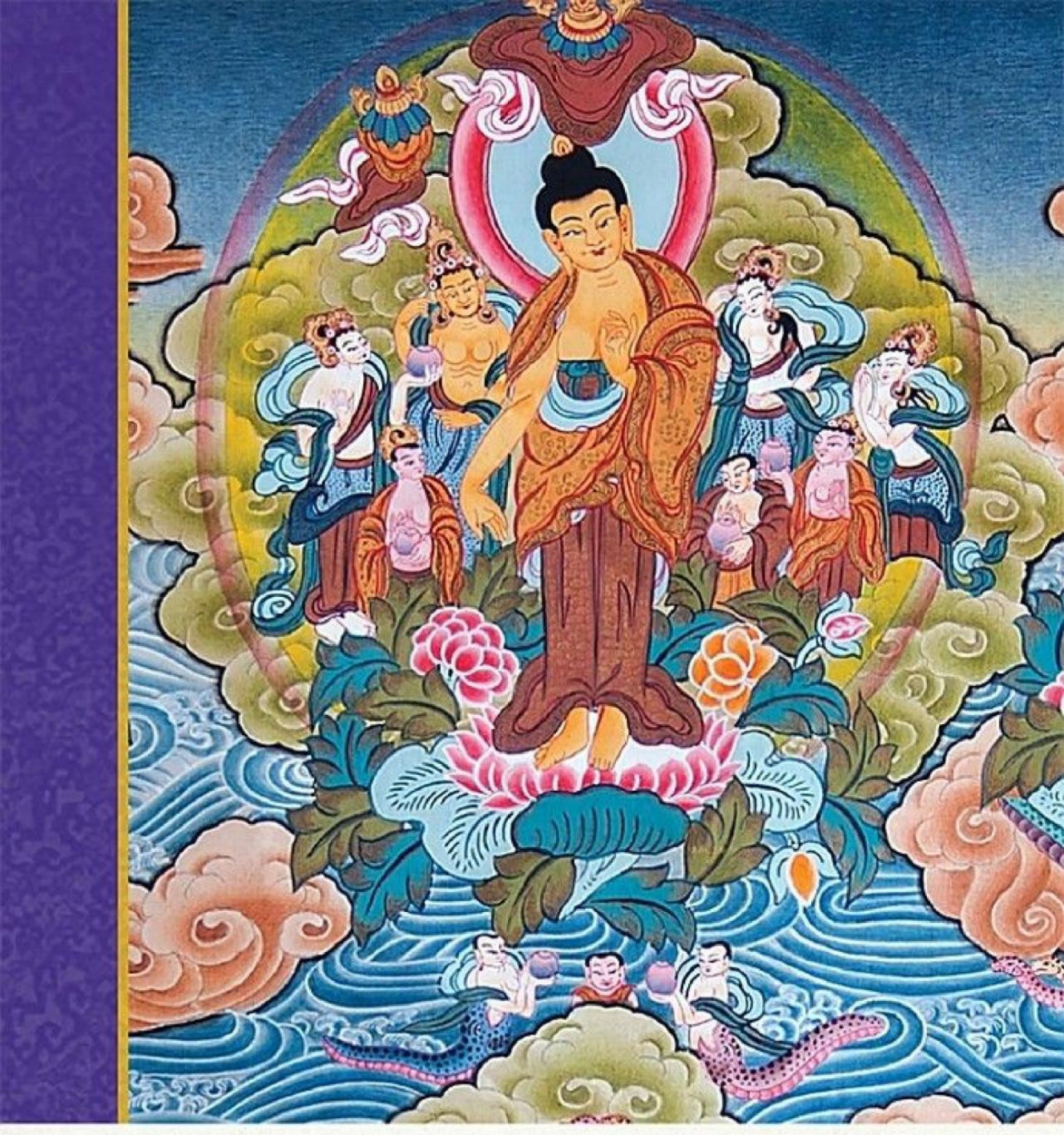

The Foundation of Buddhist Practice

The Dalai Lama and Thubten Chodron

THE LIBRARY OF WISDOM AND COMPASSION : VOLUME 2

Contents

Preface

WELCOME TO THE second volume of the Library of Wisdom and Compassion that shares His Holiness the Dalai Lama's compassionate wisdom on how to practice the path to full awakening. The first volume of the Library of Wisdom and Compassion, *Approaching the Buddhist Path*, principally contained introductory material that set the context for Buddhist practice. It gave us a way to approach the Buddha's teachings: to "get our toes wet" without diving in. This volume, which can also be read as an independent book, takes the next step and describes the foundation of Buddhist practice — important topics that will help us to stay focused on what is worthwhile and to build a firm basis on which to establish a healthy Dharma practice.

As an individual who has studied and practiced the Buddhadharma since he was a small child, His Holiness the Dalai Lama is uniquely qualified to share with us what he has learned and how he implements it in his life. Occupying the office of the Dalai Lama, Bhikṣu Tenzin Gyatso is the spiritual leader of the Tibetan people, and until he resigned in 2011 he was also their political leader. From early on, he insisted that Tibetans develop democratic institutions in keeping with modern standards. Once the Central Tibetan Authority was established in Dharamsala, India, with functioning legislative, executive, and judicial branches, he followed his heart's yearning to retire from government service and devote his time to the Buddha's teachings. Looking back on his years as a political leader, he comments that the confluence of spiritual and political power in pre-1959 Tibet was influenced by feudalism. He relinquished the political power of the institution of the Dalai Lama in favor of a democratic government and believes that spiritual and political leadership should be distinct.

His Holiness is nonsectarian in his approach to the Dharma. He is not the leader of the Geluk tradition — that position is held by the Ganden Tripa and is a seven-year appointed position accorded to a former abbot of one of the two Geluk tantric monasteries. His Holiness refers to himself as a simple Buddhist monk who follows the Nālandā tradition — the teachings of the vibrant Buddhist monastic universities in classical India, one of which was Nālandā.

How the Library of Wisdom and Compassion Came About

As explained more extensively in *Approaching the Buddhist Path*, the first volume in the Library of Wisdom and Compassion, this series grew from the need for a presentation of traditional Buddhist teachings in a new format designed especially for people who did not grow up with knowledge of the Buddha's teachings. This audience — myself included — generally engages with Buddhism using a rational approach. We seek reasoned explanations and examine what we learn to see if it

makes sense and is logically consistent. We try it out to see if it works before having faith or calling ourselves Buddhists.

With this in mind, in 1995 I requested His Holiness to write a short text that teachers could use for this purpose. He responded by saying that a larger commentary should be written first and, giving me transcripts of some of his talks, charged me with that task. Since I have been His Holiness's student since 1979, I also had a wealth of notes as well as English translations of many of the texts he has taught. With each new teaching I heard, more was added to the manuscript, and what began as one book quickly turned into a series of volumes. In addition, His Holiness said that he wanted this book to be unique and to include the perspectives of the Pāli and Chinese Buddhist traditions.

