AN INTRODUCTION TO BUDDHISM

Teachings on the
Four Noble Truths,
The Eight Verses on Training the Mind,
and the
Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment

THE DALAI LAMA

Translated by THUPTEN JINPA

An Introduction to Buddhism

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FOREWORD

THIS SMALL BOOK of teachings by His Holiness the Dalai Lama is a perfect introduction to traditional Buddhist thought and practice as understood and taught in the Tibetan tradition. Starting with the very foundation of Buddhism, the Four Noble Truths, His Holiness provides the framework and underpinnings necessary to understand the Buddha's basic teachings on working with suffering and dissatisfaction and cultivating happiness and peace, within which the entirety of Buddhism can be taught.

Following this presentation of the Four Noble Truths, His Holiness provides extremely useful and pragmatic commentaries on two of Buddhism's most popular and important short texts: *The Eight Verses on Training the Mind* and Atisha's *Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment.* The language and presentation in these commentaries is clear and succinct, yet extremely accessible and practical, teaching us how to apply basic Buddhist principles in our lives.

The Eight Verses on Training the Mind is a classic text from the genre of Tibetan spiritual teachings called *lojong* or "mind training." His Holiness often refers to this short work as one of his main sources of inspiration for the practice of compassion. Regarding these verses, the Dalai Lama has said, "I recite these verses every day and, when I meet with difficult circumstances, reflect on their meaning. It helps me."

This practice of "mind training" consists of removing negative mental states and cultivating constructive ones. These negative states have as their basis excessive self-concern and a basic misunderstanding of the way things exist, such that we overvalue and undervalue the people and things with which we come into contact. We superimpose excessive goodness and badness upon our experiences, which then acts as a catalyst for the development of our afflictive emotions.

To overcome this excessive self-concern we need to develop heartfelt concern

for others, love and compassion, the highest expression of which is the altruistic intention to become enlightened for the benefit of all beings, as well as a proper understanding of the nature of reality. We need to make this our real inner spiritual practice, and for this it always helps to contemplate and meditate upon the texts which teach about the good heart, altruism, and correct view. Such a text is *The Eight Verses on Training the Mind* written by the Kadampa Geshe Langri Thangpa.

Finally, the Dalai Lama provides a short, lucid commentary on Atisha's *Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment.* This text, which became the source of a genre of teachings called *lamrim* (stages of the path), was written for the Tibetan people by the famed eleventh-century Indian Buddhist scholar and saint Atisha and is important because, although short, it sets forth an overview of the entire Buddhist path.

Thus, the Dalai Lama explains in this book the three most fundamental topics to be found in Buddhist spiritual teachings—the Four Noble Truths, Mind Training, and Stages of the Path—in an accessible style aimed at Westerners interested in learning about authentic traditional Buddhist practice. The book also benefits from the wonderful translation by Geshe Thupten Jinpa. Therefore, this is an excellent introduction to traditional Tibetan Buddhist thought and practice.

Sidney Piburn

1. Principles of Buddhism

The Four Noble Truths

I SHALL PRESENT here a brief summary of the conceptual framework underpinning the Buddha's fundamental teaching on the Four Noble Truths—the truth of suffering, the truth of its origin, the truth of its cessation, and the truth of the path leading to cessation.

The Buddha taught these noble truths soon after his attainment of enlightenment as part of what is known as the first turning of the Wheel of Dharma. Without a good understanding of the Four Noble Truths we cannot proceed meaningfully in our study and understanding of the nature of reality according to Buddhism. But first, I would like to make it clear that all major religious traditions have the same potential, the same message and goal, by which I mean the genuine wish to bring about better world conditions, a happier world with a more compassionate humanity. This is what all the major religions share.

In order to live harmoniously, we must make a common effort. It is very important to have mutual respect, rather than trying to propagate your own tradition. Therefore I always emphasize that people from different traditions should keep their own faith and not be in a hurry to change their religion. There are many Asian people in Australia today who come from traditionally Buddhist countries, and in this gathering here we have monks and nuns from Vietnam, Thailand, Burma, Sri Lanka, and Japan; in addition there are those from China, Mongolia, and Tibet. Also, there are some people among the millions of Westerners of traditionally Christian backgrounds who have an inclination or mental attitude which finds the Buddhist approach more effective. On that basis I am giving some explanation about the Dharma here today.

Three Levels of Understanding

In Buddhism, one speaks of three different levels of understanding, which are sequential—an understanding arrived at through learning and studying, an understanding developed as a result of deep reflection and contemplation, and an understanding acquired through meditative experience.

There is a definite order in the sequence of this three. So on the basis of study and learning—which is the first level—we deepen our understanding of a given topic by constantly reflecting upon it until we arrive at a point where we gain a high degree of certainty or conviction that is firmly grounded in reason. At this point, even if others were to contradict our understanding and the premises upon which it is based we would not be swayed, because our conviction in the truth has arisen through the power of our own critical reflection. This is the second level of understanding which, however, is still at the level of the intellect. If we pursue this understanding further and deepen it through constant contemplation and familiarity with the truth, we reach a point where we feel the impact at the emotional level. In other words, our conviction is no longer at the level of mere intellect. This is the third level of understanding, which is experiential, and this is referred to in the Buddhist texts as an understanding derived through meditative experience.

