Tibetan Buddhist Essentials

A study guide for the 21st century

Volume Three

Engaging Buddhism

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

Venerable Tenzin Tharpa

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Volume Three: Engaging Buddhism

Volume 1: Introduction, Origin, and Adaptation
Volume 2: The Buddha's Teachings
Volume 3: Engaging Buddhism

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About the Author

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 Sarananda.

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 Three: Engaging Buddhism

CHAPTER ONE: The Buddhist Path

Starting Down the Buddhist Path

"Religion is not just some dry intellectual idea but rather your basic philosophy of life: you hear a teaching that makes sense to you, find through experience that it relates positively with your psychological makeup, get a real taste of it through practice, and adopt it as your spiritual path. That's the right way to enter the spiritual path." ~ Lama Yeshe

While the first two volumes of this text were dedicated to discussing Buddhism as a subject of investigation and study, here in the third volume we are going to explore what is involved in actually engaging with Buddhism, and in particular Tibetan Buddhism.

Starting down the Buddhist path can be as simple as reading some books or embracing a few Buddhist principles that interest you. Perhaps concepts like karma or Buddhism's emphasis on compassion seems to resonate with you, leading you to integrate them into your current belief system. Possibly you're interested in learning about meditation or mindfulness or looking for some new tools for improving the quality of your life, or maybe you've had an urge to explore the local Dharma center, meditation group, or audit some classes on Buddhism at a local university. If this is the case, you're not alone. Currently Buddhism is gaining enormous popularity, attracting people from every walk of life and from every ideological affiliation. People who are finding great benefits in incorporating various aspects of the Buddha's teachings within their daily lives, be it through meditation, mindfulness, transforming afflictive emotions, or learning to live in a more harmonious and fulfilling way.

One doesn't have to become a Buddhist to study or practice Buddhism. Even very serious practitioners, who have been engaged in Buddhism for years, find it unnecessary to take on the label *Buddhist,* finding the label restrictive. This feeling is often expressed by my friends in the Zen tradition, who believe that labels are merely a further attempt to reify one's existence. However, for others, to align themselves with a group gives them a sense of connection and stability, being both supportive and inspiring. Personally, by defining myself with the label Buddhist, I find it helps others to understand me more easily. For if others are familiar with some of the basic Buddhist tenets, they'll have a good idea of the values I uphold and the lifestyle to which I'm committed.

Buddhism, being more of an ideology than a religion, doesn't assert a set of laws that must be adhered to. Instead, Buddhism posits recommended guidelines which the Buddha asserted as being conducive to spiritual growth. But the decision to follow those guidelines is always one's own, with no negative consequences for those who wish not to follow them. There are no prerequisite beliefs for studying Buddhism. One can begin within whatever context they see fit, be it religious, secular, philosophical, scientific, historical, and/or cultural. Practitioners are encouraged to discard blind faith and to use logic and reason to test the teachings against one's own personal experience and common sense. One is free to take or leave as much information

as they wish, accepting or rejecting whatever principals or beliefs they may deem beneficial or irrelevant.

What attracts people to Buddhism

I've always been fascinated by the range of people and personalities within the Buddhist community. From the analytical (scientists, philosophers, students, etc.), to the intuitive (artists, writers, athletes, etc.), modern Buddhism represents a diverse and fascinating cross-section of the greater spiritual and/or religious community. And although diverse, there is one aspect that binds them all together: the wish to gain some level of control and improvement within their lives. Besides the diversity of people drawn to Buddhism, there is also a multitude of reasons people engage with Buddhism. Some may have met a teacher or read a book that had a profound impact on them, while others may have a purely philosophical or academic interest; some arrive seeking healing, spiritual direction, or recovery, while many are simply looking for a community of open-minded people with whom to connect.

What makes someone a Buddhist

Commonly, a Buddhist is understood as *someone who, after close and thorough examination, chooses to adopt the Buddha's teachings and model of reality as their own core belief system and in so doing chooses to embrace and live the basic tenets of Buddhism.* This never precludes study of other systems; one is free and encouraged to study other religion, science, philosophy, etc. In fact, His Holiness asserts that it is our duty to be well informed and educated practitioners, or in his own words, *We must be 21st century Buddhists.* With that said, I have always found it gratifying that Buddhism and science both share the same affirmation and objective– that of dispelling ignorance.

Choosing a Tradition

"All the traditions of Buddhism have their own unique aspects. But in essence, we are all students of the same teacher." ~ The 14th Dalai Lama

Many people, after exploring Buddhism for some time, may begin to feel a connection or affinity for a particular form or tradition of Buddhism, be it Chan, Pure Land, Secular, Theravada, Tibetan, or Zen Buddhism. After developing a level of trust, one may wish to engage in a more structured and/or formal style of study or practice. It is at this point that one may choose to align themselves with a tradition. Choosing a tradition is a very significant decision, a choice that will dictate one's course of study and practice. However, remember that there is no pressure or hurry to do so. This step should only be taken when you yourself believe it to be a bene-

ficial step in your development, and of course, one is always free to change traditions any time one wishes. In fact, many Western practitioners have been involved in several different Buddhist traditions before finding one with which they feel a connection.

Consequently, choosing a tradition in which one feels at home can often feel quite daunting, but fear not, you will probably find, like most practitioners, that after some exploration one tradition will speak to you (figuratively speaking). Some practitioners may begin with whatever tradition is available in their area or choose the tradition of a teacher with whom they seem to have a connection. Some choose intuitively, while others more practically. Look for a tradition that suites your disposition, be it the spacious and transcendent style of Chan or Zen, the colorful and warm style of Tibetan Buddhism, the grounded and self-reliant style of Theravada, or the practical and rational style of Secular Buddhism.

"Just as the great ocean has one taste, the taste of salt, so also this teaching and discipline has one taste, the taste of liberation." ~ The Buddha

Which tradition is best: the question of purity

To try to assert a single best or purest tradition of Buddhist thought is to misunderstand the very nature of Buddhism. For the diversity we see in today's Buddhist traditions is a natural, beneficial, and proper response to its assimilation into other cultures. Clearly there is such a thing as *authentic Buddhism*–that which is found in the scriptures and commentaries of the great masters and preserved within monasteries around the world–generally consisting of the core teachings of the Buddha (the four noble truths, dependent origination, no-self, etc. But even within these authentic scriptures and commentaries, you'll find numerous interpretations of what these masters believed the Buddha's teachings to mean–which of course is the catalyst for today's different traditions. So if we were to assert one view, tradition, or school as being the purest, which tradition would we pick? Japanese Zen? Thailand's Theravada? Tibetan Buddhism? Furthermore, within each of these traditions, there often exists different philosophical views as well. For example, let's say we choose *Tibetan Buddhism* as the purest, where the preservation of *pure lineages* is paramount. Well then, which of the four schools of Tibetan Buddhism do we assert as the most pure? And then, even within any one of those four schools, there are still many different views. This idea is illustrated nicely in the Tibetan proverb,

"*Every valley has its own dialect, and every Lama has his own Dharma*." ~ *Tibetan proverb*

His Holiness often asserts that, *Tibetan Buddhism is the Buddhism of Nalanda* (Nalanda University of ancient India), but even within Nalanda, there was never a consensus of one tradition being most pure, because Nalanda was home to many different schools of Buddhist thought. In fact, many of the greatest scholars of Nalanda had vastly different and often conflicting views.

Then, to trace Buddhism back even further to the earliest teachings within the Buddha's lifetime, we find a presentation that has little in common with the practices of today's modern Buddhist traditions. Even today in Tibetan monasteries, you can see Buddhist philosophy being debated and constantly re-analyzed, with some asserting that the final ultimate view is still being pursued. In fact, it wasn't until the 14th century CE that the Gelug school of Tibetan Buddhism settled (for the most part) on their final presentation of the ultimate view of reality.

Conversely, there are those who assert that the pure Buddhist view is that which is directly perceived by great masters and yogis while in a state of deep meditative equipoise. But here too, throughout Buddhist history there are drastically different and often contradictory accounts of their claims pertaining to the nature of that experience. And if there were one pure view, wouldn't these masters, who have transcended all conceptual elaboration, share a fairly common experience of that reality? According to His Holiness, trying to assert a single best or purest tradition of Buddhist thought is as foolish as trying to assert a single best or purest medicine. The best medicine is a medicine that is prescribed properly in accordance with the specific condition it is meant to alleviate. And like medicine, it is proper and necessary for Buddhism to have a range of presentations and applications that can be prescribed corresponding to the different dispositions and needs of practitioners.

"While it is true that Buddhism officially denies its own progressive character, depicting itself as a tradition with roots in an omniscient founder that has been steadily declining from a golden age, as insights are lost in transmission and translation, this self-image is hard to sustain. In fact, Buddhism has been self-reflective, internally complex, and philosophically progressive from the start. Buddhist philosophy has evolved in response to debate with and influence from other traditions from the beginning, including classical Indian traditions, traditions from East Asia, and more recently from the West. While the teachings of the Buddha obviously form the foundation for this vast and diverse scholastic edifice, it is equally obvious that many of the later developments in Buddhism that we now regard as so central to Buddhist philosophy were not present in the Pali canon (including much of the Mahayana), even if they were somehow, or to some degree, implicit. Buddhist philosophy, like all philosophy, has developed and become more sophisticated over time. This is as it should be—it is a sign of life, not of weakness." ~ Prof. Jay Garfield

A few words about style

Again, there were many motivations for writing this text, one of which was to highlight a subject not often acknowledged, that of *style,* pertaining to the broad array of different styles of traditions, schools, teachers, study, and practice that are available. Through my many years of engaging with Buddhism, I have found that new students are simply not aware of the many choices available to them. From traditional and religious styles of Buddhism shared in many dharma centers around the world, to secular styles found in schools and universities, the various ways available in which to engage with Buddhism are many. Even within these various venues, styles of presentation can differ greatly. I recently heard of a person who had attended a Mind and Life Conference and was delighted at the open and science-like approach of His Holiness's presentation of Buddhism, upon which they decided to investigate Buddhism further by taking a trip to their local Dharma center. However, upon arriving they felt inundated by cultural ritual and what appeared to be a very religious and devotional form of worship. Assuming that this was Buddhism in practice, and not knowing other choices were available, sadly, they decided that Buddhism just wasn't right for them.

Becoming a Buddhist

Taking refuge in the three jewels (Skt. *zaranagati*; Tib. *kyabdo*)**:** *Formal initiation into the Buddhist path* (for any practitioner–lay and monastic alike). Once one has chosen a tradition, they may then choose to take refuge. Taking refuge is for those who, after close and thorough examination, choose to adopt the Buddha's teachings and model of reality as their core belief system and in so doing choose to embrace and live the basic tenets of Buddhism. Taking refuge is said to be a source of great blessings and a way of intensifying, formalizing, and/or celebrating one's commitment to their Buddhist path. Practitioners take refuge and the accompanying refuge vows in a refuge ceremony, thereby formally becoming a Buddhist practitioner. Refuge vows must be received from a qualified teacher (this does not have to be one's current teacher), a teacher who will offer guidance pertaining to one's new vows. Traditionally a new refuge name is given, signifying that one is being reborn into the Buddhist community. Taking refuge is not a requirement to study and practice Buddhism. However, it is a foundational prerequisite in taking further vows pertaining to higher levels of practice. 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. A more comprehensive presentation of taking refuge is shared later in this volume.

CHAPTER TWO: The Tibetan Buddhist Path

Starting Down the Tibetan Buddhist Path

Choosing a school within Tibetan Buddhism

As mentioned previously, choosing a tradition may seem daunting. This can be equally true when choosing a particular school of Tibetan Buddhism. But again, there is no hurry. Often developing a connection with a particular teacher or group may suggest what school to explore first. And of course, following His Holiness the Dalai Lama is always a safe place to begin, for His Holiness represents all schools of Tibetan Buddhism.

Choosing a teacher: the unique importance of the teacher within Tibetan Buddhism

Even with its vast quantities of scriptures and commentaries by the great masters, Buddhism, and especially Tantric Buddhism, at its heart, is a path that relies on living masters to ensure that the meaning of the teachings remains relevant and accessible to the student. Buddhism is a living tradition. It's told that the Buddha taught over 84,000 teachings and to this day these teachings are still preserved, but without a master who has tasted for themselves the liberation talked about in those pages, those scriptures although profound, remain mere words on a page; words that on their own, and are a shadow of their true meaning. It's for this reason that the guidance of living masters who have tasted liberation for themselves and are therefore able to make the teachings applicable to our minds, time, and culture, and are held as the highest authority. This is especially true in Tibetan Buddhism, which asserts a particularly strong and unique emphasis on the teacher. This unique emphasis originates from the tantric aspect of Tibetan Buddhism where the importance of the teacher is often elevated to *absolutely indispensable,* culminating in the ideal of the *root lama*.

> *"Within the sutra teachings there is no emphasis on the importance of devotion. But within tantra, including the four schools of Tibetan Buddhism, guru devotion is very important."*
> *~ His Holiness The Dalai Lama*

Root Lama / *tsawe lama* (Tib.; Skt. *guru*): *Main teacher*; *most often tantric*. In Tibetan Buddhism, a student may have many teachers within their life but only one *root lama.* Within tantric practice, one's root lama is visualized as a perfect buddha and is considered to be the single source of all accomplishments and attainments. One's root lama is given absolute authority over one's path. This absolute role is justified by the fact that tantra is known to be a potentially dangerous path (psychologically) and where reliance on the teacher is paramount for the proper development and safety of the practitioner.

Note: In Tibetan Buddhism, one does not have to engage in tantric practice. Tantric Buddhism is for high-level practitioners who wish to progress very quickly on the path. For students wishing to forgo its ritual practices or potential dangers, the common Mahayana *sutra path* within Tibetan Buddhism–which is shared within this text–is a safe and profound path that equally leads to liberation.

Choosing teachers

As mentioned earlier, new students are simply not aware of the many different styles of teachers, teachings, studies, and practices that are available to them. The first step in understanding the different styles of teachers and their organizations is to do some research and find out which teachers and organizations have an approach that resonates with your own interests, beliefs, and disposition. Look for teachers who share your same sensibilities, be it lamas, monastics, professors, or authors. Those who are intelligent, mature, and emotionally balanced, who seem to possess a good knowledge of the teachings, and who are fairly skilled at sharing them. Tibetan Buddhist teachers should also represent a proper lineage (a verifiable unbroken line of teachers and teachings). Take your time and don't be afraid to pick and choose. If you're more academic, find a brilliant scholar or university professor. If you're more intuitive or spiritual, look for a teacher who exudes love and compassion, who really seems to understand you. You'll find some teachers are gentle and warm, while others may be more raw and intense; some who are very technical and others who teach more from the heart. This can range from progressive and practical teachers like His Holiness, whose knowledge of Western subjects and culture helps to demystify the teachings making them more accessible for modern audiences, to traditional teachers emphasizing devotion and religious sanctity–dedicated to preserving and passing down the unadulterated ancient teachings and traditions to the next generation of worthy practitioners.

Choosing a root lama

Once again, we must make a clear distinction between teachers and a root lama. Teachers or spiritual friends are chosen in the same way you would choose any teacher. However, choosing a root lama is different. It's said that a student's relationship with their root lama is the most important relationship they will ever have, so it's important to research the teacher's background, education, and their affiliated organizations. Today this is made easy with the help of the internet, where one can do most of this work without ever leaving one's home. For illegitimate teachers and groups exist, but fortunately the Buddhist community is vigilant in uncovering these fraudulent teachers and groups. In fact, within Tibetan Buddhism, the task of investigation and scrutiny of one's potential root lama is legendary, with scripture advising students to examine a teacher for up to twelve years before accepting them as their root lama. If one is fortunate to find a trustworthy and authentic teacher, the student may formally ask to take the

teacher as their root lama. By asking this, the student is asking to be guided. If accepted, the student must obey the root lama unconditionally; this is the reason for the intense scrutiny when investigating one's potential root lama. However, remember that taking on a root lama pertains mostly to tantric practice and is not necessary to study, practice, and actualizing the Buddha's Mahayana/sutra teachings.

When investigating a potential root lama, be careful not to venerate them too quickly. A proper teacher understands that the teacher-student relationship is cultivated gradually and that students must examine and test the teacher (and their students) for themselves, over a considerable amount of time. A proper teacher won't have any problem having their views and/or advice questioned as long as it is done in a respectful manner. A healthy skepticism should be appreciated by any teacher–however, unhealthy cynicism doesn't benefit anyone. With that said, finding that one special teacher that you really seem to connect with, who, through diligent investigation and your own common sense, checks out as authentic, may be the most significant event in one's life. His Holiness asserts that in extreme cases in which a lama may ask students to act in obviously inappropriate ways that clearly contradict the teachings, it's proper to question the teacher, seek outside advice, and/or abandon the teacher if needed.

> *"We must approach spirituality with a hard kind of intelligence. If we go to hear a teacher speak, we should not allow ourselves to be carried away by his reputation and charisma, but we should properly experience each word of his lecture or each aspect of the meditation technique being taught. We must make a clear and intelligent relationship with the teachings and the teacher. Such intelligence has nothing to do with emotionalism or romanticizing the guru. It has nothing to do with gullibly accepting impressive credentials, nor is it a matter of joining a club that we might be enriched." ~ Chögyam Trungpa*

Teacher-student relationship

Within Tibetan Buddhism, the teacher-student relationship is based upon a dichotomy. On one hand, one potentially knows themselves better than anyone else, being the only one that can truly discern what is actually working for themselves on the path; on the other hand, one's mind, although appearing rational and logical, is deeply influenced by past karmic imprints and is often mistaken in the way it perceives itself and reality. This is where the teacher comes in. If you have the great fortune of meeting an authentic teacher, a teacher whom you believe has a profound insight and understanding of you, a teacher whom you believe can see your delusions and misperceptions, who possesses a clarity and objectivity that you do not, then for you to ride the edge between confidence in one's own discernment, while at the same time being open to the wisdom of the teacher, is the true nature of the teacher-student relationship. With that said, although the teacher is seen as invaluable in tantric Buddhism, being too dependent

on one's teacher is seen as potentially problematic. There's an old Tibetan expression*, only gather initiations from a lama that lives at least three valleys away* (three days journey). This pertains to the notion that it is better to not see one's root lama too often, just on special occasions (empowerments, special rituals, and teachings). For it is not productive to be consumed with the lama's daily activities. One must find confidence in one's own abilities and not count too much on one's lama. This also helps in diminishing the mistaken idea that liberation can be found in external sources.

> *"No one saves us but ourselves, no one can and no one may; we ourselves must tread the path; the buddhas can only show the way." ~ The Buddha*

His Holiness's general guidelines for determining a suitable teacher or root lama

- They have tamed their minds and appear to be emotionally stable and clear headed.
- They possess a good knowledge of the scriptures.
- They possess proper ethical behavior.
- They uphold the principals within the teachings.
- They possess an appreciation, loyalty, and conviction towards the teachings.
- They work diligently to benefit others, sharing dharma, and increasing others' happiness.

The 10 qualities of a proper Mahayana teacher

(From Maitreya's Ornament of Mahayana Sutras)

1. Discipline
2. Serenity
3. Thorough pacification
4. More qualities than the one's students
5. Energy
6. A wealth of scriptural knowledge
7. Loving concern
8. A thorough knowledge of reality
9. Skill in instructing disciples
10. Freedom from despair

Avoiding dogmatic teachers

I often advise my friends to be cautious of teachers who make broad or dogmatic statements to be believed and followed. This is where His Holiness excels in his teachings, always rationalizing and exemplifying topics through philosophical reasoning and/or modern scientific findings, while never expecting the listener to accept a point merely because he has said it. For myself, I personally look for teachers (in any field) who utilize *intelligent speech–speaking in the lan-*

guage of potentialities and probabilities (e.g., *current research suggests*…; *it appears the Buddha may have meant*…; *currently many believe*…; *according to scriptures*…). Such teachers do not simply assert *what is* through absolute and fixed assertions but instead understand that *believing* something to be true is not the same as *knowing* something to be true.

An analogy on choosing a teacher

A practitioner is like a patient in need of a doctor. A wise patient researches and finds an excellent physician, someone they can trust and have faith in, and who they believe will give them the best advice. They look for a doctor who is not just knowledgeable but who also has a great deal of experience in the field. However, the patient's responsibility doesn't end there. A sensible patient doesn't blindly follow the doctor's advice. Instead, they carefully weigh the advice for themselves, and if in doubt, they will get a second opinion. An intelligent patient researches their illness and prescribed medicine while looking into alternative treatments. A wise patient is vigilant in their responsibility to their own health, and not merely leaving it to the physician.

Accordingly, when choosing a teacher, the practitioner must be diligent and discerning and not simply follow the majority. One must study the teacher and their teachings, testing them against one's own experience and common sense, while always remaining vigilant and accepting full responsibility for one's own path.

> *"The only qualification of a Buddhist teacher that matters is the benefit to the students, their development of realization, and their personal transformation. All titles, certificates, lineages, and presumed attainments are irrelevant if the teacher's students did not progress. If on top of that the teachers behaved badly, treats their students harshly, etc., the students should make such conduct publicly known." ~ The Dalai Lama*

The Tibetan Buddhist practitioner

Because of the various goals of practitioners, Tibetan Buddhism has an assortment of paths to facilitate the practitioner's objectives. However, the Buddhist path can mean many different things to different people. To some, the path is a practical method for improving the quality of one's life; for others, it is a transcendent method aimed at gaining liberation through the service of others; and still for others it is a radical method of extreme transformation with the aim of becoming an enlightened being. For this reason, the Buddha taught many forms of Dharma intended for the various types of practitioners, with each having its own prescribed and guided path towards awakening.

