



Tibetan Buddhist Essentials

A study guide for the 21st century

Volume Two

The Buddha's Teachings

*An expansive modern view of Tibetan Buddhism
for students of diverse backgrounds and sensibilities*



Venerable Tenzin Tharpa

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Volume 2: The Buddha's Teachings

Volume 1: Introduction, Origin, and Adaptation

Volume 2: The Buddha's Teachings

Volume 3: Engaging Buddhism

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Venerable Tenzin Tharpa

A fully ordained American Buddhist monk in the Tibetan Gelug Tradition, Venerable Tharpa is a teacher, author, and philosopher with over two decades in Tibetan Buddhist studies, half of which he has spent in Tibetan Buddhist monasteries in India.



Venerable Tharpa took full monastic ordination with His Holiness the Dalai Lama in Dharamsala India. Subsequent to ordination, Venerable Tharpa accepted an invitation to be the first Westerner to study at the renowned Gyudmed Tantric Monastic University in South India. Well known for his pragmatic, no-nonsense approach to the teachings, his ability to clarify complex philosophical points for all audiences, and his familiarity with all forms of Buddhist thought and non-Buddhist traditions as well, Venerable Tharpa is quickly becoming a valued teacher for our modern multicultural age. Currently, Venerable Tharpa resides at Sera Je Monastery in Bylakuppe, South India.

Dear reader,

Thank you for your interest in this text. I hope it brings to you the clarity and insight that you seek. In my writing, I endeavor to make the Buddha's teachings available to a wide audience, while also striving to convey to the reader the positive, life-affirming joy that permeates the Buddha's teachings, yet is often lost or overlooked in dry translations. For when understood properly, every aspect of the Buddha's teachings pertains to freedom and liberation: freedom from our daily self-imposed suffering, and liberation from mundane and unsatisfactory existence. In the spirit of the Buddha's vast generosity, all of my work, be it teaching or writing, is always free. If you enjoy this text and would like to see work of this nature continued, please consider lending your support.

Thanks and prayers,

Tenzin Tharpa

Venerable Tenzin Tharpa
Sera Jey Monastery - 2018
Bylakuppe, India

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Manjushri

Praise to Manjushri

I bow down to you, O Manjushri. With the brilliance of your wisdom,
O compassionate one, illuminate the darkness enclosing my mind.
Enlighten my intelligence and wisdom so that I may gain insight into
the Buddha's words and the texts that explain them.

Manjushri is the manifestation of the Buddha's wisdom and the deity that represents transcendent insight and discriminating awareness. It is tradition to start Tibetan Buddhist texts with prayers and praise to this eminent bodhisattva whose flaming sword symbolizes blazing enlightened wisdom that cuts through ignorance, afflictions, and delusions. Most Tibetans start their day by reciting his mantra. It can be heard at the crack of dawn in every monastery and Tibetan community being recited by monks, nuns, and devoted lay people.

Mantra of Manjushri: Om ah ra pa tsa na di

Dedication

I dedicate this text to today's progressive Buddhist masters,
first and foremost my own teacher His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama.

Additionally, I would like to dedicate this text to the monks of Sera Jey Ngari House Group.
Sera Jey Ngari Khangtsen, Bylakuppe, South India.

Lastly, I dedicate this text to those who inspired this work and continue to inspire me:
Venerable Lobsang Dorje, Venerable Tendhar, my big sister Nalini Ramesh, Mary Ann Chang,
Linda Noble, the Mowat family, the Aieta family, Alex Hayes, Jewan Kaur, Sammy Squire,
Elroy Fernandes, Suzanne Kanatsiz, Kris and Pete Barnes, Thomas Winzeler, Andrew
Bresnen, Linus Hammarstrand, Rob Miller, and Dave Nagy.

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Preface

In the winter of 2013, during a teaching at Sera Monastery in South India, His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama expressed the wish for monastics to engage in and share a broader view of Buddhism: a view that celebrates the wealth of Buddhist thought as expressed through its many traditions; a view that values, and is knowledgeable of, the greater spiritual community at large. This text is the culmination of that wish.

His Holiness continuously emphasizes that Tibetan Buddhists need to study diligently, be well-informed, and be grounded in facts, logic, and reason. They need to embrace a broader world view, cultivate an understanding that includes many disciplines of investigation, and utilize all the tools at one's disposal, or in his own words:

"We have to be 21st century Buddhists." ~ The 14th Dalai Lama

The importance of a broad view cannot be overstated. Not only is a broad view a more logical approach to study, by including many different sources of information leading to a more comprehensive base of knowledge; a broad view also allows one to contrast and compare, resulting in a more holistic understanding and view which is essential in cultivating reliable conclusions. Moreover, in my own experience, practitioners with a broad view tend to be more humble, open minded, rational, and less dogmatic and sectarian.

The inspirations for this text were many. Initially, I was inspired by friends who enjoyed listening to me share my contemporary thoughts on Buddhism and requested that I write a progressive text that could be studied and shared. I agreed for I also believed a modern text sharing the thoughts of today's progressive masters was indeed needed. Here I define progressive masters as those who work to demystify Buddhism, ushering it out of its traditional religious presentation and into a more rational and practical approach. This style of presentation is one through which many believe the Buddha always intended his teachings to be shared. Some of these modern progressive masters include: His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama, Lama Thubten Yeshe, Dzongsar Khyentse Rinpoche, Geshe Tashi Tsering, Geshe Thubten Jinpa, Prof. Jay Garfield, Prof. Jeffery Hopkins, Prof. Richard Gombrich, Jetsunma Tenzin Palmo, Stephen and Martine Batchelor, Alan Wallace, S.N. Goenka, and Jack Kornfield, to name a few.

Additionally, I created this text to share with others, while clarifying for myself, the knowledge and experience I have gained from my many years of study in Tibetan monasteries throughout India, Nepal and Tibet, including teachings I received from some of today's great living masters, foremost that of my own teacher His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama. Through my experience, I have found that within Tibetan monasteries, the style and approach to Buddhist

study and practice are often different from the styles predominantly presented in the West, with monasteries offering a more rational and practical approach—a fact that a majority of Westerners are simply not aware of. Westerners are also not aware of the many different styles and variety of choices available to them when exploring Buddhism—choices that can greatly shape one's experience. Finally, in the tradition of many students and scholars before me, this text serves as my culminating thesis marking the completion of my sutra education at the monastic universities of Sera Jey Monastery and Gyudmed Tantric Monastery in South India. This text shares the authentic presentation of Buddhism as taught within Tibetan monasteries and universities, assembled into an easily accessible and no-nonsense format. This text was written as objectively as possible. However, in the end, it is impossible to keep out one's bias altogether, for inevitably one chooses or *cherry picks* the information that they favor, believing it to be the most accurate and relevant to share—the information they believe best captures the essence of the Buddha's teachings.

I wrote this text with three types of readers in mind: the *first*, everyday people like many of my friends back home—hard working people that are simply too busy trying to sustain their lives to have the time for in-depth study. My intention was to undergo formal study and then to compile what I have learned so they too can taste the path of freedom for themselves. *Secondly*, this text was created for Buddhist teachers looking for a modern authentic presentation of Tibetan Buddhism that can serve as a basic teaching outline to be further expounded upon. *Thirdly*, this text is intended for those who wonder if their own critical and rational mindset makes their beliefs incompatible with Buddhism. For I have come to find a growing group that I believe is unrepresented within the Buddhist community. People who are drawn to the practical wisdom of the Buddha, but often feel disaffected by the more religious and/or cultural presentations found in many of the Western Buddhist groups they have investigated. People who seek the Buddha's sensible and practical methods for improving and finding fulfillment and purpose in their lives, but may not know where to begin. For all those who can identify with this...this text is for you.

Introduction to This Text

As the cover of this book states, this text presents an expansive and contemporary worldview of Tibetan Buddhism for readers of diverse backgrounds, ideologies, and beliefs. It serves as a voice for today's progressive Buddhist masters, offering a clear, concise, and transparent presentation of Buddhism, and Tibetan Buddhism in particular. This text highlights the work of modern Tibetan and Western Buddhist scholars alike and their skillful efforts in transmitting the authentic Buddhist teachings to a new generation of students. The material in this text, once understood, forms a basic foundational education in Tibetan Buddhism. Once one is comfortable with the topics contained in this text, they may consider themselves as having a reasonable working knowledge of the subject.

This text is divided into three volumes and is meant to be studied in sequential order.

Volume one, *Introduction, Origin, and Adaptation*, begins with a broad view of the origin and various adaptations of Buddhism, while also introducing the reader to essential elements that are shared by all Buddhist traditions, elements that must be understood in order to comprehend the later volumes. The second volume, *The Buddha's Teachings*, moves onto a more formal presentation of the Buddha's actual teachings. The third volume, *Engaging Buddhism*, outlines what is involved in engaging with the Buddhist path, including a detailed account of Buddhist study and practice. Customarily texts that introduce Buddhism do so from a scriptural and/or religious viewpoint, whereas this text, while still offering the traditional scriptural presentation, also offers the historical as well as modern scholastic views. The intention behind this was to present a comprehensive text that favors an objective and open presentation, while at the same time pointing out beliefs that are obviously dogmatic, unlikely, and/or mere superstition. I will be sharing the presentation of Buddhism from my own chosen path of study—that of the *Gelug School* of Tibetan Buddhism as currently taught by His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama. This is done not out of partiality, but practicality, allowing me to write from my personal experience and field of expertise. Comparisons are made between traditions when necessary, but this being an introductory text, information is kept as clear and straightforward as possible.

The Buddhist philosophical view presented in this text is the view of the *Middle Way Consequence School* within the *Mahayana tradition* (Skt. *prasangika madhyamika*; Tib. *uma talgyur*). The Middle Way Consequence view is shared by all schools of Tibetan Buddhism, a view originating from the legendary Indian University of *Nalanda* in Bihar, India (c. 500 BCE - 1197 CE). This text then follows the further interpretations of the Middle Way Consequence School asserted by the renowned Tibetan master *Lama Je Tsongkhapa*, founder of the *Gelug School* of Tibetan Buddhism. Traditionally, Buddhist study as taught within monasteries is a long and tedious undertaking, with monastics often spending half of their education on preliminary and foundational studies before ever reaching the final philosophical view. Because of this, monks

who leave the monastery prematurely, although having studied for years, may know very little about the Buddha's actual teachings. For this reason, this text, although being introductory, shares the full and final view of Lama Tsongkhapa and the Gelug school.

Some believe it is misguided to try to assert a single definitive final view, for to this day the Buddhist view continues to be debated and pondered, with many prominent masters holding different views. However, for the sake of creating a clear and comprehensive basic presentation, I believe there is more than enough agreed upon material to posit a standard view. Additionally, because the final view is a mixture of sutra and tantra teachings, positing it for the novice was challenging. Therefore this text will primarily follow the Gelug *sutra* presentation, while incorporating aspects of the tantric teachings when deemed necessary in order to present an accurate and complete picture of Tibetan Buddhism and the Tibetan Buddhist view.

Technical Considerations Within This Text

Problems with Language when sharing Buddhism

Language is often a significant obstacle when sharing any philosophical and/or ideological system, with terms having diverse meanings within the various disciplines and schools of thought. Terms are commonly borrowed, reused, and reabsorbed in ever-increasingly abstract and complex ways. One example is the Tibetan term *marigpa*, translated as *ignorance*, a term that is used extensively within Buddhist texts. However, in the West, the term ignorance is often viewed as derogatory—noting a lack of education or stupidity, whereas in Buddhism, ignorance is understood as a foundational existential confusion pertaining to the nature of reality. Buddhism's textual migration into the West first began in the early nineteenth century through often poor translations from Pali, Sanskrit, and Chinese. This work was done chiefly by religious scholars, many of whom, because they were translating what they believed to be texts that were purely religious in nature, used religious terms from their own Judeo-Christian backgrounds. In the early 1970s, the Tibetan Buddhist master *Chogyam Trungpa* began teachings and translating in the West. Besides being one of the first lamas to bring Tibetan Buddhism to the West, he was also one of the first to begin using psychological terminology when translating Buddhism—a discipline in which Buddhist thought is much more at home. Later, Western Buddhist scholars would begin to also incorporate Western philosophical and scientific terminology as well.

Translation used within this text

In order to promote the standardization of Buddhist terminology in the West, this text favors the terminological presentation of Jeffrey Hopkins whenever possible. Jeffrey Hopkins is an American Tibetologist, and Emeritus of Tibetan and Buddhist Studies at the University of Virgin-

ia, where he has taught for more than three decades. He has authored more than twenty-five books on Tibetan Buddhism and from 1979 to 1989, he was the Dalai Lama's chief interpreter. A pioneer in the study and translation of Tibetan Buddhism, he is considered by many to possess the clearest and most valid views on the subject.

Problems with positing Buddhist and Indian history

Currently there is great debate pertaining to the Buddhist/pre-Buddhist era in Indian history. This time, roughly 3,500 BCE to 250 BCE, is still currently being uncovered and is simply not as clear as many would like it to be. One example of this is that traditionally historians place the Buddha life between 563 BCE - 483 BCE. However, these dates are currently in question with some proposing the Buddha may have lived up to three-hundred years earlier than previously believed, while others assert he may have lived one-hundred years later. This is an excellent example of the delicateness of the posited history of this era and the ongoing investigation and debate currently underway. Another example of the vagueness of early Buddhist history is the fact that most of the historical information and written records of Indian Buddhism comes from personal journals of Chinese pilgrims who made extensive and detailed accounts of their travels throughout India starting in the 5th century CE. Sadly, the Buddhist scriptures themselves are simply unreliable as evidence for historical records or dates. India was and has always been a land in which its many cultural groups influenced each other openly and freely. Therefore trying to posit a definitive history and/or definitive dates of events is unrealistic at this point. Indian history, much like the way India views its cultures—as the merging of great rivers, is a history that has continually flowed and changed, while absorbing and exporting cultures, philosophies, and ideas. This text does not attempt to be an authority on Indian history or the origins of Indian religious or philosophical thought but simply attempts to share the most currently accepted theories and timelines of Buddhism within Indian history.

Positing the Historical Buddha

Many popular Buddhist texts fail to posit the Buddha in his proper historical context, that of an *Indian guru* who lived and taught in Northeast India during the 6th century BCE. The Buddha began his legendary journey by sharing his experiences that arose from his personal practice to those who would listen. In this way he developed a teaching method and tradition that would grow to profoundly change the world in unprecedented ways. Furthermore, Buddhist texts rarely mention the fact that most of the core beliefs that Buddhists hold today were in place long before the Buddha's arrival, beliefs shared by most Indian traditions to this day.

Modern innovation in interpretation

Never before has there been so many tools at our disposal with which to examine Buddhism. Today we have MRI and EEG imaging that can observe the brains of active meditators, and aca-

demically, we have scholars that can compare and contrast the various Buddhist scriptures, all within their respective languages (Pali, Sanskrit, Tibetan, Chinese, and Japanese), a development in Buddhist scholarship previously unheard of. But one of the greatest tools at our disposal that past scholars lacked, is history. For although Buddhist history has existed, each tradition only preserved its own isolated account. It is only recently that all of these various records of Buddhist history have become readily accessible for comparison. Additionally, and possibly more significantly, we now possess a broad overview of the history of successes and failures of the various Buddhist traditions, their philosophies, doctrines, practices, innovations, work at integration, propagation, sustainability, etc., allowing us to determine what have been proven truly beneficial and also what have been obstacles to the actualization, propagation, and preservation of the Buddha's teachings. This means that today we are capable of a level of investigation that is far greater than ever before. This should not be seen as a threat to traditional Buddhism, but simply as the latest development in a long tradition of continuous innovation that began over twenty-six-hundred years ago. By continuing to investigate and substantiate both the validity of Buddhism's claims as well as potential benefits of its practices, we aid Buddhism in two ways: firstly, by clearly demonstrating both the universality and legitimacy of the Buddhist teachings and showing Buddhism to be a safe and effective path. And secondly, by providing reassurance to those currently traversing the Buddhist path that their efforts are indeed advantageous.

Accuracy regarding this text

Accuracy is of paramount importance when authoring any Buddhist text, and for myself, the responsibility of such an undertaking was quite daunting. This text took over two years to write, but took an additional two year to edit and proof the vast array of content compiled. Of course studying in South India at Sera and Gyudmed Monasteries was of obvious benefit, giving me access to countless Tibetan and Western masters of the highest caliber. Additionally, my location also gave me access to masters of other traditions as well, both Buddhist and non-Buddhist alike. Although beginning as a solo work, during the final editing process, this text became a collaborative effort by the many scholars at both Sera and Gyudmed Monasteries.

Other technical considerations

With the intention to try to present a fairly concise introductory text for the novice, technical elaboration, lengthy scriptural quotes, various counter interpretations, and additional notes have been omitted due to space concerns.

The term Westerner used for non-Tibetan or non-Himalayan

Within this text when referring to *non-Tibetans* or *non-Tibetan culture*, or more appropriately *non-Himalayans* and *non-Himalayan culture*—for the Tibetan culture pervades most Himalayan

countries—I've chosen to use the terms *Westerners* and *Western culture*. This was done simply for the lack of a better term. This Western-Eastern terminological division is of course common and longstanding in many disciplines, including philosophy, religion, medicine, sociology, academia, literature, etc. This dichotomy is cultural and technological, not geographical, and it is purely conceptual, lacking any fixed borders. In this context, the term *Western* can be seen as akin to the terms *modern* or *contemporary*. I understand this can be seen as being insensitive to my Asian friends who may feel left out by the terms, including monks from my monastery, many of whom are from the various neighboring Himalayan countries outside of Tibet, who I classify here as Tibetans. I apologize to anyone I may offend through this manner of classification. With that said, although I intended this text to speak to a world audience, I often unconsciously find myself slipping into dialogue with the Western audience, an occurrence I did not intend.

In conclusion

My hope is that this text may inspire and bring a freshness to the Buddha's teachings for a new generation of students. Those who are bright, confident, and discerning, who put reason before blind faith, who use logic and critical investigation to explore the world of ideas around them, those who are not afraid to ask the tough questions.

Acknowledgments

Special thanks to:

Prof. Jay Garfield and Prof. Jeffery Hopkins for their inspiration and support.

My wonderful editors: Nalini Ramesh and Halley Haruta.

I would like to thank the following people for their help in validating the information in this text. It is due to their efforts that this text may be recommended confidently and freely as a reliable and accurate source of information for students wishing to develop a basic understanding of authentic Tibetan Buddhism, as well as a credible outline for teachers to expound upon within their own teachings and classrooms.

From Sera Jey Monastery, Bylakuppe, South India (Gelug School of Tibetan Buddhism)

Geshe Ngawang Sangye, Geshe Tenzin Namdak, Venerable Tenzin Gache, Venerable Tenzin Legtsok, Venerable Tenzin Thinly, Venerable Jampa Topgyal, Venerable Lobsang Samphel, Venerable Ngawang Khunphel, Venerable Tenzin Namjong, and Venerable Lobsang Lekshe.

From Maha Bodhi Society Bangalore, South India (Theravada Tradition)

Venerable Buddhadatta and Venerable Saranananda.

From Mysore University, South India

Dr. H.I. Shekara - Hindu studies and Indian philosophy/history

Dr. Abhijeet Jain - Jain studies and Indian philosophy/history

Additionally

Ngarampa Sangye Tsultrim - Gyudmed Tantric Monastery, South India (Gelug School)

Khenpo Sonam Tsewang - Namdroling Monastery, South India (Nyingma School)

Khenpo Thupten Phuntsok - Tsechen Dongag Choeling Monastery, South India, (Sakya School)

Muni Shri Raivat Bhushan - Sri Suvidhinath Rajendrasuri Jain temple, Mysore, South India.

Any mistakes in this text are solely my own and not that of my wonderful teachers.

May all beings benefit from any merit gained from this work.

Tibetan Buddhist Essentials

Volume Two: The Buddha's Teachings

Chapter One: The Buddha's First Teachings

The presentation of the Buddha's teachings within this volume

As mentioned earlier, there are many unique interpretations and presentations of the Buddha's teachings asserted by the different Buddhist traditions; be it the grounded Theravada, the universal Mahayana, or the mystical Vajrayana. However, there is no standard view of the Buddha's teachings in which everyone agrees. This includes the four schools of Tibetan Buddhism, in which each school asserts their own unique view. To this day, many important topics are still being actively debated, with scholars, even within the same monasteries, holding subtle different views. With that said, for the sake of simplicity for the novice, this text endeavors to posit a concise standardized view of the Buddha's teachings according to the interpretation of the *Middle Way Consequence School* of Tibetan Buddhism (Skt. *prasangika madhyamika*; Tib. *uma talgyur*) as asserted by the legendary scholar/yogi Lama Je Tsongkhapa. A presentation taught by His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama and embodied within the Gelug School of Tibetan Buddhism.

Lama Je Tsongkhapa (1357–1419)

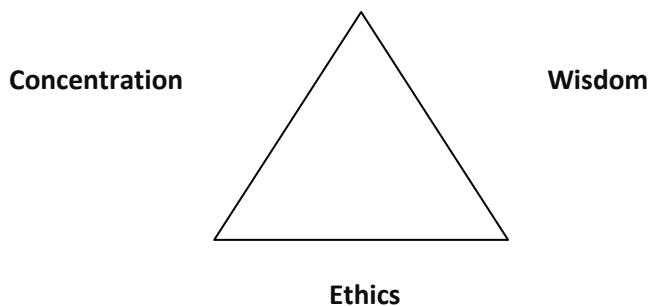
Lama Tsongkhapa, also referred to as Je Rinpoche, was one of the most influential Buddhist masters in Tibetan history. A proponent of the Middle Way Consequence School whose philosophy is based upon the work of the great Indian masters Nagarjuna, Chandrakirti, and Shantideva, among others. Tsongkhapa was the foremost authority on Tibetan Buddhism in his day, whose activities paved the way for the formation of the Gelug school of Tibetan Buddhism. It's said that Tsongkhapa's knowledge was so vast, that there wasn't a Buddhist text not known to him. In addition to being an eminent scholar and philosopher, Tsongkhapa was equally renowned as an accomplished yogi, engaging in extensive meditation retreats. It's told that Tsongkhapa was able to communicate directly with *Manjushri—the Bodhisattva of wisdom*, in order to clarify difficult points within the scriptures. Tsongkhapa's work was focused strongly on the reassessment of Tibetan Buddhism of his time. Within his work, Tsongkhapa drew from all of the various Tibetan schools; painstakingly going through every text in order to verify or reject each on the grounds of their authenticity. Tsongkhapa's work is based largely on the late Kadam school of Tibetan Buddhism established by the great Nalanda Buddhist Master Atisha, a tradition which emphasized pure monastic ethics and the complimentary union of sutra and tantra.

The Foundation of the Buddhist Path

Before we begin investigating the Buddha's teachings, we first need to understand the foundation on which all his teachings are built. First and foremost, all Buddhist teachings and practices are based on a foundation of virtuous ethics. As mentioned previously, Buddhist ethics are unique in the sense that they are not moral laws of a creator god or prophet, but instead are a set of logical ideals for living harmoniously in a way that is conducive to positive personal growth and the positive growth of society. For the practitioner, an ethical foundation allows for a more peaceful and less problematic life, while also forming a stable base for spiritual practice. Upon this base of ethics, the two complimentary aspects of training in concentration and training in wisdom are founded. Here, training in concentration pertains to the method aspect of the path, and includes the development of one's mental faculties (e.g., concentration, focus, fortitude, mental/emotional stability, and gaining control over the thinking process), while training in wisdom pertains to the wisdom aspect of the path and includes the development of insight and the proper understanding of the Buddha's teachings. These three aspects of ethics, concentration, and wisdom are referred to as *the three higher trainings*. These trainings—often symbolized by a triangle—subsume all aspects of the Buddhist path.

The Three Higher Trainings (Skt. *trisiksa*; Tib. *lhagpe labpa sum*)

- **Ethics** (Skt. *adhisilasiksa*; Tib. *tsultim kyi labpa*): Holding vows and/or monastic precepts, altruistic responsibility, cultivating virtue, abstaining from the ten non-virtuous actions.
- **Concentration** (Skt. *samadhisiksa*; Tib. *tingngedzin kyi labpa*): The method aspect of the path pertaining to the development and stabilization of one's mind and mental faculties.
- **Wisdom** (Skt. *prajnasiksa*; Tib. *sherab kyi labpa*): The wisdom aspect of the path pertaining to the development of insight and the proper understanding of the Buddha's teachings.



Note: The three higher trainings are often thought of as a practice primarily for monastics. However, according to His Holiness, this is a mistake, asserting that these three foundational trainings should be practiced by all, as their primary practice.

The Buddha's Four Noble Truths

The Buddha's teachings on samsara and nirvana

The four noble truths (Skt. *catvaryaryasatya*; Tib. *pakpe denpa shi*) are believed to be the Buddha's first teachings following his enlightenment. It was at a deer park in what is today's Sarnath, India, near the city of Varanasi, that the Buddha, in front of his first five disciples, shared his experience of attaining enlightenment and the knowledge that emerged from that experience. The phrase *noble truth* can be understood as *that which is perceived as true by a noble or superior being*. The four noble truths, besides being the Buddha's first and most famous teaching, also serves as the framework for all Buddhist thought. It's said that all of the Buddha's wisdom is contained within these four truths. It's important to understand that these *four truths known by noble beings* are not assertions based merely on a surface level examination of life, but instead on the subtlest and most profound level of analysis.

The Four Noble Truths

1. **The truth of suffering**
2. **The truth of the cause** (of suffering)
3. **The truth of the cessation** (of suffering)
4. **The truth of the path** (leading to the cessation of suffering)

Note: His Holiness, when sharing this teaching, explains that these truths should not be seen merely within the context of one's individual life, but rather in the context of humanity as a whole.

The 1st Noble Truth - The truth of suffering (Skt. *duhkha-satya*; Tib. *dukngal kyi denpa*):

The first noble truth asserts that unenlightened existence (*samsara*) of ordinary beings is pervaded by suffering (pain, misery, anxiety, disappointment, dissatisfaction, and insecurity). This truth doesn't refute the fact that we experience happiness within our lives, but asserts that the happiness we find is unstable, unreliable, fleeting, and often out of our control. The first noble truth merely underscores the problems and unsatisfactory nature of ordinary existence. I think the rock group the *Rolling Stones* said it best when they sang, *I can't get no satisfaction, though I try, and I try, and I try, and I try*. Some claim that Buddhism is overly focused on suffering—this is a mistake. The focus of the Buddha's teachings is on *liberation* from suffering. However, to accomplish this, we first need to clearly understand just what suffering is.

The three main types of suffering

Many would say that life is relatively happy with moments of suffering. However, the Buddha, through deep examination into the nature of reality, came to the opposite conclusion—that unenlightened existence is suffering with moments of happiness. According to Bud-

dhism, unenlightened existence can be analogous to an ocean of suffering from which we periodically arise from (that which we call happiness) but inevitably and continuously fall back into. This ocean of suffering (*samsara*) is actually an ocean of ignorance from which Buddhists seek liberation. *Conversely*, enlightened existence is posited as being free from any and all kinds of suffering, often likened to an open, unobscured sky. According to the Buddha, there are three main types of suffering.

1. **Outright suffering** (Tib. *dukngal kyi dukngal*): Common physical, mental, and emotional pain we experience daily (e.g. burning one's hand on the stove, sickness, the emotional pain of heartbreak, or fear and anxiety). This also includes suffering pertaining to daily problems, obstacles, as well as the suffering of not getting what we want or getting what we don't want.
2. **The suffering of change** (Tib. *gyurwe dukngal*): A constant form of suffering in our lives is our opposition to the most fundamental principle of existence, that of change. However, change itself is not the problem, because the nature of change is neither one of happiness or suffering. Our suffering arises from our desire and aversion to change. Our desire for change can be seen in the desire of children to grow up, the desire for excitement, for improvement, to live a life of purpose, etc., and our desire for things to remain the same is seen in our aversion to aging, our fear of the future, etc.

At a deeper level, the suffering of change pertains to the cyclic nature of ordinary happiness and suffering. Because ordinary beings are born within *samsara*, even our happiness is imbued with the seeds of suffering. I think we all have experienced pleasures that at some point lose their appeal and become undesirable, or possibly even agonizing. Relationships are a clear example. At the beginning, relationships can be blissful and seemingly perfect, but as we all know, over time these feelings inevitably change and can potentially manifest as feelings of jealousy, codependency, fear of rejection, loss of interest, and even revulsion. Even if all goes well, both partners will eventually suffer while watching each other grow old, become sick, and die.

Holidays are another example of how ordinary happiness has within it the seed of suffering. When preparing for that long-awaited holiday, we study brochures, book our hotel, buy our plane tickets, and envision the perfect holiday, but within our plans grow the seeds of suffering. Slowly, as the holiday begins, our exaggerated fantasies begin to unravel. We find the hotel room is not as nice as we hoped, the food is merely adequate, or maybe we find it is too touristy, etc. Then there is the inevitable disappointment and suffering at the end of the holiday knowing that the fun has ended and once again we must return to work. This illustrates how something which appears pleasurable can actually be a source of future suffering.

One last analogy is to imagine living in a house with only two rooms, one hot and the other cold. When becoming too hot while staying in the hot room we feel relief that is experienced as happiness/pleasure when entering the cold room, but after some time we become too cold and alternatively feel relief when returning to the hot room. This analogy illustrates the deepest understanding of the suffering of change, a truth that is often a bit disheartening for new students. The fact that what we often experience and believe to be happiness is nothing more than the relief of suffering (e.g., holiday is the relief from work; fun is the relief from boredom; prosperity is the relief from poverty; family, friendship, and community are the relief of loneliness).

"There is pleasure when a sore is scratched, but to be without sores is more pleasurable still. Just so, there are pleasures in worldly desires, but to be without desires is more pleasurable still." ~ Nagarjuna

Buddhism asserts that due to being born into samsara, all aspects of unenlightened existence are imbued with suffering, even that which we label happiness. In fact, the terms *ordinary happiness* and *suffering of change* are considered synonymous within Buddhism.

"When Lord Buddha spoke about suffering, he wasn't referring simply to superficial problems like illness and injury, but to the fact that the dissatisfied nature of the mind itself is suffering. No matter how much of something you get, it never satisfies your desire for better or more. This unceasing desire is suffering; its nature is emotional frustration." ~ Lama Yeshe

Happiness

To help clarify the suffering of change and to lighten up the dialogue a bit, I thought this would be a good time to talk a little more about happiness. As previously mentioned, the aim of the Buddhist path is liberation from suffering—meaning happiness. However, according to the Buddha, ordinary beings are simply unacquainted with what true happiness is. We mistakenly believe that happiness is found outside of ourselves, never realizing that since the mind is the source of our reality, the mind is logically also the source of our happiness and suffering. The Buddha taught that true happiness and its blissful levels of peace, contentment, and joy are simply unimaginable to most ordinary beings. Within Buddhist texts, true happiness is often described as a non-contingent bliss that never diminishes but continually increases—a perpetually joyous state. With that said, the Buddha posited true happiness as our true nature and taught that all beings possess the potential for its attainment. Within Buddhism, happiness can be divided

into two types, the *true happiness* of superior beings and the *mundane happiness* of ordinary beings.

- **True happiness:** *A happiness that arises from the wisdom that correctly understands the true nature of oneself and reality; a lasting happiness that can be cultivated and increased infinitely, which doesn't diminish or lead to suffering; a happiness that is rarely experienced by ordinary beings.*
 - **Mundane happiness:** *The happiness of ordinary beings that is merely a relief from suffering; a happiness tainted by ignorance and related afflictions; a happiness that is unstable, unreliable, fleeting, and inevitably turns into suffering.*
3. **All pervasive suffering** (Tib. *kyabpa duche kyi dukngal*): This type of suffering is the root of the prior two sufferings as well as the most important and subtle of the three. It is the primary suffering the Buddha referred to when saying, *suffering must be understood*. This third suffering posits that within all unenlightened beings lie the seeds of our suffering, meaning that merely possessing a mind and body is a cause for suffering. This foundational suffering, though very subtle, pervades and influences every aspect of our lives. The term *pervasive* refers to the fact that unenlightened existence, at its very core, is permeated by this type of suffering, a suffering that shares many similarities with the Western concept of *existential anxiety*—*that existence itself is marked by anxiety, fear, and worries pertaining to prosperity, survival, and angst that arises from not knowing what will happen*. Dzogchen Ponlop Rinpoche describes all pervasive suffering as *a subliminal panic that is all pervasive in every living heart*. A favorite modern composition that I think brilliantly exemplifies all pervading suffering is by Mark Epstein from his book, *The Trauma of Being Alive*:

"If we are not suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder, we are suffering from pre-traumatic stress disorder. There is no way to be alive without being conscious of the potential for disaster. One way or another, death (and its cousins: old age, illness, accidents, separation, and loss) hangs over all of us. Nobody is immune. Our world is unstable and unpredictable, and operates, to a great degree and despite incredible scientific advancement, outside our ability to control it." ~ Mark Epstein

The 2nd Noble Truth - The truth of the cause of suffering (Skt. *samudaya satya*; Tib. *kunchung we denpa*): The second noble truth pertains to the cause of suffering (*samsara*), asserting that ignorance is the root of all suffering. The term ignorance used in this context is a very specific type, a foundational confusion and misapprehension of one's true nature and the true nature of reality. It's from this ignorance that the mental distortions of attachment, aversion, and de-

sire for continued existence arise, which are the very causes for continued rebirth in samsara and the suffering which that entails.

The 3rd Noble Truth - The truth of the cessation of suffering (Skt. *nirodha-satya*; Tib. *gokpe denpa*): The third noble truth pertains to the cessation of suffering (nirvana) and an assurance from the Buddha that the irreversible liberation from all suffering is indeed possible. This is something the Buddha himself had experienced directly, an experience that liberated him forever from samsara. The cessation of suffering is attained through the elimination of its root cause which is ignorance, because when we eliminate the root cause of suffering, we eliminate the suffering as well. The cessation of suffering is achieved through the practice of the Buddha's *noble eightfold path*.

The 4th Noble Truth - The truth of the path leading to the cessation of suffering (Skt. *marga satya*; Tib. *lam kyi denpa*): The fourth noble truth pertains to the Buddhist path leading to the cessation of suffering (nirvana). This path is referred to as *the eightfold path*, and is the direct antidote that eliminates the causes of suffering at their root; a holistic methodology that integrates and utilizes all aspects of one's life.

The Noble Eightfold Path (Skt. *aryastangamarga*; Tib. *pagpelam yanlak gyüpa*):

1. **Right view:** Accurately understanding the four noble truths and the Buddhist view.
2. **Right intention:** Renunciation (the wish for freedom), benevolence, and compassion.
3. **Right speech:** Avoiding lying, slander, gossip, harsh words, idle chatter, and abuse.
4. **Right action:** Pure ethical behavior that conforms to the accurate view of the teachings (e.g., avoiding killing, stealing, or committing the ten nonvirtuous acts, etc.)
5. **Right livelihood:** Avoiding work that directly or indirectly harms sentient beings. Livelihood here is not merely occupation but refers to the way in which one sustains their life. Simply said, to avoid manipulating others to get what we want (through flattery, hinting, coaxing, seeking reward, or means of force.)
6. **Right effort:** To meditate diligently on the accurate understanding of the teachings.
7. **Right mindfulness:** To focus properly and fully upon one's object of meditation.
8. **Right concentration:** Gaining meditative stability free of laxity and excitement; a stability that acts as an antidote to obstructions, leading to the attainment of positive qualities.

Further Understanding Suffering

Understanding our suffering (pertaining to the first and second noble truths).

As mentioned earlier, the Buddha found that our suffering is psychological in nature and created by our misunderstanding and misapprehension of the true nature of oneself and reality. However, according to the Buddha, suffering isn't an innate aspect of our existence but instead is self-imposed; conversely, our true nature and the enlightened state are marked by the ab-

sence of any and all suffering. Often, when teaching suffering, there is always one person in the room who stands up and states, *I'm doing pretty good; I'm relatively happy; I'm not suffering.* However, underlying this confident statement of presumed happiness and security lies a hidden existential truth we all share: that life as we know it is unstable. Stock markets crash, loved ones become sick, spouses leave, and jobs and money are lost. The truth is that life is unpredictable, erratic, and change often comes without warning. One minute we are successful, loved, and feel invincible—the next minute we are contemplating what went wrong and how it could all slip away. We go from jumping into the air because we have fallen in love, to jumping off a bridge because they have left us. Furthermore, even when things are going well, how happy can any of us truly be when we continuously see the horrendous suffering of our fellow beings every time we turn on the television or pick up a newspaper?

How we deal with suffering

Most of us deal with suffering by living in a state of distraction, doing everything we can to stay busy and preoccupied, while at the same time denying that any problems exist. The French philosopher Voltaire wrote, *Everything is fine today; that is our illusion.* We seek out happiness and pleasure while denying and refusing to acknowledge the causes of our suffering. Often it's not until we have an overwhelming experience (the loss of loved ones, severe health issues, or impending death) that people finally start to acknowledge their suffering and the actual condition of their lives. This often manifests as the infamous midlife crisis in which one's own mortality is first glimpsed. However, it's not just suffering that awakens us, but prosperity as well. I remember once hearing that Buddhism spreads the fastest in rich countries. The reason given was that often people that "have it all", those who possess all the material components that are prescribed for happiness, find that even after getting and achieving everything they've wanted, genuine happiness and fulfillment still eludes them and often feel that their lives are still somehow incomplete. For it's when we have reached our goals, and our striving and busyness has begun to slow down, that we begin to see ourselves and our lives for what they truly are. This often becomes a catalyst for people to seek out spirituality, through which they begin to develop a thirst for the authentic and a yearning to live an honest and content life of purpose and meaning.

Suffering as a necessary aspect of the path

Clearly, we all want to avoid suffering, which is a reasonable and sensible aspiration. However, since it is not possible for ordinary beings to be entirely free of suffering, it's important to look at our suffering objectively in order to understand both its faults and even potential benefits. According to Buddhism, a proper balance of happiness and suffering is necessary for attaining liberation, for it's our aversion to suffering that fuels our wish for liberation and to traverse the spiritual path. Suffering is also that which undermines our superficiality and self-centeredness.

Through suffering we develop compassion, empathy, and understanding for others. Through suffering we develop courage, strength, and perseverance through which we strive to better ourselves and our lives. Furthermore, it's through our shared suffering that we connect and bond with each other. For how can one practice patience and perseverance without adversity, or know genuine compassion without firsthand knowledge of the suffering of others? By acknowledging this, although we clearly don't wish to suffer, when suffering does arise, we can appreciate the advantages it brings. For without suffering, spiritual and personal development would simply not be possible.

Can suffering be transcended? (pertaining to the third noble truth)

This is the very question that drove the Buddha's search for enlightenment. Motivated by great compassion, the Buddha's quest began with an unwavering determination to find the answer to this question and ended with him sitting under the Bodhi tree with a vow that he would not rise again from his meditation until he had the answer. Upon reaching enlightenment, he arose as the *Awakened One—the Buddha*, possessing the answer to his quest, because he had indeed attained the enlightened state, the state beyond suffering.

How to begin to transcend suffering (pertaining to the fourth noble truth)

Without clearly acknowledging and understanding our suffering, most of us will never develop a determination strong enough to transcend it, just like a man born into a prison, who knows nothing but those inner walls, and who might insist that his life is satisfactory. He may even wish for future rebirth within that same cell. Transcending suffering begins with truly understanding it and the ignorance that is its cause, then developing an unwavering wish for freedom from it, including a conviction that this freedom is indeed possible. By fully understanding and acknowledging our suffering, we gain a true resolve to transcend it, and we begin to search for answers and examine our lives in a much deeper way. And of course, the wish for freedom is what draws people to the Buddha's teachings. The Buddha was once asked, *What is it that you teach?* to which he replied, *I teach only suffering and the end of suffering.* The Buddha often compared himself to a physician, seeing his function in the world as a healer—healing the hearts and minds of people. In a famous analogy, the Buddha suggests seeing our suffering as similar to a disease in which we hope to recover from,

“Think of yourself as someone who is sick, that the dharma as the remedy, your spiritual teacher as a skillful doctor, and diligent practice as the way to recovery.” ~ The Buddha

The Eight Sufferings of Human Beings

Traditionally the suffering of ordinary existence within samsara is presented in eight aspects:

1. Birth
2. Aging
3. Sickness
4. Death
5. Being separated from what we desire
6. Being confronted by what we have aversion to
7. Not obtaining our desires even though we try very hard to get them
8. Having a body and mind under the control of afflictions and karma

CHAPTER TWO: The Buddha's Unique Model of Reality

The Buddha's Unique Model of Reality

What truly sets Buddhism apart from all other traditions is the Buddha's unique model of the nature of reality (Tib. *chö nyi*). It is an often complex model that mirrors a complex universe, a model established upon the following topics of karma, dependent origination, emptiness, and the two truths. It can be said that, in one way or another, all of the Buddha's teachings and prescribed practices, as well as the Buddhist path itself, can be seen as pertaining to the cultivation, habituation, and correct understanding of the Buddha's model of reality.

The Buddha's Teaching on Karma

As shared earlier in this text, *karma* (Skt.; Tib. *le*) is the driving force behind samsara, cyclic existence, and rebirth. Karma is a term that encompasses the process of cause and effect when pertaining to the lives of sentient beings, asserting that all actions whether physical, verbal, or mental have consequences. Within most Indian traditions, karma is commonly translated as *action*; however, the Buddha further defines karma as *intentional action* (deliberate action), asserting intention to be the most significant aspect of karma. Karma, or intentional actions—either positive, negative, or indifferent—performed by body, speech, or mind, subsequently produce *karmic imprints* or potentialities upon the mind. These imprints then lead to future *karmic results* that correspond with the nature of those actions, with positive or virtuous actions leading to positive results (happiness and favorable rebirth), and negative or non-virtuous actions leading to negative results (suffering and unfavorable rebirth). Besides being the cause of samsaric rebirth, karma is also the cause of the conditions of that rebirth (one's parents, health, abilities, prosperity, longevity, etc.), and of course karma plays a crucial role in our liberation.

Karma, being intentional action, can only be produced by a mind. Other phenomena, including planetary events, universal properties, weather, etc., although governed by the law of cause and effect, can never produce or possess karma. Additionally, because of being a form of cause and effect, karma lacks any moral judgment or discernment between good or bad, fair or unfair, reward or punishment, nor should it be seen as pertaining to blame, retribution, or vengeance. Within Buddhism, karma is considered the single most encompassing element of ordinary existence. In fact, at its deepest level, it is posited as the very force behind the creation of our physical universe and its inhabitants (created by the mind, karma, and subtle particles). Mistakenly assumed to be an effect or result of one's actions, karma technically should be understood as a cause—the cause of future results.

Karma should not be seen as a static or fixed property but instead as existing interdependently and interrelational in a state of constant change continuously being influenced by one's interaction with new experiences, new views, changing feelings, as well as other beings and their own distinct karma. Thus karma is not a form of predetermination, destiny, or fate, nor is it related to notions such as coincidence and luck, which are rejected by Buddhism. Instead, karma should be understood as *probable potentiality*—the probable potential of future results.

"Our happiness and pain depend on others and their happiness and pain depend on us. It is important to recognize this. We are a part of others and others are a part of ourselves."

~ 17th Gyalwang Karmapa, Orgyen Trinley Dorje

One example that illustrates the probable potentiality of karma is a person who has a karmic propensity for an early death. By engaging in risky behavior, they create causes and conditions which increase the potentiality for their karmic propensity of an early death to ripen and its effects to be experienced. However, if they adopt safer behaviors, the ripening of that karmic propensity can be postponed, avoided, or in some cases completely averted. This shows karma not as a fixed determination or destiny but instead as an ever-changing potentiality.

Another example is a person who possesses a karmic potentiality for anger, but who also had the good fortune to marry a wonderful and kind spouse who taught them how to work with their anger. When the person's karmic propensity for anger arises, the results will be far different because of the influence of their spouse. This shows how one's present state of mind and interrelations with others has an enormous effect on how karmic results unfold, including how karma is interdependent at every stage of its development. Having said that, conversely, karma is also posited as infallible. This infallibility is seen in the irrefutable fact that all things, without exception, arise from causes and conditions. This is true of all external phenomena, but also all inner phenomena (thoughts, emotions, intentions, moods, ideas, etc.). It's said that for buddhas who have the ability to comprehend its complexity, karma is predictable. However, for ordinary beings, the complex workings of karma are impossible to predict or to fully understand. In fact, because of its complexity, the Buddha within his teachings on the *four imponderables* (shared later in this text) urged his followers not to become overly preoccupied contemplating the endless possibilities of the results of karma, lest they become confused and/or distracted from their actual practice of attaining liberation.

Points of contention

There are various presentations of karma within the different Buddhist traditions. Within those there are two important questions worth mentioning: *Do buddhas possess karma?* and *Is karma generated if there is no intention or knowledge of the action?* In the first case, the Gelug school asserts that all beings including buddhas possess karma, although generally the term

karma pertains to samsara and cyclic existence, and therefore is not commonly used when referring to a buddha's very subtle karma—a karma asserted to be very different from our own. Secondly, the Gelug asserts that even without intention or knowledge of our actions, very minor karma is still created (e.g., the countless insects killed without our knowledge when driving a car).