Once you have listened to my presentation, many of you may acquire the first level of understanding. If you become interested in the topic of the Four Noble Truths, you will then need to build upon this first level of understanding by constantly familiarizing yourself with it through deep reflection and contemplation. So, in a sense, you have to do your homework! You can then reach the second level of understanding.

For those among you who are genuinely interested in the Buddhist teachings and the spiritual path they present, you will need to deepen your understanding still further by engaging in regular meditation so that you can progress to the third level of understanding. You need to appreciate, however, that this process will take time. It requires commitment to a long and sustained period of spiritual practice. So you may need to overcome the modern-day habit of automation. We flick a switch and something pops up! We need to strive to overcome this conditioning and go back through more than 2,000 years of human endeavor, to a time when hard work was the only viable method.

Buddhism and Other Ancient Indian Traditions

More than 2,500 years ago, before Buddha Shakyamuni was born, various spiritual and philosophical systems of thought existed in India. The Buddha integrated in his own teachings some of the themes and practices of these systems of thought, such as the cultivation of single-pointedness of mind to develop calm abiding, and various meditation practices aimed at reducing the levels of attachment. On the basis of these and other spiritual teachings, the Buddha developed a unique system of thought and practice centered on the key insight that there is no independently existing or "real" self. This is the teaching on no-self, known in Sanskrit as *anatman.*

Broadly speaking, there were two main categories within the world of spiritual traditions in ancient India. On one side were the spiritual traditions which, in one form or another, upheld a belief in the concept of a transcendent being or god as a divine creator; while on the other side were traditions which did not subscribe to this concept of a transcendent god. Similarly, some accepted the notion of rebirth or reincarnation, while others did not. Among those which accepted the notion of rebirth, some also accepted the possibility of attaining liberation from cyclic existence and thus the possibility that individuals can find ultimate spiritual freedom. Furthermore, among these, some accepted the notion of an eternal, abiding self (*atman* in Sanskrit) while others rejected this notion of an eternal self. Buddhism belongs to the category of those ancient Indian schools that reject any notion of a transcendent god as creator. Others in this category include a sub-school of the classical Indian Samkhya School, and Jainism.

There was such a tremendous diversity of traditions in ancient India, many of which upheld distinct and, in some cases, conflicting philosophical and metaphysical views. The question is, why was this so? I think it is important to realize that the diversity of traditions, and particularly the metaphysical views underpinning these traditions, really reflects the need of a diverse group of individual practitioners for spiritual solace. This in turn points to the fundamental diversity that naturally exists in the mental dispositions and spiritual inclinations of sentient beings.

Now, as then, the concept of a transcendent god as creator has a powerful and inspiring impact on the lives of those who believe in it. The sense that their entire destiny lies in the hands of an all-powerful, omniscient, and compassionate being leads them to try to understand the workings and key message of this transcendent being. Then, when they come to realize that this

transcendent being embodies love and infinite compassion, they try to cultivate love and compassion toward their fellow beings as the qualities through which to express love for their creator. They also gain confidence and inspiration through a sense of intimacy or connectedness to this loving, transcendent being.

Although, metaphysically speaking, Buddhists reject any notion of a transcendent creator or god, some individual Buddhists do relate to certain higher beings, such as the goddess Tara, as an independent and real being with power over their destiny. For these practitioners Tara is their sole refuge, their greatest object of veneration and their trusted guardian and protector. What this suggests is that the inclination to seek refuge in an external source is something deeply natural for us as human beings.

But it is also clear that for other people the metaphysical concept of a transcendent being is unacceptable. Questions form in their minds, such as: who created the creator—in other words—where does the transcendent being come from? And how can we posit a true beginning? People with this type of mental disposition look elsewhere for explanations. The ancient Indian Samkhya philosophy, for example, accords with Buddhist thought in accepting that all things and events, including sentient beings, come into existence as a result of causes and conditions. The Samkhya philosophers asserted that reality exists at two levels: there is the world of everyday experience, which is characterized by diversity and plurality; and there is the source of this world of multiplicity, which they called the "primal substance" (*prakrit* in Sanskrit). Buddhism rejects this theory of reality, instead upholding the understanding that all things and events, including sentient beings, exist merely in dependence upon the aggregation of causes and effects.

Buddhism recognizes two general realms of causation: external and internal. The external realm of causation refers to the external environment, such as the whole of our natural environment—that is, the physical world in which we live, including our body. The internal realm of causation constitutes our perceptions, feelings, emotions and thoughts, which we normally label the domain of "subjective experience." Both realms of causation are comprised of elements that are transient. In other words, they come into being and at some point they cease to exist. We can observe this transient nature for ourselves, both in our own thoughts and emotions as well as in our natural environment. When we understand this reality we can deduce that, for something to cease to exist, the causes of its cessation must be occurring on a moment-by-moment basis. Nothing else could coherently account for the changes we perceive over a period

of time.

