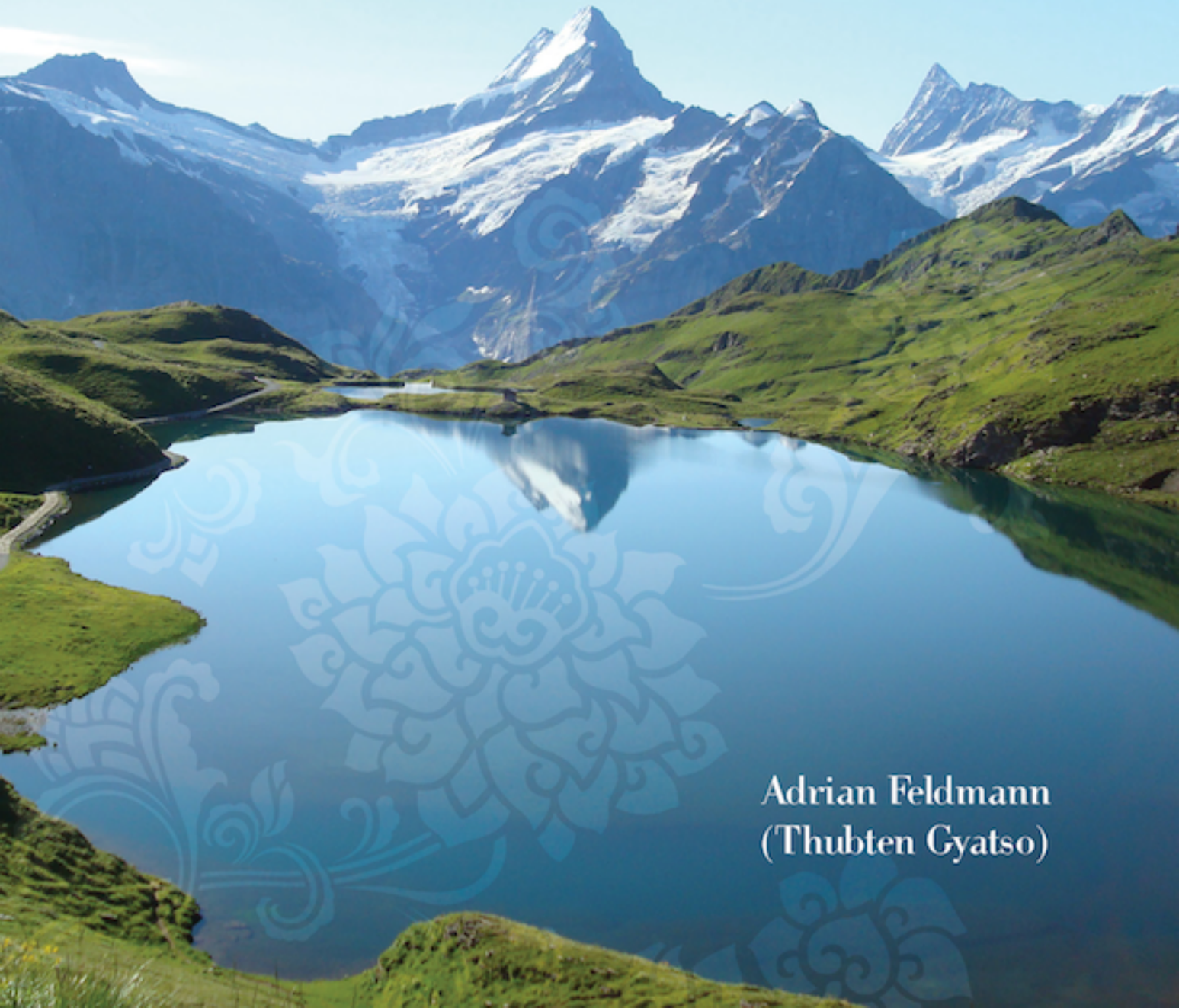
The Perfect Mirror

Reflections on Truth and Illusion



Adrian Feldmann
(Thubten Gyatso)

THE PERFECT MIRROR

Reflections on Truth and Illusion

Venerable Thubten Gyatso

(Adrian Feldmann)

Lama Yeshe Wisdom Archive • Boston
LamaYeshe.com

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First published 2003 by Thomas C. Lothian Pty Ltd
Ebook published 2015 by Lama Yeshe Wisdom Archive

Cover designed by Kennedy Koh
Double dorje drawing courtesy Robert Beers

Ebook ISBN 978-1-891868-62-7
PM-2015-v4

Lama Yeshe Wisdom Archive

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PREFACE TO THE FIRST EDITION

In the sixteenth century, Mongolian soldiers in China captured a Tibetan lama of the Gelug tradition. Impressed by his bearing, the soldiers took this monk to their king, Altan Khan. The Mongol ruler was similarly impressed and demanded that the monk's teacher, Sonam Gyatso, appear before him. The implication behind this request was that if he did not come, Tibet would be invaded. And so, in 1578, Sonam Gyatso met with Altan Khan and became his teacher. The Khan declared that his kingdom would embrace Buddhism, and many of his feared warriors laid down their weapons to become Buddhist monks.

The Mongol king Altan Khan gave Sonam Gyatso the title Dalai Lama, meaning "Ocean of Wisdom." As Sonam Gyatso was the third recognised reincarnation of a disciple of the great Lama Tsongkhapa, founder of the Gelug tradition, he was called the Third Dalai Lama. (The title "Dalai" was bestowed posthumously upon his two predecessors).

The Mongols did not have Buddhism forced upon them. Their unprecedented military success had given their rulers and warriors the power and wealth to pursue whatever material aims they wished; it was the failure of such success to bring the happiness they sought that opened their minds to the fundamental truths of Buddhist teachings. The phenomenal growth of interest in Buddhism occurring in developed countries today can be explained in a similar way. Dissatisfaction and disillusionment arising from the failure of our even greater opportunity to indulge in pleasure has driven many to seek the real causes of happiness and unhappiness. For many people, Buddhism provides the answers.

The speed with which the Mongols adopted Tibetan Buddhism is as astonishing as their rapid conquest of much of the known world in previous centuries. They became expert not only in the study and practice of Buddhism but also in related fields such as artistic expression. As a result, the collective Mongolian psyche became blessed with the honourable qualities of faith in the Buddha and his teachings, compassion, and wisdom. Many individuals attained the highest realisations of the Buddhist path, and Mongolia was able to preserve the teachings for future generations.

Early in the twentieth century, the face of Mongolia was changed forever. Russian communists took control of the country, destroyed all but five of over seven hundred Buddhist temples, and massacred the monks in huge numbers. "Yellow Cliff," a suburb of Ulaan Baatar, received its name not from any geological feature, but from the pile of saffron robes belonging to the monks who had been slaughtered and buried in mass graves. Buddhist teachings and practice were forbidden, and three generations of Mongolians were separated from their own culture and heritage.

Before coming to Mongolia in 1999, I visited one of my teachers, a revered Tibetan lama, to make an offering and request his blessing for my work of teaching Buddhism in Mongolia. The lama said, "It is I who should be making an offering to you. The Mongolian people have performed an immeasurable service to the world by preserving the precious teachings on how to cultivate and practise universal compassion. Now they are in need and it is wonderful that you can help repay their kindness."

For me, Mongolia was an unknown country. I had few preconceptions to either influence my experience of the country or be sources of disillusionment. I had heard stories of how

Christian evangelists were attempting to eliminate the last vestiges of Buddhism. Indeed, attempts are clearly being made by some Christian groups to convert the population to their own belief systems, but that alone I do not perceive to be a problem. The problem I have observed is that proper Buddhist education within the monasteries and among the laypeople has yet to be revived. The majority of Mongolian people are Buddhist by faith, but they have scant knowledge to support their faith, and therefore a limited ability to counter the anti-Buddhist arguments and misinformation spread by Christian missionaries.

I feel confident that, provided the Buddhists remain cohesive and do not break into rival sects, the Mongolian people can revive their Buddhist heritage and offer to the world a region of peace and tolerance. It is important to understand that the Buddhist path is not a social doctrine. The teachings were given for individuals. They indicate the path to be followed by those who wish to attain their full potential of Buddhahood. This path begins with living in the pure morality of not harming others, through which one creates the cause for birth in places suitable for continuing one's practice. Within the state of perfect concentration, one eventually sees reality; this wisdom extinguishes ignorance, the cause of uncontrolled rebirth and the root of all suffering. The final aspect of the path is the generation of pure altruism and the attainment of Buddhahood, through which one can manifest anywhere within the six realms of birth to guide others on the same path.

True peace in any society depends upon how many individuals within that society are following the path of eradication of ignorance, anger, and attachment, and cultivation of wisdom and loving-kindness. The terrible state of the world today is the result of our following the paths of greed, cultural arrogance, intolerance, and hatred. Instead of following the world, I firmly believe that Mongolia can lead the world by reviving its Buddhist heritage.

My teacher, Lama Thubten Zopa Rinpoche, asked me to come to Mongolia to teach at a Buddhist centre for laypeople that he was about to open. I began by giving talks at the new monastery established by the eminent Bakula Rinpoche of Ladakh, a lama who was the first Indian Ambassador to Mongolia after political and religious freedom was gained by the Mongolian people in 1989. My excellent assistant and interpreter, Gunjiimaa, translated my talks into Mongolian. At the same time, I was giving weekly talks and meditations in English to a group of expatriates and English-speaking Mongolians at my apartment. Michael Kohn, the sub-editor of the Mongol Messenger, an English-language newspaper, attended some of these evenings and asked me to write regular articles for his newspaper. The essays in this book are revisions of the original articles published in the Mongol Messenger during the years 2000 and 2001.

The articles are my attempt to express clearly the teachings of Buddha from my personal experience and understanding. I chose subjects at random, but, collectively, the essays now contain most of the essential teachings of Buddha and are presented in the same sequence in which they were first written. As each article was meant to stand alone, some repetition within the collection has been unavoidable, but it serves to emphasise the important points.

Many Mongolians stopped me in the street to thank me for the articles published in English, so I was moved to ask Gunjiimaa to translate them into Mongolian, and we published the collection as a free booklet. I have been told that this booklet is one of the first books on

Buddhist teachings written in modern Mongolian. The scriptures that remain from the past are in Tibetan and classical Mongolian that most people cannot understand.

I would like to thank all those who have encouraged me to revise the articles for this first publication as a collection in English.

Adrian Feldmann (Thubten Gyatso)
January 2003

PREFACE TO SECOND EDITION

In September 2008 I emerged from three-years of total isolation from the world and discovered that my publishing company had wound up most of its affairs and my two books that they had published were out of print. The positive feedback I have received regarding both books has convinced me to re-publish them, and I have decided to do so in a revised form. I returned to Mongolia in March 2009 and have done most of the revision of The Perfect Mirror here.

These essays are my thoughts on how we can acquire wisdom and make the best of our lives by understanding our experiences in the light of the Dharma. In other words, how we can understand and improve our lives through reflections in a perfect mirror.

Adrian Feldmann
Ulaan Baatar, August 2009

COMPASSION

Compassion is a virtuous quality admired and advocated by all great religions. It includes having sympathy for the misfortune and suffering of others, as well as the intention to help them. Cultivating the mind of compassion is one of the two foundations of the Buddhist lifestyle; the other is attaining the wisdom seeing reality that opposes the fundamental cause of our problems. By seeing through the illusory nature of our self-image, this wisdom cuts the root of disturbing emotions and brings everlasting peace.

Confusion about our self-identity leads to repeated birth within the "wheel of life." According to Buddha's teachings, virtuous actions lead to rebirth as a human or a divine being in a realm of great pleasure, whereas non-virtuous actions lead to birth as an animal, a denizen of hell, or a starving spirit in a barren land. Each of these birth states is temporary; we soon die and are reborn in another place according to our actions. Nowhere in this wheel is there freedom from confusion about reality and the resultant suffering; therefore all beings born within this wheel are objects of compassion.

Complete cessation of suffering only occurs when we break the chain that binds us to our wheel of life. This is not a state of annihilation, nor is it abandoning others. As a Buddha, we can be in this world and yet not of this world, with freedom to participate in ordinary life without being harmed by its problems. How often have we prayed for such a situation?

Although we all have some kindness in our hearts, our compassion is usually partial and not very powerful. We like some people and we dislike others; even for those we like, our friendship has its limits. Upon observing the bickering, competitiveness, jealousy, anger, and so on among his Western students, my first teacher, Lama Thubten Yeshe, said, "You people amaze me: it seems that you have more compassion for animals than you have for each other."

I still struggle with this problem: the difficulty in having compassion or concern for the welfare of those who are hostile towards me, or whose attitudes oppose my own values. We all have a world-view based upon the morality of the society in which we grew up, and moulded into shape by our personal experiences and adopted beliefs. Naturally, we think our own values are best, otherwise we would not hold them. Due to our innate self-centredness, however, our views are contaminated by selfishness, which prevents our seeing or even acknowledging the views of others. This makes us resistant to change. We become blinded to alternative approaches, our thinking becomes ossified, we turn into conservative bigots, and compassion is left far behind.

As much as I try not to be, in my heart I see that I am a conservative bigot. Maybe not totally ossified, there is still a chance for me to emulate Lama Yeshe, who had tremendous flexibility in being able to observe and respect the attitudes of others and communicate with them at their own level. This may sound like, and could well be, a condescending attitude; but whether it is or is not condescending depends upon the sincerity of one's compassion and its supporting wisdom.

Real freedom from self-centredness is the ability to choose any role in life that is useful for others, and to write our own script. In this way, we can enjoy our lives and help others without making the mistake of being too serious. Once we have fixed attitudes about right and wrong we lose flexibility and feel obliged to defend our beliefs and attack opposing ideas and those who hold them; then we lose our ability to communicate with others. What is important is not that we should avoid seeing things as right or wrong; it is that people are more important than principles, and people can change whereas principles cannot.

It is a good thing to give temporary relief by providing food, shelter, and medicine with compassion, but this is not enough. To really help others, we need to show them how to recognise and overcome the root cause of their suffering, their self-centred ignorance. This requires us to overcome our own self-centred ignorance. Then, to inspire people to abandon their habitual self-destructive behaviour, we must be able to communicate with them; and to communicate with them, we must meet them at their own level. As long as we retain awareness that we are like actors on the stage of life, we can speak meaningfully without worrying about loyalty or fearing that we will betray our own principles. Compassion supported by wisdom is a complete and pure purpose for living, an approach to life that nobody can deny. Our compassion brings relief and happiness to others; at the same time, the subjective experience of giving love and compassion brings sublime happiness and peace for oneself.

You may still ask, "Why should we have compassion for very harmful beings? Shouldn't we rejoice in their suffering as being their just reward?" The answer is an emphatic "no." Whether suffering is viewed as God's punishment or as the ripening of bad karma, we must have compassion for evil people because all beings are exactly the same as ourselves in that they are simply trying to be happy and avoid suffering. Hatred and wishing pain and revenge upon others is, in the words of my computer, a "fatal error." Anger never creates peace and only compounds our problems. In our confusion about the real causes of happiness and unhappiness, we all make mistakes. Just as we forgive the mistakes of our children and still love them, so too should we forgive the mistakes of others and keep on loving them. This does not mean we cannot resist or punish evil; resistance and even punishment can be performed with a compassionate mind.

Why should we love everybody else? In past lives we have had every relationship with every living being many times. All others have been infinitely kind to us in the past, and it is only natural to love others because all beings are our own family.

I received these words from Lama Yeshe, a consummate practitioner of compassion, and I repeat them to you. Nevertheless, I still struggle with my own self-centred attitude, which restricts my ability to practise compassion. It is clear, however, that bad habits cannot be changed overnight. And so I indulge in some compassion for myself.

THE WARM HEART

When old friends meet and exchange stories of their lives they delight in each other's tales of happiness and commiserate over news of misfortune. Delight in the happiness of others, together with its associated feeling of warmth in the heart, is the meaning of love. Heart-warming love, as described here, is the basis of compassion because, when aware of unhappiness in the minds of those we love, we gain the compassionate wish to relieve them of their troubles. Buddhist practice holds loving-kindness, the combination of love and compassion, as the most supreme and mature mental attainment. Loving-kindness opposes self-centredness, the source of all troubles, and so loving-kindness is the most precious thing in the universe.

Loving-kindness is an essential component of life. Just as mothers nourish their babies' bodies with milk, they nourish their babies' minds with the warmth of loving-kindness. Medical science recognises that babies deprived of loving attention become emotionally retarded, and even the development of their nervous system is impaired. It is not only babies that are affected in such a way. Throughout our lives we all depend upon loving-kindness for our happiness and our mental and physical security. Even though we are weaned from our mother's breast, we are not weaned from her heart. This is why we need, and sometimes neurotically demand, a maternal substitute in the form of loving kindness from our partners or friends. We need not be like this. Truly mature people are those who have freed themselves from the need for mother's love by understanding that the best happiness in life is that of giving love, and live accordingly. The measure of perfect love is to patiently guide our partners and friends beyond their addiction to being loved. Then they can discover the liberated bliss of making others happy without requiring something in return.

From a deeper point of view, loving-kindness is the source of all happiness in the world because it establishes the inner conditions required for the experience of happiness. To enjoy any pleasure, apart from the pleasant object itself, we need the internal conditions of a positive state of mind and a positive karmic potential. This potential is the result of a non-harmful action we have performed in the past; and to have behaved in that non-harmful manner, we need to have been inspired to do so by a benevolent guide, such as a Christ or a Buddha. Such beings guide others towards positive behaviour through their loving-kindness. They have no other purpose.

In the mid-1970s, before I became a Buddhist, my interest in Tibetan medicine took me to northern India where I met Dr Drolma, a Tibetan woman practising traditional medicine at Dharamsala. There, in the foothills of the Himalayas, His Holiness the Dalai Lama lived with a community of Tibetan refugees, and the thriving Tibetan Medical Centre functioned both

as a teaching institution and as a medical clinic. Dr Drolma accepted my request to accompany her as an observer and, when she was with her patients, I could not help but compare her office with the outpatients department at the hospital in Australia where I had recently worked. There was no comparison. Her diagnostic method of simply reading the pulse and observing the bubbles in urine was one thing, but the great difference was in her relationship with her patients. She loved them and they loved her. The clinic was filled with the warmth of loving-kindness, so different to the impersonal atmosphere in my outpatients department where people were more often seen as diseases rather than as human beings. Whatever the merits of her diagnostic method and her fascinating herbal remedies, I became convinced that the renowned therapeutic efficacy of Dr Drolma was due to the power of her loving-kindness.

Despite my arrogant attitude of superiority in being a practitioner of Western medicine, Dr Drolma agreed to teach me about Tibetan medicine. She explained the method of pulse diagnosis and urinalysis, but did not say a word about loving-kindness — this she simply demonstrated. Later, I was to study Tibetan medicine in more detail, and I found the chapter on ethics in the medical text to be only about loving-kindness. In medical school, our lectures on ethics had been how to avoid being sued in court; there was nothing about loving-kindness.

A Buddha is a person who has overcome all mental obstacles to having pure, unconditional loving-kindness, and has the wisdom and power to effortlessly put loving-kindness into action. The obstacles overcome by a Buddha are derivations of the innate, mistaken idea of self that manifests as disturbing emotions such as selfishness, anger, desire, and pride. The wisdom that understands how the self does not exist as we think it does is the antidote to these obstacles. Thus the inner attainments of wisdom and loving-kindness are the actual objects of Buddhist worship and aspiration. Just as Christians use a crucifix as an inspiring symbol of love and self-sacrifice for others, Buddhists use statues as symbols to help train their minds in wisdom and compassion. The magnificent 26-metre statue of Avalokiteshvara, the Compassionate Buddha, here in Ulaan Baatar is such a symbol. 'self-sacrifice" in Buddhism refers not to the person who exists, but the person we mistakenly believe ourselves to be. The meaning of self-sacrifice is, in fact, the destruction of an illusion.

In Avalokiteshvara's right hand is a vase containing the elixir of life: loving-kindness. In his left hand is a perfect mirror that reflects things as they are without distortion, symbolising the wisdom seeing reality. These two ideals are also contained in his mantra: OM MANI PADME HUM. The OM represents all the qualities of Buddhahood; MANI is the jewel of loving-kindness; and PADME is the lotus flower of wisdom. HUM symbolises the unification of wisdom and compassion in the one state of mind. When people recite this mantra, they should be thinking, "I shall attain Buddhahood, the jewel of loving-kindness in the lotus of wisdom."

Buddhists worship the inner attainment of wisdom and compassion; they are not idol-worshippers in the sense of those who seek protection and happiness from material objects such as a golden calf or a fat bank balance. Accusations that Buddhism is a manifestation of such human folly are the height of ignorance and prejudice. Buddha taught the truth of wisdom and compassion as a universal reality; this truth is not the sole possession of Buddhism or any other religion.

It is so sad that the Mongolian people today are in danger of losing their magnificent Buddhist heritage. Instead of the elixir of life in Avalokiteshvara's right hand, many see a bottle of Russian vodka.

IN THE BEGINNING

In 1974, together with two hundred other young travellers, I spent a month at a small monastery on a hilltop overlooking Kathmandu valley, listening to lamas explain Tibetan Buddhism. With my medical background I easily accepted the psychological aspect of the teachings, but my scientific mind found it difficult to accommodate the concepts of karma and reincarnation. It took another nine months of deep reflection to become convinced of the validity of these two concepts. In this essay I shall try to present a clear picture of the Buddhist world-view.

The Buddhist contribution to the eternal debate about how the universe began is simple: there was no beginning. Before this world there was life on other worlds, before this universe there was life in other universes. Life itself has two forms: the thinking and feeling world of animals and humans, and non-sentient life, the world of plants, fungi, bacteria, and so on. These two forms of life exist in a relationship of mutual interdependence, with the dominant form being sentient life because consciousness bears karma, the creative force of the universe.

Our bodies, which are dependent upon our genes and the food we eat, are temporary appearances that will soon be reduced to their component parts. Buddhism says that every atom is a continuum of ever-changing physical energy states that cannot arise from nothing. The energy of a present atom necessarily arises from a prior atom or energy state, and so on, back into a beginningless past. Some believe there was a beginning when matter arose from nothing. Faith in this idea is the other extreme of the belief that, for no apparent reason, everything was created by an omnipotent deity. Buddhism rejects both concepts.

As with our bodies, our minds are also ever-changing continuums. Their substance, however, is not material — it is simply the phenomenon of awareness, or consciousness, itself. The present moment of consciousness arises as a continuity of the previous moment and, in turn, gives rise to the future moment of consciousness. The three moments of consciousness are different, but belong to the same continuum. Thus, at any moment in time, the mind is part of a stream of awareness, and it exists in dependence upon three things: the prior moment of consciousness, a sense organ, and the object of awareness. We have five types of sensory awareness — seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting and touching — and a sixth awareness is called mental consciousness. Each of these six types of awareness is variously associated with feelings of happiness and unhappiness; emotions such as love, hate, patience, anger, desire, generosity, and so on are associated with the mental consciousness. If we look back to our first moment of awareness in this life, as our mental continuum cannot have been created by the nervous system, it cannot have broken off from our parents'

minds, and it cannot have come from nothing, then it must have come from a previous life. Looking back even further, there can be no conclusion other than the realisation that our minds have a beginningless past.

Mental consciousness mostly functions at the level of thought, or conceptualisation. Thoughts are awareness of external or abstract things that are comprehended through the appearance of a mental image of the object. Thoughts always have an element of mistake in that they confuse the mental image of the object with the object itself. Such confusion is only eliminated when mental consciousness directly observes its object without the intermediary of a mental image. Direct mental awareness needs to be cultivated in meditation, and focussing this awareness upon the ultimate reality of all things, emptiness of inherent existence, is one of the two main aspects of the Buddhist path. The other main aspect is the generation of compassion for every sentient being.

Every sentient being has a unique stream of consciousness that cannot be divided into separate streams, nor can different streams of consciousness be merged into one. A Buddha is a living being with a mind, but a Buddha is not a sentient being because the term is only used for those whose minds are contaminated by ignorance. Just as life is beginningless, there was never a first Buddha. By following the teachings of previous Buddhas, a vast number of sentient beings have attained buddhahood, divesting themselves of all impairments to perfect wisdom and training in unlimited compassion. In achieving their natural potential of buddhahood, they do not abandon the world. As long as suffering remains, they will always be there to guide sentient beings towards safety, provided they are prepared and able to listen.

Although there was no original creator, our present world and its inhabitants must still have a cause. So what is the cause of the world? A famous Buddhist text begins its chapter on karma with the statement, "This multifarious world of sentient beings and their environment arose from the karma of sentient beings."

The literal meaning of karma is action. Specifically, karma refers to the intention or purpose behind our actions. Behind every act of doing, saying, and thinking, there is an intention. Apart from the direct effect of our every action on the external world, there is also an internal effect: the establishment of an energy potential on our mental continuum. This potential, or karmic imprint, has the capacity to connect our mind-stream in the future with an experience similar to the intended action we have just performed. It does so by producing an "instinctive" intention or impulse that moves our mind towards a pleasant or an unpleasant situation. Thus our present experiences in life are reflections of our past behaviour in this and previous lives. Actions motivated by harmful attitudes create potentials for unpleasant experiences, and actions motivated by benevolent attitudes create potentials for pleasant experiences.

Unlike the body, the mental continuum survives death. Supported by a subtle form of physical energy, it passes through a dream-like intermediate state into a future body, carrying with it a great collection of karmic potentials from past lives, as well as the seeds of all our positive and negative mental qualities. Driven by desire for pleasure and aversion to pain, but unaware of the underlying causes of pleasure and pain, sentient beings are born again and again within six realms of existence that are reflections of their own minds. When the

present life is finishing, unsatisfied desire for pleasure ripens the karmic potential that irresistibly moves our mind towards a new life. Beings born in hell or as hungry spirits have bodies with an apparent ability to experience physical pleasure, but, because they have harmed others in selfish pursuit of pleasure in past lives, their karma leads them only towards intolerable suffering. Animals have a better opportunity to experience pleasure, but with their limited intellectual capacity they are unable to avoid being eaten by predators or exploited by humans.

The great advantage of being born with a human body is that the human brain provides the best support for mind to manifest its potential intelligence. We can use our intelligence to seek pleasure and avoid pain, but such benefits are temporary and there is danger of creating negative karma through desire and anger and increasing our self-centred ignorance. It is far better to use our intelligence to increase our wisdom by investigating the actual cause of suffering – karma and disturbing emotions – and by investigating the ultimate nature of all things, emptiness. Through wisdom we will be able to abandon forever the causes for suffering rebirth, and by renouncing desire and cultivating morality and compassion we will be able to help others while experiencing continual bliss. Beings born as demigods or as divine beings in heavens have even greater opportunities to enjoy physical and mental pleasure, but such indulgence numbs their intellects and they have little incentive to renounce desire. We have all been born countless times in every level of the six realms, yet we are still dissatisfied, still chasing the illusion of perfect happiness and freedom within mundane life.

Through the perfection of wisdom and compassion we can eliminate the causes for rebirth – karma and disturbing emotions – that arise from ignorance, and attain buddhahood. Thus, although there was no beginning, there can be an end to our personal wheel of life.

THE MIND

Our mind is something that we change, keep things in, and sometimes go out of. But what is our mind? Mind cannot be discussed unless it is defined. If we ask ten psychiatrists to define mind we will probably get ten different answers. My dictionary defines mind as "the ability to think, feel emotions, and be aware of things." If we ask our psychiatrist friends what are thoughts, emotions, and awareness, they will probably start talking about the electro-chemical activity of neurones in the brain. Most people do not distinguish between the mind and the functional activity of the brain and nervous system.

According to Buddhism, mind and body are mutually dependent but different entities. The "substance" of mind has nothing to do with atoms and molecules: it is the phenomenon of awareness itself. Thoughts, emotions, and awareness are functions of mind. We have six types of awareness: the five sensory consciousnesses and mental consciousness. The latter includes our capacities to think and to know things intuitively. Mental consciousness thinks about sensory experiences and initiates behaviour directed towards gaining the maximum amount of sensory pleasure and minimum discomfort in life.

Buddhism defines mind as that which has mere clarity and awareness. "Mere" excludes the need for any significant strength of comprehension. Thus deep sleep is a state of mind. "Mere" also excludes an independent, self-reliant "me" or "mind" within the head that is an agent controlling the experience, a specific entity or substance that is being aware, feeling emotions, or doing the thinking. Like all things, mind is only nominally existent; it is simply established to exist by giving the name "mind" to the combination of clarity and awareness. If we check up, neither clarity nor awareness, nor their combination, is mind itself.

In general, "clarity" refers to the non-physical nature of mind, its lack of colour, shape, or material dimension. At a deeper level, clarity is that function of mind which gives rise to appearances or images of the things that are known, like a mirror gives rise to reflected images of objects.

"Awareness," or knowing, is the function of mind. Mind knows its object, and it also knows itself in the sense that we are aware of our subjective experience of things. A mirror may reflect things, but it does not know what it is reflecting. A computer may calculate things, but it does not know what it is calculating. Can a computer ever be made to think? His Holiness the Dalai Lama answered that question by saying, "Perhaps, if they ever make a computer that is a suitable support for consciousness."

His Holiness was implying that a computer cannot create consciousness, and could only have the capacity to know things if a pre-existing mind could take residence within it. Similarly, our body cannot have created our mind because awareness is not a material phenomenon. Present awareness can only arise as a continuity of past awareness, therefore, our mind must be a continuum of awareness that existed prior to our body and only took residence within it when there was a suitable support for consciousness — a fertilised egg in our mother's womb.

"But," say the scientists, "Mind is a product of evolution."

"No," say the Buddhists, "Evolution is a product of mind."

Prior to the condensation of our world from a swirling mass of gas, our minds inhabited subtle bodies in an ethereal realm of mental happiness. As our karma for such bliss began to wane, more base desire for physical pleasures arose as a result of mental tendencies from past lives. Our collective karma for earthly existence interacted with the activity of atoms and molecules and resulted in the evolution of primitive organisms, some of which became suitable supports for consciousness. After dying in the ethereal realm, our minds came to inhabit these gross bodies, which, under the influence of desire, became progressively more complex instruments for experiencing sensory pleasure. The difference between animals and plants is that the bodies of animals are karmically shaped for indulging in the pleasures of seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, and touching, whereas the bodies of plants grow, reproduce and die without any mental involvement or feelings at all.

Even though plants do not have mind, their existence is related to the collective karma of the humans, animals, spirits, and divine beings who make use of plants. The condensation of the earth from hot gas was also influenced by our collective karma, and certainly the appearance of the first primitive organisms was related to our collective karma. Thus mind is the prime mover of the entire universe. Buddhism has no problem with the fact of evolution; it merely adds the interesting proposition that mind — in particular, the selfish desire for sensory pleasure — is the driving force of evolution.

So, what went wrong? If our human bodies are designed to experience pleasure, why is life so miserable? Why do we experience pain, the inability to find pleasure, dissatisfaction with whatever pleasure we do find, and the terrible sadness of being separated from friends and pleasant situations? The problem is that the designer, our mind, is flawed by ignorance. Unaware of how things exist in reality, we generate mistaken preconceptions about the world and ourselves. These wrong ideas obscure the natural clarity of our minds so that whatever appears to our minds is distorted, like the reflection in a twisted mirror. The root distortion is the appearance of our own self to be an entity that exists in its own right, independent of everything else. Grasping at this wrong appearance to be true, we anxiously need to reaffirm our phantom self-existence at every opportunity, and we become obsessed with having to feed this insatiable hallucination with pleasure and protect it from pain.