Karma encompasses five main elements

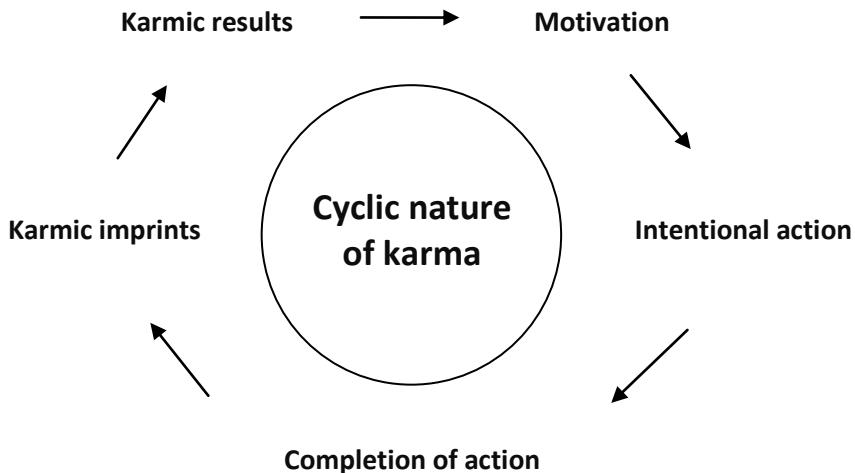
1. **Motivation** (Skt. *cinta*; Tib. *sampa*): The urge to act.
2. **Intentional action** (Skt. *maula*; Tib. *ngoshi*): The deliberate start, continuation, and completion of the action.
3. **Conclusion of the action** (Skt. *pazcima*; Tib. *thar dug*): The aftermath of the action.
4. **Karmic imprints** (Skt. *vasana*; Tib. *bakchak*): Mental/emotional residue of the action.
5. **Ripened result** (Skt. *karmaphala*; Tib. *le ki debu*): Consequences that arise from the action, of which there are three: ripened results, results that are similar to the cause, and environmental results.

Note: There are two views pertaining to which of these five aspects is technically karma. One view claims that actual karma to be one's motivation, intention, or urges. However, on the debate grounds of Sera Jey Monastery, karma is asserted as the intentional action itself.

The cyclic nature of karma

The cycle of karma begins with motivations that arise as karmic results. These motivations then give rise to the actual intentional action, which encompasses the deliberate start, continuation, and completion of the act—be it physical action, an action of speech, or action of mind (decisions and choices). At the completion of the action, the feelings that arise related to the act are imprinted upon the mind, influencing and distorting it. Finally, when suitable conditions arise, those imprints ripen and their results are experienced. These karmic imprints further affect us by influencing the mind and future motivations, beginning the cycle of karma all over again. Let's use the love of chocolate cake to illustrate the workings of karma. *First*, past karmic imprints related to chocolate cake are triggered by current thoughts or events; this leads to the motivation or urge to consume it. This, in turn, leads to the decision to start, continue, and finish consuming it. Upon completion, thoughts and emotions arise pertaining to the consumption of the cake. These thoughts and emotions could be anything from feelings of bliss and satisfaction, to feeling that the cake was too rich and not to your liking, or simply being indifferent to the experience. The residue from these feelings is then imprinted upon the mind, which inevitably manifests as future results. These karmic results may manifest as a continuous craving for more cake or possibly aversion in the case you felt it was too sweet. Other karmic results may be a change in dietary behavior, weight gain, or adoption of a new favorite hangout place for

desserts. However, karma is not a form of determinism, for we are not prisoners of our karmic imprints. One doesn't have to eat cake every time it is placed in front of oneself, for we have free will and can choose not to act.



Karmic imprints (Skt. *vasana*; Tib. *bakchak*): Karmic imprints are created when our feelings become involved, as a kind of mental/emotional residue left behind from feelings related to our intentions, thoughts, actions, reactions, and experiences. Karmic imprints influence and distort our perceptions, choices, and actions, thereby coloring and shaping our current as well as future thoughts and experiences. Often the influence of one's karmic imprints is imperceptible, manifesting simply as what information is noticed and taken in and what information is ignored and discarded. Because these imprints often manifest in deep habitual patterns that we have followed over countless lifetimes, they can be very challenging to work with (not just habitual behaviors but also habitual mental states and wrong views). Some imprints can be so strong they are impossible for us to resist, while others are more manageable. Buddhism teaches that our karmic imprints don't dissolve at death but instead follow and influence us through many lifetimes. In fact, most of the karmic results we currently experience are said to have been created in prior lives. This often makes the reasons behind our successes and misfortunes hard to trace and fully understand, while at the same time potentially answering the question, why do bad things happen to good people?

Karmic imprints are often illustrated as being like seeds, and with every intentional action carried out, a *karmic seed* or imprint is created in the mind. Buddhism posits that these karmic seeds remain dormant until the proper conditions arise, and only *if and when* those conditions arise will the effect of that ripened karmic seed then be experienced. If conditions don't arise or the karma has been purified, then no karmic result will be experienced. Stronger imprints are asserted as being more prone to ripen within one's current lifetime and weaker imprints more prone to ripen in future lifetimes. Karmic seeds or imprints also pertain to skills and talents

(proficiency in study, practice, or unique abilities) traits that can follow one into future rebirths, and although needing to be relearned, it's said that they are reacquired more easily. In fact, Tibetan school children recite prayers avowing that their hard work in studies—even up to the day before their death—is never wasted, for the positive imprints created will make their studies in the next life easier.

Karmic result (Skt. *karmaphala*; Tib. *le ki debu*): *The effects or results of one's intentional actions.* Due to the countless possible causes and conditions that can arise, a karmic result can manifest in countless different ways. Stronger intentions and actions potentially create stronger karmic results, whereas aspects like great regret potentially lessen the result of negative karma. Furthermore, intentional actions started but not completed would also have a lesser or weaker result. Generally, the results of karma are posited as three main types:

1. **Ripening result** (Skt. *vipakaphala*; Tib. *namin ki debu*): A result influencing the form and personal specifics of one's next rebirth.
2. **Result similar to the cause** (Skt. *nisyandaphala*; Tib. *gyu thun ki debu*):
 - 1) A result of a similar effect; reaping what one sows.
 - 2) A result of the urge to continue to perform the action.
3. **Environmental result** (Skt. *adhipatiphala*; Tib. *dakpö debu*): A result influencing the environment into which one will be reborn.

Example: the mind that creates the act of killing creates the *potential* to experience:

1. The *ripened result*: Of an unfavorable form in one's rebirth.
2. The *result similar to the cause*:
 - 1) Of being killed oneself.
 - 2) The propensity to kill again.
3. The *environmental result*: Of being born into a violent place.

The production of strong karmic results

As previously mentioned, there are many conditions that influence karmic results. However, Buddhism posits four main conditions necessary for the production of strong karmic results. For each of these elements missing, the karma created and the subsequent results experienced are lessened.

1. **Intention:** A clear intention towards the action (e.g., A clear intent to kill)
2. **Action:** Performing the intended action (e.g., The actual act of killing)
3. **Basis:** A subject of the action (e.g., A sentient being is the *unmistaken focus* of the act)
4. **Completion:** The completion of the action (e.g., The act is completed without regret)

How karma manifests in one's current life

Buddhism asserts that everything you commonly assume as being *you* is a product or result of your past karma: your body, mind, mental states, identity, attitudes, views, preferences, habits, desires, aversions, physical characteristics, health, prosperity, family, friends, occupation, hobbies, etc. This also means that everything you will become is currently being created through your present intentional thoughts, speech, and actions.

"All aspect of one's life are a precise representation of one's current karma." ~ Tenzin Tharpa

Understanding karma as opportunity

Karma is often seen in the West in a more negative light, as a kind of universal retribution. However, understanding karma as a positive potentiality and appreciating the amazing opportunity it allows, is far more useful and ultimately more accurate. The proper understanding of karma dictates that we are the architects of our future and not victims of our past. That we possess the ability, through making better and wiser choices, to radically improve the quality of our lives. Therefore, when contemplating karma, one should focus on what results one's present actions will produce and not be focused on what past karma may unfold. Likewise, the useless focus on assigning blame, imagining retribution, or being consumed by guilt, is a deep misunderstanding of the workings of karma.

"Karma is a flowing stream in which we abide. A current of potentiality which carries us. However, we are not aware of the fact that we are the creators of the stream, as well as the navigators. We are not aware that through every thought, word, and deed we are influencing its direction." ~ Tenzin Tharpa

Free will

One's will (Tib. *düpa*) is defined in Buddhism as *the mental activity of engaging the mind, drawing it to virtue (understanding and liberation), non-virtue (ignorance and suffering), or an ethically neutral state*. Although Buddhism asserts the concept of free will, it also posits the will as not entirely free, claiming that our choices are influenced strongly by our karmic imprints, while at the same time asserting that we are far more than the mere sum of those imprints.

According to Buddhist scholar Alan Wallace,

"Although all feelings that arise together with one's initial awareness of sensory stimuli are the result of past karma, the feelings that arise following such stimuli are not predetermined by past karma but are rather the result of fresh karma associated with the way one responds to those stimuli. And so acts of volition are conditioned both by prior influences as well as by other factors, such as the quality of one's awareness. In this sense, Buddhism asserts a

measure of free will in so far as one can reflect on one's options and decide on the best course of action in terms of its moral suitability.” ~ Alan Wallace

Wallace goes on, defining free will as *the ability to recognize the various impulses that arise involuntarily in the mind and to choose which among them to accept or reject.*

Group karma

Since karma is created by intentional action, then, logically groups can produce karma as well, with the results of that karma being experienced by all members of the group. Examples of this are people that align themselves with group ideologies (religions, political parties, etc.). Through accepting or condoning the actions of the group, one is exercising the intentional mental action of choice and thereby creating and perpetuating the group's karma while also creating personal karma for oneself.

Purifying karma: *To limit or avoid experiencing the results of one's karmic imprints.* Although there are prescribed methods for purifying non-virtuous or negative karma, often the most recommended way is to simply focus on the accumulation of new virtuous karma. One must be ever vigilant and aware of one's present actions and the karmic consequences that are being generated at this very moment, and take full responsibility for each and every word, decision, and action from this moment on. With that said, a commonly prescribed method for purifying past karma is the application of the *four opponent powers*. By strongly reflecting on the intentional action committed and then applying these four opposing powers, one can limit the effects of negative karma accumulated.

The four opponent powers (Tib. nyenpo tob shi)

These are often referred to as *the Four Rs*: regret, refuge, remedy, and resolve.

1. **The power of regret:** Realizing and regretting the mistake one has committed.
2. **The power of refuge:** To rely on the three jewels to help reestablish one's virtue.
3. **The power of remedy:** Applying the proper antidotes (conceptual antidotes, practices of atonement, apologizing, etc.).
4. **The power of resolve:** The determination to not repeat the action.

Other methods for purifying karma

It's asserted that karma may be purified through the realization of the Buddha's teachings, circumambulating stupas, and through various tantric practices.

Divisions of karma

Karma can be divided into:

- **Neither contaminated or uncontaminated karma:** Created by beings in meditative equipoise on impermanence, selflessness, or emptiness.
- **Uncontaminated karma (Tib. *zag me kyi le*):** Created by superior beings while practicing generosity, good works, etc. However, a very subtle ignorance is still present.
- **Contaminated karma (Tib. *zag ke kyi le*):** Created by ordinary beings.
(contaminated by ignorance and related afflictions)

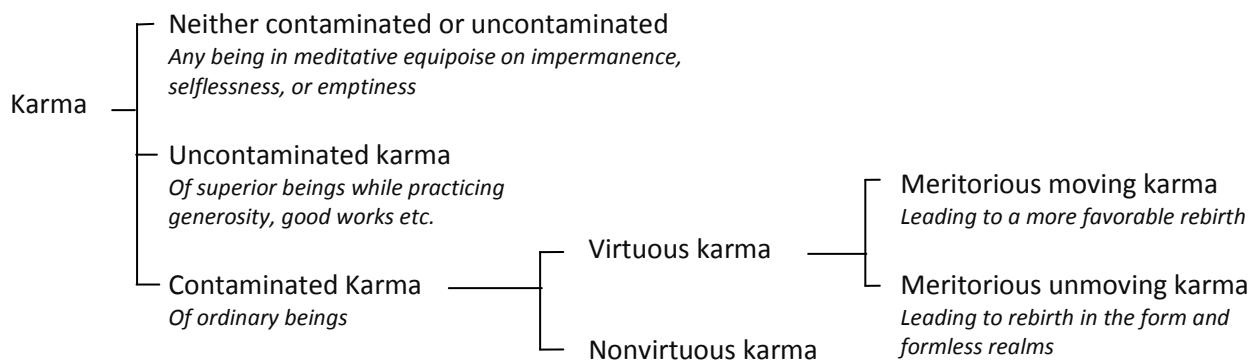
Contaminated karma of ordinary beings is divided into:

- **Virtuous karma (Tib. *gewa kyi le*):** Leading to happiness.
- **Non-virtuous karma (Tib. *migawe le*):** Leading to suffering.

Virtuous karma is then divided into:

- **Meritorious moving karma (Tib. *yo pi le*):** That which ordinary beings (non-meditators) generate through ordinary actions. The term *moving* pertains to an unstable or less certain favorable rebirth.
- **Meritorious unmoving karma (Tib. *mi yo pi le*):** That which certain highly advanced (though still slightly deluded) meditators generate through deep concentration. The term *unmoving* pertains to a reliable and assured rebirth, leading to rebirth in the form and formless realms.

Divisions of karma



Merit (Skt. *punya*; Tib. *sönam*): *Positive mental imprints created through virtuous thought, speech, or actions that result in happiness in the future.* Merit is generated through one's good works (giving, abiding in virtue, mental development, protecting life, holding vows, and interaction with holy beings, sacred places, or sacred objects). Often there is confusion pertaining to differences between *merit* (Tib. *sönam*) and *virtuous karma* (Tib. *gewa le*). Generally the two terms are synonymous and differ only in their terminological usage.

The collection of merit (Tib. *sönam tsok*): Collecting merit is one of the two prerequisite accumulations needed for the attainment of buddhahood (the collection of great wisdom and the collection of great merit) and pertains to the practice aspect of the path.

Merit and the eight worldly concerns

Mahayana Buddhism is unique in its focus on intention, with practitioners putting great effort in gaining mastery and control over it, believing that the intention that underlies all of one's thoughts and actions is the most crucial and shaping characteristic in one's life. For it's through pure intentions that one gains the ability to generate greater merit. It's said that great merit can only be gained by a mind relatively free of the three poisons (ignorance, attachment, and aversion), and free of the eight worldly concerns (attachment to gain - aversion to loss; attachment to praise - aversion to blame; attachment to fame - aversion to insignificance; attachment to pleasure - aversion to pain).

Merit field (Skt. *punyaaksetra*; Tib. *tsok shying*): Also known as *field of accumulation* or *refuge field*, an assemblage of visualized or actual superior beings used as the focus of one's practice of generating merit. Because of the vast power of the buddhas and superior beings, it is believed that to direct one's practices, offerings, deeds, and/or prayers to them, one can generate greater merit. A merit field is often represented by a refuge or lineage tree, which is a visual representation/painting of buddhas, bodhisattvas, and past masters of a distinct school or lineage painted as a massive glorious tree with the Sangha of superior beings abiding upon its branches.

The Dedication of merit (Skt. *parinama*; Tib. *ngoba*): The act of offering one's virtue for the benefit of all beings. Also known as the *transfer of merit*, this practice begins once merit has been generated, at which point it is believed crucial to then dedicate the merit in order to stop it from potentially being damaged by one's own afflictive emotions. In other words, by dedicating collected merit, one assures its safe collection, because it's said that moments of anger have the effect of postponing or destroying the benefits of one's accumulated merit that has not been dedicated. A simple way of dedicating merit is to reflect upon the virtuous act performed while reciting the phrase: *May all beings benefit from any merit I may have gained.*

I often think the practice of generating and collecting merit is misunderstood, with many seeing the practice as similar to making deposits of goodness into a bank account in order to pay for one's future enlightenment. However, according to the Indian Buddhist master Shantideva, the generation and collection of merit is not so much about gaining goodness as it is about displacing one's attachments and afflictions—transforming one's negative qualities into their positive counterparts. One example is the meritorious practice of generosity in which the practice can be seen not so much as earning goodness, but rather displacing one's miserliness.

"To be generous doesn't merely mean to give without bias and partiality; it means to be profoundly free from attachment to anything whatsoever." ~ Padmasambhava

The Buddha's Teachings of Dependent Origination

The Buddha's teaching of dependent origination (Skt. *pratityasamutpada*; Tib. *dendel*) is often praised as the Buddha's single greatest contribution. This foundation of Buddhist thought asserts that all phenomena exist dependently, or more precisely, *interdependently*—in dependence upon parts, causes, conditions, and imputation (labeling) by the mind—while conversely refuting independent or *inherent* existence. Again, inherent existence (Tib. *rangshin ki drubpa*) can be understood as *that which is self-sufficient and/or self-existent and does not change moment to moment*. More technically inherent existence is defined as (1) *That which does not rely on causes—coming into being by its own power*; (2) *That which does not rely on parts—coming into being without dependence on parts*; (3) *That which does not rely on labeling—coming into being without dependence upon imputation by a mind*. With that said, according to the Buddha, nothing exists in this inherently existent way. If something were to exist inherently, it would be utterly static and unaffected by causes, conditions, or time. It would be unable to change, enact change, or interact with its environment.

The famous Vietnamese Zen master Thich Nhat Hanh would often hold up a sheet of plain white paper and ask his students, *Can you see the tree?* His question is really asking, *can you see the many dependent aspects within the sheet of paper* (the tree, seed, water, sunshine, the factory, its workers, all of the things that came together for this sheet of paper to exist)? The human body is another wonderful example of dependent origination, in which we rely upon our hearts, lungs, brains, flesh, and bone for our existence. However, each of these parts is mutually dependent on the others, as well as on the organism as a whole for its own existence. The whole is dependent on the parts and the parts are dependent on the whole. In this same way, the Buddha asserted that all phenomena, without exception, exist dependently, in dependence on their parts, causes, conditions, and imputation by a mind.

Imputation and our world of imputed labels

Imputation (Skt. *parikalpita*; Tib. *kuntak*) or labeling is a natural and indispensable function of the mind. It is an amazing evolutionary adaptation which organizes information into efficient portions, allowing us to navigate existence more efficiently, while also facilitating quick decision-making and rapid response to dangers. We use labeling to discern and make sense of the enormous amount of information that we receive on a daily basis. Labeling can be understood as an interactive tool or interface, allowing us to engage efficiently with both the physical world as well as our conceptual world of thoughts and concepts. The act of labeling instills meaning, value, relativity, and function to one's environment. Imagine a world without labels: this would be an environment devoid of reference points, quantification, or meaning, an environment in which time, communication, memory, etc. would not function. One could not discern food from poison, good from bad, or friend from enemy. Without labels, the world as we know it would simply not exist. The act of imputation, sometimes referred to as *superimposition*, requires two elements: a mind and a valid base of imputation. *Valid base* here refers to the fact that one cannot simply impute any label on any phenomenon. We can't simply impute the label camera on a piece of wood and expect it to take pictures. There must be some accuracy in the form of

function or conceptual understanding for a base to be considered valid. In the case of a camera, a valid base for imputation would be *a machine that takes photographs*.

Problems with labeling

When used in its correct context, labeling is an essential and necessary aspect of the mind. However, this function can also be potentially problematic. Problems occur when we lose the ability to discern the difference between the labels and the phenomena they represent, reducing our lives to a mere simulation of reality—an interpretation that simply isn't real. This lack of discernment of what is real leads us to choose wrong objects, ideals, and goals in our pursuit of happiness. We invest our time and energy in chasing shadows of reality that we mistakenly believe will fulfill our needs. Some examples of this are mistaking temporary success for genuine happiness, mistaking meaningless titles for actual accomplishments, or mistaking romantic infatuation for real love. And of course, the actual goal in all three of these examples is long-term happiness—*mental and physical well-being*. Being able to clearly discern the distinction between labels and that which they represent allows us to benefit from the functionality of labeling without being drawn into mistaken and deceptive views of reality.

Dependent origination and the imputing mind

When we talk about dependent origination at its most fundamental level, Buddhism asserts the most significant interdependence is between the mind and phenomena.

"The meaning of dependent origination must be taken further and understood not only as causal dependence but also as 'dependent designation': The idea that the identity of a thing can only be conceived in dependence on other factors and not in and of itself."

~ The 14th Dalai Lama

According to the Gelug school, reality itself becomes manifest through the act of imputation by a mind in dependence upon causes, conditions, and parts. These causes, conditions, and parts, in turn, exist in dependence upon imputation on their own parts, and those parts in dependence upon imputation on those parts, etc. Even consciousness itself, though not having physical parts, is asserted as having temporal parts (instances and various moments of consciousness). This role of imputation implies that reality, existence, and phenomena necessarily require a consciousness to certify their existence, meaning that the known cannot exist without the knower, and vice versa. This relationship is referred to as *object* and *object possessor* (Tib. *yul* and *yul chen*), asserting that nothing exists outside of this mutually dependent relationship of the mind and what the mind perceives.

"Nothing exists independent from the mind. The mind is the principal ingredient in all phenomenon and reality." ~ Geshe Tashi Tsering

Imputation and nominal existence

This process of imputation or imputed origination is referred to as *nominal existence* (Tib. *mingtsam*)—existing by way of name and label. What's important to understand is that when saying something exists nominally by imputation, one is not implying that it is non-existent or unreal, but instead implying conceptual existence. Most people tend to define what is real as that which is tangible, but conceptual things can be just as real (boundaries of countries, time, laws, ownership of property, etc.). In fact, the Gelug school posits physical and conceptional phenomena as being equally valid. Marriage is a great example of something that exists merely as a conceptual imputation, because although being merely a label and concept, marriage exists—it's real, functional, and possesses the ability to affect change and shape lives. With that said, nominal existence does not imply that nothing exists outside of language and thought patterns, for clearly, phenomena are more than their mere linguistic counterparts.

"The identity and being that the world possesses are said to be only contingent. However, that is not to say that no reality exists outside of our language and thought. Fire still burns, water still quenches our thirst, and sentient beings are still born under the influence of their karma." ~ Thupten Jinpa

"Is touching a wall just touching a name?... The answer is 'no'. Thinking that apart from the name nothing else exists is an extreme of nihilism." ~ Khensur Jampa Tegchok

The Buddha often described life as dream-like but he never asserted that life was a dream, or that phenomenon did not actually exist. For the Buddhist path is the middle way between the extreme views of *nihilism—the view that nothing exists*, and *absolutism—the view that phenomena are inherently existent*. With that said, there are some Buddhists who assert reality as a mere illusion created or projected by the mind, but for them to hold the view that things do not exist at all, would be to fall into nihilism, at which point their view could no longer be considered Buddhist.

"The world debates with me, I don't debate with the world. Whatever the world posits as existent, I accept as existent, and whatever the world posits as non-existent, I accept as non-existent." ~ the Buddha

"For the most part, people in this world are trapped in the duality of 'it is' and 'it is not', but for one who sees with complete wisdom the arising of the world, there is no "It is not."
~ the Buddha

Nominal existence vs. empirical matter

According to the Gelug school, at its most fundamental level matter itself is posited as being formed through the interaction of mind or consciousness and subtle unseen particles, a concept sometimes referred to as *conceptual creation* in which mind/consciousness and karma,

combined with unseen particles, create the physical environment that we experience. According to the great Indian Buddhist master Chandrakirti, in his *Supplement to the Middle Way*,

"It is taught that all forms of life are produced by karma but without the mind there would be no karma, so it's the mind itself that creates living beings, and the great variety of worlds where they live." ~ Chandrakirti

"The universe that we inhabit and our shared perception of it are the results of a common karma. Likewise, the places that we will experience in future rebirths will be the outcome of the karma that we share with the other beings living there. The actions of each of us, human or nonhuman, have contributed to the world in which we live. We all have a common responsibility for our world, and are connected with everything in it." ~ The 14th Dalai Lama

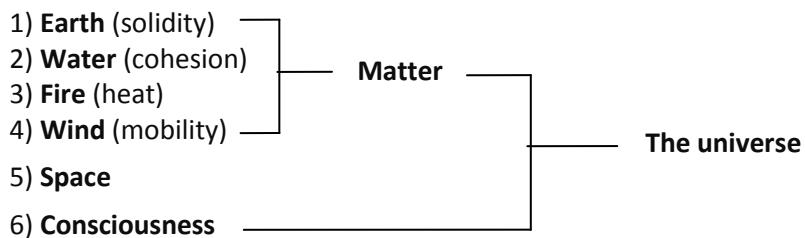
His Holiness asserts that it is difficult to determine where the natural expression of the potential of physical elements ends and the effect of karma begins because there is a very close link between cognition and matter. Here, it's important to understand that the mind does not so much create matter as validate or certify its existence, imputing meaning, relativity, and/or function, giving phenomena its conceptual and contextual existence.

"The mind creates the world in the sense that it invests the phenomenal world with value."
~ Jeffery Hopkins

"Observed phenomena don't exist as mere images, projections or visions in the mind but rather exist as separate entities from the mind. The mind and matter are two separate things. Matter is separate from the mind that cognizes and dominates it. And although observed phenomena are not simply created by a mind, their ultimate mode of existence is dependent upon the mind, so the mind doesn't create the matter but the matter is dependent on the mind that imputes it as the imputer. Therefore, their mode of existence is separate from the imputer but their existence is dependent upon the imputer. Their mode of existence is separate but their existence is dependent. Nothing can exist independently from the mind which perceives it." ~ Dalai Lama

The six elements (Skt. *mahabhuta*; Tib. *kham tuk*)

The subtle particles (shared above) are referred to as the *six foundational or irreducible elements*. The names of these elements are merely metaphors pertaining to six foundational qualities that are the building blocks of empirical existence.



“It is the mind itself in combination with subtle unseen particles that create living beings, and the great variety of worlds where they live.” ~ Chandrakirti

Existence seen as action

Existence in Tibetan Buddhism is understood more in relation to action than the traditional Western static model. This can be seen within Buddhist terminology in terms like *object* and *object possessor / yul* and *yul chen* (Tib.), which assert that existence itself becomes manifest through the *action* of perception, or the term *mind* (Tib. *sem*), understood in a more *verb-like* context pertaining to the *act* of knowing rather than to a static knower. According to Nagarjuna,

“Reality is an experiential phenomenon, not one that has an objective existence independent of our experience of it.” ~ Nagarjuna

The mutual dependence of cause and effect

Dependent origination is not simply a one-directional linear movement from cause to effect, but instead a reciprocal relationship (codependent) which in many cases appears causally paradoxical. One example is the relationship between a mother and child. No one would dispute that a mother is the substantial cause of a child, but under analysis, we find that a child is also the cause for a mother, for it is only through having a child that a woman become a mother. Another example is temporal states (past, present, and future) which are mutually dependent for their existence.

Dependent origination vs. monism

In the West, many wrongly mistake the interdependence of dependent origination for *monism*—*that all things are one*, which is a belief found in Hinduism and other traditions. Although monism and dependent origination may, on a surface level, appear similar, at a deeper level the difference is profound. Essentially the Buddhist notion of dependent origination can be seen as a form of pluralism, asserting that all phenomena possess a unique identity. However, that unique identity arises from an interdependent construction, meaning that all things are interdependent, however, all things are not one. Although interdependent, not all phenomena are necessarily interdependent with all other phenomena. The internet is a great example of this. The internet is made up of many individual computers from around the world, however, no one computer is the internet. These computers function together interdependently while still remaining distinctly individual. And although interdependent, each computer is not necessarily interdependent with every other computer on the internet at any given time. For although all of these computers are connected, they are not one computer.

The Buddha's Teachings of Emptiness

"Though we perceive a world of concrete and distinct objects, these objects are empty of the identity imputed on them by their conceptual labels." ~ Lama Yeshe

Emptiness (Skt. *sunyata*; Tib. *tongpa nyi*): Synonymous with voidness, suchlessness, essencelessness, and identitylessness. The term emptiness pertains to the doctrine that all phenomena, both external and internal, are empty of inherent existence. Again, the term inherent existence is defined as *that which is self-existent and self-sufficient; possessing a substantial independent essence*. Therefore, when asserting that all phenomena lack inherent existence, we are asserting that when, through analysis, we dissect phenomena eliminating all parts, we find there is nothing remaining which is distinctly that thing. That no single aspect can be found that exists independently from other things. That phenomena are empty of any objective essential essence that distinguishes them as uniquely themselves. *Essence* here is defined as *an inherent element or intrinsic characteristic which makes something uniquely itself*. According to the Buddha, this imagined imputed essential essence that we presume inhabits all phenomena simply doesn't exist. This can be seen as similar to images in a mirror, in which the images clearly exist (as actual reflections) but ultimately lack any true essence. Buddhism asserts that all phenomena exist in a similar manner. It's important to remember that emptiness, used in its Buddhist context, does not pertain to physical space or vacuity.

"Ordinary beings superimpose absolute characteristics, such as essences, substantiality, and permanence, upon impermanent and insubstantial things, processes, or events."
~ Khensur Jampa Tegchok

This notion that we actively impute an imagined essence upon phenomena and our environment coincides with our prior topic of nominal existence—that all phenomena exist through name and label imputed by the mind. Take a book, for example. If we create a list of what elements constitute a book, we would have two covers, a few hundred sheets of paper, ink, and binding or thread to hold it together. But when we analyze what *book* is, there is no element *book* on our list; none of those parts are *book*. This absence of *book* is the book's emptiness; its lack of inherent existence. This doesn't mean *book* is empty of being a book—for if *book* were empty of itself, there would be no book. Instead, it means that *book* exists nominally, as an imputed label, term, or concept, imputed in dependence upon its parts, causes, and conditions. Some may argue that *book* is simply its assembled collection of parts. However, those parts and/or collection of parts are, in their own right, also empty and exist in dependence upon their own parts, and those parts dependent on their own parts, and so forth. Additionally, *book* requires more than its collections of parts to exist; it also necessarily requires a mind to: 1) validate it, 2) determine and perceive those assorted parts to be a unique object, and 3) impute its function—for only a mind can recognize that a book is an object meant to be read. Only a mind has the ability to distinguish the object (the collection of assembled parts) on the table as a book and not simply a paperweight, or any other object.



<u>Parts of our book</u>	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Two covers
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Many sheets of paper
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Ink
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Binding
<input type="checkbox"/>	
<input type="checkbox"/>	

*However,
No item "book" on our list.*

Again, to be very clear, when asserting that phenomena exist nominally, merely by label and concept, this doesn't imply that only labels exist. When I pick up a book, clearly I'm picking up more than a linguistic term. I'm picking up that which the label *book* is imputed in dependence upon. Let's again use our previous analogy of the internet. As mentioned earlier, the internet is made up of many individual computers from around the world, with no one computer that is the internet. The internet clearly exists: you can get online, check your email, read the news, but *internet* is not inherently existent; there is no aspect one can point to and say *this is internet*. Internet is empty of any inherent essential essence and exists merely as an imputed concept and label, imputed in dependence upon countless individual computers—computers which in turn exist only through dependence upon their own labels and parts.

Within Tibetan monasteries, emptiness is explained by way of negation, in the same way we previously explained nirvana by way of negation. Where nirvana is the absence of afflictions in the mind, emptiness is the absence of inherent existence of phenomena. Again, it's important to understand that the concept of emptiness doesn't pertain to whether or not phenomena exist, but instead to *how* phenomena exist—their true manner of existence. When understood correctly, one sees that the concept of emptiness actually affirms the existence of phenomena, for, after all, to be empty is always to be empty of something. In other words, emptiness is a condition of something existing, not the negation of its existence.

"We do not say that, 'because things are empty they do not exist'; we say that, 'because things exist they are empty.'" ~ A Prasangika Madhyamaka saying

Emptiness and Dependent origination

When asserting that phenomena are empty of inherent existence, we are conversely asserting that phenomena exist dependently, for emptiness actually defines dependent origination and dependent origination defines emptiness. Emptiness asserts that all phenomena exist dependently, and dependent origination asserts that all phenomena are empty of inherent exist-

ence. This dependent yet empty nature of phenomena is asserted by the Buddha as the true manner in which phenomena exist and the ultimate nature of reality.

"For Gelug, emptiness and dependent arising are synonymous. The concept of emptiness is incoherent unless it means dependent arising, and equally the concept of dependent arising is incoherent unless it means emptiness of intrinsic reality." ~ Sonam Thakchoe

*"There is not a single thing that does not arise interdependently.
Therefore there is not a single thing that is not emptiness." ~ Nagarjuna*

"The direct realization of emptiness is a direct realization of dependent origination; The direct realization of dependent origination is a direct realization of emptiness." ~ Tenzin Tharpa

Conceptual understanding vs. direct realization of emptiness

Understanding the Buddha's teachings, including emptiness, is achievable through two distinct ways of knowing: *conceptual understanding* and *direct realization*. A conceptual understanding is a common knowing gained through study, contemplation, and meditation, whereas a direct realization is a superior experiential knowing gained through firsthand experience that arises from—and is the fruition of—one's conceptual understanding. A direct realization is asserted as being beyond language and concept, inconceivable and inexpressible, a knowing beyond mere analytical knowledge or logical assertion, an experience said to cut the very roots of the ignorance which keeps us bound to samsara, and an experience that instantaneously transforms one's mind and view in extraordinary and profound ways. The direct realization of the Buddha's teachings and his model of the true nature of oneself and reality is the supreme goal of the Buddhist path.

*"The direct non-conceptual realization of emptiness is known as the actual refuge because it completely eliminates the root of cyclic existence and self-grasping ignorance."
~ Khensur Jampa Tegchok*

How would emptiness be perceived?

Many wonder what the actual perception of emptiness would actually look like when directly perceived by a superior being, often falsely assuming that the phenomenon being examined would simply vanish, which is wrong. It's important to understand that the concept of emptiness only negates one thing—the perception of inherent existence. It does not negate the phenomena or its appearance. Let's again use our book as an example. When perceiving the emptiness of the book, what one sees, perceives, or realizes is its interdependence, meaning that instead of seeing a single self-existent book, one sees its composite nature—its collection of pieces and parts—that which the label *book* is imputed in dependence upon, while also understanding the causes and conditions from which it arose, including the mind's role in labeling the phenomena, perceiving it, and interpreting the visual information being delivered to the eyes

and brain. In other words, one sees the ultimate true manner in which the book exists, as a composite and dependent phenomenon. With that said, because emptiness can be known (by way of negation), it is considered an *object of knowledge—a phenomenon that can be known*.

The potential that emptiness allows

When students first learn about emptiness and the assertion that the essence they have always presumed their world to possess is merely an illusion or mistaken view, they seem to experience a sadness or sense of loss, as if their world has somehow been diminished. But once they begin to understand the concept, the opposite starts to arise. They start to understand the freedom and vast potential that emptiness allows, for it is emptiness that facilitates change, interaction, and the potential for improvement.

“Emptiness itself acts like a cause for the flourishing of the world of multiplicity; all phenomena are in some sense manifestations of emptiness, a kind of a play that arises from the sphere of emptiness.” ~ The 14th Dalai Lama

Understanding emptiness is the first step in beginning to see through the delusion of the fixed solidity we falsely presume characterizes our lives and environment, a delusion that imprisons us to a rigid and problematic existence. For when we begin to understand emptiness, we slowly start to uncover the true illusion-like ethereal nature of ourselves and our environment. We begin to understand that we exist in a much more subtle and wondrous way. We discover that even our daily problems, obstacles, and hardships are equally empty and not nearly as immediate and substantial as we would otherwise believe them to be.

The emptiness of emptiness (Tib. *tongpa nyi tongpa nyi*)

There is no phenomena that is not empty. Even emptiness itself is empty, relying upon phenomena, as well as imputation by the mind, for its existence. This is referred to as the *emptiness of emptiness*. According to Nagarjuna,

“Those who mistakenly hold emptiness as a truly existent thing, are incurable, for them there is no antidote, for they have taken the antidote and used it as a poison.” ~ Nagarjuna

This means that the antidote for our delusions and suffering is the understanding of emptiness. But to mistakenly hold or reify emptiness to be a substantial thing, ground, entity, or anything other than the mere negation that it is, is to assimilate the antidote into our delusion, thereby turning emptiness into the very poison from which we hope to escape. For those who make this mistake, there is no liberation. With that said, because emptiness is a foundational aspect of all phenomena—that which makes existence and experiences possible—it is sometimes referred to as *the foundation of existence* or *foundation of reality*. However, it is crucial to understand that this is meant purely metaphorically.

For those having trouble comprehending the notion of emptiness, it often helps to contemplate emptiness through the related topic of dependent origination, in which one contemplates how all phenomena exist interdependently, lacking any unique essential essence, which of course is emptiness.

"When you have fully understood emptiness in terms of dependent origination, and you understand dependent origination in terms of emptiness, like being two sides of the same coin, when you have completely negated inherent existence, with no residue left behind, then your realization is complete." ~ His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama

Misunderstanding emptiness: the two extreme views of nihilism and absolutism

The Buddhist path, posited as the middle way between the extreme opposite wrong views of nihilism and absolutism, asserts that wrong views arising from ignorance and related afflictions are the forces that keep us bound within cyclic samsaric existence.

Nihilism (Skt. *uccheda drsti*; Tib. *che ta*): The term nihilism, used within its Buddhist context, pertains to a dangerous misunderstanding of the Buddha's teachings on emptiness, in which one mistakes emptiness as nothingness. People who have fallen into this wrong delusional view that nothing exists, also see concepts like virtue, goodness, honesty, compassion, and the Buddhist path itself as equally nonexistent and therefore inconsequential. Again, the view of emptiness doesn't dispute the existence of things; it simply clarifies the manner in which they exist.

"Emptiness wrongly grasped is like picking up a poisonous snake by the wrong end."
~ Nagarjuna

Note: When first beginning to realize the empty and essence-free nature of reality, it can initially feel a bit nihilistic, but soon one begins to notice that nothing has actually changed: lunch still needs to be prepared, clothes still need to be washed, and friends and family still have to be cared for. The only thing that has changed is that a great weight has been removed. The weight of the immediacy and exaggerated importance of each moment. One's life has simply become lighter.

Absolutism (Skt. *nitya drsti*; Tib. *takpe taba*): Also referred to as substantialism or eternalism; the view that beings and phenomena are inherently existent (the extreme opposite of nihilism); that phenomena possess an essential essence, often believed to be eternal.

The Buddha's Teachings of the Two Truths

"The reason we are in samsara is because we don't understand the two truths."
~ Geshe Tashi Tsering

The Buddha's teachings of the two truths (Skt. *dvasatya*; Tib. *denpa nyi*) is an analysis of the true nature of reality. An examination pertaining to the manner in which phenomena and reality exist, including the validity of one's perception of phenomena and reality. The term *truth* here refers not so much to correct fact as to accurate perception. The Buddha asserted that all phenomena and one's perception of phenomena can be understood within two distinct aspects, those of *conventional truth* and *ultimate truth*, sometimes referred to as *relative truth* and *absolute truth*. The importance and pervasion of the two truths within all aspects of Buddhist thought cannot be overstated. These two truths, besides being the very foundation of the Buddha's ontological model of the nature of reality, also serves as the foundation of the entire Buddhist path, and that which differentiates all of the unique traditions of Buddhist thought.

"Those who do not comprehend the distinction between the two truths, do not know the profound reality in the Buddha's teachings." ~ Nagarjuna

Conventional truth (Skt. *samvritisatya*; Tib. *kundzob denpa*): *Superficial or relative truth; one's common everyday perception of phenomena and reality, including characteristics perceived by the senses (color, shape, texture, thought, function, etc.); that which is true from a conventional or common viewpoint in which phenomena appear to exist inherently.* Conventional truth is often referred to as an obscured or concealed truth, implying a perception which is limited and/or partially mistaken. It is mistaken in the fact that the way phenomena are perceived and the way they ultimately exist are not the same. With that said, we can further define conventional truth as *that which is true for an obscured mind*.

Ultimate truth (Skt. *paramartha satya*; Tib. *dondam denpa*): *Absolute or final truth; the subtlest truth; the ultimate and accurate perception of the true nature of phenomena and reality uncovered through analysis or perceived directly by superior beings; that which is true from an ultimate viewpoint in which the emptiness of phenomena is unmistakably perceived.* Because of its unobscured and unconcealed nature, ultimate truth is posited as a non-deceptive truth, meaning that the way phenomena appear to the mind and the way they truly exist are the same. With that said, we can further define ultimate truth as *that which is true for an unobscured mind*. In other words, when analyzing the ultimate nature of something, that which is found is the phenomena's lack of inherent existence. The fact that all phenomena are empty of inherent existence is the ultimate truth and the ultimate reality.

Note: Many mistakenly see the two truths as synonymous with samsara and nirvana, this is a mistake. Although interrelated, samsara and nirvana pertain to the quality of one's mental state, while conventional and ultimate truth pertain to the nature and perception of phenomena and reality.

The two Truths



Book

Conventional truth

That which is true from a conventional viewpoint.
One's common everyday perception about phenomena, including characteristics perceived by the senses (color, shape, texture, function, etc.)

Ultimate truth

That which is true from an ultimate viewpoint.
Pertaining to the emptiness of phenomena; the subtlest and most accurate perception, uncovered under analysis or perceived directly by superior beings.

Note: Although the senses of ordinary beings (sight, hearing, smell, taste, touch, and mental sense) are invaluable to our daily lives, they are considered unreliable tools for discerning ultimately truth. This is due to the fact that there are many ways in which our senses can be deceived (mistaking a rope for a snake, mistaking a stranger for a friend, etc.). But most significant is the way our senses continuously misinterpret the nature of reality. With that said, Buddhism asserts that reason gained through analysis as the most reliable tool and the only way for ordinary beings to properly apprehend ultimate truth.

The Gelug school's unique view of the two truths

The Gelug School posits a unique view of the two truths not shared by the other schools of Tibetan Buddhism. The non-Gelug schools assert that ultimate truth, because of its non-deceptive nature, is superior to conventional truth, equating ultimate truth to wisdom and transcendence, and conventional truth to ignorance and bondage. They thereby posit ultimate truth as the one true truth and final goal of attainment, and conventional truth as a false truth and the world of illusion. However, according to the Gelug tradition, this is a deep misunderstanding of the Buddha's teachings. The Gelug school asserts that the two truths are inseparably interrelated, with both possessing equal status. This equal status is established and corroborated first through their obvious ontological equality—with each of the two truths being equally dependent on the other for their existence, for the ultimate can only be ascertained in relation to the conventional, similar to a reflection's dependence upon its object; and secondly, through their equal validity—each being equally true in relation to the specific type of mind that perceives them. Lastly, because of the fact that when not in the mode of analysis, conventional phenomena are undeniably existent.

An important distinction between, *ultimate truth* and that which is *ultimately true*

An often confusing but important point when understanding ultimate truth and emptiness is the subtle distinction between the two related terms of *ultimate truth* and *ultimately true*.

- **Ultimate truth:** Synonymous with emptiness; the true nature of reality; asserting that all phenomena lack inherent existence.
- **Ultimately true:** Synonymous with inherently existent; although there is an ultimate truth (emptiness) there is nothing that is ultimately true (inherently existent). Not even emptiness itself is ultimately true; popularly phrased as, *the ultimate truth is that nothing is ultimately true*.

Note: When pertaining to ultimate truth, the term *ultimate* can be a confusing term in English. In its modern usage, it is often seen as synonymous with actually, essentially, and really. However, in its Buddhist context, it is synonymous with true, absolute, supreme, definitive, and final.

Right and wrong conventional truth

Conventional truth can be additionally divided into right and wrong conventional truths. As mentioned earlier, the conventional can be defined as *that which is true for an obscured mind*, but within that obscured perception, the mind can be additionally mistaken. One example is a face in the mirror. Although one's face and the reflection of one's face in a mirror are both conventionally existent, one's face is considered conventionally right or correct, whereas the reflection of one's face, although being a real reflection and therefore conventionally existent, is considered conventionally wrong. Similarly, mirages, tricks upon the senses, and a magician's illusions are equally considered conventionally wrong. An interesting analogy that helps clarify this point is of three men in a temple looking at a painting of the Buddhist deity *Avalokiteshvara* on the wall. The first man says, *That's a painting of Manjushri*. The second man says, *No, you're mistaken, that's Avalokiteshvara*. The third man says, *You're both wrong; it's merely a painting on the wall*. The first man in this analogy is conventionally wrong, the second man is conventionally right, while the third man points out the fact that both of these conventional views are deceptive, for the way the image appears and the way it truly exists is not the same.

Further clarifying the two truths

One of the most profound quotes of the Buddha, taken from his *Heart Sutra*, that helps illustrate the equal and interrelated nature of the ultimate and conventional truths:

*"Form is emptiness; emptiness is form,
form is no other than emptiness; emptiness is also not other than form."*
~ The Buddha

This legendary quote beautifully incorporates the last few topics we have discussed, those of dependent origination, emptiness, and the two truths. Here, *form* is the conventional and *emptiness* the ultimate. The first line, *form is emptiness*, asserts that form is ultimately empty of inherent existence or any essential essence, while *emptiness is form* asserts that emptiness does not have a separate identity apart from form. Again, emptiness can be seen as existing similar to a reflection that's dependent upon its object for its existence. All phenomena consist of, and are inseparable from, these two aspects of the conventional entity and its ultimate emptiness.

"When appearance dispels the extreme of existence, and emptiness dispels the extreme of nonexistence, and you understand how emptiness arises as cause and effect, you will never be captivated by views grasping at extremes." ~ Tsongkhapa

Conventional and ultimate language

When expressing these two truths, we can talk about phenomena in either common everyday language or in language corresponding to a deeper analysis.

