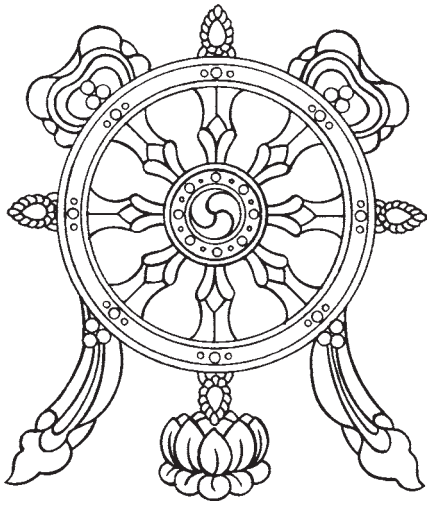
Discovering BUDDHISM *at Home*

Awakening the limitless potential of your mind,
achieving all peace and happiness



SUBJECT AREA 3

Presenting the Path

Readings

Contents

Further required reading includes the following texts:

The Wish-Fulfilling Golden Sun, by Lama Zopa Rinpoche (pp. 42–3)

Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand, *1997 gold edition* (pp. 25–125) *or 2006 blue edition* (pp. 9-100)

Wisdom Energy, by Lama Thubten Yeshe and Lama Zopa Rinpoche

Essence of Tibetan Buddhism, by Lama Thubten Yeshe

This section of readings:

Turning the Wheel

by Lama Thubten Yeshe

During the spring term of 1978, Lama Thubten Yeshe taught a course on the Buddhism of Tibet for the Religious Studies Department of the University of California at Santa Cruz. The following is an excerpt from an edited version of these lectures.. The subject matter of this article is taken from a lecture in which Lama Yeshe discussed the twelve deeds of an enlightened being, specifically those of Shakyamuni Buddha (sixth century, B.C.). These are the major events in the career of all fully awakened teachers who periodically descend to renew the spiritual life of our planet.

After discussing Shakyamuni's previous attainment of enlightenment, his descent from the Joyous Pure Land (Tushita), his birth into a north Indian royal family and his early education and marriage, Lama Yeshe described how Buddha renounced his royal life of sense indulgence and adopted the spiritual discipline of extreme asceticism. Then followed an account of Buddha's dissatisfaction with this path of self-denial, his adoption of a more moderate and balanced approach to the spiritual quest, and finally, his demonstration of the attainment of enlightenment under the bodhi tree at Bodh Gaya.

This brings us to the point in Buddha's life when he was ready to begin teaching the spiritual path to others.

Shakyamuni Buddha next performed the supreme deed of an enlightened being:

He began to give the teachings and spiritual instructions that release sentient beings from their suffering and dissatisfaction and lead them to the highest perfection of mind: enlightenment. This deed is commonly known as "turning the wheel of Dharma,"and Buddha performed it in various ways for the remaining forty-five years of his life.

Although anyone who strives to reach buddhahood does so expressly to benefit others—primarily through giving teachings—Shakyamuni did not begin teaching immediately after his attainment of enlightenment. By holding back at first, he showed that the profound realizations of enlightenment are not something the ordinary, superficial human mind can be expected to grasp easily. His discovery was beyond normal conception and words, beyond expression or description. He knew how difficult it would be for others to understand what he had realized, and so he remained silent. But after seven weeks of enjoying the bliss of enlightenment in the forest by himself, he was requested to teach for the benefit of all, and agreed to do so.

Buddha's hesitation to teach until sincerely requested emphasizes an important characteristic of his teachings in general. They are never forced upon others against their will. 'Here are fantastic teachings! Why don't you come and join us?' Neither are disciples sent out into the streets to convince people how miserable they are, offering salvation to those who will come and join them.

Buddha's teachings were never presented in this way, and the Tibetan traditions still follow the custom of waiting until someone asks before giving them teachings.

Why are Buddhists specifically instructed not to thrust their beliefs at other people or to declare, 'I have discovered the best way of life and if you don't follow it as well, you are lost.'? According to Buddha's teachings, this approach is both unskillful and unrealistic. When someone has a profound experience, be it disastrous or fantastically blissful, it is a completely unique and personal event. It is foolish to think that an account of such a private experience will be as meaningful to another as the experience was to oneself. Even if we tell our best friend what we have discovered, it is still impossible to convey the true essence of our experience to him. Since what we are saying is necessarily expressed through words and concepts, even a very sympathetic friend will probably not grasp exactly what we want him to feel. True communication on spiritual matters is very difficult.

What this shows is that we are all living quite different lives from one another. Though we may share similar patterns of perception and behaviour, our internal experiences are unique and highly individual. We each live in the private universe of our own mind. Consequently, any attempt to force our spiritual convictions on others or share with them our devotional experiences—which, if genuine, are always of such an intensely personal nature—is misguided and can easily end in frustration and misunderstanding.

Buddha showed that there are both proper and improper times to give teachings. He always waited until he was sincerely asked before giving instruction. He knew that the very act of making a formal decision to seek help and then requesting it creates an energy within those seeking the truth that prepares them to listen intently, not merely with their ears but with their hearts as well. This is a far more effective approach than giving teachings to students who are not yet ready. In other words, the students need space. If they are not given the chance to create that space within themselves—if they are not prepared to meet the teacher halfway by opening themselves up to receiving spiritual instruction—the essence of the teaching—will *never* penetrate their minds.

This is the enlightened being's skillful psychology. We might even call it his politics. He understands the way people think and can take the measure of their superstitious mind. He can adjust his approach spontaneously to their limitations and make sure they are ready before showing them their individual paths. His unobstructed vision embraces all existent phenomena, including the most subtle workings of our mind, and thus he can teach us accordingly.

When an enlightened being does give teachings, the strength of his realizations lends a special power to everything he says or does. Even one word of his awakened speech can satisfy the needs of many different beings. Ordinary people are limited in what they can convey with words; their speech seldom brings a sense of fulfillment. But an enlightened being's speech is different. No matter what the subject matter, each listener receives exactly what he needs.

Ordinarily, if we feel that someone is a good speaker, we might praise him by saying, 'What a powerful lecture he gave!' But from a Buddhist point of view, the true power of speech is not to be found in speech itself. Behind the words, within the mind of the speaker, must be the living experience of luminous, penetrating wisdom. This wisdom gives a buddha's speech its power. Such power has nothing to do with an ordinary person's eloquence. It is solely a matter of inner realizations. Since a buddha is one whose realizations are complete, his speech has the power to affect each listener in a profound and deeply personal way. Not only that, but an enlightened being can arouse

understanding without having to use any words at all.