The self exists but, like the mind, it is only a convention. It is established to exist merely by giving a name to our combination of body and mind. Nothing exists beyond this act of labelling that can be established to be the self. The self too is only nominally existent.

With regard to the world, we are unaware of the subjective role played by mind in our experience of life, so we ignorantly believe ourselves to be passive experiencers of an independent "world out there." Just as we misconceive the self to have intrinsic existence, through ignorance, the entire world appears to have its own intrinsic reality. In fact, the world too is established merely through the power of convention. In other words, the people, things, and events in our life are established by our own minds, not from their own side.

For example, when we are in love, the person we love appears to us as the most beautiful person in the world. Later, when we are divorcing them, to our hostile mind they appear to be the ugliest person in the world. For the person with whom they ran off, however, they appear to be beautiful. This shows that beauty and ugliness come from the mind, not from the side of the object. Thus, although external conditions do exist, the appearance of objects depends upon the state of mind of the observer. Therefore, the primary source of happiness and sadness is our mind, not the outside world. Our problems arise from the impossible belief that we can rid our world of ugliness and fill it with beauty. The Garden of Eden exists in our mind, not out there, and the key to that garden is wisdom and compassion.

Without that key, we shall forever be chasing illusions and running from shadows. While this world endures, a few will enter the garden, and the remainder will continue to experience the highs and lows of the wheel of life. At the end of the world, those who have not found the key will again be born in the ethereal realms of mental happiness, only to born once more in the realm of sensory desires on a new Earth when their karma for the ethereal realm eventually expires. And so the wheel has been turning since beginningless time.

WHAT AM I?

How the universe began and what happens after death are difficult to ascertain. But what about the self? I am a person, you are a person, there are people all around us, so surely it must be easy to find the answer to the question, What am I?

You may say, "Who cares? I know I exist because I eat, I sleep, I make love, I can function perfectly well without knowing exactly what I am, just like a dog."

You probably would not have added "just like a dog." I put that in to emphasise that the attitude of blindly following our instincts is no different to that of animals, who pursue pleasure and avoid pain regardless of what they are as individuals. Further, do we really function perfectly well? We humans, not to mention dogs, are not so clever at finding and maintaining the pleasure we seek, or at avoiding the pain we fear. Animals do not have the intellectual capacity to understand what they are as individuals, but we do, and it is extremely important that we exercise our intellects and discover exactly what our self is. Only then can we break through the fog of confusion about what we are and see clearly what we have to do to attain the happiness we seek and freedom from the suffering we wish to avoid.

I stress the need to understand the real nature of self because Buddha pointed out that confusion and misconception about our self-identity is the very source of our problems and our difficulty in finding and maintaining happiness. If we do not remove these misconceptions by discovering how we exist in reality, we will go on forever pushing away happiness and attracting suffering in our lives.

Self-consciousness, or awareness of self, is innate in all beings, animals included; but what we think we are — our self-image — does not accord with reality. We do not know how we actually exist as people, so our minds fabricate a false self-image that appears to be real. We then live our lives as if this apparent self were our true self. For example, if we mistakenly think a person we employ has stolen our watch, they will appear to us as an actual thief. Our mistaken mind sees their innocent behaviour as the guile of a thief, we then become angry and this causes us to end that person's employment. Just as our behaviour and emotions are inappropriate in this example, our behaviour and emotions in life are adversely affected by mistaken belief in the false images that we project onto self and others. We compound our original mistakes by exaggerating good or bad qualities on these false self-images and thinking that these projections are self-existing as well.

When I wanted to major in science at high school, my father pressured me to do humanities as he had done. He said to me, "I was never any good at mathematics, so how can you do

science?" Apart from my father's reasoning being a bit iffy, as he had brought me up to rebel against authority (either inadvertently or deliberately, I'm not sure), I took science. Later, when I did find trouble with calculus, I thought that maybe I had inherited a psychological obstacle to understanding mathematics. My wrong conception, however, was that my "self" had an inherent weakness in mathematics. If this idea had turned into a belief, it would have become a major obstacle to my following a scientific career. With this story as an illustration, we should all investigate the beliefs we hold about our own selves. We need to analyse our self-image to see if we have any fixed, false beliefs of inferiority or superiority and so on that are harming our ability to cope with and enjoy this ever-changing world.

The basic mistake in our self-image is that we think our self is something that stands alone, independent of everything else. We think there is a real, concrete, findable "me" existing in our body and mind. We can hardly be blamed for this misconception because, whenever we think "I," this is exactly how our self appears to the mind. If there were such a self, however, it should be findable under analysis, but nobody has ever discovered an independent self that can be held up and pointed to. Through cherishing this mistaken self-image, we become acutely sensitive to whatever may refer to us. We react with hostility towards things that cause us pain or harm our pride, and we have longing desire for things that give us pleasure or enhance our pride. Hostility and desire, and their cause — cherishing the mistaken self-image — are the three fundamental disturbances in our lives.

If the self that we think we are is a figment of our imagination, what is the self that does exist? The self that eats, sleeps, and makes love is a mere convention established by the thought

"I" directed towards our body and mind. This conventional self has no existence from its own side; neither the combination of our body and mind nor the label "I" is the self. The self exists, yet it is a mere convention because it cannot be located anywhere. In other words, it does not ultimately exist. "Ultimate existence" means being findable when looked for by ultimate analysis. The same can be said for everything else in the entire universe. The Earth is a mere convention, your lover is a mere convention, Buddha is a mere convention. Nothing exists in its own right. Everything merely exists in dependence upon a name applied to a suitable base for that name.

Even though you and I are mere conventions, we still exist. We can be happy or sad and we can function as individuals because we have different bodies and minds. Giving a name to our combination of body and mind is sufficient to establish our existence as individuals and to distinguish us from our brothers and sisters. Our self is merely designated upon our body and mind; there is nothing else that is 'truly me." Wherever our body and mind are, we are; whatever our body and mind do, we do. The problem is that, in our ignorance, we think we are something more substantial than a mere imputation. Terrified by the prospect of our self not existing in its own nature, we cling to the phantom of a substantial, independent self with pride; we feed it with desire and greed; we protect it with hostility, jealousy, and spitefulness; we sink into the mire of paranoia or float on a bubble of megalomania, always obsessed with ME, ME, ME!

The solution to these personally-created miseries, and the pain we inflict upon others through them, is to realise that our self is empty of the projections we imagine it to be. Only

then can our minds be free of hostility and desire, and be at peace. Just as a mother soothes her crying child who has awoken from a bad dream, the wisdom understanding our ultimate nature, the emptiness of existing as an independent self, soothes our disturbing emotions of anger, attachment, pride, and so on, and enables unhindered practice of the source of all happiness: loving-kindness.

ANGER

I once read that, after a domestic argument, an angry husband rented a bulldozer and reduced his family home to rubble. Can you imagine what was going through his mind? And can you imagine how he felt when he calmed down and realised the folly of his action? Anger is the most destructive force in the universe. It destroys our inner peace and causes us to inflict irrational verbal and physical abuse upon our family and friends, to destroy our possessions, and even to destroy our own bodies through excessive drinking, smoking, reckless behaviour, or suicide. Anger makes even the most handsome face look ugly; it harms our physical health; and it leads to isolation and loneliness because nobody can bear to be near us anymore. Buddha taught that the worst effect of anger is not immediately obvious: anger destroys our accumulated virtue,thus preventing any chance of future happiness. And karma created through anger leads to future lives of misery.

Anger is defined as an agitated state of mind that intends to inflict harm upon another living being, upon oneself, or upon an inanimate object. It gives rise to the emotions of hatred, belligerence, resentment, envy, and even fear, each of which eats away at our happiness like a cancer. The first step towards overcoming anger is to recognise its faults and then generate the strong determination to free our mind from this demon. We must see that anger is utterly evil; there is no justification in wishing harm upon others, and it is absurd to become angry at inanimate objects or our own person. The worst an external enemy can do is to take our life; the internal enemy of anger can do that with its hands tied behind its back, and it can also throw us into the misery of hell, something that no external enemy can accomplish.

Once anger has erupted, it is difficult to control. We can attempt to control it by separating ourselves from the object of our anger, for example, by going for a walk. If we can, we should stop the angry thoughts by consciously blocking them out or distracting our mind by thinking of something else, just like a mother might try to stop her children fighting by offering sweets. Of course, in both cases the relief is only temporary; anger will return just as the feud will be on again when one child sees that the other has a bigger sweet. Having gained a brief respite from anger, however, we can apply further antidotes.

Although some forms of hatred, such as racism, are acquired within this life, nobody has to teach us to be angry. Babies manifest anger at an early age because its seeds are already in their minds. The deepest source of anger is the self-cherishing ignorance that we have inherited from our past life, so the ultimate solution to anger is the wisdom realising the emptiness of self. This takes time to cultivate and, in the meantime, we must practise patience to overcome the unhappiness that fuels our anger.

Patience, the wonderful ability to remain calm and not retaliate in the face of provocation, is the main antidote to anger. When our mind is unhappy we become impatient and the smallest thing can set off an explosion of anger. Road rage begins with an unhappy mind that is ignited into an explosion of anger when another driver causes what is usually an insignificant delay. For most of us, our patience is woefully undeveloped, but we do have something to work with.

By increasing our power of patience, we can prevent unhappiness becoming a source of anger. The great Indian yogi, Shantideva, said that whenever we realise we are unhappy we should ask ourselves, "Can whatever has gone wrong be repaired? If so, what's the point of being unhappy? And, if it cannot be remedied, what's the point of being unhappy? You are just rubbing salt into the wound and exposing yourself to the greater harm of anger."

We should take this advice to heart and see unhappiness as a warning that anger is not far away. Increasing our power of patience is the best way to protect our mind from anger, and patience can only be cultivated during adversity. Because the person upsetting us gives us the opportunity to practise patience, we should consider them to be our greatest ally: to increase our power of patience we need things to go wrong.

Another method to avoid anger is to see that the person upsetting us is suffering terribly from their own anger, for which, indirectly, we are responsible; and if we do retaliate with hatred it will only make them angrier. With compassion for our adversary, the only sensible solution to any dispute is to forgive, apologise, and become friends.

To further the strength of our patience, we should also practise endurance. Farmers, fishermen, and soldiers can tolerate extreme conditions for temporary rewards without becoming angry at the weather. Lovers can undergo great hardships for brief fulfilment of their desire. So why can't we put up with slight discomforts such as cold food, a mosquito bite, or a disparaging glance without getting angry? If we use small difficulties to train our minds in patience, we will gain strength to deal with bigger problems without getting angry, and the difficulties themselves will dissolve into nothing.

Thinking like this transforms adverse situations into our advantage. Love is the opposite of anger, and when our anger is defused by patience we will regain the capacity to love. Others will love us in return, and our resulting happiness will further reduce our anger until it is finally extinguished by wisdom.

AGGRESSION

As a child I was often puzzled by anger, wondering why adults so frequently hurt each other through their nonsensical, frequent, and often bitter arguments. I remember noticing the same patterns of domestic dispute in the homes of all my school friends, and determining that when I grew up I would never let anger destroy the harmony of my future family. Later, I was dismayed to observe this destructive emotion within my own mind, and I was frightened by its uncontrolled energy when unleashed.

As a medical officer in a psychiatric hospital, I saw depths of anger, both manifest and suppressed, that I had never believed could exist. I remember suggesting to the psychiatrist-in-charge that we set up a gym with punching bags to allow our patients to vent their feelings. Powerful emotions of resentment, grudge-bearing, hostility, hatred, and fear, all derived from anger, lay behind many of my patients' problems. My scientific view was that because anger is acquired through evolution, it is necessary and must be allowed to arise and be expressed as suppression of this natural emotion would lead to further psychological problems. Evidence supporting this belief was right there in my patients. There was also plenty of evidence within society to support the conventional view that aggression is necessary for survival. Forget about the meek inheriting the earth; the only way to succeed in love, business, sport, and politics is to follow one's own purpose aggressively without worrying about those who lose out or are harmed by one's acquisitive behaviour.

In the late 1960s, Robert Ardrey, a biologist, wrote a book called The Territorial Imperative. He presented studies of animal behaviour which showed that intra-species aggression is present in the animal world as much as it is within human society. Aggression thus gained a scientific status that, at the extreme of the materialistic view, could be taken to justify war, racism, and even genocide. Another commonly held view was that male aggression complemented female submissiveness in our mutual goal of perpetuating the species. No wonder there was, and remains, debate about whether or not the study of human and animal behaviour belongs to the realm of science. In the material world, scientists can deduce fixed rules by observing the behaviour of chemicals and bodies in motion; they don't have to worry about the feelings or true motivations of the elements because there aren't any. In the animal and human kingdoms, however, it is difficult to make fixed rules based on the observation of behaviour alone because behaviour does not necessarily indicate the reason we do things.

Accurate scientific interpretation of behaviour requires an understanding of how the mind functions. As most of us are unable to read the minds of others, we can only perform field studies in behavioural research by looking into our own minds through introspective

meditation. Western pioneers in this field, such as Sigmund Freud, were ridiculed for being too subjective in their approach. To avoid this trap, we need a clear and accurate map of the mind and a method to explore and understand how our own mind functions. The theory and method for doing this was explained by Buddha over two and a half thousand years ago. Numerous meditators have since verified the accuracy of these explanations by achieving the results of the path: nirvana and enlightenment.

In view of the long history of fraud in the laboratory, there is every reason for science to be wary of subjective distortion of the facts in introspective research. But understanding the reality of mind is necessarily a mental experience that can never be achieved in the laboratory. The required instruments for observing reality are the mental powers of faith, effort, mindfulness, single-pointed concentration, and direct experience based upon pure logic. The only way to personally verify Buddha's presentation of reality is to meditate and see it for oneself. Having seen and extinguished the demon of self-centred ignorance, those who succeed in this venture will never seek the accolades of others. Indeed, spiritual fraudsters are more common than their scientific counterparts, and my rule of thumb is that if somebody claims or even hints that they have attained inner realisation, they can be dismissed. The difference between science and religion is not the difference between knowledge and faith. There is only one reality, and correct faith and knowledge are essential components of both systems. It is mistaken knowledge and wrong beliefs that lead to prejudice and human conflict, and these can pollute both science and religion.

The Buddha observed his own mind and the emotions that motivated his behaviour. He identified emotions that were useful and emotions that were useless in terms of satisfying his two fundamental needs: to be happy and to be free from suffering. By recognising the cause of harmful emotions – the ignorance of reality – he abandoned them by seeing reality and attained the unprecedented happiness of nirvana. When others followed the same path, they too attained nirvana, thus indicating that all minds function in essentially the same manner.

The concept of equal rights, a sanctified political ideal today, was presented by Buddha in his teaching that no individual, human or animal, has a greater right to happiness and freedom from suffering than any other. Buddha then explained his observation that, in our pursuit of happiness and freedom from suffering, we inadvertently push these goals away by assuming that our personal right is greater than anybody else's. Our aversion to pain results in instinctive anger and hostility towards whatever frustrates our selfish desire for happiness but, in acting out our anger, we destroy any chance of happiness. This observation is truly scientific in that, from it, fixed rules can be deduced regarding human and animal behaviour and its results. For example, anger, the agitated, irrational urge to inflict harm upon or destroy things that displease us, achieves neither the peace nor the happiness it seeks.

We can verify this by observing our own experience in life and seeing the reality of how anger is counter-productive and only brings trouble. Once we do this we will want to overcome our anger and achieve the peace and happiness we crave. We will also discover another fixed rule of human and animal behaviour: that loving-kindness, delight in the happiness of others and their freedom from pain, is by nature a happy state of mind and spreads peace and joy wherever it manifests.

Many people justify aggression by saying that if we do not fight we will be overrun by evil. The Buddhist view is that hatred itself is evil, and should be avoided in every situation. When forced to defend ourselves, we should do so with compassion for the enemy. In many situations, our own selfishness or antagonism are reasons why others dislike and attack us; if we always speak and act with kindness it is difficult to have enemies. Buddha was faced with jealous and angry people who wanted to kill him, but his compassionate approach to every situation made it impossible for them to harm him.

The view that social and personal injustice cannot be opposed without anger, or that not expressing anger is a sign of weakness, is absurd. Aggression is the real sign of weakness: it is the coward's way out. It takes far more courage to resolve a conflict with love than with anger. By allowing the flame of anger in another's mind to ignite our own anger, we and the world will be lost. If we have the power, we should use it wisely and compassionately to protect those who are persecuted and downtrodden. It is highly immoral to rationalise going to war as a humanitarian crusade when, in reality, it is an economic or racist exercise.

When anger is stopped by its antidote, patience, and replaced by its opposite, love, there is no danger of suppression of emotions with subsequent psychological imbalance. When anger is remedied there is only one result: happiness.

FAITH

In many circles, religious faith is regarded as the evil justifier for every imaginable horror that humans could inflict upon each other. Faith and reason are seen as opposite ends of the spectrum of knowledge. Correct faith, however, should not be rejected. When its object is valid, faith is a necessary foundation for the acquisition of knowledge in every field of enquiry. Without faith, it would be difficult to find relative happiness in life, not to mention the more distant goals of spiritual aspiration.

Buddhist texts on logic describe faith as a state of trust and respect in a valid person or in a correct idea that is not yet proven to oneself but cannot be contradicted by direct experience or by logic and has no self-contradiction. Thus, a proper object of religious faith is necessarily something that is correct and reliable in terms of being able to afford protection from suffering and guidance towards happiness. The final object of Buddhist faith is the wisdom seeing reality that opposes self-centred ignorance, the root cause of suffering. The Buddhist path is focussed upon generating this wisdom within one's own mind. Belief in an incorrect idea, or trust in an unreliable person, is not proper faith, it is blind-faith. It is blind-faith that has given correct faith such a bad name by causing so much anguish in human history.

Having faith does not mean we should never doubt. Buddha himself said, "Do not accept my teachings out of respect alone; investigate them thoroughly as a jeweller would investigate gold before purchase." The key words, "investigate thoroughly," are the means by which we establish whether the object of faith is valid or not. Christopher Columbus had faith in the correct idea that he would not fall off the edge of the world by sailing westwards. If he had been wrong, he would still be falling, and we would not call it faith: we would call it stupidity.

Every day we invest a little faith in the objects around us. When we board a plane we have faith that it will not crash; when we deposit money in the bank we have faith that we can withdraw it again. Ordinary objects such as planes and banks, however, can never be completely trusted to protect us from disaster. The essential quality of the three objects of faith in Buddhism is that they are completely trustworthy protectors and guides to the cessation of all disasters, including the sufferings of sickness, ageing, death, and the terrible states of rebirth. They are reliable because they explain the root causes of suffering – ignorance and karma – and possess the method by which we can oppose and eliminate these causes.

The first object of faith is Buddha, such as the historic Buddha Shakyamuni, a person whose mind is unified wisdom and compassion. Buddhas are beings who have gained total freedom from fear and suffering by eliminating the causes of suffering from their minds. They are trustworthy because they have impartial compassion for every living being, their minds understand everything, and they have extremely skilful methods for putting compassion into action.

The main way in which Buddhas help others is by explaining the nature of the mind and its role in causing happiness and suffering. Then they show how to work on one's mind and follow the path to freedom that they themselves have followed. These teachings are called Dharma, the second object of faith. Literally, Dharma means "that which supports one (from suffering)." For each individual, the actual Dharma that protects is the wisdom in their own mind that opposes ignorance, anger, desire, pride, and so on.

The third object of faith is the Sangha, the community of practitioners who have realised Dharma within their own minds and who teach and guide others on the path to buddhahood. The best guide is one who has been there before; the Sangha have overcome the obstacles to realisation and are thus fully qualified to help others achieve the same result.

The external Buddha and Sangha assist us to develop Dharma within our own minds. Then we in turn become objects of faith for others because we become Buddhas in our own right. Thus the ultimate manifestation of faith in Buddhism is courage and determination to follow the path, and self-confidence in one's own ability to attain perfection. Faith is the foundation of all virtue and progress on the path to enlightenment.

If Buddha was correct, and we owe it to ourselves to find out, one day we will all make the decision to enter this path. What is there other than faith that could lead to such a decision?

We cannot know the result of the path — the cessation of suffering — until we experience it, and therefore faith, as opposed to direct knowledge, is necessary. Such faith is based upon clear recognition of the true and admirable qualities of the Buddha, his teachings, and those who put the teachings into action.

Faith has three aspects. Admiring faith is a clear state of mind that regards the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha with delight. It is induced by knowledge gained through listening to the teachings and observing the behaviour of the Buddha and the Sangha. Believing faith is conviction and certainty in the truth of the Dharma, induced by contemplating the meaning of the teachings with logic and comparing them to one's own experiences in life. Aspiring faith is the wish to attain the stages of the path to enlightenment. It arises as a result of gaining knowledge from contemplation and meditation on the teachings and seeing that it is possible to achieve those goals.

As the three aspects of faith in Buddhism are based upon three levels of understanding, the knowledges of listening, thinking, and meditating, they cannot be called "blind." Also, as the essence of the Buddhist path is compassion, they cannot cause harm. On the other hand, cynical rejection of religious faith, and trust in science and technology alone to provide relief from suffering, truly deserves the label "blind." Without removing the obstacles to happiness

from our own minds through wisdom and compassion, we can never achieve our goals of peace and freedom from suffering.

During my recent camping trip through the Mongolian steppe, I was deeply moved by the people who, despite seventy years of harsh repression and a limited knowledge of the teachings, still have profound faith in the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha. At every ger I was treated with respect, and the people asked me to bless them and their homes. Although their faith is mostly at the level of admiring faith, it remains the very strength and soul of Mongolia. Mongolian Buddhism preserved not as an exhibit in a museum but as a warm vitality in the hearts of the Mongols is a national treasure, a precious resource for the entire world. His Holiness the Dalai Lama has said, "my religion is compassion." His proposal to turn Tibet into a zone of peace for the world was turned down by the Chinese, but it may be possible for that ideal to be realised here in Mongolia.

Without faith in virtue there is no basis for morality. There is nothing to restrain the impulses of desire, anger, and selfishness, and there is a possibility that the Mongolian people may succumb to the sense of hopelessness that we see in the West where affluence and material comforts have not brought mental peace. It would be a great tragedy if the faith of the Mongolian people were to be usurped by Western values and beliefs that propagate ignorance rather than destroy it.

MORALITY

During the 1960s, traditional notions of morality received a battering in the Western world from young people swept up in the era of free love. I was among those who sought to redefine ideas of good and evil. In view of the authoritarian and often hypocritical ways of parents, teachers, politicians, and religious identities, we rejected the belief that society could judge what was good or bad for us, and we followed our own law of behaviour: "If it feels good, do it."

Our indulgence in pleasure proved difficult to maintain. When confronted by the misery of broken relationships and the horrors of ill-health, addiction, mental instability, and death, we began to question our ethics. It was from such questioning that an interest in Buddhism developed. Apart from its atheistic stance, which met our approval, the attraction of Buddhism to many Westerners in those days was the teaching that suffering is a natural result of selfish behaviour. This was our own experience. We had gone to the extremes of self-indulgence, and those who were sufficiently honest with themselves could not deny that we were mostly responsible for our own problems. Buddhism also appealed to our anti-authoritarian attitudes. Buddha did not say you must do this and you must not do that. He simply explained the way it is, and left the decision to modify one's behaviour up to oneself. True morality must come from within; it cannot be imposed by law or by force.

Morality in Buddhism means avoiding harm to humans and animals and doing things to help them. The worst types of physical immorality are harming others through killing, stealing, or sexual activity, motivated by desire, anger, or ignorance. Examples of killing out of desire and anger are obvious. An example of killing out of ignorance is to sacrifice animals, or humans, with the belief that this is good for both oneself and the sacrificed person or creature.

Stealing is taking by stealth or device that which is not freely given. We can easily think of examples of stealing out of anger or desire; stealing out of ignorance would be cheating on our tax return with the belief that, because everybody does it, there is no fault.

Harmful sexual activity is causing harm to others, directly or indirectly, through sexual behaviour. Most often, the harm caused by immoral sexual activity is to a third person. This happens when we knowingly break up a committed relationship through selfish desire. Other examples of immoral sexual activity are rape and sexual relations with a minor. Immoral sexual activity motivated by ignorance would be, for example, a man selfishly indulging in sexual relations with the attitude that all women are like ripe fruit that is free to be eaten.

Lying, slander, abuse, and idle gossip are the main types of verbal immorality. Lying can be denying something we know to be true or pretending to know something we don't. It includes knowingly misleading others, purposely giving bad advice, and inventing faults about others or denying their good qualities. Through ignorance we might lie because we think it is amusing or because we believe there is no fault in lying. Slander involves saying things about others that will cause a division amongst friends or widen a split that has already occurred. Out of desire we can turn the person we desire against their partner; out of hatred we can turn somebody against our enemy; and out of ignorance we can turn followers of a religion against their teacher in order to convert them to our own misguided view. Harsh speech arising from ignorance involves speaking sarcastically or ridiculing someone, thinking that it is clever and fashionable to do so and that it doesn't matter if we hurt their feelings. Ignorant idle gossip includes talking about the weather, sport, or fashion with the belief that these things are really important.

These physical and verbal immoralities all stem from the three mental immoral actions of covetousness, maliciousness, and holding mistaken ideas. Living within morality does not just involve avoiding these ten immoral actions; it includes practising their opposites by saving lives, acting honestly, speaking truthfully and kindly, and so on.

Self-centred ignorance, desire, and anger are deeply rooted in our minds and cannot be transformed into virtue overnight, so Buddha taught various methods for attaining pure morality through restraint from harmful actions. The foundation of Buddhist morality is seeing our disturbing emotions and harmful behaviour as illnesses. Buddha, like an expert doctor, accurately diagnosed the problem and prescribed the medicine of pure morality. Choosing to live within pure morality is like taking the medicine, and relying upon a qualified teacher is like depending upon a nurse to help us recover.

Thus the beginning of morality is the intention to achieve happiness by abandoning the ten immoral actions. The next step is to make a promise or vow to avoid them, either for a short period or for the remainder of one's life. Buddha gave five vows for laypeople: to avoid killing, stealing, lying, sexual misconduct, and intoxicants. The first four are naturally non-virtuous actions. Sexual relations with our own partner, in moderation, is not naturally non-virtuous; nor is taking intoxicants, also in moderation. We are given the opportunity to avoid intoxicants because when we lose judgement through drunkenness we are likely to engage in the naturally non-virtuous actions without restraint. A good indication of the current state of our minds is that, initially, many Western lay-Buddhists only take the first three vows. Over time, however, they usually add the next two of abandoning sexual misconduct and intoxicants.

The next step in voluntary restraint from non-virtue is to take the various levels of ordination as a monk or nun. These vows include complete celibacy and abstinence from alcohol. Many Mongolians have the incorrect belief that a monk can drink alcohol and have a wife. They also refer to all monks as lamas, but this title is properly given only to those who are qualified spiritual guides. A qualified lama need not necessarily be an ordained person, and an ordained person is not necessarily a lama, but Buddhist monks and nuns are necessarily celibate.

The vows of monks and nuns are mainly to abstain from physical and verbal non-virtue, which is relatively easy compared to abstaining from mental non-virtue. Nevertheless, pure morality must be free from even the thought to do harm. To achieve this, Buddha gave special instruction to those who, at the time, were capable of cultivating altruism. These teachings are called the Mahayana, the Universal Vehicle. "Universal" refers to bodhicitta, the altruistic attitude of accepting universal responsibility to rescue all living beings from suffering. This is the basis of the next two levels of voluntary restraint: bodhicitta and tantric vows.

Bodhicitta vows involve restraint from physical, verbal, and mental non-virtue, and are the means by which one emulates the Bodhisattva's path to enlightenment that was followed by the Buddha himself. A Bodhisattva is a person who does not seek nirvana but remains within the wheel of life for a vast number of births working for sentient beings and gradually accumulating the causes for buddhahood. Instead of turning away from pleasure, with the aid of their vows, Bodhisattvas transform mundane existence into virtue.

Tantra is the method through which buddhahood can be attained much more quickly. Tantric practice requires supreme renunciation and mental control. These are achieved with the aid of the tantric vows, which are mostly to abandon mental immorality. Controlling our thoughts is most difficult, and these vows are the hardest to maintain. They are also the most secret because tantric practice is easily misunderstood, especially here in Mongolia. Tantric secrecy is not elitism. There are those who are not ready to understand tantra, and the secrecy is to protect such people from mistaken interpretations that could harm themselves and others.

If any group of people, any society, is to be at peace, the individuals within that group must voluntarily follow the morality of not harming others. Even so, Buddhism is not a social doctrine. The teachings and practices are given for individuals because pure morality can only come from within. Nevertheless, if enough individuals are cultivating pure morality, there will be peace and happiness no matter what the economic situation. As long as our priorities are in order, Buddhism does not shun wealth, economic growth, or technological advance. What is most important is that the inner growth and wealth of morality, wisdom, and altruism come first.

If, during the 1960s, somebody had told me that I would spend most of my life as a celibate Buddhist monk living more or less according to the Ten Commandments, I would have died laughing. Come to think of it, that is how I shall die.

DESIRE

If we were asked to make a list of our problems, most of us would soon fill a page with complaints, many of which would include a lack of fulfilment of our desires. But how many of us would list desire itself as a problem?

Buddha taught that desire is one of our greatest problems. Desire is the state of mind that craves pleasure and wants to possess a particular object of pleasure, either another person or a material thing, as our own. Desire exaggerates the pleasant qualities of the object so that it seems to be much better than it actually is; and desire is blind to any negative qualities. When we are attracted to a particular person, desire makes them appear to be the most beautiful person in the world. Their body is perfect, their voice, their clothes, everything about them is blessed with a certain magic. Physically we desire their body; mentally we crave their recognition of us as an individual. We need their smiles and their love to confirm that we are a good and lovable person. At night and during the day we cannot stop thinking about them and it is impossible to concentrate on study or anything else. If our friends point out bad qualities of the person we desire, we reject their advice. We simply cannot see any faults.

Desire is not happiness. It is an agitated, unhappy state of mind which believes that if we do not get what we want then we cannot be happy. When our desire is unfulfilled we cannot eat, we become irritable, we cannot relax or be friendly with our family, we hate life, we may even hate ourselves. If we do finally obtain the object of our desire, we soon become disenchanted because we realise the object is not as good as we thought it was; or we become bored or dissatisfied and start looking around for something or someone else.

Just as desire exaggerates and even invents good qualities and superimposes them upon our possessions, our children, our parents, and our friends, anger does the opposite. It blinds us to good qualities and exaggerates negative qualities or superimposes non-existent negative qualities upon those who displease us. With desire and anger we believe the good or bad appearances of our friends and enemies to be true. We do not realise they are projections of our mind. Because we believe the fault lies with others, satisfaction and peace are impossible to achieve. We abandon our partner, trade in the car, get a new job, move to another neighbourhood, on and on until we die, still dissatisfied.

When we marry the person we wanted so much, we may soon find out that our friends were right. Our new husband or wife is not the person our desire projected them to be. They drink too much, or are lazy or violent; perhaps their feet smell. Either consciously or unconsciously we unfairly blame them for not living up to the ideals projected by our desire. We see our partner as our possession or as an extension of our ego, and again, either

consciously or subconsciously, we manipulate or coerce them into conforming to our projections of how my partner should look and behave. This suffocates them, allows no space for them to be an individual, and unrealistically demands them to be what they are not. As we too are unable to meet the projections of their desire towards us, discord arises in the relationship and we start looking around for someone else. At a party we meet another attractive person and once again our mind comes under the control of desire. "Oh, this one is really perfect, I love him." We abandon our current partner and embark on the whole miserable journey once again. Like a donkey chasing a carrot on a stick, we are forever pursuing an unattainable goal.