Conventional language: Everyday language used to communicate easily and efficiently; common language that is perfectly acceptable when talking about everyday life. (e.g., *I picked up the book*).

Ultimate language: Precise analytical language used to express views pertaining to the true nature of phenomena and reality. (e.g., *I picked up that which "book" is imputed in dependence upon*).

The two natures: a unique feature of the Gelug School

Again, the Gelug School posits a unique view of the two truths, a difference that culminates in the concept of the *two natures*. While all schools of Tibetan Buddhism assert the two truths, only the Gelug posits the two natures. The two natures may be the single most distinguishing characteristic of Lama Tsongkhapa's unique presentation of the nature of reality. As shared previously, all schools of Tibetan Buddhism assert the two truths as dual *subjective* aspects about phenomena. However, the Gelug alone asserts that in addition to the two truths, phenomena themselves possess dual *objective* aspects, aspects or natures of appearance that serve as an ontological and epistemological foundation for the two truths. For this reason, the two natures are asserted as those which define the two truths. Because the two truths mirror the two natures, distinctions between them are often difficult to grasp. The greatest difference lies in their objective and subjective characters, meaning that while the two truths pertain to how we subjectively perceive phenomena, the two natures pertain to objective aspects or characteristics of phenomena themselves. Conversely, non-Gelug schools reject the two natures and the notion of any objective aspects or characteristics existing from the object's side.

The two natures

The two natures assert that all phenomena, internal or external, conventional or ultimate, possess and exhibit two distinct objective aspects or natures through which they are known:

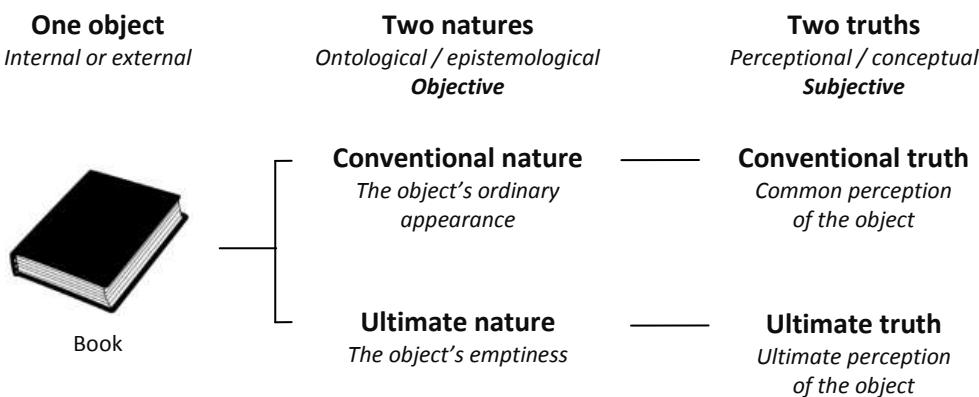
a conventional nature and an ultimate nature. However, with that said, it's important to remember that both of these natures are asserted as lacking any inherent existence or independent essence.

Conventional nature (Tib. *nekab kyi neluk*): *The objective and common everyday aspects of phenomena perceived by the senses, both internal/conceptual and external/empirical, (color, shape, texture, thought, function, etc.).* Conventional nature serves as a framework within which language, concepts, logic, and conventions of the world operate. And like conventional truth, conventional nature's mode of appearance is deceptive and inconsistent with its true mode of existence.

Ultimate nature (Tib. *nelug thar thug*): *The objective yet empty aspect of phenomena; their lack of inherent existence.* Like ultimate truth, the mode of appearance of ultimate nature is non-deceptive and consistent with its true mode of existence.

"Every empirical given object of knowledge consists of dual natures that form the objective basis for the two truths, with both emptiness and the phenomena qualifying as objective." ~ Sonam Thakchoe

The two natures and two truths



Ultimate vs. conventional existence

When we talk about ultimate and conventional truth or nature we are talking about two aspects or characteristics of any single phenomenon, either internal or external. We are not talking about two ways in which phenomena exist. For there is only one way for any phenomenon to exist, and that is conventionally. Therefore, within this context, ultimate truth can be seen as

merely a critique of conventional existence. Conventionally, existence is validated through three criteria:

1. It must be familiar to the world's convention (verified by a second party).
2. It must not be invalidated by the world's convention (invalidated by a second party).
3. It must also not be invalidated through ultimate analysis.

“While nothing exists ultimately [inherently] all phenomena including emptiness exist conventionally. If something exists, it exists conventionally. That is the only type of existence there is.” ~ Khensur Jampa Tegchok

CHAPTER THREE: The Buddha's Teaching on No-Self

No-Self

"To study Buddhism is to study oneself." ~ Dzongsar Khyentse Rinpoche

The Buddha's teaching on *no-self* (Skt. *anatman*; Tib. *dakme*) is the single most unique aspect of his teachings and that which clearly distinguishes it from all other forms of Indian thought. This topic, although potentially one of the most challenging aspects of the Buddha's teachings to fully understand, is clearly the most important pertaining to the attainment of liberation. The Buddha taught a radical view of what constitutes a person, positing the individual not as a static autonomous entity, but as a *dynamic process* in a state of constant change. The Buddha's teaching on no-self, within the cultural context in which it was originally taught, had two clear objectives: first, to clarify what a person is and how a person functions, and second, to refute the mistaken views held by the two prominent religious groups of the time, the Brahmans and Jains, both of whom shared a belief in an inherent and eternal self, soul, or spirit.

Self, soul, spirit, and liberation as asserted by the different Indian traditions

It's interesting that all of the indigenous Indian religions hinge their views about liberation upon the same aspect—that of understanding the self, spirit, or soul. In other words, liberation depends upon realizing who we are and what our true nature of existence is. Brahmanism posited that liberation is gained through the full realization of the *true self/spirit/soul*, through which liberation is seen as the merging of one's soul with *Brahma* or universal consciousness—a merging referred to as *moksha*. Jainism also asserts an inherently existent self/spirit/soul, believing that liberation lies in the purification and removal of all karma from the soul, at which point the soul is freed and can ascend to heaven realms and exist in a state of eternal bliss. Contrary to these views, Buddhism posits that liberation is achieved through the realization of the *lack* of any self/spirit/soul. This is based on the fact that, when properly analyzed, this self/spirit/soul cannot be found, meaning that sentient beings, like all phenomena, are empty of any essential essence. Therefore, Buddhism can be seen as a path of *self-transcendence*.

What Constitutes a Person

To begin to understand what the person is, Buddhism offers a reductionist analysis that deconstructs the totality of the person in order to create a suitable model that can reasonably illustrate what constitutes a sentient being. However, we must always keep in mind that when creating a model, one is always reducing, undervaluing, and fundamentally misrepresenting the true reality of the entity. It's important to understand that no presentation of a person can ever

truly exemplify the experience of human existence, and any assertion of what constitutes a person can only be a crude representation and mere shadow of the entity itself. For human existence and the mind remain as the most complex phenomenon known, a complexity that language can never fully articulate. With that said, Buddhism asserts that no one system or theory can ever fully capture the nuances, intricacies, and wonder of the human experience.

“There can be no complete theory of the phenomenal world.” ~ Nagarjuna

Elements of the person

In most cultures and religions, the person is believed to consist of three aspects: *a body*—the physical aspects of a person; *a mind*—the mental aspects of a person; and *a self/spirit/soul*—an essential essence which continues to exist after death. However, in Buddhism, where the idea of a self/spirit/soul is rejected, the person is asserted as consisting of only two aspects, or more appropriately, two collections of elements: one’s physical aspects (Skt. *rupa*; Tib. *suk*) and one’s mental aspects (Skt. *jnana*; Tib. *shepa*). The Buddha further divided these two collections into five, in order to further exemplify specific mental aspects of beings, referred to as the five aggregates within his teachings.

The Buddha’s Teachings on the Five Aggregates

The five aggregates (Skt. *pancaskandha*; Tib. *pungpo nga*) exemplify the psycho/physical aspects that all beings share. Here the term *aggregate* (Skt. *skandha*; Tib. *pungpo*) refers to *a collection or group*. The five aggregates are also known as the *five heaps*, because when the Buddha first taught them he *heaped up* various grains into five piles in order to illustrate each aggregate’s composite nature. These aggregates should not be seen as individual static containers in which their unique components reside, but instead as five dynamic and ever-changing processes, continuously arising and ceasing in every moment. It is through the continuous interaction and convergence of these collections of aggregates that our current experience of existence is made possible.

The Five Aggregates	
1) Form <i>Rupa</i> (Skt.; Tib. <i>suk</i>)	A being's physical body, including all sensory objects (sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and tactile objects).
2) Feeling <i>Vedana</i> (Skt.; Tib. <i>tsorwa</i>)	A mental factor that allows a main mind to experience objects as either pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral.
3) Discrimination <i>Samijna</i> (Skt.; Tib. <i>dushe</i>)	A mental factor that allows a mind to discern or identify objects and their attributes as being unique and distinct from others.
4) Compounding factors <i>Samskara</i> (Skt.; Tib. <i>duche</i>)	A "catch all" for all remaining mental factors and those which are neither form nor consciousness, including personality traits, intentions, habits, various emotions, and mental/karmic imprints.
5) Consciousness <i>Vijnana</i> (Skt.; Tib. <i>namshe</i>)	Synonymous with main minds; consisting of both sense consciousnesses and mental consciousness, possessing the capacity to think, cognize, conceptualize, contrast, and compare; including introspection, memory, and interpretation of the sense minds.

Note 1: Emotions exist throughout the various mental aggregates.

Note 2: Buddhas also possess these same five aggregates. However, the aggregates of a buddha are purified and do not arise out of ignorance. The aggregates of a buddha are referred to as *buddha bodies*, explained later in this text.

Note 3: Tibetan Buddhism asserts that no functional/impermanent phenomena fall outside of the classification of the five aggregates, although clearly, non-sentient phenomena would consist only of the form aggregate.

Buddhism's Unique Presentation of Consciousness and Mind

It's commonly believed that the mind and one's sense of self are created by and exist within the brain, with the mind/brain complex seen as a single autonomous element which orchestrates our lives. However, according to the Buddha, any mind matching this description cannot be found. The Buddha taught that our experience of existence instead relies upon the convergence of a range of different mental events which perceive, interpret, and/or create our experience of reality. With that said, it's important to understand that the Buddhist model of consciousness, mind, and their functions have very little in common with the Western model. In the Buddhist model, consciousness is posited as the broadest classification for a being's mental aspects, where mind, or more appropriately mind(s), is defined as any and all mental events within that consciousness (thoughts, intention, emotions, feelings, ideals, decisions, reactions, etc.)

Consciousness

Consciousness within Buddhism is defined as *that which is luminous and knowing*. *Luminous* here is defined as *the ability of consciousness to reveal, divulge, or illuminate*; while *knowing* is defined as *the ability of consciousness to perceive what appears to the senses and/or minds*. In other words, to be conscious is to be conscious of an object (internal or external). Consciousness is often exemplified by the three aspects of character, entity, and function.

1. The general *character* of consciousness is mere luminosity and knowing.
2. Its *entity* is mere luminosity, unobstructed by anything.
3. Its *function* is to know, based on the appearance of its object.

"As the primary feature of light is to illuminate, so consciousness is said to illuminate its objects. Just as in light there is no categorical distinction between the illumination and that which illuminates, so in consciousness there is no real difference between the process of knowing or cognition and that which knows or cognizes. In consciousness, as in light, there is a quality of illumination." ~ The 14th Dalai Lama

Although consciousness is indivisible, it can be understood differently according to its characteristics and function, distinguished here within the two aspects of general consciousness and specific consciousness.

- **General consciousness** (Skt. *jnana*; Tib. *shepa*): *Synonymous with awareness, knower, and primordial consciousness. General consciousness is the broadest and most encompassing term pertaining to any and all mental elements or events*. Buddhism asserts general consciousness as a distinct stream of mental awareness that serves as the basis for one's capacity for subjective experience, as well as the basis for one's unique will or agent of choice; a raw knowing without conceptual overlay, unspecified to any space or particular moment or temporal stage of existence. Buddhism asserts general consciousness as reflexive and instinctual, lacking volition or intention, being neither linguistic nor conceptual; a beginningless and endless entity of knowing whose very nature is that of mere experience.
- **Specific consciousness** (Skt. *vijnana*; Tib. *namshe*): *Synonymous with main minds. Specific consciousness is one's common everyday consciousness and the aspect of consciousness pertaining to the fifth aggregate, consisting of both sense consciousnesses and a mental consciousness—possessing the capacity to think, cognize, conceptualize, contrast and compare; including introspection, memory, and recognition*. The mental consciousness is also that which interprets what appears to the sense consciousnesses.

Mind(s) (Skt. *citta*; Tib. *sem*): Within Buddhism, minds are broadly defined as *any mental or cognitive event* (perception, cognition, conceptualization, thinking, reasoning, thought, decisions, reactions, etc.). Therefore, according to this broad definition, there can be hundreds of types of minds. Commonly the term *mind* (singular) is used when referring to mental or cognitive events within a single lifetime (similar to the Western usage of the term) whereas *consciousness* commonly pertains to the force behind those processes, and that which underlies all lifetimes.

"In general, the mind can be defined as a non-physical entity that has the nature of mere experience." ~ The 14th Dalai Lama

"The mental activity of experiencing life is what Buddhism means by mind."
~ Dr. Alexander Berzin

Main minds and mental factors

In order to illustrate its various functions, minds are categorized into *six main minds* and *fifty-one mental factors*. The main minds and mental factors encompass one's intellectual and rational aspects as well as one's emotional and intuitive aspects (both thinking and feeling). It's important to remember that these various divisions are merely for the sake of explanation—for any mind or mental factor is a consciousness, is an awareness, is a knower.

The six main minds

Main minds (Skt.) *citta*; Tib. *tso sem*): synonymous with specific consciousness or divided consciousness. The six main minds consist of five *sense main minds* and one *mental main mind*. The five sense main minds are direct sense perceivers possessing the ability to link one's external sphere of sensory activity with one's internal sphere of perception, while the one mental main mind is a direct mental perceiver possessing the ability to cognize, conceptualize, think, reason, etc. Although the five sense main minds have the ability to perceive in unison, the mental main mind can only focus on one event (single or single collection of internal or external stimuli) at one time. Of these six main minds, the mental main mind is clearly the most important, having the capacities listed above while also being the mental aspect that processes and interprets what the five sense minds experience.

The six main minds

1. Visual main mind - eye consciousness (unique knower of visual form)
2. Auditory main mind - ear consciousness (unique knower of sounds)
3. Olfactory main mind - nose consciousness (unique knower of smells)
4. Gustatory main mind - tongue consciousness (unique knower of tastes)
5. Tactile main mind - body consciousness (unique knower of tactile sensations)
6. Mental main mind – mental consciousness (unique knower of mental senses both perceptual and conceptual; possessing the ability to think, cognize, conceptualize and know the above sense minds)

Mental factors (Skt. *chaitasika dharma*; Tib. *semlay jungwa chö*): Literally, *phenomena arise from the mind*. Mental factors are aspects of the main minds which function in apprehending attributes or characteristics of phenomena while also possessing the ability to condition, influence, and/or color the minds. This means, where the main minds are understood as *knowers* of the general phenomenon itself, mental factors—which accompany all main minds—differentiate features and aspects of phenomena, affecting the manner in which the mind apprehends and relates to phenomena and one's environment. For instance, the mental factor *desire* is merely the aspect of desire of a main mind. If we take the *visual main mind* as an example, one's eye consciousness first takes in the visual experience as a whole, but it's the mental factors, like desire, that shapes our apprehension of that visual experience—deeming it desirable, undesirable, or neutral. This may include the exaggeration or distortion of one's perceptions in which we perceive things as more desirable than they truly are. Additionally, it's the mental factors that make up one's personality, including traits, emotions, intentions, habits, responses, etc. This personality acts as a lens through which we interpret the world. The transformation of these mental factors is the primary focus of the Buddhist path, because it's through the lens of the mental factors that one's intentions are forged and one's choices are decided. These intentions and choices lead to the formation of new karma and karmic imprints, imprints that not only shape one's mental factors further but also condition and color one's entire continuum.

"We don't so much perceive things, as much as perceive what we think about things. It's the mind that rules, but it is the mental factors that are the most powerful influence in our daily lives." ~ Geshe Tashi Tsering

Generally there are fifty-one mental factors asserted, which are divided into six categories.

1. **Omnipresent:** 5 factors of contact, discrimination, feeling, intention, and attention.
2. **Determining:** 5 factors of aspiration, belief, mindfulness, stabilization, and wisdom.
3. **Virtuous:** 11 factors that do not occur when afflictions are present: faith, shame, embarrassment, non-attachment, non-hatred, non-ignorance, effort, pliancy, equanimity, conscientiousness, and non-harmfulness.
4. **Root afflictions:** 6 factors of desire, anger, pride, ignorance, doubt, and afflictive view.
5. **Secondary afflictions:** 20 factors of belligerence, resentment, concealment, spite, jealousy, miserliness, deceit, dissimulation, haughtiness, harmfulness, non-shame, non-embarrassment, lethargy, excitement, non-faith, laziness, non-conscientiousness, forgetfulness, non-introspection, and distraction.
6. **Changeable:** 4 factors of sleep, contrition, investigation, and analysis.
Termed *changeable* because they can become either virtuous or non-virtuous.

Out of these six groups, the first, *omnipresent* or *always present* mental factors, are of particular importance. Arising in sequential order, these five mental factors accompany all main minds and work together in forming the basis of cognition.

- **Contact:** The initial meeting of mind and object
- **Discernment:** Identifies characteristics of the object
- **Feeling:** Experiences objects as either pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral
- **Intention:** That which focuses the mind upon the object
- **Attention:** Keeps the mind focused on the object

The origin of consciousness and the mind

Generally, Buddhism shares the same basic view of the brain held by the West, as a vital mental organ and nerve center that controls bodily functions. However, Buddhism does not accept: that the brain is the mind itself, that the brain is the cause of the mind, or that the mind abides within the brain. Instead, Buddhism asserts the mind to exist in a non-localized way within and around the body. As far as the origin of consciousness and mind is concerned, Buddhism posits it as causal, meaning that consciousness can only arise from a prior instance of consciousness, thereby asserting consciousness and mind as beginningless and endless.

Note: When talking about the mind, Westerners will typically point to their head, while Tibetans will point to their heart.

How the mind work

Again, mind can be broadly defined as *any mental or cognitive event*. Even thoughts themselves, which can only arise singularly, are considered instances of mind. The way the mind work is, as each new instance of mind arises from a prior instance of mind, it inherits the impressions and potentialities of its predecessor. On passing away, the mind then transmits its whole energy, recorded impressions, and new potentialities to its successor, thereby creating a continuous stream of mind or consciousness. This mind-stream should not be seen as individual moments strung together, but instead as an uninterrupted flowing stream of mental consciousness. It is like a braided river comprised of many different minds, all interacting and flowing in perfect union; an endless and seamless stream of minds, none of which ever arises or reoccurs identically to that which had come before.

Introspection - the illusion of dual awareness: *The watcher and that which is being watched.*

The process of introspection can be seen in the way we can give advice to ourselves or in the way we can observe the workings of our own minds. Buddhism asserts that this dual-like nature of the mind—in which two minds appear to be at work—is mere illusion. The mind cannot be both subject and object, because this would require two simultaneous mental events, and since the mind cannot apprehend two simultaneous mental events at one time, it therefore lacks the ability to observe itself. Instead, Buddhism posits the mechanism of introspection as the mind inspecting a snapshot or impression of itself from a moment ago.

Different levels of the minds and body

According to the tantric teachings, minds and body exist within three degrees of subtlety:

1. **Gross minds and body** (Tib. *lü sem rakpa*): One's ordinary physical and mental aggregates. These gross minds and body dissolve at death.
2. **Subtle minds and body** (Tib. *lü sem tamo*): Often referred to as the *wisdom body* or *light body*; subtle aspects of one's minds and body during dreams, deep states of meditation, and at the time of death. Superior beings who have control over these subtle minds and body are said to possess the ability to travel to other realms. The subtle minds and body also pertains to the system of chakras and energy channels. These subtle minds and body also dissolve at death.
3. **Very subtle minds and body** (Tib. *lü sem shintu tamo*): Also known as *clear-light mind*. At this subtlest level, *body* refers to very subtle winds (Tib. *lung*) upon which the very subtle minds ride. It's said that at this very subtle level, minds and body are not substantially different. These very subtle minds and body are beginningless and endless and at death do not dissolve but transmigrate into one's next lifetime.

Tibetan Buddhism's Unique Presentation of Person

In Buddhism, *person* (Skt. *pudgala*; Tib. *gangsak*) is synonymous with being, sentient being, "I", mere "I", individual, entity, experiencer, and agent. These terms generally pertain to all beings, from a Buddha to the smallest of insects. *Conventionally*, Buddhism shares the same common view of the person that we all assume. It's only through deeper ultimate analysis that the Buddha's radical view of what constitutes a person becomes apparent.

The conventional model of person

Generally the conventional model of person is seen as the collection of one's mind, body, karma, and continuum. The person is seen as the possessor of one's name, personality, and emotions, and the agent of one's thoughts, intentions, and actions. The person is that which seeks happiness and avoids suffering; succeeds and fails; and the individual that is born, grows old, and dies. Within Buddhism this conventional model of person is not in dispute. Buddhism accepts this conventional model as being true from a common everyday viewpoint. This conventional model is functional and essential in facilitating basic communication and interaction with one's environment.

The ultimate model of person

According to the Buddha, *ultimately*, when seen through analysis, the person exists in a manner much different than commonly conceived. From the ultimate viewpoint, the person, like all

phenomena, is empty of inherent existence or essential essence, and instead exists merely through imputation in dependence upon causes, conditions, and parts. The Buddha asserted the person not as a static autonomous entity, but as a *dynamic process* in a state of constant change, existing in an illusion-like ethereal manner. According to the Buddha, the person, when seen through analysis, is merely one's subjective identity, or the subjective narrative *me* pertaining to the innate, natural, and instinctual thought *I am*, which in the West would be referred to as one's *sense of self*, or one's *self-awareness*. The Buddha asserted the person as merely the conceptualization of one's personal subjectivity within any given experience, both conceptually and perceptually. Person is a concept and label that conceptually unifies one's mental and physical aggregates, along with one's current moment to moment experiences of the past, present, and projected future, creating an impression of a single autonomous entity and life which flows from past to future. It is in dependence upon this concept of person that we then impute the conventional labels *me* and *mine*. These conventional labels are then used when referring to one's mental and physical aggregates, along with the experiences, feelings, sensations, thoughts, and actions pertaining by those aggregates, (e.g., my mind, my body, my experiences, my feelings).

Understanding person as mere identity

To some, the assertion that person exists as mere identity may be disheartening, seeming tenuous and unsubstantial. However, when properly understood, this assertion actually posits identity as very significant, and very real. In this understanding, identity (person) possesses the ability to engage deeply with and affect profound change within its environment. In fact, identity is seen as both the most benevolent and potentially the most dangerous force known, because it is the interface that connects one's mind and body with one's environment/experience; an interface that facilitates and makes action possible.

"The fact that a substantially existent agent cannot be found does not mean that that person or agent doesn't exist at all; they exist imputedly and effectively." ~ Tsongkhapa

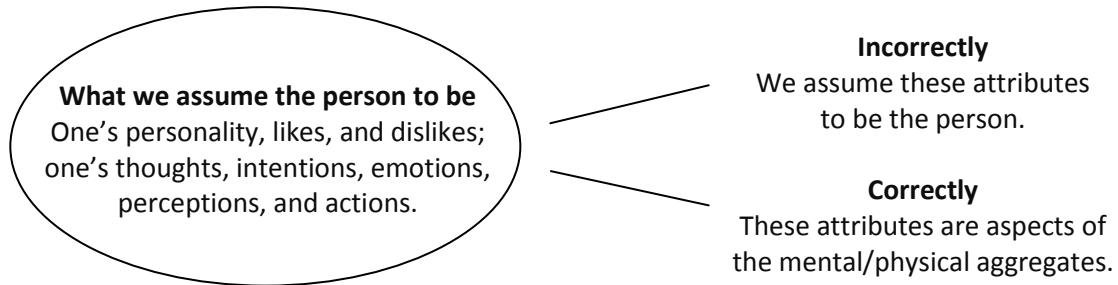
Person as an imputed narrative

An easy way of understanding the Buddhist presentation of *person* is as an imputed narrative, similar to a story that we create and continuously project. Every time we use the term *I*, *me*, or *mine*, we are actively imputing the person upon the aggregates. This act of imputation is like writing a character into a book, for the person or identity exists similar to a story that we are always actively writing. As a subjective narrative, person functions as an interface, allowing us to discern and make sense of our personal experiences as a unique whole.

What exactly is the person: a question of demarcation

All of this talk about what is and what is not the person merely pertains to a technical demarcation of where the concept *person* ends and the qualities of one's mental and physical aggregates begins. The Buddha asserted that the qualities commonly attributed to the person are actually attributes of the aggregates.

Person vs. the aggregates: A subtle line of demarcation



Understanding the person as a process

Conventionally, we assume ourselves to be relatively the same moment to moment and day to day. However, when seen through analysis, it's clear that we are constantly changing and at no time are ever quite the same, similar to a flowing river. For how can we believe that minds that are a dynamic process in constant change to be the same minds at every changing moment; and how can we believe that a body that is a dynamic process in constant change to be the same body at every changing moment; and therefore how can we believe that the person which is imputed in dependence upon these two dynamic processes of mind and body to be the same person at every changing moment? This is not even to mention the fact that our environment and other beings are continuously active in defining and redefining who we are at any given moment. A favorite quote of mine that exemplifies this idea is from the Greek philosopher *Heraclitus*:

"No man ever steps into the same river twice, for it's not the same river, and he's not the same man." ~ Heraclitus

Another analogy on this topic from ancient Greek philosophy is entitled *Ship of Theseus*.

If one has a boat made of planks and one of the planks on the boat breaks and you replace it, then later another plank breaks and you replace that as well, and this goes on until all the original planks have been replaced, can one say it is still the same boat?

The paradox of this story has proponents on both sides of the question. However, the Buddhist view is that *boat*, like all phenomena, exists nominally—imputed in dependence upon a continuously changing collection of dependent phenomena, real only in name and concept.

Fun with language

Speaking in a technically accurate manner in accordance with ultimate reality.

Conventional language: *Hi, I'm John.*

Ultimate language: *Greetings, these dynamic ever-changing processes are imputed with the label John.*

Conventional language: *That's my book.*

Ultimate language: *Those parts commonly imputed with the label book, have possession imputed upon them by these dynamic ever-changing processes imputed with the label me.*

Conventional language: *My friend John is a Buddhist.*

Ultimate language: *These dynamic processes imputed with the label me, impute a closer than usual interrelational possession with the dynamic processes imputed with the label John, who is the follower of an ideology imputed with the label Buddhism.*

Further Understanding Person

Person (Skt. *pudgala*; Tib. *gangsak*), technically referred to as the *mere I*, can be further understood within three aspects: the general person, the specific person, and the false self. The term *mere*, in *mere I*, refers to *merely imputed by name and concept*, asserting that *person* exists nominally as a mental label and conceptual designation.

- **General person** / General mere I (Tib. *gangsak chi tsampa*).

The term *general person* refers to one's *general subjective identity throughout all life-times*. The general person is the object of one's general consciousness when not focusing on any particular temporal stage or lifetime. Existing as a conceptual imputation, the general person is inseparable from the general consciousness, with both being beginningless and endless. The general person serves as the basis for one's continuity of rebirths and is the repository for one's long-term karmic and mental imprints and memories. When purified, the general person becomes the omniscient mind of a Buddha.

- **Specific person** / Specific mere I (Tib. *gangsak chedacpa*).

The term *specific person* refers to one's *specific identity (subjective and objective) within a single lifetime*. It is a mere construct imputed by the general person in dependence upon one's mental and physical aggregates. The specific person is inseparable from the specific consciousnesses. Collectively, the specific person can be understood as an instance or single temporal span of the general person, and therefore not significantly different. The specific person exists as a conceptual imputation and is the aspect of the individual—along with the gross aggregates—that is born and dies. This specific person is one's interface with the world, which relates to time, space, events, phenomena, and other beings. It is an interface that simplifies one's existence by reducing one's experience of reality into usable labels and concepts. The specific person is the creator of karma, that which experiences its results, and that which is continuously reborn into samsara until attaining liberation. It is one's everyday identity that encompasses one's name, gender, race, occupation, views, etc. It is the one who likes pizza, falls in love, goes to work, and cares for the kids. The specific person and specific consciousness are also the repository for temporary karmic and mental imprints, and memories.

Note: The common distinction between the terms *general person* and *specific person* is understood within the context in which they are used. Often *person* used singularly pertains to the specific person, but when used in the phrase, *person through all lifetimes*, it pertains to the general person.

- **Self** (Skt. *atman*; Tib. *dag*): Synonymous with *false self or illusory self* (Tib. *gagcha dag*). According to Buddhism, the self is not an additional component, but instead an exaggerated imputation and mistaken view of the specific person, believing the specific person to exist inherently, independent from the aggregates. We mistakenly believe the person to exist in a more substantial and real way than it actually does, seeing it as an essential essence/self/spirit/soul, instead of the mere subjective identity that it truly is. The Buddha rejected any notion of an inherent self/spirit/soul, resulting in his famous doctrine of no-self (Skt. *anatman*; Tib. *dakme*) which asserts that although the false self intuitively feels substantially real, it is merely an illusion, and when examined properly, no self/spirit/soul can be found. In fact, at its core, our foundational ignorance is defined as, *the mistaken grasping at an inherent self*. Conversely, the antidote for this grasping is the direct realization of emptiness of phenomena and person, which cuts through the illusion of self and allows one to see themselves and the world as they truly exist. This realization forever frees one from suffering.

"When Buddhists reject the notion of self, it is the intrinsic reality of persons that is being denied." ~ Thupten Jinpa

"We conceive of a self-instituting "I" that is an exaggeration beyond what actually exists. We conceive an "I" that does not appear to be designated upon the aggregates; rather, it seems almost as if it is its own separate entity." ~ The 14th Dalai Lama

"Both the conventional person and the illusionary self are imputed, but the illusionary self is wrongly or mistakenly imputed. For the conventional person is not imputed through ignorance, whereas the illusionary self is." ~ Jeffery Hopkins

Note: In Buddhist texts, the terms *person* and *self* are often used interchangeably. However, in recent years, with the hope of clarifying some of the confusion pertaining to these terms, prominent scholars have chosen to assert the term *person* (Tib. *gangsak*) or *mere I* (Tib. *ngatsam*) as the definiendum of a sentient being's subjective identity, and to use the term *self* (Skt. *atman*; Tib. *dag*) as synonymous with *false self* (Tib. *gagcha dag*). This clarification was proposed by Prof. Jay Garfield during the 2015 Mind and Life Conference at Sera Jey Monastery, South India. In attendance were His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama, Thupten Jinpa, Venerable Matthieu Ricard, Roshi Joan Halifax, and Prof. John Dunne.

The person understood as an imputed being

To further understand the manner in which the person exists, we need to understand how person is imputed. Buddhism asserts that person is comprised of not one but multiple layers of imputation, which are founded upon the general consciousness that serves as its valid base, upon which the general person, specific person, and self are imputed.

The multiple layers of imputations of a sentient being

This chart begins at the bottom with general consciousness serving as its foundation, upon which each additional layer is then built or imputed.

Self Skt. <i>atman</i> Tib. <i>dag</i>	An exaggerated view of the specific person as existing inherently and independent from the aggregates.	Does not exist; mistakenly imputed in dependence upon the specific person.
Person / Mere I Skt. <i>pudgala</i> Tib. <i>gangsak</i> Object of the consciousness	Specific person / Specific mere I Tib. <i>gangsak chedacpa</i> : One's subjective and objective identity within any single lifetime. <i>Birth: the formation of the gross mental and physical aggregates</i>	An instance of the general person imputed in dependence upon the five aggregates—including the specific consciousness.
	General person / General mere I Tib. <i>gangsak chi tsampa</i> : One's subjective identity which serves as the base for one's recurring lifetimes.	Beginningless and endless. Imputed in dependence upon the general consciousness.
General consciousness Skt. <i>jnana</i> ; Tib. <i>shepa</i> Object possessor	One's innate stream of awareness unspecified to any space or particular moment or temporal stage of existence; a raw knowing without conceptual overlay; lacking any volition or intention.	Beginningless and endless

How suffering arises through the grasping at the self

Again, Buddhism posits that the root cause of our suffering and rebirth within samsaric existence is the ignorance that grasps at an inherent self. It's this belief in an inherent self that is the root of our problems, from which selfish and self-absorbed attitudes arise, trapping us within an I, me, mine mindset. According to Buddhism, this false self is created out of fear that arises in relation to the ethereal and transient nature in which we truly exist, a state in which we feel unsubstantial, isolated, and vulnerable. Because of this, we create an exaggerated projection of our substantiality and validity in an attempt to create a more real representation of ourselves and environment. For the more substantial we believe ourselves and our environment to be, the more stable, secure, and in control, we feel. It is through this exaggeration of the substantiality of the specific person that we mistakenly impute the self.

However, when exaggerating the substantiality and significance of ourselves, we unwittingly exaggerate the substantiality and significance of our problems, creating a sense of immediacy in our lives that simply doesn't exist. This further creates feelings of anxiety pertaining to a fear of

loss, and a need to protect ourselves, our possessions, and our identity. Paradoxically, the self, which was initially imputed to ease our fear of feeling unsubstantial, becomes the source of even greater suffering. However, through understanding selflessness, we begin to realize that the body and mind are not the person, and because person lacks any essential essence, person cannot be harmed or diminished. This is the freedom that comes from the clear understanding of the selflessness of person.

"Ordinary being's existence is plagued by a nagging sense of insufficiency and incompleteness, creating chronic anxiety and leading to greed, desire, and relentless craving for pleasure, wealth, power, and fame, all as a means to satisfy the need for self-security; thus resulting in hatred, selfishness, and violence. To compensate for this feeling of insufficiency, we exaggerate the self to be substantial, self-subsistent, isolated units, with an immutable essence; thus through this exaggeration, the agent becomes the victim of his own ignorance and misconceptions." ~ Sonam Thakchoe

The self, self-image, and suffering

The self is a carefully created self-image that needs to be continuously nurtured, maintained, and protected in order to exist. This self-image is not only held within one's own mind but also continuously propagated, nurtured, maintained, and protected in the minds of others. Suffering arises when we feel that our carefully cultivated self-image is threatened, challenged, or criticized, or when we discover that it has deteriorated, been devalued, or exposed as unauthentic in the minds of others. Learning to watch and to become familiar with this affliction is the first step in gaining freedom from it. The ultimate antidote, again, is the understanding of the selflessness of person.

The Dalai Lama on the person and self

His Holiness shares a wonderful story, telling, *When I was about thirty-five years old, I was reflecting on the meaning of a passage by Lama Tsongkhapa about how the "I" cannot be found either within or separate from the mind-body complex and how the "I" depends for its existence on conceptuality. The passage read:*

'A coiled rope's speckled color and coiled form are similar to those of a snake, and when the rope is perceived in a dim area, the thought arises, *this is a snake*. As for the rope, at that time when it is seen to be a snake, the collection and parts of the rope are not even in the slightest way a snake. Therefore, that snake is merely set up by conceptuality. In the same way, when the thought "I" arises in dependence upon mind and body, nothing within mind and body - neither the collection that is a continuum of earlier and later moments, nor the collection of the parts at one time, nor the separate parts, nor the continuum of any of the

separate parts—is in even the slightest way the “I”. Also, there is not even the slightest something that is a different entity from mind and body that is apprehendable as the “I”. Consequently, the “I” is merely set up by conceptuality in dependence upon mind and body; it is not established by way of its own entity.¹

Suddenly, it was as if lightning moved through my chest. I was so awestruck that, over the next few weeks, whenever I saw people, they seemed like a magician’s illusions in that they appeared to inherently exist but I knew that they actually did not. This is when I began to understand that it is truly possible to stop the process of creating destructive emotions by no longer assenting to the way “I” and other phenomena appear to exist. Every morning I meditate on emptiness, and I recall that experience in order to bring it into the day’s activities. Just thinking or saying “I”, as in, I will do such-and-such, will often trigger that feeling. But still, I cannot claim full understanding of emptiness.”

Imprints, memory, and person

Understanding the nature of memory is vital to the understanding of how person exists. According to Buddhism, memory exists as a first-person narrative, meaning one doesn’t remember events but instead remembers their experience of events (e.g., *seeing* the car crash, *smelling* the bread, *hearing* the music, *feeling* the sorrow). Memory—one’s recollection of subjective experience—is one of the key aspects of the division between the general person and the specific person, while also being key in delineating the boundaries of one’s understanding of identity. For the limits or boundaries of our memories parallel the limits and boundaries of who we presume ourselves (the person) to be. We assume we only exist in this life because prior lives are not remembered. However, for a buddha who remembers all his previous lives, his past lives are correctly perceived as merely moments within his single beginningless and endless continuum. The repository for memory is twofold: the specific person—that serves as the repository of temporary memories pertaining to one’s current lifetime, and the general person—that serves as the repository of constant memories pertaining to one’s continuum of all lifetimes.

The illusion of possession

Possession, according to Buddhism, although being a practical and necessary concept, is asserted as merely a conventional construct lacking any true validity, whether it’s the ownership of a book, possession of a university degree, or owning one’s feeling, thoughts, and experiences. *Ultimately*, the assertion that any phenomenon can possess another is mistaken, because the concept of possession necessarily requires an ontological superiority by the possessor over its object, and since Buddhism asserts all phenomena as equally empty, this superiority cannot exist. With that said, there is no problem using conventional language pertaining to possession in our daily lives (e.g., my body, my thoughts, my experiences, my karma, my book, etc.), for it

would be difficult to communicate without the notion of possession. It's only within deep analysis that the illusionary nature of possession becomes clear and relevant.

The person is not a possessor

Commonly and conventionally, person is presumed as the possessor of one's mental and physical aggregates as well as any attributes of the two. However, *ultimately*, person, because of being nominally existent, lacks the ontological superiority required to be a possessor. The person and one's mental and physical aggregates merely share a common unique continuum, a continuum in which no one element possesses another, not even the continuum itself. One's continuum should not be seen as a type of container, for it too is merely a label and concept that encompasses and unifies one's various elements. One's continuum is merely the mutual karmic interdependence that these elements share, a karmic interdependence that binds and holds these elements together. In other words, *ultimately* there is no possession between one's consciousness, mental or physical aggregates, emotions, feelings, perceptions, or experiences. All of these elements merely share a unique unifying karmic relationship. This can be analogized to a train filled with passengers, in which, although the train and passengers share the same journey and destination, no one aspect possesses another: the passengers do not possess the train, nor does the train possess the passengers, and additionally neither possesses the train track. The three are unified merely through imputation, karma, and cause and effect.

- There is a continuum, but it does not possess its instances, moments, or elements
- There is a consciousness, but it does not possess its instances or moments
- There is a person, but it doesn't possess the aggregates it's imputed in dependence upon
- There is an experiencer, but it does not possess those experiences
- There is an agent, but it does not possess its actions or results
- There is a creator of karma, but it does not possess its karma
- There is a perceiver of emotions, but it does not possess those emotions

"The five aggregates belong to causes and conditions. If they belong to causes and conditions, they do not belong to oneself or others. If they do not belong to oneself or other, they have no owner. If they have no owner, there is no one who grasps them. If there is no grasping, there is no contention, and non-contention is the practice of religious devotees. Just as a hand moving in empty space touches no object and meets no obstacles, so the bodhisattvas who practice the equality of emptiness transcend the mundane world."

~ Attributed to Manjushri - From the Maharatnakuta Sutra

Note: Some try to equate the beginningless and endless general consciousness with the notion of a soul, claiming that the differences are mere semantics. This comparison is wrong. Within Buddhism the person is not consciousness, but instead is a unifying concept which exists in de-

pendence upon consciousness, an identity made manifest through the innate reflexive realization of one's existence. Conversely, consciousness is a raw awareness, energy, or life-force, not what one would commonly consider to be themselves.

The pitfall of reification

Within Buddhism, the term *reification* is defined as *considering abstract concepts to be substantially real; imputing solidity upon the ethereal, or exaggerating the substantiality of phenomena*. Our innate and instinctual need to reify our existence lies at the very heart of our ignorance. Our ignorance is driven to simplify, categorize, and quantify our experiences, with a thirst and need to validate our existence as substantial, significant, and real. With that said, we can then understand the Buddhist path as a method for undermining our habitual thirst to reify. There are three main aspects that we are habitually driven to reify: our environment, our existence, and our experience.

Reification of one's environment: Because of the complex and ethereal nature of our environment, the mind continuously tries to create a simplified and more substantial model that can be understood and navigated more easily. It's here where the mechanism of labeling begins. Again, labeling itself is not a problem, but when we begin to reify those labels by exaggerating their substantiality and validity, believing that they, and the objects they represent, are the same entity, a false model of reality is created. Previously, we asserted that our environment exists nominally through imputation. However, many would assume that at the subtlest level there must be a substantially real foundation that serves as an actual base or ground for phenomena. According to the Gelug school, there is no foundation, base, or ground of existence from which things are asserted to arise from. Some wrongly assert emptiness to be a ground of existence, which it is not. For when analyzed, the fact is that every time one arrives at a presumed base, one finds it can still be broken down into further composite collections and parts—including the general consciousness itself which can be broken down into moments or instances of consciousness.

Reification of one's existence: In the same manner, we are also driven to reify ourselves—the person. As mentioned earlier, because of the ethereal and illusion-like nature of our existence we feel anxiety that arises from a fear of being nonexistent. To compensate for this, we exaggerate the substantiality of our existence by falsely imputing a more real *me* (the self) giving us the sense that *yes, I do exist*. However, this only leads to greater suffering.

Reification of one's experience: It's not just ourselves and our environment we reify but also our experiences. We want our experiences to be more meaningful, important, and interesting than they are. We exaggerate the mysterious into mystical, coincidence into revelation,

ordinary into sacred, and project divinity upon mundane events, teachers, ideologies, and traditions. However, when this is understood and inverted, we begin to discover the sacredness that underlines all things.

Misconceptions pertaining to the Buddhist view of person

Understanding exactly what the person is can be difficult, for the Buddhist concept of person stands counterintuitive to what we commonly believe. Often, to help clarify the Buddha's teaching on person, it's helpful to understand what the person is asserted *not* to be.

The person is not...

- One's body...*although one experiences it*
- One's minds...*although one experiences them*
- One's collections of minds and body...*although not distinctly separate from them*
- One's consciousness or awareness...*although being the valid basis for the person*
- One's continuum...*although not distinctly separate from it*
- One's name or personality...*although one identifies with them*
- One's perceptions or experiences...*although one experiences them*
- One's sensations, feelings, or emotions...*although one experiences them*
- One's karma or memories...*although one experiences them*
- One's characteristics, traits, or character...*although one experiences them*

The person is not...

- The possessor of one's aggregates or consciousness...*although dependent upon them*
- That which recognizes internal/external phenomena...*although one experiences them*
- That which is afflicted or purified...*although one is affected by them*
- That which is engaged or disengaged...*although one is affected by them*
- That which recognizes...*although one experiences it*
- The performer of one's actions...*although one is affected by them*
- The experiencer...*although one is affected by them (the minds experience)*
- The possessor of views, intentions or motivations...*although one is affected by them*

A definitive illustration of the specific person

Although the five aggregates are adequate in illustrating the core aspects of sentient beings, they are not a complete representation of the person, for they don't take into account one's foundational general consciousness, the general person, or internal and external stimuli (experiences and temporal events without which the person would not exist). Therefore, the specific person can be further illustrated as a conceptual identity imputed in dependence upon one's general consciousness, mental/physical aggregates, and stream of internal/external stimuli.

This imputed identity serves to conceptually unify these elements into a single seamless experience of a unique life.

Specific person within a single lifetime

An imputed identity that conceptually unifies the elements of:

One's Consciousness General consciousness and general person <i>Beginningless/endless</i>	One's collections of Mental and physical aggregates Minds and mental factors and physical form	One's experience of Internal/external stimuli <i>The experiencer does not exist without the experience</i>
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In a nutshell: *The Buddhist assertion of person*

The person exists as a *subjective identity* imputed in dependence upon a unique stream of uninterrupted consciousness. Existence is experienced through reoccurring instances of this beginningless and endless imputed identity, with each instance representing a single lifetime. Each lifetime begins with the subjective identity "I" being imputed in dependence upon temporary psycho-physical aggregates. Existence is known as a continuous stream of experiences and temporal events within which one exists as an ever-changing process with the capacity of choice within three distinct directions: towards clarity (virtue and liberation), away from clarity (non-virtue, ignorance, and suffering), or neutrally abiding.

With that said, when we talk about, define, and/or illustrate the *person*, we must keep in mind that we are deeply undervaluing, reducing, and fundamentally misrepresenting the human experience. For language and concept simply lack the capacity to truly represent its subtle nuances and wonder. And as fervently as we try to understand ourselves within a reasonable conventional context, we reach a point where convention falls away and we are left with the abstract—that we exist as an experiential expression of the universe.