In summary, the basic Buddhist viewpoint with regard to the origin and nature of reality is that things and events come into being purely on the basis of the coming together of causes and conditions, and that all such phenomena are transient in that they are subject to constant, moment-by-moment change.

Dependent Origination and the Law of Causality

A key principle here is dependent origination. This fundamental principle of Buddhism states that everything arises and ceases in dependence upon causes and conditions. The fourth-century Indian Buddhist thinker Asanga identified three key conditions governing this principle of dependent origination. First is "the absence of designer condition," which pertains to the issue of whether or not there is a transcendent intelligence behind the origin of the universe. Second is "the condition of impermanence," which relates to the notion that the very causes and conditions that give rise to the world of dependent origination are themselves impermanent and subject to change. Third is "the condition of potentiality." This very important principle in Buddhist thought refers to the fact that something cannot be produced from just anything. Rather, for a particular set of causes and conditions to give rise to a particular set of effects or consequences, there must be some kind of natural relationship between them.

For example, our internal realm of experience—consisting of our perceptions, intentions, thoughts, emotions and so on—are mental rather than physical phenomena, and therefore we must be able to trace their evolution back through successive stages of mental cognition. We could say that, according to Buddhist understanding, this is part of a natural law that applies equally to the physical world. We must be able to trace the causation of physical properties back to other levels of these properties, and eventually to the beginning of the present universe.

Through this reductive process we can envision a kind of state at the beginning of the present universe where there was a cause for the evolution of the entire macroscopic world. From the Buddhist point of view—for example, in one of the texts of the Kalachakra Tantra—there is an understanding of what are called "space particles," for want of a better word. These are thought to be extremely subtle material particles which are seen as the source or origin of the entire evolution of the physical universe that we experience now. So in terms of

causation we can trace all material objects back to their constituted particle level and, from there, back to the origin of the universe.

The essential point about this condition of potentiality is that, although there is a causal relationship between the physical world and the world of mental phenomena, in terms of their own continuum one cannot be said to be the cause of the other. A mental phenomenon, such as a thought or an emotion, must come from a preceding mental phenomenon; likewise, a particle of matter must come from a preceding particle of matter.

Of course, there is an intimate relationship between the two. We know that mental states can influence material phenomena, such as the body; and, similarly, that material phenomena can act as contributory factors for certain subjective experiences. This is something that we can observe in our lives. Much of our gross level of consciousness is very closely connected to our body, and in fact we often use terminology and conventions which reflect this. For example, when we say "human mind" or "human consciousness" we are using the human body as the basis to define a particular mind state. Likewise, at the gross levels of mind such as our sensory experiences, it is very obvious that these are heavily dependent upon our body and some physiological states. When a part of our body is hurt or damaged, for instance, we immediately experience the impact on our mental state. Nevertheless, the principle remains that mental phenomena must come from preceding phenomena of the same kind, and so on.

If we trace mental phenomena back far enough, as in the case of an individual's life, we come to the first instant of consciousness in this life. Once we have traced its continuum to this point of beginning, we then have three options: we can either say that the first instant of consciousness in this life must come from a preceding instant of consciousness which existed in the previous life. Or we can say that this first instant of consciousness came from nowhere—it just sort of "popped up." Or we can say that it came from a material cause. From the Buddhist point of view, the last two alternatives are deeply problematic. The Buddhist understanding is that, in terms of its continuum, consciousness or mind is beginningless. Mental phenomena are beginningless. Therefore, the person or the being—which is essentially a designation based on the continuum of the mind—is also devoid of beginning.

The Inner World of Consciousness

When we use such terms as “consciousness” or “mind” it often tends to give the impression that we are talking about a single, monolithic entity; but this is misleading. Our own personal experience reveals that the mental world is tremendously diverse. Moreover, when we examine each moment of cognition or mental experience, we realize that they all relate to either internal or external objects. For example, if we examine a moment of perception we find that it takes on an aspect of whatever object happens to be its focus in that very moment. And since we often form false impressions based on distorted perceptions, we can say that some of our perceptions are valid while others are not.

Broadly speaking, we can identify two principal categories within the realm of consciousness—that is, our subjective world of experience. There are those that relate to sensory experiences, such as seeing and hearing, where the engagement with objects is direct and unmediated; and there are those where our cognitive engagement with the world is mediated via language, concepts and thoughts. In this model, perception is primarily understood as a direct experience of objects at the sensory level. This occurs through the mediation of sense data but involves no judgement about whether the object is desirable or undesirable, attractive or unattractive, good or bad. These judgements occur at the second stage when conceptual thought comes into play.

Let us now relate this to our personal experience. When we look at something, in that first instant of perception we have a direct, unmediated visual experience of the object. If we then close our eyes and think about the same object we still have its image in our mind, but now we are engaging with it at the level of conceptual thought. These two experiences are qualitatively different, in the sense that the conceptually created image involves conflation of both time and space.