Different types of practitioners within Tibetan Buddhism

- **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*): An apprentice monk in training.
  Novice nun (Skt. *sramaneri*; Tib. *getsulma*): An apprentice nun in training.
  Rabjung (Tib.): Renunciant; not yet a novice but permitted to wear robes, shave their head, and live in a monastery or nunnery. Prescribed for children who aren't yet able to comprehend monastic vows.
- **Yogis:** 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.
- **Scholars:** Monastics or lay professors possessing a strong academic proclivity.
- **Students:** Those with a more academic interest and not necessarily interested in practicing and/or actualizing the Buddha's teachings.
- **Practitioners:** Those dedicated to the study, practice, and actualization of the Buddha's teachings with the goal of attaining enlightenment.
- **Lay person:** A non-monastic person.
  Male lay practitioner holding lay vows (Skt. *upasaka*; Tib. *genyen*).
  Female lay practitioner holding lay vows (Skt. *upasika*; Tib. *genyenma*).

Note: Although I classify yogis and yoginis as non-monastics, often when emphasizing a monastic's commitment to secluded retreat, the term yogi or yogini is used. For example, Lama Tsongkhapa was a monk, but is often referred to as a *scholar/yogi* in order to emphasize his great academic prowess while also acknowledging his deep commitment to the practice of solitary meditative retreat.

Traditional practitioners within Tibet

Lay practitioners in Tibet

The Tibetan lay are a kind and gentle community who generally live simple lives of devotion. They are a deeply religious people, devoted to the buddhas and their country, but most of all to their beloved Dalai Lama, whom they hold as the culmination of all the buddhas. The average Tibetan lay practitioner (pre-Chinese invasion) was uneducated and illiterate, knowing very little of the actual Buddha's teachings. For within Tibet, the Buddha's Dharma was understood and practiced in accordance with the various types of practitioner. To the uneducated lay practitioner, Buddhism was understood and practiced in a purely religious context, with the buddhas being seen as akin to gods to be worshiped and supplicated. To the educated monastics, Buddhism was understood and practiced in a more rational, science-like, and philosophical context. However, what the simple lay practitioners lacked in knowledge, they made up for in faith, often performing amazing feats of devotion including difficult pil-

grimages across long distances, supported only by whatever food was given along the way. Their acts of devotion also include the accumulation of millions of recitation of mantras/prayers, prostrations, and ritual offerings. In Tibetan history, many lay practitioners were in fact realized yogis who lived with practically nothing, existing almost naked in mountain caves even during the cold of winter.

Monasticism in Tibet

In pre-Chinese invasion Tibet, monastics were the literate and educated; the scholars and great thinkers, doctors and teachers, both religious and secular leaders. Monastics possessed an education consisting of formal classes in Buddhist philosophy, Buddhist religion, and Buddhist science, including astrology, medicine, arts, poetry, meditation, and complex tantric rituals. Besides their formal studies, monastics also engaged in many of the popular and more devotional practices of the lay practitioners, however, in a more skillful and guided manner.

Modern practitioners outside of Tibet

As Buddhism spreads throughout the world, it is doing what it always has, adapting itself to fit the new cultures into which it is being introduced. Currently, it is still too early to see exactly what Western Buddhism will look like but we can see some distinctive traits emerging. First, Buddhism in the West is currently dominated by lay practitioners who divide their time between work, family, and their Buddhist practice. Second, sadly, the West is showing little interest in supporting Western monasticism. Third, the West seems to have a growing divide between rational and devotional approaches to Buddhism, which can be seen in the growing popularity of both secular Buddhism on one hand and more devotional groups on the other. Fourth, in the West the distinction between monastic and lay has become blurred, with Western lay practitioners studying like monastics–many of whom are today's leading scholars–and Western monastics who often appear more and more as merely lay people wearing robes–for without support, Western monastics are forced to work jobs and live in apartments which undermines the very reason for becoming a monastic, which is to become a renunciant.

Valued qualities prescribed for practitioners

The Buddha prescribed the following qualities to be cultivated by his followers: virtue, benevolence, wisdom, compassion, diligence, kindness, friendliness, impartiality, equanimity, calmness, honesty, humility, self-reliance, passionlessness, non-attachment, selflessness, patience, generosity, and mindfulness.

Striving for balance within one's path

Buddhism, being the path of moderation, advocates making great effort to maintain a balance within one's life. This is a balance between study and practice, faith and reason, humility and confidence, devotion and self-reliance, diligent effort and equanimity. It is achieved through maintaining a vigilant watchfulness to make sure we are not falling into the habitual patterns of favoring extremes.

"In spiritual growth, it is important to avoid imbalances between academic or intellectual learning and practical implementation. Otherwise there is a danger that too much intellectualization will kill the more contemplative practices and too much emphasis on practical implementation without study will kill the understanding. There has got to be a balance."
~ The 14th Dalai Lama

Freedom of choice within one's path

The Buddhist path is a path of free choice and is never pushed upon others. Even the Buddha only shared his message with those who chose to listen. In fact, to this day, monastics are instructed to teach only when asked to do so. Within Buddhism, practitioners choose through their own free will to engage in Buddhism, and subsequently at each moment and level thereafter. They themselves choose freely what direction, intensity, and the manner in which they wish to engage and proceed. Nowhere in Buddhism is there a notion of negative consequences for not following the Buddha's teachings. According to scriptures, those who choose not to engage in Buddhism simply live the common existence they always have. His Holiness encourages all practitioners to trust their own discernment and good sense, emphasizing how important it is for practitioners to know what feels appropriate for themselves and have confidence in their own ability to discern what is working and what is not. Practitioners are free to explore and embrace aspects from other Buddhist traditions as well. For instance, one can be a Tibetan Buddhist practitioner and yet be drawn to the self-reliant style of Theravada, or the open and intuitive style of Zen. Practitioners are also free to incorporate any theistic, atheist, or secular ideologies without worry of what their Sangha might say.

CHAPTER THREE: Study within Tibetan Buddhism

Study

"To dispel ignorance and to achieve the understanding, the perception, the right view, each of us needs some kind of learning, contemplation, and meditative concentration, through which knowledge can be transformed into real understanding or real wisdom. This is achievable only through education, education in a real sense. To cultivate the potential of the human mind in the finest way and to the highest level." ~ Prof. Samdhong Rinpoche

Within Tibetan Buddhism, traditional academic studies are focused on the work of the great Indian Buddhist masters from the ancient Indian University of Nalanda, teachings that encompass the Hinayana, Mahayana, and Vajrayana traditions. It's important to understand that while the Hinayana and Theravada traditions are scholastically *canonical traditions*–focused mainly on the sutras attributed to the Buddha himself–the Mahayana traditions are scholastically *commentarial traditions*–focused mainly on commentaries on the Buddha's teachings written by later great masters. His Holiness asserts that because these authentic commentaries have been tested and experimented with for centuries by countless great scholars and realized masters, they are very reliable sources of study.

Formal studies within Tibetan Buddhism include classroom study, memorization of scripture and prayers, and dialectic debate. In a broader context, the term *study* generally includes anything having to do with the intellectual or conceptual understanding of the Buddha's teaching. The objective of study in Tibetan Buddhism is of course to gain knowledge and an understanding of the teachings, but in addition, study is aimed at promoting a sophisticated and refined philosophical intelligence–teaching students *how* to think and not merely *what* to think. Study allows students to not simply become more knowledgeable, but to become wiser, possessing the ability to think for oneself and not just recite memorized rhetoric. Study is aimed at teaching critical thinking and how to engage in proper analysis, with students being encouraged to scrutinize the validity of the teachings for themselves and not to simply rely on a teacher's instructions.

"Study comes first and prayer comes second; we need to study continuously throughout our lives." ~ The 14th Dalai Lama

Benefits of study

I think many people today simply aren't aware of the level of brilliance of the discourses between the Buddha and his disciples as found in the sutras, with many believing that these legendary figures were mere passive meditators spending their days in deep trance. On the contrary, the Buddha taught discourses at the most profound level of sophistication. Today many engage in Buddhist practices such as meditation and mindfulness, believing that is what the

Buddhist path is generally about. However, other religious traditions prescribe these practices as well, so what then would be the criteria for determining what is uniquely Buddhist? The answer is, it's the Buddha's model of the nature of reality that distinguishes it from all other religious traditions. It is the understanding of his model of reality that dispels our ignorance, undermines our habitual need for reification, and institutes the proper intentions, behaviors, and view which lead to liberation. And the only way to realize the Buddha's model of reality is to study. Again, study isn't merely about becoming more knowledgeable; it is also about becoming more reasonable and logical, which works as a powerful antidote to being excessively emotional. The goal of study is to develop the mind into a fine instrument of discernment that can cut through one's ignorance, delusions, and afflictions. Additionally, when one possesses a thorough education, unanswered questions that often distract the practitioner during retreat rarely arise.

"I express the Buddhist way of practice as utilizing human intelligence to its maximum, and in that way transforming our destructive emotions." ~ The 14th Dalai Lama

"The antidote to ignorance is knowledge, not prayer." ~ The 14th Dalai Lama

Types of Educational Institutions

Buddhism as an institution has evolved greatly throughout the centuries. It began in the Buddha's lifetime as a group of wandering ascetics who slept outside under trees or in simple huts on the outskirts of society. Later, as Buddhism's popularity began to grow, they began to gain royal patronage which led to attaining housing and eventually the building of monasteries and libraries. This advancement ushered in a more sophisticated approach to the Buddha's teachings, laying the foundation for more methodical and systematized philosophical traditions to emerge. These later traditions of Indian Buddhism became the source of the curriculums taught in today's modern Tibetan Buddhist monasteries.

Monasteries/nunneries (Skt. *vihara*; Tib. *gompa*): Presently referred to as Monastic Universities. Tibetan Buddhist monasteries are not the isolated and contemplative institutions imagined. In Himalayan cultures, monasteries are universities of higher education, filled with energetic monks, young and old, engaged in deep study and intense vigorous debate on the various Buddhist studies.

Joining a monastery/nunnery

Anyone can become a monastic; there are no initial exams to pass, and no prerequisite educational requirements. The process usually begins by asking one's teacher for their blessing and permission, after which the teacher facilitates the student's entry into the monastery or nunnery, usually an institution with which the teacher is associated. It is possible to join a monastery without a teacher's help by spending some time there and

making a connection with the resident teachers. Some monasteries also allow lay students, although alternative housing and meals may need to be found.

Retreat centers (Tib. *richö*): Buddhist retreat centers, also known as hermitages, are usually located in remote locations away from the hustle and bustle of monastic life. The type of study/practice within retreat centers is appropriately called *retreat* and is seen as the practice aspect of the Buddhist path. Retreat can include meditation, contemplation, visualization, tantric practices, and/or the accumulation of merit through various practices. Retreat can be done alone or in groups, but in both cases retreat is isolated. Retreat can vary in length, from a few weeks, months, years, or even a whole lifetime. The objective of a 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. After one's retreat goals are met, the practitioner is encouraged to return to society and share the wisdom they have gained. It's a mistake to think that all Buddhist practitioners must engage in long retreats. According to His Holiness, *Long retreats are only practical and effective for a few people and most people should work in practices of social welfare.*

University studies in Tibetan Buddhism

Currently most universities around the world offer classes and degrees in Buddhism and Buddhist related subjects, often offering a more modern and secular style of curriculum. Additionally, dedicated Buddhist universities are also a choice for study, offering masters programs at little cost, with much shorter study programs than traditional monastic university.

Dharma centers (Tib. *chötsok*)

Due to the diligent efforts of great Tibetan masters, there are now Tibetan Buddhist Dharma Centers in nearly every country in the world, representing every school of Tibetan Buddhism. Dharma centers are the Buddhist equivalent of local churches or temples and can accommodate both monastic and lay alike. Serving as local Buddhist gathering places, Dharma centers are Buddhist communities that offer teachings, classes, religious gatherings, and meditation or support groups. These are often more traditional and/or religious in style than universities. Dharma centers are open to anyone and are easy to become involved with.

Dharma or meditation groups

If you can't find a Dharma center in your area, you're sure to find Dharma or meditation groups. Whether you're living in a remote town and just looking to meet like-minded people, or in a big city full of strangers, if you search you are certain to find people who want to get together to talk Dharma. These days you can find Dharma or meditation groups in the work place, on campuses, in public libraries, or in individuals' homes. Currently "online Sanghas" or "E-Sanghas" are a popular way to ask questions and interact with other practitioners, with some offering online retreats you can participate in from the comfort of your own home.

Study Curriculums

Study curriculums differ in accordance with the type of institution (monastery, university, or Dharma center), as well as for the students in attendance–monastics, serious lay practitioners, or general students. In the great Gelug monasteries of India, the presentation and approach to Buddhism is much different than that of common dharma centers, sharing a curriculum focused on reason and logic and not merely devotional practice, ritual, and ceremony. This curriculum is referred to as the *path of reason*. As mentioned earlier, each of the four schools of Tibetan Buddhism has its own unique curriculum and emphasis pertaining to study and practice. Some schools believe that a foundation of study is an essential prerequisite to practice, while other schools believe that an initial experience of meditative states to be most beneficial. Although each school's curriculum and the order in which it implements practices may vary, for the most part, all four schools share the same basic outline and structure.

The three great objectives: study, contemplation, and meditation

Within Tibetan Buddhism, the method for proper study is summarized within the *three great objectives* (Tib. *thö sam gom sum*)–s*tudy, contemplation,* and *meditation*. A student, upon studying (formal study, listening to teachings, reading, etc.), then contemplates and reflects upon what they have learned in order to gain insight into the material, after which they meditate upon what was contemplated for even greater insight.

The union of wisdom and method (Tib. *tabshe sungdel*)

As mentioned earlier, the goal of the Buddhist path is the cultivation and merging of the two complimentary elements of wisdom and method. Here, *wisdom,* pertains to one's intellectual and rational side, ultimate truth, and emptiness; the *collection of wisdom* pertaining to the development of a clear understanding of the Buddha's teachings and the true nature of oneself and reality. While, *method,* pertains to one's emotional and intuitive side, conventional truth, and bodhichitta; with the *collection of merit* pertaining to gaining merit through practice, acts of altruism, good-works, and devotion. These two elements of wisdom and method both utilize study, contemplation, and meditation. However, keeping a balance between wisdom and method can be difficult for many practitioners to maintain. For those who excel at study favor study and those who excel at practice favor practice. However, it is essential to cultivate these elements simultaneously and equally in order to achieve the final goal of the *union of wisdom and method* which is synonymous with buddhahood.

Buddhist Scriptures and Commentaries

The scriptural body of Buddhism consists of:

- **Sutras** (Skt.; Tib. *do*): Canonical text; the words of the Buddha and early great masters. Sutras exist in all three vehicles (Hinayana, Mahayana, and Vajrayana).
- **Shastras** (Skt.; Tib. *tenchö*): Formal treatises on the sutras.
- **Commentaries** (Tib. *delwa*): By later great masters.
- **Original works**: By later great masters.
- **Sadhanas** (Skt.; Tib. *drubthab*): Tantric practice texts.

As previously mentioned, currently there exist three Buddhist canons or collections of scriptures from which the different Buddhist traditions are derived. These include the Pali canon, Chinese canon, and Tibetan canon. Each of these canons is divided into three collections of teachings, collectively referred to as *the three baskets.*

The 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 (the actual words of the Buddha).
3. **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.

Sutra and tantra studies within the Tibetan Buddhist tradition

The term *sutra* (Skt.; Tib. *do*) meaning *string* or *thread*; *that which weaves or holds together*; most often refers to the canonical collections of texts and discourses of the historical Buddha and other early masters; but within Tibetan Buddhism, it also commonly refers to the teachings and practices of the Mahayana and Hinayana vehicles–sometimes referred to as the *Sutrayana*. The Tibetan Buddhist curriculum is divided into sutra studies and tantra studies, with monastics often spending the majority of their formal education studying sutra, before moving on to their tantric studies.

Interpreting the Buddha's teaching and scriptures: the definitive and interpretive

The Buddha taught many teachings from different viewpoints according to the various levels of practitioners' understanding, often teaching things that weren't literally true but were appropriate and beneficial to the practitioner at their particular level of development. This method of teaching is referred to as *skillful means*, asserting that some teachings are figurative or metaphoric in nature, while others literal and definitive. The most obvious example of this is the Buddha's teachings on the two truths, where he utilized both the interpretive (conventional) and the definitive (ultimate) in order to help illustrate the nature of reality. Another example is *the three turnings of the wheel of dharma* in which the various Buddhist traditions hold differ-

ent views on which scriptures are definitive or interpretive. The Middle Way Consequence school of Tibetan Buddhism (as shared within this text) asserts the first turnings of the wheel, as having both definitive and interpretive sutras, the second wheel as definitive, and the third wheel as interpretive. Because of these various presentations, the Buddha's teachings occasionally seem to contradict themselves. Therefore in order to distinguish the definitive from the interpretive, Mahayana Buddhism adapted a system of *hermeneutics*–an explanatory or interpretative key used to determine the definitive meaning from the interpretive meaning. Additionally, a further method for determining the definitive from the interpretive is the *four reliances*–keys for properly understanding a text's true meaning.

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

Interpretive meaning (Skt. *neyartha*; Tib. *dangdon*)**:** *Provisional; requiring further explanation or commentary.* An interpretive sutra is one that presents conventional truth as its principal subject matter, including parts of a definitive sutra that are clearly meant to be taken interpretively, through story, metaphor, or example.

The 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.

Monastic Study Programs

A formal Tibetan monastic education is usually pursued within the walls and on the debate grounds of monasteries and nunneries. Traditionally entrance into the monastery would begin around the age of seven, with one's studies consisting of Tibetan language classes and the memorization of prayers. One's studies would then move slowly into the domain of phenomenology and the study of epistemology, logic, and dialectic debate. The Nyingma, Kagyu, and Sakya Schools generally offer the same type of curriculum, which commonly constitutes a broad program for all monastics and an additional advanced program called *shedra* (Tib.) or *monastic college* (literally, *place of teachings*) for those with a stronger academic aptitude. Completion of their traditional nine to eleven-year curriculum earns one the degree of *lopön* (Tib.; Skt.

acharya) meaning master or teacher. Upon achieving the lopön degree students may continue their studies, which often requires teaching at shedra themselves for a number of years. After the student has sufficiently proven their mastery of their studies, including mastery over their mind and behavior, the student may then be awarded the degree of *khenpo* (Tib.; *khenmo* (female) meaning, *master of studies*. Conversely, the Gelug schools offer a single curriculum for all monastics, culminating in the academic degree of *geshe* (Tib.; *geshema* (female) or *virtuous friend,* which in the Gelug tradition may span more than twenty-three years of rigorous study. All schools of Tibetan Buddhism follow a study curriculum featuring the five major Buddhist treatises.

1. **Valid Cognition** (Skt. *pramana*; Tib. *tsemal*): Logic, epistemology, and the study of the fundamentals of debate; referred to as *the path of reason.*
2. **Perfections** (Skt. *paramitas*; Tib. *pharchin*): Study of the six perfections and the study of the main structure and teachings of the Buddhist path.
3. **Middle Way** (Skt. *madhyamaka*; Tib. *uma*): Ontology; the study of emptiness and the nature of reality.
4. **Monastic Discipline** (Skt. *vinaya*; Tib. *dülwa*): The study of monastic vows, rules of conduct, and ethics.
5. **Phenomenology** (Skt. *abhidharma*; Tib. *chöngönpa*): Training in wisdom; literally *the study of dharma;* including cosmology, metaphysics, ontology, phenomenology, epistemology, and mind science.

Study and debate of tenets

Another fundamental topic of study in Tibetan monasteries is the subject referred to as *tenets* (Tib. *drubta*), taught within the *perfections class* (Tib. *pharchin*). Tenets are four unique cross samples of the major historical Buddhist philosophical views, beginning with the simplest and ending with the most sophisticated. Studying tenets gives students the ability to contrast and compare between the different Buddhist philosophical views, leading to a deeper and more comprehensive understanding. The four philosophical schools of thought taught in tenets are:

1. **Middle Way** (Skt. *madhyamika*; Tib. *umapa*): A Mahayana philosophy (highest of the philosophical views); the current view of Tibetan Buddhism.
2. **Mind Only** (Skt. *yogichara* or *chittamatra*; Tib. *semtsampa*): A Mahayana philosophy.
3. **Sutra School** (Skt. *sautrantika*; Tib. *dodewa*): A Hinayana philosophy.
4. **Great Exposition School** (Skt. *vaibhashika*; Tib. *chetakmawa*): A Hinayana philosophy. (The most rudimentary of the philosophical views)

Note: Each of these philosophical school are further divided into various subschools.

Tibetan Dialectic Debate

Dialectic debate (Tib. *chöpa*) is a method for the precise analysis and examination of both our external and internal worlds. It is a powerful tool and fascinating process of inquiry and investigation into all things that can be known, through which a unique precision of mind is cultivated. In dialectic debate, the inquisitive and clever set forth hypotheses for vigorous analysis in the pursuit of wisdom, using reason and logic to uncover truth or misconception within the student's understanding. Tibetan Buddhism's dialectic method of debate is based primarily on the debate style of the great Indian Buddhist Universities, through which a uniquely Tibetan style of debate emerged. The goal of debate is to gain mastery over the path of reason in order to facilitate logical and effective thinking. This method develops clarity, improves concentration, and promotes a deeper understanding of the topics being studied. According to Buddhist scholar Thubten Jinpa:

> *"In monasteries, the main learning takes place in the debate courtyard. Knowledge is transmitted not in the form of an expert instructor passing on information to the student. Rather, knowledge emerges out of the dialectic process when the students debate. A great debate instructor sees his role as not simply passing on finished conclusions, but rather to teach the process of how to think properly."*

How to debate

Debate begins with a challenger standing and a defender sitting. The challenger starts the debate with the clap of his hands while putting forth a *philosophical syllogism* (thesis) for the defender to agree or disagree with. The challenger skillfully tries to steer the defender through a systematic method of circular logic to find faults in incorrect assumptions. Debate is a spirited and lively exchange with the intention of waking up the mind and dispelling laxity in the student. In debate, the different mental capacities of the students are asserted within four main types, referred to as *the four aspects of intelligences*.

The Four aspects of intelligence

1. Swift intelligence: A quick and sharp mind
2. Clear intelligence: A mind that thinks and speaks clearly
3. Penetrating intelligence: A deep, acute, and incisive mind
4. Encompassing intelligence: A broad mind that sees things from many different angles

It's said that on the debating courtyard the best challengers are those with a swift and clear intelligence, while the best defenders are those with a penetrating and encompassing intelligence.