The first formal teachings Shakyamuni Buddha gave after he attained enlightenment under the Bodhi tree were given at the Deer Park in Sarnath. He delivered these teachings to the five meditators who had followed him during his six years of ascetic practices but had abandoned him when he gave up his strict discipline of self-mortification. The subject of this first turning of the wheel of Dharma was the Four Truths of the Noble Ones. The first two truths reveal the existence of suffering and dissatisfaction in our lives and show how the source of all problems is to be found in the mind's craving attachment—whether directed towards objects of sense or perverted into extreme self-denial. The latter two truths describe the state of complete cessation of all suffering and the middle path, free of all extremes, that leads to this perfect cessation.

The second turning of the wheel began at Vultures' Peak outside Rajagriha, not far from Bodhgaya, and dealt with the true nature of reality. These discourses on the perfection of wisdom present the profound view of emptiness (shunyata) within the context of a bodhisattva's way of life. These teachings on the lack of inherent self-existence of phenomena—their emptiness of true, substantial exist-ence—are much more subtle than those of the first turning, and were aimed at disciples of higher intelligence and motivation.

After the first two turnings, it became necessary to clarify apparent contradictions in the teachings. While teaching the four truths, Buddha was concerned with presenting the basic path leading from suffering to liberation. Therefore he emphasized the functional nature of phenomena in those teachings. He described in detail how the mind works, how it binds us to repeated dissatisfaction and how, if properly trained, it frees us from this situation. During this first turning of the wheel Buddha spoke of the mind, or consciousness, in terms of its existence as a real entity. In the second turning, however, when he exposed the subtle miscon-ceptions with which we view reality, he talked mainly in terms of the way in which things do *not* exist.

Buddha did not wish to confuse his followers, but he saw that the apparent contradiction between these two approaches—one emphasizing existence and the other non-existence could cause some difficulties in the future. To avoid possible confusion he instituted the teachings of the third turning of the wheel.

When Buddha himself was presenting his teachings, even those of the very subtle second turning, he did not have to be concerned that his disciples would misunderstand what he meant. He knew the mental capacity of his audience, and was able to speak directly to each listener's heart. But he was concerned that other disciples of lesser capability and those who would come in the future might be confused. 'Why did Buddha sometimes say "yes" and sometimes "no" about the same issue?' they might wonder. For their sake, therefore, he provided further clarification.

A major characteristic of all of Buddha's teachings is that they are designed to fit the needs and aptitudes of each individual. Since we all have different interests, problems and ways of life, no one method of instruction could ever be suitable for everyone. Buddha himself explained that for the purpose of reaching a particular disciple coming from a particular background he would teach a particular doctrine. Thus there could be certain times when it might be necessary to say 'yes' and others when it would be more appropriate to say 'no,' even in response to the same question.

Because Buddhism is flexible in this way and lacks a rigid, dogmatic quality, I often feel that it is more of a psychological system than a religion. By this I do not mean that Buddhism has no religious aspect to it at all. I mean that Buddhism demands intelligent inspection of its teachings rather than blind acceptance. This emphasis on personal experience and investigation makes it unique among religious systems of thought.

If we do not take a reasoned, investigative look at the teachings, several dangers can arise. On one hand, the apparent contradictions between what Buddha taught at different times may make us question the value of his instructions altogether. With a limited vision unable to see the singleness of purpose behind this seeming discrepancy, we may find these teachings a source of confusion rather than insight. Consequently, we may disregard them entirely. On the other hand, if we adopt a very pious, unquestioning attitude towards the teachings, accepting at face value whatever Buddha said merely because he said it, sooner or later we shall suffer grievous disappointment. Someone will question our beliefs and, since they were founded on nothing but blind faith, our convictions will crumble.

According to Mahayana Buddhism, there are two categories of Buddha's teachings: definitive and interpretive. Definitive teachings discuss the absolute nature of reality, while interpretive teachings deal with conventional realities and therefore must be interpreted properly before they can be understood. Because there are these two divisions, we should never feel that merely because something we read or hear is the word of Buddha we must accept it literally and without question. To adopt such an uncritical attitude towards such an important matter as spiritual development is very dangerous, and completely lacking in wisdom.

For all these reasons, in the third turning of the wheel Buddha gave guidelines for reconciling the first two turnings. He explained, for those who might otherwise have misunderstood, the way in which certain aspects of things can be said to be existent and others non-existent. These guidelines show how important it is to look beyond mere words to find the true meaning of whatever the Buddha taught.

Whenever Buddha spoke he stressed the importance of making a personal investigation of his words and their meaning. Only when we are convinced that the teachings are accurate and applicable to our own lives should we adopt them. If they fail to convince us, they should be put aside. He compared this process of testing the truth of his teachings with that used to determine the purity of gold. Just as we would never, without testing, pay a high price for something purport-ing to be real gold, we are also responsible for examining Buddha's teachings for ourselves to see whether they are reasonable and worthwhile.

Although it is traditional to divide Buddha's teachings into these three turnings of the wheel of dharma, we should not think that this is all he taught. In addition to a vast body of discourses explaining the graduated path to enlightenment, he taught the lightning path of tantra, capable of bringing a disciple to full perfection within one lifetime.

There was not a single thing Buddha did from the time he came to this earth until he passed away that was done for any purpose other than leading all living beings to deliverance from their mental and physical suffering. His formal discourses were only a part of his comprehensive teachings: the way he

lived his life provided a constant example to others. And because everything he thought, said or did was born from his perfect wisdom, all his deeds were transcendental, capable of bringing ultimate peace and tranquility to those who could take these teachings to heart.

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Method, Wisdom, and the Three Paths

by Geshe Lhundrub Sopa

The great eleventh century Indian master Atisha has said,

> The human lifespan is short, the objects of knowledge are many. Be like the swan, which can separate milk from water.

Our lives will not last long and there are so many directions in which we can channel them. We should be like the swan, which extracts the essence from milk and spits out the water. There is so much that can be done: we should practice discriminating wisdom and direct ourselves to essential goals that benefit both ourselves and other beings in a way affecting this and future lives.

Human goals should be greater than those of beings such as animals, insects, and others because humans have greater potential. We have a very special intellectual capacity and can accomplish many things, even in one short lifespan. The goal to be accomplished should benefit not only ourselves but all sentient beings. Every sentient being hopes to gain the highest state of happiness or pleasure and be free from all kinds of suffering. All beings would like to attain a state of complete freedom from every kind of trouble and misery.

A human being has the potential to attain the highest happiness, the highest peace. Everybody would like to have such a state of being. Alternatively, everybody wishes to avoid misery and suffering. As spiritual practitioners we should wish freedom from misery not only for ourselves but for all sentient beings. Humans have an intelligence capable of achieving these goals. They are able to practice the teachings, the methods by which these goals are realized. A human can begin from his own starting point and then gradually attain higher levels of being, until final perfection is achieved. In certain cases the highest goal, the state Buddhists call Buddhahood, enlightenment, or the pure light, can be attained in a single lifetime.

In the *Bodhisattvacharyavatara*, the great yogi and bodhisattva Shantideva wrote:

> We all seek happiness, but turn our backs on it. We all wish to avoid misery, but race to collect its causes.