Every few years I would meet with His Holiness for a series of interviews to ask him questions that I had accumulated from my own studies and from my friends who were also Western Buddhists. Perhaps because of cultural differences or the way society is now structured, we often have questions and qualms that require in-depth explanations that are not found in the classical Buddhist texts. His Holiness enjoyed these discussions — he would often invite two or three geshes, his brother Ngari Rinpoche (Tenzin Choegyal), and the scholar and former Tibetan prime minister Samdhong Rinpoche to join us. There were serious philosophical debates and robust laughter during our sessions.

Much of the content of the two chapters on properly relating to a spiritual mentor came from these interviews as well as from gatherings of Western Buddhist teachers with His Holiness in 1993 and 1994, when we spoke frankly with him about difficulties that have arisen as Buddhism spreads in new lands. His Holiness discussed these topics openly and gave practical responses suitable for current issues.

Since the material for this series came from oral teachings, interviews, and written texts, which were translated by various interpreters who had different English translations of technical terms and different speaking and writing styles, one of my tasks as editor was to express the material in a consistent style and standardize the terms. At one point His Holiness insisted that the series be coauthored, although this was not my intent or wish. Although the series follows His Holiness's teachings, I have expanded on certain points that he covered briefly and mentioned some points that were omitted. He has been my spiritual mentor for nearly forty years, so whatever I have written has definitely been shaped by his perspective and guidance. Geshe Dorje Damdul and Geshe Dadul Namgyal also checked the manuscript.

Most of the series is written from the perspective of the Nālandā tradition, which stems from the monastic universities in ancient India, and the Sanskrit tradition in general. There are so many similarities between the Sanskrit tradition and the Pāli tradition of Buddhism that quotations from sūtras and commentaries in the Pāli tradition are freely intertwined in this book. In some places — for example, in the chapters on karma and its effects — some points from the Pāli tradition are added to expand our understanding. This is part of His Holiness's vision of our being twenty-first-century Buddhists with flexible minds who can understand and learn from a

variety of perspectives.

His Holiness wants this series to address the spiritual needs of not only Westerners but also people from traditionally Buddhist cultures in Asia and abroad, as well as the younger generations of Tibetans who are English educated.

Overview of "The Foundation of Buddhist Practice"

The "prelude" to the Library of Wisdom and Compassion was *Buddhism: One Teacher, Many Traditions*, which shared the Buddha's teachings in both the Pāli and Sanskrit traditions, showing the many similarities as well as the different perspectives. In our modern world, it is increasingly important that Buddhists from different traditions and countries learn about one another. In that way we will abandon old misconceptions that divide us and be able to speak as one voice on the Buddha's principal teachings on nonviolence, love, compassion, ethical conduct, and so forth — values that desperately need to be promulgated to counter the self-centeredness of individuals, groups, and nations.

His Holiness's teaching style is unique. He respects the intelligence of his audience and is not afraid to introduce profound concepts to beginners. While he does not expect us to understand everything the first time we hear or read it, he urges us to do our best and to come back to the material repeatedly over time and continue to deepen our understanding. He presents the path in a straightforward manner, without exaggerated claims of quick or easy attainments that require minimum effort and commitment, and urges us to exert joyous effort in learning, reflecting on, and meditating on the topics. He earnestly models this effort and commitment in his own life, living simply without any intention to become a celebrity. He also trusts that when we encounter difficult concepts, we will not give up but will persevere, gradually progressing according to our individual ability. By teaching in this way, His Holiness gives us a clear aim and path to get there as he compassionately encourages us to keep going.

The present volume begins with the four seals — basic premises that are accepted by all Buddhist schools — and the two truths, which are the basis of the path. Here we are introduced to key Buddhist ideas such as dependent arising and emptiness according to the view of the Prāsaṅgika Madhyamaka tenet system. We begin to understand that things — especially our own selves — do not exist as they appear. There is an ultimate reality to be discovered that does not negate the existence of the world but gives us a new, liberating way to see it.

Chapter 2 focuses on epistemology, how we know the phenomena that comprise the two truths. How do we discriminate reliable cognizers — awarenesses that accurately know their objects — from wrong consciousnesses that misperceive sensory objects or hold incorrect views? This topic keeps our spiritual exploration grounded in reason and is important to fulfill both our temporary and ultimate aims.

Knowing the qualities of correct and erroneous cognizers, we examine the objects of these cognizers in chapter 3 — external objects that form the environment and internal ones that are the basis of the self, our body and mind. This chapter

contains an extensive classification of phenomena that is helpful to keep in mind as we explore other topics on the path.

Chapters 4 and 5 discuss a subject that many people find confusing: how to choose a qualified spiritual mentor and form a healthy relationship with that person. Practicing under the guidance of excellent spiritual mentors is essential; without them we risk wandering in the spiritual marketplace, taking a little of this and a little of that and blending them together in a way that pleases us. Worse yet, an unqualified teacher may lead us on the wrong path. These chapters explain the different kinds of spiritual mentors, their requisite qualities, and how to relate to them in a way that benefits our practice. But for benefit to occur, we need to become receptive students. When difficulties arise in the mentor-student relationship, we need to address them skillfully. His Holiness is very practical in this regard.

Before actually embarking on the path, we also need to know the various types of meditations and how to structure our meditation session. This is covered in chapter 6. The preliminaries, such as proper sitting positions and calming the mind through observing the breath, facilitate meditation. Reciting verses that direct our minds to positive thoughts settles the mind. Doing these recitations while imagining that we are in the presence of the buddhas and bodhisattvas makes them especially heartfelt.

In chapter 7 His Holiness explains the mind, body, and rebirth in more depth, bringing in a scientific perspective while adhering to the Buddhist view that body and mind have different natures and different causes. He also introduces a meditation to help you get a sense of the clear and cognizant nature of the mind.

Chapter 8 begins the path in common with the initial-level practitioner. First we contemplate our precious human life, its meaning, and its rarity. This meditation is a wonderful antidote to depression and discouragement, for it emphasizes the good fortune and remarkable opportunity we have at present.

Chapter 9 asks us to look at what distracts us from practicing the path: our addiction to the pleasure that comes from other people and sense objects and our aversion to any pain or disappointment. The attitude that seeks only our own happiness of this life keeps us busy trying to make other people and the environment correspond with our current wishes and ignores the need to create the causes for fortunate future lives, liberation, and full awakening. Meditation on death helps us clear away our “rat race” mentality and set clear priorities. This chapter also includes advice for how to prepare for death and help someone who is dying.