For instance, you see a beautiful flower in one corner of a garden. The next day, you see the same species of flower in another part of the same garden and you think to yourself, “Oh, I have seen that flower before.” In reality, however, these two flowers are completely distinct and exist in different parts of the garden. Also, the flower you saw yesterday is not the flower you are seeing today. So although these two flowers were separated in terms of space and time, when the moment occurs in your thoughts you are conflating both time and space and projecting the image of the flower that you saw yesterday onto what you are seeing now. This blending of both time and space in our thoughts, which is often mediated through language and concepts, again suggests that some of our perceptions are valid and others are false.

If it were simply the case that these distorted or false perceptions had no negative consequences, this would be fine. But it is not so. Our distorted way of understanding the world leads to all kinds of problems by creating confusion in our mind. This confusion influences the way in which we engage with the world, which in turn causes suffering both for ourselves and for others. Since we naturally wish to be happy and to overcome suffering, it is vital to recognize that a fundamental confusion in our understanding of the world (including our own self) lies at the root of much of our suffering and difficulties. Furthermore, since our experiences of happiness and suffering and the fundamental ignorance that lies at the root of our suffering are all mental phenomena, if we genuinely wish to pursue the fulfilment of our natural aspiration to attain happiness and overcome suffering we must come to understand at least the basic workings of our inner world, namely the world of consciousness.

The Four Principles of Reality

Let us return to our discussion of the Buddhist view that all experiences and things come into existence in dependence upon causes and conditions. What does this imply for our own world or experiences, such as the experiences of pain, pleasure, suffering and happiness? Furthermore, since we all possess this natural desire to be happy and to overcome suffering, when we talk about experiencing suffering and happiness we are talking about the world of our own experience. Since experiences are mental phenomena, it becomes crucial for those who genuinely wish to attain happiness and overcome suffering to understand at least the basic workings of their own internal world.

Our experiences of happiness and suffering do not occur for no reason at all. They arise as a result of preceding causes and conditions and the coming together of many different factors. Some of these factors are external but by far the majority are internal—in other words, they are related to our mental world.

Now we might ask: “What exactly is the nature of these mental phenomena? How can we see or understand the law of causality in relation to our internal world? On what grounds can we accept that material objects possess certain defining characteristics, such as being visible, tangible and so on? And on what grounds can we understand that mental phenomena also possess defining characteristics, such as being free of obstructive, spatial properties, and having the nature of subjective experience? Why is there a continuum of consciousness

at all? And why, for that matter, is there a continuum of the material world?"

The Buddhist notion of the four principles of reality may help us address these important philosophical questions. The first is the principle of nature, according to which it is understood that the fact that we exist and that we possess a natural desire to be happy and overcome suffering is simply the way it is. This principle is similar to the idea of a natural law in science, and also relates to the fact that things and events, including sentient beings, all come into existence as a result of causes and conditions. It also extends to the evolution and origin of our current universe. According to this principle, a kind of natural causation process takes place pervasively. We can say, therefore, that the material continuum of the universe consists of objects and events that come into existence through a process of evolution.

We might then ask: "Is this a purely natural process with no extraneous influences operating? If so, how can we account for the fact that at a certain point the physical universe takes a certain nature and form, so that it has a direct impact upon sentient beings' experience of pain and pleasure? Furthermore, how is it that, through this seemingly natural process, a certain point is reached at which causes and conditions act as a basis for the arising of consciousness and experience?"

From the Buddhist point of view, this is where *karma* comes into the picture. The term "karma" literally means "action," and more specifically refers to the process of cause and effect, where the intention of an agent or being is involved. So here karma means an intentional act committed or carried out by a being who possesses a sentient nature and who is also capable of having a sentient experience.

Let's take the example of a flower again to illustrate this point. Generally, when we find a particular flower attractive and admire its scent and beautiful color, it becomes an object of enjoyment for us; we enjoy the sight of it, its beauty. At the same time, this flower may be a home for many small insects and other biological organisms. In both cases, even though in itself the flower is a non-sentient object, it has an impact on sentient beings' experience of pain and pleasure. So for Buddhists the concept of karma provides a very useful framework for understanding how a non-sentient object, such as a flower, can directly relate to sentient beings' experience.

Having said this, to what extent karma can be seen as having a role in the origination of a particular flower is open to question. Needless to say, there are

other questions as well. For example, what causes the petals of one flower to droop and fade in a day or two while others last for a week? Is this purely a function of natural laws, or does karma play a role even at that level of minute causation? All of these remain open questions. It is perhaps because of this kind of difficulty that the Buddhist texts state that only a buddha's omniscient mind can penetrate the subtlest aspects of the workings of karma, and know at the most microscopic level which specific causes and conditions give rise to which specific consequences. At our level, we can only recognize that an intimate relationship exists between the external elements of the material world and the internal elements of our mental world; and, based on that, we can learn to detect varying levels of subtlety within our mental and emotional experiences.

