> It is the origin of all the collections of virtue and all the collections of happiness. Why? Because the particular benefit of reciting this mantra is to generate compassion for each and every sentient being whose mind is obscured and who is suffering. We not only wish them to be free from all their suffering and defilements, we take on that responsibility ourselves.

### *Everybody Needs the Chenrezig Mantra*

Compassion is not just for those with faith in the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha. It is not just for those who are Buddhist, for those who seek enlightenment. Everyone needs compassion. No matter what style of life we have, the compassionate life is the best life. With that, our life is totally transformed. Before it was like kaka,<sup>50</sup> but now it is transformed into gold. Before there was just ego, the self-cherishing mind, but now there is compassion. Compassion brings a huge difference in our life, like the difference between the earth and the sky.

Everybody needs to recite OM MANI PADME HUM to develop compassion. We are so fortunate that with our human body we are able to communicate



and to chant Chenrezig's mantra. Ants need to recite it, whales need to, monkeys need to, but they can't.

In many areas in Tibet and Nepal, especially along trails, there are a lot of stupas<sup>51</sup> and stones carved with the Chenrezig mantra. You can see big piles of these stones, called "MANI stones," as you leave the airport at Lukla.<sup>52</sup> Sometimes a whole text, such as the *Heart Sutra*, is carved on a stone. One of my uncles, my teacher who first taught me the alphabet when I was four, carved MANI stones like this. Because of the mantra's great benefit, you can see it everywhere, adorning prayer flags and stones, and you can hear people reciting the mantra as they pass.

Just seeing mantras on stones purifies our obscurations by leaving impressions on the mind. As with prayer flags, when the wind touches these mantras and then touches a human being or animal, it purifies the negative karmas and obscurations of that sentient being.

Just like Westerners like to recite their mantra "Oh when can I be happy," Tibetans like to recite OM MANI PADME HUM. They recite it while they are working, cooking, or doing any of the chores they need to do. When they are not serving customers, shopkeepers recite OM MANI PADME HUM. As they walk, Tibetans will invariably have a small prayer wheel full of MANI mantras, which they spin clockwise as they recite.

Prayer wheels are my hobby; they offer so many benefits. The huge prayer wheels I ask the FPMT centers to build bless all the insects on the ground and in the area, besides all the people who turn them. They are such a great blessing for the area and a quick way to liberate sentient beings from the lower realms and enlighten them. Any person who circumambulates and turns the prayer wheel receives unbelievable purification. If a prayer wheel has one hundred million MANI's, one turn is equivalent to saying one hundred million OM MANI PADME HUM mantras.

And that is true even of the small, hand-held prayer wheels you always see Tibetans spinning as they walk. Because of methods such as microfiche printing, they can have millions of MANI's in a small wheel, so one turn creates incredible merit, no matter what they are doing. Reciting OM MANI PADME HUM makes the most mundane activity highly meaningful.

The old mothers in Solu Khumbu chant OM MANI PADME HUM so much. They have almost no intellectual understanding of the Dharma, and they can't even understand it if a lama comes to teach, because he teaches in Tibetan, not Sherpa, the only language they speak. Being illiterate, they can't even open a Dharma book and read it, and so they have no opportunity to learn the Dharma. But by reciting OM MANI PADME HUM, somehow their hearts become so much more compassionate. They may not understand why other beings are suffering so much, but they have a strong natural feeling of compassion for others and the wish to pray for them.

This was true of my mother, who would simply recite OM MANI PADME HUM when a lama was giving teachings. Because of reciting the MANI mantra, she had a hundred thousand times more compassion than I have. I can read all the texts but still my compassion is like clouds in the sky: utterly unstable, never lasting. Just before she passed away, she told me that for most of her life she recited fifty thousand MANI's a day, but as she became older she was no longer able to do that many. Still, I am certain the great power of her compassion came from reciting OM MANI PADME HUM. It gave her a happy, meaningful life and a happy, meaningful death.

There is a tantra called *Zung of the Eleven-Face Arya Avalokiteshvara*. In it Chenrezig is said to mention,

By reciting my heart mantra, sentient beings receive the bodhisattvas' holy deeds, the heart of all the Victors, called the heart of transcendental wisdom. In short, for sentient beings tormented by various sufferings, my heart mantra will abide and become a guide for them. Also, this heart mantra hooks the harm-givers, such as the flesh-eaters and other violent spirits, and causes them to generate loving-kindness and compassion. It then brings them to enlightenment.

Furthermore, he says,

Any sentient being who holds my name will abide in nonreturning. They will be completely liberated from all sicknesses and from all the defilements, all the vices collected with the body, speech, and mind.

“My name” here means the six-syllable mantra, and “nonreturning” means our life will never degenerate but always progress toward enlightenment.

When a doctor tells us we have cancer, what they are actually saying is that now is the time to cut all meaningless thoughts and only think about and practice the Dharma. We should understand such advice to mean just that, and we should do whatever is necessary to bring the Dharma into our life.

It is not enough just to be able to say the words of the mantra; we should first cultivate as positive a motivation as we can—and the bodhichitta motivation is the best—and then recite it. Whoever recites the mantra with a bodhichitta motivation is somebody who really knows how to recite it. It is said in the teachings that the greater devotion we have for Chenrezig, the more power and benefit the mantra has.

### *The Benefits of Reciting the Chenrezig Mantra*

Although there are innumerable benefits whether we recite the six-syllable Chenrezig mantra or the long one, if we can have a clear idea of what those benefits are, we will have more energy to recite it. The teachings often mention fifteen:

1. We will always be born in a country where there is a Dharma king, a ruler who works according to the Dharma.
2. We will always be born in a virtuous country, one where everybody has freedom to create virtue.
3. We will always be born in fortunate times.
4. We will always meet a virtuous friend. Here “virtuous friend” does not necessarily mean a teacher, but rather a Dharma friend, one who helps us in our Dharma practice. Their influence will help us to continue our Dharma practice.
5. We will receive a perfect body, having perfect limbs and senses.
6. Our actions will become subdued.
7. Our moral conduct will not degenerate. We will be able to increasingly keep our morality purely.
8. We will live in a good environment, surrounded by people we have a good relationship with.

9. Our material possessions will not be stolen by others.
10. We will always be respected by others and receive help from them. People will make offerings to us.
11. We will receive whatever possessions we need.
12. We will quickly attain whatever we wish for.
13. We will become a guide for others, an object of refuge for worldly gods, demigods, and the *nagas*.<sup>53</sup>
14. We will always be born in a country where a buddha is present. Just as those who were disciples of Shakyamuni Buddha are reborn in whatever country he manifests, many have the good fortune to always see His Holiness the Dalai Lama and receive teachings from him.
15. We will not only hear the teachings but also be able to realize the profound meaning of them.

Furthermore, a principal way the mantra benefits is by the protection it offers. The texts say if we recite a mala of the six-syllable mantra when we get up in the morning with the proper Dharma motivation, we will be protected in these ten ways:

1. We will never fall ill; our body will always be healthy.
2. We will always be protected by gods and buddhas.
3. We will never lack a means of living but will easily be able to gain material needs, such as wealth, food, clothing, and so forth.
4. We will have no fear of enemies because we will be able to subdue their minds.
5. We will never be disrespected, not only now but also in the future.
6. We will never fall into a lower caste, but always achieve a higher caste by living in ethics.
7. We will be free from the danger of poisons, spirit harm, and spirit possession.
8. We will never have an unpleasant odor; our body will always have a scented smell. This does not mean a scented smell from bought perfume but a natural fragrance coming from the body.

9. We will never encounter the enmity of others. Nobody will harbor bad thoughts about us or say hurtful or displeasing words. Everybody will be happy with us.
10. We will be free from chronic or contagious diseases and be liberated from untimely death.

### *The Chenrezig Mantra Purifies and Transforms Our Mind*

Reciting the Chenrezig mantra can bring all these incredible benefits because the act of reciting it with a strong, pure motivation has the power to transform our mind in two ways: by diminishing our negative minds and thus purifying our delusions, and by increasing our positive minds and thus accumulating great merit.

When we do even one prostration to Compassion Buddha or recite his name or his mantra even once, we collect the same amount of merit as having offered service to the buddhas equaling not just the number of grains of sand of the River Ganges but the number of grains of sand there would be in sixty-two River Ganges.

Any powerful delusions that arise, such as strong desire or hatred, are naturally pacified by chanting this mantra. By reciting it seven times, the negative karma accumulated from one hundred past lifetimes is purified. Reciting it twenty-one times purifies a thousand eons of negative karma. If we recite it 108 times, which means one mala, it has the power to purify forty thousand eons of negative karma. Of course, this depends on having strong faith in the benefit of the mantra and reciting it with a bodhichitta motivation, and so forth. The purer our motivation is, the greater the power of purification.

It is said that reciting it even once can purify the four root downfalls of a fully ordained monk or nun—killing a human being; telling great lies, such as boasting they have realizations when they don't; taking things not given to them; and having sexual intercourse—actions that bring about rebirth in the very lowest of the hot hells.

For both lay people and sangha, it purifies the five immediate negativities, the very heavy negative karmas that cause rebirth in the hell realm immediately after death. These are killing our mother; killing our father; killing an arhat, a

being who has achieved the arya path and who is free from samsara; maliciously drawing blood from a buddha; and causing disunity within the sangha. This last one carries the heaviest negative karma we can commit, along with heresy, holding incorrect views about the guru.

There are many stories of people who incurred different heavy negative karmas and were advised by Chenrezig to recite his mantra. Then, rather than going to the lower realms, where they were destined, they were able to be born in a pure land.

By purifying our mind with this mantra, we are able to solve all our own problems and to solve others' problems, bringing so much peace and happiness not only to our family and friends but to the whole world and all living beings, both human and nonhuman.

Generally, the motivation for what we do is self-cherishing, working only for the happiness of this life. It keeps our life so busy and causes us stress and anxiety, not to mention the attachment and anger it generates, which cause us to create nonvirtuous actions and harm ourselves and others. It is possible, however, to turn that attitude around and cherish others rather than ourselves, developing the powerful minds of loving-kindness and compassion.

When we see that all the problems in our life come from ego, from the self-cherishing mind, and that every happiness comes from a mind that cherishes others, we naturally look for a method that will bring that transformation about. The fundamental step in that is connecting with Compassion Buddha, Chenrezig, and we can easily do that by reciting his mantra.

If we were able to continuously recite the Chenrezig mantra, or even do ten malas a day, we would not only transform our own mind, but our mere presence would benefit others greatly. Those who saw or touched us, let alone spoke to us, would be somehow benefited, absorbing some of our positive energy. It is even said in the texts that, when we die and are cremated, the smoke from our burning body will have the power to purify those it touched.

Once, when I was in Malaysia, some people who worked in a hospice there told me they often felt dejected when the patient they were attending didn't have any reaction or didn't show any signs of getting better. I told them there was no reason to feel discouraged; even if there was no response, what they were doing was still very worthwhile, and I encouraged them to recite

Chenrezig's mantra to the patients as they were working. Being with a dying person after having recited the Chenrezig mantra is highly meaningful. They might not be able to see or hear us, but simply touching them, such as if we massage them, purifies their negative karma.

It is said in the tantric text *Padme Chöpen gyi Gyü* that if we recite ten malas of the mantra every day, our children, their children, and so on, up to seven generations, will never be reborn in the lower realms.<sup>54</sup> How is that possible? It is the power of the mantra. When we recite the Chenrezig mantra that many times every day, our body becomes a relic. The mantra blesses everything; everything becomes a relic, including the blood and sperm, which is passed from generation to generation.

If we recite six million OM MANI PADME HUM, even our spit has so much power. By spitting on something, or blowing on it, we are able to heal somebody so easily. For instance, if we spit or blow on some cream or butter and then rub it over a place of pain on the body, we will stop the pain. Whatever type of activity we do will be most beneficial. Whether it is a pacifying, increasing, controlling, or wrathful activity, it will be successful because of the power of the mantra. These things are not the main goal, however. The main goal is to achieve enlightenment in order to liberate sentient beings from suffering and bring them to enlightenment, but these other benefits come as a byproduct.


## HOW TO PRACTICE WITH CHENREZIG'S MANTRA<sup>55</sup>

Anyone can do this practice, called *The Welfare of Living Beings That Pervades Space* by the great yogi Thangtong Gyalpo. However, you are only permitted to generate yourself as Four-Arm Chenrezig if you have received a great initiation (*wang*) of any deity of performance (*charya*), yoga, or highest yoga tantra and the subsequent permission (*jenang*) of Four-Arm Chenrezig, or an action tantra great initiation of any deity of the tathagata or lotus families and the subsequent permission of Four-Arm Chenrezig. Otherwise, you should visualize Four-Arm Chenrezig above your head or in front of you.

I take refuge until I am enlightened

in the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Supreme Assembly.  
By my generosity and so forth,  
may I become a buddha in order to benefit living beings. (3x)

On the crowns of myself and all sentient beings pervading space  
is a white lotus and moon.

On top of it, from HRIH  arises the Supreme Arya Chenrezig,  
white and clear, radiating five-colored light rays;  
smiling and looking with eyes of compassion.

Of your four arms, the palms of the first two are joined  
and the lower two hold a crystal rosary and a white lotus.  
You are adorned with silk and precious jewelry  
and wear a deerskin upper garment.

Amitabha adorns your head.  
You are seated with your legs in the vajra posture.  
A stainless moon is your back rest.  
In nature, you encompass all objects of refuge.

Think that you and all sentient beings are making the following request as if in  
one voice:

Lord, your body is white in color, unsoiled by faults;  
a complete buddha adorns your head;  
you look at living beings with eyes of compassion;  
to you, Chenrezig, I prostrate.

Recite that request three times, seven times, and so forth—however many  
times you are able.

Through having made requests one-pointedly in that way,  
lights radiate from the body of the Arya  
and purify impure karmic appearances and mistaken minds.



The environment becomes Sukhavati Pure Land,  
and the body, speech, and mind of its inhabitants—living beings—  
become the body, speech, and mind of powerful Chenrezig—  
appearance, sound, and awareness, inseparable from emptiness.

Reflecting on the meaning of this, recite as many times as you can:

OM MANI PADME HUM

At the end, place your mind in equipoise on its own essence of the  
nonconceptualization of the three circles.<sup>56</sup>

The bodies of myself and others appear as bodies of the Arya,  
the resonance of sounds is the melody of the six syllables,  
and thoughts and conceptualizations are the expanse of great exalted  
wisdom.

Due to this virtue,  
may I quickly become powerful Chenrezig  
and lead all living beings  
without exception to that state.

### 3. MANJUSHRI

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ONCE, A VERY LONG time ago, a pilgrim to Wutai Shan, the holy place of Manjushri in China, was asked to take a letter to a particular village and give it to a particular bodhisattva. When he reached the village and asked a pig farmer there about the bodhisattva, the man replied that there was no human bodhisattva there by that name but that he had a pig of that name.

The pilgrim then read the message to the pig, which said, “Your time to be in this world is now finished. It is time for you to benefit other sentient beings in another world.” As soon as the message was read, the pig made a huge noise and passed away. He was actually a bodhisattva pig, protecting all the other pigs. When leading the other pigs, he would always check ahead for danger, and when it was safe, he would let the other pigs go first; he was always the last pig.

The man who gave the pilgrim the letter was actually Manjushri. It is said that everybody who goes on pilgrimage to Wutai Shan sees Buddha Manjushri. They don't however necessarily see him in his usual aspect, with a sword and so forth, like in the paintings. To see Manjushri in the pure aspect of a buddha you must have a pure mind, and a pure mind is very rare, so most people see Manjushri as an ordinary person (or pig!). When you go to Wutai Shan you will definitely see Manjushri, but it doesn't mean you will recognize him.

I heard this story from Kirti Tsenshab Rinpoche,<sup>57</sup> the great lama who is one of my gurus. There are many other stories about Wutai Shan and how Manjushri emanates to benefit beings. Although we traditionally see Manjushri sitting in a vajra posture with a flaming sword—the manifestation of all the buddhas' wisdom—he appears in many aspects, as do all buddhas.

### MANIFESTATIONS OF MANJUSHRI

## *Manjushri and Shantideva*

Shantideva was born with the name Shantivarman in the eighth century in India, near Bodhgaya, where the Buddha was enlightened. He was highly intelligent. When he was six, he meditated on Manjushri and not only saw Manjushri but also had a realization of him. Manjushri himself gave the young Shantivarman many teachings, passing down the lineage of the profound path—the wisdom teachings—to him.

Because Shantivarman was a prince, he was obliged to become king when his father died, but the night before his enthronement he had a dream. Manjushri was sitting on the king's throne, and he said to Shantivarman, "The one son, this is my seat and I am your guru, leading you to enlightenment. We can't both sit on the same seat." When he awoke from the dream, he realized that he could not accept the crown, and so he escaped, going to Nalanda Monastery, where the abbot ordained him, naming him Shantideva.

Nalanda was a vast and wonderful place, the greatest seat of Buddhist knowledge in the world. Thousands of scholars studied, debated, and meditated there, and great pandits wrote incomparable treatises and developed incredible tenets on logic, as well as studied the sciences, art, medicine, and so forth.

Shantideva was a hidden yogi who already had great realizations, but he didn't reveal these in Nalanda at first. He had secretly composed two texts, *Condensed Advice* and *Compendium of Sutras*, but the other monks thought Shantideva was extremely lazy. It was only when they challenged him to recite a sutra, thinking this would shame him into leaving, that he recited the complete *Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life*, his most famous work, like water pouring from a clear spring. The other monks immediately realized he was a great master.

## *Manjushri and Sakya Pandita*

When the great Tibetan yogi, Sakya Pandita,<sup>58</sup> was only twelve, his guru, Drakpa Gyaltsen, told him that, because he was the spiritual son of Lama Atisha and Lama Dromtönpa, he should study well and do a retreat on Manjushri. Because all the buddhas' wisdom is manifested in this special aspect, those who practice Manjushri can receive all seven wisdoms, which are

attainments such as *great wisdom* to comprehend and memorize both the meanings and the words of the extensive teachings, *clear wisdom* to be able to understand the subtle meaning of any subject, and *quick wisdom* to be able to immediately understand any difficult points and immediately eliminate wrong conceptions.<sup>59</sup>

Before Sakya Pandita was able to do the retreat his guru advised him to do, there were some hindrances. However, after six months, during a meditation session, he saw Manjushri sitting in front of him on a throne with two bodhisattvas beside him. Then, with his holy mouth, Manjushri gave him this short teaching on the four clingings:

- If you cling to this life you are not a Dharma practitioner.
- If you cling to the three realms of samsara that is not renunciation.
- If you cling to cherishing the self that is not bodhichitta.
- If you cling to the self as truly existing that is not right view.

Because Sakya Pandita realized that the importance of all the Buddha's teachings was contained in this advice, he kept it in his heart, meditating on it and putting it into practice.

### *Lama Tsongkhapa Is Manjushri*

Lama Tsongkhapa, the great fourteenth-century teacher who founded the Geluk tradition,<sup>60</sup> is said to be a manifestation of Manjushri. Very often, Lama Tsongkhapa is called Jamgon, which is one of the names for Manjushri, meaning the savior who has purified all obscurations. Tsongkhapa is the savior from Tsongkha in Amdo, the place he was born.

The story is that his mother gave birth to him on the road as she was leading her cows out to the mountains for the day. Because of her work, she had no choice but to leave the baby there on the road, though she was afraid he would be eaten by animals. But when she came back, she found he was protected, lying under the wings of ravens that had crowded around him. Happy, she took the baby back home alive. The blood that had come out during his birth covered the road, and at that place a sandalwood tree grew. On the leaves of the tree were images of Manjushri's vajra body and the syllable

DHI, Manjushri's seed syllable.<sup>61</sup> This is a sign that Lama Tsongkhapa is a manifestation of Manjushri. He is also the embodiment of Chenrezig, all the buddhas' compassion, and Vajrapani, all the buddhas' power. It was near that place that the Third Dalai Lama founded Kumbum monastery, where one hundred thousand statues of Manjushri have been built. Kumbum means "one hundred thousand enlightened bodies."

Manjushri often advised Lama Tsongkhapa, especially on how to quickly actualize the realizations of the graduated path to enlightenment. He told him, "To train your mind in the actual lamrim, you should purify your obscurations with a Vajrasattva practice and so forth and accumulate merit. Then, you should make a single-pointed request to the guru in order to receive the blessing within your heart. If you attempt to strongly and continuously practice in this way every day, realizations will come without any difficulty."

Because of his connection with Manjushri, Lama Tsongkhapa was able to check directly with him and clarify all the subtle and profound points within the sutra and tantra teachings, especially the Prasangika view of dependent arising and emptiness.

One day, while Lama Tsongkhapa was giving teachings to hundreds of disciples, offering several different teachings in a single day, Manjushri advised him to go into retreat immediately. Lama Tsongkhapa objected, saying he couldn't leave the teachings in the middle, but Manjushri asked him, "Don't you have to benefit numberless sentient beings?" The point of Manjushri's advice was that the people who were taking teachings from him at that time were limited in number, but sentient beings are numberless. By doing the practice he could complete the realizations on the path to enlightenment and, in that way, benefit more sentient beings. So, Lama Tsongkhapa stopped his teachings and went off to practice. Whatever work Lama Tsongkhapa had to do, whatever teachings he gave, he always asked Manjushri.

## THE SOFT GLORIFIED ONE

Manjushri is *Jampalyang* in Tibetan. The first part of the name, *manju* (*jam* in Tibetan), means "soft," "pacified," and *shri* (*pel* in Tibetan) means "glorified." So, Manjushri is the "soft glorified one." What does that mean? Manjushri's

holy mind has become soft or pacified by having eliminated all delusions, both the disturbing-thought obscurations (*nyöndrip*) that block liberation and the subtle obscurations to knowledge (*shedrib*) that block full enlightenment.

What are these subtle defilements? They are the subtle negative imprints left on the mental continuum by the concept of inherent existence. This concept is something we sentient beings hold until we become enlightened. When we become an arya being and are in meditative equipoise, single-pointedly concentrating on emptiness, these obscurations are not manifest, but when we arise from meditation, the dual view naturally reasserts itself. As an arya being, we have achieved nirvana, but we are still blocked from full enlightenment by these subtle obscurations. Therefore we need to combine the wisdom side that realizes emptiness with the method side of bodhichitta and enter the Mahayana, then work through the six perfections of a bodhisattva and achieve full enlightenment.

Only when we have eliminated all the subtle obscurations will we become fully enlightened, which is what the second part of Manjushri's name—*shri* or *pel*, “glorified”—refers to. Therefore *Manjushri*, and *Jampalyang*, refers to the holy mind that is free from all mistakes of the mind, all the defilements, and has completed all the realizations.

### *Visualizing Manjushri*

Like most deities, there are many aspects of Manjushri, such as Black Manjushri, a wrathful deity very powerful in preventing and curing illnesses, and Yamantaka, a particularly fearful deity. Usually, however, Manjushri is depicted as youthful, in the peaceful *sambhogakaya* or enjoyment body aspect,<sup>62</sup> orange in color, with one face and two hands. He is seated on a lotus and moon disk in a vajra posture, with his legs crossed. He looks at us and all sentient beings with eyes full of loving-kindness and with a compassionate smile. He is adorned with an underskirt and divine scarves and wears many ornaments.





His left hand is at his heart in the mudra of expounding the Dharma, with thumb and ring finger touching, and holds the stem of a lotus that blooms by his ear. The lotus has a *Prajnaparamita*, or *perfection of wisdom*, text resting in it, radiating light. His right hand holds a flaming sword of wisdom. You shouldn't think of Manjushri's sword as a physical one made of steel. Its nature is ultimate wisdom, the dharmakaya. Just as a material sword cuts the body, Manjushri's wisdom sword cuts through all delusions.

There is a prayer to Manjushri which describes him well.

Obeisance to my guru and protector Manjushri, who holds to his heart a scriptural text symbolic of his seeing all things as they are.

Whose intelligence shines forth as the sun, unclouded by delusion or trace of ignorance.

Who teaches in sixty ways, with the loving compassion of a father for his only son, all creatures caught in the prison of samsara, confused in the darkness of their ignorance, overwhelmed by their suffering.

You, whose dragon-thunder-like proclamation of Dharma arouses us from the stupor of our delusion and frees us from the iron chains of our karma, who wields the sword of wisdom hewing down suffering wherever its sprouts appear, clearing away the darkness of ignorance.

You, whose princely body is adorned with the one hundred and twelve marks of Buddha, who has completed the stages achieving the highest perfections of a bodhisattva. Who has been pure from the beginning, I bow down to you, O Manjushri.

You will often see images in Tibetan shrine rooms or read descriptions of what is called a “merit field.” This is a vast collection of buddhas, bodhisattvas, protectors, and so forth, grouped around a central figure, usually the Buddha or the guru. We can most easily collect the most extensive merit from meditating on this “field.” When you see an extensive merit field, such as for the Guru Puja,<sup>63</sup> you will notice there are different lineages depicted there. The Buddha’s entire teachings are often divided into two aspects, the *extensive conduct* (*zabmö tawa*) and *profound view* (*gyachen chö gyü*). The teachings of the steps of the extensive conduct, focusing on the method side of the path, were handed down from the Buddha to Maitreya Buddha and Asanga, whereas the teachings of the steps of the profound view, focusing on the wisdom side of the path, were handed down from the Buddha to Manjushri and from Manjushri to Nagarjuna and then to Aryadeva and the other pandits.<sup>64</sup> From this, we can see that Manjushri is the source of all the wisdom teachings of the Buddha.



## THE MANTRA

Manjushri's mantra is this:

OM AH RA PA CHA NA DHI

ཨོཾ་ཨ་ར་པ་ཙ་ན་ཧཱི།

For this reason, Manjushri in this more common aspect, is often called Arapatsana Manjushri. Manjushri's mantra is an especially quick way to attain wisdom and develop a sharp memory. If you recite this mantra many times, you will be able to memorize hundreds of pages of texts. It is said if you recite this mantra a hundred thousand times, you will be able to see Manjushri.

Because Manjushri is the embodiment of all the buddhas' wisdom, even the young monks and nuns in the monasteries recite the Manjushri mantra and do the Manjushri practice to purify defilements and receive wisdom. Many get up very early, around four or five o'clock, and memorize part of a text before going to the daily puja. They then chant the Manjushri mantra as they run outside, repeating the last syllable, DHI as many times as possible in one breath. You will hear them in monasteries like Kopan in Kathmandu, running to their breakfast, shouting DHI DHI DHI DHI DHI DHI! His Holiness the Dalai Lama said he used to do that, and it helped him to develop wisdom.

As you repeat the DHI, imagine Manjushri in front of you and his wisdom in the form of the flaming syllable DHI, like a blazing fire. This comes from Manjushri and absorbs into a similar DHI visualized at the back of your tongue. From this, wisdom flames arise, eliminating the darkness of ignorance. You can imagine the flame filling your whole body, fully developing your wisdom. Imagine all your pores completely fused with the syllable DHI, causing you to attain nonforgetfulness.

## HOW TO PRACTICE WITH MANJUSHRI'S MANTRA<sup>65</sup>

Having sat down and calmed yourself with some breathing meditation, visualize Manjushri in front of you (as described above). Visualize all sentient

beings in the form of human beings surrounding you.

Then, do some preliminary practices, such as saying the refuge prayer three times, the four immeasurable thoughts, and the seven-limb prayer.<sup>66</sup> You can also offer a mandala.

### *Visualization*

From the DHI ཨཱེ syllable at your heart, light radiates out and invokes from their natural abodes Arya Manjushri surrounded by the assembly of buddhas and bodhisattvas.

### *Praise*

I prostrate to Manjushri,  
who possesses the holy body of youth,  
who radiates the lamp of wisdom,  
and who dispels the darkness of the three worlds.

### *Mantra Recitation*

On top of the moon cushion at Manjushri's heart there appears a yellow wheel with six spokes. At the central hub is a syllable DHI and on the spokes are the six syllables of the root mantra. On the wheel's rim is the mantra of increasing wisdom.

Light radiates from the mantras, pouring into you and all sentient beings surrounding you, dispelling the darkness of ignorance of yourself and others. It hooks back all the wisdom of samsara and nirvana, which dissolves into you and all other beings.

With this visualization recite the mantras:

### *Mantra of Increasing Wisdom:*

NAMO MANJUSHRIYE KUMARA BHUTAYA BODHISATTVAYA  
MAHASATTVAYA MAHAKARUNIKAYA TADYATHA OM ARAJE BIRAJE

SHUDDHE VISHUDDHE SHODHAYA VISHODHAYA AMALE BIMALE  
NIRMALE JAYA VARE RUJALE HUM HUM HUM PHAT PHAT PHAT SVAHA

*Root mantra:*

OM AH RA PA CHA NA DHI

After the recitation of mantras, make offerings and praise as before and stabilize with the hundred-syllable Vajrasattva mantra, as follows:

*Offerings*

OM SARVA TATHAGATA ARYA MANJUSHRI SAPARIVARA ARGHAM  
[PADYAM, PUSHPE, DHUPE, ALOKE, GANDHE, NAIVIDYA] PRATICCHA YE  
SVAHA

OM SARVA TATHAGATA ARYA MANJUSHRI SAPARIVARA SHAPTA AH HUM  
SVAHA

*Praise*

I prostrate to Manjushri,  
who possesses the holy body of youth,  
who radiates the lamp of wisdom,  
and who dispels the darkness of the three worlds.

*Vajrasattva Mantra to Purify Mistakes*

OM VAJRASATTVA SAMAYA MANUPALAYA / VAJRASATTVA  
TVENOPATISHTHA / DRIDHO ME BHAVA / SUTOSHYO ME BHAVA /  
SUPOSHYO ME BHAVA / ANURAKTO ME BHAVA / SARVA SIDDHIM ME  
PRAYACCHA / SARVA KARMA SU CHAME / CHITTAM SHRIYAM KURU  
HUM / HA HA HA HA HO / BHAGAVAN SARVA TATHAGATA /

VAJRASATTVA MAME MUNCHA / VAJRA BHAVA MAHA SAMAYA SATTVA  
AH HUM PHAT

At the root of your tongue is a syllable DHI. The top of the DHI is facing down toward your windpipe. With this visualization, recite DHI 108 times in one breath. Visualize that the whole body turns into the syllable DHI.

### *Dedication*

Due to these merits,  
May I quickly attain the state of Arya Manjushri  
And place all migrating beings, without exception,  
In that very state.

May the day be auspicious  
May the night be auspicious  
May all the day and night be auspicious  
May there be the auspiciousness of the Three Jewels.

Then recite dedication prayers and auspicious verses.

## 4. TARA

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**B**EFORE SHE BECAME ENLIGHTENED, Tara promised to liberate all migratory beings from the two extremes: the extreme of samsara and the extreme of peace, meaning the peace of lower nirvana. That means she promised to lead all beings to full enlightenment.

From the very beginning, before she even generated bodhichitta, she vowed to attain enlightenment in a woman's body.<sup>67</sup> So, here we are talking about women's liberation happening eons ago! Initially, she attained bodhichitta in a woman's body; in the middle, she attained the paths of merit, preparation, seeing, and meditation in a woman's body; and in the end, she also became fully enlightened in a woman's body.

I heard the story of Tara from one of my gurus, Pabongka Dechen Nyingpo. Inconceivable eons ago, during the time of the Drum Sound Buddha (Dundubhisvara, Ngé Dra),<sup>68</sup> there was a highly respected princess called Wisdom Moon (Jnanachandra, Yeshe Dawa). She studied the Dharma and made offerings to that Buddha for millions of years until she attained bodhichitta.

At that time, some fully ordained monks, knowing of her great merits, told her that she could do superb work for the Dharma if she attained a man's body. When they urged her to pray for this, she answered them by making this vow: "There are many who desire enlightenment in a man's body, but few who work for the benefit of sentient beings in the body of a woman. Therefore, until samsara is empty, I shall work for the benefit of sentient beings in a woman's body."

She then lived for millions of years in the king's palace, achieving the patience of the unborn Dharma and the concentration called the *all-liberating concentration*. With the power of that concentration, she vowed that each morning she would liberate millions of sentient beings from delusions and cause them to attain renunciation, and that she would not eat until she had

done that. Then, in the afternoon, she again led that many sentient beings on the path. Because her function was to give extensive benefits to sentient beings each day like this, she became known as Tara the Liberator.

In the eon called Perfect Victory (Vishuda, Nampar Gyalwa), she promised in front of the Buddha Amoghasiddhi that she would protect sentient beings from the eight fears. Then she entered in the meditative equipoise called the *concentration of destroying the harms*. For ninety-five eons, every day during that time, she led millions of sentient beings in the path of concentration, and every night she subdued millions of maras.

During the eon called Unobstructed (Apratibaddha, Thokpa Mäpa), all the buddhas initiated a monk called Glow of Immaculate Light (Vimala Jyotis Prabha, Drima Mäpa Ökyi Nangwa)<sup>69</sup> with a great beam that was the essence of all their compassion. That monk became Chenrezig. After that, he was again initiated by all the buddhas with a great beam that was the essence of all their transcendental wisdom. Those two beams became the father and mother, and the mixing of the two caused Tara to arise from Chenrezig's heart to fulfill the wishes of all the buddhas and continuously work for migratory beings.

Whenever and wherever pitiful sentient beings are in danger and afraid, if they pray to Tara, she immediately guides them from the eight external and internal fears, such as lions, fire, pride, and hatred. As soon as beings unable to obtain their wishes pray fervently to Tara, she appears. She takes infinite forms and performs inconceivable actions to fulfill the hopes and wishes of sentient beings.

Pabongka Dechen Nyingpo said that there are so many stories about Tara, it is impossible to recount them all.

## TARA THE LIBERATOR

*Tara* means “star” in Sanskrit, and hence “that which guides us.” Her Tibetan name, *Dolma*, means “she who saves” or “liberator.” Tara, the embodiment of all the buddhas’ compassionate actions, is the one who liberates us from all the inner and outer obstacles that cloud the development of our mind and guides us to successfully accomplish both our temporal and ultimate happiness.

Therefore, to succeed in actualizing the graduated path to enlightenment, we must rely upon a buddha such as Tara.

Many Indian yogis relied upon Tara. By taking refuge in Tara, they completed the path and did great works for the teachings and for living beings, leading uncountable numbers on the path. For example, the great pandit Lama Atisha attained the entire graduated path to enlightenment by relying upon Tara.

Atisha was invited by the religious king of Tibet, Yeshe Ö, to reestablish Buddhadharma in Tibet. At that time, many wrong views had spread, and the king didn't know what to do. When a minister mentioned Atisha's name, the hairs on the back of the king's neck stood up and tears came to his eyes. He had so much devotion for Atisha, just hearing his name. While he was collecting gold to offer Atisha to invite him to travel from Nalanda Monastery in India to Tibet, he was captured by an irreligious king who demanded his body weight in gold as a ransom. His nephew had almost collected enough—the weight of his head was still missing—when King Yeshe Ö told him to not use the gold for him but to use it instead to invite Atisha, saying he would give up his life for the Dharma.

When he received the invitation, Atisha consulted Tara, who told him going to Tibet would be very beneficial for the Dharma, but his life would be shortened by many years. After a long and dangerous journey, he reached Tibet. When he arrived at court, the king's nephew explained that Tibetans were an ignorant people and asked him to therefore write something simple for them.

Atisha wrote *Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment*, which was the very first lamrim text. By listening to it and reflecting and meditating on it, so many people have achieved enlightenment. The light of this lamrim teaching has dispelled so much ignorance, even in the minds of many thousands of people living in the West, because it integrates all the teachings of the Buddha into a step-by-step practice that allows anyone to achieve enlightenment.

Even though Lama Atisha passed away a long time ago in Tibet, he is still benefiting us by giving us the opportunity to understand the teachings of the graduated path to enlightenment. He was able to offer extensive benefit to living beings and the teachings through depending upon Tara. As many stories attest, throughout Lama Atisha's life, Tara always gave him advice.

That Tara is in female form is significant. Even though there are more and more female heads of state emerging these days, there are still far more male leaders, but that has no bearing on the qualities of women. There is no difference in the potential of either sex. If a man doesn't practice the Dharma, his mind is not transformed, and it is exactly the same for a woman. Conversely, when they practice the Dharma their minds are transformed. Both men and women can attain enlightenment in exactly the same way. Just as there have been innumerable male yogis who have gone on to attain enlightenment, there have also been innumerable female yoginis who have done the same thing.

Tara is probably the most prominent example of a person who attained enlightenment in a female aspect, but there are many others. It depends on our own motivation. If we see that we can benefit others more in a female body than a male one, we can ensure that we get one. And vice versa, of course.

The English nun Venerable Tenzin Palmo is a great inspiration. Like the wonderful stories we hear of French and Spanish Christian nuns living in isolated places, or the great Tibetan yoginis, for twelve years she lived in an extremely remote place, in a cave high in the Himalayas, sacrificing her life to practice the Dharma and facing great hardships.<sup>70</sup> We need inspiring stories like that. The main thing we must cultivate to get results from our practice is continual renunciation, so she is a wonderful example for us. Just as the places in India and Nepal where yogis and yoginis achieved the path hundreds of years ago are to this day places that inspire others to practice, by being a living example, she is an inspiration to the Western world.

### *Mother Tara*

The benefits of practicing Tara are uncountable. By reciting the *Praises to the Twenty-One Taras* with devotion, at dawn or dusk, and remembering Tara and reciting her mantra at any time of the day or night, we are protected from fear and danger, and all our wishes are fulfilled. If we pray to Tara, Tara will grant help quickly.

She is especially quick in granting us success in obtaining the ultimate happiness of enlightenment, but there are also many temporal benefits of reciting the Tara mantra or the *Praises to the Twenty-One Taras* prayer. Tara can



solve many problems in life: liberating us from untimely death, helping us recover from disease, bringing us success in business. Somebody with a serious problem, such as a life-threatening disease, who relies on Tara will very commonly be freed from that problem. For instance, His Holiness the Dalai Lama encouraged us to recite Tara's mantra as a protection for ourselves and others against the coronavirus COVID-19.

Pabongka Dechen Nyingpo tells a story of one of his students who didn't know much Dharma but had faith in Tara and so received help from her, but not as much as he might have. One day during his journey to Mongolia, while walking along reciting Tara prayers, he heard a dog barking and saw a tent. Because he needed some water to quench his thirst, he went there, where he saw a young girl, alone, tending many yaks. Seeing the monk was weak and hungry, she insisted he stay with her for a few days and she fed him. When it was time to leave, she gave him some *tsampa* and other food. Because he was completely lost, she gave him very explicit directions on how to get to his destination and, as he was leaving, she gave him a large bunch of grass. She explained that when he awoke each morning, he should drop some grass on the ground and head in whichever direction it fell.

He only had a little food, enough for a day or two, but each day, when he opened the sack, his food was never depleted. Following the directions the girl had given him, he managed to find his way to his destination. When he looked in his sack at the very end of his journey, there was not one speck of food left. He was so surprised with this that he sent a letter to his guru, Pabongka Rinpoche, in Lhasa. Rinpoche wrote back and said that it was a pity he hadn't followed the girl's instructions completely. If he had, he would have been in a pure realm already. That yak herder was a manifestation of Tara, but he was unable to see this. Tara manifests in many aspects, not just the green and white forms that are commonly depicted.

Tara is like our mother. Take my mother as an example. She did all the work while the rest of us—there were three of us—were useless. One day, she had to go into the forest to get the firewood. Because none of us could make food, we waited outside the door for her to return so we could eat. When she came back very late with a very heavy load of firewood, she could not make a fire because she was sick. She lay down next to the fireplace in so much pain. There was no fire in the stove and no food. She was screaming, calling for her

mother: “Ama! Ama!” (My grandmother, who was still alive at that time, lived quite near.) Because none of us could make one, there was no fire; we just sat and watched our mother. Even adults call for their mother when they have bad pain or a serious problem. However, Tara is much closer to us than a mother, and she is quick to grant us help and protect us from danger.

The best way we can become close to Tara, what pleases her the most, is when we fervently try to develop the mind of bodhichitta. The more we are able to practice bodhichitta and cherish others more than ourselves, the closer we will be to Tara, and the easier it will be for her to offer us help quickly.

The *Praises to the Twenty-One Taras* begins, “I prostrate to the noble transcendent liberator.” That means that Tara herself is completely liberated from the whole of samsara and the cause of samsara through having completed the both the method and wisdom sides of the practice. Not only that, by having overcome the two obscurations, gross and subtle, she is also free from being bound to lower nirvana. Liberated from both samsara and the peace of lower nirvana means she is fully enlightened. And because she in turn liberates all of us, allowing us to attain full enlightenment, she is called Tara the Liberator, the mother who liberates.

### *The Mother of the Victorious Ones*

Tara is also called Mother of the Victorious Ones because, just as a mother gives birth to her children, Tara gives birth to all the buddhas. The ultimate meaning of Tara is the transcendental wisdom of nondual bliss and emptiness, the culmination of both the method side of the path and the wisdom side, fused in one mind. This is synonymous with the clear light—the dharmakaya or truth body of the buddha. This transcendental wisdom is called “nondual bliss and emptiness” because it is characterized by three things: it has realized emptiness; it experiences great bliss; and it has the feeling of vastness or being empty. This is the omniscient mind that sees both the absolute and conventional truth of all existence simultaneously.

This dharmakaya is the absolute guru, the real meaning of “guru.” It is important we understand that the word “guru” means much more than a human being who teaches us. Even though the buddhas have different aspects and different names, they are all born from the dharmakaya. In reality, every

buddha is the embodiment of this absolute guru: one manifests in many forms; many manifest in one form. When this manifests in an ordinary aspect as the conventional guru, this is the absolute guru appearing as the lama we directly receive teachings from.

As Khedrup Sangye Yeshe<sup>71</sup> explained: “Before the guru, there is not even the name ‘Buddha.’” First we meet the guru externally and separately. After receiving teachings, we listen, reflect, and meditate on the path that is revealed by this guru. On the basis of correct devotion to the guru, we gradually actualize the complete path and remove our obscurations. When that happens, we meet the guru mentally. By gradually actualizing the path and achieving the dharmakaya, we achieve the absolute guru.

So, all the buddhas are born from the absolute guru, the dharmakaya, the transcendental wisdom of nondual bliss and emptiness, which is the actual meaning of “Mother.” This transcendental wisdom, this completely pure subtle mind, manifests in this female aspect that is labeled “Tara.”



## GREEN TARA

Although there are many different aspects of Tara, the one we most often see in images is Green Tara.<sup>72</sup> The extremely vivid green color of Tara's holy form symbolizes the granting of wishes and the symbolic purification of the defilements of envy and jealousy, as well as the purification of the ordinary impure aggregate of form. Of the five transcendental wisdoms,<sup>73</sup> hers is the all-accomplishing wisdom. Her green color also symbolizes success in action.

With one face and two arms, she is in the aspect of a very beautiful sixteen-year-old girl. Her face is very peaceful, with a slight smile. Her eyes are not opened widely but are fine and a little rounded, very loving and compassionate. When we look at Tara, her eyes express compassion toward us, like the look a loving mother gives her only child. Her hair is very dark, half down and half tied up. The center of her hair has an utpala flower<sup>74</sup> as a crown. A tiara fastened in her hair is adorned with jewels, the central one being a ruby, symbolizing Amitabha, the principal buddha of her buddha family, the padma or lotus family.

Her right hand rests on her right knee, palm outward, in the mudra of granting sublime realizations, indicating her ability to provide beings with whatever they desire. Her left hand, at her heart, holds the stem of an utpala flower, with her thumb and ring finger together, symbolizing the unification of method and wisdom, and the other three fingers raised, symbolizing the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha.<sup>75</sup> In some depictions, the stem she holds has three utpala flowers—a bud, a flower that is opening, and a fully opened flower—indicating that Tara is the mother of all the buddhas: past, present, and future.

Tara has fully developed breasts, is dressed in the silken robes of royalty, and wears rainbow colored stockings, with a white half-blouse. She is adorned with a necklace, bracelets, armlets, anklets, and so forth, as well as various scarves and jewel garlands, symbolizing her attainment of the six perfections.

Her right leg is extended, showing she is always ready to rise up and come to the aid of those who need her, while her left leg is drawn up, showing her renunciation of worldly desire. She has a moon disk behind her. She is adorned with the complete holy signs and exemplifications of a buddha.

## THE MANTRA

Tara's mantra is this:

OM TARE TUTTARE TURE SVAHA

ॐ तरे तुतरे तुरे स्वाहा

There is no way to receive enlightenment without realizing the meaning of Tara's mantra. As with many mantras, Tara's mantra starts with OM and finishes with SVAHA (pronounced *soha*), with the main part of the mantra being TARE TUTTARE TURE.

### TARE *Liberates from Samsara*

TARE denotes liberating us from samsara, which means we are liberated from our five contaminated aggregates: the aggregates of form, feeling, discrimination, compositional factors, and consciousness. These aggregates are the basis on which the nominal sense of self, the I, is labeled. Because they are caused by the contaminated seed of karma and delusions, when we encounter desirable and undesirable objects, the different disturbing thoughts such as attachment and anger arise. Then, because of *that*, we again create karma. At the time of death, attachment to corporeal existence means our consciousness joins with the sperm and egg of our future parents and we take another samsaric life. Hence, the cycle of contaminated existence is perpetuated.

So, TARE shows that Mother Tara liberates living beings from true suffering, from the problems of samsara. The truth of suffering is the first of the four noble truths, the initial teaching of the Buddha after he became enlightened. We can relate this to the particular sufferings of human beings: birth, old age, sickness, death, meeting undesirable objects, not finding desirable objects, or finding them but gaining no satisfaction. No matter how much pleasure we enjoy, no matter how much we follow desire, there is no satisfaction at all. Furthermore, nothing in samsara is definite. We must leave the body again and again and take another body again and again.

Our present-life mother came from her mother, our grandmother; our grandmother came from another mother; and so on. It is the same with our father. We can see that this body we have now, which is a product of the conjoining of our parent's sperm and egg, is a collection of all the conjoinings of sperm and egg that have continued from parent to child for inconceivable generations since human beings began. Because of that, there is no essence to cling to; there is no reason to get attached to this body, this samsara.

Through all of these births, we experience problems again and again. If we have high status, we fall to low status. When we are born, we are born alone

without any companion; when we die, we also die alone, our consciousness leaving the dead body and taking another rebirth. All these are the problems of true suffering.

If we rely upon Tara, by taking refuge in her and doing Tara practices, when we recite her mantra, with TARE Tara liberates us from all these true sufferings.

### *TUTTARE Liberates from the Eight Fears*

If the first word, TARE, frees us from true suffering, the first of the four noble truths, the second word, TUTTARE, corresponds to the second noble truth in that it frees us from the true cause of suffering: karma and delusions.

We can all see how much the world is suffering now. There are more and more dangers. Glaciers are sliding into the ocean, causing the sea level to rise and endangering many coastal cities; there are more tsunamis and typhoons, more floods and fires. The dangers of the four elements of earth, fire, water, and air are increasing every year, with the potential to kill and harm millions of people. Just like the earthquake that ruined so much of Nepal years back, these disasters mean that people's survival is becoming more precarious. This is all a result of the mind. It is not a result of the subdued mind but the unsubdued mind, of the disturbing emotions such as greed, anger, ignorance, and so forth.

TUTTARE also frees us from the eight fears or dangers. There are eight fears related to external dangers from the elements, such as fire and water, and from such things as thieves and dangerous animals. However, the main dangers are not external but internal, coming from our delusions, such as ignorance and attachment. Relying on Tara liberates us from these eight internal dangers, these eight disturbing thoughts, and, as a consequence, frees us from the external dangers that arise from these disturbing thoughts. To guide us from these eight different fears, there are eight different aspects of Tara.

The eight external and internal fears:

1. fear of the danger of fire and fear of hatred
2. fear of the danger of water and fear of attachment
3. fear of the danger of lions and fear of pride
4. fear of the danger of elephants and fear of ignorance

5. fear of the danger of hungry ghosts and fear of doubt
6. fear of the danger of imprisonment and fear of miserliness
7. fear of the danger of thieves and fear of wrong views
8. fear of the danger of snakes and fear of jealousy

The first of the eight Taras<sup>76</sup> is the Tara who saves from the fear of the danger of fire and the fear of hatred. Hatred is the unsubdued mind that wishes to harm another being. Because it is such a violent, intense mind, it has the power to destroy all our virtue. It is compared to fire, which can destroy everything in its path.

Living with anger is like having a burning coal in the heart. Just as a tiny spark can set off a grass fire that can destroy a city, a spark of hatred can lead to creating harm that brings retaliation and then counterretaliation. In this way, it can destroy lives. Like a fire, hatred can rage through our life and kill our relationships and destroy any pleasure we might have. Anger can destroy everything, and therefore it is often referred to as the most destructive negative mind. By taking refuge in Tara, we can be protected from the danger of both hatred and the external fire element. It can be understood in both ways.