If we check up, the happiness of experiencing pleasure is only partially due to the pleasant feelings of touch, taste, music, or whatever is our object of desire. The main reason for our happiness is a sense of relief that our desire has stopped. Unfortunately, the cessation of desire is only temporary. Very soon, the cancer-like craving for pleasure again awakens and begins to destroy our happiness and peace of mind.

Desire for the pleasures of life arises strongly when we are approaching death. We do not want to die; death is the opposite of all that we have lived for, and appears to be the end of pleasure. This desire for life ensures that we will be born again, still seeking pleasure. It causes karma for rebirth to ripen in our mind and, without control, our mind takes another life. Next time, however, we may not be so lucky to have a human body. We could have the miserable body of someone born in the living nightmare called hell; the emaciated form of a starving ghost wandering in a barren landscape; or the feathered, scaled, or furred body of an animal. In Buddhist legend there is a story of a woman who was so attached to her physical appearance that she was reborn as a snake living inside the skeleton of her previous human body.

Desire and love are not the same thing. Love is a positive emotion that we should cultivate. It is the pure wish for somebody else to be happy, whereas desire is the wish for oneself to be happy. The emotion of "being in love" is a mixture of desire and real love, and the main cause of the unhappiness associated with this condition is desire. When pain in your heart indicates that desire is manifesting, you should apply its antidote and turn your mind towards nirvana and enlightenment. Cultivate detachment by first contemplating the folly of desire, its exaggeration, superimposition, and clinging; and then seeing the object of desire as it is in reality — a transient phenomenon that is empty of your projections. Both pleasure and pleasant objects are like illusions in that they appear to be something real and important, but have no more essence than a pleasant dream. Soon they are gone and cannot be retrieved. Buddha taught his meditators to remove disturbing fantasies of beautiful bodies by imagining them dying, decomposing, and becoming skeletons. Try it with the one who has captured your heart. When detachment frees your mind from the fog of desire, you will be able to love them purely.

When I was a medical student spending many hours each day dissecting human corpses, I was dismayed to realise that beautiful girls were beginning to appear as walking skeletons. Beneath the skin that beckoned to be touched I saw yellow nodules of fat, red muscles, and white bones that dissipated my desire – until I had a few drinks, anyway.

Romantics may complain that this clinical approach to the experience of being in love is a dispassionate negation of a true and spontaneous emotion whose pleasure is necessarily inseparable from its pain. But the cemeteries are full of frustrated romantics; there is no contradiction in cultivating love and detachment simultaneously. This, in fact, is the only way to have truly spontaneous love, the vehicle that can take us beyond suffering and death.

SELF-ESTEEM

We cannot remember our birth, but I am pretty sure our thoughts were something like, "What the hell's happening? Get me outta here!" Because we could not speak we were unable to express our indignation other than by screaming loudly. This only brought smiles to the faces of those standing around, adding insult to injury and convincing us we had been born into a world of sadists. From that moment on it was us versus the world. Our demands were simple: the world owed us pleasure, praise, love, and possessions.

Throughout our life, the rise and fall of our self-esteem has been directly related to the fulfilment or frustration of these four demands. We crave pleasure, praise, love, and possessions for both the immediate happiness they give us and for the self-confidence they engender. The more happiness we receive, the more we feel we are in control of our lives; our problems take a back seat and we become more adventurous. On the other hand, we fear pain, criticism, dislike, and poverty because the unhappiness they bring causes our self-confidence to crash. Without love, respect, or a means of livelihood, we fall into a descending spiral of low self-esteem, depression, and an even greater incapacity to find pleasure, praise, love, and wealth.

If we take a good, hard look at the way we have lived our lives, we will see that we have selfishly pursued these aims from the time we received our first toy in the cradle until recently when we bought a new car; or from the time we competed with our siblings for parental attention until the time we stole another person's partner, or cheated on our own. Our adult behaviour is just a sophisticated version of our infantile wants and don't wants. Our bodies have matured but our minds have not. And what has been the result of our relentless pursuit of pleasure, praise, love, and possessions? Dissatisfaction, separation, loss, an empty future and a wasted past. When things go wrong in our lives, especially when we are dying, what use is all the sensory pleasure we have experienced in the past? What use is our collection of possessions or our circle of loving friends? Even when we are well our nostalgia for the good times of the past prevents enjoyment of the present, and is utterly boring for our children, who constantly remind us to "Get real."

Self-esteem has two factors: the self that is esteemed and the fulfilment of the four demands that we rely upon to support our self-esteem. If we look at the objects we desire, they are unreliable because they are transient by nature, so the pleasure they bring is brief and impossible to maintain. We are not cast into despair when the beauty of a sunset is replaced by darkness because we know the light-show is temporary. But, as children, we screamed when it was time to go home from the beach because we thought the pleasure would never stop; as adults we wept at the loss of loved ones because we thought they would remain with

us forever. It is our grasping at pleasure and the objects of pleasure as if they were permanent fixtures in our life that causes us so much pain. By remembering the transient nature of things, we will be able to enjoy pleasure without pining for it when it has gone.

The transience and unreliability of objects of desire is not our only problem. From our side we suffer the terrible disease of dissatisfaction. We cannot rest when things are going well. We begin to see faults in our partner, in our job, in our car; and we dream of change, wanting something or someone better. Dissatisfaction makes it impossible to maintain happiness and causes us to abandon friends and possessions, actions that later bring regret.

With regard to the self that we esteem, we must distinguish between the self that exists and the imagined self. When we are introduced to "George," we learn to associate that name with a particular appearance. Later, when somebody asks, "Who is that?" we correctly identify the person as George. The conjunction of the correct name and his appearance is the conventional way of establishing George to exist as a person. There is no George beyond this labelling process, nothing more to identify as being George. Nevertheless, as we grow more familiar with this person, it seems that "George" exists not in dependence upon the name but somewhere within that body and mind. As soon as that person enters the room, "George" seems to appear towards us from within that body and mind rather than being labelled by us onto that base.

In a similar way, self-esteem is based upon the false appearance of an "I" that we imagine exists in its own right independent of the labelling process. In reality, there is no such self, but we think our body, our mind, even our history of achievements and failures in life, are intrinsic qualities of this imaginary self. Our self-image sometimes appears attractive, sometimes unattractive, always bearing the decorations or scars from past competition with the world. And we like or dislike our selves according to the way we project our self to exist. Herein is our greatest mistake. We incorrectly believe our self-image to be our real self, and our chance for future happiness is diminished by thoughts such as, "I can't do this because I failed in the past."

And so we join the billions who fall by the wayside of life without courage to continue.

Anorexics and body-builders obsessed with improving the physical aspect of their self-image are flogging a dead horse. Academics competing with each other in their desire for fame and glory are chasing shadows. Romantics seeking perfect love are doomed. Business tycoons seeking ultimate power and wealth are walking on clouds. They are all destined to failure because the self they are attempting to please does not exist in the way they imagine it to exist. And healthy bodies, fame, love, and wealth are not possessions or intrinsic qualities of an independent self.

If we have committed a heavy deed, such as murder, we are a bad person; but we are not an intrinsically bad person. The bad stain can be removed with sincere regret and actions done to purify the karma. The false belief that we are intrinsically bad takes us down a blind alley from which there appears to be no escape other than suicide. The great Tibetan yogi Milarepa attained enlightenment even though he had killed many people earlier in his life. In the same way, if we have done something good we are not an intrinsically good person; we should beware of our pride.

Invincible self-esteem and true happiness can only be achieved when, through the power of seeing that we are empty of existing independently, we gain the courage to engage in the practice of giving pleasure, praise, love, and gifts to others without seeking reward. We will easily abandon our innate urge to compete with others, and we will see the world as our friend.

So we have to teach our babies that "I want" and "I don't want" are the mantras of despair, while "How can I help you?" is the mantra of happiness. And how do we teach them? By being perfect examples for them to follow.

PRIDE

Buddha emphasised that all our troubles stem from our own minds, and the root of our problems is our mistaken belief in what we are as a person. In reality, our person is nothing more than a mere convention established by labelling our name upon the combination of our body and mind. No self-existing person or soul exists within the body and mind, yet we all have the innate misconception that we are self-existing individuals. This misconception is the source of all our problems because our constant self-consciousness — belief in a non-existent self as being truly me — creates the disturbing emotions of anger, attachment, and pride through which we harm ourselves and others. Like a phobia or a delusion of grandeur, this irrational belief captures our mind and distorts the reality of life. Obsession with our false self-image leads to irrational anger when our self-image is threatened in any way. Self-indulgent attachment arises when our self-image is pleased, and arrogance occurs when we see our self as superior to others.

In my younger days, while at an emotional low point, I had a flash of insight and declared that pride was my greatest enemy. I recognised that my unhappiness was connected to an overwhelming self-consciousness about the way I perceived myself and the way I wanted to be perceived by others. There was no space for spontaneity in my relationships; my words and actions had the calculated element of trying to be cool. I desperately wanted the "real me" to break out of its cocoon, but I was too afraid to admit failure or weakness, and too proud to remain with women who did not measure up to my expectations. There was conflict between my desire for people to know and love the good qualities of the "real me" and my fear that people would discover the weaknesses of the "real me." The resulting loneliness was difficult to bear. Looking back at those times of angst, how I wish somebody had told me there were no real good qualities, no real weaknesses, and no real me.

Pride was defined by Buddha as a puffed-up sense of self-importance that compounds the original mistake in our self-image by projecting and then believing that we are superior to others. Pride clings strongly to this inflated self-image and disrespects others, thus creating a tense and hostile atmosphere within which neither we nor the people around us can relax. With our self-image at stake, our pride is always defending ourselves or attacking others.

Among the seven aspects of pride, the first three arise in relation to our wealth and social standing. Towards those of lower status than ourselves we feel superior and see them as lowly. Towards those of equal status to ourselves we think we are special and superior. And towards those of higher status we arrogantly point out their weaknesses and believe we are superior to them as well.

In the fourth aspect of pride, we see our own body and mind as perfectly "me." Our pride gazes at our reflection in the mirror and tells us we are so beautiful. Sometimes called egocentric pride, it is a belief that we are perfect in body and mind. It cannot tolerate defeat.

The next aspect of pride can be seen in religious people who, through an extreme sense of self-importance, become convinced they have attained high spiritual realisations and act as if they are God's or Buddha's right-hand person.

False humility is the sixth aspect of pride. We may behave with humility in the presence of a great person, but in our mind abides the arrogant thought: "Here am I, so important, in the presence of this famous person."

The final aspect of pride is wrong pride where, for example, we commit morally degenerate acts believing that we are endowed with special qualities and are above normal ethical restraint. There is great danger of this pride arising in the minds of those who hold positions of trust, such as doctors, priests, and monks.

Is there any need for me to list more examples of pride? Not really, a touch of introspection will reveal that we all suffer from pride. Recognising pride in our own mind, and understanding its faults, is the first step towards ridding ourselves of this enemy.

Pride exaggerates our good qualities and then believes its fabrications to be true. It does this because of our misconception that a real self exists either within our body and mind or as a separate entity that possesses our body and mind. Thus the actual solution to pride is immediately obvious: recognition of the fundamental non-existence of a "real me." Such a thought can be frightening because we cling to our self-image, and the very idea of being "selfless" scares us. We can easily fall into the nihilistic belief that nothing is real. Negating the existence of an ultimate, real self, however, does not mean there is no relative self. It is essential that we dismantle our mistaken belief in a real me, both because it is wrong and because this is the only way we can liberate ourselves from the entanglement of mental projections, and experience the unrestrained happiness that we instinctively feel is possible.

Another mistake we can make when contemplating selflessness as the antidote to pride is that we can fail to take responsibility for the happiness of others. We may think, "Oh, they do not really exist and their problems are in their imagination. There is nothing I can do about it.

Realising selflessness is only half of Buddha's recipe for happiness. The other half is having loving-kindness for all beings. Universal loving-kindness is not diminished by the fact that others only exist as labelled identities. They still exist as conventional people and are suitable objects for conventional loving-kindness. In fact, universal loving-kindness requires the understanding of emptiness; without such wisdom, we cannot free our minds from the negative discrimination of others through attachment, hatred, and ignorance.

The most distasteful thing about pride is that it makes us incapable of loving those who we consider, in our arrogance, to be unsuitable recipients of our love. We are so self-important that we cannot even love members of our own family, let alone strangers and enemies. Pride isolates us from others in a capsule of loneliness that must be shattered by humility. Humility

is not a sign of weakness. It takes great strength to stand up to our own negative minds, to reject the distorted projections of self-importance, and to focus instead on the good qualities of others, sincerely rejoicing in their happiness and good fortune. I think this must be the meaning of St Matthew's, "Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth."

SUFFERING

My cat, absorbed in the pleasure of warm sunshine on the window ledge, is an illustration of how all humans and animals are equal: our fundamental purpose in life is to experience pleasure and avoid pain. If we look at the reasons behind our behaviour, all our daily activities are directed towards obtaining sensory pleasure and happiness, or towards avoiding unpleasant experiences and unhappiness. There is nothing wrong in experiencing pleasure and avoiding pain, the problem is that we are not very good at achieving these goals. Even when we do find a degree of happiness, we are skilful at destroying it.

Upon achieving enlightenment, the Buddha remained for a long time without saying anything. It is said that his hesitation in spreading the good news was due to a thought that went something like, "I have discovered the profound truth of existence; they [you and I] will never be able to understand." Fortunately, Buddha was persuaded by the great beings, Brahma and Indra, to reveal his knowledge. He began his first teaching by saying that life is miserable. I don't know how the Indians reacted to this, but when a Buddhist nun in Australia started a talk with this statement the audience immediately broke into applause.

Buddha's next point may not have been so popular: "Your suffering comes from the karma and disturbing emotions in your own mind."

We may reply to that, "Hey, it's not me. Change the politicians, give me a great, well-paid job, a beautiful family, and a house by the seaside and I"ll show you whether life is miserable or not."

In the early 1970s I travelled overland from India to England with the intention to immerse myself once more in the material world by working as a doctor in a London hospital. I felt that I had to taste 'the real world" once more before I could accept my newly discovered Buddhist philosophy. On the way, I stayed with the owner of a Norwegian shipping line who, with his wife, had built their dream house on a quiet beach on the island of Crete. His wife had died just before the house was completed, and he was very, very lonely. Although I had attended a course with Tibetan lamas, I had not yet accepted the teachings to be true. I was still chasing the dream of a perfect partner, a great job, and unsullied happiness in my life. The sad situation of my Scandinavian friend made me reflect upon what the lamas had taught me: 'the objects and situations we rely upon for happiness are unreliable because they do not last. Death and impermanence rule the world."

Expanding upon his initial declaration that life is miserable, Buddha described three levels of suffering. Suffering of suffering refers to the experiences we all accept to be suffering, such

as the physical pain of sickness and accidents. These need no explanation, but the second level of suffering, the suffering of change, is more difficult to understand. Suffering of change refers to what we ordinarily call "happiness." Most languages possess the standard greeting formula that goes something like, "Hello, how are you?" Occasionally we may truthfully reply, "Bloody awful," but usually, no matter how bad things are going, we give the standard response, "I'm okay, how are you?" The truth has to be teased out of us:

"Are you happy?"

"Yes," we reply, unconvincingly.

"Are you really happy?"

"Sort of, better than last week anyway," or we may respond simply by bursting into tears.

When we take painkillers for a toothache, after a while we will say, "Now I feel great," even though some pain persists. Feeling great is simply a lesser degree of the pain that we were experiencing before. Even though we call it happiness, we are still suffering, and the same can be said for every other happiness that we are trying to extract from this world.

Our life is pervaded by a sense of incompleteness and a need for something to make it better. "Happiness" is only a temporary respite from the gnawing anxiety within our mind. For a few moments we can forget our underlying unhappiness, but the happiness cannot stay because it depends upon the gathering of causes and conditions that cannot last forever. When the sources of our happiness cease, we inevitably experience "the party's over" type of sadness. Why else does the song, Auld Lang Syne, produce tears in our eyes?

Internally, happiness becomes suffering because, through attachment, our mind clings to the object of happiness and the happy experience itself. Yearning to never separate from our lover, we feel unhappy when alone and become consumed with jealousy and resentment whenever he or she innocently talks to another. When we do eventually separate, our attachment causes us to pine for past happiness and dwell in fantasies of future happiness that are unlikely to be realised.

Another way of thinking that transforms happiness into suffering is believing that pleasure exists as an intrinsic property of the object of pleasure, and that the acquisition of that object should automatically bring happiness. At the beach we lie in the sunshine, like the cat on the window ledge, and think that the warmth is bliss. The heat soon becomes unbearable and we enter the water, thinking the coolness is bliss. The cold then becomes unbearable and we go back onto the sand, thinking the warmth is bliss. The situation is the same with physical obsessions. Our garages and attics are full of discarded possessions that were once thought to be so important for our happiness, and our address books are full of the names of people we were convinced would make us happy. This did not work out because our expectations were simply wrong; our friends and possessions were not the intrinsic sources of happiness we had anticipated them to be.

The third level of suffering described by Buddha is a deeper, more sinister, internal reason for unhappiness. It is called pervading suffering, the suffering of always being under the control of karma, disturbing emotions, and death. Karma is the tendency of our mind to

meet with experiences that are similar to the effects our past actions have had upon others. We have no way of guaranteeing that even the temporary happiness of life can be sustained because when our good karma runs out the primary cause for happiness is lost. And when the karmic echoes of past harmful actions ripen in our mind, it is impossible to be happy no matter how much wealth we have or how big a circle of friends we have gathered around us. Death can and does occur at any time, and is rarely welcome. One moment of anger can cause us to drive too fast, crash the car, and ripen the karma to be consumed in an inferno of flames. Another karma will then throw us into our next life without choice. As we may continue to burn for aeons in hell to complete that karma, death is no guarantee of relief. "Rest in Peace" is a graveyard fantasy.

RENUNCIATION

From the time we first heard about handsome princes meeting beautiful princesses and living happily ever after, we have been chasing the concept of Happily-Ever-After-Land. Our child-like faith that perfect partners and possessions will provide the contentment we seek has been eagerly exploited by the advertising and entertainment industries, and we have fallen for their myth of perfect people living perfect lives with perfect possessions. Seeking to impress the person of our dreams, we part with our money to disguise the imperfections of our bodies with cosmetics, perfume, and fashionable clothes. As true happiness fails to materialise with the passage of time, we put on a jovial manner to conceal our inner sense of unease and doubt about where our lives are leading. Suffering from the universal neurosis of self-consciousness, we compete with each other and pretend, both to ourselves and to others, that we are happy. We are afraid to admit our failure.

Before you lose heart, I must tell you that perfect happiness is possible, not so much in our ordinary lives, but in the experience of nirvana, where the mind is free from disturbing emotions and superstitious beliefs about the world and ourselves. Superstitious beliefs and the emotions of selfishness, anger, pride, and longing desire are the real obstacles to happiness. Nirvana is not a paradise in the sky, nor is it created by anything. It is our natural potential to experience enduring peace and happiness made manifest by eliminating those emotions and superstitious beliefs. Our present happiness is short-lived because we have no control over the world or our minds. We will never gain control over the world, but understanding karmic cause and effect will protect our mind from being disturbed when the undesirable events of life occur. Also, we can gain control over our minds. Disturbing emotions and superstitious beliefs can be cleansed from our minds by first cultivating the thought of renunciation, then meditative concentration, and finally the wisdom perceiving the ultimate nature of the self. This wisdom extinguishes the self-centred ignorance that is the root of all disturbing emotions and false beliefs.

Renunciation means letting go of our mistaken belief that the world, our bodies, and even life itself are "good" in the sense that there is nothing better. Through renunciation we understand that perfect peace cannot be found anywhere in the wheel of life. Renunciation is the intelligent abandonment of faith in an untrustworthy world and the turning of one's aspiration towards the actualisation of nirvana. Other religions teach the folly of sensual indulgence and guide their adherents towards rebirth in heaven by renouncing human pleasures. But because the world, the body, and life are seen as creations of the Almighty, and therefore "good," when the faithful reach heaven they still have desire for pleasure and remain within the wheel of life. They are not liberated from suffering because they have not overcome their mistaken belief in an intrinsically existing self, or soul, and the belief that

ordinary life can be perfectly happy. When their karma for the heavenly life is exhausted, they will again be born in lower realms. Buddhism is unique in identifying the world and life itself to be products of ignorance and desire. It teaches renunciation of the pervading suffering of being trapped within an unsatisfactory universe by our personal ignorance and karma, and it provides the solution: cultivation of the wisdom that directly sees the emptiness of self.

Renunciation is acquired by investigating every aspect of suffering, seeing how it arises from karma and disturbing emotions, and turning our mind towards the attainment of nirvana. This implies that we have to move against the tide of society that mostly flows in the direction of self-indulgence. Within the bounds of Judaeo-Christian morality, Western society encourages our innate urge to seek pleasure and avoid pain. For most of us, the main purpose in our life is to experience the sensory pleasures of looking, listening, smelling, tasting, and touching. Even if we had the method, which we don't, we put no effort into subduing our crazy minds and cultivating wisdom. Instead, we tranquilise our minds with drugs and alcohol, and seek distraction in sport and other hobbies. When desire for pleasure is the only reason for living, the history of humanity shows that we are heading for trouble. Hedonism, not religion, is the opiate of the masses.

"Give me a break," you may say. "What is the point of living without desire for pleasure? It energises me to overcome my problems and, even if I do not find perfect happiness, there is always some satisfaction."

Be careful. Gamblers are encouraged by small wins to make the big bet that becomes their ruin. The odds in life are stacked so heavily against us that none of the billions who have come before have ever won. How can we be the first? Desire for worldly happiness is the greatest and most damaging addiction in the universe, the mother of all addictions. Your self-centred pursuit of happiness is very harmful.

How can you overcome your problems in life? It's easy. Forget them by forgetting about yourself, and start thinking about the problems of others. Energise and motivate your life with loving-kindness. Every time you put a smile on somebody else's face, that gives real happiness.

Why is desire for happiness such a problem? Buddha taught six shortcomings of the pursuit of worldly happiness. The first is uncertainty. No ordinary relationship or pleasure can be trusted to remain forever. Marriage sets us up for the pain of divorce, or separation at death; the birth of a baby is the cause for our eventual parting from our child; experiencing any pleasure is a condition for the misery of losing that pleasure. Every happy situation brings with it the anxiety of trying to keep the objects of happiness — friends, possessions, and so on — with us for as long as possible. Fighting the progress of time, however, is a losing battle; the sources of happiness slip from our fingers no matter how tightly we cling to them. Friends become enemies, possessions wear out, times change. Even our body is unreliable. There is no complete guarantee of happiness in any worldly situation.

The second shortcoming is dissatisfaction. Even though a nature-loving friend of mine once declared, "I will die happy if I get to see a Sumatran rhinoceros," there is no pleasurable object anywhere that can give complete satisfaction. And, from the side of our own mind,

when we do acquire friends and possessions, dissatisfaction causes us to lose interest, to see faults, and to seek something or someone better. Callously, we discard our sources of happiness, often with subsequent regret, but then it is too late. Our dissatisfaction has ruined our lives.

The next shortcoming is having to abandon our bodies repeatedly. No matter how attractive our bodies are as humans or divine beings, they let us down; we die and are reborn with ugly bodies in horrible places. There is no pure essence to our bodies, nor to the pleasure we gain from them, and yet, especially in the West, we see and worship our bodies as temples of pleasure. How much time and energy have we spent in cleaning, feeding, exercising, grooming, and dressing our bodies? How much unhappiness have we experienced because our bodies have not measured up to the socially acceptable? Ultimately, it is all to no avail. Our bodies will grow ugly with age, become racked with pain, and will have to be abandoned at death no matter how much we have cared for them. And where have all the pleasures gone, the pursuit of which has occupied our entire life, and for which we have created so much negative karma?

The fourth shortcoming is having to be reborn again and again. In this degenerate age, more and more people seek suicide as the answer to their woes, but this is no solution. Whether we want it or not, our karma forces us into a new life; and if we die with despair or anger, the next life cannot be better than this one. Whatever suffering we have experienced, we have to experience it all over again, time after time. The tears we have wept in sorrow in our past lives would fill all the oceans of the world.

The next shortcoming is losing our status again and again. In life, all collections are inevitably dispersed. Whatever is born will die, the high will become low, and friends will be parted. Human history and our own lives repeatedly illustrate the rise and fall of the mighty; and yet we still strive for power, perfection, and the impossible goal of living happily ever after. The rich become poor, families disperse never to meet again, the powerful become weak. Humans are reborn as animals, gods are reborn in hell.

Finally, there is the shortcoming of always being alone. We experience the pain and fear of both birth and death alone. Nobody is there to comfort us during the terrifying experience of being born; nobody can come with us when we die. The suffering of loneliness is also with us throughout our life. We marry for companionship, but after a while we wish our spouse would leave us alone. Even in the best of relationships it is impossible to completely share our inner feelings, no matter how close we are. Yet the loneliness when our partner has gone is even more intense than before.

Contemplation of these six shortcomings will give us the courage to renounce our mistaken belief in the outside world as a reliable source of happiness. Renunciation will enable us to open our hearts to others without fear of personal loss, and we will be energised to meditate and light the torch of wisdom that will reveal the eternal garden of bliss in our own mind.

BIRTH, LIFE, AND DEATH

For most kids in this age of the Internet, computers rather than parents are the main source of information about the facts of life. From the Buddhist perspective, the standard description of how the sperm and egg are introduced to each other is insufficient. There is a third factor involved: the stream of consciousness itself. As much as your parents thought they were performing a private activity at your conception, there was someone else present — you. Not exactly your present self, but a ghost-like person in the intermediate state, or bardo, who was karmically attracted to your parents and whose mind was destined to become your mind. Thus, at conception, your genetic inheritance from the chromosomes of your parents was supplemented by your mental inheritance: a collection of karmic potentials, memories, and positive and negative mental propensities from a string of past lives.

The Buddhist tantras say that the mind is the primary organising factor behind the transformation of the fertilised egg into the vastly complicated form of our human body. Mind is the continuum of awareness or subjective experience; its active component is intention, or will, and this is equivalent to karma. It has no physical properties, but is always associated with a subtle form of physical energy called "wind" — in Tibetan, lung. Having been karmically attracted to the situation where its future parents are in the act of conceiving a child, the bardo being dies, its mind becomes extremely subtle and, together with its supporting wind, enters the mother's womb where it joins with the egg close to the time of conception. The subtle wind and mind abide in a capsule-like structure called the indestructible drop. This is composed of physical elements acquired from both the mother and father and is "indestructible" because it remains intact from the time of conception until just before death. The combination of the very subtle mind and its supporting wind is called the eternal drop because it has existed, as an ever-changing continuum, since beginningless time and will continue to exist forever into the future.

Karma now activates the mind, giving rise to a subtle intention which causes the wind to coarsen and stream out from the indestructible drop in two directions, taking some of the physical elements from the mother and father as it goes. The direction where the wind carries mostly the paternal element will be the upper part of the body, and the direction where the wind carries mostly the maternal element will be the lower part of the body. The indestructible drop remains at the point we call the heart chakra, and a system of branching channels created by the flowing winds becomes the template upon which the embryonic cells organise to form the gross body.

For the first twenty-five weeks of gestation, the mind is active but in a sleep-like state. Now it awakens into a state of clarity where, intuitively, the foetus is aware of the connection

between its past and present lives. Seeing how its personal wheel of life functions, the foetus experiences a sense of melancholy, thinking, "Here we go again."

Memory of the previous life remains even after birth, but the baby is unable to tell anybody because it cannot talk. The immediacy of the new life takes over, and it soon forgets the past life. Even if a child does talk about such memories, it is told not to speak nonsense and hurry up and finish its cornflakes. There are many stories of children from various cultures who have spoken about a previous life. Some of these stories have been investigated to exclude fraud, and such children have been taken to the places where they said they had lived. They were able to recognise homes, describe changes, and name relatives from their previous life.

Life, the period between conception and death, is when our mind uses its body to experience as much pleasure as possible. The consciousness associated with the eternal drop is always present but is obscured by gross mental activity and is not noticed. This combination of the most subtle wind and mind, the eternal drop, is a single entity and is the final basis of designation of the person. Some may call it the soul, but that term carries the idea of an intrinsically existing, independent self, and is better not used. By calling it the "basis of designation of the self," we are not saying it is the self. It is simply suitable to be called the migrating self because it goes from life to life, bearing the karmic imprints. A self or a person is an abstract entity, the "mere I," that is simply established by labelling "I" upon an appropriate base, a body-mind continuum.

Throughout life, the mind and its wind energies fluctuate between states of activity, which we call being awake, and inactivity, which we call sleep. Our gross body, however, cannot keep pace with our mind, and it eventually wears out and dies. Death is the gradual dissociation of the subtle wind and mind from the body. It is like going to sleep, but the mind goes all the way to the clear light and then separates from the body. The process of dying occurs in five stages over a variable period of time.

As the gross mind and winds begin to withdraw from the periphery of our body, the first stage of death is characterised by physical weakness and loss of our most dominant sense faculty – our vision becomes blurred and dark. There is a physical sensation of pressure, like being buried beneath sand, or a sudden sense of loss of support; we feel as if we are falling. Similar sensations may occur when going to sleep. From the five qualities of knowledge that, when perfected, become the five transcendental wisdoms of a Buddha, our mind loses the mirror-like quality of being able to understand many different things at the same time, and there is an inner vision like a shimmering, silvery-blue mirage on the desert sand.

In the second stage of death we lose the intensity of our feelings of pleasure and pain. We lose the quality of knowledge that is able to distinguish patterns of similarity in things. Bodily secretions cease and we have dry eyes and a dry mouth. Water cannot alleviate this dryness. When I was in medical school, nurses told me that dying people appreciate sucking on a small piece of ice to relieve the dryness in their mouth. Our hearing fails and relatives have to shout for us to hear them; the inner vision becomes like a room full of smoke.

The third stage of death brings a loss of the ability to discriminate between things. We can no longer recognise our friends and relatives, or remember their names. Starting at the

periphery, our body becomes cold, breathing is weak, and we lose the sense of smell. No matter how much our relatives rub our hands and feet, they still feel icy cold. The inner vision becomes red sparks dancing in a black background. While the mind still retains some capacity to discriminate between right and wrong, this is the crucial time when the karmic seed that will throw our mental continuum into the next life is ripened.

The fourth stage of death brings a loss of volition. Losing the knowledge of accomplishment, we forget our purpose in life; taste and touch sensations cease; the inner vision becomes a pinpoint of light in the dark; and we stop breathing. Although our breathing has stopped, we are not dead until the mind separates from the body. In ordinary people, this may happen soon after breathing stops, or it may take up to three days. One who has developed clairvoyance through meditation can tell if death has actually occurred or not, and that is why Buddhists request a qualified lama to observe and say when the body can be disposed of without disturbing the mind.

With the fifth stage of death, all thought activity, virtuous and non-virtuous, ceases as the mind becomes more and more subtle. The wind energies have contracted inwards and, as the winds from the upper half of the body move down towards the heart chakra, the inner vision becomes white, like the light of the full moon in a clear sky. Then, as the winds from the lower half of the body move up towards the heart chakra, the vision becomes red, like the red sky during sunset. All the winds then reabsorb back into the indestructible drop and the vision becomes black. Finally, the last vision of death occurs, the clear light, likened to the first appearance of light in the eastern sky before dawn.