An example of dialectic debate

For this example, let's use *His Holiness The 14th Dalai Lama* as our thesis of debate. In order to properly illustrate the debate process, it's most useful to use a wrong assumption by the defender in order to show how the challenger uncovers mistaken understandings in the defender's logic. I call this example, *all Buddhists are Tibetan*. In this debate we will try to disprove the defender's mistaken belief that *His Holiness is Tibetan because he is a Buddhist.* Here, "His Holiness" is our *subject,* "that he is a Tibetan" is our *predicate,* and "because he is Buddhist" is our *reason*.

Subject Predicate Reason

His Holiness / is Tibetan / because he is a Buddhist

Our debate begins with:

The challenger posits: *His Holiness is a Buddhist?*
Because it's commonly known that His Holiness is a Buddhist, the defender answers: *I accept.*

The challenger posits: *His Holiness is Tibetan?*
Because it's commonly known that His Holiness is Tibetan, the defender answers: *I accept.*

The challenger posits: *His Holiness is Tibetan because he is a Buddhist?*
Here the defender's wrong view is uncovered as he (mistakenly) agrees by saying: *I accept.*
Note: although it's true that His Holiness is Tibetan, the reason–*because he is a Buddhist*–is wrong. This mistake is now what the challenger focuses on to draw out and exposed the error.

The challenger posits: *It follows that whoever is a Buddhist is Tibetan.*
To which the defender (wrongly) answers: *I accept.*

The challenger posits: *It follows that Thich Nhat Hanh is Tibetan.*
Because it's commonly known that the famous Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh is Vietnamese and not Tibetan, the defender questions: *Why?*

The challenger answers: *Because he is a Buddhist, and you accepted that whoever is a Buddhist is a Tibetan. Note:* Here the defender reflects on the fact that he has accepted two contradictory points. *One,* that whoever is a Buddhist is Tibetan, and *two,* that there is a Buddhist who is not Tibetan–namely Thich Nhat Hanh.

The challenger continues: *It follows that whoever is a Buddhist is not necessarily Tibetan.*
Here the defender mistaken logic is fully exposed and he has no choice but to concede by answering: *I accept.* At which point the challenger forcefully stomps his foot, slaps the back of his right hand into the palm of his left and shout *"tsar"* (Tib.) or *finished*–meaning that the defender has contradicted their root assertion (*that His Holiness is Tibetan because he is Buddhist*). By this, the defender's assertion has been thoroughly disproven.

CHAPTER FOUR: Practice Within Tibetan Buddhism

Practice

"Even if we were to study quite a lot and become very learned, if we only know the theories but don't assimilate them through reflection and actual practice itself, it would be like dying of thirst on the shores of a great body of fresh water." ~ Chokyi Nyima Rinpoche

The term *practice* in Tibetan Buddhism includes meditation, contemplation, mindfulness, mind training, vows, tantric practice, visualization, ritual, mantra recitation, good works, and various methods for accumulating merit. Within the Gelug school, a foundation of study is considered an essential prerequisite to practice, with the aim of practice to gain insight and an eventual direct realization into that which one has studied. Practice transforms knowledge (accumulated information) into wisdom (insight distilled from knowledge). For the Gelug school, the most comprehensive presentation and instructions pertaining to practice is found in Lama Tsongkhapa's *Great Treatise on the Stages of the Path* (Tib. *lamrim chenmo*), an unparalleled work which illustrates the Buddhist path and practices leading to enlightenment. It gives clear instructions on the proper manner of engagement, prescribed rituals, practice instructions for each topic, and details on the signs of achieved success.

As mentioned previously, the Buddhist path can be understood within two aspects: the study of the Buddha's teachings and the practice and realization of the Buddha's teachings. Of the two, it is said that the practice and realization of the teachings is the true Dharma. With that said, all Buddhist practices are outlined and performed within three essential aspects: intention, abiding, and dedication, referred to as *the three excellences*. These three aspects are the key to fruitful practice.

The Three Excellences

The three excellences (Tib. *dampa sum*): Also known as the *three noble principles*, these three aspects serve as a basic outline for proper practice, illustrating the manner in which one begins, abides in, and completes any practice. The method is aimed at getting the most out of one's diligent efforts. All Buddhist practices begin with establishing the proper intention.

- **Setting one's intention** - By reflecting on the excellent qualities of the three jewels, the benefits of practice, and one's commitment to benefiting others, one generates inspiration, appreciation, and faith in the three jewels. This creates an open, alert, and inspired mental state which serves as the foundation for joyous effort.
- **Abiding** - Once one has generated the proper intention and associated feelings, one relaxes into this open, calm, and attentive state; here is where the actual practice takes place. Some gentle attention is applied in order to sustain the feelings of inspiration, appreciation, and joyous effort throughout the practice.

- **Dedication of one's merit** - Upon finishing the practice, one then dedicates any merit generated. This is accomplished by reflecting on any positive feelings generated while reciting the phrase: *May all being benefit from any merit I may have gained.*

Note: The three excellences should also outline the practitioner's day, beginning with generating a proper intention upon waking, abiding in practice and contemplation throughout the day, and in the evening dedicating the day's merit, rejoicing in any virtue performed, while contemplating what one could have done better.

Contemplation

Contemplation (Tib. *sam*): As one of the *three great objectives* (study, contemplation, and meditation), contemplation is a foundational practice for cultivating an understanding and realization of the Buddha's teachings. Contemplation is a powerful tool that uses logic and reason to gain insight and wisdom, and develop positive qualities, while also being a potent antidote in eradicating wrong views. Contemplation need not be a formal seated practice and can be practiced anywhere and anytime one has a free moment to reflect. The formal form of this practice begins after studying a chosen topic. One then simply contemplates and reflects upon its meaning in order to distill a deeper understanding. Some people contemplate best when walking, other while sitting on the beach or atop a mountain, still others find a quiet place in their home to be most conducive.

Some popular contemplations include:

- Reflecting on the qualities of the three jewels.
- Reflecting on the four noble truths.
- Reflecting on Buddhism's basic tenets.
- Reflecting on emptiness and dependent origination.
- Reflecting on **the four thoughts that turn the mind** (away from samsara)
    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
- Reflecting on **the four immeasurables -** That all beings attain and abide in:
    1. immeasurable equanimity
    2. immeasurable love
    3. immeasurable compassion
    4. immeasurable joy

Mindfulness

"Mindfulness and introspection are the foundations of the entire dharma." ~ Lama Tsongkhapa

Mindfulness (Skt. *smrti*; Tib. *tenpa*): Also 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 itself. Second, as a practice of open awareness, or more commonly termed, present moment awareness–*to be completely present, accepting, and non-judgmental of the present moment and/or current activity*. In both cases, mindfulness is the cultivation and training in uninterrupted focus–to place and hold one's attention upon a chosen object. Here chosen object can be one's breath, an image/statue, the present moment, one's present actions, aspects of one's practice, or aspects of the Buddha's teachings/instructions. Within scriptures mindfulness is listed as: a foundational mental factor, an aspect of the eightfold path, and the fifth of the eight antidotes to the five obstacles to meditation. All of these various aspects of mindfulness function in much the same manner–to facilitate mental focus and prevent forgetfulness or the loss of object. The practice or cultivation of mindfulness consists of both contemplation and meditation techniques.

The four foundations of mindfulness: Four topics of contemplation used to develop a clear and correct understanding of the specific topics of the four noble truths, selflessness, emptiness, and dependent origination. The Gelug school explains the four foundations of mindfulness as antidotes to four core misconceptions pertaining to the true nature of oneself and reality. These practices are contemplated and/or cultivated in the context of both their conventional nature and ultimate nature, starting with the most basic–mindfulness of the body.

1. **Mindfulness of the body**: The internal sensory body and external physical body, including one's breath, posture, actions, reactions, and bodily sensations.
   Conventionally: Contemplating the impure nature of the ordinary physical aggregates.
   Ultimately: Contemplating the empty and illusion-like quality of the body–the antidote to the error of perceiving the body as the place where the person resides.
2. **Mindfulness of feelings**: Pleasant, painful, or neutral; both sensory and mental (physical/emotional pain, anxiety, happiness, pleasure, etc.).
   Conventionally: Contemplating feelings as transient, fickle, and the nature of suffering.
   Ultimately: Contemplating the empty and illusion-like quality of feelings–the antidote to the error of perceiving feelings as being possessed by the person.
3. **Mindfulness of mind**: Pertaining to the quality of one's general mental state.
   Conventionally: Contemplating the momentary and impermanent nature of all mental activities; recognizing the natural state of the mind as neutral and naturally free from both destructive and constructive emotions.

Ultimately: Contemplating the empty and illusion-like quality of the mind–the antidote to the error of perceiving the mind to be the person.

4. **Mindfulness of phenomena**: Contemplating and discriminating beneficial phenomena that needs to be cultivated and afflictive phenomena that needs to be abandoned. *Phenomena* here refers to all mental and physical phenomena, attitudes, views, and most importantly one's mental factors and the discernment of which mental factors to cultivate and which to abandon.
   Conventionally: Contemplating and discerning what is to be adopted or abandoned.
   Ultimately: Contemplating the empty and illusion-like quality of mental and physical phenomena–the antidote to the error of perceiving phenomena as being one with, or possessed by, the person.

Practicing mindfulness

Engaging in mindfulness as a contemplation can be done anytime one has a few free minutes. It can be practiced either as a formal seated practice where the practitioner sits and contemplates a chosen topic, or can be practiced without contemplating–simply being present in open awareness, taking in the present unadulterated moment. When engaging in activities, focus one's awareness on the breath passing through the nostrils while occasionally uttering the name of the activity being performed (e.g., walking, cleaning, eating, resting). The aim of mindfulness is to stay present in the current moment while forestalling the mind's natural tendency to wander into habitual thinking patterns, which often draw us away from the present moment and into past recollections and projected future outcomes.

The simplest and most advantageous practices of mindfulness is to simply be mindful of one's thoughts, speech, and reactions when interacting with others. Mindfulness is being aware of one's intentions and behavior–making sure that they correspond with the Buddha's advice on proper conduct, which includes being present, caring, calm, friendly, open, generous, and being a generous listener. Proper conduct further includes putting others' interests and importance before one's own, not holding strong views, not being contentious, not overreacting, and practicing staying equanimous no matter what challenges may arise.

"Ultimately, the practice of mindfulness is about developing the proper balance between one's internal conceptual world and one's external environmental world." ~ Tenzin Tharpa

Mind Training

"When your mind is trained in self-discipline, even if you are surrounded by hostile forces, your peace of mind will hardly be disturbed." ~ The 14th Dalai Lama

Mind training (Tib. *lojong*): A practice of contemplation utilized by all schools of Tibetan Buddhism. Also known as *mind development*, or *attitude transformation*. First brought to Tibet by the Indian Buddhist Master Atisha in the eleventh century CE, mind training is a Mahayana practice with the aim of cultivating and attaining bodhichitta (the mind of awakening). Mind training is practiced by contemplating prescribed topics while visualizing their effects and results. Mind training isn't merely a seated practice, but a practice that one incorporates into one's daily activities. The simplest of mind training practices is the constant reflection upon the thought, *I wish to attain enlightenment for the benefit of all beings.*

Guidelines for the teaching and practice of mind training are outlined within seven stages:

1. **Training in the preliminaries**
   Setting one's intention by contemplating *the four thoughts that turn the mind:*
   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
2. **The actual practice; training the mind in bodhichitta**
   Contemplations on conventional bodhichitta
   Contemplations on ultimate bodhichitta
   Contemplating the seven-point cause and effect method
   Contemplating the five-fold exchanging self and other methods
3. **Transforming adversity into the path of awakening**
   Training in *the four practices*:
   1. Being mindful when experiencing pain and suffering
   2. Not blaming others
   3. Using all experiences to realize the buddha bodies
   4. Realizing their indivisibility
4. **Integrating the practice throughout one's whole life**
   Training in *the five strengths*: faith, diligence, mindfulness, concentration, wisdom
5. **The signs of success or proficiency in mind training**
6. **The commitments of mind training**
   1. Don't go against the mind training you promised to observe.
   2. Don't be reckless in your practice.

3. Don’t be partial, always train in the three general points.
4. Transform your attitude but maintain your natural behavior.
5. Don’t speak of others’ incomplete qualities.
6. Don’t concern yourself with others’ business.
7. Train to counter whichever disturbing emotion is greatest.
8. Give up every hope of reward.
9. Avoid poisonous food.
10. Don’t maintain misplaced loyalty.
11. Don’t make sarcastic remarks.
12. Don’t lie in ambush.
13. Don’t strike at the vital point.
14. Don’t burden an ox with the load of a yak.
15. Don’t abuse the practice.
16. Don’t sprint to win the race.
17. Don’t turn gods into devils.
18. Don’t seek others’ misery as a means to happiness.

7. **The precepts of mind training**
    1. Every yoga should be performed as one.
    2. All errors are to be amended by one mean (method).
    3. There are two activities—at beginning and end.
    4. Whichever occurs, be patient with both.
    5. Guard both at the cost of your life.
    6. Train in the three difficulties.
    7. Seek for the three principal causes.
    8. Don’t let the three factors weaken.
    9. Never be parted from the three possessions.
    10. Train consistently without partiality.
    11. Value an encompassing and far-reaching practice.
    12. Train consistently to deal with difficult situations.
    13. Don’t rely on other conditions.
    14. Engage in the principal practices right now.
    15. Don’t apply a wrong understanding.
    16. Don’t be sporadic.
    17. Practice unflinchingly.
    18. Release investigation and analysis.
    19. Don’t be boastful.
    20. Don’t be short-tempered.
    21. Don’t make a short-lived attempt.
    22. Don’t expect gratitude.

The actual practice

Within the actual practice of mind training, there are two main presentations: *the seven-point cause and effect method*–attributed to Maitreya by way of Atisha, and *the five-fold exchanging self and other methods*–attributed to Manjushri by way of Nagarjuna.

The seven-point cause and effect method for generating bodhichitta

1. **Contemplation that all beings have been our mothers:** A contemplation in which we look upon others as if looking upon our own mothers, through which we generate and receive motherly love and give love to all beings.
2. **Remembering the kindness of our mothers:** This contemplation pertains to acknowledging and appreciating the love shown to us by all beings who have been our mothers, and considering all that they had done and sacrificed for us, including the difficulties they went through to care for us.
3. **Wishing to repay their kindness:** A contemplation in which we recognize the debt that we owe to all *mother sentient beings* that have been our mothers, and our responsibility to repay their love and kindness.
4. **Generating affectionate love**: A contemplation on the great affection we have for these mothers in order to generate great love, reciting: *May all mother sentient beings have happiness and the causes for happiness*.
5. **Generating great compassion**: A contemplation on the great affection we have for these mothers in order to generate great compassion, reciting: *May all mother sentient beings be free from suffering and the causes of suffering.*
6. **Special altruistic intention:** A contemplation on taking on the responsibility of saving all beings from suffering and leading them to happiness.
7. **Generating bodhichitta**: A contemplation on the wish and determination to achieve buddhahood in order to save all motherly sentient beings from suffering.

The five-fold method for exchanging self and other: method for generating bodhichitta

1. **Equanimity:** A contemplation on the equality of all beings. Visualize three groups of people in front of you: friends on the right, strangers in the middle, and enemies on the left. Contemplate how easily friends can become enemies and enemies can become friends and also how easy it is for strangers to become either. Reflect on how all these groups are primarily the same, in that they all want happiness and don't want to suffer. Visualize each group and examine your feelings, try to understand them, and try to generate compassion and appreciation for them equally. Endeavor to realize the fundamental equality of all sentient beings.
2. **Faults of self-cherishing**: A contemplation on the suffering of self-cherishing and that self-cherishing is the cause of great suffering.
3. **Benefits of cherishing others**: A contemplation on the virtue and happiness that arises from cherishing others and that cherishing others is the cause of real happiness.
4. **Exchanging self and other**: A contemplation on the equality of all beings, in the sense that everyone wants happiness and no one wants to suffer; reversing the attitudes one

normally has towards oneself and others, while exchanging others' perspective and view with our own (to imagine others as yourself and you as them).

5. **Tonglen** (Tib.): Giving and taking; a contemplation and visualization on taking on the suffering of others while giving them one's own happiness.

Within the Gelug school, these two methods of mind training are combined during practice. To facilitate this, Lama Tsongkhapa created a unique presentation referred to as *the eleven point method for generating bodhichitta,* a special practice found only in the Gelug schools.

The eleven-point method for generating bodhichitta

1. **Equanimity**: Visualize three groups of people in front of you: friends on the right, strangers in the middle, and enemies on the left. Contemplate how easily friends can become enemies and enemies can become friends and also how easy it is for strangers to become either. Reflect on how all these groups are primarily the same–in that they all want happiness and don't want to suffer. Try to generate compassion and appreciation for them equally. Endeavor to realize the fundamental equality that binds all sentient beings.
2. **Contemplation that all beings have been our mothers**: Imagine that all beings have been our mothers, through which we then receive and give motherly love to all sentient beings.
3. **Remembering the kindness of our mothers**: Acknowledge and appreciate the love shown by these mothers, and consider all that they had done and sacrificed for us, including the difficulties they went through to care for us.
4. **Wishing to repay their kindness**: Recognize the debt that we owe to all mothers and our responsibility to repay their love and kindness.
5. **Exchanging self and other**: Contemplate how everyone, like ourselves, wants happiness and to not suffer; exchange others' perspective with our own. (Imagine others as yourself, and you as them.)
6. **Faults of self-cherishing**: Contemplate that self-cherishing is the cause of great suffering.
7. **Benefits of cherishing others**: Contemplate that cherishing others is the cause of genuine happiness.
8. **Taking others suffering through compassion** (Tib. *tonglen*): Visualize taking on the suffering of others.
9. **Giving others happiness through love** (Tib. *tonglen*): Visualize giving others your happiness.
10. **Special altruistic intention**: Contemplate on one's responsibility in saving all beings from suffering.
11. **Generating bodhichitta**: Contemplate upon one's wish and determination to achieve buddhahood in order to save all beings from suffering.

Engaging in mind training retreats

After becoming familiar with the instructions and practices of bodhichitta through study, contemplation, and meditation, it is common for the practitioner to then engage in retreat

in order to gain an experiential realization of the practice. In the Gelug school, this is usually done within a *Lamrim* retreat based on Lama Tsongkhapa's famous text *the Lamrim Chenmo*. Retreats of this nature can last anywhere from a few weeks to a few years, depending on the aptitude and success of the practitioner.

Another famous mind training contemplation is the *eight verses for training the mind*.

1. With a determination to achieve the highest aim
   For the benefit of all sentient beings
   Which surpasses even the wish-fulfilling gem,
   May I hold them dear at all times.
2. Whenever I interact with someone,
   May I view myself as the lowest amongst all,
   And, from the very depths of my heart,
   Respectfully hold others as superior.
3. In all my deeds may I probe into my mind,
   And as soon as mental and emotional afflictions arise-
   As they endanger myself and others-
   May I strongly confront them and avert them.
4. When I see beings of unpleasant character
   Oppressed by strong negativity and suffering,
   May I hold them dear-for they are rare to find-
   As if I have discovered a jewel treasure!
5. When others, out of jealousy
   Treat me wrongly with abuse, slander, and scorn,
   May I take upon myself the defeat
   And offer to others the victory.
6. When someone whom I have helped,
   Or in whom I have placed great hopes,
   Mistreats me in extremely hurtful ways,
   May I regard him still as my precious teacher.
7. In brief, may I offer benefit and joy
   To all my mothers, both directly and indirectly,
   May I quietly take upon myself
   All hurts and pains of my mothers.
8. May all this remain undefiled
   By the stains of the eight worldly concerns;
   And may I, recognizing all things as illusion,
   Devoid of clinging, be released from bondage.

Meditation

"Meditation is the process whereby we gain control over the mind and guide it in a more virtuous direction. Meditation may be thought of as a technique by which we diminish the force of old thought habits and develop new ones." ~ The 14th Dalai Lama

Meditation (Skt. *dhyana*; Tib. *gom*): As one of the *three great objectives* (study, contemplation, and meditation), meditation is a foundational practice for cultivating an understanding and realization of the Buddha's teachings. Meditation is both developmental and revelatory and can be defined as a method of mental cultivation with the purpose of developing and gaining control over the mind and its processes; a technique and/or practice that develops insight, wisdom, concentration, clarity, and mental/emotional stability. In Tibetan, the word for meditation is *gom* (Tib.) meaning *to become familiar–to gain familiarity with the mind*. Meditation is a method of self-inquiry and self-discovery, a way of exploring and learning about one's mind, and a method for transforming one's negative mental states into their positive counterparts. Meditation is a technique that does not require a belief system or commitment to any group or tradition. The technique can be as simple as closing one's eyes and focusing on the inflow and outflow of the breath, which works to calm and stabilize the mind. No set duration is prescribed, anywhere from a few minutes, up to twenty-minutes is fine. All that is needed is a quiet environment, a comfortable seat, a fairly upright posture, and a patient openness to exploration and improvement.

Over the last few decades, meditation has gained great popularity in the West, being widely accepted as a straight-forward practical technique for working with the mind and emotions. Meditation can be practiced at many different levels, from a simple daily practice aimed at cultivating contentment and mental/emotional stability, to higher levels of practice that are said to bring about great mental discipline, euphoric bliss, mystical experiences, and even supernatural powers. There are a broad variety of different types of meditation, including sitting meditation, walking meditation, guided meditation, calming meditation, meditation that focuses on bodily sensation, meditation that develops concentration, and analytical meditation that develops wisdom.

The goal in meditation

Often meditation is said to be a goalless practice–to simply sit without an agenda–to leave one's worldly concerns, busyness, and endless striving behind. However, obviously there is an objective. On a basic level, the goal of meditation is simply to become stable and healthy, leading to a more productive and fulfilling life. On a deeper level, the goal is to create a profound positive transformation of one's mind and mental states, and of course, the highest goal is enlightenment itself, attained through a direct realization of the Buddha's teachings.