What we want and what we're doing are in contradiction. Our activities aimed at bringing happiness just cause suffering, misery and trouble. Shantideva goes on to explain how even if we desire to obtain happiness, because of ignorance we usually destroy its cause. We treat the causes of happiness like we would an enemy.

According to the Buddhist teachings, people must first learn, or study. Is there a way to attain the highest achievement, a state of peaceful freedom, the perfect light? This opens the doors of spiritual

inquiry. We then discover that if we direct our efforts and our wisdom, we can gain personal knowledge of that very goal. This leads us to seek out methods or paths to enlightenment. Buddha set forth many different levels of teachings. As humans we are able to learn these—learn not only for the sake of learning, but to practice the methods.

What is the cause of happiness? What is the cause of misery? These are important questions in Buddhist teachings. Buddha pointed out that the very source of all our troubles is wrong perception, or wrong ideation. We are always holding some kind of "I", some sort of egocentric thought or attitude. Everything we do is based on this wrong conception of the nature of the self. From this wrong grasping, this attachment to an "I", comes all self-centered thought and the thought cherishing oneself over others. This is the basis on which rest all the worldly thoughts and which creates samsara. The problems of all sentient beings start from this point. This thought, this ignorance creates all attachment to the "I". From "me" comes "mine"—my property, body, mind, family, friends; my house, country, work and so forth. From attachment arises anger at or hatred for the things that threaten the objects of attachment. In Buddhism we call these three—ignorance, attachment and aversion or anger—the three poisons. They are the real poisons. They are the real causes of our problems. They are the real enemy. We usually look outside for our enemies, but Buddhist yogis realize that there is no enemy outside. The enemy is inside. Once one removes ignorance, attachment and aversion the inner enemy has been vanquished. Pure consciousness remains. Ignorance is replaced by correct understanding. There is no longer any mistake in one's perception. The delusions are gone.

Ignorance, hatred, and attachment, together with their branches such as conceit, jealousy, envy, and so forth are very strong forces. Once they arise they quickly dominate the mind. Then we fall under the power of the inner enemy and no longer have control or freedom. These inner enemies even cause us to fight with and harm the people we love; they can even cause someone to kill their own parents, children and so forth. From where do such acts come? They come from the inner enemies, from attachment, anger and ignorance. All conflicts, from those between members of a family to international wars, arise from these negative thoughts.

Shantideva said, "There is one cause of all problems." This is the ignorance which mistakes the actual nature of the self. All sentient beings are similar in that they are all overpowered by this ego-grasping ignorance. On the other hand, each one of us is capable of engaging in the yogic practices that refine the mind to the point that it is able to see directly the way things exist. One can then see the true nature of the self and all phenomena. The workings of the illusory world no longer occur. When ignorance is gone, mistaken action will not occur. When actions are done without mistake, the various sufferings will not arise. The forces of karma are not engaged. Karma, the actions of the body, speech and mind of sentient beings, together with the seeds they leave on the mind, are brought under control. The causes of these actions—ignorance, attachment and hatred—are destroyed, thus the actions that arise from them cease. Buddha himself first studied, then practiced, and finally realized Dharma, achieving enlightenment. He saw the principles of the causes and effects of thought and action, and then taught people how to work with these laws in such a way as to gain freedom.

His first teaching was on the four truths seen by an arya: suffering, its cause, liberation and the path to liberation. First we must learn to recognize the sufferings and frustrations that pervade our lives. Then we must know their causes. Thirdly we should know that it is possible to get rid of them, to gain liberation from them. Lastly we must know the truth of the path, the means by which we can gain

freedom, the methods of practice that destroy the seeds of suffering from their very root. There are many elaborate ways of presenting the path, which has led to the development of many schools of Buddhism, such as the Hinayana and Mahayana, but to all schools the four truths are basic teachings. Each school has its own special methods, but all are based on the four truths. Without the four truths there is neither Hinayana nor Mahayana. All Buddhist schools see suffering as the main problem of existence and ignorance as the main cause of suffering. Without removing ignorance there is no way of achieving liberation from samsara and no way of attaining the perfect enlightenment of buddhahood.

What is ignorance? It is a wrong understanding of the self and of the nature of all phenomena. Buddhism talks a lot about the non-self or shunya nature of all things. This is a key teaching. The realization of shunyata, or emptiness, was first taught by Buddha, and then widely disseminated by the great teacher Nagarjuna and his successors, who explained the Madhyamaka or Middle Way philosophy. Theirs is a system of thought free from all extremes, that is they hold that the nature of how things actually exist is free from the extremes of absolute being and non-being. The things we usually perceive do not exist as we see them. As for the "I", our understanding of its nature is also mistaken. This doesn't mean that there is no person and no desire; when Buddha rejected the existence of a self he meant that the self we normally conceive is not existent. Yogis who have developed higher meditation have realized the true nature of the self and have seen that the "I" exists totally other than the way we normally conceive it. This is the emptiness of the self, the key teaching of the Buddha, the sharp weapon of wisdom to cut down the poisonous tree of delusion and mental distortion.

To use it we must first study it, then contemplate it, and finally investigate it through meditation. Then we can realize the true nature. That wisdom, realization of *shunyata* or emptiness, will cut the very root of all delusion and put an end to all suffering. It directly opposes the ignorance of not knowing correctly. Sometimes we can apply more antidotes—for example, meditating on compassion when anger arises, on the impurity of the human body when lust arises, on impermanence when attachment to situations arises, and so on. These antidotes can counteract particular delusions, but they cannot remove the root of delusion. To remove the root of delusion one must realize shunyata. The wisdom of shunyata is like a sharp axe having the power to cut the root of all distortion.

However, merely using it alone is not enough. An axe requires a handle and a person to swing it. Meditation on emptiness is a key practice, but it must be supported and given direction by the other methods. Wisdom must be supported by method. Many Indian masters including Dharmakirti and Shantideva have asserted this to be so. For example, meditation upon the four noble truths includes contemplation of sixteen aspects of these truths, such as impermanence, suffering, and so forth. Then, because we must share our world with others there are the meditations on love, compassion and the bodhimind - the enlightened attitude of wishing for enlightenment in order to be of greatest benefit to others. This introduces the six perfections, or the means of accomplishing enlightenment—generosity, discipline, patience, energy, meditation, and wisdom. The first five of these must act as supportive methods in order for the sixth, wisdom, to become stable.