The second principle of reality that is relevant to our present discussion is "the principle of dependence," which relates to the understanding of cause and effect. On the basis of understanding the principle of nature—the fact that things naturally exist the way they are—we see the operation of the principle of dependence in the inter-action of things and events giving rise to the emergence of further things and events. The third principle is "the principle of function," which gives us an understanding of how different things—such as particles, atoms and other material substances, as well as mental phenomena—have their own individual properties which cause them to function in their own particular way. Finally, on the basis of understanding these three, we can then apply the fourth principle which is "the principle of valid reasoning." This enables us to conclude that, given this, that will occur; and, given that, this will occur, and so on. So we Buddhists employ this framework of the four fundamental principles of reality as we attempt to arrive at a clearer understanding of the workings of causes, conditions and their effects.

The Four Noble Truths

If we now focus on the workings of cause and effect in relation to our own existence, naturally we will take our personal experience as the basis for cultivating deeper insight. In this context, the Buddha's teaching on the Four Noble Truths can prove extremely helpful because it relates directly to our own experience, especially to our inborn desire to seek happiness and overcome suffering. In essence, the Buddha's teaching on the Four Noble Truths leads us first to a profound recognition of the nature of suffering; then to the recognition

of the origins of suffering; then to a recognition of the possibility of the cessation of suffering; and finally to a recognition of the path that leads to such freedom.

Buddhism recognizes three levels of suffering: the suffering of suffering, the suffering of change, and the pervasive suffering of conditioned existence.

With regard to the first of these—the suffering of suffering—even animals are capable of identifying these obviously painful experiences as undesirable. Just like us, they show a natural instinct to avoid and be free of such experiences.

With respect to the second level of suffering—the suffering of change—even non-Buddhist practitioners can successfully cultivate both the recognition that this is undesirable and the desire to gain freedom from it.

It is the suffering of pervasive conditioning that is distinctive to Buddhism. Spiritual practitioners who aspire to seek complete liberation from cyclic existence must develop a profound recognition of this form of suffering. We need to cultivate an understanding that the suffering of pervasive conditioning not only acts as the basis for our present experience of suffering but, crucially, also serves as the source of future experiences of suffering. Based on such a firm recognition of our very conditioned existence as a form of suffering, we must then cultivate the genuine desire to seek freedom. Our sense of yearning for freedom should be so forceful that we feel as if this conditioned existence is an acute illness from which we eagerly wish to recover as quickly as possible.

What gives rise to this third level of suffering, namely the suffering of pervasive conditioning? Buddhism identifies the two factors of karma and afflictions as the true origins of suffering. Karma arises from mental afflictions, which are principally of two types: conceptual afflictions, such as mistaken views, and emotional afflictions such as lust, anger, and envy. We refer to these as “afflictions” (*nyonmong* in Tibetan) because their arising in our heart and mind immediately creates a form of affliction characterized by a state of deep disturbance and unrest. This leads to further levels of affliction in our mind and heart, such as being plagued by sorrow, confusion, and other forms of suffering.

Generally, all these mental afflictions arise from the three basic poisons of mind—attachment, anger, and delusion. Delusion is the foundation of the other two and of all our afflictions; and, in the context of Mahayana Buddhist thought, delusion refers to our mistaken notion of grasping at the real existence of things and events. So it is through the eradication of delusion—which lies at the root of all afflictions—that we strive to bring about an end to suffering and thereby attain true liberation (*moksha* in Sanskrit).

In his *Fundamentals of the Middle Way*, the influential second-century Buddhist thinker Nagarjuna explains that it is only by cultivating insight into the emptiness of self and phenomena that we can see through our delusions and bring this whole deluded chain of cause and effects to an end. Therefore, the understanding of emptiness combined with the cultivation of compassion is the very essence of the practice of the Buddha's teachings.[1] A realized practitioner, who has actualized the true cessation of suffering, will continue to live out this principle in the world through compassionate action. I describe this as the beautiful activity of someone who has realized emptiness and engages in compassionate behavior.

The Three Higher Trainings

The teaching on the Four Noble Truths, which was the Buddha's first teaching following his attainment of full awakening, represents the foundation for the practices of emptiness and the cultivation of compassion. This teaching underpins everything that the Buddha taught subsequently and helps us to establish a fundamental understanding of the way that things really are. On the basis of such an understanding we can successfully engage in the practices embodied in the Three Higher Trainings. These are the higher trainings in morality, in concentration, and in wisdom. The higher training in morality serves as the foundation for the cultivation of single-pointedness of mind, which is a key component of the second higher training, namely the higher training in concentration.

There are different categories of precepts in the higher training on morality. Broadly speaking, there are the layperson's precepts or morality and the ordained member's precepts or morality. Altogether we can list seven or eight different classes of precepts that combine to embody the teachings on morality. Taking morality or the practice of ethical discipline as a foundation, the individual practitioner cultivates single-pointedness of mind and thus develops the second higher training, which is the higher training in concentration.