CHAPTER FOUR: Death and Rebirth

Rebirth

Rebirth according to the different Indian traditions

The concept of rebirth (Skt. *bhava*; Tib. *yangsi*), also referred to as reincarnation, is shared by most Indian religions. Generally, rebirth is the belief that after the physical death of the body, one's self, spirit, or soul continues on, taking rebirth into a new body and beginning a new life, changing bodies as if changing one's clothes. Most of these traditions share the belief that one can take rebirth in many different forms (human, animal, or various mystical beings) and into different realms (heaven realms, human realms, animal realms, or hell realms). These traditions share the belief that the process of rebirth operates in dependence upon one's karma, with virtuous karma leading to preferred rebirth, and non-virtuous karma leading to un-preferred rebirth. These traditions also share the belief in spiritual evolution, that through diligent effort, one's life condition can be improved, eventually even leading to the attaining of complete liberation from the cycle of samsaric rebirth.

Rebirth according to Buddhism

Contrary to the general assertion of rebirth by other traditions, Buddhism asserts that that which takes rebirth is not a self, spirit, or soul but instead merely one's very subtle minds or energy. Unlike the notion of rebirth of a self/spirit/soul which is believed to be the same identity which is reborn or goes to heaven, Buddhism posits that one's identity (specific person), along with one's gross and subtle aggregates, dissolves at death and is lost. Within each new lifetime a new and unique identity is appropriated. In one lifetime, you may be a Chinese fisherman, in another, an English school teacher. When asked, I often say, *it is merely the momentum or flavor of one's life that is reborn*. What is reborn is not that which you would commonly consider to be you (likes, dislikes, personality, etc.), for one's unique identity does not take rebirth. What is reborn is merely the most subtle aspects, energy, and/or residue of one's life. More technically, it is the very subtle minds and one's karmic and mental imprints that carry over into one's next rebirth.

Rebirth within Buddhism has two types:

- **Uncontrolled rebirth** - By ordinary beings.
- **Controlled rebirth** - By superior beings who can choose the conditions of their rebirth.

Tibetan Buddhism asserts that all beings except buddhas (and in some cases arhats) continue to take rebirth. However, where ordinary beings are trapped in a cycle of uncontrolled rebirth perpetuated by ignorance, delusions, afflictions, and karma, superior beings gain the ability to control the conditions of their rebirth, including their form, environment, parents, etc. But most

importantly they possess the ability to choose an environment that is conducive to their practice and advantageous to their goals.

An interesting view on the Buddhist presentation of the death process that I have always found fascinating was shared by Professor Robert Thurman, asserting, *There are no dead people in Buddhism*. In fact, for a Buddhist, the term *dead person* is considered an oxymoron. This coincides with the Buddha's assertion that death and birth are mere illusion and that each of our lives is merely an instance of our unborn and deathless consciousness. Meaning, death is merely a brief transition between lives, and loved ones who have passed on have since taken rebirth and are currently living new lives. In addition, it's often believed that because of our karmic connection to our loved ones, they are often reborn in proximity to our own rebirths.

"We have always, and will always, exist." ~ Prof. Robert Thurman

Benefits of embracing a multiple life view

Through embracing a multiple life view one's anxieties pertaining to one's current life—and in particular, fears about death—are greatly diminished. When one embraces the idea that they have lived countless lives before, then one also accepts that they have experienced aging, sickness, and death countless times before; consequently, these processes start to be seen as benign natural aspects of one's continuing existence. When we accept the fact that we have grown old countless times before, aging becomes acceptable. When we accept the fact that we have died countless times before, we no longer fear its onset. Therefore, existential anxieties pertaining to nonexistence and even the possible nonexistence of our world and/or humanity are greatly reduced, for Buddhism posits countless world systems into which beings are reborn. Furthermore, the multi life view brings with it the realization that we have lived in countless different forms (male, female, attractive, repulsive, healthy, and sick), and within countless different environments (affluent, poor, wondrous, desolate, peaceful, and violent). This includes the understanding that, at one time or another, we have committed every virtuous action and non-virtuous action imaginable. We have been both sinner and saint, having reached the heights of virtue and success, and the darkest of moral depravity and destitution. It's through this realization that we accept, learn to appreciate, and find the courage to work diligently within our current life situation. We begin to understand that by making wiser choices, we are not only benefiting our current life but are laying the foundation for success and happiness in all future lives as well.

Rebirth as a logical hypothesis

I'm sometimes asked by those who have trouble accepting the idea of rebirth if their doubts preclude them from engaging with Buddhism. The answer is no, a belief in rebirth is not required. Buddhist practitioners are free and openly encouraged to explore and follow their own

unique inquiry. Some Buddhist masters, including His Holiness, claim to remember past lives, but for those of us who do not, the concept of rebirth remains merely a hypothesis. With that said, many Buddhists and non-Buddhists alike hold the notion of rebirth simply as a logical assumption based on the fact that virtually everything we know in the universe possesses a cyclical nature. Galaxies, stars, and planets all move and exist cyclically in an endless cycle of formation, abiding, and destruction. Even our own world functions as a collection of cyclical systems (the water/rain cycle, cycle of seasons, and the food chain). Humanity, as a species, can be seen as existing cyclically through its reliance upon the continuous birth of new members for its survival. Within science the standard model asserts that within our universe, nothing, neither energy or mass, is ever gained or lost (referred to as *the law of conservation of energy* which states that the total energy of an isolated system remains constant). Thus, energy can neither be created nor destroyed; rather, it transforms from one form to another. Some may argue, *yes, the universe recycles everything, but things do not re-manifest as the same things. The debris of a destroyed planet may re-manifest, but it does not re-manifest as the same planet.* That's true, and similarly, Buddhism asserts that it is not the same being and often not even the same type of being that is reborn. Like matter and energy, it is only the most core aspect (energy) of a being that is reborn. As for myself, I hold the notion of rebirth as a realistic hypothesis, because in a cyclic universe in which everything is continuously recycled, it's hard to believe that the consciousness or energy of beings is the only thing that is not reprocessed—that the consciousness of beings is the one and only thing in the known universe that ceases.

"It is not more surprising to be born twice than once; everything in nature is resurrection."

~ Voltaire

Death and the death process

Buddhism possesses a unique view and understanding of death and the dying process. One could say that for Buddhists, all of one's diligent study, good-works, and practice are aimed towards—and subsequently culminate in—the moment of one's death. For Buddhists, one's death is the *big event* they have been preparing for their whole lives, which leads to the expression, *Buddhists die as professionals*—pointing out Buddhism's unique focus and extensive preparation pertaining to death. Another expression, *Buddhism is the path to living and dying well*, notes that through mastering death, one consequently masters life. The moment of death presents a unique opportunity for spiritual awakening that is rarely available at other times in our lives. It offers a unique clarity for those who have prepared themselves to recognize it. The Buddha himself claimed that death was his greatest teacher, because glimpsing one's mortality can provoke great insight into one's present life situation. For the person who is aware, the closer they

get to their death, the more clarity they gain concerning their life. One story from scriptures that shows the Buddha's great insight into death tells of a hysterical mother who came to the Buddha to beg him to bring life back to her dead child she still carried in her arms. The Buddha could see that the woman's mind was so distraught that any advice he would give would be ineffective, so instead he told the mother that he could indeed help. However, to do so he would require a handful of mustard seeds (common in India) from a house untouched by death. The mother thanked the Buddha and went out and began her search. However, although every house she encountered was plentiful in mustard seeds, when she enquired if anyone from the home had been lost to death, the response she received was the same: *oh yes, we have lost loved ones.* Through her search, although gaining no mustard seeds, she instead gained the knowledge that she was not alone in her grief, and that the suffering of death is universal, at which point she understood this lesson that the Buddha had given her and was able to accept her loss and put her child to rest.

The Stages of the Death Process: *The eight dissolutions* (Tib. *thim rim gye*).

Generally, Buddhism asserts that death has occurred when consciousness is separated from the physical body. From a scriptural perspective, there are three main reasons why death may occur. 1) We have exhausted the karmic potential to live in this life. 2) We don't have enough merit to gain the conditions to keep living. 3) A negative karma ripens to interfere with this life. Within the Tibetan tradition, the most comprehensive presentation of the death process is found in the tantric teachings. The tantras assert that death occurs when one's mental and physical aggregates can no longer act as a basis for consciousness.

Within Buddhism the process of dying is said to begin with the dissolution of the mental and physical aggregates. This dissolution process has eight general stages consisting of the dissolutions of the first four aggregates (form, feeling, discrimination, and compounding factors), followed by four subtle visionary stages (white vision, red vision, black vision, vacuity), culminating in an experience of clear luminosity referred to as the *clear light mind*. With the onset of the dying process, the winds or energies associated with the four elements begin to break down and deteriorate. One by one each element dissolves into the next, coinciding with the dissolution of the gross conceptual mind. This is followed by the dissolution of the four subtle visionary stages and the subtle mind. These eight dissolutions occur naturally and automatically during the death process of ordinary beings. However, for the trained practitioner this uniquely precious time can be used to gain liberation. The presentation of the eight dissolutions pertains to a natural death, not a sudden death where the process may occur too quickly to be perceived.

The first dissolution: *earth into water*

With the onset of the dying process, the winds/energies associated with the earth element—which is the aggregate of form—begin to break down and deteriorate. The first indication of this

dissolution is the deterioration of one's eye consciousness, experienced first as the loss of clarity and then as the loss of ability to open or close the eyes. Internally, there is the feeling of sinking and being buried under earth. Externally, the body becomes thin, loose, and loses its vitality and luster. At this point, the earth element begins to dissolve into the water element, creating a vision of shimmering water, like a desert mirage.

The second dissolution: *water into fire*

With the dissolution into the water element, the winds/energies associated with the water element—which is the aggregate of feeling—begin to break down and deteriorate. The first indication of this dissolution is that one may have trouble swallowing. Internally, one loses the ability to experience the three types of feelings (pleasure, pain, and neutral). Externally, the various bodily fluids begin to dry up (sweat, saliva, tears, urine), and the deterioration of one's hearing follows. At this point, the water element begins to dissolve into the fire element, creating a vision of swirling puffs of smoke.

The third dissolution: *fire into wind*

With the dissolution into the fire element, the winds/energies associated with the fire element—which is the aggregate of discrimination—begin to break down and deteriorate. The first indication of this dissolution is the body starting to lose its warmth. Internally, one can no longer discriminate between people. Externally, breathing speeds up, and while the exhalations remain strong, the inhalation becomes weak. This is followed by the deterioration of one's sense of smell. At this point, the fire element begins to dissolve into the wind element creating a vision of sparks or fireflies.

The fourth dissolution: *wind into consciousness*

With the dissolution into the wind element, the winds/energies associated with the wind element—which is the aggregate of compositional factors—begin to break down and deteriorate. The first indication of this dissolution is the mind's inability to remain focused upon objects and the loss of the ability of physical movement. Internally, one is no longer mindful of external worldly activities. Externally, breathing stops and no pulse is detectable. At this point the person would commonly be considered dead, however, according to Buddhism, death has not yet occurred. It is at this point that the wind element begins to dissolve, creating a vision of a dull dying flame. This marks the dissolution of the last of the four elements, including the dissolution of the gross conceptual mind. And although the ability to sustain the gross consciousness is lost, a subtle consciousness still remains.

The fifth dissolution: *consciousness into luminosity*

With the dissolution of the gross consciousness, all gross conceptuality ceases and only one's subtle consciousness remains. At this point in the process, the white drop from the father that initiated birth, which after conception remains at the crown of the head, begins to descend towards the heart, producing a vision of a radiant white sky.

The sixth dissolution: *luminosity into radiance*

Next, the red *drop* from the mother that initiated birth, which after conception remains at the level of the navel, begins to ascend towards the heart, producing a vision of a radiant red sky.

The seventh dissolution: *radiance into near-attainment*

Finally, these drops meet and merge at the heart, forming a drop enclosing our very subtle consciousness and winds/energies, producing a vision of a radiant black sky. At this point, one falls into unconsciousness. However, death has still not occurred.

The eighth dissolution: *near-attainment into clear light*

After some time—from a few moments up to a few days—the drop at the heart opens and one starts to become conscious again. Now, one experiences the pristine natural state of the mind referred to as the *clear light mind* (Tib. *ösel*) which is the subtlest level of mind, often called the root of consciousness. The clear light mind appears as a luminous, radiant, and transparent vacuity. In this state one feels very calm and peaceful, and extremely alert and aware in a multi-dimensional and multi-perspectival way. According to His Holiness, this is the most restful, restorative, energizing, and liberating state of the universe. For those who are trained, this luminous vacuity is understood to be emptiness itself, through which the practitioner is given the long-awaited opportunity to gain a direct realization of emptiness and thereby fully comprehend the true nature of oneself and reality. As long as the corpse is not disturbed, a trained practitioner can stay in this clear light experience for two or three days. Great tantric masters possess the ability to remain in this state for weeks. This state and practice is referred to as *clear light mediation* (Tib. *thukdam*). Outwardly, the sign of success of a master's clear light meditation begins in the days following the death of the physical body, if the body remains fresh—showing no signs of rigor mortis, decomposition, or unpleasant odor. This state may last for weeks. The completion of the clear light state is initiated through the force of one's karma, at which point one experiences the four subtle visionary stages (white vision, red vision, black vision, vacuity) experienced in the death process, but now in reverse order. With the beginning of this reverse process the very subtle mind becomes subtler and subtler until it eventually leaves the body. This is the moment of actual death. External signs that this clear light state is finished and death has finally occurred are that the red drop has exited through the nostril and the white drop has exited through the genital opening. The very subtle mind once freed from its physical limitations then travels to what Tibetan Buddhism refers to as the *bardo* (Tib.) or *intermediate state* where one's subtle mind continues to abide while awaiting the proper conditions for its subsequent rebirth.

The intermediate state (Skt. *antarabhava*; Tib. *bardo*): Literally, *transition; the state between death and the next rebirth*. Although found in all Mahayana traditions, the bardo teachings were greatly expounded upon in Tibet. The bardo teachings assert that at the time of death, as the gross mental and physical aggregates dissolve and the gross and subtle consciousness and conceptuality cease, the remaining very subtle mind is then freed of its physical limitations and is instantaneously reborn into the intermediate state. It is this initial entry into the intermediate state that constitutes the first moment of one's next lifetime and where one perceives the form

and senses that they will later be physically born as—depending on one's karmic propensities. One exists in the bardo as a dream body or subtle body of energy and may reside there from one to forty-nine days before conditions for a suitable rebirth are attained.

Human rebirth into the womb

Upon finding the proper conditions for rebirth, karma propels one to one's future parents who lie in sexual embrace. It's believed that if one feels desire towards the mother, one will be born male; if desiring the father, one will be born female. When one's consciousness enters the womb and into the fertilized egg, rebirth is said to have officially taken place. It is here in the womb that a new *specific person (mere I)* is imputed upon a new set of mental and physical aggregates and one's new life begins. This being an introductory text, a detailed presentation of the physical processes of gestation within the womb, as taught by Tibetan Buddhism, is not given. However, I would share that their early model of the process of maternity remarkably parallels today's current medical understanding.

The Twelve Links of Dependent Origination

The Buddha's teachings on the process of rebirth within cyclic existence

"What defines a Buddhist is the practice of non-violence, and the understanding and holding of the view of dependent origination." ~ The 14th Dalai Lama

The twelve links of dependent origination (Skt. *nidanas*; Tib. *dendel yenlak chunyi*) is the Buddha's model of the process and mechanism of cyclic samsaric existence, illustrating how the sequence of uncontrolled rebirth occurs. The twelve links are twelve interrelated aspects in which each link arises in dependence on the last. The term *link* is analogous to an unbroken chain of events; however, although illustrated as sequential, these links don't necessarily follow a strictly linear sequence and should be understood as operating not within a single lifetime but within multiple lives, with aspects within one lifetime influencing aspects within other lives. These twelve links can also illustrate different aspects within one's current life (career, marriage, addiction, etc.). Through understanding the twelve links, we see how one's ignorance and karma propel the individual through cyclic existence.

The Twelve Links of Dependent Origination as illustrated within three lifetimes of a single person.

- Life 1
 - 1. **Ignorance:** A foundational ignorance of the true nature of oneself and reality.
 - 2. **Karmic formations:** Strong actions performed under the influence of ignorance. (Specifically the formation of karma that leads to rebirth)
 - 3. **Consciousness:** A specific instance of consciousness, which immediately follows a specific karmic action and becomes the repository of the seed of that action.
 - 4. **Name and form:** Within the womb at the first instance of conception; the acquisition of one's mental and physical aggregates. Here, *name* refers to the mental aggregates and *form* to the aggregates of body.
 - 5. **Sense bases:** Within the womb; the beginning of the development of the sense organs.
 - 6. **Contact:** Beginning in the womb; the beginning of the functioning of the sense organs allowing contact to begin between the object, the sense organs, and the previous moment of consciousness.
- Life 2
 - 7. **Feeling:** Beginning in the womb; the emergence of discernment that recognizes and experiences objects to be pleasurable, painful, or neutral.
 - 8. **Craving:** Beginning immediately after *feeling* arises; craving for pleasurable experiences, to be separated from unpleasant experiences, and desire for existence in the higher realms. Craving is the force that activates karma and pertains specifically to craving that influences one's future rebirth.
 - 9. **Grasping:** At the time of death; the intensification of the above craving which activates *link #2* and strongly influences our next rebirth.
 - 10. **Existence:** At the time of death; the ripening of strong karma (*link #2*) during the last moment of consciousness before death, which is the immediate cause of the next life.
- Life 3
 - 11. **Rebirth:** Consciousness entering the womb at the first instance of conception.
 - 12. **Ageing and death:** Beginning in the womb; from the second moment of conception both aging and the potentiality for death begins, which inevitably leads to death itself.

The two aspects of the twelve links

The twelve links can be further understood and contemplated through the two aspects of *the afflicted forward progression*—which represents the process of samsaric rebirth, and *the purified forward progression*—which represents the process of gaining liberation from samsara.

The afflicted forward progression

Due to the condition of ignorance - karmic formations arise
Due to the condition of karmic formations - consciousness arises
Due to the condition of consciousness - name and form arise
Due to the condition of name and form - the sense bases arise
Due to the condition of the sense bases - contact arises
Due to the condition of contact - feelings arise
Due to the condition of feelings - craving arises
Due to the condition of craving - grasping arises
Due to the condition of grasping - samsaric existence arises
Due to the condition of samsaric existence - uncontrolled rebirth arises
Due to the condition of uncontrolled rebirth - aging and death arise

The purified forward progression

When ignorance ceases - karmic formations cease
When karmic formations cease - consciousness ceases
When consciousness ceases - name and form cease
When name and form cease - sense bases cease
When the sense bases cease - contact ceases
When contact ceases - feelings cease
When feelings cease - craving ceases
When craving ceases - grasping ceases
When grasping ceases - samsaric existence ceases
When samsaric existence ceases - uncontrolled rebirth ceases
When uncontrolled rebirth ceases - aging and death cease

CHAPTER FIVE: The True Nature of Reality

The True Nature of Reality According to Buddhism

*"Buddhas do not wash away negativities with water;
clear away beings' suffering with their hands;
or transfer their own knowledge to others;
they liberate by teaching the truth of reality."*

~ The Buddha

As shared earlier, what truly sets Buddhism apart from all other traditions is the Buddha's unique model of the nature of reality (Tib. *chö nyi*), a model that encompasses the various topics discussed thus far. Reality is considered to be subjective by all Buddhist traditions, for one's subjective identity (the person) and one's reality (one's subjective experience of existence) are inseparably intertwined and mutually dependent. This dependency is based on the fact that one's reality is created and continuously perceived through the first person narrative "I". Meaning that each being creates and perceives a reality that is uniquely their own. This reality is created, shaped, and continuously filtered through one's mental factors (one's likes and dislikes, desires and aversions, and hopes and fears). To repeat a previous quote by Geshe Tashi Tsering, *We don't so much perceive things, as much as perceive what we think about things.* In other words, our reality is a conceptual and conditioned approximation or reproduction of the world. Even a Buddha's reality is subjective, for all buddhas retain a unique identity. However, the subjective reality of a buddha is purified and said to be unmediated by intention or conceptual elaboration; it is an ineffable reality beyond the scope of conventional conceptualization. For ordinary practitioners, the work at hand is to cultivate a lessening of the habitual subjective filtering of one's mental factors and move ever closer to a more objective, open, and impartial view.

"Our existence and reality are created and fueled by our intentions, aspirations, and potentiality." ~ Tenzin Tharpa

What exactly is the criterion for reality?

On the debate ground within Gelug monasteries, valid reality is defined as *that which is true to a valid cognition*, meaning, that which is perceived accurately by a unmistaken mind. With that said, this accurate and unmistaken perception falls into two categories, the accurate and unmistaken perception of the conventional—pertaining to our everyday perceptions, and the accurate and unmistaken perception of the ultimate—pertaining to a deeper *ultimate reality* (emptiness) uncovered through analysis or perceived directly by superior beings. It's asserted that only a buddha has the ability to perceive both the conventional and ultimate simultaneously. Ordinary beings, whether they are focused on convention reality or ultimate reality, because each

is still subjective, and because they are in samsara, their perceptions of reality are necessarily mistaken. However, even a reality which is mistaken is still very real to that mind perceiving it, meaning that different beings can apprehend very different and very real realities. In this way, valid reality can be understood as *that which is unmistakably perceived by a mind in accordance with that mind's condition and karmic propensities.*

"Tibetan Buddhism asserts that reality is ethereal, and illusion like, similar to the performance of an illusionist or magician, the simple minded believe the magician's illusions to be real, the educated understand that it is an illusion, but can still enjoy the show."

~ Jeffry Hopkins

Is there an ultimate reality?

Of course; the Buddha's model of the true nature of reality that serves as the foundation of the Buddhist path is a model of ultimate reality. On the debate ground, ultimate reality is defined as *that which is perceived by a superior being's pristine wisdom*; a reality that is free from any and all distorted perceptions. True reality is that which is perceived by a mind that is free of ignorance, delusions, afflictions, and any and all conceptual or perceptual obstructions, although different subtle perceptions of ultimate reality can still exist due to the subjective quality of even the purest mind.

"We need to be aware of the reality that life is impermanent and empty of many of the things we assert it to be, while at the same time, we must be willing to dance with illusion, to play along, but to lose track of the reality is to become blind." ~ Dzongsar Khyentse Rinpoche

Dual and non-dual states

Many Buddhist traditions posit a presentation of reality based on a model of dual and non-dual states of reality, asserting ultimate reality as the non-dual union of subject and object, the conventional and ultimate, or even samsara and nirvana. Others posit the non-dual state as a middle way between existence and non-existence. However, the Gelug school asserts the dichotomy between subject and object—as long as it is free of misconception—as not a problem. In fact, the Gelug go as far as to claim that duality is actually a necessary component to any wisdom, asserting that no knowledge whatsoever is possible without the interaction between cognition and cognitive field (subject and object). Furthermore, the Gelug assert that the attainment of nondual knowledge does not require the establishment of a metaphysical unity between subject and object, for even the highest level of wisdom preserves duality and diversity.

Common Existential Questions

Existential questions have been at the forefront of the human experience from its earliest origins. The questions *who am I, why do I exist, or is there a purpose to life* have confounded humankind throughout the ages; these questions (or answers) serve as the very foundation of the various religious traditions. This thirst to understand who we are is embodied in the ancient Greek aphorism *know thyself* which equates true understanding of oneself to ultimate truth and wisdom, a notion shared by Buddhism. However, in Buddhism the importance of the question *who am I* is often supplanted by the question *what am I* for when one begins to understand how they truly exist, one realizes there is no one defining point in their linear existence that one could point to and say categorically, *that's me*. *Who I am* is whatever current causes, conditions, experiences, events, and one's mental/physical processes come together and manifest as at this current moment. *What I am* is defined as: *a unifying concept existing in dependence upon ever-changing mental/physical processes*. And as far as the question *why do I exist* is concerned, I found that this question is often misunderstood or misinterpreted by many Tibetan Buddhist masters, often being taken as, *what is the purpose of life*, about which various masters hold different views.

"I believe that the very purpose of life is to be happy. From the very core of our being, we desire contentment. In my own limited experience I have found that the more we care for the happiness of others, the greater is our own sense of well-being. Cultivating a close, warm-hearted feeling for others automatically puts the mind at ease. It helps remove whatever fears or insecurities we may have and gives us the strength to cope with any obstacles we encounter. It is the principal source of success in life. Since we are not solely material creatures, it is a mistake to place all our hopes for happiness on external development alone. The key is to develop inner peace." ~ The 14th Dalai Lama

It's important to understand that His Holiness is speaking not of a superficial mundane happiness, but of true happiness at an existential level, meaning that when people say they want to be rich, powerful, famous, loved, etc., they are saying that they believe these qualities will make them happy. Thus all of our sought-after worldly goals are merely attempts by us to attain true or authentic happiness. According to the Buddha, the purpose of life is to awaken.

"Liberation and the attainment of buddhahood is the one and only consummation of one's life." ~ the Buddha

But to get back to the question of *why do I exist*, the reason this question is misunderstood or misinterpreted by many Tibetan Buddhist masters is due to the fact that the existence of the

universe, phenomena, and beings is simply presumed by Buddhism. Enquiries like the Western philosophical axiom, *why do things exist instead of not exist*, aren't commonly entertained. The Buddhist presumption and acceptance of existent phenomena is usually where enquiry begins, while questions pertaining to non-existence are often seen as frivolous. With that said, according to Buddhism, the answer to the question, *why do I exist*, is that there is no distinct reason for the existence of the universe, phenomena, or sentient beings. We exist because we exist, as a unique manifestation of the cosmos. For myself, this answer is clear and logical and only becomes complicated when seen through our own exaggerated sense of personal significance. When one sees oneself as precious and important, then one assumes there must be an important reason and purpose for their existence. However, when one subdues this self-importance and shifts the focus of analysis away from oneself, to something else, say, a bird or a flower, then this question gains great clarity. One can then ask, *why does a bird exist* and *what is the purpose of a bird's life*; suddenly the answers become obvious. Clearly a bird has no special reason to exist, it is merely a wondrous manifestation of the universe. What is extraordinary is that birds, beings, and phenomena can and do exist in the first place. Isn't that special enough? I believe to expect more is to gravely under-appreciate the wonder of existence itself.

"It has taken four billion years of evolution to generate this kind of organism with this kind of brain, and yet we wake up in the morning and feel bored." ~ Stephen Batchelor

CHAPTER SIX: Enlightenment

Enlightenment and Nirvana

These days the terms enlightenment, liberation, and nirvana are used so commonly that it is often difficult to understand what exactly is meant by each of these terms. For they are not just Buddhist terms but terms shared by many other religious traditions as well, including many modern spiritual ideologies which have incorporated them into their own belief systems, thereby adding their own unique nuances to their meanings. Additionally, we are challenged by the complexity of having to sort through the many layers of religious and cultural embellishment imputed upon these terms. Even within Tibetan Buddhism itself, the meanings of these terms (in Tibetan as well as in English) are not always agreed upon or clear. With that said, there are core aspects pertaining to these terms that all of the various traditions share. Most importantly, all of these terms pertain to a higher state of existence, as well as describing a practitioner's level of spiritual accomplishment. Here within this text, I hope to clarify, as well as help standardize, some of these often confusing terms.

Enlightenment (Skt. *bodhi*; Tib. *jangchub*): *The attainment of nirvana* (Skt.; Tib. *nyangde*); synonymous with *liberation* (Skt. *moksha*; Tib. *tharpa*). To attain enlightenment and nirvana is to be irreversibly liberated from the three poisons (ignorance, attachment, and aversion), the mental/emotional suffering of samsara, and uncontrolled rebirth. Enlightenment is achieved through the direct realization of the true nature of oneself and reality. A being who has attained nirvana is referred to as an *enlightened being* (Skt. *arhat*; Tib. *dachomba*). Within the different traditions, enlightenment is understood in two distinct ways. In the Hinayana and Theravada traditions, enlightenment and the attainment of nirvana is the highest goal of the practitioner and final achievement of the path. However, in the Mahayana tradition enlightenment is understood twofold: enlightenment which is the attainment of nirvana, and *full enlightenment* which is the attainment of buddhahood (to become a buddha).

I myself interpret the term enlightenment as synonymous with supreme understanding, because understanding is undeniably the supreme antidote for dispelling ignorance, delusions, and afflictions. The more one increases their understanding of themselves and their environment, the more these afflictions fall away and the closer one comes to liberation. In Tibetan the term for wisdom is *sherab, she* (Tib.) meaning *understanding or knowing*, and *rab* (Tib.) an intensifying particle meaning *supreme, highest, or very*; together these can be taken as, *supreme understanding*—the supreme understanding of the true nature of oneself and reality.

Etymology of the term enlightenment

The term enlightenment was first used in reference to the *Age of Enlightenment* movement of 18th century Europe. Often called the *Age of Reason*, or simply *The Enlightenment*, this social and philosophical movement advocated science, individualism, and reason, with the objective

of transforming society by liberating people from the dogmatic tyranny of the church and state. In the early 19th century, the term enlightenment was chosen by Western translators for the Buddhist term *bodhi* (Skt.; Tib. *jangchub*) meaning *to awaken*. The choice by translators to use the term enlightenment remains an excellent one, for the Buddha played a dominant role in a previous age of enlightenment in 6th century BCE India. This Indian age of enlightenment shared the same basic characteristics and intentions of the later European movement, including renouncing religious dogma and the social authority of the day, which included the rejection of India's caste system. The Buddha placed authority where it rightly belongs, upon the individual. Through this, the Buddha helped to usher in a great age of reason, education, philosophy, individualism, and awakening.

Modern usage of the term enlightenment

Today the term enlightenment has grown to have many popular meanings, including to realize a fact, to be schooled on a particular facet, to be enlightened on a subject, or noting an informative experience, *that was an enlightening presentation*. From small revelations to grand epiphanies and profound life experiences, the term enlightenment has become a household word associated primarily with the revelation of wisdom. This usage fits well into the Buddhist use of the word—*to awaken from one's ignorance, delusions, and afflictions*.

Nirvana (Skt.; Tib. *nyangde*): As shared previously in this text series, nirvana is translated as *to blow out or extinguish; to extinguish the three poisons (ignorance, attachment, and aversion)*. The concept of nirvana, although coined by the Buddha, can be found in most Indian religions. Jains posit nirvana as the freeing of the soul into a stateless eternal bliss. For Hindus, nirvana is the union with Brahman or universal consciousness. However, in Buddhism, the Buddha used a unique interpretation of the term, which can sometimes be difficult to thoroughly understand.

Within Buddhism, nirvana is enlightened existence (opposed to samsara which is unenlightened existence); a state or quality of the mind devoid of the three poisons and all mental/emotional suffering. Nirvana is attained by practitioners who have irreversibly transcended all coarse and subtle habitual wrong views, thereby clearly and unmistakably apprehending the true nature of oneself and reality. Nirvana is not a place, realm, dimension, or external phenomenon, but instead exists only within the minds of beings. Nirvana is commonly defined on the debate grounds of Tibetan monasteries as *freedom from afflictions*, or more technically, *analytical cessation that has abandoned afflictions*. Usually explained by way of negation, nirvana is not *something*, but the absence of something. In this same way, the term *freedom* is understood by negation. Freedom is not a *thing* in itself, it's an absence; it's freedom *from* something—freedom from tyranny, oppression, or bondage. Nirvana in this same way is the absence of ignorance, attachment, aversion, and suffering within the mind. In other words, nirvana is the absence of samsara. When asked to define nirvana, the Buddha would simply say,

nirvana is the end of suffering, or in Tibetan, *nyangan le depa*—to pass beyond sorrow. When asked to describe nirvana, the Buddha would claim that it was beyond language and concept, only to be experienced directly for oneself. However, later in his life, the Buddha found the words and expounded upon his earlier work.

“Nirvana is permanent, stable, imperishable, immovable, ageless, deathless, unborn, and unbecoming, it is power, bliss, and happiness, the secure refuge, the shelter, and the place of unassailable safety; it is the real truth and the supreme reality; it is the good, the supreme goal and the one and only consummation of our life, the eternal, hidden and incomprehensible peace.” ~ The Buddha

“The peaceful, beyond reasoning, everlasting, the not-born, the unproduced, the sorrowless state that is void of stain, the cessation of states linked to suffering, the stilling of the conditioned—[which is] bliss.” ~ The Buddha

“I reached in experience, the nirvana which is unborn, unrivalled, secure from attachment, undecaying, and unstained. The condition is indeed reached by me. Deep, difficult to see, difficult to understand, tranquil, excellent. Beyond the reach of mere logic, subtle, and to be realized only by the wise.” ~ The Buddha

The four types of nirvana

Although nirvana is a singular term, nirvana can be experienced differently by different minds of beings. The different types of nirvana listed below are distinguished in terms of the quality of the different minds experiencing it.

1. **Natural nirvana** (Tib. *rangzhin nyangde*): The ultimate nature and/or quality of the mind that is empty of inherent existence possessing a primal *potential* for purity. This is not actual nirvana but the basis for attaining nirvana. Liberation is attained through recognizing and cultivating this foundational quality and potential of the mind.
2. **Nirvana without residue** (Skt. *nirupadhisheśhanirvana*; Tib. *lhakchäpe nyangen dä*): The experience of nirvana by superior beings while in meditative equipoise—meditating on ultimate reality. The term residue pertains to a remaining subtle habit of still perceiving phenomena as inherently existent. It's only while in meditative equipoise on ultimate reality that superior beings are free of this habitual residue.

3. **Nirvana with residue** (Skt. *sopadhisheśhanirvāna*; Tib. *lhakmäpai nyangen*):

The experience of nirvana by superior beings while not in meditation, or meditating on something other than ultimate reality. An experience of nirvana in which the practitioner still possesses a subtle habit of perceiving phenomena as inherently existent.

4. **Non-abiding nirvana** (Skt. *apratisthitānirvāna*; Tib. *minepay nyangende*):

The experience of nirvana by buddhas; synonymous with full enlightenment, supreme nirvana, and buddhahood. Non-abiding nirvana is the irreversible cessation of the three poisons, all rebirth, all suffering (both physical and mental), and any habitual residue of perceiving the appearance of phenomena as inherently existent. It is referred to as non-abiding nirvana for although buddhas have attained buddhahood they do not merely abide within it. That is, buddhas are not bound by either samsara or nirvana, for while focused on the meditative equipoise of that nirvana, they simultaneously emanate into countless realms in order to act for the benefit of countless beings. Non-abiding nirvana is the final and supreme goal of Mahayana practitioners.

Parinirvana (Skt.; Tib. *yongsu nyangan ledépa*): Nirvana after the death of the gross aggregates. Within the Hinayana and Theravada traditions, parinirvana is the final nirvana of the arhat, attained after the death of the gross aggregates. This final nirvana is seen as the complete liberation from the cycle of rebirth, meaning the arhat will not be reborn again. Conversely, the bodhisattva of the Mahayana tradition chooses to forgo this nirvana and continue to be reborn in samsara in order to further purify themselves, with the aim of attaining the supreme goal of buddhahood. Therefore the concept of parinirvana, although used ceremoniously by Mahayanists when referring to an anniversary of the death of a great master (e.g., the parinirvana of Lama Tsongkhapa), is not a state that is coveted by the Mahayana practitioner.

The inconceivable and inexpressible experience of enlightenment

Within all Buddhist traditions, the enlightened state is regarded as inconceivable and inexpressible—beyond language and concept. Meaning, language simply cannot be used to describe this ultimate state of reality, and that it can only be experienced directly. Asserting the enlightened state as inexpressible doesn't have to imply that it is somehow other-worldly or mystical; it merely means that it is experiential—and in the same way, all direct experiences are equally inexpressible. Take the experience of tasting chocolate, can language accurately describe the difference in taste between chocolate cake and vanilla cake? Or can language describe the difference between the colors green and blue? This type of knowing is experiential, and can only be known through direct experience. In this same way Buddhism regards enlightenment as an experiential phenomenon that can only be truly understood through its direct experience. Sadly,

many use this fact to claim that because the ultimate is inexpressible, it is, therefore, a waste of time to talk about; this attitude greatly impedes philosophical and analytical investigation and discovery. According to Lama Tsongkhapa, the ultimate can and must be first conceptually understood in order to cultivate its later direct realization.

Attempting to put the inexpressible into words

It's said that traversing the Buddhist path is like climbing a mountain: the further one ascends the more vast and clear one's view becomes, perceiving the world in a way that a person on the ground could never fathom. Imagining how a superior being perceives reality can be inferred in much the same way. Another way of inferring what an enlightened being's reality would look like, is through the examination of the two truths. Since the level of a being's awakening is directly related to their correct perception of the two truths, we can try to envision their experience through this lens. Given that ultimate truth pertains merely to the emptiness of any essential essence within phenomena and that the distinction between the ultimate and conventional is not a visual distinction but instead an ontological, epistemological, and conceptual distinction, it is safe to say that the general appearance of one's environment (trees, mountains, cars, people, etc.) would visually appear *generally* the same for both ordinary and superior beings alike. This would be equally true of the distinctions between nirvana and samsara, which are states or qualities of mind and not a visual distinction. However, with that said, enlightened beings have a more refined perception of phenomena, including having enhanced senses, having a more peripheral awareness, being able to perceive subtle momentary changes within phenomena, and apprehending the true purity of phenomena.

The experience of enlightenment and nirvana when in deep meditation on emptiness

It's said that the state of enlightenment when in meditative equipoise is a transpersonal psychological experience, or a state of mind *seemingly* beyond the limits of personal identity. For an enlightened being in deep meditation on emptiness and/or the nature of reality, it's said that the conventional world of labels and concepts falls away and a direct realization of the ultimate view of reality arises as a natural unembellished state. It is described as dream-like, ethereal, the peak of bliss, and pervaded by complete clarity. It is a timeless state in which one experiences no sense of past, present, or future, in which self and the mental and physical aggregates seemingly disappear along with the sense of any subject-object duality—as if one has become indivisible with space itself. It is described as radiant and free of all appearances of the phenomenal world. It is here that conceptual ideas of person being inherently or substantially existent disappear and one directly realizes their true ethereal nature, an experience many describe as *becoming one with the universe* or *a state of selflessness* or *egolessness*. This experience of ultimate reality is purely a mental one, arising intuitively and directly through yogic direct perception. At this level of meditation, one's external senses (sight, sound, smell, etc.) have

been transcended and/or arrested, similar to a deep dreamless sleep. It is a revelatory experience in which one attains ultimate knowledge. This mental state is referred to as *nirvana without residue* because while deep in meditation, no lingering apprehension of phenomena as existing inherently remains—a mental state referred to as *nirvana with residue*.

The experience of enlightenment and nirvana when not in meditation

Again, for enlightened beings (other than buddhas), ultimate reality is only perceptible while in deep meditation. Therefore, enlightened beings when not in meditation perceive the conventional world comparatively the same as ordinary beings. However, their view is greatly influenced by their direct meditative experience of ultimate reality. Like someone coming down from a mountain, although they are again at ground level, the experience they gained from the mountain top helps them to navigate the city below with much more efficiency, while also giving them an enhanced perspective of that life.

It's said that the experience of reality for superior beings when not in meditation is analogized to someone watching a movie, for they can enjoy the film, while being fully aware that the images on the screen are illusory—empty of any inherent existence or essential essence. The reason for the superior being's unsustainable realization of enlightenment is that when not in meditation, superior beings still possess a subtle lingering residue of perceiving phenomena as inherently existent—a mental state referred to as *nirvana with residue*.

Qualities of superior and enlightened beings

There are many claims made by the different Buddhist traditions pertaining to the abilities gained by superior and/or enlightened beings. Besides enhanced senses (perceiving colors as richer, sounds as clearer, tastes as finer), various scriptures assert special powers are also attained, including: recalling past lives, powers of clairvoyance, telepathy, astral-projection, the ability to perform a vast array of miracles, for example, seeing and hearing celestial or subtle beings, seeing karmic destinations, and emanating into pure lands in order to receive teachings from buddhas—while remembering every teaching flawlessly. But most important is gaining control over the process of rebirth and thereby freeing oneself from uncontrolled rebirth. Superior and enlightened beings, because of still possessing a subtle habit of perceiving inherent existence, still take on the five aggregates during rebirth. However, their aggregates have been purified and transformed into subtler, uncontaminated, dream-like aggregates that no longer take uncontrolled rebirth through the power of ignorance. In addition to the abilities listed above, enlightened beings who have attained nirvana are said to gain ten additional powers,

The powers over:

1. Their life spans – they can live as long as they wish.
2. Their minds – they can enter/arise from limitless types of meditative concentrations.
3. Necessities of life – they can find whatever they need.

4. Activities – they know and can teach any art or science.
5. Rebirth – they can be born whenever and wherever they wish.
6. Prayers – they can manifest themselves in any form needed.
7. Aspiration – they can manifest anything they see fit.
8. Extra-physical emanation – they can go to any pure land that they wish.
9. Deep awareness – they are unimpeded in their learning.
10. The Dharma – they understand all the words and meanings of the teachings.

Full Enlightenment and Buddhahood

"If good men and women wish to know the state of buddhahood, they should know that it is not a state of the eye, the nose, the tongue, the body, or the mind; nor is it a state of forms, sounds, scents, tastes, textures, or mental objects. The nonstate is the state of buddhahood. This being the case, what is the state of supreme enlightenment as attained by the Buddha? The Buddha said: 'It is the state of emptiness, because all views are equal. It is the state of signlessness (absence of imputed attributes), because all signs are equal. It is the state of wishlessness, because the three realms are equal. It is the state of nonaction, because all actions are equal. It is the state of the unconditioned, because all conditioned things are equal.' ~ Attributed to Manjushri - from the Maharatnakuta Sutra. [Spoken to the Buddha by Manjushri]

Many different notions of what full enlightenment and a fully enlightened being (a buddha) would be like have been asserted throughout Buddhism's long history. However, with so many layers of religious and cultural embellishment having been added over the centuries, it sometimes feels difficult to have a clear idea of what this state would actually be like. The many descriptions of full enlightenment and the extraordinary abilities that are said to accompany it simply defy imagination. To begin, let's give the textbook Mahayana definition of the fully enlightened state of buddhahood.

Full enlightenment (Skt. *anuttara samyak sambodhi*; Tib. *yang dakpar dzogpay jangchub*): *The attainment of buddhahood* (Skt. *buddhatva*; Tib. *sangye kyi go phang*). Synonymous with supreme enlightenment and non-abiding nirvana, full enlightenment is the attainment of the omniscient mind of a buddha, described as a state of absolute blissful perfection. Full enlightenment is the finite and peak state of existence attained through the cessation of the three poisons, all suffering (both physical and mental), and any remaining subtle habitual residue of misperceiving oneself, phenomena, and reality as inherently existent. Through the attainment of these cessations one becomes a buddha.

Buddhas (Skt.; Tib. *sangye*): *Awakened ones; those who have perfected all possible virtuous qualities and are irreversibly freed from the endless cycle of samsaric rebirth and suffering.* A buddha is a being who has reached the very peak of spiritual evolution and comprehends clearly the ultimate nature of reality. Buddhists assert not one, but many buddhas, with the historical Buddha of our age Shakyamuni Buddha (6th century BCE) being the fourth and present buddha of our aeon (Skt. *kalpa*). Mahayanists claim thousands of Buddhas have existed and will exist in the future, positing the next buddha as Buddha Maitreya who will arrive after the teachings of Shakyamuni Buddha are no longer practiced.

The three types of Buddhas

- **Samyaksambuddhas** (Skt.; Tib. *thekchen gi jangchub*): One who after becoming fully enlightened through their own efforts and insight, then teaches the dharma to others; known as *wheel turners*—buddhas who introduce a momentous and new dharma as in the case of the historical Buddha of our age Buddha Shakyamuni.
- **Pratyekabuddhas** (Skt.; Tib. *rangyal gi jangchub*): One who becomes fully enlightened through their own efforts and insight, however, is unwilling or incapable of teaching others.
- **Sravakabuddhas** (Skt.; Tib. *nyenthoe ki jangchub*): One who depends on the guidance and teachings of a buddha to attain buddhahood.

The experience of buddhahood

Within the Gelug school, a buddha is asserted to exist in the state of non-abiding nirvana, possessing a consciousness that perceives both the conventional and ultimate simultaneously. It's asserted that buddhas, while never straying from their meditative equipoise on the ultimate, can emanate into countless realms in order to benefit countless beings.

"After becoming a buddha one continuously abides in meditative equipoise directly realizing ultimate truth. Whether the buddha appears to be in meditation or engaged in activity, the mind of a buddha does not deviate from direct knowledge of the two truths."

~ Sonam Thakchoe

While buddhas can perceive and interact within ordinary conventional existence, they perceive the conventional within its ultimate true nature (the absences of any inherent existence, the absence of dualistic appearance, and the absence of impurity—perceiving all phenomena within their natural pristine purity). And like enlightened beings, buddhas perceive the conventional world comparatively the same as ordinary beings (books are books, mountains are mountains, people are people), although possessing a pure perception of phenomena, including having enhanced senses, a more peripheral awareness, the ability to perceive subtle momentary changes

within phenomena, and the ability to see karmic paths (both past and future). It's said that buddhas possess an intention that is much different than our own—in which their actions are purely reflexive and spontaneous, arising as an effortless expression of their enlightened state. Furthermore, while emanating in samsara, buddhas are not affected by any of samsara's defilements, remaining completely pure without any danger of regaining ignorance.