To obtain buddhahood the obstacles to the goal have to be completely removed. These obstacles are of two main types: obstacles to liberation, which includes the delusions such as attachment, and obstacles to omniscience. When the various delusions have been removed, one becomes an arhant or foe destroyer. In Tibetan, arhant (Tibetan: *gra-bCom-pa*) means one who has destroyed (Tibetan: *bCom*) the inner enemy (Tibetan: *gra*), and thus has obtained emancipation from all delusions. However, this is not

the attainment of buddhahood. An arhant is free from samsara and all misery and suffering; he no longer is prone to a rebirth conditioned by karma and delusion. At the moment we are strongly under the power of these two forces, being reborn again and again, sometimes higher, sometimes lower. We have little choice or independence in our birth, life, death, and rebirth. Negative karma and delusion combine and overpower us again and again. Our freedom is thus greatly limited. It is a circle: occasionally rebirth in a high realm, then in a low world; sometimes an animal, sometimes a human or a god. This is what is meant by 'samsara.' An arhant has achieved liberation from this circle. He has broken the circle and gone beyond it. His life has become totally pure, totally free. The forces that controlled him have gone, and he dwells in a state of emancipation from compulsive experience. His realization of shunyata is complete.

On the method side, the arhant has cultivated a path combining meditation on emptiness with meditation on the impermanence of life, karma and its results, the suffering nature of the whole circle of samsara, and so forth. But arhantship does not have the perfection of buddhahood. Compared to our ordinary samsaric life it is a great attainment, but the arhants still have a certain degree of subtle obstacles. The mental obstacles such as desire, hatred, ignorance and so forth have gone, but because they have been active forces within the mind for so long they leave behind a subtle hindrance, a kind of subtle habit or predisposition. Desire may have gone, but it leaves behind something very subtle in the mind. Or, although an arhant will not have anger, he may continue an old habit such as using harsh words. And he will have a very subtle self-centredness. Similarly, arhants do not have ignorance or wrong views, but they do not see certain aspects of cause and effect as clearly as does a buddha. These kinds of subtle limitations are called the obstacles to omniscience. In buddhahood they have been completely removed. No obstacles remain. There is both perfect freedom and perfect knowledge.

With the ripening of wisdom and method comes the fruit of the wisdom and form bodies of a Buddha. The form body has two dimensions, the samboghakaya and nirmanakaya, which with the wisdom body of dharmakaya constitute the three kayas. The form bodies are not ordinary form; they are purely mental, a reflection or manifestation of the dharmakaya wisdom. From perfect wisdom emerges perfect form. Buddhahood is endowed with many qualities: perfect body and mind, omniscient knowledge, power and so forth. From the perfection of the inner qualities is manifested a perfect environment, a 'pure land.' A buddha has a cause. His cause is a bodhisattva. Before attaining buddhahood one must train as a bodhisattva and cultivate a path uniting method with wisdom. The function of wisdom is to eliminate ignorance; the function of method is to produce the physical and environmental perfections of being. The bodhisattva trainings are vast: generosity, with which one tries to help others; patience, which keeps the mind in a state of calm; diligent perseverance, with which in order to help other sentient beings one joyfully undergoes the many hardships without hesitation; and many others.

As we can see from the above example, the bodhisattva's activities are based on a motivation very unlike our ordinary attitudes, which are usually selfish and self-centred. In order to attain buddhahood one has to change one's mundane thoughts into thoughts of love and compassion for other sentient beings. One has to learn to care all the time on a universal level. The self-centred attitude should be seen as an enemy; the loving and compassionate attitude should be regarded as the cause of the highest happiness, the real friend of both oneself and all others.

In the Mahayana we find a very special practice called "changing the self for others." Of course, you

can't change you into me or me into you; this isn't the meaning. What we must change is the thought or attitude of "me first" into the cherishing of others. "Whatever bad things must happen, let them happen to me." Through meditation one learns to hold the self-centred attitude as the enemy and to transform self-cherishing into love and compassion, until eventually one's entire life is dominated by these positive forces. Then everything one does becomes beneficial to others. All actions naturally become meritorious. This is the influence and power of the bodhisattva's thought—the bodhimind, the inspiration to obtain enlightenment for the benefit of other sentient beings as a means to fulfill love and compassion.

Love and compassion have the same basic nature, but a different reference or application. Compassion is mainly in reference to the problems of beings, the wish to free sentient beings from suffering. On the other hand, love is in reference to the positive side, the aspiration that all sentient beings might have happiness and its cause. Our love and compassion should be equal toward all beings and have the intensity that a loving mother feels towards her only child, taking on ourselves the full responsibility for the well-being of others. A bodhisattva regards all sentient beings with that kind of attitude.

However, the bodhimind is not mere love and compassion. A bodhisattva sees that in order to free sentient beings from misery and give them the highest happiness he himself will have to be fully equipped, fully qualified. First he himself must attain perfect buddhahood, the state free of obstacles and limitations and possessed of all power and knowledge. Right now we cannot do much to benefit others. Therefore, for the benefit of other sentient beings we must obtain the enlightenment of Buddhahood as soon as possible. Day and night everything we do should be in order to obtain perfect enlightenment quickly for the benefit of others.

The thought characterized by this aspiration is called bodhichitta, the bodhimind, the bodhisattva spirit. Unlike the self-centred, egotistical thoughts of ordinary people, that lead only to desire, hatred, jealousy, anger, and so forth, the bodhisattva way is dominated by love, compassion and the bodhimind. If we ourselves practice the appropriate meditative techniques, we shall become bodhisattvas. Then, as Shantideva has said, all our ordinary activities—sleeping, walking, eating or whatever—will naturally produce limitless goodness, fulfilling the purposes of many sentient beings.

The life of a bodhisattva is very precious, and therefore in order to sustain it one sleeps, eats and does whatever is necessary for staying alive. Because this is the motivation in eating, every mouthful of food gives rise to great merit, equal to the number of the sentient beings in the universe. In order to ascend the ten bodhisattva stages leading to buddhahood he engages both method and wisdom: on the basis of the bodhimind he cultivates the realization of shunyata, or emptiness. Seeing the emptiness of the self, his wrong grasping and attachments cease. He also sees all phenomena as being empty, and as a result all things that appear to his mind are seen like illusions, like a magician's creations. The audience believes in a magician's creations, but although the eyes of the magician see the same show as the audience does, his understanding of the spectacle is different from theirs. When he creates a beautiful woman, the audience experiences lust; when he creates terrible animals they become afraid. The magician also sees the beautiful woman and the animals, but he knows they are not real. He sees how they are manifest but knows that they are empty of existing as they appear. Their reality is not like their mode of appearance.

Similarly, the bodhisattva who has seen emptiness sees all as an illusion, and the events that previously

had caused attachment or aversion to arise in him no longer are able to do so. As Nagarjuna said, "By combining the twofold cause of method and wisdom, the bodhisattva gains the twofold effect of the mental and physical dimensions (Sanskrit: *kaya*) of a Buddha." His accumulations of meritorious energy and wisdom bring him to the first bodhisattva stage, where he directly realizes emptiness and overcomes the obstacles to liberation. He then uses this realization through meditation to progress through the ten stages of a bodhisattva, eradicating all obstacles to omniscient knowledge. He first eliminates the coarse level of ignorance and then, through gradual meditation on method combined with wisdom, attains the perfect achievement.