The reason why Buddhist texts refer to these three as "higher trainings" is to distinguish them from ordinary practices of morality, single-pointedness, and insight, which by themselves are not unique to Buddhism. What is required in the Buddhist context for such a practice to be considered a higher training is for it to be based on an appropriate motivation, such as seeking refuge in the Three

Jewels. The Three Jewels are the Buddha, who is the teacher, the Dharma, which is the teaching, and the Sangha, the community of sincere practitioners. Of these three, a Buddhist practitioner must particularly take refuge in the Dharma as the actual means to end suffering and attain liberation. In addition to going for refuge, a Buddhist practice of developing single-pointedness must be grounded on a deep sense of renunciation transcending all mundane concerns. On the basis of these two—morality as the basis and single-pointedness as the method—the actual path is enshrined in the higher training of wisdom.

The Buddha's teachings on wisdom are presented in the texts of the first turning of the Wheel of Dharma within the framework of the "thirty-seven aspects of the path to enlightenment."[2]

In the teachings of the second turning of the Wheel of Dharma, great emphasis is placed on two essential points of practice: the first of these is *bodhicitta* which is the generation of the altruistic mind of awakening—that is, the intention to attain buddhahood for the benefit of the infinite number of sentient beings—which forms the focus of our later chapter on Langri Thangpa's *Eight Verses on Training the Mind.* The second essential point of practice is the cultivation of a deep insight into the ultimate nature of reality. This refers to the cultivation of a deeper understanding of the third noble truth—the truth of the cessation of suffering. The true nature of cessation refers to cessation of the afflictive emotions and thoughts, which we can achieve as a result of applying the appropriate antidotes or remedies.

If we are to truly understand the cessation of suffering, we first need to recognize what lies at the root of our mental and emotional afflictions, and then learn to discern which states of mind act as direct antidotes to them. Furthermore, we need to investigate whether or not these afflictive emotions and thoughts have any sound basis, and whether or not there is a genuine possibility of uprooting them from our mental continuum. In brief, the teachings of the second turning of the Wheel can be seen as representing further elaborations on the themes presented in the first turning of the Wheel, especially with regard to the third and fourth noble truths—the truth of cessation, and the truth of the path leading to cessation.

As for the third turning of the Wheel of Dharma, a key definitive text belonging to this class is the *Essence of Buddhahood* (*Tathagatagarbha Sutra*), which is the primary source text for Maitreya's well-known work *The Sublime Continuum* (*Uttaratantra*) in which we find a comprehensive discussion of the

ultimate nature of mind. The teachings of this turning of the Wheel constitute a very profound understanding of the fourth noble truth, the truth of the path leading to cessation.

These teachings help deepen our understanding of the emptiness of mind as opposed to the emptiness of external objects like vases, pillars and so on. Although both the mind and external objects are empty by nature, there is a vast difference insofar as the impact of understanding their emptiness is concerned. For when we examine the ultimate nature of mind carefully, we find it to be not only empty—that is, devoid of intrinsic reality—but naturally luminous as well. This leads us to realize that all the mental afflictions that pollute our mind, such as attachment and anger, are in principle separable from the mind. What this suggests is that these afflictions of the mind are in some sense adventitious. Since these pollutants are separable or removable from the mind, they cannot together constitute its essential nature. Rather, the essential nature of our mind is the potential for buddhahood which is inherent in us all.

So, as Maitreya points out, the various afflictions of our mind are separable from the mind's essential nature—whereas the potential for the perfection of enlightenment, the realization of omniscience and the perfection of many of the enlightened qualities of buddhahood, lie naturally in the form of a seed in the very mind that we all possess. This seed or potential is referred to in the Buddhist texts as buddha nature, the essence of buddhahood. These qualities of the Buddha are not something we need to cultivate from outside ourselves but, rather, the seed or potential that exists naturally in all of us. Our task as an aspirant to buddhahood is to activate and perfect this potential for full awakening.

2. Teachings on *The Eight Verses on Training the Mind*

Despite all the material progress in this and the last century we still experience suffering, especially in relation to mental well-being. In fact, if anything, the complex way of life created by modernization or globalization is causing new problems and new causes of mental unrest. Under these circumstances I feel that the various religious traditions have an important role to play in helping to maintain peace and the spirit of reconciliation and dialogue, and therefore harmony and close contact between them is essential. Whether we are believers or non-believers and, within the category of the believers, whether we hold this or that belief, we must respect all the traditions. That's very important.

I always tell people in non-Buddhist countries that followers of other religions should maintain their own tradition. To change religion is not easy, and people can get into trouble as a result of confusion. So it is much safer to keep to one's own tradition, while respecting all religions. I'm Buddhist—sometimes I describe myself as a staunch Buddhist—but, at the same time, I respect and admire the works of other traditions' figures such as Jesus Christ. Basically, all the religious traditions have made an immense contribution to humanity and continue to do so, and as such are worthy of our respect and admiration.

When we contemplate the diversity of spiritual traditions on this planet we can understand that each addresses the specific needs of different human beings, because there is so much diversity in human mentality and spiritual inclination. Yet, fundamentally, all spiritual traditions perform the same function, which is to help us tame our mental state, overcome our negativities and perfect our inner potential.

