



# The World and Ourselves

*Buddhist Psychology*

Adrian Feldmann  
(Thubten Gyatso)

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*Buddhist Psychology*



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**(Adrian Feldmann)**

**Lama Yeshe Wisdom Archive • Boston**

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# Lama Yeshe Wisdom Archive

*Bringing you the teachings of Lama Yeshe and Lama Zopa Rinpoche*



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## INTRODUCTION



World economics, climate change, and terrorism are big problems today, but they're not our main problem. Our biggest problem is the common source of these three, and every other difficulty in our lives: our minds. Potential economic collapse comes from greed, climate change comes from ignorance and greed, and terrorism comes from ignorance and hatred. The seeds of greed, ignorance, and hatred exist in all our minds, and it doesn't take much for them to ripen into self-destructive and other-destructive behavior. In Tibetan, the word for a student of Buddha's teaching, *dulja*, means 'one to be tamed.' That which is to be tamed, or subdued, is our own mind, and my purpose in writing this book is to explain, as best I can, why this is so and what we can do about it.

Buddhism asserts that all troubles come from the disturbing emotions of anger, longing desire, and pride which, in turn, arise from *self-grasping ignorance*: our universal, innate misconception of how we exist as an individual person. Like a child's mind being spooked by thinking a strange noise is a ghost, our minds are made acutely self-conscious by believing something which is not self to be truly me. The self-image that each of us lives by is built upon an imaginary ghost that haunts our entire life. From our first moment of awareness while still in the womb, we treasure this false self above all else. It is said<sup>1</sup> that at about twenty-six weeks of gestation, our memory becomes clear and we wonder, "Where am I." This is like waking up in a strange hotel room and wondering where we are. Due to conditioning of the mind from previous lives, the sense of self is immediately and vividly manifest, and the 'I' that we imagine ourselves to be from that first moment onwards is wrong. The self that we think we are does not exist in reality.

Overwhelmed by a driving need to please and protect our wrongly conceived selves, we harm others and ourselves in pursuing what we want and in trying to avoid what we don't want. Never finding satisfaction, we tend to blame everyone and everything other than our own mind for our problems. This leads to alienation from friends and family, fewer opportunities to find happiness and peace, and our lives begin to appear meaningless. The only way to prevent or extract ourselves from the misery and sense of hopelessness in such self-created isolation is to combine wisdom seeing how the self exists in reality with loving kindness towards everybody, especially those we have hurt in our selfishness. Who has access to our minds? Nobody but ourselves, and to stop our disturbing emotions and their resultant unhappiness it is up to each of us to generate the courage and determination to train our mind in wisdom and loving kindness. The purpose of Buddhist teachings is to explain why this must be done and how to do it.

Over two and a half thousand years, Buddhist psychology has been adopted into many different cultures, from the Middle East to the Far East, and from Indonesia in the south to Siberia in the north. It has proven to be acceptable in those societies because it unerringly explains what the human mind is, how it functions, and its underlying role in causing both happiness and suffering. Not only that, the meditational method of exploring and transforming the mind from confusion to a state of enduring bliss and peace has stood the test of time. At his teachings around the world, His Holiness the Dalai Lama always says it is not his intention for people to become Buddhist. He simply hopes to share with others the wisdom contained in Buddhist teachings. Now, as qualified Buddhist teachers are present in most countries around the world, we have an unprecedented opportunity to incorporate this knowledge into our established religious and scientific world views, to improve ourselves, and to truly make the world a better place.

For each of us, mental stability and the constructive qualities of wisdom and loving kindness acquired through study and meditation will strengthen our minds to the point where we can support those who depend upon us. We will be able to give them safe and reliable direction in their lives, and we will be a refuge for them in times of despair. If we don't discover the reality of our own being, and, by extension, the reality of others, we will continue our futile striving to gratify and protect phantom selves conjured up in a fog of confusion. We will be swept along in a flood of self-centred desire and aggression, creating misery for ourselves and others. Thus Buddha's warning: 'Beware of your mind!'

In our pursuit of happiness and freedom from problems we seek appropriate friends, possessions, entertainment, food, wealth, respect, good reputation, and so on, and try to avoid all that is bad. It is not easy, however, to find and keep close the objects we believe will make us happy. And even though we don't seek problems, they find us. No matter how much success we may have, the happiness we do find never lasts because the objects we depend upon go away, or, through dissatisfaction, our mind cannot abide in peace and we reject them, looking for something or someone better. Our clinging attachment smothers our close friends and forces them to distance themselves from us, our angry outbursts hurt them, and our self-centred arrogance turns them away from us. So we have to question the belief that true happiness can be derived from external objects and other people. And we have to investigate why our mind so quickly falls into dissatisfaction and aversion when we do find some degree of happiness.

Painful in their own nature, our destructive, self-centred emotions hinder our pursuit of peace and happiness. They prevent our gaining any insight from life's vicissitudes and, through them, we create causes for future misery.<sup>2</sup> This is why they are our worst enemy. The flood of confusion and mental disturbance only abates when it is opposed by insight into the way we exist as individuals. Such wisdom defuses the explosive potential of self-centred anger, desire, and pride and opens the door to our being able to express genuine love and compassion free from self-interest, and to willingly accept the responsibility of helping others to attain freedom from suffering and its causes.

The importance of this brief outline of Buddhist thought cannot be exaggerated. After seven years experience as a doctor working in hospitals in Australia, New Guinea, and England, I had become convinced that human suffering and happiness are largely rooted in our behavior, in particular, the attitudes behind our behavior. Seeing that many physical



illnesses and even the rate of recovery from surgery were strongly connected to our lifestyle, which comes from our mind, I eagerly took a job at a psychiatric hospital to learn more about the mind. It was a valuable experience, but I was deeply dissatisfied with our physicochemical approach to diagnosis and treatment of mental illness. Having abandoned the alluring prospect of a *soma*<sup>3</sup> in various psychedelics, I was looking for an acceptable explanation of what the mind is and how it functions. This search led me to a Buddhist monastery on a ridge overlooking Kathmandu valley.

The teachings challenged my scientific world-view to the core, but after eighteen months of thorough investigation I accepted them to be valid. To learn more, and to incorporate this knowledge into my life as best I could, I became a monk in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition in 1975. I saw this big step to be an opportunity to further my medical training through application of the proverb, ‘Physician, heal thyself.’ Although I still have a long way to go on my own path, many have requested me to share with them what I have learned since then; hence this book.

## **The Buddha**

According to the Universal Vehicle tradition,<sup>4</sup> the historic Buddha’s appearance in India about 2500 years ago was the manifestation of a fully enlightened being – a person who has freed his or her mind of all traces of self-centred confusion and who has attained all good qualities. In previous lives, the Buddha had been an ordinary person like ourselves, and is said to have completed the path to enlightenment many aeons ago. Since then, like all Buddhas, he has lived in a *pure land* created through the power of his mind. In such places, Buddhas in either male or female aspect teach advanced practitioners the final stages of the path to enlightenment. For less capable beings, they emanate physical forms that appear in impure places, such as our own Earth, to teach the whole path or some aspect of the path. Our Earth is said to be impure because it is the result of the collective actions, or *karma*, of its inhabitants, whose minds are made impure by the distorting effect of self-centred confusion, anger, desire, and unskillful behavior motivated by these disturbed mental states.

Although Buddhas know all that needs to be known, they can only explain the path to freedom from suffering at a level which accords with the capacity of their listeners to comprehend and practise. Thus the Buddha taught at different levels according to the abilities of those present, and various lineages of practice evolved that were based upon particular teachings received at different times. The Hinayana tradition is now mostly practised in Sri Lanka and south-east Asia. In Tibet and Mongolia, the Mahayana tradition has preserved the entire spectrum of Buddha’s teachings at every level of subtlety. As I have been instructed in the Universal Vehicle tradition, it is this point of view that I shall present.

## **The teachings**

The Buddhist path is an inner journey. It refers to progressively enhancing the positive qualities of one’s mind and eliminating the negative ones. During his life, the historic Buddha demonstrated the three essential aspects of the path to enlightenment: renunciation, great compassion, and the wisdom seeing reality. Renunciation occurs when, seeing the misery experienced by self and others in our relentless and never-satisfied pursuit of mundane pleasure, we abandon belief in ordinary life as being a source of pure happiness

and turn our minds towards freedom from suffering and its causes. After seeing the signs of sickness, ageing, and death afflicting his people, the Buddha, as Prince Siddhartha, showed renunciation by leaving behind the pleasures of his princely life and becoming a wandering ascetic. His purpose for doing this was not selfish. With great compassion he was determined to discover the real cause of suffering so that he could lead all beings to freedom by showing them how to overcome that cause. By learning all that the greatest spiritual teachers in India had to teach at that time, and realising the profundity but incompleteness of their understanding, he showed the cultivation of wisdom seeing reality by meditating beneath the bodhi tree at Bodhgaya and gaining enlightenment.

### **The four arya truths**

After the Buddha demonstrated the attainment of enlightenment, he remained for many weeks in deep contemplation with the awareness:

This truth (*dharma*) that I have attained is profound, hard to see and hard to understand, peaceful and sublime, unattainable by mere reasoning, subtle, to be experienced by the wise.

This in itself was a teaching in that it stimulated interest and a wish to discover that truth. At the request of many great beings, the Buddha went to Sarnath, near Varanasi, and taught the four fundamental truths that he had realised. These truths, which explain the nature of suffering and its causes, and the wisdom paths that lead to the cessation of suffering and its causes, are the essence of all his teachings given over the next forty years. They can only be fully understood when one attains the power of direct meditative insight into reality and becomes an arya, or noble, being. Thus they are known as the *four arya truths*:

#### ***1 The arya truth of suffering***

All things that have karma and disturbing emotions as underlying conditions for their existence – sentient beings, their bodies, minds, and environments – are unsatisfactory, or in the nature of suffering, which has three levels:

(i) *Suffering itself* is physical pain and mental unhappiness, sickness, hunger, and thirst – the things that we all recognise as suffering.

(ii) *Suffering of change* is what we call ‘happiness.’ Ordinary happiness is inseparable from suffering because when the conditions for pleasure inevitably cease, cannot be obtained, or are over-indulged, we experience the pains of loss, craving, and exhaustion. Happiness is like a lighter degree of suffering, as when we take an aspirin and, even though some pain remains, we say we feel good. It’s exactly as Mark Twain says in *Captain Stormfield’s Visit to Heaven*:

You see, happiness ain’t a thing in itself – it’s only a contrast with something that ain’t pleasant. That’s all it is. There ain’t a thing you can mention that is happiness in its own self – it’s only so by contrast with another thing. And so, as soon as the novelty is over and the force of the contrast dulled, it ain’t happiness any longer, and you have to get something fresh.

This could be the Buddha talking. As nothing exists in its own right or by its own nature, Mark Twain's insight into the nature of happiness – *happiness ain't a thing in itself* – indicates what Buddha described as the ultimate nature of things: emptiness of inherent existence. The absence of inherent self-existence of all things is opposite to the fundamental misconception we have about ourselves and others, and the meditative wisdom realising this is the fourth arya truth.

Secondly, as the experience we call 'happiness' is fully dependent upon constantly changing conditions, it inevitably dulls. Ordinary happiness cannot remain, and this is the seed of suffering contained within our happiness. As the highs of alcohol, cocaine, a new relationship, or whatever we depend upon for happiness fade, we want more or someone different. We need to *get something fresh*. Here, Mark Twain reveals what Buddha called the conventional nature of things: nothing exists in its own right because things only exist in dependence upon other things.

(iii) *Pervading suffering* is the unhappiness of always being under the control of karma and disturbing emotions. No matter how well-off we think we are, our bodies and minds always have the potential to give rise to suffering either now or in the future. Happiest occasions are quickly ruined by fits of anger, jealousy, or pride, and happiest lives end with death when, without choice, we are pushed by our karma into a future life which may not be so nice.

## ***2 The true sources of suffering***

The sources of our suffering are our disturbing emotions based upon self-centred ignorance, and actions motivated by those emotions (karma). Our confused actions place latent potencies upon our mind-streams that have the capacity to ripen and connect us with suffering experiences in this or future lives. The disturbing emotions are agitating by nature and, as magnets attract iron, karmic potencies ripen as mental impulses or intentions that connect us with unpleasant or pleasant objects and experiences.

## ***3 True cessation of suffering and its causes***

The wisdom seeing emptiness of inherent existence progressively and permanently abandons the many levels of disturbing emotions until one attains *nirvana*, the state of complete cessation of all disturbing emotions and their karmic potencies. This is the final goal of the Hinayana path, but bodhisattvas – those who have entered the Mahayana path – continue working on their minds to bring about cessation of even the subtle stains of the emotions, which are obscurations to the state of all-knowing, or Buddhahood. By attaining their full potential of enlightenment, they become perfectly qualified to actualise their wish to lead all beings out of suffering.

## ***4 True paths leading to the cessation of suffering and its causes***

True cessation of suffering and its causes is attained through the path of method (renunciation, morality, concentration, great compassion) and wisdom seeing ultimate reality. This wisdom sees that the functioning, existing self is empty of existing in its own right, of inherent existence, and this directly opposes the innate ignorance that wrongly conceives the self to exist in its own right.

...

Suffering, the result of karma and mental afflictions, is presented first because it is immediately recognisable and is what we all wish to be free from. Rather than quickly blaming others and external conditions for our problems, the *real cause* of suffering requires deeper investigation. If we take an honest look at our own minds, our disturbing emotions of selfishness, anger, and attachment are easily identifiable, and it requires no faith to recognise and accept their direct association with unhappiness. Karma, however, is not immediately obvious. But by reflecting upon Buddha's explanation of karma and how it leads to suffering, the wisdom of karmic cause and effect will make sense, to the point where we can establish and follow guidelines of ethical conduct with confidence.

Also, by mindfully observing the true causes of suffering as they affect our own lives, we will come to understand that cessation of those causes is logically attainable, and that cessation of suffering is the obvious result. As the true sources of suffering are rooted in ignorance, the only path that can bring about the cessation of these causes is the inner path of wisdom. Buddha's detailed description of this path, the same path that he and all past Buddhas followed, shows the safe direction that we must take in life.

The two sets of cause and effect presented as the four truths need to be assessed in the light of our own experience. As karma and disturbing emotions are the underlying cause of suffering, whenever we experience suffering or unhappiness we should examine our mind to see whether anger, pride, or attachment have precipitated the situation. At times when it seems we are totally innocent and the other person is at fault, we should think about karma. Every experience of happiness or unhappiness has an underlying karmic cause that comes from within our mind. And results cannot be experienced without a cause of similar type, so the karmic cause for our present painful situation must have been established on our mind-stream in a previous life when we caused hurt to others.<sup>5</sup>

After recognising that there is always some responsibility from our own side, even if it was created in a previous life, we should think that if we could stop anger, pride, and attachment we could free ourselves from karma and prevent suffering altogether. Thus our present hurt should energise us to do this, we should not let it reduce us to paralysing self-pity. More than just seeking our own welfare, knowing that others suffer in the same way as ourselves, empathy and compassion should stimulate us to follow the path of wisdom to destroy our root ignorance so that we can show them how to follow the path to freedom within their own minds.

### **Thinking about karma and rebirth**

Conviction in the reality of karma and rebirth is the underlying reason for becoming a Buddhist and striving to attain one of the three spiritual goals: a happy rebirth, complete liberation from the wheel of life (nirvana), and full enlightenment or Buddhahood. At the moment we cannot remember past lives, and such conviction initially relies upon inferential understanding cultivated by first hearing or reading a clear presentation of these subjects and then thinking deeply about the meaning. When we reach the point where karma and rebirth appear more likely to be true than false, we can meditate with confidence, and it is through insight gained from meditation that our understanding of these subjects will grow from

belief to direct knowledge. For now, I request those who have serious doubts about karma and rebirth to be patient and try to see the overall picture as it unfolds.

After three days at my first meditation course in Kathmandu, my totally sceptical mind was demanding *proof* of rebirth. The 250 young Westerners at the course had been told about the teacher's previous life as a lay holy man in the Solokhumbu region of Nepal. Now he was reborn as Lama Zopa Rinpoche, a Sherpa who had become a monk at a young age and was educated in Nepal and Tibet. During a break in the teachings, I went up to Lama Zopa, still sitting on the teaching throne, and asked him, 'Lama Zopa, these stories about your previous life, are they true?'

He gave me a penetrating look, and replied, 'Yes.'

'How do you KNOW?' I asked.

'Through mental experience,' he replied. I realised that the direct proof I was looking for was impossible to find, and *mental experience* was the only way to really know about past lives. I thanked Lama Zopa and returned to my seat, fully aware that I would have to do a lot more work on my mind to find the proof. I also walked away with a strong feeling that Lama Zopa's mental experience was correct. Later, I found out that lamas never claim to remember past lives, even His Holiness the Dalai Lama says, 'I don't remember.' Perhaps Lama Zopa recognised that I was on the verge of leaving the course, and his direct reply helped calm my frustrated mind so that I would remain and receive more information.

With regard to karma, much later, when I was a monk preparing for a three-year meditation retreat, Lama Zopa Rinpoche, told me about a Western monk, well-educated in Buddhism, who justified stopping meditation retreat and abandoning his vows by concluding that living within ordination was the cause of the sexual fantasies that were preventing his attainment of concentration. This contradicts the elementary teaching of Buddha that moral restraint, best achieved by taking vows, is an essential foundation for attaining concentration.

Rinpoche commented, 'I think that sometimes it's not intellectual understanding but karma that is the most powerful influence in our lives.'

Rinpoche knew all about karma and how it dominates our lives. Not only was he giving me advice on what to expect during my own retreat, he was also underlining the scary reality of karma: everything in our lives is a reflection of deeds performed in this and previous lives.

At a public talk at the University of Melbourne in the late seventies, my other main teacher, Lama Thubten Yeshe, was asked by a young woman, 'What is karma?'

Lama stopped a moment, and replied very powerfully, 'YOU are karma.'

The following silence was broken by a male voice from the back of the hall, 'I didn't understand the answer to that question.'

'No,' said Lama Yeshe immediately, 'because the answer was for *her*, not for *you*.'

'You understood didn't you dear?' he said to the woman.

‘Yes,’ she replied, hesitantly.

Lama Yeshe was indicating that, for each of us, our body, our mind, our life, and our environment, all good and bad experiences, are reflections, manifestations, or the ripening effects of karma – the repercussions of past physical, verbal, and mental actions performed in this life or in previous lives.

And what is it that links past actions with future results? It’s our own mind-stream, the continuum of consciousness that comes from a beginningless past and flows endlessly into the future. This does not mean that we are hopelessly trapped forever in worlds of karmic destiny. As the unskillful actions that we call karma arise from a mind contaminated by the presence of ignorance that misconceives the nature of self, if we gain the wisdom that penetrates the veils of misconception and sees the reality of the self, we can extinguish that ignorance and break free from our karmic prison.

Literally, karma means *action*, in particular, intentional actions of the mind in terms of our thoughts, as well as the physical and verbal actions initiated by these intentions. Buddhas do not create the type of karma that binds one to the suffering wheel of life because their intentions arise effortlessly in a mind that is free from ignorance; a mind which always knows exactly what is to be done without having to think about it.

Just as the law of gravity describes the natural force of attraction between physical masses, the law of karma describes the natural cause and effect relationship between intentional behavior and later experience. Isaac Newton described but did not invent gravity, and Buddha described but did not invent karmic cause and effect. Gravity and karma are, respectively, natural functions of matter and of mind. God did not create gravity or karma, but He, or Moses, knew about karma and hence the Ten Commandments, an instruction on fundamental ethics that is not too different from the Buddha’s own teachings on how to establish a firm foundation of ethical conduct. By understanding gravity we can build rockets to escape the gravitational pull of the earth and explore the universe; by understanding the ultimate reality of non-inherent existence of the self, we can escape the karmically-conditioned wheel of life and experience the freedom and bliss of enlightenment.

### **The law of karma**

Whatever ignorant beings<sup>6</sup> do, say, or think with benevolent or malevolent intention leaves potencies upon their mind-stream. These potencies are maintained through time without wearing out, even from life to life. They connect us with pleasant or unpleasant rebirth states, and lead to experiences similar to the effects our original actions had upon others. In general, all actions that arise from attachment or aversion to the happiness or pain of the present life belong to the second arya truth: true sources of suffering. The only exception is when the mind, in whatever state, is influenced by the power of an external object such as an image of the Buddha or a *stupa* that represents the body, speech, and mind of Buddhahood and the path to that attainment. Upon seeing such objects, potencies that can lead to enlightenment are established upon the mind-stream, and this is why such importance is placed upon images of the Buddha in Buddhist countries.

Not knowing about karma, in our daily pursuit of happiness and avoidance of pain we are like confused people thinking they can fly by jumping off a cliff. It is a mistaken belief to think there is no fault in killing animals because they are pests or are here for our consumption, or there is no fault in hanging murderers or shooting enemy soldiers. Such actions rebound upon us in the form of rebirth in hellish places of terrible suffering where beings are constantly fighting and, even when that karmic result is exhausted and one is fortunate enough to be born human again, one will live in a dangerous place such as a war zone, one's life will be short, and one will have the karmic tendency to kill again.

Similarly, it is a mistake to think there is no fault in stealing from the wealthy or cheating on our tax return. Such actions rebound upon us in the form of rebirth as wandering spirits in a state of extreme deprivation 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.

And it is a mistake to think there is no fault in having an affair with our neighbour's partner. This action causes anguish to our neighbour and will rebound upon us in the form of rebirth as animals in states of extreme stupidity. Even when that result is exhausted and we are fortunate enough to be born human again, we will live in a polluted place, our partner will be unfaithful or hostile, and we will have the karmic tendency to commit sexual misconduct again.

These three examples can be taken as guides to the type of karmic results that may be experienced from the verbal actions of lying, speaking harshly, slandering, and idly gossiping, and the mental actions of covetousness, maliciousness, and wrong views, such as rejecting karma by saying it is something invented to control people through fear. On the positive side, benevolent actions such as saving the lives of those in danger, being generous and truthful, speaking kindly, and so on will rebound upon us in the form of birth as a human or a divine being, a long life, an attractive body, wealth, good health, and so on.

### **Gaining conviction in the reality of karma and rebirth**

To reject karmic cause-and-effect on the basis of doubt alone and to not investigate it further is unwise. If we examine our experience in this life, even without observing the subtle mechanism of karma, we should be able to see a connection between our past intentional actions and their subsequent influence on our behavior and experience, good or bad. Then, with further learning and the power of meditative insight into the nature of mind and the reality of past lives, the meaning of karma will become clearer. If this were not the experience of past meditators, the teachings of Buddha would have disappeared long ago.

In the beginning, fear of unhappy rebirth and faith in the validity of the Buddha and his teachings are prerequisites for deciding to be more ethical in our lives and to cultivate beneficial actions of body, speech, and mind. For those who recoil in shock at the concept of actively cultivating fear and faith in their minds, you have to understand that the fear is not wrong and the faith is not blind. Even though we cannot remember our past lives, this does not *prove* karma and rebirth to be wrong. The memories exist, and we can gain access to them through the power of single-pointed concentration.

To generate correct belief, or faith, that the Buddha and his teachings are valid, we must analyse the teachings to see if there is any contradiction with our own experience, and to see if there is any inconsistency within the teachings themselves. If we see no direct contradiction or inconsistency, at least our minds will be open to the possibility of karma and rebirth. We will be able to infer both the possibility and the dangers of terrible rebirths, and deep concern for the imminent danger for both self and others is perfectly reasonable. Such cultivated fear and faith are based upon logic and are essential motivators to provide the impetus for engaging in the path of training our mind in wisdom and loving kindness. My teacher, Lama Thubten Yeshe said: 'You have to check up. It's your responsibility to know whether something is right or wrong. You can't say, 'This is true because Buddha, or God, said it.' Lord Buddha himself made that very clear.'<sup>7</sup>

### **Karmic potencies**

From their own side, karmic potencies established by past actions do not lose their power, in fact, they increase in strength with the passage of time. The good news is that the strength of karmic potencies created by malevolent deeds and which result in suffering can be weakened and even destroyed before bringing about their results. This is achieved through four activities:

- (i) Generating sincere regret for one's action.
- (ii) Expressing confidence in one's moral guides and compassion for suffering beings.
- (iii) Opposing malevolent actions through benevolent deeds.
- (iv) Determining to not repeat the action.

The bad news is that potencies established by benevolent actions and which result in happiness can be weakened or destroyed by disturbing emotions such as strong anger or denial of reality.

Many people see the presentation of karma as being no different from outdated, archaic ideas, such as the threat of punishment in hell for the seven deadly sins of pride, covetousness, lust, anger, gluttony, envy, and sloth. They see the purification of negative karma to be no different from what they consider empty promises of forgiveness of sins 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. The records of our deeds are not written in a book in the sky, they are imprinted upon our mind-streams simultaneously with the actions we perform. When conditions are suitable, these karmic potencies ripen in the form of mental impulses that will attract us to painful or pleasurable objects like moths to a flame. Karmic cause and effect is based upon the maxim that no result, no pain or pleasure, can occur without a direct cause of similar nature. Combinations of causes and conditions bring about pain and pleasure but, in this context, the main condition is an internal, mental cause: the karmically-generated impulse that leads to a meeting with the object that gives rise to the experience.



Birth is the primary cause of death, and Buddha taught that, life after life, we cycle between temporal happiness and pain in our never-satisfied pursuit of pleasure. He said that karmic potencies for rebirth can be destroyed by the wisdom that opposes ignorance. This wisdom also eliminates anger and desire, and the result is *nirvana*, liberation from the beginningless cycle of death and rebirth. Those who have faith in the concept of an almighty creator, a God who rewards good deeds and punishes the bad, and who observe pure morality on the basis of this belief, may avoid rebirth in hell and may go to heaven.<sup>8</sup> But this is not liberation from the cycle. Unless they eliminate their disturbing emotions forever, they will continue to cycle forever between heaven, hell, and the other rebirth states. If they profess faith but are hypocritical and do not observe morality, they will meet similar minded so-called Buddhists drinking molten copper in the Hades Restaurant.

## PART ONE: THE BUDDHIST WORLD



At my first Buddhist meditation course in Kathmandu in the early seventies I was not looking for religion or a guru, I simply wanted information. Wary of the human tendency to throw reason to the wind and surrender one's life to a clever speaker with oodles of charisma, I paid close and sceptical attention to the lamas and what they were saying. Lama Zopa Rinpoche was definitely not trying to control people through his verbal presentation; it took a huge effort to remain focussed during his lengthy discourses. Lama Yeshe had charisma and a spontaneous humour that could only be admired, but what impressed me most was that both lamas taught and exhibited intelligence and compassion with an uncontrived innocence and a refreshing absence of pride. And what they said made perfectly good sense.

Although I tried hard to find fault in the lamas and their presentation, I began to realise that they were two remarkable beings. They seemed to be in complete control of their minds and were living in accordance with the teachings, showing kindness and intelligence with no obvious anger, avarice, or selfishness. Their teachings turned out to be straightforward psychology, simple and accurate in terms of all that I understood about the mind. Karma and reincarnation were not so easy to accept. It took nine months of observing myself and others – our lives, our thoughts, and our behavior – before I could do so, and become a Buddhist. Even then, I did not understand the mechanism of karma and reincarnation, but I recognised the Buddha and the lamas as authorities whose guidance could be trusted. After another nine months of investigation, I was ordained as a novice monk.

Now, thirty-nine years later, I know that meaningful wisdom lies not in understanding the structure of either the universe or the atom, but in understanding our own minds and lives. Nevertheless, as the inner world of our minds and the outer world of objects are interdependent, in the cultivation of wisdom it is necessary to know about the outer and the inner realities of existence in order to understand the mechanism of this interdependent relationship.

In explaining his special insight into the conventional nature of the mind and, in particular, the ultimate nature of all things, the Buddha based his teachings on the prevailing world view. For ordinary people, many aspects of pre-Buddhist Indian cosmology are beyond our immediate perception, and we can easily be side-tracked into endless debate about the literal reality of the presentation. Nevertheless, to understand the Buddha's teachings we must have some familiarity with the way the world was seen to exist at that time. I am confident that scientific *knowledge* is not contradictory to the Buddha's teachings. Scientific presumptions, yes; Buddhism contradicts major hypotheses that some hold as fact, such as everything came

from nothing with a big bang, brain is mind, consciousness is a product of evolution, and the genetic imperative that all facets of life have evolved for the singular purpose of gene propagation.

I feel that the wisdom contained in Buddha's presentation of the mind and the world, based upon introspective analysis and sound reasoning, will clarify not only the above hypotheses but will enhance our understanding of scientific fact established on the basis of experimental evidence combined with sound logic and reasoning. Without understanding the deep meaning of Buddhist teachings, outright rejection of what doesn't fit into our scientific paradigms is not being scientific. We must first see the whole picture and then use logic to decide what is acceptable and what is not acceptable. Thus I shall present a brief description of the way things exist according to the Buddha.

### ***1 EXISTING THINGS***

Whatever exists is knowable by mind.<sup>2</sup> Nothing is unknowable, but it might take a Buddha's mind to know it. Buddha classified existing things into the permanent, those things that do not change moment-by-moment, and the impermanent, those that do. Permanence, in this context, doesn't necessarily mean lasting forever. A permanent thing can always be there, or it can be something which comes into and goes out of existence. The point is that, while it exists, it does not change moment-by-moment like an atom, which is in a state of constant flux, or the mind, which is a constantly changing stream of awareness.

An example of a permanent thing is space, defined as the mere absence of obstructive contact, and it exists everywhere. Even solid things have their own space, otherwise they couldn't be where they are. The term, 'mere,' indicates the absence of any special substance that is space. The mere absence of obstructive contact is something which exists but is not produced by anything, and it is permanent in that it does not change moment-by-moment. Physical things and consciousness arise as products of various causes and conditions that necessarily change in producing their result, and their results also have the property of moment-by-moment change. Thus, whatever arises from causes and conditions is an impermanent thing.

Another permanent thing is emptiness of inherent existence, a quality possessed by everything that exists, for example, the emptiness of inherent existence of a ceramic vase. A vase is produced in dependence upon clay, a potter, heat, glaze, and so on. It has no inherent nature that is the vase in itself. When the potter removes an object from the kiln, you may think it is a tall cup, but the potter declares it to be a vase. At the moment of labelling it 'vase,' the emptiness of inherent existence of 'the vase' comes into existence and it remains unchanging until little Jimmy knocks it off the mantelpiece with his football and the emptiness of the vase ceases as it is smashed into pieces that are no longer suitable to be called 'vase.'<sup>10</sup>

*Impermanent things* are divided into three categories: material objects (form), all aspects of mind and its functions (consciousness), and produced things that are neither form nor consciousness.

## Forms

Although Buddhism does assert the existence of atomic particles, the physical world is not described in terms of atoms and molecules but in terms of *forms*: the way things are experienced by the five sense consciousnesses.<sup>11</sup> Colours and shapes are forms that appear to visual consciousness; pleasant and unpleasant sounds are forms that appear to auditory consciousness; fragrant and non-fragrant odours are forms that appear to olfactory consciousness; tastes are forms that appear to gustatory consciousness; and tangibles, such as smooth, rough, heavy and light, are forms that appear to tactile consciousness.

Just as my high-school science teachers described elements and compounds of elements in terms of their sensory qualities of colour, smell, taste, and texture, and their physical state of gas, liquid, or solid, Buddhism presents the physical world in terms of appearance to the senses and the five physical states called earth, water, fire, and air *elements*. These five states are not elements as in the Periodic Table, they are tangible forms. Earth element is the entity of hardness, water element is dampness, fire element is heat, and wind element is lightness.

## Consciousness

Mind, or consciousness, is a self-perpetuating, non-material, stream of brief moments of awareness. Its various aspects – main minds and mental functions – will be discussed in Part 4.

## Products that are neither form nor consciousness

Jeffrey Hopkins<sup>12</sup> describes produced things that are neither form nor consciousness as having two types: persons and non-persons. He says that a person is (merely) designated in dependence upon a combination of body and consciousness and, since a person is neither the body (form) nor consciousness, but is still impermanent, it must belong to this category. ‘Non-persons’ within this category are called ‘designations to states.’ For example, ‘life’ is designated to the state of living; it is the basis of consciousness and warmth. Also, production, ageing, duration, and impermanence are designations to states of the characteristics of things. Words, time, area, number, and collection are some other members of this category.

## ***2 REALMS OF BIRTH***

### **Establishing the reality of other realms**

The Buddhist presentation of other realms of existence, including heavens and hells, is difficult for Westerners to accept. Many, if not most, of us have already rejected the concepts of heaven and hell, and I suspect that the majority of the remainder hold an interpretative rather than a literal view of the meaning of an afterlife in heaven or hell. Buddhism denies the existence of an all-powerful creator, but it still asserts the existence of temporary heavens and hells that occur in other lives as the results of karma created by the individuals who experience them.

If heavens and hells were visible to the common person they would be acceptable even to one who denies God. But they are not. Nevertheless, seeing-is-believing is not the only way

to gain knowledge of something. Just as we can correctly infer the presence of fire through the reason of seeing smoke, it may be possible to infer the existence of heavens and hells in dependence upon logical reasoning. If we can logically prove the non-existence of rebirth and of heavens and hells, such things and places must be rejected. But if we cannot prove their non-existence, their rejection remains an opinion; it is not an established fact.

After studying the Buddhist presentation of the mind and of karma, I began to accept the possibility of rebirth by seeing rebirth states as analogous to the way in which our usual personality and experience can be so different in a dream. Just as dreams are reflections of our state of mind at the time, and we interact with the dream environment as if it were real, if the mind-stream did survive death and join with a new body, the future life could be pleasant or unpleasant according to the mind's emotional state. The environment experienced in that life would exist as something to be experienced but, like the vase, it would not be inherently real. It would be labelled 'heaven' or 'hell' from our subjective experience.

Another point is that, if heaven and hell rebirths are actual events, we can gain correct belief in their occurrence if their description does not contradict other aspects of the teachings that we have established to be correct either through direct experience or through logic.

Finally, we have to remain open to the possibility that, through the power of meditation, it may be possible to directly perceive heavens and hells that exist for sentient beings in a way that is not immediately obvious to our ordinary human senses. Such awareness has been reported by a great number of meditators from the time of Buddha himself until the present day. This is the only way that you and I can ascertain the reality of rebirth through direct observation.

Buddha taught according to the prevailing cosmology of the day, and I find it reasonable to presume that even if there may be variations in the actual reality of rebirth states, he would have taught the four arya truths within a context that people would accept according to their beliefs. If there were no rebirth whatsoever, he would have refuted it. One of the attributes of a Buddha's mind is complete lack of fear in expounding the way things are.<sup>13</sup>

I find it reasonable to presume that Moses knew about karma and the non-existence of an Almighty, but he taught morality within the confines of the commonly-held belief system at the time. Both teachers established similar systems of ethical conduct that definitely create causes for happiness and avoid causes for suffering. By living within the pure morality of non-harmfulness, one's mind becomes clear, peaceful, and capable of comprehending more subtle presentations of the way things are.