The mind, supported by its subtle wind, now separates from the body, and the experience is like going from deep sleep to a dream. The opening of the indestructible drop is sometimes indicated by a reddish liquid coming from the nostrils and a whitish liquid coming from the sex organ. The subtle wind activated by the mind forms the body of the bardo being, which has the five sense faculties, and the subtle mind becomes the mind of the bardo being.At first, we may see our old body with our relatives standing around crying. We try to communicate with them but they cannot see or hear us. In distress, we lose contact with the past life and spiral away into a pleasant dream or a nightmare, according to the state of our mind as we were dying.

The appearance of the bardo body is similar to its next life, the karma for which ripened during the third stage of death. If one is to be reborn as a cow, it will look like a cow; if one is to be reborn as a human, it will look like a human the size of a six-year-old child. It has the capacity to pass through solid structures; when we think of a place, suddenly we are there. We eventually come across our future parents in the act of intercourse. Our future sex has already been determined by karma and we experience physical desire for the parent of opposite sex. This draws us irresistibly towards the union of our future parents' sex organs. We feel hostility towards the parent of same sex, and this agitation causes us to die from the bardo state. Our mind, once again in the clear light, enters the egg within the mother's womb. If conception does not occur, we awaken again, still in the bardo. After seven weeks the vast majority of bardo beings have taken rebirth. And so our personal wheel of life has turned one full cycle, as it has been turning since time without beginning.

PROBLEMS, PROBLEMS, PROBLEMS

You might have noticed that things tend to go wrong in life, or at least they do not happen exactly as you wish. "Problems, problems, problems," a refrain I heard more than once during my childhood, is a cry for help from those who are drowning in an ever-more complex sea of responsibilities and obligations acquired in the daily battle for survival. Ever since we can remember, we have been trying to avoid problems by changing the world, achieving temporary happiness at best, outright failure at worst. Most often, we stumble along making the best we can out of a poor deal. Who has ever come out on top in the world? In all of human history no one has ever succeeded in eliminating problems, particularly the personal problems of sickness, ageing, death, and having enemies. There is a method, however, that can remove the word "problem" from our vocabulary.

Instead of being obstacles to happiness, the things that go wrong in life, to which we usually react with sadness and anxiety, can become sources of happiness. The key to this magical transformation is knowing that, just as rain is a curse for picnickers but a blessing for farmers, the self-oriented outlook determines things to be problems whereas an other-oriented outlook can extract value from whatever happens in life. If we always react to difficulties with self-centred aversion and blame the external world for our troubles, things will forever appear to be against us and we will never be free from sadness, anxiety, or fear.

To not be disturbed when difficulties arise, we must first reject the attitude of not wanting things to go wrong. We have to abandon our aversion to suffering by recognising that things are always going wrong and it is useless to be unhappy when they do so. If the problem can be fixed, there is no need to feel sad. And, if the problem cannot be fixed, being sad cannot help — it only rubs salt into the wound.

In modern psychology, the expression of grief is seen to be a natural activity and therefore good: if we do not grieve there is something wrong with us. Buddha did not equate natural with good. He said that consideration for others is good because it brings happiness to self and others, and selfishness is bad because it harms oneself and others. The former comes from wisdom and loving-kindness, and the latter comes from ignorance. It is true that if we suppress grief we may create extra problems, but if there is no grief at all we cannot have the problem of suppression, nor will we have the sadness of grief itself.

We need to abandon aversion to problems because fear and anxiety only increase harm by sapping us of courage. Compare the experience of an injection for a child who fears needles and a child who has no fear. Anxiety, which makes even small sufferings intolerable, can be cured by facing up to our problems and seeing just how much they have been exaggerated

by our own mind. The point of this exercise is not to stop problems happening, it is to prevent them harming our inner peace.

Aversion to things going wrong is the root of our anxiety. To overcome anxiety and to derive happiness from our problems, we should now cultivate the attitude of being happy when problems arise. Problems should be seen as useful because they give us opportunities to train our mind in consideration for others and in abandoning selfishness. We need not go to the extreme of seeking problems through extreme ascetic practices. Problems will always find us; when they do, we can deal with them in many skilful ways.

To recover from their addiction, alcoholics must remove the illusion that intoxication is happiness and see the reality that alcohol only brings misery to them and others. To free ourselves from the illusion that external objects are the true source of happiness, we should use the inevitable loss of a prized possession, or the death of a loved one, as opportunities to see reality and break our addiction to the world of ephemeral pleasures. In other words, problems help us to gain renunciation, the first step towards enlightenment.

When we experience pain, if we forget ourselves and think of others with the same problem and generate compassion for them, our own pain will be reduced immediately, and we will increase the strength of our compassion. By not identifying with the pain as my pain, and by seeing it as the pain of others that we have willingly taken upon ourselves, our mind can be transported from the misery of self-pity to great happiness. If we want the best medical treatment, we should find a doctor who suffers from the same disease as ours: that doctor will have empathy. In the same way, if we want to help others, we need to know how they are feeling, and we can see our own problems as beneficial because they help us to know the suffering of others and to have heartfelt compassion.

Pride destroys our happiness; it is a bigger problem than most external troubles, so we can use problems as opportunities to remove arrogance and contempt for others. If we make mistakes, laughing at ourselves and pointing out our own mistakes to others will destroy pride and prevent us from falling into neurotic concealment of our failings. Instead of ridiculing us, people will like and trust us more.

As patience is the antidote to anger, our worst enemy, we need problems in order to practise patience. People who harm us are actually our best friends because they are giving us the opportunity to overcome that which hurts us more than anything — our own anger.

Finally, if we are aware of karma, we will know that nothing happens without a cause. Sorrow is the result of negative karma and happiness is the result of positive karma. When things go wrong we can feel relief that our negative karmas are diminishing, and we will be stimulated to purify remaining negative karmas and accumulate positive karma. Thus problems are useful because they help remove the dangerous thought, "It can't happen to me," and the miserable, self-pitying thought, "It's not fair."

By cultivating these positive attitudes towards problems, we will find that our mind becomes lighter. Our confidence will be unaffected even by big problems and, instead of causing unhappiness, these will become sources of bliss. In these disturbed times, we need the protection of a happy mind. If we are always discontent and anxious, our physiology will

become imbalanced and physical illness will result, making us more unhappy. If we are able to ride the bumps of life and even extract happiness from them, our body will be healthy and our mind will be happier.

If we understand the inner, mental component of happiness and suffering, when physical pain occurs our thoughts can remain peaceful and even happy; external events will not harm our mind. If we seek happiness from outer things, we will be controlled by the world, and even a little criticism will send us into despair. It is far better, and easier, to be in control of our own mind. Only fools complain; the wise find value in everything.

REALITY

Often we hear the parents of teenage children complaining, "I can't communicate with my kids, they live in a different world." And at the same time, their children are saying, "my parents have completely lost the plot, they cannot see beyond their own narrow lives."

According to Buddhism, both complaints are true in a sense that we have never imagined. Buddha taught that all troubles stem from our mind. He also said that all happiness comes from our mind. If we think about this, it seems that the entire world comes from our mind — and, yes, Buddha said that too.

There is a world outside of our minds, but our assumption that it is the same world for everybody, and within which we move as passive observers, is incorrect. Each of us has a personal world that appears to us according to our state mind; no two people can ever have exactly the same experience. There are enough things in common in the way we project things to enable us to talk about "our world." But "our world" is only a generalisation. If we closely examine our lives, each of us has a particular pattern of projections that creates a unique world for us alone. Each of us lives in our own world.

For example, when we are in love, flowers become incandescent temples of colour, birdsong is a heavenly symphony, and the world seems full of promise and happiness. But when we are depressed, colour drains from the world, ugliness becomes apparent, and everything seems wrong and meaningless. When a depressed person and a person in love walk along the same street, is there an independent reality that exists apart from their two quite different worlds? Is the street both pleasing and ugly simultaneously?

Buddha explained that the houses, trees, and gardens in the street have no self-existence. They are nameless entities with the potential to appear to mind in many different ways. According to our state of mind, we see only one of these potentials; this becomes our reality, and we name the object according to the way we perceive it. Someone who sees a different potential appearance through a different state of mind sees another reality. An illustrationof this principle is the appearance of a flower to a bee and a human. The eye of a bee is sensitive to different wavelengths of light to those seen by the human eye, so the bee sees a flower completely differently to the way a human sees it. Which, then, sees the real flower? There is no real flower existing in its own right independently of an observing mind. There is a base with many potentials, but it only becomes a flower-for-a-human when it is observed by a human. At other times it is a flower-for-a-bee, a flower-for-a-bird, and so on.

Furthermore, those of us with the preconception that this particular flower is a weed will feel displeasure and see the flower as an enemy. Non-gardeners, however, will see it as a pretty thing and will feel pleasure. The appearance of the flower as friend or enemy comes from the mind. There is no real flower that can be independently established to be friend or enemy. One of the more pleasurable tasks in my life was to help establish a Tibetan Buddhist monastery in the south of France. My first aim was to create a garden, and I soon realised that if I changed my attitude towards buttercups and wild violets and saw them as part of the rose garden rather than as weeds, I could reduce my workload and increase my pleasure at the same time.

In the Buddhist texts, the classic example given to show how karma influences our perception of things is that what humans experience as pure water is seen and experienced by hungry ghosts as a filthy and undrinkable liquid, and by divine beings as blissful ambrosia.

Scientists pride themselves in presenting an objective picture of the world, but even they have to admit that, ultimately, the very act of observation is a determining factor in establishing what is observed. There is no absolute reality; Newtonian physics must give way to relativity.

Carl Jung showed that paintings gave insight into the minds of his patients, and later psychiatrists used acting, sand-play, and other methods to learn about the inner world of the mind by assessing its external expression. This is in harmony with Buddha's teaching that the entire way we live our lives, not just our artistic expression, reflects the way we see the world to exist. In our pursuit of happiness and our attempts to avoid suffering, we are constantly trying to transform the physical world. Such behaviour is extreme human folly; all we have to do to achieve peace and happiness is change our mind.

Contrary to what many think, Buddha did not say the world is an illusion. He said it is like an illusion. Ignorance, anger, and desire distort the entities of our world, including our own self, into appearing as if they are inherently good, bad or indifferent. Like a puppy barking at its reflection in a mirror, we react to these false appearances as if they are true and have nothing to do with our minds. Enclosed within our world of deluded projections, we become more ignorant, attached, and angry until someone finally points out our mistake. The only person who can show us our mistakes is somebody who has removed the sources of illusion from their own mind, and such people are difficult to meet.

At least you now know enough to be able to communicate with your children by remembering that pop-music-for-a-kid is entirely different to pop-music-for-a-parent. Abandon your subjective discriminations, remember your own childhood, and treasure the precious opportunity to enjoy life with your kids, before it is too late.

THAT'S THE WAY IT IS

I have added this essay to the original text to clarify the previous essay on reality. In describing the physical world, the great Indian Buddhist scholar, Vasubandhu,said that matter is composed of minute atoms and has four fundamental properties: the elements of earth, water, fire, and wind. These are not elements as we normally understand the term, they are four properties of matter. The entity of earth element is hardness and it supports other physical objects. The entity of water element is dampness and it holds things together. The entity of fire element is warmth and it ripens things. The entity of wind element is lightness and it causes movement. Every piece of matter has all four elements manifesting in varying degrees according to various conditions, including the karma of sentient beings. Unfortunately, Vasubandhu did not go into detail of how the four elements manifest in relation to karma. To gain insight into this we have to look at the tantric texts that explain the subtle relationship between body and mind.

Mind, the continuum of mere clarity and awareness, has no physical properties but is always supported by matter in the form of subtle wind element. The combination of wind and mind is like a blind man carrying a legless person with good eyesight. Separately, they cannot go where they want, together, they can reach their destination. The analogy is not perfect because the two persons are separate individuals, whereas mind and its supportive wind are one entity with two functions: awareness, which we label mind, and motion, which we label wind. This entity is the meeting point between body and mind.

From the moment of conception onwards, progressive coarsening of the mind and its supporting wind element gives rise to the (internal) fire, water, and earth elements of the developing body. The coarsening winds and their associated states of awareness play a vital role in physiological functioning, such as breathing, sensation, urination, defecation, speaking, swallowing, bodily heat, digestion, and physical movement. As desire for sensory pleasure is dominant in our minds, our human karma has connected our mind with a body well-suited for experiencing sensory pleasure. Whether we spend our life pursuing pleasure or use our time to go beyond the wheel of life depends upon our wisdom and compassion.

After we are born, the way in which external objects appear to our sense consciousness is determined by the same ripening propensity associated with that consciousness. The four (external) elements of the physical environment do not have a direct connection with consciousness but, nevertheless, their appearance to any individual is determined by that person's karma and therefore by the mind.

Remember, the four elements cannot be placed in labelled jars. They are physical properties of matter. We can easily demonstrate the four internal elements of our body by lifting a heavy weight. The movement indicates wind element, bodily heat indicates fire element, sweating indicates water element, and supporting the weight indicates earth element. This is also a demonstration of non-physical mind being a causal factor for bodily activity through appearance of the elements. Unaware of the subtle wind element and its association with mind, scientists say the body can influence mind but a non-physical mind (which they do not accept) would be unable to influence the body. If the mind is sufficiently motivated, however, through subtle wind energy, it can cause the neuromuscular system to lift a heavier weight than anybody else and win an Olympic gold medal. It is mind power that wins gold; muscle power is only a secondary condition.

Wakefulness and alertness are associated with full peripheral activity of the wind and other elements in the sense organs and muscles. Drowsiness is associated with the winds gradually withdrawing from the periphery, and we lose sensory awareness, muscular tone, and clarity of thought. The earth element weakens and the body feels heavy, lethargic, and assumes a horizontal posture on the couch. If a friend appears with a case of beer, moved by desire, the elements return to full duty. If nobody comes and the mind falls asleep, the earth, water, and fire elements lose power and the winds become more subtle as the mind reverts to something approaching the clear-light state in deep sleep.

There is a parallel between this description of the emergence of the internal and external elements in our lives and the explanation of the coming and going of the universe. The latter has a similar emergence and decay of the external elements, and it also occurs in correspondence with the ripening of the collective karmic potencies of the inhabitants of the universe. How this happens is the question.

In Dharamsala in 1982, at the request of Lama Thubten Yeshe, His Holiness the Dalai Lama gave a series of talks to an audience of Westerners and Tibetans. In relation to the above question, he saidthat, after conception, the embryonic mind becomes increasingly coarse as it is progressively supported by the increasingly coarse elements of the body and, correspondingly, that mind gives rise to appearances of elements in the form of (external) sense objects. The specific forms of these appearances, the way they appear to mind, are shaped by karmic propensities from past actions that have been transmitted with the continuity of clear light mind.

Thus His Holiness explains that karmic propensities ripen not only into experiences of happiness or suffering, but also into the external conditions, the objects, that produce those experiences. He says that the internal development of the body and sense organs arising from the clear light mind is, in some intimate way, causally related to the appearance of one's environment. Then, in giving the example of one type of weather causing happiness or suffering in different people according to their karmic propensities, he says that the immediate cause of the weather is the local physical conditions, but if we trace back the causes for the movements of weather, we come to the causal relation between the emergence of the internal and external physical elements.

His Holiness says that the scriptures are not clear in explaining how instincts or potencies established on the mental continuum by karmic actions bring about change in the external

world, and we need to analyse the point ourselves. His opinion is: "I think there is definitely some kind of relation between internal and external elements. On one level, we can say that now our internal elements are totally under the influence of the external elements. But when we reach an advanced state of meditational realisation, we gain control over our internal elements. Then, through meditation, our internal elements can affect the external ones, such as by starting or stopping rain. Because of this relationship, on the level of the spiritual path, of actions involving the internal elements effecting changes in external ones, I believe there must also be some similar relationship on the basis (ordinary) level as well."

His Holiness says that just as Buddhism asserts collective karma, similar potencies in the minds of many beings giving rise to a common experience, and individual karma, potencies ripening into individual experience, he believes that, similarly, there are two levels of cause for changes in the elements of the external environment. The world and the general environment are the result of the collective karma of the numerous beings inhabiting it, but it would be difficult to ascribe to karma why one leaf on a tree is bigger than another or why two leaves fall at different times. It is better, he says, to see minor happenings like these as results of the physical powers of the external elements themselves.

At another talk, in France in 1993,His Holiness said:… things do not happen to us (purely) by chance. Overall, our everyday experiences depend upon karma. But we must distinguish between causes and circumstantial conditions. When events reach the point of pleasant or unpleasant feelings, karma is becoming apparent. The continuity of physical manifestations, however, from space particles during the period of emptiness to a fully evolved universe with animate objects such as the human body and inanimate things such as rocks can in no way be ascribed to karma. The relationship between sentient beings and the environment is of a karmic nature, but we cannot attribute to karma the continuity of the evolutionary process of the formation of the universe. The empty nature (non-inherent existence) of all things is not a product of karma, nor is the capacity of sentient beings to feel joy or sorrow. The various capacities of chemical components cannot be attributed to karma but rather to the laws of nature. At what stage does karma begin to play an active role and up to what point are we dealing with the laws of nature alone? This is an interesting terrain for research.

The fact that this tulip is in front of me is undoubtedly connected with karma, but karma has nothing to do with the growth of the tulip in dependence upon water, sunlight, etc. A flower grows as a result of chemical reactions; this is a natural law in which karma plays no part. The principle of karma is only a part of the law of causality, which covers much more ground than the principle of karma operating within it. The law of causality is a natural principle produced neither by Buddha nor by prayer, or even by karma. It is simply a natural law. It is impossible to explain the principle of karma without accepting that there is a law of nature underlying other principles (of causality). When someone asks me why virtuous acts result in beneficial effects and negative acts lead to unpleasant consequences, I can only answer, "That's the way it is: it's natural." There is no logical explanation.

TRUST

From sibling rivalry to international relationships, our society is pervaded by conflict, with temporary periods of peace characterised by artificial smiles that conceal the inner thought, "I don't trust you." In society today, prenuptial divorce agreements are the perfect example of our inability to trust each other. Sure, nobody is perfect in this imperfect world, and self-interest is indeed a universal affliction, but isn't there a way to reduce our cynicism and rediscover trust in each other?

Even when our own thoughts are worthy, it is difficult to avoid the suspicion, or the outright paranoia, of others. I think we do not trust each other because we cannot even trust ourselves.

Our lives are a masquerade, guiltily concealing the inner reality of self-indulgent weakness in our minds. Outer conflict is a reflection of the conflict within our mind, the abode of the devil. This demon does not have horns and a tail; it is our infatuation with our self-image born out of ignorance. In our blindness to what we are, we fabricate a self that appears to exist in its own right, independently of everything else. Believing this false self to be true, we cherish our self-image above all else, and immediately fall into neurotic modes of behaviour to protect it in our own eyes and in the way we want others to see us.

The major disturbing emotions are attachment, hatred, and pride. Attachment is our habit of grasping at things that please us or enhance our self-image; hatred is our tendency to push away all that displeases or harms our self-image; pride is a swollen-headedness that makes us aloof from others. Each of these emotions is obviously related to self-centredness. There are, however, more subtle self-centred mental disturbances, such as pretension and dishonesty. If we wish to be trustworthy, we must be able to recognise and abandon these two mental attitudes.

Pretension is when, through seeking material things or the approval of others, we fabricate a good quality about ourselves and try to convince them it is true. We do this so often that we soon believe our own lie, and move further away from reality. For Buddhist monks, pretension lies behind the five wrong livelihoods: contrived behaviour such as false humility, flattery, hinting, threatening others, and giving something small with the hope of a large return. Buddha instructed his monks to beg openly, whereas each of these wrong livelihoods has a hidden message that obliges someone to give. It is not only monks who behave like this.

Dishonesty is when, through seeking material things or approval, we confuse others by concealing our faults. This too can go from conscious concealment to the situation where we believe our lie to be true. The ultimate result of both pretension and dishonesty is that we cheat ourselves, and we turn others away from us because they soon learn we cannot be trusted.

Life is hard enough, and if there is nobody to trust it becomes intolerable. For our own sake, we have to realise that being deceitful places us in a situation where we will not trust anybody else, and so we will cut ourselves off from the comfort and security of good friends. In terms of our responsibility to others, we will be unable to provide them with the comfort and security they need. The best gift we can give to our family, to anybody else, and even to ourselves, is to be trustworthy. So we have to observe our mind closely and abandon our instinctive responses to pretend we are something that we are not and to conceal our mistakes.

Living a falsehood eats away at our peace of mind like cancer devouring our body. Being honest, admitting our mistakes, and apologising brings instant relief and happiness. It releases us from the solitary isolation of pride, and diminishes our tendency towards anger and attachment. I am not talking about major lies, although they may be included. Mostly I am referring to our ignorant compulsion to exaggerate or invent good qualities of our body, mind, and possessions, or to hide their faults. This creates the mentality of, "I can do anything you can do, better," and sets off an endless spiral of competition against everyone, even our own partner.

By incorporating our body and possessions into our self-image, we open ourselves to exploitation by the advertising and fashion industries, experts in the arts of exaggeration and concealment, who do not waste a moment in taking advantage of our foibles. When a person's worth is judged by their possessions and physical appearance, society is in a sorry state. Here in Mongolia the movement towards capitalist-style consumerism is rapidly accelerating, and traditional Buddhist values are quickly disappearing. The people themselves are not helping to avert the loss of their culture. Some men defy the basic teachings by wearing the robes of a Buddhist monk yet living as laymen: marrying, drinking alcohol, and reciting scriptures as their means of livelihood. Young people no longer trust their parents, teachers, or politicians, so the degenerate behaviour of these men who are not real monks removes the last opportunity for the younger generation to have trust in someone. Thus they are exposed to the danger of nihilism that afflicts young people in the West. There is nobody they can trust.

The best hope for Mongolia, and the world, is that we parents, teachers, politicians, and religious practitioners fulfil our responsibility to society by abandoning our self-cherishing, pretension, and dishonesty, and become truly trustworthy.

KARMA

At a public lecture in Australia in 1979, a woman asked Lama Thubten Yeshe, "What is karma?"

Lama Yeshe replied, "You are karma."

The audience went silent. From the back, a male voice said, "I didn't understand that answer."

"No," Lama Yeshe instantly replied, "because the answer was for her, not for you. You understood didn't you dear?" Lama said to the woman.

"Yes," she replied, hesitantly.

So, if you understand Lama Yeshe's answer, there is no need to read any further. Otherwise, read on.

To give a good public speech, one needs the ability to adjust the delivery according to how the audience is responding. In a similar way, to live our lives successfully, we need the flexibility to be able to change directions according to changing circumstances in our life. We need to live like car drivers in Ulaan Baatar, where the only way to survive is to follow the rule, "Expect the unexpected." Despite every effort to plan our lives, the unexpected soon shows us that we are not in control.

There are two forces governing our lives: one is the force of chaos, as with the traffic in Ulaan Baatar, and the other is the force of order, and this is karma. Karma is the pattern of experience in life created by the interaction between our behaviour and the environment. Our type of body is karma, our mental state is karma, everything is karma in the sense that the way our universe and its inhabitants exist is a result of karma. Just as gravity is a universal law of matter, described but not invented by Newton, karma is a universal law of mind described but not invented by Buddha. The law of karma is simple: all mental actions, and verbal and physical actions motivated by mind, leave potentials on our mind-stream that have the power to connect us with future experiences similar to the intended effects of those actions. Actions intended to please others create potentials that connect us with future pleasant experiences; actions intended to harm others create potentials that connect us with future unpleasant experiences. We cannot experience something, either pleasant or unpleasant, if we do not have the karmic potential in our mind for that experience to happen.

Our mind-streams are endless, circling from one life to another since time without beginning and bearing the echoes of past lives in the form of countless karmic potentials. Until they give rise to their effects, karmic potentials never lose their potency, even after the passage of many lives. Small potentials have the power to bring big results because they have the tendency to increase in strength over time. Nevertheless, positive potentials can be weakened or destroyed by anger, and negative potentials can be weakened and even eliminated by the application of four opponent powers based on sincere regret.

Our bodies, our possessions, our relationships, all aspects of our lives, are constantly changing; nothing remains as it was even from one moment to the next. This is not karma, it is the natural state of change that occurs within both physical and mental phenomena. In this sea of moment-by-moment impermanence we are struggling for our lives, trying to reach the safety of happiness and avoid drowning in sorrow. Positive karmic potentials are a tide flowing in our direction and negative potentials are a tide flowing against us.

This is where flexibility comes into the picture. Completely unaware of karma, we blindly push through life like pigs rooting in the mud and eating whatever comes into their mouths, good or bad. In ignorance of karma, we follow whatever impulses arise in our mind, constructive or destructive, unaware of the long-term results of our actions. Knowledge of karma gives us the flexibility to choose which mental impulses to follow. We can resist negative, destructive impulses of anger, selfishness, and desire; and we can cultivate positive, constructive behaviour motivated by compassion, love, and patience. If we are to remain like driftwood caught in the ebb and flow of life, it is our own choice. Surely the wise would choose to control the tide and escape the sea forever?

Theoretically, if there was no such thing as karma, our lives should be getting progressively happier as we learn from our mistakes and our behaviour becomes more skilful. But the reality is that we do not get happier with age. Buddhism says this is because we have no real control over our impulsive intentions.

For example, if we give chocolate with the thought of making someone happy, and our purpose is free from expecting something in return, we will establish a positive karmic potential in our mind. In future lives we will never miss out on having chocolate. If our initial good intention changes and, out of greed, we decide to eat the chocolate ourselves, we will create a negative karmic potential in our mind. This may result in rebirth as a hungry ghost and, in a later life, when we are reborn as a human, nobody will give us any chocolate.

The key elements in these two actions were the intentions behind them. The first intention was the virtuous thought of love; the second was the non-virtuous thought of greed. The mental activity of intention in these examples was the causal aspect of karma. The intended actions created karmic potentials, and when those karmic potentials ripen to produce their effect they will do so by creating another mental intention that will connect our mind with a particular object. This second intention is the resultant aspect of karma, and the experience it brings about is called a karmic ripening. New intentions are arising in our mind every split second, but not all come from karma — some come from good or bad behaviour patterns that we consciously establish in this life.

All the countless births we have taken within the wheel of life, even the good ones, have been the direct result of our purposeful actions. If we wish to avoid an unpleasant birth in hell, as a hungry ghost, or as an animal, we need to use our intelligence and perform only virtuous actions — things that help others. Thus, in everything we do, we have to be sure of our purpose in doing it. We can then choose whether or not to follow non-virtuous impulses, and whether or not to cultivate virtuous intentions. We alone are capable of determining our future lives; nobody else can control our destiny because karma is in our mind, not in a ledger in the sky.

We have been born as humans and divine beings many times, yet we still crave the physical and mental pleasures of those birth states. Complete freedom from the wheel of life has never been experienced because all our actions have been contaminated by the ignorance of reality. A far better goal than birth in heaven is to attain nirvana — liberation from the wheel of life — through destroying that ignorance with wisdom. And, based upon universal compassion, the supreme goal is to become a Buddha where one abides neither in nirvana nor in the wheel of life but is fully capable of leading beings away from suffering birth states forever.

THE SUPERHERO FACTOR

For some people, the 1960s was a time when love was the in-word and hugging was an obsession. They wrapped their arms around everyone they met, and even embraced trees. Their interpretation of the meaning of "love" was unrestricted sex and freedom for people to do whatever they wanted as long as it made them happy. But soon they realised that some acquaintances were pains in the neck, their children became hyperactive demons, and friends — even partners — became enemies. The love, love, love credo required serious revision. Unfortunately, it was replaced by the central tenet of New Age philosophy: "love yourself ." This was justified by the assertion that you cannot love others if you do not love yourself, but the New Agers were unaware of the hidden danger in the self-image. Blindly harbouring their worst enemy, self-cherishing, they made self-indulgence fashionable, and this drove their friends even further away.

In its emphasis on the possibility and the need to cultivate altruism, Buddhism takes us back to the 1960s. Love, love, love is a valid philosophy based upon one essential tenet: all beings are suitable objects for our love because everyone has been our mother countless times in past lives. In advocating love, I am not talking about free sex and doing whatever we want. The love towards all beings that Buddha encouraged us to cultivate is like the warm, joyful feeling in our heart when we think of, or see, our mother, especially when she is happy. Universal love is the selfless wish for all others to be happy, and the intention to make them happy.

If you hate your mother, but please bear with me. Every living being has also been our father, our husband, our wife, and so on many times, but the special relationship with our mother is that she gave us her body and her love when we were helpless babies. Wishing only for our happiness, she taught us how to talk, to walk, and enjoy our senses. Our laughter was sufficient reward for her self-sacrifice. It was not her fault she made mistakes later on. Mothers, like ourselves, also suffer from the sickness of self-cherishing ignorance.

By acknowledging the kindness of our mother in this life, we will feel the wish to repay her kindness and we will see her in the light of heart-warming love. As our mother is worthy of heart-warming love for her kindness, how much more should we love her when we know that she has been our mother countless times in past lives? Equally, our partner, our children, strangers in the street, even the cockroaches in our kitchen, have all been our mother countless times in past lives.

When we deeply understand this reality, every living being we meet becomes a suitable object of heart-warming love, and a source of great happiness for ourselves. Doing the

slightest favour for anyone or anything becomes the joyful experience of giving a small treat to one's mother multiplied a billion times over. Don't worry, you do not have to hug trees; they are not sentient and were never our mother. Protect trees by all means, because they are the homes and the food of so many of our real past mothers.

When we look around we see that our past mothers are not so happy. They are experiencing the sufferings of sickness, ageing, and death; there is so much loneliness, mental confusion, and unhappiness. Our mothers whose karma has taken them to animal, hungry ghost, or hell births are suffering things that we, temporarily born as humans, cannot even imagine. So, whose responsibility is it to help them? If our present mother is trapped in a burning house, do we stand back and ask somebody else to rescue her? Of course not; we will put our own lives in danger to rescue her. Just as it is our natural responsibility to brave the flames and lead our present mother to safety, it is also our natural responsibility to rescue every living being from suffering. This thought is the superhero factor.

Hollywood has run out of plots for heroes rescuing ladies in distress or marshals saving townships. Nowadays, heroes and heroines rescue the entire world from the baddies, braving flames, explosions and evil of more and more fantastic varieties. Their altruism, arising from the scriptwriter's pen, is a bit far-fetched: we have been conditioned by Hollywood into believing that naturally good guys always turn up at the right time. But is it possible for somebody to be truly altruistic?

Although, in view of our past-life relationships, it is our natural responsibility to help others without regard to self, it is not our natural inclination. Our innate self-centredness soon draws the line at how much we are prepared to give up our own happiness for the sake of others. Altruism, however, is not just another Hollywood fantasy. The courage and determination to take personal responsibility to rescue all living beings from suffering, the superhero factor, will arise from universal compassion. This compassion sees others as no different to oneself in wanting to be happy and free from pain; it sees one's own needs as insignificant compared to the needs of the world; and it sees that if one has the cure for suffering it would be the height of selfishness to not share it with others.

The cure for suffering is the wisdom realising selflessness, the perfect remedy to selfishness, and thus an important aid to the cultivation of altruism. Like a parent wishing to protect his or her child from the troubles of adolescence, universal compassion understands the suffering of all beings caught in the net of self-centred confusion, and wants to set them free. Such compassion is born from the mind of heart-warming love, which, as we have seen, arises from acknowledging the debt we owe to every living being due to the infinite kindness they have bestowed upon us when they were our mothers in past lives.