The main subjects of this discourse—renunciation, emptiness and the bodhimind—were taught by Buddha, Nagarjuna and Tsongkhapa, and provide the basic texture of the Mahayana path. They are three keys for those who wish to obtain the enlightenment of buddhahood. In terms of method and wisdom, renunciation and the bodhimind constitute method, and meditation on emptiness is wisdom. These two are like the wings of a bird, enabling one to fly high in the sky of Dharma. A bird with one wing cannot fly. In order to achieve the high stage of buddhahood, the two wings of method and wisdom are required.

The principal Mahayana method is the bodhimind. To generate the bodhimind one must first generate compassion—the aspiration to free sentient beings from suffering, which becomes the basis of one's motivation to obtain enlightenment. However, as Shantideva has pointed out, one must begin with compassion for oneself. One must want to be free of suffering oneself before being able to want it truly for others. The spontaneous wish to free oneself from suffering is renunciation. Most of us do not have this renunciation. We do not see the faults of samsara. We cannot ourselves continue being entranced by samsaric activities while speaking of working for the benefit of other sentient beings. Therefore one must begin with the thought of personal renunciation of samsara, a wish to obtain freedom from all misery. In the beginning this is very important. Then this quality can be extended to others, as love, compassion and the bodhimind. These two combine as method. When united with wisdom, realization of emptiness, one has all the main causes of buddhahood.

Of course, to develop one must proceed step by step, and therefore it is necessary to study, contemplate and meditate. We should all try to carry out a daily meditation practice. Young or old, male or female, regardless of race, we all have the ability to meditate. Anyone can progress through the stages of understanding. Human life is very meaningful and precious, but it can be lost to temporary goals like seeking sensual indulgence, fame, reputation and things which benefit this lifetime alone. Then we become like animals; we have the goals of the animal world. Even if we don't make great spiritual efforts, we should at least try to start with the practices that make human life meaningful.

QUESTION: Could you clarify what you mean by removing the suffering of others?

ANSWER: We are not talking about temporary measures, like hunger or thirst. One can do acts of charity with foods, medical help and so forth, but these provide only superficial help. Giving can never fulfill the world's needs and can itself become a cause of trouble or misery. What beings lack is some kind of perfect happiness or enjoyment. Therefore one cultivates a compassion for all sentient beings that wishes to provide them with the highest happiness, happiness which can last for ever. The practitioners, yogis and bodhisattvas consider this as the main goal. They practice giving temporary things as

much as possible, but their main point is to produce a higher happiness. That is the bodhisattva's main function.

QUESTION: Buddhism believes strongly about past and future lives. How is this consistent with the idea of impermanence taught by Buddha?

ANSWER: Because things are impermanent they are changeable. Because impurity is impermanent, purity is possible. The relative truth can function owing to the existence of the ultimate truth. Impurity becomes pure, imperfect becomes perfect. Change can cause conditions to switch. By directing the way our life builds and develops, we can stop negative patterns. If things were not impermanent there would be no way to change and evolve.

In terms of karma and rebirth, impermanence means that one can gain control over the stream of one's life. Our life is like a great river, never the same from one moment to the next. If we let negative sources flow into a stream it becomes dirty. Similarly, if we let bad thought, distorted perception and wrong action control our lives, we evolve into negative states and take a low rebirth. Alternatively, if we control the flowing of the stream skillfully we evolve positively, take creative rebirths and perhaps even attain the highest wisdom of Buddhahood. Then the coming and going or imperfect experiences subside and the impermanent flow of the pure perfection comes to us. When that happens the human goal has been achieved.

QUESTION: In the example of a stream of water, the content of the stream is flowing water, sometimes muddy and sometimes clear. What is the content of the stream of life?

ANSWER: Buddhism speaks of the five skandhas, one of which is mainly physical and four mental. There is also a basis which is a certain kind of propensity that is neither physical nor mental, a kind of energy. These five impure skandhas eventually become perfectly pure and then manifest as the five dhyani buddhas.

QUESTION: What is the role of prayer in Buddhism? Does Buddhism believe in prayer, and if so, since Buddhists don't believe in a God, to whom do they pray?

ANSWER: In Buddhism, prayer means some kind of wishing, an aspiration to have something good occur. In this sense a prayer is a verbal wish. The prayers of buddhas and bodhisattvas are mental and have great power. These beings have equal love and compassion for all beings. Their prayer is to benefit all sentient beings. So when we pray to them for help or guidance they have the power to influence us.

As well as these considerations, prayer produces a certain kind of buddha-result. Praying does not mean that personally you don't practice at all, that you just leave everything to Buddha. That is not the case. The buddhas have to do something and we have to do something. The buddhas cannot wash away our stains with water, like washing clothing. The root of misery and suffering cannot be extracted like a thorn from the foot. The buddhas can only show us how to pull out the thorn. The hand that pulls it out must be our own. Buddha cannot transplant his knowledge into our being. He is like a doctor who diagnoses our illnesses and prescribes the cure that we must follow through personal responsibility. If the patient does not take the medicine or follow the advice, the doctor cannot help, no matter how strong his medicines or excellent his skill. A doctor must give medicine to a patient who

will take it and follow his advice in order that his efforts will be successful. If we take the medicine of Dharma as prescribed and observe the supportive advice, we can easily cure ourselves of the diseases of ignorance, attachment and the other obstacles to liberation, and also the obstacles to omniscience. To turn to the Dharma but then not to practice it is to be like a patient burdened by a huge bag of medicine while not taking any. Therefore Buddha said, "I have provided the medicine. It is up to you to take it."

QUESTION: Sometimes in meditation one visualizes Buddha Shakyamuni. Did Shakyamuni himself visualize anything when he meditated? What should we meditate upon?

ANSWER: Shakyamuni Buddha himself meditated in the same way as we teach: on subjects such as compassion, love, the bodhimind, the four noble truths, and so forth. Sometimes he also meditated on perfect forms, like that of a buddha or a particular meditational deity. These deities symbolize perfect inner qualities, and through meditation on them one is brought into proximity with the symbolized qualities. Both deity meditation and ordinary simple meditations tame the scattered, uncontrolled, elephant-like mind. The wild, roaming mind must be calmed in order to enter higher spiritual practices. Therefore, in the beginning one tries to stabilize the mind by focusing it on a particular subject. This is shamatha meditation. The main aim of this type of meditation is to keep the mind focused on one point without any wavering or fatigue, abiding in perfect clarity and peace for as long as one wishes without any effort.

As for the object to be visualized in this type of meditation, there are many choices: a piece of a lamp, a statue, an abstract object, and so forth. Since the form of an enlightened being has many symbolic values and shares the nature of the goal we hope to accomplish, visualizing such an object has many advantages. But it is not mandatory; we can choose anything else. The main thing is to focus the mind on the object and not allow it to waver. Eventually one can meditate clearly and peacefully as long as one wishes, being able to remain absorbed for days at a time. This is the attainment of samatha. When one has this mental instrument, all other meditation becomes far more successful.