When I first came across the Buddhist presentation of the various states of rebirth, I took them to be a metaphor for the spectrum of human states of mind. The constant fear and agony of the hells, along with the karmic appearances of persecuting demons, seemed a fair representation of our potential to experience paranoid psychosis and other mental disorders such as extreme depression and some types of dementia. These represent the lower end of human experience that can affect any of us. And I thought the description of great bliss and happiness in the heavens of divine beings (devas) could refer to the highest bliss of human

experience which, for me, was the psychedelic experience and orgasm, especially the two combined. The hungry ghost realm can represent the intense misery and despair we may feel when caught in a famine, or the wretched state of miserliness that prevents us enjoying what we have. The main psychological feature of the animal realm is dullness of intellect, an inability to discriminate between right and wrong, which we may all experience at one time or another. And the jealous, grasping attitude of the warlike demigods (asura) represents the common human attitude of seeking to attain pleasure, wealth, fame, or power through aggression.

The Buddhist description of a hell where one is attacked by giant birds with iron beaks reminded me of a patient of mine, an eighteen-year old man who told me he was being pursued by giant birds with iron beaks that were accusing him of various sexual misdemeanours and were trying to peck out his brains. With a look of total horror on his face, he pointed to the window behind me and said, "There's one of them out there now." Apprehensively, I turned to look and, of course, saw nothing. In psychiatry we call this an hallucination – a perception without objective reality. But Buddhism says such visions may not be mere hallucinations but can be karmic appearances – objectively real (but not inherently real) things that function in relation to the particular individual whose karma brings them into existence. Two weeks after that interview, the young man committed suicide.

This common description coming from such different sources made me think that, if there really is life after death, then perhaps 'rebirth in hell' refers to a post-mortem nightmare, a future life created by the mind and from which it is difficult to emerge. Now, having contemplated the Buddhist explanation of mind and karma, I accept the reality of continuity of mind after death, and rebirth in pleasant or unpleasant situations determined by one's state of mind.

### **What is mind?**

In Buddhism, mind is asserted to be the mere experience of things, either through the five senses or through thought. Mind is not some esoteric substance in the background that does the experiencing; it is the very experience itself. Our experience of things includes whatever subjective feeling of happiness or unhappiness, or emotion of love, anger, generosity, greed, and so on, that accompanies our awareness. As it is simply the experience of things, mind is not a physical entity. Even though our mind depends upon a functioning brain and nervous system, experience itself has no material properties such as colour, shape, texture, and so on. Nor is it any of the physiological processes or organs upon which awareness depends. Thus the human organism consists of a duality of body and mind that are interdependent but different entities.

Seeing mind, or consciousness, as a non-physical entity of experience that arises in dependence upon its own momentum, the body, and the object of awareness, the next question is: where does it come from? The scientific point of view is that mind is an emergent phenomenon that directly arises from the nervous system as its cause. For example, although water is the same material substance as its causal components, hydrogen and oxygen, its particular properties emerge from the bonding of those two elements. Being a liquid at room temperature and water's chemical activity are new properties that do not

exist in its components, but its substance – matter – is the same as the two gases. Scientifically, we see mind as a physical thing that arises from a physical substantial cause.

From the Buddhist point of view, even though the human mind exists in dependence upon our sense organs and nervous system, the very substance of experience is not an emergent quality of the brain. Mind's nature is awareness, and therefore its substantial cause is necessarily awareness itself, a non-physical phenomenon. Thus, although mind depends upon a functioning brain, it is not of the same nature, or substance, as the brain. It is not created by the brain.

If our mind came from our parents' minds, we would be born with mental qualities of knowledge, memories, and so on similar to our parents. But each baby is born with its own mind, including independent personality characteristics that often manifest at an extremely early age before nurture has time to have an effect. From the Buddhist point of view, 'nature,' in terms of a condition that influences our personality, can have both genetic and karmic aspects.

Finally, mind cannot arise from nothing. It is a self-perpetuating continuum in that the present moment of awareness arises directly from a previous moment of awareness and, in turn, gives rise to the next moment of awareness. A *mind-stream*, as this succession of moments of awareness is called, is unique to every individual.

Buddhism asserts that no two mind-streams can merge into one, and no individual mind-stream can split into two, separate mind-streams. Thus, if we go back to the very first moment of awareness in this body, that mind can only have arisen as the continuum of a previous moment of awareness – from another life. And when did the mind-streams that currently inhabit our bodies first begin? They didn't. Each mind-stream is beginningless. For those who recognise that mere experience, or mind, is a non-physical entity, this reasoning is proof of reincarnation.

I don't know how literally the description of the realms of rebirth is to be accepted. Apart from the human and the animal realm, ordinary beings have no direct experience of the other realms and, until we gain the mental power to see such realms through meditation, we have to rely on the descriptions given by the Buddha and his followers who have attained such mental powers. Now, without any interpretation, I shall present the realms of rebirth according to various Buddhist sutras and commentaries.

### **The three realms and six levels of birth**

The Buddhist *abhidharma* texts describe three main realms of birth in the cycle of death and rebirth that arises from karma and disturbing emotions: the desire, form, and formless realms.

The *desire realm* is so-called because the predominant attitude causing birth there is desire for sensory pleasure, particularly for the taste of food and for sexual pleasure. Its six levels include three unhappy states: the hells, the realm of hungry ghosts, and the animal realm. These are miserable rebirths because the predominant experience is mental and physical suffering. The remaining three levels are 'happy' states in that pleasure and pain are balanced

or there is a preponderance of pleasure. These are rebirth as a human, as a demigod (*asura*), or as a ‘pleasure being’ – a *deva* or god. There are six levels of devas in the desire realm: two are said to inhabit the earth’s surface and four inhabit celestial abodes.

The *form realm* has four main levels or concentrations, so-called because the karma to be born there is created through attachment to the mental experience of progressively refined levels of single-pointed concentration. All desire for sensory pleasure is temporarily suppressed by desire for the purely mental experience of concentration. Their bodies are the most refined type of matter, and their name, ‘form gods,’ distinguishes them from the gods of the formless realm.

The *formless realm* also has four levels, attained through even more powerful concentration. These beings have no gross bodies at all but, according to the esoteric teachings (tantras), their minds are still supported by subtle “wind element” that is physical in nature.

### **Birth states within the wheel of life**

The following table shows the states of rebirth in the three realms in terms of increasing levels of temporal happiness or refinement of the mind, from the hells at the bottom to the highest formless level at the top.

#### **1 Formless realm devas**

- 4th Absorption - *Peak of Cyclic Existence*
- 3rd Absorption - *Limitless Nothingness*
- 2nd Absorption - *Limitless Consciousness*
- 1st Absorption - *Limitless Space*

#### **2 Form realm devas**

- 4th Concentration -
  - Great Fruit*
  - Born from Merit*
  - Cloudless*
- 3rd Concentration -
  - Vast Bliss*
  - Limitless Bliss*
  - Small Bliss*
- 2nd Concentration -
  - Bright Light*
  - Limitless Light*
  - Small Light*
- 1st Concentration
  - Great Brahma*
  - Reciting in Vicinity of Brahma*
  - Brahma Type*



### 3 Desire realm

Desire realm devas  
Sky-dwelling -  
    *Heaven Controlling Others' Emanations*  
    *Heaven Enjoying Own Emanations*  
    *Joyous Heaven (Tushita)*  
Earth-dwelling -  
    *Heaven Without Combat*  
    *Heaven of the Thirty-Three*  
    *Heaven of Four Great Royal Lineages*  
Demigods (*asuras*)  
Humans  
Animals  
Hungry ghosts (*pretas*)  
Hell beings

The mental continuum can never be destroyed. Like Dr. Who, it travels with time,<sup>14</sup> repeatedly taking new bodies in different birth states determined by the ripening power of karma. Potencies established on the mind through intended actions ripen at death to cause the rebirth status of a sentient being, and other potencies ripen during each rebirth to influence one's character, one's experiences, and even one's environment. In general, the collective karmic potencies of beings give rise to the worlds they inhabit, and individual potencies give rise to particular individual experiences of the world.

Birth-states not included within the wheel of life can occur in 'pure lands' – places created through the accumulations of wisdom and merit<sup>15</sup> in a Buddha's mind to provide the best conditions for sentient beings to complete the path to enlightenment. Bodhisattvas who have attained the direct realisation of emptiness may be born in highest pure lands, *Akanishtha*, where Buddhas exist with the physical form of an Enjoyment Body (*Sambhogakaya*). Enjoyment Bodies are immortal in that, even though they change moment-by-moment, they remain forever, effortlessly teaching the Mahayana doctrine to their retinue of arya bodhisattvas. For ordinary beings, as well as those who have realised emptiness, the Enjoyment Body manifests pure lands where Emanation Bodies (*Nirmanakaya*) teach either the Mahayana or the Hinayana doctrine according to the dispositions of those who have created the cause to be born there. Jeffrey Hopkins says: "Perhaps it could be said that the ability to produce pure lands is a conscious sublimation of the uncontrolled process of creation of less suitable worlds by contaminated actions."<sup>16</sup>

*Akanishtha* (None Higher) pure lands are technically at the level of the fourth form realm concentration, while *Nirmanakaya* pure lands can be at other levels. *Tushita* (Joyous) pure land is at the level of the Joyous Heaven, and *Shambhala* pure land is at the human level. They are not included among the realms of rebirth in the suffering cycle of death and rebirth because rebirth in pure lands is the result of a pure intention and not contaminated karma.

The abhidharma mentions that the hell realms are located at various distances beneath the surface of the earth. I'm not sure if this can be taken literally; the great Indian bodhisattva, Shantideva, said:

Who intentionally created  
All the weapons for those in hell?  
Who created the burning iron ground?  
From where did the women (in hell) ensue?

The Mighty One has said that all such things  
Are (the workings of) an evil mind.  
Hence, within the three world spheres,  
There is nothing to fear other than my mind.<sup>17</sup>

In one region of hell, beings have instant hatred for each other. Taking up weapons that fall from the sky, they fight until nearly dead, revive, fight until mortally wounded, revive, fight again, and so on for aeons and aeons. There are hot hells and cold hells; the ground of the hot hells is experienced as red-hot iron. In another region, the 'women' mentioned in Shantideva's verse refers to attractive apparitions, male or female, who resemble those towards whom one has had past attachment. From the top of a tree is heard an irresistibly appealing voice and, driven by desire to be with that person, the hell being climbs the tree, being cut to pieces by its sword-like leaves. Upon reaching the top, the enticers are found to be giant birds with iron beaks that peck at one's eyes and brains. The 'evil mind' that creates hell is the karmic ripening within one's own mind.

Hell beings are said to be born spontaneously and their environment is produced with them through their own karma. When they eventually die, their environment ceases. Hell is a personal or uncommon karmic appearance, it is not a place waiting for us, but is still real for the individual who is experiencing it. The apparitions, weapons, and so on are not like hallucinations or mistaken appearances, they are an objective reality for that individual. Karmic appearances can be common or uncommon. For humans, a common karmic appearance would be a hot day; the uncommon factor is the different ways in which people relate to the heat: some see it as pleasant and love it, others see it as unpleasant and hate it. For spontaneously produced beings, such as hell beings, *bardo* (intermediate state) beings, and devas, their environment and resources are uncommon appearances; their world is born with them and ceases with them.<sup>18</sup>

In a commentary to the above two verses, my teacher, Geshe Jampa Tegchok, said:

The sufferings of the hells are not mere hallucinations that are not really being experienced. It is not that they are non-existent. If they were mere hallucinated appearances, they could not function as they appear. For example, when a mirage appears to be water there is no water for us to use because it is an hallucinatory appearance. Or, when we see the moon (reflected) in a body of water, that is just a mistaken appearance. The moon is not actually down there in the water. But here it is not like that. We really do experience suffering from the instruments of torture in the hell realms when we have been born there, and we really do experience feelings of pain from the burning hot iron ground. Therefore they are not mere hallucinations or mistaken appearances.

For example, when a deva, human, and hungry ghost, who have accumulated different strong karmas, look together at a bowl of water, what appears to the deva is nectar, water appears to the human, and pus and blood appear to the hungry ghost. These individual karmic appearances are not mistaken or hallucinated appearances because they are there to be used (experienced) as they appear.

When a friend looks at the face of a person he likes, he sees a face that is good and pleasing. When an enemy who dislikes that person looks at his face, he sees something unpleasant. And when someone who is neither a friend nor an enemy looks, he has a neutral appearance. The appearance of all three forms (pleasing, displeasing, and neutral), is established by valid cognition. In each case, the same person is the referent condition. When the eye consciousness of the friend meets the form of that person (the referent condition), to the eye consciousness of the friend there is a form-appearance of pleasant form. That pleasant form is established as the appearance to him. When the person's form acts as a referent condition meeting with the visual consciousness of the enemy, due to the enemy's karmic appearance, at that moment a new form-appearance of displeasing form occurs. Similarly, hell comes from the karma of the person experiencing the suffering of hell. More precisely: it is made from the 'evil mind' of that person. The place where the suffering of hell is experienced, and the suffering itself, are established together.<sup>19</sup>

### ***3 THE PURPOSE OF LIFE***

Buddhism asserts that there are some amongst us who possess a supreme purpose for living. These are the *bodhisattvas*<sup>20</sup> who, having cultivated the great compassionate attitude of *bodhicitta*, live their lives with unwavering determination to help others attain happiness and freedom from sorrow. I believe that a shining example of such a person is His Holiness the Fourteenth Dalai Lama.

The rest of us have a great variety of ambitions and goals in life that are far from the altruistic ideal of the bodhisattva. The common denominator of most human endeavour is self-oriented pursuit of pleasure and avoidance of pain. Happiness and contentment, however, are difficult to maintain, and suffering is difficult to keep away. When the superficiality of sensory pleasure and the impossibility of securing our basic desires become evident, most of us start to question and investigate whether our lives can have any deeper meaning. It's so important that we persevere with the search for meaning and don't give up. Otherwise, deterred by the opinions of those who are afraid to rock the boat, we might end up preserving the status quo by morphing into one of three attitudes: religious extremism, blindly accepting simplistic explanations without question; non-religious extremism, blindly living according to fixed belief systems ranging from far-out new age fantasies to scientific dogma; or agnosticism, sitting on the fence and doing nothing.

The compassionate attitude of universal responsibility provides inner determination to tackle any obstacle that may arise while working for others and attaining our full potential of enlightenment. And the wisdom perceiving ultimate reality provides the ability for our mind to overcome those obstacles. Without combining wisdom and compassion, after brief forays into the search for meaning we may revert to lives of self-gratification under the control of self-centred ignorance. This will simply perpetuate our succession of uncontrolled rebirths under the influence of ripening karmic potencies at the time of death, and our lives will

indeed be meaningless. We have to understand that purpose and meaning in life is not something to be discovered, it's something to be created by each of us. Although there may be many wholesome purposes for living, the selfless dedication to others of bodhicitta is supreme. An external, divine reason for existence is excluded by the Buddhist refutation of a supreme Creator.

When we die after a life of pursuing pleasure and avoiding pain, without choice, karmic potencies carried upon our minds will be nurtured by craving and grasping at our illusory self-image and our home-grown beliefs about life's apparent pleasures. These ripened potencies will provide the impetus for our mind to connect with a new body, a new life, for indulging in pleasure. But, like the man in the TV commercial who wished to be really cool and delicious for his wife, and the genie turned him into a refrigerated Tim Tam,<sup>21</sup> which she ate, our desires can backfire. If we're reborn with the body of a hell being, our craving for pleasure will be hopeless.<sup>22</sup> The body of a *deva* will be supreme for experiencing sensual pleasure, but when our deva karma runs out and our physical beauty declines as we once again approach death, we will experience more misery as a deva than the average human experiences in an entire lifetime.

In-between heaven and hell, as a result of the ripening of virtuous karma, we may be born with a human body, well-equipped for indulging in sensory and mental<sup>23</sup> pleasure. Unfortunately, not all human bodies are equal, nor do all human situations provide equal opportunities to engage in pleasure and avoid pain. Even those whose bodies and environments are at the nicer end of the human spectrum can experience great pain, sickness, and sorrow. And we all undergo ageing and death.

Compared to birth as an animal, a hungry ghost, or a hell being, a human life has great potential for pleasure and freedom from pain. A human birth requires strong virtuous karmic potential established through benevolent actions of generosity and kindness based upon patience and the pure morality of not harming others. Because of the dominating influence of self-centred ignorance, anger, and desire, such benevolence is rare. It cannot arise spontaneously but may arise from past-life imprints. Usually, it is only cultivated after gaining trust in a qualified teacher who shows us the path of pure morality. Such teachers are difficult to find and so, in comparison to the number of births in the three suffering realms, a human rebirth is very rare and precious.

Non-harmfulness, generosity, and the pure wish to further our spiritual growth are the main causes for human rebirth, in particular, a birth where we meet and can practise the teachings of a Buddha. Thus, it might be said that our personal reason for being born human is to continue our path of compassion and wisdom, and a desire to discover the reason for suffering. Simply because we are human, we all have past-life karmic tendencies to be generous, kind, patient, and moral. Unfortunately, our minds also bring from past lives the seeds of disturbing emotions as well as karmic potentials for suffering. As we forget our pure purpose for being human, if we're not careful our innate self-centred attachment to pleasure and aversion to displeasure can unleash disturbing emotions that lead to bad experiences which overwhelm our virtuous tendencies towards generosity, kindness, patience, and morality.

Through the early manifestation of self-centred ignorance in our lives, as babies we see ourselves as the centre of the universe, to be fed, cuddled, loved, and played with on demand. Our family is usually willing enough to oblige, and we reward them with smiles. We think we are in heaven, and our attachment to this pleasure and to our self-image grows strongly. Soon, however, the picnic is over and, to our horror, we find that our demands are not always met. Our rising anger nurtures negative completing karma, and our self-image plummets as we lords of the universe crash in flames.

And so our lives unfold in confusion. Not knowing how to maintain happiness or prevent unhappiness, self-centred confusion, desire, and anger poison our lives and, instead of following our past-life's path of non-harm, we can waste our humanity by hurting others and creating countless causes for birth back into the three realms of misery.

Every human being has some good qualities. Even the cruellest despots of the 20th century, including Adolf Hitler, Josef Stalin, and Mao Tse Tung, had innate goodness, but something went badly wrong in their minds. They must be experiencing terrible karmic results due to their actions and, as they are not inherently evil persons, they are also suitable objects for compassion – the sincere wish for them to be free from suffering. Loving kindness intending to make all beings without exception happy and free from suffering is the finest manifestation of morality.

#### ***4 MIND, KARMA, BIRTH, & DEATH***

In explaining the physical world, the great Indian Buddhist scholar, Vasubandhu,<sup>24</sup> described matter as composed of minute atoms with four fundamental properties, the elements, or qualities, called earth, water, fire, and wind. As mentioned before, the entity of the earth element is hardness, and its function is to support or obstruct other physical objects. The entity of water element is dampness and its function is moistening or cohesion. The entity of fire element is warmth and its function is burning or ripening. The entity of wind element is lightness and its function is motion. Every physical thing has all four elements manifesting in varying degrees. Buddha taught that the manifestation of these elements in terms of our sensory awareness of the environment is related to the karma of living beings. Unfortunately, Vasubandhu did not go into the details 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 the inner four elements that are associated with our mind and body, and the outer four elements of the physical environment.

##### **The subtle body**

As well as the gross body that is obvious to us all, Buddhist tantric texts present a subtle body composed of channels, *chakras*, *bindu*, and winds. 'Channels,' are described as thin, flexible, and hollow tubes of subtle matter that branch out from certain points (*chakras*) on a central channel and pervade the entire body. *Chakra* means *wheel* – the radiating channels look like spokes of a wheel. *Bindu*, 'drops', are subtle matter initially derived from the parents; their movement within the central channel is associated with experiences of bliss. Winds are subtle matter that functions as a support for awareness.

The tantric texts are meditation manuals for highly proficient yogis and yoginis who, through meditation on the subtle body, can quickly gain control of their minds, eliminate

mental obscurations, and acquire the merit or positive potential to achieve enlightenment. Our senses and scientific instruments cannot observe this subtle body, but I am tempted to equate it with the central and peripheral nervous systems and the endocrine glands. Whether it exists as described, or the description is only a map, a guide for meditation, doesn't really matter. The test for its authenticity is meditating upon it as instructed, and achieving the results as described. Since the time of Buddha, generations of meditators have done just this.

### **Inner and outer physical elements**

Mind is defined as mere clarity and knowing, a continuum of moment-by-moment awareness possessed by every sentient being and by Buddhas. Mind has no physical properties but is always supported by subtle wind. This combination of subtle wind and mind is said to be like a blind man carrying a legless person with good eyesight. Separately, they cannot go where they want, together, they can reach their destination. In the analogy, the two persons are separate individuals, but mind and its supportive wind are one entity with two functions: awareness, which we label mind, and motion, which we label wind.

As 'wind element' refers to the function of motility within matter, with regard to the inner wind – that which is associated with consciousness – it is interesting to reflect upon what type of motility it is that is so closely associated with consciousness. I assume that the random atomic vibration that we call Brownian motion is more associated with heat, the fire element. So, what subtle physical motion within the body is it that supports consciousness? Could it be the flow of electrons or ions from one charged pole to another? Could it be speeding electromagnetic radiation? Could it be some other sub-atomic motion of particles, or waves? The interesting point is that, whatever this particular wind is, Buddhism suggests that conscious intent might need to be added to mathematical equations describing, or hoping to describe, motion within the conscious body of a sentient being.

The mental function of intention, 'the awareness which moves the mind towards its object', is the fundamental meaning of karma. And every verbal and physical action follows upon a mental intention. So, how does non-material intent induce physical activity? It seems to me that the transmission of impulses along nerve axons must be closely related to the inner wind that supports consciousness. And intent, or will power, is the *initiator* of thought-induced transmissions rather than the *result* of transmissions, as science says.

Conception as a human being requires the meeting of three things: the two human gametes and a mental continuum supported by its subtle wind. This entity of subtle wind and mind enters the ovum either just before or soon after fertilisation and is said to abide within a sphere composed of subtle physical matter (*bindu*) derived from the parents. This sphere is 'indestructible' in that it remains intact from conception until death. At death, the two parts derived from the parents separate and the enclosed subtle wind and mind leave the body and take the intermediate state (*bardo*) existence. From conception onwards, the ripening of karmic propensities causes progressive coarsening of the mind and its supporting wind. This gives rise to the (inner) fire, water, and earth elements of the body which, essentially, is a support for the five sense organs through which coarse states of consciousness are able to experience the physical environment.

There is a subjective factor in our sensory awareness: the way in which an external object appears to a sense consciousness is determined by the same ripening propensity associated with that particular consciousness, and so things appear to the mind according to our karma. As it has been mentioned, any two individuals, for example, a human and a hungry ghost, may have entirely different experiences of a common external object. For the human mind, water element, ‘damp and moistening,’ appears and functions as clean water; to the mind of a hungry ghost it appears as a filthy, undrinkable liquid; and to the mind of a divine being it appears and functions as ambrosia. At the relative level, all three experiences are valid in that the appearing object is what it appears to be – filth, water, or ambrosia. In this way, Buddhism presents a multi-dimensional universe determined not only by the physical properties of matter but also by the karmic propensities in the minds of different sentient beings experiencing their environment.<sup>25</sup>

*Inner elements* are the four bodily elements associated with consciousness; outer elements are the four elements of the physical environment that do not have a direct association with consciousness. Nevertheless, their appearance as sense objects to an individual is determined by that person’s karma and therefore by the mind. Although Buddhism presents the body and mind as having mutually exclusive properties, they are still interdependent, and it is through the medium of its supporting subtle wind that non-physical mind is able to influence the functioning of the body. Thus we have the meeting point between body and mind.

### **The elemental qualities and growth within the womb**

At conception, the mind is in its subtlest state, the clear light experience, which is even deeper than dreamless sleep. The combination of clear light mind and its support, the subtlest wind, is said to be eternal<sup>26</sup> because it has existed since time without beginning and will continue forever into the future, even after one attains Buddhahood. During life, this combination abides within the indestructible sphere. At death, all gross levels of consciousness and their gross supporting winds absorb back into it, and it leaves the body. Although it exists forever, this combination of most subtle wind and mind is a continuum that is changing moment-by-moment. Each moment of awareness arises in dependence upon the previous moment, and it has many parts – all the potentials for the various types of gross consciousness – and thus it doesn’t exist independently or in its own right. This one entity, the most subtle wind and most subtle mind, is the final base of designation of ‘person’, but it is not the person, nor is it a permanent soul.

The progressive coarsening of wind and mind that occurs after conception is due to the ripening of karmic potentials and the seeds of emotions. The mind’s increasing activity induces coarsening of its supporting winds, and the inner water, fire, and earth elements manifest. Formation of the embryonic body begins when the coarsening winds stream out in two directions from the indestructible sphere towards what will eventually become the upper and the lower parts of the body. The indestructible sphere abides at a point near the centre of the chest, the heart *chakra*.

From the Buddhist point of view, the flowing wind energy directed by mind moved, in turn, by karmic ripening (intention), is one of the factors associated with organisation of the shape and structure of the developing embryo and foetus. 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. The close relationship between the mind and these supporting winds indicates how various emotional states can influence these functions.

As desire for sensory pleasure is the dominant feature of desire realm beings, the human karma that ripened as we died in our previous life has brought about the association of our mind-stream with a body that has evolved to connect our mind with the particular sensory pleasures that humans enjoy. Whether we spend our life pursuing sensory pleasure or use our time to go beyond the cycle of uncontrolled death and rebirth depends upon our wisdom and compassion, which, in turn, depend upon the inspiration and guidance of a qualified teacher.

Remember, the four physical elements of our body are not substances to collect and place in labelled jars like the ordinary elements. They are physical functions of our body. These four elements can be illustrated by lifting a heavy weight. The movement indicates wind, the produced bodily heat indicates fire, sweating indicates water, and supporting the weight indicates earth. This is also a demonstration of non-physical mind being a causal factor for bodily activity: there is no way a body, especially my own, would lift a heavy weight without a purpose. And purpose, or intention, is purely a mental thing.

The materialistic view is that the body can influence mind but a non-physical mind (which is not accepted) could not influence the body. If the mind is sufficiently motivated, however, the subtle wind energy that is inseparable from mind can cause the neuromuscular system to lift a heavier weight than anybody else and win an Olympic gold medal. As every sports coach knows, it is mind power that wins gold, muscle power is only a secondary condition.

The mental functions of wakefulness and alertness are associated with full activity of the wind and other elements in the sense organs and muscles. Drowsiness is associated with withdrawal of the winds and their supported consciousnesses (the five senses and thinking) from the periphery, and we lose sensory awareness, muscular tone, and clarity of thought. The earth element weakens, the body feels lethargic, and it assumes a horizontal position on the couch. If a friend appears with a case of beer, moved by desire, the elements return to full duty. If nobody comes, the earth, water, and fire elements lose power, the winds become more subtle and, in deep sleep, the mind closes down to something approaching the clear light of death.

### **Who dies and goes on to the next life?**

Every teenager knows that when angry parents tell them to take a good look at themselves, the proper response is a rapid exit with a well-slammed door and retreat to a private space with the thought, “Who do they think they are? They’re the ones with problems, not me.”

But what does it mean to “take a good look at oneself?” What do we look at? Parents may be upset about their child’s physical appearance, their hair, their clothes, their attitude, or their behavior. These things are indications of the self, but they are not the self. We instinctively believe there is a real, true me but, as much as we may try, no self that exists in its own right can be located when we look for it. From the Buddhist point of view, this is



because there is no such thing as a findable, true self. But even the self, or person, of this life which does exist cannot be located because it simply exists through being labelled or imputed onto the body and mind and has no intrinsic existence. Apart from the body and mind, there is no third entity, a soul or a spirit, that is the self. Belief in such an entity is an unconscious justification of our innate mistaken conception of a self that exists in its own right.

At death, when the gross body and mind cease to exist, all that remains to be labelled as the person is the most subtle body and mind. This is the entity that passes from one life to the next. It is called 'the final basis of imputation of the person' because, in going from life to life, this combination represents the continuity of the person. Its awareness aspect bears each individual's karmic potentials as well as the seeds of their unique mental qualities and memories. Thus, in the same way that it is correct to talk about 'me' when we were at different ages in the past, even though we are no longer the child or the teenager who once existed, we can talk about 'my' past lives even though the persons in those lives were not the same as the person we are today. If we think exactly the same person exists in this life and other lives, we are mistaken. The person of this life is established in dependence on the current body and mind and will cease to exist at death. We may have been a horse in our previous life, but we are not horses now. Nevertheless, along with other factors such as genetics and environment, the mental characteristics of the previous life form the basis of our present psychological make-up. And our present mental characteristics will form the basis of our future life's psyche. So there is a unique continuum that validates discussion of my past and my future lives. Just be careful to not become a cockroach in your next life.

Because seeing our self wrongly is the root of our problems, we must be able to establish how the self exists in reality. Self-awareness begins with awareness of our bodies and our minds – our thoughts, feelings, and so on – which exist and function differently from the bodies and minds of others. This naturally gives rise to the sense of an entity, me, who is doing what the body and mind are doing. This is the merely-imputed I. It is 'merely-imputed' in that it doesn't exist from its own side, it only exists in dependence upon the label, "I," being given to our functioning body and mind. When parents give their new baby a name, the person of this life who is identified by that name comes into being. In other words, our self, the person we are in this present life, has no existence from its own side but is established merely by the thought which imputes "I," or our name, upon the ability of our present mental and physical continuum to function as a person.

To illustrate the way in which a person is imputed to exist, I am reminded of a time when I was walking along a busy street in Paris. Ahead, I saw a granite-coloured statue of a man on the footpath. Thinking this quite strange, I joined the crowd. When I saw that the eyes were alive, and the statue was slowly moving, I realised that my initial imputation, 'statue,' was wrong. The object was no longer suitable to be called a statue, it was a human being, an actor, and a very good one too. Upon that human body, albeit painted all over to look like stone, and that obvious mind indicated by the lively eyes and bodily movement, I was able to impute 'person.' And upon that person I quickly imputed 'actor.' Neither the actor's body nor the actor's mind was a true person existing in its own right, and there was no independently existing actor who possessed that body and mind, yet the correct awareness of an existing 'actor person' was established in my mind.

To complicate matters, to the mind that is aware of the merely-imputed person, there is a mixed appearance of the person existing (correctly) as a mere imputation and of the person existing (incorrectly) in his or her own right, or inherently. In relation to our own person, the conception that apprehends the merely-imputed I as an inherently-existing I is the fundamental error that keeps us bound to the suffering cycle of uncontrolled death and rebirth.

All things, including the self, are merely imputed upon suitable bases. If the base of imputation and the imputed object were the same thing, there would be no need to name things; everything would automatically have its own name. When Manchester United football team was first established, a group of footballers got together in a pub (I presume), and decided to form a football team called “Manchester United.” The team of footballers that we call “Manchester United” is not Manchester United, but Manchester United football team exists in dependence upon the group of players as the base of imputation and the labelling or imputing process. Our problem is that, in our confusion as to how things are established to exist, we see and believe that the imputed entity exists in its own right within the base of imputation, and appears towards us from that base. We do not realise that imputed entities are placed upon suitable bases of imputation by our own minds. Because all problems arise from such confusion in relation to our own self, and to everything and everyone else, it is essential that we come to understand that whatever exists is a merely imputed entity; nothing anywhere in the universe exists in its own right, independent of mental imputation.

### **The five stages of dying<sup>27</sup>**

None of us knows when our time will be up. It could be many years down the track, it could be today. Either way, we need to be prepared for death and know how to die properly. At death, the karmic potential that determines our next life will ripen, and whether we have a happy or an unhappy rebirth is determined by our state of mind at that time. A wholesome attitude will ensure the ripening of a positive potential, an unwholesome attitude will ripen a negative potential. If we cannot maintain a wholesome attitude, things can go awfully wrong and our next life may be most unwelcome.

We should start preparing for death right now by consciously abandoning self-centred behavior and living altruistically, helping others through love, compassion, and wisdom. Not only will this make every moment of our life meaningful in terms of creating the cause to go from happiness to happiness, it will enable us to effortlessly maintain a wholesome attitude as we are dying. Also, if we know what to expect during death, we will not give up our wholesome attitude through shock and dismay at what we are experiencing. And so the death process is described in great detail in Buddhist scriptures.

Death can occur rapidly or over a period of time. It is said that, through dreams and other signs, experienced meditators can be aware of their approaching death six months or so before the final event happens. In such cases, they sort out their financial affairs, distribute their belongings, and even collect the wood for their own cremation. In particular, they pay special attention to cleansing their minds of all unwholesome thoughts and imprints.

## The five heaps, or aggregates

Buddha once placed five heaps of mixed grains on a table to illustrate impermanent things in terms of five heaps, or aggregates of parts. The first heap, the **form aggregate**, represented all material things – the different parts of our bodies and environmental objects.

The next heap represented the **aggregate of feelings**: happy, unhappy, and neutral mental feelings,<sup>28</sup> and pleasant, unpleasant, and neutral physical feelings.<sup>29</sup>

The third heap represented the **aggregate of recognition**. Recognition, either conceptual or non-conceptual, differentiates between things and identifies them according to what has been observed before, what is known from verbal description, what is good or bad according to observable qualities, and according to prior knowledge of the classification of things.

Feelings and recognitions in minds contaminated by self-grasping ignorance are distinguished from the other mental functions as separate heaps because they are the basis of all human conflict. Attachment to desirable objects causes conflict between ordinary people, and attachment to their own views causes conflict between scholars. These attachments lead to faulty recognitions that are followed by karmic actions that bind us tighter to the cycle of death and rebirth.

The fourth heap represented the remaining forty-nine mental functions, wholesome and unwholesome,<sup>30</sup> as well as those products that are neither form nor consciousness. It is called the 'heap of compositional factors,' or the **aggregate of volitions**, because it includes the important mental function of intention which, in essence, is karma.

The final heap, the **aggregate of consciousness**, represented the six main types of consciousness, sensory and mental.

The actual process of dying is not dissimilar to going to sleep; the five aggregates of our body and mind gradually weaken in power, with the body aggregate going first. Death thus occurs in five stages with progressive weakening of the five aggregates, the five foundations of a Buddha's perfect wisdom, the five sense objects, the four physical elements, and the six sense faculties.

### First stage of death: weakening of the body (form) aggregate

- 1 *Bodily form*: the limbs become thin, weak, and difficult to move.
- 2 *Mirror-like wisdom*: one's capacity to realise many objects, such as ugly and beautiful, at the same time fades. The sign of this happening is that the vision becomes blurred and dark.
- 3 *Earth element*: one feels a sinking sensation or a sensation of pressure on the chest. These signs can sometimes be noticed when falling asleep – a sudden sense of falling makes one reflexively put out one's arms only to find that one is perfectly secure on the bed.

4 *Eye-sense*: as the wind associated with visual consciousness withdraws from the eyes, the dying person experiences difficulty in opening and closing the eyes, and the vision becomes blurred.