As the sufferings of their mothers are self-induced through selfishness, anger, and attachment, the only way our heroes can rescue them is to show the path by which they can overcome the flames of their own anger, the explosions of their own attachment, and the evil of their own self-cherishing. Thus, by first following the path themselves, our heroes become perfectly qualified to guide their mothers to safety. Such heroes are called bodhisattvas, who think nothing of giving their own lives for the sake of others. In the world today there are many bodhisattvas living an unheralded existence and helping others in a variety of ways. When former president Mikhail Gorbachev was making radical changes in

Russia to bring an end to the Cold War, I attended the annual cricket match between my centre and another Tibetan Buddhist centre in Sydney. The lama from the opposing side leaned across to me and said, "You know, what Mr Gorbachev is doing for the world today is like the activity of a bodhisattva."

MEDITATION

My nephew, a promising young footballer, once tried to impress his monk uncle by telling me that his team meditates before the game.

"Excellent," I replied. "Upon what do you meditate?"

"On hatred," he said, with enthusiasm.

It probably worked, but perhaps this is not the most skilful application of the powers of meditation. The purpose of meditation in Buddhist practice is first to reduce the noise of uncontrolled thoughts and emotions in our mind, and then to turn our attention towards a fine analysis of how we exist. With the right instruction and sufficient effort, this can culminate in us directly realising our ultimate nature. Such wisdom then eliminates the self-grasping ignorance, the root of all suffering. A second function of meditation is to train our mind in positive attitudes such as loving-kindness. This may not win many football games, but it will make our lives a whole lot better. And it provides the support of self-confidence and happiness through which we will be able to persevere and achieve that wisdom.

We all want to be attractive and liked by others, so we spend our time and money grooming and decorating our bodies to make them appear as beautiful as possible. But most of us simply do not have the genetic potential to even approach the physical prowess or the bodily perfection of field, screen, and catwalk idols. On the other hand, every one of us has the mental potential to attain the exquisite inner beauty of patience, loving kindness, and wisdom. These mental qualities are truly attractive. Even the most seriously physically challenged person brings warmth and joy to our hearts when their mind is radiating loving-kindness. And the most handsome and athletic people become ugly when they are angry, disgusting when they are greedy, repulsive when they are arrogant, and terrifying when they preach distorted views such as racism.

So, if we want to be liked, we should spend more time on the meditation cushion and less time in front of the mirror. Meditation requires instruction and inspiration from an experienced person, a quiet and comfortable place, and more determination than an athlete intent on winning gold. Don't worry, that degree of enthusiasm will appear as you begin to taste the benefits of meditation.

Meditators must focus their minds upon a chosen object, a mental picture such as the image of Buddha, and hold that object without distraction. At first, our mind is like a wild horse that refuses to be captured and we cannot hold the object for more than a split second. With

perseverance, we will be able to remain focused on the object of meditation, just as a horse can be tied to a post with a strong rope. The rope is the power of mindfulness that remembers the object and keeps the mind fixed upon it. Until our mindfulness gains full strength, our mind can still break free, usually by slipping into a fantasy of desire, and we may even forget that we are supposed to be meditating. Due to past habits of daydreaming about personal glory or sexual escapades, our mind may become lost in stories that can continue from one meditation session to another for days or even weeks.

When we stop these distractions of mental excitement, and hold the object consistently, we will meet another obstacle: dullness. Although the object remains in focus, its clarity fades and our mind becomes dark. We fall into a trance-like state, which we may believe is good meditation but in reality is creating the karma to be born with a dull mind, like a cow. Excitement and dullness repeatedly interrupt our concentration on the object and we have to cultivate the power of alertness, watching our own mind for these distractions, which can be very subtle. Alertness rings the alarm, mindfulness wakes us up, and we place our mind on the object again. Results come slowly and are often imperceptible to the meditator, who thinks his or her mind is as crazy as ever. But you know something is happening when people start asking, "How come you are so calm these days? What are you taking?"

Such is the depth of our self-centredness, it is better to not tell anybody we are meditating; otherwise pride will take our mind in a wrong direction, and external obstacles will arise. But I will tell you about an experience I had because it is my job to do so. Before deciding to become a monk, I meditated alone for three months in the Australian bush, accompanied only by animals and birds that had no fear. During my evening meditations, a marsupial mouse would curl up and sleep in the warmth of my hands, and during the day small birds would hop from my lunch bowl to my head, enjoying their first taste of lentils and rice. I followed a strict daily regime of eight one-hour sessions, two meals, and not going beyond the boundary of the cabin I had built from timber-mill off-cuts and materials salvaged from the rubbish dump. I had plenty of books on Buddhism to read, but made no contact at all with the outside world.

As thoughts of the immediate things in my life died away, memories of past events came vividly to mind, together with their associated emotions. Sometimes tears flooded down my cheeks; sometimes I could hardly restrain myself from laughing. Buddhism is essentially a system of psychology, and the meditation provided me with ample material to test the structure of Buddhist logic. The system held. It became overwhelmingly clear to me that every unhappy experience in my life would not have happened, or would have been greatly reduced in intensity, if my mind had been free from self-importance, self-cherishing, and self-justification. And the good times in my life were best when I was able to forget myself and love others. The retreat became three months of intense psychoanalysis, with the teachings acting as the analyst, a mirror showing me the beauty and the ugliness of my mind. Importantly, my meditation experiences confirmed that the Buddha's explanation of psychology was as true for us today as it was for the people of India two and a half thousand years ago.

At the end of the retreat, I climbed to the top of the ridge where, to the right, an old logging track disappeared towards virgin rainforest. To the left, the track ran down to my friend's farm. I was tempted to turn right and disappear forever, but I had to see the world again.

Speaking after three months of silence was a novelty. Open fields of sunshine with green grass and spring flowers were a touch of paradise after the dark enclosure of the forest. That evening, the bush hippies congregated at the farm for a full-moon party. Without the aid of any substance, I was higher than them all, and soon left the noise of the party to return to the sound of silence in my cabin.

A month later, at work in a hospital in Melbourne, I was telling a young doctor about my experience in retreat. He looked at me in astonishment. "Three months!" he exclaimed. "How could you? What about your career?"

I felt so sorry for him, already locked into a system that would slowly cut him off from other realities. Such an experience is the best thing anybody can have for their career, and for their life.

GROWING UP

When we were born we became the star attraction in our family. With our every requirement lovingly provided, we can hardly be blamed for assuming we were the centre of the universe. It came as a shock when, as we grew older, we were subjected to parental discipline and sibling rivalry. We realised we had to fight for ourselves and fight we did, knowing full well what we wanted, what we did not want, and what was ours. We experimented with temper tantrums, but they backfired and resulted in punishment, so we soon gave them up. Anyway, they were exhausting and nothing pleased our siblings more than to hear us scream. Then we tried violence. In hospital emergency departments I have seen babies who were killed by elder siblings desiring to regain their status at the centre of the world. Most of us have left physical violence behind as a means of obtaining our own ends, and have cultivated the subtler strategies of flattery, false smiles, and so on. This progressive sophistication of selfish behaviour is called growing up.

We adults retain in our psyches an impression of the time when we were loved and entertained by everybody, and we have an inner craving to rediscover the lost paradise that we cannot remember but we feel exists somewhere. Beneath our competition against each other for material possessions, sensory pleasures, praise, and fame lies a yearning for this intangible ideal. When we feel frustrated by the impossibility of recreating the dreamland of our nursery, we lose our sophisticated airs and revert to infantile behaviour patterns. As the great bodhisattva, Shantideva, said:

When their sandcastles collapse,
Children howl and despair;
Likewise, when my praise and reputation decline,
My mind becomes like a little child.

Our lives of conflict and unrealised dreams drain us of hope and, as old age and death approach, we give up on our personal goals and transfer our aspirations onto our children. We plan their lives in the hope that they will find the happiness we have failed to achieve. But they grow up just like us, or even worse, and contentment eludes them as well. Then we place our hope in our grandchildren, but we probably die before they too have the opportunity to disappoint us. All three generations are frustrated in their search for happiness because they are discontented with the present. Their minds are torn between nostalgia for past happiness and dreams of future happiness.

The truly mature person, a rare flower in this world of thorns, is one whose mind is at peace in the present, free from the need to pursue self-centred dreams, free from clinging to the

past. This person craves no wealth, pleasure, praise, or fame, and is unmoved by loss, pain, criticism, or ignominy. Such maturity is attainable by everybody, and is the goal of the Buddhist path. It is the result of raising to their full potential our inner qualities of wisdom and love, our ability to see reality, and to extract joy from the happiness of others. To grow up in a Buddhist sense is to achieve our potential of becoming a Buddha, a path upon which we all must eventually embark if we want real happiness for others and ourselves.

The practice of tantra is the most profound and the quickest method for achieving this aim. Tantric practitioners take male or female Buddhas as role models for transforming their physical, verbal, and mental energies into wisdom and loving-kindness. The plethora of tantric deities is not polytheism, as some people mistakenly assert. Each meditational deity represents a fully enlightened Buddha whose form symbolises a particular aspect of the enlightened mind. The multiple heads, arms, legs, and so on symbolise various aspects of the path and the enlightened activity of the Buddhas. According to their different personalities, practitioners choose a compatible deity practice as the central theme for their personal maturation into Buddhahood.

In general, the enlightened mind is the unification of exalted wisdom and compassionate bliss. The perfection of the masculine part of our psyche is compassionate bliss; the perfection of our feminine aspect is exalted wisdom, and the sublime combination of these two is symbolised by tantric deities in sexual union. This has nothing to do with mundane sexual activity — another mistaken belief held both by non-Buddhists and those Buddhists who have failed to abandon their childish pursuit of self-gratification. A sad indicator of these degenerate times is the current New Age interest in tantra, with self-proclaimed tantric gurus teaching a hotchpotch of ideas gleaned from different sources and with no realisation of the essential tantric foundation of renunciation, altruism, and wisdom.

To grow up we need to have a role model. I have already stated my opinion that parents, teachers, politicians, and stars of the field, screen, and catwalk are unsuitable models. I have not mentioned rock stars: they can speak for themselves. Clone clubs, where people dress and behave like their particular hero, can be simple fun; but they also reveal our inner need to identify with a hero. Our tendency to identify with anti-heroes or tragic figures is a reflection of the inner turmoil of our minds. The loss of a sense of meaning and purpose in modern life is a major factor in the epidemics of drug addiction, suicide, and violence that are spreading around the world.

Many religious figures have depressingly tragic life-stories, or have been exposed as hypocritical frauds and are not acceptable either as heroes or anti-heroes. So, what is left?

Buddhahood is not a state of omnipotence, such a state is considered to be impossible, but it is a state of perfection of both wisdom and compassion, something that is truly attainable by each one of us. If we are fortunate enough to see this, and if we generate the aspiration to attain buddhahood, the proper role models for us to follow are the tantric deities, who are supreme in every aspect. Their bodies, voices, and minds represent the perfect qualities of universal love, bliss, wisdom, and power.

Tantric deities can manifest in peaceful, semi-wrathful, or wrathful forms. In training our mind towards enlightenment, each form has a particular activity that can overcome negative

aspects of our mind that are far more terrifying. Tourists visiting Mongolian or Tibetan temples often leave with frowns, muttering things such as "devil worshippers." Do not be put off by the images of tantric Buddhism. They have a profound meaning and function that is of vital importance to the world. In his human aspect, the Dalai Lama of Tibet is a perfect role model as a Buddhist monk, a wise politician, and a compassionate human being. In his aspect as the tantric deity Avalokiteshvara, the Buddha of Compassion, he is a perfect tantric guide to buddhahood.

THE LAMA

In March 1974, two-thirds of the way into a one-month meditation course in Nepal, the word went around that Lama Yeshe was coming to talk. I and two hundred other young Westerners had been following an intense program of meditations, lectures, and discussions, during which we were not allowed to leave the grounds of Kopan Monastery. That posed no particular problem. Kopan is on a ridge overlooking the entire Kathmandu valley, with a marvellous view of terraced hillsides, rice paddies, giant bamboo waving in the breeze, and the snow-covered Himalayas.

We had heard stories about the remarkable Lama Yeshe, but most of us had not yet seen him, and our interest was intense. While we were waiting for his arrival in the huge tent, there was a slight disturbance as a monk slipped beneath the rear flap of the tent and, with a corner of his robes concealing his face, joined the line of Western monks sitting on the ground in the front row. As time passed, the air of expectancy grew stronger; all eyes were on the main entrance when, suddenly, there was a high-pitched laugh, almost a shriek, from this tardy monk. It was Lama Yeshe. Still laughing, Lama Yeshe took his place on the teaching throne, and immediately won my admiration for his brilliant entrance that had deceived us all.

I had almost left the course several times. Karma and reincarnation did not fit my scientific world-view, and I suspected that Buddhism was just another superstitious attempt to make sense of life. Charles Darwin, physics, chemistry, and biology were good enough for me. But something had kept me there, and it was not the food. There were some interesting things the lamas had to say about the mind, what it is and how it works. During his talks, Lama Yeshe's answers to my many questions did not resolve my problem with karma and reincarnation, but they further whetted my appetite for Buddhist psychology.

I asked Lama Yeshe about the causes of schizophrenia. In his answer, Lama Yeshe showed that he clearly understood the nature of the illness, and his explanation that it can arise from both physiological and psychological causes gave balance to the polarised Western opinions that schizophrenia comes only from physiological causes or only from psychological causes. For the latter, Lama gave the example of an intelligent young person who gradually loses control of his thoughts and behaviour due to conflicting pressures from his parents, society, and his own mind. This description was in line with what I had observed with some patients while working in a psychiatric hospital in Australia.

I was interested in this question because the only way I could come to terms with the description of other realms of birth was that they were metaphors for the spectrum of

human experience. Hell, with its persecuting, hallucinated demons, was a reasonable description of the experience of paranoid schizophrenia. Hungry ghosts suffering extreme deprivation due to miserliness was a reasonable description of those who hoard money and die of starvation; or those with obsessive–compulsive disorder who live utterly miserable lives. There are plenty of examples of humans exhibiting animal-like thoughts and behaviour. The demigods' jealousy and desire for possessions that drive them into battle against the gods was a reasonable description of the lust for power and wealth that we see in certain politicians, military personnel, and business magnates. And the delightful pleasures of the divine realms may have represented the bliss of orgasm or, perhaps, the psychedelic state.

My next meeting with Lama Yeshe was a year later in Australia, at the University of Melbourne. As Lama Yeshe arrived to give a public talk, I went to open his car door. Before I could do so, he reached through the window, grabbed my beard, and pulled my face down towards his. With mock ferocity he said, "I remember you, you"re the one who asked all those questions at Kopan," and once again he broke into that high-pitched laugh. I mumbled some sort of an apology. In those twelve months I had been unable to prove that karma and reincarnation were wrong, and I had realised they were not contradictory to my scientific knowledge. In fact, I saw them as complementary to science, and I had become a Buddhist.

A week later, at a five-day retreat by the seaside, in the privacy of his caravan, I said to Lama Yeshe, "I want to practise the teachings as much as I can, and I see two possibilities. The first, which I prefer, is to live with someone and practise together. The second is to become a monk."

Wiping the tears from his eyes after laughing his beautiful laugh, Lama Yeshe suddenly became serious. "Possible, dear, possible," he said. "You can live with a lady and both practise Dharma. But it is difficult. Instead of one crazy mind, you have two crazy minds."

Again he collapsed into laughter. Defensively, I asked, "What's the advantage of becoming a monk?"

Lama Yeshe instantly replied, "You can practise twenty-four hours a day." This challenged me to live up to my original statement that I wanted to practise as much as possible.

Following that interview, I attended another one-month course with the lamas in Australia. I then built a cabin in the bush and did the three-month meditation retreat that I described in the previous essay on Meditation. Seven months after the talk with Lama in his caravan, I was back at Kopan and, along with ten other Westerners, received novice ordination as a Buddhist monk. After the ceremony, Lama Yeshe said to us, "From now on, I am your mummy, your daddy, your boyfriend, your girlfriend. I will give you everything you need."

Lama Yeshe lived up to his promise. Apart from the hundred Tibetan and Nepalese monks at Kopan, there were twenty-five Western monks and nuns, and Lama was constantly supervising our formal education as well as every aspect of our lives. Observing that we were trying to live and eat simply, as Buddhist monks and nuns are supposed to, Lama Yeshe once asked someone what Westerners usually ate for breakfast. The next morning, we

discovered Lama Yeshe in our kitchen. On the table was a feast of cornflakes, fried eggs, cheese, toast, and jam. "You must eat properly, your bodies cannot take ascetic trip," he said, and walked out.

Another time, high in the Himalayas, at the beginning of a strict meditation retreat, I was sitting on my bed looking dejectedly at the breakfast that had been delivered to my room: one greasy, fried lady's finger vegetable. How can I possibly do retreat with such awful food? I thought. At that moment my window was pushed open and Lama Yeshe's hand came inside, holding a piece of Tibetan bread covered in Vegemite, something that Australians are thought to crave. Without saying a word, Lama gave me the bread and went away. I was never bothered by the food again (it did not improve).

In Tibet, "lama" means virtuous friend. Not all monks are lamas, as very few have the precious qualifications. For those of us lost in the quagmire of ignorance, such friends are as essential to following the spiritual path as is the air we need to remain alive.

LONELINESS

In the Himalayan kingdom of Nepal there is a custom for a young girl to be selected as the representative of a goddess and kept in a palace away from her family and friends. She receives lavish provision of her material needs, but her hair is never cut and her feet are not allowed to touch the ground. I once saw a film where one of these young goddesses was shown at the palace window, gazing wistfully into the busy streets of Kathmandu, her face a picture of boredom. The girls are finally released from their palatial prison when they begin to menstruate, the "curse" becoming their saviour, and another luckless victim takes their place. People believe these little girls are fortunate, but my godless Buddhist mind is saddened by the isolation and loneliness they are forced to endure.

Some people think that being a celibate Buddhist monk is an equally perverse situation. On my last day at work before flying from Australia to Nepal to become ordained, I followed the hospital tradition and went to the local pub with my fellow doctors for a farewell drink. There I was, the prospective Buddhist monk, sitting at a table with a cigar in my mouth, a jug of beer in front of me, and my arms around two young female doctors. Echoing my own doubts about whether it was possible to live the rest of my life alone, one of them asked, "But won't you miss the cuddles?"

"I don't know," I replied, "but I have to give it a try."

Loneliness was no stranger to me. A few years before, I had left my love in Australia and gone to England for further experience and post-graduate study in medicine, and for adventure. I found it all: adventure, friends, interesting work and study; but when I received letters from my girlfriend and memories of her invaded my mind, swinging London became the loneliest place in the world. I yearned for her to be with me and share my happiness.

My willingness to risk such loneliness again by becoming a monk was based on the inspiring example of the lamas, and on insights I had gained from the Buddha's teachings. Nobody I had ever met could approach the level of sanity, happiness, and humour of the lamas. If I could learn how my mind functioned and gain control over it like they had, I would free myself from loneliness and all other forms of unhappiness. This is what Buddhism is all about.

We all experience loneliness in varying degrees throughout our lives, and we tend to blame the non-caring attitude of others, or society in general, for our isolation. It is true that external conditions for loneliness exist, but the main cause for the misery of loneliness is clinging to the mistaken belief that we cannot be happy without a companion. It is not just

any companion we want. In our mind we build an image of the perfectly compatible person who will understand us and give us what we want. For many, this wish amounts to little more than the search for a maternal or paternal substitute. When we cannot find someone who measures up to our expectations, our self-image feels incomplete; afraid to reveal our unhappiness, we withdraw into a world of self-doubt. This blocks our capacity to recognise the needs of others, so our mind is less capable of loving and companions become even harder to find.

When we were babies, our mothers nourished our bodies with milk and our minds with love. We were weaned from our mother's breast but not from her heart and, as we grew older and felt the need for independence, we separated ourselves from maternal concern. We desired our mother's love, yet felt aversion to the demands she put upon us, and the way in which she made us feel like a child. Many adults even blame their mothers for the difficulty they have in establishing new relationships. They are half right. The real problem is our craving for the love, recognition, and appreciation that we used to receive from our parents. This makes us place a subtle, psychological demand upon our partner to provide the maternal love or the paternal protection that we crave, but our pressure has the opposite effect. The more we demand the love and protection of others, the more likely they are to withdraw their affection and distance themselves from us.

Desire for love can elevate us to great heights of happiness when we hear the words, "I love you"; but it can drive us to the depths of despair, even suicide or murder, when somebody says they do not love us anymore. The misery of loneliness is a deep well of self-pity from which we can only emerge by realising that, as we crave love, so do others; and the best thing to do in life is to take upon oneself the role of giver rather than receiver. I am not saying we should reject the love of others; my point is that we should free ourselves from our dependency upon love by abandoning self-concern and thinking only of the needs of others.

Paradoxically, giving love without wanting anything in return makes others love, recognise, and appreciate us even more. And so the cure for loneliness is to love others without restraint and without demands. It's easy. Just think of what you can do or say to make others happy, and do it. If you find it difficult with adults, you can give love to children. Even young goddesses need to be loved.

GENEROSITY

I recently heard the story of a woman in Holland who found an envelope containing ten-thousand dollars. She handed it to the lost property office and, when the money was claimed, this honest woman wanted no reward. The following week, she won a million dollars in a lottery.

My own story, not as dramatic, illustrates the same point. At the time when I was just becoming interested in Buddhism, I was leaving a shop and realised I had been given five dollars too much change. "Keep it," said my companion. I was tempted to follow his advice, but apart from his having just been released from prison, I thought, "If I am serious about Buddhism, I have to take it back." I returned and explained the situation to the shopkeeper. "Really?" he said. "If I was that stupid, you can keep it." Lesson number one for my companion and myself.

Now that I know more about Buddhism, it all seems fairly obvious: we cannot experience something if we have not created the cause. There is no such thing as simple luck where good or bad things happen without a prior cause. To experience any pleasure, from the relief of a cool breeze on a hot summer's day to whatever level of ecstasy we can imagine, and to experience any pain, from a pinprick to being roasted alive in a volcanic eruption, there must be two things in our mind. The first is the primary cause, a karmic potential established on our mindstream in a past life when a previous owner of our mind intentionally caused others to experience similar pleasure or pain. (Yes, you have a second-hand mind. Look after it: you will be passing it on at the end of your life).

The second thing that connects us with pleasant or unpleasant experiences is our mental attitude. If, for example, we are a generous person, our generosity is a suitable basis upon which karmic potentials established out of generosity can ripen. Twenty miserly people may walk past a ten-dollar note on the ground without seeing it, but when a generous person comes along they will be the "lucky" one whose eyes are drawn towards the note. The ripening of the karmic potential in their mind somehow connects their attention with the money on the ground. Exactly how this magic occurs, I cannot yet say. But I'm working on it.

Before claiming as our own anything valuable that we may find, the Buddhist scriptures say that we should make a reasonable effort to locate the owner. If we are in an isolated place, we should shout loudly in the four directions, "Does anybody own this?" If there is no reply, we can keep it without incurring the karma of stealing. These days, perhaps we should take the object to the lost property office.

In 1979, two young men in Perth, on the west coast of Australia, heard about the impending visit of Lama Zopa Rinpoche and Lama Thubten Yeshe to Melbourne, on the east coast. They very much wanted to meet the lamas, but had no money. While renovating an old house, one of them felt a strange compulsion to look into a cavity in the basement. Behind some rubbish, he saw a rusty tin can, inside of which was enough money for him and his friend to catch the bus to Melbourne. One of the men eventually became a monk, and the other and his wife became strong Buddhist practitioners. That was the working of karma.

On the negative side, if we are angry, wanting to abuse or hurt somebody, or our mind is simply filled with dislike, these attitudes will set us up to experience karmas where we have hurt others in the past. We may be attacked by a dog or beaten up by a hostile drunk on the street (you can see that this essay is being written in Ulaan Baatar). Everything that happens to us in our life is the expression of our karma and mental attitudes.

Many people want to be rich, but if the previous owners of your mind were stingy misers it will be difficult for you to succeed. Your only chance is to practise generosity. It is rare for karmas created in this life to ripen in this life, but it can happen if the deed is performed with power and pure motivation. As a friend of mine said in a lecture to businessmen on how to make money, "The first step in making money is to give money away." Provided you give with pure kindness and no wish for a reward, your generosity can ripen karmas for wealth here and now. If you have no such karmic potentials, your efforts will not be wasted: your generosity will be a cause for wealth to be experienced by the person who has your mind in the next life. And don't you wish the previous owners of your mind had been a bit more generous?

In Mongolia there is a belief that giving food or money to beggars, or even giving your old clothes away, is not good because you give away your luck and you will become hungry or poor yourself. This is pure superstition, a mistaken idea associated with self-cherishing ignorance. Generosity with the sincere thought to help others out of trouble can only bring good results.

Miserliness is a miserable state of mind that cuts us off from others and brings no enjoyment in life. Its opposite is generosity, the willingness to give and taking pleasure in helping others. There is great contentment in fulfilling the wishes of others. Generosity is not just giving material things such as money to the poor, food to the hungry, or shelter to the homeless. There is also the generosity of giving protection to those who are in danger, exploited, or persecuted, by using political power or social influence to protect them. The best way to practise generosity is to guide others towards happiness by teaching them the morality of abandoning negative karma and accumulating positive karma and positive attitudes, such as compassion and wisdom.

Finally, there is the generosity of giving love. We may have no money or food to give, we may have no power or influence to protect others, but we all have the power to give unlimited love.

ETHICS

In reference to Buddha's teaching that one of the heaviest negative karmas is to kill one's mother, an ancient Indian Buddhist textasked the hypothetical question, "If an egg is taken from the womb of one woman and placed in the womb of another, and the resulting child kills the surrogate mother, does it incur the heavy karma of killing its mother?"

The text then gives the answer, "It is negative karma of killing, but it is not the karma of killing its mother. The child will only receive the particularly heavy karma of killing its mother if it kills the woman who donated the egg."

Apart from this question and answer being a useful medico-legal point today, I find its remarkable prescience regarding modern obstetric practice to be a good indication of how, in those days, the wisdom of India was so far ahead of Europe, which Westerners arrogantly assume to be the cradle of knowledge.

On the subject of eggs and wombs, the stream of consciousness coming from the previous life is said to join with the egg close to the time of conception. Although for the first twenty-five weeks the mind is in a state of deep sleep, its subtle activity is essential for embryonic development. Therefore, rebirth occurs at conception, not nine months later, and to deliberately abort an embryo or foetus is to create the karma of killing a human being. It is a mistake to think that an embryo or a foetus is a mindless bunch of cells. Not all women have a choice when faced with an unwanted pregnancy, but if they do they deserve to have all the information available in order to make a wise choice.

A fertilised egg within a test-tube may or may not be a human being, depending upon whether a stream of consciousness has entered that egg or not. If there is no mind, destroying the fertilised egg is not the karma of killing. The ancient texts do not mention this situation, but my feeling is that probably a mindstream does not join with the fertilised egg until it is placed within a womb.

The one and only time I have ever phoned into a radio talk-back show, the subject was abortion. The host, an ex-Christian minister, listened politely as I explained how my pro-abortion attitude had been reversed by further knowledge and experience as a doctor. But when I mentioned I had become a Buddhist he instantly cut me off, saying that religious beliefs had no place in the discussion, and the conversation was ended. The point I had wanted to make was that, as a scientist and a doctor, I had studied and contemplated the Buddhist presentation of rebirth and could not refute it. Seeing the world from the point of view of karma and reincarnation had enhanced my understanding of many things, from

embryonic development to psychosomatic illness and, especially, psychology itself. I had tried hard to prove it to be wrong because, at my first meditation course, I had realised that, if Buddhism were true, ordination was the only logical course in life, and the last thing I wanted to do was to become a monk.

Buddha's explanation of karma is a description of the subtle cause-and-effect mechanism that lies behind every experience in our life. The teaching was given for individuals to understand the real causes of their suffering and how to overcome them. It is not a system of morality invented to bring order within society. Buddha had the courage to stand before the world and declare that he had seen reality and, out of compassion, for forty years he explained the nature of the mind, the fundamental ignorance that lies behind all suffering, and how this ignorance leads to suffering through karma. His teachings have withstood the tests of time and transmission from one culture and language to another many times. There is no divine purpose behind the system of cause and effect that Buddha called karma; it is simply a natural function of the ignorant mind, just as gravity is a natural function of matter.

"Now you know," Buddha said at the end of his teachings. "Whether or not you benefit from this knowledge by modifying your behaviour is completely up to you."

We must have compassion for those who act out of ignorance. Hatred of abortionists or of anti-abortionists is a sign of stupidity. It reminds me of the time when I was visited by two animal liberationists, and the discussion came around to the subject of rebirth.

"You should not hate the scientists," I said, "for the result of their research on animals may be that they will be reborn as rabbits in a laboratory."

"Oh, I hope so," they said in unison.

"But can't you see," I said, with a degree of frustration, 'that the animals for which you now have so much compassion may be ex-scientists?"

At the other end of life, death occurs when the body is no longer able to support consciousness and the mindstream separates from the body, usually soon after the breathing stops. To turn off a life-support machine that is artificially maintaining bodily function is not the karma of killing because the person dies as they would have through natural causes. If a person deliberately causes the death of an extremely ill or dying person who is not on life-support, even if this is done with the compassionate thought to relieve pain, this will be the karma of killing if the motivation includes the mistaken belief that this is the best thing to do. It is not necessarily the best thing because, for example, a premature death may inadvertently cause someone to be born in a realm of great suffering, whereas if they had lived longer they would have exhausted that karma and would have been reborn in a better place. Only a fully realised meditator with clairvoyance can tell if someone is heading towards a pleasant or unpleasant rebirth.

The best way to help a dying person is to surround them with an atmosphere of kindness, ease their physical pain as much as possible without destroying their clarity of mind, and relieve their worries with wise counsel. There are many meditation practices that can be done

by both the dying person and their carers that can ease the transition into the next life. Now is the time to learn these practices; when we are on our deathbed it will be too late.

WHY AM I DOING THIS?

My generation did not trust the establishment. In my younger days I blamed society for most things that went wrong, and took pride in being an individual with the freedom to live spontaneously. I liked to follow my heart rather than my head, particularly when my actions went against the norm. For a while I was lucky, then my life became unhappy and I lost faith in my heart. Having just returned to Melbourne after two years in England, I received a double whammy: things did not work out with my girlfriend and my mother died unexpectedly. Buddhism helped put things together again by pointing out that, as long as we remain ignorant of our true nature, we cannot trust either our heads or our hearts to lead us to happiness and away from suffering.

Putting it simply, selfish behaviour leads to unhappiness and actions motivated by genuine concern for the welfare of others lead to happiness. So, to avoid the pitfalls of life, all we have to do is abandon our selfishness. This is not easy. The complete abandonment of selfishness is only attained by generating the wisdom that realises how our self is empty of being what we think it is. Until we gain such wisdom, we should block selfishness by being mindful of the motivations behind our behaviour. Before doing any action we should stop and ask ourselves, "Why am I doing this?"

It is said that human behaviour is derived from "nature and nurture" – our genetic make-up and environmental influences in our life. Buddha explained a third important influence on behaviour: the psychological and karmic predispositions that we inherit from previous lives. Through these predispositions acquired with our mind, we are born with an established self-identity; nature and nurture merely modify what is already there. Thus our personalities, and what we do with our lives, are eminently changeable; we are not like a granite statue that must remain the same forever. We have no control over our genes, not yet anyway, but we can improve our personality and behaviour by selecting constructive environmental influences and psychological qualities and abandoning their destructive opposites.