"Meditation is a method for training our intelligence and warm-heartedness so that we will lessen our destructive emotions and act with more compassion and wisdom in daily life."
~ Dr. Alexander Berzin

"The goal of meditation is not to control your thoughts, but to stop letting your thoughts control you." ~ Unknown

The benefits of meditation

Presently, meditation has been the subject of an explosion in scientific research. Research asserts a long list of health benefits, including enhancing one's immune system, lowering stress, lowering blood pressure, and controlling reactivity, while also increasing empathy, compassion, and general happiness. Meditation stabilizes one's emotions while creating an overall sense of wellbeing and clarity. Further research suggests meditation can also help many chronic health issues, including depression, addiction, ADHD, and age-related cognitive decline. However, for a Buddhist practitioner, the greatest benefit of meditation is to gain control over one's mind and thereby gain control over one's life and potential.

"Meditation is not making you a better person – It is revealing the person you are."
~ Chögyam Trungpa

Meditation within Tibetan Buddhism

Tibetan Buddhism generally utilizes two forms of mediation: *calm abiding meditation*–which, as the name implies, is aimed at calming and stabilizing the mind, and *insight meditation*–a contemplative and analytical meditation aimed at attaining insight and wisdom. Of the two, insight meditation is the main meditation practice of Tibetan Buddhism, asserted as the only form of meditation with the ability to eliminate one's foundational ignorance and/or wrong views. Conversely, Tibetan Buddhism asserts that engaging in calm abiding meditation alone has the potential danger of creating a deep laxity, trapping the meditator in a habituated lethargic dullness. With that said, the ultimate goal for the meditator is to attain the simultaneous union of the two, appropriately referred to as *the union of calm abiding and special insight*, which in Tibetan Buddhism is usually cultivated and achieved within tantric practice.

Calm abiding meditation (Skt. *shamatha*; Tib. *shine*): Also referred to as *mindfulness meditation*. Calm abiding is commonly considered a passive meditation and benefits the practitioner in two ways. First, it calms and stabilizes the mind, resulting in a more expansive awareness, and second, it helps one develop one's mental faculties (e.g., concentration, focus, fortitude, mental/emotional stability, and gaining control over habitual behaviors). In this meditation, practitioners use an object of meditation (one's breath, statue/image, candle flame, etc.) to place and hold their attention. When refined, this meditation leads to the development and attain-

ment of *single-pointed concentration* (Tib. *tingdzin tsechik*), also known as *focused attention*– the ability to stay focused on any given object for an extended amount of time. Calm abiding meditation aims at gaining control over the thought process (or more appropriately the *thinking* process). Here a distinction needs to be made between thinking and thought. *Thought* is a natural byproduct of the mind that arises naturally from one's karmic imprints and internal/external experiences, whereas *thinking* is the intentional and/or habitual act of operating those thoughts. In its best scenario, thinking is focused on achieving goals and/or finding solutions (creating, working, communicating, learning, or helping others). In its worst scenario, thinking can be an uncontrollable habit that often torments the thinker through relentless negative thinking, reflecting on useless past painful events or projected future outcomes, imagining non-virtuous actions, thinking badly of others, self-deprecation, guilt, and self-loathing. This type of uncontrollable, incessant, and often senseless habitual thinking is often likened to a hamster on a wheel, on which the rodent mindlessly never stops running. With practice, calm abiding meditation can help one to lessen or even eradicate these negative habitual aspects of one's thought process, freeing the mind for more productive activities.

Note: the terms calm abiding and single-pointed meditation pertain to both the meditative practice as well as their final attainment.

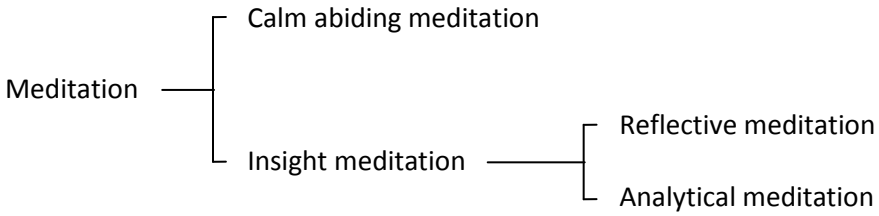
Insight meditation (Skt. *vipasyana*; Tib. *lhakthong*): An active contemplative and/or analytical meditation used to cultivate deep insight and wisdom. Insight meditation, also known as *special insight meditation,* utilizes conceptional reasoning and logic to actively examine concepts, beliefs, and assumptions in the pursuit of wisdom; this can also include working with mental and bodily sensations in order to gain experiential insight, as in the four foundations of mindfulness. Insight meditation is also used to cultivate distinct virtuous states of mind. Within Tibetan Buddhism, calm abiding meditation is seen as a preparatory practice, whereas insight meditation is the principle practice, meaning that calm abiding sets the stage for insight meditation. The Gelug school of Tibetan Buddhism asserts a unique presentation of insight meditation by dividing it into *reflective meditation* and *analytical meditation*.

Reflective meditation (Tib. *shar gom*): A method of meditation that utilizes contemplation and reflection to cultivate deep insight and wisdom. Contemplation and reflection themselves are powerful tools for gaining wisdom, but when combined with meditation they have the potential to reach profoundly deep levels of understanding and realization, uncovering one's intuitive and innate wisdom. Reflective mediation is generally synonymous with insight meditation.

Analytical meditation (Tib. *che gom*): A more systematic contemplative meditation with the goal of not merely gaining conceptual insight but also gaining an experiential realization of different virtuous mental states. This is accomplished through the repeated contemplation of a chosen topic of meditation, in which one uses scriptural citations, quotations, philosoph-

ical reasoning, and logical arguments to analyze the topic from every viewpoint in order to elicit an experiential realization.

Forms of Tibetan Buddhist meditiation



Other forms of meditation

- **Walking meditation:** Very slow and methodical pacing or circumambulating. Generally calm abiding meditations is practiced when engaged in walking meditation.
- **Guided meditation:** Usually a group meditation in which a teacher instructs/talks practitioners through various steps of meditation. This may include new meditative techniques, working with intentions, goals, virtuous qualities, and different meditative topics.
- **Glance meditation:** A form of insight meditation in which one, while reading/studying, pauses upon an interesting passage, then reflects and meditates upon it in order to gain a deeper understanding.
- **Mantra meditation:** The mental repetition of a mantra during meditation in order to stabilize the mind and/or to accumulate merit. This is a form of calm abiding meditation.

General steps in basic meditation

- Establish a peaceful place
- Establish a comfortable seat, chair, or cushion
- Establish your intention (with prayer and/or contemplation)
- Establish the proper posture and breath (straight back and slow natural breath)
- Focus gently on the object of meditation (your breath, statue/image, flame)
- Relax, clear your mind, and focus on the object of meditation
- Conclude your meditation by dedicating the practice to all sentient beings

Basic Instruction for Calm Abiding Meditation

1. **Establish a comfortable sitting position.** If sitting on a cushion on the floor, you can sit cross-legged. If sitting on a chair, it's recommended to place both feet flat on the floor. In either case, it's important that your back is straight and remains in an alert posture as if being pulled upwards by a string attached to the crown of your head. If sitting in a chair, choose a chair without arms and sit upright without leaning against the backrest. The hips are drawn slightly forward, allowing the small of the lower back to be lightly accentuated. The shoulder blades are drawn slightly together. Your hands can be placed upon the knees, thighs, or placed palms facing up, right upon the left, at the level of the navel, with the thumb tips touching. The head is tilted slightly downward, with the teeth slightly parted. The tongue should rest at the roof of the mouth, lightly touching the back of the teeth, helping to reduce salivation. The eyes are focused on a spot on the floor about six feet in front of oneself. It's generally recommended that the eyes remain partially closed, although some recommend the eyes to be completely closed.
2. **Generating the proper attitude.** The mind should be kept in a natural, alert, and vivid state, without any over conceptualization. You should attempt to stay present–keeping the mind in the present moment without thinking about the past or future. Once the mind is stabilized, you set your intention, generate inspiration, and set your resolve by remembering the benefits and reasons for practice.
3. **Begin to focus on the object of meditation.** (In this example we will use the breath.) This aspect of focused meditation is often referred to as *placement meditation* (Tib. *jog gom*). Begin by bringing your awareness to the sensation of the breath as it passes over the upper lip and through the nostrils. Breathe naturally and continue to soften the breath, mind, and body. Keep a slight awareness on your posture, making sure your back remains fairly straight with the small of the back lightly accentuated. At this point, simply try to gently keep your attention on the breath and the sensation around the nostrils (or stabilize your gaze upon the object of meditation, if using a visual object). For beginners, keeping your attention on the breath for any extended amount of time is nearly impossible, for the mind will continuously wander and get lost in thought. This is inevitable and assumed, and it is the very reason for engaging in calm abiding meditation–to cultivate an ability to remain focused without distraction. While continuing to focus on the breath, remain patient and calm, simply observe without judgment or concern. When you realize your mind has wandered, simply bring your focus gently back to the breath or visual object; repeat this process over and over and over again. It's important that you never try to force the mind. When your mind wanders, accept it, and when possible, simply bring our attention gently back to the object of meditation. The mind needs to be slowly and patiently habituated to this new

practice. The more patience, understanding, and loving-care shown to the mind, the faster you'll improve and the more enjoyable the practice becomes.

The nine stages of calm abiding: also known as *the nine stages of sustained attention.* The nine stages is a progressive outline for cultivating and mastering single pointed concentration and calm abiding, which may take years of practice to attain, or with tremendous dedication, as little as six-months.

1. **Placing the mind**: Placing attention on the object of meditation. In the beginning the practitioners can only maintain their attention for a limited duration.
2. **Continuous placement**: Experiencing longer moments of attention on the object.
3. **Patch placement**: Being able to recognize as soon as the object is lost and reapply one's attention or "patch it up" immediately; being able to hold one's attention on the object for most of the session.
4. **Close placement**: A more refined placement in which one is able to hold one's attention on the object for the entire session (one hour or more). However, one must be diligent in watching for underlying excitement, dullness, and subtle thought.
5. **Taming**: Achieving deep tranquility and pleasure from one's meditation. However, one must remain diligent in watching for dullness which is achieved by remembering the benefits of attaining calm abiding.
6. **Pacification**: The arising and pacification of subtle excitement; this state is achieved only after thousands of hours of training.
7. **Complete pacification**: The final pacification of subtle excitement or dullness
8. **Single-pointedness**: Being able to reach high levels of concentration for the full duration of the session with only a slight effort.
9. **Balanced placement**: The experience of *absorbed concentration* (Skt. *dhyana*; Tib. *semten*; Pali. *Jhana*), synonymous with samadhi (Skt.), a deep meditative equanimity in which one is able to hold one's attention for four hours or more without interruption.

When the ninth stage of calm abiding is combined with a sense of complete mental and physical bliss and pliancy that is confident in its ability to concentrate perfectly on anything it wishes for any duration of time, one has attained calm abiding. The attainment of calm abiding is often listed as the 10th stage of calm abiding.

Note: For practitioners on the tantric path, only the first stage of calm abiding is cultivated. The other stages are then cultivated and attained through tantric practice.

Basic Instruction for Reflective Meditation

1. **Begin with calm abiding meditation to stabilize and focus the mind,**
   including proper seating, posture, and setting one's intention.
2. **Once a level of stability has been achieved one then enters reflective meditation.**
   Reflective meditation begins with the introduction of an object of contemplation (a word, concept, thought, or phrase), usually philosophical in nature or something related to one's studies or practice. Additionally, one can also introduce a problem or obstacle within one's life that one may be trying to resolve or understand. For an example, let's use the single word *emptiness*. The word or topic *emptiness* is introduced/placed in the mind, upon which one then simply sits with it. Often, after a period of time, the mind by its own volition will start to unravel the word, allowing for conceptual and intuitive insight and/or innate wisdom to arise. Other times, phrases like *emptiness is form–form is emptiness,* may be introduced. His Holiness often recommends isolating the object of reflective meditation from everything else by imagining placing it into a clear bubble in front of oneself, which creates a level of detachment, helping to separate the object of meditation from other irrelevant factors, allowing one to explore it in different ways and from every angle. There are no particular rules when engaging in reflective meditation; sometimes a spacious approach is most useful, other times a more conceptually active approach works best. One merely plays with the mind, searching for insight while learning how this meditation best works for oneself. Any topic or question may be introduced during reflective meditation. A few popular topics are:
   - Interdependence - when disassembling a car, when does it stop being a car?
   - Emptiness of inherent existence - the notion of essencelessness.
   - Where is the mind? - an investigation into the location of one's mind.

   As one engages in reflective meditation, one's meditative stability will waver, at which point one returns briefly to calm abiding meditation in order to stabilize the meditation. Once stabilized, the practitioner then returns to their reflective meditation. Generally a typical meditation section may consist of one-third calm abiding and two-thirds reflective meditation. It is through the periodic alternating of the two meditation techniques that one's reflective meditation remains stable. Eventually this may lead to the attainment of the union of calm abiding and special insight in which both arise spontaneously in continuous inseparable union.

Basic Instruction for Analytical Meditation

1. **Begin with calm abiding meditation to stabilize and focus the mind,**
   including proper seating, posture, and setting one's intention
2. **Once a level of stability has been attained, one then enters analytical meditation.**
   Analytical meditation begins with the introduction of an object or topic of analysis. Here let's use the topic of impermanence and death as our object of meditative analysis. Traditionally this topic has three unique contemplations for its analysis:
   - That death is inevitable and definite – there is no avoiding or preventing death
   - The time of death is uncertain – one never knows when death will occur
   - Nothing else can help us at the time of death except Dharma

   One begins by analyzing the first contemplation, *that death is inevitable and definite*. One then uses reason, logic, quotes, scriptural citations, and past personal experiences with the goal of gaining a palpable experiential realization with the accompanying emotional reaction to the contemplation. This is accomplished by repeatedly analyzing the contemplation from every viewpoint possible. Upon success of the first contemplation one then moves on to the second and third. One has achieved the goal of this particular topic when the three contemplations merge into a single experiential realization of the preciousness of one's life and the amazing opportunity one has to study and practice the Dharma. This realization should induce an urgent thirst for practice. Upon attaining this realization or state of mind, one then meditates single pointedly upon the sensation, experience, or mind. This whole process, on a single topic, may take hours, weeks, or months, depending on the abilities of the practitioner and the nature and difficulty of the specific topic of analysis. As one engages in analytical meditation, one's meditative stability will waver, at which point one returns briefly to calm abiding meditation in order to stabilize the meditation. Once stabilized, the practitioner then returns to their analytical meditation. Generally a typical meditation section may consist of one-third calm abiding and two-thirds analytical meditation. It is through the periodic alternating of the two meditation techniques that one's analytical meditation remains stable. Eventually this may lead to the attainment of the union of calm abiding and special insight in which both arise spontaneously in continuous inseparable union.

What to expect from your meditation practice

In the beginning, the effects of meditation aren't always apparent, for it takes a fair amount of practice before the mind and body become supple enough to experience benefits. This often leaves the meditator sitting impatiently waiting for *something* to happen. Once the body is supple enough to sit comfortably with no pain, and the mind has become supple enough to remain equanimous for an extended amount of time, then the benefits begin to emerge. Many

claim that after a good, long, comfortable meditation the mind feels wonderfully stable, healthy, and calm. It is at this point that meditation becomes a very pleasant experience that one deeply enjoys, and establishing a consistent practice becomes much easier.

Initially, when first starting to meditate the mind is thrown into a bit of chaos, for meditation is often counterintuitive to the mind's habitual workings. In the beginning, the mind feels starved of experience because it is accustomed to a constant stream of stimuli. Because of this, the mind begins trying to create its own experiences, generating images, sensory experiences, emotions, and of course a diverse assortment of thoughts. Distractions are also generated in the body–felt as itching, discomfort, or pain. Generally these should be seen as inconsequential, for once one has established a stable practice, and the mind and body finally become comfortable, these distractions lessen and a base for actual meditative experiences is created. However, one should never push through pain or torture oneself by setting unrealistic practice goals, which will only create an aversion to practice. Always keep in mind that meditation is a personal practice pertaining to one's own mind, body, and aspirations and needs to be approached with a gentle, caring, and therapeutic attitude for any real progress to occur. Experiences in meditation come sooner for some than others, for there are many factors at work: a person's temperament, background, karma, attitude, lifestyle, environment, past life impressions, and time constraints.

It's important to understand and accept that every time you sit to meditate, the experience is different. One day your session may be highly productive, the next day sleepy and unrewarding. One day you feel like you could meditate uninterrupted for hours, other times you have problems sitting for a few minutes. Regarding this, it's essential that your meditation practice be devoid of all judgment and concern. You have to accept that each meditation section is new and unique from all others, and that within each new meditation session, you must simply sit and explore the current condition of the mind without any wish for it to be different. Whether this session is anxious or sleepy is OK, you accept it and explore it, accepting that there are no good or bad sessions. With every mental state we explore, either productive and unproductive, we learn about ourselves. It's through this exploration of our mind and habits that we find antidotes to obstacles in our practice. Therefore, although some meditation sessions may be more challenging to work with, we should see them all as good sessions.

Experiences arising from meditation

As one becomes proficient at meditation, various experiences can arise: experiences of intense wellbeing or bliss, experiences of both cognitive and sensory lucidity, experiences of no-thought or non-conceptuality, and even experiences of selflessness/egolessness. However, one must never become attached to experiences either by trying to recreate them from previous sessions or by continuously using a technique for attaining a specific experience (except within analytical meditation where this is the actual method). There can never be any kind of creating, projecting, grasping, or anticipation of specific results when meditating. It's for this very reason that traditionally, experiences that arise from meditation are not shared with the novice. Meditation needs to be open, objective, and organic, with no striving, agenda, or preconceptions. Meditation must be fresh and new every time one sits down, and besides applying the basic meditation technique, one should sit as an open observer without trying to influence the meditation experience in any way.

"As you continue to practice meditation, you may have all kinds of experiences, both good and bad. You might experience states of bliss, clarity, or absence of thoughts. In one way these are very good experiences, and signs of progress in meditation. For when you experience bliss, it's a sign that desire has temporarily dissolved. When you experience real clarity, it's a sign that aggression has temporarily ceased. When you experience a state of absence of thought, it's a sign that your ignorance has temporarily died. By themselves they are good experiences, but if you get attached to them, they become obstacles."
~ Sogyal Rinpoche

Signs of success

At the beginning, the measurement for success can be simply feeling more calm, stable, patient, and content. At higher levels, success can be seen as:

1. The attainment of *the mind of renunciation* (the resolute wish for freedom)
2. The development of deep inspiration, faith, and appetite for practice
3. Realizing the futility of one's mundane goals and self occupied interests
4. Becoming less reactionary while recovering more quickly from negative mental states
5. That one's negative emotions are being transformed into their positive counterparts
6. That one is beginning to experience bliss and equanimity, not only when meditating but throughout one's day as well

Advice on beginning a meditation practice

When first beginning to meditate, it is often hard for practitioners to sit and/or focus for any prolonged length of time. Therefore the aim should be to slowly habituate yourself to this new practice of meditation. This is accomplished by engaging in short, frequent sections of five to ten minutes throughout the day. If it becomes tiresome, stop and feel good about the amount you've done. By keeping the practice short, light, and pleasurable, your meditation practice will become something you look forward to and learn to deeply enjoy. If you want to experience real benefits, it's important to develop a consistent practice, at least two sitting sessions daily, once in the early morning and again in the early evening. Missing even one section can significantly set back any progress. For beginners, there is not much benefit to meditating more than twenty-minutes or so in a single session. It's said the best time for meditating is in the morning when the mind is clear and alert and the stomach is empty, making the mind lighter. But it's important to discover what works best for you. For myself, I'm a night owl and find early evening the most powerful time for my meditation. One last piece of advice: make your meditation practice personal. This is your mind and your practice, and it is vital at some point that you cultivate your own unique style and method of meditation, based on many hours of personal experience and evaluation on the cushion. As our minds and karma are unique to each one of us, so too must your practice and technique be.

Probably the best advice pertaining to meditation, and the Buddhist path in general, is to *just let go*: to let go of busyness, agenda, ambition, judgment, doubt, desires, etc. This includes the constant thirst for excitement, new experience, and stimulation. I remember hearing this adage when I first started studying Buddhism and now over two decades later, it still remains the most concise, comprehensive, and penetrating advice for Buddhist practice I have ever come across.

Lastly, If you find meditation particularly difficult, this could mean two things. On the one hand, it could be a sign that you are in need of a meditation practice, and that for your health and mental and emotional stability, your busy mind needs to learn how to slow down. You might need to cultivate some distance from the worries and complexities that prohibit you from sitting still for a handful of minutes. On the other hand, sometimes when people have difficulty establishing a consistent meditation practice, it's because their minds are simply not ready. Often after purifying and taming the mind through other practices and/or study, practitioners are then more successful at meditation. It's important to know that meditation is not a necessary requirement for Buddhist practice. Within Tibetan Buddhism there are a vast array of practices to choose from, including mindfulness, mantra recitation, study, prayer, mind training, contemplation, and tantric practices, which are all viable means for progressing on the path.

Note: For myself, I see the last two topics of meditation and mindfulness as interrelated, with the only significant difference being the level of depth of practice. Meaning, where meditation is primarily an internal or inward focused practice, mindfulness engages with both the internal and external. A good example is the difference between walking meditation and mindful walking. During walking meditation, although a small amount of attention must be given to the act of walking and navigating one's path, the practice is primarily internal; whereas in mindful walking the aim is to use the external activity to become internally present with the activity. The aim of both practices is the same, to cultivate a state of limited conceptualization (calm abiding) and to become one with the present moment. I often see mindfulness as merely the natural extension of one's meditation practice when not on the cushion, with present moment mindfulness being the natural extension of calm abiding meditation, and reflective mindfulness being the natural extension of insight meditation.

Obstacles and antidotes to meditation

Traditionally, Buddhism asserts five faults and eight antidotes to meditation practice.