5 *Inner-form*: the colour of the body fades and there is a silvery-blue *inner vision* like a shimmering mirage of water on hot sand.

### **Second stage of death: weakening of the feeling aggregate**

1 *Feelings*: coarse pleasant, unpleasant, and neutral feelings associated with touch diminish but subtle feelings remain.

2 *Wisdom of equality*: in general, this wisdom sees similarity in things such as products necessarily being impermanent. It sees the three feelings as just feelings. The sign of this weakening is that the dying person loses recollection of mental feelings of pleasure, pain, or indifference.

3 *Water element*: sweat, saliva, and tears are no longer produced. When a dying person complains of a dry mouth, giving them a piece of ice to suck may help.

4 *Ear sense*: the wind associated with auditory consciousness withdraws from the ears and we have to shout for the dying person to hear us.

5 *Inner sound*: the constant buzzing noise in the ears stops and the *inner vision* becomes like a room full of smoke. This may be noticed when one falls into a faint. At this stage there may be indications of one's future rebirth. Agitation and anguish may indicate a bad rebirth. A sense of peace, no fear, and no distress may indicate a good rebirth.

### **Third stage of death: weakening of the recognition aggregate**

1 *Recognitions*: one loses the ability to remember the affairs of close friends and relatives. This is the most crucial time of the death process because, in the final moments of the fading power of recognition, the karmic potential for the next life is activated. If the dying person maintains a constructive or virtuous state of mind at this time, a karmic potential for a pleasant rebirth will be ripened. If the mind is disturbed by anger, for example, at the doctors for not preventing one's death, or at one's relatives for fighting over their inheritance, a karmic potential for an unpleasant rebirth will ripen.

2 *Wisdom of individual recognition*: one's ability to know the names and classifications of things weakens. One forgets the names of relatives and so on. There is loss of the ability to distinguish different sensory objects and to discriminate between things, such as virtue and non-virtue.

3 *Fire element*: the body becomes cold from the extremities inwards, towards the heart, and digestion stops.

4 *Smell-sense*: the sign of one's weakening ability to detect smells is that the breathing becomes weak with short inhalations and long exhalations.

5 *Inner smell*: the *inner vision* changes to blackness permeated by dancing red sparks rising from a fire at night, or fireflies.

#### **Fourth stage of death: weakening of the volitions aggregate**

1 *Volitions*: the dying person can no longer move.

2 *Wisdom of accomplishment*: is the ability to set and attain goals in this and future lives. One forgets the purpose of external work in this life.

3 *Wind element*: the breathing stops but one is not yet dead: subtle consciousness remains associated with the subtle wind element that is withdrawing towards the central channel of the subtle body.

4 *Taste-sense*: is lost and the tongue contracts and turns blue. The sense of touch also ceases at this point.

5 *Inner taste*: with loss of the sense of taste, the *inner vision* becomes like a pinpoint of light at the bottom of a deep well.

#### **Fifth stage of death: weakening of the consciousness aggregate**

The wisdom of *dharmadhatu* weakens here. This wisdom refers to the potential of our mental consciousness to know the entire sphere of existence, the two levels of truth<sup>31</sup> about everyone and everything. It becomes the omniscient wisdom of a Buddha.

1 *Primitive conceptions cease*. Thirty-three coarse primitive conceptions cease, including repulsion, sorrow, fear, hunger, thirst, and protectiveness. Then forty subtle conceptions cease, these include longing, satisfaction, and the wishes to suckle, kiss, hug, or to be unruly.

2 *Seven subtlest conceptions cease*. These include boredom, indifference, and laziness.

3 *White substance descends*. Subtle white matter originally received via the father's sperm descends from the crown chakra towards the heart chakra, borne on winds from the upper part of the body. The inner vision becomes the *white appearance*, like radiant light from a full moon lighting up the darkness of the sky on a clear autumn night.

4 *Red substance ascends*. Subtle red matter originally received in the mother's ovum ascends from the navel chakra to the heart chakra, borne on winds from the lower part of the body. The inner vision becomes the vision of *red increase*, like the colour of a deep red sunset in the night sky.

5 *Winds enter the indestructible sphere*: the inner vision becomes the *black vision of near-attainment*, a vision of total darkness.

For a person who has no meditative control, the final five steps can occur within moments or may last up to three days after breathing has stopped. An experienced meditator may prolong the final vision of death, the clear light appearance, for many days or even weeks.

Meditators can use this most subtle mind to meditate on emptiness of inherent existence, the ultimate nature of all things.

At the black vision, the white and red substances from the crown and navel chakras have absorbed into the upper and lower parts of the indestructible sphere. The wind has entered the indestructible sphere and is in its most subtle form, the motility aspect of the combination of most subtle wind and mind. After a momentary loss of consciousness, the two halves of the indestructible sphere slightly separate and the final vision of death occurs. This is the *clear-light vision*, like the hint of light in the early dawn sky indicating that the sun is just below the horizon. The clear light vision is a vacuity that is the absence of the three previous subtle visions. The actual moment of death is when the indestructible sphere opens fully and the most subtle wind and mind leave the gross body.

Immediately after that, the eight visions occur in reverse as one arises in the *bardo* or intermediate state between one life and the next. This is experienced like a dream arising from deep sleep. Just as a block of marble is the substantial cause for a statue, and the sculptor is the co-operative condition, the substantial cause for the bardo body is the subtle wind quality and the co-operative condition is the subtle consciousness. And, the substantial cause for the bardo mind is the subtle consciousness and the co-operative condition is the subtle wind quality. Due to the activated rebirth karma, the shape of the bardo body is that of the future life.

The duration of life in the bardo is indefinite; some say the bardo being experiences absorption into the clear light every seven days and then reappears in the same aspect until it is eventually reborn, usually within seven weeks. Those to be born in the desire realm are nourished by odours. Through karmic clairvoyance, the bardo being can see its place of birth at a great distance. Some who are going to be reborn human have a vision of their future parents engaged in coitus. Their gender is already determined by the throwing karma that ripened at death, and males feel desire for the mother and hostility towards the father. The opposite emotions occur in a female.<sup>32</sup> The desire attracts one to the vision of the parents' sex organs in union, and the hostility causes one to die. The most subtle wind and mind enter the mother's womb and join with the egg at or close to conception. It then abides within a new indestructible sphere.

### **How to die skilfully**

It is taught that we are born with a karmically-determined lifespan that, under ordinary conditions, cannot be lengthened, although it is possible to die before that lifespan is attained. We all know we are going to die, but we don't know when or how, and we fall into the trap of believing it won't happen soon. But when the passage of time is measured in progressively shorter intervals, years, months, weeks, and so on, and we get down to split seconds, the numbers tick over so rapidly that they become a blur. This is the speed at which our death is approaching. As His Holiness the Dalai Lama once said at a birthday celebration arranged for him in Los Angeles, "What's the big deal? Each birthday is just another year closer to death."

Increasingly more humans are dying even before they emerge from their mother's womb. For those who survive until birth, there is no guarantee as to how long they will be here. Our

bodies are fragile, our environment is dangerous, the food we eat and the medicines we take to stay alive can kill us. Even the air we breathe can be our downfall, so preparation for death needs to begin now, no matter how healthy we feel.

Why prepare for death? Because at death our state of mind ripens the karma which forms the template for the next life and, if we have not replaced self-cherishing with cherishing others, fear of extinction and grasping at life will overwhelm our mind with disturbing emotions. This will nurture a negative karma and our mind-stream will go on to an unfortunate rebirth. So, right now, we need to begin the long process of eliminating our habitual self-centred approach to life and start thinking of others, speaking pleasant words, and doing helpful things. It's as simple as the Boy Scout and Girl Guide motto, in every situation, "be prepared" to stop self-cherishing and cultivate cherishing others in all actions of body, speech, and mind. Then, when death comes, it'll be a breeze.

A friend who is reading a draft of this text and making helpful suggestions has put a note here: "Gyatso, it only sounds easy to do this. You should say how bloody hard it is to stop self-cherishing and cherish others, how counter-culture it feels in the West. Easterners have this attitude in their society, but we are lone wolves pursuing the truth."

Yes, it's bloody hard to stop self-cherishing and open our heart to others. Even towards certain members of our own family such as our spouse who, in our mind, may have transformed from the most wonderful person in the world to the most awful. Self-cherishing, putting ourselves before others, has dominated our mind since beginningless time and is not going to lie down without a fight. Cultural norms are an asset, but no matter what society we live in, each of us has to go into battle against our self-cherishing and, with courage and determination, train our mind to cherish others until it becomes as spontaneous as our self-cherishing is now. It becomes easier when we fully recognise that self-cherishing is the root cause of all unhappiness and cherishing others is the cause of all happiness.

In preparing for death it is also important to purify past negative karma and to have strong powers of concentration. Then we can use the death process to become aware of the fundamental clear light nature of mind and use it to recognise the ultimate nature of all things, emptiness of inherent existence. Death should be seen as an opportunity, not as an enemy, and when it comes we should let go of all things involved in the present life. I was once asked to visit a man in a hospice, his body was riddled with cancer but he wouldn't die. We spoke for some time and it came out that he hated his mother. I could see that the intensity of his resentment towards her was making him unable to let go of his life. I reminded him of how kind she was when he was still in her womb and, when he was a helpless baby, how she fed, cleaned, and protected him with all her heart. He understood that, in fact, the good things she had done for him far outweighed the bad things. That night, to the surprise of the nursing staff, he let go and died in peace.

## 5 BUDDHIST COSMOLOGY

Having described the death process, I shall now present the ancient Buddhist description of the origins of the universe. There are interesting parallels between the two processes that give insight into the relationship between mind, karma, and the environment. I cannot attest to the literal accuracy of this presentation, but I find the general picture is worth looking at.

With regard to death and rebirth, growth of the embryo involves the elements of fire emerging from wind, of water emerging from fire, and of earth emerging from water. The reverse occurs when dying. This coarsening of the four physical elements occurs in correspondence with coarsening of the mind resulting from ripening of karmic potencies borne on the mind-stream, and the reverse occurs at death. Similarly, the coming and going of a galaxy has emergence and decay of the four physical elements, and it occurs in dependence upon the ripening of the collective karmic potencies of beings inhabiting that galaxy. How this happens is the question.

Buddhism sees the vast universe as composed of an uncountable number of *world systems* coming into and going out of existence. If events described as ‘big bangs’ do occur, in the Buddhist system matter cannot come from nothing as science claims. Matter must arise from matter – the residue of previous world systems that have collapsed. It is said that the underlying cause of the formation and eventual destruction of world systems is the collective karma of the beings inhabiting them. A world system contains a thousand million solar systems with suns and planets which may or may not be inhabited. Perhaps a ‘world system’ refers to galaxies such as the Milky Way, I’m not sure. Each world system comes and goes over four equal and extremely long periods of time: the periods of formation, abiding, destruction, and emptiness.

The coming and going of different world systems, or galaxies, is not in phase. While some are being destroyed, others are abiding, and so on. The living beings inhabiting a galaxy can be reborn again and again in the same galaxy or, according to their karma, they can migrate from one galaxy to another. If one’s karma for hell rebirth is not finished and one’s own galaxy is entering the period of destruction where no hell birth occurs, one’s mind will be reborn in a hell state belonging to another galaxy where hell rebirth is still flourishing.

### **The period of emptiness**

A period of emptiness follows the period of destruction of a previous galaxy. During this period the sentient beings in that region all abide at the second level of the form realm or above. There is no gross matter, no desire realm, just empty space. This is not a vacuum. There are no atoms but, according to His Holiness the Dalai Lama in quoting the *Kalachakra Tantra*, at this time matter exists in the form of extremely subtle “space particles,” whatever such things may be.

The immense duration of the period of emptiness finishes when the sentient beings’ karma to abide at the second level of the form realm or above begins to expire and, correspondingly, a cool wind moving the space particles signals the beginning of the period of formation. This wind is said to be gentle at first and, over many years, it gathers momentum and heats up. Perhaps to the level of having the power of a big bang, I don’t know. The important point is that it occurs as a result of the collective karma of those living



beings and thus, according to Buddhism, it is our minds that cause the world, or galaxy, or universe to appear, and not the other way around. The appearance of a galaxy does not happen without a cause or by chance, and it does not occur through the will of an omnipotent creator.

### **The period of formation**

At the beginning of the period of formation, the gentle wind gives rise to the environments of the first form realm level and then the four heavens of the sky-dwelling devas of the desire realm. These five celestial realms become inhabited by those who had been abiding at the second level of the form realm or above. As the wind gains strength, fire, water, and earth qualities manifest. Condensation and precipitation of earth quality forms suns, planets, and moons. On suitable planets, great rains fall, creating oceans and continents, and the remaining desire realm environments appear. For the remainder of the period of formation, sentient beings begin to inhabit the other levels of the desire realm, from the lowest hells (first) up to the earth-dwelling devas. The period of formation ends when all levels become inhabited.

### **The period of abiding**

At the beginning of the period of abiding, the first humans are like gods. They are spontaneously born, and have bodies of light. Surviving on bliss alone, they have a very long lifespan. Gradually, due to coarsening of their collective karma, these humans, and those who follow, experience the five degenerations:

- (i) The average lifespan decreases.
- (ii) The times degenerate: food becomes scarce and of poor quality, violence and disharmony increase in families, between groups, and between nations.
- (iii) The disturbing emotions of hatred, desire, and so on, become stronger.
- (iv) People hold strongly to wrong views, such as denial or distorted versions of karmic cause and effect.
- (v) People's bodies become gross, short in stature, ugly, and weak, and their minds become feeble.

During this decline, there is a point when humans lose their god-like form and appear in bodies like our own, or more primitive forms. To my mind, this karmically-caused degeneration of humanity from god-like forms to modern *Homo sapiens* does not contradict the observed facts of evolution.<sup>33</sup> Although the ripening of karma is a main condition for the environment that we experience, it is not the only condition, and the material world cannot be said to be karma. Also, the physical and chemical activity of matter is not karma. If earthly life did begin in the hypothetical primordial soup of simple organic compounds, it is quite conceivable that, through physical and chemical activity alone, primitive, non-sentient, reproducing life-forms may have arisen. As these organisms diversified, some would have gone in the direction of becoming plants, without minds, and others would have evolved towards sentience. From the Buddhist point of view, there would have been a time when the

bodies of the latter became suitable supports for consciousness, and the minds of beings who had died from higher or lower realms would find suitable physical supports to indulge in their emerging (from latency) sensory desires, such as eating gross substances and sexual activity. With the combination of body and mind, the first truly animate creatures, sentient beings of the animal realm, would have appeared.

I believe that humans as we presently define ourselves would have appeared with the emergence of the dominant *Homo sapiens* from the evolutionary line that gave rise to ape-like creatures that could be classified either as human or animal. For a while, some of the original god-like humans may have co-existed with humans having coarse bodies and minds like our own, I don't know. There probably aren't any god-like humans around these days, even though some of us may think we belong to that category.

His Holiness the Dalai Lama once gave an interesting answer to the question: Will computers ever become intelligent? His answer was something like, 'Perhaps, if computers evolve to the point where they are suitable supports for consciousness.' In other words, we cannot create awareness newly, but we might be able to produce something in which a pre-existing mind-stream may take up residence. I doubt it, but the computer geeks had better watch out.

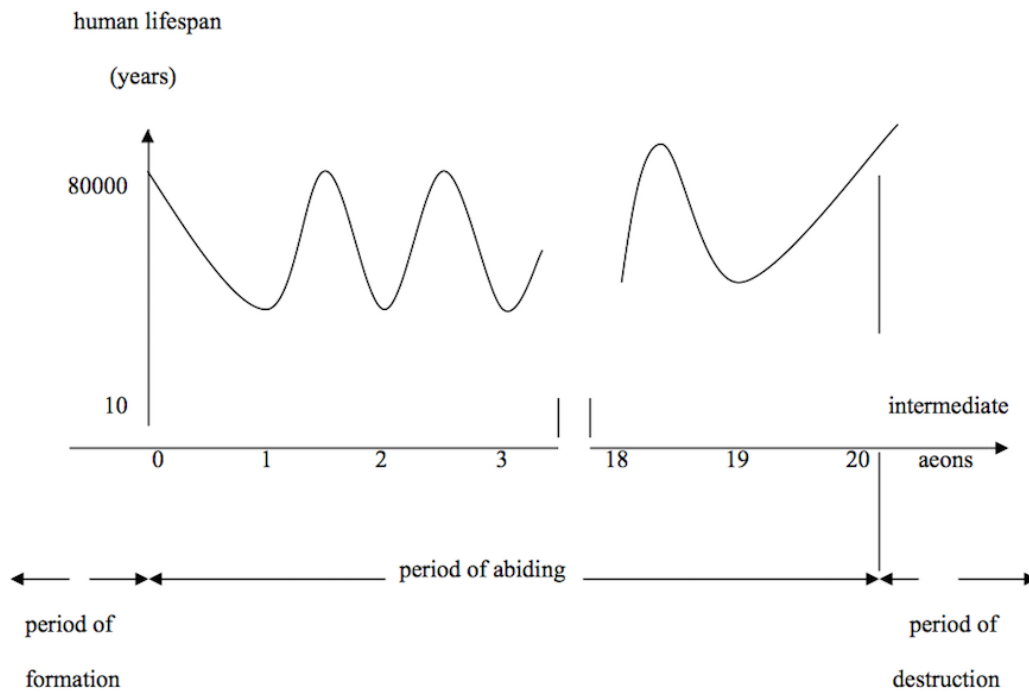
The *abhidharma* texts say that when, due to the five degenerations, our newly evolved human society on this Earth reaches its nadir, there will be death on a massive scale due to war, epidemics, or famine. It is said that our present society will be destroyed by weapons of war. Shocked by the slaughter, the survivors will be inspired by Maitreya, the coming Buddha, to practise the fundamental morality of non-harmfulness, and things will improve. At that time, Maitreya will appear with a tall and handsome body that will inspire faith in his teachings. He will not appear as a wheel-turning Buddha until much later, during the next period of five degenerations.

As a result of the collective practice of morality, the five degenerations will be reversed, and the lifespan will again become very long. Then the five degenerations will begin all over again. On our Earth, we are experiencing the very first of twenty lesser periods that occur during a period of abiding. This period of long descent from maximum to minimum lifespan will be followed by eighteen cycles during which the lifespan increases to the maximum and then decreases again to the minimum. During the twentieth lesser period there will be a long increase from the minimum lifespan to the maximum, the attainment of which will mark the beginning of the period of destruction.

### **The period of destruction**

Cessation of the period of abiding coincides with cessation of rebirth in the lowest hell, the attainment of peak human lifespan, and the beginning of the period of destruction. The inhabitants of our galaxy of worlds will be reborn in progressively higher realms in this galaxy or, if their karma for low rebirth has not yet expired, in the lower realms of other galaxies. Eventually, the beings of our galaxy will all be at the second form realm level and above, and the period of destruction will end with burning of the desire realm environments by a fire that leaves no ash or smoke. The next period of emptiness will then begin, and so on.

## The period of abiding illustrated



In the above diagram of the period of abiding in relation to our Earth, we are at the point during the first of the twenty intermediate aeons, or lesser periods, when the average human lifespan is about 80 years. Many planets have evolution of life-forms similar to what has occurred on the Earth, but whether Buddhas appear and teach the Dharma or not is dependent upon the collective karma of the humans on that planet. Sometimes worlds can pass through all four great periods with no Buddhas appearing, or just a few. The collective karma of the humans on our planet, however, is said to be extremely fortunate because, during our period of abiding, a thousand Buddhas will appear and teach the Dharma.

The thousand Wheel-Turning Buddhas<sup>34</sup> only appear during times of degeneration, when humans are actively seeking the cause of suffering, unlike the ascending times when things are getting better all the time. The first four to appear were Buddha Kakutsunda, Buddha Kanakamuni, Buddha Kashyapa, and Buddha Shakyamuni. The next will be Buddha Maitreya who, at present, is said to be teaching in the Tushita Pure Land.

### The Dalai Lama

In Dharamsala in 1982, at the request of Lama Thubten Yeshe, His Holiness the Dalai Lama gave a series of talks to a large audience of Westerners and Tibetans. In relation to the question of how karma influences the environment, he said<sup>35</sup> that, 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 – the three realms of existence. 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 not karma but the local physical conditions. If we trace back the causes for the movements of weather, however, we come to the causal relation between the emergence of the internal and external physical elemental qualities.

His Holiness says that the scriptures are not clear in explaining how 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,<sup>36</sup> 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.

## PART TWO: TAKING FALSE APPEARANCES AS TRUE – THE MISCONCEIVED NOTION OF SELF



Appropriately, we all seek happiness and try to avoid unhappiness, but our pursuit of these goals by attempting to change the external world has got us nowhere. The world is beyond our control. The objects we seek for physical pleasure are unreliable and even if we manage to surround ourselves with pleasing things there is no guarantee that happiness will ensue. Possessions wear out, wealth is lost, and partners, children, the people we associate with, rarely behave exactly as we wish. Compared to people, our pet dogs and cats are more dependable to give us the affection we crave. As much as we try to create peace and happiness, we can never gain control of the external world and even when we achieve a semblance of happiness, our mind soon becomes bored and dissatisfied and starts looking elsewhere. The real cause of unhappiness and the obstacle to happiness is our mind: our problems all boil down to holding the wrong appearances of self and the world to be true.

Although our minds are also out of control, unlike the world, it is possible to gain control over them, to eliminate their pollution, and attain the peace and happiness that we intuitively believe is possible. The two-fold method for achieving this is cultivating wisdom and a sense of responsibility for the welfare of others. Knowing reality will protect us from being fooled by false appearances, and loving kindness will free our minds from obsessive self-concern. Taking the problems of others upon our shoulders and wanting to make them happy is the most liberating and joyful attitude in the world. It is called loving kindness.

Common objections at this point are, 'But surely I have to love myself first before I can love others,' and 'If I can't make my own family happy and stop their problems, how can I possibly take on the responsibility for all others?'

The meaning of love is the wish to make someone happy and to take delight in their happiness. We have an abundance of this wish for our own selves already. I think the first question refers not to a need to 'love oneself,' but to the observed reality that when we receive another's love our self-confidence grows strongly. With low self-esteem we find it difficult, almost impossible, to freely express love for others. Fear of rejection or ridicule inhibits our ability to express love, and it indicates that the dominant concern in our mind is our self-image, not the happiness of others. Craving for recognition and love and an inability to express love unless the feeling is reciprocated are signs of ego immaturity. They are a recipe for disaster in relationships established on such a give-and-take basis.

With regard to taking responsibility for the happiness of all others, of course, we can't make everyone happy now. But by cultivating the sincere attitude of loving all others we can

bring some happiness to the people we meet by boosting their self-confidence. And we can do this now. If we do not open our hearts to the world, in our self-obsession we will continually create negative karma and will go from unhappiness to unhappiness.

Karma is actions initiated by the minds of those who are confused by false appearances – all of us. Even within the womb our minds have the wrong appearance of our self to exist in its own right, independent of anything else. As we mature, our belief in this wrong appearance engenders arrogant self-importance, paralysing self-consciousness, paranoid self-reference, and a whole host of self-centred attitudes relating to what we want and don't want. These emotions, and the actions we perform through them, are the very obstacles to finding happiness and cultivating wisdom and love. By selfishly attacking, exploiting, and harming others, we create a miserable karmic destiny. To free ourselves from karma which, in essence, is the acting-out of our delusions, we must learn to recognise the wrong conception of self and oppose it with wisdom seeing the actual way the self exists.

### ***1 TAKING FALSE APPEARANCES AS TRUE***

I once heard that, while innocently doing his weekend shopping, a British actor was attacked by an umbrella-wielding old lady for doing what he did in his role as a nasty, a real cad, in a television soap opera. We smile at such stories. And haven't we all laughed at a puppy trying to play with its image in a mirror? Taking a false appearance as true and acting in the light of that mistaken impression is not an occasional humorous event. Tragically, it occurs throughout our lives.

Whatever exists appears to our mind falsely, but we take that false appearance to be true. In other words, the things we call reality, the world and ourselves, are not as real as they appear to be. Due to beginningless confusion about how things exist, we are born with mental veils that cause everything to appear to our mind as if it exists independently, in its own right. By accepting these false appearances as true, we behave inappropriately, unskillfully, or stupidly, like the old lady with the umbrella. Such behavior sets in motion chains of events that become conditions for every misery, every unhappiness, every unfortunate experience in life.

#### **The misconceived notion of self**

During an intensive retreat at a Buddhist monastery in South Korea, I was told to meditate on the question: What am I? At an interview with the Zen master, I gave what I considered to be a reasonable answer. It didn't work. I was threatened to be struck 36 times by the gnarled stick that lay on the table in front of him. The point is, an intellectual understanding of how the self does or doesn't exist is needed, but it's not enough. The understanding has to be deep, heart-felt, and direct. To discover how the self exists in reality, we have to first recognise the way the self appears to our mind when we think, "I," and then deeply investigate to see whether it actually exists in the way it appears or not.

One might say, 'Who cares what the Buddhists say about the self? I'm here, I exist, and I'm going to have fun in life.'

Very brave, and logical if we do exist in the way we assume. But when we say, 'I'm going to have fun in life,' our mind is clinging to a wrong image of self that has been appearing all our life. Thoroughly acquainted with this false appearance, we have unquestioningly identified

with it as the ‘true me.’ And we cherish it above all else. Not only that, since the beginning we have held as true the wrong appearances of our parents, friends, enemies, and even inanimate things.

In the story of the old lady with an umbrella, the actor falsely appeared to her mind as if he were the real character from the soap opera. She held that false appearance to be true, saw him as truly bad, believed him to be truly bad, and angrily punished him. Her thoughts and her action were not in accord with reality, and she created negative karma.

In the same way, the self that actually exists in dependence upon being merely imputed onto the physical and mental continuum can wrongly appear to us as a solid, independent entity, separate from but in possession and control of our body and mind. This type of wrong appearance is rooted in a philosophical or religious belief of a ‘true self’ or a soul that survives death and goes to heaven or hell. This concept is apparent when we think *my body* or *my mind*.

Apart from that intellectually-acquired misconception, there is a more fundamental, innate mistaken sense of self possessed by all children, adults, and even by animals. This misconception is based on the false appearance of a true self that exists not as an owner of the body and mind but generally within the body and mind. When we say, ‘He touched me,’ we are more closely identifying with our body as being our ‘true self.’ And when we’ve done something silly and we say to others, ‘Don’t laugh at me,’ the ‘true self’ is identified more with our mind.

Our innate wrong conception of a true self is called self-grasping ignorance. We feel there is a ‘real me’ who does and experiences pleasant and unpleasant things; a real me about whom people say nice or bad things; a real me who possesses or doesn’t possess things; a real me who is honoured or ignored by society.

Infatuated with this mistaken self-image, we hold the apparent real me to be the most important person in the world, and we regard all others, all things, and all events as being good, bad, or neutral according to whether they please, displease, or are unrelated to our self-image. Through attachment to pleasure and the objects of pleasure, we offer chocolate to pleasing things; through aversion to pain and harmful objects we angrily wield our umbrellas against displeasing things; and through indifference we ignore unrelated things.

Not only does our self appear wrongly on each of these occasions, but the other people, the objects, and the events that we discriminate as good, bad, or neutral also wrongly appear to our minds. With all of this falsity, it is said that the whole world is not an illusion but is like an illusion. The world exists, but not in the way it appears to our mind.

### **What is a human being?**

The Buddhist answer to this question is that a human being is a person with a body and mind like our own. In Buddhist terminology, all beings with mind – humans, animals, Buddhas, and other types – are suitable to be called persons. You already know that your dog or cat is a person, but so are the cockroaches in your kitchen and the worms in your intestines (if you’ve been where I’ve been). All animals have been humans in past lives. Now,



temporarily, they have fur, scales, or feathers and their minds are limited in expression by the capacity of their brains, but they're still persons. Plants don't have minds and are not persons, no matter how much we may like to talk to the flowers in our garden.

Seeing the terms 'person' and 'self' as referring to the conventionally-existing individual, we need to ask, *What is the relationship between the self and the body and mind?* Buddha taught that the self is neither the body nor the mind, nor the collection of the two. Nor is it some mystical entity, a soul, a third thing that exists independently of body and mind. The self is nominally existent in that its existence is established merely by mental imputation in dependence upon the appearance of our functioning physical and mental continuum. Like in a strange situation where we pinch ourselves to establish that our body and feelings are functioning as they should and we are not dreaming.

Until death, our bodies and minds are always together and, wherever they are, there is our self. But, if we search for the self upon the body and mind, it cannot be found because it exists only in a nominal fashion. Nominal existence, however, does not mean that the self cannot function, cannot do things, cannot be happy or sad. It is appropriate to say that whatever the body and mind do, the merely-imputed self does: when the mind is sad, the merely-imputed self is sad, when the body is old, the merely-imputed self is old. The merely-imputed self is the person who exists and functions conventionally according to whatever the body and mind are doing but, under ultimate analysis, cannot be found. This reality applies to everything in the universe: all things exist conventionally or relatively; nothing exists ultimately, in its own right and independent of mental imputation.

In Buddhism, the body and mind are distinct entities that function in dependence upon each other. The essence of the body is atoms and their combinations, whereas the essence of mind is awareness – the ever-changing stream of subjective experience that flows from past to present to future. Although our minds function in dependence upon the nervous system, the entity of awareness is not produced by the nervous system. It is not the same as the nervous system. Similarly, although our bodies function in dependence upon our minds, they are not produced by our minds. Nobody can deny that awareness exists; we all have subjective awareness of sensory objects and thoughts. Unlike the body, however, awareness has no physical properties.

### **The materialist view**

In science, we believe that everything about a human being can be reduced to the physical properties of our bodies, and there is no such thing as a mind that is not of physical nature. In other words, we say that mind is the electro-chemical activity of our nervous system, principally the brain. This, however, is an unproven assumption. If the Buddhist presentation of mind as mere awareness with no physical properties is correct, mind cannot be measured in our usual ways of analysing things, and its non-observation even with the most refined instruments does not prove its non-existence. Also, there is no scientific proof that mind does not exist as a different entity from the body. Denial of such existence is a scientific tenet of faith. In my opinion, blind faith.<sup>37</sup>

The only way to directly observe and analyse non-material mind is through introspection: observation and analysis of our own mental experience. Mind, consciousness, awareness,

experience, all referring to the same entity, is literally staring us in the face. Every moment we have mental experience in the forms of sensory awareness, thoughts, emotions, and feelings of happiness, sadness, pleasure or pain. It's not right to dismiss subjective observation of one's own mind as being non-objective and therefore not acceptable. There is simply no other way to directly observe mind. And we don't need to cultivate introspection blindly like an uninformed tourist visiting a foreign country. All beings' minds function in similar ways. There is a wealth of instruction and information handed down by the Buddha and the great meditators of India and Tibet who have examined and verified his original description of the nature and function of mind. Based upon these instructions, meditation is the proper method by which we can not only understand our mind but, more importantly, how we can control and change our mind from its unsatisfactory state of confusion and unhappiness into a state of wisdom and peace.

### **Three levels of knowledge**

The Buddha said:

Do not accept my words simply through faith and respect for me. Examine them like a goldsmith test gold before buying it. Only when your own investigation verifies what I have said should my words be accepted.

In life in general, and especially for following the path to Buddhahood, three levels of correct knowledge are needed. In the context of understanding the emptiness of inherent existence, these are:

- (i) *The knowledge of listening and observing* is valid information gained from one's own observations and from others either by hearing their teachings or reading their books explaining emptiness. This would include the swift cognition that psychologists call intuitive thinking and, in Buddhism, is categorised as correct belief (see Part Three, Ways of Knowing). Even though it is correct, without a strong foundation of logic one can be talked out of one's belief by clever but deceptive reasoning. Mistaken intuitions and incorrect hunches do not belong to this category, they are wrong conceptions.
- (ii) *The knowledge of analysis* is the psychologist's analytical cognition. Based upon pure logic, it is unshakeable inferential understanding of emptiness acquired through the effort of reflecting upon and analysing the meaning of our knowledge of listening and observing.
- (iii) *The knowledge of meditation* Based upon the above two levels of knowledge, meditational knowledge is the inferential and then the direct wisdom perceiving emptiness supported by a perfectly concentrated mind associated with the unprecedented bliss of mental suppleness (calm abiding).

Thus, it is not enough to simply take somebody else's word for the truth. We have to work hard to recognise for ourselves the conventional reality of how mind functions and its ultimate reality of emptiness of inherent existence.<sup>38</sup> In scientific terms, for the person wishing to understand mind, the first level of knowledge is the theory to be proven, and analysis and meditation are the methods of verification. The Buddha received information from his own teachers and through analysis and meditation he attained wisdom verifying that knowledge, Q.E.D.

As we progress on the path of wisdom cultivation, skilful teachers give further information and guidance in logic and how to meditate. The teacher knows the many conceptual pitfalls and blind alleys that can lead us away from the correct view, and guides us past them. Thus, reliance upon and trust in a qualified teacher are essential, right through until the final attainment of Buddhahood.

Why do we need to see for ourselves the correct way in which mind exists? If we want happiness and do not want suffering, we must learn how to transform our minds from confusion to clarity and wisdom. And to achieve this we must know what mind is and how it functions. Changing our minds means abandoning strongly habituated misconceptions about the world and ourselves by acquiring correct understanding. It also involves the massive task of cultivating loving kindness for all beings by transforming our habitual self-importance into seeing the needs of others as more important than our own.

To cherish others without discrimination we have to transform our miserliness into generosity, hatred into love, and jealousy into rejoicing at the qualities of others. This is not easy. It can be done through admiration and faith in the teacher, but to do it completely and irreversibly we need to be energised by the power of universal compassion, the intention to release all beings from suffering. Then we need to cultivate the wisdom born from direct meditative experience of the ultimate reality of our own mind. This wisdom is the antidote to the root of all suffering – the self-grasping ignorance. The intellectual understanding of ultimate reality (emptiness) cannot uproot this ignorance, only the meditative wisdom directly perceiving emptiness can do that. By eliminating our own wrong conceptions, we become qualified to give reliable guidance to others.

### **Bodhicitta: the purpose for actualising our supreme potential of Buddhahood**

The term, *ultimate bodhicitta*, refers to the wisdom that directly realises emptiness of inherent existence, the ultimate nature of all things. This is not the same as *conventional bodhicitta*, which refers to the primary mental consciousness generated by the altruistic intention to attain one's supreme potential of Buddhahood in order to be fully qualified to guide all beings away from suffering. This state of mind comes from a sense of universal responsibility for all beings; it is born from love and compassion. Conventional bodhicitta provides the will-power to overcome obstacles and accumulate the positive energy required for following the path to enlightenment. My teacher, Geshe Jampa Tegchok, said that although the wisdom seeing reality is the actual antidote to self-grasping ignorance and the disturbing emotions, conventional bodhicitta is like the CEO who organises and puts that wisdom into action.

How does one cultivate such a universally benevolent attitude? The essential foundation is to recognise that, because of beginningless rebirth, we are related to every living being in the universe. In past lives, we have all been each others' mothers, fathers, brothers, sisters, husbands and wives countless times. We may not be particularly fond of some of our current family members, but if we reflect on the general nature of family relationships, particularly that between mother and child, we can realise that, in past lives, every living being has been exceptionally kind towards us.