The opportunity to improve our personality is afforded by our quality of discriminating intelligence or knowledge that is free from doubt. In relation to our behaviour, the term "discriminating intelligence" means that we can distinguish between correct and incorrect actions in terms of achieving happiness for our self and others, and we can do this through analysing our experiences in life. All religions teach a fundamentally similar type of morality; although we may rely upon Moses, Christ, or Buddha for the theory, the knowledge of morality that we acquire through this analysis is our own.

Seeing the underlying principles of morality is one thing; acting upon them is another. Acting in a moral way is difficult because we have to oppose our habitual tendencies to follow innate and acquired selfishness, desire, and anger. This is where faith is required. Trust in the purity of motivation of our spiritual teacher and in our ability to attain our goal of enlightenment gives us the courage and determination to choose moral behaviour and oppose non-virtuous impulses that arise in our mind. Faith and morality then provide the foundation of the path to freedom from suffering.

In general, our ideas or impulses to do things can be either stupid or intelligent. Stupid ideas come from mistaken beliefs. Drinking excessive quantities of alcohol with the belief that it is a manly and honourable thing to do is an example of behaviour arising from a stupid idea. Drinking excessive quantities of alcohol through desire for the state of intoxication, believing it to be a state of superior happiness, is equally stupid. There are plenty of other examples of stupid ideas in our lives.

Intelligent ideas come from morality, loving-kindness, and knowledge of the relative and ultimate natures of things. In Buddhist terms, relative wisdom includes our understanding of the changeable nature of everything around us. By not clinging to the wrong concept of a fixed world where everybody and everything is safely predictable, we become much more easygoing and capable of adapting to change. Relative wisdom also includes understanding of the unsatisfactory nature of whatever has arisen from karma and afflictions. Imperfection rules our bodies, minds, and environment. If we can enjoy being what we are and avoid feeling frustrated every time things go wrong, we will be much easier to live with. Those who possess ultimate wisdom understand that nothing exists in its own right. This wisdom allows them to mature and gain control over their lives. Whenever our minds have wisdom, unconditional love, patience, and compassion, we will always have intelligent ideas. We can trust our hearts when these attitudes are present.

If we are aware that our relationships are transient experiences, how then can we ruin the happiness we get from each other by indulging in petty criticism, irritability, and anger? We know a delicate flower will soon be thrown out with the garbage, but while it is manifesting all its beauty we treat it with great tenderness and care. Why do we not treat our family and friends the same way? If we think they have let us down and deserve to be hurt or abandoned, the fault is ours, not theirs. We expect too much; we want perfection in an imperfect world.

What lies behind our will to do things? The basic urges common to us all are our needs to be happy and to avoid suffering. In following these needs, we may experience psychological conflict arising from the different influences on our behaviour. Intellectually, we may be trying to live according to the moral standards of society, but because of immoral behaviour in past lives we have the instinctive urge to break those standards. Or we may be born in a family of thieves and, due to honesty in past lives, have an instinctive urge to break family tradition and live honestly.

When we have no means of discriminating between stupid and intelligent urges, we will have no freedom. We will be unable to avoid following the urges of self-cherishing, anger, and attachment because they are stronger, having been deeply embedded in our minds during countless previous lives under the influence of ignorance.

Adopting the moral code of not harming others is the first step towards freedom. It gives us a choice when we ask, "Why am I doing this?" If the urge to do something is more selfish than beneficial for others, we should drop it. If it is more beneficial for others, we should do it. When the intention to help others is supported by perfect concentration and wisdom that understands the relative and ultimate realities of ourselves and the world, we will have freedom in our lives. Destructive instincts will never again obscure the purity of our intentions. We will have free will.

PURIFICATION

Ever since Sigmund Freud described the long-term danger of suppressed emotions and traumas, the concept of freedom of self-expression has grown within our collective psyche to become an inalienable right of every individual, and the best indicator of a free and healthy society. I do not intend to discuss the pros and cons of this belief; I simply want to present the Buddhist position that relief from mental disturbance can best be achieved by purifying our minds of disturbing emotions and traumas rather than by suppressing or by expressing them.

During the 1970s, at the Cosmos Centre in Amsterdam, a birthplace of the New Age movement, my teacher, Lama Yeshe, was giving a talk on overcoming disturbing emotions. Puzzled by the sound of muffled screams coming from the basement, Lama Yeshe asked what was happening. It was explained that there was a healing group whose method of freeing the mind from suppressed emotions was for people to strip naked and mingle with each other in a concrete-lined room (that could be hosed down afterwards), and hurl faeces and abuse at each other. "Really?" said Lama Yeshe, his raised eyebrows and wide eyes showing astonishment at the huge gulf between Buddhist and New Age psychology.

Unresolved issues in our lives and relationships are a constant source of unhappiness, guilt, and resentment, and of fresh pain every time we think about them. To avoid disturbing memories we use psychological tricks such as denial and suppression, but mostly these memories remain in our immediate awareness. Conversations at the family dinner table become minefields; we have to avoid certain topics to prevent emotional outbursts and so we lose our freedom of expression. Our lives become half-truths as we pretend to be happier than we are, seeing no alternative to making the best out of a situation we would prefer not to be in at all.

What do we do with our psychological garbage, as Lama Yeshe used to call it? Self-justification does not work; we end up reliving the dispute in our mind and reasoning again and again that we were right and the other was wrong. And even if we confront our adversaries with clear reasoning, they will not accept it and our logic will only make them angrier. We cannot change others, so there is no choice but to work on our own mind. The need to purify the mind is a universally recognised problem, but we should have a suitable method. Throwing faeces at each other is probably not a good idea. From submersion in holy rivers, to the confessional, to the Japanese coming-of-age rite of cleansing the mind by bathing in freezing cold water, every culture has its method of purification, many of dubious value. I once knew a girl who refused treatment for an ulcer on her leg because of the "wonderful karmic purification" evidenced by the copious amounts of pus that daily exuded

from the wound. Although she was a university graduate, she subscribed to the belief that antibiotics are evil and the body must heal itself. Eventually the infection reached the bone and she could have lost her leg.

It is possible to free ourselves from the burden of guilt and resentment by openly investigating our side of troublesome situations. By discovering causal factors in our own mind, we will know what needs to be purified and we can search for the antidote. If, in analysing the problem, we discover that we were the one at fault, the mistake will always be associated with self-centredness manifesting as either anger or attachment. There will be no reason to feel guilty: the fault lies in these emotions. Resentment can be stopped when we see that, even when others behaved badly, there was something from our side, such as pride or jealousy, that precipitated or worsened the situation. At least there was a karmic imprint in our mind that was a condition for it to happen. Resentment can also be overcome by seeing that those who hurt us are under the influence of the same disturbing emotions as ourselves, and in many cases their suffering is much worse than our own. Thus resentment can be transformed into compassion.

To achieve the peace and happiness we are seeking, we need to purify our mind by applying the antidotes to the disturbing emotions and their seeds, as well as to the karmic potentials created by those emotions. Buddha said that as much as he wanted us to be happy, he could not wash away our faults with water; he could not take our faults upon himself; and he could not transplant his wisdom and happiness into our minds. Indeed, he explained that we can rid our minds of disturbing emotions by cultivating their primary antidote: the wisdom seeing how we, and the objects of our emotions, are empty of the good and bad characteristics we project upon them. The secondary antidotes are patience opposing anger, generosity opposing miserliness, renunciation opposing attachment, humility opposing pride, and so on. We must train our mind in each of these antidotes until they become spontaneous and effortless qualities of our mind.

Negative karmas can be purified by four activities that oppose the four components of the action that created them. First is the object component: when we deliberately cause harm to a living being, the objective aspect of that karma is opposed by reflecting on the suffering we have caused others, and generating compassion.

Secondly, the motivational component is opposed by the power of strong determination to not repeat a similar harmful action in the future. We can determine to not repeat the action within the next twenty-four hours, week, month, or for the rest of our life, according to our capacity to keep that promise. Breaking a promise greatly increases the heaviness of the karma, so it is much better not to make a promise that we are unlikely to keep. If we do relapse, we should still not feel guilty. We should use the experience to increase our resolve to avoid the action in the future.

Thirdly, the action component is opposed by an action that opposes the karmic action. For example, apologising and doing something to mend the effect of our harmful action. If we have physically harmed others, we can care for humans or animals in danger of harm, hunger, or sickness. If we have stolen something, we can practise generosity. If we have spoken harshly, we can speak in a kind and gentle manner. There are other activities, such as mantra recitation, that can make this third step extremely powerful.

Finally, the completion component, such as feeling happy at having killed an annoying mosquito, is opposed by the power of regret for having done that. Regret is cultivated by seeing the mistake in our anger and regarding it as a sickness, knowing the result of the karma of killing, and having compassion for the mosquito. Admitting our mistakes with sincere remorse overcomes guilt; it does not create it. Guilt is unhappiness brought on by a negative self-image. As the self-image itself is a mistaken concept, guilt is also a mistaken state of mind. If the doctor says we have tuberculosis we will regret our condition, but we won't feel guilty that we have tuberculosis. We will enthusiastically follow whatever treatment the doctor recommends. In the same way, we regret our disturbing emotions and karma, and we do something to remove them from our mind.

Eliminating disturbing emotions by first applying temporary antidotes and then their final antidote, the wisdom seeing non-self-existence, is not suppression. This method bestows progressive control over disturbing emotions and eventually extinguishes them, as well as the karma created by them. It enables us to face the difficulties of life with patience, love, and enthusiasm to help others, rather than worrying about not getting what we want. When we forget ourselves, anger, attachment, and pride have no basis upon which to arise. By weakening and eventually destroying negative karmic potentials and the seeds of disturbing emotions, these four opponent powers render our relationships constructive and sources of happiness.

THE PURPOSE OF LIFE

An Australian Prime Minister once got into trouble by declaring that life was not meant to be easy. In their reaction to this philosophical approach to politics, the news media and the opposition accused him of avoiding responsibility for his government's failure to deal with social problems. In his defence, he should have quoted Buddha's first teaching, which was that life is definitely not easy. Buddha explained that life is full of suffering because we inadvertently create problems by selfishly pursuing our own welfare at the expense of others. This selfish behaviour arises from ignorance of karma and lack of awareness of how the self exists in reality. And so Buddha taught that the path to happiness is the internal path of wisdom opposing ignorance and compassion opposing selfishness. I have already discussed these points; in this essay I want to discuss the phrase, "life was not meant to be easy," which implies that life was created for a particular purpose.

There is a reason for life, but it has nothing to do with divine purpose. The belief that the universe, and hence life, must have had a beginning demands a theory of how it happened. The divine creation theory does not explain where the omnipotent Creator came from, or why he or she decided to create this miserable world in the first place. The mechanical theory, that the universe arose from nothing, and life subsequently appeared by accident is not satisfactory, to my mind anyway. I know there are theories about how something can come from nothing but, hey, these are just ideas, they are not proven facts. What I want to ask is: "Why must there have been a beginning?"

If we examine ourselves and our environment, we will discover a law of interdependence: nothing can arise or continue to exist without depending upon something else. How the scientists can see this, and I presume they do, yet still maintain that the entire universe arose from nothing is beyond me. I'm no physicist, and the scientific explanation of how something can come from nothing leaves me stymied; its logic seems as twisted as a Mongolian contortionist. I wonder if so much effort has been put into developing this theory simply to squash the belief of the Creationists? According to Buddhist teachings, both the Creation and the Big Bang theories are off-track because they are based upon the mistaken presumption that there had to be a beginning.

At first, Buddha was reluctant to answer the question about a beginning of the world because he said that people would argue the point forever, and their arguments would do nothing to help them in their immediate task of finding happiness and avoiding suffering. Later, he explained that conscious life has always existed in a beginningless universe. This requires no stretching of logic, and cannot be proven to be incorrect. The Big Bang theory would be acceptable if universes are seen to come and go in a beginningless series of

explosions and implosions with no loss of energy. His Holiness the Dalai Lama said, "If the theory of a single big bang is proven to be the real beginning of the universe, Buddhist thinkers will require a lot of head scratching. If several big bangs are posited, then this would go very well with Buddhist theory."

Let us now investigate the reason for our continuing to be reborn in a beginningless universe. During a recent talk here in Mongolia, I asked my students, "Do you eat to live or do you live to eat?" After much discussion the consensus arose that they live to eat, hardly a surprising conclusion in this country where eating is indeed the national pastime. In effect, my students declared that their main purpose for living is to experience sensual pleasure, which begins with the mouth. My cat, still sunning itself on the windowsill, agreed with them. Most humans are similar to my cat but, unfortunately, they are not very successful in attaining even this basic aim. Seeing nothing beyond their present life, they live by the slogan, "Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die." But they do not really believe that death will come tomorrow and, when it does come, they feel cheated that their opportunity to indulge in pleasure has come to an end, and they crave to live longer. This craving ripens a karmic potential that propels their mind towards a future birth. As they have made no preparation for a happy future life, their dominant karmas will be for birth as an animal, a hungry ghost, or a hell being. It will take many lifetimes in these realms before they exhaust that karma and ripen a new karma for another human birth.

There are some humans, however, who have a purpose that looks beyond the pleasures of this life. Their higher aspiration comes from the inspiring leadership of someone who has seen the reality of future lives, and that future happiness depends upon actions performed in past lives. Such teachers appear in the world out of compassion, and they teach how to avoid rebirth in states of extreme suffering, such as hell, and how to attain rebirth in happy places, as a human or as a divine being in one of the various heavens. After contemplating and accepting the possibility of heaven and hell, their listeners follow a path of pure morality based upon a healthy fear of the lower realms of rebirth, unwavering confidence in their guide, and the desire for a happy rebirth. This is the simplest spiritual aspiration.

The middling spiritual aspiration follows a guide who can take us even beyond attachment to the happiness of future lives. It comes from seeing that birth in heaven is insufficient because, as long as one remains under the control of karma and disturbing emotions, there is danger of falling from heaven and finding oneself back in the lower realms. Based upon a life of pure morality, those of middling spiritual aspiration cultivate their power of concentration, and turn their minds towards the realisation of ultimate reality – emptiness. This wisdom destroys karma and then clears away progressively more subtle veils of ignorance that obscure the mind. When the final veil is removed, they attain the state of nirvana, complete liberation from the wheel of life. The purpose of life for these people is to abandon forever their mental afflictions of selfishness, anger, and desire. They turn away from ordinary life and live in monasteries or isolated retreats to complete their mental purification.

The highest spiritual aspiration goes beyond even the desire for nirvana. There are those who, through great compassion, reject seeking their own liberation and take responsibility to rescue all living beings from suffering. Such people remain in the world and train their minds in intense renunciation of mundane desire so that they will not be distracted in their work

for others. They strive to increase their power of compassion, and they cultivate perfect concentration and the wisdom realising emptiness. In order to be fully qualified to help all beings, their ultimate aim is to achieve buddhahood. While on their path, they guide others to freedom in one of three ways: like a shepherd who pushes the flock before him; like an oarsman who takes his passengers with him; or like a king who leads others by walking ahead. Having achieved enlightenment, they abide neither in nirvana nor in the wheel of uncontrolled death and rebirth, As Buddhas, they can spontaneously appear anywhere to benefit sentient beings.

Thus I have described four purposes for living to be found in the minds of humans. The first, seeking pleasure in this life, is mundane, can never be fulfilled, and inevitably leads to suffering. The other three are spiritual paths in that, fundamentally, they oppose ignorance and desire for the pleasures of the present life. From our countless past lives, we carry in our minds instincts for all four purposes. Whether or not we continue to progress on our past spiritual path depends upon the circumstances we meet in this life. It is always possible to advance to a higher spiritual path but, until we realise ultimate reality, there is the danger of falling to a lower spiritual path, or all the way back to the mundane path.

Just prior to discovering Buddhism, I was working in a psychiatric hospital where one of my patients was a Christian minister, well known for his good work amongst underprivileged people. Despite the countless times the psychiatrists sent him into convulsions with shock therapy, and the great variety of chemical cocktails they prescribed for him, he remained severely depressed. I can still picture him sitting immobile at the end of a bench, neat and tidy, exquisitely polite. Whenever I asked him what was wrong, he could only say, "Doctor, I have lost my faith."

Being a very ordinary person, interested only in my current happiness, my rejection of religion at that time could not have been stronger, and I had nothing to offer this poor man. In defending our selfish pursuit of happiness, we ordinary people look at those who take on a spiritual path and accuse them of being failures in life. I held this view, and I also blamed religion for many of our problems. Now I understand that the real failures in life are those who have no courage to oppose their own selfishness, pride, anger, and desire.

If people use religion as a means to attain happiness in this life, and have no aspiration for a true spiritual path, they are headed for the worst suffering of all. Hypocrites who financially or sexually exploit others under the guise of religion make it very easy for non-religious people to dismiss religion entirely. This is unfortunate because there are precious jewels of wisdom in most religions and these should not be discarded along with the garbage. In sorting the treasure from the trash, healthy scepticism is required. "Healthy" means that we must have doubt but our doubt should not become a barrier; we need to investigate our doubts with open minds. If something cannot stand up to investigative logical analysis, then it cannot be accepted as truth and can be rejected with a clear conscience.

HEAL THYSELF

On my first visit to the United States, I spent six weeks enjoying the glorious Boston spring, then two months in the redwood forest near Santa Cruz in California. One of the many impressions I received from the American people was that everyone living on the East Coast is in therapy, and delighted to talk about it, and everyone living on the West Coast is a therapist, and delighted to talk about it.

In Australia, people rarely attend psychotherapy, and if they do, nobody else will know about it. I am not saying one system is better than the other, we all have our problems, it's just that Americans like to tell everybody their problems while Australians keep theirs to themselves. Even in Australia, however, the psychological support industry is a growing phenomenon. Counsellors are ready to leap into action to assist in all manner of traumatic events, large and small. Australians are at last beginning to realise the importance of their mental attitude in resolving problems and, rather than being shameful, it is becoming socially acceptable to have psychological therapy and counselling. In the words of my teacher, Lama Yeshe, to truly heal our minds and free them from misery forever, we must eventually learn how to be our own therapist.

Others can tell us how to fix our minds, but we are the only ones who can actually do it. It is not easy; to control our own mind and rid it of disturbing emotions requires effort, courage and determination. Although we need to become independent thinkers able to deal skilfully with every problem that arises, we still need to rely upon a qualified guide to show us the way. Devoting ourselves to a charismatic leader of religious or political inclination may make us feel good, but if the leader has not solved his or her own problems it will be a case of the blind leading the blind. We will have lost our freedom to choose an intelligent direction and we will be led further into the darkness of ignorance.

Our bodies are beautifully organised for self-repair, so much so that doctors deserve only a fraction of the credit they receive for healing. Unfortunately, our minds are not so well organised. When our minds are sick with anger, greed, jealousy, pride, selfishness, and so on, we do not have a natural mental mechanism for healing those disturbing emotions. Certainly, sorrow can be dismissed by denial and suppression, but such relief is temporary. The source of the problem is not resolved. The sorrow can surface again in the form of chronic anxiety, guilt, depression, or personality and behavioural disorders. Not only does the mind not naturally heal itself, disturbing emotions such as anger and attachment are self-perpetuating and have a tendency to become progressively worse. Every time our mind is angry we become more likely to react with anger in the future. Our life becomes ever more unhappy, and even trifling events will precipitate anger. It is common, and terribly sad, to see old

people caught up in this vicious circle. With bitter thoughts about life, or miserliness regarding their possessions, they approach death in a whirlpool of anger or grasping that sucks them down towards lower realms of birth.

The basis of being our own therapist is knowing how our mind functions, and how to apply the appropriate antidote. Self-centredness is the root of our problems; it constantly appears, causing us to ignore others and think only of ourselves. The heroic approach to overcoming self-centredness is to reverse this attitude by ignoring oneself and thinking only of others. We should look at others, including animals, and imagine our mind within their body. Then think, "If I were they, what would I want to be happy?" We then do whatever we can to make them happy. The ultimate medicine for self-centredness is the wisdom realising emptiness of the self – seeing that we are empty of being what we think we are. The self-image is a projection of our mistaken mind and therefore that which we hold so closely as "me" is no more real a person as is a scarecrow. Just as clever crows build their nest on top of a scarecrow, by ignoring the false appearance of self we can simply let go of our neurotic self-consciousness and be happy.

Anger is the most violent of our mental sicknesses. Its antidote is patience, cultivated by first preventing the immediate cause of anger: unhappiness. Anger never arises in a happy mind, so it is essential that we stop complaining and avoid succumbing to sorrow, despondency, and gloom. If we don't, we will get angry, and that is far more harmful to us than whatever it is we are worrying about. Many of us are attached to these miserable states of mind, gaining a perverse enjoyment out of bringing others down with us. If whatever has gone wrong can be fixed, there is no need to worry. And, if it cannot be fixed, worry will not help. So stop worrying. If you want to be happy, oppose irritability with patience and cultivate the opposite to anger: love.

The medicine for miserliness is generosity. Especially, if we detect selfish clinging to "me" and "mine," we should immediately give up the objects we crave. The cure for an aggressive, harmful attitude is compassion, the thought and intention to ease the burden of suffering experienced by others. Adopting and maintaining a code of morality is the medicine to prevent destructive behaviour – all forms of harm that we inflict on others through carelessness, hatred, or desire. Laziness is overcome by enthusiasm for helping others; there is no better way to lift ourselves out of depression than striving to help someone. There are eighty-four thousand disturbing emotions and eighty-four thousand cures taught by Buddha. These examples should give you an idea of how to work on your mind.

Disturbing emotions and their resulting unhappiness arise from various causes and conditions. Their foundation is latent seeds carried on the mindstream from previous lives. Don't tell me you have no problem with anger: you have seeds for all eighty-four thousand disturbing emotions. The real problem is that they are self-perpetuating: anger begets anger, desire begets desire.

Serious mental disturbance and insanity can also arise from karma. Buddha gave some examples of past-life actions that can result in mental disturbance in this life. These are causing others to become deranged through spells or concoctions; forcing others to drink poisons or intoxicants against their will; frightening wild animals; setting forests on fire; and throwing beings into a chasm. He also said that mental imbalance can be caused by events in

this life such as fear when seeing a terrifying ghost; harm by a disturbing spirit; grief at the death of a relative; and physiological imbalance. Any action that harms the mental well-being of another becomes a cause for our own mental imbalance.

It is common sense that if we want to be happy and free from mental disturbance we should avoid disturbing others, and we should do whatever we can to help them be at peace. Physiological imbalance can be addressed by proper diet and behaviour, a peaceful environment, and, if necessary, medicine. For example, for anxiety, Tibetan Buddhist medical texts recommend eating oily foods and red meat, drinking alcohol, having sex, avoiding windy and high places, keeping warm, and wearing red clothing. When I mentioned this to a group of American students, one of them said, "Oh, I wish my doctor would prescribe that for me."

To be our own therapist, it is necessary first to recognise that our anger, attachment, pride and so on are illnesses. We need to be mindful of our thoughts and apply the appropriate antidote as soon as a disturbing emotion begins to arise. For example, to avoid anger, remember that to receive harm is a reflection of our own karma. Through past actions of harming others we have a karmic tendency that attracts us to harmful situations. We should not become angry because the main condition that exposes us to the danger of being harmed by others comes from our own mind. Secondly, we need to recognise that anger superimposes or exaggerates negative qualities on the person harming us; thus our anger is an entirely inappropriate response and is usually out of proportion to the harm received. Finally, our anger is far more harmful to us than any external person or object, so we must practise patience, with love.

In the 1960s, an Australian psychiatrist published a bookin which he advocated meditation as a means to overcome physical and mental pain. When the medical establishment objected to his revolutionary ideas, he gave up his membership of the College of Psychiatrists rather than surrender to their conservative approach. Fortunately, as Bob Dylan said, the times they were a-changin."

FREEDOM

My first taste of freedom was rudely interrupted when my mother busted me and my brother with pocketfuls of threepenny pieces. We had wagged school for three days and spent the time at Rose Bay golf course in Sydney. We shared our school lunches with a cat and her new litter of kittens, and profited greatly from wayward golfers whose drives from the tee ended up in a tidal stream that cut across the fairway at a most unfair place. The golfers paid us three pence, or a "trey" in those days, for each ball we retrieved from the water.

For the remainder of my school and university days, my concept of freedom was to be able to do whatever I wanted after the cessation of lectures and examinations. When that was finally achieved, my second taste of freedom was rudely interrupted when I was busted with some Indian weed in my pockets. My concept of freedom then became a commune in the countryside where, with like-minded friends, I would return to the earth and live a lifestyle free from the moral restraints of a repressive and conservative society.

This third taste of freedom was rudely interrupted when I realised that my friends and I had emotional hang-ups similar to those of the "straight" people we thought we were above. I abandoned the dropout commune concept and struck out on my own, believing that freedom was total self-sufficiency in all aspects of life. This did not work either. A broken heart made me realise that happiness in life depends upon others, and to be happy I could not continue taking, I had to give as well. As a battle raged in my mind and my life between wanting to stay independent and wanting to commit to a partner, freedom took a back seat.

Then some Tibetan lamas in Nepal told me that self-centredness was the root of all my problems. I knew they were right. But when they told me I needed to have faith in a person called Buddha, and related stories about rebirth and karma, with punishment in hell for past misdeeds and reward in heaven for past good deeds, my mind screamed, "Religion! Don't feed me your superstitious beliefs designed to subdue people and take away their personal freedom."

I ran away from the lamas and my girlfriend, and travelled overland from Nepal to England, still seeking freedom. I soon found myself living in a squat in Bethnal Green with a new girlfriend whose friends were into extreme left-wing politics. It was election time and, during a political meeting at a school hall in Hackney, I stood up to debate with Vanessa Redgrave, a member of the Workers' Revolutionary Party. I asked about her party's position on the death penalty. She gave the evasive reply that the capitalists had been using it as a weapon against the workers for centuries.

"So, who is going to kill the capitalists we see in the streets of London? They will never accept your politics and they will fight to the death against your revolution. Are you going to kill them or are you going to ask the people here to do the killing for you?" I indicated the blue-collar workers who made up the audience.

"What are you, some sort of Jesus freak?" asked a venerable old communist on the stage, trying to dismiss me. The audience came to my aid and demanded I be allowed to speak.

"No," I replied, "I have no religion. I have come here to find an answer to the injustice and imbalance I see in our society, but all I hear from you is hatred. That is no solution."

Aware of Stalinist and Maoist evil, I had hoped British socialism would have a better face, but I was not impressed. The Buddhist explanation of the troubles of society, and the solution, was seeming more and more sensible to me. Although I had a degree of freedom, living with a good woman, plenty of work as a doctor in London, and nobody exerting authority over me, I knew that, like the communists, I was not free from anger myself. The Tibetan lamas were undoubtedly the happiest and most patient people I had ever met; with mixed feelings, I decided to return to India to discover their secret. I also knew this might lead to me becoming a Buddhist monk.

"What a waste," said my lady, and I had no answer. Accepting Buddhism was one thing, but to become a monk would be a step into the unknown.

In India, I met my previous girlfriend and we meditated with a Burmese master in Varanasi. Then I went to Bodhgaya, a peaceful village near the great stupa erected at the site where the Buddha attained his enlightenment. I roamed the rice paddies, climbed ridges, and discovered ancient charnel grounds and caves where great yogis had meditated. And I sat under the bodhi tree, a descendant of the same tree beneath which the Buddha had meditated.

I understood that I could never be free as long as my mind remained enslaved to its disturbing emotions of anger, desire, pride, and jealousy. Heaven and hell were no longer alien concepts. I could see them as potential products of my own mind, and I could not disprove rebirth. In Bodhgaya I met more of those happy, confident, powerful, and wise Tibetan lamas. They filled me with confidence and so I became a Buddhist.

In accordance with my intuition, ten months later I took ordination as a Buddhist monk. My world had turned full circle and I was again putting my life in the hands of others. I knew that I needed guidance in renouncing my never-ending pursuit of self-gratification and directing my life towards enlightenment. I saw the vital necessity of learning about karma and how the self exists in reality. And I saw that training my mind in loving-kindness was the real path to freedom from anger. Once again I was turning my back on society, this time to face the inner challenge of changing my mind rather than changing the world. As a Buddhist friend had written to me several years before when I was looking for land to establish a hippie commune, "It's peace of mind you want, not piece of land."

The vows of a monk are not a loss of freedom, they are the basis for gaining complete freedom from the control of disturbing emotions, and from the control of society, which

forces us into conformity. No matter our position in life, we all believe we are on the right path. If we have doubt, we follow the majority, too afraid to make a stand against greed, the lust for power, prejudice, and plain stupidity.

A Buddhist monk, or nun, is the ultimate nonconformist, a challenge to those who retain faith in the material world despite the glaringly obvious failure of any human society in all of history to bring lasting peace and happiness.

FLEXIBILITY

After fifteen months in dreary Ulaan Baatar, memories of suburban Melbourne in Australia conjure up a paradise of immaculate houses surrounded by green lawns and a profusion of trees and flowers. Like all things, however, appearances are not necessarily the reality. I also remember that when I was a doctor making house calls in the suburbs of that city, which was recently deemed to be "the most liveable city in the world," the beautiful exteriors of houses often concealed interiors of unbearable misery. Apart from the usual problems of sickness, old age, and death, I encountered scenes of domestic violence and personal anguish so bad that it is painful to even think about them.

Even when not at war, no human society has ever attained stable peace because the components of society — the people — are always in conflict with each other. Even when we are alone it is rare for our mind to be at peace. Apart from during sleep, and some fleeting moments after orgasm, our minds are usually whirlwinds of uncontrolled thoughts and emotions that are anything but peaceful. Euphemisms such as ""free world" for countries not under the control of totalitarian regimes, and "peacekeepers" for soldiers trained to kill, belie the reality of what is happening behind our own front doors.

Collective peace in society may be impossible, but all is not lost. The short moments of peace we do experience as individuals indicate that our minds do have the potential to be free from turmoil. To realise this potential, each of us needs to follow a personal path of wisdom and compassion that winds through the minefield of relationships, families, and society. The meditation cushion is a vital aid to following this path, but significant progress is only achieved when we apply our wisdom and compassion within the social context. The true medium for spiritual growth is in our relations with others. Personal and international disasters can only be avoided when we learn to communicate with each other skilfully through wisdom and compassion.

A friend of mine has a problem in communicating with her mother. Every day she has to move between the three personas of being her mother's daughter, her mother's employee, and her mother's best friend. I said to her, "Insight into this situation gives you the opportunity to train in the best method for living happily. Don't be too serious. Think that your purpose in life is to make others happy, and treat these situations as if you are acting on stage. Play the roles of daughter, employee, and best friend with all your heart whenever the script calls for it. Remember, there is no true you anyway, no person has any more concrete identity than a character in a play. Your craving to be recognised and treated as an individual in your own right is itself the foundation of your unhappiness, and it is based on an illusion."

You, my reader, may object to this: "Wait a minute," you might say, "tears and laughter in life are real, emotions on stage are pretended." Well, I think the best actors and actresses are those who can identify with their character to the extent that their emotions on stage are real, even though they are reacting to pretend situations. Also, the situations in our lives that bring us to tears or laughter are not so real. Distorted by our prejudices, projections, and exaggerations, they contain a great deal of unreality. Remember, appearances are never what they seem. The admonition to "get real," usually given by teenage children to their parents, deserves deep consideration because the unhappiness of miscommunication, and that of feeling isolated from others, is usually due to our keeping a rigid self-image and an inflexible attitude about what we will and will not do.