THE FIVE FAULTS	THE EIGHT ANTIDOTES
1. Laziness Sleepy or slothful; busyness in useless activities; dwelling in discouragement	1. Confidence and faith in the benefits of meditation 2. A positive aspiration towards one's meditative goals 3. A joyful effort towards one's meditation practice 4. The wish to achieve pliancy and flexibility
2. Forgetting the instructions Losing the object of meditation	5. Being mindful and keeping the mind focused
3. Excitement and laxity	6. Introspective awareness–watching the mind
4. Non-application of the antidote	7. Apply the antidote at the proper moment
5. Over-application of the antidote	8. Abiding in a natural open equanimity

Cultivating the Four Noble Truths

We begin cultivating an understanding of the four noble truths through study, contemplation, and meditation. Regarding this, the Buddha posited a unique aim for each of the four:

1. The truth of suffering - sufferings are to be *known*
2. The truth of the cause - their causes are to be *abandoned*
3. The truth of the cessation - their cessation is to be *actualized*
4. The truth of path - the path is to be *relied upon*

Note: Ordinary practitioners are said to *practice* these truths, whereas superior beings are said to *directly realize* them, meaning, they have fully *realized* sufferings, completely *abandoned* the causes, and perfectly *actualized* cessation, by thoroughly *cultivating* the path.

The sixteen aspects of the four noble truths

The sixteen aspects of the four noble truths are comprised of four characteristics that counteract four distorted concepts pertaining to each truth. These characteristics are studied, contemplated, and meditated upon in order to gain a deeper insight into their meaning.

The sixteen aspects of the four noble truths

The Four Truths	Contemplations
The truth of suffering	**Impermanence**: That one's aggregates are impermanent undergoing continuous momentary arising and disintegration
	Suffering: That one's aggregates are the nature of suffering because they are under the influence of karma and afflictions
	Emptiness: That one's aggregates are empty because of not being a permanent, unitary, and independent self
	Selflessness: That one's aggregates are selfless because they lack a self-sufficient substantially existent self
The truth of the cause	**Cause**: That ignorance and afflictions are the cause of suffering, through which delusions, attachment, and aversion arise
	Origin: That ignorance and afflictions are the origin of suffering, through which suffering continuously arises again and again
	Strong production: That ignorance and afflictions possess a great force which produces strong suffering
	Conditions: That attachment is the condition that allows ignorance to give rise to its suffering result
The truth of the cessation	**Cessation**: That liberation is the cessation of suffering, because once suffering has been abandoned, it is no longer produced
	Pacification: That liberation is peace and the pacification of all ignorance, delusion, attachment, aversion, and afflictions
	Superb: That liberation is the supreme source of benefit and happiness because there is nothing higher
	Definite emergence (renunciation–the wish for freedom): That liberation is the total irreversible release from samsara
The truth of the path	**Path**: That the wisdom directly realizing selflessness/emptiness is a true path because it leads to liberation
	Awareness: That wisdom directly realizing selflessness/emptiness is the antidote to afflictions
	Achievement: That wisdom directly realizing selflessness/emptiness is achievement because it directly realizes the nature of the mind
	Deliverance: That wisdom directly realizing selflessness/emptiness is deliverance because it brings irreversible liberation

Study, contemplation, and meditation on the eightfold path
Commonly the eightfold path is practiced through the three higher trainings.

The Three Higher Trainings		Corresponding to the eightfold path
1. **Training in ethics**	Ethics, vows, and monastic rules of conduct, the ten virtuous acts, benefiting beings, creating virtue	Right speech (3) Right action (4) Right livelihood (5)
2. **Training in concentration**	Gaining mental stability	Right concentration (8)
3. **Training in wisdom**	The ability to discriminate what is to be accepted (right view), and what is to be abandoned (wrong views)	Right view (1) Right intention (2) Right effort (6) Right mindfulness (7)

Training in wisdom: the thirty-seven aids to awakening
Pertaining to the third aspect of the three higher trainings. Training in wisdom is cultivated through the *thirty-seven aids to awakening*, also referred to as the *thirty-seven factors leading to a purified state.* Although not all aspects of the thirty-seven aids are considered higher trainings in wisdom, they do in one way or another contribute to the cultivation of wisdom that leads to liberation. These thirty-seven aids, along with the cultivation of the six perfections and bodhichitta, are used to accomplish the five bodhisattva paths leading to buddhahood. Together these practices bring about deep insight and a clear and correct understanding of selflessness/emptiness and the four noble truths. These aids are studied, contemplated, meditated upon, practiced, and eventually perfected. The thirty-seven aids are organized into seven sets.

1. **The four foundations of mindfulness**
    1. Mindfulness of the body
    2. Mindfulness of feelings
    3. Mindfulness of mind or consciousness
    4. Mindfulness of phenomena
2. **The four supreme strivings**
    1. Preventing non-virtue, afflictions, and destructive actions from arising
    2. Abandoning current non-virtues
    3. Generating new virtues
    4. Enhancing and sustaining virtues already generated
3. **The four bases or supernormal powers**
    1. Aspiration
    2. Effort
    3. Intention
    4. Investigation

4. **The five faculties to overcome unfavorable conditions**
    1. Faith
    2. Effort
    3. Mindfulness
    4. Concentration
    5. Wisdom

    Note: These five faculties at an advanced and stable level become the five powers.
5. **The five powers to overcome unfavorable conditions**
    1. Faith
    2. Effort
    3. Mindfulness
    4. Concentration
    5. Wisdom
6. **The seven awakening factors**
    1. Mindfulness
    2. Discrimination of phenomena
    3. Effort
    4. Bliss
    5. Pliancy
    6. Concentration
    7. Equanimity
7. **The noble eightfold path**
    1. Right view
    2. Right intention
    3, Right speech
    4. Right action
    5. Right livelihood
    6. Right effort
    7. Right mindfulness
    8. Right concentration

Holding Vows

Vows (Skt. *samvara*; Tib. *dompa*): *A solemn pledge or promise.* In Buddhism, where ethics are the foundation of all practices, holding vows, for both monastics and lay practitioners alike, is seen as a deeply transformative practice and a source of great merit. Vows are a pledge to the three jewels, one's teacher, and oneself to uphold a prescribed set of precepts pertaining to one's ethical conduct and one's commitment to training. Vows can be seen as a logical extension of one's ethical volition, in which one puts their ideals into practice by establishing basic dos and don'ts in order to facilitate reaching one's goals swiftly and efficiently. For example, if one wants to be healthy, they may voluntarily commit to new eating habits, an exercise program, and avoid activities that might weaken the body. Similarly, if one wants to transcend ignorance and suffering, they would voluntarily choose to commit to new habits and ideals that naturally lead to that goal, while avoiding actions that potentially cause ignorance and suffering to arise or increase.

> *"Vows are not forced on us by an external authority; they are trainings we voluntarily uphold because we want to fulfill our spiritual aims." ~ The 14th Dalai Lama*

Precepts (Tib. *chepa*)**:** *Guidelines of personal conduct intended to stabilize one's thoughts and behavior in order to facilitate swift spiritual progress.* According to His Holiness, precepts are not absolute rules, but instead guidelines intended to stabilize and deepen one's commitment to their spiritual path. The Buddha himself asserted that it is the *spirit* of the rules that matters most. Each precept outlines clear and precise parameters pertaining to one's behavior. This creates a great level of clarity and stability in one's life by outlining predetermined behaviors that clearly dictate appropriate choices, actions, and reactions. By maintaining pure precepts, one increases and protects their virtue and merit. And in moments of difficulty or indecision, in which one might be susceptible to making poor choices, one's precepts remain clear. It is at these times that one can rely on their precepts to ensure that their choices, actions, and reactions are appropriate and coincide with the Buddha's teachings.

Taking vows

Vows of holding precepts are always taken voluntarily with the practitioner deciding for themselves just how committed they wish to be. Within Tibetan Buddhism, there are various levels of vows, precepts, and commitments that a practitioner may take if they feel it will benefit their practice. Upon deciding to take vows, a practitioner would ask their teacher for their advice, permission, and blessing. If the teacher feels the practitioner possesses a genuine motivation and is ready, the teacher gives their blessing and helps to facilitate the process. The first step in taking vows is taking refuge vows.

Refuge vows (Skt. *zaranagati*; Tib. *kyabdo*)**:** *Talking refuge in the three jewels*; *an expression of the Hinayana vehicle and formal initiation into the Buddhist path*. Practitioners take refuge and refuge vows in a refuge ceremony, thereby formally becoming a Buddhist practitioner. Refuge vows must be received from a qualified teacher (this does not have to be one's current teacher), a teacher who will offer guidance pertaining to one's new vows. Traditionally a new refuge name is given, signifying that one is being reborn into the Buddhist community. Taking refuge is not a requirement to study and practice Buddhism. However, it is a foundational prerequisite in taking further vows pertaining to higher stages of practice. The term *refuge* can be understood as *going for protection or safety*, as if taking refuge in a shelter from a storm, or taking refuge in the advice of a doctor when sick. Traditionally, refuge vows consist of *three prescriptions*, *three prohibitions*, and *five precepts.*

The three prescriptions to develop

1. Honoring the Buddhas
2. Developing confidence in the dharma
3. Respecting and supporting the sangha

The three prohibitions to avoid

1. Do not go for refuge to worldly attainments or gods
2. Abandon harming sentient beings
3. Do not be influenced by those opposing the dharma

The five common precepts

1. Do not abandon the three jewels even at the cost of your life
2. Do not look to other worldly methods even in important ventures
3. Offer the first portion of your food to the three jewels
4. Always keep your refuge in mind, while encouraging others to go for refuge
5. Whatever direction traveled, pay homage to the Buddha of that direction

Note: Refuge vows can differ slightly in different traditions. Often teachers may ask students to simply follow basic lay vows, also known as householder vows, shared later in this section.

The mind of refuge

The most important element when taking refuge is having the right intention, referred to as *the mind of refuge.* The intention behind the mind of refuge is explained as, when, through study, contemplation, and meditation, one has come to acknowledge the fundamentally unsatisfactory nature of unenlightened existence, and wishing for freedom from that suffering, one turns to the three jewels, believing them to be a viable path to liberation. This intention is generated in one's mind during the refuge ceremony.

According to the Buddha, one should seek refuge with this thought in mind:

To see one's ignorance and one's physical, mental, and emotional pain as an illness,
To see the buddhas as the doctors who prescribe the proper medicine and dosage,
To see the Dharma as the medicine needed to heal,
To see the Sangha as a community who helps in nursing us back to health.

The refuge prayer

The refuge prayer is recited during the refuge ceremony, and daily thereafter.

Taking daily refuge in the three jewels is the cornerstone of all Buddhist practice.

I take refuge in the Buddha
I take refuge in the dharma
I take refuge in the sangha
(Recited three times with prostrations)

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 Mahayana path, with the aspiration to one day become a bodhisattva (and eventually a buddha). The bodhisattva vows are a pledge to uphold sixty-four precepts focused on ethics, compassion, selflessness, and excellent human behavior. These precepts are also unique in their emphasis on the *intentions* behind actions and not merely the acts themselves. The bodhisattva ideal is the guiding force behind any Mahayana practitioner's path. Students must have a profound understanding of the bodhisattva path before moving onto the next stage, that of taking tantric vows. On a personal note, I believe that the bodhisattva vows are the most beautiful guiding principles for human behavior. The bodhisattva vows consist of eighteen root precepts and forty-six secondary precepts, here referred to as downfalls.

The eighteen root downfalls

1. Praising oneself and belittling others
2. Not sharing with others one's wealth and dharma
3. Not forgiving even when others apologize
4. Doubting and denying the doctrine of the Mahayana vehicle
5. Taking offerings intended for the three jewels
6. Abandoning the doctrine through sectarianism
7. Causing an ordained person to disrobe
8. Committing one of the five crimes of immediate retribution
9. Holding perverted views
10. Destroying places such as towns
11. Teaching emptiness to the untrained
12. Discouraging others from seeking full enlightenment

13. Causing others to break the vows of individual liberation
14. Belittling those who follow the path of individual liberation
15. Proclaiming false realizations such as the realization of emptiness
16. Accepting gifts that have been misappropriated from the three jewels
17. Laying down harmful regulations and passing false judgment
18. Giving up the pledge of altruistic aspiration

The forty-six secondary downfalls

1. Not making offerings every day to the three jewels
2. Acting out of desire because of discontent
3. Not paying respect to those senior in ordination and in taking the bodhisattva vows
4. Not answering others' questions out of negligence, though one is capable of doing so
5. Not accepting invitations due to pride, anger, laziness, or to hurt others
6. Not accepting other's gift out of jealousy, anger or to hurt others
7. Not giving the dharma teaching to those who wish to learn
8. Ignoring/insulting one who committed any of five heinous crimes or defiled their vows
9. Not observing the moral conduct because one wishes to ingratiate oneself with others
10. Complying with minor precepts when the situation demands one's disregard of them
11. Not committing one of the seven negative actions if compassion deems it necessary
12. Accepting things that are acquired through one of the five wrong livelihoods
13. Wasting time on frivolous actions such as dancing or playing music just for fun
14. Misconceiving that bodhisattvas do not attempt to attain full liberation
15. Not living up to one's precepts
16. Not correcting others who are motivated by delusions
17. Parting from the four noble disciplines
18. Neglecting those who are angry with you
19. Refusing to accept the apologies of others
20. Acting out thoughts of anger
21. Gathering circles of disciples out of desire for respect and material gain
22. Wasting time and energy on trivial matters
23. Being addicted to frivolous talk
24. Not seeking the means to develop concentration
25. Not abandoning the five obscurations which hinder meditative stabilizations
26. Being addicted to the joy of meditative absorption
27. Abandoning the Hinayana, believing it unnecessary for following the Mahayana
28. Exerting effort mainly in another system while neglecting the Mahayana teachings
29. Exerting effort to learn or practice non-Buddhist teachings without good reason
30. Favoring non-Buddhist teachings, although studying them for a good reason
31. Abandoning any part of the Mahayana by thinking it is uninteresting or unpleasant

32. Praising oneself and belittling others because of pride and anger
33. Not going to dharma gatherings or teachings
34. Disparaging the spiritual master
35. Not helping those who are in need
36. Not helping those who are sick
37. Not alleviating the suffering of others
38. Not explaining what is the proper conduct to those who are reckless
39. Not benefiting in return those who have benefited oneself
40. Not relieving the sorrow of others
41. Not giving material possessions to those in need
42. Not working for the welfare of one's circles of friends, students, employees, helpers
43. Not acting in accordance with others' wishes if it doesn't bring harm to oneself/others
44. Not praising those who have good qualities
45. Not acting to stop someone from doing harmful action
46. Not using miraculous powers, in order to stop others from doing harmful actions

Tantric vows (Skt. *tantra samvara*; Tib. *sangngak kyi dompa*): *An expression of the Vajrayana vehicle and initiation into the tantric path.* These vows and precepts are secret and focus on ethical, mental, and physical behavior of the tantric practitioner. These vows are neither strange nor provocative and uphold the same basic principles and ethics of the bodhisattva vows. Their secrecy is based on the potential dangers of practicing them incorrectly. Again, the tantric path is an extension of the Mahayana tradition focused on accomplishing the Mahayana path faster. However, without a reasonable understanding of the Mahayana teachings on selflessness, emptiness, and bodhichitta–on which tantra is based–tantric practice is said to be ineffective. Tantric vows can be taken by monastics, yogis/yoginis, as well as lay practitioners; however, permission, vows, and blessing must be received from a qualified teacher within the appropriate empowerment ceremony.

Individual liberation vows (Skt. *pratimoksha samvara*; Tib. *sothar kyi dompa*): Literally, *towards liberation.* An expression of the Hinayana vehicle, this group of vows encompasses 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 deals with ethics and monastic discipline and is the Buddha's prescribed training system for attaining liberation. In other words, to take individual liberation vows is to undertake the Buddha's Vinaya training.

Monastic vows

Monastic vows are 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. For monastics, holding vows is seen as one's primary practice and/or training. The monastic precepts are asserted to have been established by the Buddha himself within his own lifetime. Again, according to His Holiness, precepts should be seen as guidelines and not absolute rules. In fact, it's told that the Buddha's early Sangha initially lived in harmony without a need for precepts. But as the Sangha grew and monastics began to behave less than adequately, precepts were introduced one by one as the Buddha saw fit. The importance the Buddha placed on Vinaya can be clearly seen at the time of his death. When he was asked, *Who will be your successor and lead the Sangha when you are gone*? the Buddha answered, *Whatever doctrine and discipline taught and made known by me will be your teacher when I am gone*. By this the Buddha held his teachings and Vinaya as the absolute source of authority within the Buddhist tradition. Generally, monastic vows are seen as being beneficial in three ways:

1. Through limiting desire - by training and habituating monastics in ethical behavior
2. Through creating harmony within the Sangha - by simplifying life and adding structure
3. Through promoting a virtuous and healthy relationship with the lay community

These three are condensed from the following ten reasons which constitutes the foundation for monastic training:

1. For the excellence of the sangha
2. For the comfort of the sangha
3. For the restraint of evil minded men
4. For the ease of well behaved monks
5. For the control of the contamination in the here and now
6. For the combating of the contaminants in future worlds
7. For the benefit of outsiders (non-Buddhists)
8. For the increase in the number of insiders (Buddhists)
9. For establishing the Dharma
10. For following the rules of discipline

The three types of monastic vows

1. **Renunciate vows** (Tib. *rabjung*) *Leaving the householders life*; a monastic's 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 allows the practitioner to live within the monastic community. Renunciation vows consist of three commitments and five vows.

The commitments to:

1. Leave behind one's lay clothes and signs of being a lay person
2. To shave one's head and wear the robes of an ordained person
3. To follow the Buddha's teachings

The five vows of monastic conduct:

1. Not killing a human being, while avoiding harming any sentient being
2. Not stealing
3. Not lying about spiritual accomplishments or mystical powers
4. Not taking intoxicants
5. Celibacy

2. **Novice monastic vows:** Vows of a monastic in training.
   36 precepts of ethical conduct and behavior for monks and nuns in monastic training.
   Novice monk (Skt. *sramanera*; Tib. *getsul*)
   Novice nun (Skt. *sramaneri*; Tib. *getsulma*)

3. **Fully ordained monastic vows:** Vows of a fully ordained monastic.
   253 rules of conduct for fully ordained monks; 364 rules for fully ordained nuns.
   Fully ordained monk (Skt. *bhiksu*; Tib. *gelong*)
   Fully ordained nun (Skt. *bhiksuni*; Tib. *gelongma*)

Lay practitioner vows

Householder vows (Skt. *upasaka samvara*; Tib. *genyen kyi dompa*): An aspect of the individual liberation vows and therefore an expression of the Hinayana vehicle.

Male lay practitioner with vows (Skt. *upasaka*; Tib. *genyen*)
Female lay practitioner with vows (Skt. *upasika*; Tib. *genyenma*)

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.

Householder vows:

1. Not killing a human being, while avoiding harming any sentient being
2. Not stealing
3. Not lying about spiritual accomplishments or mystical powers
4. Not taking intoxicants
5. No sexual misconduct (no sexual harm–physical, mental or emotional)

One day vows (Skt. *upavasa samvara*; Tib. *nyenne*): An aspect of the individual liberation vows and therefore an expression of the Hinayana vehicle. Also known as ***fasting vows***, these are temporary vows taken by lay people for a single day, often during special teachings. (Refuge vows are prerequisite)

One day vows include:

1. Not killing a human being, while avoiding harming any sentient being
2. Not stealing
3. Not lying about spiritual accomplishments or mystical powers
4. Not taking intoxicants
5. Celibacy
6. Not eating after midday
7. No idle chatter, singing, dancing, music, perfumes, makeup, or ornaments
8. Not sitting on luxurious beds or high seats

Note: 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. (Refuge vows and bodhisattva vows are prerequisite for taking the eight Mahayana precepts.)

The order in which vows are taken

Monastics usually take vows in the following order:

1. Renunciate vows - Taken together with refuge vows
2. Novice monastic vows - Taken when old enough to comprehend the vows
3. Bodhisattva vows - Initiation into the Mahayana path; can be taken at anytime
4. Full monastic ordination - Taken 3 to 8 years after novice vows
5. Tantric vows - Taken when the student is ready to be initiated into the tantric path

Non-monastics (lay practitioners, yogis/yoginis) usually take vows in the following order:

1. Refuge vows – Initiation into the Buddhist path
2. Bodhisattva vows – Initiation into the Mahayana path; taken a few years after refuge
3. Tantric vows – Taken when one's teacher believes the student is ready for initiation

Householder and one day vows can be taken anytime *(refuge vows are prerequisite)*

Other Buddhist Practices

The 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 (Skt. *punya*; Tib. *sönam*) is generated through one's good works (giving, abiding in virtue, mental development, protecting life, holding vows, interaction with holy beings, sacred places, or sacred objects).

The 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. In other words, by dedicating generated merit one assures its safe collection; for 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.*

Purification (Tib. *jongwa*): The practice of purification can be found in all Buddhist traditions; however, it is often misunderstood. 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. Purification is accomplished through the accumulations of wisdom and method leading to a continuously deepening understanding of the right view of the Buddha's teachings and the true nature of oneself and reality. The gradual purification of one's view subsequently leads to a direct realization of ultimate reality, which in turn purifies one's mental and physical aggregates, consciousness, and continuum, culminating in the complete and final purification of all qualities–which is the perfected state of buddhahood. Therefore it can be said that the purification of one's view is the utmost aim of all Buddhist study and practice, and the single most important aspect in liberating oneself from samsara.