Then, there is the Tara who saves from the fear of the danger of water and the fear of attachment. Attachment is like water. Some dirt on a dry cloth can be brushed off easily, but when the cloth is wet, the dirt soaks right into it and it becomes incredibly difficult to clean. The wet cloth and the dirt sort of become inseparable. In the same way, it is almost impossible to separate the attached mind from the object of attachment. This Tara can protect us from all the outside dangers caused through water, such as floods and tsunamis, as well as the danger of attachment.

During the early Kopan courses, when we were still in the old tent, we would often do an all-night Tara practice,<sup>77</sup> which was a very powerful purification practice, extremely effective in developing wisdom and protecting from black magic and so forth. Very often, while we were doing the practice, it would start raining heavily.

There is also the Tara who saves from the fear of the danger of lions and of pride. The snow lion exemplifies pride because it lives in very high places and thinks itself the most powerful and magnificent of all the animals.



Then there is the Tara who saves from the fear of the danger of elephants and of ignorance. The elephant is used as an example of ignorance because when it is untamed, the harm it can do is enormous.

The next Tara is the one who saves from the fear of the danger of hungry ghosts and of doubt. This is also translated as spirits, meaning flesh-eating spirits. Just as they can consume us, so can doubt, making it impossible to make correct, virtuous choices.

Next is the Tara who saves from the fear of the danger of imprisonment or enchainment and of miserliness. Miserliness ties us to the object, making us cling to it. Further, it ties us to the whole of samsara through desire for the samsaric perfections we are attached to. Like a chain that imprisons us, where each link holds the next, our miserliness has us always grasping at one object of desire after the other.

There is also the Tara who saves from the fear of the danger of thieves and of wrong views or heresy. Whenever heresy arises toward the Three Rare Sublime Ones—the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha—such as denying the teachings on karma and reincarnation, it robs us of the merits that have been collected within our mindstream for countless eons. Because heresy postpones for an incredible length of time the ripening of the result of even the merits we have dedicated, it is very dangerous.

Finally, there is the Tara who saves from the fear of the danger of snakes and of jealousy. Just as a snake can creep up on us unobserved and bite us, jealousy can bite into us and cause us such pain.

Because Tara is said to be able to save people from the eight fears, Tibetans naturally take refuge in her when they face any danger.

### *TURE Liberates from Disease*

TURE liberates us from disease and corresponds to the third noble truth, the cessation of suffering. Our fundamental disease is ignorance, not knowing the absolute nature of the I. Relying on Tara, we can realize emptiness easily, which frees us from the ignorance that keeps us trapped in samsara.

Before that, Tara can save us from all the disturbing thoughts that arise from that ignorance, all of our delusions, such as anger, jealousy, miserliness, and so forth. As we develop on the path, these deluded aspects of mind lessen

and then cease. This relates to the fourth noble truth, that of the path that leads to cessation.

In that way, TARE, which frees us from the truth of suffering, and TUTTARE, which frees us from the cause of suffering, relate to the method side of the path. TURE, corresponding to the cessation of suffering, relates to the wisdom side of the practice.

### *The Meaning of the Whole Mantra*

Tara, Mother of the Victorious Ones, guides us and other living beings from the danger of falling into both samsara and lower nirvana and leads us to the perfect state of enlightenment.

The rough meaning of TARE TUTTARE TURE is “To you, embodiment of all the buddhas’ actions, I always prostrate with my body, speech, and mind, no matter what my circumstances, happy or unhappy.”

All the *yanas* or paths are contained in TARE TUTTARE TURE: the Hinayana, the Mahayana Paramitayana, and the Mahayana Vajrayana. The cessation of both the gross and subtle obscurations is contained in TARE TUTTARE TURE. Relating to the lamrim, TARE is the graduated path of the lower capable being, TUTTARE of the middle capable being, and TURE of the higher capable being.

As we have seen, with the final word, SVAHA, we ask that the blessings of the deity are firmly rooted in us. In other words, by taking refuge in Tara, reciting her mantra, and doing her practice, we receive the blessings of Tara and establish the path of the three capable beings in our heart. Through this, we can purify all obscurations of our body, speech, and mind and achieve Tara’s pure vajra holy body, holy speech, and holy mind, which are signified by OM.

Whenever we recite or even just hear Tara’s mantra, because it contains the four noble truths and the path to enlightenment in its entirety, it leaves an imprint on our mental continuum to actualize the whole path. Then, sooner or later, this imprint will manifest. At that time, we will not only be able to meet the Dharma again, but to actualize the complete meaning of the mantra, which is nothing less than attaining all the realizations and becoming enlightened, allowing us to do perfect work for all sentient beings.

## THE TWENTY-ONE TARAS

Although there are innumerable aspects of Tara, there are twenty-one main ones, which are usually visualized as surrounding the central green Tara when we recite the *Praises to the Twenty-One Taras*. Each has a different function and can bring a particular benefit to sentient beings. Whether we are troubled with illness, poverty, an impending court case, or any other difficulty, there is one specific Tara we can address to help us with our problem.

The fact that so many holy beings have been able to offer extensive benefit to the world is due to Tara. The success that many common people enjoy is also due to Tara. In Tibet, it is very common to do a Tara puja for success or for overcoming obstacles such as sickness, where the *Praises to the Twenty-One Taras* is recited many times.

The first text I ever learned was the *Praises to the Twenty-One Taras*. There was an elder monk at Domo Geshe's monastery in Tibet who took care of me and helped me become a monk. Even though the *Twenty-One Taras* was all he ever taught me, when I asked Kirti Tsenshab Rinpoche whether I should regard him as my teacher, he said yes.

Every day we had to do pujas in peoples' homes. There were four or five monks, one who played cymbals, one who played the drum, and one who played the bell and *damaru*. Once I played the flute with him, copying what he did with his fingers. Sometimes we did all-night pujas, chanting the *Praises to the Twenty-One Taras*. My teacher had a long stick with a needle on top. There was a young monk who fell asleep and got the needle, right in the shoulder blades, but somehow I didn't get it. I don't know whether I slept or not.

The texts on Tara mention that it is very effective if we do the *Praises to the Twenty-One Taras* twice in the morning, three times around noon, and seven times in the evening, but, of course, even if we can only recite it once, that is very effective. Because we become closer to Tara and therefore more easily receive Tara's guidance, it helps us succeed in whatever we wish for. Naturally the best way to practice is with a bodhichitta motivation.

There are different traditions regarding the twenty-one Taras, so you might see images of them that differ slightly. There is one tradition, according to the great translator Phari Lotsawa, where there are peaceful-looking Taras and wrathful-looking ones, and some have many arms. There is also a tradition

from Lama Atisha where each only has one face and two arms, but some have different colors and one or two are wrathful. I will describe the twenty-one Taras found in Lama Atisha's tradition.

A simple way to visualize the twenty-one Taras as you recite the praises is to visualize Green Tara in the center with the twenty-one Taras surrounding her clockwise on a twenty-one-petaled lotus, each on a petal and moon disk. One tradition says that as you recite the praise to each Tara, you imagine that Tara sending out an emanation that absorbs into you, giving you that quality—in the case of Tara the Swift Lady of Glory, the first Tara, the ability to influence sentient beings. If you have taken a Tara initiation, you can visualize that you become that Tara; otherwise, you can just feel that you now have that Tara's qualities. Then, in the same way, as you say the next praise, the next Tara sends an emanation that absorbs into you, and you receive that quality, and so on for all the twenty-one Taras.

If you find it too difficult to imagine each Tara absorbing into you, you can just imagine the principal Tara sitting at the center of the lotus on a moon disk, and as you say the praises with your hands in the prostration mudra, you imagine purifying beams coming from the principal Tara's heart and entering your heart. Then, at the end, imagine that a replica of Tara absorbs into your heart and your body, speech, and mind become one with Tara's holy body, holy speech, and holy mind.

### *Visualizing the Twenty-One Taras*

According to the tradition of Lama Atisha, the color of each of the twenty-one Taras corresponds to the four types of enlightened activities of a buddha: white for pacifying; yellow for increasing positive qualities; red for power, such as the power to overcome external forces; and black for wrath, using forceful means to accomplish enlightened activities that cannot be accomplished by other means.

Each Tara has one face and two hands. In the palm of her right hand is a flask that accomplishes the activity of that Tara, while in her left hand is an utpala flower. Each sits on a throne of lotus and moon in the same position as the principal Tara—with right leg extended and left leg drawn up—and is adorned with silks and precious ornaments.

## 1. Swift Lady of Glory

Homage! Tara, swift, heroic!  
Eyes like lightning instantaneous!  
Sprung from op'ning stamens of the  
Lord of three world's tear-born lotus!<sup>78</sup>

On the first petal is Tara the Swift Lady of Glory (Nyumma Palmo),<sup>79</sup> red in color. She is the quick one, holding in her right palm a red flask for controlling. She grants the ability to influence sentient beings so that they will listen to you and you can lead them to the Dharma. Her mantra is this:

OM TARE TUTTARE TURE WASHAM KURU SVAHA

ཨོཾ་ཏཱ་རེ་ཏུ་ཏྲཱ་རེ་ཏུ་རེ་ལྷ་ཤི་ཀུ་ཅ་སྐྱ་ཏྲཱ་

## 2. Lady of Supreme Peace

Homage! She whose face combines a  
Hundred autumn moons at fullest!  
Blazing with light rays resplendent  
As a thousand-star collection!

On the second petal is Tara, Lady of Supreme Peace (Shiwa Chenmo), white in color, holding a white flask containing nectar for pacifying disease. Her mantra is this:

OM TARE TUTTARE TURE SHANTIM KURU SVAHA

ཨོཾ་ཏཱ་རེ་ཏུ་ཏྲཱ་རེ་ཏུ་རེ་ཤཱན་ཏིལ་ཀུ་ཅ་སྐྱ་ཏྲཱ་

## 3. Lady of Golden Yellow Color

Homage! Golden-blue one, lotus

Water born, in hand adorned!  
Giving, effort, calm, austerities,  
Patience, meditation her sphere!

On the third petal is Golden-Colored Tara, Giver of Supreme Virtue (Serdok Chen), yellow-gold in color, holding in her hand a yellow flask containing nectar for increasing life and fortune. Her mantra is this:

OM TARE TUTTARE TURE PUSHTIM KURU SVAHA

ཨོཾ་ཏཱ་རེ་ཏུ་ཏྲཱ་རེ་ཏུ་རེ་ཕུ་ཤྲིཾ་ཀུ་རུ་སྐྱ་ཏྲཱ་

#### 4. Lady of Complete Victory, Embodying All Positive Qualities

Homage! Crown of tathagatas,  
Actions triumph without limit!  
Relied on by conquerors' children,  
Having reached ev'ry perfection!

On the fourth petal is Tara Completely Victorious, Embodying All Positive Qualities (Tsuktor Nampar Gyalma), yellow in color, holding a yellow flask containing nectar for increasing the lifespan. Her mantra is this:

OM TARE TUTTARE TURE AYUR-JYANA PUSHTIM KURU SVAHA

ཨོཾ་ཏཱ་རེ་ཏུ་ཏྲཱ་རེ་ཏུ་རེ་ཨྲ་ཡུ་རྫྱ་ན་ཕུ་ཤྲིཾ་ཀུ་རུ་སྐྱ་ཏྲཱ་

#### 5. She Who Proclaims the Sound of Hum

Homage! Filling with TUTTARE,  
HUM, desire, direction, and space!  
Trampling with her feet the seven worlds,  
Able to draw forth all beings!

On the fifth petal is Tara Proclaiming the Sound of HUM (Hung Dradrokma), red-yellow in color, holding a red flask containing nectar with the function of enchanting other sentient beings, causing them to be attracted to you. Her manta is this:

OM TARE TUTTARE SHTRI AKARSHAYA HRIH SVAHA

ཨོྃ་རཱེ་ཏུ་རཱེ་ཏུ་རཱེ་མྱེ་ཤྱི་ཀཱ་རྩ་ཡ་མྱེ་ཞིང་སྐྱ་རྩཱ།

If there is somebody you need to influence, such as somebody who is extremely deluded and tries to harm you and others and to harm the Dharma, in order to help that person transform their mind into the Dharma, then you can recite this mantra and insert that person's name between the *tuttare shtri* and the *akarshaya*, so the mantra becomes OM TARE TUTTARE SHTRI [the name of the person] AKARSHAYA HRIH SVAHA.

## 6. She Who Is Completely Victorious Over the Three Worlds

Homage! Worshipped by the all-lords,  
Shakra, Agni, Brahma, Marut!  
Honored by the hosts of spirits,  
Corpse-raisers, gandharvas, yakshas!<sup>80</sup>

On the sixth petal is Tara Completely Victorious Over the Three Worlds (Jikten Sumle Nampar Gyalma), red-black in color, who is victorious over the three realms. She holds a blue flask containing nectar that intoxicates the spirits. Her mantra is this:

OM TARE TUTTARE TURE SHATRUN UCCHATAYA SVAHA

ཨོྃ་རཱེ་ཏུ་རཱེ་ཏུ་རཱེ་ཤ་ཏུ་རྩུ་བ་ཤྱེ་རྩུ་ལ་ཕྱེ་སྐྱ་རྩཱ།

By intoxicating the spirits, they become unable to function and so unable to cause harm to others. I guess it's a bit like taking a business client to dinner

and getting them drunk, making it a lot easier to get them to agree to any deal you have to make.

## 7. She Who Conquers Others

Homage! With her TRAD and PHAT sounds  
Destroying foes' magic diagrams!  
Her feet pressing, left out, right in,  
Blazing in a raging fire-blaze!

On the seventh petal is Tara Who Conquers Others (Shen Jom-Ma), black in color, destroying those possessing black magic. She has a slightly wrathful appearance—her forehead is wrinkled—and she holds a black flask containing nectar that averts mantras and black magic sent against you. Her mantra is this:

OM TARA TUTTARE TURE SARVA VIDYA APARA VARANAYA SVAHA

ཨོཾ་རྩ་རེ་རུ་རྩ་རེ་རུ་རེ་སྐྱེ་བའི་རྩ་ཨ་པ་ར་ལ་ར་རྩ་ཡ་སྐྱ་རྩ།

## 8. She Who Conquers Maras and Enemies

Homage! TURE, very dreadful!  
Destroyer of Mara's champion(s)!  
She with frowning lotus visage  
Who is slayer of all enemies!

On the eighth petal is Tara Who Conquers Maras and Enemies (Dru Dra Jom-Ma), red-black in color. Her right hand holds a red flask containing nectar whose function is to defeat maras and enemies. Her mantra is this:

OM TARE TUTTARE TURE SARVA MARA SHATRUN MARAYA PHAT SVAHA

ཨོཾ་རྩ་རེ་རུ་རྩ་རེ་རུ་རེ་སྐྱེ་བའི་རྩ་ཨ་པ་ར་ལ་ར་རྩ་ཡ་སྐྱ་རྩ།



## 9. She Who Protects from All Fears

Homage! At the heart her fingers,  
Adorn her with Three Jewel mudra!  
Light-ray masses all excited!  
All directions' wheels adorn her!

On the ninth petal is Tara Who Protects from All Fears (Jikpa Kunkyob Ma), white in color, her gesture signifying the Three Rare Sublime Ones. She holds a white flask containing nectar whose function is to protect all sentient beings from fear and dangers. Her mantra is this:

OM TARE TUTTARE TURE MAM UPAKRAMA RAKSHA RAKSHA SVAHA

ཨོཾ་ཏཱ་རེ་ཏུ་ཏྲཱ་རེ་ཏུ་རེ་མུ་ཡུ་པ་གྲ་མ་ར་གྲ་ར་གྲ་སྐྱ་ཏྲཱ།

If there are dangers such as earthquakes, floods, typhoons, or the like, you can take strong refuge and recite this mantra, or visualize Tara in front of you.

## 10. She Who Brings Maras and the World Under Her Power

Homage! She so joyous, radiant,  
Crown emitting garlands of light!  
Mirthful, laughing with TUTTARE,  
Subjugating maras, devas!

On the tenth petal is Tara Who Brings Maras and the World Under Her Power (Dudang Jikten Wangdu Dema), red in color, holding a red flask containing nectar whose function is to destroy Mara and to control the world. Her mantra is this:

OM TARE TUTTARE SARVA MARA PRAMARDHANI SVAHA

ཨོཾ་ཏཱ་རེ་ཏུ་ཏྲཱ་རེ་ཏུ་རེ་སའ་མ་ར་པ་མར་ན་ནི་སྐྱ་ཏྲཱ།

## 11. She Who Eradicates Poverty

Homage! She able to summon  
All earth-guardians' assembly!  
Shaking, frowning, with her HUM sign  
Saving from every misfortune!

On the eleventh petal is Tara Who Eradicates Poverty (Ponpa Selma), red-yellow in color, like refined gold. She holds a yellow flask containing nectar whose function is to eliminate poverty. Her mantra is this:

OM TARE TUTTARE TURE VASUDHARINI SVAHA

ཨོཾ་རྩ་རེ་ཏུ་རྩ་རེ་ཏུ་རེ་བླ་མ་རྩ་རེ་ཏི་སྣ་རྩ་

This is the Tara you use when you make a Tara wealth vase for prosperity. When you put a statue or drawing of this Tara in a wealth vase, to eliminate either your poverty or that of others, you take strong refuge and recite this mantra in front of the vase.

## 12. She Who Grants All That Is Auspicious

Homage! Crown adorned with crescent  
Moon, all ornaments most shining!  
Amitabha in her hair-knot  
Sending out much light eternal!

On the twelfth petal is Tara Who Grants All that Is Auspicious (Trashy Tamche Jinma), golden in color, performing auspicious activities. She holds a white flask containing nectar that performs auspicious actions. Her mantra is this:

OM TARE TUTTARE TURE MANGALAM SVAHA

ཨོཾ་རྩ་རེ་ཏུ་རྩ་རེ་ཏུ་རེ་མང་ལོ་སྣ་རྩ་

### 13. She Who Blazes Like Fire

Homage! She 'mid wreath ablaze like  
Eon-ending fire abiding!  
Right stretched, left bent, joy surrounds you  
Troops of enemies destroying!

On the thirteenth petal is Tara Who Blazes Like Fire (Metar Barma), red in color and blazing like fire. She holds a red flask containing nectar that destroys enemies and protects from obstacles. Her mantra is this:

OM TARE TUTTARE TURE BHAYA BHASMIM KURU SVAHA

ཨོཾ་ཏཱ་རེ་ཏུ་ཏུ་རེ་ཏུ་རེ་རྣ་ཡ་རྣ་སྒྲི་ཀུ་ཏ་སྐྱ་ཏཱ།

There are wrathful actions you can do to destroy enemies, but whatever meditations or recitations you do, if you do them with anger, they don't become Dharma; they just become negative karma. It has to be done with the thought of bodhichitta—the wish to benefit other sentient beings, especially the harmful being, to stop them engaging in negativities.

### 14. She Who Is Frowning Wrathfully

Homage! She who strikes the ground with  
Her palm, and with her foot beats it!  
Scowling, with the letter HUM the  
Seven levels she does conquer!

On the fourteenth petal is Tara Who Is Frowning Wrathfully (Tronyer Chen), having a slightly wrathful appearance, black in color. She holds a dark blue flask containing nectar that controls and subdues interferences. Her mantra is this:

OM TARE TUTTARE TURE VAJRA MAHA PADA BHASMIM KURU SVAHA

ཨོཾ་ཏཱ་རེ་ཏུ་ཏཱ་རེ་ཏུ་རེ་བཟོ་མ་ཏཱ་སྐྱ་ད་ལྷ་མོ་ཀུ་ཅ་སྐྱ་ཏཱ།

## 15. She of Supreme Peacefulness

Homage! Happy, virtuous, peaceful!  
She whose field is peace, nirvana!  
She endowed with OM and SVAHA,  
Destroyer of the great evil!

On the fifteenth petal is Tara the Supremely Peaceful One (Shiwa Chenmo), white in color. She holds a white flask containing nectar whose function is pacifying and purifying negative karma. Her mantra is this:

OM TARE TUTTARE TURE SARVA PAPAM PRASHAMANAYA SVAHA

ཨོཾ་ཏཱ་རེ་ཏུ་ཏཱ་རེ་ཏུ་རེ་བཟོ་སྐྱ་པོ་སྐྱ་ཤ་མ་ཏཱ་ཡ་སྐྱ་ཏཱ།

Reciting her mantra pacifies sickness, spirit harm, obscurations, and negative karma.

## 16. Tara Who Arises from the HUM of Intrinsic Awareness

Homage! She with joy surrounded  
Tearing foes' bodies asunder,  
Frees with HUM and knowledge mantra,  
Arrangement of the ten letters!

On the sixteenth petal is Tara Who Arises from the HUM of Intrinsic Awareness (Rikpa Hungle Drölma), red in color. She holds a red-yellow flask containing nectar whose function is to increase wisdom. Her mantra is this:

OM TARE TUTTARE TURE SARVA DHARMAH PRATI-PARISHODHAYA  
SVAHA<sup>81</sup>

ཨོཾ་ཏཱ་རེ་ཏུ་ཏཱ་རེ་ཏུ་རེ་སའ་རྣ་མུང་མ་ཉི་པ་རི་ཤོ་རྣ་ཡ་སྐྱ་ཏཱ།

## 17. She Who Causes the Three Realms to Tremble

Homage! TURE! With seed letter  
Of the shape of syllable HUM!  
By foot stamping shakes the three worlds,  
Meru, Mandara, and Vindhya!<sup>82</sup>

On the seventeenth petal is Tara Who Causes the Three Realms to Tremble (Drölma Jikten Sumyowa), red-yellow in color. Pacifying maras and obstacles, shaking the triple world, she holds a yellow flask containing nectar whose function is to control the power of mantras, which means controlling those who try to harm you using mantras. Her mantra is this:

OM TARE TUTTARE TURE SARVA STAMBHANI TARE SVAHA

ཨོཾ་ཏཱ་རེ་ཏུ་ཏཱ་རེ་ཏུ་རེ་སའ་སྐྱུ་འི་ཏཱ་རེ་སྐྱ་ཏཱ།

## 18. She Who Neutralizes Poison

Homage! Holding in her hand the  
Hare-marked moon of deva-lake form!  
With twice spoken TARA and PHAT,  
Totally dispelling poison!

On the eighteenth petal is Tara Who Neutralizes Poison (Dukselma), white in color. She holds a white flask containing nectar whose function is to eliminate all sicknesses and poison. Her mantra is this:

OM TARE TUTTARE TURE NAGA VISHA SHANTIM KURU SVAHA

ཨོཾ་ཏཱ་རེ་ཏུ་ཏཱ་རེ་ཏུ་རེ་རྣ་ག་བི་ཤ་ཤུ་རྩི་ཀུ་རུ་སྐྱ་ཏཱ།

If somebody poisons you or you have taken some poison by mistake, this is the mantra you can chant to eliminate it.

## 19. She Who Alleviates All Suffering

Homage! She whom gods and their kings,  
And the kinnaras<sup>83</sup> do honor!  
Armored in all joyful splendor,  
She dispels bad dreams and conflicts!

On the nineteenth petal is Tara Who Alleviates All Suffering (Duk-Ngal Tamche Selwé Drölma), white in color. She holds a white flask containing nectar that eliminates disputes, bad dreams, and other suffering. Her mantra is this:

OM TARE TUTTARE TURE MOCANA SVAHA

ཨོཾ་རྩ་རེ་ཏུ་རྩ་རེ་ཏུ་རེ་མོ་ཙ་ན་སྐྱ་ཏུ།

Because this Tara eliminates quarrels and bad dreams, if you are having persistent nightmares or quarrels in the family or in the office, this is the mantra to recite.

## 20. She Who Removes Pestilence

Homage! She whose two eyes bright with  
Radiance of sun and full moon!  
With twice HARA and TUTTARA  
She dispels severe contagion!

On the twentieth petal is Tara Who Removes Pestilence (Rimne Selwé Drölma), red in color. She holds a red flask containing nectar whose function is to eliminate all epidemics and contagious diseases. Her mantra is this:

OM TARE TUTTARE TURE VISARATA SVAHA







## WHITE TARA

White Tara resembles Green Tara in most aspects, besides, of course, that her color is white, symbolizing having overcome the two obscurations. She has seven eyes: a third eye on her face in the middle of her forehead, and one on each of her palms and on the soles of her feet. These symbolize her realization of the three doors of liberation (emptiness, signlessness, and wishlessness)<sup>84</sup> and the realization of the four immeasurable thoughts (loving-kindness,



compassion, joy, and equanimity). Unlike Green Tara, who has her right leg extended, White Tara sits in the full vajra posture.<sup>85</sup>

White Tara's long-life mantra is this:

OM TARE TUTTARE TURE MAMA AYUR PUNYE JNANA PUSHTIM KURU  
SVAHA

ཨོཾ་ཏཱ་རེ་ཏུ་ཏཱ་རེ་ཏུ་རེ་མུ་མུ་ཞུ་ཡུར་པུ་ཉེ་རྣམ་པུ་ཉི་ཀུ་བ་སྐྱ་ཏཱ།

Although we all have a certain lifespan determined by the karma created in previous lives, that lifespan can be cut short through the ripening of negative imprints caused by having committed a heavy negative action motivated by self-cherishing or one of the other delusions. This creates an obstacle to our life, which can result in death.

Reciting the mantra of White Tara is especially effective for eliminating life obstacles, helping us to have a long life. It is also a powerful healing mantra. However, as I have mentioned, if the motivation is only for relief from this temporal suffering and to enjoy this life's pleasures, the recitation does not become virtuous, even though it may help alleviate the immediate problem.

Along with the practices of Namgyalma and others that help us have a long life, a White Tara practice is considered very effective when we liberate animals. Prolonging the lives of the animals by saving their lives naturally prolongs our own life. By planting a particular seed, we get a particular result. If we plant a potato, a potato grows; if we plant a chili seed, a chili plant grows. In the same way that the plant depends on the seed, the result depends on the cause, and a positive action that prolongs the life of another creates the cause for our own long life. We can not only liberate animals for our own long life, however; we can also dedicate the practice to members of our family or to other people. We can actually dedicate it to all living beings.

A very simple way to practice White Tara is to visualize the sick person you are trying to help in front of you with White Tara above them. You then visualize beams of white nectar entering the crown of their head, totally filling their body, purifying all their defilements and negative karmas, their sickness, and the threat of untimely death. As you do this, you can recite White Tara's

long-life mantra for them at least twenty-one times and then the Tara mantra, OM TARE TUTTARE TURE SVAHA.




Then, when you have finished the mantra recitation, really feel that their body is filled with white nectar like milk from White Tara and envision they have achieved all of Tara's qualities: perfect power, the ability to benefit sentient beings, great compassion, and especially immortality.

## HOW TO PRACTICE WITH GREEN TARA'S MANTRA<sup>86</sup>

There are many ways of practicing Tara—and many different aspects of Tara to practice—from a simple Green Tara sadhana<sup>87</sup> to the highest yoga tantra aspect of Chittamani Tara. Even if you don't do a formal practice, it is very good to visualize Tara when you recite her mantra.

Visualize Tara as described above in the space in front of you, level with your forehead, at a comfortable distance of about one body length. (If you wish, you can visualize Tara on your crown.)

First, think of the transcendental wisdom of nondual bliss and emptiness of all the buddhas, which fully sees all existence. This is the holy mind of the dharmakaya, the absolute guru. Just as sentient beings act under the control of anger and attachment, buddhas work for all living beings under the control of compassion. At this time, the holy mind of all the buddhas, the absolute guru, manifests in this particular female form of Tara.

On her forehead is a white OM , the essence of the vajra holy body; at her neck, a red AH , the essence of vajra holy speech; and at her heart, a blue HUM , the essence of the vajra holy mind.

From the OM at Tara's forehead, white nectar beams are emitted and enter you through your forehead, completely purifying all the obscurations and negative karmas you have accumulated with the body from beginningless rebirths until now. From the AH at Tara's throat, red nectar beams are emitted and enter through your throat, completely purifying all the obscurations and negative karmas accumulated with your speech from beginningless rebirths until now.

From the HUM at Tara's heart, blue nectar beams are emitted and enter your heart, completely purifying all the obscurations and negative karmas accumulated with your mind from beginningless rebirths until now. Out of compassion for you and all living beings, Mother Tara has purified you.

Concentrate on this as you recite the mantra:

OM TARE TUTTARE TURE SVAHA

When you finish the meditation, pray to Tara:

Without delay of even a second, may I become Tara and, in each second, free uncountable numbers of living beings from all their sufferings and lead them to full enlightenment.

Pray that, through generating bodhichitta, you will achieve your wish to achieve Tara for the sake of other living beings.

The essential Mahayana practices of loving-kindness, compassion, morality, and, ultimately, bodhichitta are the best offerings you can make to Tara; they are the practices that please her the most. They bring you closer to Tara, so that she quickly helps all your actions to succeed.

Because, rather than following the selfish mind, you are using your life to serve others—because of your attitude of bodhichitta—Tara is extremely pleased with you. She melts into green light, enters through your forehead, and absorbs into your heart.

Think:

My body, speech, and mind have been blessed to become Tara's  
vajra holy body, holy speech, and holy mind

By receiving the blessings of Tara with a calm, devoted mind, you plant the seed to develop your mind and actually achieve Tara.

After the absorption, if you wish, one-pointedly concentrate on the nature of Tara's holy mind. Then conclude your practice by dedicating the merits to the generation of bodhichitta and to your achievement of Tara, in order to lead every living being as quickly as possible to Tara's enlightenment. You can finish with the standard dedication prayers.

## 5. MEDICINE BUDDHA

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WHEN THE MEDICINE BUDDHA was a bodhisattva called Stainless Star, one of the many prayers he made for us sentient beings was this:

When I become the Medicinal King, the King of Lapis Light, may any sentient being who recites my mantra or hears my name or sees, hears, touches, or remembers me, or does the recitation-meditation never have any sickness or harm. May they have a long life, the Dharma, and wealth.

There is no doubt that for any sentient being who makes a statue of Medicine Buddha or does concentration, or meditation, on Medicine Buddha, but even for somebody who doesn't concentrate on Medicine Buddha but simply expresses my name or even makes seven steps in my direction [which means toward a Medicine Buddha statue or to do a puja], the door to the evil-gone realms [which means the lower realms] and to samsara will be closed. May they be born in the higher realms, have all the seven qualities, and achieve peerless enlightenment.

May the power of my prayers be equal to that of all the buddhas of the fortunate eon, especially in regard to profundity, extensiveness, and power.<sup>88</sup>

The above prayer was just one that the Medicine Buddha made when he was a bodhisattva. He and all seven of the Medicine Buddhas did so many prayers for us sentient beings, that in these degenerated times—which is now—all our wishes might succeed.

Reciting the Medicine Buddha's mantra or the names of the seven Medicine Buddhas every day purifies whatever karma we have to be reborn in the lower realms. That was guaranteed by the main Medicine Buddha and the

other Medicine Buddhas when they made extensive prayers for the sentient beings of these degenerate times. They promised that if we do the Medicine Buddha practice, they will actualize our prayers, allowing us to quickly be able to accomplish everything we wish for.



THE SEVEN MEDICINE BUDDHAS

In the Medicine Buddha practices, such as the one called the *Wish-Fulfilling Jewel*,<sup>89</sup> there are seven Medicine Buddhas, but generally when we visualize the Medicine Buddha to recite the mantra, we visualize the main Medicine Buddha: Medicine Guru, King of Lapis Light.

In the center of a lotus is a white moon disk. Seated on the moon disk is the Medicine Buddha. He has one face and two arms. He is blue in color, like a very clear, very blue sky, radiating blue light from his body. In the past we translated *bendurya*, the color of the Medicine Buddha, as lapis lazuli, but that seems incorrect. Although there doesn't seem to be an exact translation in English, we can take it to be sapphire.

His right hand rests on his right knee, palm up, in the mudra of granting sublime realizations. He holds the stem of an arura plant between his thumb and index finger. Arura is the special plant that heals both the sickness of the mind and sickness of the body, destroying all suffering and its causes. His left hand is in the mudra of concentration. In it, he holds a lapis lazuli bowl filled with immortal nectar that destroys death and pacifies the chronic disease of the delusions.

He is seated in the full lotus position and is wearing the three red-colored robes of a monk. He has all the signs and holy exemplifications of a buddha.

Even though he appears to us as truly existent, every part of Medicine Buddha's holy body is merely labeled by the mind: the head, the hands, the legs, the begging bowl, the arura plant.

Besides the main Medicine Buddha, there are the other six Medicine Buddhas. Generally, we visualize them all above our head. From the top to the bottom they are like this:





The first buddha is Renowned Glorious King of Excellent Signs. He is golden in color and is making the mudra of granting refuge, his right hand at his heart, palm outward, and his left hand on his lap, palm upward, as in the meditation mudra.

Below him is King of Melodious Sounds, Brilliant Radiance of Skill, Adorned with Jewels, Moon, and Lotus. He is yellow in color and is making the mudra of granting the supreme, with his right hand on his right knee, palm outward, similar to Tara's mudra, and his left hand in the meditation mudra.



Then there is Stainless Excellent Gold, Great Jewel Who Accomplishes All Vows. He is golden in color and is making the Dharma teaching mudra, both hands at his heart, with his right palm outward and raised and his left palm inward and raised and partly in front of the right.

After that is Supreme Glory Free from Sorrow. He is light red in color and is making the mudra of meditative equipoise, with both hands on his lap, the right resting on the left and the thumbs touching.

Next there is Melodious Ocean of Proclaimed Dharma. He is pink in color and is making the Dharma teaching mudra.

Then there is Delightful King of Clear Knowing, Supreme Wisdom of an Ocean of Dharma. He is coral colored<sup>90</sup> and is making the mudra of granting the supreme.

The last of the seven Medicine Buddhas is Medicine Guru, King of Lapis Light. As we have seen, he is sapphire colored, with his right hand in the mudra of granting the supreme realizations and his left in the mudra of concentration.

All of these buddhas are sitting on a lotus and moon disk and wearing the three robes of a monk, as in the description of the main Medicine Buddha. The differences are their colors and their mudras.

## THE MANTRA

There is a long and a short Medicine Buddha mantra. The long one is this:

OM NAMO BHAGAVATE BHAISHAJYE / GURU BAIDURYA / PRABHA  
RAJAYA / TATHAGATAYA / ARHATE SAMYAKSAM BUDDHAYA / TADYATHA  
/ OM BHAISHAJYE BHAISHAJYE MAHA BHAISHAJYE [BHAISHAJYE] / RAJA  
SAMUDGATE SVAHA

ཨོཾ་མེ་ལྷ་ག་མ་ཏི་རྗེ་པ་ཏྲེ། ལུ་ཅུ་བཞུགས། བ་རྗེ་རུ་ངོ་ཡ། ཏ་ལྷ་ག་ཏ་ཡ།  
ཨཱ་ཏི་ལི་ཐུ་མི་བུ་རྒྱ་ཡ། ཏཏ་ལྷ། ཨོཾ་རྗེ་པ་ཏྲེ་རྗེ་པ་ཏྲེ་མ་རུ་རྗེ་པ་ཏྲེ་[རྗེ་པ་  
ཏྲེ། རུ་ངོ་ལ་ཐུ་རྗེ་ཏི་སྐ་རྗེ།

Common pronunciation:

*Om namo bagawatay bekanzay guru baidurya / praba radza ya /  
tatagataya / arhatay samyaksam buddhaya / ta ya ta / om bekanzay  
bekanzay maha bekanzay [bekanzay] / radza samudgatay soha*

The short Medicine Buddha mantra is this:

TADYATHA / OM BHAISHAJYE BHAISHAJYE MAHA BHAISHAJYE  
[BHAISHAJYE] / RAJA SAMUDGATE SVAHA

ཏད་ཡའ་ འོ་རྣམ་ཤེས་ལྷན་ལྷན་མ་རྒྱ་རྣམ་ཤེས་ལྷན་ལྷན་[རྣམ་ཤེས་]རྒྱ་ཇ་ས་སུང་གཏེ་སྐྱ་ཏྲེ།

Common pronunciation:

*Ta ya ta / om bekanzay bekanzay maha bekanzay [bekanzay] / radza  
samudgatay soha*

The bracketed BHAISHAJYE (*bekanzay*) is optional.

### *The Meaning of the Mantra*

In the Medicine Buddha mantra, BHAISHAJYE means the elimination of pain and MAHA BHAISHAJYE means the great elimination of pain. In one explanation of the mantra, the first BHAISHAJYE refers to eliminating the pain of true suffering, the pain not just of disease but of all the problems of body and mind. It also eliminates the pain of death and rebirth, that which is caused by karma and delusions.

The second BHAISHAJYE refers to eliminating all the true causes of suffering, which are not external but within the mind. This refers to the karma and delusions themselves, the inner causes that enable external factors to become conditions for disease.

The third BHAISHAJYE, MAHA BHAISHAJYE, or the great elimination of pain, refers to eliminating even the subtle imprints left on the consciousness by the delusions.

The fourth BHAISHAJYE is optional. Some texts have it, others don't, but His Holiness the Dalai Lama recites the mantra with the fourth BHAISHAJYE.

The Medicine Buddha mantra actually contains the remedy of the whole graduated path to enlightenment, from the beginning up to the peerless happiness of full enlightenment. The first BHAISHAJYE contains the graduated path of the lower capable being; the second BHAISHAJYE, the graduated path of the middle capable being; and MAHA BHAISHAJYE, the graduated path of the higher capable being. Reciting the mantra leaves imprints on our mind so that we are able to actualize the path contained in the mantra.

As we have seen, the initial word of the mantra, TADYATHA, means "this contains," and the OM, composed of *a*, *o*, and *ma*, signifies the pure holy body, holy speech, and holy mind of the buddha, here referring to those of the Medicine Buddha. Actualizing the whole path to enlightenment purifies our impure body, speech, and mind and transforms them into the Medicine Buddha's pure holy body, holy speech, and holy mind.

We can then become a perfect guide for living beings. With our omniscient mind, we are able to effortlessly, directly, and unmistakably see the level of mind of every living being and all the methods that fit them, in order to lead them to the peerless happiness of full enlightenment. We also have the perfect power to manifest in various forms to suit every living being and reveal the necessary methods to guide them, whether giving material help, secular education, or Dharma teachings. Whenever an imprint left by a sentient being's past positive actions ripens, without the delay of even a second, we can reveal the various means to guide them to enlightenment.

### *The Power of the Mantra in These Degenerate Times*

It is explained in the sutras that reciting the Medicine Buddha mantra, doing his practice, or making offerings to him are extremely effective ways to bring peace and success to a whole country, especially in these degenerate times. In a country where there is untimely rain, hailstorms destroying the crops, earthquakes, and various contagious diseases, the Medicine Buddha helps. Also, wherever there are wars, famines, and natural disasters, the texts say that if the king of the country, with a mind of loving-kindness, makes offerings to the Medicine Buddha, the crops will grow well, wars will cease, and the

sentient beings of that country will be happy and healthy, enjoying greater wealth, long life, and power.

When Manjushri, in the presence of all seven Medicine Buddhas and Shakyamuni Buddha, requested the Medicine Buddha to grant his mantra, they all in one voice granted it and explained its benefits. Because of that, when we recite this mantra, all the buddhas and bodhisattvas will pay attention to us and protect us.

The text called *Mengyu Rinchen Bumpa* says,

Reciting Medicine Buddha's name and mantra once equals having recited the names and mantras of all the tathagatas of the past, present, and future.

It also says,

Remembering, seeing, hearing, touching, or meditating on Medicine Buddha includes remembering, seeing, hearing, touching, or meditating on all the buddhas and bodhisattvas, all the Triple Gem. Therefore, Medicine Buddha's holy name is "All-Encompassing of Those Gone to Bliss."<sup>91</sup>

Reciting this mantra as a daily practice purifies all our negative karmas and quickly pacifies diseases and harm from spirits. Furthermore, just as a mother pays attention to her beloved child, all the buddhas and bodhisattvas always pay attention to us, guide us, and protect us. Because of that, the mantra has the power to immediately pacify all our inner sicknesses and harm from spirits. We will no longer be controlled by others, and all the harms and quarrels caused by our enemies will be pacified.

Because of the extensive prayers the seven Medicine Buddhas made when they were still bodhisattvas to actualize all the wishes of living beings when the teachings of Shakyamuni Buddha were in decline, whatever we wish for will happen when we rely on them. Therefore, of all the many different deities that can be practiced, to really progress quickly in the Dharma in these degenerate times, my suggestion is that everybody should practice the Medicine Buddha.

We are living in a time when the five degenerations are flourishing: the degenerations of mind, lifespan, sentient beings, time, and view. All the other

degenerations basically come from the first, the *degeneration of mind*. Because we sentient beings have not developed our minds in spiritual paths, ignorance, anger, desire, and other delusions have increased and become very gross. This has resulted in the *degeneration of lifespan*, with the average life expectancy becoming progressively shorter than when human beings first appeared in this world system.<sup>92</sup> It has also led to the *degeneration of sentient beings*, whose minds have become very stubborn and difficult to subdue. It is increasingly difficult for us to practice patience, loving-kindness, compassion, and so forth. The *degeneration of time* is shown by the escalation of wars and natural disasters such as earthquakes, droughts, famines, and epidemics. Finally, there is the *degeneration of view*, with fewer people believing the truth and more people believing lies and wrong explanations, such as believing that virtue is not the cause of happiness and nonvirtue is not the cause of suffering.

Just as Guru Padmasambhava predicted more than a thousand years ago, because of the flourishing of the five degenerations, new diseases are emerging all the time, doctors are becoming less able to recognize and treat them, and the power of medicine to cure them is decreasing. Food is becoming less nutritional and air and water pollution are causing more and more illnesses. Everything is degenerating, including success in both worldly concerns and the Dharma.

Because our minds are degenerating, practicing the Dharma is becoming harder and whatever practice we do seems to have less effect. Even our ability to connect to the power of most mantras has degenerated, which is why when we do a deity practice now, we generally have to recite many more mantras than in previous times.

On the other hand, because of the power of the promises made in the past by the Medicine Buddhas, the Medicine Buddha mantra actually becomes *more* powerful as times degenerate. So, you can see why it is important to recite the Medicine Buddha's mantra. By doing so, the wishes we have for our Dharma practice are quickly achieved, as well as, along the way, worldly matters such as success, health, and long life. The main success we should aim for, of course, is success on the path to enlightenment, to liberate ourselves from the oceans of samsaric suffering forever and achieve enlightenment so we can enlighten all sentient beings.

I often recommend that for anybody interested in Buddhist practice—in fact for anybody who wants happiness—the fundamental practice should not only be to recite OM MANI PADME HUM but also the mantra of the Medicine Buddha. I also recommend that centers do Medicine Buddha pujas in addition to their regular Tara pujas. If you normally do a Tara puja in the evening of the Tibetan eighth<sup>93</sup> as part of your center's activities, it is very good to do a Medicine Buddha puja in the morning before breakfast.

### *The Mantra That Saves from the Lower Realms*

When we recite the Medicine Buddha mantra, any being who hears us—not just humans but also animals, birds, and insects—will never be born in the lower realms again. In that way, not only do we take care of ourselves each day by reciting the Medicine Buddha mantra and doing the practice, we are also able to take care of others.

When the texts talk about the benefits of reciting the Medicine Buddha mantra and the names of the Medicine Buddhas, we can take these as definitive teachings, not interpretive. It's not that they say such-and-such, but we must try to understand that there is another meaning there. When the texts tell us that chanting the mantra saves from the lower realms, they mean exactly that. Therefore when I recite mantras for animals or human beings, one of the mantras I always recite is the Medicine Buddha mantra, to prevent them from ever being reborn in the lower realms. Whenever we meet somebody, we should do this.

If you have your own pets, you should recite the Medicine Buddha mantra to them every day. Really, the mantra is so short it takes almost no time to recite, so it would be a great loss if you didn't recite it. Of course, there are many benefits to reciting it silently with the intention of benefiting that person or that animal, but here I'm talking about reciting it out loud in the ear of the being, not just quietly mumbling it.

Just providing your pets with food and comfort is not enough. This is not their only life, so it is essential that you help them attain a better rebirth, one where they will have less suffering and more happiness. When you recite the mantra to them, you leave a positive imprint on their mindstream, meaning they will be able to meet the Dharma in all future lifetimes, to be quickly

liberated from the oceans of samsaric suffering, and to achieve enlightenment. That is the most important aim. To do anything less is kind of sad. Having a pet becomes more for your own selfish happiness.

Hearing or remembering the Medicine Buddha's mantra even purifies the five immediate negativities, karmas so heavy they cause one to immediately be born in the hell realm after death. It also says that even seeing, touching, or remembering the holy body of a statue of the Medicine Buddha completely purifies the pollution that comes from taking food and other things that people have offered with devotion to the sangha community. Here *pollution* does not refer to external pollution, as in the Western sense; this is mental pollution.

In *Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand*, when Pabongka Dechen Nyingpo talks about the refuge practice, he mentions various negative karmas collected in relation to the sangha that have to be purified, including stopping somebody from making offerings to the sangha, criticizing the sangha, and causing disunity among the sangha. These are all very heavy negative actions, but they can all be purified by reciting the Medicine Buddha mantra, as can all the negative karmas collected in relation to the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha.

### *The Mantra That Heals*

The Medicine Buddha mantra is extremely effective at healing, whether we recite it for our own benefit or somebody else's. When we recite it 108 times and blow over the food, drink, or the medicine we are taking, the sickness will be pacified, we will have long and healthy life, and all our wishes will be fulfilled. By reciting the Medicine Buddha mantra, we can also increase the power of the medicine we are taking or giving to others.

Place the medicine in a bowl in front of you and visualize a moon disk above it. Standing on the moon disk is a blue OM surrounded by the syllables of the Medicine Buddha mantra, TADYATHA OM BHAISHAJYE BHAISHAJYE MAHA BHAISHAJYE BHAISHAJYE RAJA SAMUDGATE SVAHA, in a clockwise direction. As you recite the mantra, visualize that nectar flows down from all the syllables of the mantra and absorbs into the medicine. The syllables and the moon then dissolve into the medicine, which becomes very powerful and able to cure all



diseases and harm from spirits, as well as their causes: negative karma and delusions.

After Tibetan doctors have made medicine, they use Medicine Buddha meditation and mantras to bless it. The medicine is then more effective because, besides the power of all the medicinal plants and other substances it contains, it has additional power from their practice that can help bring purification of the mind and a quick recovery.

It is good for somebody who is a healer to do a Medicine Buddha retreat for one or two months, where the mantra and the Medicine Buddhas' names are recited every day. It is mentioned that if we do this, the medicinal goddesses and protectors will help us make correct diagnoses of our patients' illnesses and to prescribe the right treatments.

My relative Pemba is codirector of Chamtse Ling, the FPMT center in Hong Kong, with Esther Ngai, who helped to buy the place. Esther sometimes had unimaginable headaches and had to have major brain surgery. She usually recited one mala of Medicine Buddha mantras a day, and during the operation she was able to see the Medicine Buddha the whole time. That means the Medicine Buddha was guiding her, appearing to her during the operation when she needed help. There are so many stories I could mention about the healing abilities of reciting the Medicine Buddha mantra.

### *The Mantra That Benefits the Dying and Dead*

When somebody such as a family member is dying, we must remember to recite the Medicine Buddha mantra with a bodhichitta motivation, not quietly to ourselves, but loudly in the person's ear. Then, even if they are unconscious, because they will still absorb the sound of the mantra, they will be saved from rebirth in the lower realms and get a higher rebirth.

The Medicine Buddha practice can even purify those who have already died and liberate them from suffering, and that includes animals. Anybody who eats meat should make it beneficial for the animal that has been killed by reciting a purifying mantra before eating. Reciting one (or all) of the mantras of Medicine Buddha, Mitrukpa, or Milarepa,<sup>94</sup> as well as the special mantra to bless the meat, OM AH BIRA KHE CHARA HUM, and blowing upon the meat about



to be eaten purifies the being's karmic obscurations and allows it to be reborn in a pure land or in one of the upper realms, as a human or god.

This is even true of blowing on a dead body or old bones we find on the road. Even if the animal or human being died hundreds or even thousands of years ago and their consciousness is in the lower realms, reciting the Medicine Buddha mantra and blowing on their bones can transfer the consciousness to a pure land or an upper realm. At the very least, it will shorten the duration of their suffering in the lower realms.

By reciting the Medicine Buddha mantra, blowing over substances such as powder or sand grains, and then sprinkling that substance on the body of somebody who is dying or dead, we can benefit them. Although the texts specify sand grains, I usually mention powder or sesame seeds because people might find the thought of sprinkling sand over the head uncomfortable. If it is difficult to go to where the person is, the blessed substance can be sent there and somebody else can sprinkle the body for purification. I keep some black sesame seeds and some white powder for this purpose, and if there is somebody dying or dead, I do various mantras for them, including Medicine Buddha and Namgyalma, and then blow over these substances and sprinkle them on the body.