Of course, every living being, even some current family members, has been unkind towards us as well. But, if our present mother goes insane and attacks us with a knife, we will not be

angry. We will disarm and restrain her with love and compassion and seek help. Similarly, others hurt us because their minds are controlled by the insane emotions of self-centredness, greed, desire, anger, pride, and so on. Thus, like our insane mother, they should be seen with compassion, not with thoughts of hatred or revenge, and we should try to help them.

Overall, the benefit we receive from family members far outweighs any harm they may cause. And so, by concentrating on the good aspects of relationships, we can genuinely and properly see every living being with a sense of warm love in our hearts. They will appear to our mind in a pleasing aspect. This is an incredible change from our habitual judging of others through attachment, anger, or indifference, where we see them as likeable if they promise some benefit to us, as unlikeable if they pose some threat to us, or to be disregarded if they offer no benefit or harm. Instead of this, we can become like His Holiness the Dalai Lama, who once said, “When I meet so many people around the world, I treat each one as if I’m meeting a long-lost friend.”

A powerful way to transform our attitude towards others is to cultivate empathy by putting ourselves in their shoes. If we assume we are their personality and imagine we are experiencing their experiences, we can free ourselves from discriminating attitudes and feel real love and compassion for them. This works with animals, insects, and birds as well.

A key aspect of conventional bodhicitta is a sense of personal responsibility to rescue all beings from suffering. If we think, “There are plenty of Buddhas, they can look after my past family,” we will not have the intense aspiration that is needed to attain enlightenment. We won’t be able to generate conventional bodhicitta.

## ***2 LOOKING FOR THE SELF***

It should be evident by now that our unawareness of the role played by karma in our lives and of the nature of our own person is not ‘blissful ignorance.’ Such ignorance is the most terrifying thing in the universe. Understanding karma takes time. It begins with thinking about the description of the coming and going of world systems and the rebirth states of sentient beings, and then deep analysis of the mind. This comes in the next part of the text.

It’s a lot easier to understand the actual nature of the self. To begin, we need to recognise the mistaken appearance of an inherently existing self. Then, to be convinced that this is indeed a false appearance, we need to thoroughly examine every possible place where such a self could exist. If it cannot be found anywhere, we will come to the inner understanding that the actual self is empty of existing inherently. This realisation will affirm our understanding that the self is merely conventional, it exists not in its own right but in dependence upon its basis of imputation and the imputation, “I.” An intellectual understanding of the unreality of an inherently existing self is not enough, we have to see this for ourselves. In our investigation, we need to know how an inherently existing self appears to our mind, and how our mind grasps at that false appearance to be true.

### **Recognising the self to be refuted**

Whenever we think, “I,” the appearance of an inherently existing self is mixed with appearance of the conventional self, and this makes it difficult to distinguish between the two. An inherently existing self appears as a solid self, neither imputed nor labelled, that

pervades the collection of body and mind without seeming to be more connected with one or the other. On the other hand, the conventional self is not seen as having any particular mode of existence. Grasping at the false appearance occurs when we identify with the appearance of an inherently existing self as being truly me. This is the self-grasping conception, the fundamental ignorance that gives rise to all our disturbing emotions and to the karma that binds us to the suffering cycle of death and rebirth.

Negating the reality of an inherently existing self should affirm the existence of a conventional self. But if we feel fear that we don't exist at all, we are mistakenly negating the conventional self as well as an inherently existing self. And if we do not clearly recognise the wrong appearance that is to be refuted, we won't even come close to realising the emptiness of inherent existence of the self.

### **The limits of where an inherently existing self could exist**

If the self exists inherently as it appears, then it must exist either as one with the body and mind or separate from them. There is no third alternative. Thus, if we cannot find an inherently existing self in either of those two possibilities, the conclusion we must come to is that there is no such thing as an inherently existing self, and its appearance is indeed a wrong appearance.

### **There is no inherently existing self that is one with the body and mind**

The body and mind are different entities but the self is a single entity. So, if the self were one with the body and mind, as it appears, the body and mind would have to be one thing, which they are not. Or, as the body and mind have many separate parts, there would have to be many selves, but there is only one self.

### **There is no inherently existing self that is separate from the body and mind**

If there were an inherently existing self different from the body and mind, there should be no relationship at all between the self and the body and mind. After eliminating the body and mind, the self should remain and be identified. But if we were to do this, there would be nothing left to indicate the person; it is impossible to describe a person without making some reference to their body and mind. The person and the body and mind do have a dependent relationship, whatever harm befalls the body and mind harms the person. If they were unrelated, the person would have no gender, it wouldn't age, it wouldn't get sick, and it wouldn't die – because these are characteristics of the body and mind.

### **The conventional self**

In the above analysis we are trying to locate an inherently existing self, but even if we search for the conventional self, the person who exists, this too cannot be pin-pointed. If it could, it would inherently exist. But our inability to pin-point the conventional self does not prove its non-existence, it proves its non-ultimate existence. Nothing in the entire universe can bear ultimate analysis in that it can be found to exist in its own right. Non-finding of the self through ultimate analysis proves that the person exists only conventionally, as a dependent relationship between the body and mind and the label "I." When a body and mind appear to us with the ability to function as a person, we label the name 'person' onto that ability to

function. In this way, the body and mind are the basis of designation of the person, but they are not the person. The person is merely imputed, it has no existence from its own side. Even though it cannot be found upon analysis, the conventional self is located wherever the body and mind are located, but an inherently existing self cannot be located either conventionally or ultimately, and therefore it does not exist at all.

### **Is my body me?**

When we say “my body,” our sense of self is leaning towards a possessor of the body. If this were so, as a possessor and that which is possessed are not the same thing, by removing all the parts of the body we should come closer and closer to observing the self that possesses the body. But this doesn’t happen. And when we say, “look at me,” we are leaning towards a self that is the same as the body. The body cannot be the self because the hand and most other parts can be removed or replaced by parts from another body, and we still remain the same person.

Like the conventional self, a hand is nominally existent, it doesn’t exist in its own right but exists through being merely labelled upon a suitable base – a collection of fingers and a palm. This doesn’t mean that a hand is just the name ‘hand.’ Hands possess the properties of the fingers and palm but, amongst those parts, there is nothing that can be pointed out to be the hand in itself.

The fingers and palm too are only nominally existent; they do not exist in their own right. ‘Finger’ is something merely labelled upon an assembly of bones, tendons, and skin that is suitable to be called a finger. There is no findable finger within that assembly.

The same can be said for the cells of the component parts of the finger. Cells too are only nominally existent; they do not exist in their own right. ‘Cell’ is something merely labelled upon an intricate collection of molecules within a membrane. Within that collection there is nothing that can be pointed to as being the cell in its own right.

Molecules too are only nominally existent; there is nothing that exists as a molecule in its own right. ‘Molecule’ is something merely labelled upon a collection of atoms.

Atoms too are only nominally existent; they do not exist in their own right. ‘Atom’ is something merely labelled upon a collection of particles.

Particles too are only nominally existent; they do not exist in their own right. ‘Particle’ is something merely labelled upon a packet of energy. At this point, science and Buddhism come together: nothing exists in its own right because everything is relative. I have already mentioned the important point of logic that, if something exists in dependence upon mental labelling, the merely imputed object and the base that it is labelled upon are not the same thing.

Coming back to the gross level of existence, I once worked with a doctor who broke his leg while skydiving. It was not a bad break; with his leg in plaster he was still able to do his duties at the hospital. He told me that when he was carrying an X-ray of his leg for checking by the orthopaedic surgeon, he could not bring himself to look at it. Even though he had seen hundreds of X-rays of broken bones, he could not look at his own fracture because he

thought, *'This is me.'* For all of us, when it comes down to cherishing the misconceived notion of self, intelligence and reason go out the window.

The body is continually breaking down and rebuilding. I was taught in high school that, after seven years, every cell of the body that exists now will have been replaced. It is important to reflect upon the subtle change of the body because, apart from the wrong conception of our body to exist as a solid, independent 'me' or 'body,' we also wrongly conceive it to be an unchanging entity. Having the deep awareness that our body is nothing other than transformed food and drink that we have consumed over the past seven years opens the way to realising that it is not a solid, independent 'me' or 'body.'

### **Is my mind me?**

Someone might say, 'If the body is not the self, then the mind or some part of the mind must be the self.' To investigate this question, we need to be completely clear about what is the mind.

Amid a host of synonyms, my favourite dictionary<sup>39</sup> says mind is "that which thinks, knows, feels, and wills." This is a good description of mental activity, but is not a clear definition of mind itself. According to the scientists, it could equally be a description of cerebral activity. But the belief that mind is a mere epiphenomenon of brain, something directly arising from brain as its substantial cause, is not proven. Buddhism asserts that the substance of mind is awareness, a non-physical entity. There is no widely accepted scientific definition of mind and so, to examine these contradictory assertions we must hold off our preconceptions and think about the Buddhist definition of mind. If the terms we use are not defined, any investigation into what constitutes mind cannot reach a conclusion.<sup>40</sup>

### **Definition of mind**

Mind is defined in Buddhism as mere clarity and awareness. It exists as a never-ending continuum of brief moments of awareness.

(i) *Clarity* refers, in general, 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. Such appearances are potentially accurate and 'clear' because distorted awareness due to disturbing emotions is superficial and not one with the nature of mind. When there are no disturbing emotions the image is accurate. At an even deeper level, clarity of mind refers to the mind's final nature of non-inherent existence.

(ii) *Awareness* is not possessed by mirrors; it is the activity of apprehension, knowing, or cognitive engagement in the five sense objects<sup>41</sup> or in objects appearing to thought.

(iii) *Mere* excludes the need for any significant strength of comprehension of the object: deep sleep is also a mental experience. It also excludes an independent, self-reliant me or mind within the head that is an agent having or controlling the experience.

Further important points:

- Clarity and awareness of a particular object of mind occur simultaneously.
- Mind cannot be extinguished like the dousing of a flame; it is a self-perpetuating continuum of awareness and clarity that has no beginning or end.<sup>42</sup>
- The present moment of awareness of an object arises in dependence upon the meeting of the object, the immediately preceding moment of clarity and awareness (mind), and a sense organ (the ‘sense organ’ for thought, or conceptual mind, is the continuum of consciousness itself).
- The natural capacity of mind to know clearly whatever exists is temporarily obscured by distorted mental conceptions and their habits. Such obscuration is superficial, like waves on the surface of the ocean, and can be eliminated by the wisdom seeing ultimate reality. Thus every sentient being, even the fly on the wall and those who have committed the most heinous crimes, has the potential to become a Buddha.

...

Six main types of awareness are included within mind: the five senses – visual, auditory, olfactory, gustatory, and tactile consciousness – and mental consciousness. The latter is the main domain of our awareness. It receives sensory input and engages in thinking or conceptualising about what has been experienced.

Thoughts experience their object indirectly, through an idea, or mental image of it. This leads to an element of mistake because we confuse the actual object with our idea of it. Through the power of concentration, however, mental consciousness can attain *direct perception* that does not rely upon an intermediary mental image. Based upon perfect concentration, the wisdom of higher-seeing, *vipassana*, is first cultivated at the intellectual or conceptual level, and then one leaves behind the mental image of the object and attains direct, non-conceptual awareness of it. In relation to the emptiness of inherent existence, conceptual wisdom understanding emptiness does not have the power to abandon self-grasping ignorance. The wisdom that directly realises emptiness does have that power, and thus the aim of Buddhist meditation is to cultivate direct perception of emptiness.

The dictionary definition of mind, ‘...that which thinks...etc.’, gives the impression that mind is a particular entity, an independent agent, that does the thinking, knowing, feeling, and willing. The Buddhist definition of mind excludes this assumption with the term ‘mere,’ which preserves the status of mind as being only nominally existent. Mind is merely imputed upon the combination of clarity and awareness; it does not exist independently or in its own right.

When meditating on our own clarity and awareness, even though we are observing the base of imputation of mind, and not mind in its own right, it is suitable to say we are observing mind. Other than mind itself, there is no instrument that can directly observe clarity and awareness. Scientists who believe they are observing mind when their instruments show areas of the brain lighting up during thought activity are as far away from observing mind as a palaeontologist is from observing a dinosaur by seeing fossilised footprints.



At school we learn that, in the constant change of physical things from one state to another, no new matter or energy arises from nothing and no old matter or energy disappears into nothing. A similar principle applies to the non-physical mind asserted in Buddhism. Every person has mind, a continuum of mere clarity and awareness that exists as a functioning thing undergoing moment-by-moment change just as things of the physical world are constantly changing. Even though the proton in a particular hydrogen atom never remains the same for more than a split second, as long as we are aware of its momentary nature it is not inappropriate to regard that proton as something existing over a period of time – as a continuum. In a similar way, mind is a constantly renewing continuum in that the present moment of a particular person’s mind arises in dependence upon cessation of the previous moment and, in turn, its own cessation gives rise to the next moment of mind. In this way, mind is a beginningless and endless continuum.

Positive and negative qualities present in one moment of mind will necessarily influence the character of the next moment of mind. Fortunately, negative qualities such as self-centredness, anger, and desire, are superficial distortions and can be diminished and even totally stopped without harming the mental continuum in any way. Even in the material world temporary appearances can stop forever, for example, ocean waves disappear when the conditions for their existence cease, and the water itself is not harmed in any way. The *energy* of the waves is preserved in other forms, but the waves themselves cease.

### **Where does mind come from?**

Whereas an atom can be broken up into its component parts, even though a mental continuum does have parts, these cannot be physically separated like particles of matter. One mind cannot divide into separate minds, and separate minds cannot unite to become a single mind. Because mind is indivisible, our first moment of consciousness cannot have come from the minds of our parents. Also, it cannot have come from the developing nervous system because matter and mind are completely different things. They have no substance in common and, even though they can influence each other, they cannot be substantial causes for each other. Finally, as our first moment of consciousness cannot have come from nothing, it must have arisen from a previous moment of consciousness. Therefore our mind must have come from a previous life. This is how the reality of rebirth is established: it is the mind that goes from life to life.

At death, mind does not disappear into nothing. In dependence upon the karmic potential activated during death, the mental continuum conjoins with another gross physical support and rebirth occurs in either a pleasant or an unpleasant state. Thus there can be no beginning to our mental continuum taking birth in the wheel of life and there can be no end to the continuity of our mind. It will take rebirth again and again or it will become the ongoing mind of a future Buddha.

The universe contains a limitless number of sentient beings, each with its own mental continuum and each with the full mental potential to become a Buddha. What will happen when every sentient being becomes enlightened? The Buddha did not answer that question, but a monk friend of mine replied during a radio interview, “There will be the biggest party in the universe.”

Awareness is not a simple thing. Each moment of awareness bears memory imprints of this life and all past lives, habits of our past constructive or destructive emotions, and potencies created by our past intentional actions. These imprints, habits, and potentials have a profound influence on the way things appear to our mind and the way in which we apprehend them. Also, the ways in which things appear to and are apprehended by mind are influenced by whatever emotion, constructive or destructive, is manifest at the time of observation. Thus awareness is both a conditioned and a subjective phenomenon. So, how can one claim to see reality if one's observations are subjectively conditioned?

No problem. We are intelligent beings. While cultivating the three types of knowledge, listening, observing, and analysing will oppose subjective distortion due to wrong views and will enhance right views. Finally, the wisdom of direct, non-conceptual awareness of reality based upon single-pointed concentration will oppose all imprints associated with ignorance-confusion and will begin the permanent extinguishment of ignorance and the power of karmic potencies. The waves of obscuration will cease and our mind, an ocean of awareness, will abide in its natural state of perfect clarity and tranquillity. A Buddha's mind sees both conventional and ultimate reality at all times without subjective distortion.

### **Objects of knowledge**

Whatever exists can be known by mind, and all knowable things are either apparent or hidden:

- (i) *Apparent things* are those that can be observed directly through our senses.
- (ii) *Hidden things* are not immediately obvious to sense consciousness; we come to know them through inference.
  - (a) *Slightly hidden things*, like subtle impermanence and emptiness, are able to be first understood through logical reasoning and then they are known directly.
  - (b) *Very hidden things*, such as the intricate workings of karma, can be understood by ordinary beings through the reasoning of relying upon a valid authority, such as a Buddha. As we progress on the path to enlightenment, our mental consciousness will eventually directly perceive even very hidden things.

All things can be known through sensory or mental consciousness. The five sense consciousnesses directly perceive their particular types of object in dependence upon conjunction of the object, the physical sense power, and the mental continuum. Mental consciousness, the 'sixth sense,' is mostly the realm of our thoughts – conceptions that apprehend their objects indirectly through the medium of a mental image. It does, however, have the potential to perceive things directly, and a major goal of meditation is to achieve and eventually remain within direct mental perception of all things.

At any one moment, only one of the six types of consciousness is fully operational in that it can induce a memory of what is being observed. When one of the six types of consciousness is engaging in its object, objects may appear to the other consciousnesses but awareness of them is said to be 'inattentive' in that it cannot induce a memory. Like my bad habit of daydreaming: my thoughts can drift away while I am reading and when my eyes get to the

bottom of the page I cannot remember anything about what they have just looked at. While watching television it seems as though we are seeing, hearing, and thinking simultaneously, but our attention is rapidly alternating between visual, auditory, and conceptual awareness.

The sense consciousnesses feed information to the mental consciousness which then thinks about what has been observed, applies names, and so on. For example, the old Superman series on television used to begin with a shot of the good citizens of Metropolis looking up at the sky. A sound like a jet engine could be heard and they were saying, "It's a bird!" "It's a plane!" "It's Superman!" Busily sorting out the visual and auditory information, their mental consciousnesses finally came up with a suitable label.

...

Returning to the original question, 'Is my mind me?' we usually describe a person by beginning with their physical characteristics: sex, age, colour of hair, body shape, sound of voice, and so on. Then we add their mental qualities: intelligent, stupid, humorous, boring, happy, sad, extroverted, introverted, and so on. Immigration officials are happy with a photograph, signature, and official document. But none of the things we use to identify a person is the person. Even our unique set of chromosomes cannot be said to be the person, otherwise we would flush our own person down the toilet every time we push the button.

The collection of things we use to identify a person cannot be said to be the person either, because a collection is not different from its parts. If none of the parts is the person, the collection cannot be the person. As all the parts are undergoing constant change, not even the shape of our body or a general snapshot of our mind can be the person either.

Nevertheless, persons exist and the law courts can justly punish a person for a past wrong deed. So, what is the connection between the person who committed the past action and the present person? Are they the same thing? If not, is it fair to punish a present person for something a past and different person may have done? In this situation it seems quite reasonable to assert that the mental continuum, in particular the mental consciousness, is the person because it was the mental consciousness that purposely initiated the past bad action and was rewarded by whatever it sought, and it is the continuum of that mind which deserves to be punished, and no other mental continuum.

Even many Buddhists think the continuum of mental consciousness is the person, especially as Buddhists have a need to provide a link between past actions, even in past lives, and the resultant karmic effect of those actions being experienced by an apparently innocent person in the present or a future time. And, indeed, it is the continuum of mental consciousness that goes from day to day and from life to life, bearing the karmic potencies of past actions and experiencing their ripening effects in terms of pleasant or unpleasant happenings. But fine analysis of the mental continuum shows that even the mental consciousness is not the person.

We have seen that the mental continuum has five sense consciousnesses and mental consciousness. Each of the sense consciousnesses is different from the others in terms of the type of object cognised and its physical sense faculty. And within any particular mental consciousness there are various mental functions that render that consciousness wholesome

or unwholesome, happy or sad, pleasurable or painful, correct or mistaken, and so on. Thus, as the mental continuum in general, and the mental consciousness in particular, has many separate parts, the mind cannot be the person otherwise there would be as many persons as there are parts of the mind. But each of us is only one person.

### **The person**

In Buddhism, a human person is simply the one who walks, sits, eats, farts, laughs, cries, sleeps, and so on. How does the person exist? What is the person? The person is the one who exists in dependence upon the mere act of attributing a name or the thought 'I' to a base – a combination of body and mind that functions as a person.

Neither the base of imputation nor the imputation itself can be shown to be the person, but whatever the body and mind do, or whatever happens to them, it is suitable to say that the merely-imputed I, the person, does or experiences these things. If the body walks across the road, it is correct to say that the merely-imputed person, the mere-I, has crossed the road, even though it is not the body. If the mental consciousness carries the karmic potencies from life to life, it is suitable to say that the mere-I bears the karmic potencies, even though the mere-I is not the mind.<sup>43</sup> Finally, as there is always a proper base for imputation of 'I' – the subtle body and subtle mind that continue through life, death, the intermediate state, and conception into a new life – it is suitable to assert that the mere-I goes from life to life and experiences the karmic effects of past-life actions.

Going back to our example of Superman, the good citizens first imputed 'bird' onto the object flying across the sky. That was mistaken because the object didn't have flapping wings. Their imputation 'plane' was also mistaken because, although it sounded like a jet plane, it didn't have wings at all. Then they saw the appearance of a human form and they imputed a mere-I, a person, on that object. As they knew there was only one human person who could fly, they finally came up with the proper label, 'Superman.'

### **How the mind influences the way things appear to us**

Our problem is that the person, Superman, appears to our minds as Superman existing from his own side, completely independent of the act of labelling. And we take that false appearance to be true. To investigate the way in which things come from our mind we can use the example of our mother. We label 'mother' onto a familiar body, mind, or voice that is suitable for us to call mother. But we don't think our mother is the body, the mind, or the voice, we mistakenly think she is a real, true, self-existing mother abiding somewhere within all that. To somebody else she may be called 'old lady who lives down the street.' To that person there is no appearance of mother whatsoever, she appears simply as an old-lady. To another she may be called 'nasty woman,' and to that person she appears as an unlikeable person with the same body and mind that you see as your loveable mother. So, for every person with whom we relate, the basic mere-I of that person and his or her characteristics such as mother, father, nice, nasty, and so on, all come from our mind.

Even before we impute 'mother' upon that particular combination of body and mind, however, her body and mind already appear to us as existing from their own side, independent of the names, body and mind. And we incorrectly apprehend them to exist in

that way. Then, even though we correctly impute the mere person, ‘mother,’ onto that basis, we apprehend our merely-imputed mother in the same mistaken fashion. As our relationships are precariously based on such false apprehensions of self and others, they are doomed to end in unhappiness arising from attachment or anger. Others cannot live up to the projections we put upon them, and we cannot live up to the projections they put upon us.

A philosopher contemplating the question of what is a person would probably come to the same conclusion as a Buddhist: within the body and mind there is nothing that can be identified to be the actual person. Both would agree that there is no such thing as a person existing entirely separately from the body and mind. The Buddhist would understand that the misconception of the person to exist in that way is the cause of all suffering, but the philosopher would not realise the devastating import of that self-grasping ignorance.

### **Beware of the nihilistic trap**

If a person cannot be found anywhere, does this mean there are no persons at all? In which case, shouldn’t we seriously revise our laws on punishment and imprisonment? What’s the point of punishing a person-less skeleton with its lumps of person-less meat and organs? And why should we worry about karma if there’s no ‘real’ self to experience the results of our actions? When committed materialists are asked to identify the person they love, hate, or think deserves punishment, they can only come up with the electro-chemical activity of the brain to be the person. They cannot comprehend how a nominally existent person can actually exist. We may well ask them, ‘What’s the point of punishing some poor neurons that are just doing their job?’

Look at the Buddhist assertion again:

*The person, the individual who sleeps, eats, and so on, is established to exist merely through attributing a name to a base: a mere-person is imputed to exist in dependence upon the appearance of a physical and mental continuum that is able to function as a person.*

Mere imputation means that the person is established to exist by the imputing consciousness, not from its own side.

Not only persons, but *all things* only exist nominally. And because they possess the properties of their bases of designation they can still function as existing entities even though they cannot be found by analysis – when they are thoroughly searched for. The person ‘Jack’ does not exist anywhere within the body and mind that are suitable to be called ‘Jack.’ But wherever that combination of body and mind is, that’s where Jack is. (Unless, of course, Jack’s body has smoked some of that funny-smelling green stuff, in which case Jack will be somewhere else).

It seems to me that, philosophically, we accept the non-existence of a real self, a true, independent entity that is ‘me.’ Nevertheless, this is just an intellectual belief, an assumption; it is not the realisation of selflessness that is so important for opposing the self-grasping ignorance. And when we go home from the laboratory or the lecture theatre we remain completely under the illusion that we are true, self-existing individuals. We do not investigate

or even recognise the wrong appearance of true, self-existence that contaminates every moment of ordinary consciousness, and we don't realise that grasping at this wrong appearance to be true, the self-grasping ignorance, is the root of all disturbing emotions and all our problems. Thus, in science and philosophy, we have no realisation that our conventionally-existing self as it wrongly appears to us is non-existent; there is no realisation of emptiness. Without deep analysis and meditation upon the fact of a non-inherently existent self, neither a scientist nor a Buddhist can abandon their self-grasping ignorance.

In the same way that Calvin sees and relates to his toy tiger, Hobbes, as a real living tiger,<sup>44</sup> we all mistakenly cognise and relate to a real, true me existing within our body and mind. As Hobbes the tiger reverts to a toy in the eyes of Calvin's parents, the eye of wisdom sees the merely-imputed I as existing but not existing in the way that ignorance holds it to exist. When we no longer grasp at our mere-I to exist in its own right, we will see the folly of spending so much time and money in feeding, exercising, washing, and clothing the body and entertaining the mind, believing them to be the real, true me or the abode of a real, true me. Pleasure can be useful and pain is best avoided, but there is no inherently existing self that experiences them. Being obsessed with self-gratification through the pursuit of pleasure and avoidance of pain gives rise to all our troubles.

The mind and its supporting body go from past to present to future, constantly changing moment-by-moment. Thus there is no unchanging, true self flowing through time, but we still dwell in nostalgia for 'truly-existent' past acquaintances and experiences, craving the good times and deeply regretting the painful ones. Obsessed with the present, we demand the best and angrily reject the bad. And we dream of an impossible future when all will be truly-existingly well. What a waste of time!

Hobbes the living tiger is a projection of Calvin's mind, but Calvin (and we readers) takes Hobbes to be a truly existing tiger-person. In the same way, we take as true the wrong appearance of our mere self to be a true, inherently-existing me. Believing in this false self-image is the foundation of our destructive emotions and behavior. From an early age we self-centredly crave attention, recognition, and love. If we don't receive these, or if we experience their opposites, we can do anything from throwing a temper tantrum to committing murder or suicide. We crave objects of pleasure, either persons or possessions, seeing them as mine – possessions of a truly existent me.

It's not recommended, but if you want to precipitate an anxiety crisis in a young child, try hugging its mother and saying, 'My mummy.'

'NO,' will reply the child, visibly upset, 'MY mummy.'<sup>45</sup>

If we take an honest look at the underlying motivations for our behavior, we will see that we are no different from a self-centred child, 'It's good, I want it, it's mine.' 'It's bad, I don't want it, take it away.' This is why Buddha frequently referred to self-cherishing humans as being childlike.

In the *Arya Sanghata sutra*,<sup>46</sup> Buddha divides human beings into 'young ones' and 'old ones.' Young ones are those who see the tragedies of sickness, relationship breakdowns, old age, and death all around but have the optimistic belief, 'It won't happen to me.' Old ones are

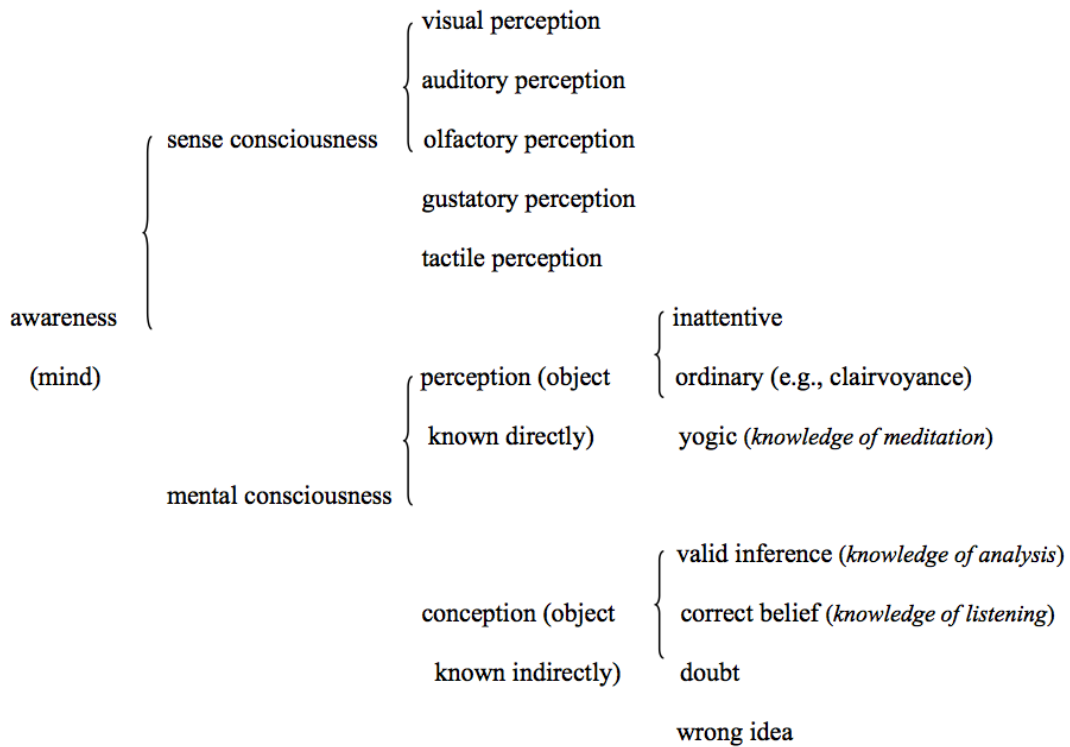
those who have experienced the problems of sickness, relationship failures, and so on, but have the stubborn belief, 'It won't happen to me again.' Both indulge in whole-hearted pursuit of happiness with faith that pleasure is out there waiting for them, and reacting with clinging attachment or angry disappointment when things do or don't go according to plan. This is very childish.

## PART THREE: WAYS OF KNOWING



Although mind cannot be measured by physical means, mind is still knowable by everyone on the planet because it is knowledge, or experience, itself. While awake, if we're not directly experiencing sensations we are thinking about them. When asleep, the senses subside and mental consciousness functions in deep sleep and dreams. The six main types of consciousness are self-evident and, even though some Buddhist schools posit other types of consciousness, the most straight-forward presentation is that of five sense consciousnesses and mental consciousness. The *ways of knowing* indicate the inner path from ignorance to full understanding of reality.

### Ways of knowing





## The five sense consciousnesses

To understand sensory awareness, look at the blueness of the sky and pay attention to your subjective experience of the colour blue. Almost immediately you will start thinking about it or about something entirely unrelated. This means your visual perception of blue has faded and your conceptual mental consciousness has been activated and is thinking about the sky or some other thing. If you stop that sequence of thoughts and go back to the simple visual experience of blue sky again and again you will become more familiar with the meaning of non-conceptual visual perception.

Then analyse the relationship between your visual consciousness and its object. What is blue? We experience the colour blue when electro-magnetic waves of a certain frequency strike our retina and an electrical signal is sent to the optical region of the brain. Those electro-magnetic waves, or photons, are not the colour blue. The electrical signal from the retina is not the colour blue. The chemicals that transfer the signal from one neuron to another are not the colour blue. Even the subjective awareness of blue is not the colour blue: awareness is mind, and mind is not a physical thing. For us, the colour blue is experienced when there is a conjunction between those particular light rays, our visual apparatus, and our visual consciousness. It is the object of that awareness and, even though the light rays are external to our body and mind, there is no colour blue whatsoever existing independently of our mind.

People with normal vision all agree that the colour blue exists, and they know what is suitable to be called blue. They agree that most days the sky appears to be blue. But the sky is a mixture of colourless gases, and it cannot be the colour blue. The colour blue exists, but it doesn't exist within the mind or as the outer conditions that give rise to the experience of blue. We cannot say where it exists, and so the question is how does it exist? When experienced by visual consciousness, those electro-magnetic waves of a certain frequency are suitable to be called blue, but they are not blue in their own right. 'Blue' only comes into existence when a visual consciousness is initiated by those waves and we say, 'I see blue.' Without that mental experience, and without the label 'blue,' the colour blue does not exist.

You can make similar analyses of your other senses by focussing on the sound of a flute, the taste of chocolate, the smell of a flower, or the touch of a smooth object. The taste of chocolate is something you experience when a mixture of certain chemicals comes in contact with the taste buds and a signal is sent to the brain. Each chemical alone, or their mixture, is not chocolate taste. The electrical signal is not chocolate taste, and so on. You should try to ascertain what it is that you call 'chocolate taste.' Does chocolate taste exist independently of your mind?

Then you should contemplate your desire for sensory pleasures. What's the big deal? Why are you so preoccupied with the experiences of food, music, colours and shapes, perfumes, and sex? Why do you kill, steal, or lie to experience these transient and illusory pleasures? Why do you hurt, starve, or even kill yourself if you can't experience them?

With regard to mental consciousness, try a similar analysis of your conceptual sense of self. When somebody insults you and you angrily reply, 'Don't say that about me,' how does the

aggrieved 'me' appear to your mind? Where, and how, does that apparent self exist? Why is your self-image so insecure that it requires such an aggressive defence?

### **Conceptual consciousness**

Thinking, or conceptualising, is awareness of things that arises in dependence upon a mental image of the object. Unlike our sensory *perceptions*, which know their objects directly without an intervening mental image, *conceptions* are mental consciousnesses that apprehend their objects indirectly, through the appearance of an idea of the object.

If we've never heard of Superman, we can conceive an idea of him just by hearing his name and a description. Without more information, our mental image cannot be accurate, but if we have the fortune to actually meet Superman we can connect the idea generated by his name with a more accurate image derived from having seen him. Thus we can say that thought is a conceiving consciousness that apprehends the two images – derived from name and from experience – as suitable to be combined. Conceptions may have wrong or correct understanding of their object, but even correct conceptions have an element of error in that the conceiving mind confuses its mental image of the object with the actual object.

This is very important. Through our preconceptions we distort the reality of almost everything. By understanding that our ideas about people and things influence the way they appear to us, we shouldn't rush to judgement about people and events. Apart from the all-pervading wrong appearance of inherent existence, we think that the way things appear as good or bad and so on, comes from their side, not from us, and so we behave towards them in an inappropriate or mistaken manner. To live skilfully we need to assess each other's qualities correctly. First, we must recognise our distorted judgements and discriminations, and then we must work hard to cleanse our minds of their habitual projections, prejudices, and mistaken beliefs. Discordance with reality in the way we see each other is the main cause of social disharmony.

Subjective distortion, however, is not an inescapable problem. Wrong ideas can be transformed into correct conceptions based upon logic. Even correct conceptions with their natural confusion between object and mental image of the object can be transcended through cultivation of direct mental perception achieved on the basis of single-pointed concentration. This is a major goal of Buddhist meditation.