Prayer (Skt. *prarthana*; Tib. *monlam*): The practice of prayer can be found in all Buddhist traditions. Buddhism believes prayer has the ability to effect profound positive change within one's life and therefore is a vital part of one's daily practice. Within Buddhism, prayer serves many functions: 1) To supplicate the buddhas and bodhisattvas for their help and blessings. 2) As a method for visualizing and contemplating virtuous qualities one wishes to cultivate and internalize. 3) As a tool for cultivating inspiration and devotion by reflecting upon the virtuous qualities of the three jewels and past and present great masters. 4) As a tool for cultivating appreciation and admiration for those masters, including a genuine aspiration to follow in their example. 5) Regular prayer habituates and permeates the mind in virtuous thought, thereby limiting non-virtuous thought. 6) Since merit is created through one's virtuous intentional ac-

tions (karma), prayer–which is a virtuous mental/verbal intentional action–becomes a powerful and prolific method for creating vast amounts of merit.

Taking one's obstacles as the path

One essential aspect of Buddhist practice is the method of seeing one's suffering, adversity, and obstacles as opportunities. Whether we like it or not, it's through overcoming challenges and adversity that we develop and grow. With that in mind, it's the ultimate aim of practitioners to transform every aspect of their life into spiritual practice and a means for liberation, including obstacles, challenges, and shortcomings. This is often likened to *manure for the field* in which all of one's hardships are seen as similar to stinky manure, which, although being unpleasant and difficult to work with, provides the potential for a bountiful result. In a garden, this would be an abundance of produce; within one's spiritual path, this would be an abundance of wisdom and understanding. Suffering contains a great potential for insight into our true nature, insight that when applied correctly can be cultivated into spiritual awakening. According to Buddhism, a proper balance of happiness and suffering is actually necessary for attaining liberation. Without suffering, spiritual and personal development would simply not be possible. For it's the wish to overcome our suffering that fuels our aspiration for liberation and our drive to traverse the spiritual path. The practice of taking one's obstacles as the path begins with the practitioner coming to terms with and accepting their current life situation with all its problems, tragedies, limitations, and injustices. This includes all past trauma and abuses one has experienced. Then to fully let go of all resentment, disappointment, anger, and any longing or wish for one's present situation to be any different than it is. This then becomes one's accepted base–the ground, foundation, and true starting point of one's spiritual path. In doing this, one accepts and utilizes adversity as practice, using it to grind down and polish one's rough edges.

> *"A large part of our practice is to recognize where our weaknesses and difficulties are, and to take those and use them as our path. If we were all so perfect, we wouldn't need a path. So our imperfections are not the cause of our being unable to walk the path, they are the reason why we are walking the path." ~ Jetsunma Tenzin Palmo*

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 asserted as a great source of merit and purification. Prostrations begin in a standing position. The hands are joined, palms together at the chest, forming a lotus bud; the joined hands are then placed at the crown of the head while reciting, *I go for refuge to the Buddha.* The hands are then brought to the throat while reciting*, I go for refuge to the Dharma.* Finally, the hands are brought to the heart while reciting*, I go for refuge to the Sangha.* One then bows down, placing their palms flat on the floor, and then

slides their hands forward until they are laying flat and fully extended on the ground, after which the hands are then brought back and once again one returns to a standing position. Prostrations are a fundamental practice within Tibetan Buddhism, with some practitioners performing millions of prostrations within their lifetimes.

Circumambulating (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. It is usually performed while reciting mantras or prayers, and always in a clockwise direction.

Pilgrimage (Tib. *nyekor*): A journey for the purpose of spiritual insight and revelation, usually to spiritually significant destinations. The travel itself is seen as the practice, not the arrival at one's destination. During a pilgrimage, practitioners travel mindfully in order to generate insight and accumulate merit.

Receiving blessings (Skt. *adhisthana*; Tib. *chinlap*): All traditions of Buddhism (Mahayana and Tibetan Buddhism in particular) believe 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.

> *"I believe the ultimate source of blessings is within us. A good motivation and honesty brings self-confidence, which attracts the trust and respect of others. Therefore the real source of blessings is in our own mind." ~ The 14th Dalai Lama*

Making offerings (Tib. *chöpa pul*): The practice of making offerings can be found in all Buddhist traditions. However, within the Mahayana and especially Tantric Buddhism, the practice becomes central and foundational. Offerings are commonly made/presented to the three jewels and generally have four purposes: 1) To supplicate the buddhas and bodhisattvas for their help and blessings. 2) As a symbolic gesture of reverence and appreciation. 3) To focus and inspire the mind. 4) To accumulate merit and blessings through the practice of generosity. Popular offerings are flowers, candles, incense, candy, food, water, money, or religious items, but anything (wholesome) can be offered, including one's study and practice, a beautiful view, and even virtuous experiences or emotions.

> *"The best offering one can make to the buddhas and their teachers is to put the Dharma into practice." ~ Dzongsar Khyentse Rinpoche*

Offering scarves (Tib. *Khatak*) Most 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 or teachers, placed on statues, shrines, or altars, or attached to sacred structures.

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

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

Offering of an altar

A daily altar (Tib. *chösham*): The daily offering of an altar is a popular offering practice, but not a requirement. There are many different configurations of altars, with some practices and deities requiring unique altars. The most common altar is the *seven bowl offering*. Altars are prepared fresh each morning and can include statues, images, Buddhist text, food, flowers, candles, incense and/or ritual items, as well as personally inspirational items (pictures of your teacher or inspiring places).

Note: Some add an additional eighth bowl at the end, symbolizing music, usually represented by a small conch shell, bell, or drum. The simplest and most popular of altars consists of seven bowls of clean water.

Morning altar offering

With the elaborate altar offering (pictured above), only the water bowls need to be changed on a daily basis; the flowers (usually plastic), incense, candle, and food offering need only be replaced when necessary. Traditionally, bowls are filled and placed one at a time, from left to right upon the altar. A popular method for filling the bowls is to fill the first water bowl

with water but before setting it on the altar, pour most of the water into the second bowl, then place the first bowl on the altar with just a small amount of water inside. Then before setting the second bowl down, pour most of the water into the third, etc., continuing until all the bowls have been placed on the altar with a small amount of water in each, after which one then goes back and tops-off all the water bowls. This method is based on the belief that it is considered non-virtuous to place empty bowls (empty offerings) upon an altar. The mantra *om ah hum* can be recited while each bowl is being filled in order to purify the offering. Incense and candles can then be offered. Visualize yourself making these offerings to the three jewels, your teachers, and all sentient beings. One completes the altar offering by reciting the refuge prayer three times with accompanying prostrations.

Evening altar practice - *Squaring away the altar*

Again, with an elaborate altar, only the water bowls need to be changed daily. The method for emptying water bowls is similar to filling them but in reverse order. Starting from right to left, each water bowl is emptied, wiped dry, and placed upside down in the same place on the altar. As far as the proper time to empty water bowls, there are many different views. Tibetan lay practitioners commonly follow the custom of emptying their water bowls before sunset. At Sera Monastery, most monks empty their water bowls just before going to bed. Many high masters I've known leave the bowls filled all night and empty and refill them each morning. I recommend empting water bowls at the completion of one's evening practice.

Various Aspects of Tantric Practices

Mantras (Skt.) *ngak* (Tib.): 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 power. The practice of mantra recitation can be found in all Indian religions, including all Buddhist traditions. However, within tantric Buddhism or Vajrayana, the practice becomes central and foundational. In fact, the term Vajrayana is interchangeable with the term *Mantrayana*. The recitation of mantras is used to purify, accumulate merit, protect, heal, and 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. In Tibet, the recitation of mantras is a central part of daily life, where their continuous recitation can be seen on the lips of the devoted. Mantras are not only recited, but are also placed within prayer wheels, chiseled into stone, carved into spinning water wheels, and drawn on prayer flags–to let the wind carry their blessings.

There are many different thoughts on how mantras affect the mind. Some claim the vocal vibrations created when reciting mantras manipulates the central nervous system, while others

believe that the sacred tones influence the mind directly. His Holiness asserts mantras work to protect the mind by focusing one's attention on virtuous thought, thereby working as an antidote to suppress aspects of the mind deemed non-virtuous. In Tibetan Buddhism, the most famous mantras is the *mani mantra–om mani padme hum*, the six syllable mantra of the deity *Avalokitesvara* (Skt.; Tib. *Chenrezig*), the manifestation of the Buddhas' compassion and the patron deity of Tibet. The lineage of Dalai Lamas is asserted to be the succession of incarnations of Avalokitesvara. The simplest translation of the mani mantra is *the jewel in the lotus*–jewel here symbolizing compassion, while lotus symbolizes wisdom. His Holiness says it is best interpreted as *compassion born from wisdom.* When reciting this mantra, one focuses on Avalokitesvara's qualities of compassion and loving-kindness, not necessarily on the meaning of the mantra itself.

Other popular mantras

Om ah ra pa tsa na di - The mantra of Manjushri (Skt.; Tib. *jamyang*), the manifestation of the Buddhas' wisdom. Most Tibetans start their day by reciting this mantra, heard at the crack of dawn in every monastery and Tibetan community being recited by monks, nuns, and devoted lay. Reciting this mantra petitions Manjushri for his blessing of wisdom, clarity, intelligence, and diligence in study.

Om tare tutare ture soha - The mantra of the female deity Tara (Skt.; Tib. *dolma*), the manifestation of the Buddhas' enlightened activities and the remover of obstacles. Tara is the deity most people turn to when in need of quick assistance, including healing, protection, prosperity, removing obstacles, and long life.

Om vajra sattva hum - The mantra of Vajrasattva (Skt.; Tib. *dorje sempa*), the deity of purification. Many practitioners recite this mantra daily to purify negative karma.

Om bekanze bekanze maha bekanze radza samudgate swaha - The mantra of the Medicine Buddha (Skt. *bhaisajyaguru*; Tib. *sangye menla*). This mantra is recited for improving health and healing for oneself or others.

Note: Questions about the speed at which mantras should be recited often arise. However, there is no single answer. Of course to recite mantras slowly while deeply contemplating the qualities they represent is a powerful practice. However, in most cases, mantras are recited at lightning speed, as fast as humanly possible.

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 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.

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. Prayer wheels can be small enough to fit in your hand or some so large they may take several people to turn.

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 the virtuous union of body, speech, and mind utilized for practice. One popular mudra is the mandala offering.

Mandala offering mudra

This hand-mudra represents *Mount Meru* and the four island continents which according to Buddhist cosmology lie at the center of the universe. When making this offering, one imagines that they are offering the entire universe, including all of the precious substances within it, to the three jewels. This offering is a symbolic gesture of reverence and appreciation, as well as a practice of generosity. This mudra is usually performed as part of a formal request for tantric teachings, when taking vows, and/or during empowerments.

Interlock fingers

Pull back little fingers with thumbs

Pull back middle fingers with index fingers

Raise ring fingers to create Mount Meru

Tantric empowerments / (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.

Tantric commitments (Skt. *samaya*; Tib. *damtsig*): Most tantric empowerments and practices come with a commitment (vow or promise) of daily practice. Tantric commitments must be fully understood before taking an empowerment. Depending on the teacher and the tantric practice being received, commitments can vary. Some traditional teachers may ask for a lengthy commitment, possibly the daily recitation of the deities *sadhana* (Skt.; Tib. *drubthab*)–a tantric practice text of the empowerment being received, which could require hours of daily practice. Other teachers may ask for a small commitment. His Holiness often asks only for the daily recitation of the deity's mantra (one mala) which may take only a few minutes each day.

Advice on taking empowerments and commitments to practice

When I was a new practitioner, I was lucky to receive some good advice, *to keep a clean practice,* which meant to not take empowerments merely for the sake of taking them, thereby being committed to many lengthy daily practices, and instead to wait until I knew which practices would become my life's root practices. This didn't mean I couldn't go to empowerments, for many teachers will allow students to attend merely as a blessing, while not actually receiving the empowerment or accompanying commitments. I took this advice to heart and today I have a very clean or light daily commitment practice. It's imperative that students carefully research and understand the associated practice commitments before attending any tantric empowerment.

Pointing-out instructions / (Tib. *ngo trö kyi dampa*): *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 these, 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.

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, whereupon an assortment of prayers, rituals, and/or offerings are prescribed by the lama in order to dispel obstacles that are impeding one's life.

Channeling: *The practice of channeling helpful spirits by oracles or spiritual mediums who can communicate or be possessed by them*. Oracles are high Buddhist masters who can go into a deep trance-like state and receive and/or channel direct transcendental wisdom and provide wise counsel and/or precognition of future events.

Healing: There are many Buddhist practices for the healing of physical and mental afflictions, including exorcism.

Mystical powers: There is a vast array of different mystical powers attributed to Buddhist practice and in particular tantric practice (clairvoyance, mind reading, astral-projection, manipulating phenomena and reality, assorted miracles, speed running, and flying).

Control over the death and rebirth process: Being able to control aspects of one's death process, including being able to choose or induce the time of death. This also includes having control over aspects of one's rebirth (choosing one's parents, place of birth, conditions of that rebirth, and the type of being one wishes to be reborn as).

Some Well-Known Tantric Practices

Preliminary practices (Tib. *ngöndro*): Most schools of Tibetan Buddhism require that students, after being initiated into the tantric path, begin their 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 usually consist of the accumulation of:

- 100,000 - Prostrations
- 100,000 - Ritual mandala offerings
- 100,000 - Purification mantras
- 100,000 - Guru mantras

Dzogchen (Tib.; Skt. *maha ati*): *The great perfection*; *the primary tantric 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*.

Mahamudra (Skt.; Tib. *chakgya chenpo*)**:** *The great seal*; *the primary tantric practice of the Kagyu schools*. Mahamudra is the union of great bliss and emptiness and pertains to viewing the world as it truly exists, culminating in buddhahood.

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.

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 will actually do their daily commitments, prayers, and practices during their evening sleep.

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.

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

Reoccurring Practices and Calendar Events Within Tibetan Buddhism

Pujas (Skt.; Tib. *tsok*): *To honor or revere*; *a practice found in all Indian traditions*. Commonly the term puja pertains to a religious gathering. It is 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 (either sutra or tantra) 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. Pujas generally are offered to the three jewels, chosen deities, and/or Dharma protectors. Pujas are performed on auspicious dates (holidays, anniversaries, auspicious lunar calendar dates), or simply when needed, in case of sickness, births, deaths, crisis, celebration, or the blessing of homes. Some important forms of puja are:

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, but in addition guru puja is used to merge one's mind with the mind of the guru. The guru puja ceremony is performed on the 10th and 25th of every Tibetan lunar calendar month.

Tsok offering (Tib.; Skt. *ganacakra*): *A commitment for tantric practitioners 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 ceremo-

ny. The tsok ceremony is performed on the 10th and the 25th of every lunar calendar month, usually combined with Guru puja.

New moon days (Tib. *tse 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.

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.

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.

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 protector days are performed on the 29th of every Tibetan calendar month.

Practice Related to Death and the Dying Process

Dying is a fact of life and everything that has ever lived has died. Death is a topic many find uncomfortable, and many live in fear of it. They fear the potential pain and suffering of the death process, the loss of control and independence, separation from loved ones, and the anxiety related to not knowing what will happen. Buddhists believe it's best to face death rationally and responsibly, focused on preparation and education, which not only allows one to die well but also allows one to also live well by diminishing fear and anxiety. Without preparation, we will inevitably face death with confusion and fear, grasping desperately at the false self and current life. It's through accepting the inevitability of death that we reset our priorities and are motivated to live our lives wisely and responsibly, in a beneficial and meaningful way.

"Analysis of death is not for the sake of becoming fearful but to appreciate this precious lifetime during which you can perform many important practices. Rather than being frightened, you need to reflect that when death comes, you will lose this good opportunity for practice. In this way contemplation of death will bring more energy to your practice."
~ The 14th Dalai Lama

How to live and die well

Below is a basic Buddhist formula for living and dying well:

1. Educate oneself about the death process
2. Cultivate an acceptance of death
3. Live a virtuous and wholesome lifestyle
4. Develop a daily practice of meditating on the death process
5. Contemplate and visualize a preferred rebirth
6. Study, contemplate, and meditate on the Buddha's teachings
7. Practice *the five powers*

The five powers

1. The power of purification: The four opponent powers of regret, refuge, remedy, and resolve. Also Vajrasattva practice is recommended for purification.
2. The power of intention: Training the mind to be positive and stable even in the face of pain and suffering.
3. The power of remorse: Meditating on feelings of remorse and forgiveness.
4. The power of prayer: Making aspirations not to be separated from the Dharma.
5. The Power of familiarity of the teachings: Becoming familiar and prepared with the stages of the death process.

Contemplations, meditations, and practices for preparing oneself for death

There are two prescribed contemplations or meditations that work together in union to prepare one for the death process. The *eight dissolutions* and *the nine-point meditation on death.*

- **The eight dissolutions:** A daily practice in which practitioners, through meditation and visualization, simulate and rehearse the death process in order to prepare themselves to die consciously and skillfully (shared previously in the second volume). His Holiness recommends that if one could familiarize oneself with this process until it becomes akin to an arpeggio or a musical scale, it would be very beneficial.

- **The nine-point meditation on death**
  A contemplation and meditation practiced each day which helps us to understand, accept, and prepare one's mind for death while also inspiring one's spiritual practice. These contemplations include:

  Death is certain

  1. No being has ever escaped death (unless one becomes enlightened).
  2. One is constantly getting closer to death.
  3. There is not much time to practice the Dharma.

  The time of death is uncertain

  4. The lifespan of human beings is not fixed.
  5. More conditions endanger life than support it.
  6. One's body is extremely fragile.

Nothing can help at the time of death except one's Dharma practice

7. Wealth can't help
8. Friends and relatives can't help
9. One's body can't help

Other practices pertaining to the death process

- **Clear-light meditation** (Tib. *thukdam*): *A tantric Buddhist technique for achieving enlightenment during the death process*. According to tantric Buddhism, during the death process, the very subtle mind still remains in the body in a state called *clear light*. A skilled practitioner with experience in this meditation–at the time of death–can experience one's pristine natural awareness (clear light), a state defined as clear and luminous. It's said this state offers the greatest opportunity to achieve enlightenment. Outwardly, the sign of success of a master's clear light meditation begins in the days following the death of the physical body, at which point the body remains fresh, showing no signs of rigor mortis, decomposition, or unpleasant odor. This can last anywhere from a few days up to several weeks. Mastering this practice involves daily cultivation.
  (Explained in detail in the second volume).

- **Powa** (Tib.): *A method of ejecting one's consciousness at the time of death*. Powa allows the practitioner to induce their subtle consciousness to leave their body at a moment of their choosing. It is used to attain a *perfect death* by allowing the practitioner to escape bad mental states, unconducive environments, or a prolonged or agonizing death process. A practitioner skilled in the practice of powa can eject their consciousness upwards through the crown of their head directly to the intermediate state or pure lands.
  Mastering this practice involves daily cultivation.

- **Vajrasattva purification:** *A tantric practice prescribed for purifying one's karma, as well as for purifying the mind during the death process*. Vajrasattva practice consists of a combination of visualization and mantra recitation techniques.

What to do when death arrives

When the final day arrives, one needs to accept it and see it as a natural aspect of life. Maintaining a positive mental and emotional state is crucial in creating advantageous conditions that lead to favorable rebirth, while also playing a role in determining which karmas are activated at the moment of death. Disturbing emotions, such as general negative emotions, fear, confusion, grasping, anger, or sadness arising from the impending separation of loved ones are particularly dangerous at the time of death. Of course, the manner in which one dies also has a profound effect in the rebirth process, with one's feelings towards the experience and/or trauma, pro-

foundly affecting one's mental and emotional state. For example, if one is well prepared for their death and knows well the challenges they'll face, one can be mentally and emotionally prepared and thereby maintain a positive state of mind. However, a traumatic or sudden death in which one is unprepared or unable to control the conditions and environment of their death can create fear, anger, remorse, and confusion, creating a poor mental state leading to a potential un-preferred rebirth.

Measures need to be taken to ensure that a peaceful and calm environment is maintained for the dying person. Experienced practitioners who are aware that this is a time for serious practice and not a time for emotional indulgence, may wish to say their final goodbyes to friends and family in the days leading up to their death. This is because having emotional loved ones around them, may distract them from their practice. An emotional environment can also be counterproductive to the important process of letting go of this present life, disrupting the cultivation of a single-pointed focus on one's next life. Below is a checklist of aspects to cultivate at the onset of the dying process:

- **Cultivate a peaceful mind** - The quality of your mind and emotions at the time of death is profoundly important to a preferred death and rebirth.
- **Pacify negative emotions** - Avoid focusing on fear, attachment, or negative emotions.
- **Accept your death** - Let go; be peaceful; don't fight it; accept that this is your time. Remember that you have died countless times before.
- **Take comfort in the three jewels** - Have confidence in the power of the three jewels.
- **Have confidence in your practice** - Have confidence that your merit and practice has properly prepared you and will support you in your next life.
- **See the time of death as a time for serious practice** - not a time for emotional indulgence.
- **Focus on having a magnificent death** - dying consciously and mindfully.
- **Focus on your next life** - Let go of concerns and worries pertaining to your current life, including thoughts and attachments to family and friends. Focus on, pray for, and visualize your next life and the environment you have been preparing for (pure lands, human rebirth, etc.).
- **Contemplate all of your virtuous actions** - Dedicate all of your merit, throughout your life, towards attaining a magnificent rebirth filled with vast opportunity.
- **Let go of regret** - Understanding that all ordinary beings are strongly influenced by ignorance and past habitual behaviors and that throughout our countless lifetimes we have committed every virtuous and non-virtuous act imaginable. Understand that we are often prisoners of our past karma and simply do the best we can to be virtuous.
- **Cultivate the altruistic intention of bodhichitta** - taking your attention away from yourself and worries of death, and instead focuses on wishing for a rebirth that can be bene-

ficial to others, in the greatest ways possible. The altruistic mind of bodhichitta is simply the utmost supreme and beneficial state of mind one can generate at the time of death.

During the actual death process

- **Recognize the eight stages of dissolutions as they appear** - Remain conscious, mindful, and attentive of the process, keeping your attitude and intention peaceful and virtuous.
- **Perform powa** - if you have prepared yourself to do so, when the time has come, you can eject your consciousness.
- **Reflect on your clear light practice** - if you have prepared yourself to do so; reflect and prepare yourself to undergo the stages of dissolutions.
- **Prayers and visualizations** - The most prescribed deity practice at the time of death is of *Avalokiteshvara* (Skt.; Tib. *Chenrezig*), who represents enlightened compassion and loving-kindness. Prayers, supplications, and visualization of this pristine deity are said to calm the mind, warm the heart, induce a peaceful passing, and create the conditions for a preferred rebirth.