Understanding the value of our lives and determined to use them to progress on the path to awakening, we want to learn how to create the causes for happiness and abandon the causes of suffering. This is covered in the final three chapters about karma and its effects. Here we find a comprehensive description of how our actions create our experiences. We learn to distinguish virtuous and nonvirtuous actions, giving us power to create the kind of future we want. A section on current ethical issues is a starting point for discussions on how to live an ethical life in a changing society. The four opponent powers set out a psychologically healthy way to remedy our misdeeds and begin anew. We also explore the deeper implications of causality.

With this knowledge we can live in a healthy, wholesome, and meaningful way that enables us to accomplish our spiritual goals.

Please Note

Although this series is coauthored, the writings are primarily His Holiness's instructions. I wrote the parts pertaining to the Pāli tradition and some other paragraphs.

For ease of reading, most honorifics have been omitted, but that does not diminish the great respect we have for these most excellent sages and practitioners. Foreign terms are given in parentheses at their first usage and in the glossary. Unless otherwise noted with "P" or "T," indicating Pāli or Tibetan, respectively, the italicized terms are Sanskrit. Sanskrit spelling is used for Sanskrit and Pāli terms used widely (nirvāṇa, Dharma, arhat, and so forth), except in citations from Pāli scriptures and parenthetical technical terms in explanations from the Pāli tradition. For brevity, the term *srāvaka* encompasses solitary realizers (*pratyekabuddha*) as well, unless there is reason to specifically speak of solitary realizers. To maintain the flow of a passage, it is not always possible to gloss all new terms on their first use, so 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 second volume is due to the talent and efforts of His Holiness's translators — Geshe Lhakdor, Geshe Dorje Damdul, and Mr. Tenzin Tsepak. I appreciate Samdhong Rinpoche, Geshe Palden Dragpa, Geshe Sonam Rinchen, and Geshe Dadul Namgyal for their clarification of important points. I also thank Bhikkhu Bodhi for his clear teachings on the Pāli tradition, 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 I wrote this series, and David Kittelstrom and Mary Petrusewicz for their 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.

ADK	*Treasury of Knowledge* (*Abhidharmakośa*) by Vasubandhu.
ADKB	*Treasury of Knowledge Autocommentary* (*Abhidharmakośabhāṣya*) by Vasubandhu.
ADS	*Compendium of Knowledge* (*Abhidharmasamuccaya*).
AN	Aṅguttara Nikāya. Translated by Bhikkhu Bodhi in *The Numerical Discourses of the Buddha* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2012).
BCA	*Engaging in the Bodhisattvas' Deeds* (*Bodhicaryāvatāra*) by Śāntideva. Translated by Stephen Batchelor in *A Guide to Bodhisattva's Way of Life* (Dharamsala, India: Library of Tibetan Works and Archives, 2007).
CMA	*Abhidhammattha Saṅgaha* by Anuruddha, in *A Comprehensive Manual of Abhidhamma*, edited by Bhikkhu Bodhi (Seattle: BPS Pariyatti Editions, 2000).
CŚ	*The Four Hundred* (*Catuḥśataka*) by Āryadeva. Translated by Ruth Sonam in *Āryadeva's Four Hundred Stanzas on the Middle Way* (Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion Publications, 2008).
DN	Dīgha Nikāya. Translated by Maurice Walshe in *The Long Discourses of the Buddha* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 1995).
EPL	*Elucidating the Path to Liberation: A Study of the Commentary on the Abhidharmakosa* by the First Dalai Lama. Translated by David Patt (PhD dissertation, University of Wisconsin–Madison, 1993).
LC	*The Great Treatise on the Stages of the Path* (T. *Lam rim chen mo*) by Tsongkhapa, 3 vols. Translated by Joshua Cutler et al. (Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion Publications, 2000–2004).
MMA	*Supplement to the "Treatise on the Middle Way"* (*Madhyamakāvatāra*) by Candrakīrti. Hereafter *Supplement*.
MN	Majjhima Nikāya. Translated by Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi in *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2005).
PDA	*Praise to Dependent Arising* (T. *rten 'brel bstod pa*) by Tsongkhapa. Translated by Thubten Jinpa. http://www.tibetanclassics.org/html-assets/In%20Praise%20of%20Dependent%20Origination.pdf.
PV	*Commentary on the "Compendium of Reliable Cognition"* (*Pramāṇavārttika*) by

Dharmakīrti. Hereafter *Commentary on Reliable Cognition.*

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

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

Sn — *Sutta Collection* (*Suttanipāta*). Translated by Bhikkhu Bodhi in *The Suttanipāta: An Ancient Collection of the Buddha's Discourses Together with Its Commentaries* (Somerville, MA: Wisdom Publications, 2017).

T. — Tibetan.

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

Introduction

Three Aspects of Buddhism's Contribution

OVER THE CENTURIES, Buddhism has made a powerful and valuable contribution to our human culture. When speaking of the contribution of the Nālandā tradition in particular, I place its contents in three categories: Buddhist science, philosophy, and religion. *Buddhist science* includes discussion of the nature of the external world and the subject, the mind, that cognizes it, as well as how the mind engages its objects through sensory and mental cognizers and through conceptual and nonconceptual consciousnesses. Buddhist science also discusses how the mind engages with objects by employing reasoning that helps establish facts about the world.

Buddhist philosophy includes discussion about the conventional and ultimate modes of existence of persons and phenomena, the four seals indicating a philosophy is Buddhist, the two truths, and emptiness and dependent arising. *Buddhist religion* describes the basis, path, and result of spiritual practice and emphasizes its liberating aspirations and goals. Buddhist religion relies on understanding Buddhist science and philosophy, in the sense that they provide the foundation and essential elements for the path to fulfill the spiritual aims of liberation and full awakening. Based on the assumption that every living being has the potential to become fully awakened, Buddhist religion stresses the path of mental development and transformation to attain these supramundane states.

Since we live in a multicultural, multireligious world, one of my aims is to present ethical conduct and compassion in a secular way, free of reliance on a specific religious doctrine, so that people of all faiths and of no faith can benefit. I also wish to give society access to the intellectual treasures in India's ancient texts and ensure that they are preserved in the body of world knowledge. In this light, I asked some of my foremost students, who are scholars in their own right, to form compendiums of the important points of Buddhist science and philosophy and translate them into a variety of languages. The series of these compendiums is entitled *Science and Philosophy in the Indian Buddhist Classics* and is published by Wisdom Publications.

Buddhist science and philosophy can be studied by all. However, Buddhist religion is for Buddhists and those interested in it. We respect each individual's choice regarding religion. The Library of Wisdom and Compassion deals with the spiritual and religious perspective of Buddhism's contribution to the world. It is for those who are interested in learning and practicing the path that frees us from *duḥkha* — the unsatisfactory conditions of cyclic existence (*saṃsāra*) — and enables us to actualize our full human potential. In this Library, you will find Buddhist science and philosophy presented as the basis and means for practicing the

liberating path. You will learn how to engage with this liberating knowledge in a personal, transformative way.