At first when one tries this kind of practice one discovers one's mind to be like a wild elephant, constantly running here and there, never able to focus fully on or totally engage in anything. Then little by little, through practice and exercise, it becomes calm. Even concentrating on a simple object like breathing in and out while counting will demonstrate the wildness of the mind and show the calming effects of meditation.

Colophon:
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An Outline of the Path to Enlightenment

by Nick Ribush

The Buddha taught so that beings would be happy and satisfied. Having attained the ultimate happiness of enlightenment himself, out of love and compassion for each sentient being he wanted to share his experience with them all. But he could not transplant his realizations into the minds of others, remove their suffering by hand or wash away their ignorance with water—he could only teach them to develop their minds for themselves, as he had done. Thus he showed the path to enlightenment.

The nature of the mind

Beings with mind are two: buddhas and sentient beings. Buddhas were once sentient beings, but through completing the practice of *Dharma* they fully purified their minds of both gross and subtle obscurations and attained enlightenment, or buddhahood.

Sentient beings are also two: those beyond cyclic existence *(samsara)* and those within. Those beyond cyclic existence *(arhants)* have purified their minds of the gross obscurations but not the subtle. Samsaric sentient beings are suffering from both levels of obscuration and are under the control of the disturbing negative minds (delusions) and their actions *(karma)*.

The mind, or stream of consciousness, is formless—it has no shape or color. It is impermanent, that is changing from moment to moment. All impermanent phenomena are the products of causes, thus so is the mind—it does not arise from nothing. Furthermore, since effects must be similar in nature to their principal causes, the principal cause of the mind must also be formless and not some material substance such as the brain.

The mind proceeds from a previous state of mind; each thought moment is preceded by a prior thought moment and there has never been a first. Moreover, each mind comes from its own previous continuity and not from another mind such as some "cosmic consciousness" or the minds of one's parents. Hence, each individual's mind is beginningless. And just as physical energy never goes out of existence, disappearing into nothingness, so too does mental energy continue forever; only its state changes.

How is it possible to attain enlightenment?

The mind is different from empty space, which is also formless, in that it has clear light nature and the ability to perceive objects. Our minds are like mirrors smeared with filth—our minds' clear light nature is polluted by the delusions. However, just as the filth is not inextricably mixed with the potentially

pure, clear mirror beneath, similarly the delusions are not one with the mind. An appropriate method such as washing with soap and water will clean the mirror; the right way to purify the mind of the delusions and their impressions, the subtle obscurations, is to practice Dharma. This results in the ultimate happiness of enlightenment and, since the minds of all sentient beings have clear light nature, all have the potential to become buddhas. The difficulty lies in finding the opportunity and the interest to practice Dharma.

This precious human rebirth

Even if we have the opportunity and the interest, we have to be taught to practice. Finding a perfectly qualified teacher is the most important thing in life, and once we have found this teacher we must follow him or her correctly—this is the root of the path to enlightenment.

Sentient beings in cyclic existence are of six types: those in the three lower realms—hell *(narak)* beings, hungry ghosts *(pretas)* and animals—and those in the three upper realms—humans, "non-gods" *(asuras)* and gods *(suras)*. The sentient beings in the three lower realms cannot practice Dharma because they are oppressed by the heavy sufferings of ignorance, deprivation and pain. In the three upper realms, only humans can hope to practice Dharma—the suras and asuras are too distracted by enjoying high sense pleasures or squabbling over them.

Even amongst human beings it is extremely difficult to find the freedom and circumstances to practice perfectly. Most are born at a time or in a place where there are neither teachers nor teachings. Even when born at an opportune time or place there will be either personal or environmental hindrances to practice. If, upon reflection, we find ourselves with the perfect chance, we should rejoice and enthusiastically make the most of our precious opportunity.

As Dharma practitioners, the least we can do is strive for the happiness of future lives, that is rebirth in the upper realms. If we are wiser we shall try to attain the everlasting bliss of nirvana, liberation from the whole of cyclic existence. And the wisest amongst us will realize that we have a chance to reach the ultimate goal of enlightenment for the benefit of all sentient beings and will set their minds on that alone. Every single moment of our precious human lives gives us the opportunity to purify eons of negative karma and take giant steps towards enlightenment by engaging in the profound practices of the Mahayana path. Wasting even a second of this life is an incalculable loss.

How do we waste our lives? By following the attachment that clings to the happiness of just this life. Practicing Dharma means renouncing this life, that is the happiness of this life.

All sentient beings want happiness and do not want suffering, but these desires alone are insufficient for them to accomplish their goals. Most sentient beings do not know that happiness and suffering are the result of both principal and secondary causes. Most recognize the secondary, or contributory, causes, such as food, liquid, cold, heat and other sense objects and environmental conditions, but consider these to be the true causes of happiness and misery. Thus most of us are outward-looking and materialistic in our pursuit of fulfillment.

However, the principal causes, the mental imprints, or karmas, are what determine whether we shall experience happiness or suffering when we come into contact with a particular sense object. Positive

karmas bring happiness; the negative bring suffering. If we want to be happy all the time, under any circumstances, we have to fill our minds with positive karma and completely eradicate all the negative. It is only through practicing Dharma that we can do all this, and practicing Dharma means first renouncing this life. On this foundation all other practices are built.

Dharma practitioners do not care whether this life is happy or not—they are far more forward-looking than that—and just through this sincere change in attitude they experience more happiness in this life than do most others. And they create much positive karma, which brings better and happier future lives, and liberation from samsara. Those who work for this life alone rarely experience contentment, create much negative karma, and suffer in many lifetimes to come.

Simply desiring a better future life is not enough: we have to create the cause of an upper rebirth consciously and with great effort, by practicing morality. And to receive a perfect human rebirth, with its eight freedoms and ten richnesses for Dharma practice, we must also practice generosity and the other perfections of patience, enthusiastic perseverance, concentration and wisdom. Finally, all these cause have to be linked to the desired result by stainless prayer. Hence it is easy to see why a perfect human rebirth is so hard to get—it is extremely difficult to create its cause. One virtually has to have a perfect human rebirth in order to create the cause for another.

Impermanence and death

We are certain to die but have no idea when it will happen. Each day could be our last yet we act as if we were going to live forever. This attitude prevents us from practicing Dharma at all or else leads us to postpone our practice or to practice sporadically or impurely. We create negative karma without a second thought, rationalizing that it can always be purified later. And when death does come, we die with much sorrow and regret, seeing clearly but too late how we lost our precious chance.

By meditating on the certainty of death, how our lives are continuously running out and how uncertain is the time of death, we shall be sure to practice Dharma and to practice right now. When we meditate further on how material possessions, worldly power, friends and family, and even our most cherished body cannot help us at the time of death, we shall be sure to practice only Dharma.

