Approaching the Buddhist Path

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Approaching the Buddhist Path

Bhikṣu Tenzin Gyatso,
the Fourteenth Dalai Lama

and

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Prologue

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

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

To grow these understandings in ourselves, reciting prayers and mantras

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

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

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

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

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

Bhikṣu Tenzin Gyatso, the Fourteenth Dalai Lama
Thekchen Choling

Preface

The Purpose of This Series

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Overview of the Entire Series

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Overview of Volume I

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Please Note

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

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

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

Acknowledgments and Appreciation

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

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

Bhikṣuṇī Thubten Chodron
Sravasti Abbey

Abbreviations

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

AN Aṅguttara Nikāya. Translated by Bhikkhu Bodhi in *The Numerical Discourses of the Buddha* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2012).

AKC *Advice to Kunzang Chogyal*, by Dza Patrul Rinpoche, translated by Karen Lilienberg. http://vajracakra.com/viewtopic.php?f=57&t=3287.

BCA *Engaging in the Bodhisattva's Deeds* (*Bodhicaryāvatāra*) by Śāntideva. Translated by Stephen Batchelor in *A Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life* (Dharamsala, India: Library of Tibetan Works and Archive, 2007).

CŚ *The Four Hundred* (*Catuḥśataka*), by Āryadeva.

LC *The Great Treatise on the Stages of the Path* (Tib. *Lam rim chen mo*) by Tsongkhapa, 3 vols. Translated by Joshua Cutler et al. (Ithaca: Snow Lion Publications, 2000–2004).

MN Majjhima Nikāya. Translated by Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi in *The Middle-Length Discourses of the Buddha* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 1995).

RA *Precious Garland* (*Ratnāvalī*) by Nāgārjuna. Translated by John Dunne and Sara McClintock in *The Precious Garland: An Epistle to a King* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 1997).

SN Saṃyutta Nikāya. Translated by Bhikkhu Bodhi in *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2000).

Vism *Path of Purification* (*Visuddhimagga*) of Buddhaghosa. Translated by Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli in *The Path of Purification* (Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 1991).

Approaching the Buddhist Path

1 | Exploring Buddhism

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Purpose of Existence and the Meaning of Life

The Buddha says (MN 46.2):

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

A Middle Way between Theistic Religions and Scientific Reductionism

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Buddhadharma and Other Religions

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Religion in the Modern World

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

A Broad Perspective

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

2 | The Buddhist View of Life

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

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

What Is Mind?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

REFLECTION

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

Body, Mind, Rebirth, and Self

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

REFLECTION

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

Dependent Arising and Emptiness

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Dependent Arising and the Three Jewels

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

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

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

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

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

3. The wisdom that eradicates ignorance (the true paths) and the freedom from duḥkha that comes about due to it (true cessations) are the Dharma Jewel.

4. People who have actualized the Dharma Jewel in their minds are the Saṅgha Jewel and the Buddha Jewel. Thus the Three Jewels of refuge exist.

The Possibility of Ending Duḥkha

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

In his *Commentary on the "Compendium of Reliable Cognition"* (*Pramāṇavārttika*),[6] Dharmakīrti says that mental states influenced by ignorance, like any other wrong conception or erroneous consciousness, lack a valid

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

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

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

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

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

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

3 | Mind and Emotions

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

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

Buddhism, Science, and Emotions

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

REFLECTION

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

2. When you give up an immediate pleasure due to your sense of personal integrity or for the sake of long-term happiness, how do you feel at the time? How do you feel later, when reflecting on your action?

3. How integral is ethical conduct to your happiness? Based on what you conclude here, make some determinations about how you want to live.

Emotions and Kleśas

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

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

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

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

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

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

Constructive and Destructive Emotions

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