### **Wrong idea (wrong conception)**

When I was a medical student, the definition of a psychotic delusion was a *fixed, false idea impermeable to reason*. How many domestic arguments and divisions between friends arise from wrong ideas that approach this definition? And how many of those disputes go on to severe verbal and physical abuse and even murder, all from a stupid, mistaken idea? The same can be said for just about every civil and international conflict in history, where the causes, from religious bigotry to racial hatred or superiority, to economic greed, and so on, are based upon wrong ideas.

From the Buddhist point of view, the most insidious wrong idea is denial of distant results of one's actions. In other words, denial of karmic cause and effect or, in Judeo-Christian

terms, denial of heavenly reward for good and hellish punishment for bad. In both systems, these teachings, along with cultivation of love and compassion, are the foundation for ethical principles of conduct. If they are literally or just metaphorically correct, rejecting them opens the way to mistaken actions, such as unrestrained killing of humans or animals, which becomes a cause for future suffering. Whether the code of ethics is based upon the in-your-face presentation of personal karmic responsibility or the more comforting concept of a supreme loving being who deals out justice according to The Law, living according to non-harmfulness and compassion can cause no harm. It will bring peace and happiness to our own minds, and the ripple-effect will benefit society as a whole.

I accept that many paralysing guilt complexes, suicides, murders, cases of paranoia, wars, persecution, terrorism, and other past and present social ills are associated with, or ‘justified’ by, religion. But I believe most of these problems arise from mistaken interpretation, or selfish and deliberate distortion, of the meaning of the original teachings. As we shouldn’t judge a book by its cover, we shouldn’t judge a religion by the misbehavior of some of its adherents.

Buddhism does not assert a creator God or an entity who observes our behavior and rewards or punishes accordingly. The children of Moses were an unruly lot steeped in the worship of mundane deities such as golden calves. I think they could only comprehend the law of karmic cause and effect by seeing it in the form of an all-powerful God, a father figure, who judged and delivered the appropriate reward or punishment. My point is that the obscuring effect of attachment to the mundane pleasures of the present life pushes happiness away and only creates causes for suffering. So, even if such a being doesn’t exist, belief in him, in his Ten Commandments, and in an after-life would open the door to abandoning attachment. By avoiding harming others and cultivating love and compassion, the children of Moses would create the causes for a happy rebirth and would avoid miserable rebirths. Without even hearing the term ‘karma,’ they would be observing it in their ethics. They would not hold the wrong conception that denies karmic cause and effect. Again, I must emphasise that karmic cause and effect is not an invention of the Buddha; it is a natural law of sentient behavior, just as gravity is a natural law of the physical world. It can only be taught in a way that accords with the listeners’ varying capacities to comprehend. At some stage in the future, those of simple understanding will mature and will be able to comprehend and practise karma at a deeper level.

Buddhist *abhidharma* texts point out that wrong conceptions, such as the ones that reject the reality of past and future lives and karmic cause-and-effect, are not simple disbeliefs. They have five qualities:

- (i) They are views with which we feel comfortable because we don’t realise they bring suffering.
- (ii) We hold strongly to them because we do not see them as mistaken.
- (iii) We consider them to be intelligence.
- (iv) We build up a conceptual framework to support them.

(v) We speculate that they are correct.

It is imperative that we check on our beliefs and disbeliefs by expressing, discussing, and examining them in the light of these five points and any new knowledge we may have acquired.

### **Other wrong ideas**

Apart from denying the existence of things that exist in reality, there are wrong conceptions that assert the existence of things that do not exist, for example, the belief in a permanent self, or body. In this context, permanent does not mean eternal, it means static or not changing moment-by-moment. If we analyse the way we relate to our bodies, we will see that we regard them as unchanging entities. It's hard for our minds to accept gross change such as ageing or an incapacitating illness. And subtle moment-by-moment change is definitely not registered. Instead, we have the wrong idea that this morning's body is exactly the same as this afternoon's body. Seeing changing things as unchanging is a major cause of sorrow. Unable to adapt to the naturally changing world, we are deeply disturbed by the loss of cherished possessions, the severing of relationships, and our approaching demise.

Combining the wrong conception of a unchanging self with the wrong conception of an independent, inherently existing self is the foundation of selfishness, desire, and anger, and the negative karma created through them. Freedom from wrong conceptions and sorrow arises with the wisdom that directly perceives subtle moment-by-moment change and emptiness of inherent existence. These two realities, however, are not immediately obvious to our senses, so we must approach this wisdom through progressive refinement of conceptual understanding until we reach the point of direct mental perception associated with the single-pointed concentration called *calm-abiding*. There is no other solution.

### **How to achieve this refinement**

#### ***1 Doubting our present beliefs***

Buddha taught that misery is brought to an end by fully understanding with direct mental perception four simple realities, the four seals that identify Buddha's doctrine:

- (i) All contaminated things (consciousnesses pervaded by ignorance and things conditioned by karma – which includes our bodies, minds, and environment) are in the nature of misery.
- (ii) All products (things arising from causes and conditions) are impermanent (change moment-by-moment).
- (iii) All things are selfless (empty of inherent self-existence).
- (iv) Nirvana is peace (the cessation of ignorance and its resultant misery).

When we contemplate the four seals, we may generate doubt about permanence and impermanence. Doubt, a conception that wavers between the correct and the incorrect conclusion, has three types: doubt wavering towards the incorrect conclusion, sitting-on-the-fence doubt, and doubt wavering towards the correct conclusion. In relation to our body,

when we hear about the subtle moment-by-moment change of all physical things, we may have the thought, “Maybe my body is an unchanging entity as it appears to my mind, maybe it isn’t, I don’t know.”

Doubt leaning towards the correct conclusion is the doubt that Buddha encouraged us to cultivate when he said something like, ‘Don’t accept my words out of simple faith, only accept them after analysing their meaning and seeing that they are valid in your own experience.’ Using doubt to analyse reality gives the initial impetus towards finding the truth.

## ***2 Cultivating correct belief***

Through investigation we can leave doubt behind and accept that all things produced by causes and conditions are impermanent. But without fully understanding *why* something produced from other things is necessarily impermanent, this acceptance will only be a correct belief – an assumption that accords with the truth but is not based on sound or well-understood logic. This is an example of knowledge derived from listening.

To conceptually realise subtle impermanence<sup>47</sup> of the body, first a mental image of gross impermanence is generated through contemplating death or a house burning down. We then apply that understanding to the subtle change of our body, its moment-by-moment approach towards death, and an image of subtle impermanence will arise in our mind.

For something to be produced by a collection of causes and conditions, its causes necessarily possess the property of moment-by-moment change. Otherwise, they would remain the same and never able to produce anything. For example, the substantial cause of a ceramic vase is clay. If the clay was permanent, it would always be clay and could never be changed into a ceramic vase by the co-operative conditions of a potter and heat. The result, the ceramic vase, arises with the cessation of clay as clay, and it necessarily possesses the same property of moment-by-moment change as its substantial cause possessed. Similarly, mind changes moment-by-moment, with each moment of awareness arising from the cessation of the previous moment, and then ceasing as it gives rise to the next moment, and so on. With regard to persons, a person is merely imputed upon the appearance of a mere-I in relation to the physical and mental continuum and has no substantial existence. Nevertheless, a person is impermanent because the two components of the base in dependence upon which it is imputed, the body and mind, are changing moment-by-moment, and imputed things necessarily have the same characteristics as their bases of imputation.

Being always aware of the impermanence of conditioned things, we will be protected from shock and devastation when sudden loss of things, or death of people, occurs.

## ***3 Attaining valid inference***

When our analysis of subtle impermanence generates understanding based upon unshakeable logic, we have attained inferential realisation that our body is impermanent. Valid inference, in this context, is a conception that is incontrovertible with respect to its apprehended object, subtle impermanence of the body (a hidden thing). It is generated in dependence

upon a correct logical sign as its basis. This is an example of knowledge derived from analysis.

Although this inference realises subtle impermanence of the body, it is not strong enough to remove forever the wrong conception of the body being permanent. Conceptual awareness is never as clear as direct awareness, and it always confuses the actual object with its mental image of the object. Also, at this stage there is a strong sense of duality, a sense of distance between the object and the subjective mind realising that object. To abandon forever the wrong conceptions of permanence and of inherent existence, we need to attain yogic direct perception of reality.<sup>48</sup>

To achieve mental (yogic) direct perception of the mere-I being empty of an objective, inherently existing self, we must first attain calm abiding. This is a state of effortless concentration associated with an unprecedented blissful experience of physical and mental suppleness. Having attained this, we focus our mind on our inferential understanding of emptiness of self. By alternating between analytical meditation on emptiness and calm abiding single-pointedly focussed upon our understanding of emptiness, the knowledges of analysis and meditation come to support each other and we attain special insight. This is the first appearance of knowledge derived from meditation.

#### ***4 Achieving yogic direct perception***

Special insight (Skt. *vipassana*) is wisdom induced by the power of analysis. It thoroughly realises its object and simultaneously experiences the blissful suppleness of calm abiding. Initially, special insight is still an inferential understanding of subtle impermanence or of emptiness. Gross duality, the sense of separation of the subjective mind and its object, ceases, but subtle duality – confusion between the actual object and the mental image of the object – remains. In terms of meditation on the emptiness of self, with further power of concentration the mental image of emptiness of self fades away and the conceptual wisdom transforms into yogic direct perception of emptiness of self. This is also wisdom derived from meditation, and it is also special insight.

Subtle duality ceases, and the wisdom consciousness and its object, emptiness of self, cannot be differentiated, like water mixed with water. This wisdom is the direct antidote to self-grasping ignorance.<sup>49</sup> When it is first achieved, it extinguishes forever our intellectually acquired states of ignorance. With repeated attainment of yogic direct awareness of emptiness supported by greater and greater powers of concentration and accumulations of merit, the many levels of innate ignorance and the other innate mental afflictions are progressively abandoned. Eventually, they are all removed with the attainment of nirvana.

#### **Ordinary mental direct perception**

To complete our discussion of the table of ways of knowing, an example of ordinary mental direct perception is clairvoyance. In dependence upon attaining calm abiding, anybody, Buddhist or non-Buddhist, can generate clairvoyance. For example, to attain the clairvoyance of remembering past lives, on the basis of calm abiding, one generates clear, direct awareness (non-conceptual), of early experiences of this life, then the intermediate state prior to this life, and then the previous life. With increasing power of concentration one can go even

further into many lives before that. There are five types of clairvoyant power attainable on the basis of single-pointed concentration:

- 1 *Magical creations*: flying, speed walking, transforming one's body or an external object into something else.
- 2 *Divine ear*: being able to hear sounds at a great distance.
- 3 *Knowing others' minds*.
- 4 *Remembering one's previous lives*.
- 5 *Divine eye*: knowing the time of death, place of migration, and rebirth of self and others.

Clairvoyance is based upon the perfectly concentrated mind of calm abiding. I have spent three years alone in the Australian bush trying to achieve calm abiding, and I didn't even get to first base. So I have presented clairvoyance here as it appears in the texts, not from my own experience.

In life there are many examples of apparent psychic communication, especially amongst twins. And I'm sure most of us have experienced the uncanny coincidence of thinking of a friend and, at that moment, the phone or the doorbell rings and there is that person. There are also stories of children with memories of previous lives and whose descriptions of their previous family and environment have been found to be accurate.<sup>50</sup> Such flash-like experiences are not actual clairvoyance, but they do indicate the potential of our mind to have clairvoyance of knowing others' minds or remembering past lives.

### **Inattentive mental direct perception**

It is important to know that only one of the six main types of consciousness, or main minds, can be fully manifest at any one time. For example, when mother calls the children to dinner while they are watching television, they really do not hear her because they are thinking about what they're watching. When other sounds appear to their auditory consciousness at this time, that auditory awareness is inattentive and does not take in what is heard.

With regard to inattentive mental direct perception, when a sense consciousness ceases and gives rise to a mental awareness of what has been experienced, ordinary beings have a brief moment of mental direct perception that is immediately followed by conceptuality with a mental image of the sense object. That moment of mental direct perception is too brief to induce ascertainment of the object, and so it is called inattentive mental direct perception.

## PART FOUR: THE DISTURBING EMOTIONS AND HOW THEY ARISE



### *1 MAIN MINDS AND MENTAL FACTORS*<sup>51</sup>

Every moment of mental experience has two aspects:

- (i) General awareness of the object, experienced by the main mind – one of the six types of consciousness.
- (ii) Awareness of the specific features of the object associated with subjective mental factors such as happiness, unhappiness, love, anger, enthusiasm, and laziness.

For example, if we freeze a video of our summer holiday, the general object on the screen may be a beach scene and then there are the particular features within that scene – people, water, sand, sky, and so on, that evoke different emotions. Similarly, if we ‘freeze’ a moment of memory thinking about our holiday, the general memory of a pleasant event will be associated with happiness and perhaps love related to particular experiences during that event. Memory of an unpleasant event will come with sadness and perhaps anger.

Memories are experienced within the mental consciousness and, in the above example, the main mental consciousness is experiencing the memory image in general, and its secondary aspects, or mental factors, are experiencing the image according to their particular subjective tone: virtue or non-virtue, happiness or unhappiness, love or anger, and so on.

Mental factors are aspects of awareness that occur simultaneously with any of the six main consciousnesses – the five sense consciousnesses and mental consciousness. The description of mental factors enables us to recognise the details of what is happening in each moment of awareness and, by extension, how the stream of consciousness functions over time. In particular, this presentation gives insight into how karmic potentials are created and how they bring about their results. In an introduction to this subject, one of my teachers said:

If we strive only for the happiness of this life, we will forget our future life and we will make no preparation for it. On the other hand, by reflecting on the continuity of consciousness, we will realise that at death we will have no freedom to go where we want. Without choice, we may be obliged to take birth in unpleasant places. The absence of choice in taking rebirth is due to the influence of karma, our previous actions. When we understand that rebirth is determined by karma, and karma is created by mental factors, we will make a positive effort to avoid having to take rebirth without choice. If we do not understand the relationship between main minds and mental factors, we will be unable to



achieve our wishes, in particular, true cessation (the cessation of suffering and its causes). On the other hand, by understanding minds and mental factors, we will know how to create virtue through constructive mental factors and how to avoid non-virtue caused by destructive mental factors.<sup>52</sup>

Normally, we respond to pleasant or unpleasant experiences with impulsive bursts of habitual attachment or anger, through which we create non-virtuous karma. There is, however, a time-gap between stimulus and response. If we know how the mind functions, and if we have mindfulness of what is occurring each moment, we will be able to take advantage of that space and respond with a virtuous attitude rather than a non-virtuous one. Instead of an automatic response of anger, we can remember impermanence and the unsatisfactory nature of life under the control of karma and disturbing emotions, and this will help us to respond with patience, love, or compassion.

## ***2 EGO PSYCHOLOGY***

I feel it will be useful to compare the Buddhist presentation of mental factors with ego psychology based upon Sigmund Freud's insights into the way our minds function. Although we can rightly question some of Freud's conclusions that reflected cultural prejudices of his day, I have great admiration for his pioneering work in investigating and explaining mental function at a time when Western psychology and psychiatry were pitifully impoverished branches of knowledge and practice. Freudian psychoanalysis is still taught and practised today, but it has declined in popularity due to the rise of behaviorism and, more recently, cognitive behavioral therapy.

The central assumption of ego psychology was that mental disorders are symptoms of unconscious conflicts within the mind. This is in line with Buddhist thought, where the mental afflictions are said to have gross and subtle levels. The latter are not immediately obvious, but they can be recognised through the power of introspection during meditation. The *abhidharma* texts assert that, although karma and the mental afflictions are underlying causes for mental disorders, there are other conditions that can precipitate psychological problems. These are strong fear, grief, harm caused by malevolent spirits, and physiological imbalances.

I base my discussion of ego psychology on Kaplan and Sadock's *Synopsis of Psychiatry*.<sup>53</sup>

### **Id**

The id is present from birth and is the source of all the energy needed to run the psyche, including the basic urges for food, water, warmth, affection, and sex. According to Freud, the individual cannot consciously perceive this energy as it is below the level of awareness. I feel this 'energy' can be equated with the *eighty primitive conceptions* that cease after we stop breathing during the death process. And I would qualify Freud's idea by saying these conceptions are 'below the level of *ordinary* awareness,' because a skilled meditator can be aware of them at any time.

In his analysis of the way mind functions, Freud painted a picture of each newborn's mind being a mass of uncontrolled instinctual drives, or urges, for pleasure and to avoid pain, the *pleasure principle*. He called this innate state of mind, with its narcissistic, amoral, and relentless

demand for immediate satisfaction, ‘the it’ (*das es*). We call it the *id*, and I’ll swear that more than once I’ve heard exhausted parents refer to their young child as ‘it’ rather than he or she. An in-joke amongst psychiatrists is that a newborn is ‘an alimentary tract with no sense of responsibility at either end.’

## Ego

As we begin to grow, our *libido*, the urge for life, kicks into action and our troubles begin. According to Freud, during this period boys become attached to their mothers and aggressive towards their fathers, who they see as rivals – the *Oedipus complex*. Carl Jung used the term *Electra complex* to describe a similar psychological process where girls become attached to their fathers and hostile towards their mothers. While passing through the oral, anal, urethral, and phallic stages of psychosexual development we come face-to-face with the fact that the world is not what the *id* craves and demands it to be. Experiencing conflict between instinctive drives and the outside world, the mind constructs its own suitable reality – *the reality principle* – of how to proceed. ‘Ego’ is thus our progressively growing capacity for reason and common sense that acts according to the reality principle. Overwhelmed by the conflict between our inner drives and the reality of life, we initially rely upon the egos of our parents for comfort and direction, but gradually our own ego emerges to take control.

The ego, which Freud called ‘the I,’ arises at about six months of life and it includes a sense of self as we start to distinguish between ‘me,’ mostly referring to our body, and ‘not me,’ the external world of things and people. To protect and enhance the self-image, the acutely self-conscious aspect of ego urgently needs to understand the reality of things. This leads to investigation and questioning of the world, and our ego grows into a host of mental functions including knowledge, reason, creativity, and memory.

As Buddhism has pointed out, our initial sense of self is contaminated by the misconception of the self to exist in its own right, independent of the body and mind and the imputation ‘I.’ This is the fundamental flaw in our ego that is the cause of all our troubles and, to me, it is indicated by a translation of ego as ‘I myself.’ The main point of Buddha’s teaching, however, is that the two aspects of ego can be brought to full maturity through wisdom. The wisdom of ultimate reality (emptiness) opposes and stops the misconception of self, and the wisdom of conventional reality (dependent-arising, karmic cause-and-effect) perfects reason and common sense.

## Super-ego

As we resolve our Oedipus or Electra complex, we begin to identify with our parent of the same sex. In doing so, we incorporate the ethical standards of our parents – what is permissible and what is not – into our ego struggle to repress instinctual urges from the *id* that are incompatible with the reality principle. This acquired attitude of renunciation and prohibition is the *super-ego*, Freud’s ‘over-I,’ which, as we grow older, continues to develop through identification with our teachers, heroic figures, and admired persons. And thus our moral standards, values, ultimate aspirations, and ideals are generated in dependence upon others. Super-ego can be seen as our conscience; in Buddhist terms, it is equivalent to the mental factors of self-respect, consideration, and conscientiousness.

The danger of our super-ego inducing feelings of guilt, anxiety, and inferiority within the ego, or inflated attitudes of superiority and megalomania, can be averted by seeing the self-image not as a true, concrete self but as a plastic phenomenon with a beautiful potential for uninhibited love and joy that needs to be carefully nurtured like a newly planted garden.

### **Ego defence mechanisms**

In our quest for happiness and freedom from pain, we have to deal with super-ego restraint as well as the conflict between instinctive urges from the id that are painful or in opposition to the reality principle. Our egos employ defence mechanisms to protect the self-image from anxiety, social disapproval, and situations with which we cannot cope. For example, through *repression*, we stop memories, emotional impulses, and ideas from invading our conscious mind. Through *identification*, we incorporate into our ego the personality characteristics of our mother or father. These mechanisms are not calculated, they are unconsciously adopted behavior patterns that function to decrease tension and anxiety by covering up or warding off threatening impulses, thoughts, and emotions. Some ego defences are said to be necessary aspects of normal psychological maturation, others are recognised as neurotic behavior that is detrimental to body and mind.

**Narcissistic defences** occur ‘normally’ in children and, pathologically, in those suffering severe psychotic disorders. They include:

- *Denial*, where we refuse to perceive or consciously acknowledge external reality that is too threatening to our self-image and provokes strong anxiety. This can be seen in those with alcohol or drug dependency, post-traumatic stress, or terminal illness. For example, denying that one is an alcoholic or refusing to accept a diagnosis of cancer. When a friend of mine contracted polio as a young boy, his father went into total denial that his son had any paralysis of his legs.
- Children may sometimes replace denied reality with *fantasy*.
- *Distortion* is reshaping external reality to suit our inner needs, such as our megalomaniac beliefs and wish-fulfilling delusions.
- Through *primitive idealisation*, or “splitting,” we unrealistically see things as totally good or totally bad, and endowed with great power. We can abruptly shift things from the ‘all good’ category to the ‘all bad.’ Splitting is most commonly associated with those with borderline or narcissistic personality disorders. The former have intense but unstable relationships as they cannot combine another’s good and bad qualities into a constant, coherent understanding of that person. They idealise potential partners, friends, (and therapists) at the first or second meeting, demand to spend a lot of time together, and share the most intimate details early in the relationship. But then they tend to flip quickly from idealising others to devaluing them, feeling that the other person does not care enough, does not give enough, and is not there enough. A psychologist friend of mine describes a client who would go from idealising her partner, “I cannot live without him, “There’s no-one like him,” “Nobody understands me like he does,” “He’s an angel,” to saying “He’s disgusting, I feel nothing for him.” To escape the anxiety elicited by recognising her lover’s flaws, she saw her partner as two separate people. The good one was idealised and the bad one was devalued.

- To avoid unacceptable inner impulses we may *project* them externally, as in paranoid delusions of persecution. In extreme cases, our own problem may be seen as a problem in another individual or group.
- When our self-image has undesirable aspects, we may project them onto others so that we can comfortably *identify* with that person.
- Finally, we can *convert* inner conflict into physical symptoms such as blindness or paralysis.

**Immature defences** are seen in adolescents and adults experiencing stress and anxiety provoked by situations that are threatening to their self-image. These defences can be associated with depression, obsession, and compulsions. They can greatly impair our ability to cope effectively.

- We may *act out* fantasies through impulsive behavior that gratifies our inhibited desires.
- Or we may exhibit *passive-aggressive* behavior where we indirectly express our aggression towards others through passivity, masochism, or turning against our own self.
- When inner anxiety or hostility becomes too difficult to bear, we may *regress* to earlier stages of mental development.
- Or we may retreat into a world of *fantasy*.

**Neurotic defences** occur in adults suffering stress, obsessive-compulsive behavior, or a conversion disorder. They are used to cope with stress but when habitual they cause problems in relationships and life in general.

- We may become *control freaks*, trying to manage and take over everything that is happening.
- We may *displace* our desire or aggression from a frightening object onto something or someone who is less threatening.
- Through excessive preoccupation or worry about having a serious illness, we may manifest *hypochondria*.
- Or, to avoid stress, we may escape reality by temporarily *dissociating* our identity from its normal state and transforming it into a very different persona. In Mongolia, I was helping look after a little boy who had grown up on and under the streets – living in the vast network of tunnels for the city-wide central heating system. After even the slightest admonition, he would switch off his normally ebullient self into a state of total unresponsiveness. I wasn't sure if this was a neurosis or some form of epilepsy, but I good-heartedly gave him the nickname, "Windows."

Dissociation may be seen in those suffering childhood trauma where, to escape painful memories of events such as sexual abuse, they engage in daydreaming, or blank out the memory through traumatic amnesia. Due to their dissociation, as adults they may sometimes question whether they 'imagined the whole thing.' They may dissociate to the point of developing distinct multiple personalities that take control of their behavior at different

times. *Fantasy* is also common in abused children, who may dissociate and develop a fantasy world into which they can escape their painful reality. My psychologist friend had a client who escaped into a make-believe world where she had different parents and where white unicorns roamed in beautiful woods. This world was her ‘safe place.’

- Anxiety arising from the maelstrom of inner conflict between instinctive impulses and ego’s attempt to modify them in accord with the reality principle can severely limit expression of our emotions and inner feelings through *inhibition* or *intellectualisation*, where we restrict ourselves to an intellectual approach that rationalises, compensates, represses, withdraws, or resorts to ritualised or even magical explanations behind which we feel safe.

**Mature defences** are described as ‘normal adult adaptive ego defence mechanisms.’ It is said that although many of these have evolved from immature stages of development, they have been adapted to make our lives more happy, interesting, and meaningful. They give us a sense of control by helping us to subdue inner conflict and remain effective in our lives.

Mature ego-defences are considered to be healthy, desirable, and virtuous. From the Buddhist point of view, the mere term *ego-defence* indicates a different story. Obsessed with our self-image, we are never free from the anxiety of needing to maintain and enhance its appearance in the eyes of self and others. Therefore, even our ‘normal’ attitudes and behavior are pathological in that the mind is never truly at peace. If I have accomplished my purpose in writing this book, you will know why: the self-image that the ego is trying to defend is wrong. We are defending an illusion of a real me. The illusion exists, but a real me has never existed. The mistaken belief that the self truly or inherently exists is the source of our anxiety, and this can only be removed by the wisdom seeing ultimate reality, emptiness.

- *Altruism*. In general, altruism is the intention to forgo one’s own desires in order to enhance another’s welfare, induced by a sense of empathy for their needs. The ultimate aim of egoistic altruism, however, is the self-benefit of gratifying one’s instinctual needs through service to others. Whether we can fully separate a sense of self or self-benefit from altruistic thoughts is a matter of philosophical debate.

...

In Mahayana Buddhism, one trains the mind to oppose self-cherishing – putting self before others – by progressively cultivating the attitude of putting others before self. This altruistic attitude is perfected in the form of *bodhicitta*, which has two purposes. The purpose for others is taking personal responsibility to help all beings gain freedom from suffering. This arises from empathy, love, and compassion, and gives rise to the self-purpose, the intention to attain Buddhahood in order to be fully qualified to help all beings.

The greatest happiness in life is the joy of helping others, but an unconscious egoistic desire for this reward is not an aspect of *bodhicitta*.<sup>54</sup> The happiness experienced when helping others is simply the way it is, and the *bodhisattva* takes it on board with equanimity. Compassion alone can be associated with great sadness, but when compassion is supported by wisdom it is impossible to not feel peaceful and happy – because one knows there is a solution. The attainment of enlightenment requires vast accumulations of wisdom and positive psychic power derived from compassionate actions. These accumulations cannot be

acquired through selfish motivation, and so bodhicitta is true altruism and not egoistic. With the attainment of Buddhahood, the purposes for self and for others are achieved simultaneously.

- *Anticipation* is realistic planning to avoid future discomfort. It becomes neurotic when we worry too much and are over-concerned about the possibility of undesirable future events.
- *Asceticism* is the stopping or diminishing of pleasurable emotions related to particular experiences that one sees as 'base.' Inner gratification is derived from the renunciation of these things.

In Buddhism, renunciation is one of the three principal aspects of the path to enlightenment. It is the essential foundation for the other two: wisdom and bodhicitta. Its purpose is not to abandon pleasure, but to abandon desire for the pleasures of existence and even for the bliss of nirvana. To help our minds cultivate renunciation, Buddha introduced vows to avoid certain pleasurable experiences because, without the freedom of living within the morality of restraint, it is almost impossible to abandon desire. When desire is overcome, the vows are no longer needed, but even if one has reached that state it is important to maintain pure vows in order to help others by being a shining example of morality.

- *Humour*, in the context of a defence mechanism, is lightening our inner discomfort about certain ideas and feelings by expressing them in a round-about way that amuses others. An element of pathos remains, but we feel relief through indirectly expressing that which is too terrible for us to mention openly. This differs from wit, which is using humour to completely distract self and others from painful issues.
- *Sublimation* is re-directing the expression of an inner drive from behavior that is unacceptable to society or one's super-ego towards approved behavior. Examples are: channelling one's libido instincts from forbidden sexual activity towards artistic creativity, or one's aggressive impulses into socially acceptable sports.
- *Suppression* of thoughts is to consciously suppress an impulse or conflict in order to cope with the present reality and deal with the disturbing emotion at a later time. For example, "I'd prefer not to talk about this until a later time."

In conclusion, although Freud's structural theory of mind does not say what mind is, it clearly recognises and explains the overwhelming influence of self-consciousness in the ways in which our minds function and deal with the external world. In our quest to understand mind and how it functions, verbal descriptions are helpful, but the final and complete source of knowledge is our own mind. Our minds are our textbooks of psychology and, to fully understand Freud's theory, not to mention the Buddha's presentation of mental factors, we must compare what we read with our own experience. As we study the fifty-one mental factors we should be simultaneously trying to recognise the way they appear and function within our own minds.

### 3 THE FIFTY-ONE MENTAL FACTORS

In general, the six main consciousnesses are not specified to be either virtuous or non-virtuous. The sense consciousnesses remain neutral, but mental consciousness can be rendered either virtuous or non-virtuous according to the types of mental factor manifest in its retinue at any particular time. If a non-virtuous mental factor is manifesting, the main mental consciousness becomes non-virtuous, if a virtuous mental factor is manifesting, the main mental consciousness becomes virtuous. A non-virtuous mental factor cannot manifest simultaneously with a virtuous mental factor and so, by conscientiously maintaining our mind in virtue (conscientiousness is one of the eleven virtuous mental factors), with effort, we can protect our mind from non-virtue and its unwanted results.

The texts describe fifty-one mental factors. They do not all manifest simultaneously, but there are five *ever-present* mental factors that do occur in every moment of consciousness.

#### THE FIVE EVER-PRESENT MENTAL FACTORS

- 1 Intention
- 2 Mental engagement
- 3 Contact
- 4 Feeling
- 5 Recognition

**1 Intention** is sometimes called *will*, *urge*, or *volition*, and is a mental impulse that moves the mind-stream towards a particular object. Perhaps it can be likened to Big Brother Google which knows what type of news item we usually read and selects items that will interest us.<sup>55</sup>

Intention is equivalent to karma in that it is the main mental factor involved in actions that establish karmic potencies upon the mind-stream. When accompanied by a non-virtuous mental factor, intention is rendered non-virtuous and the action induced by that state of mind establishes a negative karmic potency. This will ripen as an unhappy rebirth and future unpleasant experiences. When accompanied by a virtuous mental factor, intention becomes virtuous and a positive karmic potency for a happy rebirth and pleasant experiences is established.

Intention is also instrumental in bringing about karmic results. For example, in Buddha's presentation of the 12 links of interdependent origination,<sup>56</sup> as one approaches death the 8th and 9th links, *craving* and *grasping* at life, ripen a karmic potency to the point of giving rise to its result. This is the 10th link, *existence*, where the fully ripened potency initiates an *intention* which propels the mind through the intermediate state and into *rebirth*, the 11th link.

Even after that rebirth result has been experienced, the original karmic potency still has the power to bring about further results, which can occur in other lives. There are two results similar to the cause and an environmental result. The first result similar to the cause is the karmic tendency for behavior that repeats the same type of action. The second is the arising of intentions that connect one with experiences similar to the effect the original karmic action had upon others. The environmental result is that even one's experience of the external environment is pleasant or unpleasant according to the original karmic action.

Geshe Jampa Tegchok<sup>57</sup> said,

What we normally refer to as *karma* is an intention provoked by an ignorant mental continuum. It is *contaminated* in that the mind is moved by an afflictive emotion. Uncontaminated karma refers to very subtle mental actions performed by those who have reached liberation (nirvana) but still need to take certain births in order to attain complete enlightenment. When aroused from their blissful nirvana by Buddhas, those who have completed the Hinayana path enter the Mahayana path by taking birth in a pure land. To take that birth they need a karmic action – a very subtle effort that they are able to perform due to the left-over imprints of the afflictions. These imprints are obscurations to attaining the omniscient mind of Buddhahood, but can be secondary conditions that help attain birth in the pure land. The principal cause for such a birth is the great accumulation of prayer and merit.

Similarly, in order to help sentient beings, arya bodhisattvas who have abandoned all the afflictions (but have yet to attain Buddhahood), are able to take birth on Earth through subtle effort made in dependence upon their obscurations to omniscience. These obscurations are like moisture needed to germinate a seed. Bodhisattvas can be born wherever they wish within the realms of cyclic existence, but they are not like Buddhas who can do so without effort. They require something like a fault in order to help attain the intended birth (by generating an effortful movement of the mind).

I find it very interesting that creation of a karmic propensity requires effortful intention associated with ignorance and its derivatives. This makes me wonder that, as conceptual mental activity is associated with movement of its supporting subtle wind quality, and as wind quality is capable of bringing about change in both the inner and outer physical elements, perhaps this is the way in which karma influences our personal world, and through which mind can influence external matter.

Even though our entire life is influenced by countless past karmas, the events of our life are not pre-determined. When we see a car being driven fast and erratically we can make the reasonable prediction, ‘There goes an accident waiting to happen.’ But it is not definite; the driver may come to her senses and slow down. By coming to our senses and cultivating renunciation, compassion, and wisdom, we can establish new intentions with wholesome attitudes which can override our karmic impulses to act non-virtuously, and we can create virtue instead. Or, we can continue on our foolish way and allow stupidity, anger, and desire to create new, unwholesome intentions that will override virtuous karmic impulses and we will act non-virtuously.

Thus we can consciously change the direction of our karmic momentum, and our life can become either more constructive or more destructive. It’s our choice. It is difficult but not impossible to change our karmic outlook, and we must do it. The key to changing our direction in terms of opening the door to liberation and enlightenment is the wisdom understanding the relative reality of karmic cause and effect and the ultimate reality of emptiness of inherent existence. And the purpose for turning that key is universal responsibility, bodhicitta born out of great love and compassion.

As Buddhism rejects the concept of an autonomous controller running our own show, there is no independent person separate from the body and mind, or within the body and



mind, that makes decisions. The mind makes decisions. Therefore, the term 'will' can only refer to the mental factor of intention with its accompaniment of either wise or stupid mental factors. Ignorance binds our mind to the suffering wheel of life. Wisdom and compassion endow our mind with freedom from karma and disturbing emotions; first to a limited degree, later to boundless freedom in all actions. I have been a celibate Buddhist monk for thirty-nine years, and if that's not a demonstration of free-will overcoming karmic impulses, not to mention mind over matter, nothing is.

**2 Mental engagement** is when the mind first moves to the general object by the power of intention, then engagement focuses the mind without distraction and pays attention to the specific details of the object. It may engage with the object lightly or with powerful attention, and is a foundation for the mental factor of mindfulness. The engagement may be in accord or not in accord with the reality of the object, for example, it may incorrectly regard an impermanent object as permanent or correctly regard it as impermanent.