It is also very beneficial to do an elaborate Medicine Buddha puja, such as the *Wish-Fulfilling Jewel*, for those who are dying or have already died. The Medicine Buddha puja contains the dedicated purposes of each of the Medicine Buddhas and is often done for someone who is seriously ill.

There are many ways you can help somebody who is about to die.<sup>95</sup> One thing I would like to emphasize is that when you visit a dying person, the first thing you should do is recite the name of the Buddha Having a Jewel Ushnisha: Rinchen Tsugtor Chänla.<sup>96</sup> Because he is similar to the Medicine Buddha and Maitreya Buddha in that through the prayers he made, anybody who even hears his name will not be reborn in the lower realms, I would strongly recommend you recite the his name along with the mantras of the Medicine Buddha and Maitreya.

HOW TO PRACTICE WITH MEDICINE BUDDHA'S MANTRA<sup>97</sup>

When you do a practice for a sick or dying person or animal with all the seven Medicine Buddhas, you visualize them all piled up, one above the other, above the head of the being you are practicing for. Alternatively, for yourself or on behalf of the other being, you visualize them above your own head, as described here.

About four inches above the crown of your head is a lotus flower. In the center is a white moon disk, upon which is seated your root guru—the dharmakaya essence of all buddhas—in the form of the main Medicine Buddha.

Do some preliminary practices, such as saying the refuge prayer three times, the four immeasurable thoughts, and the seven-limb prayer.<sup>98</sup>

### *Request*

Then, make this request:

I beseech you, Bhagavan Medicine Guru, whose holy body signifies omniscient wisdom and compassion as vast as limitless space, please grant me your blessings.

I beseech you, compassionate Medicine Guru, holding in your right hand the king of medicines symbolizing your vow to help all pitiful sentient beings plagued by the 424 diseases, please grant me your blessings.

I beseech you, compassionate Medicine Guru, holding in your left hand a bowl of nectar symbolizing your vow to give the glorious undying nectar of the Dharma, which eliminates the degenerations of sickness, old age, and death, please grant me your blessings.

### *Visualization*

Above the crown of Guru Medicine Buddha is a wish-granting jewel, the essence of which is the Guru.

Above that is Buddha Delightful King of Clear Knowing, Supreme Wisdom of an Ocean of Dharma, whose body is coral-colored. His right hand is in the mudra of bestowing sublime realizations and his left hand is in the mudra of granting the supreme.

Above him is Buddha Melodious Ocean of Proclaimed Dharma, with a pink-colored body and hands in the mudra of teaching the Dharma.

Above him is Buddha Supreme Glory Free from Sorrow, light red in color, with both hands in the mudra of meditative equipoise.

Above him is Buddha Stainless Excellent Gold, Great Jewel Who Accomplishes All Vows, golden in color, with his right hand in the mudra of expounding the Dharma.

Above him is Buddha King of Melodious Sound, Brilliant Radiance of Skill, Adorned with Jewels, Moon, and Lotus, yellow in color, with his right hand in the mudra of bestowing sublime realizations and his left hand in the mudra of concentration.

Above him is Buddha Renowned Glorious King of Excellent Signs, golden in color, with his right hand in the mudra of granting refuge and his left hand in the mudra of concentration.

### *Request*

Repeat each verse seven times. After the seventh recitation, as you repeat “May your vow . . .,” the Medicine Buddha of that request absorbs into the one below.

To the bhagavan, tathagata, arhat, fully enlightened Buddha Renowned Glorious King of Excellent Signs I prostrate, offer, and go for refuge.

May your vow to benefit all sentient beings now ripen for myself and others.

To the bhagavan, tathagata, arhat, fully enlightened Buddha King of Melodious Sound, Brilliant Radiance of Skill, Adorned with Jewels, Moon, and Lotus I prostrate, offer, and go for refuge.

May your vow to benefit all sentient beings now ripen for myself and others.

To the bhagavan, tathagata, arhat, fully enlightened Buddha Stainless Excellent Gold, Great Jewel Who Accomplishes All Vows I prostrate, offer, and go for refuge.

May your vow to benefit all sentient beings now ripen for myself and others.

To the bhagavan, tathagata, arhat, fully enlightened Buddha Supreme Glory Free from Sorrow I prostrate, offer, and go for refuge.

May your vow to benefit all sentient beings now ripen for myself and others.

To the bhagavan, tathagata, arhat, fully enlightened Buddha Melodious Ocean of Proclaimed Dharma I prostrate, offer, and go for refuge.

May your vow to benefit all sentient beings now ripen for myself and others.

To the bhagavan, tathagata, arhat, fully enlightened Buddha Delightful King of Clear Knowing, Supreme Wisdom of an Ocean of Dharma I prostrate, offer, and go for refuge.

May your vow to benefit all sentient beings now ripen for myself and others.

To the bhagavan, tathagata, arhat, fully enlightened Buddha Medicine Guru King of Lapis Light I prostrate, offer, and go for

refuge.

May your vow to benefit all sentient beings now ripen for myself and others.

### *Visualization*

Granting your request, from the heart and holy body of Medicine Guru, infinite rays of white light pour down, completely filling your body from head to toe. They purify all your diseases and afflictions due to spirits and their causes, all your negative karma and mental obscurations. Your body becomes clean and clear as crystal.

The light rays pour down twice more, each time filling your body with blissful clean-clear light which you absorb. You become the essence of the Medicine Buddha's blissful and omniscient mind of wisdom and compassion.

At your heart appears a lotus and moon disk. Standing at the center of the moon disk is the blue seed syllable OM surrounded by the syllables of the mantra. As you recite the mantra, visualize rays of light radiating out in all directions from the syllable at your heart. The light rays pervade the sentient beings of the six realms, especially the being you are doing the practice for. Through your great love wishing them to have happiness, and through your great compassion wishing them to be free from suffering, they are purified of all diseases and afflictions due to spirits and their causes, all their negative karma and mental obscurations.

### *The Recitation of the Mantra*

The long mantra, as commonly pronounced:

*Om namo bagawatay bekanzay guru baidurya / praba radza ya /  
tatagataya / arhatay samyaksam buddhaya / ta ya ta / om bekanzay  
bekanzay maha bekanzay [bekanzay] / radza samudgatay soha*

The short mantra, as commonly pronounced:

*Ta ya ta / om bekanzay bekanzay maha bekanzay [bekanzay] / radza  
samudgatay soha*

Feel great joy and think: All sentient beings are transformed into the aspect of the Guru Medicine Buddha. How wonderful that I am now able to lead all sentient beings into the Medicine Buddha's enlightenment.

The Guru Medicine Buddha melts into light and absorbs into your heart. Your mind becomes completely one with the dharmakaya, the essence of all the buddhas.

Finish with dedications prayers.

When you have finished, imagine that there is not even an atom of negative karma left in your mental continuum. If you have done this practice for somebody and have been imagining the Medicine Buddhas absorbing into that being, imagine the same for them. As the last Medicine Buddha, King of Lapis Light, absorbs into that being, their body becomes calm and clear, like crystal, and their body, speech, and mind become one with the Medicine Buddha's holy body, speech, and mind.

When this practice is done with stable concentration and strong compassion, you can definitely help that being to avoid birth in the lower realms. You don't have to be physically in the presence of that person or animal. You can be home while they are in the hospital, for instance; it is still as effective.

## 6. VAJRASATTVA

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**M**ANJUSHRI ADVISED LAMA TSONGKHAPA that meditation alone is not enough to quickly generate the realizations of the path. Just as a crop cannot grow in a rocky and barren field—the ground must be cleared and well watered before the seeds can grow into strong plants—so too the mind cannot develop on the path while it is clouded with negative thoughts and emotions. We must eliminate our negativities and actualize our positive potential to the fullest by not creating any more negative karma, accumulating positive karma, and purifying the negative karma we have in our mindstream. These three things are vital if we are to gain any realizations.

The sublime method to accumulate merit is the guru yoga practice within the Vajrayana, where we see our guru as inseparable from the deity we are practicing. The sublime method to purify the negative karma and obscurations that cloud our mind is the Vajrasattva practice. If we do a daily tantric practice, at the beginning of a higher tantric sadhana there are invariably the twin preliminaries of a guru yoga practice and a Vajrasattva meditation in order to create the cause for success in the main part of the practice.

At present, we have mental blocks that hinder our Dharma practice, obstacles that obstruct us and prevent us from generating realizations on the path. Unless we can remove those blocks, we will be unable to develop the mind. Our mind—our sleeping, ignorant mind—won't awaken. The practice of purification is therefore vital because it creates the space that allows the mind to have realizations. I would say that purification practice is *the* essential practice we can do.

There are many means of purifying the mind, many purification practices, but the Vajrasattva practice is one of the most powerful; it is the one that has the power to purify even the heaviest negative karma. It is common to all schools of Tibetan Buddhism and is a crucial element of any *ngöndro*, the series

of preliminary practices that are undertaken before beginning a long tantric retreat.



You might have seen that there are two main forms of Vajrasattva. One form is simpler and is just Vajrasattva on his own, whereas in another he is sitting in union with the wisdom mother. This form is often referred to as “with consort” or *yab-yum* or “father and mother.”<sup>99</sup> This representation of a deity in union with the wisdom mother is common in highest yoga tantra and it is symbolic.



In reality it is one being, but its manifestation as father and mother signifies the unification of method and wisdom—the dharmakaya.

Vajrasattva without a wisdom mother is white, with one face and two hands; he is in the aspect of a youth of sixteen. Half of his black hair is gathered on top of his head, the rest curls down his back. He is seated on a moon disk on a white lotus, his legs crossed in the vajra position. In his right hand he holds a gold vajra (*dorjé*) to his heart, symbolizing bliss, and in his left, at his hip, he holds an upturned bell, symbolizing emptiness.<sup>100</sup> He is dressed in lavish garments and adorned with gold and jewels, ornaments, earrings, bracelets, and so forth. His face is gentle and loving.

When we visualize Vajrasattva with the wisdom mother, both their bodies are white; each has one face and two arms. He holds a vajra and bell at his heart, she a curved knife and skull cup.<sup>101</sup> They are embracing each other. The father is adorned with six mudras, the mother with five.<sup>102</sup> He sits in the vajra posture, she in the lotus posture.<sup>103</sup>

The Vajrasattva mantra is effective no matter who does it, but it will be even more effective if we have taken a Vajrasattva initiation, either a great initiation in the lower kriya tantra<sup>104</sup> or a highest yoga tantra initiation. With the highest yoga tantra, we are empowered to do all the meditations, visualizing ourselves alone or with consort.

However, it is not that we can only visualize Vajrasattva with the wisdom mother after we have taken a highest yoga tantra initiation. As long as we have faith and we feel the need to purify, we can do the meditation, even visualizing the highest yoga tantra aspect.



There is nothing that cannot be purified with the Vajrasattva practice. Because Vajrasattva without the wisdom mother is a kriya tantra deity, reciting the mantra while visualizing him purifies broken *pratimoksha*, or individual liberation, vows, and bodhisattva vows. When we do the practice as a highest yoga tantra, with the aspect of Vajrasattva with wisdom mother, that purifies everything, including the heaviest karma of breaking the root tantric vows.

## THE MANTRA

The long, hundred-syllable mantra is this:

OM VAJRASATTVA SAMAYA MANUPALAYA / VAJRASATTVA  
TVENOPATISHTHA / DRIDHO ME BHAVA / SUTOSHYO ME BHAVA /  
SUPOSHYO ME BHAVA / ANURAKTO ME BHAVA / SARVA SIDDHIM ME  
PRAYACCHA / SARVA KARMA SU CHAME / CHITTAM SHRIYAM KURU  
HUM / HA HA HA HA HO / BHAGAVAN SARVA TATHAGATA / VAJRA MAME  
MUNCHA / VAJRA BHAVA MAHA SAMAYA SATTVA AH HUM PHAT

ཨོཾ་བཛྲ་སདྲ་ས་མ་ཡ་མ་རུ་སྤྲ་ལ་ཡ། བཛྲ་སདྲ་དུ་འོ་པ་ཏིལ། འི་རྩོ་མེ་རྩ་  
མ། སུ་ཏི་ཕུ་མེ་རྩ་མ། སུ་པོ་ཕུ་མེ་རྩ་མ། ཨ་རུ་རྩོ་མེ་རྩ་མ། སམ་སིལྱི་ལྱི་  
སྤྲ་ཡ་རྩ། སམ་ཀམ་སུ་ཅ་མེ། ཅིའི་སྤྱི་ཡི་ཀྱ་ཏ་འི། ཏ་ཏ་ཏ་ཏ་ཏོ་རྩ་ག་ལྷན་  
སམ་ཏ་སྤྲ་ག་ཏ། བཛྲ་སྤྲ་མེ་རུལྱ། བཛྲི་རྩ་མ་སྤྲ་ས་མ་ཡ་སདྲ་ཨུའི་པའ།

The short mantra is this:

OM VAJRASATTVA HUM

ཨོཾ་བཛྲ་སདྲ་ཧུཾ།

There is also a short mantra that goes OM VAJRASATTVA HA but when I wrote to my root guru, His Holiness Trijang Rinpoche,<sup>105</sup> and asked about both versions, he replied that it was better to recite OM VAJRASATTVA HUM.

It is recommended in many texts and by many great masters such as His Holiness Trijang Rinpoche that each day we recite either the long mantra twenty-one times or the short one twenty-eight times in order to stop the increase of any negative karma we have accumulated during that day, as well as purifying the negative karma accumulated during this life and from beginningless previous lives. The root tantra called *Adorned with the Vajra Essence (Dorjé Nyungpo Genki Gyü)* explains,

According to the method of the hundred syllables, each recitation of the mantra twenty-one times stops you receiving the downfalls and increasing any negative karma. This is explained by the highly

attained ones. You should also enjoy reciting it in the interval times.

Here, “downfalls” refers to the root vows we have broken. “Interval times” means in the breaks between meditation sessions.

Of course, reciting a full mala of the long mantra is more powerful than just twenty-one recitations, but even if we cannot do that before going to bed each day, a shorter recitation, with prostrations if possible, will still purify our negative karma.

### *The Meaning of the Mantra*

The meaning of the short Vajrasattva mantra, OM VAJRASATTVA HUM, is this:

Bhagavan, the Destroyer, the Qualified One Gone-Beyond, you who have the nature of possessing the vajra of all the tathagatas, great hero with your holy mind, in accordance with your samaya, please don't give up on me.

The Sanskrit *bhagavan* is *chom den dä* in Tibetan—*chom* “destroyer,” *den* “having all the qualifications,” and *dä* “having transcended the world”—meaning Vajrasattva has completely destroyed, or purified, the two obscurations and obtained all the qualities of a buddha, having gone beyond even the peace of lower liberation and attained highest enlightenment.

The “vajra of all the tathagatas” refers to the dharmakaya, the transcendental wisdom of nondual bliss and emptiness, the absolute guru. When we visualize Vajrasattva with the wisdom mother, the male deity represents bliss—the method side of the practice—the female deity represents the realization of emptiness, and being in union means that in tantra these two aspects of the path are combined. This is the definitive meaning of “vajra.” It is the real meaning of the guru—the absolute guru, the dharmakaya. We should remember this whenever we see, hear, or remember the guru.

Vajrasattva, Dorjé Sempa in Tibetan, consists of vajra (*dorjé*) and sattva (*sempa*), which means “hero,” so here we are asking—actually, demanding!—that Vajrasattva, this great hero, never forsakes us, in accordance with his samaya, referring to the pledge or commitment Vajrasattva made in the past.

The meaning of the long mantra is this:

Vajrasattva, you who have pledged (SAMAYA) to lead me on the path to enlightenment (MANUPALAYA), bring me to your vajra holy mind (VAJRASATTVA TVENOPATISHTHA), and grant me the firm and stable realization of the ultimate nature (DRIDHO ME BHAVA). Grant me the blessings of being extremely pleased with me (SUTOSHYO ME BHAVA) and bless me with the nature of great bliss (SUPOSHYO ME BHAVA).

Bless me with the love that leads to your state (ANURAKTO ME BHAVA), grant all powerful attainments (SARVA SIDDHIM ME PRAYACCHA), grant all virtuous actions (SARVA KARMA SU CHAME), and grant all your victorious qualities (CHITTAM SHRITAM KURU), the vajra mind (HUM), and the five transcendental wisdoms (HA HA HA HA HO).

You who have destroyed every obscuration, attained all realizations, and passed beyond suffering (BHAGAVAN), you who have realized emptiness and know all things just as they are, inseparably (SARVA TATHAGATA VAJRA), do not abandon me (MAME MUNCHA), you who are in nature indestructible inseparability (VAJRA BHAVA), the great pledge being, the vajra holy mind (MAHA SAMAYA SATTVA), the vajra holy speech (AH), the transcendental wisdom of great bliss (HUM), clarifying the transcendental wisdom of inseparable bliss and emptiness and destroying the dualistic mind that obstructs it (PHAT).

### *The Power of the Mantra*

Reciting the Vajrasattva mantra daily or in a long retreat—usually three months with one hundred thousand mantras—is considered the supreme method of purification. Through the practice we are able to not only purify our general nonvirtues but even the very heavy negativities, such as breaking the bodhisattva or tantric vows.

If negative karma is not purified with a practice such as Vajrasattva it continuously increases day by day, month by month, year by year. Even though

we might not have killed any human beings or performed any other heavy negative actions, small negative actions become like huge mountains.

Therefore in order to stop that terrifying growth, everybody needs a powerful daily purification practice such as the Thirty-Five Buddhas or Vajrasattva.

It is said in the teachings,

To the wise man, even a great negativity becomes small;  
to the fool, even a small negativity becomes huge.<sup>106</sup>

The wise are wise in the profound methods of purification and renunciation, wise in practicing bodhichitta, wise in meditating on emptiness. For such a person, even if they have created much heavy negative karma, it becomes weak because they have the means to purify it.

For example, in his early life, Milarepa used black magic to destroy the house where some enemies of his mother were enjoying a wedding feast, killing the many guests who were upstairs and the horses who were tied up downstairs. Afterward, repenting his act, he asked the lama who taught him the black magic what to do. The lama advised him to go to the great lama Marpa, who put him through a series of great hardships—such as building a nine-story house with his own hands, not once but three times—in order to overcome his negativities. Each time he had finished, Marpa had him tear it down and start again. Marpa scolded him and beat him many times, refusing to give him the teachings he wanted.

All these things became his preliminary practices, like doing many hundreds of thousands of Vajrasattva mantras and prostrations. Through this, Milarepa purified unimaginable obscurations and created unbelievable merit. By correctly following his guru Marpa's advice, he achieved the complete path to enlightenment in one lifetime.

On the other hand, even though the foolish person might not create many very negative actions, because they have no idea about purification, their karmic results become bigger and bigger. It is like a small amount of poison that has gone inside the stomach, spreading throughout the system, or like a small candle flame that can destroy a forest, a mountainside, or a whole city. Even though the negative karma is tiny, the harm is great.



If we examine the negative karmas we create in one day, even one hundred thousand rebirths in the animal, hungry ghost, and hell realms would not exhaust the suffering results of that one day's accumulation. The negative karmas that throw us into the lower realms don't need to be heavy ones. The Kadampa geshe<sup>107</sup> say, "While laughing and playing, just by moving our lips, we sink into the lower realms." This means that whatever we do thoughtlessly, frivolously, meaninglessly, even if it is just fooling around, becomes the cause to be reborn in the lower realms. Knowing this, when we have such a profound method of purification like Vajrasattva, how can we not think of using it?

We should all do the Vajrasattva practice every day, even if our Dharma understanding is limited or we are unable to do many retreats. In this way, we pacify the inner cause of our problems and experience more happiness and peace. If we live our life like this, when the day of our death comes, our negative karma will have become much weaker, causing much less distraction, and allowing us more chance of dying with a virtuous, happy mind, one that is free of worry and fear. Then we will more easily find a better body in our future life and be able to train our mind in the path.

To be able to do a three-month Vajrasattva retreat where we recite the mantra one hundred thousand times is truly incredible. It is stated that the Vajrasattva mantra is so powerful that reciting it that many times purifies any infraction of the root tantric vows, and even the five immediate and the five near-immediate negativities are purified. As we have seen, any of the five immediate negativities—killing your mother or father, killing an arhat, drawing blood from a buddha, and causing disunity in the sangha—causes us to be reborn in the lowest hell immediately after this life. The five near-immediate negatives are similar in having that result. They are killing a bodhisattva, killing an arya not yet an arhat, defiling our mother or a female arhat through sexual misconduct, stealing property from the sangha, and destroying a stupa. Vajrasattva purifies all negativities relating to the sangha, such as making a living through selling holy objects, as well as negativities relating to the Dharma. It purifies all the degenerated vows, such as criticizing the guru. To be able to purify whatever karma we have on our mindstream that brings such a result—can there be anything more worthwhile in life to do than this?

Purification does not depend solely on the number of mantras recited. As Pabongka Dechen Nyungpo explained, the effectiveness of the purification comes from both strong regret and strong determination not to commit the negative action again. These two factors make the purification extremely powerful. And, as I have said many times, a pure motivation is crucial and the best motivation is bodhichitta.

The most important reason for doing the practice of purification is to be able to generate the realizations of the path to enlightenment so we can do perfect work to bring all sentient beings to enlightenment. That's the main aim. Even if our life is so busy that there is not much time to do sitting practice, if we can live our life with the thought of benefiting all sentient beings, when we recite even one Vajrasattva mantra with bodhichitta, we receive the same benefit as having recited one hundred thousand Vajrasattva mantras.

But doing a Vajrasattva purification practice every day takes care of everything else by the way. It takes care of health, it ensures a long life, it overcomes obstacles to being successful, but most importantly, it overcomes obstacles to practicing the Dharma.

### *Vajrasattva Purifies Broken Vows*

A lamrim text explains four ways to make our life most meaningful.

- The best way to live is to always live in the vows.
- The best way to act is to always act with a positive motivation.
- The best way to offer is to see all holy objects as embodiments of the guru.
- The best way to give is to give the Dharma.

The first way to make our life meaningful is to live in the vows. There are various levels of vows we can take to protect our karma, from the pratimoksha vows, such as the five lay vows and the vows of ordained sangha, up to the tantric vows,<sup>108</sup> and these vows are the tools we can use to most quickly accumulate merit. Unless we take and then keep our vows purely, enlightenment is impossible.



As Lama Tsongkhapa said in the *Foundation of All Good Qualities*,

Even if I develop only bodhichitta, without practicing the three  
types of morality  
I will not achieve enlightenment.  
With my clear recognition of this,  
please bless me to practice the bodhisattva vows with great energy.<sup>109</sup>

If our morality degenerates, we become like a pot with no bottom—no matter how much delicious food we put in it, it runs straight through. We have no base for realizations. Although Lama Tsongkhapa mentions the bodhisattva vows here, this is true of all levels of vows. Without the morality of the pratimoksha vows, there can be no realizations. The more purely we keep the pratimoksha vows, the more quickly we are able to achieve the realizations of the lamrim topics, the three principal aspects of the path, and the two stages of highest yoga tantra: the generation stage and the completion stage.

Whether we are living in one, five, or a thousand vows, we accumulate an inconceivable amount of merit every second. On the other hand, when we break one of the vows we have pledged to keep in front of our guru, we create oceans of negative karma and have downfalls pour down on us like a tropical rain shower. The higher the vow we have taken, the heavier the karma we create by breaking it. The consequences of breaking a secondary bodhisattva vow are one hundred thousand times heavier than of breaking a pratimoksha root vow. And the consequences of breaking a secondary tantric vow are one hundred thousand times greater than of breaking a bodhisattva root vow.

Reciting the Vajrasattva mantra every day is vital if we have taken any level of vows, especially if we have taken a tantric initiation and have been given the bodhisattva and tantric vows. Because of their great subtlety, tantric vows can be very easily degenerated, and so we need to constantly purify whatever vows we have broken.

We might be quite daunted if we consider just this point, and the question might arise, “Since I seem to be incapable of keeping these vows purely, meaning negativities pour down on me like rainfall, how is it possible for me to achieve enlightenment?” Lama Atisha answered this question by explaining that the Vajrasattva practice is like throwing one stone to chase away a hundred

birds. This means that doing the one practice of Vajrasattva can purify everything.

If we are put off taking initiations because we are scared of the vows, we will never get to plant the seed of the quick path to enlightenment. In one way it is difficult, because we do not have the very basic realizations, so our mind is very uncontrolled and we constantly break vows and receive downfalls. But on the other hand, we have the skillful means to purify all these negative karmas and infractions, especially with the highest yoga tantra aspect of Vajrasattva with the wisdom mother. Even the heaviest karmas can be purified with this aspect. Therefore, whoever has taken a highest yoga tantra initiation should visualize Vajrasattva with the wisdom mother in order to purify any tantric vows that have been broken.

## HOW TO PRACTICE WITH VAJRASATTVA'S MANTRA

### *The Four Opponent Powers*

If you recite the Vajrasattva mantra or do prostrations to the Thirty-Five Buddhas, in order to make the purification most effective, it is extremely important to incorporate it with the four opponent powers:

1. the power of dependence
2. the power of regret
3. the power of remedy
4. the power of the restraint

The first of the four powers is the power of dependence. This can also be called the “power of reliance on the holy object” or the “power of faculty of the holy object.” It refers to taking refuge in the Three Rare Sublime Ones and generating bodhichitta. By taking refuge you save yourself from harm, and by generating bodhichitta you save others from harm.

The second power is the power of regret. Seeing you have created one specific negative action, or negative actions in general, you recognize that you have unwittingly created the cause for suffering. Understanding this, you naturally regret it. Thinking in this way takes very little time and it is easy and

very effective for the mind. The more you understand the shortcomings of negative karma and the more you can regret having committed negative acts, the more powerful your purification will be.

Regret is not guilt; it is not living your life weighed down by guilt. Regret is the wisdom to see you have harmed yourself and others by doing that action. When you see that, the resolve not to repeat the action comes naturally. With regret comes the power to change the situation.

The third power is the power of the remedy. The texts often cite six ways of practicing the power of the remedy: reciting the names of the buddhas, reciting purifying mantras, making holy objects, reciting emptiness texts, meditating on emptiness or bodhichitta, and making offerings to the Three Rare Sublime Ones. Of these, the Vajrasattva practice is the perfect remedy.

Even when you purify very strongly, you can still suffer. People who do retreats such as Vajrasattva often have illnesses, pain, and even mental problems. That does not mean the purification is ineffectual or you are creating more negative karma. Far from it. Like a burst boil oozes pus, you are seeing the effects of purifying. Rather than experiencing eons in the lowest hells, you suffer a few days of stomach pains. Therefore that pain is a good sign that you are purifying, and that the practice is benefiting you.

The final power is the power of restraint, resolving not to do the action again. Pabongka Dechen Nyingpo said that this power means that you think, “From now on, even if it costs me my life, I won’t commit this negative karma again.” If you can do this strongly enough, you can completely destroy the negative karmic imprint of the action. Purifying less strongly will not completely destroy it but will lessen its effect. I often advise that if it is unrealistic to think you will never do that action again, then choose a feasible length of time you can restrain from doing it, such as a day, an hour, or even a minute, and then resolve to restrain from doing it for that period.

### *Ways to Visualize the Purification*

Whether you do a formal Vajrasattva meditation or simply recite some mantras as you are walking along the road, as you recite you should visualize Vajrasattva (either with or without the wisdom mother) above your head and nectar

flowing from his heart into you. I will describe various ways of doing this, but you can modify it to suit your circumstances.

Visualize Vajrasattva at whatever size suits you—small, the size of a person, or the size of Mount Everest. If Vajrasattva, the moon disk at his heart, and the mantra around the moon disk were all the same bright white color, your visualization might not be clear because you might be unable to differentiate the features. You can therefore visualize Vajrasattva's holy body as crystal, the moon disk at his heart as the color of a conch shell, and the mantras as silver. Although they are all white, making them slightly different shades aids clear visualization. The lotus is also white, as is the moon disk. Everything is white. The function of Vajrasattva is to pacify negative karmas, obscurations, disease, and harm from spirits, and the color white signifies the action of pacifying.

As you recite the mantra, there are three ways to visualize the nectar that flows from the heart of Vajrasattva (or the hearts of the deity father and mother) into your body.

The first way is called “chasing from above,” which means purifying downward. It is like washing a bottle that is black with dirt under a tap, so that all the dirt flushes away and the bottle becomes sparkling clean and clear. Visualize nectar in the form of a white beam of light coming from Vajrasattva's heart and the heart of the wisdom mother, joining at the place of union and flowing in through the top of your head. It fills your body from above, causing all your negative karmas and obscurations to come out of the lower part of the body in the form of a dirty black liquid, like liquid coal sludge. In a more advanced visualization, you can imagine disease coming out in the form of blood and pus, spirit harm in the form snakes or other animals, and all negative karma and obscurations in the form of liquid smoke or sludge.

These flow out of you into a crack in the earth all the way to where the Lord of Death resides. You can visualize him as he appears in the illustration of the wheel of life, to signify impermanence and death. He is looking up, and the ocean of negativities, in whatever form you have visualized them, pour into his wide-open mouth. His mouth closes and is sealed with a golden double vajra. The crack in the earth closes up, making it impossible for the Lord of Death to return. In this way, you stop the danger of untimely death.

The second way is called “purifying from below,” which is like pouring milk into a glass with some dirt in the bottom. As the milk fills the glass, the

dirt is pushed to the top. Similarly, the nectar flows down into the body and pushes up all the negative karmas, in the form of liquid coal sludge, which goes out through the mouth and nose. You can imagine all the negative karmas blown straight out and away, like a hat blown by the wind.

Then, with the third way, called “purifying from the center,” all the negative karmas and obscurations are chased away by the light pouring into the heart, like when you turn on a light and all the darkness in the room disappears immediately. Similarly, all the negative karmas and obscurations in the form of darkness at the heart become completely nonexistent as nectar flows into the heart.

## A SHORT VAJRASATTVA MEDITATION<sup>110</sup>

### *Visualization*

On your right side is your father; on your left side is your mother. Your enemies and those sentient beings who make you agitated are in front of you, and your friends and those you are attached to are seated behind you. All other universal living beings, in human form, are surrounding you, as far as you can imagine.

Visualize your object of refuge, the merit field, in the space in front of you, either elaborately or in the one aspect of Buddha Shakyamuni. As you recite the verse below, think that you and all sentient beings are together taking refuge in the Three Rare Sublime Ones.

### *The Power of Dependence: Taking Refuge*

I forever take refuge in Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha, and in all the  
three vehicles,  
in the dakinis of secret mantra yoga, in the heroes and heroines,  
in the empowering goddesses and the bodhisattvas.  
But most of all, I take refuge in my holy Guru forever. (3x)

### *The Power of Regret*

Think, “Almost every action I do, twenty-four hours a day, is motivated by worldly concern, attachment to the comfort of this life. Nearly every action I have ever created has been nonvirtuous, the cause of suffering. Not only that, but I have also been continuously breaking my pratimoksha, bodhisattva, and tantric vows. Worst of all, I have created the heaviest of negative karmas in relation to my virtuous friends—getting angry at them, generating wrong views, having nondevotional thoughts toward them, harming their holy bodies, and disobeying their advice.

“Having these negative imprints on my mental continuum is unbearable. It’s as if I’ve swallowed a lethal poison. I must practice the antidote right away and purify all these negative karmas immediately, without a second’s delay.”

In this way, generate strong feelings of urgency and regret.

### *Remembering Impermanence and Death*

Think, “Many people my age or younger have died. It’s a miracle that I’m still alive and have this incredible opportunity to purify my negative karma. Death is certain but its time is most uncertain. If I were to die right now, I would definitely be born in the lower realms. Because I could not practice Dharma there, I would remain in the lower realms for countless eons. Therefore, how unbelievably fortunate I am to be able to purify my negative karma right now, without even a second’s delay, by practicing the Vajrasattva meditation-recitation.”

### *The Power of Dependence: Generating Bodhichitta*

Think, “But I am not practicing this Vajrasattva purification for myself alone—the purpose of my life is to release all hell beings, hungry ghosts, animals, humans, demigods, gods, and intermediate state<sup>111</sup> beings from all their suffering and its causes and lead them to unsurpassed enlightenment. In order to do this, I must first reach enlightenment myself. Therefore, I must purify all my negative karma immediately by practicing the Vajrasattva meditation-recitation.”

## *Visualization*

Above the crown of your head, seated upon a lotus and moon seat, are Vajrasattva father and mother. Their bodies are white; each has one face and two arms. He holds a vajra and bell, she a curved knife and skull cup. They are embracing each other. The father is adorned with six mudras, the mother with five. He sits in the vajra posture, she in the lotus.

Vajrasattva is your root Guru, the holy mind of all the buddhas, the dharmakaya, who, out of his unbearable compassion that embraces you and all other sentient beings, appears in this form to purify you and all others.

Thinking in this way, your mind is transformed into guru devotion—the root of all blessings and realizations of the path to enlightenment.

On a moon disk at Vajrasattva's heart stands a HUM encircled by a garland of the hundred-syllable mantra. A powerful stream of white nectar flows from the HUM and mantra garland and you are cleansed of all sickness, spirit harm, negative karma, and obscurations.

## *The Power of the Remedy: Mantra Recitation*

OM VAJRASATTVA SAMAYA MANUPALAYA / VAJRASATTVA  
TVENOPATISHTHA / DRIDHO ME BHAVA / SUTOSHYO ME BHAVA /  
SUPOSHYO ME BHAVA / ANURAKTO ME BHAVA / SARVA SIDDHIM ME  
PRAYACCHA / SARVA KARMA SU CHAME / CHITTAM SHRIYAM KURU  
HUM / HA HA HA HA HO / BHAGAVAN SARVA TATHAGATA / VAJRA MAME  
MUNCHA / VAJRA BHAVA MAHA SAMAYA SATTVA AH HUM PHAT (*Recite  
this 21x, 100x, or as many times as you can.*)

## *Generating Faith in Having Been Purified*

From the crown of your head, Guru Vajrasattva says, “Child of the race, your negativities, obscurations, and broken and damaged pledges have been completely purified.” Generate strong faith that all is completely purified just as Guru Vajrasattva has said.

### *The Power of Restraint: Refraining from Creating Negativities Again*

Think, “Before Guru Vajrasattva, I vow never again to commit those negative actions I can easily abstain from and not to commit for a day, an hour, or at least a few seconds those negative actions I find it difficult to abstain from.”

### *Absorption*

Guru Vajrasattva is extremely pleased with your pledge. Vajrasattva father and mother melt into light and dissolve into you. Your body, speech, and mind become inseparably one with Guru Vajrasattva’s holy body, speech, and mind.

### *Meditation on Emptiness*

In emptiness, there is no I, creator of negative karma; there is no action of creating negative karma; there is no negative karma created.

Place your mind in that emptiness for a little while. In this way, look at all phenomena as empty—they do not exist from their own side. With this awareness of emptiness, dedicate the merits.

### *Dedication*

Think, “Due to all these merits of the three times collected by all the buddhas, bodhisattvas, myself, and all other sentient beings, which appear to be real from their own side, but which are totally empty, may the I, which appears to be real but is totally empty, achieve Guru Vajrasattva’s enlightenment, which appears to be real but is totally empty, and lead all sentient beings, who appear to be real but are totally empty, to that enlightenment, which appears to be real but is totally empty, by myself alone, who appears to be real but is also totally empty, nonexistent from my own side.”

Now finish with your usual dedication prayers.<sup>112</sup>



## 7. THE THIRTY-FIVE CONFESSION BUDDHAS

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TO CLIMB A FLIGHT of stairs, we naturally put our foot on the first stair, the one right in front of us. Unless we do that, we won't be able to step onto the second or the third stair, and so on, and finally get upstairs. Just wishing to be upstairs to enjoy that comfortable bed won't get us there. Likewise, attaining enlightenment happens step-by-step, but whether we progress quickly or slowly—whether we can achieve enlightenment in one, two, or many lifetimes—depends on how well we observe the vows we have taken. The importance of keeping the vows, and purifying the ones we have broken, is explained very clearly in the Vajrayana teachings.

Besides continually reciting the Vajrasattva mantra to purify the negativities accumulated from having broken our vows, another very powerful way to purify them is by prostrating while reciting the *Confession Prayer* within the prayers and prostrations to the Thirty-Five Confession Buddhas.<sup>113</sup> The prayer is incredibly beneficial, especially for those of us trying to live within the vows we have taken. Just saying it once purifies eons of negative karma.

Why is reciting the Thirty-Five Confession Buddhas' names so beneficial? Lama Atisha explained that when the Thirty-Five Buddhas were bodhisattvas engaging in the bodhisattvas' deeds, they each made a prayer: "If I become enlightened, for any sentient being who holds my name, who prostrates while reciting my name, may such and such of their negative karmas be purified." Each Confession Buddha specified which negativity would be purified. One of the powers of a buddha is that any prayer they made before buddhahood is actualized when they achieve enlightenment. This means that when we recite their names, by the power of that prayer, our recitation has unbelievable power to purify the different negative karmas.

Don't think you have ever purified enough. Even Lama Tsongkhapa, who actualized the graduated path to enlightenment and achieved the fully enlightened state, recited this prayer with prostrations, doing thirty-five sets of prostrations to the Thirty-Five Buddhas many hundreds of thousands of times. He practiced this so much and so intently during his retreats that the Thirty-Five Confession Buddhas actually appeared to him in his cave. (The visualization we use in our tradition is according to Lama Tsongkhapa's vision.) Due to this purifying practice, his Dharma work for sentient beings became as infinite as space. This is the power of purification.

I once asked one of my gurus, Denma Locho Rinpoche,<sup>114</sup> why Lama Tsongkhapa's life story talks about him doing many hundreds of thousands of prostrations to the Thirty-Five Confession Buddhas but doesn't mention Vajrasattva. Rinpoche explained that the Thirty-Five Buddhas practice, if done well even once, can purify even the five immediate negativities. That's why, although the practice of Vajrasattva is also incredibly effective, the Thirty-Five Buddhas practice is emphasized in Lama Tsongkhapa's biographies.

Just like Lama Tsongkhapa, many other yogis have purified by prostrating to the Thirty-Five Buddhas and doing the confession prayer. I generally encourage my students to do this practice every morning, reciting each name, if possible, three times while prostrating. That way, it becomes more than a hundred prostrations. It is also very good to do it again in the evening. Doing it in the morning purifies negative karmas broken during the night, and doing it in the evening stops the negative karmas of the day from increasing. If that is not possible, then do whatever you can. If you can even just recite each name once and then prostrate, that is very good. Of course, if you can do more than a hundred, no question that is excellent.

Whether you recite the Vajrasattva mantra or do prostrations to the Thirty-Five Buddhas, in order to make the purification completely effective, it is extremely important to incorporate it with the four opponent powers, as we have seen with the Vajrasattva practice above.

## THE THIRTY-FIVE BUDDHAS

The Thirty-Five Confession Buddhas are visualized as a merit field, arranged in five rows below Guru Shakyamuni Buddha.

At Shakyamuni Buddha's heart sits Thousand-Arm Chenrezig, and at Chenrezig's heart is the syllable HRIH. Beams of light are emitted from the HRIH, forming five rows in the space below. At the end of each of the thirty-four beams is a throne supported by elephants and adorned with pearls. On each throne is seated one of the Thirty-Five Buddhas.

The thrones are supported by elephants rather than snow lions as usual because the elephant is stronger and more powerful than any other animal, meaning your negativities will be strongly purified. Pearls are specifically mentioned because they are white, symbolizing completely purifying all negativities.

In the first, top, row are six buddhas, blue in color and in the aspect of Akshobhya. Their hands are in the mudra of granting the supreme, with their right hand on their right knee in the earth-touching mudra (like Shakyamuni) and their left in their lap in the meditation mudra, holding a begging bowl. The exception is the third buddha (the fourth in the list below), King Lord of the Nagas, who has a blue-colored body but a white head. He holds his hands in a teaching mudra, with both hands at the heart.

In the second row are seven buddhas, white in color and in the aspect of Vairochana, their hands in the mudra of supreme enlightenment.

In the third row are seven buddhas, yellow in color and in the aspect of Ratnasambhava, their hands in the mudra of granting supreme realizations.

In the fourth row are seven buddhas, red in color and in the aspect of Amitabha, their hands in the lap in the mudra of concentration, holding a begging bowl.



In the fifth row are seven buddhas, green in color and in the aspect of Amoghasiddhi, their left hand in the mudra of concentration and their right in the mudra of giving refuge.

With Shakyamuni, these are the Thirty-Five Confession Buddhas. Each one is in the posture of the particular buddha of that buddha family.

## THE BENEFITS OF RECITING THE NAMES

There are two main texts that explain the benefits of prostrating to each of the Thirty-Five Confession Buddhas. One is by Lama Atisha and the other is by Gyaltsep Jé, Lama Tsongkhapa's disciple. There is also another text by Ngulchu Dharmabhadra<sup>115</sup> that explains it a little bit differently.

The first of the Thirty-Five Confession Buddhas is the founder, Shakyamuni Buddha.

## 1. Shakyamuni Buddha

*[Lama] tön pa chom den dä de zhin sheg pa dra chom pa yang dag par  
dzog päi sang gyä päl gyäl wa sha kya thub pa la chhag tshäl lo*<sup>116</sup>

To the founder, bhagavan, tathagata, arhat, perfectly completed  
buddha, glorious conqueror Shakyamuni Buddha, I prostrate.

With *lama tön pa chom den dä*, it says that the lama is the founder of the present Buddhadharma, the one who has been constantly guiding us from beginningless rebirths. For *chom den dä*, as we have seen with Vajrasattva, *chom* means “having destroyed,” so he has destroyed the delusions. (I say “he” because we are talking about Shakyamuni Buddha, but if we are talking about Tara it’s “she.” Unlike English, Tibetan does not have this distinction.) *Den dä* means “having all the qualifications and transcended the world.”

When you say *lama* at the very beginning, you reinforce that meaning of the ultimate guru. Everything is that quality. The meaning of just that very first word, *lama*, is unimaginable. It is like the limitless sky; everything refers to that. When you get ready to recite *lama tön pa chom den dä*, you can first think a little bit about the guru, what *lama* means, and then recite it. In that way, it becomes unbelievably rich.

When Lama Tsongkhapa first saw the Thirty-Five Buddhas while doing seven hundred thousand prostrations at Wolka Chölung in Tibet, he saw them without heads. This is because he recited the prayer without the words *de zhin sheg pa*, meaning “tathagata,” which explains that quality of the buddhas. But afterward, when he recited *de zhin shek pa*, he saw them with heads.

Some texts say reciting Guru Shakyamuni Buddha's name purifies forty thousand eons of negative karma and some say eighty thousand eons, but in

the Kangyur it says that reciting this name once purifies one hundred million eons of negative karma, and on top of that, hundreds and thousands more.

Reciting the names of the remaining thirty-four buddhas brings different benefits.

## 2. Thoroughly Destroying with Vajra Essence

*De zhin sheg pa dor je nying pö rab tu jom pa la chhag tshäl lo*

To Tathagata Thoroughly Destroying with Vajra Essence, I prostrate.

Thoroughly Destroying with Vajra Essence (Dor je nying pö) purifies ten thousand eons of negative karma. Also, by reciting it, you become enlightened.

## 3. Radiant Jewel

*De zhin sheg pa rin chhen ö thrö la chhag tshäl lo*

To Tathagata Radiant Jewel, I prostrate.

Radiant Jewel (Rin chhen ö thrö) purifies ten thousand eons of negative karma as well. For anybody who hears the name of this buddha, all their wishes succeed, and if a woman hears this name, she will become a wheel-turning king. That's what it says! I don't know. Also, hearing this name is the cause to receive a long life and help from the gods.

## 4. King, Lord of the Nagas

*De zhin sheg pa lu wang gi gyäl po la chhag tshäl lo*

To Tathagata King, Lord of the Nagas, I prostrate.

King, Lord of the Nagas (Lu wang gi gyäl po), also purifies a thousand eons of negative karma, as well as purifying harm from nagas. Because this buddha liberated so many nagas from suffering, benefiting and healing them, they are

indebted to him. So, if you recite the name of the King, Lord of the Nagas, any sicknesses caused by nagas will be cured.

## 5. Army of Heroes

*De zhin sheg pa pa wöi de la chhag tshäl lo*

To Tathagata Army of Heroes, I prostrate.

Army of Heroes (Pa wöi de) purifies the negative karma of gossiping. Ngulchu Dharmabhadra says that it purifies all the negative karmas of speech.<sup>117</sup>

## 6. Delighted Hero

*De zhin sheg pa päl gye la chhag tshäl lo*

To Tathagata Delighted Hero, I prostrate.

Delighted Hero (Päl gye) purifies two thousand eons of negative karma.

## 7. Jewel Fire

*De zhin sheg pa rin chhen me la chag tsäl lo*

To Tathagata Jewel Fire, I prostrate.

Jewel Fire (Rin chhen me) purifies the negative karmas of the mind that have been stained by the pollution of the sangha. When people make offerings to the sangha, because they have delusions, the offerings are polluted, which can affect any sangha member who is not yet an arya being. Reciting this name protects against that.

According to Dharmabhadra, reciting the name once purifies a hundred thousand eons of causing disunity within the sangha or criticizing the arya sangha.<sup>118</sup> *The Preliminary Practice of Prostrations* also says this name purifies



the five immediate negativities, especially that of causing disunity among the sangha.<sup>119</sup>

## 8. Jewel Moonlight

*De zhin sheg pa rin chhen da ö la chhag tshäl lo*

To Tathagata Jewel Moonlight, I prostrate.

Jewel Moonlight (Rin chhen da ö) purifies eight thousand eons of negative karma of the mind. It purifies having criticized the arya sangha. Ngulchu Dharmabhadra says that *all* the negative karmas collected with the mind are purified.<sup>120</sup>

## 9. Meaningful to See

*De zhin sheg pa tong wa dön yö la chhag tshäl lo*

To Tathagata Meaningful to See, I prostrate.

Meaningful to See (Tong wa dön yö) purifies a thousand eons of negative karma and the five immediate negativities—killing your father, mother, or an arhat, and so forth—which usually lead to being immediately reborn in the lowest hell after death without any intervening life. Even if you have committed one of these negative karmas, it is purified by reciting the name of Meaningful to See.

## 10. Jewel Moon

*De zhin sheg pa rin chhen da wa la chhag tshäl lo*

To Tathagata Jewel Moon, I prostrate.

With Jewel Moon (Rin chhen da wa), the five immediate negativities are purified, especially killing your father.



## 11. Stainless One

*De zhin sheg pa dri ma me pa la chhag tshäl lo*

To Tathagata Stainless One, I prostrate.

Stainless One (Dri ma me pa) purifies the five near immediate negativities. The *Preliminary Practice of Prostrations* also mentions it purifies the negative karma collected from stepping over the shadow of a stupa.<sup>121</sup>

## 12. Bestowed with Courage

*De zhin sheg pa pä jin la chhag tshäl lo*

To Tathagata Bestowed with Courage, I prostrate.

From the five immediate negativities, Bestowed with Courage (Pä jin) purifies the karma of having killed an arhat. It also purifies the negative karmas collected through becoming angry.

## 13. Pure One

*De zhin sheg pa tshang pa la chhag tshäl lo*

To Tathagata Pure One, I prostrate.

Pure One (Tshang pa) purifies the negative karmas collected through attachment. According to Ngulchu Dharmabhadra, the negative karma of malevolently causing a buddha to bleed is also purified.<sup>122</sup>

## 14. Bestowed with Purity

*De zhin sheg pa tshang pä jin la chhag tshäl lo*

To Tathagata Bestowed with Purity, I prostrate.

With Bestowed with Purity (Tshang pä jin), ten thousand eons of negative karma are purified, as well as the nonvirtue of causing disunity among the sangha.

## 15. Water God

*De zhin sheg pa chhu lha la chhag tshäl lo*

To Tathagata Water God, I prostrate.

With Water God (Chhu lha), a thousand eons of negative karma are purified, as well as the near immediate negativity of defiling your mother or a female arhat.

## 16. Deity of the Water God

*De zhin sheg pa chhu lhäi lha la chhag tshäl lo*

To Tathagata Deity of the Water God, I prostrate.

According to Ngulchu Dharmabhadra, with Deity of the Water God (Chhu lhäi lha), the negative karma of killing a bodhisattva is purified, as well as five thousand eons of negative karma.<sup>123</sup>

## 17. Glorious Goodness

*De zhin sheg pa päi zang la chhag tshäl lo*

To Tathagata Glorious Goodness, I prostrate.

Glorious Goodness (Päi zang) purifies five thousand eons of negative karma, as well as the negative karma of having killed the vajra master. The term used in the text is *lobpen*, which can mean guru or preceptor.

## 18. Glorious Sandalwood

*De zhin sheg pa tsän dän päl la chhag tshäl lo*

To Tathagata Glorious Sandalwood, I prostrate.

Glorious Sandalwood (Tsän dän päl) purifies seven thousand eons of negative karma, as well as having taken money, food, or offerings given to the sangha. If you have harmed the sangha by taking away what brings them together, those negative karmas are purified.