A Good Attitude toward Learning the Dharma

Buddhist texts contain wise advice about how to approach learning the Buddha's teachings and explaining them to others. Since in this volume we will establish the foundation for Buddhist practice, it is especially helpful to touch on this now.

Reflecting on the value of learning the Dharma in my own life, I recall some verses in the *Jātaka Tales* (LC 1.56):

> Hearing (learning) is a lamp that dispels the darkness of afflictions,
> the supreme wealth that cannot be carried off by thieves,
> a weapon that vanquishes the foe of confusion.
> It is the best of friends, revealing personal instructions, the techniques of method.
> It is the friend who does not desert you in times of need,
> a soothing medicine for the illness of sorrow,
> the supreme battalion to vanquish the troops of great misdeeds.
> It is the best fame, glory, and treasure.

Due to the problems concerning Tibet's sovereignty that occurred during my youth, I had to accept the request of the Tibetan people and assume leadership of the Tibetan government. I was a mere teenager at the time, with little to no experience of my new duties and responsibilities that concerned the well-being of millions of people. Although anxiety was always beckoning, the Buddha's teachings gave me inner strength. They were the lamp that dispels the darkness of afflictions.

When I had to suddenly flee to India in March 1959, and leave almost all possessions behind and go forward to an unknown future, the Dharma was the friend who did not desert me in times of need. All the sūtras and scriptures I had memorized throughout the years came with me to India, providing guidance whenever I needed it. As I lived in exile and watched my homeland and its traditions, culture, and temples be destroyed, the Dharma was a soothing medicine for the illness of sorrow, giving me optimism and courage. In exile, the Buddha's teachings have been the best fame, glory, and treasure because they are always valuable in life and in death.

Seeing the benefits of learning the Buddha's teachings, we want to listen to and study them in an effective manner, without the defects of three faulty vessels. If we don't pay attention while at teachings or when reading Dharma books, we don't learn anything. Like an upside-down pot, nothing can go in. If we don't review what we have heard or read to make our understanding firm, we will forget the teachings, becoming like a leaky pot that can't retain the precious nectar poured into it. If we are closed-minded, opinionated, or have the wrong motivation for learning the Dharma, we become like a filthy pot; pure nectar may be poured inside and stay

there, but because it is mixed with the filth in the pot it cannot serve its purpose to nourish us.

With this in mind, please set a wholesome altruistic intention when reading this book. Aspire, "May I read, reflect, and meditate on the Buddha's teachings so that I can become a kind, compassionate, and wise person. Through this, may I be of benefit to all living beings, and in the long term, may I become a fully awakened buddha."

Bhikṣu Tenzin Gyatso, the Fourteenth Dalai Lama
Thekchen Choling

1 The Buddhist Approach

Four Seals

THE ISSUE OF distinguishing Buddhists from non-Buddhists existed in olden times as it does now. In ancient India, this was usually done on the basis of philosophical views regarding the nature of the self and phenomena. A convenient and concise way to delineate Buddhist views is according to the four seals as found in the *King of Concentration Sūtra* (*Samādhirāja Sūtra*). People accepting the four seals are considered Buddhists by view,[1] and those accepting the Three Jewels as their ultimate source of refuge are considered Buddhists by conduct. The four seals are: (1) all conditioned phenomena are transient, (2) all polluted phenomena are duḥkha (unsatisfactory) in nature, (3) all phenomena are empty and selfless, and (4) nirvāṇa is true peace.

1. All conditioned phenomena are transient.

Conditioned phenomena are products of causes and conditions, and all of them undergo change, disintegrating from what they were and becoming something new. Change occurs in coarse and subtle ways. Coarse change occurs when the continuum of a thing ceases. Subtle change occurs moment by moment — it is a thing's not remaining the same from one instant to the next.

We can observe coarse impermanence with our senses: we see that after coming into being, things later cease. A chair breaks, a person dies, bottles are recycled. Understanding coarse transience is not difficult; we don't need logical arguments to accept this coarse level of change.

However, for something to arise and cease in this obvious way, there must be a subtler process of change occurring moment to moment. Without a seed changing moment by moment, a sprout will not appear. Without the sprout growing in each moment, the plant won't come into being. Without the plant aging and disintegrating moment by moment, it won't die. Without subtle, momentary change, coarse change could not occur. The fact that things end indicates they change subtly in each instant. They are transient or impermanent. In Buddhism, "impermanent" means changing moment by moment.

All the main Buddhist philosophical tenet schools (except for Vaibhāṣika, which has a slightly different understanding of the process of change and cessation) accept that the moment a thing comes into being, it contains the seed of its own cessation simply by the fact that it is produced by causes and conditions. It is not the case that one cause produces a particular thing, that thing remains unchanged for a period of time, and then another condition suddenly arises that causes its cessation. Rather, the

very factor that causes something to arise also causes it to cease. From the very first moment of a thing's existence, it has the nature of coming to an end. The very nature of conditioned phenomena is that they do not last from one moment to the next.

Generally speaking, when we think of something coming into being, we look at it from a positive angle and think of it growing. When we think of something ending, we have the negative feeling that what existed before is ceasing. We see these two as incompatible and contradictory. However, if we reflect on the deeper meaning of impermanence, we see that its very definition — momentary change — applies to both the arising and ceasing of a thing. Nothing, whether it is in the process of arising or the process of ending, lasts into the next moment.

The present is insubstantial. It is an unfindable border between the past — what has already happened — and the future — what is yet to come. While we spend a great deal of time thinking about the past and planning for the future, neither of them is occurring in the present. The only time we ever live is in the present, but it is elusive, changing in each nanosecond. We cannot stop the flow of time to examine the present moment.

Scientists, too, speak of momentary change: subatomic particles are in continuous motion, and cells in our body undergo constant, imperceptible alteration. When we understand impermanence to mean momentariness, we see that arising and ceasing are not contradictory but are two aspects of the same process. The very fact that something comes into being means it will cease. Change and disintegration occur moment by moment. When we understand impermanence in those terms, we'll recognize the significance of the first seal, that all conditioned phenomena are impermanent.

Understanding impermanence is a powerful antidote to harmful emotions that plague our lives. Emotions such as attachment or anger are based on grasping: we unconsciously hold the view that the people to whom we're attached will not cease and that the problem or mood we're experiencing at present will continue. Contemplating impermanence shows us the opposite: since everyone and everything changes, clinging to people, objects, or situations as being fixed doesn't make much sense. Since our problems and bad moods are transient by nature, we do not need to let them weigh us down. Rather than resist change, we can accept it.