**3 Contact** is the initial experience of the object, which may be a pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral object. Contact thus functions as the basis for the feelings of pleasure, pain, or indifference. As cause and effect cannot exist simultaneously, at any one moment the mental factor of feeling present is the result of contact during the previous moment of awareness, and not of the contact with which it co-exists.

**4 Feeling**, in the Buddhist context, has a more specific meaning than its general connotation of 'emotional state' as in our ordinary use of the word. Here, feeling refers to the experience of pleasure, pain, or indifference arising when the mind contacts a pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral object. There are various causes and conditions behind every experience, and pleasure and pain, either mental or physical, do not arise simply by a chance meeting with pleasant or unpleasant circumstances. Every feeling in life is a ripening effect of past actions. It is said that all pleasures within the wheel of life, from a cool breeze in hell to the bliss of the deva realms, arise from virtuous karmic potentials, and every pain, from a pin-prick to the excruciating misery of hell, arises from non-virtuous karmic potentials. The karmic potentials ripen as intentions that connect the mind with the particular objects. By reacting to pleasure, pain, or indifference with attachment, aversion, or bewilderment, new intentions create further karma that binds us even more strongly to the wheel of life.

Geshe Tashi Tsering<sup>58</sup> mentions four conditions associated with the generation of feelings:

- (i) *Natural condition*: the natural attraction towards pleasant objects and aversion to unpleasant objects.
- (ii) *Training (habituation)*: environmental and cultural influences that modify our feelings. (As a child I hated the taste of olive oil, now I like it).
- (iii) *Disposition*: karmic conditioning that affects our potential to feel in relation to sensory objects. (Dogs love eating feces, humans don't).
- (iv) *Personality*: gentle and mindful persons have feelings that are different from the rough and thoughtless.

**5 Recognition** distinguishes the particular features of an object and identifies it to be one thing as opposed to another, and it serves as a basis for memory. Recognition within a sensory cognition can distinguish people and other things as good or bad, or simply distinguish blue from red and so on, but it does not ascribe a name to the object. It is recognition within a subsequent conceptual cognition that gives names to things, but not necessarily so. The mental factor of recognition in the mind of a child who has not yet learned language can still discriminate between two objects, but it doesn't ascribe names. The power of recognition is essential in identifying what is negated by the view of selflessness.

To illustrate these five ever-present mental factors we can examine one moment of visual consciousness apprehending blue. This is a main mind that simply views the entity of blue, nothing else. *Intention* moves the main mind towards engaging in the blue object. *Mental engagement* pays attention to that particular blue object and holds the mind upon it. With the meeting of the visual consciousness, eye organ, and the object, *contact* experiences it as pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral, and *feeling* is the experience of pleasure, displeasure, or neutral feeling. *Recognition* distinguishes the blue from other colours although, as this is a sense consciousness, it does not ascribe the label 'blue.'

## **THE FIVE FOCUSING (OBJECT-ASCERTAINING) MENTAL FACTORS**

- 1 Aspiration
- 2 Conviction
- 3 Mindfulness
- 4 Concentration
- 5 Knowledge

The five focussing mental factors zero in upon specific characteristics of an object, such as desirability from the point of view of mental maturation on the spiritual path, and they hold the object with progressively increasing power. They are the mental factors to be employed during study or meditation upon any subject. In general, they accompany almost every moment of consciousness and can be virtuous or non-virtuous in dependence upon the object of awareness and associated mental factors. Here, we present those that function when mental consciousness is focussing upon a virtuous object.

To free ourselves from the suffering cycle of death and rebirth under the control of karma and mental afflictions, and to be able to guide others to such freedom, we need to unify wisdom and compassion in our minds. In other words, we need to follow the path of mental maturation and become a Buddha in our own right. These five mental factors are the means by which we can do this.

In every aspect of life, whether we are working on the spiritual path or on day-to-day survival, whether we're working for others in a soup kitchen or robbing a bank, success depends upon our ability to remain focussed on the job at hand. But even though the Banks may be robbing us,<sup>59</sup> we're not interested in robbing Banks. The presentation here refers to gaining concentration upon a wholesome object and goal. This sequence of five mental factors shows the essence of the mental path by which concentration, and its resultant wisdom and compassion, are attained.

**1 Aspiration** seeks a virtuous object of study, meditation, or practice with interest and faith, and wishes not to separate from it. Based on faith in a wholesome object, such as an aspect of Buddha's teaching, aspiration associated with its induced enthusiasm is the initial antidote to laziness in study, meditation, or spiritual practice. Faith is necessary for motivating us towards a virtuous goal not yet experienced, for meeting again a virtuous object from the past and, most importantly, for maintaining focus on a virtuous object in the present.

Aspiration to embark upon the path of mental maturation is founded upon faith and belief in the presentation of karmic cause-and-effect. It is the first of the six powers through which that result will be attained. If we fail to recognise our current state of being dominated by spontaneous and cultivated unwholesome attitudes and their resultant suffering, we will never wish to practise wholesome deeds and emerge from this woeful state.

**2 Conviction**, appreciation, or strong resolve stabilises the mind focused on the wholesome object found by aspiration. Generated by further study and analysis, conviction fully appreciates the validity and value of the object or goal, and this helps to prevent distraction. Through logical reasoning, it gives rise to firm faith that cannot be dissuaded by another's arguments or opinions.<sup>60</sup> If we lack conviction, the effort of aspiration fades and we start daydreaming.

As Geshe Rabten explains,<sup>61</sup> '(conviction) in an object only follows after its qualities have been ascertained as being worthwhile or valuable. Once (convinced) in this way, the mind will be far more inclined to pursue a certain form of behavior in order to either obtain the object or realise a goal embodied in or otherwise related to the object. In the practice of Dharma, (conviction) is an essential element for a meaningful state of faith and confidence. The stronger one's appreciation of the natures and characteristics of the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha, for example, the stronger will be one's faith in their infallibility, and the stronger one's motivation to realise one's spiritual goals. In fact, the Buddha himself, in the *Sutra Requested by Sagaramati*, has said that (conviction) is the very root of all that is wholesome.'

Conviction is the second power required for attaining unified wisdom and compassion. Strong resolve to attain that goal requires three levels of self-confidence or steadfastness:

- (i) *Self-confidence of independent action* is the thought to cultivate wholesome actions without relying upon others to do things for us. Maturation of the mind in the form of attaining wisdom and compassion comes from our own actions, not from somebody else.
- (ii) *Self-confidence of ability* is belief in our capacity to accomplish the inner path. Seeing that the majority of people are following self-centred activities, this self-confidence is strong determination to achieve our wholesome goal for their benefit.
- (iii) *Self-confidence over the afflictions* is the heroic attitude to never allow the mental afflictions to control us, and to destroy them with wisdom and compassion.

Even to achieve ordinary goals in life we need self-confidence. This is best achieved by doing things with a good heart because positive feedback occurs instantaneously, whereas doing things with a bad heart only gives negative feedback. While training our mind in the

wholesome attitude of self-confidence, we must avoid contamination of our mind by the affliction of self-importance, or pride. Shantideva says:<sup>62</sup>

Whoever has self-importance is destroyed by it:  
They are disturbed and have no self-confidence.  
For those with self-confidence do not succumb to the power of the enemy,  
Whereas the former are under the sway of the enemy of self-importance.

Inflated by the disturbing conception of my self-importance,  
I shall be led by it to the lower realms.  
It destroys the joyous festival of being human.  
I shall become a slave, eating the food of others,  
Stupid, ugly, feeble, and everywhere disrespected.<sup>63</sup>

This practice is difficult but discouragement achieves nothing. We must have self-confidence to accomplish our goal. The next two powers for achieving our goal are joy and rest. Joy is delight in engaging in wholesome activities, like the happiness of diving into cool water on a hot summer's day. Rest is skilfully taking a short break in our practice when our body and mind approach exhaustion. We need to reach our limits and then push a little bit further, but know when not to go too far. Overexertion can lead to sadness and abandoning our wholesome activity.

**3 Mindfulness** holds the virtuous object firmly with conviction and comes into operation by continually recollecting the object. Its three qualities of familiarity with the object, not forgetting the object, and remaining undistracted are the basis for concentration.

Geshe Rabten says, 'During single-pointed concentration, (mindfulness) is the factor responsible for constantly bringing the object to mind and holding it there. In the practice of moral discipline it is compared to the watchman at the doorway of the mind who has the task of being constantly mindful of the various mental factors – in particular the afflictions – that arise. Through recollection of one's vows and commitments, unwholesome mental factors are unable to gain a foothold in the mind and cause turmoil and chaos. While studying, (mindfulness) enables one to remember what one has learnt previously and thus allows a store of knowledge to be built up. In everyday life it gives order to one's daily activities through enabling one to remember what has to be done at particular times and so forth. In brief, (mindfulness) is compared to a treasure house that can store many wholesome qualities without letting them perish.'

Mindfulness, with its associated mental factor of alertness, or watchfulness of the mind (introspection), is the fifth power required for attaining unified wisdom and compassion.

**4 Concentration** is the perfection of mindfulness; it remains single-pointedly and continuously focused on the virtuous object. It functions as the basis for acquiring knowledge and bringing under control all things in our life. Not yet meditative stabilisation, it is the stability of mind<sup>64</sup> we have now.

According to Geshe Rabten, 'Concentration exists, to some degree, in the minds of us all. At present this faculty may be undeveloped and only able to remain on one object for a very

limited duration. But with continuous effort and practice, its ability to dwell one-pointedly upon a single object can be developed until, in a state of total mental quiescence, one may remain for days concentrating on a particular object. Furthermore, beings who have taken rebirth in one of the formless realms can spend aeons absorbed in concentration on extremely subtle objects such as the infinity of space and the infinity of consciousness. Concentration is also an important factor in the heightening of intelligence. When we are taking a photograph, the steadier we hold the camera, the sharper will be the picture. Similarly, the firmer and more intense our concentration becomes, the sharper and more acute becomes our intelligence.’

**5 Knowledge**, or intelligence, is the mental factor that examines the qualities of the object with fine analysis. It functions to remove doubt, to maintain the mind in virtue, and to see hidden phenomena through insight. It can be innate from past lives or acquired through the three activities of listening, analysing, and meditating.

Geshe Rabten: ‘Intelligence (knowledge) can be applied in unwholesome as well as wholesome pursuits. It has enabled people to construct highly complex weapons of destruction on the one hand, and codes of ethical conduct on the other. But by far the most important role it plays is that of discerning the nature of ultimate truth – selflessness. Both for the inference as well as for the immediate perception of selflessness, a keen intelligence is the vital factor in reaching a comprehension. Nevertheless, without being mounted upon the firm concentration of mental quiescence, it alone lacks any power to cause one to progress along the path to liberation. Similarly, mental quiescence and the various other levels of concentration also lack any liberating power by themselves alone. Thus it is essential to combine the firm concentration of mental quiescence with the intelligent recognition of penetrative insight.’

The sixth power, control over body and mind, arises when our wisdom and compassion have been cultivated to the extent where our thoughts and actions are spontaneously focussed upon virtue. As Shantideva says, like the stork, the cat, and the thief, we will move silently and carefully through life, accomplishing what we desire to do.

### **The six powers for maintaining focus on the path to wisdom and compassion:**

I have referred to this path as *mental maturation* because this indicates that, no matter what our age, while under the control of self-cherishing we behave like children but we all have the potential to mature into Buddhas. *Incorporated within the five focussing mental factors are six powerful conditions that we need to achieve our full potential.* These conditions, or requirements, should be contemplated in depth because they are the essential component for success in whatever goal in life we may set out to achieve. These six powerful conditions are:

- (i) *Aspiration* to mature our mind into the aspect of wisdom and compassion.
- (ii) *Conviction* in the possibility and our capacity to do this, and strong resolve to achieve it.
- (iii) *Delight* in performing virtuous actions, completing them, and doing more.
- (iv) *Rest*: knowing when to ease off to prevent physical and mental exhaustion.
- (v) Holding our mind focussed on the virtuous goal with *mindfulness* and *alertness*.
- (vi) *Control* over all actions of our body and mind. This is a result of the previous powers.

## THE ELEVEN VIRTUOUS MENTAL FACTORS

- 1 Faith
- 2 Self-respect
- 3 Consideration
- 4 Non-attachment
- 5 Non-anger
- 6 Non-confusion
- 7 Enthusiasm
- 8 Pliancy
- 9 Conscientiousness
- 10 Equanimity
- 11 Non-harmfulness

Almost daily we hear reports of hypocrisy, exploitation of vulnerable individuals, and absurd assertions associated with established religions, new-age faddists, and born-again of many types whose ideologies mostly abide at the ridiculous end of the spectrum. So it's no wonder that many of us resent being told that if we want to be happy we have to be virtuous and avoid non-virtue. It's not that we disagree with the basic concept, it's just that we suspect the motivation of those who are telling us to be good. And we have decided long ago to live our lives in our own way and not to become involved in any organised system of faith. Nevertheless, it will help us if the meaning of virtue and non-virtue is explained so that we can learn and incorporate this knowledge into whatever plan for living we decide to adopt.

It's not too difficult to recognise the simple reality that helping others with sincere loving kindness is good for their minds as well as our own. And harming others through self-centred anger, desire, or wrong views such as racism is bad for their minds and our own.

We may think this presentation of virtuous mental factors is nothing new. It isn't, but putting it into practice may be something new. If we're unhappy, we are not practising virtue; if we're not unhappy, we are practising virtue. The importance of understanding and practising these eleven virtuous mental factors is beyond expression.

According to Buddhism, virtue is that which, in the short term, brings a pleasant karmic ripening result and, in the long term, protects one from all suffering within the wheel of life by bringing one to nirvana and enlightenment. Non-virtue is deeds which bring unpleasant karmic results.

The eleven virtuous mental factors are virtuous from their own side. Whenever they manifest, the main mind as well as all other mental factors operating at the same time become virtuous by association. In general, a virtuous state of mind is described as being smooth, harmonious, and pleasant, whereas an afflicted or non-virtuous state of mind is disturbed.

**1 Faith** In my final year at high school, my favourite quotation was from the chapter on Evolution in my 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.”<sup>65</sup>

I knew nothing about religion, but I had always been sceptical, and this statement summed up my objections. Most laudably, my biology teacher, a devout Christian, told us that she agreed with this comment. She was a good woman, I liked and admired her more than any of my other teachers, and her stance against the myth of creation, despite her faith, established a challenge for my mind. For me, reason represented by science and supported by my teacher’s rejection of Creationism, was an unquestionably obvious approach to life. Yet I felt that it was her faith in her religion that gave her the inner strength, humour, and friendliness that made her so likeable.

At university and after graduation I realised that it wasn’t just religion that was obsolete, the entire Establishment needed a major shake-up to remove the paralysing influences of bigotry, narrow-mindedness, and intolerance. It was the sixties, and I wasn’t the only one, but even though most of my acquaintances straightened up after graduation, I never abandoned my distrust in archaic institutions – religious, legal, medical, and society in general.<sup>66</sup> So you can imagine my reaction when I first heard the lamas talking about heaven, hell, faith, and morality. Being a scientific flower-child meant that karma, reincarnation, nirvana, and enlightenment were also beyond my ken. Life was all so beautiful, not suffering as the Buddha would have us believe.

But something obviously happened,<sup>67</sup> and faith had a lot to do with it. There are many truths that each of us has yet to experience. In the meantime, it won’t hurt us to cultivate a correct belief in things such as karma and rebirth. We can do this by depending upon a trusted authority, or because we cannot refute karma and rebirth, or simply because they are logical. The meaning of faith is trust, confidence, and belief in something that is true. Believing in something that is not true is not faith; it’s a wrong conception. Because it takes effort to discover reality, faith is a necessary precursor that helps us overcome obstacles to achieving wisdom seeing reality. It’s said that faith can move mountains. Metaphorically, this is true, but so can wrong conception. Wrong conception lies behind the entire history of human atrocities up to modern day terrorism, so often performed under the guise of faith. This includes going to war under the banner, *In God We Trust*. A truly compassionate God would never bless a fishing fleet, not to mention an army.

### **Definition of faith**

Faith here refers to confidence in the reality of rebirth, karma, the four arya truths, and so on. It is the mental factor of appreciation and admiration of virtuous qualities and beings who possess such qualities, and has the wish to attain them. It functions as the basis for aspiration to create virtue. There are three types of faith:

(i) *Faith of conviction* is acquired by listening to teachings on the four arya truths, contemplating their meaning, and coming to the conclusion that they are both logical and in accord with one’s experience. The more one gains knowledge by listening, thinking, and meditating, the stronger becomes one’s faith of conviction. Faith and knowledge play mutually supportive roles until eventually faith is no longer needed as one’s knowledge becomes the wisdom of meditation that directly perceives reality.

(ii) *Admiring faith* admires the good qualities of things such as the Buddha and his teachings. It is a joyful mind that weakens the power of jealousy. It is sometimes called *clarifying faith* because it makes the mind clear, one can see where one is going. It endows one with strong determination and courage to achieve one's goal, and is the foundation of all virtue.

(iii) *Aspiring faith* is acquired when one contemplates the objects of faith, virtuous goals such as renunciation or great compassion, and feels convinced that such goals are attainable, and one aspires to do so.

The Buddhist path has three step-like goals attained by virtue founded upon faith: a happy rebirth, full liberation from cyclic existence (nirvana), and enlightenment, or Buddhahood. Simply enjoying happiness and freedom from pain without attachment is not non-virtue, but craving for happiness and aversion to pain in this life are disturbed minds, they are not virtue, they are not faith. They lead to negative karma and unhappy rebirth.

Even if one has never heard of rebirth in places other than heaven or hell, I don't think one has to be a Buddhist in order to have virtuous faith. Faith in the ideal of universal love and compassion, seeing Jesus Christ as the personification of these virtues, and aspiring to follow his path would be virtuous faith. One could create the cause to be reborn in a heaven and not in hell, at least for a while. Thus the first goal of the Buddhist path, a happy rebirth, can be attained by such a person. But if one is not aware of the possibility of nirvana or enlightenment and the paths to attain them, one can never aspire to attain these goals until, in this or a future life, one meets the Buddha's teachings, generates faith, and enters the paths to attain them.

Karma and the habitual mental afflictions are far too powerful for virtue to arise spontaneously without a cause. Virtue only arises through the ripening of virtuous karmic propensities from past lives or by meeting a teacher with virtuous qualities who inspires one to change one's pattern of behavior in the present life.

**2 Self-respect** shows is something about the self-image that we have to understand: it's not all bad. But the new-age mantra, 'love yourself first,' is as mistaken as the television advertisement extolling us to buy a product because we, 'owe it to ourselves.' These are bad. Self-confidence and self-respect are essential, but a self-image based upon the wrong concept of a 'real me' only encourages arrogance and aggression in our fight to the top. No peace or happiness can come of it. And that is in this life; in future lives we will pay for the way we've hurt others in our self-centred competitiveness.

To say that a person exists merely-labelled upon the body and mind and has no existence from its own side may give the impression that there is no 'real' person at all. The idea of a real me, however, has the mistaken appearance of an inherently existing self. When we're rejected by someone, we feel that if only that person knew the real me they would love me. Or, if we behave stupidly and hurt someone, in our apology we say, 'I'm sorry, but that wasn't the real me.' This concept of a real me that we carry with us at all times makes us so sensitive that our emotions react way out of proportion to any insult or praise, real or imagined, that may come our way. Such self-consciousness becomes a huge burden in life, and we're much better off without it.



## Don't throw out the baby

We shouldn't be afraid of there being no real me. We are able to function in life because we exist conventionally and not ultimately. If our self existed ultimately, in its own right as a real me, it could never function because it could never change. In every action the agent who or which performs the action necessarily changes in producing the effect. And so the self can only exist conventionally, that is, by being merely imputed upon the physical and mental continuum, which, in itself, is not the person. Then, as the base of imputation, the continuum of body and mind, is changeable, the person imputed upon that base is also changeable, and it is able to function. Whatever the body and mind do, the merely-imputed person does.

The real me that we hold so closely in our heart is a figment of our imagination. We see it as a constant, findable, self-existing me. This is the object refuted by the term 'selflessness.' The difficulty in recognising this false self is that the merely-labelled I, which exists, appears to our thought as a real me, which doesn't exist. And so we cannot distinguish between the self that exists and the self that doesn't exist. All the good and bad qualities of our body and mind are the basis upon which the merely-labelled I is imputed, and so it is correct to say that the mere I possesses these qualities. The wrong idea of self is that these qualities are me, in other words, they seem to be inherently existing aspects of an inherently existing, or real, me.

A powerful self-image and self-confidence are essential for following the spiritual path, where bad mental qualities are replaced by good qualities. Although our self-image and self-confidence are enhanced by having healthy and attractive bodies, that is minor compared to the inner strength we can gain from the other half of our base of imputation: our mind. No matter what our body looks like, if we have the inner qualities of an intact code of ethics, indiscriminating loving-kindness, and wisdom, our self-confidence and self-respect will be supreme. My view is that the spiritual path leads to a perfect ego, not to a state of non-ego.

Quite often the term 'egolessness' is used for selflessness. This can be misleading if we take it to mean we have to abandon the ego altogether. I feel it should be seen to mean that we must abandon the mistaken and harmful aspects of ego, in particular self-cherishing, that arise from self-grasping ignorance. In the early days, when my friends and I were discussing the merits of Buddhist philosophy, one of the antagonists in our group claimed that if he gave up his ego he would die. Knowing the extent of my friend's ego, but not knowing anything about the meaning of selflessness, I thought, *Yes, you probably would*. Now, with a small degree of comprehension, I see my friend's comment as a good illustration of self-cherishing ignorance and the fear that will arise if we mistakenly reject the conventional self along with an ultimate self.

As we have seen in the section on ego psychology, *ego* refers to a collection of factors in the mind which have some association with the self-image. At every moment, awake or dreaming, our thoughts are constantly re-affirming the apparent existence of a real me. This concept becomes so powerful that to question its existence in reality is too threatening to even contemplate. So, of course, when the non-existence of a real me is mentioned, we definitely think we would cease to exist, as did my friend.

Superimposing, or reifying, a real me onto our self-image and believing that this is what will survive death and go on to the next life is the extreme mistaken view of *eternalism*. This leads to obsessive self-concern. On the other hand, fearing a total extinction of self at death, or thinking that ‘selflessness’ means there is no self at all, is the extreme mistaken view of denial, or *nihilism*. Buddha avoided these two extremes with the middle-way view: the self is empty of inherent existence because it exists in dependence upon causes and conditions. This statement simultaneously dispels the two extreme views. ‘Existing in dependence upon causes and conditions,’ removes the extreme view of nihilism, and ‘empty of inherent existence’ removes the extreme view of eternalism.

Ego includes self-consciousness and consciousness of others; it has a self-image acquired in dependence upon an ever-increasing number of factors, including input from experience, learning, conditioning, and thinking. Thus the self-image aspect of ego is a hugely plastic appearance, continually changing – sometimes favourable, sometimes not – and not necessarily correct. There is much error in our interpretation of ourselves and the world, and there are many situations where we take on false ideas about ourselves, coming from both the outside world and from our inner world of misconceptions and wrong beliefs, some of which may be conditioned from past lives.

The removal of all that is false in our self-image, particularly the wrong appearance of a real me, is achieved by the incorporation of wisdom into the foundation of our ego. Because wisdom relies upon perfect concentration, and perfect concentration relies upon pure ethical conduct, this wisdom can only be acquired when there is a fully evolved superego maintaining pure morality. Thus, when such wisdom based on pure morality is accompanied by great compassion, my own conclusion is that the resultant Buddha mind is the unification of perfect ego and superego. My point is, the ego is not to be destroyed, it is to be purified of all that is mistaken and, on the basis of pure morality, it is to be united with superego until the entire mind becomes the perfect union of wisdom and compassion.

My teacher, Lama Thubten Yeshe, said:

To realise that only your own mind and effort can release you from your ego is most worthwhile. For years and years, all you’ve done is build up your ego, and under the influence of its hallucinated projection of the sense world, you’ve run, run, run from one thing to another, as if you’d lost your mind. To now have even a flash of recognition of this reality is most worthwhile and well worth the effort. Don’t think that without your own effort, without using your own wisdom, you can stop the schizophrenic mental problems that result from the energy force of your own ego. It’s impossible.

No lama believes that he can solve your problems without your own effort and action. That’s a dream. If that’s what you think, it’s a complete misconception. ‘God will do everything for me; Buddha will do everything for me. I’ll just wait.’ That’s not true either. ‘I don’t have to do anything.’ That’s just not true. You’ve already done everything and now you have to experience the powerful consequences. You can see all this through your own experience. Just one meditation session is all it takes. What I would like is for each of you to become a wise human being instead of one dominated by the energy-force of a super-sensitive ego.<sup>68</sup>

And so we return to self-respect. Self-respect is the mental factor of refraining from committing non-virtue through a sense of honour. Having decided it is wrong to kill, steal, lie, and so on, if the impulse to do so arises we do not act upon it because we feel it would be shameful to do something that goes against our belief. Based upon understanding of the first two *arya* truths,<sup>69</sup> and the decision to abide within the morality of non-harmfulness, self-respect thus functions as a superego that keeps our impulses of desire, anger, and ignorance in check. It does not induce the paralysing emotion of guilt.

Guilt is a weakness of the ego that occurs when the misconceived real me is seen in a bad light. The sense of being inherently good is shaken, our self-worth hits rock bottom, we see ourselves as inherently bad, and depression or violent self- or other-destructive behavior can be unleashed. Self-respect is mental strength that knows one's faults, is not shocked when they manifest, and is courageously determined to overcome them.

**3 Consideration** provides a second way of opposing harmful impulses: to consider the feelings of others. Restraint is induced by thinking that selfish and harmful actions towards others would meet the disapproval of one's teacher and the Buddhas and bodhisattvas. It would harm the faith that others have in oneself or in the Buddhist path.

Self-respect and consideration, the roots of all virtue, occur at times of turning away from non-virtue. Within other religions, they would apply in a similar way. Geshe Rabten says that self-respect and consideration for others are the determining factors whereby people are regarded as being noble or not. He says they are like a vessel that contains all divine and human virtues, as well as a strong fence that guards them.

In politics, religion, business, sport, in all human activities, we constantly see how the mighty fall when morality is loosened and misdeeds are covered up. Their inner strength evaporates and no matter how high their station in life, they become objects of ridicule. In our vicious *real me*-centered society, if those with self-respect and consideration for others are ridiculed, their inner strength only increases and they maintain their peace of mind. If they get upset and fight back with anger, they lose self-respect and consideration.

If we neurotically identify with our religion as an extension of our flawed self-image, shame and embarrassment masquerading as self-respect and consideration may be used to justify terrible things such as 'honour' killings of women, which are wrong in every respect. Genuine self-respect and consideration are based upon equal love for all beings. False self-respect and consideration are a sham, based upon self-centred anger, desire, and pride.

Virtuous self-respect and consideration arise from faith, or correct belief, in the four *arya* truths. Their essential function is to observe the pure morality of abstaining from all actions – physical, verbal, and mental – motivated to harm or disregard the welfare of others. To lose faith and develop the wrong belief that denies karmic cause and effect and so on, we cut our root of virtue and we engage in destructive actions without restraint. It's only when we are about to achieve the wisdom directly realising emptiness that we become free from the danger of cutting the root of virtue. So we must aspire to fully understand the four *arya* truths as quickly as possible.

## Identification with the teacher seen as a Buddha

As we have seen, the mental functions that are collectively called “ego” are the foundations of our sense of self and how we intend to deal with our world. Initially we identify with a parent, usually the parent of same sex, and then throughout life, consciously or unconsciously, we incorporate into our self-image likeable aspects of the personalities of many others. Buddhism uses this natural role-modelling process as the very foundation of the spiritual path. We train our mind to see the qualified teacher<sup>70</sup> not as an ordinary being but as a Buddha, and imagine becoming oneness with him or her.

Caught up in their own delusional states, parents and other ordinary role models are unreliable and potentially dangerous. When they let us down, our ego collapses and we can spiral into a void of meaninglessness and resentment. To avert this danger, the Buddhist path involves progressive reconstruction of the ego in dependence upon the support of a qualified spiritual friend, a lama or guru. We have to consciously abandon unreliable and dangerous personality traits cultivated and cherished over many years, and replace them with these eleven virtuous qualities founded upon wisdom. As our ego is both our sense of purpose and our defence against the world, it is difficult to deconstruct. Our deep, inner resistance to doing so can only be overcome through the support of a qualified teacher and, from our side, freeing our mind from doubt by seeing the teacher as a Buddha. With this awareness, our mind is cushioned from the potentially disastrous effects of ego-meltdown because we rebuild our self-image in the form of a Buddha in the aspect of the teacher.

Immediate resistance arises to the idea of ego reconstruction. We do not want to become a proselytising born-again extremist or a brain-washed cultist, and we can point out many features of the teacher that do not appear to be very Buddha-like. But, as the great lamas say, it doesn't matter whether, from his side, the teacher is a Buddha or not. From our side, if we see the person who conveys to us the Buddha's teachings as the Buddha himself, and identify with that teacher, we will gain the necessary courage and inspiration to use that information to dismantle our ego and rebuild it in a perfect way. As we are the only ones who have access to our own minds, we are the only ones who can do this. Not even a Buddha can transform our mind from its present unsatisfactory state to its full potential of Buddhahood. But we can do it by establishing a proper relationship with a qualified teacher.

In Tibet, Geshe Rabten was renowned for his great skill and eloquence in scriptural debate. Philosophical debate is a major learning method in the great monasteries, where deep understanding is cultivated by alternating between spirited defence of an unacceptable tenet and spirited assertion of the accepted view. One monk challenged Geshe Rabten by asserting that his teacher was not a Buddha. Instead of resorting to the well-known logical reasoning proving his teacher was a Buddha, Geshe Rabten replied, ‘You shut your mouth about whether my teacher is a Buddha or not.’ This mode of reply is a profound indication of the meaning of proper identification with the teacher. Tibetan monks roll about in laughter and delight when they hear this story.

Perhaps this practice may shed light on the reason for the Catholic Church's dogma of papal infallibility. It's not that the pope himself has to be infallible, but by seeing him as a pure representative and conduit of Jesus Christ's teachings, followers will gain strength of

inspiration to put the teachings into practice by maintaining pure morality through the mental factor of consideration.

There is always the danger of establishing a connection with a charlatan or false prophet. Even more thoroughly than checking the qualifications of the person we might marry, before entering this special relationship with a teacher we need to check the teacher in every way. And a proper teacher must check us as well. Even though the teacher may be well qualified, we may not be compatible or capable of following his or her particular method. My own teacher, Lama Thubten Yeshe, once said, ‘You Westerners approach gurus like dogs eating meat, wolfing it down without checking to see if it’s good or poisoned. Don’t think every Tibetan wearing red robes is a bodhisattva.’

The commonly heard shout from the playground, ‘Mummy, look at me,’ clearly illustrates how a child’s developing ego demands recognition and praise. Unfortunately, as we grow up most of us never break free from this need and it is always a factor behind our behavior and emotions. As Shantideva says:

When their sandcastles collapse,  
Children howl and despair;  
Likewise, when my praise and reputation decline,  
My mind becomes like a little child.<sup>71</sup>

During the current Olympic Games, an athlete who had just won a silver medal was totally distraught and in tears at not having won gold: ‘What will my mother and father think of me? I’ve let them down.’

An immature ego craves material possessions, sensory pleasures, praise, and a good reputation, and it lives in dread of not having or losing these things. Western civilisation emphasises self-sufficiency and independence as personal ideals but, under the influence of these insatiable desires and aversions, we find no true peace or happiness. We may project our parental ego-dependency onto our partners, even our ‘mother-country’ or ‘fatherland,’ but relief and happiness do not last. So we look to God, the great father in the sky, as the one who truly loves me, who knows me, who will never let me down. But if we don’t use our religion to mature our ego, this relief remains precarious as well.

When I took novice ordination with a group of ten young Western men and women, our teacher, Lama Thubten Yeshe, said to us, ‘From now on I am your mummy, your daddy, your boyfriend, your girlfriend. I will look after you.’

The Buddhist path thus begins by shifting one’s ego-dependency onto the lama. Then we train our mind to see the teacher as the embodiment of all the qualities of the Buddha, his teachings (Dharma), and the community of beings who have realised those teachings (the Sangha). At this stage, our ego-support is the external Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha. Then we gradually focus upon our inner potential to attain these qualities, and this becomes our inner ego-support. Our mind fully matures when our ego becomes the unwavering determination to attain Buddhahood for the welfare of all beings. Embracing others with love and compassion, we abandon all self-centred thoughts and behavior, and finally we leave the nest.

The descent into meaninglessness that may occur with ego-meltdown reminds me of Munch's image, *The Scream of Nature*. The dissolution of a magnificent sunset into a sky of blood is thought to represent the insecurity of life where meaningful existence is forever threatened by death, non-existence, and meaninglessness. The screaming figure in the foreground is our innate fear and anxiety of the underlying unreality of everything we stand for, in particular, our self-image. On occasions, we all glimpse this inner despair and quickly suppress it through our favourite ego-defence mechanisms. Depersonalisation, however, is something we must go through during the process of eliminating the falsity in our self-image through wisdom. Only a qualified teacher can guide us through the experience of letting go all that we have relied upon for psychological support. Why society considers this horrible image to be worth 120 million dollars is a good question. I think we see the painting as valuable because its truth resonates in our collective awareness. So what value should we place on the wisdom realising selflessness, the truth that eliminates this depressing reality?

The feeling one might experience when meditating upon selflessness can be something like my first parachute jump. My left foot was on the wheel of the small Cessna, my right foot was swinging in the slipstream, and I was holding onto the wing-strut. When my instructor said, 'Go,' I let go of physical support for the first time in my life. I wasn't aware of it, but my instructor told me that before the canopy opened as I was falling, my legs were kicking wildly, looking for the solid ground to which they were accustomed. As we begin to comprehend the meaning of selflessness, our mind fights wildly for affirmation of self and either reassembles a more subtle but still false self-image or falls into a pit of nihilism. The supporting canopy of the qualified teacher will enable us to float safely in the void, and a sense of exhilaration beyond imagination will be experienced. We can fly.

**4 Non-attachment** is the opposite of attachment. Although self-grasping ignorance is the root of all disturbing emotions, it is attachment to transitory pleasures and objects of pleasure that binds us to the cycle of death and rebirth. Attachment wishes to acquire and keep close objects whose good qualities are exaggerated and whose bad qualities are ignored. This attitude easily leads us into non-virtuous actions from killing through to idle gossip. As we approach death, attachment generates craving and grasping at life, which nurture karmic propensities for rebirth, and this is why some see it as the root of cyclic existence. The opposite of attachment is non-attachment, a strongly functioning, positive attitude that, far from being a blank, emotionless state, renders the mind peaceful by seeing through the false projections of ignorance and attachment.

On the Buddhist path, those who aspire to a happy rebirth cultivate non-attachment to the pleasures of this life; those who aspire to nirvana cultivate non-attachment to the pleasures of cyclic existence in general; and those who aspire to Buddhahood cultivate non-attachment to the bliss of nirvana – self liberation. In this context, non-attachment is the foundation of renunciation. With non-attachment, we are able to experience pleasure without clinging to the object or the experience. When the conditions for that pleasure cease, our mind is untroubled and remains focused upon virtuous goals.