"When attaining full enlightenment our conventional world does not dissolve. When we have attained full enlightenment our perception is not only the perception of emptiness but the perception of the conventional world as well. Understanding emptiness should not destroy or distance ourselves from the conventional empirical world; it should in fact give us more respect for it." ~ Khensur Jampa Tegchok

Differences between an enlightened being and a fully enlightened being

To further understand buddhahood and what the experience of a fully enlightened being may be like, let's look at the differences between an enlightened being and a fully enlightened being—a buddha. Generally, the differences between the two are distinctions of clarity, purity, and pervasion. However, these differences can be profound. It's said that comparing the miraculous powers of an enlightened being to that of a buddha is similar to comparing the amount of water in a hoof print to that in an ocean. In addition to the powers of an enlightened being listed previously, the greatest and most obvious distinctions between enlightened beings and fully enlightened beings are:

- A buddha has fully accomplished the path by completely purifying any and all qualities.
- A buddha has fully and irreversibly abandoned all foundational ignorance.
- A buddha has fully and irreversibly transcended samsara.
- A buddha's mind is omniscient and omnipresent (all knowing/existing everywhere).
- Upon attaining buddhahood, a buddha gains the four buddha bodies.
- Upon attaining buddhahood, a buddha spontaneously manifests a pure land.
- A buddha possesses a non-conceptual wisdom, not interpretive but direct and explicit.
- A buddha's awareness is ultimate rather than relative and is free of any cognitive error.
- A buddha perceives the ultimate and conventional simultaneously and continuously.
- A buddha abides in the state of non-abiding nirvana (buddhahood).

Miracles of a buddha

The belief in miraculous powers of buddhas is asserted within all Buddhist traditions. Buddhist scriptures are full of accounts of Buddha Shakyamuni having performed a vast array of miracles including walking on water, flying, traveling through space, traveling to heavens to teach gods, making himself as big as a giant and then as small as an ant, becoming invisible, passing through solid objects, walking through mountains, diving in and out of the earth, projecting images of

himself in the sky, multiplying into a million replicas, and even touching the sun and moon with his hand.

The power of a buddha's emanation

Mahayanists assert that all buddhas reside within a *pure land* while simultaneously emanating into countless world systems, in all conceivable forms, in accordance to the needs of sentient beings, all without ever straying from that pure land and the wisdom realizing ultimate reality. In fact, Mahayana scriptures posit our historical Buddha as being a mere emanation of Shakyamuni Buddha. For although all Buddhist traditions agree that prior to his enlightenment the Buddha was an ordinary human being like ourselves, the Mahayana asserts that Buddha Shakyamuni had already attained Buddhahood aeons ago and merely emanated into our world while manifesting birth, enlightenment, old age, and death to exemplify the way of the path. The logic behind such an assertion is derived from the notion that one necessarily must have abandoned one's contaminated aggregates (have died) in order to attain Buddhahood. The way in which a buddha's emanations are asserted to manifest is equated to the moon and its many reflections, for although there is only one moon, its image can be reflected simultaneously and seen in thousands of different pools of water.

Buddha pure lands

Pure lands (Skt. *buddhaksetra*; Tib. *tak shing*): Also known as *buddha fields* or *pure realms*. In Mahayana Buddhism, pure lands are celestial dwellings or pure abodes of buddhas, realms beyond samsara that transcend time and space. A pure land is created each time a bodhisattva attains Buddhahood and is established through their great merit and virtuous activities. Pure lands are spontaneous manifestations of a buddha's purified mind, realms totally free from suffering. Often confused with the everlasting reward of eternal heaven found in other religions, pure lands instead are realms where superior beings can visit to receive teachings directly from the buddha of that pure land, realms where all conditions are conducive to the practice of Dharma and the attainment of enlightenment. Descriptions of pure lands within supplication prayers are spectacular. *A realm whose ground is covered in gold, where magnificent pavilions adorned with precious substances stand raised above pools filled with water of merit and virtue, their bottoms covered with precious gems. On the surface of the pools are wonderfully fragrant lotuses the size of carriage wheels in every color one can imagine. Heavenly music continuously plays while flowers rain from the sky. In this place there are wondrous birds that sing the Dharma and when the soft wind blows, rows of jeweled trees produce wonderful sounds evoking mindfulness in all that hear it.* There are said to be an infinite number of pure lands, populated by an infinite number of buddhas. Superior beings and even ordinary beings with the adequate

merit can be reborn into these pure lands. Some well known pure lands are: *Tushita* (Skt.; Tib. *Gaden*) of *Maitreya Buddha*; *The copper-colored mountain* (Skt. *Camaradvipa*; Tib. *Zangdok-palri*) of *Padmasambhava*; and *Sukhavati* (Skt.; Tib. *Dewachen*) of *Amitabha Buddha*. However, the most important is *Akanishta* (Skt.; Tib. *Omin*) of *Vairochana*, the pure land where superior bodhisattvas attain buddhahood.

Akanishta (Skt.; Tib. *Omin*): Meaning *nothing below; highest; or above all else*.

The pure land where superior bodhisattvas attain buddhahood. After achieving buddhahood, buddhas abide within the pure land Akanishta (in a *Sambhogakaya* form) while emanating within their own pure land, and countless world systems, manifesting enlightened activities.

Buddha bodies

Buddha bodies / *buddha kaya* (Skt.; Tib. *sanggyekyi ku*): The attainment of buddhahood and the attainment of the buddha bodies are synonymous. The attainment of buddhahood occurs after the death of the physical body and subsequent rebirth into the pure land Akanishta. When attaining buddhahood, an enlightened bodhisattva's subtle dream-like mental and physical aggregates are completely purified and thereby transformed into the *truth body* (Skt. *dharma-kaya*; Tib. *chöku*)—a mental body of a buddha; and the *form body* (Skt. *rupakaya*; Tib. *zugku*)—a manifestation body of a buddha. At this point, the buddha is completely free from the process of rebirth. The buddha bodies are attained through the accomplishment or perfection of the six perfections. The term *body* (Skt. *kaya*; Tib. *ku*) in this usage, is understood not merely as a physical body, but instead includes all aspects and qualities of a buddha (all forms, emanations, attributes, and mental aspects). At this level the buddha's physical body is nearly indistinguishable from the mind, with the body being merely a subtle wind (Tib. *lung*) upon which the mind rides, existing as two aspects of the same entity and analogized as a horse and rider.

Each Buddhist tradition posits their own unique assertions of how exactly buddhas exist after attaining buddhahood. One novel approach to understanding the ontological nature of buddhahood is to combine the two assertions: (1) That consciousness is beginningless and endless and can never cease, and (2) that buddhas escape the cycle of rebirth and the taking on of an ordinary physical body. Therefore the consciousness of buddhas can never be extinguished yet it exists without the need of ordinary physical form.

The two buddha bodies: *the truth body and form body*

- **The truth body** (Skt. *dharmakaya*; Tib. *chöku*): Also known as the *mental body; the enlightened aspect of the mental aggregates related to a buddha's experience of buddhahood*. This mental body is the base or ground of buddhahood itself, the omniscient mind of a buddha and the emptiness of that mind. The truth body pertains to a buddha's ultimate unconditioned aspect attained through the collection of wisdom and the cultivation of the wisdom side of the path through the practice of the 4th, 5th, 6th perfections.
- **The form body** (Skt. *rupakaya*; Tib. *zugku*): Also known as the *manifestation body; the enlightened aspect of the form aggregates related to a buddha's manifestation body, the aspect of a buddha that benefits beings by manifesting in whichever way is most useful*. The form body pertains to a buddha's conventional conditioned aspect attained through the collection of merit and the cultivation of the method side of the path, through the practice of the 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th perfections.

"The moment when the causes and conditions of your own enlightenment are present, you will become a buddha. In other words, the moment when your two accumulations of merit and wisdom are complete, buddhahood will naturally arise as the result, and nothing, absolutely nothing can stop this process." ~ Chamtrul Rinpoche

The four buddha bodies model

The two aspects of a buddha, the truth body and form body, can be further divided in order to illustrate their different aspects. Tibetan Buddhism gives two presentations: a three body model and a four body model. The Gelug school and this text follow the four body model.

Note: The four body model calls into question the prior three body model's dualistic assertion that the ultimate is only attained through the abandonment of the conventional, an assertion rejected by the Gelug School. The four body model asserts that the conventional and ultimate are inseparably entwined and that a buddha is not bound by either state, referred to as non-abiding nirvana.

The Four Bodies of a Buddha	
Truth body divisions	Truth body (Skt.) <i>Dharmakaya</i> (Tib.) <i>Chöku</i> (Mental body)
	<i>Truth body defined:</i> The omniscient mind of a buddha and the emptiness of that mind; the enlightened aspect of the mental aggregates related to a buddha's experience of Buddhahood, attained through the collection of wisdom through the practice of the 4 th , 5 th , 6 th perfections.
	Nature body (Skt.) <i>Svabhavikaya</i> (Tib.) <i>Ngowo nyiku</i>
Form body divisions	Wisdom truth body (Skt.) <i>Jnanakaya</i> (Tib.) <i>Yeshe chöku</i>
	<i>Form body defined:</i> The aspect of a buddha that benefits beings; manifesting in whichever way is most useful; the enlightened aspect of the form aggregates attained through the collection of merit and through the practice of the 1 st , 2 nd , 3 rd , 4 th perfections.
	Enjoyment body (Skt.) <i>Sambhogakaya</i> (Tib.) <i>Longku</i>
	Emanation body (Skt.) <i>Nirmanakaya</i> (Tib.) <i>Tulku</i>
	The manifestation of a buddha in a subtle body of light that appears to superior bodhisattvas; this body abides in the pure land Akanishta.
	The manifestation of a buddha in a physical body which can be perceived by ordinary beings.

Recognizing the seeds of the four buddha bodies present within ourselves

It's important for one's practice to recognize the potentiality or seeds of the four buddha bodies that are currently present within us in order to cultivate and nurture them into their later full fruition.

The seed of our **nature truth body**: The emptiness of inherent existence of one's mind.

The seed of our **wisdom truth body**: One's own current insight and wisdom.

The seed of our **enjoyment body**: Oneself at one's best; one's potential for perfection.

The seed of our **emanation body**: One's projected persona enabling interaction with society.

Thirty-two major and eighty minor physical signs, marks, or attributes of a buddha

Besides the amazing assortment of powers that buddhas receive upon attaining the truth body, buddhas' form bodies also receive attainments displaying thirty-two major marks and eighty minor physical signs.

The thirty-two major signs are:

1. Feet with a level tread
2. Dharma wheels on the palms and feet
3. Projecting heels
4. Long fingers and toes
5. Soft and tender hands and feet
6. Web-like hands and feet
7. High raised ankles
8. Legs like antelopes
9. Ability to touch the knees without bending
10. Male organ enclosed in a sheath
11. Complexion like gold
12. Skin so smooth no dust can adhere to it
13. Separate body hairs, one to each pore
14. Bluish black body hairs curling right
15. Divinely straight body
16. Seven convex surfaces on the body
17. Front part of the body like a lion's
18. No hollow between the shoulders
19. Proportioned like a banyan tree
20. Evenly-rounded bust
21. A perfect sense of taste
22. Jaws like a lion
23. Forty teeth
24. Even teeth
25. No spaces between the teeth
26. Very bright canine teeth
27. Very long tongue
28. A Brahma-like voice
29. Deep blue eyes
30. Eyelashes like a cow's
31. Hair between the eyes soft like cotton
32. Head like a royal turban

Some of the eighty minor signs include:

Smooth hands, copper colored nails, perfectly proportioned body, lips of cherry color, etc.

CHAPTER SEVEN: The Path to Enlightenment

The Mahayana Path to Buddhahood

Before sharing the outline of the Mahayana path (Skt. *Mahayana marga*; Tib. *thek chen lam*) let's first look at some of its foundational elements, specifically: *the three principal aspects of the path, the vehicles of the path, the divisions of the path, and obstructions abandoned along the path.*

The three principal aspects of the path

Besides being foundational elements of the Mahayana and Vajrayana paths, the three principal aspects of the path is also the title of a short text (condensed Lamrim) by Lama Tsongkhapa that highlights the three most important features of the path. It's said that all of the Mahayana teachings are contained within these three principal aspects; and in kind, it is the Mahayana path that facilitates the inspiration, application, and attainment of them, which is necessary for achieving enlightenment.

1. **Renunciation** (Skt. *nihsarana*; Tib. *ngejung*): The wish for freedom; the determination to gain liberation from samsara.
2. **Bodhichitta** (Skt.; Tib. *Jangchup kyi sem*): The altruistic intention to become a buddha in order to liberate others from suffering.
3. **The correct view** (Tib. *yangdakpe tawa*): A proper understanding of the true nature of oneself and reality.

The four vehicles for traversing the path

The four vehicles (Skt. *yanas*; Tib. *thegpa shi*): The term *vehicle* can be translated as *raft* or *ferry*, meaning *a means of arriving at the other shore of liberation*, and in this context is synonymous with *path* or *method*. These vehicles are differentiated in terms of: the motivation and goal of the practitioner, one's preference in study and practice, and one's choice in traditions. These four personal vehicles for traversing the path, although related, should not be confused with the three vehicles of the Hinayana, Mahayana, and Vajrayana which pertain to the philosophical view that serve as their base.

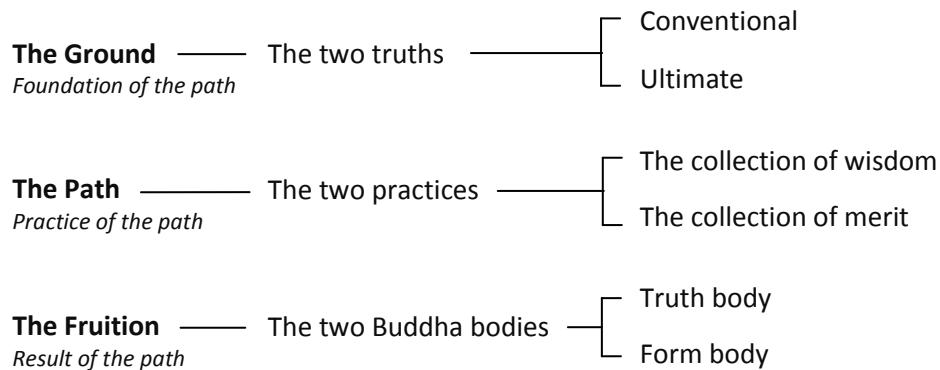
- **Hearer vehicle** (Skt. *sravakayana*; Tib. *nyantö thegpa*): Path to personal liberation that relies on a buddha in order to attain nirvana; attained through accomplishing the path of wisdom. One who has accomplished this path has become a *Shravaka Arhat*. (Hinayana/Theravada traditions)
- **Solitary realizer vehicle** (Skt. *pratyekabuddhayan*; Tib. *ranggyal thegpa*): Path to personal liberation; the accomplishment of nirvana without the help of a buddha; attained through accomplishing the path of wisdom. One who has accomplished this path has become a *Pratyekabuddha Arhat*. This vehicle is no longer followed or practiced. (Hinayana/Theravada traditions)

- **Bodhisattva vehicle** (Skt. *bodhisattvayana*; Tib. *jangsem thegpa*): The universal path to buddhahood; a path that relies on a buddha in order to attain buddhahood; attained through the accumulation of the two complimentary paths of wisdom and method. One who has attained this path has become a buddha. (Mahayana tradition)
- **Vajrayana vehicle** (Skt. *tantrayana*; Tib. *gyü thegpa*): The accelerated path to buddhahood; a method for accomplishing the bodhisattva vehicle faster; sharing the same Mahayana path and goals but differing in method and how it attains those goals. One who has accomplished this path has become a buddha. (Vajrayana tradition)

Note: Hearers and solitary realizers of the Hinayana and Theravada traditions predominately accumulate the path of wisdom which eliminates afflictive obscurations. However, the Mahayana asserts that in order to become a buddha one must also fully accumulate the path of method which eliminates cognitive obscurations.

Ground, Path, and Fruition

The Mahayana path can be understood within three divisions, referred to as *the ground, path, and fruition* (Tib. *shi lam debu sum*), consisting of the ground—*the teachings and foundation for all practice*, the path—*the actual practices of working with one's mind*, and the fruition—*practices pertaining to attaining the buddha bodies*. It's essential that these three elements be thoroughly understood in order for one's path to be productive.



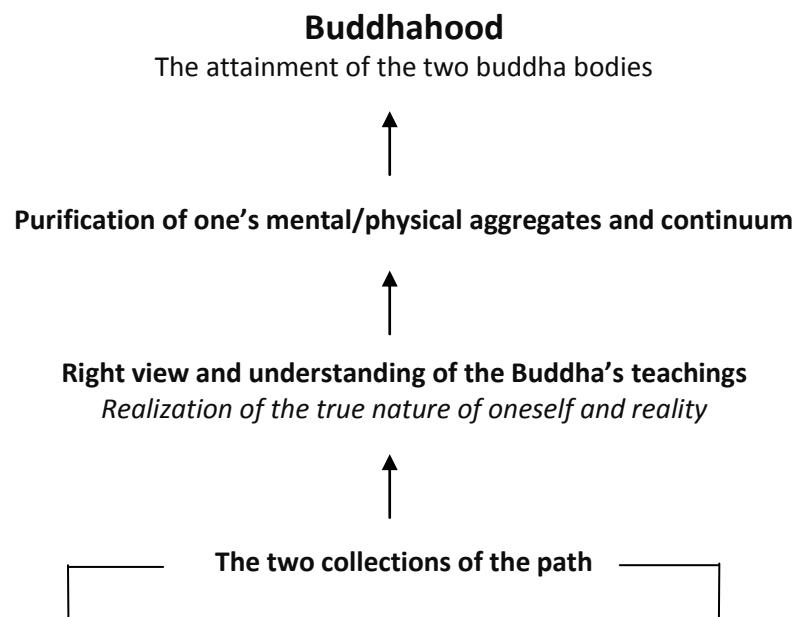
The Two Collections of Wisdom and Method

For Mahayanists, enlightenment is attained through the *two collections*—the generation and collection of *great wisdom* and *great merit*.

The two collections (Skt. *sambharadvaya*; Tib. *tsoknyi*)

- **The collections of wisdom** (Skt. *jnanasambhara*; Tib. *yeshe kyi tsok*)
To gain a clear understanding of the true nature of oneself and reality.
Wisdom here is the discriminating awareness of emptiness.
- **The collection of method** (Skt. *punyasambhara*; Tib. *sönam kyi tsok*)
To gain merit through acts of altruism, practice, good-works, devotion, etc.

(The chart below begins at the bottom)



The generation and collection of wisdom
With the goal of transcending one's cognitive obstructions to omniscience, leading to the attainment of the truth body; the wisdom side of the path pertains to ultimate truth; cultivated through study, contemplation, and meditation of the Buddha's teachings leading to the purification of one's view. Qualities gained include: becoming more logical, rational, understanding, clear.

The generation and collection of method
With the goal of transcending one's afflictive obstructions to liberation, leading to the attainment of the form body; the method side of the path pertains to conventional truth and is cultivated through study, contemplation, meditation, mind training, and the accumulation of merit leading to the purification of one's view. Qualities gained include: becoming more altruistic, intuitive, and content.

Abandonments along the path

The attainment of buddhahood can also be understood through what obstructions are abandoned along the path. Buddhism asserts that ordinary beings' minds are contaminated by two types of obstructions: obstructions to liberation, and obstructions to omniscience. However, through diligent practice, these obstructions can be gradually transcended.

- **The abandonment of obstructions to liberation** (Tib. *nyodip*) leading to the end of suffering; also known as *afflictive obscurations–hindrances to the attainment of liberation; pertaining mainly to the three poisons (ignorance, attachment, and aversion)*. These are eradicated upon attaining the eighth ground and through the cultivation of the wisdom aspect of the path.
- **The abandonment of obstructions to omniscience** (Tib. *shedip*) leading to buddhahood; also known as *cognitive obscurations–hindrances to the attainment of omniscience that prevents one from gaining the two buddha bodies; pertaining mainly to one's foundational ignorance*. These are eradicated upon attaining the tenth ground through the cultivation of the method aspect of the path.

Outline of the Mahayana Path to Buddhahood

Below is the outline of the Mahayana sutra path to enlightenment (as opposed to the tantric Buddhist outline) as presented by the Gelug school of Tibetan Buddhism. Aspects of the path can differ according to the various traditions and various capacities of practitioners, including: the order of stages and attainments, when vows are taken, when particular topics are studied, or when to begin to incorporate tantric practices. A comprehensive understanding of the stages of this outline is considered essential in attaining buddhahood.

The Mahayana Path to Buddhahood

(This chart begins at the bottom)

BEINGS	5 PATHS	10 GROUNDS	ENTRYWAY
Buddha (Full enlightenment)	5 Path of no more learning		Attainment of buddhahood, cessation of ignorance
Foe destroyer/arhat 3 rd great countless eons	4 Path of meditation	Grounds 8-10	Nirvana, cessation of the three poisons
Arya bodhisattva (Superior Bodhisattva) 2 nd great countless eons	3 Path of seeing	Grounds 2-7	Beginning to eliminate one's innate afflictive obstructions
Ordinary bodhisattva 1 st great countless eons	2 Path of preparation	1 st Ground	First direct nonconceptual realization of emptiness.
	1 Path of accumulation		Uncontrived bodhichitta
Ordinary practitioner of greater capacity	Achieving calm abiding: By use of the 9 stages		
	Meditating on contrived bodhichitta		
	Meditating on gaining <i>reasoned faith</i> in buddhahood		
	Meditating on emptiness: Using different reasoning to understand emptiness		
	Meditating on examining the possibilities of attaining enlightenment		
	Meditating on altruistic intention		
	Meditating on great compassion		
	Meditating on affectionate love		
	Meditating on equanimity		
Ordinary practitioner of medium capacity	Meditating on the 12 links		
	Meditating on the four noble truths		
	Meditating on the faults of samsara		
Ordinary practitioner of small capacity	Meditating on karma and cause and effect		
	Meditating on refuge		
	Meditating on faith: Understanding the power of the three jewels to help		
	Meditating on fear: Fear of unfavorable rebirth and the suffering of samsara		
	Meditating on death and impermanence		

Note: In the above chart the word *meditation* in this context pertains to the study, contemplation, meditation, and/or familiarization of each topic.

Stages of the Path

Levels of ordinary practitioners

Our outline begins at the bottom of our chart, starting with one who has just began to study and investigate Buddhism—referred to as an *ordinary practitioner of small capacity*. Traditionally, entry onto the path begins with taking refuge vows thereby "formally" becoming a Buddhist practitioner, but this is not required. As one begins to study, contemplate, and meditate on these various topics, and one's understanding grows, one then progresses to the next levels of *ordinary practitioner of medium capacity*, and subsequently to *ordinary practitioner of greater capacity*. Throughout the path, the practitioner practices the three higher trainings, honors any commitments and/or vows taken, and continues to study, contemplate, and meditate on the array of Buddhist topics they have studied thus far.

Taking vows on the path

Where refuge vows usually mark the entry into the Buddhist path, bodhisattva, tantric, monastic, and/or lay vows are not taken at any distinct point. Often teachers recommend that a practitioner wait at least one year after taking refuge vows before taking bodhisattva vows. Tantric vows are usually taken after one has a good understanding of their sutra studies and one's teacher believes the student to be ready and that tantric practice may be of benefit to them. Monastic and lay vows can be taken at any time.

Note: In Tibetan Buddhism, practitioners at the very beginning of the path are already engaging in Mahayana study and practice even before taking their bodhisattva vows.

The bodhisattva grounds and paths

Grounds and paths (Tib. *salam*): Levels of a bodhisattva's development and attainments on the path to Buddhahood. The grounds and paths are referred to as minds because each is a spiritual realization and becomes a constant and enduring mental state through which one perceives reality. This text being introductory will share a simple outline in order to provide a clear illustration of the bodhisattva path.

- **The Five Paths** (Skt. *pancamegha*; Tib. *lam nga*): Five stages of a bodhisattva's realization and development towards Buddhahood. *Path* in its singular form commonly refers to one's Buddhist or spiritual path; whereas *paths* pluralized usually refers to the five paths.
- **The Ten Grounds / bhumi** (Skt.) *sa chu* (Tib.): Ten levels of realization and attainments of a bodhisattva leading towards Buddhahood.

The first path – The path of accumulation (Skt. *sambharamarga*; Tib. *tsoklam*).

The first level of a bodhisattva on the path. Referred to as *the path of accumulation* because at this stage the practitioner amasses great knowledge and great merit. Upon achieving *uncontrived* bodhichitta along with an unwavering determination to be free from samsara, one becomes a actual bodhisattva and enters the path of accumulation. Usually by this point, the practitioner has already achieved single-pointed concentration.

Divisions

Large: The samadhi of a river of Dharmas – a special *samadhi* (meditative concentration) that allows one to visit buddha fields to receive teachings, while remembering them all.

Medium: Can no longer fall to a lower path.

Small: Having a foundation of bodhichitta.

Entry into this level: The achievement of uncontrived bodhichitta along with an unwavering determination to be free from samsara.

Abilities gained at this level: The elimination of the gross defilements that cause samsaric suffering. Upon attaining the medium level the bodhisattva's bodhichitta becomes stable and will never degenerate.

Practices at this level: Receiving teachings, meditating, cultivating calm abiding, practicing the six perfections, abandoning the three poisons, and collecting merit.

The second path – The path of preparation (Skt. *prayogamarga*; Tib. *jorlam*).

The second level of a bodhisattva on the path. Referred to as the path of preparation because at this stage one prepares his mind for the experience of the direct realization of emptiness through the union of calm abiding and special insight focused on emptiness.

Division (these divisions are shared in ascending order)

Highest dharma: No longer the gross arising of the conception of true/inherently existence of the realization of emptiness.

Forbearance: No longer the gross arising of the conception of true/inherently existence of wrong mental states.

Peak: No longer the gross arising of the conception of true/inherently existence of *pure phenomenon* (i.e., path, Dharma, Buddha) as truly existent.

Heat: No longer the gross arising of the conception of inherent existence of contaminated phenomenon as truly/inherently existent. One's first experience of the fire that will become the path of seeing. Each of these levels moves farther away from grasping at inherent existence.

Entry into this level: The union of calm abiding and special insight focused on emptiness.

Abilities gained at this level: The lessening of dualistic appearances. At the highest level, the roots of virtue of a bodhisattva cannot be destroyed by wrong views.

Practices at this level: Overcoming the misconceptions of true existence, deepening one's conceptual realization of emptiness, meditating, cultivating the six perfections, abandoning the three poisons, and collecting merit.

The third path – The path of seeing (Skt. *darsanamarga*; Tib. *tonglam*)

The third level of a bodhisattva on the path. Through the bodhisattva's first direct and non-conceptual realization of emptiness they enter both the path of seeing and the first of the ten bodhisattva grounds, thereby becoming a *superior bodhisattva* (Skt. Arya bodhisattvas; Tib. *jangsem pakpa*).

The first bodhisattva ground: Very joyful; attained through the perfection of giving which marks one's further development towards buddhahood.

Entry into this level: The direct/non-conceptual realization of emptiness.

Abilities gained: At the path of seeing, the bodhisattva no longer experiences ordinary birth, sickness, and death. Other attainments include the disappearance of dual appearance while in meditative equipoise. According to scripture, the bodhisattva, upon entering the first ground, gains twelve powers, each involving one-hundred things:

1. To behold 100 buddhas.
2. To receive teachings from 100 buddhas.
3. To live for 100 eons.
4. To see past happenings and future happenings of phenomena for 100 eons.
5. To enter and arise from 100 absorbed concentrations.
6. To shake up 100 world-systems.
7. To illuminate all 100 world-systems with their radiance.
8. To make 100 beings ripe for realizations by helping them make their minds agile.
9. To travel to 100 pure land buddha fields.
10. To open 100 gateways of *Dharma preventive measures* through giving teachings.
11. To emanate in 100 bodies.
12. To have each body surrounded by 100 bodhisattvas.

Note: These same powers are then multiplied as higher grounds are attained:

1st ground – 100 things, 2nd ground – 1,000, 3rd ground – 100,000, etc.

Practices at this level: The abandonment of intellectually acquired afflictive obstructions through one's meditative equipoise, practicing the six perfections, abandoning the three poisons, and collecting merit.

The fourth path – The path of meditation (Skt. *bhavanamarga*; Tib. *gomlam*).

The fourth level of a bodhisattva on the path. As the superior bodhisattva begins to eliminate the innate afflictive obstructions, he enters the path of meditation while simultaneously attaining the second bodhisattva ground. The attainment of all ten grounds is achieved through the

cultivation of the ten perfections (these ten perfections are condensed into the six perfection shared earlier, with the seventh through tenth perfections of method, prayer, spiritual power, and exalted wisdom, merged into the sixth—perfection of wisdom). Through the further practice of these perfections one then attains the third, fourth, fifth, sixth and seventh grounds.

The second ground: Stainless; attained through the perfection of ethics.

The third ground: Luminous; attained through the perfection of patience.

The fourth ground: Radiant; attained through the perfection of joyous effort.

The fifth ground: Difficult to overcome; attained through the perfection of concentration.

The sixth ground: Manifesting; attained through the perfection of wisdom.

The seventh ground: Gone afar; attained through the perfection of method.

The eighth ground: Immovable; attained through the perfection of prayer.

Upon reaching the eighth bodhisattva ground, one attains nirvana (the irreversible cessation of the three poisons) and has become an enlightened being. Further deepening meditation leads to the attainment of the ninth and finally tenth bodhisattva grounds.

The ninth ground: Good intelligence; attained through the perfection of spiritual powers.

The tenth ground: Cloud of doctrine; attained through the perfection of exalted wisdom.

Entry into this level:

Grounds 2-7: Beginning to eliminate the innate afflictive obstructions.

Grounds 8-10: Attaining nirvana.

Abilities gained at this level:

Grounds 2-7: The multiplying powers shared earlier: 100 things, 1,000 things, etc.

Grounds 8-10: Having attained nirvana the superior bodhisattva gains ten powers in addition to the multiplied powers above. These are the powers over:

1. Their own life spans – they can live as long as they wish.
2. Their minds – they can enter/arise from limitless types of absorbed concentration.
3. Necessities of life – they can find everything they need.
4. Activities – they know and can teach any art or science.
5. Birth – they can be born whenever and wherever they wish.
6. Prayers – to manifest themselves in any form needed.
7. Aspiration – they can manifest anything they see fit.
8. Extra physical emanation – they can go to any pure land that they wish.
9. Deep awareness – they are unimpeded in their learning.
10. The Dharma – they understand all the words and meanings of the teachings.

Note: These powers, although beyond ordinary comprehension, still do not approach the qualities and abilities of a buddha's omniscient awareness. Therefore when bodhisattvas are described as understanding all the dharma and so on, this means just within their own level and abilities.

Practices at this level: Abandoning *innate* afflictive obstructions and cognitive obstructions, meditating, cultivating the six perfections, and collecting merit.

The fifth path – The path of no more learning (Skt. *asaiksamarga*; Tib. *melobpelam*).

The fifth and final level for a bodhisattva on the path, which is buddhahood; the attainment of the omniscient mind of a buddha. The Mahayana tradition defines a buddha as an omniscient and omnipresent being, possessing both miraculous mental and miraculous physical qualities.

Entry into this level: The final abandonment of any remaining residue of ignorance, delusions, and afflictions, including the full perfection of all virtuous qualities and an uninterrupted direct cognition of emptiness.

Abilities gained at this level: Besides all of the powers attributed to a supreme bodhisattva, a buddha spontaneously manifests a pure land while existing in the state of non-abiding nirvana. The buddha attains the four buddha bodies, perceives both the ultimate and conventional simultaneously, can manifest countless emanations, in all conceivable forms, in countless worlds according to the needs of countless sentient beings, all without ever straying from the wisdom realizing the final nature of phenomena.

(This chart begins at the bottom)

Practices corresponding to each stage of the five paths		
5 Paths	About	Main practices
5 Path of no more learning	Buddhahood	
4 Path of meditation	Grounds: 8-10 - Nirvana	Abandoning any remaining residue of ignorance, meditating, practicing the perfections, meditation, and the collection of merit.
	Grounds: 2-7	Abandoning <i>innate</i> afflictive obstructions and cognitive obstructions, meditating, practicing the perfections, abandoning the three poisons, and collecting merit.
3 Path of seeing the disappearance of dual appearance when in meditation.	1st Ground: First direct non-conceptual realization of emptiness; no longer experiencing ordinary birth, sickness, and death	The abandonment of <i>intellectually acquired afflictive obstructions</i> through one's meditative equipoise, practicing the perfections, abandoning the three poisons, and collecting merit.
Path of preparation 2 The gradual lessening of dual appearances.	Highest dharma: No longer gross arising of the conception of true existence of the realization of emptiness. Forbearance: No longer the gross arising of the conception of true existence of wrong mental states. Peak: No longer the gross arising of the conception of true existence of pure phenomenon as truly existent. Heat: No longer the gross arising of the conception of true existence of contaminated phenomenon as truly existent.	Overcoming the misconceptions of true existence, deepening one's conceptual realization of emptiness, meditating, practicing the perfections, abandoning the three poisons, and collecting merit.
1 Path of accumulation	Large: The samadhi of a river of dharma Medium: Can no longer fall to lower path Small: Having a foundation of bodhicitta	Receiving teachings, meditating, cultivating calm abiding, practicing the perfections, abandoning the three poisons, collecting merit.

CHAPTER EIGHT: Buddhist Cosmology

Buddhist Cosmology/Mythology

In this chapter, I follow in the tradition of the Buddha, who showed little interest in addressing questions pertaining to metaphysics or cosmology, and instead, urged students to focus on the present task of liberating themselves from samsara. Additionally, because of growing debate pertaining to whether the Buddha actually taught the current presentation of cosmology shared by modern Buddhist traditions, I have decided, in the same spirit of the Buddha, not to emphasize this topic and instead have saved it for the end of this section where students can investigate it if they so wish. The Buddha's own aversion to metaphysical enquiry can be seen in his famous parable of a person who had been shot with an arrow but refused medical treatment until first finding out who shot him and what kind of arrow it was—a person who would potentially die while his questions still remained unanswered—implying that students shouldn't waste their time and energy on speculation, but instead, focus on the immediate work of attaining liberation.

Determining the current presentation of Buddhist cosmology as fact, metaphor, or mythology

The most potential inaccuracies within Buddhism are found in Buddhist cosmology, most of which are later scriptural additions not taught by the Buddha himself. In fact, many questions pertaining to cosmology and metaphysics were asked of the Buddha. However, he refused to answer these questions and often would simply remain silent. This became known as the Buddha's golden silence.

The Buddha's Golden Silence

Again, the Buddha had little interest in metaphysical and cosmological conjecture which he referred to as a net of theories and speculations that he refused to be drawn into and instead would often remain silent on these questions. It's speculated that the Buddha remained silent because any answer given, whether affirming or negating, would lead students into extremes of view. In fact, these same questions on which the Buddha remained silent are still being debated to this day by Buddhists, philosophers, and scientists. These questions became known as *the fourteen unanswered questions* of the Buddha.

- 1 & 2 - Is the universe eternal or transient?
- 3 & 4 - Is the universe both eternal and transient or neither eternal nor transient?
- 5 & 6 - Is the universe finite or infinite?
- 7 & 8 - Is the universe both finite and infinite or neither finite nor infinite?
- 9 & 10 - Is the 'I' identical with the material body or different from the material body?
- 11 & 12 - Does the Buddha exist after death or perish after death?
- 13 & 14 - Does the Buddha exist and perish after death or neither exist nor perish?

The Four Imponderables

Along this same vein, the Buddha also asserted the four imponderables. Also referred to as the *four unconjecturables, unthinkables, or incomprehensibles*, these four observations that are not to be extensively contemplated lest one become confused and/or distracted from the immediate work of attaining liberation.

1. The buddha-range of the buddhas: The range of powers of buddhas
2. The range of the meditative absorptions: The powers obtainable through meditation
3. The results of karma: The precise workings of karma
4. Speculation about the cosmos: Origins, existence, etc.

Although the Buddha remained silent on these questions, later Buddhist scholars did address these topics and in so doing began the evolution of the many different schools of Buddhist thought. These topics continue to be vigorously debated to this day.

Sources of Buddhist cosmology

Buddhist and tantric Buddhist cosmology are both derived from an Indian model that predates them, though each of the Indian religions seems to have tailored this cosmology to fit their own needs. The unique Buddhist cosmology was shaped mainly through the abhidharma scriptures—a repository of higher knowledge and training in wisdom, including cosmology, epistemology, ontology, phenomenology, metaphysics, and mind science. However, tantric Buddhist cosmology derives its presentation from tantric scriptures, mainly from the *Kalachakra tantra* and *Guhayasamaja tantra*, which compliment and further elucidate and expound upon the traditional Buddhist cosmological presentation. The Abhidharma was first presented within the Theravada tradition, a scriptural element that distinguished the Theravada from other Buddhist traditions of that time. Later the Abhidharma was translated/interpreted into Sanskrit by the great Indian master *Vasubandhu* in the fourth century CE. However, at the completion of the translation and/or interpretation, Vasubandhu himself had strong reservations about the validity of many of the assertions within these teachings. And now in the 21st century, we clearly know that aspects of the Abhidharma are simply inaccurate. The Abhidharma has always been a contentious collection of teachings, with each Buddhist tradition reinterpreting it to coincide with their own distinct views.

“My own view is that Buddhism must abandon many aspects of the Abhidharma cosmology.”

~ The 14th Dalai Lama

Some of the obvious inaccuracies within the Abhidharma include measurements of the size and distance of the sun and moon—asserting the sun to be only slightly bigger than the moon and roughly the same distance from the earth. On another account, the Kalachakra tantra asserts

that at the center of the universe lies the celestial mountain *Mount Meru* surrounded by oceans and four continents that are the base of support for all of the different realms and their inhabitance. Our own world is asserted to be located on one of the southern continents, a place known as *Jambu* or *Jambudvipa*. His Holiness asserts these views are clearly outdated. With that said, this doesn't undermine the value and validity of other assertions within the Abhidharma, where its teachings on epistemology, ontology, phenomenology, and mind science are profoundly insightful. It's important to remember that the Abhidharma was not taught by the Buddha himself, although, in an attempt to legitimize these teachings, it was asserted to have been taught by the Buddha to superior beings and his deceased mother in the heaven realms before being passed down to our realm.

The Cosmos According to Buddhist Scripture

Again, Buddhism inherits a similar cosmology to that of other Indian religions. It posits a universe possessing an infinite amount of inhabited world systems, existing in a constant cycle of expansion and contraction (formation, abiding, destruction, and vacuity). A universe that extends both horizontally—as in the groupings of stars and planets, as well as vertically—in ascending levels or realms of existence. The Buddha's model of reality doesn't posit a cosmos locked in battle between good and evil, but instead a natural universe indifferent to the ethical strife of beings. A cosmos that is inhabited by a multitude of streams of sentient consciousnesses (sentient beings) that continually manifest in various reoccurring forms. It's through the potential (*karma*) created through these beings' awareness that our reality and the cosmos is made manifest. A universe that tantric Buddhism asserts is comprised merely of mind and energy.

The three realms of samsaric existence (Skt. *tridhatu*; Tib. *kham sum*)

Buddhism asserts samsara as consisting of three distinct realms of existence: *the formless realm*, *form realm*, and *desire realm*. Although existence in some of these realms can be extremely long, none are eternal. All beings in these three realms, propelled by their karma and/or the purification of that karma, will eventually be reborn or transmigrate into higher or lower realms. Whether or not the three realms exist as actual realms of existence may be disputed; however, it is widely accepted that the three realms exist as levels of mental and/or meditative absorptions or concentrations (Skt. *dhyana*; Tib. *samten*; Pali. *jhana*).

1. The Formless realm (Skt. *arupyadhatu*; Tib. *zukmekham*)

Home of the *formless beings* (Skt. *arupadhatu pudgala*; Tib. *zugme kyi gang zag*): The name *formless* here pertains to the fact that beings in this realm are no longer preoccupied with matter or material concerns. This does not imply that these beings themselves are formless—instead, beings in this realm are said to possess very subtle bodies. In this realm, all sense forms (sights, sounds, odors, tastes, and tangible objects, including the

five senses for perceiving them) are arrested or suspended, and beings abide in single pointed meditation, without distraction. Practitioners who have attained a profound level of meditation may be reborn into this realm of subtle meditative absorption. The formless realm is divided into four levels called the four absorptions. *Absorptions* here can be understood as *deep meditative states of mind*.

The Four Absorptions

- Peak of cyclic existence level (*highest of the four absorptions*)
- Nothingness level
- Limitless consciousness level
- Limitless space level

2. The Form realm (Skt. *rupadhatu*; Tib. *zukham*)

Home of the *form beings* (Skt. *rupadhatu* *pudgala*; Tib. *zug kam kyi gang zag*): Beings with bodies of a very subtle nature. Practitioners whose minds have temporarily transcended the external sense desires of the lower realms, but still partake in the pleasures of internal contemplation, may be reborn into this realm of subtle meditative concentration or absorption. The form realm is divided into four levels called the *four concentrations*.

The Four Concentrations

- 4th Concentration level (*highest of the four*)
- 3rd Concentration level
- 2nd Concentration level
- 1st Concentration level

3. The Desire realm (Skt. *kama-dhatu*; Tib. *dökham*)

Home of beings who are primarily motivated by their desire for sense pleasures. The desire realm is divided into six realms. Of the six desire realms, the three higher realms are considered desirable destination of rebirth, whereas the three lower realms are considered undesirable destination of rebirth. Traditional teachers hold these realms and their corresponding types of inhabitance as real, whereas many progressive teachers assert the six desire realms as mere metaphor exemplifying different distinct states of consciousness and/or environments within our present world. According to Dzongsar Khyentse Rinpoche, *No Mahayana tradition believes the six realms to be physical places*. His Holiness the Dalai Lama states that it is up to the student's discretion whether to take the six realms as actual or metaphor.

1. **God realm:** Highest of the six desire realms and home of the *devas* (Skt.) *Iha* (Tib.), godlike beings possessing beauty and long life, who live in a state of blissful sensory pleasure. Beings in this realm, because of their strong attachment to blissful pleasures, are blind to the suffering of others, making spiritual practice and the

attainment of liberation difficult. *Type of suffering:* Although possessing every pleasure, devas suffer from the knowledge that at some point their superior karma will be exhausted—necessarily leading to lower rebirth. Their suffering also includes the pity and alienation they receive from the other devas preceding their death.

2. **Demigod realm:** Home of the *jealous devas* (Skt. *asuras*; Tib. *lha min*), warlike covetous god-beings depicted as enemies of the devas. *Type of suffering:* Because of their desire for the blissful pleasures of the god realm and their desire to be superior to others, these beings are consumed with jealousy and envy.
3. **Human realm:** Home of human beings (Skt. *manusyas*; Tib. *mi* (Tib.)). Considered the most fortunate state of existence because humans have the optimum balance of pleasure and suffering which offers the greatest potential for enlightenment. *Type of suffering:* physical, mental, and emotional, and existential suffering arising from ignorance, desire, aversion, fear, doubt, etc.
4. **Animal realm:** Home of animals (Skt. *tiryaks*; Tib. *dhüdo*). A realm of killing and being killed; due to deep ignorance and the lack of self-awareness or introspection, liberation cannot be achieved in this realm. *Type of suffering:* physical, mental and emotional suffering, stupidity, complacency, fear, being exploited by humans, etc.
5. **Hungry ghost realm:** Home of *hungry ghosts* (Skt. *pretas*; Tib. *yidag*), beings who are tormented by continual and unsatisfied cravings. Depicted with huge bellies representing their insatiable desire, and tiny mouths and throats representing their inability to satisfy their desire. *Type of suffering:* compulsion, unattainable desire, and addiction/obsession.
6. **Hell realm:** Home of hell beings (Skt. *narakas*; Tib. *nyalba*), beings who, because of their past negative karma, are horribly and continuously tortured. Within the Buddhist hell realm, there are eight hot and eight cold hells. Often imagined as existing deep below the surface of the earth. *Type of suffering:* The suffering of the hell realms are depicted in a myriad of strange and horrible descriptions of recurring physical and mental torture.

Note: Again, it's asserted that although existence in some of these realms can be extremely long, no realm is eternal. All beings in these three realms, propelled by their karma and/or the purification of that karma, will eventually be reborn or transmigrate into higher or lower realms; or through diligent effort gain irreversible liberation from the three realms by attaining enlightenment.

The Realms of Existence Within Buddhism

(This chart begins at the bottom)

Existence outside of the three realms		
Pure land Akanishta	Non-abiding nirvana Liberation from the three realms	Buddhas
Nirvana	Liberation from the suffering of the three realms while still technically existing within them	Arya bodhisattvas and arhats
The 3 samsaric realms	The 9 levels	Beings in these realm
The 3 samsaric realms can be further divided into the 9 levels of samsaric existence. All samsaric realms are suffering with rebirth contingent upon one's karma		
Formless realm The 4 immaterial absorptions Skt. <i>arupyadhatu</i> Tib. <i>zukmekham</i>	9. Peak of cyclic existence level	* Formless beings and Formless realm gods
	8. Nothingness level	
	7. Limitless consciousness level	
	6. Limitless space level	
Form realm The 4 material concentrations Skt. <i>rupadhatu</i> Tib. <i>zukkham</i>	5. 4 th Concentration level	* Form beings and Form realm gods
	4. 3 rd Concentration level	
	3. 2 nd Concentration level	
	2. 1 st Concentration level	
Desire realm The 6 desire realms Skt. <i>kama-dhatu</i> Tib. <i>dökham</i>	1. Desire level	
	1. God realm	Gods
	2. Demigod realm	Jealous gods
	3. Human realm	Humans
	4. Animal realm	Animals
	5. Hungry ghost realm	Hungry ghosts
	6. Hell realm	Hell beings

* These high realms are considered to be heaven realms, therefore these high level meditators once born into these realms are considered form realm gods and formless realm gods. It is said that they possess the same abilities and can interact with all the devas in the realms in which they inhabit.