There is nothing definite in our life other than the fact that one day we will die. When that happens, we will look back on our lives and realise how stupid we were to cause so much unhappiness to others and ourselves by being far too serious. As we are dying, our life will appear no more real than last night's dream and, if we do not see this truth now, we will waste our lives absurdly posturing with pride and unnecessarily causing misery to others and ourselves by angrily and jealously defending our self-image, and feeding it with attachment and greed.

If we retain a fixed attitude of self-importance, the ever-changing and unexpected events of life will break us, like the wind snapping in half the strongest of trees, the oak. If, however, we are flexible, like the bamboo, even the most powerful wind will be unable to affect us. My teacher, Lama Yeshe, was extremely skilful at communicating with others because he had no need to defend his self-image and no need to force his opinion upon others. At all times he expressed interest in others: in their lives, their opinions, and their well-being. Nobody felt threatened or bored, he made every meeting exciting, humorous, and an opportunity to open the eye of wisdom. If we had any sense, we would copy Lama Yeshe in the way we live our lives.

The secret path to happiness is to write our own script in life by treating our worst enemy, self-importance, as a joke. Whatever insult we receive, give it to self-importance. Whatever mistake we make, blame it on self-importance. In all situations, good or bad, we must be flexible and use them as opportunities to advance on the path and destroy the illusion of self before it destroys us.

RELIGION

In translating a Buddhist work from English into Mongolian, a student at my centre had trouble with the word "religion" because she felt it was synonymous with superstition. Her reaction was understandable, considering her background of an education system still heavily influenced by communist anti-Buddhist rhetoric. I too am reluctant to use the word. My mind has always equated religion with superstition, prejudice, hypocrisy, and the long history of murderous crusades and inquisitions conducted under the auspices of religion. During the extermination of the Cathars in Europe, perhaps the truest Christians of all, a Papal military commander, unable to distinguish between "heretics" and true believers in a French village, gave the infamous order to his troops: "Kill them all and God will take care of his own."

Long ago, my scientific ethos was neatly summed up by a statement in the chapter on evolution in my high-school biology textbook. In reference to the biblical account of Creation, it said, "There is in history no more devastating example of the paralysis inflicted upon the human mind by undue reverence for the written word."

You might have guessed that I am thinking about the recent decision by the Mullahs to destroy all Buddhist statues created in pre-Islamic Afghanistan. This action is inexcusable. One cannot compare the use of images of Buddha within the Buddhist path to the primitive idol-worship prevalent among Middle-Eastern tribes at the time of Moses. The image of Buddha symbolises the unification of wisdom and loving-kindness, the total elimination of selfishness and its cruel cohorts of hatred, greed, and pride. Statues of Buddha function to remind and inspire those who wish to achieve such unification in their own minds. They are as important to Buddhists as holy calligraphy is important to Muslims. Through their special appearance and proportions, statues of Buddha bless the minds of all those who gaze upon them, even those who look with closed-minded hatred through the sights of an artillery piece.

A group of friends and I once spent a night in the remains of an ancient Buddhist cave monastery carved into a cliff overlooking the Kabul River near Jalalabad in Afghanistan. Despite enlisting the aid of psychedelics, we did not succeed in our naïve aspiration for instant enlightenment, but our visit to those ruins was the unexpected beginning of my spiritual path. I had been strongly inspired by the intangible spiritual strength of the Afghans and, in line with the Sufi approach to life, I decided on an extraordinary course of action. The 1972 Indo-Pakistani war had closed the border at Lahore and, in order to reach India, we needed to go to Karachi from where we could sail to Bombay. I realised that the river we had just crossed by raft joined the Indus River in Pakistan, and that great watercourse went all the way to Karachi. All we had to do was build a raft and float to our destination. The

remarkable journey that ensued gave me the impetus to loosen the shackles that were tying me down to a conventional doctor's life, and eventually become a Buddhist monk. Thus I am indebted to the kind and wise people of Afghanistan and Pakistan, and I feel certain that the great majority of them have no wish to destroy Buddha images. The Taliban's decision to destroy the statues is the result of blindness in the minds of only a few.

From the Buddhist point of view, the loss of the statues is a pity, but no big deal. Everything is transient, nothing remains forever, and Buddhas themselves cannot be harmed. The disastrous consequence of this action that upsets the minds of Buddhists is the harm those few are causing to themselves. They are creating the cause for their own demise. The Dalai Lama repeatedly tells the Tibetan people to have compassion, not anger, for the Chinese who are systematically dismembering Tibetan culture and religion; so too, the Mullahs are objects of compassion, for they know not what they are doing.

Let us return to the troublesome word, "religion." I think we all take "religion" to mean a belief system that purports to explain where we came from and where we are heading, and which presents various practices designed to avoid unfortunate destinies. Buddhism fits this description, and its definition of religious practice is doing things that enhance virtue and diminish non-virtue. Virtue is those wholesome states of mind that are pleasant by nature and bring well-being for oneself and others. Examples of virtuous states of mind are love, the wish for others to be happy, compassion, the wish for others to be free from pain, and patience, the power to remain calm in the face of adversity. Non-virtue is the opposite. It is agitated states of mind, such as anger or jealousy, that harm others and oneself.

The Dalai Lama has said that, just as there are many medicines in this world for a particular disease, there are many religious systems that serve to bring happiness to living beings. Even though there are different theories about where we are coming from and where we are going, there is a common aim to bring happiness to the minds of people. In general, most religions teach that happiness is achieved by abandoning non-virtuous actions such as killing, stealing, lying, and slander, and cultivating their opposites. He remarked on the sad history of struggle and hatred among followers of different religions, and declared his wish that religious practitioners live without bias towards each other, and without hatred towards those who do not practise religion.

Human conflict in the name of religion is as infantile as the fighting between followers of opposing football teams. If human society does not rapidly mature and free itself from intolerance, it will not just be statues that are destroyed by the weapons of war; we will destroy each other on an unprecedented scale of primitive butchery. I do not wish to be alarmist – there are many good things happening in the world today – but the increasingly frequent outbursts of hatred based upon nationalism, racism, and religious intolerance do make me worry for our future.

MINDFULNESS

When giving counsel to a family member or friend in an emotional crisis, we often find ourselves saying, "It is not so bad; try looking at it from another point of view."

The same can be said for all our troubles. One of the main practices in Buddhism is to be continually mindful of what we are doing, saying, and thinking, because our habitual, confused way of relating to the world is the source of most problems. To overcome our troubles we need to recognise the mistaken way we see things, and understand the objects of our problems in their true context. All things in the world have arisen from karma and disturbing emotions, as a result of which they have the four qualities of being impure, unsatisfactory, transitory, and empty of intrinsic existence. In our confusion, we see them as pure, satisfactory, unchanging, and intrinsically existent.

Our bodies are obviously impure. If we remove our bodily camouflage of clothing, make-up, and perfume, and do not wash for a few days, the natural impurity of our bodies will become obvious. So what? The problem is, we imagine our own bodies to have a pure essence. When smitten by physical desire, the body and person of the one to whom we are attracted appear perfect, and we are blinded to their faults. Why does familiarity breed contempt? Because we see through the veils of desire and cruelly blame the other for not living up to our expectations. Why does absence make the heart grow fonder? Because the veils are once again drawn across reality. Our bodies are imperfect instruments designed by our imperfect minds for indulging in pleasure. They are magnets for the sufferings of sickness, ageing, and death. Sex can kill us, food can kill us, even breathing, especially the air here in Ulaan Baatar, can kill us.

Our bodies are also sources of dissatisfaction. What fuels the industries of hairdressing, cosmetics, bodybuilding, cosmetic surgery, diet, and weight reduction? And who is so satisfied with the body of their partner that their eyes do not wander to others? Every bone and organ in our body is prone to disease; our bodies and our health are temporary. Shock, denial, and depression at the signs of ageing indicate that we blind ourselves to the transitory nature of our bodies with the wrong belief that they will stay the same and we will not grow old.

Finally, our bodies do not intrinsically exist. Even though the fad of political correctness has many absurdities, and I don't like it, I acknowledge that there is a difference in saying somebody is physically challenged and saying they are ugly. People are hurt if they are told they are ugly because they feel that their body is an intrinsically existing possession or part of their self. I once worked with a doctor who broke his leg while skydiving. Despite having

seen innumerable x-rays of broken bones, he was unable to bring himself to look at the x-ray of his own broken leg. This is a good illustration that, despite all evidence to the contrary, we cling to the illusion that our bodies are an intrinsically existing part of the self. In reality, there is no body, or self, that intrinsically exists. The phrase "physically challenged" helps to separate the sense of self from the body, and so we don't feel so bad when it is applied to us, unless we dislike political correctness.

In relation to our feelings of happiness and unhappiness, these are impure because they give rise to longing desire for more happiness, and anger towards whatever makes us unhappy. The feeling of pleasure is unsatisfactory because, no matter how often we experience pleasure, we are never satisfied. Wanting more, and wanting variety, we will continue to desire pleasure until the day we die. Our insatiable appetite for pleasure and our deep aversion to discomfort make it impossible for us to experience peace and contentment in life. And, through desire and aversion, we ruin our future lives by foolishly creating negative karma.

We pine for happiness when it has passed because we cannot see the transitory nature of pleasure and the objects of pleasure. Our mind mistakenly grasps at pleasure and the objects of pleasure to remain the same, and we fall into depression. People who are depressed feel as if they are inescapably caught up in a horrible situation that will never end. They don't realise that unhappiness and the causes of unhappiness too are transitory.

Not understanding that our feelings have no intrinsic existence, we project onto happiness an intrinsic quality which, forever afterwards, we try to rediscover. The ghosts of past pleasure make it impossible to fully enjoy, or even to find, present happiness. We are always comparing the present with our exaggerated memories of the past. Similarly, we mistakenly project onto unhappiness an intrinsic quality that transforms it into a terrifying demon from which we can never escape.

Our mind is a stream of awareness that flows through time. It is impure because it contains the disturbing emotions and their seeds; it is transitory because mental experiences are never the same for more than a second. Burning love that we declare eternal never lasts; it cools and may be replaced by frigid hatred within a few short years, months, or even days. Inconsolable grief at the loss of someone close will one day be only a memory; we will learn to laugh again. Our mundane mind is unsatisfactory because we can never find contentment, and it is not intrinsically existent because it depends upon causes and conditions.

In this forever-changing world, our clinging to the illusion of constancy fills our mind with nostalgia for the past and there is no freedom to enjoy the present. As we grow older, our life becomes one long melancholic feeling that the party is over. We must understand that our minds, our very selves, are constantly changing. The person we were during that emotional event in the past no longer exists. The emotion itself, like a beautiful rainbow or a terrible storm, has come and gone; it no longer exists.

Our inability to let go of the past is a torment that can only end when we abandon the mistaken belief that our minds, and our selves, are forever the same. There is no concrete reality anywhere. Life is a dance between the mind and the world, where the mind is the

leader. When our mind clings to a concrete self, the dance is a shambles. When we realise that nobody is an entity unto themselves, the dance becomes sublime.

The wisdom understanding the reality of impurity, unsatisfactoriness, transience, and emptiness of intrinsic existence is the door to liberation from suffering. It is an excellent foundation for universal compassion because understanding our own suffering and its causes gives us the ability to have empathy for the suffering of others.

GHOSTS

One of the most difficult concepts to understand in the Buddhist worldview is the existence of realms of birth other than those we can see directly. Buddha taught that we all live within a beginningless cycle of rebirth as gods, demigods, humans, animals, hungry ghosts, and hell beings. According to our karma, we cycle from one level of birth to another, never free from the problems of death and being under the control of karma and disturbing emotions that arise from ignorance of reality. This state of being trapped within the suffering wheel of life will only cease when we generate the wisdom seeing reality and remove all confusion from our mind. Then, having cultivated great compassion as an essential aspect of the path to enlightenment, we will have the freedom to appear anywhere within the realms of birth to help others. We will never again be affected by suffering because we will have destroyed our karma by vanquishing ignorance and selfish behaviour.

When I first heard the lamas talking about hungry ghosts, hell beings, and divine beings, I was unable to accept the literal reality of such birth states. Captured, as I was, by the simple and accurate presentation of psychology within the Buddha's teachings, I assumed the vivid descriptions of other realms of birth to be a metaphor for the spectrum of human mental experience. This assumption was reinforced when I heard a description of a hell where one is attacked by giant birds with iron beaks. Buddha said that these birds and the persecuting demons of hell are mental projections. The description of these birds reminded me of a schizophrenic patient of mine who had been tormented by visions of giant birds with iron beaks that pursued him, accusing him of various sexual misdemeanours and trying to kill him. I thought, yes, hell must be paranoid schizophrenia; and hungry ghosts must be those whose miserliness and neuroses severely impair their enjoyment of life.

I could accept the idea of being born again in the animal realm, even though I found it difficult to imagine my mind inhabiting an oyster. I enjoyed eating oysters. Then I thought, as an embryo, my body and mind were once more primitive than an oyster. And it seemed logical that if all minds have the potential for every experience up to enlightenment, then the difference between my mind and that of a rabbit, for example, is not in the minds themselves, but in the nervous systems that support the mind. If my mind were transplanted (can we say downloaded?) into a rabbit's brain, how could it express itself as anything other than a rabbit? And if a rabbit's mind were transplanted into a human nervous system, its potential for human intelligence would be able to manifest because of the upgraded hardware that has suddenly become available.

Demigods are described as martial beings whose minds are dominated by the lust for power and by jealousy of the gods who are closely related to them but have far superior pleasures.

Yes, I thought, I know some humans whose minds are of the demigod ilk. The gods themselves have many levels, ranging from those indulging in exquisite sensory pleasure to those whose desire is purely for the mental bliss of meditation. Perhaps, I thought, the psychedelic experience and orgasm, or the two combined, are examples of the god state?

That was how I saw it in the beginning. The lamas, however, continued to assert that the other realms were actual birth states. For example, they said our world is full of hungry ghosts that we cannot normally see because our karma projects a human world, whereas their karma projects the bleak and barren world of a hungry ghost. Contrary to our ordinary belief, the world out there is not a concrete reality existing from its own side; the world that each individual experiences is related to their own mind. Physical properties such as solidity, liquidity, heat, and movement — the four elements of earth, water, fire, and air — exist in the world, but even they are not totally independent of mind. The way in which matter appears, its "reality," is determined by the observing consciousness.

The reality of the world, whatever the world is for you and I, is completely relative in that it depends upon our individual minds. For example, Buddha said that a liquid seen as water by a human is seen as a filthy, undrinkable substance by a hungry ghost, and as ambrosia by a god. The one liquid has these three potential ways of appearing, each of which can be activated by the specific karma of the observing mind. In other words, the things that you and I experience in the world do not exist until we experience them.

Physicists say that if you want to measure light as a wave it will appear as a wave; if you want to measure light as a particle it will appear as a particle. Is this a modern illustration of how the subjective mind determines the reality of what is observed? Your girlfriend only exists when you are with her. At other times she is her brother's sister, her mother's daughter, her boss's employee, her own self. She is only the person you know as your girlfriend in your own mind. And even then she may be somebody else's girlfriend, god bless her.

When I became a monk, I opened a medical clinic at Kopan Monastery on a beautiful ridge overlooking Kathmandu valley. I gave first aid to the Tibetan and Nepalese monks, to people from the surrounding villages, and to the occasional Westerner. An Australian woman saw me in the clinic and told me that all her life she had seen ghosts, and the Buddhist description of hungry ghosts attracted her because it confirmed her own experience. She was a graduate in psychology and a very down-to-earth woman. She had stopped telling people about her experiences because of their sceptical reactions. She then described a round, black, hairy ghost with huge eyes that appeared most evenings at the foot of a bodhi tree in the monastery grounds. A year later, a man from Argentina told me a similar story, and described the same ghost. Another year later, a young man came to collect his girlfriend at the end of a meditation course. Not interested in Buddhism, he had gone trekking while she meditated. He had never seen a ghost in his life. During the final evening of the course, while we were meditating, spine-tingling screams of terror came from outside. Our round, black friend had appeared in this man's tent. The appearance of this ghost was not common knowledge, as I had told nobody about it. Three independent sightings made me think that perhaps there is something out there after all.

CONVENTIONS

We all carry memories of those few times in our life when we believe our real self has broken free from its psychological cocoon and enjoyed pure happiness. The wish to recapture and increase such treasured moments is a deep hope that maintains our momentum in life, despite the obstacles that mount up against us. We desperately want our partners to know the "real me" that we are convinced is a nice, loving, humorous, relaxed, and wise person. We may sometimes bite our tongues at having spoken spiteful words that we feel did not come from our real self, and we think, "Why do I have to be this awful person, why can't I just be me?"

With others, however, we allow no space for mistakes. We judge their behaviour as always coming from what we consider to be their real selves, and so we build up a fixed view of them as people with self-existing likeable or unlikeable characteristics. Thus our world becomes populated with concrete entities, our own self, friends, and enemies, who we see as self-existent and, tragically, we lose sight of the possibility that both others and ourselves can change. As children, we can easily transform our self-identity from being an aspiring astronaut to being a future rock-star to being a future famous footballer but, as we grow older, we lose that flexibility. We acquire fixed positive and negative views about ourselves that we think are part of our intrinsic nature. This solidification of our self-image in our mind is a mistake. Not only is it incorrect; it also weakens our ability to adapt to the inevitable and often rapid changes that occur in life.

Before going any further, I must say that the idea of a real self is an illusion because what we take to be the "real me" does not exist. Like lost travellers in the desert pursuing a mirage of water, we waste our lives trying to uncover and present to the world our real self. Also, our inappropriate emotional reactions of desire and aversion towards the real selves that we mistakenly project upon others bring a continual stream of unhappiness in our lives.

Whenever we think "I," the self-image in our mind has a mistaken appearance. It wrongly appears to be an unchanging entity that exists in its own right. Just as there is no real water in the mirage, there is no unchanging, independent self in the "I" even though the self appears to exist this way.

The self, or person, that does exist is a mere convention established by our name, or the thought "I," directed towards our combination of body and mind. Thus the conventional self exists merely by virtue of its name and that which is named — the body and mind. Neither the name nor the body and mind are the self. If the self existed as an independent entity, as it wrongly appears, it would be findable when we search for it. But the self is not an

independent entity because if we look for an unchanging, independent self within the body and mind, or separate from them, it cannot be found. This non-existence of an independent self is the ultimate or empty nature of the conventional self.

Discovering that the people in our life and our own selves are mere conventions, empty of existing in the way we have always thought them to exist, is a major psychological step forward. It breaks through the illusion that has brought all the troubles in our life, and enables us to live without harming others or ourselves. The dissolution of the concrete world we have always believed in is a little scary at first, but we will soon adjust to the space-like emptiness of things and we will become accomplished skywalkers.During my first parachute jump, when I let go of the wing-strut of the plane, my feet began kicking, looking for the solid world I had left behind. In my next jump I adapted to the new medium, stabilised my fall, and felt a rush of exhilaration and freedom. In a similar way, seeing whatever exists as merely conventional brings the freedom we have always sought.

Whatever exists has two realities: its conventional reality and its ultimate reality. Its conventional reality is established by consensus. Imagine you are asked to go outside and check the weather, and what you see fits the conventional label "blue sky." You return with your weather report, and the words "blue sky" conjure up a correct mental picture in the other person's mind: they know what you are talking about. If they went outside, they would agree with your report according to their own eyes. This is the conventional reality of blue sky. Mixed with the conventional appearance of blue sky, however, is the wrong appearance of a blue sky that exists in its own right, independently of everything else. This wrong appearance is due to a fault in our mind, it does not come from the sky. The blue sky has always been empty of existing in its own right; this is its ultimate reality. The term "ultimate" is used to indicate that in normal situations we do not bother to ultimately investigate what something or someone is; we simply rely upon names when referring to each other and to the things around us. But if we subject a person, blue sky, or anything else to ultimate analysis and try to find out exactly what it is, nothing can be found to be the object. Thus the ultimate reality of whatever exists is that it is empty of existing in its own right.

All the problems in our life begin with the wrong appearance of our self to exist in its own right. This wrong appearance is mixed with the correct appearance of the conventional self, and it is difficult to distinguish between illusion and reality. Our mind grasps at the wrong appearance to be true, and we strongly identify with this phantom as the real me. Cherishing our false self-image, we selfishly pursue pleasure at the expense of others and angrily protect it against harm. These emotions, however, only push happiness away and attract suffering. Real happiness is achieved by loving others, and we can only truly love others when we see no difference between them and ourselves.

All beings equally want happiness, do not want suffering, and are equal in being mere conventions. To discriminate against others through attachment, hatred, or indifference is as unreal as two reflections in a mirror liking or hating each other. Buddha's revolutionary insight that everything is just a convention, in the sense that nothing exists from its own side, is pure nectar for the troubled mind. It liberates us from our psychological prison, from the projections of our confused minds that we take to be real, and enables us to break on through to the other side.

DEPRESSION

Depression is a state of extreme unhappiness, described by sufferers in a recent BBC radio program as a black, dismal dungeon of despair; as a stifling hot room with no means of escape; as a heavy overcoat of pain with the buttons soldered together; or as like walking through treacle. It is characterised by a sense of loss of control over one's life, a loss of enthusiasm, and the inability to enjoy pleasure. One may know what to do, but cannot summon the energy to do it.

Depression may be precipitated by bereavement, illness, unemployment, and sometimes a physiological imbalance. According to Buddhism, the underlying cause of depression is self-cherishing, seeing one's own physical and mental pleasure as more important than anybody else's. Self-cherishing is the irritability we feel when asked to do something that interrupts our own enjoyment, such as watching television, playing sport, or talking with our friends. It is the desire to get the best food for oneself, the best seat in the cinema, the best result in an examination, and the most praise from someone of influence.

How can a small thing such as selfishness, which we all have, be a cause of such a major illness as depression? There are two main reasons. The first is that unhappiness arising from selfishness is cumulative. When we do not obtain what we want, or are stopped from doing what we want, we often overreact to a ridiculous extent. In your own experience, how many heavy domestic arguments have exploded out of petty causes? Even though we later chastise ourselves for our stupid behaviour, we repeat the same thing again and again. At home, at work, at the club, wherever we go to relax, our selfish behaviour isolates us from others. The accumulation of small failures in life erodes our self-confidence, we are unable to be happy, and we spiral into depressive self-pity.

The second reason why selfishness causes depression is because it prevents us from doing the one thing that is guaranteed to bring happiness — cherishing others. Self-obsession smothers consideration for the needs of others and we stop giving love. The constant whirl of self-centred thoughts in our heads — "I am so sad," "poor me," "I need to be happy" — blinds us to the needs of our family and friends, and we do nothing to help them. Our self-confidence takes a further battering because we no longer receive the feedback of love from them, or the pure satisfaction and joy of making them happy. The joy of making others happy is pure because we do not crave it again and again, unlike the pleasure of self-indulgence, which is impure because it never brings satisfaction. With a sense of being isolated from the world and unloved, we sink into unhappiness, self-doubt, and the thought that we are going insane. This is depression.

Buddha's explanation of the cause of depression is not petty or discriminative. We all have self-cherishing and, if we allow it to take over our lives and block our love and compassion for others, we will be in danger of following that awful path into depression. Depression does not cause misery, depression is misery, at its worst — in the human realm anyway. Depressives may not believe this, but it can get far worse in other realms of birth. To indicate our own part in the development of depression is not to point the finger of blame and should not cause guilt. If we can see that the cause is in our own mind, we will understand that the cure is also in our own mind.

Seeing the shattered self-confidence of depressed people, many New Age creeds attempt to cure the problem with the philosophy of "love yourself first." But this is the cause, not the cure. The great Indian bodhisattva, Shantideva, said, "If you want to be happy, you should never seek to please yourself." Instead, we should seek to please others. If we ask, "But, don't I have to protect myself from suffering?" Shantideva replies, "If you wish to be protected, you should constantly protect all others."

Buddha's prescription for happiness is to forget oneself and love others. Even when we are not seeking the love of others, the more we look after our family and friends, the more they will care for us. It is so simple, so obvious, but we have to do it. And it is not just our family and friends for whom we should take care; our purpose in life should be to protect every living being from suffering. When the attitude to look after all beings is supported by wisdom, we will never know unhappiness.

Should you flush your Prozac down the toilet? No, not yet. Begin with small actions to help others. Empty the garbage can without being asked, clean up your own mess in the kitchen, polish the shoes of others. Smile occasionally. Gradually build up the courage and determination to confront your self-cherishing mind and declare yourself a slave and friend of all living beings. Then you will extract more joy from cleaning up somebody else's mess than you will ever get from watching the football on television. Not only will this lift your depression, it will place you on the path to bliss.

CELIBACY

Jalalabad 1972: travellers on their journey to the East stranded in Afghanistan by the Indo-Pakistani war are partying. A heavily made-up and very camp Afro-American, who played himself in Fellini's Satyricon, waltzes into a room where straight couples sit in stoned silence. "Hmmmf," he sniffs, with his nose in the air and a wicked smile, "heterosexual hang-ups." Then he returns to the main room where the action is happening.

In those days, the sexual revolution was in full swing and inhibitions were the modern-day leprosy. Later, an Australian newspaper columnist expressed a view that was commonly held at the time: "I consider celibacy to be the ultimate perversion."Yet many Westerners who participated in that revolution have taken vows as Buddhist monks and nuns, which include being celibate. Why did they do it? Partly it was because the teachings of Buddhism confirmed their experience that no matter how much sex, drugs, and rock-and-roll they enjoyed, there was no satisfaction and no contentment in their lives. And Buddha's explanation of the reason — uncontrolled emotions of pride, desire, and anger arising from a serious case of neurotic self-centredness — was all too clear to them. In particular, inspiration to take ordination came from the lamas themselves. On the road in India and Nepal, the hippies were welcomed and treated by everyone as favourite children. Hashish was sold in shops, wild marijuana grew everywhere, and the flower children thought they had discovered paradise, considering themselves Lords of the Road. Then they met the Tibetan lamas.

"Your heads are full of shit," they were told, in as many words. Normally we would walk away from somebody who spoke to us like this, but the lamas themselves were too cool to be ignored. They had the humour, the freedom, the calm, and the happiness that everybody was looking for. The hippies swallowed their pride and asked the lamas, "What are you on about?" And so began the ongoing process of Tibetan Buddhism making a big impression on Western society.

If you want to achieve the stages of the Buddhist path, celibacy is not essential; it is simply an aid. The main objective of the path to nirvana is to abandon the desire for sensory pleasure, not sensory pleasure itself. Such abandonment is achieved on the basis of morality, meditation, and wisdom. Living within morality means having a lifestyle where one avoids deliberately harming other sentient beings in any way. Killing, stealing, and lying are obvious ways of harming others. Having sexual relations with one's own partner is neither negative karma nor immorality, but it does have the unfortunate result of increasing our desire and dissatisfaction, which may generate the urge to take somebody else's partner as well. This is negative karma because others will be hurt. The main purpose of the vow of celibacy is to

help free the mind from desire by opening up a space where our most dominant desire — the desire for sexual pleasure — has no place. This space protects our mind from frequent interruption by thoughts of sexual activity. It is said that the average person thinks about sex a remarkable number of times each day. Maybe you can do some research on your own mind and see whether you need the vow of celibacy or not.

Every time we experience pleasure, our desire for that pleasure increases; it will be difficult to attain meditative concentration if we live the life of a layperson as our mind will be constantly distracted by fantasies arising from desire. Not that monks and nuns are free from desire and fantasies, but their vows give them the mental space to easily let go such distractions because they have already made the decision and promise before their lama to abandon sexuality. In this way, vows are a source of strength, not of weakness as some think. Weakness in the mind only occurs when desire causes monks and nuns to doubt the validity of living a celibate life. Doubt is an obstacle that every ordained person will meet and will have to overcome if they are to remain ordained. Another advantage of celibacy is that, without a husband or wife, one does not have the responsibility of looking after a family. Of course, it is excellent karma to look after a family with love, but there is little time or energy left for study and meditation.

Undistracted concentration is needed because concentration is the foundation for both altruism and the special wisdom that is the antidote to self-centred ignorance, the root of all our troubles.

This wisdom is the doorway to nirvana, but the attainment of nirvana is not the only goal of the Buddhist path. Through altruism, the supreme goal is to become a Buddha with the power to lead all living beings out of suffering. One does not wait until buddhahood before working to help others, such activity starts at the beginning of the path to enlightenment. One helps others to escape the misery of the wheel of life by encouraging them to abandon the mistaken belief that enjoying sensory and mental pleasure is ultimate happiness, and by guiding them on the path. Intellectual reasoning is not strong enough for them to abandon desire for sexual pleasure, they also need faith. This is achieved by the inspiring example of monks and nuns, whose pure lifestyle and inner attainment of peace show that renunciation is possible.

Just as the Tibetan lamas inspired the hippies through their personal example, the world today needs the inspiring example of Western monks and nuns so that people can generate faith in renunciation and morality, the foundation of the paths to nirvana and to enlightenment. This is the best reason for living the celibate life of a Buddhist monk or nun. And it is the reason why Buddha said that his teachings would remain alive wherever there was a group of monks or nuns keeping pure vows; and wherever there were no monks or nuns, his teachings would not exist.

IDIOT COMPASSION

Proudly having survived two Mongolian winters, I now happily reflect on the mileage I can extract from liberally exaggerating horror stories of the cold upon my return to Australia. I can also claim a broad knowledge of nature, there being only two channels worth watching on cable television: National Geographic and Animal Planet. If I see another penguin or whale, or that mad Aussie snake-catcher again, I may go insane, but the most haunting image remaining in my mind is that of vast herds of animals in drought-stricken Africa walking in a giant circle on the Serengeti Plain. Although going nowhere, they are driven by the momentum of the herd, believing they will find the happiness of food and water. Their companions are dropping from hunger and thirst or being eaten alive by fat carnivores, but still they trudge in an endless, meaningless circle because that is what the others are doing.

This tragic image is a good illustration of the wheel of life, within which we have been circling since beginningless time. Every birth brings new hope that this time we will be free from troubles and we will find the peace and happiness that have eluded us in all our previous lives. Every death brings disappointment that life did not even approach the ideals of our youth. Nevertheless, as our family and friends, exhausted in their toil, fall around us, we plod on through life in pursuit of the illusion of perfect happiness, a projection of the mass psychosis that has been the bane of all our lives. A Buddhist sutrasays people are of two types: "young ones," who see the misery around them but believe it won't happen to them, and "old ones," who have experienced misery but believe it won't happen to them again.

The moments of happiness we do find are temporary; they depend upon ever-changing causes and conditions that soon finish and leave us with nostalgic craving for the good times of the past. In George Orwell's novel Nineteen Eighty-four, historians are constantly rewriting history in order to suit the current political climate.Not only is this frighteningly reminiscent of modern-day China, but our own minds too are constantly rewriting our personal histories, editing out the bad and polishing the good so that we, the prime actors, appear perfect. This makes it progressively harder to experience happiness in the present. Always comparing, forever criticising, we become sad old fogies and even our children cannot bear to be with us.

The cause of this miserable state of affairs is the ego, a monster unwilling to admit that we can be wrong, or make mistakes, and that somebody else may be right. There is a sharp, competitive edge to our lives that may begin in jest but soon becomes serious as we defend our beliefs. There is nothing like a discussion on politics or religion to quickly unearth our insecurity. Having incorporated our beliefs into our egos and identified with them as part of

ourselves, we will abandon logic and abuse, fight, and even kill those who present a different opinion.

A sickening aspect of this ego defence mechanism is that we feel obliged to crusade and convert others to our beliefs. Although some action may be justified in the name of compassion, there is a great danger in what Buddhism calls "idiot compassion": compassion bereft of wisdom. Idiot compassion is exemplified by an incident that took place in the Pokhara valley in Nepal. This region was renowned for its sweet oranges until someone came along and said, "You need Californian oranges." The trees he introduced did not survive, and they contained a disease that wiped out the local orchards.