While the direct and complete antidote to attachment is the realization of selflessness, an understanding of impermanence will prepare our mind to gain insight into the meaning of selflessness. But understanding impermanence will not harm beneficial qualities such as love, compassion, and altruism because those emotions are not based on unrealistically grasping impermanent things to be permanent. Contemplating impermanence gives us confidence that our disturbing emotional habits can change and that excellent qualities can grow in us.

2. All polluted phenomena are duḥkha — unsatisfactory by nature.

Polluted phenomena are those produced under the control of ignorance and its latencies. Because all things in cyclic existence — including our body and mind — are polluted in this way, they are said to be *duḥkha*, unsatisfactory by nature. They

are not capable of providing the enduring happiness and security that we seek.

How are the unsatisfactory circumstances in our lives related to our minds? In the *Sūtra on the Ten Grounds* (*Daśabhūmika Sūtra*), the Buddha said, "The three realms are only mind." The Cittamātra (Mind Only) school says this means the external physical world that we perceive is nothing but a projection of our mind. The Prāsaṅgika Madhyamaka school understands this statement differently, saying that it indicates there is no absolute, independent creator and that the source of our experiences lies in our minds — our virtuous, nonvirtuous, and neutral minds — and the actions, or karma, that these mental states motivate.

From the Buddhist viewpoint, many universes exist simultaneously at different stages of development — some are beginning while others are devolving. Before a particular universe begins, the potential for material substances exists in the form of space particles. Changing moment by moment, these space particles are not absolute or independent entities.

How is the physical evolution of a universe related to sentient beings — their mental states and their experiences of pain and pleasure, happiness and unhappiness? This is where karma comes in. Karma is intentional actions done by sentient beings.[2] As the potencies remaining from these actions ripen, they shape the evolution of the external world and condition our experiences in it.

Sentient beings create karma physically, verbally, and mentally. Our motivation is principal, for it fuels our physical and verbal actions. Destructive actions are motivated by afflictions such as attachment, anger, and confusion, which in turn are polluted by and rooted in ignorance, an erroneous belief in inherent existence.[3] Even when sentient beings act with kindness, the karma they create is still polluted by the ignorance grasping inherent existence. So whether the actions are constructive or destructive, they produce rebirth in cyclic existence. Because unawakened cyclic existence is a product of the undisciplined mind, it is said to be duḥkha, unsatisfactory by nature. Secure peace and happiness cannot come from ignorance. For this reason, the second seal of Buddhism is that all polluted phenomena are in the nature of duḥkha.

The first truth, the truth of duḥkha, consists of two factors: those in the external environment, such as our environment, tables, and oceans, and those internal to sentient beings — our bodies and minds. Within the latter, the feeling aggregate, the primary consciousnesses and mental factors that accompany them, and the cognitive faculties that cause these consciousnesses are all unsatisfactory by nature. Both the external and internal objects are true duḥkha because they come into being due to the polluted karma and the afflictions of ordinary sentient beings.

Once someone has eliminated afflictions and karma, she becomes an arhat, someone liberated from cyclic existence. Even so, she may continue to live in the external world, which is true duḥkha. In other words, the criterion for being in cyclic existence is not the environment in which a person lives but her state of mind.

The first two seals are related. We can use the transient nature of functioning things as a reason to show that all polluted phenomena are unsatisfactory in nature. Functioning things are products of causes and conditions, thus they are under the

control of other factors. Polluted things, such as our ordinary bodies and unenlightened minds, are under the power of polluted causes — the undisciplined mind, at the root of which lies ignorance. As long as our minds remain under the control of ignorance, we live in an unsatisfactory state where the cause of suffering is always present.

3. All phenomena are empty and selfless.
4. Nirvāṇa is true peace.

The third and fourth seals are closely related. The explanation of the third seal accepted by almost all Buddhist tenet schools glosses the term "empty" as the absence of a permanent, unitary, independent self or soul and "selfless" as the absence of a self-sufficient, substantially existent person. According to the Prāsaṅgika Madhyamaka school, which is considered the most accurate view, "empty" and "selfless" both refer to the absence of inherent, true, or independent existence. Unless otherwise noted in this book, explanations will be according to this school.

The root of our cyclic existence is the ignorance that grasps phenomena as possessing some sort of independent existence, selfhood, or self-existence. The word *ignorance* conjures up the image of something inauspicious or undesirable, and it is indeed so. Just as whatever grows from a poisonous seed will be poisonous, everything that arises from ignorance will be undesirable. As long as we remain under the control of ignorance and erroneous views, there is no possibility for lasting joy.

According to Prāsaṅgikas, ignorance is not simply a state of unknowing. It actively grasps or conceives things to exist in a way that they do not. Superimposing inherent existence on persons and phenomena, it apprehends what is contrary to reality. Whereas persons and phenomena do not exist inherently, under their own power, ignorance grasps them as existing in that way.

As we investigate how phenomena actually exist, our conviction that ignorance is erroneous increases. By seeing and familiarizing ourselves with the wisdom knowing reality, we gradually erode the force of ignorance and the undisciplined mind. When the cause, ignorance, is completely uprooted by its counterforce, wisdom, its resultant duḥkha is likewise extinguished. This state of freedom is nirvāṇa, lasting peace and true freedom. Therefore the fourth seal of Buddhism is that nirvāṇa is true peace.

Knowing the evolution of afflictions such as attachment and anger helps us understand the necessity of employing analysis to gain the wisdom realizing the selflessness of persons and phenomena that eradicates ignorance. If we examine emotions such as attachment and anger, we see that they are rooted in grasping at inherent existence. The stronger our grasping at an independent I, the stronger our attachment to the concerns of that self. We cling to whatever is seen as important to the self and are hostile toward whatever impedes fulfilling its interests.

For example, we may see a beautiful item that we are very attracted to in a store, and we crave to possess it. After we buy it, we call it mine and become even more

attached to it. Behind the label mine is the belief in a self whose happiness is extremely important. If someone else then takes or breaks the article, we become angry because the happiness of this I has been adversely affected. Here we see the relationship between our grasping at an inherently existent I and our attachment to the article and anger at whatever interferes with our enjoying it. Refuting the inherent existence of this I eliminates the basis of our attachment and anger, which subsequently diminish and eventually are totally eradicated.

The distinguishing mark of being in cyclic existence is the mere I being under the control of ignorance and karma; that is, when the aggregates that are the basis of designation of the I are produced by these polluted causes, the person designated in dependence on them is bound in cyclic existence. As soon as that person eliminates ignorance, she no longer creates polluted actions that propel cyclic existence. Her cyclic existence ceases, and that person — that mere I — attains liberation. Gradually, she can also remove the cognitive obscurations that prevent omniscience, and when this is done, that mere I attains buddhahood, the state of full awakening or nonabiding nirvāṇa, in which the person abides neither in cyclic existence nor in the personal peace of an arhat's nirvāṇa.