Note: These nine realms can be further divided into thirty-one planes of existence, with the desire realm being divided into eleven distinct planes of existence, the form realm divided into sixteen planes, and the formless divided into four.

Time According to Buddhist Cosmology

Buddhism posits time, including the three times of past, present, and future, as merely a conventional function of the mind that conceptually imputes it. Ultimately, time doesn't exist. This was asserted by the Buddha when he claimed that nirvana (the ultimate truth) is beyond time.

"Buddhists don't assert space and time as a background grid that provides the space/time coordinates of objects located within it." ~ Dr. Alexander Berzin

The time span of the universe

Buddhist cosmology measures the time span of the universe in aeons (Skt. *kalpas*; Tib. *kalpas*), with one aeon being the period of time between the creation and recreation of a universal system. A kalpa begins with the arising of the primordial winds, which begin to reform the structures of the previous universe that was destroyed at the end of the last kalpa.

Belief in an apocalypse: Unlike most other religions, Buddhist does not assert an apocalyptic story. Instead it posits the natural recurring process of formation, abiding, destruction, and vacuity of universal systems. However, Tibetan tantric scriptures do have an epic story and/or prophecy of a future war pertaining to the mythical Tibetan kingdom of *Shambala* (Skt.; Tib. *deyung*), depicted as a hidden and magical Himalayan kingdom inhabited by enlightened beings. According to His Holiness, Shambala is not a physical place that can be found, but instead, is a pure land existing within the human realm where those with the proper merit can visit or be reborn. The prophecy of the war of Shambala tells of a distant future when our world is divided into two opposing forces: the forces of light (the Buddhist Shambalains) and the forces of darkness (barbarians). The forces of darkness, which have conquered most of the world, are focused on conquering the Shambala kingdom. The story tells of the forces of darkness waging a brutal battle against the forces of light. However, due to the Shambalain's advanced technology, the forces of darkness are repelled and conquered, ushering in a golden age of peace in the world.

Beings within Buddhist Cosmology

Buddhist cosmology asserts a myriad of different beings, from humans and animals to a miraculous list of supernatural, mystical, and mythical beings.

Animals (Skt. *tiryaks*; Tib. *dhüdo*): Inhabitants of the animal realm—including insect life. Due to deep ignorance and lack of self-awareness and introspection, liberation is not possible for the beings in this realm.

Arhats / arhati (female) (Skt.; Tib. *dachomba*): *One who is worthy of veneration*. The highest level of enlightened beings (however, not yet a buddha). A term used predominately within the Theravada tradition.

Bodhisattvas (Skt.; Tib. *jang chub sempa*): *Humans who possess the mind of awakening* (bodhichitta); an advanced practitioner (monastic or lay) who possesses the altruistic aspiration and determination to attain buddhahood in order to free all beings from samsara. It's asserted that the bodhisattva, although in a position to attain parinirvana, out of great compassion to sentient beings, forgoes it and instead chooses to be reborn and abide in samsara to continue to perfect themselves in order to become a buddha. A foundational element of the Mahayana tradition.

Buddhas (Skt.; Tib. *sanggye*): *Awakened ones*; a human who has perfected all possible virtuous qualities while abandoning all remaining residue of ignorance, afflictions, and delusions, thereby achieving buddhahood—the complete and irreversible liberation from samsara.

The three types of buddhas

- **Samyaksambuddhas** (Skt.; Tib. *thekchen gi jangchub*): One who becomes fully enlightened through their own efforts and insight and then teaches the dharma to others. Also known as *wheel turner*—buddhas who introduce a momentous and new dharma as in the case of the historical Buddha of our age Buddha Shakyamuni.
- **Pratyekabuddhas** (Skt.; Tib. *rangyal gi jangchub*): One who becomes fully enlightened through their own efforts and insight; however are unwilling or incapable of teaching others.
- **Sravakabuddhas** (Skt.; Tib. *nyenthoe ki jangchub*): One who depends on the guidance and teachings of a buddha to attain buddhahood.

Dakinis and dakas (Skt.): *Sky-goers*; fully enlightened beings who are the embodiment of enlightened activity; beings who may take on different forms in order to aid and guide practitioners.

ers on their path. Dakinis and dakas can also be highly realized human yogis or yoginis often acting as oracles or spiritual muses during tantric ritual. These terms can additionally pertain to a tantric sexual consort.

Dakinis (Skt.; Tib. *khandroma*): Female sky-goer

Dakas (Skt.; Tib. *kandro*): Male sky-goer (less prevalent in Tibetan Buddhism)

Devas, deities, gods, and spirits

It's important to understand that the East and West have much different concepts of what constitutes a god, deva, or deity. In the West, god is often seen as a loving/punishing father who is the creator of the universe and its inhabitants, whereas in the East, god/gods, devas, and deities are often seen as more impersonal and less involved in the daily lives of human beings. They are powerful beings who are charged with specific roles in keeping the universe in balance and aid in its continuation. Buddhism, being non-theistic, does not adhere to the concept of an all powerful omnipotent creator god, nevertheless there is the notion of lesser gods/devas who, although god-like, are merely highly-evolved sentient beings. Generally the terms devas, deities, and gods can be understood as synonymous, but on a deeper level, there are subtle differences. Devas, deities, and gods are commonly divided into two types: the *mundane*-gods, demigods, deities, and spirits who although powerful are still, like ourselves, trapped within the three realms of samsaric cyclic existence, and impaired by the same ignorance, afflictions, and delusions; and the *supramundane*-specific deities and protectors, including deities within tantric mandala practices who are considered buddhas, including: deities that are emanations of buddhas, and superior bodhisattvas—including buddhas who emanate as bodhisattvas and actual superior bodhisattvas who have attained the path of seeing. Generally, I use the terms gods and devas as synonymous, pertaining to the mundane beings who inhabit the god realms, and the term deities as pertaining to supramundane beings that are emanations of buddhas and superior bodhisattvas. With that said, below I present some points that commonly differentiate these similar and often confusing terms.

Devas (Skt.; Tib. *lha*): *Shining one*; inhabitants of the deva or god realm; the term deva is found within all Indian religions and is commonly understood as mundane gods possessing beauty and long life, who live in a state of blissful sensory pleasure. Although powerful, devas are still unenlightened beings and exist within samsaric cyclic existence and therefore are inferior to buddhas.

Deities (Skt. *ishtadevata*; Tib. *yidam*): Synonymous with supramundane deities, meditation deities, and tantric deities. Within Buddhism, and especially tantric Buddhism, there are countless deities, each embodying and exemplifying a unique set of qualities. However, what exactly deities are, and how they exist, is not often clear, because many traditions and

teachers have their own unique interpretations. Some see deities as omnipotent gods and the focus of worship, while others believe deities to be merely symbolic representations or archetypes of distinct aspects of the mind used as visualization aids. The Gelug school asserts that deities are emanations of various aspects of the enlightened mind, meaning that buddhas and superior bodhisattvas can emanate as particular deities in order to benefit in particular ways. Buddhas may choose to emanate as a specific deity because of its unique benefit or because they possess a strong predisposition for that specific deity. With that said, the idea of deities as existing as singular entities is mistaken. For example, the deity *Avalokiteshvara*—the deity of loving kindness and compassion, is not merely a single deity, but instead is the enlightened aspect of compassion and can be manifested by many buddhas simultaneously, meaning there can be countless Avalokiteshvaras in existence at any given time.

Wrathful deities (Tib. *dragpo lha*): *The wrathful aspect/emanations of deities.* In difficult situations, when power, strength, and controlled anger may be needed to benefit others, peaceful deities can manifest their wrathful aspect in order to skillfully create a virtuous result.

Demigods (Skt. *asuras*; Tib. *lha min*): *Inhabitants of the demigod realm;* the realm of the fighting gods; one of the six desire realms. Often referred to as *jealous devas*, demigods are warlike mundane gods depicted as enemies of the devas who are consumed with jealousy and envy. Although powerful, demigods are still unenlightened beings and exist within samsaric cyclic existence and therefore are inferior to buddhas.

Dharma Protectors (Skt. *dharmapala*; Tib. *chö kyong*): *Mundane deities that protect the Buddha's teachings.* Often believed to be harmful spirits that Buddhism had conquered, tamed, and transformed into a strong positive force, who are then delegated to protecting the dharma and Buddhist practitioners under their care. The almost demonic imagery of both wrathful deities and dharma protectors can be found throughout Tibetan iconology. Although rituals pertaining to Dharma protectors can be found in earlier Indian Buddhism, within Tibetan Buddhism the practice became central and vastly expanded. It's said that many of the Tibetan dharma protectors began as demons from the early Bön religion—the original shamanistic religion of Tibet. Demons, although pacified by the Dharma, still possess their wrathful/evil appearance.

Form beings (Skt. *rupadhatu pudgala*; Tib. *zug kam kyi gang zag*): *Inhabitants of the form realm;* one of the three realms of existence. Beings who possess forms of a very subtle nature, whose minds have temporarily transcended the sense desires of the desire realm.

Formless beings (Skt. *arupadhatu pudgala*; Tib. *zugme kyi gang zog*): *Inhabitants of the formless realm, the peak of the three realms of existence.* The name *formless* here pertains to the fact that the beings in this realm are no longer preoccupied with matter or material concerns and does not imply that these beings themselves are formless, but instead possess very subtle bodies.

Hell beings (Skt. *Narakas*; Tib. *nyalba*): *Inhabitants of the hell realms, the lowest of the six desire realms.* Because of past negative karma, these beings are delegated to an existence of horrible pain and continuous torture within any of the eight hot or eight cold hells.

Human beings (Skt. *manusyas*; Tib. *mi*): *Inhabitants of the human realm; one of the six desire realms.* Considered the most fortunate state of existence because humans have the optimum balance of pleasure and suffering which offers the greatest potential for enlightenment.

Hungry ghosts (Skt. *pretas*; Tib. *yidag*): *Inhabitants of the hungry ghost realm, one of the six desire realms.* Hungry ghosts are beings who are tormented by continuous and unsatisfied cravings. Depicted as having huge bellies representing their insatiable desire, and tiny mouths and throats representing their inability to satisfy their desires.

Mara (Skt.; Tib. *dü*): *Metaphor and personification of one's self-grasping ignorance, afflictions, samsaric delusions, and/or obstacles to Dharma practice.* Mara is the embodiment of the false self, wrong views, and desire for samsaric sense pleasures. In the story of the Buddha's enlightenment, Mara (the Buddha's own ignorance, delusions, and afflictions) is the tempter that the Buddha must overcome prior to his awakening.

Nagas (Skt.; Tib. *lu*): *Magical serpent-like creatures found in both Hindu and Buddhist mythology.* Nagas, usually water dwelling, are said to be temperamental beings described as half fish and half snake, also interpreted as dragons. Although classified as animals, they are intelligent and possess god-like powers which can both help and hinder human beings.

Spirits, ghosts, and demons

Within Buddhism, these three terms, though generally synonymous in scripture, are seen as distinctly different among common people. Within Tibetan Buddhism, the list of the various spirits, demons, and ghosts is extensive.

Spirits (Tib. *namshe*): Both helpful and harmful; although often powerful, spirits are still unenlightened beings within samsaric existence and rebirth. Harmful spirits may create obstacles for humans, while helpful spirits may be called upon for divination or protection.

Ghosts (Tib. *dre*): *Disembodied beings trapped in the in-between state between rebirths, similar to the Western idea of ghosts.*

Demons (Tib. *döñ*): *Extremely wicked and always hostile to humans. Similar to the Western depiction within horror movies.* Considered to be mere superstition by most Buddhist traditions yet widely accepted by common people.

Yama or yamaraja (Skt.; Tib. *shinje chögyal*): *The lord of death; a metaphor and personification of the impending inevitability of death.* An ancient Indian archetype shared by most Indian traditions.

CHAPTER NINE:

Benefits and Misconceptions of the Buddhist View

Benefits of holding the Buddhist View

Here, after exploring the Buddha's many teachings and asserted beliefs, I thought it would be a good place to underscore some of the benefits of holding the Buddhist view, as well as to address some of the common misconceptions that frequently arise. Besides the most obvious benefit of cutting directly at the roots of one's ignorance, thereby establishing the causes for liberation, the Buddhist view also benefits practitioners in many other ways.

- **Through embracing a multi life view** - one's anxieties pertaining to one's current life and in particular, fears pertaining to aging, sickness, and death are greatly diminished. For when one embraces the idea that they have lived countless lives before, then one also realizes that they have experienced aging, sickness, and death countless times before and consequently these processes become benign, unthreatening, and are seen as natural aspects of one's existence.
- **Through embracing the positive potentiality of karma** - one begins to recognize the vast potential and opportunity that karma presents. One can construct or reinvent one's life in any way one sees fit.
- **Through embracing impermanence** - one begins to realize obstacles and difficulties as transitory and ephemeral. This leads to an acceptance of the natural ebb and flow of experiences and events (both positive and negative) within one's life.
- **Through embracing selflessness and emptiness** - one begins to realize that we exist in a wondrous and extraordinary way—not as static autonomous entities but as beginningless and endless dynamic processes in a state of constant and infinite change. Through understanding selflessness, we begin to realize that the body and mind are not the person, and because *person* lacks any essential essence, *person* cannot be hurt, insulted, or diminished. This is the liberation and freedom that comes from the clear understanding of the emptiness of person and phenomena.
- **Through embracing altruism** - one contributes to a more harmonious community, while in return creating the causes for one's own happiness.
- **Through embracing obstacles as fuel for one's path** - one begins to see one's suffering and hindrances as a means for liberation; for it's through life's trials and tribulations that we grow and mature. Therefore the Buddhist view helps us to see obstacles as opportunities for practice and a method for improving ourselves. Meaning, although suffering and hindrances remain challenging to work with, they are accepted and engaged within a positive framework. Furthermore, the arising and passing of obstacles are seen as a process of purification, in which our past karma is being burned off.

Common misconceptions about the Buddhist View

- **The misconception that Buddhism rejects pleasure**

Buddhism doesn't deny that worldly sense pleasures are indeed enjoyable. It merely asserts that they are often problematic, unstable, fleeting, and most often not conducive to the goal of liberation. Conversely, Buddhism asserts that through deep meditation, high states of bliss are attainable, a transcendental bliss that far outweighs ordinary worldly pleasure. This meditative bliss is said to be the highest pleasure attainable within cyclic existence. Therefore it can be said that Buddhist practitioners are not denying themselves pleasure, but instead merely trading fleeting trivial pleasures for greater ultimate pleasure, often expressed as *trading candy for gold*.

- **The misconception that Buddhism asserts all desire as non-virtuous**

It's true that within Buddhist scriptures the term *desire* or *attachment* is associated with non-virtue. However, this is merely semantics, for clearly there are *virtuous desires* (e.g., the desire to benefit others or the desire to attain enlightenment). Generally, Buddhism uses the term *wish* when pertaining to virtuous intentions (e.g., the wish to benefit others, the wish to attain enlightenment), and the term *desire* for non-virtuous intentions (e.g., worldly desires, the desire for wealth and power), this is due to the fact that the Tibetan term for desire (Tib. *düchak*), carries a negative connotation.

- **The misconception that desire is the root cause of suffering**

Correctly, Buddhism posits that it's one's ignorance of the true nature of oneself and reality that is the source of all suffering. It is through one's ignorance that delusions, afflictions, desire, and aversions arise as secondary afflictions.

- **Misconceptions about virtue, non-virtue, and sin**

The Buddhist model of reality does not assert the notion of a universe locked in battle between the forces of good and evil. Instead, Buddhism posits a natural universe that is indifferent to the strife of beings, beings who live within self-generated realities of conflict and suffering, whose true struggle is between ignorance and understanding, not good and evil. Buddhism asserts that it is ignorance, not evil or sin, that is the source of all suffering, and understanding and wisdom that is the catalysts for liberation. With that in mind, because of being non-theistic, Buddhism doesn't posit the notion of sin—commonly defined as *a violation of a moral law or law of God*. Instead, Buddhism posits *virtue* that leads to liberation and *non-virtue* that leads to suffering. However, currently within Tibetan Buddhism, due to poor translations, the English term *sin* is commonly being used by practitioners (both Tibetan and Western alike). This is due to the mistaken translation of the Tibetan term *digpa* (often translated as sin); however, *digpa* is actually synonymous with the Tibetan term *migewa*, meaning non-virtue and/or negative action.

- **The misconception that Buddhism asserts the ego as the enemy**

This is a clear misunderstanding of the Buddha's teachings. Of course one's narcissism (ego) is a core problem and an immediate cause for suffering. However, within Buddhism, it's one's own ignorance of the true nature of oneself and reality that is the root cause of suffering. The idea of one's narcissism being the foundational cause of suffering creates a strange image of a schizophrenic-like split of the mind—as if there were two opposing wills locked in battle—which is simply not the case. Some teachers incorrectly present ego or narcissism as a kind of entity fighting to survive, or an enemy one must overcome to reach enlightenment—this is mistaken. Even in the story of the Buddha's enlightenment where he is depicted as fighting *Mara* (the metaphorical tempter the Buddha must overcome prior to his awakening), Mara is not his narcissism, but instead the personification of his self-grasping ignorance and his attachment and aversions to worldly concerns and sense desires. The truth is, we possess one will—not two. One's narcissism is merely an aspect of the mind (comprised of many different exaggerated mental factors) and not an entity in its own right. I often wonder if this is an unconscious act of assimilating the Judeo-Christian concept of the two external opposing forces of good and evil locked in battle over one's will (commonly illustrated as an angel sitting on one shoulder and a devil on the other) which is a concept not found within Buddhism.

- **The misconception that Buddhism asserts life as merely a dream**

This is a common misconception. What the Buddha asserted was that life is dream-like, but he never posited life to be a dream.

- **The misconception that Buddhism believes nothing exists**

No tradition of Buddhism rejects existence—although different Buddhist traditions have various assertions on *how* things exist. Any rejection of existence would be nihilism, a dangerous wrong view, and would disqualify any group from being considered a Buddhist tradition.

- **The misconception that all Buddhist beliefs were established by the Buddha**

Many of the beliefs that Buddhism asserts, including samsara, karma, and rebirth, were in place long before the Buddha's arrival, although he often asserted a unique interpretation of the terms. However, there are elements of the Buddha's teaching that are clearly unique and could not have been derived from earlier Indian traditions of that time. They include:

- The doctrine of no-self
- The doctrine of the two truths
- The doctrine of dependent origination
- The doctrine of emptiness
- The Buddha's four noble truths
- The practice of mindful awareness

- The Buddha's middle way philosophy
 - The concept of nirvana
 - The concept of bodhichitta
 - The concept of self reliance and the rejection of authority and absolutism
 - The four hallmarks of Buddhism
 - Monasticism
-
- **The misconception of watered-down Buddhism**

On a personal note, I have always had difficulty with the term *watered-down Buddhism*, referring to a diluted interpretation of the Buddha's teachings which lacks its true essence. I find that besides being a difficult discernment to isolate, the expression is a contentious term used to condemn divergent interpretations and an expression favored by the dogmatic. Of course the term is illogical for anyone who knows Buddhism's long and diverse history of ever-changing interpretations and adaptation. Buddhism from its very conception has always existed in multiple levels of presentations. The Buddha himself was a master teacher who skillfully taught different presentations to different audiences in accordance with their particular needs and aptitudes rather than imposing a one-size-fits-all doctrine. To this day, it's considered the responsibility of every qualified teacher to make the teachings relevant and accessible to all, including for students who may feel alienated by certain beliefs, cultural aspects, or philosophical views.

With that said, no one would deny that the accurate preservation of the authentic Buddha's teachings is paramount in any Buddhist tradition and that a distinction must always be made between authentic presentations, skillful presentations, and wrong presentations. However, to believe that a qualified teacher sharing the Buddha's teachings in a manner or on a level that is beneficial and useful to a particular audience is somehow teaching *watered-down Buddhism* is logically indefensible. Clearly, there are core aspects of the teachings that can't be changed (the four noble truths, dependent arising, no-self etc.), however, many secondary concepts are still being debated to this day. This can be seen within Buddhist cosmology where many long-held beliefs have been clearly disproven and are no longer accepted by any properly educated practitioner (e.g., that the world is flat, or that the sun and moon are roughly the same size and distance from the earth). Many of the views that are currently accepted as being taught by the Buddha are actually divergent philosophies that emerged hundreds of years after the Buddha's death. Likewise, there is often new evidence that calls into question which aspects of the teachings are authentically Buddhist and which are merely traditional, cultural, or religious adaptations. Would abandoning concepts of this nature constitute watered-down Buddhism? When is it acceptable to abandon scriptural assertions that have been long proven wrong? And by whose authority?

There are those who can't envision how an authentic presentation of the Buddha's teachings and a skillful presentation can mutually coexist. However, throughout Buddhism's long history these different presentations have always coexisted harmoniously,

with no account of the skillful presentation ever undermining, diminishing, or damaging the authentic teachings. Tibetan Buddhism is possibly the best example of this, where differences between the monastic and lay presentations were extreme and almost unrecognizable as the same tradition. The lay presentation resembling a theistic religion, with practitioners holding the buddhas to be omnipotent gods, a presentation almost devoid of the Buddha's actual teachings or common Buddhist practices such as meditation or mindfulness. However, this skillful presentation never interfered with the preservation and transmission of the authentic Tibetan Buddhist teachings, nor was there any fear that it would.

- **The misconception that Buddhism is about withdrawing from the world**

On the contrary, Buddhism is about cultivating the right balance between one's external and internal environments. It's about learning how to properly engage with the world and in one's relationships (family, friends, community, and workplace). Although some practitioners may choose to practice in solitude, residing in remote places; this is done simply because the silence and peace are conducive to Buddhist practice. However, once their studies and meditation goals have been achieved, they would then re-enter, engage with, and benefit the world. The Buddha himself, before becoming enlightened, practiced in solitude for many years until his goals were reached, after which he reemerged and spent the rest of his life engaging fully with the world.

- **The misconception that Buddhism asserts monism—that all things are one**

Buddhism posits a form of pluralism, not monism. It asserts that all phenomena exist interrelationaly, dependent on many causes and conditions. However, at the same time, each phenomenon maintains a unique independent nature. For although phenomena are interdependent, they are not necessarily interdependent with *all* other phenomena.

- **The misconception that the Buddha was obese**

I'm often asked about the statues portraying the Buddha as obese, referred to as the fat or laughing Buddha. However, these very popular statues are not a representation of the Buddha, but instead of an eccentric Chinese monk named *Budai* who is seen as the embodiment of contentment and known for his love of candy. Conversely, the Buddha is depicted as having a thin build, as seen in Thai statues. In fact, it's said that prior to his enlightenment while in ascetic retreat, the Buddha almost starved himself to death, living on as little as five grains of rice a day. Today, statues of the *emaciated Buddha*, depicting him in ascetic retreat, which exemplifies the Buddha's incredible perseverance, are very popular among serious practitioners.

- **The misconception that all Buddhist monastics are vegetarians**

Many people believe that Buddhist monastics are vegetarians, which is false. The majority of monastics in the world eat meat—as did the Buddha himself (this can be verified

through various scriptural citations in which the Buddha defends his meat consumption when confronted with various Brahmans). The reason for this is that many monks, like the Buddha himself, practice *choicelessness*, eating whatever is placed into their alms bowl. By being choiceless, monastics are less of a burden on the lay community, while at the same time negating any negative karma pertaining to the slaughter of animals. However, today, most of us are fully engaged in making choices every time we pick up a menu or purchase meat from the market. Therefore, as Buddhist logic clearly dictates, one is participating in the slaughter and commerce of sentient beings, and will therefore share the negative karma generated from such an act. Today, most modern Buddhist traditions are now emphasizing vegetarianism. His Holiness has mandated that all Tibetan monasteries adhere to a strictly vegetarian menu—although many monastics, when outside of the monastery, still eat meat, per their Tibetan culture.

Conclusion

To some, the Buddha's teachings can seem ambiguous, overly complex, and difficult to fully understand. This can be attributed to the fact that the Buddha's complex model of the nature of reality parallels a highly complex universe. Also, the Buddha's model of reality is often counter-intuitive and contrary to the way we intuitively believe ourselves to exist, bringing into question the very validity of our presumed reality. It is similar to Copernicus's shocking proclamation that the earth was not the center of the universe, which may have been the first time people began to see how their intuitive beliefs about themselves and their world could be mistaken, and that counterintuitive truth, however uncomfortable to accept, could in the end, be correct. The Buddha challenges us to be courageous enough to embrace the complexity and ambiguity of our existence, to step outside of the comfort and security of our presumed reality, and to be open to the possibility that our current views could be mistaken. The Buddha's unique model of the nature of reality is that which truly separates Buddhist thought from all other ideologies. It can be said that all of the Buddha's teachings, prescribed practices, and the path itself can be seen in one way or another as pertaining merely to the cultivation and habituation of the Buddha's model of reality. Buddhism asserts, that through the direct realization of our true selfless nature and the true empty nature of reality, permanent freedom from mundane samsaric existence is attainable.

Appendix

Buddhist Symbols, Ritual Implements, and Paraphernalia

Symbols Shared by All Buddhist Traditions



Dharma wheel (Skt. *dharma cakra*; Tib. *chökhor*): Symbolizing Buddhism and the Buddha's teachings; pertaining to *the turning of the wheel of buddhadharma*—the introduction of a momentous new teaching by a buddha.



Deer wheel (Tib. *retak chö khor*): Symbolizing Buddhism and the Buddha's teachings, and/or more specifically, the first turning of the wheel of buddhadharma at the Deer Park in Sarnath, India.



Buddhist flag (Tib. *nangpe darcha*): Designed in the late 19th century to unite the various Buddhist traditions under one flag.



Bodhi tree (Skt.; Tib. *changchup jün shing*): *Tree of enlightenment*. The tree that sheltered the Buddha while he attained enlightenment. The Buddha claimed that because this tree had sheltered him, it was worthy of veneration and could serve as a symbol of his teachings.



Lotus flower (Skt. *padma*; Tib. *pema*): Symbolizing enlightenment. As a beautiful flower that grows out of mud, the lotus symbolizes purity arising out of impurity and the transmutation of ignorance into wisdom.



Wisdom eyes (Tib. *sherub ki chen*): Often found painted on stupas, these wisdom eyes represent the all-seeing omnipresent compassion of the buddhas. The dot between the eyes represents the third eye—a symbol of spiritual awakening.



Stupas (Skt.; Tib. *chöten*): Buddhist ritual monuments. Sacred structures often containing relics of great masters. Believed to have the power to generate world peace, prevent natural catastrophes, and a source of great blessings. All Buddhist traditions practice circumambulation (Tib. *Kora*) of large stupas in order to gain blessings.



Small stupas (Skt.; Tib. *chöten*): Small stupas that can be placed on one's altar as a representation of the Buddha's mind.



Footprints of the Buddha (Skt. *sri pada*; Tib. *shinye*): A symbolic representation of the Buddha meant to remind us that he was present on earth and left a spiritual path to be followed.

Tibetan Symbols



Tibetan flag (Tib. *püki gyaldar*): The national flag of Tibet. In the centre of the flag stands a white snow-mountain representing the nation of Tibet. The six red bands spread across the dark blue sky represent the original ancestors of the Tibetan people. The pair of snow lions represents fearlessness and virtue, and the jewels they hold represent Tibetan's reverence for the three jewels.



Snow lion (Tib. *kang seng*): Celestial/mythical animal and emblem of the snowy mountain ranges of Tibet. Symbolizing power, strength, fearlessness, playfulness, joy, and bliss. The Snow Lion's roar is said to embody the sound of emptiness, courage, and truth.



Prayer flags (Tib. *lung ta*): Inscribed with auspicious symbols, invocations, prayers, and/or mantras and hung between trees, around temples, homes, or mountain ridges where their blessing can be carried by the wind to bring good fortune to the surrounding area. Traditionally in five colors (yellow, green, red, white, blue) representing the elements of earth, water, fire, wind, and space.

Tibetan Buddhist Ritual Implements



Altars (Skt. *butsudan*; Tib. *chösham*): The preparing of a daily altar is an offering practice used to petition blessing and focus one's practice. The most common alter being a statue or picture of the Buddha and/or one's teacher with seven small bowls of clean water placed before it.



Vajra and bell (Tib. *dor-dil*): Tantric practice implements.

Vajra (Skt.; Tib. *dorje*): Meaning thunderbolt or diamond. A ritual scepter symbolizing the masculine principle, compassion, skillful means, and indestructibility.

Bell (Skt. *ghanta*; Tib. *dilbu*): The necessary counterpart to the vajra. Symbolizing the feminine principle and the wisdom of emptiness.



Prayer beads (Skt. *mala*; Tib. *teng wa*): Used to count the amount of mantras, prostrations, or ritual offerings made during practice. Malas traditionally have 108 beads and can be made of various materials and in various colors that may be associated with particular deities or symbolic meanings.



Prayer wheels (Tib. *mani khorlo*): Spinning round hollow drums filled with scrolls of mantras. It's believed that when one spins the wheel the merit gained is the same as if one recited all the mantras contained within it.



Handheld prayer wheels (Tib. *mani lakkhor*):

Small prayer wheels spun in one's hand to accumulate merit.



Scroll painting (Tib. *thangka*): Depicting deities, mandalas, or aspects of practice; used as a focal point of meditation in tantric practice, where one visualizes deities and their respected qualities while making offerings and requests for blessings. Hung on the walls of temples, shrine rooms, practitioner's rooms, and homes.



Cloth victory banner (Skt. *dhvaja*; Tib. *gyaltsen*): Cylinder cloth banners that hang in prayer halls. Symbolizing complete victory of the Buddhist doctrine over the three poisons, delusions, afflictions, and negativities of the world.



Metal victory banner (Skt. *dhvaja*; Tib. *gyaltsen*): Ornate copper drums traditionally placed on the four corners of monastery and temple roofs. Symbolizing complete victory of the Buddhist doctrine over the three poisons, delusions, afflictions, and negativities of the world.



Vajra cross (Skt. *visvavajra*; Tib. *dorje gyatram*): Also referred to as the *double dorje*; symbolizing the foundation of the physical world. Whether vertical or in X-form, it is an emblem of stability, protection, immoveable determination, and all-accomplishing wisdom. Often used as a seal or stamp, found impressed on plates at the base of statues that protect and keep prayers/relics inside.



Large ritual drum (Tib. *nga*): Used in tantric practice to set the meter or rhythm for group chanting.



Ritual drum (Tib. *damaru*): A small hand drum used in tantric practice.



Cymbals (Tib. *bukchai*): Wrathful cymbals used during tantric ceremonies.



Small cymbals (Tib. *tingsha*): Tingshas produce a clear, high pitched, and long ringing tone or "ting" sound, from which its name is derived. In the Tibetan tradition it is mainly used when making tantric smoke offerings.



Ritual dagger (Tib. *phurba*): A three sided ritual dagger used only symbolically within tantric practice. The three sides represent the cutting of the three poisons (ignorance, attachment, and aversion) also used to arrest demons.



Ritual hooked knife (Skt. *kattari*; Tib.*tikug*): A ritual curved knife symbolizing the destruction of the demonic forces (destructive emotions). Used only symbolically in tantric practice, the hooked knife represents the cutting of ego, pride, boredom, lack of faith, and fear.



Thighbone trumpet (Tib. *Kangling*): A wrathful and subjugating trumpet used in tantric practice. Often made from copper or silver but originally made from human thighbones.



Conch shell (Skt. *shankha*; Tib. *dung*): A ritual horn whose sound when blown symbolizes the spread of Dharma and awakening from ignorance.



Skull cap vase (Skt. *Kapala*; Tib. *töpa*): Found on the lama's table during tantric empowerments. Kapalas are filled with blessed water and sacred pills that are used to anoint or bless. Kapalas symbolize the ability to sustain the bliss of nonconceptual wisdom.



Mandalas (Skt.; Tib. *kilkhor*): Sacred models or diagrams, often circular, which are symbolic representations of a meditational deity's palace/universe, his entourage, and his enlightened activities. Mandalas are used as an aid to visualization within tantric practice.



Sand mandalas (Skt.; Tib. *kilkhor*): Created using colored sand and used as a focal point for visualizing deities and their respected qualities. As a meditation on impermanence (a central teaching of Buddhism), after completion, it is dismantled/destroyed and dispersed into a river or lake.



Offering mandalas (Skt.; Tib. *mandal*): Assembled during tantric empowerments. Smaller offering mandalas can be placed upon one's altar.



Offering mandalas (Skt.; Tib. *mandal*): Offered to the lama as part of a tantric empowerment, often with a long colorful braided ribbon attached. The pan is the actual mandala and the knobs on top are torma offerings representing Mount Meru and the four continents.



Ritual offering cakes (Skt. *bali*; Tib. *torma*): Made from roasted barley or wheat flour, tormas are special food offerings used in tantric rituals. Usually ornate and molded in an inverted conical shape, but can be made in many different shapes and sizes.



Ritual water vase (Tib. *bumpa*): Found on the lama's table during tantric empowerments. This vase is filled with blessed water and soaking peacock feathers which are pulled out to sprinkle blessings. These water vases symbolize the expanse of the universe.



Butter lamps (Tib. *chöme*): Small candles made from butter, usually placed on altars as a light offering to the three jewels.



Protection cords (Tib. *sung dü*): Small knotted strings that are blessed by lamas and given to practitioners for protection and blessing. Usually received during tantric empowerments and worn around the neck or wrist.



Tsa tsas (Tib.): Small clay icons of deities made with a metal *tsa tsa* mold. Often, students are given a commitment to make 100,000 tsa tsas of a particular deity as a method of collecting merit.

Other Tibetan Paraphernalia



Offering scarves (Tib. *khatak*): Commonly made of white imitation silk, presenting *khatas* is an easy way to practice generosity, accumulate merit, and receiving blessings. *Khatas* are presented to lamas, teachers, placed on statues, shrines, altars, or attached to sacred structures.



Singing bowls (Tib. *ke nyenpo jinpe lungsye*): Used to create a contemplative and calming sound. The sound of a singing bowl can be used to mark the beginning or end of a meditation period, or during meditation to focus the mind.



Mani pills (Tib. *mani rilbu*): Special blessed herb pills made and prayed over by lamas. Mani pills are eaten for blessings and healing.



Relics (Skt. *sarira*; Tib. *ringsel*): After the cremation of great masters, relics can be found in the remaining ashes, often in the form of pearl-like formations, jeweled beads, or bone pieces in auspicious shapes. Said to bestow blessing on those who look upon them.



Tibetan scripts (Tib. *pecha*): Rectangular loose-leaf books, usually with cardboard or wooden covers. *Pechas* are usually wrapped in ornate cloth for their protection.



Amulets (Tib. *sung khor*): Charms and/or filled vials, often worn by the lay for protection against obstacles, negativities, and harmful spirits.

The 8 Auspicious Symbols in Tibetan Buddhism

(Skt. *sarikha*; Tib. *dungkar yekhyil*)



Protection parasol (Skt. *chatraratna*; Tib. *rinchenduk*): Symbolizing the wholesome activity of protecting beings from illness, harmful forces, obstacles and so forth in this life.



Golden fish (Skt. *gaurmatsya*; Tib. *sernya*): Symbolizing emancipation of one's consciousness from all suffering and thereby leading to eventual spiritual liberation.



Great treasure vase (Tib. *terchenpoi bumpa*): Symbolizing long life, wealth, and prosperity.



Lotus (Skt. *padma*; Tib. *pema*): Symbolizing purity of the body, speech, mind, and the blossoming of wholesome deeds in blissful liberation. The fully-opened lotus represents the fully-awakened mind.



Right-turning conch (Skt. *shankha*; Tib. *dungkhar yekhyil*): Symbolizing the spread of Dharma and awakening from ignorance.



Endless knot (Skt. *srivatsa*; Tib. *pelbeu*): Symbolizing the unity of wisdom, great compassion, and the illusory character of time.



Banner of victory (Skt. *dhvaja*; Tib. *gyeltsen*): Symbolizing complete victory of the Buddhist doctrine over death, ignorance, and all the negativities of this world.



Wheel of Dharma (Skt. *dharmachakra*; Tib. *chö kyi khorlo*): Symbolizing the turning of the wheel of Buddha's doctrine—the introduction of a momentous new teaching by a buddha.

Foundational Deities



The Buddha (563 - 483 BCE)

Buddha Shakumuni (Skt.; Tib. *Sanggye Shakyatubpa*): The enlightened sage of the Shakya clan. Born Siddhartha Gautama.

Mantra: Om mune mune mahamunaye svaha



Avalokiteshvara (Skt.; Tib. *Chenrezig*)

Patron deity of Tibet. The manifestation of the buddhas' compassion and loving-kindness.

Mantra: Om mani padme hum



Manjushri (Skt.; Tib. *Jamyang*)

Deity of insight, clarity, and intelligence. The manifestation of the buddhas' wisdom.

Mantra: Om ah ra pa tsa na di



Vajrapani (Skt.; Tib. *Chakna Dorje*)

The manifestation of the buddhas' power. Usually depicted as blue in color and holding a vajra. Vajrapani is responsible for protecting and transmitting the tantric teachings, because of this he is known as the lord of secrets.

Mantra: Om vajrapani hum



Tara (Skt.; Tib. *Dolma*)

The manifestation of the buddhas' enlightened activity. The female deity that most people turn to when in need of quick assistance, including healing, protection, prosperity, and long life.

Mantra: Om tare tutare ture soha



Vajrasattva (Skt.; Tib. *Dorje Sempa*)

Deity of purification. The manifestation of the buddhas' purity. Many practitioners recite this mantra daily to purify negative karma.

Mantra: Om vajra sattva hum

Glossary of Buddhist Terms

Abandonments along the path: Mahayana Buddhism asserts that ordinary beings' minds are contaminated by two types of obstructions that must be abandoned along the path.

- **The abandonment of obstructions to liberation** (Tib. *nyodip*) - Culminating in nirvana. Pertaining mainly to the abandonment of the three poisons.
- **The abandonment of obstructions to omniscience** (Tib. *shedip*) - Culminating in buddhahood. Pertaining to the abandonment of any remaining residue of ignorance.

Abhidharma (Skt.; Tib. *chöngönpa*): Literally, the study of dharma. The repository of higher knowledge and training in wisdom, considered the first attempt to arrange the Buddha's teachings into a comprehensive philosophical system. Part of the Buddhist canon. See Buddhist canon.

Absolute truth: See ultimate truth.

Absolutism (Skt. *nitya drsti*; Tib. *takpe taba*): Also referred to as *substantialism* or *eternalism*; the view that beings and phenomena are inherently existent and that phenomena possess an essential essence—often asserted as eternal.

Acharya (Skt.; Tib. *lobpön*): Teacher, master, or instructor.

Afflictions (Skt. *klesha*; Tib. *nyön mong*): Negative mental states that cloud and disturb the mind. The five main afflictions are referred to as the five poisons: ignorance, desire, aversion, pride, and jealousy.

Aggregates (Skt. *skandha*; Tib. *pungpo nga*): see five aggregates.

Akanishta (Skt.; Tib. *omin*): Meaning, *nothing below; highest; or above all else*.

The pure land where superior bodhisattvas attain buddhahood. After achieving buddhahood, buddhas abide within the pure land Akanishta (in *Sambhogakaya* aspect) while emanating within their own pure realm and countless world systems, manifesting enlightened activities.

Altars (Skt. *butsudan*; Tib. *chösham*): The preparing of a daily altar is an offering practice used to focus one's intentions, practice, and to petition blessing from the three jewels. The most common alter consists of seven bowls of clean water and a statue or picture of the Buddha and/or one's teacher. See appendix.

Amitabha (Skt.; Tib. *Öpame*): Principal Buddha on the Pure Land School. One of the five Dhyani Buddhas, red in color and representing the wisdom of discrimination, discernment, pure perception, and deep awareness.

Animal realm: Home of animals (Skt. *tiryaks*; Tib. *dhüdo*); a realm of killing and being killed; due to deep ignorance and the lack of self-awareness or introspection, liberation cannot be achieved in this realm.

Arhat - male / *arhati* - female (Skt.; Tib. *dachomba*): *One who is worthy of veneration*. The highest level of enlightened beings (however not yet a buddha). A term used predominantly within the Theravada tradition.

Arya bodhisattva (Skt.; Tib. *jangsem phakpa*): See superior bodhisattva.

Asuras (Skt.; Tib. *lha min*): See demigod.

Atisha (Skt.; Tib. *Atisha*): Legendary Indian Buddhist master (982-1055 CE); founder of the Kadam school of Tibetan Buddhism.

Atman (Skt.; Tib. *dag*): See self.

Attachment (Skt. *raga*; Tib. *düchak*): Synonymous with desire, greed, and passion; defined as wishing not to be separated from the object of one's desire; the compulsive grasping, clinging, or thirst to obtain, possess, or protect, that which is desired.

Avalokiteshvara (Skt.; Tib. *Chenrezig*): Patron deity of Tibet; the manifestation of the buddhas' loving compassion. See appendix.

Aversion (Skt. *dvesha*; Tib. *shedang*): Synonymous with anger, aggression, and hatred; defined as a feeling of intense dislike; the rejection or need to harm that which is detested.

Bakchak (Tib.; Skt. *vasana*) See karmic imprints.

Bardo (Tib.): See intermediate state.

Bell: See vajra and bell, See appendix.

Blessings (Skt. *adhishthana*; Tib. *chinlap*): Buddhism asserts that through prayer, contact with sacred objects, being touched by or being in the presence of great beings, or practicing on auspicious dates, blessing can be received and/or merit accumulated. Properly, blessing should be seen as that which improves the quality of one's mind, meaning that the actual motivation in receiving blessings should pertain to the hope of receiving inspiration, guidance, and clarity.

Bodhi tree (Skt.; Tib. *changchup jün shing*): Tree of enlightenment. The tree that sheltered the Buddha while he attained enlightenment. The Buddha claimed that because this tree had sheltered him, it was worthy of veneration and could serve as a symbol of his teachings. See appendix.

Bodhichitta (Skt.; Tib. *jangchup kyi sem*): The mind of enlightenment; the altruistic aspiration and determination to become a buddha in order to free all beings from the suffering.

Bodhisattva (Skt.; Tib. *jang chub sempa*): One who possesses bodhichitta—the mind of awakening; an advanced practitioner (monastic or lay) who possesses the altruistic aspiration and determination to attain buddhahood in order to free all beings from suffering. It's asserted that the bodhisattva, although in a position to attain nirvana—out of great compassion to sentient beings—forgoes nirvana and instead chooses to be reborn and abide in samsara to continue to perfect themselves in order to become a buddha.

Bodhisattva vows (Skt. *bodhisattva samvara*; Tib. *changchub sempe dompa*): An expression of the Mahayana vehicle and initiation into the Mahayana path. Upon receiving bodhisattva vows, one enters the path of the bodhisattva with the aspiration to one day become a bodhisattva (and eventually a buddha) in order to benefit all beings. The bodhisattva vows are a promise to uphold sixty-four precepts focused on ethics, compassion, selflessness, and excellent human behavior.

Bön (Tib.): *The black sect*; The pre-Buddhist indigenous religion of Tibet. The history of Bön is unclear. Some place its origin at 400 BC, while Bön scriptures claims itself to be 18,000 years old. Originally a shamanistic/animistic tradition, over time the *Bönpo* merged with the Buddhism imported from India to create a unique syntheses of teachings.

Brahmanism (Skt.): A pre-Buddhist Indian Vedic religious tradition and the roots of Hinduism. The Brahmins upheld the householder's way of life, focused on health, wealth, longevity, and offspring—gained through the practice of ritual offerings and singing hymns to appease the gods. Other distinctions of the Brahman tradition included India's caste system and one's obligation to the performance of one's duty to society and family.

Buddha (Skt.; Tib. *Sangye*): Awakened one. One who has purified all defilements and attained all possible virtuous qualities, thereby achieving buddhahood. Buddhists believe in many Buddhas, the historical Buddha of our age being *Shakyamuni Buddha* (Skt.; Tib. *Sangye Shakya Tubpa*) (563-483 BC). See appendix. *The three types of Buddhas are:*

- **Samyaksambuddhas** (Skt.; Tib. *thekchen gi jangchub*): One who after becoming fully enlightened through their own efforts and insight, then teaches the dharma to others; known as *wheel turners*—buddhas who introduce a momentous and new dharma as in the case of the historical Buddha of our age Buddha Shakyamuni.
- **Pratyekabuddhas** (Skt.; Tib. *rangyal gi jangchub*): One who becomes fully enlightened through their own efforts and insight; however, is unwilling or incapable of teaching others.
- **Sravakabuddhas** (Skt.; Tib. *nyenthoe ki jangchub; savakabuddha*): One who depends on the guidance and teachings of a buddha to attain buddhahood.

Buddha bodies (Skt. *buddha kaya*; Tib. *sanggyekyi ku*): The mental/physical aggregates of a buddha. Synonymous with buddhahood; attained by a superior bodhisattva after the death of the physical body and subsequent rebirth into the pure land Akanishta.

Buddhadharma (Skt. *dharma*; Tib. *chö*): See Dharma.

Buddhahood (Skt. *samyaksam buddhatva*; Tib. *sangye kyi go phang*): Synonymous with full enlightenment (Skt. *anuttara samyak sambodhi*; Tib. *yang dakpar dzogpay jangchub*), supreme enlightenment, and non-abiding nirvana. Buddhahood is the attainment of the omniscient mind of a buddha. Full enlightenment is the finite and peak state of existence attained through the cessation of the three poisons, all suffering (both physical and mental), and any remaining subtle habitual residue of misperceiving oneself, phenomena, and reality as inherently existent.