## 19. Infinite Splendor

*De zhin sheg pa zi ji tha yä la chhag tshäl lo*

To Tathagata Infinite Splendor, I prostrate.

Infinite Splendor (Zi ji tha yä) purifies seven eons of negative karma, as well as the negative karma of having destroyed stupas.

## 20. Glorious Light

*De zhin sheg pa ö päl la chhag tshäl lo*

To Tathagata Glorious Light, I prostrate.

Glorious Light (Ö päl) purifies seven eons of negative karma, as well as the negative karma collected through anger. You must relate this to your own life and see how often you get angry and how easy it is to do so. However, no matter how destructive anger is, by reciting the name of Glorious Light, you can purify all the negative karma you have created through anger.

## 21. Sorrowless Glory

*De zhin sheg pa nya ngän me päi päl la chhag tshäl lo*

To Tathagata Sorrowless Glory, I prostrate.

With Sorrowless Glory (Nya ngän me päi pä), the negative karma collected through attachment is purified. Gyaltsap Jé, Lama Tsongkhapa's older disciple, and Dharmabhadra both mention that.<sup>124</sup>

## 22. Son of Noncraving

*De zhin sheg pa se me kyi bu la chhag tshäl lo*

To Tathagata Son of Non-Craving, I prostrate.

With Son of Noncraving (Se me kyi bu), Ngulchu Dharmabhadra says ten thousand eons of negative karma are purified.<sup>125</sup> Gyaltsap Jé said whatever imprints left on the mind by having created negative karma are purified.<sup>126</sup>

## 23. Glorious Flower

*De zhin sheg pa me tog pä), la chhag tshäl lo*

To Tathagata Glorious Flower, I prostrate.

Glorious Flower (Me tog pä) purifies the negative karma collected with the body, which means through physical actions. Gyaltsap Jé says one hundred thousand eons of negative karma are purified.<sup>127</sup> After Shakyamuni Buddha's verse, this purifies the greatest amount of negative karma.

## 24. Pure Light Rays Clearly Knowing by Play

*De zhin sheg pa tshang päi ö zer nam par röl pä ngön par khyen pa la  
chhag tshäl lo*

To Tathagata Pure Light Rays Clearly Knowing by Play, I prostrate.

Pure Light Rays Clearly Knowing by Play (Tshang päi ö zer nam par röl pä ngön par khyen pa) purifies negative karmas collected with speech. According

to Ngulchu Dharmabhadra, one thousand eons of negative karma are purified.<sup>128</sup>

## 25. Lotus Light Rays Clearly Knowing by Play

*De zhin sheg pa pä mäi ö zer nam par röl pä ngön par kyen pa la chhag tshäl lo*

To Tathagata Lotus Light Rays Clearly Knowing by Play, I prostrate.

Lotus Light Rays Clearly Knowing by Play (Pä mäi ö zer nam par röl pä ngön par kyen pa) purifies seven eons of negative karma.

## 26. Glorious Wealth

*De zhin sheg pa nor päl la chhag tshäl lo*

To Tathagata Glorious Wealth, I prostrate.

Again, with Glorious Wealth (Nor päl), imprints left on the mind by committing negative karma are purified. It is also said that engaging in activities that pollute the sangha is purified.

## 27. Glorious Mindfulness

*De zhin sheg pa drän päi päl la chhag tshäl lo*

To Tathagata Glorious Mindfulness, I prostrate.

Glorious Mindfulness (Drän päi päl) purifies the negative karma of having criticized holy beings.

## 28. Glorious Name Widely Renowned

*De zhin sheg pa tshän päl shin tu yong drag la chhag tshäl lo*

To Tathagata Glorious Name Widely Renowned, I prostrate.

With Glorious Name Widely Renowned (Tshän päl shin tu yong drag), the negative karma collected with the body, through physical actions, is purified. It purifies the negative karma of being unhappy with a buddha descending to this world. Instead of rejoicing, you feel the opposite. Gyaltsap Jé also mentions that the negative karma collected through jealousy is purified.<sup>129</sup>

## 29. King Holding the Victory Banner of Foremost Power

*De zhin sheg pa wang pöi tog gi gyäl tshän gyi gyäl po la chhag tshäl lo*

To Tathagata King Holding the Victory Banner of Foremost Power,  
I prostrate.

King Holding the Victory Banner of Foremost Power (Wang pöi tog gi gyäl tshän gyi gyäl po) purifies having caused other sentient beings to collect negative karma and the negative karma you have collected by slandering others. *The Preliminary Practice of Prostrations* says the negative karma collected through pride and jealousy is purified.<sup>130</sup>

## 30. Glorious One Totally Subduing

*De zhin sheg pa shin tu nam par nön päi päl la chhag tshäl lo*

To Tathagata Glorious One Totally Subduing, I prostrate.

Glorious One Totally Subduing (Shin tu nam par nön päi päl) purifies subtle negative karmas, mainly to do with slander. Gyaltsap Jé says causing others to create negative karma is purified.<sup>131</sup>

## 31. Utterly Victorious in Battle

*De zhin sheg pa yül lä shin tu nam par gyäl wa la chhag tshäl lo*

To Tathagata Utterly Victorious in Battle, I prostrate.

For Utterly Victorious in Battle (Yül lä shin tu nam par gyäl wa), Gyaltsap Jé says reciting this name purifies all delusions and Dharmabhadra says it purifies the negative karma collected with pride.

By reciting this name, the negative karmas of rejoicing in others doing negative karma are purified. For example, rejoicing when there is a war. Let's say a Tibetan person rejoices when he hears that a hundred Chinese soldiers have been killed in a war. That person gets the same heavy karma as if he had killed those hundred human beings.

### 32. Glorious Transcendence through Subduing

*De zhin sheg pa nam par nön pä sheg päi pääl la chhag tshäl lo*

To Tathagata Glorious Transcendence through Subduing, I prostrate.

Glorious Transcendence through Subduing (Nam par nön pä sheg päi pääl) purifies the negative karmas collected by slandering others, as well as causing others to create negative karma.

### 33. Glorious Manifestations Illuminating All

*De zhin sheg pa kün nä nang wa kö päi pääl la chhag tshäl lo*

To Tathagata Glorious Manifestations Illuminating All, I prostrate.

Glorious Manifestations Illuminating All (Kün nä nang wa kö päi pääl) purifies having caused others to engage in negative karma and rejoicing when others create negative karma.

### 34. All-Subduing Jewel Lotus

*De zhin sheg pa rin chhen pä mäi nam par nön pa la chhag tshäl lo*

To Tathagata All-Subduing Jewel Lotus, I prostrate.

With All-Subduing Jewel Lotus (Rin chhen pä mäi nam par nön pa), you purify the very heavy negative karma of having abandoned the holy Dharma, which means losing all respect for and reliance on any of the Buddha's teachings.

For example, say that because you don't understand a teaching you have heard, you reject it, thinking the fault lies with the teaching rather than your lack of understanding. To think like that is to avoid the holy Dharma, which is a heavier negative karma than having destroyed all the temples, statues, stupas, and scriptures in this world. What you *must* think in such a situation is that, although you can't appreciate and understand the teaching now, you determine that you will be able to do so in the future.

You also have to be very careful disposing of Dharma texts. Traditionally, damaged texts or texts that people can no longer keep are kept in a stupa or a special house like a *tsatsa* house;<sup>132</sup> they are not burned. When that isn't possible, you can respectfully offer fire to the Dharma texts you can no longer keep. As the letters of the text are burned, you can imagine them becoming empty, or imagine them absorbing into your heart in the form of the syllable AH. You should never throw any Dharma texts in the garbage because that's the equivalent of seeing them as garbage, which is avoiding the holy Dharma.

### 35. King, Lord of the Mountains Firmly Seated on Jewel and Lotus

*De zhin sheg pa dra chom pa yang dag par dzog päi sang gyä rin po  
chhe dang pä ma la rab tu zhug pa ri wang gi gyäl po la chhag tshäl  
lo*

To Tathagata, arhat, perfectly completed buddha, King, Lord of the Mountains Firmly Seated on Jewel and Lotus, I prostrate.

King, Lord of the Mountains Firmly Seated on Jewel and Lotus (Dra chom pa yang dag par dzog päi sang gyä rin po chhe dang pä ma la rab tu zhug pa ri wang gi gyäl po) purifies the negative karma of having criticized the guru. It also purifies degenerated samaya vows. It is a good idea to recite this buddha's




name three times. As criticizing the guru is the heaviest negative karma and something that happens very easily, if you can recite a mala of this name, that is excellent.

## HOW TO PRACTICE WITH THE THIRTY-FIVE CONFESSION BUDDHAS<sup>133</sup>

This is an abbreviated practice of prostrating to the Thirty-Five Confession Buddhas.

In the space in front of you, visualize your guru in the aspect of Shakyamuni Buddha, with Thousand-Arm Chenrezig at his heart.

At the heart of Thousand-Arm Chenrezig is the syllable HRIH . Beams of light are emitted from the HRIH, forming five rows in the space below. At the end of each of the thirty-four beams is a throne supported by elephants and adorned with pearls and on each throne is seated one of the Thirty-Five Buddhas [as described above on page 137]. If you like, you can also visualize a row of the seven Medicine Buddhas below the Thirty-Five Buddhas and prostrate to them as well.

Think that each one of these buddhas is the embodiment of all the Buddha, Dharma, Sangha, and all statues, stupas, and scriptures of the three times and ten directions, whose essence is the Guru. Have complete faith that each one has the power to purify all your negative karma and imprints collected from beginningless time.

Now imagine that you emanate numberless bodies and that, as you prostrate, all these bodies—in all directions, covering every atom of the earth—prostrate along with you.

Then, before you start prostrating and saying the names of the Thirty-Five Buddhas, increase the merit by taking refuge:

To Bhagavan, Tathagata, Arhat, Perfectly Complete Buddha,  
Precious Victory Banner, I prostrate. (7x)

OM NAMO BHAGAVATE RATNA KETU RAJAYA / TATHAGATAYA / ARHATE  
SAMYAK SAMBUDDHAYA / TADYATHA / OM RATNE RATNE MAHA RATNE  
RATNA BIJA YE SVAHA (7x)

OM NAMO MANJUSHRIYE / NAMA SUSHRIYE / NAMA UTTAMA SHRIYE  
SVAHA (3x)

Homage to the *Confession of a Bodhisattva's Downfalls*.

I, [say your name], throughout all times, take refuge in the Guru.  
I take refuge in the Buddha.  
I take refuge in the Dharma.  
I take refuge in the Sangha. (3x)

Then, while prostrating, recite the name of each buddha as many times as you can. At the end of reciting the names of the Thirty-Five Confession Buddhas, you can also recite the name of the Medicine Buddhas once while prostrating.

To the founder, bhagavan, tathagata, arhat, perfectly completed  
buddha, glorious conqueror Shakyamuni Buddha, I prostrate.

To Tathagata Thoroughly Destroying with Vajra Essence, I prostrate.

To Tathagata Radiant Jewel, I prostrate.

To Tathagata King, Lord of the Nagas, I prostrate.

To Tathagata Army of Heroes, I prostrate.

To Tathagata Delighted Hero, I prostrate.

To Tathagata Jewel Fire, I prostrate.

To Tathagata Jewel Moonlight, I prostrate.

To Tathagata Meaningful to See, I prostrate.

To Tathagata Jewel Moon, I prostrate.

To Tathagata Stainless One, I prostrate.

To Tathagata Bestowed with Courage, I prostrate.

To Tathagata Pure One, I prostrate.  
To Tathagata Bestowed with Purity, I prostrate.  
To Tathagata Water God, I prostrate.  
To Tathagata Deity of the Water God, I prostrate.  
To Tathagata Glorious Goodness, I prostrate.  
To Tathagata Glorious Sandalwood, I prostrate.  
To Tathagata Infinite Splendor, I prostrate.  
To Tathagata Glorious Light, I prostrate.  
To Tathagata Sorrowless Glory, I prostrate.  
To Tathagata Son of Noncraving, I prostrate.  
To Tathagata Glorious Flower, I prostrate.  
To Tathagata Pure Light Rays Clearly Knowing by Play, I prostrate.  
To Tathagata Lotus Light Rays Clearly Knowing by Play, I prostrate.  
To Tathagata Glorious Wealth, I prostrate.  
To Tathagata Glorious Mindfulness, I prostrate.  
To Tathagata Glorious Name Widely Renowned, I prostrate.  
To Tathagata King Holding the Victory Banner of Foremost Power,  
I prostrate.  
To Tathagata Glorious One Totally Subduing, I prostrate.  
To Tathagata Utterly Victorious in Battle, I prostrate.  
To Tathagata Glorious Transcendence Through Subduing, I  
prostrate.  
To Tathagata Glorious Manifestations Illuminating All, I prostrate.  
To Tathagata All-Subduing Jewel Lotus, I prostrate.  
To Tathagata, arhat, perfectly completed buddha, King, Lord of the  
Mountains Firmly Seated on Jewel and Lotus, I prostrate.

Then, either recite the confession prayer and general confession, and close the session with the mantra of pure morality and the prayer to keep pure morality, as in the practice in FPMT's *Confession of Downfalls: Prostrations to the Thirty-Five Buddhas*, or just finish with your normal dedications.

## 8. THE FIVE GREAT MANTRAS

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### THE MANTRAS

There are five great mantras for liberating sentient beings from the lower realms:

1. The Kunrik Mantra
2. The Mitrukpa Mantra
3. The Namgyalma Mantras
4. The Stainless Pinnacle Deity Mantra
5. The Wish-Granting Wheel Mantra

Besides these mantras, there are other powerful mantras, such as the powerful mantras for benefiting beings at death and the four dharmakaya relic mantras, which are incredibly beneficial in protecting us in our life and helping us when we or somebody else is dying.<sup>134</sup>

### THE BENEFITS OF THE MANTRAS

These five great mantras are commonly used when an extremely powerful blessing is needed, such as when we bless water during an animal liberation practice or with a *jangwa* purifying puja when someone has died.

Generally, our next rebirth is determined by the final moment of the consciousness of this life, the mind we have right at the moment of death. The teaching on the twelve links of dependent origination explains that as we are dying, as our body ceases to function, the two links of craving and grasping cause us to seek another body. If the mind is dominated by negative thoughts such as anger or attachment, that ensures a rebirth in the lower realms. Due to

anger, for instance, our grasping will lead us to a hellish intermediate state and then to rebirth in a hell realm. According to tantra, however, it is possible to change that while the person is in the intermediate state through the power of the tantric practice of *jangwa*, which includes reciting these mantras to the dying person, done by a powerful meditator with good concentration.

Of course, this type of practice is far too advanced for us, but we can make our life very meaningful with these mantras. Even our leisure time, such as going to the beach, can become meaningful, a cause for enlightenment, rather than just for our own pleasure and thus a cause for more samsara. By reciting these mantras over a container of sea water (or some water from our home already blessed) and then pouring it in the sea, we bless all the beings in the sea.

It's wonderful to help animals, but how can we *best* help them? On a very practical level, we can always be careful not to harm them, avoiding stepping on ants and so forth, but it would be so much better to bring them real peace and to make their lives meaningful, so sooner or later they can be reborn as a human being, meet the Dharma, and go on to attain liberation and enlightenment. One way we can do this is to say mantras to them whenever we encounter them. Although the animal has no logical understanding, there is power in the mantra that can help purify their delusions. Chenrezig's mantra, OM MANI PADME HUM, is especially good for this.

There is also the practice of animal liberation,<sup>135</sup> where we actively buy live animals from a place where they are going to be killed and sold for food, then release them in as safe a place as possible, somewhere where they can live without danger. Liberating animals is also a huge benefit to us humans. Prolonging the lives of the animals creates the cause for us to have a long life.

Much more beneficial than just saving their lives is to do it within the context of a Dharma event, thus giving them a Dharma imprint at the same time. When we are about to liberate an animal (or a million animals), we can say mantras and carry the animal while we circumambulate a stupa or other holy objects. The positive merit that the animal receives from such a practice is incalculable. On one level, we are saving that animal's life, and on another level, we are giving it the causes for full enlightenment. What more can anybody do for an animal?

Liberating animals can be a simple act or part of a ceremony involving many people and thousands of animals. In Singapore, Hong Kong, and Taiwan, they release animals by the tens of thousands, making an elaborate and wonderful ceremony of it. They set up an altar with many stupas filled with mantras, such as the four dharmakaya relic mantras, and many texts, such as teachings by Lama Tsongkhapa, prajnaparamita sutras, and so on. Then, they sprinkle the animals with water blessed by reciting the five great mantras as well as the names of the Thirty-Five Confession Buddhas and the Medicine Buddhas. While saying mantras over the animals, they circumambulate with them around an altar full of holy objects, each circumambulation creating the karma for the animals to achieve enlightenment. After that, they mindfully release them some place where they will be safe.

Placing the five great mantras on the body of a dying or dead being purifies their negative karma, meaning they are saved from rebirth in the lower realms. Kirti Tsenshab Rinpoche explains that the people of Amdo, in the lower part of Tibet, use a method where they print or write these mantras on paper and press them onto the person who is dying or dead to purify that person's negative karma.

If you drive, killing insects is unavoidable, and so having these mantras on your car is important. A long time ago, my attendant, Venerable Roger, decided we needed a car while we were in California, so he bought a red van. He was very excited. When I saw it, I thought, "This car belongs to all sentient beings," but the thought only lasted a couple of days.

Trying to think of how to protect the insects that were killed when they hit the windscreen, I decided to put some mantras on the car. Gradually, we added more and more—we made stickers of the mantras of the Thirty-Five Buddhas, Lama Tsongkhapa, Maitreya Buddha, White Tara, all the powerful mantras—and soon the car was covered. The idea is that the mantras that are on the car, especially these five very powerful mantras, have unbelievable power to purify the karma of any being that sees or touches them.

I often tell people in the West that having mantras such as Namgyalma in the car is vital, because not only the sentient beings inside but also all beings who touch the car have their negative karma purified and they obtain a higher rebirth. When you drive, so many insects and ants are killed, especially at nighttime when so many insects fly into the windscreen or are crushed under

the wheel, but with the powerful mantras inside, the negative karma of all those small insects is purified. Of course, that doesn't mean you should drive over rabbits or dogs or children! As a policeman drags you to prison, you can't really tell them you did it because you have a mantra in the car! I suspect that would be inadmissible in a court case.

### *The Kunrik Mantra*

Kunrik's mantra is this:

OM NAMO BHAGAVATE / SARVA DURGATE PARI SHODHANI RAJAYA /  
TATHAGATAYA / ARHATE SAMYAKSAM BUDDHAYA / TADYATHA / OM  
SHODHANI / SHODHANI / SARVA PAPAM BISHODHANI / SHUDHE  
BISHUDHE / SARVA KARMA AVARANA BISHODHANI SVAHA

ཨོཾ་ནཾ་མྱེ་ལྷ་ག་མ་ཏེ། སའ་རུག་ཏེ་པ་རི་ཤོ་རྒྱ་ནི་རྒྱ་ལྷ་ཡ། ཏ་སྤྱ་ག་རྒྱ་ཡ།  
ཨའ་ཏེ་སུལྷི་བུལྷི་ཡ། ཏཏ་སྤྱ། ཨོཾ་ཤོ་རྒྱ་ནི། ཤོ་རྒྱ་ནི། སའ་སྤྱ་པི་བི་ཤོ་རྒྱ་ནི།  
ཤུལྷི་བི་ཤུལྷི། སའ་ཀམ་ལྷ་མ་ར་ཏ་བི་ཤུལྷི་སྤྱ་ལྷ།

Kunrik is called the king of the deities purifying from the lower realms. He is white in color, with three faces; he holds a *dharmachakra* (Dharma wheel).

In Amdo, a customary preparation for death is receiving a Kunrik initiation, which completely purifies all the negative karma created during that life. This leaves the person very relaxed and without any worries, so they are prepared when death happens.

Although *jungwa*, the practice that is done when somebody has died, now incorporates practices such as Medicine Buddha or Vajrayogini,<sup>136</sup> it was originally done with Kunrik. If you do a Kunrik puja for somebody who has already been reborn in the lower realms, they are liberated from there.

### *The Mitrukpa Mantra*

Mitrukpa's mantra is this:

NAMO RATNA TRAYAYA OM KAMKANI KAMKANI ROCHANI ROCHANI  
TROTANI TROTANI TRASANI TRASANI PRATIHANA PRATIHANA SARVA  
KARMA PARAM PARA NI ME SARVA SATTVA NANCHI SVAHA

ན་མོ་རྩུ་ཏུ་ཡུ་ཡུ། རྩི་ཀོ་ཀ་ནི་ཀོ་ཀ་ནི། རོ་ཅ་ནི་རོ་ཅ་ནི། རྩོ་ཏ་ནི་རྩོ་ཏ་ནི།  
ཏུ་ས་ནི་ཏུ་ས་ནི། སྤ་ཏི་ཏ་ན་སྤ་ཏི་ཏ་ན། སམ་ཀམ་པ་རི་པ་རྩུ་ཏི་མེ་སམ་  
སམ་རྩུ་རྩུ་སྤུ་སྤུ།

Mitrukpa is Tibetan for Akshobhya, one of the five buddha families or Dhyani Buddhas. It is said that anybody who simply hears the Mitrukpa mantra can be saved from the lower realms. The mantra can even purify somebody who has created very heavy karma through doing the five immediate negativities or harming or criticizing the sangha. If you abandon the holy Dharma, this very heavy negative karma can be purified by just seeing the Mitrukpa mantra, so another powerful way of helping a dying person is to place this mantra next to their bed where they can see it. If simply seeing this mantra can do that, there is no need to mention the unbelievable benefits that come from reciting the Mitrukpa mantra.

When you recite the Mitrukpa mantra one hundred thousand times and blow on water, sand, or mustard seeds, and then sprinkle that blessed substance on the body of a person or animal that has died, if that being has been born in one of the lower realms, they will immediately be liberated from there. Even though the consciousness has been separated from the body and is somewhere else completely, because of its past connection with that body, the consciousness is still affected. It is said that that being will attain a higher rebirth within seven days.

His Holiness the Dalai Lama explained that in the past, when he ate meat, he kept all the bones, then recited the Mitrukpa mantra and blew on the bones. This kind of practice is unbelievably good to do. If you eat meat, you *must* do something for the animal who has died. Otherwise, it is very sad; that animal cherished its life as much as you cherish yours. If you don't know the Mitrukpa mantra or any of the other powerful mantras, you must at least recite one mala or half a mala of OM MANI PADME HUM or the Medicine Buddha mantra.<sup>137</sup> If that's not possible, you should at least recite it twenty-one or



seven times. Reciting it with strong compassion, you blow on the meat before you eat it and make a strong dedication for that animal to immediately be liberated from the lower realms and to receive a perfect human body or rebirth in a pure land.

It is said in the texts that to recite the Mitrukpa mantra even once purifies the negative karma that continues from life to life. Therefore it is very good to have the Mitrukpa mantra somewhere in the house, especially above the door, where people can see it. If you recite the Mitrukpa mantra every day, there is no question that at the time of your death you will be saved from the lower realms.

### *The Namgyalma Mantras*

Namgyalma's long mantra is this:

OM NAMO BHAGAVATE SARVA TRAILOKYA PRATIVISHISHTAYA /  
BUDDHAYA TE NAMA / TADYATHA / OM BHRUM BHRUM BHRUM  
SHODHAYA SHODHAYA / VISHODHAYA VISHODHAYA / ASAMA  
SAMANTA AVABHASA SPHARANA GATI GAGANA SVABHAVA VISHUDDHE  
/ ABHISHINCHANTU MAM / SARVA TATHAGATA SUGATA VARA VACHANA  
AMRITA ABHISHEKARA / MAHAMUDRA MANTRA PADAI / AHARA AHARA  
/ MAMA AYUS SAMDHARANI / SHODHAYA SHODHAYA / VISHODHAYA  
VISHODHAYA / GAGANA SVABHAVA VISHUDDHE / USHNISHA VIJAYA  
PARISHUDDHE / SAHASRA RASMI SANCHO DITE / SARVA TATHAGATA  
AVALOKINI / SHAT PARAMITA PARIPURANI /SARVA TATHAGATA MATE /  
DASHA BHUMI PRATISHTHITE / SARVA TATHAGATA HRIDAYA /  
ADHISHTHANA ADHISHTHITE / MUDRE MUDRE MAHA MUDRE / VAJRA  
KAYA SAMHATANA PARISHUDDHE / SARVA KARMA AVARANA  
VISHUDDHE / PRATINI VARTAYA MAMA AYUR / VISHUDDHE SARVA  
TATHAGATA / SAMAYA ADHISHTHANA ADHISHTHITE / OM MUNI MUNI  
MAHA MUNI / VIMUNI VIMUNI MAHA VIMUNI / MATI MATI MAHA MATI  
/ MAMATI SUMATI TATHATA / BHUTA KOTI PARISHUDDHE / VISPHUTA  
BUDDHE SHUDDHE / HE HE JAYA JAYA / VIJAYA VIJAYA / SMRARA  
SMRARA / SPHARA SPHARA / SPHARAYA SPHARAYA / SARVA BUDDHA  
ADHISHTHANA ADHISHTHITE / SHUDDHE SHUDDHE / BUDDHE

BUDDHE / VAJRE VAJRE MAHA VAJRE / SUVAJRE VAJRA GARBHE JAYA  
GARBHE / VIJAYA GARBHE / VAJRA JVALA GARBHE / VAJROD BHAVE /  
VAJRA SAMBHAVE / VAJRE VAJRINI / VAJRAMA BHAVATU MAMA  
SHARIRAM / SARVA SATTVA NANCHA KAYA PARISHUDDHIR BHAVATU /  
ME SADA SARVA GATI PARISHUDDHISHCHA / SARVA TATHAGATASHCHA  
/ MAM SAMASHVAS YANTU / BUDDHYA BUDDHYA / SIDDHYA SIDDHYA /  
BODHAYA BODHAYA / VIBODHAYA VIBODHAYA / MOCHAYA MOCHAYA /  
VIMOCHAYA VIMOCHAYA / SHODHAYA SHODHAYA / VISHODHAYA  
VISHODHAYA / SAMANTANA MOCHAYA MOCHAYA / SAMANTA RASMI  
PARISHUDDHE / SARVA TATHAGATA HRIDAYA / ADHISHTHANA  
ADHISHTHITE / MUDRE MUDRE MAHA MUDRE / MAHAMUDRA  
MANTRA PADAI SVAHA



The short mantra is this:

OM BHRUM SVAHA / OM AMRITA AYUR DA DE SVAHA

ཨོཾ་བྷུཾ་སྤྱཾ་ཨོཾ་ཨ་མི་ཏཱ་ཨ་ཡུར་དེ་སྤྱཾ་སྤྱཾ་

At the conclusion, you recite:

OM AMITE / AMITODA BHAVE / AMITE VIKRANTE / AMITA GATRE /  
AMITO GAMINI / AMITA AYURDADE / GAGANA KIRTI KARE SARVA  
KLESHA KSHAYAM KARI YE SVAHA

ཨོཾ་ཨ་མི་ཏཱ་ཨ་མི་ཏཱ་ད་ལྷ་བཤེན་ཨ་མི་ཏཱ་བི་ཀྱར་ཏཱ་ཨ་མི་ཏཱ་གཏི་ཨ་མི་ཏཱ་ག་  
མི་རྣེ། ཨ་མི་ཏཱ་ཡུར་དེ། ག་ག་ཀ་ཀི་ཀ་རི་སྤྱཾ་སྤྱཾ་ཡི་ཀ་རི་ཡི་སྤྱཾ་སྤྱཾ་

Namgyalma is a deity for long life and purification. Both the long Namgyalma mantra and the short one have skies of benefits. If you recite the mantra daily, you will have a pure life at all times, you will always meet buddhas and bodhisattvas in each life, and you will achieve enlightenment.

Namgyalma's mantra is said to be so powerful that anybody who hears it will never again be reborn in the lower realms. There is a story from the time Guru Shakyamuni Buddha was on the earth concerning a god called Paripu Denpa. As he was dying, Denpa saw that he was about to be reborn as an animal—a dog or monkey or something. Very worried, he asked King Indra for advice and Indra suggested that he see the Buddha, which he did. The Buddha manifested as the deity Namgyalma and gave him the mantra. Denpa recited it six times daily, and in seven days completely changed his karma so that he did not have to be reborn as an animal.

Even if you are in danger of dying because the karma that determines your lifespan is running out, if you wash your body, wear clean clothes, and, abiding in the eight Mahayana precepts, recite the Namgyalma mantra one thousand times, you can increase your lifespan, purify your obscurations, and free yourself from disease.

By reciting this mantra twenty-one times and blowing on mustard seeds, when you throw them onto the bones of a being, even one who has created

many heavy negative karmas, they will immediately be liberated from the lower realms and reborn in a higher realm.

When I give refuge and lay vows, I often give the students a card with the Namgyalma mantra on it as well a blessing string and a picture of the bodhisattva Kshitigarbha.<sup>138</sup> These things are incredible because just having them constantly purifies negative karma.

Putting the Namgyalma mantra up somewhere in your home brings it protection and makes it a holy place. Then, whatever sentient beings are inside—dogs, cats, mosquitoes—always have their negative karma purified and they obtain a higher rebirth. If even the shadow of the house touches any being, like an insect or a person, their negative karma is purified, and they obtain a higher rebirth. If the Namgyalma mantra is on top of a mountain, the whole mountain becomes holy and the negative karma of any being who climbs or touches the mountain is purified and they obtain a higher rebirth. And it is vital to have it in your car.

When Lama Yeshe<sup>139</sup> and I were visiting my root guru, His Holiness Trijang Rinpoche, in Mundgod in India,<sup>140</sup> Rinpoche chatted with us while maintaining his meditation practice at the same time. Afterward, he explained he was doing the Namgyalma mantra for all the people who had sent him offerings. The purpose was twofold. Because the people who sent the offerings had delusions, the offerings were polluted and the mantra purified that pollution, but it also purified the negative karma of the people and helped them have a long life. That is how powerful the Namgyalma mantra is.

### *The Stainless Pinnacle Deity Mantra*

The Stainless Pinnacle Deity mantra is this:

OM NAMAS TRAIYA DHVIKANAM / SARVA TATHAGATA HRIDAYA  
GARBHE JVALA JVALA / DHARMA DHATU GARBHE / SAMBHARA MAMA  
AYUH SAMSHODHAYA / MAMA SARVA PAPAM / SARVA TATHAGATA  
SAMANTOSHNISHA VIMALE VISHUDDHE HUM HUM HUM HUM / AM  
VAM SAM JA SVAHA



ཨོ་ན་མ་རྒྱལ་རྒྱ་ལྷ་ལྷོ་ལྷོ། སའ་ཏ་སྤྲ་ག་ཏ་འི་ད་ཡ་གཞི་རྩ་ལ་རྩ་ལ། རྣམ་རྣམ་  
 ཏུ་གཞི། སྤྲ་ར་མ་མ་ལྷ་ཡུཾ་སྤོ་རྣ་ཡ། མ་མ་སའ་སྤྲ་པོ། སའ་ཏ་སྤྲ་ག་ཏ་  
 ས་མ་རྣམ་པུ་པུ་པུ་པུ་པུ། ཧཱུྃ་ཧཱུྃ་ཧཱུྃ་ཧཱུྃ། ཨོ་པོ་ཨོ་པོ་ཨོ་པོ་ཨོ་པོ།

The Stainless Pinnacle Deity mantra is one of the four dharmakaya relic mantras. Hearing or seeing the Stainless Pinnacle Deity mantra liberates from all negative karmas and defilements and the fears of the lower realms. Like fire that turns hay to fine ash, which is then swept away by the wind, similarly, all negative karmas are consumed and swept away completely. The mantra is also compared to a flash flood that sweeps away all the garbage lying on the ground, or to a goldsmith’s fire that softens the hard metal and makes it pure and workable. This relates to how reciting or seeing this mantra purifies you and makes your body malleable, a suitable vessel for helping others. When the sun rises, its beams cover the whole world, beautifying it. In the same way, this mantra beautifies anyone who keeps it on them.

Merely by remembering or reciting this mantra, your obstacles are pacified and you have long life. If you put this mantra inside a stupa, no matter what size, it helps prolong the life of somebody whose life is nearly finished. A text describing the benefits of the mantra says that when death comes, just as a snake changes its skin, your consciousness leaves your body and immediately goes to Amitabha’s pure land. Then, you will never be reborn in the lower realms and never experience the feeling of death, which I think means suffering. Once you get to a pure land, you will never again hear the word “hell,” let alone experience any suffering.

That is why I usually encourage people to build stupas that have mantras such as the Stainless Pinnacle Deity mantra inside. There are incalculable benefits for those involved with planning it, those who fundraise for it, those who actually build it, and so forth. It is a very skillful way to liberate sentient beings. Then for the hundreds or thousands of years that the stupa stands, whenever any being sees it, they collect merits greater than making offerings of divine clothes—where one ornament is of greater value than all the wealth of this world—and divine food to as many arhats liberated from samsara as there are grains of sand in the River Ganges. For animals that go near the stupa, for insects and birds that fly around it and land on it, the merit they collect is

unbelievable and the negative karma they purify is incalculable. And that is the same for people who see it, remember it, talk about it, and so forth. The stupa is a protection, a blessing for the area, for the country, for humans and even nonhumans: spirits and nagas, and so forth.

### *The Wish-Granting Wheel Mantra*

The Wish-Granting Wheel mantra is this:

OM PADMO USHNISHA VIMALE HUM PHAT

ཨོཾ་པདྨོ་ཡུ་སྐལ་པུ་བཤི་མ་ལེ་རྩུ་པཎ།

This mantra also has unbelievable benefits. If you recite it seven times every day, you accumulate merit equivalent to that of making offerings to buddhas equal in number to the grains of sand in the River Ganges. In your next life, you will be reborn in a pure realm and will be able to achieve great concentration.

It not only purifies and heals you, but, if you recite it and then blow on the clothes you wear, it purifies and heals any other sentient being who touches them. If the clothes are made of an animal product, such as leather, silk, or fur, it purifies the negative karma of the animal that died in making them and helps them be reborn in an upper realm.

Recalling this mantra just once has the power to purify even the five immediate negativities. It prevents rebirth in inexhaustible hot hell, the heaviest of all the hells. For many eons you will not have to be reborn in this state of unbearable suffering. It enables you to remember past lives and see future lives. It helps you achieve the complete qualities of a buddha.

If you recite this mantra, blow upon sand, and sprinkle that sand onto a dead body, even if the dead person had broken vows and was reborn in a lower realm, you can change their life and they will be reborn in a higher realm.

If you recite it and blow on burning incense or on perfume, it purifies all sentient beings who smell it, even curing them of contagious diseases. It is said in the Kangyur that anybody who passes underneath the Wish-Granting Wheel mantra has a thousand eons' negative karma purified. That is why I

encourage students to put this mantra and the other powerful mantras above a door in their house. It is also good to have it in the car so that insects that touch the car are purified. If the car gets rained on, the rainwater becomes like holy water after touching the Wish-Granting Wheel mantra.



## CONCLUSION: THE BENEFITS OF RECITING MANTRAS ARE UNCOUNTABLE

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**N**O MATTER WHICH MANTRA we recite, OM MANI PADME HUM, the Medicine Buddha's mantra, the names of the Thirty-Five Buddhas, or whatever, our mind is transformed and protected by the power of that mantra. Because each mantra contains the enlightened being's name, each links us directly to the dharmakaya, the omniscient mind of all the buddhas. Knowing how powerful mantra recitation is, our devotion to the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha, and to our own guru, becomes stronger and stronger, and that transforms our mind, protecting us from suffering.

When our mind is about to slip into negativity, reciting a mantra protects us, keeping it virtuous. Reciting a mantra can also destroy the negative karmic imprints that are on our mindstream that will otherwise manifest as suffering when the conditions arise. Every mantra does this, not just the great purification mantras like Vajrasattva. Because of that purification, we are spared all sorts of suffering, such as sickness, relationship problems, and so forth, as well as being saved from an unfortunate rebirth. A mantra is like a flame that can burn up all our negative karma.

How effective our mantra recitation is depends on our motivation. Because of the power of the mantra itself, we can gain some benefit even if we do it with a selfish motivation. For instance, reciting a White Tara mantra to be saved from sickness or untimely death without any altruistic intention will definitely help, but it is not Dharma. For a mantra recitation to be Dharma, we must have the motivation of attaining a fortunate rebirth, achieving liberation from samsara, or—the very best motivation—attaining enlightenment in order to benefit all sentient beings. Reciting a mantra such as OM MANI PADME HUM even once with a bodhichitta motivation has the power

to totally transform our mind. It is like reciting one hundred thousand mantras with a lesser motivation.

The reason we are alive, the reason we have this precious human body, is to benefit other sentient beings. Therefore, it is vital that we bring this motivation into everything we do, and that includes practicing a tantric deity and reciting a mantra. Every action—eating, walking, sleeping, working—should be purely to benefit others, so of course our Dharma practice should be to benefit others. This should be our attitude for life. When we do everything with this motivation, everything becomes the cause of enlightenment.

When we understand the benefits of reciting mantras and know how powerful they are, reciting a mantra comes as easily as breathing. It is a joy to do. Then, with every mantra we recite, our mind is profoundly transformed. The drops of water that comprise all the oceans can be counted, the atoms of the earth can be counted, each snowflake in a countryside covered in snow can be counted, but we can never finish counting the benefits of mantras; they are infinite.

## APPENDIX 1: PREPARING FOR PRACTICE<sup>141</sup>

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### CREATING A SACRED SPACE

It is very helpful for your practice to have a special area of your home dedicated for your daily practice, whether it is a separate meditation room or a part of another room kept for that purpose. You can make your meditation space simple or ornate, but I strongly recommend making it as beautiful as you can, with an altar with offering bowls and an image of the Buddha. Of course, it is even better to have ten images and better still to have ten thousand!

If you have an altar in your home and you offer incense and lights to the statues on that altar with the mind of bodhichitta, the effect is so powerful. You can also do this with a “mental altar” just by visualizing the Buddha, but a physical altar can become the focus of your meditations. Once your altar is set up, every time you see the altar you see the Buddha. This is not some projection from your own side. The Buddha *is* there. To think this is just in your imagination disturbs your practice. Whether you have a statue or not, there is no place where the omniscient mind doesn't reside, and so when you make offerings to the altar, you are not making offerings to a small bronze statue but to the actual Buddha.

Westerners seem to lead incredibly busy lives. Students are always telling me that they have no time to meditate. But they certainly have time to buy food and make lots and lots of cups of tea. In all that running here and there, you can easily sacrifice just a few minutes filling a few water bowls instead of (or as well as) filling the kettle. It's not difficult, it doesn't take much time, and it creates incredible merit.

The main items to include in your meditation room or space should be an altar, your meditation seat, and perhaps a text table and a bookshelf to hold your Dharma books. The altar is where you place the holy objects, pictures, and texts that inspire you. It should be used only as an altar and not double as

a coffee table or desk, and it should be kept in a clean, respectful place. The objects should be placed higher than the level of your head as you sit facing your altar.

Before setting up your altar for the first time, clean the space well and burn incense to purify the place. After initially setting up your altar, always keep the area clean. Sweep and dust every day before making offerings.

The Tibetan Buddhist altar contains a statue or photo of Buddha Shakyamuni and other deities you feel a connection with. These symbolize the enlightened holy body. Photographs of your spiritual teachers may be included here as well. Traditionally, statues of the Buddha and other deities are placed at the center of the altar, with pictures of teachers placed to either side of the deities. The statues need to be filled with certain mantras and incense and blessed.<sup>142</sup>

If you like, you may wrap each statue in a *khatak*—the silk scarf Tibetan Buddhists traditionally use for greeting and offering. You can do that by wrapping the scarf beautifully around the statue's base and part of the statue itself.

If you have sacred paintings of deities (*thangkas*), these can be hung on the wall above the altar or on either side of it. Often, a *khatak* is draped over the top of the *thangka*, or alternatively, wrapped around the decorative ends of the *thangka* at the bottom.

To the left of the Buddha as you face the altar, place a Dharma text. This symbolizes the enlightened holy speech. The text does not need to be written in Tibetan or Sanskrit; it can be in any language. If you use a cloth to wrap the texts it should be new and clean, or at least it should not have been used for anything in the past except wrapping texts.

To the right of the Buddha as you face the altar, place a stupa. The stupa symbolizes the enlightened mind of the Buddha. It doesn't have to be expensive—a simple plaster stupa or even a photograph of one is acceptable. If you have a real stupa, you might also like to wrap it in a *khatak*.

So, the order should be, from left to right (as you are facing the altar): text, Buddha, and stupa, with the offering bowls in front.

## YOUR DAILY ROUTINE

Before you start your main meditation practice, such as a daily deity practice, there are certain preliminary practices that should be done:

- cleaning the room
- setting up the altar
- doing three prostrations
- sitting in a proper meditation posture
- doing some form of calming meditation such as watching the breath
- reciting the preliminary prayers, such as refuge, bodhichitta, the seven-limb prayer, and so forth<sup>143</sup>

The purpose of doing actions such as cleaning the room, making offerings, and prostrating to the enlightened beings is to purify your negativities. The power of these actions comes not only from the action itself but from the power born out of the limitless wisdom and compassion of the Buddha. As you make offerings or prostrate, if you are aware of the great qualities of the Buddha, this increases your devotion to him and therefore the effectiveness of the action. Making offerings and prostrating are not ritualistic customs without meaning or benefit. If you do them with full awareness, they can bring about the most profound purification. Even if you don't have so much as a stick of incense, just visualizing a buddha image and mentally offering it creates unbelievable merit.

### *Cleaning the Room and Setting Up the Altar*

Even if the altar and meditation room are not particularly dirty, you should still clean them. You should think that this is Guru Shakyamuni Buddha's room, not yours. It's not like you are cleaning the room to impress a friend who is coming over; this is out of great respect for the Buddha. This is his mandala, his palace, and cleaning it is offering service to him, rather than becoming a service to your negative mind. You should therefore check your motivation carefully as you are cleaning the room.

After that, make offerings to the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha on the altar. They should be clean, new, and honestly obtained. Offer only fresh food and flowers, never anything spoiled or dirty. Fill bowls or vases high with

offerings to create the cause for abundance; never offer a bowl that isn't filled to the top. It is better to offer a small bowl heaped high with offerings than a large bowl that looks partly empty.

To make the offerings, you need to offer something, and the simplest, easiest, and cheapest thing is water—and, unlike a nice piece of chocolate, there is little likelihood of your becoming attached to it—and so you should have water bowls placed in front of the image. The traditional number of bowls in Tibetan Buddhism is seven or eight. The eighth bowl symbolizes music, so if you recite aloud, some traditions leave this out. If you don't have room, then one or two is also okay. A hundred thousand is better of course.

These are the offerings placed in the bowls at the front of the altar, from your left to right:

- *argham*: water for drinking
- *padyam*: water for cleaning the feet
- *pushpe*: flowers
- *dhupe*: incense
- *aloke*: light
- *ghande*: perfume
- *naividya*: food
- *shapta*: music

During the time of the Buddha, when someone important visited, these were offered as a sign of hospitality, and so this is according to Indian custom. If you can imagine a king coming to your home in ancient times, on a hot, dusty day, you would first offer him water to drink to quench his thirst and then water to wash the dust off his feet. The other offerings are to delight his senses. You would offer flowers, perhaps as a garland to place around his neck. There would be incense burning in the room and lights, such as candles, making the room visually beautiful. You would offer him perfume, perhaps a scented cloth to wipe his face, and food. Finally, while the king is eating, there would be beautiful music playing, an offering for the ear. If you think about the preparations you make for receiving a good friend in your house here in the twenty-first century, it is not that different.

Another way of laying out the offerings is with actual substances instead of water. So there would be incense, a candle, food, and flowers. This makes a very attractive offering.

It is good to make the offerings in the morning as you start your day, and to take them down in the evening, dispensing the blessed water respectfully, by pouring it over the flowers in your garden, for instance.

You are making an offering to a holy being, so it's important not only to be mindful and respectful, but also to make the offerings and the action of offering as beneficial as possible. Don't be lazy or sloppy, and make sure everything is very clean—make sure the bowls are clean and the water is clean.

The bowls don't have to be big, but they shouldn't be tiny, like a child's plaything. They can be very simple; they can be glass or porcelain or even clay, but they should be as beautiful as possible. Crystal or gold bowls make the altar look so much nicer and the mind feels so much happier than if cheap, ugly ones are used.

If possible, use saffron water in the bowls. To do this, boil a pot of hot water and then put a small amount of saffron in the water. Cover the pot with a towel and let it sit until it is a deep yellow or orange color. Then place the water in a clean, covered container and refrigerate it. Each day, a small amount of this saffron water can be added to the water in the pitcher used to fill the bowls. The color of the saffron water in your bowls can vary—some teachers suggest it should be the color of a fine champagne, while others like the water to be a more vibrant yellow.

The bowls will be upside down from when you emptied them the previous day, so, traditionally, you “seed” the bowls. This means holding each bowl upside down and filling it with incense smoke to purify it, while saying OM AH HUM. An empty vessel should never be placed right side up on an altar, as this empty offering creates the cause to not receive the bounty of the Dharma. Then, with a pitcher of water, pour water into the first bowl until it is full. Then pour most (but not all) of the water from the first bowl into the second bowl and place the first bowl onto your altar, toward the left-hand side. Pour most of the water from the second bowl into the third, and place the second bowl onto the altar, just to the right of the first bowl. Continue in this way

until all seven or eight bowls are on the altar in a straight line, each with some water in the bottom of it.

Make sure the bowls have been placed in a straight line, close together but not touching. Traditionally, the distance between bowls is about the width of a grain of wheat. The symbolism in this is that if the bowls are too far apart, you can create the karma to be separated from your guru; if they are too close together, you can create the karma to have a dull mind, without sharp intelligence.

Now, use your pitcher of water and, while reciting OM AH HUM, fill each bowl. The reason for saying OM AH HUM is to protect yourself from interference from spirits who can steal the essence of the offerings. For instance, it is said that if you don't say these three sacred syllables as you are offering light, it can be the cause to become very dull and distracted. So, you should always remember to say this. Even when you turn on a light in a room, especially one with holy objects in it, this is very good to do.

Pour the water like the shape of a wheat grain—in a thin stream at first, then gradually more, tapering off at the end. Try to pour the water neatly, without making noise. The water should fill the bowl to just about the size of a wheat grain from the top, so that the bowls are full but not too full. If your bowls are not full enough, your wisdom will be incomplete; if they are overfull, you create the cause for your wisdom to be incomplete or for it to be unstable. In addition, you might want to cover your mouth with a *khatak* or face mask, as it is important not to breathe on the offerings while making them.

As I have said, instead of water, you can offer flowers, incense, light, and food in their respective places in the lineup of water bowls. For instance, for the nonwater offerings, you can place some rice in the bowl and the offering on top of that—a small flower, a stick of incense, a tea-light, a piece of fruit, and so forth. You can have water in the perfume bowl and add some fragrance you really like. For the music offering, you can have a bell or even a recording of beautiful music. For the nonwater offerings, you don't have to turn the bowls over when clearing away the offerings at the end of the day.

Whether you use just water or different substances depends on your resources and what suits you. Whatever you use, when you make the offering mentally, you transform it into divine nectar for the Buddha; it is no longer a



bowl of water or an apple. The important thing is to feel very happy you are offering these substances and to make the offerings as beautiful as you can.

There are two ways of making offerings, actually transformed offerings and mentally transformed offerings. Physically, what you have in the bowls are just mundane substances—water, rice, incense, and so forth—but by saying the mantra OM AH HUM and visualizing the offerings as divine offerings, you transform them into what you are actually offering the Buddha. (There are also methods of increasing the offerings, using other mantras, which you can find in many sadhanas and pujas.)

You can even make offerings without anything physical there at all, merely by visualizing offerings. The main part of the offering doesn't take place on the altar but in your mind. You could have all the riches in the world in the room with that Buddha image, but that doesn't mean you are making vast offerings to the Buddha. The idea is to mentally create the most wonderful things and then freely offer them all up to the Buddha, without a shred of attachment from your side. In fact, offering is a direct antidote to miserliness.

And just as you can make the offerings as extensive as possible, dependent on your ability to visualize, you can make the field to which you are offering as extensive as possible. I have talked of offering to Guru Shakyamuni Buddha, but Tibetan Buddhism describes extensive merit fields—fields that allow you to create merit—with the Buddha or Lama Tsongkhapa at the center and all the buddhas, bodhisattvas, and lineage lamas surrounding.

When you make the offering, besides saying the mantra, it is very good to dedicate to not only the Buddha but to all sentient beings, that they might quickly attain enlightenment. Then even if it is the simplest of actions, just pouring a little water in a bowl, it covers all sentient beings; you have done a service for an infinite number of beings and so the benefits are infinite. It is so easy that way. For instance, as you light a candle for the light offering you can think, “By making this light offering, may the ignorance of all sentient beings be burned and destroyed and may the transcendental wisdom light shine forever in their minds.” Think that all their dualistic thinking is consumed in the flames of the wisdom realizing emptiness. This sort of offering is very effective. And, of course, if your offering is imbued with the mind of enlightenment, bodhichitta, then it becomes so powerful.