Our situation is this: we have been born human with all the conditions of a perfect human rebirth, but so far our lives have been spent almost exclusively in the creation of negative karma. If we were to die right now—and where is the guarantee that we won't?—we would definitely be reborn in one of the three lower realms, from which it is nearly impossible to escape. But ignorance prevents us from recognizing the urgency and danger of our position, and instead of seeking an object of refuge we relax and spend our time creating only more negative karma.

Refuge

When we have a problem we usually take refuge in sense objects: when we are hungry we eat food; when thirsty we drink something. These things may help solve such superficial problems temporarily, but what we really need is a solution to our deepest, most chronic problems: the ignorance, attachment and aversion so firmly rooted in our minds—the source of all suffering.

When we are seriously ill we rely on a doctor to make the diagnosis and prescribe the appropriate medication, and on a nurse to help us take it. We are now suffering from the most serious illness there is, the disease of the delusions. The supreme physician, the Buddha, has already made the diagnosis and prescribed the medicine, the Dharma; it is up to us to take it. The Sangha, the monastic community, help us put the Dharma teachings into practice.

Following karma

What does it mean to take the medicine of Dharma, to put the teachings into practice? The Buddha has shown us the nature of reality; now we must try to live in accordance with it by observing the law of karma, cause and effect. Positive karma brings happiness; negative bring suffering. Actions of body, speech and mind leave positive or negative imprints on the consciousness, which are like seeds planted in the ground. Under suitable conditions they ripen and produce their results.

The positivity or negativity of a particular action is determined primarily by the motivation behind it and its effect, not by its outward appearance. Basically, actions motivated by the desire for the happiness of just this life are negative, whereas those motivated by the desire for happiness in future lives, liberation or enlightenment are, if appropriate, positive. Since we have neither the insight to detect the true motivation for our actions nor the clairvoyance to determine their effects, the Buddha laid down a fundamental code of moral conduct for beginners to follow: the ten moralities. Actions opposite to these are negative, the ten non-virtues: three of body (killing, stealing, sexual misconduct), four of speech (lying, slandering, speaking harshly, gossiping), three of mind (covetousness, malice, wrong views). In practice, we must avoid creating negative actions and purify the imprints that those of the past have left on our mind streams. We must develop whatever positive tendencies we have and acquire those that are missing. In this way we shall gradually develop our minds to perfection and experience ever-increasing happiness as we do.

Renunciation of suffering

The happiness we experience in samsara is dangerous because we get attached to it very easily. However, while it appears to be happiness, it isn't true happiness: it never lasts and it always changes into suffering, and in fact is merely a lessening of the suffering we were just experiencing. Just as we feel aversion to obvious sufferings such as pain, illness and worry and want to be free of them, so should we renounce transient pleasures and even upper rebirths and strive single-pointedly to escape from samsara. The fully renounced mind, the first of the three principal teachings of Buddhism, is that which yearns for liberation day and night. It is the main source of energy for those who seek nirvana, and serves as the basis for their development of perfect concentration and right view of reality as they proceed towards their goal of arhantship.

Working for others

Equanimity

But it is not enough to strive simply for one's own liberation. We are the same as all other sentient

beings in wishing for all happiness and freedom from even the tiniest suffering, and it is selfish and cruel to desire and strive for everlasting bliss and perfect peace for ourselves alone. The most intelligent will see that until each and every sentient being has finally found the highest possible happiness, one's responsibility to others has not been fulfilled. Why responsibility? Because all our past, present and future happiness up to and including enlightenment depends on all other sentient beings without exception. It is our duty to repay this kindness.

The first hindrance we must overcome is our chronic habit of feeling attached to some sentient beings, averse to others and indifferent towards the rest. As our ego—the wrong conception of the way we exist—makes us feel "I" very strongly, we strive for our egoistic happiness and shy away from whatever we deem unpleasant. We associate various sense objects with these feelings, and when these objects happen to be other beings, we label them "friend," "enemy" and "stranger." As a result, we become strongly attached to and do as much as we can to help our friends, we hate and try to harm our enemies as much as possible, and avoid and ignore the vast majority of sentient beings, strangers who we feel are totally unconnected with either our happiness or our problems. Therefore, we have to train our minds to feel equanimity towards all sentient beings, to feel them all equally deserving of our efforts to help them find the happiness they seek.

Even in this life, the friend to whom we are attached and who we try to help so much has not always been our friend. Earlier on we had no idea of his (or her) existence, and as he neither helped nor hindered our pursuit of happiness we categorized him as a "stranger." When later he somehow or other gratified our ego, we began to regard him as useful, as a "friend," and thus fostered his attention by being nice to him and doing whatever we could to look good in his eyes, concealing our faults in the process. But the friendly relations between the two of us being maintained by a certain amount of effort and a good deal of deception on both sides will not last. Sooner or later one of us will do something to upset the other or will get bored with the relationship. Then the other person, who appeared so desirable, will start to become unattractive, something to be avoided. Gradually, or even suddenly, the relationship will deteriorate and we shall become "enemies." Of course, this doesn't always happen, but all of us must have had experiences like it.

Hence, the labels of friend, enemy and stranger we apply to others are very temporary and not based on some ultimate aspect of reality to be found in the other. They are projected by the ego on the basis of whether that person is useful for our own happiness, causes us problems, or does not seem to be involved one way or the other.

In some previous lives our best friends of this life have been our worst enemies. The same is true of our enemies of today—in previous lives they were parents, friends and strangers too. As these ever-changing samsaric relationships are beginningless, we can see that each sentient being has functioned as our friend, enemy and stranger, taking each role an infinite number of times. Thus all sentient beings are equal in this way, and none are more deserving of our help than others, irrespective of the tunnel vision of our present view. Furthermore, as long as we remain in samsara these relationships will continue to change. Therefore, there is no reason to be attached to our friends, who will soon become harm-giving enemies, or to hate our enemies, who are sure to become beloved friends. By fully opening our minds and seeing things in the broadest possible perspective we shall see all sentient beings as they really are—equal—and all will be attractive and dear.

Seeing all sentient beings as mother

If all sentient beings have been our enemy perhaps we should try to harm them all equally! While it may be true that, out of ignorance and anger they have all hurt us in the past, their kindness far exceeds their cruelty. By depending equally on every single sentient being, and only by this, we receive the sublime, everlasting happiness of enlightenment. Even in a worldly way has each sentient being been kind—all have been our mother.

Each sentient being has had an infinite number of rebirths, but the mother of this life has not been the mother of each of our previous lives. Usually we have not even been born together in the same realm or in the same type of body. There is no samsaric body or realm that has not been experienced by any sentient being and no time that sentient beings first began to be mother. Thus each sentient being has been our mother an infinite number of times and, constantly keeping this fact in mind, we should try to see each one as mother. Imagine that our mother had been caught in a fire and burnt beyond recognition—we know it's her but can't tell by looking; it's the same stream of consciousness, and we feel incredible compassion for her unbearable suffering. Similarly, if we have done the above analytical meditation properly, when we see insects, for example, we shall feel that they are our mother of a previous time—it is the same stream of consciousness—but having to undergo the great suffering of being trapped in such as unfortunate body. Hence love and compassion will arise whenever we see any sentient being.