Buddha nature (Skt. *tathagathagarbha*; Tib. *dezhin shegpe nyungpo*): The innate potential of all beings to become buddhas; the emptiness of inherent existence of the mind.

Buddha's golden silence: fourteen unanswered questions of the Buddha

1 & 2 - Is the universe eternal or transient?

3 & 4 - Is the universe both eternal and transient or neither eternal nor transient?

5 & 6 - Is the universe finite or infinite?

7 & 8 - Is the universe both finite and infinite or neither finite nor infinite?

9 & 10 - Is the 'I' identical with the material body or different from the material body?

11 & 12 - Does the Buddha exist after death or perish after death?

13 & 14 - Does the Buddha exist and perish after death or neither exist nor perish?

Buddhist canon / the three baskets (Skt. *tripitika*; Tib. *denö sum*)

1. **Vinaya** (Skt.; Tib. *dülwa*): Training in monastic discipline, vows, and rules of conduct.
2. **Sutra** (Skt.; Tib. *do*): Discourses of the Buddha (actual words of the Buddha).
3. **Abhidharma** (Skt.; Tib. *chöngönpa*): Literally, the study of dharma. The repository of higher knowledge and training in wisdom.

Buddhist councils: After the Buddha's death, councils of Buddhist leaders were held to discuss monastic rules and the preservation and dissemination of the Buddha's teachings. The number of councils asserted to have been held varies among different traditions. However, all posit the occurrence of the first three councils within India as being historically accurate.

Butter lamps (Tib. *chöme*): Small candles made from butter, usually placed on altars as an offering of light to the three jewels. See appendix.

Calm abiding meditation (Skt. *shamatha*; Tib. *shine*): See meditation.

Canon: See Buddhist canon.

Cause and effect (Skt. *hetuphala*; Tib. *gyude*): The universal property of *causality*; also known as *the law of cause and effect*, which asserts that all things, without exception, arise as results of previous causes.

Chan Buddhism (CH.; Skt. *dhyana*): Literally, meditation or meditative state. Founded in the 6th century CE. Chan is an experiential tradition, emphasizing the cultivation of direct insight into one's true nature. Similar to the Zen Buddhist tradition, with some asserting that the only difference being the pronunciation of the names.

Chandrakirti (Skt.; Tib. *Dawatakpa*): 7th century Indian Buddhist master and disseminator of the Consequence School of Mahayana Buddhism. An important source of the Gelug School's philosophy.

Chenrezig (Tib.): See Avalokiteshvara. See appendix.

Chittamatra (Skt.; Tib. *semtsampa*): See Yogachara.

Chöd (Tib.): Cutting through; a tantric practice aimed at cutting through ego and fear. An often macabre practice of visualizations and offerings performed in frightening places (cremation grounds, haunted places, dark caves, or forests).

Chöten (Tib.): See stupa. See appendix.

Circumambulation (Tib. *kora*): The practice of walking around sacred structures (temples, monasteries, shrines, or stupas). This popular practice is believed to bring blessings and accumulate merit. Usually performed while reciting mantras or prayers, and always in a clockwise direction.

Clear light meditation (Tib. *thukdam*): A tantric meditative technique for achieving enlightenment during the death process.

Collection of merit (Tib. *sönam tsok*): The collection of virtue gained through virtuous thought, speech, or action which result in happiness in the future. Merit can be generated through both wisdom and method including through giving, abiding in virtue, mental development, protecting life, rejoicing in other's virtue, holding vows, attending Dharma teachings, and studying Dharma. Additionally, interaction with holy beings, sacred places, or sacred objects are asserted as ways to generate merit.

Commitments (Skt. *samaya*; Tib. *damtsig*): Sacred word of honor; a vow or promise of daily practice usually received within tantric empowerments.

Compassion (Skt. *karuna*; Tib. *nyingje*): To identify with the suffering of others; to wish that they may be free of suffering and the causes of suffering.

Compounding factors (Skt. *samskaras*; Tib. *düche*): Compounding factors; also referred to as mental formations; the fourth of the five aggregates; a catch all for uncategorized mental factors and those which are neither form nor consciousness. Including: personality traits, intentions, habits, various emotions, mental/karmic imprints.

Concentration (Skt. *samadhisiska*; Tib. *tingngedzin kyi labpa*): The ability to focus the mind upon any chosen object.

Consciousness: Consciousness is conceptually divided into two aspects.

- **General consciousness** (Skt. *jnana*; Tib. *shepa*): Synonymous with primordial consciousness, awareness, and knower. General consciousness is the broadest and most encompassing term, pertaining to any and all mental elements or events; a distinct stream of mental awareness that serves as the basis for one's capacity for subjective experience, as well as the basis for one's unique will or agent of choice; a raw knowing without conceptual overlay, unspecified to any space or particular moment or temporal stage of existence; a beginningless and endless *entity of knowing* whose very nature is that of mere experience.
- **Specific consciousness** (Skt. *vijnana*; Tib. *namshe*): Synonymous with main minds; one's common everyday consciousness and the aspect of consciousness pertaining to the *fifth* aggregate; consisting of both sense consciousnesses and a mental consciousness—with the capacity to think, cognize, conceptualize, contrast and compare, including introspection, memory, and recognition. The mental consciousness is also that which interprets what appears to the sense consciousnesses.

Contemplation (Tib. *sam*): A practice of reflection that utilizes logic and reason to gain insight, wisdom, and develop positive qualities, while also being a potent antidote in eradicating wrong views and undesirable traits.

Conventional nature (Tib. *nekab kyi neluk*): See two natures.

Conventional truth (Skt. *samvritisatya*; Tib. *kundzob denpa*): See two truths.

Cyclic existence: See samsara.

Dakinis (Skt.; Tib. *khandroma*): Female sky-goer, fully enlightened beings who are the embodiment of enlightened activity; beings who may take on different forms in order to aid and guide practitioners on their path. Dakinis can also be highly realized human yogis often acting as oracles or spiritual muses during tantric ritual. These terms can also pertain to a tantric sexual consort. **Dakas** (Skt.; Tib. *khandro*): Male sky-goer (less prevalent in Tibetan Buddhism).

Damaru (Skt): Small hand drum used in tantric practice. *See appendix.*

Dedication of merit (Skt. *parinama*; Tib. *ngoba*): The act of offering one's virtue for the benefit of all beings. The practice of dedicating one's merit is also known as the transfer of merit. This practice begins once merit has been generated, at which point it is believed crucial to then dedicate the merit in order to stop it from potentially being damaged by one's own afflictive emotions.

Deer wheel (Tib. *retak chö khor*): Symbolizing Buddhism and the Buddha's teachings; and/or more specifically, the first turning of the wheel of buddhadharma at the Deer Park in Sarnath, India. *See appendix.*

Definitive meaning (Skt. *nitartha*; Tib. *ngedon*): Ultimate; as opposed to interpretive; possessing a clear and incontrovertible meaning. A definitive sutra is one that presents ultimate truth (emptiness) as its principal subject matter. *See interpretive meaning.*

Deities (Skt. *ishtadevata*; Tib. *yidam*): Found in the Indian Mahayana and tantric traditions; synonymous with supramundane deities, meditation deities, and tantric deities. Within Buddhism, and especially tantric Buddhism, there are countless deities that are the embodiment and emanations (archetypes) of various aspects of the enlightened mind.

Demigod realm: Home of the *jealous devas* (Skt. *asuras*; Tib. *Iha min*); Warlike covetous god-beings depicted as enemies of the devas.

Demigods (Skt. *asuras*; Tib. *Iha min*): Inhabitants of the demigod realm; the realm of the fighting gods; one of the six desire realms. Often referred to as *jealous* devas, demigods are warlike mundane gods depicted as enemies of the devas who are consumed with jealousy and envy. Although powerful, demigods are still unenlightened beings and exist within samsaric cyclic existence and therefore are inferior to buddhas.

Demons (Skt. *maras, yakka, yaksa*; Tib. *dön*): Extremely wicked and always hostile to humans. Similar to the Western depiction within horror movies. Considered to be mere superstition by most Buddhist traditions yet widely accepted by common people.

Dependent origination (Skt. *pratityasamutpada*; Tib. *dendel*): This foundation of Buddhist thought asserts that all phenomena exist dependently, or, more precisely, *interdependently*—in dependence upon parts, causes, conditions, and imputation (labeling) by the mind; while conversely refuting independent or inherent existence.

Desire: *See attachment*

Desire realms (Skt. *kama dhatu*; Tib. *dökham*): Home of beings who are primarily motivated by their desire for sense pleasures. The desire realm is divided into six realms: the god, demigod, human, animal, hungry ghost, and hell realms.

Devas (Skt.; Tib. *Iha*): *Shining one*; inhabitants of the deva or god realms; the term deva is found within all Indian religions and is commonly understood as mundane gods possessing beauty and long life, who live in a state of blissful sensory pleasure. Devas, although powerful, are still unenlightened beings and exist within samsaric cyclic existence and therefore are inferior to buddhas.

Dharma (Skt.; Tib. *chö*): Teaching, path, and way of life. The term Dharma is shared by all Indian traditions but is defined slightly differently by each, having no single word translation in English. The earliest use of the term, found in Brahmanism, defines Dharma as: duty, moral code, righteousness, and conduct pertaining to the proper way of living. Within Buddhism, Dharma is commonly understood as the teachings of the Buddha (buddhadharma), but can additionally mean: phenomena, reality, ultimate truth, virtuous action, or universal law or order.

Dharma centers (Tib. *chötsok*): Local Buddhist centers/communities which offer teachings, classes, religious gatherings, and meditation or support groups. Often more traditional and/or religious in style compared to universities. Dharma centers are open to anyone and are easy to get involved in.

Dharma protectors (Skt. *dharmapala*; Tib. *chö kyong*): Mundane deities that protect the Buddha's teachings. Often believed to be harmful spirits that Buddhism had conquered, tamed, and transformed into strong positive forces, who are then delegated to protecting the dharma and Buddhist practitioners under their care. The almost demonic imagery of both wrathful deities and dharma protectors can be found throughout Tibetan iconology.

Dharma protectors days (Skt. *dharmapala days*; Tib. *chö kyong days*): A special day for petitioning the dharma protectors for protection and to clear obstacles. Dharma protectors days follow the Tibetan lunar calendar and are performed on the 29th of every Tibetan calendar month.

Dharma wheel (Skt. *dharma cakra*; Tib. *chökhor*): A symbol of the Buddha's teachings shared by all Buddhist traditions, representing the turning of the wheel of buddhadharma. Meaning, the introduction of a momentous new teaching by a buddha. See appendix.

Dhyana (Skt.; Tib. *samten*): See meditative concentration.

Divination (Tib. *mö*): A mystical method for precognitive insight. Realized lamas are said to possess an assortment of mystical powers, including the power of insight into future events. Divinations are used to help with difficult choices and/or to reveal the nature of one's current life's situation, where upon an assortment of prayers, rituals, and/or offerings are prescribed by the lama in order to dispel obstacles that are impeding one's life.

Dolgyal (Tib.): *See* Shugden.

Dorje (Tib.): *See* vajra and bell. *See* appendix.

Double dorje (Tib.): *See* vajra cross. *See* appendix.

Dream yoga (Tib. *milam naljor*): Lucid dreaming; the ability to become fully conscious while still in the dream state. The practice of dream yoga allows practitioners to practice visualization and mental creation. Many high practitioners actually do their daily commitments, prayers, and practices during their evening sleep.

Duhkha (Skt.; Tib. *dukngal*): Suffering, dissatisfaction, anxiety, frustration.

Dzogchen (Tib.; Skt. *maha ati*): The great perfection; the primary practice of the Nyingma school. According to the Nyingma, Dzogchen is the heart-essence of all spiritual paths and the summit of an individual's spiritual evolution. Dzogchen works directly with one's perception with the goal of attaining "the view"—an unobstructed pure perception of reality, which culminates in buddhahood.

Eight auspicious symbols (Skt. *sarikha*; Tib. *dungkar yekhyil*): Sacred symbols in Tibetan Buddhism: conch shell, endless knot, golden fishes, lotus, parasol, treasure vase, Dharma wheel, and victory banner. *See* appendix.

Eight dissolutions (Tib. *thim rim gye*): Eight general stages of the death process that coincide with the dissolution of the four elements (earth, water, fire, wind) as well as four subtle visionary stages (white vision, red vision, black vision, vacuity).

Eight Mahayana precepts (Skt. *Mahayana poshada*; Tib. *thek chen so jong*): *See* fasting vows

Eight sufferings of human beings

Traditionally, the suffering of human existence within samsara is presented as eight aspects: birth, aging, sickness, death, being separated from what we desire, being confronted by what we have aversion to, not obtaining our desires even though we try very hard to get them, and having a body and mind under the control of afflictions and karma.

Eight worldly concerns (Tib. *jigten chögye*): Also known as *the eight worldly dharmas*. The eight worldly concerns represent our misguided samsaric attachments, goals, and motivations which are to be abandoned on the Buddhist path.

1-2 - Attachment to gain - aversion to loss

3-4 - Attachment to praise - aversion to blame

5-6 - Attachment to fame - aversion to insignificance

7-8 - Attachment to pleasure - aversion to pain

Emanation: Mahayanists assert that all buddhas reside within the pure land Akanishta (Skt.; Tib. *omin*) while simultaneously emanating into countless world systems, in all conceivable forms, in accordance to the needs of sentient beings, all without ever straying from that pure land and the wisdom realizing ultimate reality.

Empowerment (Skt. *abhisheka*; Tib. *wang*): Initiation ceremonies granting permission and bestowing blessing, thereby empowering the practitioner to engage in tantric practice. Initiation by a qualified teacher is required before beginning any tantric practice. It's said that without attaining the proper empowerment, tantric practice is ineffective.

Emptiness (Skt. *sunyata*; Tib. *tongpa nyi*): Synonymous with voidness, suchlessness, essencelessness, and identitylessness. The doctrine that asserts that all phenomena lack inherent, self-existent, or self-sufficient existence.

Enlightenment (Skt. *bodhi*; Tib. *jangchub*): To attain nirvana. An enlightened being is a being who has irreversibly transcended all ignorance, attachment, and aversion and is liberated from uncontrolled rebirth and the mental/emotional suffering in which that entails.

Full enlightenment: See buddhhahood.

Equanimity (Skt. *upeksa*; Tib. *tangnyom*): A neutral state of mind that is neither favoring nor opposing; an unbiased attitude towards all beings that is the foundation for bodhichitta and universal compassion.

Eternalism: See absolutism.

Ethics (Skt. *sila*; Tib. *tsultrim*): Discipline; Buddhist ethics are unique in the sense that they are not moral laws of a creator god or prophet, but instead are a logical set of ideals for living harmoniously in a way that is conducive to positive personal growth and the positive growth of society.

Fasting vows (Skt. *upavasa samvara*; Tib. *nyenne*): An aspect of the individual liberation vows and therefore an expression of the Hinayana vehicle. These are temporary vows taken by lay people for a single day, often during special teachings (refuge vows are prerequisite). Fasting vows include not killing, not stealing, not lying, not taking intoxicants, celibacy, not eating after midday, no idle chatter, singing, dancing, music, perfumes, makeup, or ornaments, not sitting on luxurious beds or high seats. These vows are also referred to as the **eight Mahayana precepts** (Skt. *Mahayana poshada*; Tib. *thek chen so jong*) with the only difference being the Mahayana altruistic intention of taking and holding the vows for the benefit of all beings

Five aggregates (Skt. *skandha*; Tib. *pungpo nga*): Five psycho/physical aspects that comprise all beings. Here the term *aggregate* refers to, *collection or group*. The five aggregates are:

1. Form (Skt. *rupa*; Tib. *suk*):
2. Feeling (Skt. *vedana*; Tib. *tsorwa*):
3. Discrimination (Skt. *Samijna*; Tib. *dushe*):
4. Compounding factors (Skt. *Samskara*; Tib. *duche*):
5. Consciousness (Skt. *Vijnana*; Tib. *namshe*):

Form beings (Skt. *rupadhatu pudgala*; Tib. *zug kam kyi gang zag*): Inhabitants of the form realm; one of the three realms of existence. Beings who possess forms of a very subtle nature, whose minds have temporarily transcended the sense desires of the desire realm.

Form realm (Skt. *rupadhatu*; Tib. *zukkham*): Home of form beings, beings with bodies of a very subtle nature. This is a realm of subtle meditative concentration that practitioners whose minds have temporarily transcended the external sense desires of the lower realms but still partake in the pleasures of internal contemplation may be reborn into. The form realm is divided into four levels called the *four concentrations*.

Formless beings (Skt. *arupadhatu pudgala*; Tib. *zugme kyi gang zag*): Inhabitants of the formless realm, the peak of the three realms of existence. The name *formless* here pertains to the fact that the beings in this realm are no longer preoccupied with matter or material concerns and does not imply that these beings themselves are formless, who instead possess very subtle bodies.

Formless realm (Skt. *arupyadhatu*; Tib. *zukmekham*): Home of the *formless beings*; the name *formless* here pertains to the fact that beings in this realm are no longer preoccupied with matter or material concerns and does not imply that these beings themselves are formless—instead, beings in this realm possess very subtle bodies. This realm is a realm where all forms (sights, sounds, odors, tastes, and tangible objects, including the five senses for perceiving them) are arrested or suspended, a realm where beings abide in single pointed meditation, without distraction; a realm of subtle meditative absorption that practitioners who have attained a profound level of meditation may be reborn into. The formless realm is divided into four levels called the *four absorptions*. Absorptions here can be understood as deep meditative states of mind.

Four foundations of mindfulness (Skt. *smrtyupasthana*; Tib. *dranpanyebarshakshi*): Four topics of contemplation used to develop a clear and correct understanding of the Buddha's teachings. (1) mindfulness of the body, (2) mindfulness of feelings/sensations, (3) mindfulness of mind, (4) mindfulness of phenomena.

The Four Hallmarks of Buddhism (Skt. *caturmurda*; Tib. *domshi*): Also known as *the four seals of Dharma*; four foundational tenets held by all Mahayana traditions.

1. All compounded phenomena are impermanent (in a state of constant change).
2. All contaminated phenomena are unsatisfactory (the source or nature of suffering).
3. All phenomena are empty and selfless (lacking independent self existence).
4. Nirvana is true peace (the irreversible cessation of the three poisons).

Four immeasurables (Skt. *caturapramana*; Tib. *tsemeshi*):

Love, compassion, joy, and equanimity; four core aspects of all Mahayana practices and the foundational qualities that lead to the attainment of *bodhicitta*.

The four immeasurable thoughts:

1. May all beings have happiness and the causes of happiness.
2. May all beings be freed from suffering and the causes of suffering.
3. May all beings never be separated from the happiness that knows no suffering.
4. May all beings live in equanimity, free from attachment and aversion.

Four imponderables: Commonly translated as the *four unconjecturables, unthinkables, or incomprehensibles*; four observations that are not to be extensively contemplated lest one become confused and/or distracted from the immediate work of attaining liberation.

1. The buddha-range of the buddhas: the range of powers of buddhas
2. The range of the meditative absorptions: the powers obtainable through meditation
3. The results of karma: the precise workings of karma
4. Speculation about the cosmos: origins, existence, etc.

Four noble truths (Skt. *catvaryaryasyatya*; Tib. *pakpe denpa shi*)

1. The truth of suffering
2. The truth of the cause (of suffering)
3. The truth of the cessation (of suffering)
4. The truth of the path (leading to the cessation of suffering)

Four opponent powers (Tib. *nyenpo tob shi*): A commonly prescribed method for purifying past karma. These are often referred to as *The Four Rs*: regret, refuge, remedy, and resolve.

5. The power of regret: Realizing and regretting the mistake one has committed.
6. The power of refuge: To rely on the three jewels to help reestablish one's virtue.
7. The power of remedy: Applying the proper antidotes (conceptual antidotes, practices of atonement, apologizing, etc.).
8. The power of resolve: The determination to not repeat the action.

Four reliances (Skt. *catuhpratisarana*; Tib. *tönpa shi*): Four keys applied for properly understanding a text's true meaning.

1. Rely on the Dharma, not on the teacher
2. Rely on the meaning, not the letter
3. Rely on the definitive meaning, not on the interpretive meaning
4. Rely on wisdom, not on your ordinary mind.

Four seals: See four hallmarks of Buddhism.

Four thoughts that turn the mind (towards renunciation) (Tib. *lodoknamshi*):

1. The preciousness of human birth
2. Impermanence and the certainty of death
3. The relentless nature of causality (karma)
4. The disadvantages of samsara

Four vehicles for traversing the path

The four vehicles (Skt. *yanas*; Tib. *thegpa shi*): the term *vehicle* can be translated as *raft* or *ferry*; meaning a means of arriving at the other shore of liberation, and in this context is synonymous with path or method.

1. **Hearer vehicle** (Skt. *sravakayana*; Tib. *nyantö thegpa*)
2. **Solitary realizer vehicle** (Skt. *pratyekabuddhayan*; Tib. *ranggyal thegpa*)
3. **Bodhisattva vehicle** (Skt. *bodhisattvayana*; Tib. *jangsem thegpa*)
4. **Vajrayana vehicle** (Skt. *tantrayana*; Tib. *gyü thegpa*)

Fourteen unanswered questions of the Buddha

- 1 & 2 - Is the universe eternal or transient?
- 3 & 4 - Is the universe both eternal and transient or neither eternal nor transient?
- 5 & 6 - Is the universe finite or infinite?
- 7 & 8 - Is the universe both finite and infinite or neither finite nor infinite?
- 9 & 10 - Is the 'I' identical with the material body or different from the material body?
- 11 & 12 - Does the Buddha exist after death or perish after death?
- 13 & 14 - Does the Buddha exist and perish after death or neither exist nor perish?

Full enlightenment: See buddhahood.

Full moon days (Tib. *tsepa chunga*): A powerful day for practice and a good day for taking the Mahayana precepts and Medicine Buddha practice. Full moon days occur on the 15th of every Tibetan lunar calendar month.

Gelong (Tib.): *See* monasticism.

Gelongma (Tib.): *See* monasticism.

Getsul (Tib.): *See* monasticism.

Getsulma (Tib.): *See* monasticism.

Gelug School (Tib.): *The way of virtue (the yellow hats)*. The latest and most progressive of the schools. Founded by *Lama Tsongkhapa*, the Gelug school is considered a study lineage, emphasizing logic, debate, and academic excellence. Practitioners of this school are referred to as Gelugpa and include monastics and lay. Coming from the second propagation of Indian Buddhism into Tibet, the Gelug school asserts study and academic excellence as a necessary prerequisite for the practice of tantra.

Geshe - male / geshema - female (Tib): *Virtuous friend*; highest academic degree of the Gelug School. There are four levels of *geshes*: *lharam* (highest), *tsokram*, *rigram*, and *lingse*.

Ghosts (Tib. *dre*): Disembodied beings trapped in the in-between state between rebirths, similar to the Western idea of ghosts.

God realm: Highest of the six desire realms and home of the *devas* (Skt.) *Iha* (Tib.); godlike beings possessing beauty and long life, who live in a state of blissful sensory pleasure.

Gods: *See* devas.

Great Exposition School (Skt. *vaibhashika*; Tib. *chetakmawa*): A Hinayana philosophy.

Grounds and paths (Tib. *salam*): Ten grounds and five paths pertaining to a bodhisattva's development, attainments, and abandonments on the path to buddhahood.

Grounds, path, and fruition (Tib. *shi lam debu sum*): The Mahayana path can be understood within three divisions:

1. **The ground** (Skt. *asraya*; Tib. *shi*): The foundation for all practice—the two truths.
2. **The path** (Skt. *marga*; Tib. *lam*): Practice of accumulation—the two collections.
3. **The fruition** (Skt. *phala*; Tib. *depu*): Attaining buddhahood—the two buddha bodies.

Guru (Skt.; Tib. *lama*): Spiritual and/or tantric teacher.

Guru devotion: A tantric practice of supplicating the guru in order to develop inspiration, faith, and devotion.

Guru puja (Skt.; Tib. *lama chöpa*): A tantric ceremony of prayer, chanting, and making offerings to the three jewels and one's guru. Like all pujas, this is a request for blessings, purification, and the clearing of obstacles. The guru puja ceremony is performed on the 10th and 25th of every Tibetan lunar calendar month.

Guru Rinpoche: See Padmasambhava.

Guru yoga (Skt.; Tib. *lame naljor*): A devotional tantric practice in which one visualizes one's root lama as a buddha. Besides being used to attain blessings and assistance along the path, guru yoga is aimed at merging one's mind with the wisdom mind of one's root lama.

Hinayana (Skt.; Tib. *thegmen*): *Small raft*—the individual liberation vehicle. The Hinayana vehicle focuses on individual liberation and monasticism, with the aim of attaining nirvana. The original and earliest teachings of the Buddha. The Hinayana should not be confused with the later Theravada tradition.

Hell realm: Home of hell beings (Skt. *narakas*; Tib. *nyalba*) a realm that beings who, because of their past negative karma, are horribly and continuously tortured. Within the Buddhist hell realm, there are eight hot and eight cold hells. Often imagined as existing deep below the surface of the earth.

Hell beings (Skt. *narakas*; Tib. *nyalba*): Inhabitants of the hell realms, the lowest of the six desire realms. Because of past negative karma, these beings are delegated to an existence of horrible pain and continuous torture within any of the eight hot or eight cold hells.

Householder vows (Skt. *upasaka samvara*; Tib. *genyen kyi dompa*): Householder vows are a set of five precepts for lay practitioners wishing to deepen their commitment to their practice. These vows can be taken for a designated amount of time or for one's entire life.

Human beings (Skt. *manusyas*; Tib. *mi*): Inhabitants of the human realm; one of the six desire realms. Considered the most advantageous state of existence because of having a favorable balance of pleasure and suffering which offers the greatest potential for enlightenment.

Human realm: Home of human beings (Skt. *manusyas*; Tib. *mi* (Tib.)); Considered the most fortunate state of existence because humans have the best balance of pleasure and suffering which offers the greatest potential for enlightenment

Hungry ghost realm: Home of *hungry ghosts* (Skt. *pretas*; Tib. *yidag*); beings who are tormented by continual and unsatisfied cravings. Depicting with huge bellies representing their insatiable desire, and tiny mouths and throats representing their inability to satisfy their desire.

Hungry ghosts (Skt. *pretas*; Tib. *yidag*): Inhabitants of the hungry ghost realm, one of the six desire realms. Hungry ghosts are beings who are tormented by continuous and unsatisfied cravings. Depicted as having huge bellies, representing their insatiable desire, and tiny mouths and throats, representing their inability to satisfy their desires.

Idiot compassion: See compassion.

Ignorance (Skt. *avidya*; Tib. *marigpa*): A *foundational existential confusion*. Within Buddhism, ignorance is defined as *an active cognitive state of both mis-knowing and not knowing*; the habitual misapprehension of the true nature of oneself and reality.

Impermanence (Skt. *anitya*; Tib. *mitakpa*): An essential doctrine of Buddhism. Asserting that all of *conditioned* existence, without exception, is transient and in a constant state of flux. No conditioned phenomena is fixed or permanent, and all things are in a state of constant change. *Conversely*, permanent phenomena can only be known by a mental consciousness (e.g., non-created/natural space, emptiness, generic images, generic facts about things, and generic labels (blue/red, hot/cold, sweet/sour, new/old, etc.) also integer numbers, and alphabetic letters).

Imprints: See karmic imprints.

Imputation (Skt. *parikalpita*; Tib. *kuntak*): *Labeling*; the act of imputation, sometimes referred to as *superimposition*, requiring a mind and a valid basis of imputation.

Individual liberation vows (Skt. *pratimoksha samvara*; Tib. *sothar kyi dompa*): Literally, *towards liberation*. An expression of the Hinayana vehicle, this group of vows encompass both monastic vows and lay vows. The individual liberation vows are contained within the Buddha's teachings referred to as *Vinaya* (Skt.; Tib. *dülwa*) which mainly deal with ethics and monastic discipline and is the Buddha's prescribed training system for attaining liberation.

Inherent existence (Tib. *rangshin ki drubpa*): That which is self-sufficient and/or self-existent and does not change moment to moment; (1) That which does not rely on causes—coming into being by its own power, (2) That which does not rely on parts—coming into being without dependence on parts, and (3) That which does not rely on labeling—coming into being without dependence upon imputation by a mind.

Initiation: See empowerment.

Insight meditation: See meditation.

Intermediate state (Skt. *antarabhava*; Tib. *bardo*): Literally *transition*; the state between death and the next rebirth.

Interpretive meaning (Skt. *neyartha*; Tib. *dangdon*): Provisional; as opposed to definitive; requiring further explanation or commentary; an interpretable sutra is one that presents conventional truth as its principal subject matter. Additionally, parts of a definitive sutra that are clearly meant to be taken interpretively, through story, metaphor, or example. See definitive meaning.

Jainism (Skt.): An Indian religious traditions. Contemporaries of Buddhism, the Jains founded their tradition on the principle of *ahimsa* (Skt.) or non-violence in all forms (physical, verbal, and mental). The Jains assert speaking the truth, celibacy or monogamy, detachment from all material things, and an intense style of asceticism and practices of self-mortification, such as prolonged fasting, breath holding, and exposure to pain.

Jhanas (Pali; Skt. *dhyana*; Tib. *samten*): See meditative concentration.

Jonang School (Tib.): Founded in Central Tibet by *Kunpang Thukje Tsöndru* (1294 CE). The Jonang were renowned for their teachings on tantra, especially their presentation of the Kalachakra Tantra, and their unique teachings on emptiness. Heavily persecuted due to political rivalry, the Jonang School was believed to be extinct since the 17th century. However, currently the Jonang are known to have survived and continue to this day as a distinct and important tradition.

Kadam School (Tib.): Authoritative word. Founded by the Nalanda Buddhist master Atisha (1042 CE), the Kadam School was famous for re-introducing the study and practice of the Mahayana sutras to Tibet (a time when the Tibetan schools were singularly focused on tantra) while also demonstrating the compatibility of the two. The Kadam school had a strong emphasis on ethics and the teachings of mind training. Later, the Kadam tradition became the foundation for the Gelug school, and although the Kadam School no longer exists, their teachings, especially those of mind training, are currently practiced within all schools of Tibetan Buddhism.

Kagyu (Tib.): *The Lineage of the oral instructions*. Founded by Marpa the translator, the Kagyu school is generally considered a yogi lineage and is the second oldest of the Tibetan Buddhist schools. The Kagyu school (or more correctly Kagyu school(s), for there are many sub-schools within the Kagyu tradition) comes from the second propagation of Indian Buddhism into Tibet. The Kagyu schools are considered practice lineages emphasizing tantric practice, ritual, and meditation. Practitioners of these schools are referred to as Kagyupas and include yogis, monastics, and lay.

Kalpa (Skt.; Tib. *kalpa*): Aeon; the period of time between the creation and recreation of a universal system.

Kangyur (Tib.): See Tibetan Buddhist canon.

Karma (Skt.; Tib. *l/e*): The driving force behind samsaric cyclic existence; the process of cause and effect when pertaining to the lives of sentient beings, asserting that all intentional actions (deliberate actions), whether physical, verbal, or mental, have consequences. Karma (intentional actions) either positive, negative, or indifferent—performed by body, speech, or mind—subsequently produce *karmic imprints* or potentialities upon the mind. These imprints then lead to future *karmic results* that correspond with the nature of those actions—with virtuous karmic imprints leading to positive results (happiness and favorable rebirth) and non-virtuous karmic imprints leading to negative results (suffering and unfavorable rebirth).

Karmapa (Tib.): A title pertaining to the system of recognizing reincarnate lamas (*Tulkus*). The first Tulku lineage to be established; belonging to the Kagyu School of Tibetan Buddhism. Beginning with Dusum Khyenpa who posthumously became the first Karmapa, initiating the precession of rebirths leading up to the present day 17th *Gyalwang Karmapa, Orgyen Trinley Dorje*—the current spiritual leader of the Kagyu school.

Karmic imprints (Skt. *vasana*; Tib. *bakchak*): Karmic imprints are created when our feelings become involved, as a kind of mental/emotional residue left behind from feelings related to our intentions, thoughts, actions, reactions, and experiences. Karmic imprints influence and distort our perceptions, choices, and actions, thereby coloring and shaping our current as well as future thoughts, actions, and experiences.

Kaya (Skt.: Tib. *ku*): See Buddha bodies.

Khangling (Tib.): Thighbone trumpet. A wrathful and subjugating trumpet used in tantric practice. Often made from copper or silver but originally made from human thighbones. See appendix.

Khatak (Tib.): See offering scarves. See appendix.

Kilkhor (Tib.; Skt. *mandala*): See mandala. See appendix.

Kleshas (Skt.; Tib. *nyön mong*): See afflictions.

Kora (Tib.): See circumambulation.

Lama (Tib.; Skt. *guru*): Spiritual and/or tantric teacher.

Lamrim (Tib.): The stages of the path. A graduated presentation of the complete path to enlightenment as taught by the Buddha. First presented in this form by the Indian master Atisha (11th century). Further lamrims were composed by various scholars, most renown being Great Treatise on the Stages of the Path (Tib. *Lamrim Chenmo*) by Lama Tsongkhapa.

Liberation: See nirvana.

Lineage (Tib. *gyüpa*): A pure and unbroken teacher-student transmission of teachings. Pure lineage authenticates the tradition, school, teacher, and teachings taught. High Lamas may be asked to become *lineage holders* of a certain set of teachings. Being a lineage holder is to be held responsible for personally safeguarding, preserving, and propagating those specific teachings placed in one's care for future generations.

Lojong (Tib.): See mind training.

Lotus flower (Skt. *padma*; Tib. *pema*): Representing enlightenment; as a beautiful flower that grows out of mud, the lotus symbolizes purity arising out of impurity and the transmutation of destructive emotions into wisdom. See appendix.

Love / loving-kindness (Skt. *maitri*; Tib. *jampa*): Wishing someone to be happy; pure goodwill—the desire of bringing welfare and good to fellow beings.

Madhyamaka (Skt.; Tib. *umapa*): See middle way philosophy.

Mahamudra (Skt.; Tib. *chakgya chenpo*): The great seal; the primary tantric practice of the Kagyu school. The union of great bliss and emptiness culminating in buddhahood.

Mahayana (Skt.; Tib. *tegpa chenpo*): Large raft; the universal vehicle. Founded upon the Hinayana tradition, the Mahayana focuses on reaching enlightenment as a society. Based on the altruistic intention of bodhichitta and the aim of attaining buddhahood. Mahayana is considered a North and East Asian tradition, traditionally found in Bhutan, China, India, Japan, Korea, Nepal, Tibet, and Vietnam. Asserted to have been taught secretly by the Buddha within his own lifetime, believed to surface publically sometime after 200 BCE.

Mahayana philosophy (Skt.; Tib. *tegpa chenpo*): The philosophy of the Mahayana tradition, consisting of two main branches, the *Madhyamaka* and the *Yogachara*. Main differences between the two pertain to their often opposing views on the topics of consciousness, epistemology, and the nature of reality.

Main minds (Skt.) *chitta*; Tib. *tso sem*): Synonymous with specific consciousness or divided consciousness. The six main minds consist of five *sense main minds* and one *mental main mind*. The *five sense main minds* are direct sense perceivers possessing the ability to link one's external sphere of sensory activity with one's internal sphere of perception, while the *one mental main mind* is a direct mental perceiver possessing the ability to cognize, conceptualize, think, reason, etc. The six main minds are visual, auditory, olfactory, gustatory, tactile, and mental main minds.

Maitreya (Skt.; Tib. *sanggye champa*): The next (5th) wheel turning buddha of this aeon.

Maîtri (Skt.; Tib. *jampa*): See love / loving-kindness.

Mala (Skt.; Tib. *theng wa*): See prayer beads. See appendix.

Mandalas (Skt.; Tib. *kilkhor*): Sacred models or diagrams, often circular, which are symbolic representations of a meditational deity's palace or universe, his entourage, and his enlightened activities. Mandalas are used as an aid to visualization within tantric practice. See appendix.

Mandala offering: The tantric offering practice in which one visualizes offering all of their wealth to the three jewels and all sentient beings.

Mani pills (Tib. *mani rilbu*): Special blessed herbal pills made and prayed over by Lamas. Mani pills are eaten for blessings and healing. See appendix.

Manjushri (Skt.; Tib. *Jamyang*): Deity of insight and knowledge; the manifestation of the buddhas' transcendent wisdom. See appendix.

Mantras (Skt.; Tib. *ngak*): Literally, instrument of thought; a tool for working with the mind. Mantras are sacred syllables or incantations that are considered enlightened speech and asserted to have psychological, spiritual, or even magical powers. The recitation of mantras is used to purify, accumulate merit, protect, heal, or to cultivate virtuous qualities such as compassion, wisdom, and/or long life. Mantras, either as single syllables or syllabic phrases, can be recited alone or chanted or sung in groups.

Mara (Skt.; Tib. *Dü*): *The demon of reification*; a metaphor and personification of one's self-grasping ignorance, afflictions, samsaric delusions, and/or obstacles to Dharma practice. Mara is the embodiment of the false self, wrong views, and desire for samsaric sense pleasures. In the story of the Buddha's enlightenment, Mara (the Buddha's own ignorance, delusions, and afflictions) is the tempter that the Buddha must overcome prior to his awakening.

Within Jainism, the term *mara* is synonymous with money.

Meditation (Skt. *dhyana*; Tib. *gom*): *A method of mental cultivation with the purpose of developing and transforming the mind*; a technique/practice that develops insight, wisdom, concentration, clarity, and mental stability; a foundational practice for cultivating an understanding and realization of the Buddha's teachings.

- **Calm abiding meditation** (Skt. *shamatha*; Tib. *shine*): Also referred to as *mindfulness meditation*. Calm abiding is a passive meditation used to calm and stabilize the mind.
- **Insight meditation** (Skt. *vipassana*; Tib. *lhakthong*): An active contemplative and/or analytical meditation used to cultivate deep insight and wisdom.

Meditative absorption (Skt. *samadhi*; Tib. *tingedzin*): A meditative state of single-pointed concentration characterized by the feeling of great serenity and bliss. Attained through the practice of meditative concentration (Skt. *dhyana*; Tib. *samten*; Pali. *jhana*), utilizing both calm abiding and insight meditations.

Meditative concentration (Skt. *dhyana*; Tib. *samten*): Cultivated meditational states of mind leading to perfect equanimity and awareness; found in all forms of Buddhism as well in Hinduism and Jainism. Buddhism asserts eight levels of meditative concentration, four meditation levels of form, and four greater levels called formless meditations. Meditative concentration corresponds with the fifth of the six paramitas (concentration) as well as the seventh of the eightfold path (right consciousness) and utilizes both calm abiding and insight meditations.

Mental factors (Skt. *chaitasika dharma*; Tib. *semlay jungwa chö*): Literally, *phenomena arisen from the mind*. Generally there are fifty-one mental factors which are aspects of the main minds which function in apprehending attributes or characteristics of phenomena while also possessing the ability to condition, influence, and/or color the minds.

Mere I (Skt. *pudgala*; Tib. *gangsak*): See person.

Merit (Skt. *punya*; Tib. *sönam*): Positive mental imprints created through virtuous thought, speech, or actions that result in happiness in the future.

Merit field (Skt. *punyaksetra*; Tib. *tsok shying*): Also known as *field of accumulation* or *refuge field*, an assemblage of visualized or actual superior beings used as the focus of one's practice of generating merit. Because of the vast power of the buddhas and superior beings, it is believed that to direct one's practices, offerings, deeds, and/or prayers to them, one can generate greater merit. A merit field is often represented by a *refuge or lineage tree*, which is a visual representation/painting of buddhas, bodhisattvas, and past masters of a distinct school or lineage painted as a massive glorious tree with the Sangha of superior beings abiding upon its branches.

Method: See union of wisdom and method.

Middle way path (Skt. *madhyamapratipada*; Tib. *uma ki lam*): The path of moderation and balance, neither favoring or opposing; a middle way between the extremes of self-indulgence and self-mortification as well as a middle way between the extreme views of nihilism (that nothing exists) and absolutism (eternal and/or self-existent).

Middle way philosophy (Skt. *madhyamaka*; Tib. *uma*): Literally, middle-most; beyond all extremes. The predominant philosophy of today's Mahayana traditions and Tibetan Buddhist schools. Founded by the legendary Indian Buddhist master *Nagarjuna* (2nd century CE), Madhyamaka asserts that all phenomena lack any inherent or essential essence.

Middle way consequence school (Skt. *prasangika madhyamika*; Tib. *uma talgyur*):

The current philosophy of all Tibetan Buddhist schools. Founded by the legendary Indian Buddhist master *Buddhapalita* (6th century CE) and later elaborated on by the Indian master *Chandrakirti* (7th century CE). The Middle Way Consequence School is a later development of the Mahayana middle way philosophy (Skt. *madhyamaka*; Tib. *umapa*), and is considered the pinnacle of Buddhist philosophy. Defined by its use of *logical consequence reasoning–reductio ad absurdum*—to reduce an opponent's argument to absurdity (as opposed to syllogistic reasoning) while not necessarily asserting a position of one's own.

Mind(s) (Skt. *citta*; Tib. *sem*): Within Buddhism, minds are broadly defined as, *any mental or cognitive event* (perception, cognition, conceptualization, reasoning, thought, decisions, reactions, etc.) Therefore, according to this broad definition, there can be hundreds of types of minds. Commonly the term *mind* (singular) is used when referring to mental or cognitive events within a single lifetime (similar to the Western usage of the term), whereas *consciousness* commonly pertains to the force behind those processes, and that which underlies all lifetimes.

Mindfulness (Skt. *smrti*; Tib. *tenpa*): Translated as recollection, awareness, or attention. Simply put, mindfulness is the absence of mind wandering, and can be understood twofold. First, to recall, remember, or keep in mind the Buddha's teachings and instructions, as well as remembering to stay engaged in mindfulness. Secondly, as a practice of present or open awareness.

Mind Only School (Skt. *chittamatra*; Tib. *semtsampa*): See Yogachara.

Mind training (Tib. *lojong*): Also known as *mind developing*, or *attitude transformation*. A practice of contemplation with the aim of cultivating bodhichitta (the mind of enlightenment). Mind training is practiced by all schools of Tibetan Buddhism.

Monasticism: A monk or nun in the Buddhist *monastic order*; a renunciant who willingly takes vows of virtuous conduct and poverty; one who has abandoned lay existence and mundane worldly concerns in order to dedicate their lives fully to the Buddha's teachings and the attainment of enlightenment.

Monastics: Ordained monks and nuns usually residing in monasteries or nunneries.

- **Fully ordained monk** (Skt. *bhiksu*; Tib. *gelong*).
- **Fully ordained nun** (Skt. *bhiksuni*; Tib. *gelongma*).
- **Novice monk** (Skt. *sramanera*; Tib. *getsul*): Apprentice monk in training.
- **Novice nun** (Skt. *sramaneri*; Tib. *getsulma*): Apprentice nun in training.
- **Rabjung** (Tib.; Skt. *anagarika*): Renunciant; not yet a novice but permitted to wear robes, shave their head, and live in a monastery or nunnery.

Monastic vows (Skt. *pratimoksha*; Tib. *sothar kyi dompa*): An aspect of the individual liberation vows and therefore an expression of the Hinayana vehicle. Monastic vows are taken for one's entire life and consist of the promise to uphold the precepts of proper conduct of an ordained monk or nun, mainly comprised of: ethical conduct, monastic discipline, and training in monastic community living. See individual liberation vows.

Mudras (Skt.; Tib. *chakgya*): Symbolic and/or sacred hand gesture used in tantric rituals. Mudras are common to all Buddhist traditions and can be seen in images of the Buddha. Hand mudras are combined with mantras and virtuous intention to create a union of body, speech, and mind utilized for practice.

Nagarjuna (Skt.; Tib. *lutub*): Legendary 2nd century Indian Buddhist master and founder of the Madhyamaka philosophy. Considered the father of the Mahayana tradition and seen as the most important Buddhist master after the Buddha himself.

Nagas (Skt.; Tib. *lu*): Magical serpent-like creatures found in both Hindu and Buddhist mythology. Nagas, usually water dwelling, are said to be temperamental beings described as half fish and half snake, also interpreted as dragons. Although classified as animals, they are intelligent and possess god-like powers and can both help and hinder human beings.

New moon days (Tib. *tsé sumchu*): A powerful day for practice and a good day for taking the Mahayana precepts or Medicine Buddha practice. New moon days occur on the 30th of every Tibetan lunar calendar month.

Ngöndro (Tib.): See preliminary practices.

Nihilism (Skt. *uccheda drsti*; Tib. *che ta*): The term nihilism, used within its Buddhist context, is a dangerous misunderstanding of the Buddha's teachings on emptiness, in which one mistakes emptiness as nothingness. People that have fallen into this wrong view believing that nothing exists, while also seeing concepts like virtue, goodness, honesty, compassion, and the Buddhist path itself as equally nonexistent and therefore inconsequential.

Nirvana (Skt.; Tib. *nyangde*): *To blow out or extinguish; to extinguish the three poisons.* Nirvana is enlightened existence (opposed to samsara which is unenlightened existence). A state or quality of the mind devoid of the three poisons, attained by practitioners who have transcended all coarse and subtle habitual wrong views, thereby clearly and unmistakably apprehending the true nature of oneself and reality.