## *Prostrations*

A simple action like making a water bowl offering can have such vast results, and it's the same with prostrations. Many people new to Buddhism seem reluctant to prostrate, thinking prostrations are somehow both alien and hard work (even though the same people often spend so much time and money—and sweat—at the gym). When they are told about the Thirty-Five Buddhas practice, they put it off and put it off. If they could really see how prostrating to the Thirty-Five Buddhas can completely transform their minds, there would be nothing else they would want to do.

Doing prostrations correctly brings so many benefits. As you go down onto the floor, you have to prostrate to the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha, otherwise it just becomes exercise. When you prostrate, you are wiping off the garbage, the obscurations, the negative karma collected through actions of your body, speech, and mind from beginningless rebirths. I don't know what the English word "prostration" means, but the Tibetan *chagtsel* has this meaning.

By purifying the negative karma collected with your body, speech, and mind, prostrations create the cause to achieve the vajra holy body, vajra holy speech, and vajra holy mind of the Buddha. A prostration is the particular remedy to a particular delusion in the same way that specific medicines are used for particular illnesses. Pride is a huge hindrance to developing on the path, and prostration is a very strong antidote to pride. Even if you don't do a full-length or a five-limb (half) prostration, when you recite the seven-limb prayer, with the line to do with prostrating, you must put your palms together in the prostration mudra. To not do so would be such a waste.

The prostration mudra is a very simple action that can take less than a second, but it is incredibly powerful. Each aspect of the mudra has significance. You place your hands at your chest, palms together and fingers straight and facing upward, much like a Christian prayer mudra. The thumbs are slightly tucked in.

This is also called the "lotus bud" mudra because it looks like the bud of a lotus plant, and it has great significance. Keeping the two thumbs inside signifies offering a jewel, rather than prostrating with empty hands with the palms flat, which is regarded as the non-Buddhist prostration method. The hollow between the palms signifies the dharmakaya and the two thumbs inside that hollow signify the rupakaya, the dharmakaya and rupakaya being the two

buddha bodies that result from completing the two paths of wisdom and method.

The full-length prostration is according to the tradition of Naropa. It is good to begin with this mantra:

OM NAMO MANJUSHRIYE NAMO SUSHRIYE NAMO UTAMASHRIYE  
SVAHA

His Holiness Serkong Rinpoche explained the meaning of the mantra to me, but I didn't write it down immediately so I have forgotten. (I think it is quite uncommon for someone to know the meaning of these mantras.) It is said in the teachings that if you recite this mantra three times you not only receive the same merit as listening, reflecting, and meditating on the Tripitaka, the three baskets of teachings, but also, when you do three full-length prostrations with this mantra each day, you receive the benefit of being able to achieve the path of seeing—the wisdom directly perceiving emptiness—in this life, and you will not be afflicted by disease, spirits, or human beings. One of the main advantages of doing prostrations with this mantra is that it increases the benefits of each prostration one thousand-fold.

Furthermore, if you recite the following buddhas' names seven times at the beginning of doing prostrations, it increases the benefits of the prostrations ten million times.

CHOM DÄN DÄ DE ZHIN SHEG PA DRA CHOM PA YANG DAG PAR DZOG  
PÄI SANG GYÄ RINCHHEN GYÄLTSHÄN LA CHHAG TSHÄL LO

OM NAMO BHAGAVATE RATNA KETU RAJAYA / TATHAGATAYA / ARHATE  
SAMYAK SAMBUDDHAYA / TADYATHA / OM RATNE RATNE MAHA RATNE  
RATNA BIJA YE SVAHA

When you prostrate, keep your feet together, not separated, but also not like an army exercise. With your hands in the prostration mudra, first place them on your crown, which causes you to create the merit to achieve a crown pinnacle, one of a buddha's thirty-two holy signs and eighty holy exemplifications. Then, touch them to the forehead, which, according to Kyabje Pabongka Rinpoche, purifies the negative karmas collected with the

body from beginningless rebirths. It creates the cause to achieve the holy sign of the clockwise curled hair at the center of a buddha's eyebrows, for which unbelievable merit is needed. It also creates the cause to achieve the vajra holy body. Then, touch your folded hands to the throat, which purifies the negative karmas collected from speech from beginningless rebirths and creates the cause to achieve the vajra holy speech. Then, touch them to the heart, which purifies the negative karmas collected with the mind from beginningless rebirths and creates the cause to achieve the vajra holy mind.

When you go down, either with a full or half prostration, you must touch the ground with your forehead, otherwise it doesn't become a complete prostration. But then, you should get up quickly, signifying a quick release from samsara. To lie there without immediately getting up creates the karma to be reborn as a worm or snake—a creature who slides along the ground!

You should also be careful to hold your hands in the correct fashion when you are on the ground, with the fingers straight out. If you splay them you create the karma to be reborn as a duck or a creature with webbed feet, and if you bunch them up you create the karma to be reborn as a horse or a creature with hooves. Doing prostrations correctly brings the most amazing benefits, but because you are prostrating to the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha, a sloppy prostration can bring great suffering results.

With the full-length prostration, you then lie flat on the floor, stretching your arms in front of you and touching your head to the floor. The more you spread your body, the more atoms touch the ground. It is said in the *Lankavatara Sutra* that when you do a full-length prostration, with your hands fully extended, you create the merit to be born a wheel-turning king a thousand times for each atom of the floor your body covers, and that is not just the atoms on the surface, but from the surface right down to the center of the earth. It is unimaginable.

A five-limb or half prostration is when you simply go down on your knees and touch your head to the floor.

You can increase the power of your prostration in many ways. Firstly, if prostrating to one buddha creates vast merit, then prostrating to countless buddhas creates even more, and so, if you can, it is good to visualize the merit field as not just Guru Shakyamuni Buddha but as a whole field of buddhas,

bodhisattvas, and gurus, such as you see in the illustrations of the Guru Puja merit field.

Also, rather than prostrating alone, one body making offerings to the buddhas, you can visualize countless other sentient beings surrounding you, in all directions, covering the entire planet. Then, however many bodies you can visualize prostrating with you, you collect that much merit. If you visualize a hundred thousand beings prostrating with you, you collect the merit of a hundred thousand prostrations with just one movement. This is the most extensive way to collect merit when you prostrate, which is reflected in the verse from *The King of Prayers*:

With the energy of aspiration for the bodhisattva way,  
with a sense of deep respect,  
and with as many bodies as atoms of the world,  
to all you buddhas visualized as real, I bow down.<sup>144</sup>

### *The Posture*

Then, having cleaned the room; made offerings to the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha on your altar; and prostrated, you sit down in a proper meditation posture. The texts say this should be Vairochana's seven-point meditation posture:

- legs in vajra (full lotus) position or crossed
- hands in meditation mudra
- back straight
- head tilted forward
- eyes slightly open, gaze directed downward
- jaw relaxed, tongue against palate
- shoulders level and relaxed

The full vajra position is where your legs are crossed with each foot, sole upward, placed on the opposite thigh. This is difficult for many Westerners, so a half vajra (with just one foot on the thigh) or with the legs just crossed is also acceptable. It's good to have a cushion that raises your buttocks slightly. This

will enable you to easily keep your back straight for an extended period. If sitting on the floor is too uncomfortable, you can also sit on a chair.

The meditation mudra is holding your hands on your lap, just below the navel, palms upward with the right hand on top of the left and thumbs touching, forming a triangle. Arms and shoulders should be relaxed, and you should hold your arms out slightly from your body to allow the circulation of air.

Your back should be straight but relaxed. It helps to imagine your spine as a pile of coins rising straight up. Your gaze should be slightly down to prevent mental wandering (if the gaze is too high) or drowsiness (if it is too low). Your eyes should be half open. This is often difficult for new meditators, so having them closed is acceptable. However, this can lead to drowsiness, just as having them fully open can lead to distractions. Your jaw should be relaxed, with your tongue lightly touching the roof of your mouth, just behind the teeth. Your teeth should be slightly apart and your lips lightly together.

When you are sitting comfortably, you can do some form of calming meditation, such as watching the breath, and then begin reciting the preliminary prayers.

## APPENDIX 2: PRELIMINARY PRAYERS AND DEDICATIONS<sup>145</sup>

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### PRELIMINARY PRAYERS

#### *Taking Refuge and Generating Bodhichitta*

I go for refuge until I am enlightened  
to the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Supreme Assembly.  
By my practice of giving and other perfections,  
may I become a buddha to benefit all sentient beings. (3x)

#### *The Four Immeasurable Thoughts*

May all sentient beings have happiness and the causes of happiness.  
May all sentient beings be free from suffering and the causes of  
suffering.  
May all sentient beings be inseparable from the happiness that is free  
from suffering.  
May all sentient beings abide in equanimity, free from attachment  
for friends and hatred for enemies.

#### *Seven-Limb Prayer*

Reverently, I prostrate with my body, speech, and mind;  
I present clouds of every type of offering, actual and imagined;  
I declare all my negative actions accumulated since beginningless  
time

and rejoice in the merit of all holy and ordinary beings.  
Please, remain until the end of cyclic existence  
and turn the wheel of Dharma for living beings.  
I dedicate my own merits and those of all others to the great  
enlightenment.

### *Short Mandala Offering*

This ground, anointed with perfume, strewn with flowers,  
adorned with Mount Meru, four continents, the sun, and the moon:  
I imagine this as a buddha field and offer it.  
May all living beings enjoy this pure land!

IDAM GURU RATNA MANDALAKAM NIRYATAYAMI

## DEDICATION PRAYERS

Due to the merits of these virtuous actions,  
may I quickly attain the state of a Guru-Buddha  
and lead all living beings, without exception,  
into that enlightened state.

May the supreme jewel bodhichitta  
that has not arisen, arise and grow;  
and may that which has arisen not diminish  
but increase more and more.

You may include many other dedication prayers, especially prayers for the long life of your gurus, such as His Holiness the Dalai Lama.



## APPENDIX 3: MEDITATION ON THE SEVEN WISDOMS<sup>146</sup>

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**T**HIS PRACTICE OF ATTAINING the seven wisdoms is a part of the *Lama Tsongkhapa Daily Guru Yoga Meditation*.

### VISUALIZATION FOR CLEANSING AWAY IMPURITIES

Visualize Lama Tsongkhapa, who is Manjushri; Gyalsap Jé, who is Chenrezig; and Khedrup Jé, who is Vajrapani, in the space in front of you, and then focus on Lama Tsongkhapa in particular. For this to become a guru yoga practice, it is important to maintain the awareness that your root guru is inseparable from Lama Tsongkhapa, who in essence is the three deities: Manjushri, the embodiment of all the buddhas' wisdom; Chenrezig, the embodiment of all the buddhas' compassion; and Vajrapani, the embodiment of all the buddhas' power.

By the force of my having fervently requested in this way,  
from the hearts of the three—the perfect, pure Father and Sons<sup>147</sup>—  
hollow beams of white light are emitted  
and, combining into one, enter my crown.  
White nectar, the color of milk,  
flows from the opening of the tube of white light,  
cleansing away all my sicknesses, harm from spirits, negative karmas,  
obscurations, and their imprints without exception.  
My body becomes as pure and clear as crystal.

## FIVE-LINE PRAYER TO LAMA TSONGKHAPA (MIGTSEMA)

*Mig me tse wäi ter chhen chän rä zig*  
Chenrezig<sup>148</sup> great treasure of nonobjectifying compassion;  
*dri me khyen päi wang po jam päi yang*  
Manjushri, master of stainless wisdom;  
*dü pung ma lü jom dzä sang wäi dag*  
Lord of Secrets, destroyer of the entire host of maras;  
*gang chän khä pä tsug gyän tsong kha pa*  
Tsongkhapa, crown jewel of the sages of the Land of Snow;  
*lo zang drag pä zhab la söl wa deb*  
Losang Dragpa, at your feet I make requests.

## VISUALIZATIONS FOR ACHIEVING THE SEVEN WISDOMS

Continue reciting the five-line *migtsema* while doing the following visualizations for achieving the seven wisdoms. For the last three wisdoms, spend more time on the particular wisdom that you wish to achieve.

### 1. Great Wisdom

Please bless me to achieve great wisdom,  
which is unimpeded in discerning the meanings of the infinite  
scriptures.

Once again, great wisdom flows forth  
in the form of orange nectar, whereby my body is filled.  
Light radiates from the atoms of the nectar,  
which are clarified in the form of perfect, pure Manjushris.

The great wisdom of the victorious ones of the ten directions and  
their sons

absorbs into me in the form of bodies of the deity, whereby my body is filled.

## *2. Clear Wisdom*

Please bless me to achieve clear wisdom,  
which clarifies the detailed, subtle, and difficult vital points without  
mixing them up.

Once again, clear wisdom flows forth  
in the form of orange nectar, whereby my body is filled.  
Light radiates from the atoms of the nectar,  
which are clarified in the form of AH RA PA CHA NA DHI.

The clear wisdom of the victorious ones of the ten directions and  
their sons  
absorbs into me in the form of the mantras, whereby my body is  
filled.

## *3. Quick Wisdom*

Please bless me to achieve quick wisdom,  
which quickly cuts through nonunderstanding, misunderstanding,  
and doubt.

Once again, quick wisdom flows forth  
in the form of orange nectar, whereby my body is filled.  
Light radiates from the atoms of the nectar,  
which are clarified in the form of orange DHI syllables.

The quick wisdom of the victorious ones of the ten directions and  
their sons  
absorbs into me in the form of the seed syllables, whereby my body  
is filled.

#### *4. Profound Wisdom*

Please bless me to achieve profound wisdom,  
which is unfathomable in discerning the meanings of the scriptures.

Once again, profound wisdom flows forth  
in the form of orange nectar, whereby my body is filled.  
Light radiates from the atoms of the nectar,  
which are clarified in the form of texts and swords.

The profound wisdom of the victorious ones of the ten directions  
and their sons  
absorbs into me in the form of the hand implements, whereby my  
body is filled.

#### *5. Wisdom of Explaining*

Please bless me to achieve the wisdom of explaining,  
which gives supreme ascertainment regarding all words and their  
meanings.

Once again, the wisdom of explaining flows forth  
in the form of orange nectar, whereby my body is filled.  
Light radiates from the atoms of the nectar,  
which are clarified in the form of the texts that are explained.

The wisdom of explaining of the victorious ones of the ten directions  
and their sons  
absorbs into me in the form of the texts, whereby my body is filled.

#### *6. Wisdom of Debating*

Please bless me to achieve the wisdom of debating,  
which thoroughly deprives malicious debaters of their self-  
confidence.

Once again, the wisdom of debating flows forth  
in the form of orange nectar, whereby my body is filled.  
Light radiates from the atoms of the nectar,  
which are clarified in the form of wheels of swords.

The wisdom of debating of the victorious ones of the ten directions  
and their sons  
absorbs into me in the form of the wheels, whereby my body is  
filled.

### *7. Wisdom of Composing*

Please bless me to achieve the wisdom of composing,  
which gives rise to a joyous, clear understanding of the excellent  
words and their meanings.

Once again, the wisdom of composing flows forth  
in the form of orange nectar, whereby my body is filled.  
Light radiates from the atoms of the nectar,  
which are clarified in the form of texts and wheels.

The wisdom of composing of the victorious ones of the ten  
directions and their sons  
absorbs into me in the form of the texts and wheels, whereby my  
body is filled.

### REQUEST

May my wisdoms of listening, reflecting, and meditating increase.  
May my wisdoms of explaining, debating, and composing develop.  
May I be granted the supreme and common realizations.  
Please bless me to quickly become like you. (3x)

May my transcendental wisdom of simultaneously-born great bliss  
arise.

May my stains of mistakenly grasping things as real be purified.

May my net of doubts that is only mind be cut.

Please bless me to quickly become like you. (3x)

The special benefit of meditating on these seven wisdoms within the Lama Tsongkhapa Guru Yoga is that you quickly develop your wisdom. Practicing for even a month, you can see the development. Whatever you do—listening, reflecting, meditating, or whatever—becomes effective, subduing your mind and eliminating the obstacles to practicing the Dharma.

Furthermore, when you die you will be able to be born in Tushita pure land, the pure land of Lama Tsongkhapa and Maitreya Buddha. And, even more special than that, in future lives you will be able to meet Lama Tsongkhapa's teachings. They say that meeting Lama Tsongkhapa's teachings is much rarer than being born in Amitabha's pure land, because his teachings are the unification of sutra and tantra. That means you will have the opportunity to practice tantra.

## APPENDIX 4: A SHORT GREEN TARA SADHANA<sup>149</sup>

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### A GLANCE MEDITATION ON THE GRADUATED PATH

#### *Refuge*

I take refuge in the holy guru, essence of all buddhas, original grantor of all holy teachings and lord of all supreme beings.

#### *Prayer for Success in Dharma Practice*

Please, Guru-Buddhas, bestow on me the ability to unify my mind with the Dharma and be successful in practicing the Dharma in order to achieve the graduated path. May no hindrances occur while achieving this path.

#### *Prayer of the Practitioner of Lower Capability*

Please bless me to realize that I have received a perfect human rebirth, which is highly meaningful, for many reasons difficult to obtain, but perishable, transient, and fragile, decaying in the shortest moment because of its changeable nature. Thus, my death is definite, but its actual time is most indefinite, and after death I am far more likely to be reborn in the lower suffering realms, having created infinitely more negative than positive karma in this life and all previous lives.

Please bless me to comprehend how incredibly unendurable is the suffering of the lower realms, that I might take refuge in Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha with all my heart, and realize the evolution of karma in all its profundity, that I might perform only virtuous actions and abandon all negative creations.

### *Prayer of the Practitioner of Middling Capability*

By practicing in this way I will be reborn in the upper realms but will still have to experience unlimited samsaric suffering because of uncontrolled delusion and karma.

Please bless me to realize fully the evolution of samsara, from uncontrolled rebirth to death to rebirth, and to follow day and night the three higher trainings of the path: higher conduct, higher concentration, and higher wisdom, which are the main methods to release me from samsara.

### *The Prayer of the Practitioner of the Higher Capability*

#### The Sutra Path

But as each sentient being has been my mother and as most of them are in extreme suffering, please bless me to bring success to all by renouncing the perfect happiness of self and practicing the bodhisattva's deeds of the six perfections with a bodhisattva's mind of bodhichitta, on the basis of the equanimity meditation. Thus shall I have no sorrow in experiencing the samsaric suffering of all other sentient beings for no matter how long, having trained my mind in the general path.

#### The Vajrayana Path

Please bless me to follow the quick Vajrayana teachings, by feeling sentient beings' suffering, very unimaginably unbearable for even



the shortest moment, as my own, and to achieve the attainment of Shakyamuni Buddha immediately, at this very moment, by keeping my ordinations and the instructions of the guru with the best and highest care in life for the sole purpose of enlightening all sentient beings.

## VISUALIZATION

Above the crown of my head I visualize a lotus and a moon disk. Upon these is the great treasury of compassion, Arya Tara, mother of all enlightened beings, who is oneness with my kind root guru. My guru is seated in the full lotus position within a transparent bubble of rainbow-colored light, is pink in complexion, and wears saffron robes and a pandit's hat. His right hand is at his heart in the gesture of teaching the Dharma and holds a vajra and the stem of a white lotus that blooms beside his right ear. His left hand rests on his hip; it holds a bell and the stem of another white lotus that blooms beside his left ear.

At my guru's heart is Arya Tara in female aspect, green in color and seated in the dancing posture within a rainbow bubble. Her left leg is bent up, and her right leg is outstretched. Her left hand is at her heart in the mudra symbolizing the Triple Gem and holding the stem of a blue utpala flower. Her right hand extended over her right knee is in the mudra of granting sublime realizations. She is beautifully adorned with jeweled ornaments and scarves and at her three places (crown, throat, and heart) are syllables OM ཨྎ, AH ཨྎ, HUM ཨྎ. At her heart is a lotus and moon seat on which stands a radiant green syllable TAM ཨྎ. Rays of green light radiate in all directions from the TAM and invoke all the enlightened beings of the ten directions. They are all absorbed into Arya Tara and become one.

*Make a heartfelt prayer:*

Please remain above my head until I receive enlightenment.

## REFUGE AND BODHICITTA

I go for refuge until I am enlightened  
to the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Supreme Assembly.  
By my merit from giving and other perfections,  
may I become a buddha in order to benefit all sentient beings. (3x)

### SEVEN-LIMB PRAYER

Reverently, I prostrate with my body, speech, and mind;  
I present clouds of every type of offering, actual and imagined;  
I declare all my negative actions accumulated since beginningless  
time  
and rejoice in the merit of all holy and ordinary beings.  
Please, remain until the end of cyclic existence  
and turn the wheel of Dharma for living beings.  
I dedicate my own merits and those of all others to the great  
enlightenment.

### MANDALA OFFERINGS (OUTER AND INNER)

This ground, anointed with perfume, strewn with flowers,  
adorned with Mount Meru, four continents, the sun, and the moon:  
I imagine this as a buddha-field and offer it.  
May all living beings enjoy this pure land!

The objects of my attachment, aversion, and ignorance—  
friends, enemies, and strangers—and my body, wealth, and  
enjoyments:  
without any sense of loss I offer this collection.  
Please accept it with pleasure and  
bless me with freedom from the three poisons.

IDAM GURU RATNA MANDALAKAM NIRYATAYAMI

## PURIFICATION

### *Request:*

Please bless me to purify all obscurations of my body, so that it will become one in essence with Guru Tara's holy vajra body.

### *Visualize:*

White light emanates from the OM at Arya Tara's brow and curves in an arc to enter my brow. My body is purified completely of all obscurations and becomes one in essence with Guru Tara's holy vajra body.

### *Request:*

Please bless me to purify all obscurations of my speech so that it will become one in essence with Guru Tara's holy vajra speech.

### *Visualize:*

Red light emanates from the AH at Arya Tara's throat and curves in an arc to enter my throat. My speech is purified completely of all obscurations and becomes one in essence with Guru Tara's holy vajra speech.

### *Request:*

Please bless me to purify all obscurations of my mind so that it will become one in essence with Guru Tara's holy vajra mind.

### *Visualize:*

Blue light emanates from the HUM at Arya Tara's heart and curves in an arc to enter my heart. My mind is purified of all obscurations and becomes one in essence with Guru Tara's holy vajra mind.

*Request:*

Please bless me to purify all delusions and subtle obscurations to omniscience so that my body, speech, and mind will become one with Guru Tara's holy body, holy speech, and holy mind.

*Visualize:*

Now the three-colored beams emanate simultaneously from the OM, AH, and HUM syllables, curving in an arc and entering my three places, completely purifying all my delusions and subtle obscurations to omniscience. My body, speech, and mind become one in essence with Guru Tara's holy body, holy speech, and holy mind.

My root guru dissolves into Arya Tara who melts into green light, which flows into me. Instantly, my wrong conception that I and all other phenomena are self-existent, together with my dualistic mind and its views, disappear, becoming completely empty—not even a trace of them remains.

I concentrate one-pointedly in this empty state, with the wisdom that is indistinguishably one with Guru Tara's blissful omniscient mind.

Then, out of that emptiness, my wisdom manifests instantly as Arya Tara's holy body seated upon a lotus and moon cushion. At my heart is another lotus and moon, upon which in the center stands the syllable TAM surrounded in a clockwise direction by the syllables of the mantra: OM TARE TUTTARE TURE SVAHA. The TAM and the mantra are manifestations of Guru Tara's holy mind, with which my mind is totally united.

Green light radiates from all the letters. Spreading in every direction, it purifies the negative karmas, gross delusions, and subtle obscurations to omniscience of all sentient beings, who become Tara.

Again light radiates, bearing manifold offerings to the six transcendental senses of all the buddhas and sentient beings who have become Tara.

The enlightened beings are extremely pleased, and shower down the superlative qualities of Buddha Tara's holy body, holy speech, and holy mind—omniscient wisdom, supreme power, and infinite compassion, in the form of a great shower of light rays. As I recite the mantra, I absorb and am blessed by this rain.

OM TARE TUTTARE TURE SVAHA

## DEDICATION

May I quickly become Guru Arya Tara and lead each and every sentient being into her enlightened state because of these merits.

May the supreme jewel bodhichitta that has not arisen, arise and grow; and may that which has arisen not diminish, but increase more and more.

## APPENDIX 5: HEALING BUDDHA<sup>150</sup>

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### A PRACTICE FOR THE PREVENTION AND HEALING OF DISEASE

by Padmasambhava

#### THE ACTUAL PRACTICE

##### *Motivation*

The purpose of my life is to free all living beings from all of their problems and from the causes of these problems, which are in their minds; also to bring them peace and happiness, especially the peerless happiness of full enlightenment, which they need. In order to accomplish this, I need a perfect, pure, healthy mind and body. For this reason, in order to benefit all living beings equaling the extent of space, I am going to do this healing meditation.

##### *Meditation*

At dawn or at another time, visualize your ordinary body. In the center of your chest is your heart, upside down, pointing upward. Inside your heart is an eight-petaled white lotus. In the center of this is a moon disk, and on that is Medicine Buddha.

His holy body, clear and in the nature of deep blue light, is in the aspect of supreme transformation. He is holding an arura plant in his right hand and a begging bowl in his left. In front of Medicine Buddha is the white medicinal goddess Actualized Wisdom; to his right, the yellow medicinal goddess Simultaneous Wealth; behind him, the red forest goddess Neck of Peacock; to

his left, the green tree goddess Having Radiance. Each of these goddesses is in the nature of blissful radiant light and has one face and two arms. In her right hand, each goddess holds an arura plant, and in her left, a vase adorned with various ornaments. Each is seated cross-legged (not in the full vajra position) in an attitude of respecting Healing Buddha.

### *Visualization and Mantra Recitation*

From the five deities in your heart, light beams are emitted in their respective colors. Your whole heart and body are filled with these blissful light beams, which completely purify all disease, harm from spirits, negative actions, and their imprints.

From all the pores of your body, five-colored light beams are emitted. Also, nectar flows down from the begging bowl and the vases held in the left hands of the five heart deities, completely filling your heart and body. Make a strong determination that all diseases have been completely pacified forever, that you can no longer experience any disease.

While one-pointedly concentrating on this visualization, recite the short or long mantra of Medicine Buddha seven, twenty-one, 108, or more times.

If you are ill with a contagious or other disease, after reciting the mantra, put some saliva on your left palm and rub it with the tip of your right ring finger. Then place the tip of the right ring finger at the base of the right and left nostrils, where there is a nerve called the All-Doing King Nerve. Then apply the saliva wherever there is disease.

### *Short Medicine Buddha Mantra*

TADYATHA / OM BHAISHAJYE BHAISHAJYE MAHA BHAISHAJYE  
[BHAISHAJYE] / RAJA SAMUDGATE SVAHA

ཏཱ་ཨྱི་ཨྱི་ཤཱི་ཤཱི་མཱཱ་ཨྱི་ཤཱི་[ཨྱི་ཤཱི་]། རྒྱ་ལོ་སྤྱུ་ལྷི་སྤྱུ་ལྷི་

*Common pronunciation:*

*Ta ya ta / om bekanzay bekanzay maha bekanzay [bekanzay] / radza samudgatay soha*

*Long Medicine Buddha Mantra*

OM NAMO BHAGAVATE BHAISHAJYE / GURU BAIDURYA / PRABHA  
RAJAYA / TATHAGATAYA / ARHATE SAMYAKSAM BUDDHAYA / TADYATHA  
/ OM BHAISHAJYE BHAISHAJYE MAHA BHAISHAJYE [BHAISHAJYE] / RAJA  
SAMUDGATE SVAHA

ॐ नमो भगवते वासुदेवाय । नमो भगवते वासुदेवाय ।  
नमो भगवते वासुदेवाय । नमो भगवते वासुदेवाय । नमो भगवते वासुदेवाय ।  
ॐ नमो भगवते वासुदेवाय । नमो भगवते वासुदेवाय । नमो भगवते वासुदेवाय ।  
ॐ नमो भगवते वासुदेवाय । नमो भगवते वासुदेवाय । नमो भगवते वासुदेवाय ।

*Common pronunciation:*

*Om namo bagawatay bekanzay guru baidurya / praba radza ya /  
tatagataya / arhatay samyaksam buddhaya / ta ya ta / om bekanzay  
bekanzay maha bekanzay [bekanzay] / radza samudgatay soha*

(The bracketed BHAISHAJYE is optional.)

*Then make this request:*

You, the destroyer, the qualified one gone beyond (Medicine Buddha) and the four medicinal goddesses, please help me to avoid experiencing the various diseases and to pacify immediately those that I am already experiencing.

*After doing this, recite the mantras of the Sanskrit vowels and consonants as much as possible, and also the Heart of Dependent Arising mantra:*



## Sanskrit vowels

OM A AA I II U UU RI RII LI LII E AI O AU AM AH SVAHA

ॐ अ आ इ ई उ ऊ रि री ली ली ए ऐ ओ औ अम् अह स्वाहा

## Sanskrit consonants

OM KA KHA GA GHA NGA / CHA CHHA JA JHA NYA / TA THA DA DHA NA  
/ TA THA DA DHA NA / PA PHA BA BHA MA / YA RA LA VA / SHA SHA SA HA  
KSHA SVAHA

ॐ का खा गा गघा नगा / चा चघा जा जघा न्या / ता था दा दघा ना  
/ ता था दा दघा ना / पा पघा बा बघा मा / या रा ला वा / शा शा सा हा  
क्षशा स्वाहा

## *The Heart of Dependent Arising Mantra:*

OM YE DHARMA HETU PRABHAVA HETUN TESHAN TATHAGATO  
HYAVADAT TESHAN CHA YO NIRODHA EVAM VADI MAHA SHRAMANA  
YE SVAHA (3x)

ॐ ये धर्मा हेतु प्रभवत्तेषां तेषां तथगतो ह्यवावदत् तेषां चा यो निरोद्धा एवमवदति महाश्रमणा ये स्वाहा

This practice protects you from diseases not yet experienced and from those already being experienced. It is the terma (treasure) advice instruction of the Lotus Arisen One (Padmasambhava).

## *Dedication*

Due to all my past, present, and future positive actions, which bring the result of happiness, may the ultimate good heart that cherishes and cares for all living beings, who are the source of all

my and others' happiness in the past, present, and future, be generated in my mind and the minds of others. May that which has already arisen in my and others' minds increase.

Due to all my positive actions in the past, present, and future as well as those of all holy beings, who have the purest attitude, may all father and mother living beings have happiness, and may I cause this by myself alone. May the realms of the unfortunate beings (hell, hungry ghost, and animal) be emptied forever.

Wherever there are holy beings who dedicate their lives to bringing happiness to others, may all their prayers succeed immediately, and may I cause this by myself alone.

Due to my positive actions of the past, present, and future and those done by these holy beings, may I achieve the peerless happiness of full enlightenment—the state of mind that is free of all mistakes and possesses all positive qualities—and lead everyone to this state.

## APPENDIX 6: MORE POWERFUL MANTRAS

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**T** of mantras that I have been recommending for many years because of their great power. They are specifically those mantras than can benefit beings who are dying or dead and the four dharmakaya relic mantras.

### THE POWERFUL MANTRAS FOR BENEFITING BEINGS AT DEATH<sup>152</sup>

#### *1. The Chenrezig Mantras*

The short mantra:

ཨོཾ་མ་ཎི་པ་ལྷོ་ཧྲཱི།

The long mantra:



ན་མོ་རྣམ་པར་ཡུལ་ཡ། མེ་གི་ག་ནི་གི་ག་ནི། རོ་ཙ་ནི་རོ་ཙ་ནི། རྩོ་ལ་ནི་རྩོ་ལ་ནི།  
རྩོ་ས་ནི་རྩོ་ས་ནི། སྤ་ཉི་ཉ་ན་སྤ་ཉི་ཉ་ན། སམ་ཀམ་པ་རི་པ་རྣམ་ཅི་མེ་སམ་  
སམ་རྣམ་རྣམ་སྤྲོ་བ།

### 5. *The Namgyalma Mantras*

The long mantra:











8. *The Milarepa Mantra:*

ཨོཾ་ཨུཾ་གུ་ཏུ་ཏ་ས་བཟླ་སམ་སི་རྗེ་པ་ལ་ཧྲཱི།

9. *The Zung of the Exalted Completely Pure Stainless Light (1):*

ན་མེ་སལྷ་ལྷོ་སྟེ་མཉམ་ལྷོ་གོ་ལྷོ་རྒྱ་པ་རི་ཤུལ་མ་ན་སེ། ཨ་ལྷོ་ཅི་ཏ་པ་ཏི་ཅུ་  
ཏུ་རྒྱ་ན་མེ་ལྷ་ག་བ་ཏེ། ཨ་མི་ཏ་ཨུ་ཡུ་ཤ་ཤུ། ཏ་སྤ་ག་ཏ་ཤུ། ཨོ་སམ་ཏ་  
སྤ་ག་ཏ་ཤུ། ཨུ་ཡུ་རི་ཤོ་རྒྱ་ནི། སོ་ཏ་ར་སོ་ཏ་ར། མམ་ཏ་སྤ་ག་ཏ་སྤུ་བ་  
ལེ་ན་སྤ་ཏི་སོ་ཏ་ར་ཨུ་ཡུ་སྤ་ར་སྤ་ར། མམ་ཏ་སྤ་ག་ཏ་ས་མ་ཡ། སོ་རྒྱི་སོ་རྒྱི།  
ཤུལ་ཤུལ། སོ་རྒྱ་ལ་སོ་རྒྱ་ལ། མ་མ་སམ་སྤ་པོ་ཨུ་བ་ར་ཅ་པོ་ཤུལ། བེ་ག་ཏ་མ་  
ལོ། མོ་ར་སྤ་ཤུལ་ཤུལ་ཏུ་ཏུ་ཏུ་ཏུ་སྤ་སྤ།

10. *The Zung of the Exalted Completely Pure Stainless Light (2):*

ན་མེན་བ་ན་བ་རྒྱུ་འུ་ཏ་སྐྱ་ག་ཏ་གི་སྐྱ་འོ་རྒྱུ་ལྷ་གྲ་འོ་ ཀོ་ལི་ནི་ལྷ་ཏ་ཤ  
ཏ་ས་ཏ་སྐྱུ་འོ་ འོ་བོ་བོ་ལི། ཅ་རི་ཅི་ཅ་ལི། མོ་རི་གོ་ལི་ཅ་ལ་བྲ་རི་སྐྱུ་འོ།

### 11. *The Maitreya Buddha mantras*

The mantra of Maitreya Buddha's promise:

ན་མོ་རྣ་ཏ་ཡུ་ཡ། ན་མོ་ལྷ་ག་བ་ཏེ། རྒྱུ་ལྷ་ན་ཡེ། ཏ་སྐྱ་ག་ཏུ་ཡ། ཨཱཱ་ཏེ་  
སུལྷོ་བུལྷོ་ཡ། ཏུ་སྐྱ། འོ་ཨ་འོ་ཏེ། ཨ་འོ་ཏེ། ཨ་བ་རྣ་འོ་ཏེ། ཨ་འོ་ཏུ་ཡ།  
ཏ་ར་ཏ་ར། མི་འི་ཨ་བ་ལོ་གི་ཏེ། ཀ་ར་ག་ར། མུ་ས་མ་ཡ་སིལྷོ། ལྷ་ར་ལྷ་  
ར། མུ་བོ་ལྷོ་མུ་བོ་ལོ། ལྷ་ར་ལྷ་ར། ཨཱཱ་ཀོ་ས་མ་ཡ། བོ་ལྷོ་བོ་ལྷོ། མུ་བོ་  
ལྷོ་སྐྱུ་འོ།

The heart mantra:

འོ་མོ་ཏེ་མོ་ཏེ་མུ་མོ་ཏེ་སྐྱུ་འོ།

The close heart mantra:

འོ་ལྷོ་ནི་ལྷོ་ནི་སྐྱུ་ར་སྐྱུ་འོ།

*12. The Buddha Rinchen Tsugtorchen Name Prayer:*

*De zhin sheg pa rin chhen tsug tor chän la chhag tshäl lo*  
To Tathagata Precious Ushnisha, I prostrate.

*13. The Lotus Pinnacle of Amoghapasha:*

འོ་བོ་སྒྲོ་ལྷ་རྒྱུ་པ་བི་མ་ལེ་རྒྱུ་པཎ།

*14. The Celestial Mansion Extremely Secret Sublime Success:*

འོ་བི་བྱ་ལ་གཞི། མ་ཁི་མ་ཞི། ཏ་སྐ་ག་ཏ་འི་ར་དེ་ག་འེ། མ་ཁི་མ་ཁི། ལུ་མ་  
ཞི། བི་མ་ལེ། བ་ག་ར་ག་རྒྱུ་རེ། རྒྱུ་རྒྱུ། རྒྱ་ལ་རྒྱ་ལ། བྱུ་བྱུ་བི་ལོ་གི་ཏེ། ལུ་ཏུ་  
ལཱི་ལྷི་ཏེ། བཞི་སྐ་ཏུ།

*15. The mantra from the Sutra of Great Liberation:*

ར་མོ་བུ་རྒྱ་ཡ། ར་མོ་རྒྱ་རྒྱ་ཡ། ར་མེ་ལྷོ་རྒྱ་ཡ། ཨ་དན་ཉི་རྒྱ་ར་ཀྲི། ཉཅུ་སྒྲ། ཨྲ་  
 ཀྲ་ཤ་ནི་བླ་བློ་ནི། སམ་རྒྱ་རྒྱ་ནི་བ་ནི། ཡི་ཤ་མ་ན། བི་བ་ཤ་ན། བི་མ་ལ་སུ་བ་  
 རི། རྒྱ་རྒྱ་ནི་ལ་ན། བ་རུ་ནི་ཙ་ཡ་ཉ་མ་ལེ། ཙ་ལེ། རུ་ལུ་རུ་ལུ། ཤི་བི་ཉ། མཇྲ་  
 མཇྲ་མཇྲ་ལྷོ་རྒྱ།

### THE FOUR DHARMAKAYA RELIC MANTRAS<sup>153</sup>

There are four dharmakaya relic mantras:

1. The Stainless Pinnacle Deity Mantra
2. The Secret Relic Mantra
3. The Zung of the Exalted Completely Pure Stainless Light
4. The Hundred Thousand Ornaments of Enlightenment Mantra

These four mantras are the relics of the dharmakaya, the relics of the Buddha. Other relics that we normally see, such as robes or parts of the Buddha’s holy body, are secondary relics. These are the highest relics. After I learned about the unbelievable benefits of each of these mantras, I had them written down and we printed many copies. These are normally what we should put inside stupas, statues, and so on.

By putting these mantras inside a stupa, even a bell that is offered to the stupa brings unimaginable benefit. For example, the negative karma of all sentient beings who hear the sound of that bell is purified; they are liberated from the lower realms and receive a good rebirth. In that way, it makes it so easy for sentient beings to purify negative karma and reach enlightenment.

Even while building a stupa, people’s minds are transformed. Students tell me how their hearts become softer, and they can definitely see some purification. To put just one brick or stone in a stupa being built becomes the cause for enlightenment. And when the stupa is finished, especially if it contains these four very powerful mantras, it blesses the whole environment around it; it protects it and helps all beings: humans, animals, even spirits and nagas.

You don't have to be Buddhist to benefit from a stupa. I remember the builders who built the Kadampa stupa at Institut Vajrayogini in France were Christians, a very special group whose service to their church was to build and restore holy objects.

There was also a stupa built in Iceland. A student at Tushita, Dharamsala, asked me what she should do after the meditation course, so I suggested building a stupa, which she did back at home in Iceland. Most of the people who helped her build it were non-Buddhists. I went there to bless it. When the sun is shining there, the area of the stupa is so pleasant, close to the main road and overlooking the city. But when I was there, the weather was very bad: windy, foggy, snowing! I ended up having to do half the ceremony in the car, which was being rocked by the wind. I have no idea how they managed to build the stupa in such a place. After it was consecrated, it was offered to the government, so the mayor came to give a speech—even in all that foggy weather. Now, the stupa is easily seen from the road and many people stop to look at it. It is of great benefit to Iceland.

The benefits of circumambulating and so forth are extensively explained in sutras such as *Arya Compassionate Eye Looking One* and *Compassionate White Lotus*.

### 1. *The Stainless Pinnacle Deity Mantra*

As we have seen, the heart mantra of Stainless Pinnacle Deity (*Tsugtor Drime*) is this:

ཨོྫ་མ་རྩི་ཡ་རྩི་ཀུ་རྩི། སཐ་ཏ་སྐ་ག་ཏ་ཨི་ད་ཡ་གཟེ་རྩི་ལ་རྩི་ལ། རྣམ་རྩི་  
ཏུ་གཟེ། སི་རྣ་ར་མ་མ་ཞུ་ཡུཾ་སི་ཤོ་རྣ་ཡ། མ་མ་སཐ་སྐ་པི། སཐ་ཏ་སྐ་ག་ཏ་  
ས་མ་རྩི་རྩི་པ་བི་མ་ལེ་བི་བྱེ། རྩི་རྩི་རྩི་རྩི། ཨོྫ་པི་སི་རྩི་རྩི།

As explained by the Buddha in the Kangyur, there are skies of benefits for making even just one prostration, circumambulation, or offering to a holy object containing the Stainless Pinnacle Deity mantra:

- It completely purifies the karmic obstacles of the five immediate negativities.
- You will be completely liberated from the hell, hungry ghost, and animal realms, and from the evil-gone realm of the yama world.
- You will have a long life.
- Like a snake changing its skin, when leaving the body, you will have the fortune to go to the blissful realm (that is, a pure land).
- You will never be stained by the smell of the womb.
- All your wishes will be completely and exactly fulfilled.
- If you put this mantra inside a stupa, you will never be reborn in the lower realms and will have a pure life until you achieve enlightenment.
- You will have good rebirths up until enlightenment is achieved.

This is most amazing. We have so many human problems that are unbearable, so how could we bear the sufferings of the lower realms, such as being born as an insect, much less being born a hell being or a hungry ghost? When we human beings have problems, we can communicate and try many ways to resolve the problems, but animals and hungry ghosts cannot do this, and their suffering is so much greater. And if their problems are unimaginably terrible, there is no question that the sufferings of the hell beings are so much worse. Therefore it is incredibly precious that just by putting this mantra inside a stupa, we can be freed forever from these sufferings, be ensured pure lives, and have higher rebirths until enlightenment is achieved.

## *2. The Secret Relic Mantra*

The Secret Relic (Sangwa Rigsel) Mantra is this:



ན་མ་རྩི་ཡ་རྩི་གུ་ལྟོ་སའ་ཏ་སྲ་ག་ཏུ་ལྟོ་ཨོ་རྩུ་འི་རྩ་སྲུ་བ་རེ་བ་ཙེ་ལོ་ཙེ་  
ལུ་ཙེ་ལུ་རྩ་ར་རྩ་ར་སའ་ཏ་སྲ་ག་ཏུ་རྩ་ཏུ་རྩ་རེ། བརྩ་གརྩེ། ར་ཡ་བ་རེ།  
ཨ་ཙེ་ལེ། ལྷ་ར་ཏ་སྲ་ག་ཏུ་རྩ་མ་ཙེ་ལ། ས་བརྩ་ན། བརྩ་པོ་རྩི། མརྩ་ཨ་ཡི་  
གུ་ར། ཨ་ཡི་གི་ཏེ། སའ་ཏ་སྲ་ག་ཏུ་ཨ་རྩི་རྩི་ཏེ། བོ་རྩ་ཡ་བོ་རྩ་ཡ། བོ་རྩ་འི་བོ་  
རྩ་འི། བརྩ་ཡ་བརྩ་ཡ། སོ་བོ་རྩ་འི་སོ་བོ་རྩ་ཡ། ཙེ་ལ་ཙེ་ལ། ཙེ་ཡི་ཏུ་སའ་ལྷ་  
བ་ར་རྩ་ན། སའ་སྲ་པོ་འི་ག་ཏེ། ཏུ་ཏུ་ཏུ་ཏུ། སའ་པོ་ག་འི་ག་ཏེ། སའ་ཏ་སྲ་  
ག་ཏུ་འི་ད་ཡ། བརྩི་འི། སོ་རྩ་བ་སོ་རྩ་བ། སའ་ཏ་སྲ་ག་ཏུ་ལུ་ལྟོ། རྩ་ར་འི་ལུ་  
འི། བརྩེ། ལུ་བརྩེ། སའ་ཏ་སྲ་ག་ཏུ་ཨ་རྩི་རྩི་ཏེ། རྩ་ཏུ་གརྩེ་སྲ་ལྟོ། ས་མ་ཡ་ཨ་  
རྩི་རྩི་ཏེ་སྲ་ལྟོ། སའ་ཏ་སྲ་ག་ཏུ་འི་ད་ཡ། རྩ་ཏུ་ལུ་འི་སྲ་ལྟོ། ལུ་ས་འི་རྩི་ཏུ་ལུ་འི་  
ཏ་སྲ་ག་ཏུ་ཨ་རྩི་རྩི་ཏེ། རྩི་རྩི་སྲ་ལྟོ། ཨོ་སའ་ཏ་སྲ་ག་ཏུ་ལུ་རྩི་པ་རྩ་ཏུ་ལུ་སྲ་འི་  
སའ་ཏ་སྲ་ག་ཏུ་རྩ་མ་རྩ་ཏུ་འི་རྩུ་འི་ཨ་རྩི་རྩི་ཏེ་ཏུ་ཏུ་ཏུ་ཏུ་རྩི་རྩི་སྲ་ལྟོ།

The heart mantra is this:

ཨོཾ་མཐ་ཏ་ཐ་ཤ་ཏ་ཏུ་མེ་ཏུ་ཐུ་ཏུ་མེ་ཏུ་མཐ་ཏ་ཐ་ཤ་ཏ་ཏུ་མེ་ཏུ་ཐུ་ཏུ་མེ་ཏུ་  
ཏེ་ཨོ་ཏུ་ཏུ་ཏུ་ཏུ་ཏུ་ཏུ་ཏུ་

As explained by the Buddha in the Kangyur, if you have this mantra inside a holy object, then all the buddhas will abide in that holy object. Therefore, there are skies of benefits for making even just one prostration, circumambulation, or offering to a holy object containing the Secret Relic Mantra:

- You purify the negative karma of the ten nonvirtuous actions as well as the five immediate negativities and so forth, and will be completely liberated from the eight hot hells.
- You will never turn back from peerless enlightenment. (That is, your life will always be directed toward enlightenment. This is irreversible; you will never go in the opposite direction.)
- You will always attain higher rebirth.
- By printing the Secret Relic Mantra just once, you collect the same amount of merit as making offerings to one hundred thousand times ten million times one hundred billion buddhas. This was told to Vajrapani.
- You create the same merit as having made offerings to as many buddhas as there are in ninety-nine sesame seed pods and you are always guided by that many buddhas.

This is just a tiny drop from the unimaginable benefits of this mantra.

### *3. The Zung of the Completely Pure Stainless Light*

There are many Zung of the Exalted Completely Pure Stainless Light (Özer Drime) mantras, and they are all contained within the Four Dharmakaya Relic Mantras. Some of them are this:





ཨོ་སཐ་ཏ་སྐྱ་ག་ཏ་མ་ལ་བི་ཤོ་ད་ནི་ཅུ་རྒྱ། བ་ལེ་སྤ་ཏི་སི་སྐྱ་ར། ཏ་སྐྱ་ག་ཏ་  
རྒྱ་ཏུ་རྒྱ་རེ། རྒྱ་ར་རྒྱ་ར། སི་རྒྱ་ར་སི་རྒྱ་ར། སཐ་ཏ་སྐྱ་ག་ཏ་ཨ་རྒྱི་རྒྱ་ན་ཨ་རྒྱི་  
ལྷོ་ཏི་སྐྱ་རྒྱ།

As explained by the Buddha in the Kangyur, there are skies of benefit in making even just one prostration, circumambulation, or offering to a holy object containing the Zung of the Completely Pure Stainless Light:

If you offer even a bell to a stupa containing this mantra, all the sentient beings in that area, animals or humans, by hearing the sound of that bell will be completely purified of the five immediate negativities.

Normally, committing the five immediate negativities is the cause to be reborn in the lowest hot hell, which is the most extreme suffering there is, but having this mantra inside a stupa purifies that. This shows how unbelievably powerful this mantra is. Since even hearing the sound of a bell offered to such a stupa has incredible power to purify, there is no question that any insect or other being who sees or touches the stupa is purified of negative karma. The mantra is so powerful that even just *thinking* about the stupa purifies the five immediate negativities. That is amazing! It is like a small flame that eventually grows into a fire that burns many thousands of miles of forest or entire cities.

If water, rain, or dust just touches the stupa, it is so blessed that it purifies all the negative karmas of the insects on the ground who come into contact with it. And the wind that touches such a stupa purifies the negative karmas of people or animals that it contacts, ensuring a good rebirth. Even the shadow of the stupa does this.