A mother's kindness

Why do we easily feel love and compassion for our mother? Because our love and compassion are impure, partial. They are not directed equally at all, only towards those who help us, our "friends." And our mother is the best friend of all.

We must meditate on just how kind our mother has been. She happily underwent many difficulties to bear us; she fed us and protected us from harm when we were helpless; she taught us to speak, walk and look after ourselves; she ensured we had a good education; she provided us with the necessities and enjoyments of life. She has always put our welfare ahead of hers: who else has been so kind? The more we recollect the kindness of the mother, the greater will be our affection for her—this is natural. The more we recognize other sentient beings as mother, the greater will be our affection for them all. And the greater will be the thought of repaying their kindness.

Repaying kindness

Wanting to repay others' kindness is also a natural and positive emotion. The repayment should at least equal the kindness shown. Since we receive enlightenment from each and every mother sentient being, it is our responsibility to see that each also receives it.

Cherishing others

The greatest hindrance to enlightenment is the self-cherishing mind, which puts one's own happiness

ahead of everybody else's and causes us to act accordingly. Every personal problem we have ever experienced has come from this; so too has every interpersonal problem, from the smallest argument among children to wars between nations. The more we think about it the more we shall see that the self-cherishing mind is the most dangerous phenomenon in existence. Yet it can be destroyed and replaced by the mind that cherishes others, putting oneself last of all. This is the greatest mind we can generate—from it arises the state of enlightenment. We must cultivate the mind that cherishes others.

From seeing that no sentient being, ourselves included, wants or deserves happiness and freedom from suffering more than any other, a feeling of equality arises. As the desire for these ends is the same, why should I act as if my happiness were more important than anybody else's? There can be no logical justification for such an attitude. Moreover, if all suffering—from the smallest to the greatest—arises from the self-cherishing mind, surely I should wait not a moment longer to destroy it completely. Thinking like this, we engage in the practice of exchanging self for others.

Exchanging self for others is not a physical practice. It means that so far, since beginningless time, we have been going around harboring the thought deep in our hearts, "My happiness is the most important thing there is." It may not be conscious, but its presence is reflected in our actions. So now, instead of putting ourselves first we put ourselves last: "My happiness is the least important of all." Through this we can destroy the self-cherishing mind.

The practice of taking and giving

We also practice the meditation of taking the suffering of others upon ourselves and giving them all happiness. Visualizing all sentient beings in the three realms undergoing their respective sufferings, we inhale all those sufferings in the form of black smoke, which smashes the self-cherishing conception at our hearts. When we exhale we send out pure white light, which reaches all sentient beings, bringing them everything they want and need, temporally and spiritually—all the realizations of the path, from devotion to the spiritual master to enlightenment. We visualize all sentient beings in the aspect of buddhas.

Arising from this meditation we may feel it was of no use—all the sentient beings are still suffering, just as they were when we started it. But each time we do this meditation we damage our self-cherishing mind and take a giant step towards enlightenment.

Generating bodhichitta

We should wish sincerely and pray from the bottom of our hearts: "May all sentient beings be free from all suffering and ignorance and find the perfect bliss of enlightenment." Feeling it our responsibility to see them there, we should vow to bring about each sentient being's enlightenment ourselves, and understand what we must do to fulfill this obligation. In our present condition we can't even guarantee ourselves temporal happiness—how can we hope to bring others to perfect bliss? Only a buddha can lead others to buddhahood, therefore, each of us must reach that state in order to help others get there. Thus we determine: "For the sole purpose of enlightening all sentient beings I shall reach enlightenment myself." When this thought becomes a realization underlying our every action it is called *bodhichitta*.

Bodhichitta is the most precious mind we can strive for—it is the principal cause of enlightenment. It is the most virtuous mind—with bodhichitta we can obliterate vast accumulations of negative karma and create huge amounts of merit. It is the most beneficial mind—when we have bodhichitta, whatever we do helps all other sentient beings in the highest way, and when through it we have attained enlightenment, we work as buddhas for the enlightenment of all sentient beings. To fulfil our vow of enlightening all sentient beings we must first receive bodhichitta, by training our mind in all the preceding meditations, starting from devotion to the spiritual master.

To help us in this we take the sixty-four bodhisattva vows from a fully qualified teacher and train ourselves in the six perfections of charity, morality, patience, enthusiastic perseverance, concentration and wisdom.

Emptiness: the right view of reality

Traditional texts on the graduated path to enlightenment will deal in some detail with the latter two perfections, but much of this is too technical for this paper. On the prerequisite basis of perfect moral conduct—impeccable observation of the law of karma—we develop single-pointed concentration. Having gained conceptual insight into emptiness, the ultimate nature of all phenomena, we use our perfect concentration to gain direct, non-conceptual insight into the ultimate nature of our own minds. With this achieved, we gradually develop insight into the nature of all other phenomena.

Practicing all the analytical meditations of the path in their correct sequence brings us the three major realizations of the fully renounced mind, bodhichitta and right view, the wisdom realizing emptiness. Thus we are qualified to enter the quick path to enlightenment, the *Vajrayana*.

Tantra: the highest path

There are two ways to reach enlightenment, one slow, the other quick. By practicing the *Paramitayana*, the perfection vehicle, one may take three countless great eons to attain the goal. Lifetime after lifetime the bodhisattvas travelling this path take rebirth in samsara for the benefit of all sentient beings, gradually approaching buddhahood through development of the six perfections and other practices. We see some examples of this in stories of Shakyamuni Buddha's previous lives (the *Jataka Tales*).

But for other bodhisattvas this is too slow. Those who are filled with compassion for the suffering of other sentient beings, who feel unbearable at the thought of others suffering for even a second longer, who feel other sentient beings' suffering as their own, as if they themselves had been dipped into boiling water, who want to put an immediate end to samsara, who are fully qualified physically and mentally, have been given the supreme path of tantra by the Buddha.

Since this tantric path to enlightenment is the quickest, it is also the most difficult to follow. The consequences of mistakes made by tantric practitioners are far more serious than those made by followers of lower paths. Thus few beings have the ability or opportunity to enter this path.

As ever, the most important thing is to have a fully qualified spiritual master. Having established a master-disciple relationship, the most important thing is to follow the master correctly. He will give his

students initiations, tantric vows and teachings on the two stages of tantra, the development and the completion stages. Under his guidance, the disciple will practice the special meditations, and for the rare and most fortunate few it is possible to gain enlightenment in this very life, that is entering and completing the path in a single lifetime.

This, in brief, is an outline of the path to enlightenment, as explained by most of the Tibetan schools of Buddhism. They vary in their modes of presentation and in the study and meditation techniques employed, but their similarities are much greater than their differences. They all follow the graduated path to enlightenment.

Colophon:
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