In the case of Buddhism, historically diverse philosophical schools have

evolved, such as the Vaibhashika, Svatantrika, Cittamatra and Madhyamika. These schools not only uphold different but often contradictory tenets, leading to vigorous debates between their proponents. Yet they all follow the same teacher, Buddha Shakyamuni, and cite authoritative scriptural sources to validate their understanding of his teachings.

To us Buddhists, what this indicates is the tremendous importance the Buddha himself placed on recognizing the diversity of needs, inclinations, and mental dispositions among his followers, which led him to give greater priority to their needs than to present a unified doctrinal standpoint on key issues. The lesson we must draw from this is that the essential point of spiritual teachings is their appropriateness to the needs of individual circumstances.

Historically, two main sources of scriptural lineage evolved among the followers of the Buddha's teachings in India: one was based upon the canonical texts existing in the medium of the Pali language, known as the Pali Canon, and the other existed in the medium of Sanskrit as the primary language. The great masters at Nalanda monastic university in ancient India studied and practiced both of these two scriptural traditions. I believe that Tibetan Buddhism inherited and developed this rich Indian Nalanda tradition. Prominent and highly learned Nalanda scholars were responsible for planting the seeds of Buddhism in Tibet; and especially during the period that later came to be known as the second phase of dissemination of Buddhism in Tibet, the great Nalanda master Atisha Dipamkara made tremendous contributions to Buddhism in Tibet.

What do I mean when I say that Tibetan Buddhism has inherited the Nalanda tradition? In this tradition all the key elements of the Buddha's teachings are understood in terms of two key factors. One relates to the enhancement and cultivation of wisdom or insight into the ultimate nature of reality, and the other comprises all the teachings pertaining to the cultivation of skillful means. In this context, the term "skillful means" refers to such factors as the development of compassion, the cultivation of the altruistic aspiration to attain buddhahood for the benefit of all beings and so on—these being the spiritual practices associated primarily with conventional truth. As a preliminary to the practices of these two factors of wisdom and skillful means, we cultivate a strong sense of renunciation derived from a deep disillusionment with the concerns and activities of mundane existence.

Atisha firmly established this Nalanda tradition of Buddhism in Tibet. Among his disciples was the Tibetan master Dromtönpa, who founded what is known as

the Kadam school. This Kadam lineage was inherited by Dromtönpa's student Geshe Potowa, who in turn had two principal students, Sharawa and Langri Thangpa, the latter being the author of the *Eight Verses on Training the Mind.* This work became extremely popular in Tibet within all schools of Tibetan Buddhism as a major focus of spiritual teaching and practice. It is this short text on training the mind that we shall be reading together.

Cultivating Wisdom and Skillful Means

In essence, the short text entitled *Eight Verses on Training the Mind* presents the practices of cultivating both conventional bodhicitta, or the altruistic aspiration to attain buddhahood for the benefit of all beings, and ultimate bodhicitta, the profound insight into the ultimate nature of reality or "the ultimate mind of enlightenment." The first seven stanzas present the practices related to the former while the last stanza presents the practices related to the ultimate mind of awakening.

In his classic work on the Middle Way philosophy entitled *Supplement to the Middle Way,* the Indian Buddhist master Chandrakirti compares the conventional and ultimate truths to the two wings of a bird with which it flies across the sky. In the same way, he suggests, we can traverse the vast expanse of reality by means of these two minds of awakening. The point he is making is that the ultimate aim of a Buddhist practitioner is the attainment of buddhahood, which is the embodiment of two perfections—Buddha's truth body (*dharmakaya*) and form body (*rupakaya*); and it is through the union of these minds of awakening that we can achieve this perfected state.

The real basis of dharmakaya (the Buddha's truth body) is his wisdom mind. This is described in the texts as an omniscient state of mind with the dual character of a profound insight into the ultimate nature of reality of all things, while at the same time perceiving the diversity of conventional reality in its entirety. Since that is the nature of the dharmakaya, the path leading to its attainment must share features corresponding to this ultimate objective. This path is the sustained cultivation of insight into emptiness, which enables us to transcend all the limitations of conceptual elaboration.

The second embodiment of the Buddha's enlightenment is the rupakaya or his form body, through which he assumes diverse forms in order to be of benefit to sentient beings. The path that shares features corresponding to this aspect of the

Buddha's enlightenment is primarily the cultivation of bodhicitta, the altruistic intention to attain buddhahood for the benefit of the infinite number of sentient beings. This altruistic intention must be grounded upon a strong compassion that aspires to free all beings from suffering. With this altruistic intention as motivation, we engage in the practice of the six perfections.[1] The combination of these two factors of the path—skillful means, such as bodhicitta and compassion, and the wisdom aspect, which primarily entails cultivating insight into emptiness—leads to the fulfilment of our ultimate spiritual objective, namely the attainment of buddhahood.

It is crucial that these two aspects of the path are well combined, for they complement and reinforce each other. For example, deepening our understanding of emptiness has a tremendous power to enhance our natural empathetic feeling toward other fellow sentient beings and thus give rise to stronger compassion. Similarly, enhancing our compassion can expedite our accumulation of merit, which makes it easier for us to deepen our understanding of emptiness. So we can see how these two aspects of the path complement each other.