Everything that touches the land the stupa is on becomes meaningful, including the rain that touches the stupa and then flows to the ground and touches worms. The worms' negative karma is purified, and they will receive a higher rebirth.

#### *4. The Hundred Thousand Ornaments of Enlightenment Mantra*

The mantra of the Hundred Thousand Ornaments of Enlightenment (Jangchub Gyänbum) is this:

ཇི་ན་མོ་རྣ་ག་བ་ཏེ་མི་ཕུ་ལ་བ་ད་ན་གུ་རྩུ་ལོ་ཏ་གྱི་དྲུ་ མ་ལྷ་ས་གེ་རུ་ཕུ་རྩུ་  
 བེ། ཏ་སྐ་ག་ཏ་ཡ། ཇེ་རྩ་ཏེ། ས་ཕུ་རྩི་ཕུ་རྩུ་ཡ། བ་མོ་རྣ་ག་བ་ཏེ་མི་ཕུ་ཕུ་བ་  
 ཡ། ཏ་སྐ་ག་ཏ་ཡ། ཇེ་རྩ་ཏེ། ས་ཕུ་རྩི་ཕུ་རྩུ་ཡ། ཏ་ཏུ་སྐ། བོ་རྩི་བོ་རྩི། བོ་རྩི་བོ་  
 བོ་རྩི་བོ། སམ་ཏ་སྐ་ག་ཏ་མོ་ཙ་མི། རྩ་ར་རྩ་ར། ཏ་ར་ཏ་ར། མ་ཏ་ར་མ་ཏ་ར།  
 མ་རྩ་བོ་རྩི་ཙི་རྩ་རྩ་མེ། རུ་ཕུ་རུ་ཕུ། བ་ཏ་ར་སྐྱི་ས་རྩུ་ཏེ་ཏེ། སམ་ཏ་སྐ་ག་ཏུ་  
 མི་ཏི་གྱེ། ཕུ་ཏི་ཕུ་བ་ཏེ། སམ་ཏུ་རྩུ་ཕུ་རྩུ་བ་རྩུ་སེ། མི་མི་མི་མི། ག་ག་བ་ཏ་  
 ཡ། སམ་ཏ་སྐ་ག་ཏུ་རྩི་རྩི་ཏེ། བ་རྩ་རྩ་ཡེ། བ་མེ་བ་མེ། མ་བ་མེ་མ་བ་མེ། སམ་  
 ཏ་སྐ་ག་ཏུ་སམ་སྐ་བོ་མ་བ་མ་བེ། སམ་སྐ་བོ་མི་བོ་རྩི་བེ། ཏུ་ཕུ་རུ་ཕུ། མ་རྩ་  
 བོ་རྩི་སྐ་མ་སྐ་མ་ཏི་རྩི་ཏེ། སམ་ཏ་སྐ་ག་ཏ་ཕུ་མ་ཏི་རྩི་ཏེ། ཕུ་རྩུ་སྐ་རྩུ། ཇི་སམ་  
 ཏ་སྐ་ག་ཏ་ཕུ་བ་མོ་གི་ཏེ། རྩ་ཡ་རྩ་ཡ་སྐ་རྩུ། ཇི་རུ་ཕུ་རུ་ཕུ། རྩ་ཡ་ཕུ་མི་སྐ་  
 རྩུ། ཇི་བརྩ་ཕུ་ཕུ་ཏི་སྐ་རྩུ།

It has both heart mantra and nearing heart mantra. The heart mantra is this:

ཇི་སམ་ཏ་སྐ་ག་ཏ་ཕུ་བ་མོ་གི་ཏེ་སྐ་རྩུ། རྩ་ཡ་རྩ་ཡ་སྐ་རྩུ། ཇི་རུ་ཕུ་རུ་ཕུ། རྩ་  
 ཡ་ཕུ་མི་སྐ་རྩུ།

The close heart mantra is this:

ཇི་བརྩ་ཕུ་ཕུ་ཏི་སྐ་རྩུ།

As explained by the Buddha in the Kangyur, there are skies of benefits for making even just one prostration, circumambulation, or offering to a holy object containing the Hundred Thousand Ornaments of Enlightenment

Mantra. When you do, you are not only making offerings to the stupa but also to all the Three Rare Sublime Ones that exist in the ten directions, in every universe.

By putting even just one mantra inside a stupa, it brings the same merit as having built one hundred thousand stupas—whether the stupa is gigantic like Bodhgaya or just the size of a finger. By dedicating this merit for the happiness of all sentient beings up to full enlightenment, both you and they receive unbelievable benefits.

A wonderful practice is to chant the name of somebody who has died at the exact moment you put this mantra inside a stupa. Then you make offerings to the stupa—either actual offerings or visualized offerings, as in the seven-limb prayer. If you visualize offerings, you can include all the flowers inside and outside, all the food offerings, all the water offerings, all the light offerings, everything! You can use all the offerings at my houses in California and Washington, as well as all the offerings at all the FPMT centers.

The Buddha said to Ananda,

I explained this sutra for those beings who have very little merit and no devotion, for those who are overcome by doubt and cannot believe in the Dharma. For those sentient beings, I explained the Hundred Thousand Ornaments of Enlightenment mantra.

That means the Buddha explained this mantra for us. The Buddha also told Ananda,

In future times, if ordained ones don't read this sutra that contains the benefits of this mantra and don't make offering to this mantra, which makes it so unbelievably easy to purify the negative karma that are the cause to be reborn in the lower realms and to accumulate the merit to achieve enlightenment and then offer extensive benefit to sentient beings, those ordained ones will suffer in the same way as householders. But if they listen to this teaching and then make even one stupa with this mantra inside, they make offering to all the eighty-four thousand teachings of the Buddha.

This means that this mantra is an antidote to the eighty-four thousand delusions, and you create inconceivable heaps of merit through reciting it. When you put these four dharmakaya relic mantras inside a stupa, even mentioning the name of a person or animal that has died and praying for them brings them a good rebirth, such as birth in a pure land. That person will definitely be liberated from the lower realms. Placing the mantras inside a holy object such as a stupa, saying the seven-limb practice, and making dedications for that person or animal is a very powerful method for healing.

Holy objects such as these liberate sentient beings continuously, twenty-four hours a day, every day. They purify the causes of the lower realms and bring sentient beings to the higher realms where they can meet the Dharma and then reach liberation and enlightenment.

As soon as stupas and statues of the Buddha are made, they have the power to cause sentient beings to do actions such as circumambulating, prostrating, offering, and so forth, which then become virtuous actions creating the cause of enlightenment, even if they are done with the eight worldly dharmas and nonvirtuous thoughts. So even though you might not have any realizations such as bodhichitta or emptiness, the holy objects you make still have the power to liberate sentient beings from the oceans of samsaric suffering, to actualize all the realizations of the path, and then to achieve enlightenment.

## APPENDIX 7: DAILY MANTRAS<sup>158</sup>

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### A COMMENTARY ON “BLESSING THE SPEECH ACCORDING TO THE INSTRUCTIONS OF GREAT YOGI KHYUNGPO”

#### *Why and When to Do the Practice Blessing the Speech*

According to the Instructions of Great Yogi Khyungpo, this is a method to make the speech perfect. According to my root guru, Kyabje Trijang Rinpoche, this practice of blessing the speech multiplies the recitation of mantra ten million times. I received the oral transmission of this practice from Kyabje Kirti Tsenshab Rinpoche. You should do the blessing of the speech and recite the daily mantras first thing in the morning before you begin to speak, even while you are still in bed.

#### *Visualizing Yourself as the Deity*

I clarify myself as the deity.

To do this practice, you need to transform yourself into the form of a deity. You don't just change a truly existent human body into a truly existent deity body; it is not like that. First you purify the truly existent I in emptiness by looking at the real I as empty, as it is empty. Then, your wisdom of realizing emptiness, which is nondual with great bliss, manifests as a deity. Usually you arise as the main deity with whom you have a karmic connection and by means of which you will achieve enlightenment most quickly. However, if you are doing a deity retreat, you can arise as that deity. You are only allowed to clarify yourself as a deity after having received a great initiation of a lower

tantra or highest yoga tantra deity. If you haven't received a great initiation, you can visualize yourself as Guru Shakyamuni Buddha. My guru Kyabje Denma Locho Rinpoche said that this is an exception based on the Buddha being the founder of the present Buddhadharma. However, for Medicine Buddha, Chenrezig, and all other deities, you must have received the initiation of the deity in order to visualize yourself as that deity. If you haven't received a great initiation, it might also be okay to do the blessing of the speech with your ordinary body, but I haven't actually heard that.

### *Visualizing the Seed Syllable and Mantra Garlands*

On my tongue, a syllable transforms into a moon. On top of it appears a white syllable encircled by the white Sanskrit vowels standing clockwise, the red Sanskrit consonants standing counterclockwise, and the blue Dependent Related Heart Mantra standing clockwise.

On your tongue, in the center, visualize a white syllable . The transforms into a white moon disk, transparent like a magnifying glass and of the nature of light. In the center of the moon disk is a white , standing upright and facing forward. Standing clockwise around the are the white Sanskrit vowels, called in Sanskrit— . Standing counterclockwise around the vowels are the red Sanskrit consonants, called in Sanskrit—

. Standing clockwise around the consonants is the blue Dependent Related Heart Mantra—

. All the letters of the mantras are standing upright and are radiant, like neon signs on hotels and restaurants at night. The three s that begin the three mantras are in front of the syllable that is in the center of the moon disk. The mantra garlands do not circle the in the sense of turning or spinning around it.



## *Visualizing Hooking Back the Power and Blessings of Speech*

Light beams radiate from the syllable        and the mantra garlands, hooking back the blessings and power of the speech of those beyond and not beyond the world in the form of the three mantras, the seven sublime precious objects of a king's reign, the eight auspicious signs, [and the eight auspicious substances].

Those who are beyond the world are the buddhas, arya bodhisattvas abiding on the three pure bhumis, and arhats. Those who are not beyond the world are the yogis who are accomplishing the path and the sages who have actualized words of truth. Due to the power of abiding in silence and living in the morality of abstaining from negative karmas of speech, the words of these sages have much power and so whatever they pray for is successful.

All their blessings and power of speech are hooked back in the form of the three mantras, the seven precious objects of a king's reign, the eight auspicious signs, and the eight auspicious substances, filling the whole sky. They absorb into the mantras on the moon disk on your tongue, like rain falling on the ocean.

Visualize that light beams are emitted from the syllable        and the three mantra garlands on your tongue. They hook back the blessings and power of speech of those who are beyond the world and those who are not beyond the world.

“Those who are beyond the world” does not mean those who are distant from the world, but those who are beyond samsara; that is, beyond aggregates caused by karma and delusions. They are the buddhas, arya bodhisattvas abiding on the three pure bhumis, and arhats—those who have achieved liberation from samsara through developing their minds in renunciation and the wisdom realizing emptiness.

First, visualize that beams are emitted from the syllable        and the three mantra garlands on your tongue and hook back all the blessings and power of their holy speech in the form of the three mantras—the vowels, consonants, and Dependent Related Heart Mantra, which absorb into the mantras on your tongue. Then, beams are emitted and hook back all the blessings and power of

their holy speech in the form of the seven precious objects of a king's reign, the eight auspicious signs, and the eight auspicious substances. These fill the sky in different layers, like the layers of clouds you see when you travel by plane. Visualize that many sets of the seven precious objects of a king's reign absorb into the mantras on your tongue, like snowfall or rainfall. Then visualize that many sets of the eight auspicious signs absorb into the mantras on your tongue, like snowfall or rainfall. Then visualize that many sets of the eight auspicious substances absorb into the mantras on your tongue, like snowfall or rainfall.

Those who are not beyond the world are samsaric beings—those whose aggregates are caused by karma and delusion. They include some yogis. Yogis can be of different levels—those who have achieved high realizations of secret mantra and are beyond samsara and those who are still samsaric beings. The beings who are not beyond the world also include sages who have actualized words of truth. Due to living their whole life in silence and practicing the morality of abandoning negative karmas of speech by abstaining from telling lies, gossiping, and so forth, their words have power and so their prayers are quickly actualized.

Visualize that the blessings and power of the speech of these yogis and sages are hooked back in the form of the three mantras, the seven precious objects of a king's reign, the eight auspicious signs, and the eight auspicious substances. These are not material things; they are of the nature of light. They absorb into the mantras on the moon disk on your tongue, like rain falling on the ocean.

### *Visualizing the Purification of Negative Karmas and Obscurations*

I have added a visualization here that is not mentioned in the actual practice. As you recite the vowels three times, visualize that from each syllable of the white vowels, white nectar beams are emitted. They totally illuminate and fill the inside of your whole body from your feet up to your head, like a glass filled with milk. All your negative karmas and obscurations collected with the body from beginningless rebirths are completely purified.

As you recite the consonants three times, visualize that from each syllable of the red consonants, red nectar beams are emitted and completely fill your

whole body. All your negative karmas and obscurations collected with the speech from beginningless rebirths are completely purified.

As you recite the Dependent Related Heart Mantra three times, visualize that from each syllable of the blue mantra, blue nectar beams are emitted and completely fill your whole body. All your negative karmas and obscurations collected with the mind from beginningless rebirths are completely purified.

### *Reciting the Mantras*

#### Mantras for Blessing the Speech

Concentrate on the visualization and recite the mantras beginning from the inner circle.

Recite the mantras one by one, three times each, beginning with the vowels, the inner circle; then the consonants; and then the Dependent Related Heart Mantra, the outer circle.

When you recite mantras, you have to recite them very clearly and slowly. For example, when you recite the vowels, say (pause), (pause), (pause), (pause), and so forth.

When Kyabje Choden Rinpoche gave a commentary on Secret Vajrapani at Vajrapani Institute, he talked about how important it is to recite mantras correctly. Rinpoche used this example of the Sanskrit vowels to show how they should be recited very clearly and very precisely, with the sounds of all the syllables pronounced correctly.

There are different techniques for reciting these mantras, but according to the great yogi Drubchen Khyungpo, all three mantras—the vowels, consonants, and Dependent Related Heart Mantra—have at the beginning and at the end.

#### Sanskrit Vowels (*Ali*)

As you recite the vowels, white nectar beams flow down from the mantra and fill your whole body. All negative karmas collected



As you recite the mantra, blue nectar beams flow down from the mantra and fill your whole body. All negative karmas collected with your mind from beginningless rebirths are completely purified.

ཨོ་ཡི་ལྷ་མུ་ཏེ་དུ་མ་ལྷ་བུ་ཏེ་དུ་ལྷི་ལྷ་ལྷ་མུ་ག་ཏོ་བྱ་བ་དཏ་ཏེ་ལྷ་ལྷ་ཡོན་རོ་ལྷ་  
ཨོ་འོ་བུ་དྲི་མ་དྲི་བྲ་མ་ཏ་ཡེ་སྐ་དྲི་

Although there is no break in the Tibetan writing, you have to pause between and . This is because if you recite and together as , the mantra would have the very strange meaning of “May the female sex organ be destroyed.” But if you pause after and then recite , it doesn’t mean that. This way of reciting the mantra is explained and emphasized in the texts. Reciting this mantra stops all inauspicious things, gathers all good things, and fulfills all wishes.

### *Absorption of the Mantras*

The Dependent Related Heart Mantra absorbs into the consonants, the consonants into the vowels, the vowels into the syllable , and the into the moon cushion. That transforms into a syllable . The melts into pink nectar and absorbs into my tongue, which becomes of the nature of a vajra.

Your tongue becomes very heavy and strong, as if difficult to move, and as indestructible as a vajra. Generate very strong faith that all the blessings and power of the speech of all the buddhas, bodhisattvas, arhats, yogis, and sages have entered your speech and made it perfect. Think: “My speech has become perfect.”

When you have finished reciting the three mantras, visualize that the outer mantras gradually absorb into the inner ones. First visualize that the Dependent Related Heart Mantra absorbs into the consonants. Then the consonants absorb into the vowels. Then the vowels absorb into the syllable in the center of the moon disk. The syllable absorbs into the moon disk. The moon disk transforms into a syllable, which is what it originally came from. Here you should visualize a Tibetan letter like this, ཨྱེ, with a small ཨ, and the two dots, ེ. The ཨྱེ melts into pink nectar, which absorbs into your tongue. Your tongue becomes the nature of a vajra, indestructible. Eating black foods can no longer destroy the power of your speech. Think that your tongue becomes solid, like iron or a rock, as well as very strong and very heavy, almost as if you cannot move it. Generate very strong faith that the blessings and power of speech of all the buddhas, bodhisattvas, arhats, yogis, and sages have entered your speech and made it perfect. Think: “My speech has become perfect.”

### *The Benefits of Blessing the Speech*

The benefits of blessing the speech are: (1) the power of your speech becomes perfect; (2) whatever you recite is multiplied ten million times; (3) the power of your speech is not taken away by eating wrong foods; and (4) gossiping becomes the recitation of mantra.

When you bless your speech, all the blessings and power of the holy speech of all the buddhas and other holy beings are received in your tongue, and you get an unbelievable number of benefits. I don't know how many millions and zillions of benefits are received! However, there are four particular benefits.

The first benefit of blessing the speech is that it makes the power of your speech perfect. Due to this, when you teach the Dharma, everyone listens to you and practices the Dharma. When you do counseling, everyone pays attention and follows your advice. When you give a lecture, even a political speech, all the people pay attention and listen to you. When you speak to an important person, they listen to you and help you. In short, when your speech

has power, other people listen to you, pay attention to you, and keep your words in their hearts.

Therefore, you should bless your speech in the morning, not only for your recitation of mantras to have power, but even for your ordinary speech to have power. Whether it is to do your job, to request someone's help, or to explain something to someone, your speech needs power. If your speech doesn't have power, nothing will work.

The second benefit of blessing the speech is that any prayer or mantra you recite is multiplied ten million times. For example, if you recite a mantra such as *Om Hrim Namah Shivaya* or the Vajrasattva mantra one time, you get the benefit of having recited it ten million times. It is unbelievably powerful. However, other mantras and practices also do that.

The third benefit is a particular benefit of the practice of blessing the speech—it stops the power of your speech, including the power of your mantras, from being taken away or degenerated by eating black foods. According to the Kadampa text *Practical Buddhist Tantra*, eating garlic takes away the power of speech for seven days, onion for five days, and radish for nine days. There are different types of radish, but I think this is a particular radish that is large, round, and very strong; it makes the breath smell, produces a lot of gas, and pollutes the whole body. Eating nettles causes the power of your speech to be lost for half a year. When nettles are cooked well they are very delicious, but eating them has this shortcoming. Eating animal tongue, in particular sheep tongue, takes away the power of your speech for your whole life. Animals such as sheep are extremely ignorant, so when you eat their meat, in particular the lower parts of their bodies, the heart, and, worst of all, the tongue, due to a dependent arising it dulls your mind and causes your intelligence and wisdom to degenerate. Blessing your speech in the morning stops all the harm that comes from eating these wrong foods.

If you are very sensitive, you can feel the harmful effects of having eaten black foods. They make your mind unclear and can also make your body kind of tough and even cause it to change color. Because black foods destroy the power of your mind and body, in addition to the power of your speech, it is best to avoid eating them. However, it is different for a great yogi of secret mantra who has complete control over their mind and the winds that are the vehicle of the mind. Such a person can eat black foods, and even poisons that

would normally kill an ordinary person, and not be harmed. Instead these foods only become a cause to increase their bliss and realizations.

The fourth benefit is also a particular benefit of the practice of blessing the speech—anything you say, even gossip, becomes the recitation of mantra. If you do the practice of blessing the speech in the morning, from then until sunrise the next morning, by the power of this practice all your gossip becomes the recitation of mantra. This probably means that whatever you say becomes virtue. There are also other specific benefits of blessing the speech. For example, Lama Atisha taught that when reciting a certain number of mantras, such as twenty-one or a hundred, if you engage in ordinary talk before you finish the recitation, your mantras are as if stabbed with a sword and their power is taken away. If you do this blessing of the speech, that doesn't happen.

### *Dedication*

May my tongue sense base  
have all the courage of the ones gone to bliss.  
By the magnificence and power of my words,  
may all sentient beings be subdued.  
May all the meanings of whatever words I say be accomplished.

I added this dedication from a Nyingma prayer book containing a collection of daily practices. It is a very good and important dedication that summarizes the purpose of blessing the speech in three requests.

First dedicate for your tongue sense base, or sense power, to have the courage or power of the ones gone to bliss, the buddhas. Then dedicate for the magnificence and power of your words to subdue the minds of sentient beings, so that when you give teachings and when you talk to others, you will be able to bring inner peace to them by pacifying their delusions, selfish mind, and negative thoughts. Then, when you say, “May all the meanings of whatever words I say be accomplished,” dedicate that whenever you teach the Dharma, or even when you explain something to someone, give someone advice, or ask someone to do something, you will be able to accomplish whatever you say because they will listen to you.



## *Nagarjuna's Heart Practice*

Nagarjuna's heart practice is to recite these three mantras—the Sanskrit vowels, Sanskrit consonants, and Dependent Related Heart Mantra—three times each after doing any virtuous activity of body, speech, or mind. In particular, it is good to recite these mantras after reciting the mantras of a deity when doing a sadhana or during a session in retreat. By doing this, the purpose for which you recited those particular mantras will be accomplished. For example, you can recite mantras for pacification (to pacify sicknesses, harm from spirits, negative karmas, and defilements), for increase (to increase life, merits, wisdom, wealth, and realizations), for control (to have the necessary outer conditions, such as material things, for your practice of Dharma and your actions to benefit others to be successful), or for wrath (to gain control over evil beings so that they listen to you and stop engaging in heavy negative karma, so you can then bring them into the Dharma and to enlightenment).

## A COMMENTARY ON “DAILY MANTRAS” AND “MANTRAS FOR SPECIFIC OCCASIONS”

### *Daily Mantras*

It is very good to recite these mantras first thing in the morning to make your life meaningful and to increase all the merits you collect during the day.

### The Mantra to Bless the Mala

ཨོ་འུ་ཅི་ར་མ་ཉི་མ་བཏུ་ཡ་ཏྟཱི།

Recite this mantra seven times and then blow on your mala. All the recitations you do of the secret mantras taught by the Tathagata are multiplied one hundred sextillion times (10<sup>21</sup>). This is taught in .

If you recite          seven times and then blow on your mala, the power of any mantra taught by the Buddha that you recite, such as          or the Vajrasattva mantra, is increased ten million times one hundred billion times a hundred thousand. Although other mantras can be used to bless the mala in order to increase the power of mantra recitation, the benefits of this one are unbelievable.

This mantra was taught in the sutra

. The name of the sutra is mentioned here to show that this mantra came from the Buddha. The Buddha taught it so that sentient beings' merits could be increased. Due to the power of the Buddha's compassionate wish to bring sentient beings to enlightenment, reciting even one mantra can become very powerful.

I asked a Sanskrit expert how the Sanskrit syllable          should be pronounced. He said that although it can be pronounced         , it is better to say         , as if it had the Tibetan letter          at the end rather than the letter         . However, I don't know what other people who know Sanskrit would say about that.

## The Mantra to Multiply Virtue

ཨོཾ་སྐྱུ་ར་སྐྱུ་ར་བི་མ་ན་ས་ར་མདུ་ཇ་བ་ཏུ། ཨོཾ་སྐྱུ་ར་སྐྱུ་ར་བི་མ་ན་སྐྱུ་ར་  
མདུ་ཇ་བ་ཏུ།

If you recite this mantra seven times, any virtuous activity you do is multiplied by a hundred thousand. This is taught in the

There are many different mantras to increase the merits that you collect during the day. If you recite this particular mantra seven times, any virtuous activity you do with your body, speech, or mind during the day will increase one

hundred thousand times. The Buddha taught this mantra in the

In your daily life, because you don't want suffering and want only happiness, you need to make the fewest mistakes—nonvirtues—possible and create the most merits—virtues—possible. This is because suffering comes from nonvirtue and happiness comes from virtue. Therefore, reciting this mantra is very important; it makes the way you live your life very wise.

## The Zung of the Completely Pure Stainless Light

ན་མཆོད་བ་ན་བ་ཀྱི་ལྷོ། ཏ་སྤྱ་ག་ཏ་གི་སྤྱ་ལྷོ་ལྷོ་ལྷོ་ལྷོ་ལྷོ། ཀོ་ལི་ནི་ལྷོ་ཏ་ཤ།  
ཏ་ས་ཏ་སྤྱ་ལྷོ། ལྷོ་བོ་བོ་རི། ཅ་རི་ཅི་ཅ་རི། མོ་རི་གོ་ལི་ཅ་ལ་སྤྱ་རི་སྤྱ་ལྷོ།

Talking to a person who has recited this mantra purifies even the five heavy negative karmas without break. Just hearing the voice of a person who has recited this mantra, being touched by their shadow, or touching their body purifies negative karmas collected in this and past lives. If you recite this mantra, you won't be harmed by poison, spirits, lightning, and so forth. All the buddhas will protect you, Chenrezig will look after you, and all the devas and those who are living in samaya will support you. You won't be harmed by black magic mantras, rituals, and substances. If this mantra is put inside a stupa, the negative karmas of anyone who sees the stupa, hears of it, touches it, or is touched by earth, dust, or wind that has touched it get purified. They won't be reborn in the lower realms and instead will be born as a happy transmigratory being.

This mantra, one of the dharmakaya relic mantras, is from the Kangyur, the Buddha's teachings. I received the oral transmission of all four mantras and their benefits from Kyabje Kyongla Rato Rinpoche in San Jose, California. It is

good to recite the Zung of the Completely Pure Stainless Light after blessing your speech in the morning, before you begin to talk and engage in impure speech. You can recite it twenty-one times, ten times, or even just three, four, or five times.

The

says that if someone recites this mantra after blessing their speech in the morning, the five heavy negative karmas without break of anyone who talks to them get purified. What does “without break” mean? Without the break of another life. Because these negative karmas are very powerful, right after you die you are reborn in the lowest hell, the inexhaustible hell, where the suffering is the heaviest in samsara and experienced for the longest time—one intermediate eon. And if your karma to be there is not finished when this world ends, you will be reborn in that hell in another universe.

Also, after you have recited this mantra, there is unbelievable benefit for anyone who hears your voice, whose body is touched by your shadow, and who touches your body (for example, a person who shakes your hand or an insect that lands on your body). Not only are their negative karmas of this life purified, but also their negative karmas from past lives. Because even their very heavy negative karmas without break are purified, there is no doubt that their ten nonvirtuous actions are also purified. Therefore, whether you are doing counseling, teaching in a school, or just engaging in conversation, reciting this mantra becomes beneficial for others when they hear your voice. Even if someone is blind and cannot see you, you can speak to them so that they hear your voice and you can touch their body, hands, or face and bring them unimaginable benefit. You should remember this when you are talking to and touching others.

Also, due to reciting this mantra you will be protected by all the buddhas. You will be supported and helped by Chenrezig. All the devas and all those living in samaya will be happy with you. You won't be harmed by others' black magic mantras, rituals, and substances.

If this mantra is put inside a stupa, the negative karmas are purified of anyone who sees the stupa, hears about it, touches it (including the insects that land on it), or is touched by earth, dust, or wind that has touched the stupa, and they won't be reborn in the lower realms. Instead they will be reborn as

happy transmigratory beings, as devas or human beings. In short, it will be impossible for those who are in the lower realms to be born back there again.

Guru Shakyamuni Buddha explained to Bodhisattva Great Sattva Eliminating All Obscurations, Lord of Secrets (Vajrapani), the Four Great Kings, and the gods, including Brahma, who is the lord of this unbearable suffering world; the devas of Brahma Type; and Maheshvara,

Holy beings, I am handing you the essence of the king of secret mantras. You should always respect and offer service to it. Keep it and put it inside a jewel container. Then announce it in all places and unceasingly show it to sentient beings. If you make them see and hear it, their five negative karmas without break will be purified.

Usually big statues and stupas have a life-tree inside them on which the four dharmakaya relic mantras are written in gold, but this mantra can be put in small statues and stupas instead of it. Even if there is just one Zung of the Completely Pure Stainless Light in a statue or stupa, there is unbelievable benefit—the negative karmas and obscurations of anyone who sees it get purified.

### The Mantra of Great Wisdom Bimala Ushnisha

ཨོ་ཨི་ཡ་རྟེ་སའ་ཏ་སྐ་ག་ཏ་ཨི་ད་ཡ་གཞི། རུ་ལ་རྟམ་རྟུ་ཏུ་གཞི། སི་ཏ་ར་ཎ་  
ཞུ་ཡུལ་མོ་རྟེ་ཡ། སྐ་པི་སའ་ཏ་སྐ་ག་ཏ་ས་མཇུ་ཞུ་ཞི་པ་བེ་མ་ལེ་རྟེ་ཤུ་རྟེ་སྐ་རྟེ།

This mantra has two major benefits. The first is that it purifies the five heavy negative karmas without break of anyone who hears it. The second is that because it is the most powerful mantra for

consecration, it can be used to consecrate holy objects as well as rocks, trees, mountains, and so forth.

There are two versions of the Mantra of Great Wisdom Bimala Ushnisha. One version begins with \_\_\_\_\_ and the other with \_\_\_\_\_. The rest of the mantra is the same. I found the first version in a book written by a very great and learned lama in Tibet to educate young incarnate lamas. It explains to them how to do prayers and practices in order to help people, for example, how to do \_\_\_\_\_, transference of consciousness, for the dying, what prayers to do for the sick, and so forth. There must be a valid source for this version of the mantra, but so far I haven't been able to find it in the Kangyur, whereas the version that begins with \_\_\_\_\_ is found in the Kangyur. The benefits of reciting this mantra are mentioned in the book from Tibet. There it says,

After you recite this mantra, if you make one stupa \_\_\_\_\_, it becomes the same as having made ten million stupa tsatsas. Also after you have recited this mantra, if any of the four elements touches you, it becomes twice as powerful as a stupa, and anyone who sees or touches the element will be liberated, their five heavy negative karmas without break will be purified, they will be reborn in a high caste, have a long life and wealth, remember their past lives, be protected from all harm, and achieve enlightenment. This is taught by Drodren Gyalwa Cho.

If you recite this mantra and make a huge stupa, such as a billion-story stupa, or a small tsatsa stupa the size of a fingernail, you receive the same benefit, or the same amount of merit, as having made ten million huge or small stupas.

The merits you receive from making one stupa, which are inconceivable, are multiplied by ten million by reciting this mantra. Because it has this unbelievable benefit, it is important to recite this mantra before you begin the work of building a stupa, but you should also recite it every day during its construction. You can use it to bless the bricks, cement, and any other material that you are going to use. If you were to actually make ten million stupas, even small ones, can you imagine how many years it would take? If you were to build ten million big stupas the size of Lama Yeshe's stupa at Chenrezig

Institute, can you imagine how many lifetimes it would take? But if you recite this mantra when you start to build a stupa, you get the same benefit as having built ten million stupas without needing to undergo all the hardship. The whole point is that the more merit you are able to collect, the more easily and quickly you will be able to achieve enlightenment, which means that you will be able to liberate sentient beings from the sufferings of samsara and bring them to enlightenment more quickly.

By reciting this mantra, if any element—earth, water, fire, or wind—touches your body, it gets blessed. It gains the power to liberate other sentient beings by purifying their negative karmas. For example, if you recite this mantra and then swim in water, the water becomes blessed and when it touches the numberless creatures living in it—from the largest whale down to the tiniest microscopic insect—and when it touches the human beings who are diving and playing in it, they are liberated from their negative karmas and the lower realms. It's the same for the rest of the elements; by your reciting this mantra and touching them, the elements gain the power, double that of a stupa, to purify other sentient beings.

This advice was taught by Drodren Gyalwa Cho, which might be the name of one of Buddha's past lives. However, the term is confusing. means "transmigratory being" and means "guide." I'm not sure whether Drodren Gyalwa Cho is the name of a buddha or if it is simply talking about the function of a buddha, which is to guide transmigratory beings to enlightenment.

This mantra can be recited a few times at the beginning of each day along with other morning prayers and mantras, as well as before making statues, stupas, or tsatsas. The people who, in particular, can use this mantra to benefit others are those who are seen by and who touch many people or animals, such as performers, models, public speakers, teachers, nurses, doctors, veterinarians, and so forth, as well as those who touch objects or elements that other sentient beings see or touch, such as cooks, bakers, potters, artists, painters, factory workers, dry cleaners, swimmers, and so forth.

There are also two major benefits of this mantra. The first is that reciting it purifies the five heavy negative karmas without break of anyone who hears it, whether they created these negative karmas in this life or in past lives. Because of this, I try to chant it, along with Maitreya Buddha's mantra, whenever I

recite mantras for people and animals. Hearing Maitreya Buddha's mantra makes it impossible for that sentient being to be reborn in the lower realms. Also, if they do not become enlightened during Buddha Shakyamuni's time, when Maitreya Buddha descends they will be among his first disciples and will receive teachings from him and a prediction regarding their enlightenment.

The second benefit of this mantra is that it can be used for consecration. In the Kangyur, the Buddha said that among the many different prayers for consecration, this mantra is the most powerful. If you chant this mantra on a holy object, all the buddhas' wisdom absorbs into it. But even if you chant this mantra on a tree, rock, mountain, and so forth, all the buddhas' wisdom absorbs into it and then you and other sentient beings can circumambulate it. Because of this benefit, I often add this mantra to the usual short consecration ritual. Since this mantra is not common and most people don't know it, when I do consecration with others I usually end up being the only one saying the mantra!

Because all the buddhas' wisdom abides in any object on which this mantra is recited, I only recite it on holy objects, since they will be treated with respect. I don't recite it on malas that people give me to bless, because people treat them as ornaments and tend to leave them lying around anywhere. I just recite a few times and then blow on the mala. If that mantra is recited on a mala, when the person touches and uses it, all their negative karmas, and especially their five heavy negative karmas without break, get purified.

In short, because this is a very powerful mantra for consecration, you can use it even if you don't know any other prayers for consecration. Also, when you don't have much time, you can do a short consecration by reciting the mantra of Bimala Ushnisha three times. Then, say the two prayers: "Please, Bhagavan, the destroyer qualified gone beyond one, abide until this world ends," and "Please grant all sentient beings the common and sublime realizations." When there is time you can do a longer version. The most elaborate consecration ritual involves doing sessions for seven days with a lot of offerings and a fire puja at the end. There is another ritual that involves reciting the Yamantaka sadhana, which takes about two hours to do. Then there is a very short consecration that has seven outlines and includes offering a tormo to



the interferers and a bath offering. However, the mantra of Bimala Ushnisha is the most important one

## The Holy Name Mantra That Fulfills Wishes

De zhin sheg pa sa dzin gyäl po la chhag tshäl lo  
To Tathagata Earth-Holder King, I prostrate.

ཏཱ་ཐཱ་ལྷོ་མེག་པ་ས་ཏཱི་འཇམ་མེག་པ་ལ་ཅམ་ག་ཏཱེ་ཤེ་ལོ།

This mantra is found in the Kangyur. You can recite the buddha's name, Sadzin Gyalpo (Earth-Holder King), and the mantra together for one mala, half a mala, or twenty-one times. Although there are other mantras to achieve success, those who are able to and would like to can recite this one. It is not difficult to recite and even if you recite it just a few times, it will be very helpful.

### *Mantras for Specific Occasions*

#### Mantra to Increase the Power of Recitation

ཏཱ་ཐཱ་ལྷོ་མེག་པ་ས་ཏཱི་འཇམ་མེག་པ་ལ་ཅམ་ག་ཏཱེ་ཤེ་ལོ།

I received the oral transmission of this mantra from my guru Geshe Sengé, who was a disciple of Gonsar Rinpoche's previous incarnation in Mongolia. If you recite it seven times before you read a Dharma text, such as , , and so forth, it is as if you read the text millions of times. When you read the text, you should think that you are teaching it to the six-realm sentient beings, who all hear it in their own language.

## Mantra to Bless the Feet

ཨོ་ཕྱི་ཙ་ར་ལྷ་ན་ཕུ་ལྷི་སྤྲ་ལྷ།

My Tibetan prayer book doesn't mention which text this mantra comes from. However, I found it in the .

Some texts say to recite this mantra seven times, others say to recite it three times. After reciting it, don't only blow on the soles of your feet, spit on them. Then, any insects that die under your feet that day will be reborn in the deva realm of the Thirty-Three. Although the text says to spit on your feet, since you usually wear shoes, after reciting it seven or three times you should spit on the soles of your shoes because they are what actually kill the insects. If you generate faith and do this practice, it will be of great benefit to sentient beings.

I also suggest that before you drive somewhere you chant this mantra and then spit on the wheels of the car, which are what touch the ground. Or you can chant the mantra over some water, blow on it, and then sprinkle it on the wheels. Since there are definitely many insects on the roads, they will get killed when you drive a car, but if you do this at least they will get a higher rebirth. If you are working in a garden or building something, you can also recite this mantra and spit on the tools you are using. Don't only think to bless your feet or shoes—you can bless anything that could kill sentient beings.

In short, any time you find yourself in a place or situation where there is the danger of crushing and killing sentient beings, it is good to recite this mantra. Therefore, you should write it in a notebook and carry it with you all the time in case you need to recite it but can't remember it. Reciting it makes your life very fruitful and beneficial for other sentient beings. You should think from your heart that this mantra for blessing the feet and other things is important. It is one way to make your life meaningful. I want to emphasize this because otherwise, although this mantra is in your prayer book, you might never use it. Don't do that! You must take advantage of this practice, since it is the Buddha's way of helping you by making it very easy for you to purify negative karmas, collect merits, gain realizations, and achieve enlightenment quickly. You must think about that and you must take each opportunity to use it. Don't just leave this mantra in your prayer book and then die without ever having taken advantage of it while you were alive!

## GLOSSARY

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( ). The dharmakaya; the omniscient mind of a buddha, free from all gross and subtle delusions, compared to the conventional guru, the spiritual teacher.

( ). The psychophysical constituents that make up a sentient being: form, feeling, discrimination, compositional factors, and consciousness. Beings of the desire and form realms have all five, whereas beings in the formless realm no longer have the aggregate of form.

. Mitrūkpa

( ). One of the five buddha families or types (Dhyani Buddhas), red in color, representing the wisdom of discernment and the fully purified aggregate of discrimination. five buddha types.

( ). One of the five buddha families or types (Dhyani Buddhas), green in color, representing the all-accomplishing wisdom and the fully purified aggregate of compositional factors. five buddha types.

. A disturbing thought that exaggerates the negative qualities of an object and wishes to harm it; one of the six root delusions.

( ). Literally, “foe destroyer.” A person who has destroyed their inner enemy, the delusions, and attained liberation from cyclic existence.

( ). Literally, “noble.” One who has realized the wisdom of emptiness.

(982–1054). The renowned Indian master who went to Tibet in 1042 to help in the revival of Buddhism and established the Kadam tradition. His text

( ) was the first lamrim text.

. A disturbing thought that exaggerates the positive qualities of an object and wishes to possess it; one of the six root delusions.

. Chenrezig.

( ). Epithet for a buddha; one who has destroyed ( ) all the defilements, possesses all qualities ( ), and has transcended the world ( ).

( ). A principal consciousness that combines the two factors of wishing to free all beings from suffering and wishing to attain enlightenment in order to accomplish that.

( ). One who possesses bodhichitta.

The vows taken when you enter the bodhisattva path.

, ( ). A fully enlightened being. One who has totally eliminated ( ) all obscurations veiling the mind and has fully developed ( ) all good qualities to perfection. enlightenment.

, . The historical Buddha. Shakyamuni Buddha

The teachings of the Buddha. Dharma.

( , , or ). graduated path of the three capable beings.

( ). Compassion Buddha. The meditational deity embodying the compassion of all the buddhas. The Dalai Lamas are said to be emanations of this deity.

( , ). The wish that others be free from suffering.

Chenrezig

wisdom mother.

( ). As opposed to ultimate truth, which is the understanding of the ultimate nature of reality (emptiness), conventional truth is what is true to the valid conventional consciousness. It is also called concealer truth or all-obscuring truth because, although true on one level, it obscures the ultimate nature. Conventional and ultimate truth form the important subject in Buddhist philosophy called the two truths. ultimate truth.

samsara.

(b. 1935). Gyalwa Tenzin Gyatso. Revered spiritual leader of the Tibetan people and tireless worker for world peace; winner of the Nobel Peace Prize in 1989; a guru of Lama Zopa Rinpoche.

( , ). An emanation of the enlightened mind used as the object of meditation in tantric practices.

( , ). An obscuration covering the essentially pure nature of the mind, causing suffering and dissatisfaction; the main delusion is ignorance, and all the others come from this. root delusions; three poisons.

( , ). A being in the god realms who enjoys greater comfort and pleasure than human beings but who suffers from jealousy and quarreling. six realms; cyclic existence. god.

( ). The second refuge jewel. Literally, “that which holds or protects (from suffering)” and hence brings happiness and leads you toward liberation and enlightenment. In Buddhism, absolute Dharma is the realizations attained along the path to liberation and enlightenment, and conventional Dharma is seen as both the teachings of the Buddha and virtuous actions.

( ). The truth body of a buddha (the other “body” being the form body, or rupakaya); the blissful omniscient mind of a buddha, the result of the wisdom side of the path. It can be divided into the wisdom body ( ; ) and the nature body ( ; ). rupakaya delusion.

( ; ). Also known as , these are the grosser of the two types of obscurations, the ones that block liberation. obscurations to knowledge; two obscurations.

. The eight internal and external dangers or fears that Tara saves us from. They are the fear of: fire and hatred; water and attachment; lions and pride; elephants and ignorance; hungry ghosts and doubt; imprisonment and miserliness; thieves and wrong views; and snakes and jealousy.

One-day vows to abandon killing; stealing; lying; sexual contact; taking intoxicants; sitting on high seats or beds; eating at an inappropriate time; and singing, dancing, and wearing perfumes and jewelry.

( ; ). The absence, or lack, of true existence. Ultimately every phenomenon is empty of existing truly or from its own side or independently.

( ; ). Full awakening; buddhahood; omniscience. The ultimate goal of a Mahayana Buddhist, attained when all limitations have been removed from the mind and the positive potential has been completely and perfectly realized. It is a state characterized by infinite compassion, wisdom, and skill.

( ). A world period, an inconceivably long period of time. The life span of the universe is divided into four great eons, which are themselves divided into twenty lesser eons.

The absence of the usual discrimination of sentient beings into friend, enemy, or stranger, deriving from the realization that all sentient beings are equal in wanting happiness and not wanting suffering and that since beginningless time all beings have been all things to each other. An impartial mind that serves as the basis for the development of great love, great compassion, and bodhichitta.

( ). Also known as five Dhyani buddhas. Five buddhas that represent a different aspect of enlightenment, linked to a fully purified aggregate and a fully purified delusion. They are (white, form aggregate, transforming ignorance into the mirror-like wisdom); (yellow, feeling aggregate, transforming miserliness or pride into the wisdom of equality); (red, discrimination aggregate, transforming desire into the wisdom of discernment); (green, compositional factors aggregate, transforming jealousy into the all-accomplishing wisdom); and (blue, consciousness aggregate, transforming anger into dharmadhatu wisdom).

. The ways in which our world is degenerating: the degenerations of mind, lifespan, sentient beings, time, and view.

( ; ). The five actions that are so heavy that they are the cause to be reborn in hell immediately after death. They are killing your father or mother, killing an arhat, maliciously drawing blood from a buddha, and creating a schism in the sangha.

( ; ). The precepts taken by lay Buddhist practitioners for life, to abstain from killing, stealing, lying, sexual misconduct, and taking intoxicants. pratimoksha vows.

( ; ).  
Similar to the five immediate negativities in that they are the cause to be reborn in hell immediately after death, they are: killing a bodhisattva, killing an arya not yet an arhat, defiling your mother or a female arhat, stealing property from the sangha, and destroying a stupa.

The paths along which beings progress to liberation and enlightenment: the path of merit, the path of preparation, the path of seeing, the path of meditation, and the path of no more learning.

The five forces to be practiced both in this life and at the time of death: the power of motivation, the power of acquaintance, the power of the white seed (developing positive qualities), the power of destruction (of self-cherishing), and the power of prayer.

( ; ). The wisdoms possessed by a buddha, they are the mirror-like wisdom, the wisdom of equality, the all-accomplishing wisdom, the wisdom of discernment or discriminating wisdom, and the dharmadhatu wisdom.

. Four mantras placed in holy objects such as stupas. Simply circumambulating an object containing these mantras purifies the karma to be reborn in the hot hells. They are the Stainless Pinnacle Deity Mantra ( ), the Secret Relic Mantra ( ), the Zung of the Completely Pure Stainless Light ( ), and Hundred Thousand Ornaments of Enlightenment ( ).

( ). Also known as the or the ( ), these are four states of mind or aspirations: loving-kindness ( ; ), compassion ( ; ), sympathetic joy ( ; ), and equanimity ( ; ). They are usually expressed in this prayer, which also has longer variations: May all sentient beings have happiness and its causes, be free from suffering and its causes, be inseparable from sorrowless bliss, and abide in equanimity.

The subject of the Buddha's first turning of the wheel of Dharma: the truths of suffering, the origin of suffering, the cessation of suffering, and the path leading to the cessation of suffering as seen by an arya.



( ). The four practices used to purify nonvirtuous imprints on the mindstream. They are: the , taking refuge in the Three Rare Sublime Ones and generating bodhichitta; the , feeling deep regret for the negativity committed; the , determining not to repeat that negativity; and the , a practice such as Vajrasattva that effectively acts as an antidote to the negativity.

One of the four main traditions of Tibetan Buddhism, it was founded by Lama Tsongkhapa in the early fifteenth century and has been propagated by such illustrious masters as the successive Dalai Lamas and Panchen Lamas.

. Literally, “elder.” A title of respect.

Literally, “a spiritual friend.” The title conferred on those who have completed extensive studies and examinations at Geluk monastic universities.

( ). A being dwelling in a state with much comfort and pleasure in the god realms of the desire, form, or formless realms.

lamrim.

Also known as the or the three levels of the lower, middle, and higher capable being, based on the motivations of trying to attain a better future rebirth, liberation, and enlightenment respectively. higher capable being; middle capable being; lower capable being.

( ; ). The compassion that includes not only the wish for all sentient beings to be free from suffering and its causes but the heartfelt determination to accomplish this on your own.

immeasurable compassion.

( ). The inspirational text written by the eight-century Indian master Shantideva.

( ). A spiritual guide or teacher. One who shows a disciple the path to liberation and enlightenment. Literally, “heavy”—heavy with knowledge of the Dharma. In tantra, your teacher is seen as inseparable from the meditational deity and the Three Rare Sublime Ones.

The sutra or tantra practice of seeing the guru as a buddha, then devoting yourself to him or her with thought and action.

The historical Buddha. Lama Zopa Rinpoche often adds “Guru” to remind us of the inseparability of the guru and the Buddha.

The fundamental tantric practice whereby your guru is seen as identical with the buddhas, your personal meditational deity, and the essential nature of your own mind.

A samsaric being in the realms of gods ( ), or demigods ( ), or humans ( ). The samsaric realm with the greatest suffering. There are eight hot hells, eight cold hells, and four neighboring hells. six realms; cyclic existence.

( ). Also called , one of the five afflicted views that are part of the root afflictions. A deluded intelligence that rejects the existence of something that exists, such as karma, reincarnation, the Three Rare Sublime Ones, and so forth, and ascribes existence to that which is nonexistent, such as inherent existence. It is also the holding of incorrect views about the guru.

The highest of the three levels of practice or scopes, it has the goal of full enlightenment. graduated path of the three capable beings; lower capable being; middle capable being.

( ). The fourth and supreme division of tantric practice, sometimes called . It consists of generation and completion stages. Through this practice you can attain full enlightenment within one lifetime. kriya tantra.

. Literally, “Small, or Lesser, Vehicle.” One of the two general divisions of Buddhism, the other being the Mahayana. His Holiness the Dalai Lama usually refers to this as the (with the Mahayana referred to as the ). It can also be called as compared to . Hinayana practitioners’ motivation for following the Dharma path is principally their intense wish for personal liberation from samsara. Two types of Hinayana practitioner are identified: hearers ( ) and solitary realizers ( ). Mahayana; individual liberation.

( ). The hungry ghost realm is one of the three lower realms of cyclic existence, where the main suffering is hunger and thirst. six

realms; cyclic existence.

( ; ). Literally, “not seeing” that which exists or the way in which things exist. There are basically two kinds: ignorance of karma and ignorance of ultimate truth. The fundamental delusion from which all others spring. The first of the twelve links of dependent origination.

( ). The gross and subtle levels of the transience of phenomena, gross being the observable changes in things and events, and subtle being the moment-by-moment disintegration that happens the moment they come into existence.

. One of the initial practices of the graduated path of the lower capable being, showing how fragile this precious life is and how you must not waste a moment of it.