When mother calls the children inside while they are enjoying a great game, can you imagine them instantly stopping the game and, with clear, happy, and concentrated minds, going to do their homework? If they had non-attachment they would. Can you imagine yourself being unperturbed and able to deal skilfully with sudden loss of the people and

things you hold most dear? If you had non-attachment, you could. And, if these separations don't occur sooner, you inevitably have to face them when you die. So, now is the time to overcome attachment.

**5 Non-anger** is the opposite of anger. Anger is aversion and a wish to harm objects whose negative qualities are exaggerated and whose positive qualities are ignored. There are three sources of irritation: sentient beings who harm us or our friends, the harm itself, and the causes of harm – weapons, thorns, sickness, and so on. This irritation leads to destructive outbursts of anger where we lose all reason and say and do things that can hurt dear friends, destroy treasured possessions, or harm our precious body. Non-anger sees the faults of anger and the underlying nature of impermanence and emptiness of problematic things, and has no urge to act aggressively. Remaining in peace with no intention to harm, it has the aspect of loving-kindness – the opposite of anger. There are four ways to train our mind in non-anger:

- (i) *Not blaming others when they blame us.* Whether guilty or innocent, we quickly defend ourselves by putting the fault back onto the person who is blaming us. Hyper-sensitivity to blame opens the door to anger; we fight back and lose our way in explosions of irrational accusation and counter-accusation.
- (ii) *Refraining from striking others when they strike us.* The school-yard and your typical Hollywood action film are excellent places to observe how we automatically respond with physical violence towards any attack. We justify anger and violent responses with, 'he deserved it,' just as politicians justify unwarranted invasion of other countries and murder of their citizens. As the Dalai Lama repeatedly says, 'Aggression is not the way to deal with Chinese atrocities in Tibet. Violence does not bring peace, it only breeds more violence.'
- (iii) *Not getting angry with those who are angry at us.* An angry response in the face of another's antagonism will only add fuel to their fire and will expose us to more pain now and in the future.
- (iv) *Not criticising others when they criticise us.* There is value in being criticised. If it is incorrect, we can cultivate patience, the antidote to anger. Provocation gives us the opportunity to practise patience. And, if the criticism is valid, we can accept it with appreciation and use it to overcome our pride.

**6 Non-confusion** is an innate or acquired clarity of mind associated with the knowledges of listening, analysing, and meditating. These oppose confusion by understanding cause and effect and clarifying how we can live within virtue. Ultimately, these knowledges comprehend the nature of emptiness.

Geshe Rabten says, 'Confusion is like the darkness in a room, and non-confusion is like the light that clears it away. It itself is not a form of intelligence (knowledge) but is a lucid quality of mind accompanying the firm intelligence that bears a relationship of similarity with either enthusiasm or concentration.'

**7 Enthusiasm** is the attitude of taking delight in doing virtue. It opposes laziness by getting us on our feet to engage in and complete wholesome activities. Laziness here is when we

know that the result of wholesome activity is worthwhile and attainable, but we're reluctant to pursue it. This prevents our entering into and attaining spiritual goals, it supports our mental afflictions, and we create little virtue and much non-virtue.

There are three aspects of this laziness that need to be overcome:

(i) *Laziness of attachment to pleasure-seeking activities*: attachment to mundane activities dismisses the thought to study and meditate, and strongly energises us to seek entertainment, watch or play sport, throw parties, collect things, and so on. This laziness can be overcome by reflecting on rebirth and karma and looking beyond temporary sensual pleasures to the never-ending happiness of liberation and enlightenment. Don't forget, you've been a cockroach scuttling under kitchen benches many, many times in past lives. Do you want to go back there?

(ii) *Laziness of procrastination*. With some understanding and desire to cultivate virtue, but no energy to do so, we put it off until later. Believing we will have time to practise later is a wrong conception. To overcome this laziness we need to reflect upon impermanence, the fact that we are definitely going to die but don't know when. And the most helpful thing when we do die will be our accumulation of virtue. Our hoard of wealth will be useless.

(iii) *Laziness of belittling oneself*: we want to practise virtue, there is no procrastination, but we become discouraged, thinking, "I'm stupid. This is for noble, intelligent people, not me." First recognise that this attitude is a type of laziness, and then overcome it with the compassion that takes upon oneself the responsibility to guide others to safety by finding the way out of the jungle of cyclic existence and then showing it to others.

### **Types of enthusiasm**

To avoid the trap of waiting for the right circumstances, we must make use of what we have now. The attitude, 'I could practise in a peaceful place, but not here,' is a lazy way of rationalising our non-engagement in virtue. We can gain enthusiasm for virtue by reflecting on the faults of self-cherishing and the benefits of cherishing others. Being a prisoner, a nurse, a busy office worker, and raising children are all excellent circumstances for helping others with loving kindness and opposing our harmful attitudes. The five types of enthusiastic perseverance that oppose laziness are:

(i) *Armour-like enthusiasm* is great joy in merely the thought of doing virtuous actions, the courage to confront and overcome negative attitudes in our mind, and determination to remain with the action until it is completed.

(ii) *Applied enthusiasm* is joy while engaging in the action.

(iii) *Unshakeable enthusiasm* overcomes discouragement once we have begun the virtuous action.

(iv) *Irreversible enthusiasm* is a sense of capability, 'I can do.' There is no sense of feeling inferior or unable to do the action.



(v) *Enthusiasm of not being satisfied* with virtue that has been accomplished, and wanting to do more.

The first four powerful conditions mentioned in the context of maintaining our focus on the spiritual path will function to empower our enthusiasm:

(i) *The power of aspiration* is a natural liking for wholesome goals, plus interest and desire to achieve them. This is cultivated by recognising that our present problems are a result of not wishing to cultivate virtue in the past, and it would be foolish to waste our present opportunity by not striving to benefit our self and others.

(ii) *The power of determination* to complete a wholesome activity without giving up. We may begin with enthusiasm but as soon as difficulties arise we abandon it. It is wise to first assess the possibility of completing a task and, if it is possible, we should go ahead with the full intention to complete it. The bad habit of giving up virtuous tasks adversely affects our future lives.

To support this power we can cultivate self-confidence by thinking that we can do the virtuous action on our own without relying on others to do it for us. Then we can generate confidence in our capacity to accomplish the whole path to enlightenment by thinking, “Most others have no power to free themselves from suffering, I’ve met the teachings, and so I can attain enlightenment and show them the way.” This attitude needs to arise from compassion, not from pride or conceit.

Finally, by regarding our mental afflictions as the true enemies of self and others, we can think, “I will never allow the afflictions to control me; I can and will abandon them through wisdom and compassion.”

(iii) *The power of delight* is to happily engage in virtue and to joyfully wish it to never stop. It is said that ordinary pleasures are like licking honey off a razor blade, the sweetness is inseparable from injury. The pleasure of virtuous activity and inner realisation of wisdom and compassion, however, always improves and has no associated suffering. The happiness of putting smiles on other faces is pure, the result has been achieved and there are no unpleasant side-effects.

(iv) *The power of rest* knows our limits and takes a break when the body and mind approach exhaustion. Pushing beyond our capacity can be disheartening and we will abandon that activity. After a short rest, we should take up the task once again with refreshed body and mind.

**8 Pliancy** is a special mental factor that only manifests after the attainment of single-pointed concentration upon a virtuous object. It is a pure state of mind that prevents the arising of mental or physical stiffness and enables the mind to remain effortlessly focused on any virtuous object. It leads to physical pliancy, where the body loses all tiredness and can remain in the meditative posture as long as one wishes. There is a feeling that the body is so light that it can fly. After passing through experiences of unprecedented physical and mental bliss, the mind settles into the state of calm-abiding (*shamatha*), and the meditator focuses his or her mind upon subtle impermanence and emptiness. Although we have yet to experience

the mental factor of pliancy, just the knowledge of its occurrence and brief flashes of experience during meditation can inspire us to persevere with our efforts to attain single-pointed concentration.

**9 *Conscientiousness*** is a caring attitude that protects the mind against any affliction from arising and harming one's virtuous conduct or the welfare of others. Associated with non-attachment, non-anger, non-confusion, and enthusiasm for virtue, it is aware of non-virtue and has the attitudes to purify past negative karma, to avoid future negative karma, and to avoid creating negative karma in the present.

Geshe Rabten says, 'However much we try to develop wholesome and positive qualities, we will not succeed if we lack the quality of conscientiousness. Living an unconscientious existence is comparable to being spiritually dead, since any opportunity for cultivating virtue is automatically squandered. Living with conscientiousness, though, is equivalent to having found immortality.'

**10 *Equanimity*** operates in association with non-attachment, non-anger, non-confusion, and enthusiasm for virtue, and is the mental factor that holds the mind on virtue and gives no opportunity for afflictions to arise. Specifically, equanimity occurs when one is meditating on a virtuous object and mental balance is attained: the mind is unaffected by the distractions of excitedly chasing objects of attachment, sinking into a foggy state, and unnecessary watchfulness.

**11 *Non-harmfulness*** is compassion unable to bear the suffering of others. It includes the courage and willingness to face any difficulty in rescuing others from suffering, and the absence of any intention to inflict harm on others. Simple compassion wishes others to be free from suffering; non-harmfulness will not hurt others even if they are harming us.

Non-harmfulness is the essence of all Buddha's teachings. When His Holiness the Dalai Lama says, 'My religion is kindness,' he is referring to the mental factor of non-harmfulness. All-embracing compassion arises strongly when contemplating the three sad situations:

- (i) Living beings are helplessly trapped within the cycle of death and rebirth through the force of their ignorant clinging to an imaginary self-existent person.
- (ii) Although beings invest so much energy to attain stable happiness in life, everything is transient and their hopes are inevitably dashed.
- (iii) Even though living beings appear to inherently exist, in reality they do not inherently exist, and all their woes are meaningless.

## **THE AFFLICTIONS**

If we judge society according to technological achievement, we are improving at an incredible rate. On the other hand, if we use our average state of mind as an indicator, society is degenerating at an incredible rate. Or maybe contentment, peace, and happiness have always been as elusive as they are now, and today's people are just waking up to a reality that previous societies have realised when it was too late: selfishness, greed, hatred, and confusion rule the world.

I think we are recognising that our collective mental state is a major problem, and this is why Buddhist teachings are so acceptable to Western society. In our striving to improve the welfare of others, we are at last beginning to move beyond the blinkered view of blaming selfish, angry, or greedy persons for the deficiencies of society. We are recognising that selfishness, anger, and greed in all of our minds are the real problems.

Totalitarian regimes work by controlling the minds and thoughts of their subjects to make them conform to the current ideology. By fostering ego-identification with The State or with The Religion, it becomes easy to manipulate peoples' pre-existing selfishness, greed, and hatred to the point of breeding an apparently limitless supply of political yes-men and suicide bombers. But the resulting atmosphere of fear and oppression is the opposite of what the people want. Even a so-called 'free society' has trouble in establishing and maintaining peace and happiness because transformation of our thoughts from self-centredness to virtue cannot be imposed from the outside. True freedom arises from changing our attitude in a positive way, the essence of Buddhist practice, and this can only be achieved voluntarily, with clear understanding of the purpose and with great effort. This requires the strongest motivator of all, which is not desire for wealth, pleasure, fame, or love. It is universal compassion. As mental afflictions based upon selfishness cause all suffering in the universe, positive thought transformation involves changing our attitude from self-cherishing to cherishing all others. Such transformation cannot occur spontaneously. We can only begin after receiving clear instruction on the nature of our mind and becoming inspired to eliminate our afflictions and cultivate virtue.

In general, an affliction is a mental factor whose nature disturbs the mind and prevents peace, making the mind difficult to subdue. We are born with the seeds of disturbing emotions that can be exacerbated or lightened according to our experiences in life. So don't feel guilty if your child behaves like a self-centred, greedy, angry little brat. It's not completely your fault – the little brat received those tendencies from a past life. Your role in parenting is to provide the conditions, mainly through model behavior, that will lessen your child's negative tendencies and enhance its positive ones.

Self-grasping ignorance, the single root of all afflictions, is expanded into the 'three poisons' – confusion, hostility, and longing desire. These are expanded into the six root afflictions and twenty closely associated afflictions. The six root afflictions include five non-views and five afflicted views:

## THE SIX ROOT AFFLICTIONS

- 1 Attachment
- 2 Anger
- 3 Ignorance  
(These first three are non-views)
- 4 Pride
- 5 Doubt
- 6 Afflicted views  
(A view is a belief that is held to be true; it can be innate or acquired, correct or incorrect)
  - (a) View of the transitory group as a real I and mine
  - (b) Extreme views
  - (c) Views of supremacy
  - (d) Views that hold wrong morality and spiritual disciplines as supreme
  - (e) Wrong views

**1 Attachment** is a mental factor that sees a contaminated object as attractive and wishes to acquire it. 'Contaminated objects' are things that have arisen from karma and mental afflictions, in other words, everything in our world. Although attachment observes its object correctly, it is a mistaken consciousness because it apprehends the object incorrectly: improper attention exaggerates the good qualities of the object or projects non-existent good qualities onto the object and attachment holds these exaggerated and super-imposed qualities to truly exist on the side of the object. This is easily demonstrated at the beginning of a relationship. Our friends may wonder what on earth we see in the chosen one and, after some time, the same thought may come to our own mind, or to our partner's mind. Gradually, or even suddenly, we realise that our partner is not what we thought she or he was. As the fire of attachment begins to cool, if we have no wisdom we will blame them for not living up to our unrealistic projections, and the fires of rejection and hostility will begin to blaze.

Attachment is a non-aversion to existence in the mundane cycle of death and rebirth. It exaggerates the attractiveness of the object, wishes to not separate from it, wants happiness, and results in suffering by disturbing the mind. Love and compassion are not selfish and do not exaggerate. They are concerned for the welfare of others and they increase one's sense of well-being. Seeking virtue, such as the desire to attain nirvana, is not attachment if it renders the mind peaceful.

Attachment seeks the pleasures of all three realms of existence. Other afflictions are easy to abandon, like washing dirt from a cloth, but attachment is difficult because it believes its projections to be true and cannot bear to be separated from the object, or it pines for objects not possessed. It is like oil on cloth, difficult to separate from the mind.

It's clear that, in the Buddhist view, attachment to ordinary pleasure and pleasurable objects is something to be recognised as faulty, and abandoned as quickly as possible. A Mongolian friend once said to me, 'Those who stop having attachment become like grandmothers, and others think they are queer in the head. No more fantasies, no more fun.' She was pointing

out the prevailing view amongst the nominal Buddhists in her country that there is nothing wrong in seeking and enjoying pleasure, as it's their birthright.

Let's make no mistake; pleasure and happiness are not attachment but, in our innate confusion about reality, we cannot experience pleasure without becoming attached. Attachment clings to all objects of pleasure, and especially to those we claim, or desire, as close friends or sexual partners. Attachment to another person is a self-centred, agitating emotion that craves to always be with that person, to have the pleasure of their affection, companionship, and the touch of their body. It sees that person as an extension of one's self-image, holding them as 'mine,' and is unable to bear even the thought of separating from them or losing them. Attachment is that which causes the roller-coaster fall from joy to misery when we separate from a partner, or the ongoing misery of not being able to attract the special person of our dreams. Attachment is the poison that causes the down-side in the experience of 'being in love.' Such experiences are mixtures of love and attachment. Pure love comes from non-anger and is a virtuous mind free from self-centredness and attachment. It is an outgoing sense of warmth in the heart that takes delight in the happiness of others and in making them happy. If we want happiness and do not want misery, we need to cultivate our capacity for love and abandon our neurotic tendency towards attachment.

Non-attachment is the foundation of renunciation, a mental state of peace, contentment, and freedom from craving impossible ideals of perfection. Others may well think that a person who has renounced craving for worldly pleasure is 'queer in the head' because renunciation goes against everything that our society is geared to attain. As for 'becoming like a grandmother,' in the wisdom of experience, old people see the folly of giving rein to attachment in childish pursuits of 'fantasies and fun,' and use their time in practising the art of loving. Well, that's the ideal. Unfortunately, many old people today seem to have gained little wisdom from life and have regressed into private worlds of resentment, bitterness, and loneliness.

The concerns expressed by my friend are the way of attachment. Too accustomed to seeking and indulging in comfort, the very thought of renunciation is difficult to entertain. I have made a stand against attachment by becoming a Buddhist monk. This is not an indication that I have gained renunciation; it's the method I have adopted to try to attain that result. This is not everybody's method. The alternative, which most Buddhists attempt, is to work on attachment while surrounded by its very objects. This is a bit like trying to put out a fire with petrol, but it's not entirely impossible. It's just hard, very hard. Burning in the miserable fire of attachment is like being in hell. But it can also be an opportunity to overcome misery by using those very flames to consume attachment and its causes.

### **Causes and conditions behind attachment and its associated suffering**

(i) *The seed of attachment is in the mind* because we are born with the tendency to become attached to pleasure and its objects. This is the cause of our regular episodes of misery when we are not getting what we want. The self-pitying, miserable thought of "poor me" only compounds the pain of having no pleasure. This thought can be overcome by giving the pain to our attachment. When attachment is making us cry, have disturbing dreams, toss in bed at night, and not eat, we should think that attachment is doing the suffering, and say to it, "Ah ha, enemy, take that for causing me so much pain."

(ii) *The object of attachment* is the other person. Remember, this is not the person him or herself, it's the idealised person we have created in our mind, the "indispensable companion," the "ideal father or mother for my children," the "unfailing source of happiness," my "special, perfect partner." Perfection is an unreal elaboration by attachment. Whenever we think of the other person, our mind confuses the actual person with our projections, and the knot in our heart tightens once again. For now, we can stop our mind from being obsessed with the other person by disassociating ourselves from our attachment, "Oh, attachment, there you go again. Leave off your fantasies and give me a break."

(iii) *Proximity* means that after a separation, mutual friends, the house and places where we were together, forever remind us of what it was like, and give us no space to view the world freshly, without projections. During the acute pain of separation, moving somewhere else can help, but we will always have to go back. If we can stand it, it is better to face up to and destroy our demons when and where they show their faces; just as long as they do not destroy us first.

(iv) *Social convention* is how we are raised to believe that, to be happy, we must have a partner, children, career, a place in society. This social conditioning comes from every direction; from films, literature, people in the street, relatives, even the pigeons cooing to each other on the roof. It's hard to resist, but the "Prince and Princess kissed and lived happily-ever-after" concept we were fed at kindergarten was a lie. Worldly happiness, if we taste it, is not real happiness, it is just a lighter degree of suffering, and is contaminated by dissatisfaction, jealousy, and pride. When supported by wisdom seeing reality, real happiness, the peace of renunciation and joy of loving others, will never go away; it gets better all the time.

(v) *Habituation* means we become addicted to the presence of our partners, and separation can lead to withdrawal symptoms that are even more miserable than coming off hard drugs. Maybe we should start up groups called *Attached Anonymous*. We shouldn't fret about withdrawal from the object of our attachment. Unlike drug withdrawal, there's no organic dependency, and the pain will pass.

(vi) *Inappropriate thinking* exaggerates our partner's good qualities, ignores the bad ones, and obsessively dwells upon our partner again and again to take us out on a dangerous limb of unreality. Fantasising a future that may never happen, and clinging to a past that didn't really happen, are seeds of insanity. Unable to live up to our unrealistic expectations, our partners feel smothered, restrained, and manipulated, and they bounce away from us, seeking freedom.

Attachment occurs because, confused about the real nature of our self-identity and the identity of our partner, we invent selves that don't really exist. We then cling to these mistaken projections as true, and add all sorts of imagined qualities to them. Our fundamental mistake is to see our own person and the person to whom we are attached as independent, solid selves that possess their body and mind and are experiencing their own lives. In reality, we are only bodies and minds, there is nothing that can be identified as a true self. The motivator and the experiencer of life is mind alone, and this is not self. Our individuality as persons is merely established by affixing names to our bodies and minds. Wherever our body is, we are; whatever our mind experiences, we experience. But there is no self existing in its own right, either as part of our body and mind or separate from them,

that is an agent behind it all. Attachment is based upon an opposite belief, a belief in selves conceived to exist in their own right, and so the ultimate solution to attachment is to realise the emptiness of being concrete, independent selves. Until that happens, we must cultivate temporary antidotes to attachment by thinking of its disadvantages:

- We and the person to whom we are attached must inevitably separate. Even if we do meet in future lives, we will not recognise each other.
- Attachment makes it impossible for us to concentrate on anything positive.
- Attachment is never satisfied, it wants the pleasure again and again.
- Clinging to unreliable and ever-changing “friends” obstructs our path to real happiness.
- Indulging in attachment completely wastes our human life with its potential to mature in wisdom and compassion.
- Running after objects of attachment is childish and quickly leads to rebirth in suffering states.
- Friends are unreliable. One moment they are our friend, the next moment they are our enemy.
- Friends become upset and angry even in joyful situations; it is so difficult to please ordinary people (those who have no method or inclination to improve their mind).
- Friends get angry even when we say something beneficial to them, and they turn us away from what is beneficial for ourselves.
- That love can so quickly turn into hatred is not a paradox. It’s because what we call ‘love’ is attachment incorporating others into our extended self-image. When we are rejected or abandoned it feels like a piece of our self has been assaulted and is dying, and we seek revenge. Even when our friends continue liking us, we blame them and get angry at them for not living up to our expectations.
- Unhappiness, frustration of desires, and anger arising from the many faults of attachment are the major reasons for the tragedy of domestic violence that affects every human society.

Being convinced that attachment is useless, our priority in life should be its elimination. We don’t have to be ‘queer in the head’. We just have to replace unrealistic desire for worldly pleasure with the intention to make others happy. Wherever this intention leads us, we should go happily. Why? Because real happiness comes from making others happy and so, from this point of view, the more friends we have the better. If we decide to establish a relationship with another person, we should do so with the thought to make that person happy by avoiding all unrealistic projections from our side. But we have to be careful. As Lama Yeshe once said to me, ‘Instead of just one crazy mind to deal with, you’ve got two.’ We shouldn’t believe that a relationship in itself will make us happy. It can’t.

**2 Anger** observes a contaminated object whose bad qualities are exaggerated and good qualities ignored by improper attention. Anger sees the object as undesirable and wishes to separate from it by harming or destroying it. Like attachment, anger is a mistaken consciousness because, although it observes its object correctly, it apprehends its object as actually possessing the exaggerated or superimposed bad qualities.

Anger can be directed towards a sentient being, suffering in one's own body or mind, or an inanimate object such as a thorn. There are nine situations in which we become angry at any of these objects: anger directed towards someone or something that has harmed, is harming, or will harm me; towards someone or something that has harmed, is harming, or will harm my friends; or towards someone or something that has helped, is helping, or will help my enemy.

Nobody likes anger. Just seeing an angry face makes children cry, and yet we continually become angry because we have no control over our mind, especially when it's under the influence of alcohol. We justify our anger by seeing faults in others, not in ourselves. To free our minds from anger we must gain control of our minds by cultivating patience. Just as the cure for alcoholism necessarily begins with acceptance that one has an alcoholic problem, the cure for anger begins with recognition of our anger as being an illness that hurts both self and others, and has no justification whatsoever.

### **The *obvious* faults of anger**

- Anger destroys our mental equilibrium; an agitated mind cannot enjoy peace. No matter how much our friends try to calm us by making jokes or offering food, we cannot be happy, we cannot laugh, we cannot sleep, we cannot enjoy pleasure, and our favourite food becomes tasteless.
- Anger throws our inner physiology out of balance and is a condition for both minor and major physical health problems. Habitual anger changes the circuitry within our brains so that we have ever stronger tendencies to become angry even at the slightest irritations in life.
- Anger makes us ugly. Even the most conventionally attractive face looks awful when angry. A good, quick antidote to the angry mind is, when you feel anger coming on, go and look in a mirror. Even if we dress to appear happy, our angry appearance frightens others and makes them sad. The way we look, act, talk, see the world, and feel about things are all transformed in a negative way.
- We forget the past kindness of friends and see them as our enemies, wanting to harm them or even kill them.
- Anger makes us irrational. We lose the ability to distinguish right from wrong and we misconstrue situations by seeing them as threatening in one way or another.
- Through anger we expose ourselves to danger and we destroy our precious possessions. There's no need for me to list examples, you just have to read or listen to today's news report.
- An habitual angry disposition makes our family and friends ignore and finally abandon us.



- The world appears dark and threatening to an angry mind and this can lead to paranoia.

### **The *hidden* faults of anger**

- Actions performed out of anger create karmic potencies for rebirth in suffering states.
- When anger is manifest in the mind it weakens or completely destroys our accumulation of positive karmic potencies.
- Every moment of anger increases the strength of the seed of anger in our minds so that in this life and even in future lives we will have a strong tendency to become angry.

We have to be thoroughly convinced that our own anger is our worst enemy. Other enemies, at most, can separate us from this body. Even if the entire world were our enemy, the worst they could do would be to kill us, but they cannot send us to hell. Our anger, on the other hand, causes unhappiness not only in this life but also in countless future lives, and it can send us to hell. We may superficially blame our troubles on karma, but if we examine the cause of that karma we will discover that most of the cause was anger in previous lives. Tibetan lamas say that ordinary people seek shelter from their enemies to avoid suffering but they do not recognise the inner enemy that is the cause of that suffering and from which they cannot seek shelter. The lamas think it is astonishing that we avoid and kill our external enemies but make no attempt to remove our worst enemy. Instead of stopping our anger, we allow it to remain within our mind. The one good thing about anger and attachment is that if we do not reinforce them through habitual negative attitudes they will naturally decrease and wear out whether we apply a remedy or not. To be happy we need to stop our habitual reactions of attachment to pleasant things and anger towards unpleasant things, and use the resultant peaceful mind to create virtue.

Anger destroys the virtue of holy beings, it makes the beautiful ugly, and the intelligent stupid. But the main reason for eliminating anger is that it has no wholesome purpose and it produces the most intense suffering. None of us wishes to suffer at any time, yet we continue to generate anger. These two facts are contradictory. So we must train our mind in the remedy, patience, and the opposite of anger, loving kindness.

### **The *underlying* causes of anger**

- (i) *The seed of anger in the mind* We are born with the potential to become angry every time we experience pain or cannot get what we want. When young toddlers manifest wild anger, the parents look at each other in dismay and say in unison, “He didn’t get it from *me*.” No, he didn’t, it came with his mind.
- (ii) *The object of anger* We see the person or object towards which we feel anger as totally bad, to the absurd extent that we hate everything about them – their name, their friends, their car, even their pet dog. We can become crazily, even murderously, upset when good things happen to our enemies. In our obsessive dislike of the enemy, we even get angry at bad things we imagine them to be doing, when, in reality, they may be thinking or saying good things about us.

(iii) *Proximity* When we meet the object of our anger, or we are just thinking about our enemy, there is great danger of an uncontrolled explosion into anger. We should prevent irritation towards them by freezing our thoughts and thinking about something else, or by leaving the room and taking a walk. It is much better to calm down in this way, and we may even be able to return to the room and deal with our problem skilfully.

(iv) *Social convention* We deliberately train and encourage our soldiers to hate others and, to all appearances, we do the same with our politicians, athletes, and business executives. It seems that most human activities are contaminated by aggressive competitiveness and overt hostility towards the opposition. Whose childhood has not been affected by some degree of angry parental conflict? And why do we parents still lose it in front of our own children? Forget infectious diseases, obesity, even poverty; the greatest threat to social welfare is the uncontrolled epidemic of anger. Nearly thirty children are murdered by their parents in Australia every year, usually as a result of anger towards one's spouse, I presume. How bad is anger?

(v) *Habituation* As we are born with the seeds of anger, we quickly learn and adopt the angry response to adversity as being the natural and proper way to behave. Does anyone seriously believe that the extreme violence to which we are exposed in computer games, television, and films doesn't contribute to a culture where aggression is accepted as the norm?

(vi) *Inappropriate thinking* Exaggerating our enemy's bad qualities, ignoring the good ones, and angrily dwelling upon them again and again places us on another dangerous limb of unreality. While we remain angry there is no way we can become friends or resolve the dispute, and it's our own anger which continues the hurt originally inflicted by the enemy. We can stop hurting if we stop being angry; it's up to us.

### **The benefits of patience**

The essence of patience is the virtuous mental factor of non-anger. It is a strong state of mind able to remain calm and clear in the face of adversity. Patience has many benefits:

- The patient person goes from happiness to happiness with few enemies, few conflicts, and close friendships with others.
- Having been patient and free from anger in life, we die without regrets and are reborn in pleasant places.
- By conquering the inner enemy of anger, outer enemies cease to exist.
- Patience is the best way to overcome those who are antagonistic to our chosen way of life. It empowers us to bear the austerities of practice with joy, and it protects us from the abuse and criticism of others.
- Patience pleases others and they want to be near us, to help us, and to accept our guidance. If we don't retaliate against harmful people they are more likely to become our friends.

- Patience endows our future bodies with beauty, which makes others automatically friendly towards us, and it gives us the strength to never abandon working for the benefit of others.
- Even the most conventionally ugly face appears beautiful when it is radiant with love.

### **There are four ways to oppose anger**

#### *(i) Prevent the cause of anger*

The root cause of anger is the innate self-grasping ignorance, and so the way to eliminate anger forever is to gain the direct realisation that the conventionally existing, merely imputed, self is empty of inherent existence.

Until we attain that wisdom, we must stop the immediate cause of anger – unhappiness and frustration of our desires. We do this by reflecting on the faults of anger and the benefits of patience, and putting patience into practice. When the causes and conditions for any effect are complete, the result will happen and cannot be reversed. So, whenever unhappiness and frustration are present, we must urgently invoke patience to prevent anger from arising.

#### *(ii) Voluntarily endure difficulties*

As anger always grows from the fertile ground of an unhappy mind, the most skilful way to deal with problems is to transform our reaction to them from unhappiness to happiness. Feeling miserable and belly-aching whenever things go wrong soon becomes an intractable habit and we begin to see the dark side of everything. This makes us difficult to please and always prone to anger.

The pain of habitual worry, anxiety, and fear is mainly due to a lack of understanding that any state of mind – happiness or sorrow, virtue or non-virtue – grows stronger the more it is repeated. Not realising this, we are quick to anger, blaming external objects and situations for our problems, and our misery only gets worse. While we remain under the influence of karma and afflictions we cannot stop problems, they will always find us, but we can stop the hurt engendered by an unhappy and angry response to them. To do this, we need to first abandon aversion to problems and then cultivate a sense of delight when things go wrong by seeing these situations as opportunities to train our mind in virtue.

To abandon aversion to suffering we need to convince ourselves of the utter uselessness of worry and anxiety. Instead of diminishing the pain, such attitudes actually increase the hurt of problems. As the great Indian master, Shantideva said, ‘Why worry and complain about something if the problem can be fixed? Worry only pours salt onto the wound. And, why worry and complain if the problem cannot be fixed? Prolonging our sadness in this way is self-inflicted suffering, it’s not a result of the problem.’

These days, it seems that instead of getting on with life when something goes badly wrong we are socially obliged to grieve. Then there’s the concept of ‘closure,’ an apparent need for grief to finally be brought to an end by exacting revenge on the perpetrator or finding out exactly what went wrong and why. My point is, the problem has happened, it can’t be reversed, and, even though it is necessary to prevent something similar happening to others by understanding the causes or restraining the perpetrators, there is no need for grief at all.

Of course it takes great strength to remain calm when someone close to us dies, so, before the inevitable happens, we should start cultivating that strength now by training our mind to deal skilfully with small problems. Then we can work up to the big ones. To not have grief should not be seen as heartless or callous, it can be a sign of wisdom.

Anxiety and unhappiness lower our pain and endurance thresholds so that minor problems quickly become overwhelming. When our mind is happy and free from anxiety, major problems are brushed off lightly. Instead of anxiously worrying about a problem, such as receiving an injection, and becoming completely stressed out so that the needle assumes the size of a harpoon, if we keep our mind in its natural state of peace we won't even notice that something has pierced our skin.

Then, just as those with acute appendicitis will happily undergo the pain of surgery to save their life, there are many ways in which we can use problems to our advantage. After a while, all problems will come to be seen as excellent opportunities. To overcome our anger, for example, we need problems to occur, otherwise we would never be able to cultivate patience. As anger is by far our worst enemy, things going wrong and other people hurting us are just what we want because they help us destroy our main problem. So our reaction to these things should be joy, not sorrow.

Suffering can also be used to train our mind in non-attachment: when a possession is lost or stolen we can reflect on the transient nature of all things, including our own life, and rejoice that we have been freed of the burden of having to look after something that could never fully please us anyway. Attachment to that object never gave us a moment of peace and, as a Tibetan lama once said when he discovered that a clock had been stolen from his room, 'How wonderful, the thief has now got something he really wanted. I rejoice in his happiness.' And he meant it.

Pride, arrogance, and contempt for others are far too common in our society. If we're honest, we have to admit that each of us has these afflictions at various levels. When we are shown photos of last night's party, whose face do we look for first? When we accidentally bump into a post while walking, do we not quickly look around in the hope that nobody saw us? Things going wrong, especially when they expose our stupidity, are the most wonderful thing. We should broadcast our faults, tell everybody. Laughing at ourselves is a great remedy for pride, and others admire us rather than putting us down for our big-headedness. When others succeed ahead of ourselves, instead of twisting up inside with anger, jealousy, or self-pity, we should sincerely rejoice in their happiness. The inability to take delight in the success and good fortune of others can drive us crazy and lead to foolish behavior. We cannot be happy.

Suffering helps our training in compassion. We know what others are feeling when they experience a similar problem and we can console and help them from our heart. They say that if you want the best treatment for a particular illness, find a doctor who has suffered the same problem.

The great Lama, Jikme Tenpel Nyima, wrote, 'We have to understand that whether something is pleasing or not depends entirely upon how the mind sees it. If we put effort into training our mind to always abide in peace and to extract joy from adversity, our mind

and character will become gentle and flexible; it will become broader and more open; we will be easier to be with, courageous and confident.’<sup>72</sup>

(iii) *Seeing reality*

Patience automatically arises with deep understanding of the reality of karma and mental afflictions being the true cause of suffering, and wisdom and compassion being the true path to cessation of suffering. When this knowledge is manifest, the world appears very differently to our minds: mundane actions and aspirations lose their urgency and meaning, and ordinary setbacks cannot upset our courage and determination to listen, think about, and meditate on the path of wisdom and compassion.

When we are angry, we see the object of our anger as being thoroughly bad from his or her side. Seeing their harm as a deliberate, pre-meditated act of hostility towards us, we justify our own angry response and try to get rid of them through physical, verbal, or even mental violence. We do not realise that their anger towards us is an inevitable result of a gathering of causes and conditions that have no intention to cause anger. It just happens, like a seed will ripen when the conditions of water and warmth are present. Water and warmth have no intention to cause the ripening, it is the natural potential contained within the seed. Even the seed itself has no intention to ripen. In the same way, people do not intend to become angry towards us, it just happens when the conditions are present.