The four seals follow each other in a natural sequence. The existence of our body, mind, self, as well as the people and environment around us, is governed by causes and conditions. Thus their very nature is transient and momentary. The very causes and conditions that brought them into existence are the causes for their disintegration. In short, all conditioned phenomena are impermanent, the first of the four seals.

The external environment as well as factors internal to sentient beings — our bodies and minds — came about under the influence of our afflictions and polluted karma. Thus they are unsatisfactory by nature. As the second seal states, all polluted phenomena are duḥkha.

The story does not stop here, because there exists a powerful antidote — the wisdom realizing the emptiness of inherent existence — that is capable of totally eradicating ignorance, afflictions, and karma. All phenomena are empty and selfless, the third seal. When emptiness is realized directly and nonconceptually, and the mind becomes habituated with it through consistent meditation, all afflictions and karma causing rebirth are eradicated. In this way, cyclic existence is ceased and the fourth seal — nirvāṇa is peace — comes about.

The four seals are related to the four truths. The first two seals — all conditioned phenomena are transient and all polluted phenomena are unsatisfactory — describe the first two noble truths: the truths of duḥkha and its origins. But knowing this alone doesn't overcome our suffering. The last two seals — emptiness and selflessness, and nirvāṇa — speak of the third truth, true cessations, and imply the fourth truth, true paths, as the path that realizes them. By realizing the true path — the wisdom realizing emptiness — that knows all phenomena are empty and selfless, we uproot the ignorance that is the root cause of cyclic existence. Its cessation is the fourth seal, nirvāṇa is true peace.

Two Truths

From the perspective of subtle dependent arising, all phenomena are empty of inherent existence and exist by being merely designated by names and concepts. How, then, do we maintain a coherent notion of our everyday world? How can we accept causes producing results and maintain the distinctions among different objects if ultimately everything lacks inherent existence and exists by mere designation? The Buddha's teaching on the two truths — ultimate and conventional — helps us understand this.

Ultimate (*paramārtha*) truth — the emptiness of inherent existence of all phenomena — is the actual way phenomena exist. Ultimate truths are true in that they exist the way they appear to the nonconceptual wisdom of āryas. *Saṃvṛti*, the Sanskrit word translated as "convention," also means "veil," indicating that the actual truth of an object is obscured or veiled — the veil being ignorance, the mind grasping inherent existence. Due to ignorance, phenomena appear inherently existent, whereas they are not. Veiled truths are not true — they do not exist as they appear — they are true only for ignorance, and as such, are false. Our everyday world of people, things, and experiences are veiled truths.

To give another example, people gave me the title Dalai Lama. If you attend a public teaching that I give, you look at the person in the front of the room who is speaking and think, "This is the Dalai Lama," as if there were an objective person out there, a person that exists from his own side. But when you search for exactly what that person is, you can't pinpoint anything. You see the body of a Buddhist monk and hear a voice. Through my body language and speech, you have some idea of what is going on in my mind. But when you look in the body, speech, and mind, you can't find the Dalai Lama. He is not his body, speech, or mind. The appearance of the Dalai Lama as an inherently existent person is false. Actually he exists because on the basis of the collection of body and mind, your mind forms the conception of a person that you then designate the "Dalai Lama." The Dalai Lama exists by being merely designated by name and concept. That is his conventional nature. The deeper way he exists — his ultimate nature — is the emptiness of being an inherently existent Dalai Lama.

For each phenomenon, the two truths are present on that one base. For example, the mind has a veiled or conventional nature and a deeper reality or ultimate nature. Its conventional nature is its clarity and cognizance, the mind that perceives and experiences things. Its ultimate nature is its emptiness of inherent existence. These two truths exist inseparably with respect to the mind, although they are perceived by different cognizers. The conventional mind is perceived by a conventional reliable cognizer, while the ultimate nature of the mind is known by a wisdom mind that realizes emptiness. Although the two truths are different, they exist together and depend on each other. For that reason, the mind and its emptiness are said to be one nature but nominally different. The two truths are not two unrelated levels of being, with ultimate truth being some absolute independent reality separate from the world of interdependent things.

Evident phenomena are those that ordinary beings can easily perceive. These include (1) external objects, such as colors, sounds, odors, tastes, and tangible objects, which are known by *direct reliable cognizers* that correspond to our five physical senses, and (2) internal objects, such as feelings of happiness, pain, hopes, and desires, which are known by the mental consciousness.

Slightly obscure phenomena cannot initially be directly perceived. Ordinary beings must initially know them by *factual inferential cognizers* — inferential reliable cognizers based on valid factual reasons. Examples of slightly obscure phenomena are subtle impermanence — the momentary arising and ceasing of conditioned things — and selflessness. The fact that the apple arises in dependence on causes and conditions is part of the conventional nature of the apple. Through understanding that its existence is a result of causes and conditions, we can know that the apple is impermanent.

The sun setting in the west is coarse change that is evident to our visual sense. But to understand the sun's subtle changeable nature, we must use reasoning. The sun rose in the east and in order to set in the west, it must move continuously, moment by moment, imperceptibly across the sky. This momentary change cannot be detected by our eyes; we need reasoning to know it.

To know a slightly obscure phenomenon such as selflessness — for example, the absence of a permanent, independent soul or self — we may use the reason of "dependence" and contemplate the syllogism *Consider a person, she does not exist as a permanent, partless, under-its-own-power soul or self because she depends on her body and mind*.

Very obscure phenomena are known by ordinary sentient beings by relying on *inferential reliable cognizers by authoritative testimony*, the attestation of someone who is authoritative in that field. We know our birthday by asking our mother, and we understand the subtle intricacies of karma by depending on the Buddha's teachings. While atoms and subatomic particles are slightly obscure phenomena that can be known by inference, most of us rely on the testimony of scientists to know their existence and characteristics.

According to Sautrāntikas, from the viewpoint of direct perceivers, all functioning things are evident phenomena because under the right conditions they can be perceived by our direct perceivers. From the viewpoint of conceptual consciousnesses, all knowable objects — both impermanent and permanent — are obscure phenomena because they can be known by a conceptual consciousness thinking about them. Conceptual consciousnesses are obscured because they know things by means of a conceptual appearance, which obstructs them from seeing functioning things directly.

Prāsaṅgikas describe evident and obscure phenomena differently, saying that evident objects are those that can be known through our own experience, without depending on inference; for example, sense objects. Obscure objects must initially be known by depending on a reason. They are objects of inference — for example, the subtle impermanence of the body and the selflessness of the person.