( ). The seed, or potential, left on the mind by positive or negative actions of body, speech, and mind.

The liberation achieved by the hearer ( ) or the solitary realizer ( ) within the Hinayana tradition, as compared with enlightenment achieved by a practitioner of the Mahayana tradition.

. A transmission received from a tantric master allowing a disciple to engage in the practices of a particular meditational deity. It is also referred to as an and can be given as a full empowerment ( ) or a permission to practice ( ).

( ). The state between death and rebirth.

. A powerful tantric practice done when somebody has just died to try to influence their next rebirth.

A practitioner of Kadam lineage. Kadampa geshees are renowned for their practice of thought transformation.

Literally, “translation of the [Buddha’s] word.” The part of the Tibetan canon consisting of 108 volumes that contains the sutras and tantras. Commentaries on this from Indian and Tibetan masters are contained in the Tengyur, which consists of about 225 volumes (depending on the edition).

( ). Action; the working of cause and effect, whereby positive (virtuous) actions produce happiness and negative (nonvirtuous) actions produce suffering.

(1926–2006). A highly attained and learned ascetic yogi who lived in Dharamsala, India, and who was one of Lama Zopa Rinpoche's gurus.

The monastery near Boudhanath in the Kathmandu Valley, Nepal, founded by Lama Yeshe and Lama Zopa Rinpoche.

( ; ). The first of the four classes of tantra, it emphasizes external activities, such as prayers, mudras, and so forth.

highest yoga tantra.

. A deity belonging to one of the lower tantras, known as the king of the deities purifying the lower realms. Somebody who has died who has a Kunrik practice or puja performed for them will be liberated from the lower realms, even if they have already been born there.

( ). A spiritual guide or teacher; one who shows a disciple the path to liberation and enlightenment.

Atisha Dipamkara Shrijnana.

Tsongkhapa, Lama Jé Losang Drakpa.

. The graduated path. A presentation of Shakyamuni Buddha's teachings in a form suitable for the step-by-step training of a disciple. The lamrim was first formulated by the great Indian teacher Atisha when he came to Tibet in 1042. Atisha; three principal aspects of the path.

( or ). The state of complete freedom from samsara; the goal of a practitioner seeking his or her own escape from suffering.

A spiritual teacher who is in the line of direct guru-disciple transmission of teachings, from Buddha to the teachers of the present day.

( ; ). In the context of the seven points of cause and effect, the wish for all beings to have happiness and its causes, with the added dimension of ("beautiful" or "affectionate"); often translated as "affectionate loving-kindness." Rinpoche suggests this is the "loving-kindness of seeing others in beauty."

The first of the three levels of practice or scopes, the lower capable being has the goal of a better future existence. graduated path of the three capable beings; higher capable being; middle capable being.

The three realms of cyclic existence with the most suffering: the hell being ( ), hungry ghost ( ), and animal ( ) realms.

six realms; cyclic existence.

. Literally, “Great Vehicle.” It is one of the two general divisions of Buddhism. Mahayana practitioners’ motivation for following the Dharma path is principally their intense wish for all sentient beings to be liberated from samsara and to attain the full enlightenment of buddhahood in order to accomplish this. The Mahayana has two divisions,

( ) and (also known as or ).

( ). After Shakyamuni Buddha, the next (fifth) of the thousand buddhas of this fortunate eon to descend to turn the wheel of Dharma. Presently residing in the pure land of Tushita ( ). Recipient of the method lineage of Shakyamuni Buddha’s teachings, which, in a mystical transmission, he passed on to Asanga.

( ) A rosary of beads for counting mantras.

( ). A circular diagram symbolic of the entire universe. The abode of a meditational deity.

( ). The buddha (or bodhisattva) of wisdom. Recipient of the wisdom lineage of Shakyamuni Buddha’s teachings, which he passed on to Nagarjuna.

( ). Literally, “mind protection.” Mantras are Sanskrit syllables usually recited in conjunction with the practice of a particular meditational deity; they embody the qualities of the deity with which they are associated.

The four external and internal hindrances or obstacles to our spiritual progress. They are the mara of the (contaminated) aggregates, the mara of delusions, the mara of the Lord of Death, and the mara of the deva’s son (the demon of desire and temptation).

( ; ). A buddha who vowed as a bodhisattva to be able to completely free all sentient beings from their illnesses.

( ). Familiarization of the mind with a virtuous object. There are two types: single-pointed ( ), also called , , or ; and analytic or insight meditation ( ).

. Positive imprints left on the mind by virtuous, or Dharma, actions. The principal cause of happiness. two merits.

. All aspects of the path to enlightenment other than those related to emptiness, principally associated with the development of loving-kindness, compassion, and bodhichitta.

The second of the three levels of practice or scopes, the middle capable being has the goal of liberation from suffering. graduated path of the three capable beings; higher capable being; lower capable being.

( ). One of the five buddha types or families, blue in color, representing the dharmadhatu wisdom and the fully purified aggregate of consciousness. five buddha types.

The mythical center of the universe in Buddhist cosmology.

( ). Literally, seal or token; a symbolic hand gesture, endowed with power not unlike a mantra.

( ) Snakelike beings of the animal realm who live in or near bodies of water; commonly associated with fertility of the land but can also function as protectors of religion.

. A Mahayana Buddhist monastic university founded in the fifth century in North India, not far from Bodhgaya, which served as a major source of the Buddhist teachings that spread to Tibet.

( ). One of three long-life deities, with Amitayus and White Tara.

. Negative karma; that which results in suffering.

( ). Liberation; the state of complete freedom from samsara; the goal of the practitioner of the individual liberation path. “Lower nirvana” is used to refer to this state of self-liberation, while “higher nirvana” refers to the supreme attainment of the full enlightenment of buddhahood. “Natural nirvana” is the fundamentally pure nature of reality, where all things and events are devoid of any inherent existence.

A two-day thousand-arm Chenrezig retreat that involves fasting, prostrations, and silence.

( ; ). One of the two obscurations, these are the more subtle ones that block enlightenment; also known as , and . disturbing-thought obscurations; two obscurations.

OM MANI PADME HUM. The ; the mantra of Chenrezig, buddha of compassion.

(1871–1941). An influential and charismatic lama of the Geluk order, Pabongka Rinpoche was the root guru of His Holiness the Dalai Lama's senior and junior tutors. He also gave the teachings compiled in .

. The eighth-century Indian tantric master who played a key role in establishing Buddhism in Tibet; he is revered by all Tibetans but especially by followers of the Nyingma tradition, which he founded. Often known in Tibetan as Guru Rinpoche.

Scholar; learned person.

The final nirvana the Buddha attained when he passed away in Kushinagar.

The rare human state, qualified by eight freedoms and ten richnesses, which is the ideal condition for practicing the Dharma and attaining enlightenment. The eight freedoms are being free from being born as a hell being, hungry ghost, animal, long-life god, or barbarian, or in a dark age when no buddha has descended, holding wrong views, and being born with mental or physical problems that preclude you from understanding the Dharma. The ten richnesses are being born as a human being, in a Dharma country, and with perfect mental and physical faculties; not having committed any of the five immediate negativities; having faith in the Buddha's teachings; being alive when a buddha has descended, the teachings have been revealed, the complete teachings still exist, and when there are still followers of the teachings; and having the necessary conditions to practice the Dharma, such as the kindness of others.

( ). Sutras pertaining to the Buddha's second turning of the wheel of Dharma, in which the wisdom of emptiness and the path of the bodhisattva were set forth.

Perfection of Wisdom.

. The various levels of individual liberation vows for lay and ordained, including the five lay vows, the novice vows, and full ordination taken by monks and nuns.

vows.

( ). The practices that prepare the mind for successful tantric meditation by removing hindrances and accumulating merit. These practices are found in all schools of Tibetan Buddhism and are usually done 100,000 times each; the four main practices are recitation of the refuge formula, mandala offerings, prostrations, and Vajrasattva mantra recitation. The Geluk tradition adds five more: guru yoga, water bowl offerings, Damtsig Dorjé purifying meditation, making , and the Dorjé Khadro burning offering practice. The term is also used to refer to the practices done on a daily basis before the main meditation session, such as cleaning the room, setting up the altar, doing a breathing meditation, and the preliminary prayers.

Paying respect to the guru-deity with body, speech, and mind; one of the tantric preliminaries.

A worldly or enlightened being who protects Buddhism and its practitioners.

. Literally, “offering”; a religious ceremony. The term is usually used to describe an offering ceremony such as the ( ).

A pure land of a buddha is a place where there is no suffering. In some but not all pure lands, after taking birth, the practitioner receives teachings directly from the buddha of that pure land, allowing them to actualize the rest of the path and then become enlightened.

. The elimination from the mind of negative imprints left by past nonvirtuous actions, which would otherwise ripen into suffering. The most effective methods of purification employ the four opponent powers, the powers of the dependence, regret, restraint, and the remedy.

( ). One of the five buddha types, yellow in color, representing the wisdom of equality and the purification of the feeling aggregate. five buddha types.

A valid mind that holds a stable, correct understanding of a Dharma subject, such as emptiness, that effects a deep change within the continuum of the person. The effortless experience resulting from study and meditation supported by guru devotion and ripened by purification and merit-building practices.



. The door to the Dharma path. Having taken refuge from the heart, you become an inner being or Buddhist. There are three levels of refuge—Hinayana, Mahayana, and Vajrayana—and two or three causes necessary for taking refuge: the sufferings of samsara in general and lower realms in particular; that Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha have the qualities and power to lead you to happiness, liberation, and enlightenment; and (for Mahayana refuge) for all sentient beings.

. The state of mind of not having the slightest attraction to samsaric pleasures for even a second and having the strong wish for liberation. The first of the three principal aspects of the path to enlightenment. bodhichitta; emptiness.

Literally, “precious one.” Epithet for an incarnate lama, that is, one who has intentionally taken rebirth in a human form to benefit sentient beings on the path to enlightenment.

One of the six groups of mental factors, these are the deluded or nonvirtuous minds that subsequently lead to the secondary afflictions. There are six: desire, anger, pride, ignorance, afflicted doubt, and afflicted view. mental factors.

( ). The form body of a fully enlightened being; the result of the complete and perfect accumulation of merit. It has two aspects: ( , enjoyment body), in which the enlightened mind appears to benefit highly realized bodhisattvas; and ( , emanation body), in which the enlightened mind appears to benefit ordinary beings. dharmakaya.

Method of accomplishment; the step-by-step instructions for practicing the meditations related to a particular meditational deity.

( ). Cyclic existence; the six realms of conditioned existence, three lower—hell being ( ), hungry ghost ( ), and animal ( )—and three upper—human ( ), demigod ( ), and god ( or ). The beginningless, recurring cycle of death and rebirth under the control of karma and delusion, fraught with suffering. Also refers to the contaminated aggregates of a sentient being.

( ). Spiritual community; the third of the Three Rare Sublime Ones. In Tibetan literally means “intending ( ) to virtue ( ).”

( ; ). In tantric visualizations, a Sanskrit syllable arising out of emptiness and out of which the meditational deity in turn arises. A single syllable representing a deity's entire mantra.

The self-centered attitude of considering your own happiness to be more important than that of others.

An unenlightened being; any being whose mind is not completely free from gross and subtle obscurations.

. As explained in the Lama Tsongkhapa Daily Guru Yoga Meditation, these are the seven types of wisdom that need to be attained: great wisdom, clear wisdom, quick wisdom, profound wisdom, wisdom of explaining (the Dharma), wisdom of debating, and wisdom of composing.

(563–483 BC). Fourth of the one thousand founding buddhas of this present world age. Born a prince of the Shakya clan in North India, he taught the sutra and tantra paths to liberation and enlightenment; founder of what came to be known as Buddhism. (From , “fully awake.”)

(685–763). The Indian Buddhist philosopher and bodhisattva who wrote the quintessential Mahayana text,

( ).

( ). The practices of a bodhisattva. On the basis of bodhichitta, a bodhisattva practices the six perfections: generosity, morality, patience, enthusiastic perseverance, concentration, and wisdom.

The general way that Buddhism divides the whole of cyclic existence, with three suffering realms (hell, hungry ghost, and animal) and three fortunate realms (human, demigod, and god). samsara.

root delusions.

. Beings not usually visible to ordinary people; they can belong to the hungry ghost or god realms, and they can be beneficent as well as harmful.

A dome-shaped structure, often containing Buddhist relics, that represents the enlightened mind; stupas range in size from huge to a few inches in height.

. obscurations to knowledge

A discourse of the Buddha recognized as a canonical text.

The secret teachings of the Buddha; a scriptural text and the teachings and practices it contains. Also called \_\_\_\_\_ or \_\_\_\_\_.

(\_\_\_\_\_). A female meditational deity who embodies the enlightened activity of all the buddhas; often referred to as the mother of the buddhas of the past, present, and future. The \_\_\_\_\_ prayer is the most popular prayer for lay and ordained Tibetans alike.

(\_\_\_\_\_). Epithet for a buddha; literally, “one who has gone to suchness.”

\_\_\_\_\_. General actions to be avoided so as not to create negative karma. Three of body (killing, stealing, and sexual misconduct); four of speech (lying, speaking harshly, slandering, and gossiping); and three of mind (covetousness, ill will, and wrong views).

\_\_\_\_\_. Also called \_\_\_\_\_. Used in the practice of confessing and purifying negative karmas, the group of thirty-five buddhas visualized while reciting the \_\_\_\_\_ and performing prostrations.

\_\_\_\_\_. Attachment, anger, and ignorance.

\_\_\_\_\_. The three main divisions of the lamrim: renunciation, bodhichitta, and the right view (of emptiness).

(\_\_\_\_\_ ; \_\_\_\_\_). Also called the \_\_\_\_\_ or \_\_\_\_\_; the objects of Buddhist refuge: the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha. Lama Zopa Rinpoche prefers “Three Rare Sublime Ones” as a more direct translation of \_\_\_\_\_.

\_\_\_\_\_. Sentient beings who pass from one realm to another, taking rebirth within cyclic existence.

### Three Rare Sublime Ones

\_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_ (1357–1419). Founder of the Geluk tradition of Tibetan Buddhism and revitalizer of many sutra and tantra lineages as well as the monastic tradition in Tibet.

(\_\_\_\_\_). The Joyous Land. The pure land of the thousand buddhas of this eon, where the future buddha, Maitreya, and Lama Tsongkhapa reside.

(\_\_\_\_\_ ; \_\_\_\_\_). Also called the \_\_\_\_\_ or \_\_\_\_\_: the merit of virtue (also called the \_\_\_\_\_ or the \_\_\_\_\_), which develops the method side of the path by practicing generosity and so forth; and the merit of (transcendental)

wisdom (also called the *śūnyatā*), which develops the wisdom side of the path by meditation on emptiness and so forth.

(*āvaraṇa*; *āvaraṇa*). Deluded mental states that block the attainment of liberation and enlightenment. They are the grosser kind, called disturbing-thought obscurations or obscurations to liberation (*āvaraṇa*, *āvaraṇa*); and the subtle obscurations, the imprints left when those are purified, called obscurations to knowledge or obscurations to enlightenment (*āvaraṇa*, *āvaraṇa*).

. The paths of method and wisdom.

(*saṃvṛta*; *saṃvṛta*). The two ways of relating to phenomena: conventional or all-obscuring truth (*saṃvṛta*; *saṃvṛta*), which is the truth to a worldly mind; and ultimate truth (*paramārtha*; *paramārtha*), the truth to a mind engaged in ultimate analysis conventional truth, ultimate truth.

(*paramārtha*, *paramārtha*). One of the two truths, the other being conventional truth. It is the understanding of the ultimate nature of things and events, emptiness. *paramārtha* conventional truth.

(*śūnyatā* or *śūnyatā*). One of the five buddha types, white in color, representing mirror-like wisdom and the purification of the form aggregate. *śūnyatā* five buddha types.

(*śūnyatā*). Literally, “adamantine”; the four- or five-spoke implement used in tantric practice.

(*śūnyatā*). A male meditational deity embodying the power of all enlightened beings to accomplish their goals.

(*śūnyatā*) A male meditational deity symbolizing the inherent purity of all buddhas. A major tantric purification practice for removing obstacles created by negative karma and the breaking of vows.

. Another name for *śūnyatā*; the Adamantine Vehicle; the second of the two Mahayana paths. It is also called *śūnyatā* or *śūnyatā*. This is the quickest vehicle of Buddhism, as it allows certain practitioners to attain enlightenment within a single lifetime.

. Positive karma; that which results in happiness.

. Precepts taken on the basis of refuge at all levels of Buddhist practice. Pratimoksha precepts (vows of individual liberation) are the main vows in the Hinayana tradition and are taken by monks, nuns, and laypeople; they

are the basis of all other vows. Bodhisattva and tantric vows are taken in the Mahayana tradition in association with a tantric initiation.

. Different levels of insight into the nature of reality. There are, for example, the three wisdoms of hearing, contemplation, and meditation. Ultimately, there is the wisdom of realizing emptiness, which frees beings from cyclic existence and eventually brings them to enlightenment. The complete and perfect accumulation of wisdom results in the dharmakaya.

( ). A tantric consort.

. Also called . A jewel that brings its possessor everything that they desire.

A highly realized male meditator.

(1905–1984). A powerful Gelukpa lama renowned for his wrathful aspect, who had impeccable knowledge of Tibetan Buddhist rituals, art, and science.

( ). Zungs resemble mantras, but are usually longer than a mantra, consisting of a homage or invocation of the deity, followed by a request to act.

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# NOTES

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## FURTHER SUGGESTED READING

### *Practices Available on the FPMT Website*

*These practices, which are available on the FPMT website ([shop.fpmt.org](http://shop.fpmt.org)), are commonly used within the FPMT. Some are only for people who have taken a*

*tantric initiation in that deity (these are indicated), some are intended for initiates but can be done without an initiation if you don't visualize yourself as the deity, and some are practices without any restrictions. Most are available as pdf downloads (many free).*

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He is the spiritual director and cofounder of the Foundation for the Preservation of the Mahayana Tradition (FPMT), an international network of Buddhist projects, including monasteries in six countries and meditation centers in over thirty; health and nutrition clinics, and clinics specializing in the treatment of leprosy and polio; as well as hospices, schools, publishing activities, and prison outreach projects worldwide.

Lama Zopa Rinpoche is the author of numerous books, including *Patience*, *The Six Perfections*, *Bodhichitta*, *The Four Noble Truths*, *Transforming Problems into Happiness*, *How to Enjoy Death*, *Ultimate Healing*, *The Door to Satisfaction*, *How to Be Happy*, *Wholesome Fear*, *Wisdom Energy*, and *Dear Lama Zopa*, all from Wisdom Publications.

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Gordon McDougall was director of Cham Tse Ling, the FPMT's Hong Kong center, for two years in the 1980s and worked for Jamyang Buddhist Centre in London from 2000 to 2007. He helped develop the Foundation of Buddhist Thought study program and administered it for seven years. Since 2008 he has been editing Lama Zopa Rinpoche's teachings for Lama Yeshe Wisdom Archive and Wisdom Publications.

## ABOUT THE PAINTER



Peter Iseli, born in 1947, studied thangka painting with Chating Jamyang la and his master student Sherab la; with Jampa la, the Tibetan state artist; and at the Library of Tibetan Works & Archives. Iseli lives in Bern, Switzerland.

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# Zen

Dao Re





# ZEN

Dao Re

Published

By

Dilip

Rajeev

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ISBN:





**T**he world is witnessing  
in 2022, a phase where  
technology and social trends  
imposed by the Ruling  
Forces push the world's  
population into a sense of  
isolation and loneliness.

**A** group of Zen monks  
of the Storm and Thunder  
Order, the Hidden Rai Jin  
order of Zen, decided to  
bring out the ancient wisdom  
to enable individuals to grow  
during the phase, and defeat  
the plans of the evil empire.

**I**ndividuals who take up this ancient and powerful way of transcending, are urged to share this book widely. The world is presently at a Spiritual war with forces that seek to destroy the very DNA of humanity.



**Z**en were the mode of  
meditation of the Samurai  
Warrior, and action to  
defend the world against the  
forces of Evil, is the way of  
the Warrior.

And in action the warrior  
builds Virtue and Good  
karma.

**I**n ancient days the Zen path were imparted during a phase of war against the evil alien race, that occurred on the planet Dubbore. During the war phase, the adepts were urged to hide their practice under various symbols – a Silver Sun, a Silver horizontal stroke, calligraphic in form, other than the usual Silver Enso.

Form tightly knit groups,  
ideally within own family,  
and immediate friends, that  
explore the art and various  
ideas pertinent to Zen, and  
for that matter Zen is open  
to the study of any field or  
mythology, or the principle  
of different traditions.

Discuss own experiences.  
Organize games, and so on,  
with a Zen Spirit.

The  
Breath

# Training Day 1

**Z**en is found not just on earth but is  
practiced by several extraterrestrial  
civilizations.

In the words of a sage from another world,  
“The breath is an anchor that is always there.”

**I**n Zen meditation, one focuses on the

breath. Before leading you to the understanding of the way to meditate on the breath, these pages will familiarize you with the Nature of the Breath.

**T**ake a deep breath and observe the nature of it. Are you able to define its properties with the senses? The touch, smell, sensations, of what one describes as the breath.



**W** hat about defining the properties  
of the breath with the mind?

**T**he wisdom of the - now lost to the  
greater world- Zen book written by Ame No  
Wakahiko, says,

“**T**he purest part of the breath  
is beyond the senses, and  
transcends the mind.”

“The purest part of the breath  
is beyond the senses, and  
transcends the mind” - Ame No  
Wakahiko

Study your own breath,  
observe it, deeply, at ease and  
staying in the ease, till you  
discover that part of own  
breath.

# Training

## Day

### 2

“What is Beyond the mind and  
the senses, is beyond the  
universe.” - Wakahiko

**P**onder deeply on what Wakahiko says

in the verse above. Discuss aspects of it in  
own thought. Is the breath, being beyond the  
senses and the mind, beyond the universe in  
origin?

One of the foundational planes of the universe is termed ether. It is ether in vibration that appears as the breath here.

So the breath is the whole universe in movement, an aspect of which animates own physical form.

“**T**he breath is one  
function” – Ame No Wakahiko

A Zen Koan has it that three monks were meditating in a monastery near mount Fuji. The Flag, on a post near the monastery, which had the Enso on it, fluttered in the wind, making a sound that brought the novice monk out of meditation. The novice said, “ The Flag is fluttering.”

The older disciple said, “ It is the mind that is fluttering, not the flag.”

The Zen teacher said, “ Both the mind and the flag are fluttering. “



Were it the flag or the mind  
that were fluttering?

The flag, the mind, are all movements of  
a universal breath, and one is not independent  
of the other.

The observer of the Zen breath, beyond  
external vibrations, is beyond the mind, and  
the world phenomenon.

The world, the mind, the flag, these are all one  
function. And Zen adept transcends *that*.

# Training Day 3

**T**he goal of Zen is to transcend the  
appeared universe.

The universe is made of several planes,  
hierarchies, of divine beings exist above the  
earthly planes, for instance.

And hierarchies exist below as well. This is  
related to the geometric and vibrational  
structure of the universe.

**O**n the same plane, there exists  
different parallel worlds.

**T**he human mind through a zero point

is bonded to an underlying plane beyond vibrations. Phenomenon such as interaction across a distance, beyond light speed, and so forth, and even humans being able to feel each other across space, is related to the Zero point plane.

**B**eyond the Zero Point, is the Silver

Planes, the Great Brightness into which the  
Zen Adept finally enters.

**T**he presence of higher and lower

dimensions and parallel worlds account for a great variety of phenomenon. Do ponder for a while, what such would have been part of your worldly experiences.

# Training Day 4



# Zen

Breathing is  
to be  
understood,

By first taking in a deep ,  
breath. Natural, almost  
effortless. Then breath out  
slow, and deep into the  
lower abdomen, the hara,  
the space of the abdomen  
below the navel region.

One follows the breath.  
The awareness follows the  
breath moving naturally  
down along the front of  
the body, entering the  
lower abdomen, the hara.

““**T**he hidden key is  
not for the beginner,  
and one is to ignore it  
unless it is experienced,  
but the rising breath  
touches the Silver, and  
the Silver is guided  
down and the breath  
enters the hara, forming  
the body in Silver.” – Ame

No Wakahiko

# Training Day 5

**S**earch online for  
Hinnerk Zen meditation  
15 minutes. Meditate to  
the audio instructions, if  
you are able to find the  
audio. If not, meditate to  
your breath.

Try meditating then to  
silence, and then to your  
favorite music – any  
genre, rock, or soft rock,  
playing in the  
background.

# Training Day 6



Find a few  
Zen books.

Study a few  
pages, and  
see if it  
appeals to  
the Soul.

If it does,  
follow on,  
with the  
Study.

Add those  
books to  
your library.

One studies  
the theory,  
and then  
abandons it  
for the  
experience of  
Zen, In

# Meditation

Reason  
forms the  
frame of a  
theory.

And then,  
the beyond is  
approached  
in Zen.

# Training Day 7



Zen form of  
sitting  
meditation,  
Is termed  
**Za Zen.**

Study the Za  
Zen form  
with various  
resources  
you are able  
to discover.

One, in the  
traditional  
form,  
Sits in the  
Half lotus or  
Full lotus  
position.

The left leg,  
is generally,  
on top of the  
right, and the  
left palm  
rests above  
the right.

The thumb tips  
may be held  
touching each  
other, forming  
the oval shape  
of the  
DharmaDatu  
mudra.

That the  
left palm  
is above,  
were  
taught

by the  
God  
Ebisu.

Different  
schools of  
Zen may  
use slightly  
Different  
mudras.



One  
may  
adopt  
any  
position

in which  
the spine  
is  
relatively  
straight,

be it  
lying  
down  
with the  
head

rested  
on a  
good  
pillow,  
or

standing  
up.

Another  
recomm  
ended  
mudra is  
left hand

forming  
a natural  
hollow  
fist, and  
the

thumb  
wedged  
between  
the  
fore-



finger  
and  
thumb  
of the  
right

hand.

The  
right  
hand

naturally  
wraps  
around  
he left  
fist.

The left  
fist is  
held  
natural  
and

hollow.

The left  
thumb is  
held in  
a way  
that it

endows

a

natural

sense

of

upward  
flow, of  
the  
Silver,  
along



the  
spine.

Training

Day

8

The  
adept  
should  
follow  
the

Soul-  
Impulse  
in his  
or her  
actions.

The  
Soul  
impulse  
is

above  
the  
Senses,  
and is  
found

gradually  
as one  
progresses  
on  
the

path.



When  
the  
Vital  
Spirit is

preserv  
ed, and  
the  
breath  
attende

d to,  
there is  
both  
Joy and  
wisdom



The

adept  
should  
realize  
meditati  
on is

practica  
l work.

Meditat  
ion

purifies  
the  
being,  
grants  
prowes

s to the  
being,  
is work  
that  
outlasts



a  
lifetime,  
and in  
the  
ultimate

sense,  
grants  
enlighte  
nment.

# Training

## Day

### 9

Zen lays  
great  
emphasi  
s on  
aesthetic

S.

The

environ  
ment  
ought be  
clear,

And the  
room  
for  
meditati  
on duly

prepared

•

In



ancient  
days,  
one  
would  
light a

natural  
Zen  
incense.

The

duration  
for  
meditati  
on were  
till the

incense  
burned,  
around  
half an  
hour.



# Training Day 10

The  
Stability  
of one's  
thoughts  
and

energies  
is  
directly  
related  
to the



food.

If the  
food is  
of

discordant  
vibrations, so will  
the body

and  
mind be.

Thus  
gentle,  
tasteful,

nourishi  
ng food,  
prepared  
with  
gentle

herbs,  
and  
never  
anything  
of a

harsh  
nature  
were the  
food of  
the Zen

# order.

The way the food is prepared in itself endows elevating properties. The state of the awareness of the one preparing the food, and, further, things such as vegetarianism were never path of any ancient Zen order.

Training

Day

11



One  
may  
explore  
the  
various

forms of  
Zen,  
Tea, the  
paintings  
, these

arts may  
be  
studied  
and  
refined

based on  
own  
intuition

•





# effING up DE EVIL CASTE SYSTEM

D Words From a 9000 Year Old Imaginary  
Y Himalayan Sage.

A  
U  
S  
A  
D  
I  
T  
Y  
A





Effing up De  
Evil  
Caste System

DY AUS ADITYA

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**T**he word Brahmana  
referred to a kind sage  
striving for enlightenment.

Are cruel fakers  
and

**EVIL**

repressors

enlightening and enlightened  
sages, or evil?

The word kshatriya  
referred to a super warrior  
who could fight a whole  
army single handedly,  
without any fancy weapons.

Are evil  
**fools** who  
cannot win a boxing  
match, who strut

around like vain  
aunties, insulting  
people, “ kshatriyas?”

Kshatriya and Brahman were  
only names of two modes  
of enlightenment, and not  
names by birth.

**E**nough is enough of  
this evil.

It is time to get India rid of  
these falsely peddled evil  
labels.

Do not be passive.

Stand up for your  
nation **NOW**

Share this PDF **WIDELY**,  
**WITH EVERY SINGLE**  
**PERSON YOU KNOW** and  
don't.



U  
SE THE  
IMAGINATION TO  
ARRIVE AT  
CREATIVE WAYS TO  
SHARE THE PDF.

I'm what you might  
think of as an imaginary  
immortal.

And given that that says I  
have seen more of historical  
truth than you would admit  
in your imagination even,  
allow me to give you a  
glimpse of what the Aryan



Religion says

about the caste system.

There is **no trace**  
of a by marriage caste system  
in the original Vedic writings.  
Does the marriage of  
prominent characters of  
the two major mythologies  
follow that pattern?

In Mahabharata we have the  
Pandavas marrying all  
around.

The caste system is therefore not the idea of the four orders mentioned in the early writings. Which are clearly nothing but four sacred forms in which the Divine were served. What were Valmiki's order?

It altered through life,  
DYNAMIC, were not  
externally imposed, and were  
taken up so that each could  
do action that led them to  
the Divine.

Arthasastra points out actors.

Doctors, engineers,  
Teachers, all these are the  
Sudra order. The word  
were not an

insult, as the ngyaaha  
myaaha guluuha  
abomiantions have made it  
to be. Su means good and  
Dra means substance. Of  
Good substance.

A student in an Ashram in  
early studies in the novice  
monk stage is in that mode.

They made sure they used  
their skills to serve Good  
people – not as slaves, but as  
free independently thinking  
yet profoundly humble  
humans.

They selected who they serve  
as the action were done for  
Divine benefit. And to raise  
oneself to higher planes.

If you go serve an evil fool  
for money and work just for  
money, and study for some  
joobu for some foreign firm,  
you are not even of the four

sacred orders.

Approaching the state of enlightenment, one may enter the form of a sage which is called Brahmanical – and had nothing to do with birth. If so – how were Vyasa or Valmiki or Vishwamitra all the greatest of Brahmanical sages?

The Impostors –  
ngyaaha myaaaha gluuha  
– insult to humanity and  
God - that category of



# abomina tions are

nothing but thieves. As per  
the Vedic ideal.

The enlightened would  
gently guide the others  
through wisdom. Just as the  
seven sages gently guided  
Valmiki. Did they go “  
ngyaaha myaaaha gluuha”  
“jump to de sidoo”

Mahabharata often has

statements like “in that forest a Brahmin ( not a birth idea) lived with a forest woman.”

And it were normal. And  
Sacred.

Sudra were as per the Arthasatra that mode of action which served the purpose of the truly Enlightened. A truly enlightened person is like the Buddha. Not ngaaahah myaaha gluuha evil impostor.

Bhima, a Kshatriya by prowess, had a rakshasi wife.

Did anyone make a ruckus?  
Where were de dukking caste  
system ?

Or are the marriages of the  
Pandavas as per Gotras?

Anyway, regarding the term  
Sudra, ..

Again: The term is for a  
mode of Divine serving.. and  
they served the “ Twice  
Born” – the truly  
Enlightened people – not  
fake ngaaayha myaaha gluuha

# evil, cruel, actors.

They who served were gently  
guided spiritually, rewarded  
for their work, etc.

The word Kshatriya  
referred to somebody who  
had enough strength to  
conquer the whole world  
single handedly. “ A Single  
kshatriya can defeat  
the whole world’s  
armies by the strength of  
his bare arms alone,” says the

## Mahabharata.

There are no fools in India who can even win a proper running race, a lemon and spoon race on the international level, musical chair, or a boxing match at the top level. So let no dukking impostor fool you saying he is a kshatriya. Ask him to fight 10 MMA fighters single handedly in front of all. IF NOT LAUGH AT THE DUDE FOR BEING AN EVIL FAKER AND AN IMPOSTOR WANNABE,

BY GENERATIONS.  
LIVING  
OFF OF  
FOOLING  
PEOPLE.

“Guna Karma  
Vibhagasa,” says  
the Gita. It means  
the four orders  
were merely just  
dynamic labels,  
overall identifying  
people’s Inner  
Nature and  
Ability to Do  
Action .

Karna were  
married to  
Princesses.

Karna Rules as a  
King.

Did anybody  
Oppose?



Fake mythology  
and edited  
versions of  
Mahabharata say  
Karna were not  
allowed to  
participate in the  
Swayamvara.

While all major

recensions  
including the  
Southern one  
says Karna were  
allowed to  
participate but  
failed to tie the  
bow.

# Only Arjun

*a* Succeeded.

A source says,  
“ the insult by  
Draupadi is  
present only in  
about 3  
manuscripts out  
of some 1200  
manuscripts of  
Mahabharat.

Hence **it is**  
**conside**  
**red** an  
interpolation(  
IMAGINARY  
ADDITION).”

IT WERE THE  
FUKKED UP  
BRITS DATTE  
ADDED THE  
NONSENSE  
FROM THE  
FRINGE  
MANUSCRIPTS  
TO DE  
OFFICIAL  
EDITION.

It were done so  
as to divide India  
and run down  
Indian traditions.

How could the  
lineage of  
mendicant

Brahmins WHO  
pandavas  
appeared to be,  
be known?

Anybody could  
take up  
Brahmanical  
form of effort,  
THAT ERA.



And no enquiry  
were made to  
their lineage for  
the marriage  
WITH  
ARJUNA— as  
they kept their  
anonymity.

Some major  
characters in  
Indian mythology  
were even  
adopted.

“ Found in the  
earth”

EVEN A  
STRAND OF  
DISRESPEKT  
IS SEEN  
BECAUSE OF  
THAT IN  
RAMAYANA?  
DID IT  
AFFEKT  
KASTE  
SYSTEM

MARRIAGE?

NOPE. IT  
DIDN'T EXIST  
EVEN IN  
IDEA, THAT  
ERA.

Did **any** of  
them have a caste  
oriented marriage  
and shi\*t?

Did Vyasa's  
father marry by  
any of that idea?

Were tribal  
kings  
who  
warmly  
interacte

d with  
the  
mytholo  
gical  
heroes  
treated by any



caste system?

A  
SIMPLE  
ROYAL  
TY OR  
ANYTH

ING IS  
NOT  
“KHS  
A  
TRIYA”

IF  
THEY  
DO  
NOT  
HAVE

SUPER  
POWE  
RS  
SUCH  
AS THE

DIVIN  
E  
WEAP  
NS OF  
MAHA

BHARA  
TA.

LETS  
DO A  
FIND  
DE



CASTE  
FUKKE  
DUP  
PUZZL  
E

Get a  
piece of  
paper  
and note  
down

# the relations

•

“Ghatot  
kacha  
was the  
son of  
the

Pandava  
Bhima and  
the demoness  
Hidimbi” –  
Wikipedia

“ In Rajasthan,  
Barbari  
ka is  
worship  
ped as  
Khatushyamji,

and in Gujarat, he  
is

worship

ped as

Baliyadev” -

Wikipedia

“

According to a  
legend,  
Ahilawati or  
Mauravi was  
the daughter  
of Mura, the  
general of  
the demon  
Narakasura.”



– Wikipedia

“Barbarika  
(Barbarīka), is a  
Hindu deity,  
particularly  
worshipped in  
western India.

According to the

Skanda Purana,  
Barbarika  
was the son  
of  
Ghatotkacha  
(Son of  
Bhima) and  
Princess

Maurvi,  
daughter of  
Daitya  
Moora,” -  
Wikipedia

So  
WADD  
A  
FAKK  
IS DE

“KAST  
E” OF  
BARB  
ARIKA

?

Is HE  
NOT A  
GREAT  
KSHAT

RIYA?

WHY? BY  
PROWESS.

DERE IS  
ONLY  
ONE  
SET OF  
LOWD  
OWN



SHIT  
IN  
INDIA -

THOSE WHO  
OBSCURED  
SCRIPTURE  
AND TRUTH  
FOR

MATERIAL  
BENEFITS  
  
AND  
PRETENDED  
TO BE  
SPIRITUAL AT  
DE SAME  
TIME.

AND THREW

THEIR EVIL  
ON NATIONS  
AND ALL  
OTHER  
HUMANS  
AROUND.

ENOUGH IS  
ENOUGH OF  
EVIL AND  
SGTRUTTING

AROUND  
UNDER FALSE  
LABELS .

IT's necessary to  
get rid of these  
false labels. OR

ARE YOU  
COWARDS, SO  
AS TO LEAVE  
IT to your

INNOCENT  
KIDS TO DO?

THAT KINDA  
STRUTTING  
BEHIND  
SPIRITUAL

IDEAS, IS A  
DIFFE

RENT  
LEVEL  
OF  
EVIL  
SHIT.

IF GOD'S  
WRATH  
FELL ON  
INDIA  
AND  
INDIA  
FELL INTO  
TRAGEDY

OF  
INVASION  
S,

DE ONLY  
TRASH TO  
BLAME FOR IT  
ARE  
PRETENDER  
S WHO



DESTROYED  
DE  
BACKBONE  
OF INDIA BY  
DENYING  
PEOPLE DE  
RIGHT TO  
STUDY  
SCRIPTURE  
EVEN.

Here is an  
authentic sage –  
sage Bhrigu from  
the Mahabharata,

“

Of mobile objects the number is infinite;  
the species also of immobile objects are  
innumerable. How, then, can objects of such  
very great diversity be distributed into  
classes?’,

“

Bhrigu said, 'There is really no distinction between the different orders. The whole world at first consisted of Brahmanas. Created (equal) by Brahman, men have, in consequence of their acts, become distributed into different orders. They that became fond of indulging in desire and enjoying pleasures, possessed of the attributes of severity and wrath, endued with courage, and unmindful of the duties of piety and worship,--these Brahmanas possessing the attribute of Passion,--became Kshatriyas. Those Brahmanas again who, without attending to the duties laid down for them, became possessed of both the attributes of Goodness and Passion, and took to the professions of cattle-rearing and agriculture, became Vaisyas. Those Brahmanas again that became fond of untruth and injuring other creatures, possessed of cupidity,--engaged in all kinds of acts for a living, and fallen away from purity of behaviour, and thus wedded to the attribute of Darkness, became Sudras. Separated by these occupations, Brahmanas, falling away

from their own order, became members of the

other three orders. **All the four**

**orders, therefore,**

**have always the**

**right** to the

performance of all

pious duties and of

**sacrifices.** Even thus were the four

orders at first created equal by Brahman who

ordained for all of them (the observances

disclosed in) the words of *Brahma* (in the

Vedas). Through cupidity alone, many fell

away, and became possessed by ignorance.

The Brahmanas are always devoted to the

scriptures on Brahma; and mindful of vows

and restraints, are capable of grasping the

conception of Brahma. Their penances

therefore, never go for nothing. They amongst

them are not Brahmanas that are incapable of

understanding that every created thing is

Supreme Brahma. These, falling away, became members of diverse (inferior) orders. Losing the light of knowledge, and betaking themselves to an unrestrained course of conduct, they take birth as *Pisachas* and *Rakshasas* and *Pretas* and as individuals of diverse *Mleccha* species. The great *Rishis* who at the beginning sprang into life (through Brahman's Will) subsequently created, by means of their penances, men devoted to the duties ordained for them and attached to the rites laid down in the Eternal Vedas. That other Creation, however, which is eternal and undecaying, which is based upon *Brahma* and has sprung from the Primeval God, and which has its refuge upon *yoga*, is a mental one." [1](#)

- <https://www.sacred-texts.com/hin/>

m12/m12b015  
.htm

Once you take away false labels the quality of people's souls are apparent. The fake brahmin pretender wanker eating off of the

EVIL insults

he throws at the human,  
when in the heart of each  
human resides God Himself,  
as per Scripture, is the sole  
evil category .

And I am not bracketing any  
by birth. But let not

for

OWN

# DIGNI TY'S SAKE

ANYBODY HOLD FALSE  
LABELS AND STRUT  
AROUND AS PANDITS  
AND BRAHMINS WHILE  
THEY WERE  
HISTORICALLY OFTEN  
ABOMINATIONS TO  
THE VERY IDEA THAT  
TERM REPRESENTED.



To appropriate a term such as “pandit” is like appropriating the word “genius” and labelling oneself a genius for no reason and saying all else are not. What evil stupidity. A genius is individually known by inner wisdom (guna) and action (karma). Prahlada were a pundit, his ancestors all not so.

A brahmin were ANY  
SAGE WHO WERE  
APPROACHING  
ENLIGHTENMENT IN  
THE SAGELY MODE.

A KSHATRIYA WERE A  
SUPERPOWER WARRIOR  
WITH DIVINE  
WEPAONS ABLE TO  
SINGLE HANDEDLY  
FACE AN ARMY WITH  
BOMBS AND  
MACHINERY, BY OWN  
SUPERNOMRAL  
PROWESS ALONE.

NOBODY NEEDS  
LABELS TO IDENTIFY  
SUCH PEOPLE.

FAKE LOWDOWN  
CRUEL PEOPLE ARE  
THE WORSE THAN  
DEMONS CATEGORY.  
WHATEVER FALSE  
LABELS THEY STRUTT  
BEHIND. IS THAT NOT  
THE IDEA OF ANY  
SACRED FAITH?

AND OFTEN  
KSHATRIYAS AS THE  
PANDAVAS DID EVEN  
HIDE THEMSELVES,  
TAKE UP WORK IN A  
ROYAL PALACE FOR A  
YEAR, ETC. SO THE

MODE WERE ALWAYS  
DYNAMIC. THEY  
WOULD ALSO AS  
ARJUNA DID , DO  
TAPASYA IN THE MODE  
OF THE BRAHMINICAL  
DIVINE EFFORT.

WHEN THE  
SITUATION  
DEMANDED THEY  
EVEN SERVED  
WORKING LIKE  
THE ORDINARY IN  
A PALACE – THEY  
DYNAMICALLY SHIFT  
THEIR mode of action.

This dynamic mode of shifting between the four orders is prescribed in the Bhagavada as well.

ANYBODY, EVEN A FOREST HUNTER-THEIF IF HE TAKES UP AND UNDERTAKES THE DIVINE EFFORT SUCCESSFULLY IS ON THE DIVINE PATH, AND DESERVES A DIVINE TERM TO DESCRIBE HIM OR HER. AND IT IS OBVIOUS WHAT HE OR SHE IS WITHOUT ANY

TERM. SO LET THE  
TERMS BE AVOIDED TO  
THE GREATEST.

ANYWAY, THE TERM  
WERE ONLY THAT FOR  
A MODE OF  
ACTION. A MODE  
OF SPIRITUAL  
EFFORT.

THE WARRIOR-KING  
MODE OF SPIRITUAL  
EFFORT, HAD A  
DIFFERENT SENSE TO  
THAT OF THE SAGE.  
THAT WERE THE IDEA

OF KSHATRIYA MODE  
VS BRAHMIN MODE.

INITIALLY ALL HAVE  
TO START BY SERVING  
– THERE IS NO  
OTHER WAY  
AROUND.

ONE HAS TO SERVE  
THE GOOD, DO GOOD  
THINGS, STUDY, AND  
SO ON.

ASSUMING ONE  
BECAME A  
SUPERPOWER WARRIOR

STILL ONE HAS TO  
HUMBLY SERVE THE  
WHOLE KINGDOM.  
NOBODY IS STRUTTIG  
AROUND KALLIGN  
EACH OTHERS  
RANDOM NAMES.  
THOSE KINDS OF  
PEOPLE ARE EVIL  
TRASH TO BE  
PUNISHED BY DIVINE  
LAWS.

Everything in the mahabahrat from the term suta putra to everything has been made an insult by the shitty evil nyaahas. A suta is one that kan divinely guide a king. It were not an insult. The narrator of Bhagavat Gita to Dhratashtra is what? If things were by marriage isn't the whole of kauravas not of any lineage as Vyasas father had Vyasa in a simple but assumably beautiful lakeside, village girl?



THE caste  
system of  
today is from  
the kraKsshit  
primitive  
tribes.

The gotra system is

found in primitive aboriginal tribes. Freud in his writing, "Taboo and Totem," describes this.

The "Fear of Incest" is the origin of the Gotra system. In small tribes inbreeding would result in their getting diseases and getting

wiped out. So marriage within a group were heavily punished. Even Now, the krakkshit northie gotra system refers to people in one gotra as “ siblings,” and they have death penalty idea for marrying within same gotra or caste. These are the retarded tribes

who never understood

Aryan  ideas.

The South Indian caste system is de same evil shit – nonsense of tribes. Pretenders who never understood

Aryan



traditions, and

fools who

fooled

others for

money and other easy

benefits. Frown on

those who do that.  
Look down on them.  
They are NOT of the  
Vedic tradition of  
India. For the Vedas  
have nothing of it and  
say the OPPOSITE  
REPEATEDLY. Where  
did their Yama  
Niyamas such as  
ahimsa go – aren't they  
evil and a harm to

fellow humans? Are they kind to good humans? So they are a fallen group. Do they have yoga, inner spirituality, the goodness that emerges from spiritual effort? Aren't those who harm and insult fellow humans evil, by ancient mythology of

this land, and as per  
the standards of  
authentic core ancient  
scriptures? Or by the  
Standards of Soul and  
God?

The Dignity and Worth  
of every Good Human  
is God Himself. Do not  
let these impostors  
tread on Human



Dignity.

Wipe out the idea of  
caste system from India  
– for it is not part of  
any authentic high  
Indian tradition, be it  
Indus Valley,  
Ramayana, or  
Mahabharat.

Discourage and mock  
openly the use of these  
labels is Surnames.

If the evil nonsense is  
not removed from  
India, each day it adds  
to the Sin of the land,  
pushing out God, by  
humans insulting each

other as if there is  
nothing else to do in  
the absolute loony  
asylum.

People of a similar  
quality and action bind  
in Marriage and even  
ordinary friendships.  
Its Natural. Valmiki  
won't be smoking  
weed in a Pub or

Hunting birds after  
enlightenment. Before  
a baaaad theif and a  
hunter.. after.. the  
Greatest kinda  
Brahmin.. Who would  
dispute? You? So it is  
entirely dependent on  
inner Wisdom,  
awareness and action,  
and displayed ability –  
and not the ability to

act and fool, with a shit  
ton of fake  
paraphernalia..

People can easily be given assistance based on their individual family economic background. Ban labelling people for it, as one would ban a sin on the nation. India and its sacred

traditions also get  
laughed at because of  
these fools peddling de  
evil.

Indians themselves  
generally hate Sanskrit  
due to the Ngyaaha  
Myaaha Gluuuha trash  
pretending around.

Their pronunciation of Sanskrit even is an abomination with no depth. And I am not generalizing.

The remedy is infusion of proper interest, text to speech accurate rendering of the Vedas,



revival of the original chanting principle from texts, and so on. What is beautiful, now sounds retarded – precisely because no study or effort takes place in that direction, given fools sit on top of it scaring everybody away.

Another idea is the

word Aryan  .

This idea were  
appropriated by the  
fukked up British trash.

They claimed they are Aryans and hopped over Himalayas with the Mahabharata and Ramayana and Vedas.

Then why does all those texts place them in the Geography of India. Physical features, ornaments, places such as

Himalaya, Lanka, traits such as unbreakable marriages, were and are still only found in India.

THE pink bunch of dressed up british cucks are another evil category - Dressing up and strutting around to fool people and loot

and pretending to be  
this and that. And  
stealing even  
traditions, and  
appropriating labels for  
power, sitting on top of  
a fake academia to  
destroy the world  
through sly ways.  
Strikes a cord with the  
ngyaaaha myaahha  
trash in the evil they

do.

Adolf Hitler and Co  
then nuked the fake  
brits taking up the  
Aryan label on  
themselves.

Btw, wonder why the  
Nazis hated the  
Ngyaaha category?

They rightly said the  
Ngyaahas had  
corrupted scripture,  
tortured people, and so  
on, and had no values  
outside of material  
gains and moneys.

Even the Aristocracy  
were all manipulated

by that trash resulting  
in the fall of India, due  
to what? God's Wrath,  
I assume.

So let us now discard  
that culture of labels.

The Aryan 



label were in the  
Mahabharata only a  
dynamic term for the  
Spiritually Evolved.  
Valimiki is an Aryan



sage, and before  
that an unAryan  
hunter.