The four types of nirvana

Although nirvana is a singular term, nirvana can be experienced differently by different minds of beings. The different types of nirvana listed below are distinguished in terms of the quality of the different minds experiencing it. The four types of nirvana are:

5. **Natural nirvana** (Tib. *rangzhin nyangde*): The ultimate nature and/or quality of the mind that is empty of inherent existence possessing a primal *potential* for purity. This is not an actual nirvana but the basis for attaining nirvana. Liberation is attained through recognizing and cultivating this foundational quality and potential of the mind.
6. **Nirvana without residue** (Skt. *nirupadhisheśhanirvana*; Tib. *lhakchäpe nyangen dä*): The experience of nirvana by superior beings while in meditative equipoise—meditating on ultimate reality. The term residue pertains to a remaining subtle habit of still perceiving phenomena as inherently existent. It's only while in meditative equipoise on ultimate reality that superior beings are free of this habitual residue.
7. **Nirvana with residue** (Skt. *sopadhisheśhanirvana*; Tib. *lhakmäpai nyangen*): The experience of nirvana by superior beings while not in meditation, or meditating on something other than ultimate reality. An experience of nirvana in which the practitioner still possesses a subtle habit of perceiving phenomena as inherently existent.
8. **Non-abiding nirvana** (Skt. *apratisthitianirvana*; Tib. *minepay nyangende*): The experience of nirvana by buddhas; synonymous with full enlightenment, supreme nirvana, or buddhahood. Non-abiding nirvana is the irreversible cessation of the three poisons, all rebirth, all suffering (both physical and mental), and any habitual residue of perceiving the appearance of phenomena as inherently existent. It is referred to as non-abiding nirvana, for although buddhas have attained buddhahood they do not merely abide within it. That is, buddhas are not bound by either samsara or nirvana, for while focused on the meditative equipoise of that nirvana, they simultaneously emanate into countless realms in order to act for the benefit of countless beings. Non-abiding nirvana is the final and supreme goal of Mahayana practitioners.

Noble eightfold path (Skt. *aryastangamarga*; Tib. *pagpelam yanlak gyüpa*): The Buddha's prescribed path to enlightenment, consisting of right view, right intention, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration.

Nominal existence (Tib. *mingtsam*): Existing by way of name and label; also known as imputed origination.

Non-abiding nirvana (Skt. *apratisthitianirvana*; Tib. *minepay nyangende*): See nirvana.

Non-dual (Skt. *advaya*; Tib. *nyime*): Not two; undivided consciousness in which the dichotomy of subject and object is transcended; and/or the union of conventional and ultimate reality is realized.

No-self (Skt. *anatman*; Tib. *dakme*): The Buddha's doctrine that asserts that sentient beings, like all phenomena, are empty of any inherent essential essence.

Nyingma (Tib.): *The ancients*; the first and oldest of the schools of Tibetan Buddhism. Founded by the Indian tantric master *Padmasambhava* also known as *Guru Rinpoche*. Originating from the first propagation of Indian Buddhism into Tibet, the Nyingma is considered a practice lineage emphasizing tantric practice, ritual, and meditation. Practitioners of this school are referred to as Nyingmapas and include yogis, monastics, and lay.

Offering scarves (Tib. *khatak*): Commonly made of white imitation silk. Presenting *khatas* is an easy way to practice generosity, accumulate merit, and receiving blessings. Khatas are presented to lamas and teachers, placed on statues, shrines, altars, or attached to sacred structures. *See appendix.*

Omnipresent (Skt. *sarvatraga*; Tib. *kunskyab*): Being present everywhere at once.

Omniscience (Skt. *sarvajnata*; Tib. *namkhyen*): All knowing; having infinite knowledge.

Oracles (Tib. *chö kyong*): A spiritual medium that provides wise counsel and/or precognition of future events. In the Tibetan culture, oracles are used by all institutions—with even the state having an official oracle. An oracle is a high Buddhist master who can go into a deep *trance-like state* and receive and/or channel information of coming events from spirits.

Padmasambhava (Skt.): Also known as Guru Rinpoche; the eighth-century Indian tantric master predominant in establishing Buddhism in Tibet. Highly revered by followers of the Nyingma school, which he founded.

Pali: The scriptural language of the Theravada Tradition; one of two of the Buddhist scriptural languages, the other being Sanskrit.

Paramitas (Skt.; Tib. *pharchin*): *See* perfections.

Parinirvana (Skt.; Tib. *yongsu nyangan ledopa*): Within the Hinayana and Theravada traditions, parinirvana is the *final* nirvana of the arhat, attained after the death of the gross aggregates.

Passion: *see* desire.

Patience (Skt. *ksanti*; Tib. *zöpa*): Good-natured tolerance to the un-desirable. One of the six perfections.

Pecha (Tib.): Tibetan scripts; rectangular lose-leaf books, usually with cardboard or wooden covers. Pechas are usually wrapped in ornate cloth for their protection. *See appendix.*

Perfections (Skt. *paramitas*; Tib. *pharchin*): The practices of a bodhisattva.

The Six Perfections (Skt. *paramitas*; Tib. *pharchin*):

1. **Generosity** (Skt. *dana*; Tib. *jnpa*): Giving of resources, dharma, protection, care, love, one's time, and oneself.
2. **Ethics** (Skt. *sila*; Tib. *tsultrim*): Virtue, discipline, restraint, proper conduct, and abandoning the ten non-virtuous actions.
3. **Fortitude** (Skt. *ksanti*; Tib. *zöpa*): Tolerance, patience, acceptance, and endurance.
4. **Joyous effort** (Skt. *virya*; Tib. *tsöndrü*): Enthusiasm, energy, and diligence.
5. **Meditative stability** (Skt. *dhyana*; Tib. *samten*): Single-pointed concentration, mindfulness, clarity, and focus.
6. **Wisdom** (Skt. *prajna*; Tib. *sherab*): Transcendental wisdom and deep insight into the Buddha's teachings and the true nature of oneself and reality.

Person (Skt. *pudgala*; Tib. *gangsak*): Synonymous with being, sentient being, "I", mere "I", individual, entity, experiencer, and agent. The person exists as a subjective unifying identity, imputed in dependence upon a unique stream of uninterrupted consciousness, mental and physical aggregates, and stream of experiences.

Pharchin (Tib.; Skt. *paramitas*): See perfections.

Phenomena (Skt. *dharma*; Tib. *chö*): That which can be known; both external phenomena—known by the senses, and internal phenomena—known by the mind (thoughts, ideas, emotions, feelings, etc.).

Phurba (Tib.): A three-sided ritual dagger used only symbolically within tantric practice. The three sides represent the cutting of the three poisons (ignorance, attachment, and aversion); also used to arrest demons. See appendix.

Pilgrimage (Tib. *nyekor*): A journey for the purpose of spiritual insight and revelation, usually to spiritually significant destinations.

Pointing-out instructions (Tib. *ngo trö kyi dampā*): The direct introduction to the nature of the mind. In many of the Tibetan Buddhist schools, pointing-out instructions, also known as mind transmissions, are received during the time of an empowerment. In pointing-out instructions, the teacher, during an empowerment, or when they deem the student ready, draws out an experience or taste of the true nature of mind from the student's mind.

Powa (Tib.): A method of ejecting one's consciousness at the time of death. Powa allows the practitioner to choose the proper moment to induce their subtle consciousness to leave their body; used to attain a *perfect death* by allowing the practitioner to escape bad mental states, uncondusive environments, or a prolonged or agonizing death process.

Prajna (Skt.; Tib. *sherab*): See wisdom.

Prasangika Madhyamika (Skt.; Tib. *uma talgyur*): See Middle Way Consequence School.

Pratimoksha vows (Skt.; Tib. *sothar kyi dompa*): See individual liberation vows.

Pratyekabuddhas (Skt.; Tib. *rangyal gi jangchub*): See Buddha.

Prayer beads (Skt. *mala*; Tib. *theng wa*): Used to count the amount of mantras, prostrations, or ritual offerings made during practice. Malas traditionally have 108 beads and can be made of any material (wood, stone, crystal, jewel, seed, metal, bone, or plastic) and come in many different colors that may be associated with particular deities or symbolic meanings. See appendix.

Prayer flags (Tib. *lung tha*): Inscribed with auspicious symbols, invocations, prayers, and/or mantras. Hung between trees, around temples, homes, or mountain ridges to bless the surrounding area and to bring good fortune. As the wind blows, their prayers and blessings are carried by the wind. Traditionally in five color sets (yellow, green, red, white, and blue), representing the elements of earth, water, fire, wind, and space. See appendix.

Prayer wheels (Tib. *manikorla*): Spinning round hollow drums filled with scrolls of mantras. It's believed that when one spins the wheel, the merit gained is the same as if one recited all the mantras contained within it. Prayer wheels can be small enough to fit in your hand or some so large it may take several people to turn. See appendix.

Precepts (Tib. *chepa*): Guidelines of personal conduct intended to stabilize one's thoughts and behavior in order to facilitate swift spiritual progress. See vows.

Preliminary practices (Tib. *ngondro*): Most schools of Tibetan Buddhism require that students, after being initiated into the tantric path, begin preliminary or preparatory tantric practices. These practices are designed to purify negative karma, accumulate merit, and reduce pride, while preparing the student psychologically, physically, and emotionally for tantric practice. These preliminary practices consist of 100,000 accumulation of: prostrations, ritual mandala offerings, purification mantras, and guru mantras.

Prostrations (Skt. *namaskara*; Tib. *chaktsal*): Prostrations are long, full-body bows that serve as a form of offering and an antidote to pride. Prostrations are performed to show reverence and humility to the three jewels and teachers while also being a great source of merit and purification.

Prostration board: A long, smooth, and flat board placed on the ground that aids in doing prostrations.

Protection cords (Tib. *sung dü*): Small knotted strings that are blessed by masters and given to practitioners for protection and blessing. Usually received during tantric empowerments and worn around the neck and wrist. See appendix.

Pujas (Skt.; Tib. *tsok*): To honor or revere; a practice found in all Indian traditions. Commonly, the term puja pertains to a religious gathering. More precisely defined as a religious expression of devotion, worship, and supplication for the purpose of gaining inspiration, blessings, and merit. Puja performances or ceremonies include prayer, mantra recitation, chanting of scripture, supplication, and making offerings (candles, flowers, food, incense, etc.) Pujas may be large formal ceremonies within monasteries, temples, or dharma centers, or informal ceremonies performed in homes by small groups, or even by individual practitioners as part of their daily practice.

Pure lands (Skt. *buddhaksetra*; Tib. *tak shing*): Also known as buddha fields or pure realms. In Mahayana Buddhism, pure lands are celestial dwellings or pure abodes of buddhas. A realm beyond samsara that transcends time and space. Pure lands are created each time a bodhisattva attains buddhahood and is established through their great merit and virtuous activities. Superior beings can visit to receive teachings directly from the buddha of that pure land, a realm where all conditions are conducive to the practice of Dharma and the attainment of enlightenment.

Pure Land Buddhism: The path of serene trust. One of the most popular Mahayana traditions in East Asia. Traditionally found in China, India, Japan, Korea, Taiwan, and Vietnam. Focused on the *Buddha Amitabha* (Skt.; Tib. *öpame*), Pure Land Buddhism can be found within all Mahayana schools. Although originating in India, Pure Land Buddhism didn't become a substantial movement until the 5th century CE.

Purification (Tib. *jongwa*): Buddhism asserts purification not as the purification of a self, soul, or spirit—which Buddhism rejects; but instead as the purification of one's view. The eradication of ignorance, delusions, and afflictions from the mind.

Rainbow body (Tib. *jalü*): In the case of high masters, after death has occurred, their corpse does not decompose, but instead over a period of days starts to shrink until it finally disappears with only finger and toe nails and hair left behind. The appearance of mystical lights and/or rainbows is said to accompany this event. This phenomenon is referred to as the attainment of rainbow body.

Realization: To gain a direct experience of emptiness and/or the true nature of reality.

Rebirth (Skt. *bhava*; Tib. *yangsi*): Synonymous with reincarnation; the belief that sentient beings' subtle minds at the time of death *transmigrate* and take rebirth. The goal of Buddhism is to escape the cycle of rebirth and the suffering which it entails.

Refuge (Skt. *sarana*; Tib. *kyabdo*): Formal initiation into the Buddhist path. Practitioners take refuge and the accompanying refuge vows in a refuge ceremony, thereby formally becoming a Buddhist practitioner. The term refuge can be understood as going for protection or safety, as if taking refuge in a shelter during a storm, or taking refuge in the advice of a doctor when sick.

Refuge field: See merit field.

Refuge vows (Skt. *zaranagati*; Tib. *kyabdo*): Formal initiation into the Buddhist path. Practitioners take refuge and *refuge vows* in a *refuge ceremony* thereby formally becoming a Buddhist practitioner. Traditionally, refuge vows consist of: *three prescriptions, three prohibitions, and five precepts*.

Reification: Super-imposition; to consider abstract concepts to be substantially real; to impute solidity upon the ethereal, or to exaggerate the substantiality of phenomena.

Reincarnation: See rebirth.

Relative truth: See conventional truth.

Relics (Skt. *sarira*; Tib. *ringsel*): After the cremation of great masters, relics are said to be found in the remaining ashes. These relics are often in the form of pearl-like formations, jeweled beads, or bone fragments found in auspicious shapes. Relics are said to bestow blessings on those who look upon them. See appendix.

Renunciate vows (Tib. *rabjung*) Leaving the householders life; a monastics first vows taken upon entering a monastery. While the *rabjung* (person), usually a child, may appear to be a monastic, they are not officially a monk or nun until taking novice vows. Becoming *rabjung* and abiding within its precepts, allows the practitioner to live within the monastic community. Renunciation vows consist of three commitments and five vows.

Renunciation (Skt. *nihsarana*; Tib. *ngejung*): Definite emergence—the definite determination to be free, or emerge from, samsara; simply defined as the wish for freedom.

Retreat centers (Tib. *richö*): Also known as hermitages; usually located in remote locations away from the hustle and bustle of monastic life. The objective of retreat is to give the practitioner the time and space to cultivate a deeper understanding of their studies, through which profound insight and a direct realization of the teachings can be attained.

Right view (Tib. *yangdakpe tawa*): The correct perception and understanding of the true nature of oneself and reality. For someone following the Buddhist path, this means having an accurate understanding of the Buddha's teachings and ontological model of reality. Right view is posited as the cause and condition for the attainment of nirvana and buddhahood, whereas wrong view(s) are posited as the causes and conditions for continued existence in samsara.

Rime movement (Tib.; pronounced *ri-mey*): Meaning *unbiased* or *non-partisan*.

Originating in Tibet in the late 19th century and fueled by religious and political suppression of non-Gelug schools, the Rime movement sought to unify and strengthen the teachings and institutions of the Nyingma, Kagyu, and Sakya schools. His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama has been a strong supporter of the Rime movement, instructing all of his students to embrace the Rime ideal.

Rinpoche (Tib.): *Precious one*; a title used for high lamas or *tulkus* (Tib.)—reincarnate lamas.

Root lama (Tib. *tsawe lama*; Skt. *guru*): *Main teacher*; most often tantric. In Tibetan Buddhism, a student may have many teachers within their life, but only one root lama.

Sadhana (Skt.; Tib. *drubthab*): Tantric practice texts.

Sakya School (Tib.): *The pale earth*—referring to the unique grey landscape of the hills of Southern Tibet. The Sakya is the third oldest of the Tibetan Buddhist schools. Founded by *Khön Könchok Gyalpo*, the Sakya school is considered a study lineage emphasizing logic, debate, and academic excellence. Practitioners of this school are referred to as *Sakyapas* and include monastics, yogis, and lay. This lineage comes from the second propagation of Indian Buddhism into Tibet.

Samadhi (Skt.; Tib. *tingedzin*): See meditative absorption.

Samaya (Skt.; Tib. *damtsig*): See commitments.

Samsara (Skt.; Tib. *khorwa*): Wandering through or circling; commonly translated as cyclic existence. Samsara is unenlightened existence and the mode of existence common to ordinary beings. A state or quality of the mind pervaded by ignorance, delusions, afflictions, and suffering; a state habituated by wrong views and misguided intentions.

Samskaras (Skt.; Tib. *düche*): See compounding factors.

Samyaksambuddhas (Skt.; Tib. *thekchen gi jangchub*): See Buddha.

Sangha (Skt.; Tib. *gedün*): *Harmonious community*. A Buddhist spiritual community or congregation. There is some debate about what the term *Sangha* actually pertains to. Some say Sangha refers to one's congregation of fellow Buddhist practitioners. Others posit Sangha as a group of four or more fully ordained monastics. However, according to scripture, Sangha is traditionally defined as the array of buddhas and superior beings who have directly realized the Buddha's teachings. With that said, all of the above interpretations are acceptable and commonly used.

Sanskrit: An ancient language of India, no longer spoken. The primary literal and philosophical language of Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism. The language of the Buddhist Mahayana canonical texts and tradition.

Secular Buddhism: A modern approach to the study and practice of Buddhism that deemphasizes its more religious, mystical, and cultural aspects. This approach attempts to clarify the Buddha's teachings by lifting them out of their presumed religious and cultural context, while further examining later works in order to determine legitimate teachings from religious or cultural adaptation.

Self (Skt. *atman*; Tib. *dag*): Synonymous with *false self* or *illusory self* (Tib. *gagcha dag*). According to the Buddha, the self does not exist, but instead is merely an exaggerated mistaken view of the specific person, believing the person (one's identity) to exist inherently and independent from the aggregates.

Sentient being: A being possessing a mind (people, animals, insects).

Shakyamuni Buddha (Skt.; Tib. *sangye shakya tubpa*): (563-483 BC)

The historic Buddha—the awakened one; fourth of the Buddhas of this aeon. Born *Siddhartha Gautama* of the Shakya *clan* in Lumbini, Nepal, near the India border. See appendix.

Shamata (Skt.) *See* meditation.

Shambala (Skt.; Tib. *deyung*): A mythical Himalayan kingdom inhabited by enlightened beings.

Shantideva (Skt.; Tib. *Shilha*): Eighth century Indian Buddhist master who propounded the middle way consequence school. Author of *A Guide to the Bodhisattva Way of life*, a profound and heart touching text on altruism and the virtues of the bodhisattva path. The writings of Shantideva strongly shaped Tibetan Buddhism's unique focus on compassion and loving-kindness.

Shastras (Skt.; Tib. *tenchö*): Treatises on the sutras.

Shine' (Tib.; Skt. *shamatha*): Calm abiding meditation. *See* meditation.

Shugden / Dorje Shugden (Tib.): Also known as *Dolgyall* (Tib.). A worldly spirit previously practiced by many followers of the Gelug school. His Holiness the Dalai Lama has declared Shugden a harmful spirit and has banned its worship and practice. Currently, a great controversy is ongoing, created by Kelsang Gyatso founder of the *New Kadampa Tradition* (NKT) a Buddhist school considered by many to be a dangerous cult.

Siddha (Skt.; Tib. *drubtob*): A spiritual master who possesses siddhi. *See* siddhi.

Siddhi (Skt.; Tib. *ngödup*): Supernatural and/or psychic powers of various kinds attained through meditation and/or tantric practices.

Singing bowls (Tib. *ke nyenpo jinpe lungseye*): Used to create a contemplative and calming sound. The sound of a singing bowl can be used to mark the beginning or end of a meditation period, or during meditation to focus the mind. *See appendix.*

Single-pointed concentration (Tib. *tingdzin tsechik*): Pertaining to a type of meditation as well as to its attainment. The ability to stay focused on any given object for an extended amount of time.

Six elements (Skt. *mahabhuta*; Tib. *kham tuk*): Also known as the *six foundational or irreducible elements*. The names of these elements are merely metaphors pertaining to six foundational qualities that are the building blocks of empirical existence: earth, water, fire, wind, space, and consciousness.

Six perfections (Skt. *prajnaparamita*; Tib. *parchin*): *See perfections.*

Six realms: *See desire realm.*

Six session guru yoga (Tib. *thün tuk*): A prayer and/or practice recalling one's tantric vows, pledges, and tantric intentions. A daily commitment/requirement if one has taken a tantric empowerment. Recited three times in the morning and three times in the evening.

Sixteen aspects of the four noble truths: A contemplation practice; four characteristics that counteract four distorted concepts pertaining to each truth.

Skandhas (Skt.): *See aggregates.*

Skillful means (Skt. *upaya kausalya*; Tib. *tab la kepa*): *Skillful method in conveying teachings.* Pertaining to a teacher's ability to adapt the teachings to the needs and aptitude of the student or particular group in order to successfully communicate the Dharma.

Snow lion (Tib. *kang seng*): Celestial animal and emblem of the snowy mountain ranges of Tibet. The snow lion symbolizes power, strength, and fearlessness, while also seen as the personification of primordial playfulness, joy, and bliss. The snow lion's roar is said to embody the sound of emptiness, courage, and truth. *See appendix.*

Sojong (Tib.; Skt. *posadha*): A confession and purification ceremony for ordained monastics, used to repair damaged vows. Performed bi-monthly on every full moon and new moon.

Solitary realizer (Skt. *pratyekabuddha*; Tib. *rangsangye*): *See four vehicles.*

Spirits (Tib. *namshe*): Spirits can be both helpful and harmful, and although often powerful, they are still unenlightened beings trapped within samsaric existence and rebirth. Harmful spirits may create obstacles for humans, while helpful spirits may be called upon or channeled for divination, protection, or even temporal wealth or power. However, spirits cannot aid in the attainment of liberation.

Spiritual: An often vague term referring to existential beliefs and feelings related to one's virtue, higher purpose, and altruistic responsibility towards other beings—usually attributed to a soul or spirit. This term is also used to discern a distinction between the positive qualities of religious beliefs from their supposed negative institutional or dogmatic attributes.

Sramana (Skt.): A pre-Buddhist Indian religious tradition of ascetic wandering mendicants, consisting of many small groups that shared similar views who existed independently from society. Practices included detachment from material concerns, inward salvation, meditation, and attaining liberation through self-effort. The origin of Jainism and Buddhism.

Sravakabuddhas (Skt.; Tib. *nyenthoe ki jangchub*; *savakabuddha*): See Buddha.

Stupas (Skt.; Tib. *chöten*): Buddhist ritual monuments. Stupas are sacred structures often containing relics of great masters. Believed to have the power to generate world peace, prevent natural catastrophes, and as a source of great blessings. All Buddhist traditions practice circumambulation (Tib. *Kora*) of large stupas in order to gain blessings. See appendix.

Suffering: (Skt. *duhkha*; Tib. *dukngal*): Physical, mental/emotional, and existential pain, anxiety, and/or misery.

Sunyata (Skt.; Tib. *tongpa nyi*): See emptiness.

Superior bodhisattva (Skt. *arya bodhisattvas*; Tib. *jangsem pakpa*): One who has attained a direct and non-conceptual realization of emptiness and thereby has entered both the path of seeing and the first of the ten bodhisattva grounds.

Sutra (Skt.; Tib. *do*): Meaning, string or thread; that which weaves or holds together. The discourses of the Buddha (the actual words of the Buddha) and discourses by his major disciples. The sutra collection is one of the three divisions of the Buddhist canon. Additionally, within Tibetan Buddhism, the term sutra can pertain to the Mahayana teachings. See *Buddhist canon*.

Sutra School (Skt. *sautrantika*; Tib. *dodewa*): A Hinayana philosophy.

Tantra (Skt.; Tib. *gyu*): A system of rapid spiritual cultivation. A secret and esoteric teaching and practice that harnesses psycho-physical energies through ritual, visualization, and meditation. The word tantra comes from Sanskrit, meaning continuity, continuum, or interwoven. Tantra is an ancient teaching and practice found in most Indian religions.

Tantric Buddhism: A general term pertaining to tantra within any Buddhist tradition. The two main traditions of Tantric Buddhism are the Indian Vajrayana Tradition (no longer practiced) and the Tibetan Tradition. Other lesser known Buddhist schools that practice tantra (mainly subschools of the Chan and Zen traditions) continue to exist; however, their emphasis on tantric teachings and practices are limited and far less prominent.

Tantric vows (Skt. *tantra samvara*; Tib. *sangngak kyi dompa*): An expression of the Vajrayana vehicle and initiation into the tantric path. Tantric vows and precepts are secret and focus on ethical, mental, and physical behavior.

Tara (Skt.; Tib. *Dolma*): The female deity that most people turn to when in need of quick assistance; the manifestation of the buddhas' enlightened activity and the remover of obstacles. *See appendix.*

Tathagata (Skt.; Tib. *deshin shekpa*): Thus gone; an epithet of the Buddha.

Ten non-virtuous actions (Skt. *dasakusala*; Tib. *migewa chu*): Destroying life, stealing, sexual misconduct, false speech, harsh or rude speech, slanderous speech, idle chatter, covetousness/envy, ill will, and wrong views.

Tenets (Skt. *siddhanta*; Tib. *drubta*): A fundamental topic of study in Tibetan monasteries; four unique cross samples of the major historical Buddhist philosophical views:

1. Middle Way (Skt. *madhyamika*; Tib. *umapa*): A Mahayana philosophy.
2. Mind Only (Skt. *chittamatra*; Tib. *sem tsampa*): A Mahayana philosophy.
3. Sutra School (Skt. *sautrantika*; Tib. *dodewa*): A Hinayana philosophy.
4. Great Exposition School (Skt. *vaibhashika*; Tib. *chetakmawa*): A Hinayana philosophy.

Note: Each of these philosophical schools can be further divided into various subschools.

Tengyur (Tib.): *See* Tibetan Buddhist canon.

Terma and tertons (Tib.): *Terma*—hidden treasure; teachings hidden by great masters or mythical beings and revealed at an appropriate time to *tertons*—treasure revealers. Termas can be physical objects hidden in the ground, in rock, trees, water, or the sky. They can also take the form of mental objects like texts and teachings hidden in the mind of disciples.

Thangka (Tib.): Scroll paintings depicting deities, mandalas, or aspects of practice, used as a focal point of meditation and tantric practice in which one visualizes deities and their respected qualities while making offerings and requests for blessings. Hung on the walls of temples, shrine rooms, practitioner's rooms, and homes. *See appendix.*

Theravada (Skt.; Tib. *neten depa*): Doctrine of the elders; a later development of the Hinayana tradition; generally regarded as a South Asian tradition found in Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Thailand, and Vietnam. Theravadists see themselves as traditionalists, presenting and preserving a more conventional and historically accurate account of the Buddha and his teachings. The Theravada Tradition is deeply rooted in monasticism, believing it to be the most conducive lifestyle for achieving nirvana. Theravada accepts the Pali canon as the only source of authentic Buddhist texts.

Thirty-seven aids to awakening: Pertaining to the third aspect of the three higher trainings—the training in wisdom. Also referred to as the thirty-seven factors leading to a purified state. These thirty-seven aids along with the development of the six perfections, and the cultivation of bodhichitta, are used to traverse and accomplish the five bodhisattva paths leading to Buddhahood.

Three excellences (Tib. *dampa sum*): Also known as the *three noble principles*. These three aspects serve as a basic outline for proper practice. (1) Setting one's intention, (2) abiding in the proper attitude (3) dedication of one's merit.

Three great objectives (Tib. *thö sam gom sum*): study, contemplation, and meditation.

Three higher trainings (Skt. *trisiksa*; Tib. *lhagpe labpa sum*):

1. **Ethics** (Skt. *adhisilasiksa*; Tib. *tsultim kyi labpa*): Holding vows and/or monastic rules, altruistic responsibility, creating virtue, abstaining from the ten non-virtuous actions.
2. **Concentration** (Skt. *samadhisiska*; Tib. *tingngedzin kyi labpa*): The method aspect of the path pertaining to mental cultivation and the stabilization of one's meditation and mind.
3. **Wisdom** (Skt. *prajnasiksa*; Tib. *sherab kyi labpa*): The wisdom aspect of the path pertaining to attaining the proper understanding of the Buddha's teachings.

Three jewels (Skt. *triratna*; Tib. *konchog sum*): Jewel refers to that which is precious and rare.

1. The **Buddha** (Skt.; Tib. *sanggye*): The awakened one.
2. The **Dharma** (Skt.; Tib. *chö*): The Buddha's teachings.
3. The **Sangha** (Skt.; Tib. *gedün*): Those who have realized the Buddha's teachings.

Three marks of existence (Skt. *trilaksana*): impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and suffering.

Three poisons (Skt. *trivisa*; Tib. *duksum*): Ignorance, attachment, and aversion. Note: With the addition of pride and envy these make up **the five poisons**.

Three principal aspects of the Mahayana path: It's said that all of the Mahayana teachings are contained within these three aspects.

1. **Renunciation** (Skt. *nihsarana*; Tib. *ngejung*).
2. **Bodhichitta** (Skt.; Tib. *Jangchup kyi sem*).
3. **The correct view** (Tib. *yangdakpe tawa*).

Three realms of samsaric existence (Skt. *tridhatu*; Tib. *kham sum*): Buddhism asserts samsara as consisting of three distinct realms of existence:

4. **Formless realm** (Skt. *arupyadhatu*; Tib. *zukmekham*) See formless realm
5. **Form realm** (Skt. *rupadhatu*; Tib. *zukham*) See form realm
6. **Desire realm** (Skt. *kama-dhatu*; Tib. *dökhamb*): See desire realm.

Three turnings of the wheel of Dharma (Skt. *tridharmacakra*; Tib. *chökhör rimpa sum*):

Three momentous teachings of the Buddha which serve as the foundation of the various Buddhist traditions. The expression, *turning the wheel of dharma*, can be defined as the introduction of a momentous and new teaching by a buddha.

Three vehicles of Buddhism (Skt. *triyana*; Tib. *tegpasum*): three unique Buddhist traditions that can lead practitioners to enlightenment.

1. **Hinayana** (Skt.; Tib. *tegmen*): See Hinayana.
2. **Mahayana** (Skt.; Tib. *tegpa chenpo*): See Mahayana.
3. **Vajrayana** (Skt.; Tib. *dorje tegpa*): See Vajrayana.

Tibetan Buddhism (Skt.; Tib. *pür ki nangchö*): A later form of Vajrayana Buddhism and therefore a branch of the Mahayana. Tibetan Buddhism accepts the Hinayana, Mahayana, and Vajrayana as authentic teachings of the Buddha.

Tibetan Buddhist canon: A unique presentation of the Buddha's teachings translated primarily from Sanskrit (but also Chinese) into Tibetan and compiled into the two texts of *the kangyur* and *the tengyur* (Tib.).

- **The Kangyur** (Tib.): Meaning translated word; the spoken words of the Buddha. The kangyur consists of 108 volumes of the Buddha's Hinayana, Mahayana, and Vajrayana discourses, including teachings and explanation from close disciples and other enlightened beings.
- **The Tengyur** (Tib.): Meaning translated treaties; consisting of 224 volumes of commentaries and treaties by the great Indian Buddhist masters explaining and elaborating on the words of the Buddha, including commentaries and treaties on the Hinayana, Mahayana, and Vajrayana teachings.

Torma (Tib.): Ritual offering cakes made from roasted barley or wheat flour; tormas are special food offerings used in tantric rituals. Usually ornate and molded in an inverted conical shape, but can be created in many different shapes and sizes. *See appendix.*

Tripitika (Skt.; Tib. *denö sum*): *See* Buddhist canon.

Tsa tsas (Tib.): Small clay icons of deities made with a metal tsa tsa mold. Often students are given a commitment to make 100,000 tsa tsas of a particular deity as a method of collecting merit. *See appendix.*

Tsawe lama (Tib.; Skt. *guru*): *See* root lama.

Tsok offering (Tib.; Skt. *ganacakra*): Tsok is a commitment for tantric practitioners and used to restore vows and pledges. A *tsok* offering is a ceremony in which food and drink are offered to the three jewels and then distributed among the participants to enjoy at the end of the ceremony. The tsok ceremony is performed on the 10th and the 25th of every lunar calendar month, usually combined with Guru puja.

Tulku (Tib.; Skt. *nirmanakaya*): Emanation body; a reincarnate lama. A distinct feature found only in Tibetan Buddhism; a system of recognizing reincarnate lamas, referred to as *tulkus*. Often called by the title *Rinpoche* (Tib.) meaning *precious one*, tulku are common to all schools of Tibetan Buddhism and are highly venerated within Tibetan society. The practice of recognizing reincarnated masters is unique to the Tibetan Buddhism Tradition. Famous tulku include His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama and the 17th Gyalwang Karmapa.

Tumo (Tib.; Skt. *chandali*): *Inner-heat*; a practice of purification through burning off negative karma. An interesting side effect of this practice is the significant rise of one's metabolism and body temperature which can be used to protect oneself from winter elements when in retreat.

Twelve links of dependent origination (Skt. *nidanas*; Tib. *dendel yenlak chunyi*): The Buddha's model of the mechanism of cyclic samsaric existence, illustrating how the sequence of uncontrolled rebirth occurs. The twelve links are ignorance, karmic formation, consciousness, name and form, sense bases, contact, feeling, craving, grasping, existence, rebirth, and aging and death. *See* dependent origination.

Two collections (Skt. *sambharadvaya*; Tib. *tsoknyi*):

- **The collection of wisdom** (Skt. *jnana sambhara*; Tib. *yeshe kyi tsok*): To gain a clear understanding of the true nature of oneself and reality.
- **The collection of merit** (Skt. *punya sambhara*; Tib. *sönam kyi tsok*): To gain merit through acts of altruism, practice, good-works, and devotion.

Two natures: Found only in the Gelug School, the premise of the two natures assert that all phenomena (internal or external / conventional or ultimate) possess and exhibit two distinct *objective* aspects or natures through which they are known, a conventional nature and an ultimate nature (opposed to the two truth which are *subjective* perceptions). However, with that said, it's important to remember that both of these natures are asserted as lacking any inherent existence or independent essence.

- **Conventional nature** (Tib. *nekab kyi neluk*): The *objective* common everyday aspects of phenomena.
- **Ultimate nature** (Tib. *nelug thar thug*): The *objective* yet empty aspect of phenomena.

Two truths (Skt. *dvasatya*; Tib. *denpa nyi*): Two distinct manners in which phenomena and reality can be perceived, *conventionally* and *ultimately*.

- **Conventional truth** (Skt. *samvritisatya*; Tib. *kundzob denpa*): Superficial or relative truth; one's *subjective* everyday perception of phenomena and reality.
- **Ultimate truth** (Skt. *paramarthasatya*; Tib. *dondam denpa*): Absolute or final truth; the subtlest *subjective* perception pertaining to the emptiness of phenomena.

Ultimate nature (Tib. *nelug thar thug*): See two natures.

Ultimate truth (Skt. *paramarthasatya*; Tib. *dondam denpa*): See two truths.

Union of wisdom and method (Tib. *tabshe sungdel*): Synonymous with buddhahood; the cultivation and merging of the paths of wisdom and method. *Wisdom*—pertaining to one's intellectual and rational side, ultimate truth, and the collection of wisdom pertaining to a clear understanding of the Buddha's teachings and the true nature of oneself and reality; and *method*—pertaining to one's emotional and intuitive side, conventional truth, and the collection of merit generated through acts of altruism, practice, good-works, and devotion.

Vajra and bell (Tib. *dor-dil*): Tantric practice implements. See appendix.

- **Vajra** (Skt.; Tib. *dorje*): Meaning thunderbolt or diamond. A ritual scepter symbolizing the masculine principle, compassion, skillful means, and indestructibility.
- **Bell** (Skt. *ghanta*; Tib. *dilbu*): The necessary counterpart to the vajra. Symbolizing the feminine principle and the wisdom of emptiness.

Vajra cross (Skt. *visvavajra*; Tib. *dorje gyatram*): Also referred to as the *double dorje*; symbolizing the foundation of the physical world. Whether vertical or in X-form, it is an emblem of stability, protection, immovable determination, and all-accomplishing wisdom. This is a mark often used as a seal or stamp impressed on the plate at the base of a statue that protects and keeps prayers/relics inside. See appendix.

Vajrapani (Skt.; Tib. *Chakna dorje*): Protector of tantra and holder of secrets; deity and manifestation of the buddhas' power and strength. *See appendix.*

Vajrasattva (Skt.; Tib. *Dorje sempa*): Deity of purification and manifestation of the buddhas' purity. *See appendix.*

Vajrayana (Skt.; Tib. *dorje tegpa*): Indestructible raft—the Indian Buddhist tantric vehicle. An esoteric and secret vehicle that utilizes visualization, meditation, and ritual, while working with subtle mind and body energies, with the aim of attaining Buddhahood in as short as one lifetime. Scripturally believed to be taught by the Buddha to the gods and bodhisattvas in the heaven realms within his own lifetime, it's believed these hidden teachings first began to surface publically sometime after 600 CE.

Vipassana (Skt.): *See* meditation.

Vinaya (Skt.; Tib. *dülwa*): The Buddha's training system for attaining liberation, comprised of precepts of ethical conduct, monastic discipline, and training in monastic living. To become a monastic is to undertake the Buddha's Vinaya training. Part of the Buddhist canon. *See Buddhist canon.*

Virtue (Skt. *sila*; Tib. *gewa*): That which is proven through logic and reason to be beneficial to oneself and others and leads to happiness, favorable rebirth, and liberation.

Non-virtue (Tib. *migewa*): That which is proven through logic and reason as harmful and/or not beneficial and leads to suffering, unfavorable rebirth, and bondage.

Vows (Skt. *samvara*; Tib. *dompa*): A solemn pledge or promise to oneself, one's teacher, and the three jewels to uphold various prescribed precepts. *See* precepts, individual liberation vows, bodhisattva vows, tantric vows.

Wang (Tib.; Skt. *abhisheka*): *See* empowerment.

Wheel of Dharma: *See* Dharma wheel. *See appendix.*

Wisdom (Skt. *prajna*; Tib. *sherab*): Supreme understanding; a profound insight that clearly discerns that which is true, right, just, and fair.

Wrathful deities (Tib. *dragpo lha*): The wrathful aspect/emanations of deities. In difficult situations, when power, strength, and controlled anger may be needed to benefit others, peaceful deities can manifest their wrathful aspect in order to skillfully create a virtuous result.

Yama (Skt.; Tib. *Shinje chögyal*): The lord of death; a metaphor and personification of the impending inevitability of death. An ancient Indian archetype shared by most Indian traditions.

Yana (Skt.; Tib. *thegpa*): See four vehicles.

Yidam: see deities.

Yoga (Skt.; Tib. *gyü*): Union; a general term for mental, spiritual and physical techniques or practices in Indian religions. In Tibetan Buddhism, the word yoga and tantra are synonymous and usually refer to tantric ritual practices.

Yogachara (Skt.; Tib. *naljorchedöpa*): Yoga practice; also known as the *Mind Only School* (Skt. *Citta matra*; Tib. *sem tsampa*); a branch of the Mahayana, the Yogachara philosophy thrived in India, East Asia, and early Tibet. Founded by the Indian Buddhist masters and half brothers *Asanga* and *Vasubandhu* (4th century CE), the Yogachara is seen as pertaining primarily to the *third turning of the wheel of Dharma* and is thought of as more experiential—an explanation of experience rather than a system of ontology. Often seen as a form of *subjective idealism*, asserting reality and one's environment as a creation or projection of the mind, or more properly, that *phenomena exist only in the nature of the mind*. Today, the Yogachara is no longer practiced as a single philosophy. However, it continues to strongly influence many modern schools, including East Asian Mahayana Traditions and Tantric Buddhism.

Yogis: (Plural) Non-monastics tantric practitioners usually residing in isolated retreat.

- **Yogi** (Skt.; Tib. *naljorpa*): Male tantric practitioner.
- **Yogini** (Skt.; Tib. *naljorma*): Female tantric practitioner.
- **Householder yogis** (Tib. *ngagpa*): Dedicated non-monastics tantric practitioners. Commonly married with children; often farmers residing in lay communities.

Zen Buddhist Tradition (JP.; CH. *Chan*): Literally, meditation or meditative state. A branch of the Mahayana vehicle found in Japan, Vietnam, and Korea. Founded in Japan (600 CE), Zen is a later development of Chinese Chan Buddhism. Some assert that the only difference between Zen and Chan Buddhism is merely the pronunciation of the names. However, although having much in common, Zen differs in subtle ways, most notably differences in emphasized scriptures, monastic style, and practice techniques. Practice within Zen is mainly focused on *zazen*, literally *seated meditation*.

Recommended Reading

Novice reading

His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama

My Land and My People. 1962. New York. Potala Publications.
The Buddhism of Tibet. 1971. Snow Lion Publications.
Healing Anger. 1997. Snow Lion Publications.
The Art of Happiness. 1998. Riverhead Books.
The Meaning of Life. 2000. Wisdom Publications.
In My Own Words. 2008. Hay House.
For the Benefit of All Beings. 2009. Shambala Publications.
Beyond Religion. 2012. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.
Buddhism: One Teacher, Many Traditions. 2014. Wisdom Publications.

Lama Thubten Yeshe

Becoming Your Own Therapist. 1998. Lama Yeshe Wisdom Archive.
Make Your Mind an Ocean. 1999. Lama Yeshe Wisdom Archive.
The Essence of Tibetan Buddhism. 2001. Wisdom Publications.
The Peaceful Stillness of the Silent Mind. 2004. Lama Yeshe Wisdom Archive.

Dzongsar Khyentse Rinpoche

What Makes You Not a Buddhist. 2008. Shambala Publications.

Jetsunma Tenzin Palmo

Cave in the Snow. 1999. Bloomsbury Publishing.
Reflections on a Mountain Lake. 2002. Snow Lion Publications.

Thubten Chödron

Buddhism for Beginners. 2001. Snow Lion Publications.
Don't Believe Everything You Think. 2013. Snow Lion Publications.

Pema Chödron

Comfortable with Uncertainty. 2003. Shambala Publications.
When Things Fall Apart. 1996. Shambala Publications.

Shantideva

A Guide to the Bodhisattva Way of Life. 1997. Snow Lion Publications.

Intermediate reading

Richard Gombrich

A Social History from Ancient Benares to Modern Colombo. 1988. Routledge-Kegan Paul.
The Buddha's Book of Genesis. 1994. Oxford.
History of Early Buddhism. 1994. Oxford.
How Buddhism Began. 1996. London, Athlone press.
How the Mahayana Began. 1996. London, Athlone press.
What the Buddha Thought. 2009. London: Equinox.

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The Four Noble Truths. 1998. Thorsons.
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Practicing Wisdom. 2004. Wisdom Publications.
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Geshe Gedün Lodro

Calm Abiding and Special Insight. 1998. Snow Lion Publications.

Elizabeth Napper

Dependent-Arising and Emptiness. 1989. Wisdom Publications.

Geshe Sonam Rinchen

The Three Principal Aspects of the Path. 1999. Snow Lion Publications.
Eight Verses for Training the Mind. 2001. Snow Lion Publications.

Geshe Tashi Tsiring

The Four Noble Truths. 2005. Wisdom Publications.
Buddhist Psychology. 2006. Wisdom Publications.
Relative Truth, Absolute Truth. 2008. Wisdom Publications.
The Awakening Mind. 2008. Wisdom Publications.
Emptiness. 2009. Wisdom Publications.
Tantra. 2012. Wisdom Publications.

Advanced reading

James Blumenthal

The Ornament of the Middle Way. 2004. Snow Lion Publications.

Chandrakirti

Introduction to the Middle Way. 2004. Shambala Publications.

Clear Words. 1998. Paljor Press.

Dagpo Rinpoche

The Pearl Garland. 2012. Editions Guepele, India

Georges Dreyfus

The Sound of Two Hands Clapping. 2003. University of California.

Jay. L. Garfield

The Fundamental Wisdom of The Middle Way. 1995. Oxford University Press.

Buddhist Philosophy: Essential Readings. 2009. Oxford University Press.

Sonam Gyatso

Essence of Superfine Gold. 2012. Library of Tibetan Works & Archives.

His Holiness the Dalai Lama

Kindness, Clarity, and Insight. 1984. Snow Lion Publications,

The Dalai Lama at Harvard. 1988. Snow Lion Publications.

Consciousness at the Crossroads. 1999. Snow Lion Publications.

The Universe in a Single Atom. 2005. Morgan Road.

Jeffrey Hopkins

Emptiness Yoga. 1987. Snow Lion Publications.

Cutting Through Appearances. 1990. Snow Lion Publications.

Meditation on Emptiness. 1996. Wisdom Publications.

Maps of the Profound. 2003. Snow Lion Publications.

Tsongkhapa's Final Exposition of Wisdom. 2008. Snow Lion Publications.

Thupten Jinpa

Self, Reality, and Reason in Tibetan Philosophy. 2002. RoutledgeCurzon.

Mind Training: the Great Collection. 2006. Wisdom Publications.

Lati Rinpoche

Death, Intermediate State and Rebirth. 1980. Rider & Co.
Meditative States in Tibetan Buddhism. 1983. Wisdom Publications.
Mind in Tibetan Buddhism. 1986. Snow Lion Publications.

Donald S. Lopez, Jr.

Buddhist Hermeneutics. 1988. University of Hawaii Press.
Religions of Tibet in Practice. 1997. Princeton University Press.
Buddhist Scriptures. 2004. Penguin.

Nagarjuna

Precious Garland. 1998. Snow Lion Publications.
Letter to a Friend. 2005. Snow Lion Publications.

Pabongka Rinpoche

Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand. 1997. Wisdom Publications.

Geshe Lhundup Sopa

Cutting through Appearances. 1990. Snow Lion Publications.
Steps on the Path to Enlightenment. 2000. Snow Lion Publications.
Peacock in the Poison Grove. 2001. Wisdom Publications.

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