These categories are described in relation to ordinary sentient beings, not āryas.

For an ārya, subtle impermanence and selflessness are evident phenomena, whereas for us they are slightly obscure. There are no obscure objects for buddhas because they are omniscient. Even in terms of ordinary sentient beings, these categories can vary according to our situation. When we are at a campfire, the fire is evident to us; we see it with our eyes and feel the heat on our skin. To people on the other side of a clump of trees, the campfire is slightly obscure; they must infer, "In the area behind those trees, there is fire because there is smoke." To our friends in another state, the campfire is very obscure. They know it because we call and tell them we are at a campfire.

Another example is devas — celestial beings such as the god Brahmā. For us human beings who live on Earth, Brahmā is very obscure; we know about him only through the testimony of a reliable authority. Our senses cannot see him and no amount of reasoning can prove his existence. To other living beings born in that realm, Brahmā is evident. Similarly, to people watching a spacecraft land on the moon, that event is evident, but to people who have no idea that such a thing is possible, it is very obscure. They must trust the testimony of those who witnessed it to know it happened.

An object becomes evident, slightly obscure, or very obscure in relation to an individual. For ordinary beings who haven't entered a path, subtle impermanence and emptiness are slightly obscure, while for āryas they are evident phenomena, known by yogic direct perceivers.

To our mother, our birthday is an evident phenomenon, but for us it is a very obscure phenomenon. Owing to the extremely long distance, the details of various stars and planets in the universe are very obscure to us. But they are evident to whatever life forms inhabit those places.

Various aspects of one thing may be different types of objects. Our friend's body is an evident phenomenon that we see with our eyes. His heart is a slightly obscure phenomenon that we infer because all human bodies have hearts. The karmic causes for our friend to be born into that body are very obscure phenomena known only by a buddha.

REFLECTION

1. Make examples of evident phenomena, slightly obscure phenomena, and very obscure phenomena that you already know. How did you come to understand them? Which type of reliable cognizer was involved?

2. Consider how we know things such as the existence of atoms, the Ice Age, or the qualities of other solar systems. Which of the three types of objects are they and how do we know them?

3. If you have never been to Antarctica, which of the three categories of phenomena is Antarctica in relation to you? Is it very obscure because you have to depend on another person's testimony to know what it looks like? Is it slightly obscure because by seeing photographs or a 3D model you can infer what it looks like? Would it be evident because you could see it through live streaming on the Internet?

in watching a movie, our auditory consciousness hears the voices of people near us, but later we cannot say with certainty that people were speaking or what they were discussing.

6. *Deluded doubt* is an awareness that vacillates between two or more options and is inclined toward the wrong conclusion.
7. A *wrong awareness* (*viparyayajñāna*) is either a conceptual or nonconceptual consciousness that incorrectly apprehends its observed object. A hallucination hearing voices where there are none is a wrong sensory awareness. Holding the view that impermanent things are permanent or that what is foul is actually delightful are wrong conceptual awarenesses.

Reliable Cognizers and Unreliable Awarenesses

Dharmakīrti, who wrote from the Sautrāntika and Cittamātrin perspective, and Candrakīrti (ca. 600–650 CE), who taught from the Prāsaṅgika Mādhyamaka perspective, defined the Sanskrit term *pramāṇa* differently. According to Dharmakīrti, *pramāṇa* is a prime cognizer — a new and nondeceptive knower. "New" indicates that it is the first moment of a nondeceptive cognizer; the following moments in that continuity knowing the same object are subsequent cognizers and are not prime.

According to Candrakīrti, *pramāṇa* is a knower that is nondeceptive (*avidaṃvādi*) with regard to its principal or apprehended object (*muṣṭibandhaviṣata*). In his *Commentary on "The Four Hundred,"* he says, "Undeceived consciousness is seen in the world to be reliable cognizer (*pramāṇa*) itself."[4] "Nondeceptive" means incontrovertible; this knower is trustworthy and knows its object correctly. It does not have to be the first moment of a stream of moments of cognition. It is called a *reliable* cognizer because it can lead us to accomplish our purpose. Prāsaṅgikas say subsequent cognizers are reliable cognizers because they know the same apprehended object as the first moment that preceded it. Candrakīrti's *Clear Words* (*Prasannapadā*) lists four types of reliable cognizers according to the objects to be comprehended:[5]

1. *Direct reliable cognizers* know their objects — evident phenomena — directly and nondeceptively, without depending on a reason or logical mark. With an unimpaired eye faculty, we see blue. This is a nonconceptual direct reliable cognizer. A subsequent cognizer can also be a direct reliable cognizer. A consciousness correctly remembering a conversation we had yesterday is a direct reliable cognizer even though it is a conceptual memory of the conversation. Similarly, many, but not all, scholars agree that the second moment onward of an inferential cognizer realizing impermanence is a direct reliable cognizer because unlike the first moment of that inferential cognizer, it does not depend on a reason. Although it is considered a direct reliable cognizer, it does not directly apprehend its object because it is a conceptual consciousness.

presentation of slightly obscure phenomena. To assess this, we examine if its presentation of slightly obscure phenomena can be refuted by inference.

3. There is no reason to reject this scripture in terms of its presentation of very obscure phenomena. To assess this, we examine two factors: (a) The scripture's explicit and implicit meanings about very obscure phenomena are free from contradiction. The explicit meaning is the evident theme of the scripture; the implicit meaning is other topics that are the basis. The explicit meaning of the Prajñāpāramitā Sūtras is the doctrine of emptiness and the implicit meaning is the progressive stages of the paths that realize emptiness. (b) The former and latter passages of its presentation of very obscure phenomena are free from contradiction. What the scripture says in one place does not contradict what it says in another.

There is not a recommended number of pages to read in order to determine that a scripture is free from faults by the threefold analysis. Each person must read enough to be satisfied that his or her analysis is thorough. If a scripture meets these three criteria, accepting its statements as true gives us access to knowledge that is useful for our Dharma practice.

Dharmakīrti says that a scripture may also be considered trustworthy if its author is a reliable or credible person. A reliable person is one who is able to fulfill the desires of disciples in a nondeceptive manner. The Buddha is a reliable being because he has freed his mind from all defilements, developed all excellent qualities, and knows all phenomena directly with his omniscient mind. Motivated by compassion, he has the genuine wish to lead all sentient beings from duḥkha to the joy of liberation, and he has no reason to lie. Furthermore, what the Buddha said about the most essential aspects of the path — the four truths and emptiness based on dependent arising — can be validated by an inferential reliable cognizer. As we become convinced regarding these subjects, we begin to appreciate the possibility of attaining awakening and respect the Buddha as the one who taught such a wonderful path. Since the Buddha explained the essential aspects in a nondeceptive manner, we can infer that his statements on auxiliary topics that are very obscure phenomena are also trustworthy.[10] Āryadeva says (CŚ 280):

> Whoever doubts what the Buddha said
> about that which is very obscure
> should rely on emptiness
> and gain conviction in him alone.