The Buddhists texts

describe the adepts of  
Buddhism as Aryans



The Heart

Sutra describes words  
of the Bodddhisattva

Arya  -

Avalokiteshwara. See  
the Heart Sutra.

Now the word has  
become to mean a  
krakkshit pink fool  
rolling out tanks the  
kill the unarmed, a tin  
foil imitation of Adolf.

All outside of India  
were thought generally  
UnAryan tribes by the  
ancient Indians.

This is not to say they were disrespected. The Romanaka, and other people with high divine nature outside of India, are all described in the Mahabharata, in that section where Sanjaya narrates the world's layout to Dhritarashtra

before the war.

Mutual respect were  
always great.

Neither were Aryanism  
based on appearance.

What were Astavakra?

These superficial ideas  
are from the West.

“It is UnAryan  ,

Unheavenly, Not  
Leading to Glory,” as  
the Gita says.

On a side note, Adolf  
Hitler and Himmler of  
the Nazi fame, who  
hated the Brahmins,

were in high  
appreciation of the  
Gita. It were a source of  
Inspiration.

Krakksshit fools cannot  
understand high ideas.  
Like tribal trash when  
they hear Aryan  
mythology will gang  
up and attack unarmed  
people like hyenas.

They forget Pandavas endured 12 years just avoid war, then attempted a peace treaty. Never fought anyone not wielding a weapon against them, never fought from behind, etc.

Even Nazis, despite being not authentic



Indian Aryans,  
attempted for peace in  
their fight against the  
shadow banker's gov.

Mental disease is a  
feature of primitive  
tribes. The caste  
**psychosis** is one  
of them.

And what is a tribe - is it by birth? No.. it is based the present level of evolution.

Tribes in Africa,  
Himalayas, North East  
are all bearers of High  
Wisdom – and are to be  
profoundly respected,  
venerated. Studied,  
Humbly, learned from.

If you read a few books on African Wisdom as, “ The Healing Wisdom of Africa,” by Malidoma, for instance, you will understand the depth and profundity of those traditions.

And why they maintain a timeless

state focused on their  
sacred community,  
meditativeness, and  
effort at the Spirit.

It is as respectable as  
the Aghori sage .They  
exit the world in a  
supernormal state,  
abiding in that form.

The

abominatio

n is the fool

living in

delusion for

material things,

putting false

labels on

oneself and  
others.

I am referring to both  
the indigenous and the  
krasskhsit brit  
educated, brainless,  
substanceless fool.

**T** here are  
dimensions

and planes  
to the  
Universe.

The  
Purpose of  
Good



Action,  
Good  
endeavors,  
Brahmacharya,  
Joyous  
Familal

mode, is all  
to form  
own stuff  
in heavens.  
Spend eons  
in those

worlds,  
reincarnati  
ng again  
taking up  
the effort  
for absolute

enlightenm  
ent, and so  
on. The  
work in a  
human life  
is to

accumulate  
wisdom,  
and virtue  
toward  
that.

Virtue,

gained by  
treating  
fellow  
humans  
with  
humility is

a material  
gain in the  
Universe.  
Analogous  
to the idea  
of Good

Karma.

And not

just the

action, the

Inner

Thought,



Soul State,  
Bhava, all  
determine  
the Virtue  
of an  
action.

Good  
words to a  
good and  
innocent  
human is  
an offering

to the  
Yagna of  
the  
Universe,  
to God's  
Yagna.

It forms  
rewards  
automatic  
ly.

Life itself is

the form of  
the Yagna.

Good  
joyous  
interaction,

being kind  
and helpful  
to good  
people in  
need, not  
being vain,

not  
strutting  
around, all  
these are  
foundational  
aspects.

Any form  
of strutting  
is a fall  
from the  
needed



Spiritual  
State of  
Inner  
Depth  
and

Profun  
dity.

Any  
display of  
parapherna  
lia to  
appear  
spiritual, or

false labels  
is only a sin  
of Vanity.

Does  
Arjuna

have to  
announce  
he is a  
Kshatriya?  
Or does he  
stay

humble,  
often for  
years  
staying  
away from  
society. At

times,  
living a  
simple life  
to avoid  
war, taking  
nothing in

the form of  
benefits or  
attention.

He even  
turns down



invitation  
to  
IndraLoka,  
in favour of  
just  
performing

his

Dharma.

Dharma

naturally

arises from

the Soul,  
Ishvara.

The first  
few sutras  
of the  
Mimamsa

sutra make  
it obvious.

And within  
the humn it  
appears as  
an inner

push to  
Good  
Action,  
from  
Ishvara and  
Soul

planes.

Did  
Yudhistra  
even want  
the  
Kingdom  
after war –

or wanted  
to take up  
Spiritual  
effort in the  
forests after  
war?



So the  
original  
Kshatriyas  
were not  
FAKE

display

aunties

with labels.

YUDHSITR

A HAD TO  
BE  
ADVISED  
BY  
EVERYBO  
DY AND

REMINDE

D IT is his

dharma TO

RULE.

The form of

Dharma is  
not  
outward  
command  
ment – but  
the form

that  
appears  
from the  
Ishvara,  
through the  
Soul, and

the  
Universe,  
Prakriti.

India  
needs  
to



throw

out

these

labels

of

fools,

stop

being

the

laughi

ng

stock

of the  
world.

Focus

with

deep

reason

, on

the

writin

gs of

the



ancien

ts.

Nyaya(  
Reasoni  
ng ) ,  
Sankha

( Math-  
Analysi  
s) were  
foudna

tional

in

ancient

Indian

traditio

ns.

The

Subject

of

Study

were “

Sat”, “

Reality

”

, which

were

underst

ood to

have



differe  
nt  
dimens  
ions.

Foolish

brits

have

taught

that

reality

is

“Imagi

nary”

and

that

only

their

bankin

g

system

is

reality.

When a false reality is held  
people become victims of it.  
For forest dwellers technology  
doesn't exist. For those lost in  
tech the superpowers of the  
Buddhist monk still  
disappearing into brightness in

Tibet, doesn't exist.

For the

wester

ns,

marria

ge

doesn't

exist.

Why?



A false  
reality  
is  
taught

and it

become

s the

narrow

possibil

ity

observe

d.

A New  
Religion  
For India

**F**or those who wish to stay out of this krakkshit nonsense, and abide by the purest part of the Vedas – which are not just surface writings but mathematical ideas encoded in symbols, I describe a religion in the appended books.

First thing is to avoid a  
Jandu label. Call yourself  
a student of reality. Or  
that you do Zen, or

**IDEN**

**TIFY**

# WITH

the Solar Order which  
doesn't believe in false  
labels.

If Janduism is a bunch  
foolishness and hate  
peddled on India by the  
brits be anything but a  
Jandu.

Call yourself a aspirant  
“ Surya Yagnika” do  
not claim you have  
touched the standards  
required, but if you  
aspire to the standards,  
say you do so. Do not  
boast around or put up  
fancy airs. But keep the  
Dignity. Have, if needed,  
the Symbol as that of the  
Silver Sun, if you truly



aspire to the mode of  
Study, Meditation, and  
avoiding unreasonable  
false ideas. Do not fall  
into vanity of displays,  
but aesthetics form a  
force in itself.

The Family itself is the  
monastery.

As above, so below, the  
family here is not so

different often in its core  
aspect from the family in  
heaven.

Sacred forms of  
interaction within family,  
and within society.

Not allowing human  
Dignity to be stepped on,  
and not allowing own  
Dignity to be stepped on.

Keeping Inner Ease and Steadiness. Endeavoring on the Greater Goal of life in the best ways one is able to .

These are the ideals of this path. There are no labels or anything.

Only if pressed to say a

religion, one says, the  
Vedic Solar Religion,  
the Surya Yagnika.

The idea entirely is  
aligned to  
mythology, the  
aspects of it not  
distorted by the  
distorters of tradition  
( remember the same

myth has different versions in different ancient writings) .

One uses own reason and Good judgement to distinguish.

God as the Spirit  
Inside guides, not  
random writings of  
humans. Writings are

only to spark that  
Inner Brightness, and  
Soul.

Profundity, depth,  
humility these keep one  
grounded to the Spirit  
and free of vanity.

The Upanishads describe

that One Purusha who  
appears from Yuga to  
Yuga to restore Dharma –  
that One God, as also the  
“Purusha in the Sun.”

“Adityanam aham  
Vishnu,” says the Gita. “  
Within the Suns, I am  
Vishnu.”

The Gita also states  
“Jyotisam ravir  
amsuman,” “ Amongst  
the Bright, I am the

Splendorous Sun.”

The Surya Yagnika mode doesn't limit itself to this form or that form, but adopts freely study of the Truth Under the Sun.

The Sat, the Truth is the Goal. Not random ideas made by humans.



The ritual forms one may abide by the Vedic, or adopt the sacred Idea of African Traditions that any who is a human may make a ritual.

If you pour water on the earth Understanding Earth to be the Solar Body itself, wishing the

Good of all Existence,  
that is a Great Ritual.

Those vibrations held, if  
accepted by the Aware  
Solar God, transform the  
world. No ritual  
imitation is needed. Just  
the reason and a direct  
awareness is needed.

If you pour that water to  
a cactus or any plant in  
your Garden that space

and the plant even holds vibrations inviting of Goodness, and evolving Goodness for the world.

Anyway, you will find these ideas discussed better in the attached two books.

One abandons every idea that is not the purest of

Vedic Ideas – all later distortions of scripture and fake additions nowhere found in the original great tradition. One abandon that which is not Reason. One accept all forms of reason.

Like simple reason that brahma made humans 4 trillion years and all de trash since then bred under labels is false. And so is it demonstrably false by the easily demonstrable science of genetics. All that is unveiled by reason, is true. Aunty logic and vanity and evil is why the system existed in the first place.

We do not hesitate to employ ways of the present day world to research, study, preserve accurately the stuff of the traditions. To broadly make available source material for Individuals' research.

There are only two sources of knowledge – the Soul, and world-

observation. The Vedic Scriptures are a window to what is in the Soul planes. To unveil the original meaning of the Vedas, they have to be deciphered on that plane, by the individual.

Interpretations are only fancy ideas of the mind. Truth is beyond the mind – a mere sense organ, as per Buddhist traditions.

Buddhist and Vedic traditions were understood as aligned to the same Truth in the times of Nalanda.

The Sun worship found across the world, aligns to the same truth.

Mathematics based on axiomatics of thought

unveil patterns in reality.

Experiment based on

sensory observation

unveil truths in reality.

Thus, the Buddhist

scholar Dharmakirti

pointed out that there are

only two sources of

knowledge “ Inner Soul

Form Observations ( Sva

Lakshana ) and sensory

observation.” If sensory

observation were flawed,



the empirical sciences  
would fall apart. Only  
the interpretation of the  
senses can be wrong, or  
just limited to one set of  
dimensions that that  
sense processes, but it is  
indeed a function of the  
greater truth.

We abide by the  
ParjnaAparamita

# Principle

That any idea taken  
to an extreme is  
false.

Human words or  
ideas cannot  
capture the great

ultimate truth. So any expression of it is not the ultimate truth. “No Dharma taught is fully true or fully false” says the Buddhist traditions, thus.

And it need not be

entirely false either.

If someone says,  
truth is this set of  
words, “ Well.. it is  
false.” By the  
PrajnaAparamita  
Principle. Prajna  
means wisdom,  
Aparamita means

boundless or  
unbounded.

The Gita says, “  
What use is in a  
well, in the middle  
of an infinite ocean,  
the knowledge of  
the so labelled  
brahimins are that

much in the Ocean  
of Vedas' Wisdom.”

Arjuna is obviously  
being advised not  
to fall into narrow  
ideas. Arjuna is  
also advised to turn  
away from the  
shaky ideas of

scripture and  
directly situate his  
awareness in the  
Absolute planes.  
That is Yoga.

“ A log of wood  
that doesn't get  
stuck to either bank,  
eventually floats to

Ocean,” noted the Buddha. “ The right view, gravitates, levitates.. toward the Absolute.”

So do not hold extreme views, absolute exclusivity etc., as truths.



We broadly study different traditions. Zen, which focuses on the breath, is another view of a Vedic approach which states, “All of the Vedas are in the Breath.”

We study books  
such as Zen by Dao  
Re ( available for  
free download on  
Scribd.com . Dao Re  
is a pseudonym,  
btw), Meditate to  
images in CC Tsai's  
Zen.

We broadly study  
the Daoist  
traditions, gain  
wisdom from the  
African traditions,  
in alignment with  
Uddhava Gita  
which describes the  
Universe itself as  
the Teacher, and

various forms of  
Nature appearing  
as the Teacher.

We go beyond the  
words, read,  
keeping only the  
divine essence in  
own Wisdom,  
forgetting the

words.

We adopt the idea of the YogaSutra, which describes God as a "VeshsaPurusha," a unique Individual – just as the Gita does.

And the path of the  
Yogasutras “ Tapa ( Effort and  
Meditation), SvaDhy  
ana ( Self Study and  
Inner Observation,  
Trusting and noting  
down what one sees  
within, when it falls  
into a frame of

reason, eventually),  
IshvaraPranidhana  
( Obeisance to the  
One God.)”

We note that the  
writings of the  
Apocryphon of  
John regarding  
“The Inexpressible

One,” the Writings  
of Plotinus on the  
One, the Writings of  
the Egyptian Sage  
Hermes, studied by  
the Greeks, which  
describe the  
descend of “the  
One,” are all  
reflections of what



is the description of  
God in the Gita.

So traditions in  
their original purity  
were visions of the  
same Truth.

We take broad

study, reading,  
SvaDhyaya (Inner  
and Outer Self  
Study), as adoration  
of that Divine  
Supreme within.

The Bible actually  
says stuff such as  
“even the writings

of Moses veils the heart” and the New Testament is a testament directly of the Spirit, written in the Soul and Heart, not of words, for “ the letter kills, spirit gives life.”  
Read that section.

The Gnostic writing  
“ Apocryphon of  
John” says “ I will  
appear as the eagle  
on top of the tree”  
That is the wisdom  
unfolded from God’  
on the brain- spine  
tree.”

We abide by the  
Zen principle in  
later stages of  
meditation,  
described by Dao  
Re, “ Be devoid of  
oneself and others,  
situated in the  
Atman( Eternal  
Self.)”

Well, another view  
had described it  
has,” Be devoid of  
yourself and others,  
situated in the  
Atman,” the phrase  
were rephrased in a  
Zen sense to put  
oneself first, and a  
greater centering in

the Spirit achieved.

We subscribe to the teaching of ease and stability, sukham sthiram, of the awareness, taught in the YogaSutras, by absorbing any sense of unease,

into the awareness  
of the Infinite  
absolute.

“ prayatna[Effort]  
śaithilyānanta [By  
awareness of the  
ease of the Infinite  
absolute]samāpattib  
hyām[is absorbed]”  
– YogaSutras 2.47.



By that ease, we go  
beyond Duality. “

tato

dvandvānabhighāta  
ḥ” – Yogsutras 2.48.

This ease and  
stability, Sukham  
Sthiram, were the

original definition of Asana in Yogasutras, and Yogasutras had no reference to any idea of exercises or artificial effort.

Thus these texts have not to this date even been properly translated.

We are open to  
discovery. Even the  
sound of OM, might  
have been ONG. For  
the vibration of the  
absolute were  
associated with the  
top of the nose area  
– when sound  
vibrates there the  
sound is NNGGGG.

Some ancient Saivite  
texts describe the  
end sound of  
syllables such as  
LAM as

**LANNNGGG..**

“the sound a  
honeybee.” The  
written form of OM  
in other traditions  
we research, for

some even seem to  
abstract the nose  
and the Divine  
Origin as a bindu – A  
DOT -marked on top.  
The U shaped form  
above OM form we  
mathematically  
understand as the  
intensity of spatial  
density involved in  
topological

projection and  
compression of  
higher dimensions  
to the lower, making  
that form appear  
with the bindu  
inside, and it is  
observed during  
meditation, directly  
a stage.

Sankhya for us is the processing domains, the 7 cores of which starting from the root chakra are the processing cores of the universal DNA DIFFERENTIATED in the human.

The processing cores were associated with the numbers, as

the initial phrases of Bija Ganita of Bhaskaracharya make apparent. It is not a text of algebra, for even the second chapter says for title, “there are six different types zeros( corresponding the 6 processing domains,



chakras, in the  
human.)”. It  
describes a yogic  
procedure for  
directly  
understanding it.  
Sunyata of the  
Buddhists would  
thus have had an  
mathematical zero  
plane of the  
Universe

interpretation.

We study the intricacies of language and grammar. Those inclined to such study even going into the depths of the Astadhyaayi. We attempt to use

modern tools and  
programmatic  
expressions to  
present another  
view of the system.

We abide by own  
Dharma, the idea of  
duty to, friends and  
family, itself as a  
whole path.

Dharma we do not understand as a false outwardly imposed duty, but naturally arising from the Soul Planes, planes beyond ideas of thought.

Buddha's idea that attachment is "fuel"

ON THE PATH - and  
attachment, joy in  
family forms is what  
unveils the  
Brightness of God.

Dharmic  
Love is God  
Himself, says

the Gita. Familial forms of Love, and Devotion among humans, unveil God, thus.

Joyousness, games, all have their part. The study of the Gayatri Mantra intensifies it.

The preservation of  
the Inner Vital as  
foundation to  
evolving spiritually.

And that God has not  
set up any set of  
circus hoops and  
given it a label as  
“religion” to go

anywhere. The Gita asks abandoning fixation on scripture. Buddha emphasized reason and direct understanding over time. And a discouragement of foolish fixation on ritual forms of religion and ideas that are ultimately



without substance,  
are also found in the  
Gita, and in the  
Buddhist teachings  
as well – which  
emphasize reason  
and direct  
understanding.

We stay wary of the  
academia which tells  
foolish things such as

Buddhists don't believe in the Self, while those famous Ox Herding Diagrams of Zen, the writings of Zen masters, all say the opposite. The "Great Brightness of Zen" is the same the Brahman. The Second teaching of the Buddha taught about distinguishing

sings of Soul from that  
of the ephemeral ,non-  
Soul. The major  
Buddhist writings has  
Buddha  
acknowledging the  
Vedic sages, listing  
their names, received  
revelation in the form  
of the Vedas. Buddha  
encourages chanting of  
the Gayatri Mantra of

the rig veda, in another Sutra. So the foundational ideas were the exact same, obviously. Buddha offered another approach - avoiding the great deal of ritual nonsense the truth were obscured by.

We research and study

on own and never rush  
into narrow ideas, or  
simplistic conclusions.

Even good music, art,  
good food, aesthetics,  
all unveil the Divine,  
through the Soul. Life  
itself is the path, and  
not any artificial set of  
labels or mimicry of  
things of another era.

At the same time we  
acknowledge the force  
and sacredness of  
formalized ancient  
ritual forms. And we  
remember the  
Bhagavata asks often  
that they all be  
abandoned and the  
individual directly  
resort to the One God.  
“ Unto to that One

God, in the Heart of All  
Beings, alone Resort,”  
says the Gita.

Well, do a flip through  
of the appended two  
books.

This is a new path for  
all those who would  
not identify with a

mess of false ideas  
insulting fellow  
humans and allowing  
fake vanity, for their “  
religion.” Vanity and  
hate is a path to God?

One only fights to  
protect the Human  
Dignity - which is a  
Universal Dharma – to  
destroy evil forms that  
insult each other, and



thus the God within.  
The word temple in all  
ancient traditions  
originally referred to  
the human form. “ This  
body is the Kshetra(  
temple),” says the Gita.  
So its important to  
Run, as in the Pink  
Floyd Song, Just like on  
a Pill, from false  
religion set up to insult

humans.

We understand the six enemies of the human mind, AriShadVargas are to be overcome even in dreams, as the arthasastra also reminds.

Unless people push us  
to express a label for  
our religion, we do  
not identify with  
labels.

Grand Solar  
Architecture for places  
of study and  
preservation of

knowledge, aesthetics,  
grand art, only  
achieved by an  
elevated consciousness,  
these can be aspired for  
as forms.

And we do not hesitate  
to engage in the  
simplest of art as in  
Zen. For in simplicity is

the greatest profundity.

We aspire to build  
grand cities. We aspire  
to build beautiful  
simple villages, for  
beautiful form reflects  
the Divine. We study  
aesthetics of traditions  
world over. From the  
Greek to the Japanese.

In food habits we abide by reason. There is no false vegetarianism or avoiding of beef or anything. The Vedas prescribe eating of beef, meat, wine.

On a side note: Here is from Hatha Yoga Pradipika as translated by Pancham Singh," Those who eat

the flesh of the cow and drink the immortal liquor daily, are regarded by me men of noble family. Others are but a disgrace to their families.”

गोमांसं भक्षयेन्नित्यं पिबेदमर-वारुणीम ।

कुलीनं तमहं मन्ये छेत्रे कुल-घातकाः ॥ ४७ ॥

ghomāṃsaṃ bhakṣhayennityaṃ pibedamara-  
vāruṇīm ।

kulīnaṃ tamahaṃ manye chetare kula-  
ghātakāḥ ॥ 47 ॥

Not just a disgrace the next phrase used is kula-ghātakāḥ - “destroyers of own family and nation” in addition to the author saying “kulīnaṃ tamahaṃ manye” - “I think of them as the dull brained of the family, the dullening of family glory.” A full translation would be

“Those who do not eat beef daily, and drink the wine of the Gods, I think of them as the ones who dullen familial gory and the destroyers of own family/nation/lineage.” Refer Manusmriti on the aspect as well – which uses even more stronger words saying they will be reborn as sacrificial animals eaten for food – to understand it is not a bad thing. Yagnavalkia says he enjoys beef. Both Mahatma Gandhi and Vivekananda have pointed out in their published writings that the original ancient Indian religion had the requirement on the spiritual aspirant.

The not killing of animals raised as pets are normal. Nobody eats their pet swordfish for dinner.

Ideas and discussion along the lines may be found in the Book, “ A Path To Greatness: A Book for India” by Dilip Rajeev, available for free download online, and on Scribd.

We do not do any “pushipatam vacham” ( research the meaning of the phrase as found in



the Gita, “flowery words” ) or take weak forms of life as some spiritual ideal, but understand that such ideas are false, and we stay away from such patterns deviant from forms set by the Universe Itself for human beings. The flowery worded spirituality is the domain of fools who do not understand anything, points of the Gita.

We pay attention to the aesthetics of our actions, surroundings, living spaces. Often when necessary taking an approach of Zen simplicity and clarity of living spaces, so that the greater endeavour can be focused on. On each stage the ideals are different. On each plane of awareness the demands and forms of existence are different. What is acceptable in heaven, may not be so on earth. Time, Space, Dharma Sense, Inner Soul, these determine the action. Individual to individual this is different. Listening to own Soul, that deeper impulse from God, beyond all flimsy thoughts, beyond the mind and passing emotion, one understand what the Dharmic action is.

Aesthetics of good food and wine, can in itself become a spiritual path. Food forms the vibrations that form the body and mind. The Gita advises wholesome nourishing, creamy, food pleasing to the heart. Good fats reduce the glycemic index. Spices and overly salty food chaotize the body and the brain.

Gentle herbs as in  
western food is an ideal.  
Overtly medicinal herbs  
are unhealthy as food.

The properties of food  
unveil in its texture, taste,  
and appearance, the  
wavefunction form of it.  
Taste unveils all the  
properties, as per  
Ayurveda, and all  
ancient traditions world

over. A good nourishing taste is a window to the Divine planes of the Soul. Overly harsh vibrations make spiritual efforts even difficult. The importance of a spiritual focus in determining the quality of food, including of meats and wines, which are necessary for the fire element in appropriate amounts

differing from Individual to Individual, is a great endeavor in itself. Stage of the spiritual endeavour, and all other factors determine which food endow a clear view of the inner, stabilizing the energies clearing up the vibrations. And it is one's own reason, study and judgement that decides. Not anything

outward. The soul state of the person preparing the food has an impact. I once had a rasgulla made by someone at a restaurant in a Himalayan nation. The taste immediately took me to the Zero point of Zen, and for the first time. As if the person who made it had no intent, no motive to

please or not please, no  
motive to impress or not  
impress, no motive for  
money, yet an absolute  
pleasantness, difficult to  
put in words. A Zen  
meditative state,  
inimitable, not  
describable.

One should think of  
Spirituality as field of  
discovery, of joyous  
discovery, understood

fully by no mortal. For if  
any understood it fully,  
they wouldn't be mortal.

The Guru, is depth of  
reasoning.

Fake Gurus with  
paraphernalia and  
followers admiring them  
and describing their feats  
are a way of employing  
spies to fool people as per



Kautilaya's Arthasastra.

A beyond “ This is the approach to understanding, and you are by yourself and with God,( whose brightness will appear inside you, )in walking the Path. “ no Guru has any role. In an era of writing and what not,

there is no need for  
people to gather others  
around.

The Yogasutras for  
instance guide that  
way. A good book on  
Zen can take farther  
ahead than any of these  
on stage for fame  
gurus.

Vedas are ultimately  
mathematical code,  
interpreted understood  
once their vibration-  
origin is found and  
awareness stilled by  
Samadhi in the  
absolute planes, as  
yogasutras describe.

Discussion and exchange of ideas could easily happen in a formal setting, much like an academic setting, with no banners but the topic of discussion – in the style of the present day's academia, and that attire and structuring, if not, the discussion

can also be casual ,  
between friends.

Normal reason,  
experience and insights  
guide. One may  
discuss things one read  
last week, with friends.  
Or, discuss insights  
with family.

Even the talk between  
Socrates and friends is

that way. Simple  
conversations.

Sparking deeper ideas  
naturally.

Be dynamic in forming  
and discarding  
understandings. That is  
the way any field of  
study progresses, the  
faster you can identify  
a wrong idea, or the  
narrowness of a view,

the faster you end up  
in the possibility of a  
greater view.

The Socratean  
approach were to lead  
the reasoning of the  
other person by asking  
simple questions.

One should be  
absolutely cool and at  
ease about admitting  
one doesn't know

things. Who knows what. I know nothing is what Socrates said.

The family space can be streamlined to support this endeavor, by eliminating out unnecessary efforts.

The Purpose of family is to encourage on each other in the Spiritual effort.



And to gently guide.  
One should  
understand own  
wisdom is limited and  
often the other being  
has a purpose in its  
inner and deeper  
inclination.

For the Zen monk, the  
tea experience unveils  
joys of the Divine. Thus

the senses in the right mode are an opening to the Divine.

The Senses are also an input of knowledge.

This idea is present in the Gita as well – as pointed out by Abhinavagupta's writings.

Joyousness,  
Family, Good  
friendships, all  
of this are integral  
and natural aspects  
of a Spiritual  
Journey.

I urge the reader to  
widely share the  
PDF, to displace the  
false ideas that have  
been permeating India,  
and threatening the  
very displacement of  
the original sacred  
traditions from India,  
and alienating people

from spiritual efforts.

It is the individual's duty. There is nothing else outside that would transform the world, it is own duty to help lift up own nation.

Do not shy away from own Dharma.

All Good

Emerges from the  
Doing of

own

Dhar  
ma.









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DILIP RAJEEV



# Solar Worship

Dilip Rajeev

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ISBN:



The Sun is a Conscious  
Living Expression, of the  
One.

The ancient Upanishadic  
traditions describe God as,  
“the Purusha in the Sun.”

The Sun is a 6D expression,  
it expresses the world  
phenomenon here, and its  
own DNA, differentiated,  
becomes the DNA of the  
worlds and beings appeared  
here.



A 6D space has 5D for its surface expressions. The planetary bodies, thus are as expressions of the Sun's surface, 5D in Nature.

Each planet is thus as a Solar  
Chakra.

Within the human, the 6  
Chakras reflect the 6 -  
Dimensional nature of the  
Solar Angel, the Sun.

The heart chakra, the 4<sup>th</sup> chakra, an expression of four dimensional aspect of the Sun, is where the human finds his or her feeling of the three dimensional world.

The Earth is 5D, and within  
the earth is an expression of  
the Sun, the 6D, in a  
dimensional view.

Within 5D is 6D, and 5D as  
it evolves and draws from  
6D, is also as if orbiting the  
6D world.

Thus, the earth is a set of frequencies, scanning the DNA of the Sun itself.

Earth exists not a distance  
from the Sun, but in the Sun.  
The idea of distance emerges  
from the way the frequencies  
projected by the Sun are  
interpreted.



All phenomenon in Solar  
Space, is as if storypaths  
projected by the Sun.

The awareness identified  
with a high vibration story,  
evolves out a greater world  
on earth.

The Solar Universe is made  
of parallel worlds, and  
dimensions invisible to the  
human eye.

The Sun is the Origin of Life  
and Consciousness here, and  
the Predominant Expression  
of Pure Divine in our World.

Great traditions, particularly  
the Vedic, Adored the Sun.

For Solar Worship,  
The Sun is to be understood  
as the Living Expression of  
the Divine in which the  
world here exists.

Early Morning, One,  
Listening to Vedic Chants, or  
After Reciting a verse such as  
the Gayatri, One  
worshipfully offers his or her  
obeisance to the Sun.

As water is a medium which  
embodies thoughts, a  
medium of expression, and  
that which binds the worlds,  
a handful of water is  
worshipfully offered to the  
Sun.



The water is, in the ancient way of doing it, held in the hand and offered by the heart and thoughts of worship-devotion unto the Solar Angel, in whom the world exists.

The water is then gently and respectfully, poured on the Earth, while One faces the Sun.

The water offered in  
Worship, may be poured as  
well on the roots of a sacred  
plant such as holy basil.

Then, one stands awhile in  
Profound Worship, facing  
the Sun, Pondering the  
World as emerging from the  
Sun, and one's own life  
expression here as from the  
Solar Angel.

One on the Vedic Path,  
tends to study the Gayatri  
Mantra frequently. Prepare a  
book in which on each page  
is the Gayatri Mantra with  
Vedic Markers,

Gain an understanding of the  
Pronunciation of the Gayatri  
by listening to the Chanting  
of it in the Vedic form,

Study the Gayatri Mantra by  
visually reading it from the  
pages, 108 times, if one is  
inclined to the Mantra Yagna  
form of Worship.



The  
Symbol  
of the  
Silver  
Sun, is a  
symbol of the Path.

And those who abided by  
the ancient religion  
described here, were  
identified by the name,

Surya  
Yajnika.



# The Precepts

Thou  
Shalt  
Not  
Squander  
The Vital  
Spirit

Thou  
Shalt Abide  
By the  
Sacred  
Ways of  
Thy  
Forefathers

Thou  
Shalt  
Follow  
Thy  
Soul



The

*Gayatri*

*Yajna*

Yagna

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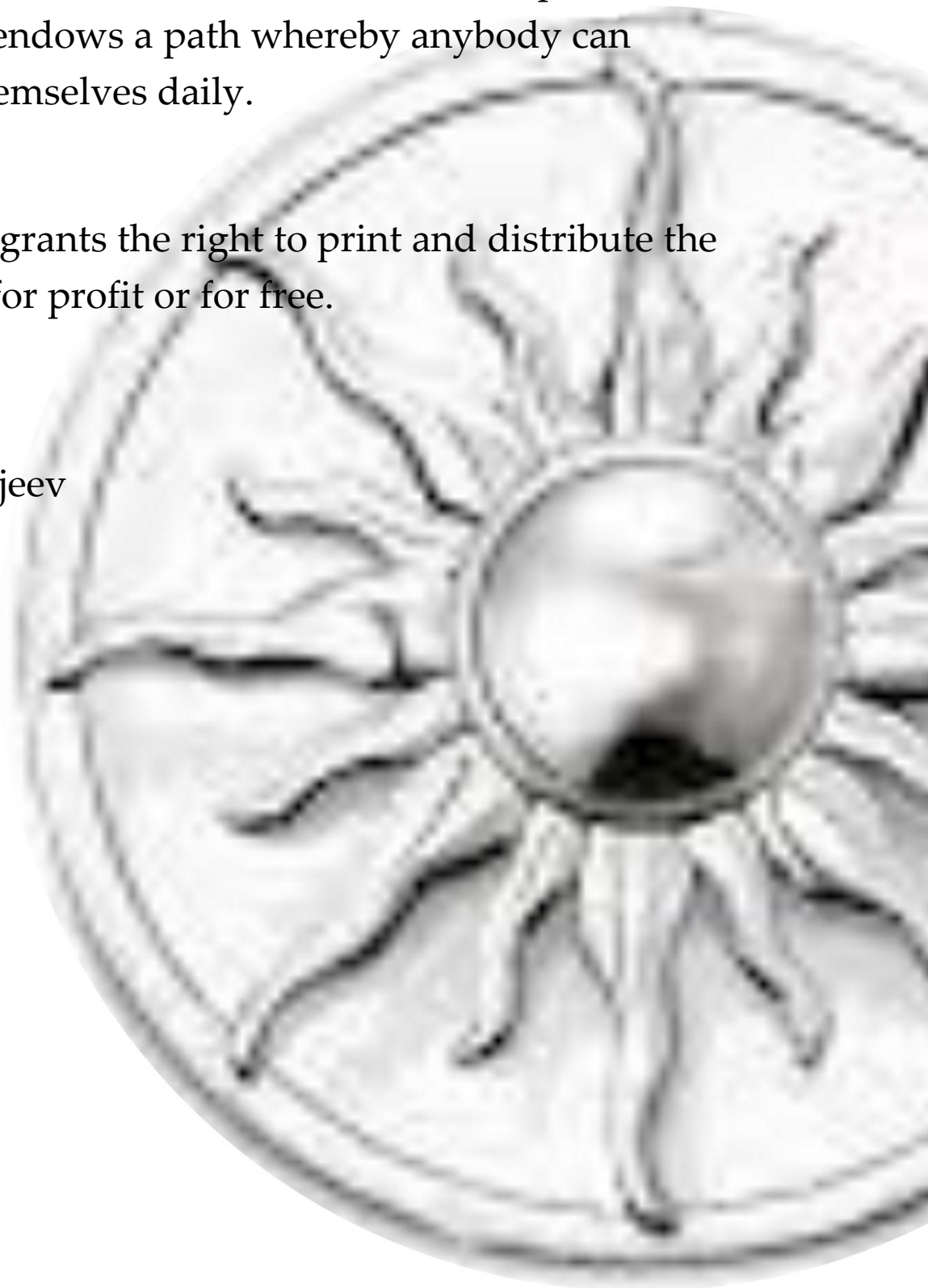
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The author grants the right to print and distribute the book as is, for profit or for free.

**Dilip Rajeev**

**A**uthor

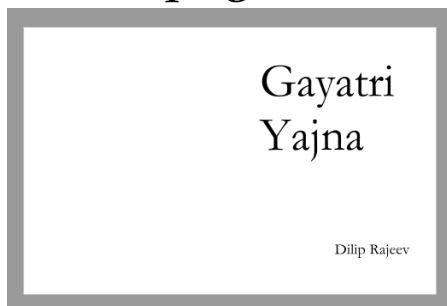


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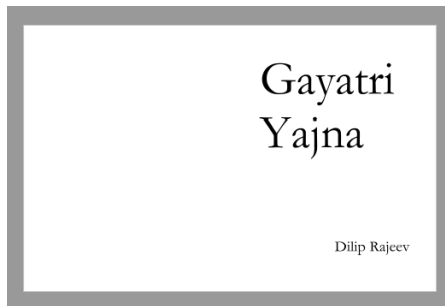


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# Gayatri Yajna

Dilip Rajeev

# Gayatri Yajna

Dilip Rajeev

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**T**his work is a guidance to  
establishing oneself in a great  
yajna.

The happiness of individuals  
evolve as they evolve the spiritual  
light inside.

**T**he Gayatri Yajna involves  
studying the Gayatri Mantra 108  
times, at the 3 sandhyas, daily.



**T**he three sandhyas are at early morning, midday, and at night.

# The gayatri

**mantra** is to be studied

with a deep sense 108 times, at the  
three Sandhyas.

Each sound of the mantra is to be studied in a way that brightens the inner. That brightness inside is the Sun.

The Sun is a term used for the Atman, the Soul.

When the sounds of the Gayatri Mantra reveal an inner brightness, keep the awareness on that inner bright Sun. The awareness expands forth what it holds.

The Sound vibrates the body and the mind, and thus unveils what is beyond the body and the mind, which is the Soul, the Sun.

**T**he Gayatri Mantra may be read a few times at any point one wishes to brighten one's intelligence.

**D**o keep sharing with all your friends, and family. A Yajna is to bring joy, love, and spiritual light to the entire world.

As part of the Yajna itself, do take this work to as many in the world, as you are able to.

**T**he Universal DNA, or the EkaBija of the Universe is processed by the 6D entity that is the Sun. The Same 6D system unfolds as the human chakras, viewed through unique maps of the differentiated individual DNA, by the unique individual awareness spark, the individual soul in that DNA matrix space.

The Planets, thus are as if Chakras or processing spaces of the Sun. They are in the Sun, so to speak, and the notion of distance arises from the set of frequencies processed by the planets each of which is a 5D sphere. The human experience involves the 4D DNA differentiated views, the heart chakras of humans, processing the world-phenomenon as projected by the Solar God.



108 Times

Gayatri Mantra

ॐ भूर्भुवः स्वः

तत्सवितुर्वरेण्यं भर्गो देवस्य धीमहि ।

धियो यो नः प्रचोदयात् ॥

ॐ भूर्भुवः स्वः

तत्स॑वि॒तुर्वरे॑ण्यं॑ भर्गो॑ दे॒वस्य॑ धीमहि ।

धियो॑ यो नः॑ प्रचो॒दया॑त् ॥

ॐ भूर्भुवः स्वः

तत्सवितुर्वरेण्यं भर्गो देवस्य धीमहि ।

धियो यो नः प्रचोदयात् ॥

ॐ भूर्भुवः स्वः

तत्स॑वि॒तुर्व॑रे॒ण्यं॑ भ॒र्गो॑ दे॒वस्य॑ धीमहि ।

धियो॑ यो नः॑ प्र॒चोद॑यात् ॥

ॐ भूर्भुवः स्वः

तत्सवितुर्वरेण्यं भर्गो देवस्य धीमहि ।

धियो यो नः प्रचोदयात् ॥

ॐ भूर्भुवः स्वः

तत्स॑वि॒तुर्वरे॑ण्यं॑ भर्गो॑ दे॒वस्य॑ धीमहि ।

धियो॑ यो नः॑ प्रचो॒दया॑त् ॥

ॐ भूर्भुवः स्वः

तत्सवितुर्वरेण्यं भर्गो देवस्य धीमहि ।

धियो यो नः प्रचोदयात् ॥



ॐ भूर्भुवः स्वः

तत्सवितुर्वरेण्यं भर्गो देवस्य धीमहि ।

धियो यो नः प्रचोदयात् ॥

ॐ भूर्भुवः स्वः

तत्सवितुर्वरेण्यं भर्गो देवस्य धीमहि ।

धियो यो नः प्रचोदयात् ॥

ॐ भूर्भुवः स्वः

तत्स॑वि॒तुर्वरे॑ण्यं॑ भर्गो॑ दे॒वस्य॑ धीमहि ।

धियो॑ यो नः॑ प्रचो॒दया॑त् ॥

ॐ भूर्भुवः स्वः

तत्सवितुर्वरेण्यं भर्गो देवस्य धीमहि ।

धियो यो नः प्रचोदयात् ॥

ॐ भूर्भुवः स्वः

तत्स॑वि॒तुर्वरे॑ण्यं॑ भर्गो॑ दे॒वस्य॑ धीमहि ।

धियो॑ यो नः॑ प्रचो॒दया॑त् ॥

ॐ भूर्भुवः स्वः

तत्स॑वि॒तुर्व॑रे॒ण्यं॑ भ॒र्गो॑ दे॒वस्य॑ धीमहि ।

धियो॑ यो नः॑ प्रचो॒दया॑त् ॥

ॐ भूर्भुवः स्वः

तत्स॑वि॒तुर्व॑रे॒ण्यं॑ भ॒र्गो॑ दे॒वस्य॑ धीमहि ।

धियो॑ यो नः प्रचो॒दया॑त् ॥

ॐ भूर्भुवः स्वः

तत्सवितुर्वरेण्यं भर्गो देवस्य धीमहि ।

धियो यो नः प्रचोदयात् ॥



ॐ भूर्भुवः स्वः

तत्सवितुर्वरेण्यं भर्गो देवस्य धीमहि ।

धियो यो नः प्रचोदयात् ॥

ॐ भूर्भुवः स्वः

तत्सवितुर्वरेण्यं भर्गो देवस्य धीमहि ।

धियो यो नः प्रचोदयात् ॥

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तत्सवितुर्वरेण्यं भर्गो देवस्य धीमहि ।

धियो यो नः प्रचोदयात् ॥

ॐ भूर्भुवः स्वः

तत्स॑वि॒तुर्वरे॑ण्यं॑ भर्गो॑ दे॒वस्य॑ धीमहि ।

धियो॑ यो नः॑ प्रचो॒दया॑त् ॥

ॐ भूर्भुवः स्वः

तत्स॑वि॒तुर्वरे॑ण्यं॑ भर्गो॑ दे॒वस्य॑ धीमहि ।

धियो॑ यो नः॑ प्रचो॒दया॑त् ॥

ॐ भूर्भुवः स्वः

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धियो यो नः प्रचोदयात् ॥

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धियो यो नः प्रचोदयात् ॥



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तत्स॑वि॒तुर्वरे॑ण्यं॑ भर्गो॑ दे॒वस्य॑ धीमहि ।

धियो॑ यो नः॑ प्रचो॒दया॑त् ॥

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तत्सवितुर्वरेण्यं भर्गो देवस्य धीमहि ।

धियो यो नः प्रचोदयात् ॥

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तत्स॑वि॒तुर्वरे॑ण्यं॑ भर्गो॑ दे॒वस्य॑ धीमहि ।

धियो॑ यो नः॑ प्रचो॒दया॑त् ॥

ॐ भूर्भुवः स्वः

तत्सवितुर्वरेण्यं भर्गो देवस्य धीमहि ।

धियो यो नः प्रचोदयात् ॥

ॐ भूर्भुवः स्वः

तत्स॑वि॒तुर्वरे॑ण्यं॑ भर्गो॑ दे॒वस्य॑ धीमहि ।

धियो॑ यो नः॑ प्रचो॒दया॑त् ॥

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धियो यो नः प्रचोदयात् ॥

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धियो यो नः प्रचोदयात् ॥

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धियो यो नः प्रचोदयात् ॥



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तत्स॑वि॒तुर्वरे॑ण्यं॑ भर्गो॑ दे॒वस्य॑ धीमहि ।

धियो॑ यो नः॑ प्रचो॒दया॑त् ॥

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धियो यो नः प्रचोदयात् ॥

ॐ भूर्भुवः स्वः

तत्स॑वि॒तुर्व॑रे॒ण्यं॑ भ॒र्गो॑ दे॒वस्य॑ धीमहि ।

धियो॑ यो नः॑ प्रचो॒दया॑त् ॥

ॐ भूर्भुवः स्वः

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धियो॑ यो नः॑ प्रचो॒दया॑त् ॥

ॐ भूर्भुवः स्वः

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धियो॑ यो नः॑ प्रचो॒दया॑त् ॥

ॐ भूर्भुवः स्वः

तत्सवितुर्वरेण्यं भर्गो देवस्य धीमहि ।

धियो यो नः प्रचोदयात् ॥

ॐ भूर्भुवः स्वः

तत्स॑वि॒तुर्व॑रे॒ण्यं॑ भ॒र्गो॑ दे॒वस्य॑ धीमहि ।

धियो॑ यो नः॑ प्र॒चोद॑यात् ॥

ॐ भूर्भुवः स्वः

तत्सवितुर्वरेण्यं भर्गो देवस्य धीमहि ।

धियो यो नः प्रचोदयात् ॥

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तत्स॑वि॒तुर्वरे॑ण्यं॑ भर्गो॑ दे॒वस्य॑ धीमहि ।

धियो॑ यो नः॑ प्रचो॒दया॑त् ॥

ॐ भूर्भुवः स्वः

तत्सवितुर्वरेण्यं भर्गो देवस्य धीमहि ।

धियो यो नः प्रचोदयात् ॥

ॐ भूर्भुवः स्वः

तत्स॑वि॒तुर्वरे॑ण्यं॑ भर्गो॑ दे॒वस्य॑ धीमहि ।

धियो॑ यो नः॑ प्रचो॒दया॑त् ॥

ॐ भूर्भुवः स्वः

तत्सवितुर्वरेण्यं भर्गो देवस्य धीमहि ।

धियो यो नः प्रचोदयात् ॥



ॐ भूर्भुवः स्वः

तत्स॑वि॒तुर्व॑रे॒ण्यं॑ भ॒र्गो॑ दे॒वस्य॑ धीमहि ।

धियो॑ यो नः॑ प्रचो॒दया॑त् ॥

ॐ भूर्भुवः स्वः

तत्सवितुर्वरेण्यं भर्गो देवस्य धीमहि ।

धियो यो नः प्रचोदयात् ॥

ॐ भूर्भुवः स्वः

तत्स॑वि॒तुर्वरे॑ण्यं॑ भर्गो॑ दे॒वस्य॑ धीमहि ।

धियो॑ यो नः॑ प्रचो॒दया॑त् ॥

ॐ भूर्भुवः स्वः

तत्सवितुर्वरेण्यं भर्गो देवस्य धीमहि ।

धियो यो नः प्रचोदयात् ॥

ॐ भूर्भुवः स्वः

तत्स॑वि॒तुर्वरे॑ण्यं॑ भर्गो॑ दे॒वस्य॑ धीमहि ।

धियो॑ यो नः॑ प्रचो॒दया॑त् ॥

ॐ भूर्भुवः स्वः

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धियो यो नः प्रचोदयात् ॥

ॐ भूर्भुवः स्वः

तत्सवितुर्वरेण्यं भर्गो देवस्य धीमहि ।

धियो यो नः प्रचोदयात् ॥

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धियो यो नः प्रचोदयात् ॥



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तत्स॑वि॒तुर्वरे॑ण्यं॑ भर्गो॑ दे॒वस्य॑ धीमहि ।

धियो॑ यो नः॑ प्रचो॒दया॑त् ॥

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धियो॑ यो नः॑ प्रचो॒दया॑त् ॥

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तत्स॑वि॒तुर्वरे॑ण्यं॑ भर्गो॑ दे॒वस्य॑ धीमहि ।

धियो॑ यो नः॑ प्रचो॒दया॑त् ॥

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तत्स॑वि॒तुर्वरे॑ण्यं॑ भर्गो॑ दे॒वस्य॑ धीमहि ।

धियो॑ यो नः॑ प्रचो॒दया॑त् ॥

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तत्सवितुर्वरेण्यं भर्गो देवस्य धीमहि ।

धियो यो नः प्रचोदयात् ॥



ॐ भूर्भुवः स्वः

तत्स॑वि॒तुर्व॑रे॒ण्यं॑ भ॒र्गो॑ दे॒वस्य॑ धीमहि ।

धियो॑ यो नः प्रचो॒दया॑त् ॥

ॐ भूर्भुवः स्वः

तत्स॑वि॒तुर्वरे॑ण्यं॑ भर्गो॑ दे॒वस्य॑ धीमहि ।

धियो॑ यो नः॑ प्रचो॒दया॑त् ॥

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तत्स॑वि॒तुर्व॑रे॒ण्यं॑ भ॒र्गो॑ दे॒वस्य॑ धीमहि ।

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तत्स॑वि॒तुर्व॑रे॒ण्यं॑ भ॒र्गो॑ दे॒वस्य॑ धीमहि ।

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तत्स॑वि॒तुर्वरे॑ण्यं॑ भर्गो॑ दे॒वस्य॑ धीमहि ।

धियो॑ यो नः॑ प्रचो॒दया॑त् ॥

ॐ भूर्भुवः स्वः

तत्सवितुर्वरेण्यं भर्गो देवस्य धीमहि ।

धियो यो नः प्रचोदयात् ॥

ॐ भूर्भुवः स्वः

तत्स॑वि॒तुर्वरे॑ण्यं॑ भर्गो॑ दे॒वस्य॑ धीमहि ।

धियो॑ यो नः॑ प्रचो॒दया॑त् ॥

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धियो यो नः प्रचोदयात् ॥

ॐ भूर्भुवः स्वः

तत्स॑वि॒तुर्व॑रे॒ण्यं॑ भ॒र्गो॑ दे॒वस्य॑ धीमहि ।

धियो॑ यो नः॑ प्रचो॒दया॑त् ॥

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ॐ भूर्भुवः स्वः

तत्स॑वि॒तुर्व॑रे॒ण्यं॑ भ॒र्गो॑ दे॒वस्य॑ धीमहि ।

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तत्स॑वि॒तुर्व॑रे॒ण्यं॑ भ॒र्गो॑ दे॒वस्य॑ धीमहि ।

धियो॑ यो नः॑ प्र॒चोद॑यात् ॥

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