For those caring for the dying practitioner

- **Read Buddhist scripture to the dying** - Often sutras containing the Buddha's thoughts as he himself prepared for his own death are recommended. Playing recordings of the dying person's teacher or other Dharma talks is also beneficial. If it is a tantric practitioner, their personal tantric practice may be recited. Practitioners of the Nyingma school recite from the *Bardo Thödol* (Tib.) *Liberation in the Intermediate State Through Hearing,* commonly known as *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*, a text outlining the experiences one will face in the intermediate state.
- **Chanting mantras** - Softly chanting the mantra of Avalokiteshvara or Medicine Buddha is recommended.
- **Display visual representations of the Dharma** - These can be statues, an altar, thangka paintings, candles, etc.

After death has occurred

For Buddhists, especially tantric practitioners, one should try to leave the body undisturbed for as long as practically possible after the death. As mentioned previously, Buddhists believe the dying process lasts up to three or four days longer than is commonly accepted. Of course, within modern medical facilities, this may simply not be possible because of various health safety concerns. For accomplished tantric practitioners, where the death process may take weeks, leaving the body undisturbed may only be possible within a retreat center or monastery. In many traditions, a lama or monastic will perform a powa ceremony for the newly departed in order to help them into a pure land or preferred rebirth.

After the death of the practitioner, an auspicious date is chosen and the empty vessel (the corpse) is usually cremated while monastics recite prayers and scriptures. For great masters,

their ashes and relics may be placed into stupas as an object of veneration. In Tibet, where firewood was scarce and the ground frozen solid for most of the year, the empty vessel would often be dismembered and fed to fish (if the streams were not frozen over) or fed to vultures– referred to as a *sky burial* (Tib. *chator*). The feeding of the corpse to animals is considered to be the last act of generosity of the departed person, in which their very last possession (their body) is given away to nourish and benefit other sentient beings.

Practices for the newly deceased

Customarily, prayers and services for the deceased consist of monastics reciting prayers and scriptures which are held every seventh day for seven weeks corresponding to the time that the deceased may take to go through the intermediate state before taking physical rebirth (one to forty-nine days). The first seven days are considered the most important, with prayers being recited daily by family members.

CHAPTER FIVE: Daily Practice

Due to the unique curriculums of the various schools and the different levels of a practitioner's practice, vows, and commitments, daily practice can vary. One's daily practice is usually tailored (with the help of one's teacher) to fit with goals, time constraints, and personal needs. Those who are drawn to a more traditional style of Buddhism may have a very elaborate and ritualistic daily practice. Others that are more progressive may have a practice less dependent on external elaboration. Some may enjoy a rich daily practice that lasts for hours, while others may be drawn to a short practice done well. Following is a general outline of daily practice for practitioners of the Tibetan Buddhist tradition.

Basic Daily Practice for Entry Level Practitioners

Beginning the day - Setting one's intention

Upon awakening, even before getting out of bed, set your day's intention and motivation by reflecting on the excellent qualities of the three jewels, the benefits of practice, and on your commitment to benefiting others. Allow this to generating inspiration, appreciation, and joy in your mind. While rising out of bed, recite this morning prayer:

Waking prayer

Today I am fortunate to be alive, to have a precious human life, I will not waste it,
I will use all my energies to develop myself, to expand my heart out to others,
To achieve enlightenment for the benefit of all beings.
Today I am going to have kind thoughts towards others,
I am not going to get angry or think badly about others,
Today I'm going to benefit others as much as I can.
~ The 14th Dalai Lama

Setting up one's altar (not a requirement; shared previously in this volume)

- Fill the offering bowls while reciting *om ah hum* to purify the offerings
- Offer incense and/or candles
- Recite the refuge prayer three times with accompanying prostrations.
  (Reciting the refuge prayer is a daily requirement if you has taken refuge vows.)

The refuge prayer

I take refuge in the Buddha,
I take refuge in the Dharma,
I take refuge in the Sangha.

Main morning practice

Begin by sitting in front of your altar or chosen place of practice. Start by setting your intention by reciting (aloud or to yourself) the following prayers while contemplating their meaning in order to generate inspiration, appreciation, and joyous effort within the mind. Try to sustain this mind throughout the practice.

Refuge and generating bodhichitta prayer

I go for refuge until I'm enlightened to the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha.
From the virtuous merit I've accumulated from practicing giving and the other perfections,
May I attain the state of buddhahood in order to benefit all sentient beings.
(Recite three times - no prostrations required)

The four immeasurable thoughts

May all beings have happiness and the causes of happiness,
May all beings be freed from suffering and the causes of suffering,
May all beings never be separated from the happiness that knows no suffering,
May all beings live in equanimity, free from attachment and aversion.
(Recite once)

Short mandala offering

This ground, anointed with perfume, strewn with flowers, adorned by Mount Meru, the four continents, and the sun and moon, I visualize this as a buddha-field and offer it; may all beings enjoy this pure land.
Recite the mandala mantra*: Idam guru ratna mandalkam nirya taya mi*
(Recited once while offering the mandala hand-mudra)

Any personal prayers can be added here.

Morning mantra recitation

Recite one mala (108 beads) of each of the mantras below while reflecting upon that deity's unique qualities, while trying to generate these qualities within your own mind.

- ***Om ah ra pa tsa na di*** - The mantra of Manjushri, the manifestation of the Buddhas' transcendent wisdom. (During the recitation of this mantra, on the last 108th bead, the last syllable *di* is repeated for the duration of one breath)
- ***Om mani padme hum*** - The mantra of Avalokitesvara, the manifestation of the Buddhas' compassion and loving kindness.
- ***Om vajra sattva hum*** - The mantra of Vajrasattva, the manifestation of the Buddha's purity and the aspect of purification.

Morning contemplations

There is no formal structure to these daily contemplations. You can spend a few minutes on each or contemplate different topics on different days. Topics of contemplation vary according to the practitioner's level of study.

Reflecting on the three jewels

Reflect on the preciousness, qualities, and power of the three jewels, and how fortunate you are to have found them.

1. **The Buddha** - The awakened one
2. **The Dharma** - The Buddha's teachings
3. **The Sangha** - Those who have realized the Buddha's teachings

Reflecting on the four hallmarks of Buddhism

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 all suffering)

Reflecting on the eight worldly concerns

Any Dharma activity performed with these intentions is not true Dharma.
Liberation lies between these sets of dichotomies.

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

Reflect on the four noble truths

1. The truth of suffering: That unenlightened existence is pervaded by suffering.
2. The truth of the cause: That ignorance is the cause of suffering.
3. The truth of the cessation: That complete cessation of suffering is attainable.
4. The truth of path: That the eightfold path leads to cessation/liberation.

Note: You can also contemplate the 16 aspects of the four noble truths, previously explained. The eightfold path is commonly cultivated through the practice of the three higher trainings.

Reflecting upon the three higher trainings

The Three Higher Trainings		Corresponding to the eightfold path
1. **Training in ethics**	1. Ethics, vows, and monastic rules of conduct; the ten virtuous and ten non-virtuous acts 2. Benefiting sentient beings 3. Creating virtue	Right speech (3) Right action (4) Right livelihood (5)
2. **Training in concentration**	Gaining meditative discipline and stability	Right concentration (8)
3. **Training in wisdom**	Determining what is to be accepted (right view), and what is to be abandoned (wrong views)	Right view (1) Right intention (2) Right effort (6) Right mindfulness (7)

Reflecting on the four foundations of mindfulness:

1. **Mindfulness of the body**:
   Conventionally: Contemplating the impure nature of the ordinary physical aggregates.
   Ultimately: Contemplating the empty and illusion-like quality of the body–the antidote to the error of perceiving the body as the place where the person resides.
2. **Mindfulness of feelings**:
   Conventionally: Contemplating feelings as transient, fickle, and the nature of suffering.
   Ultimately: Contemplating the empty and illusion-like quality of feelings–the antidote to the error of perceiving feelings as being possessed by the person.
3. **Mindfulness of mind**:
   Conventionally: Contemplating the momentary and impermanent nature of all mental activity; recognizing the natural state of the mind as neutral and naturally free from both destructive and constructive emotions.
   Ultimately: Contemplating the empty and illusion-like quality of the mind–the antidote to the error of perceiving the mind to be the person.
4. **Mindfulness of phenomena**:
   Conventionally: Contemplating and discerning what is to be adopted or abandoned.
   Ultimately: Contemplating the empty and illusion-like quality of mental and physical phenomena–the antidote to the error of perceiving phenomena as being one with, or possessed by, the person.

Morning meditation

Begin by setting your intention by contemplating *the four thoughts that turn the mind.*
This contemplation cultivates the wish for freedom while illustrating the dissatisfactory nature of samsara.

The four thoughts that turn the mind (away from samsara) (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

Actual meditation

Calm abiding meditation alone or combined with insight meditation.
(Time duration is up to the practitioner - usually 10 to 20 min.)

Ending and dedicating the morning practice

While reflecting on the merit created through your practice, recite the dedication prayer.

Dedication prayer

Through the merit of these virtuous actions
May I quickly attain the state of buddhahood
And lead all living beings, without exception, into the enlightened state.
May the supreme jewel bodhichitta arise and grow and may that which has arisen not diminish but increase more and more.

Note: A simple dedication for use throughout the day is:

May all beings benefit from any merit that I may have gained.

Practice and Intention Throughout the Day

Try to sustain the inspiration, appreciation, and joyous effort generated in your morning practice throughout the day, while continuing to contemplate and being mindful of:

- Honoring your refuge vows and pledges (If you have taken refuge)
- Practicing mindfulness
- Practicing the three higher trainings
- Abandoning the ten non-virtuous actions
- Reflecting upon the qualities of the three jewels
- Reflecting upon the four noble truths
- Reflecting upon the eight worldly concerns
- Reflecting upon Buddhism's basic tenets

Making prayers and offerings at meals (required if one has taken refuge vows).
At the beginning of the meal, before eating, set aside a small portion of food on your plate as an offering to the three jewels and recite the meal prayer.

Meal prayer
To the supreme teacher, the precious Buddha,
To the supreme protection, the precious Dharma,
To the supreme guide, the precious Sangha,
To these three jewels, the supreme refuge, I offer this meal.

This prayer can be used for other offerings by substituting the last line with:
To these three jewels, the supreme refuge, I make this offering.

Evening Practice

Begin by sitting in front of your altar or chosen place of practice. Start by setting your intention by reciting (aloud or to yourself) the following prayers while contemplating their meaning in order to generate inspiration, appreciation, and joyous effort within the mind. Try to sustain this mind throughout the practice.

Refuge and generating bodhichitta prayer
I go for refuge until I'm enlightened to the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha.
From the virtuous merit I have accumulated from practicing giving and the other perfections,
May I attain the state of buddhahood in order to benefit all sentient beings.
(Recited three times, no prostrations required)

The four immeasurable thoughts
May all beings have happiness and the causes of happiness,
May all beings be freed from suffering and the causes of suffering,
May all beings never be separated from the happiness that knows no suffering;
May all beings live in equanimity, free from attachment and aversion.
(Recite once)

Any personal prayers can be added here.

Evening meditation
Begin by setting your intention by contemplating *the four thoughts that turn the mind.*
This contemplation cultivates the wish for freedom while illustrating the dissatisfactory nature of samsara.

The four thoughts that turn the mind (away from samsara) (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

Actual meditation
Calm abiding meditation alone or combined with insight meditation.
(Time duration is up to the practitioner - usually 10 to 20 min.)

Ending and dedicating the evening practice

At the completion of the evening practice, dedicate the generated merit in order to assure its safe collection. While reflecting on the merit created through your practice, recite the dedication prayer. Optionally, you can also recite His Holiness long life prayer.

Dedication prayer

Through the merit of these virtuous actions
May I quickly attain the state of a buddhahood
And lead all living beings, without exception, into the enlightened state.
May the supreme jewel bodhichitta arise and grow and may that which has arisen
not diminish but increase more and more.

Long life prayer for His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama

From the land encircled by snow mountains
You are the source of all happiness and goodness.
All powerful Chenrezig, Tenzin Gyatso,
Please remain until samsara ends.

Squaring away the altar

One completes their evening practice by squaring away their alter. Again, with an elaborate altar, only the water bowls need to be changed daily. The method for emptying water bowls is similar to filling them but in reverse order. Starting from right to left, each water bowl is emptied, wiped dry, and placed upside down in the same place on the altar. After squaring away the alter one recites the refuge prayer three times with accompanying prostrations.
(a daily requirement if one has taken refuge vows)

The refuge prayer

I take refuge in the Buddha,
I take refuge in the Dharma,
I take refuge in the Sangha.
(Three times with prostrations)

Ending contemplation: When lying down to sleep spend a few minutes to:

- Rejoice in the day's virtuous intentions, accomplishments and actions performed.
- Reflect on what you could have done better (in a rational manner without judgment).
- Develop a positive motivation to try to do better tomorrow.

Basic Daily Practice for bodhisattva Level Practitioners

As practitioners acquire further vows, they move further along the Buddhist path, which may include taking bodhisattva vows. Upon receiving bodhisattva vows, one enters the bodhisattva path which leads to buddhahood. Daily practice on the bodhisattva path has additional Mahayana elements which are added to the basic daily practice outline given thus far. These additional elements are:

- Honoring one's bodhisattva vows
- The daily cultivation of the six perfections
- The daily cultivation of bodhichitta - the altruistic mind of enlightenment
- Reciting one's bodhisattva pledge (required if one has taken bodhisattva vows)
- Additional contemplations pertaining to emptiness and bodhichitta

Reciting the Bodhisattva pledge

After receiving bodhisattva vows, one is then required to recite the bodhisattva pledge daily. The bodhisattva pledge is added to one's basic daily practice and is recited each morning and again each evening.

The Bodhisattva pledge

Oh buddhas, bodhisattvas, and gurus, please listen to what I say now from the depths of my heart. Just as the buddhas of the past have developed the thought of enlightenment, true bodhichitta, then practiced its stages in graded development following all the trainings of all the buddhas sons, so may I too, for the sake of all beings, develop bodhichitta and follow the trainings, exactly as all the bodhisattvas have done.

(Recited three times - no prostrations required)

Mahayana contemplations

Contemplation on emptiness: That the true nature of self and phenomena lacks inherent existence or any essential essence. Conversely one can also contemplate the interdependent nature of phenomenon (dependent origination), which leads to the same conclusion.

Contemplating the three principal aspects of the path

1. **Renunciation**: The wish for freedom; the determination to be liberated from samsara
2. **Bodhichitta**: The intention to become a buddha to liberate others from suffering
3. **The correct view**: A proper understanding of the true nature of oneself and reality

Mind training

Lama Tsongkhapa's eleven-point method for generating bodhichitta

1. **Equanimity**: Visualize three groups of people in front of you: friends on the right, strangers in the middle, and enemies on the left. Contemplate how easily friends can become enemies and enemies can become friends and also how easy it is for strangers to become either. Reflect on how all these groups are primarily the same–in that they all want happiness and don't want to suffer. Try to generate compassion and appreciation for them equally. Endeavor to realize the fundamental equality that binds all sentient beings.
2. **Contemplation that all beings have been our mothers**: Imagine that all beings have been our mothers, through which we then receive and give motherly love to all sentient beings.
3. **Remembering the kindness of our mothers**: Acknowledge and appreciate the love shown by these mothers, and consider all that they had done and sacrificed for us, including the difficulties they went through to care for us.
4. **Wishing to repay their kindness**: Recognize the debt that we owe to all mothers and our responsibility in repaying their love and kindness.
5. **Exchanging self and others**: Contemplate how everyone, like ourselves, wants happiness and to not suffer; exchange others' perspective with our own.
   (to image others as yourself, and you as them).
6. **Faults of self-cherishing**: Contemplate that self-cherishing is the cause of great suffering.
7. **Benefits of cherishing others**: Contemplate that cherishing others is the cause of genuine happiness.
8. **Taking others suffering through compassion** (Tib. *tonglen*): Visualize taking on the suffering of others.
9. **Giving others happiness through love** (Tib. *tonglen*): Visualize giving others your happiness.
10. **Special altruistic intention**: Contemplate on your responsibility in saving all beings from suffering.
11. **Generating bodhichitta**: Contemplate upon your wish and determination to achieve buddhahood in order to save all beings from suffering.

Contemplation, cultivation, and practice of the six perfections

The practice of perfecting the qualities of:

1. **Generosity:** Giving of resources, Dharma, protection, care, love, one's time, oneself
2. **Ethics:** Virtue, discipline/restraint, proper conduct, abandoning the 10 non-virtues
3. **Fortitude:** Tolerance, patience, forbearance, acceptance, endurance, understanding
4. **Joyous effort:** Resolve, determination, energy, diligence
5. **Meditative stability:** Single-pointed concentration, mindfulness, clarity, focus
6. **Wisdom:** Transcendental wisdom and deep insight into the Buddha's teachings

Basic Daily Practice for a Tantric Level Practitioner

A practitioner on the tantric Buddhist path is someone who has taken tantric vows and is, therefore, engaging in tantric Buddhist practice. For these practitioners, there are additional elements that are added to the basic daily practice and bodhisattva practice outlines given thus far. Each level of practice is built upon the last, so at this stage, a practitioner's daily practice would have elements of all three vehicles: Hinayana, Mahayana, and Vajrayana.

Tantric Buddhist elements within daily practice

Because tantric Buddhism is an esoteric/secret path, only a brief description will be given here.

- **Six session guru yoga** (Tib. *thün tuk*): A prayer/practice recalling one's tantric vows and tantric intentions. Recited three times in the morning and three times in the evening.
- **Tantric commitments**: One's daily tantric practices pledged during empowerments.
- **Sadhana recitation:** (Tantric practice texts) Practice and meditation on one's daily sadhana practice.
- **Preliminary practices** (Tib. *ngondro*): Tantric preparatory practices performed daily until the set goal is accumulated.
- **Tantric contemplations:** A unique set of contemplations held throughout the day.

When not in retreat, the above daily tantric practices are usually performed in the morning. When in retreat, the practitioner commonly performs four three-hour sections daily.

CHAPTER SIX: Obstacles and Advice

Obstacles Along the Buddhist Path

There are many common obstacles that students come across when starting down the Buddhist path, but somehow we all survive them. I share these impediments to practice merely in the spirit of aiding students and not as a criticism of present day teachers, organizations, or practitioners.

Having a fixed, rigid, or narrow view - Often for new practitioners who have just chosen a teacher and/or tradition, there arises an exaggerated feeling of devotion and loyalty towards their new chosen path, which often is accompanied by narrow and dogmatic views pertaining to the perceived superiority of one's teacher and tradition. This is a normal response and is the mind's attempt to assimilate and/or reify this new system. This narrow and dogmatic view manifests as strong judgment, rejection of other views/traditions, being preoccupied in what others think and do, and touting self-righteous opinions of what Buddhism "really" means. Often this form of ignorance diminishes as the novice progresses in their education and begins to discover the vastness and wonder of the Dharma, through which they gain a broader, healthier, and more accurate view. Sadly, this form of ignorance is not limited to the novice. Even senior practitioners may maintain this affliction and remain deeply sectarian and dogmatic. And again, this is commonly due to the lack of a proper broad education. However, at its deepest level, it is fear that is the cause of narrow mindedness: fear of change, fear of the new, fear of one's inability to understand or cope, fear of looking ignorant or being insignificant.

Molding Buddhism to fit one's current view - For new practitioners, there's a natural urge to choose or cherry-pick aspects of the Buddhist teachings that support one's own current views. This can be seen clearly in how Westerners tend to interpret Buddhism, usually unknowingly, through their Judeo-Christian values. For many, it isn't until moving away from one's own culture that they began to see just how influenced they are by their upbringing and how these cultural values permeate every aspect of their lives in many unconscious ways. One example is the way Westerner Buddhists have trouble letting go of the Judeo-Christian notion that they are being watched over in judgment, presuming a universe that favors good over evil, while mistakenly seeing karma to be an agent of that judgment. Another example is the way that many Western Buddhists see purification as pertaining to one's soul, spirit, or inner essence, which of course Buddhism rejects. For correctly, Buddhism asserts purification as pertaining to the purification of one's view. These examples point to the fact that practitioners, often without knowing, may subtly alter the teachings to fit their current beliefs, instead of engaging in proper critical examination of those beliefs. For to study Buddhism is to be open to an investigative process that may make one question, or even find fault in, views one has long held as certain.

Being naïve - Practitioners should bring to Buddhism the same discernment, good judgment, and caution that they use in their daily lives. These skills, which make us intelligent, rational, and effective people in the world, are also essential tools in the study of Buddhism. Sadly, in the realm of spirituality and religion, many don't make use of these powerful and invaluable tools.

Romanticizing about Buddhism - Many people coming to Tibetan Buddhism imagine that it is an enlightened institution and all its members are extraordinary beings. However, romanticizing like this can be a great obstacle in maintaining objectivity and remaining rational, authentic, and grounded. Remember that Buddhism is a method for dispelling delusions–and not merely acquiring a new set. It's important to not be naive and to realize that all religions, ideologies, and/or institutions, wherever you may find them, tend to share the same basic problems and shortcomings. They're all filled with sinners and saints, the kind and the cruel, the authentic and the hypocritical. In the case of Tibetan Buddhism and the Tibetan people, I think it's unfair to naively idealize and project our own exaggerated ideas of perfection upon these simple practitioners who are merely trying to practice, preserve, and share their unique tradition.

Avoiding reality - Another major concern in the romanticism of Buddhism pertains to the way in which practitioners use Buddhism to escape or side-step their conventional lives and daily concerns, referred to as *spiritual bypassing*. Often, upon becoming a Buddhist practitioner, many begin to project a fantasy of having gone through a deep spiritual transformation in which they reinvent themselves as deeply spiritual beings. This behavior is dangerous and runs the risk of suppressing one's problems, thereby losing the opportunity to work with and eventually resolve them. Practitioners instead should strive to be genuine and honest with themselves and see the Buddhist path as a method for engaging fully and properly with reality, a means of working with one's current problems and not merely hiding from them.