When the first Christian missionaries arrived in Lhasa, Tibet, they were welcomed by the lamas, who invited them to present their beliefs in a public discussion. The lamas were not impressed by missionary logic, but good-heartedly allowed them to build churches and worship as they wished. Such is the Buddhist tradition, where logic is revered as the stepping-stone to the wisdom seeing reality, which, in turn, is the support of universal compassion. Here in Mongolia, the magnificent Buddhist culture of wisdom and compassion has been almost extinguished by seventy years of political oppression. There is no spiritual strength or financial power to challenge the beliefs of foreign invaders. With faith in Buddhism but little understanding of the Buddha's teachings, the Mongols are being influenced by well-financed missionaries who use old Communist propaganda as well as their own style of misinformation to attack Buddhism. The cultural and spiritual arrogance of Westerners who reject Eastern wisdom and try to impose their own beliefs upon others is not fair to the world. Should Mongolia lose the chance to revive its Buddhist heritage, the loss to human society will be infinitely greater than the loss of a few Nepalese oranges.

According to a report on the BBC World Service in 2002, the motto of the first Sri Lankan Buddhist monk to become a member of parliament is, "Observe with compassion, analyse with wisdom." He means that when you aspire to help people, you should do so with wisdom, which includes full knowledge of the cultural background of the people you are trying to help. Many people who come to Mongolia do not even bother to examine the cultural beliefs of the people. If missionaries in Mongolia are convinced that only their own beliefs are correct, then they will be true possessors of idiot compassion, and their presence will be more destructive than beneficial.

MORE ON KARMA

The other morning, while supposedly meditating, my wayward mind was composing an article on marriage, and I was trying to remember what Zorba the Greek said about the subject. After meditation, I made a bowl of muesli and turned on the BBC World Service. At that very moment, they were playing the soundtrack of the sequence in the film that I had been trying to remember. The English journalist asked Zorba if he was married, and Zorba replied, "I'm married. Wife, children, house, everything. The full catastrophe."

A simple coincidence maybe, but when these things happen one cannot help wondering if something else is going on behind the curtains. Buddhism says that every experience in our life comes from karma that is within our own mind. There is a subjective, mental component in the forging of the patterns of our lives that is often overlooked, or simply not recognised. Every small and great experience in life is related to our state of mind immediately prior to the event because our attitude determines which karmas will ripen. A bad attitude ripens karma that causes bad things to happen; a good attitude ripens karma that causes good things to happen.

How this occurs is the question. I am not suggesting that some part of my mind was aware the broadcast was about to happen and made me tune into the BBC. It was a "harmonious conjunction," which sounds good but is difficult to explain. For me, karma is suggested in the experiences of athletes when they are hot, and of gamblers when they are on a roll; or when nothing goes right for no apparent reason. I have observed that whatever happens to me is closely related to what I am thinking at the time. And I have concluded that whether my world is peaceful or turbulent depends upon whether my mind is peaceful or turbulent.

It is not just chance that makes life flow smoothly or roughly, there is a subtle causal factor behind every experience, no matter how slight. Just as Albert Einstein saw orderliness in nature and declared that nobody plays dice with the universe, Buddha said that we cannot attribute to luck the good and bad things that happen to us. All experiences in life are conditioned by karmic activity within our own minds. This is the revolutionary thought of the Buddha. Good karma produces a smooth passage through life, like a Taoist butcher's knife that never requires sharpening, and bad karma produces bumps and bruises of life, like a Russian jeep on a Mongolian road.

Just as the law of gravitation describes the natural force of attraction between masses, the law of karma describes the natural cause and effect relationship between intentional behaviour and later experience. Gravity and karma are, respectively, natural functions of matter and of mind. God did not create gravity or karma, but he knew about karma and

hence the Ten Commandments. By understanding gravity, we can build powerful rockets to escape the Earth, but it is easier to escape from karma: as karma originates in ignorance, it is simply extinguished by wisdom.

The law of karma is that whatever ignorant beings do, say, or think with benevolent or malevolent intention, their behaviour leaves a potency upon their mind-stream that is maintained through time without wearing out, even from life to life, and which has the potential to give rise to a pleasant or unpleasant experience similar to the original action. In our daily pursuit of happiness and avoidance of pain, if we do not take the law of karma into consideration, we are like fools who think they can defy gravity and fly by jumping off a cliff. It is a mistake to kill animals with the belief that there is no fault because animals are pests or are here for our consumption. And it is wrong to justify the hanging of murderers or killing of enemies simply because it is allowed by law. Such actions rebound upon us in the form of rebirth in regions of terrible suffering where beings are constantly killing each other and, even when that result is exhausted and we are fortunate enough to be born human again, we will live in a dangerous place such as a war zone, our life will be short, and we will have the karmic tendency to kill again.

Similarly, it is a mistake to steal with the thought that there is no fault in stealing from the wealthy or in cheating on our tax return. Such actions rebound upon us in the form of rebirth as wandering spirits in a state of extreme destitution and, even when that result is exhausted and we are fortunate enough to be born human again, we will live in a place where natural disasters destroy our wealth, or it is stolen by others, and we will have the karmic tendency to steal again.

Also, it is a mistake to have an affair with our neighbour's wife or husband by thinking that there is no fault as long as nobody finds out. This action will rebound upon us in the form of rebirth as an animal in states of extreme stupidity and, even when that result is exhausted and we are fortunate enough to be born human again, we will live in an unclean place, our partner will be unfaithful or hostile, and we will have the karmic tendency to commit sexual misconduct again.

These three examples of the results of physical non-virtue are a guide to the karmic results that may be experienced from the verbal actions of lying, speaking harshly, slandering, and idle gossip, and the mental actions of covetousness, maliciousness, and holding wrong views such as denying karma. On the positive side, benevolent actions of saving the lives, generosity, truthfulness, speaking kindly, and so on will rebound upon us in a pleasant way. We will be born as humans or gods with long lives, attractive bodies, wealth, good health, and so on.

Is this teaching just a way of controlling people's behaviour? If we examine our own experiences, even if we cannot see the subtle mechanism of karma, we will see that the explanation of karma is consistent. Then, with further instruction, and the power of meditative insight, the reality of karma will become progressively clearer.

From their own side, karmic potencies do not lose power, in fact, they increase in strength with the passage of time. The good news is that the strength of malevolent karmic potencies can be weakened and even destroyed through the four activities of generating sincere regret

for one's action, faith in one's moral guides and compassion for suffering beings, opposing malevolent actions through benevolent deeds, and determining to not repeat the action. The not-so-good news is that benevolent potencies can also be weakened or destroyed by disturbing emotions such as strong anger.

The presentation of karma has a familiar note to the threat of punishment in hell for the seven deadly sins of pride, covetousness, lust, anger, gluttony, envy, and sloth. It also sounds like the old story of forgiveness through confession and penance, and going to heaven for being good. Don't allow well-honed scepticism about religion to blind your wisdom eye. According to Buddhism, there is no supreme person who passes judgement and rewards or punishes us. Karmic potencies ripen in the form of mental impulses that attract us to painful or pleasurable objects just as a moth cannot resist a flame and a fish is lured to the bait. No pain or pleasure can arise without having an internal, mental cause to meet the object that gives rise to that experience.

Self-consciousness — believing we really are what we think we are — is the root of all our troubles. For the athletes and the gamblers, concern about how they measure up in the eyes of others, as well as pride, aggression, and greed, can all lose them the game. Supreme performances only occur when they are able to forget themselves.

Karma is the energy of intention, or willpower, within the minds of those who are afflicted by ignorance, anger, and attachment. Individually, karma causes the variety of experiences within each person's life; collectively, karma is the creative force of the entire universe. The physical and chemical activity of matter exists independently of karma, but is organised by the collective karma of sentient beings to produce a degree of order out of matter's natural state of chaos. Those who have attained buddhahood are free from personal karma. For them, the creative principle of intention or will remains, but now acts spontaneously through wisdom and compassion and is not called karma.

Conflict in families and neighbourhoods, and between nations, is inevitable as long as we remain ignorant of the role played by our own minds and by karma. George W. Bush wants to put weapons in space to overcome his enemies. It would be far better to aim his missiles at his own head, metaphorically speaking, of course.

With regard to my unwritten article on marriage, Zorba said it all, didn't he?

THE PATH

Fortunately, we cannot remember the lonely and frightening experience of birth. Nobody was there to comfort us when, hour after hour, we experienced the pain of our skull being squeezed out of shape and the sense of suffocation as we emerged from our mother's womb. Likewise, at the end of our life, we will die alone. No matter how much we want to stay in our body, no matter how much our family and friends implore us to remain, we will have no choice but to leave and go on alone.

Throughout our lives, too, we are alone. Although we try to express our innermost thoughts and feelings, it is impossible to truly share them with anybody because no one has access to our mind other than ourselves. At death our body is left behind while our mind, with all its good and bad qualities, carries on into the next life. If we are sick of suffering, blowing a hole in our head with a shotgun cannot destroy our mind or stop our suffering. The mind continues for all eternity and our suffering will re-emerge in the next life, which may be even worse than this one. Our body has its limits, but we can always improve the quality of our mind and transform it from its present state of confusion to the sublime unification of wisdom and bliss. Such transformation is the spiritual path to enlightenment, which is said to be much easier to attain than it is to get out of the three lower realms of existence.

The path to the unification of wisdom and bliss necessarily begins with doubt. Born with innate misconceptions about the world and ourselves, year by year we increase our confusion by adding further wild ideas about reality. To cut through this confusion, first we need to doubt everything we believe, and use logic to establish the truth. The closer our ideas come to reality, the happier our lives will be; the further they are from reality, the unhappier we will be. My first teacher, Lama Thubten Yeshe, used to say again and again, "You need to check up. Investigate with logic not only your preconceptions but also the teachings of Buddha."

Objects of knowledge are infinite, but we do not need to know all the types of insect in the world to experience the bliss of nirvana. All we need to know is what it means to be a human being, how we ultimately exist as individuals, and how we arrived here through the process of karmic cause and effect. Doubt means questioning and investigating all that we hold to be true, using the tools of logic and comparison with our own experience.

To energise our practice of wisdom and compassion, we need a healthy fear of birth in suffering states. As we investigate karma, we will understand that our mind contains potentials for hell, hungry ghost, and animal rebirths, none of which is particularly desirable. If we have no fear of birth in these lower realms, we will do nothing to prevent being born

there. If we do see birth in such places as a real possibility, we will seek a safe direction in life that leads to happiness. The best way to fear hell is to have compassionate concern for those who are experiencing that misery, and to have the intention to rescue them.

To discover and follow the right direction in life we need to find somebody we can trust, who knows reality, who has freed him or herself from the danger of self-centred emotions, who has the skill to guide us, and has love and compassion wanting to help us. Such a person is a Buddha, in whom we must have faith; otherwise our efforts on the path will not be strong enough to overcome the self-centredness of thinking we know best. After receiving instruction and contemplating its meaning, to progress in our practice we need the kindness and support of fellow travellers who have overcome the obstacles we are about to meet. Our faith in the teacher, the teachings, and the helpers will grow from simple admiration to the aspiration to emulate them, and a deeply held conviction in their reality — a conviction that is based upon our own emergent wisdom.

In this age of self-reliance and spiritual scepticism, it goes against the grain even to think about putting our lives in the hands of others. But as babies we gladly gave ourselves to our mothers, having at last found a friend after our awful entry into the world; as students we relied upon our teachers; in our first job we relied upon someone to train us. If we want to follow the path to awakening, we have to put our lives into the hands of a qualified teacher. As we mature on the spiritual path, the wisdom and compassion we cultivate in our own minds will become our inner guides.

Wisdom and compassion based upon renunciation of attachment to worldly goals are the essence of the path to enlightenment; it is only through cultivating these qualities that we can be safely self-reliant. Without wisdom, our self-reliance will be a form of self-cherishing arrogance disguised as spiritual practice. This dangerous trap exists for followers of every religious tradition, and the hypocrisy manifested by those who have fallen into it is one of the main reasons for much of our scepticism towards all things religious.

It is a sign of laziness, however, to allow our awareness of the failures of others to prejudice our minds against the path. We must learn from their mistakes and find the courage to enter the path ourselves and succeed where others have failed. Herein is the role of faith, which is cultivated by investigating both the teachings and the teachers, and comparing what is said and done with our own experience in life. Then we can make a sound judgement about whether or not we should follow the spiritual path.

Because selfish ignorance and other disturbing emotions are deeply embedded in our minds, the path to their eradication is going to take many lifetimes. Consequently, we need patience and perseverance. Many people start out with great enthusiasm to achieve high realisations quickly. After a few months or years, when nothing seems to have happened, they completely give up, or they become content with small advances and, using age as an excuse, sit back and take it easy for the remainder of their life. But until we approach the realisation of emptiness, there is no guarantee that in our next life we will have the same opportunity to follow the path. Therefore, there is no time to waste; we must use every moment to increase our knowledges of listening, thinking, and meditating, and our capacity to love and have compassion for others.

Just as we are alone in life, the spiritual path too is shared with no one else because it is the inner growth and maturation of our own personality. The sense of loneliness will gradually evaporate because a major component of the spiritual path is universal love — the opening of our hearts to the entire world. With such love, every living being will become our dear friend. His Holiness the Dalai Lama often says, "I treat everybody I meet as a dear friend I have not seen for a long time."

A MONGOLIAN RETREAT

At the turn of last century, the monastery of Baldan Baraivan, 300 kilometres east of Ulaan Baatar, housed nearly three thousand monks. Another two or three thousand lay practitioners lived nearby. First, an epidemic of what sounds like influenza decimated the inhabitants; then the communists completed the devastation. With no capitalist system to attack in this country of nomads, the communists turned their hatred towards the monasteries. First they taxed the monks at a ridiculous level; then, over three years in the 1930s, on the pretext of the monks not having paid their taxes, they took all the older monks and leaders of the monasteries away and murdered them. Witnesses tell me of a line of yellow lama hats along the top of a ditch dug to receive their bodies — the hats fell off as communist bullets entered the back of their heads. The physically strong monks were sent to work camps in Siberia, and were not heard from again; and the young novices were sent home to look after the animals. The communists then removed all usable building materials from the monastery site (which was like a small town), destroyed the holy objects, and burned everything else.

Today, the roofless shell of the main temple remains, but little else. Granite foundations show where the monks and laypeople lived in their wooden and felt gers and shacks. The ground is littered with broken domestic and religious artefacts, and conifers and silver birches have crept down from the surrounding granite ridges to reclaim their valley. The people have gone, and in early summer only the sound of cuckoos can be heard in this valley of magnificent rock formations. These formations would delight any feng shui practitioner, but the Buddha's teachings require more than auspicious rocks to remain alive.

A ray of hope for this tragic scene is the enthusiasm of Mark Hintzke from San Francisco. Mark is the founder of the Cultural Restoration Tourism Project, which aims to rebuild the main temple and turn the valley once again into a place of Buddhist study and practice. He provides the basic requirements for people from all over the world to come and help the Mongolian people with restoration work. Cultural tourists perform light manual work, and their fees finance the project, along with donations from individuals and clear-sighted organisations. There is also plenty of time to explore the magnificent surroundings — the entire valley was once part of Genghis Khan's home territory. And there is time to play, but take care: I am still recovering from a knee injury sustained during the Baldan Baraivan Olympic Sack Race of 2001.

I arrived at Baldan Baraivan in mid-June to give some Dharma talks to the local people and to the group of volunteers working on the restoration. For one week, a group of lamas from a main town in the province came to lead the laypeople in a mani retreat, where they recited

the mantra of Avalokiteshvara, the Buddha of Compassion, many thousands of times. Some of these lamas were in their eighties and nineties and had been among the young novices expelled from the monastery before it was destroyed. They had lived as herders and then returned to the religious life when freedom was regained from the communists. People arrived on horseback from many miles away, and the valley assumed the classic appearance of the popular Mongolian painting style that shows "A Day in the Life of Mongolia." Gers and tents mushroomed, and everywhere there were cooking fires, wood-gatherers, horses, dogs, sheep, goats, cattle, and children at play.

About fifty people, including the lamas, attended my talks in a newly built wooden hall beside the main ruins. The old men stamped their feet and spat on the floor in agreement with many of the things I had to say about the sad state of affairs in modern Mongolia, and several were openly moved to tears. Their faith is so strong; but none of them, including the lamas, had received any real teachings on Buddhism. My talks were supposed to be an hour and a half, but they asked me to speak longer. I felt a powerful, joyful energy as if the spirits of the lamas who had given their lives for the Dharma were rejoicing that their prayers were being fulfilled and the teachings were returning to the valley. A younger lama sincerely thanked me for explaining how to make a prostration and its meaning. He requested me to visit his monastery to give talks to the twenty or so monks who have no teacher.

I helped the volunteers excavate a half-buried 12-foot statue of the great Tibetan scholar and yogi, Lama Tsongkhapa, which had been carved into a granite cliff overlooking the valley.

There was some damage, probably from communist bullets, but the statue was well preserved and there were even traces of paint and gilding. We then cleared the rubble from a temple that had once housed a Maitreya statue. Made of clay, this statue was easily destroyed by the communists and the weather combined. We also discovered, buried in the rubble, a three-foot statue of the female Buddha, Tara, carved in granite; as well as some beautiful clay images. One of these images, a lion-faced Dakini, was given to me to take to Australia and place within the replica of the Gyantse Stupa of Tibet that is being built near Bendigo in Victoria.

Then I rented a ger and, with my translator, Gunjiimaa, moved to a quiet, open area about a mile up the valley to do a meditation retreat. We slept in tents, meditated in the ger, and cooked food over an open fire. The creek was clear and cold; I called it Icy Creek before learning it had been named Yellow Creek by Genghis Khan himself. We camped in the centre of a field of flowers in mauve, yellow, white, and pink, with great clumps of wild rhubarb growing around the entrances to marmot warrens. The rhubarb was a welcome addition to our menu, although we had to send an urgent request to the main camp for more sugar. At night the howling of wolves in the nearby forest moved Gunjiimaa to say, jokingly, "Last night I really became a Buddhist, I took refuge strongly because I thought I was going to be eaten."

Before starting retreat we walked over the ridge behind our flowery glade to inspect the ruins of a nunnery that had been a special place for yogis and yoginis meditating upon the Heruka and Vajrayogini Tantra. This profound and quick path to enlightenment called the Vajrayana was introduced into Tibet from India many centuries ago, and the practice soon became very important in both Tibetan and Mongolian Buddhism. A laywoman who has been given

permission to rebuild the nunnery on the five hectares of very isolated valley requested our help in this project. It is tempting, but there is so much to do to help revive the Dharma in this country, and our capacity is stretched to the limit. It is difficult to know where best to put one's energy. I placed a photo of His Holiness the Dalai Lama inside a rocky crevice of the ruins, offered a traditional Mongolian golden scarf, and prayed strongly for the Vajrayana to return.

The meditation retreat was welcome relief from the scattered energy of Ulaan Baatar. Once again I prostrate to my lamas and thank them from the depths of my heart for giving me the teachings. After two weeks we returned to the main camp where I introduced Mark and his workers to the delights of wild rhubarb, and a particularly delicious shelf fungus that grew on the side of trees. I also put an end to a local taboo, and greatly upset a pair of geese, by walking over a mass of thickly matted floating grass and swimming across the lake in the centre of the valley. It was believed that one would sink into the (non-existent) quicksand and re-emerge in another lake on the other side of the hills because "it once happened to a cow."

Glossary

See also the LYWA online glossary at LamaYeshe.com

(Skt = Sanskrit; Tib = Tibetan)

Avalokiteshvara. (Tib. Chenrezig) The meditational deity who personifies the Great Compassion of an enlightened mind.

bardo. The Tibetan term for the dream-like state of existence that occurs between one life and the next.

bodhi tree. The tree (Ficus religiosa) beneath which the historic Buddha, Shakyamuni, sat when he attained enlightenment. A cutting from that tree still grows in Sri Lanka, and an offspring from the Sri Lankan tree now flourishes where the original tree grew near the town of Bodhgaya in the Indian state of Bihar.

bodhicitta. (Skt.) The altruistic state of mind infused with the aspirations to attain the state of Buddhahood in order to lead all beings out of suffering.

Bodhisattva. (Skt.) A person who has bodhicitta within his or her mind.

Buddhahood. The state of having fully awakened from the darkness of ignorance; the ultimate potential of every living being's mind; the perfection of wisdom and compassion.

demigods. (Skt. asura; Tib. lha ma yin) Beings born close to the realm of suras, "pleasure beings" or gods. They do not have all the pleasures of the gods and, consumed with jealousy, they go to war against the lower gods, trying unsuccessfully to acquire what they lack.

Dharamsala. A hill-station in the Indian state of Himachal Pradesh where the Dalai Lama and many exiled Tibetans live.

Gelug tradition. The most recent of the four Tibetan Buddhist traditions. Established by Lama Tsongkhapa (1357 – 1419)

Ger. The traditional Mongolian nomad's dwelling made of heavy felt draped over a circular lattice-work of wooden slats. The entire structure can be dismantled in half an hour and all the parts can be carried by two camels.

Hell beings. Those who are born in any of the several types of hot or cold hell.

Heruka. (Skt. Chakrasamvara; Tib. Demchog) A semi-wrathful ("heruka") tantric deity. Buddha Shakyamuni manifested in the aspect of Chakrasamvara in order to subdue disharmony caused by the sura, Ishvara, to whom people were making sacrifices at thirty-two places in India. These places then became specially blessed in a positive aspect. This tantric practice was brought to Tibet and eventually to Mongolia through the inspiration of the great Indian yogi, Naropa.

Hungry ghosts. (Skt. preta; Tib. yidag) A state of rebirth characterised by extreme hunger and thirst, often a result of actions committed through miserliness.

Jewels of refuge. Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha, the three foundations of Buddhist faith and direction. Buddha Shakyamuni is the founder, Dharma is his teachings, and the Sangha are the community of practitioners who have actualised the teachings.

karma. (Skt.; Tib. las) Literally "action," refers to intentions within the mind that lead one along paths of action, including physical and verbal behaviour. Every action one performs creates a karmic potential upon the mind that can lead one to experience something similar in the future.

lama. (Skt. guru) A spiritual teacher who has mastered the Dharma and is willing and capable of guiding students on the path to enlightenment.

lung. (Skt. prana; Chin. chi) "Wind," the Tibetan term for the subtle physical energy of motion that supports the mind and the physiological functioning of the body.

Mahayana. (Skt.) "Great Vehicle" the term given to Buddha Shakyamuni's teachings on bodhicitta and the path followed by Bodhisattvas.

nirvana. (Skt.) The final cessation of all ignorant conceptions and the suffering caused by them; a blissful state of liberation from the wheel of life and its causes.

sentient being. (Skt. sattva; Tib. semchan) A living being whose mind is still contaminated by ignorance or the imprints of ignorance. This includes beings belonging to every level of rebirth within the wheel of life, but excludes Buddhas, who have no ignorance.

Shakyamuni Buddha. Born as a prince of the Shakya clan, historic Buddha was called Shakyamuni – Lord of the Shakya Clan.

stupa. (Tib. chorten) A Buddhist monument that symbolises the path to enlightenment. Stupas contain relics, special texts, and other precious objects, and variations in their design indicate different activities of the historic Buddha.

Ulaan Baatar. The present capital city of Mongolia, population about one million.

Vajrayogini. (Tib. Dorje Naljorma) Literally, "Diamond Yogini", the female deity who is the chief consort of Chakrasamvara. Her essence is the wisdom that cognises the inseparability of bliss and voidness.

voidness. (Skt. Shunyata; Tib.Tong.pa.nyi) The ultimate nature of all phenomena – emptiness of inherent existence.

wheel of life. (Skt. samsara; Tib. khorwa) The state of mind that is under the control of karma, death, and the disturbing emotions of ignorance, anger, and attachment. It includes the various realms and types of birth that occur as results of karma.

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May whoever sees, touches, reads, remembers, or talks or thinks about these books never be reborn in unfortunate circumstances, receive only rebirths in situations conducive to the perfect practice of Dharma, meet only perfectly qualified spiritual guides, quickly develop bodhicitta and immediately attain enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings.

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The Lama Yeshe Wisdom Archive (LYWA) is the collected works of Lama Thubten Yeshe and Lama Thubten Zopa Rinpoche. Lama Zopa Rinpoche, its spiritual director, founded the Archive in 1996.

Lama Yeshe and Lama Zopa Rinpoche began teaching at Kopan Monastery, Nepal, in 1970. Since then, their teachings have been recorded and transcribed. At present we have well over 12,000 hours of digital audio and some 90,000 pages of raw transcript. Many recordings, mostly teachings by Lama Zopa Rinpoche, remain to be transcribed, and as Rinpoche continues to teach, the number of recordings in the Archive increases accordingly. Most of our transcripts have been neither checked nor edited.

Here at the LYWA we are making every effort to organize the transcription of that which has not yet been transcribed, edit that which has not yet been edited, and generally do the many other tasks detailed below.

The work of the Lama Yeshe Wisdom Archive falls into two categories: archiving and dissemination.

Archiving requires managing the recordings of teachings by Lama Yeshe and Lama Zopa Rinpoche that have already been collected, collecting recordings of teachings given but not yet sent to the Archive, and collecting recordings of Lama Zopa's on-going teachings, talks, advice and so forth as he travels the world for the benefit of all. Incoming media are then catalogued and stored safely while being kept accessible for further work.

We organize the transcription of audio, add the transcripts to the already existent database of teachings, manage this database, have transcripts checked, and make transcripts available to editors or others doing research on or practicing these teachings.

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Irrespective of the medium we choose, the teachings require a significant amount of work to prepare them for distribution.

This is just a summary of what we do. The Archive was established with virtually no seed funding and has developed solely through the kindness of many people, most of whom we mention and thank sincerely on our website. We are indebted to you all.

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The FPMT has been established to facilitate the study and practice of Mahayana Buddhism in general and the Tibetan Gelug tradition, founded in the fifteenth century by the great scholar, yogi and saint, Lama Je Tsongkhapa, in particular.

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Should you need to get rid of Dharma materials, they should not be thrown in the rubbish but burned in a special way. Briefly: do not incinerate such materials with other trash, but alone, and as they burn, recite the mantra OM AH HUM. As the smoke rises, visualize that it pervades all of space, carrying the essence of the Dharma to all sentient beings in the six samsaric realms, purifying their minds, alleviating their suffering, and bringing them all happiness, up to and including enlightenment. Some people might find this practice a bit unusual, but it is given according to tradition. Thank you very much.

Dedication

Through the merit created by preparing, reading, thinking about and sharing this book with others, may all teachers of the Dharma live long and healthy lives, may the Dharma spread throughout the infinite reaches of space, and may all sentient beings quickly attain enlightenment.

In whichever realm, country, area or place this book may be, may there be no war, drought, famine, disease, injury, disharmony or unhappiness, may there be only great prosperity, may everything needed be easily obtained, and may all be guided by only perfectly qualified Dharma teachers, enjoy the happiness of Dharma, have love and compassion for all sentient beings, and only benefit and never harm each other.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Born in Melbourne, Australia, in 1943, Dr Adrian Feldmann graduated from the University of Melbourne with a degree in medicine. After practising medicine in Australia and England, he travelled through Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India, eventually finding his way to a Tibetan monastery in Nepal.

After intensive study and meditation, he became ordained as the Buddhist monk, Thubten Gyatso. Since then he has run a free medical clinic in Nepal, taught Buddhism and meditation in many countries, and established monasteries in France and in the country town of Bendigo, outside Melbourne.

In 1999, he was asked by his teacher, Kyabje Thubten Zopa Rinpoche, to go to Mongolia and help establish a new Buddhist centre. Mongolia was emerging from seventy years of communist rule, during which the Stalinist purges of the 1930s virtually extinguished the traditional Mongolian Buddhist culture. He was well received in Mongolia where, apart from the classes he gave at the new centre, his teachings were presented on radio and television and published in the local newspapers.

23,000 copies of the Mongolian translation of the first edition of this book have been distributed, mostly free of charge, and it has become one of the most popular books on Buddhism in Mongolia. After leaving Mongolia in 2003, Thubten Gyatso built a cabin in the Australian bush where he meditated in strict isolation from the world for three years.

Sign up for the LYWA Monthly Eletter

Sign up to receive a monthly e-message from LYWA offering you a newly edited teaching from Lama Yeshe or Lama Zopa Rinpoche, up-to-date news about the work of the Archive both at home and online, links to other great Dharma online resources and very special offerings for the LYWA community.

E-letter No. 138: November 2014

Email PDF Large Print

By Dr. Nicholas Ribush (Last Updated Nov 25, 2014)

Dear LYWA friends and supporters,

Below, we have much to share with you about new teachings made available to you in November from the Archive. Thank you so much for your continued interest and support.

NEW TEACHINGS ON OUR WEBSITE

We have just posted a translation and short commentary by Lama Zopa Rinpoche on the meaning of the eight auspicious signs and how they can be used for success. It was dictated to Ven. Sarah Thresher at Root Institute, Bodhgaya, India, on February 4, 2014.

Read a talk on Transforming the Mind in Everyday Life, given by Kyabje Lama Zopa Rinpoche in Adelaide, Australia, on August 2, 1991. In this teaching Rinpoche talks about the purpose of our life and how to develop a positive attitude, and gives advice on searching for the I. You can read an excerpt from this teaching as our eletter teaching below.

You can also read the prayer for the quick return of Geshe Lhundub Sopa Rinpoche, composed by His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama. Geshe Sopa, Abbot of Deer Park Center in Wisconsin, passed away in August.

Read advice from Rinpoche where he discusses the reasons for giving up alcohol, cigarettes and other addictive substances at a Dharma talk in Bendigo, Australia, in August 1991. Read more advice from Rinpoche regarding Addiction in the Online Advice Book.

MORE ADVICE FROM LAMA ZOPA RINPOCHE

New advices added to the Online Advice Book this month include a letter to a student advising how to benefit her dogs by building stupas and circumambulating them. In this letter Rinpoche says:

> *In reality by just walking around a stupa even one time, so many eons of heavy negative karma collected from beginningless rebirth gets purified and we collect extensive merits every time we go around it. That makes it possible to achieve enlightenment.*

Read also a letter from a student writing to confess that he had negative, harmful thoughts when hearing Rinpoche speak; and advice from Rinpoche that when teaching Dharma, the main emphasis should be on the good heart and benefiting others.

For our friends in the US who are celebrating Thanksgiving this week, it is always good to remember the Rinpoche's advice for this holiday. Read a letter Rinpoche wrote to the Sangha of Sera as dedication for pujas they did for all the turkeys killed for Thanksgiving, and Rinpoche's thoughts about this holiday.

OUR WORK TOGETHER

Last week we sent you an email about our annual year-end appeal. Our sincere thanks to those of you who donated during Lhabab Duchen to give us an excellent start to this year's appeal. To date we have raised over $6,000 towards our $50,000 goal.

We have much to rejoice in after a very successful year of fulfilling our mission to bring you the teachings of Lama Yeshe, Lama Zopa Rinpoche and other great lamas of our time.

This year saw the publication of many new ebooks and the start of our first ebook only series of teachings from Kopan. Our website continues to grow by leaps and bounds and we are hard at work on a new and improved website design. We have begun to post many new videos to our YouTube channel and this year we more than doubled the number of people we share the teachings with daily through social media outlets such as Facebook and Twitter.

Browse LYWA Ebooks and Audio Books

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