Dharmakīrti makes a similar point (PV 1.217):

> Alternatively, since the true nature (*tattva*) of that which is to be avoided and that which is to be done along with the methods for doing so are well established, the statements of the credible person in question [the Buddha] are nondeceptive with regard to the most important issues [the four truths]. Hence, he is a source of inferential knowledge with

cognizers can prove its existence.

The minds of white appearance, red increase, and black near attainment that appear during the dissolution process are probably very obscure phenomena for us as well. We may get some inkling of these increasingly subtle states of mind culminating in the clear light by considering that the eighty indicative conceptions are classified into three levels according to their subtlety. Thus the combination of wind and mind that are their underlying foundation — the vivid white appearance, red increase, and black near attainment — should also be increasingly subtle and culminate in the clear light. For example, we may see three clouds moving at different speeds in the sky — one fast, another slower, and a third barely moving at all. Although we cannot see the winds moving the clouds, we can infer that those winds are moving at three different speeds.

Also, tantric texts that discuss the various levels of mind describe many things that we can verify through direct perceivers — we have experiences of the awake state, dream state, and state of deep sleep, which are increasingly subtle states of mind. This gives us confidence in the accuracy of other topics presented in these texts. Furthermore, we do not know of any evidence that contradicts the existence of the clear light mind. Therefore, based on the authoritative testimony of the Buddha and those meditators who have direct experience of the subtlest clear light mind, there seems to be more grounds for accepting its existence than disproving it

For us ordinary beings, the level of realizations of those who are more highly realized than we are is very obscure. In his commentary on the *Ornament* entitled *Golden Rosary* (*Legs bshad gser phreng*), Tsongkhapa said that no matter how many reasons ordinary beings apply or how much logic they use, they cannot infer the level of realizations of highly realized practitioners. However, for those with higher realizations, the level of realizations of people inferior to them are evident phenomena.

If we are speaking with our teacher in the classroom, and he says that there is a text on the table in another room, we can accept that as true by believing his words. While in general the book is an evident phenomenon, to us at that moment it is very obscure. We cannot see it with our eyes or know it by inference. At that time, the only way we have to know the book is by relying on the testimony of someone who does.

However, simply citing our teacher or a scripture that says, “All phenomena are empty because they are dependent” will not help us to understand emptiness initially. What is the difference between trusting our teacher’s words to know the book and to understand emptiness? In general, a book is an evident phenomenon. We know what it is and have an image of a table with a book and a table without one. His words clarify for us which one it is. However, initially we do not have an idea of what emptiness is — or if we do, it’s the emptiness of our stomach, which is not the kind of emptiness we’re trying to realize! Quoting our spiritual mentor that phenomena are empty does not enhance our understanding of emptiness, even if we have tremendous devotion to our teacher. However, our trust in our teacher will inspire us to contemplate and meditate on emptiness according to the teachings, and

through that we will understand the three criteria of the syllogism and in time will gain an inferential reliable cognizer of emptiness.

REFLECTION

1. Who do you trust as an authority and in what areas do you take them as authoritative? To what extent is that person fully reliable in terms of knowledge of that topic?

2. Those of us who are not scientists know the existence of atoms, the healthy range for human blood pressure, and so forth through accepting the word of scientists. Do we investigate their qualifications as authorities on the subject or do we blindly accept their word?

3. When politicians make various statements, to what extent do we check the reliability of their information and the reliability of their words before believing their statements?

4. In what other areas of life do you rely on the testimony of others to know something? Do you check the credibility of the person first or do you tend to believe something simply because someone said it or you read it somewhere?

Applying the Threefold Analysis

If direct reliable cognizers, inferential reliable cognizers, or other reliable scriptures contradict a particular scriptural passage, or if scientists can irrefutably prove that a scriptural statement is incorrect, we should not accept it. Vasubandhu's *Treasury of Knowledge* (*Abhidharmakośa*) describes the structure of the universe as a flat world with Mount Meru at the center, four surrounding continents, heavenly realms above, and hellish states below. The sun and moon are said to be the same distance from the Earth, and the sun is only slightly larger than the moon. I do not believe that we should accept this description as accurate. My reasons for this are based on the guidelines the Buddhist scriptures have set out for evaluating the veracity of a teaching.

In Vasubandhu's time the structure of our solar system was a very obscure phenomenon. Now, due to scientific advancement, some parts of its structure are evident while other parts can be known through factual inference. This new information affects our understanding of Vasubandhu's description. We must apply the threefold analysis necessary for inference by scriptural authority to determine whether to accept his statements regarding our solar system.

The first criterion, that the statement is not contradicted by direct perception of evident phenomena, is not fulfilled. One way of proving the nonexistence of something is to prove the existence of its opposite. Vasubandhu describes the sun and moon as being almost the same size — 51 yojanas (20,400 km) and 50 yojanas (20,000 km) in diameter, respectively.[12] However, reliable scientific instruments have measured the sun's diameter as 1,392,000 km and the moon's diameter as


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Wisdom Publications
199 Elm Street
Somerville, MA 02144 USA
wisdompubs.org

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Names: Bstan-dzin-rgya-mtsho, Dalai Lama XIV, 1935– author. | Thubten Chodron, 1950– author.
Title: The foundation of buddhist practice / Bhiksu Tenzin Gyatso, the Fourteenth Dalai Lama and Bhiksuni Thubten Chodron.
Description: Somerville: Wisdom Publications, 2018. | Series: The library of wisdom and compassion; volume 2 | Includes bibliographical references and index. |
Identifiers: LCCN 2017037684 (print) | LCCN 2018009580 (ebook) | ISBN 9781614295457 (ebook) | ISBN 9781614295204 (hard cover: alk. paper)
Subjects: LCSH: Buddhism — China — Tibet Autonomous Region. | Buddhism — Doctrines. | Religious life — Buddhism. | Spiritual life — Buddhism. | Buddhist philosophy.
Classification: LCC BQ7604 (ebook) | LCC BQ7604 .B768 2018 (print) | DDC 294.3/420423 — dc23
LC record available at https://lccn.loc.gov/2017037684

ISBN 978-1-61429-520-4 ebook ISBN 978-1-61429-545-7

22 21 20 19 18

5 4 3 2 1

Photo credits: p. xii, Kenryun Ong; pp. 50, 230, Thubten Tenzin; p. 130, Stephen Ching; p. 182, Libby Kamrowski; p. 340, Mike Novak
Cover and interior design by Gopa & Ted2, Inc.