> *"Trying to move beyond our psychological and emotional issues by sidestepping them is dangerous. It sets up a debilitating split between the buddha and the human within us. And it leads to a conceptual, one-sided kind of spirituality where one pole of life is elevated at the expense of its opposite: absolute truth is favored over relative truth, the impersonal over the personal, emptiness over form, transcendence over embodiment, and detachment over feeling." ~ John Welwood*

Projecting one's delusions and fantasies upon the teacher – Often, new practitioners find a need to project an exaggerated view of the sanctity of their teacher, tradition, or group envisioning them to be extraordinary or enlightened beings. This natural tendency is an attempt by the mind to project a sacredness upon the external, with the hope of creating a source of external salvation. However, this lies contrary to the Buddha's teachings, in which he asserted

that liberation is found through inward cultivation, attained through one's own diligent efforts. The remedy for this delusional affliction is often simply being aware of the intoxicating condition itself.

Choosing a tradition, school, or group too quickly - As mentioned previously, there's no hurry in picking a path. Buddhism doesn't ask for any initial commitment to any one tradition, school, or group. Take your time and have fun investigating the many different schools of Buddhist thought. Conversely, one should also be suspicious if feeling pressured to commit, including any pressure to take vows or tantric initiations, for this is not proper conduct within any Buddhist tradition.

Choosing a teacher too quickly - Because of being overly enthusiastic, many new practitioners don't research teachers properly, and instead commit themselves prematurely. Again, remember there's no hurry; Buddhism doesn't ask for any initial commitment. Later, if one wishes to progress deeper within their studies, a commitment to a teacher, that one has known and studied with for many years, can be considered.

Misplaced faith - Because Buddhism is a fairly new development in the West, there still exist many poor translations, continuously republished misconceptions, and under-educated teachers. Therefore caution needs to be observed. Be watchful of teachers that speak in the language of absolutes (dogmatic views and opinions), or teachers who ask for a high level of devotion from their students. Devotion must be earned gradually, which any qualified teacher knows and expects. A proper teacher respects a self-reliant practitioner and should never allow students to become overly dependent on them.

The inability to actualizing the teachings - One of the most pervasive problems for practitioners is the inability to internalize or actualize the teachings. Meaning, despite the fact of devoting a considerable amount of time and effort to one's studies and practice, signs of success remain unattained, and there remains a disconnect between the teachings and one's daily life. This is often due to: a lack of true renunciation, having a superficial relationship with the teachings, and/or not putting into actual practice what one has studied.

> *"One of the great challenges I see is that Buddhism remains purely theoretical and practitioners have trouble actually incorporating the teachings into their daily lives and real change remains elusive to most. This is possibly the area that requires the most attention in the West." ~ Thích Nhat Hunh*

Advice on Study and Practice

When receiving advice about one's practice, it's important to take a few things into account: the type of practitioners or audience the advice or teachings are intended for; the venue and environment in which they are given; and the teacher's particular views, affiliations, and their education/credentials. This is important because each practitioner's mind, path, and level of practice are unique and any common–*one size fits all*–advice often doesn't apply to all practitioners. General advice to a general audience must be evaluated to see if it applies to oneself and one's level of practice; depending on the content, one must decide whether or not it should be taken as personal guidance. Conversely, *one-on-one* advice or advice given to a specific audience can be taken more to heart, if one believes the person giving the advice shows a level of insight into one's path. With that said, advice should never be followed blindly. Listen to the advice, study and contemplate it, but in the end, evaluate it for yourself and determine how it best applies to you and whether it's advice to be followed or disregarded.

The proper attitude towards practice - His Holiness advises practitioners to cultivate a scientific approach to their Buddhist studies, based on logic and reason and not on blind faith or unanalyzed beliefs. The Indian religious traditions are a good example of this, having a much different approach to religion from that of the West, being both more open and exploratory; a style much closer to Western philosophy than Western religion. In a speech made at a science symposium in Delhi, India, the Dalai Lama shared,

> *In many Buddhist countries, Buddhism is followed as a tradition, and practiced in a ceremonial way, with many practitioners who diligently chant their daily practice, however, don't know their meaning. This is not sufficient. We must study. Study is essential. Just prayer or simple meditation is not enough. We must utilize and maximize our human intelligence in order to transform our emotions. The transformation of emotions needs constant effort, and in order to sustain constant effort, we need enthusiasm; in order to develop enthusiasm, we must know the real purpose and meaning of the teachings; once clearly understood, real enthusiasm develops. Praying to the Buddha will not bring us wisdom. Some practitioners undergo mantra recitation retreats in order to sharpen their minds; this may be good, however, I believe study would be better. Often teachers recommend simply reciting some scripture and/or make donations, claiming it to be Buddhist practice–this is wrong, this is nonsense, it's old fashion Buddhism; I am totally against that.* (transliterated and abridged)

> *"Buddhism is different from all other religious traditions, for in Buddhism there's no place for un-analyzed faith or something which is to be accepted without one's own understanding or logical conclusion." ~ Prof. Samdhong Rinpoche*

For myself, I see the Buddhist practitioner as a mix of scientist, philosopher, social worker, and explorer. Meaning, they possess the analytical intelligence of a scientist–rooted in critical thinking; the inquisitiveness of a philosopher–with a profound thirst for truth; the altruistic heart of a social worker–dedicated to the well being of others; and the daring of an explorer–who fearlessly explores their mind in order to discover and illuminate the path.

Thoughts from my own path

Through the years, I have discovered various things pertaining to practice that have benefitted my own path greatly, things I thought may be of some use to readers.

Keep focused on your daily practice - Although it's essential to know that you are heading in the right direction, being overly concerned with your progress and resulting goals can be a great distraction from the real work at hand–that of focused daily practice. It's only within the present moment that any progress can occur, meaning that by focusing on each day's study and practice and being committed to doing it well, we establish the causes and assurance of our future enlightenment. Therefore, to focus on daily practice, to be a little better each and every day–to be better today than yesterday–to be better tomorrow than today, is the real work at hand and the only truly sensible goal.

Letting go of spiritual ambition - Paradoxally, the Mahayana sutras attest that the ambition to become a buddha is the very thing that will prevent one from becoming a buddha. That is, one's preoccupation with the goal prevents one from being present on the path. This doesn't mean that one abandons their goals and efforts, it simply means one must let go of passion, expectation, and grasping at any projected outcome. At some point on the path, the practitioner must recognize their ambitions and let them go: the grasping at spiritual gain, the endless drive to be better than others, or the need to be special. One must, at some point, accept and embrace the present moment and one's present place on the path. One must understand that we are all works in progress and that our current qualities and character only pertain to this very moment in one's development. We must stop striving for something in the future and instead slow down and take delight in the joy, beauty, and contentment that is abundant in this–and every–moment.

> *"We go around and around trying to improve ourselves through struggle, until we realize that the ambition to improve ourselves is the problem." ~ Chögyam Trungpa*

Letting go of spiritual materialism - The expression *spiritual materialism* pertains to being overly focused on external and/or trivial aspect of one's spirituality. The most obvious example is the infatuation with the material aspects of practice (a spectacular altar, imported meditation cushion, custom made prayer beads, special clothes; the collecting and displaying of holy stat-

ues, art, implements, or books as if they were trophies). This can also be seen in the way some turn spiritual practice into a fad or exotic lifestyle, in which people advertise their "spiritual identity" while fervently trying to convince others of their sincerity and pure devotion. Those who suffer from spiritual materialism feel the need to brag about what great teachers they have met, sacred places they've visited, titles or status, their special relationship with the lama, or exclusive practices they have received. They're often preoccupied with letting others know how important and highly developed they are, while also preoccupied in knowing the level of other practitioner's practice, by which they hope to verify their own spiritual superiority. Both spiritual materialism and spiritual ambition arise from the three poisons (ignorance, attachment, and aversion), and more precisely, from narcissism and passion.

Make sure your practice is always free of the eight worldly concerns

It's said that any dharma activity performed with these intentions is not true dharma.

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

Practice should be light, joyful, and recharging - The heaviness that some practitioners feel within their practice is their own ignorance and habituated afflictive emotions and views. For this problem, the Gelug school utilizes conceptual antidotes to undermine and transform this heaviness into its opposite qualities, those of lightness, joy, and equanimity. One antidote is the cultivation of great appreciation–appreciation of one's life, current situation, and vast potential. This includes developing a deep gratitude for having found the three jewels and becoming a student of the Buddha. However, on the deepest level, the absolute antidote to this heaviness is the understanding of selflessness and emptiness. Through the use of antidotes and the understanding of selflessness and emptiness, one's path becomes lighter, more joyful, and recharging. With that said, some teachers assert that the arising of obstacles is a sign of spiritual progress, and that happiness that arises from practice is something to be attained in the future. To this, I fully disagree. I believe that if you're not enjoying your practice and if your practice is not improving your mental and emotional state, thereby making you happier and feeling more stable and content, there's something missing. If this is the case, you might consider exploring different teachers, groups, or traditions. However, with that said, often when first engaging in Buddhism and/or meditation, many practitioners may have obstacles and/or strong emotions arise; this is normal and shouldn't be judged too quickly. It is usually something that passes once one's mind and body become accustomed to the practice, developing suppleness and equanimity. If one suffers from clinical depression or other chronic illnesses, they should work closely with both their teacher and their personal physician.

Persevere and don't be disheartened by slow progress – Often, for beginners on the Buddhist path, day-to-day improvement and/or benefits aren't always obvious. However, when one becomes more experienced, developing a more subtle awareness, day-to-day subtle changes begin to be perceived and eventually can become quite profound and inspirational. For those who believe that they are not making sufficient progress on their path, I recommend the diligent (re)application of what I call the *three - threes*: the *three higher trainings*–ethics, concentration, and wisdom; the *three great objectives*–study, contemplation, and meditation; and the *three excellences*–setting one's intention, abiding within the proper mental state, and dedicating one's merit. (All discussed previously in this text series)

Inspirational Study and Practice Quotes

"No one saves us but ourselves; no one can and no one may; we ourselves must tread the path; the buddhas can only show the way." ~ The Buddha

"That which is passed down by tradition may be well learnt or badly learnt, it may be true or it may be otherwise. Only if a spiritual life leads to the ending of suffering is it of true value." ~ The Buddha

"I appeal to all who belong to the generation of the 21st century to be determined to create a happier, more peaceful world. Use your intelligence in a positive way, to cultivate the warm-heartedness that can be the catalyst for constructive change. When the education system encourages only materialistic goals with little concern for universal human values, cultivating warm-heartedness can make all the difference." ~ The 14th Dalai Lama

"Our negative karma comes from grasping at an illusory self. This grasping can only be tackled by understanding selflessness and emptiness. Neither listening to or reciting mantras nor visiting temples will cure this grasping. You have to understand the teaching and apply it in meditation." ~ The 14th Dalai Lama

"I am a Buddhist who is critical of the present state of Buddhist practice, which is often too involved with ceremony and ritual. The proper practice is to use our human intelligence to transform our emotions. I am a human being, I also experience destructive emotions, but the only difference is that I use my intelligence to discriminate which of my emotions is helpful and which is harmful. I then try to restrain the harmful and increase those that are helpful and this gives me peace of mind." ~ The 14th Dalai Lama

“Devotion is not enough. We need to be modern and well-informed practitioners; we have to be 21st century Buddhists.” ~ The 14th Dalai Lama

“You must keep your mind happy and know how to laugh.” ~ The 14th Dalai Lama

"I myself feel and also tell other Buddhists that the question of nirvana will come later. There is not much hurry. But if in day-to-day life you lead a good life, honestly with love, with compassion, with less selfishness then automatically it will lead to nirvana. Opposite to this, if we talk about nirvana, talk about philosophy but do not much bother about day-to-day practice, then you may reach a strange nirvana but will not reach the correct nirvana because your daily practice is nothing. We must implement the teaching in daily life." ~ The 14th Dalai Lama

“Becoming a Dharmic person means that in your everyday life from morning to morning, around the clock, you are not trying to kid anybody." ~ Chögyam Trungpa

"Support and take refuge in those spiritual masters who focus their practice in solitary retreat. Before one attains enlightenment, one should also enter into solitary retreat to focus on one's practice under his or her close guidance and mentorship. If not, it will be just like now, where everywhere is flooded with Khenpos (lamas) *who give empty talks. Those ignorant ones, who run after fame and fortune, and establish their own factions, will cause people to have an aversion for Buddhism and lead to the extinction of Buddhism sooner or later. Hence, it is said that the authentic Dharma is not in the monasteries, it is not in the books and not in the material world, but within the mind. There is a need to awaken it through practice and to realize it, in order to be called the continuation or preservation of the Dharma." ~ Chatral Rinpoche*

"My wish is to prevent my students from approaching Buddhism as a religion, per se, in which a supreme being of either human or ethereal nature is beseeched for help in worldly matters. In truth, I have given my best efforts in the objective of freeing myself from the trappings of religious administrations. Frequently, religion produces fanaticism, which often results in splitting the community and thus damages the integrity of a society." ~ The 14th Gyalwa Shamarpa

"Two extremes to be abandoned: self-cherishing and self-neglect." ~ GesheTashi Tsering

“We must distinguish between what is cultural in a spiritual tradition and what is teaching, which will transform our minds.” ~ Jetsunma Tenzin Palmo

“*Immerse yourself in the meaning of the teachings, day after day, month after month, and the spiritual qualities of a bodhisattva will develop without difficulty, like honey collecting in the hive as the bees go from flower to flower, gathering nectar.” ~ Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche*

“The main point is that if we are going to be real practitioners of the Dharma, then we need to become independent practitioners. Instead of constantly looking to something that is outside of us, we have to develop the ability to pay attention in a mindful way and an insightful way to what is actually happening within us, so that we can become capable, autonomous practitioners of the Dharma.” ~ 17th Karmapa, Ogyen Trinley Dorje

“Buddhist practice entails that one embraces the world with all its contingency and specificity, with all its ambiguity and flaws. It requires and unflinching honesty with oneself, a willingness to face one’s deepest fears and longings, the courage to resist fleeing to the imagined safety of one’s place.” ~ Stephen Batchelor

" If you are attached to this life, you are not a person of Dharma
If you are attached to cyclic existence, you do not have renunciation.
If you are attached to your own benefit, you do not have bodhichitta.
If you have grasping and fixation, you do not have the view.
~ Attributed to Manjushri

"At some point virtue and spirituality themselves must be transcended, until the bodhisattva is free from all ideas of virtue: 'They do not see themselves nor the object they give, nor the recipient of the gift. They do not see the field of merit, they do not see a deed, or its results, or its fruits, great or small.'…the bodhisattva understands the qualities of enlightened beings are no different from the qualities of the world, the qualities of the world no different from the qualities of enlightened beings.'… the bodhisattva stays out of nirvana because they see the idea of a safe, transcendent spiritual realm is a trap. Thus they remain without reaching their spiritual goal, without not reaching their spiritual goal, without grasping, and without not grasping. They are being not of this world not the buddha realms.'… They are free from the spiritual realm as well as the realm of passion.'… free from extreme notions of impure and pure, including spiritual hierarchy.” ~ Luis O. Gomez

“As one of the seven factors of enlightenment, joy is not only a fruit of awakening but also a prerequisite. Joy creates a spaciousness in the mind that allows us to hold the suffering we experience inside us and around us without becoming overwhelmed, without collapsing into helplessness or despair.” ~ James Baraz

Conclusion

For myself, I believe the Buddha's assertion shared in the beginning of this text–that his teachings are not something to be worshiped, nor mere philosophical hypothesis, but instead a means for practice–to be the most comprehensive advice on how to properly engage in the Buddhist path.

"My teaching is not a philosophy; it is the result of my own direct experience.
My teaching is a means of practice, not something to hold onto or to be worshiped.
My teaching is like a raft used to cross a river; only a fool would continue to
carry the raft around after already reaching the other shore of liberation."
~ The Buddha

The Buddha was rational and pragmatic, often describing himself more as a physician than a teacher, and his teachings as medicine to be applied, rather than a static doctrine to be blindly followed. The Buddha urged his followers to use reason, logic, and their own common sense when investigating his teachings. Today, many Buddhists see the Buddha's teachings as akin to religious doctrine, holding them as infallible scriptures. However, this is a mistake. All scholars accept that a great deal of the Buddhist scriptures are interpretive rather than literal. Because of this, I believe all practitioners need to diligently strive to maintain a scientific and practical approach to the teachings and not fall into a purely religious and devotional orientation.

At the beginning of this text series, I shared my thoughts on what I believe Buddhism is, writing, *For myself, I posit Buddhism not as a religion or philosophy but as a Dharma. Defined as a teaching, path, and way of life…A method for transcending inferior states of consciousness…a path of personal cultivation for dispelling the obstacles that stop us from understanding ourselves, our world, and reality…Simply put, Buddhism is the path to freedom*.

However, here, at the end of this text series, after helping the reader gain a foundational understanding of the Buddha's view and teachings, I would like to again share my thoughts on what Buddhism is, but this time on a level meant for those currently beginning to engage in practice. At its most profound level, Buddhism is a method or path of mental development and training, devoted to purifying and liberating the mind from wrong and unhealthy views. As we have read throughout this text series, Buddhism asserts the mind as the most significant aspect of one's life, being the source of one's happiness and sadness, obstacles and successes, bondage and freedom, and the sole cause of enlightenment. Simply put, we suffer and are bound within samsara because we possess confused and unruly minds. Therefore, to gain mastery and control over the mind, is to gain mastery and control over one's life. When understood correctly, there is not a single aspect of the Buddha's teachings, methods, and path that doesn't pertain directly to the development, training, and purification of the mind. This includes actions

and behaviors which help others to purify their own minds as well. Therefore, developing and training the mind is the sole goal of all practitioners. Once again, simply put, Buddhism is the path to freedom…freedom from one's confused and unruly mind.

The root of Dharma is your very mind. Tame it and you're practicing the Dharma.
For to practice Dharma is to tame your mind, and when you tame it, then you will be free!
~ Dudjom Rinpoche

The Buddha's Last Words and Thoughts

I thought a fitting way to finish this text series would be to leave the reader with the last thoughts and words of advice given by the Buddha before he passed into parinirvana.

"I am old and my pilgrimage in this life is nearing its end. My body looks like an old cart that has been used a great deal and is still working only because some of its parts are precariously tied up with straps of leather. But that's enough, now it's time to go." ~ The Buddha

"My years are now fully ripe, the life span left is short. Departing, I go hence from you, relying on myself alone. Be earnest, then monks, be mindful and of virtue pure, with firm resolve guard your own mind." ~ The Buddha

"Weep not for me; think not for me; I am gone. Work out diligently your own salvation. Each one of you is just what I am. I am nothing but one of you. What I am today is what I made myself. Do your struggle and make yourselves what I am…" ~ The Buddha

"Conditions, truly they are transient; their nature is to arise and cease; having arisen, then they pass away; their calming and cessation is true bliss." ~ The Buddha

"Behold, O monks, this is my advice to you: all things [in unenlightened existence] *are disappointing; it is through vigilance that you succeed." ~ The Buddha*

"Now, monks, I declare this to you: it is the nature of all formed things to dissolve. Strive with diligence! ~ The Buddha

Appendix

Buddhist Symbols, Ritual Implements, and Paraphernalia

Symbols Shared by All Buddhist Traditions

Dharma wheel (Skt. *dharmacakra*; 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. *bukchal*): 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. *adhisthana*; 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 Brahmans 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. d*harma*; 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 nyingpo*): 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. *lha min*); Warlike covetous godbeings depicted as enemies of the devas.

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.

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. *lha*): *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. *dharmacakra*; 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. *catvaryaryasatya*; 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.

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.

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.) *lha* (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 10^{th} and 25^{th} 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 principal 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. *le*): 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 though 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. g*angsak*)**:** *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 on 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. *tse 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 unmistakenly 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:

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 an 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. *nirupadhisheshanirvana*; 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. *sopadhisheshanirvana*; 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. *apratisthitanirvana*; 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 samara 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. *apratisthitanirvana*; Tib. *minepay nyangende*): *See* nirvana.

Non-dual (Skt. *advaya*; Tib. *nyime)*: Not two; undivided consciousness in which the dichotomy of subject and object is trascended; and/or the union of conventional and ulitmate 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. *kunkyab*): 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 ledepa*): 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. *jinpa*)**:** 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. g*angsak*): 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 dampa*): 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 students 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, unconducive 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 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. *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 know 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:

1. **Formless realm** (Skt. *arupyadhatu*; Tib. zukmekham) *See* formless realm
2. **Form realm** (Skt. *rupadhatu*; Tib. zukham) See form realm
3. **Desire realm** (Skt. *kama-dhatu*; Tib. *dökham*): *See* desire realm.

Three turnings of the wheel of Dharma (Skt. *tridharmacakra*; Tib. *chökhor 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,* tulkus 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 tulkus 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. *sambhar advaya*: Tib. *tsoknyi*):

- **The collection of wisdom** (Skt. *jnana sambhdra*; 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, immoveable 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. *naljorchöpa*): 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
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The Buddhism of Tibet. 1971. Snow Lion Publications.
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The Meaning of Life. 2000. Wisdom Publications.
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For the Benefit of All Beings. 2009. Shambala Publications.
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Jetsunma Tenzin Palmo
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Thubten Chödron
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Don't Believe Everything You Think. 2013. Snow Lion Publications.

Pema Chödron
Comfortable with Uncertainty. 2003. Shambala Publications.
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A Guide to the Bodhisattva Way of Life. 1997. Snow Lion Publications.

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The Three Principal Aspects of the Path. 1999. Snow Lion Publications.
Eight Verses for Training the Mind. 2001. Snow Lion Publications.

Geshe Tashi Tsering
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.
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Dagpo Rinpoche
The Pearl Garland. 2012. Editions Guepele, India

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