In Buddhism, when we speak of gaining deeper and deeper levels of spiritual realization, this also implies a correspondingly progressive overcoming of the various levels of mental obscurations or defilements. In the initial stages our spiritual practices enable us to temporarily overwhelm our negative impulses and in this way help to reduce their force. Eventually, through sustained practice, we can totally eliminate these defilements. The process of overcoming our defilements goes in conjunction with gaining higher levels of realization. In fact, when we speak of gaining higher levels of realization in Buddhism we are speaking primarily of the processes through which our wisdom and insight deepen. It is actually the wisdom aspect that enables the practitioner to move from one level to the next on the path. We speak of five levels on the path: the path of accumulation, the path of preparation, the path of insight, the path of meditation, and the path of no more learning.

The attainment of these levels of the path is explained in condensed form in the *Heart Sutra*, where we find the mantra *tadyatha om gate gate paragate parasamgate bodhi svaha*. *Tadyatha* means "It is thus"; *gate gate* means "go, go"; *paragate* means "go beyond and transcend"; *parasamgate* means "go utterly beyond, go thoroughly beyond"; and *bodhi svaha* means "firmly rooted in enlightenment."

This mantra in the *Heart Sutra* encapsulates the progression of the practitioner in terms of the five levels of the path. “Go, go” (*gate*, *gate*) refers to the attainment of the path of accumulation and the path of preparation; “go beyond” (*paragate*) refers to the attainment of the path of insight, suggesting that when one gains the path of insight—which is direct insight into emptiness—at that point one has transcended the state of ordinary existence and becomes what is known as an *arya* or “noble being.” The metaphor of “go beyond”suggests crossing to the shore on the other side, when one’s own ordinary state is understood as this side of the shore. The other side of the shore is *nirvana* or the state of liberation. By attaining the path of insight one has already gone beyond the ordinary state of cyclic existence. The next phrase in the mantra, “go utterly beyond” (*parasamgate*), implies the attainment of the path of meditation. Essentially this is a state when the direct insight one has gained has further deepened through constant familiarity and culminates in the attainment of enlightenment or total transcendence.

The point here is that this entire process of different levels of realization, culminating in the attainment of buddhahood, is understood in the Buddhist context as a process that combines the method aspect and the wisdom aspect of the path. The entirety of the Buddha’s teachings and practices is embodied in these two aspects, which are known as the two accumulations: the accumulation of merit and the accumulation of wisdom.

These two aspects can be understood in terms of how we relate to and engage in the world. For example, if our engagement with the world is at the level of diversity of things, events, and objects, that is the method aspect of the path. When we engage with the world in terms of the deeper nature of reality, which is understood as the emptiness of all things and events, that practice belongs to the cultivation of wisdom.

So what is this profound understanding of emptiness that we are attempting to realize through the wisdom aspect of the path? In his *Fundamentals of the Middle Way*, Nagarjuna writes:

> Whatever is dependently originated,
> That is explained as emptiness.
> This is dependently designated
> And it is the true middle way.[2]

A true understanding of emptiness according to the Middle Way school is based on an understanding of dependent origination. In other words, dependent origination must be understood as the very ground upon which emptiness arises. Historically, two lineages of interpretation evolved with regard to understanding Nagarjuna's teaching on emptiness, one represented by Bhavaviveka and his followers and the other by Buddhapalita, Chandrakirti, and their followers.

Buddhapalita explains that when we analyze things and events, particularly the world of cause and effect and the plurality of our everyday experience, we are relating to the world at the conventional level of reality. If we are unsatisfied with that level of everyday reality, however, and we go beyond it to critically enquire into the exact nature and relationship of causes and effects, analyzing whether they are identical or independent of each other and so on, we are then relating to the world at the level of ultimate truth. Buddhapalita explains that when we critically subject cause and effect to that kind of penetrative questioning, we soon come to the conclusion that they are unfindable. No concepts, whether of cause and effect, origination and cessation, or any others, can withstand that kind of critical analysis. Therefore, when we engage with the world, we have to do so at the level of conventional truth or everyday reality.

Similarly, in his *Supplement to the Middle Way,* Chandrakirti explains that a genuine understanding of emptiness entails a deeper appreciation of the interdependent nature of reality—that all things and events come into being as a result of dependence on other factors. Recognizing this, we arrive at the conclusion that things and events are devoid of inherent existence. And as we deepen our conviction in the laws and operation of cause and effect in the realm of the conventional level of reality, we enhance our practice of the accumulation of merit. As we gradually deepen our conviction in the truth of the teachings on emptiness—particularly emptiness as the absence of inherent existence—we are able to cultivate the accumulation of wisdom. These two practices are known as the two accumulations referred to earlier.

MAKING A NEW SPIRITUAL RESOLVE

At the level of conventional truth we all naturally possess both the desire and the potential to overcome suffering and to attain happiness. In this context, we can reflect upon the Buddha's teachings on the Four Noble Truths and the Two Truths, and on the basis of such reflection we gradually develop an

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