These causes and conditions are karma in the minds of both parties, the seeds of anger in their minds, and distorted, wrong views towards each other. We see the aggressor as empowered from his or her own side as an enemy whereas, in fact, the aggressor’s hostility is powered by the gathering of causes and conditions which have no intention to cause anger. Our angry response is directed towards something unreal, an illusion of a person evil in his or her own right. Our anger is a wrong consciousness. As that person’s anger towards us is causing and will cause him far more pain than he can possibly inflict upon us, the best response is compassion. If we can’t feel compassion, at least we shouldn’t become angry.

(iv) *Not retaliating*

The essence of the practice of patience is to not retaliate but remain calm in the face of hostility or harm from others. We need to think that those who are angry towards us are doing so without control, they are moved by their inner afflictions to act in the way that they do. They are suffering from anger, and we are a condition that precipitated their anger. As their anger harms them more than it could possibly harm us, the appropriate response is compassion, not anger.

**3 Pride** Once again we must return to our ongoing investigation of how the person exists. When we say to somebody, ‘I’ll meet you at the coffee shop,’ there appears to our mind an image of my body and mind, I, meeting another body and mind, you, at the coffee shop. ‘I’ and ‘you’ are merely labelled upon the appearances of functioning persons associated with bodies and minds. This is how we exist as individuals: we are merely labelled onto the bodies and minds that are suitable to bear our names. There are no concrete, independent, findable selves existing either as part of the bodies and minds labelled by our names, or as separate owners of those bodies and minds. Mixed with the correct appearance of the two persons, I

and you, however, is the incorrect appearance of two concrete, independent, findable selves. These two falsely appearing selves are believed by self-grasping ignorance to truly exist in their own right, as they appear.

Self-confidence based upon recognition of good mental or physical qualities possessed by the merely-labelled self is not pride. Pride is an inflated state of mind, an exaggerated attitude of superiority that sees the false I as superior to others with respect to power and influence in society, physical strength and appearance, wealth, family background, knowledge, and so on. With this inflated attitude of self-importance, pride belittles and disrespects others and makes one's own mind agitated and unhappy. Believing oneself to be perfect, it sees no reason for accumulating virtue and cannot admit to mistakes, thus making purification of negative karma an impossibility.

*Abhidharma* texts present seven divisions of pride. If we examine our minds closely, we will discover that each of us possesses all seven:

- (i) *Simple pride* feels superior to those who are less intelligent, less wealthy, or socially inferior to us. It judges the way others dress, talk, behave, and so on, and discriminates against them as “low-class.”
- (ii) *Superiority* is a competitive attitude thinking that, even amongst our peers, we have special qualities and are actually better than them.
- (iii) *Extreme pride* is feeling superior even to those who are more intelligent, wealthier, and socially higher than ourselves.
- (iv) *Egotism* is when in reality, our body and mind are empty of being an inherently existing self but not knowing this, we think our body and mind exist as a true “me” and we grasp at that idea, thinking “I’m so wonderful.” It’s the “I” to which we give the thumbs up when checking in the mirror after dressing up for a party. Egotism includes aloofness regarding our level of education.
- (v) *Pretension* is with a grossly inflated attitude wrongly assuming we have spiritual realisations, we act in a contrived and holy manner.
- (vi) *Slight inferiority*, or false modesty. We act in a humble way in the presence of greatly superior persons, feeling that our humility itself is a special quality, much greater than others possess.
- (vii) *Wrong pride* is arrogantly thinking we are so special that we are above ordinary morality, or pride in our immoral actions such as killing or stealing, thinking these are good qualities.

Then there are nine types of pride according to the situation:

### **Comparing self to others**

1 “*I am superior to others.*” Buddha can say this as it’s true and isn’t pride. If we say we are superior to animals, this is true and isn’t pride. If, however, our attitude of superiority is an inflated mind that renders no peace and causes later disturbance, it is pride.

2 “*I am equal to others.*” ‘Others’ are those higher than us, and saying that we are equal implies an inflated mind.

3 “*I am inferior to others.*” Verbally we say we are inferior, but mentally we have the inflated attitude that we are better.

### **Comparing others to oneself**

4 “*Others are superior to me.*” This inflated mind accepts the superiority of others but thinks that oneself is also good.

5 “*Others are equal to me.*” This attitude sees equality with others but has an inflated idea of one’s own goodness.

6 “*Others are inferior to me.*” Is an inflated attitude of superiority that is clearly pride.

### **Rejecting certain qualities of others in comparison with oneself**

7 “*There is nobody greater than me.*” This is clearly pride.

8 “*There is nobody equal to me.*” Is an inflated idea that one is so perfect that nobody can compare with oneself.

9 “*There is nobody lower than me.*” Has the idea that, although one is the lowest, one will come out on top.

A function of pride is to have no respect for those with high attainments, to never show humility, and to always remain stiff and straight. This is a great obstacle to acquiring new knowledge from those who know more than us. The Tibetan lamas say that just as high mountains bear no grass, those who are high with pride can bear no knowledge. Apart from its present disadvantages, the future disadvantages of pride are that one is reborn in the three suffering realms and, even when reborn as a human, one is born in the lowest ranks of society. Some humans are so low that they cannot even speak to others. Again, the Tibetans say a stalk of barley with a load of ripe grain bends gracefully, but when there is no grain the stem remains straight and stiff. Like this, proud persons remain unbending and have no load of knowledge.

**4 Ignorance** (*ma.rig.pa*), in the context of being a simple lack of awareness of things, ignorance is a type of mental darkness, a confusion about the ultimate reality of things – their emptiness of inherent existence – and of the relative reality of karmic cause and effect. It is the foundation for the ignorance (*jig.lta*) that falsely conceives a self-existent person, and is a root for all other afflictions as well as the non-virtuous karma and the states of birth that they produce.

In the context of being a wrong idea or wrong view, ignorance (*jig.lta*) is the mistaken self-grasping conception that is opposite to the wisdom realising selflessness. Within our general unknowing of how things actually exist, things appear to exist in a wrong way and ignorance apprehends them to exist in this wrong way. This wrong appearance of true self-existence is an illusion that appears to our mind as a result of imprints from past lives. Not knowing any

better, we grasp at these false appearances to be true, and behave accordingly. Believing in a truly existing me, and holding our body and mind to be mine, the possessions of a truly existing me, we become self-centred in our attitude to the world. Then the afflictions of doubt, pride, attachment, anger, and so on are unleashed.

**5 *Deluded doubt*** is not the ordinary doubt of everyday life. It is a mental factor that indecisively wavers between the correct and incorrect understanding of selflessness, karmic cause and effect, and so on. Deluded doubt obstructs the attainment of liberation and enlightenment. As mentioned in part three, there can be doubt leaning towards the incorrect conclusion, doubt leaning towards the correct conclusion, and doubt in the middle. Specifically, doubt here refers to doubt in relation to the reality of the four arya truths. It is called *deluded* doubt because it is not just doubt in the middle which cannot decide, it particularly refers to doubt which leans towards the incorrect conclusion: “I’m not sure if karma and afflictions are the real cause of suffering, but I don’t think so.”

Deluded doubt and the first four root afflictions are called non-views, whereas the sixth root affliction is a view.

**6 *Afflicted view*** are the basis upon which all the other afflictions arise and cause so much trouble. In general, a view is a belief that is held to be true. It can be innate or acquired, correct or incorrect. Five incorrect or afflicted views are mentioned here. The first is the ignorance, (*jig.lta*), mentioned above, and the other four are further mistaken conceptions based upon this ignorance.

(a) *View of the transitory group as a real I and mine (jig.lta)*. Unaware of how a person is established to exist merely through the process of labelling ‘I’ onto a physical and mental continuum that functions as a person, this mistaken view sees the body and mind, or some part of them, to be an independent, unchanging, real I. Or, it sees them to be mine, the possession of an independent, unchanging, real self.

In other words, we all have a self-image based upon the mistaken appearance of a ‘true self’ that is the same as, or the possessor of, our physical and mental qualities, both our good and our bad ones. Whenever we think, ‘He touched me,’ or, ‘I’m so stupid,’ we are identifying with our transitory group – our ever-changing body and mind – as a real I. And when we say, ‘my body’ or ‘my mind,’ we are seeing our body and mind as possessions of a real I, as mine.

A more subtle explanation of *jig.lta* is that this ignorance observes not the body and mind themselves but the mere-I that is labelled upon our transient continuum of body and mind (which does exist) and holds it to be a real, self-existent I (which doesn’t exist). When this view sees the body and mind as “mine,” the dominant apprehension of that thought is the apparent possessor, a real, self-existent I.

It is essential that we come to understand this explanation of ignorance by checking our thoughts again and again and accurately recognising the false appearance of a real, self-existent I. Then we should thoroughly analyse to see that, if our self exists in the way it appears, how and where can it exist? This analysis leads us towards the wisdom realising that the merely-labelled I is empty of inherent existence.



At Nalanda Monastery in France, Geshe Jampa Tegchok taught:

What is the person who goes from life to life creating karma and experiencing the result? It is only the merely-labelled I, the 'I' imputed upon the collection of body and mind. Or, according to the tantras, the mere I is imputed upon the most subtle mind and its supporting wind. "Mere imputation" means deciding what the object is without engaging in thorough analysis. First there is the mere appearance (of what is suitable to be called a person – a functioning physical and mental continuum) and then the imputation is made upon that. If we clearly understand that the mere I is an imputation we will have a good grasp of this view, but if we just say "the person is a mere label," without understanding what it means, this is not enough.

In Tibetan monasteries we ask: "What is the mere I?" Monks think about it deeply, with much perspiration, and the teacher insists, "Come on, *what is it?*" The students must think more and more, feeling embarrassed, but this penetrating search for the mere I leads them to a good understanding. This essential subject must be contemplated deeply. The mere I is just the mere name labelled on the basis of designation. All phenomena are mere conceptual designations, and this includes the person. In all lower schools of Buddhist tenets, an illustration of the person is always found but, according to the highest school, the Dialecticists (*Prasangika*), an illustration of the person cannot be found. They assert that the person is only the mere label.

It's easy to see how this profound presentation of the way things exist can give people the mistaken and frightening impression that there is no reality or self whatsoever, everything is an illusion. It is important to avoid this wrong interpretation because it can cause us to reject the only antidote to the self-grasping ignorance, and we will remain trapped within the suffering cycle of death and rebirth for a very long time.

An illusion is something that appears one way but exists in another way, such as a mirage of water on hot sand. The mirage appears to be water but is merely refracted sunlight; it is empty of being water. Buddhism says that the way all things appear to us is like an illusion because, due to the effect of beginningless confusion in our minds, merely-labelled things appear to us as existing inherently, in their own right, and, not knowing any better, we grasp at this wrong appearance to be true. This is like somebody who doesn't know the district believing the mirage is real water.

*(b) Extreme views*

Once the idea of a concrete, unchanging, real self is established by the previous afflicted view, such a self can then be seen to exist forever, surviving death and going on to the next life, or, secondly, being completely extinguished at death along with the body and mind. These extreme views observe the existing I and mine of one's own mental and physical continuum, but hold the I, as conceived by the transitory view, to be either eternal or annihilated at death.

Such views are opposed to Buddha's presentation of the Middle Way which denies the two extremes. The eternalistic extreme view is opposed by Buddha's assertion that the mere-I is empty of being an independent, self-existing person. And the nihilistic extreme view is opposed by the assertion that the ever-changing consciousness survives death and continues

on to a future life where, in conjunction with a new body, it forms an unbroken continuity of a basis for labelling a mere-I. Thus the person, John, who is established to exist by the name 'John' being given to the mere-I, the person imputed upon the physical and mental continuum that functions as a person suitable to be called John, does indeed cease at death. But there is no break in the continuity of the mere-I because there is an ongoing suitable base of imputation for it.

*(c) Views of supremacy*

Further, views of supremacy regard the previous mistaken views, and the physical and mental continuum upon which they are based, to be correct, supreme, and the best for gaining spiritual realisations. These ideas cause attachment to mistaken views to increase.

These views are dangerous. The historical record shows again and again how we become attached to our beliefs of supremacy – religious, racial, political, scientific, sporting, and so on. These identifications become extensions of our egos, and we quickly resort to violence and will even murder anyone who opposes our view.

*(d) Holding wrong morality and spiritual disciplines as supreme*

These ideas see physical, verbal, or mental wrong actions to be correct and superior methods for attaining spiritual qualities. Not only do these practices fail to achieve their aims, they become the cause of unwanted and unexpected suffering.

A classic illustration of wrong morality is the story of a man who had the mistaken idea that a human rebirth must be preceded by a dog rebirth. To ensure he would be reborn again as a human, and knowing that pure morality is a main condition for human rebirth, he thought that, as dogs only engage in sexual activity when the female is on heat, he would be celibate and only engage in sexual activity with his wife when his pet dog was on heat.

And there are many examples from ancient India of wrong spiritual disciplines, such as the mistaken belief that one can purify one's negative karma by leaping from the banks of the Ganga River onto a trident in the hope that the three prongs will pierce the body evenly. Then there are examples of extreme asceticism, fasting, burning the body, and so on. Today we often hear the sad news of mass suicides by members of various cults, believing they will go somewhere happy.

*(e) Wrong view*

We can have a great variety of wrong ideas about things, but here, wrong view specifically refers to intellectually-acquired (as opposed to innate) mistaken ideas that deny the reality of things such as karma, rebirth, and the four arya truths – the things we need to understand in order to attain liberation and enlightenment. It's not simply not knowing about or disbelieving in karma and so on. Wrong view has to be a reasoned denial so strong that it has the power to oppose our roots of virtue (the mental factors of self-respect and consideration) and harm our accumulated virtuous karmic potentials.

Wrong view sees no need to abstain from non-virtuous actions or to cultivate virtue. Instead, we ridicule ethical standards and those who try to maintain them, and we engage in

non-virtue with enthusiasm and self-justification based upon our wrong views. Wrong view gradually destroys our virtuous potentials. First, the virtues acquired at birth are progressively eliminated, then virtuous potentials acquired since birth are eliminated. As wrong view grows stronger from small to large, our virtues disappear from large to small.

Wrong view may begin when we are trying to practise virtue and our business fails while others who are not involved in spiritual matters succeed in everything. We will think that they are right and we are wrong and there is no need to cultivate virtue. Or, we may become disillusioned by seeing others trying to create virtue and having miserable experiences while those who are not cultivating virtue are having a good time. The idea that karmic cause and effect is wrong will grow until we reach the point where, if someone explains that problems are due to previous negative actions and that the results of present actions will be experienced in future lives, we will not accept it, the wrong view will be consolidated in our minds. As this wrong idea grows stronger, our accumulation of virtue will decrease like a waning moon. This bleak prospect can be reversed by meeting fortunate conditions in the future and regaining our roots of virtue, but it's better to not lose them in the first place.

How does anger destroy virtue? Anger cancels or strongly diminishes the power of our virtuous propensities so that their future results will be minimal. But when wrong view cuts our roots of virtue it eliminates the causes of virtue. Without self-respect and consideration we cannot create any virtue, and so, among the ten non-virtuous actions,<sup>73</sup> wrong view is the worst.

Three-and-a-half of the first four afflicted views are not wrong view because wrong view must have an aspect of denial. The three-and-a-half all have an aspect of exaggeration, they superimpose something that does not exist on the object. For example, transitory view superimposes self-existence on the I and mine. The view holding mistaken views as supreme superimposes supremacy on mistaken views. The view of wrong morality and conduct superimposes supreme morality and conduct upon activities that do not possess them. The half refers to the eternalistic extreme view, which superimposes permanent, eternal existence on the I and mine. Only the extreme view of nihilism and wrong view are views that are denial. Thus denial and exaggeration include all five wrong views.

## THE TWENTY CLOSE AFFLICTIONS

The following twenty afflictions are close to and derived from one or more of the three poisons: confusion, anger, and attachment. They are distinct mental factors that can be recognised by their own characteristics.

### Five close afflictions derived from anger

- 1 Belligerence
- 2 Resentment
- 3 Spite
- 4 Jealousy
- 5 Harmfulness

**1 Belligerence**, or wrath is an extreme form of anger. Anger disturbs the mind simply when thinking about any of the three causes of harm – sentient beings, suffering in one’s own continuum, and inanimate things. On the other hand, belligerence arises when the object is nearby. It is an intense attitude wanting to inflict harm on that object, such as physically striking someone.

We can imagine a stereotypical image for each of these close afflictions, and always keep a mirror on hand to observe our face when our mind is upset. My image of a belligerent person is a red-faced, slightly balding male in his mid-twenties with blazing eyes and semi-intoxicated.

**2 Resentment**, or vengeance, is continual anger or grudge-holding, a lasting belligerence. A difference between anger and resentment is that the former can be directed towards any object whereas the latter is only directed towards animate objects. After belligerently striking someone who comes near us, the anger can fester in our mind and, when we meet them again, we strike them once more. This maintenance of an angry mind is the mental factor of resentment. Anger, belligerency, and resentment all have the same function of hurting oneself and others.

Anger is like a cancer of the mind and has no positive qualities whatsoever. His Holiness the Dalai Lama has said that holding on to anger is like swallowing poison and waiting for the other person to die.

**3 Spite** arises from anger and resentment and is a mental factor that wants to verbally abuse others. When we have faults to which we are strongly habituated, we refuse to listen to any criticism and we react indignantly with spite, denying any offence, and abusing our critics. Some texts include spite within the category of holding mistaken views as supreme.

There is a clear progression from the impulsive arising of anger to belligerency, the urge to immediately inflict harm, to resentment, being angry over a long period of time, to spite, which angrily abuses someone who exposes our faults. All four are disturbed states of mind that have the wish to inflict harm; the difference seems to be merely a matter of when.

**4 Jealousy**, or envy, is a mental factor that is disturbed by seeing the good qualities of others. Its entity is anger, but there is also some desire for the good things possessed by

others. Jealous persons can never remain happy because as soon as they see good things possessed by others they become disturbed. We're not just talking about obvious green-faced jealousy, there are many times when we see things that people, such as our neighbours, possess and think, "Oh, I want that."

There can also be an element of fear and competition in jealousy. We may see somebody about to get something we want, or somebody being friendly with the person we hope will become our closest friend, and, afraid that we will miss out, we start to dislike and even hate the person who appears as an obstacle to our getting what we want.

**5 Harmfulness**, or cruelty, is the opposite of non-harmfulness. Harmfulness is a lack of compassion that wishes to disturb or harm the minds or bodies of others. With no sense of love at all, we directly harm others, order someone else to harm them, or simply rejoice at the news or the sounds of others being hurt. Buddha strongly condemned harmfulness, saying that anybody who indulged in harmfulness in any of these three ways was not a disciple of his.

It's difficult to be always free from harmfulness. We are habituated to imagining revengeful deeds against our enemies, from cutting their minds to pieces with well-chosen words to cutting their bodies to pieces with sharp weapons. Or, our harmful attitude can manifest simply by refusing to answer a question. Whenever we find our mind dwelling on harmful thoughts, we should apply antidotes immediately, seeing our own harmful attitude as the worst possible thing in our lives. The negative karma of nursing a harmful attitude over a long period of time is much greater than a short moment of harmfulness.

In reply to the question, "Did Buddha justify causing harm to protect our village, monastery, or country?" Geshe Jampa Tegchok answered:<sup>74</sup>

Buddha said that he who possesses a harmful mind was not one of his disciples. Such activities are not justified. We should treat all sentient beings – enemies and friends – as if they are our mother. Buddha taught that, in regard to our personal practice, in deciding what to do in difficult situations we should weigh up and compare the risk of creating negative karma together with the potential for benefit in our actions. If the risk is small and the benefit is big, we can defend the village or monastery. If, on the other hand, the benefit is small and the risk big, we should not. Buddha said that if we die from the actions of others, only this life is lost, it's not a big problem, but if we violate our morality of not causing harm we will receive negativities that will influence hundreds of future lives.

We all possess these attitudes associated with anger, and harbouring them in our mind is like inviting a gang of thugs into our home. To memorise this list and think, *Tut tut*, is not good enough. We have to be intensely watchful of our mind, recognise the way these attitudes sneak in like party crashers who look acceptable but soon create mayhem, and get rid of them. Time and time again we justify our dislike of others because of what they have done, are doing, or may do to us and our friends. We rejoice when harm comes their way, we slander them and try to turn others against them, we seek opportunities to hurt them, we fantasise them doing bad things, we can't stop thinking about them. Our real problem is not the other person, it's our own mind.

## Three close afflictions derived from attachment

- 1 Miserliness
- 2 Haughtiness
- 3 Excitement

**1 Miserliness**, or avarice, is the mental attitude of intense clinging to objects of attachment, unable to give them away. The objects we cling to include our possessions, recognition and respect, and even our knowledge – we are unwilling to share what we know. From the karmic point of view, miserliness is the obstacle to practising generosity and it creates the cause for future poverty, both material and spiritual.

Miserliness is overcome by cultivating generosity, a willingness to give these things without attachment, hesitation, or expectation of reward. Generosity is a lack of attachment to one's possessions, body, and virtue, plus a sincere desire to give to those in need, even to give one's life. It includes all generous actions of body, speech, and mind.

To cultivate generosity we must overcome our psychological obstacles to giving. Fear of losing what we cherish most, and miserliness, are, at best, useless and, at worst, terribly harmful because they lead us to rebirth as hungry ghosts. It is said that even if one simply decides to give a gift, but retracts that idea through miserliness, one will create the karma to be reborn as a hungry ghost. Regret at being separated from things is easily stopped by the wisdom that sees how all things lack any true essence. Also, that to which we are attached is actually the non-existent qualities that we have superimposed upon the object. The objects of our attachment are not as good or as necessary as we think they are.

Attachment to our own being, our body and life, is stopped by thinking,

*My unclean body and life are changing without control. They are like a dream and yet, through my childish attachment to them, I create non-virtue and, when I die, I will go to a miserable rebirth. Just as the Bodhisattva gave his body to a starving tigress through compassion and without attachment, I can use my impure body to attain the stainless body of Buddhahood.*<sup>75</sup>

We have to eventually give up our body and wealth anyway, so why not make profit from them? Understanding impermanence enables us to practise both generosity and great compassion by regarding our wealth and body as the possessions of others and therefore suitable to be given away. Training our mind in generosity, and practising it, is immensely liberating; we will lose our fears of death, bodily harm, and losing our wealth.

## Types of generosity

- (i) *Generosity of giving wise counsel*

We give scriptural or experiential advice to help those who are suffering under the influence of their afflictions, and which leads them to ultimate peace or to some ordinary good. This highest form of giving is practised not only by teaching, but also by studying and meditating with the thought to help others with the insight one will gain. Whatever skills we have, we should enthusiastically teach them to others, in conversation to help others think correctly,

writing encouraging letters, and speaking soothing words to those in special need: the forlorn, the sick, the dying, and animals.

(ii) *Generosity of giving protection from fear*

However we are able, we should do what we can to free prisoners, to rescue animals from danger, to help people in difficult situations such as the sick, someone drowning, and those under threat from thieves or wild animals. And we should always be prepared to use our social influence or political power to protect those in difficult situations.

(iii) *Generosity of giving love*

Continuously viewing others with love from our heart makes both others and ourselves always happy. We've nothing to lose and everything to gain; loving others costs us nothing.

(iv) *Generosity of giving material aid*

Our wealth, our possessions, our enjoyments, even our body, can all be actually given or given simply by sincerely wishing. In general, we should give without miserliness, regret, or bias. The best things to give are things that are really helpful. Even if requested, we shouldn't give harmful things.

**2 Haughtiness**, or self-satisfaction, is a puffed-up mind of delight in an exaggerated and unreal goodness of our social status, the appearance of our body, our education, our cleverness, our youth, our friends, our possessions, and our power and authority. It feels that we have superior qualities that we do not, in fact, possess.

There have been many occasions when I've felt like throttling people who say to me, "Buddhism is good for those who need it," implying that they are perfectly okay thank you very much. Sure, there's some ego-defence in my reaction, and throttling people isn't very friendly, but really, isn't this the height of arrogance? This is exactly the problem with haughtiness. It's a self-satisfied attitude of superiority that sees no need to eliminate destructive attitudes from one's own mind or to cultivate virtuous qualities. One is fully satisfied with one's present life and there is no inclination to change things. One does not even bother to think about the sadness and misery experienced by others.

As Geshe Rabten says, it is not necessarily unwholesome to be aware of the good qualities we may have. What must be avoided is to overvalue them and conceitedly boast about them. This mental factor is very liable to give rise to self-importance (pride).

**3 Excitement** is a distraction, a disturbing mental factor where we are unable to keep our mind focussed upon a constructive object of study or meditation because we keep thinking about objects of sensual desire. Our mind can experience no peace and it's a major obstacle during meditation.

Excitement considers contaminated objects to be important and wishes to experience them again and again. We cannot remain focussed on virtuous objects because our mind keeps drifting off into sexual or other sensory fantasies or reliving pleasurable experiences from the past.

Anger and ignorance can also distract our mind from concentrating on a virtuous object, but this does not imply that excitement is present. Distraction, in the form of excitement, is strongest towards objects of attachment. Coarse excitement completely loses the object of meditation; subtle excitement occurs when mindfulness is still holding the object but part of the mind moves onto an object of attachment, like water flowing beneath the layer of ice on a partially frozen stream.

### **Six close afflictions derived from confusion**

- 1 Concealment
- 2 Lethargy
- 3 Non-faith
- 4 Laziness
- 5 Forgetfulness
- 6 Non-alertness

**1 Concealment** is the mental attitude that seeks to hide our present faults, deny our past faults, or keep our faults a secret. Some say that concealment is also related to anger and attachment. We slip into concealment when a well-intentioned person mentions bad qualities and actions in general, or our own bad qualities and actions in particular. Feeling guilty, we react with, “Not me,” and try to forget what they say or hide our faults. We can even convince ourselves that we were not at fault, but there remains an underlying sense of heaviness and discomfort in our mind. It increases the strength of negative karma and needs to be immediately opposed by confession.

In general, we should try to avoid negative actions, but if they are made we should declare them to others and not conceal them. The opposite of concealment is contrition, open recognition of our faults with no effort to hide or disguise them. Sincere contrition is the foundation for the practice of confession that has the power to purify negative karmas.

Confession is invoking four powers to oppose the four branches that establish karmic potencies on our mind-stream. These branches are the object of the action, a non-virtuous motivation for doing the action, the action itself, and completion of the action.

#### *The four opponent powers*

(i) *Sincere regret*, based upon contrition, is to openly confess our negativities to someone who can understand our words, or even to a photo or an image of our teacher or the Buddha himself. This opposes the completion branch, where our intended action has been accomplished and we are satisfied with the result.

(ii) *Reliance* refers to the object of our action, usually a sentient being who we have hurt in some way. Here, this power is to reflect upon the hurt we have caused others by our negative action, and also to reflect on the suffering of sentient beings in general, and to then cultivate great compassion intending to guide all beings out of suffering.

(iii) *Action* opposes the action branch of the negative karma. This can be any virtuous action performed with awareness of the harm we have caused and the wish to purify that action.



Seeing the whole incident in terms of emptiness of inherent existence is the most powerful remedial action, and there are many other particular purifying actions such as mantra recitation, prostrations, and so on.

(iv) *Promise*, or vow, to not repeat the action. This opposes the motivation branch behind the original negative action. Karmic potencies grow in strength over time and, if we do not immediately confess our negative karmas by putting these four opponent powers into action, relatively minor potencies will soon have the power equivalent to very heavy deeds.

**2 *Lethargy*** is a darkness of mind that makes the body heavy and inflexible, unwilling to do anything virtuous, especially to meditate. We all know this one. It prevents concentration by allowing excitement to arise and, even when one manages to focus on a virtuous object, it gives rise to laxity, a darkness that makes the mind unclear. As laxity is in the retinue of a virtuous mind, it is not the same as lethargy.

**3 *Non-faith*** is the opposite of admiring faith, aspiring faith, and the faith of conviction. When hearing about things which are correct, such as karmic cause and effect, rebirth, and enlightenment, non-faith has no appreciation for the meaning of the words and thinks it is all nonsense. With no wish to listen any more, it functions as a basis for laziness and is a complete obstacle to training the mind in wisdom and compassion.

**4 *Laziness*** is where the mind is preoccupied with engaging in current pleasurable activities and takes no interest in the idea of doing virtue to attain future happiness. By preventing virtuous activities such as listening, thinking, and meditating, it distances oneself from the results of those activities – liberation and enlightenment.

The disadvantages of laziness are not so visible because while indulging in pleasure we do not notice the time and energy that we waste. If laziness was more obviously harmful, like anger, we could recognise its bad effects and be motivated to repair the damage. Laziness is the principal foundation of all afflictions and whoever has intense laziness will never have strong virtue.

**5 *Forgetfulness*** doesn't refer to forgetting names and phone numbers, it is a negative mind that forgets virtuous things with which one has previously been acquainted. This leads to remembering non-virtuous things. In this way it serves as a basis for generating distraction and other afflictions.

**6 *Non-alertness*** is a type of deluded knowledge, the opposite of discriminating alertness, the knowledge which sees things correctly. Not knowing proper modes of behavior, and considering improper actions to be suitable, non-alertness is a careless indifference that leads us to engaging in physical, verbal, and mental actions of non-virtue. It also prevents us practising the four opponent powers as a remedy for negative karmas. Even if we have faith and the experience of listening to many teachings, we can lose everything if we do not have discriminating alertness.

## Two close afflictions derived from both attachment and confusion

- 1 Pretension
- 2 Deceit

**1 Pretension** is the false assumption of powers such as clairvoyance or some other spiritual attainment by Buddhist monks strongly attached to receiving offerings and respect with the purpose of deceiving others to obtain something from them. This mental factor is the basis of the five wrong ways in which monks may try to get what they want. Lay people too are not free from these five wrong livelihoods:

(i) *Contrived behavior* is motivated by the desire to receive offerings, money, respect, or honour from others we make a show of being friendly, kind, wise, and so on, any quality that will impress people but which we do not in fact possess. I wouldn't know, but politicians and used-car dealers are reputed to manifest this kind of behavior.

(ii) *Flattery* is speaking soft and pleasing words with desire to receive presents or honour from others. If there is no desire for material gain or honour, speaking pleasing things to others is not an affliction. One's words can be a comfort for their minds.

(iii) *Hinting* is saying something like "I wish I had a watch just like yours," with the hope that it will be given to you.

(iv) *Concealed threat* is like saying, "You have so much wealth, it is good to be generous and there are many faults of miserliness, so you should make offerings to me." It can also refer to threatening others by saying "If you do not give you will be reborn as a hungry ghost, you should be generous."

(v) *Making a small offering with the hope of a large return* such as saying, "The offering you gave me last year was most useful but now it has run out," with the wish that you will receive the same again. Or it can be giving things with the thought that it will make the receiver feel obliged to give a large gift to oneself.

**2 Deceit** is again, through desire for material gain or respect, hiding our faults from others. From the Buddhist point of view, covering up our faults by pretending to be intelligent is stupid because, no matter how much we pretend to be clever, we cannot hide our faults from the countless Buddhas and bodhisattvas. Being mindful that we are always in the presence of the Buddhas who can see our faults clearly, and thinking it would be shameful to be dishonest before them, is invoking the virtuous mental factor of consideration to oppose deceit.

In the *Sutra Arising From Kasyapa's Question*, Buddha taught that the mental factors of pretension and deceit are thoroughly unwholesome. Not only do they deceive ourselves, they deceive others who trust us. At the same time, we control them by trickery and lying.

## Four afflictions derived from all three mental poisons

- 1 No self-respect
- 2 Inconsideration
- 3 Non-conscientiousness
- 4 Distraction

**1 No self-respect** is an attitude of not restraining oneself from committing a negative action by not caring about a personal code of ethics. Just as self-respect is a root of all virtue, a lack of self-respect causes much unwholesome behavior. It is the attitude of a monk who drinks alcohol without thinking about it. The opposite in this case is to think, *I am a monk and taking alcohol is forbidden, therefore I shall not drink.*

**2 Inconsideration** is the mental factor of not abstaining from unwholesome activity by not caring about the opinion of others or the effect the action has upon them. It's the opposite of the virtuous mental factor of consideration. For example, it is the opposite of the thought: I will not do this because it will make others unhappy. If a monk acts as he likes in the presence of lay people they will think that all monks behave in this way, they will have a bad opinion about monasticism and their faith will be harmed.

No self-respect and inconsideration assist many other afflictions to arise because when they are manifest we have no power to abstain from non-virtue, we engage in it without hesitation. They are said to be the roots of all non-virtue.

**3 Non-conscientiousness** is particularly associated with laziness and is not abstaining from bad actions but continuing on with them. Non-conscientiousness allows our mind to be taken over by the afflictions and, as our non-virtue increases, our previously accumulated virtue is lost.

**4 Distraction** causes the mind to leap away from the virtuous meditation object and follow a thought related to the three poisons. Distraction makes our mind unable to abide in virtue and is a major obstacle to attaining freedom from attachment because we need strong concentration on a virtuous object in order to overcome the afflictions.

If we're trying to concentrate and our mind starts thinking about healing the sick, this virtuous distraction is not the afflicted distraction under consideration here. The mental factor of excitement is an afflicted distraction that specifically goes to objects of desire.

While trying to concentrate, any sensory awareness, such as a sound, can immediately cause our mind to leave the object. Or we can simply think of some sensory pleasure, this is excitement. Laxity (mentioned above) and excitement are the principal obstacles to concentration. Another distraction is hoping for a sign of recognition that we are a great meditator. Like Snoopy sitting on top of his kennel and seeing himself as a World War 1 Flying Ace, we sit on our cushion seeing ourselves as great modern yogis or yoginis. We have to be aware of the egocentric, puffed-up attitude of self-importance that may arise when we are engaging in any virtuous action.

## The four variable mental factors

- 1 Sleep
- 2 Regret
- 3 Investigation
- 4 Analysis

The last four mental factors are called *variable* because they are not virtuous or non-virtuous from their own side but can become virtuous, non-virtuous, or neutral according to the type of mental factors that accompany them. For example, if we study a subject such as medicine or the four arya truths with the sincere thought of compassion to help others with what we learn, then the mental factors of investigation and analysis in that mind will be virtuous. But if we study the layout of a bank in order to break in and steal money, the investigation and analysis will be non-virtuous.

**1 Sleep** is a mental factor that makes the mind unclear and withdraws the consciousness inwards, away from the senses. The body feels heavy, weak, and fatigued, and the mind becomes dark. Sleep can be virtuous if we go to sleep with a positive mind of love or compassion, thinking to refresh our body and mind so that we can do beneficial things the next day. It will be non-virtuous if we hit the mattress with strong attachment to rest and the darkness of sleep. It is said that going to sleep in this way will create the cause to have a dark, ignorant mind in the future – such as rebirth as an animal.

In deep sleep the mental consciousness is very subtle and, in most people, awareness at that time is not strong enough to induce a memory. Dreams occur when the mental consciousness becomes lighter, and the dream content is influenced by recent or past experiences and our stronger emotions, virtuous and non-virtuous. It's possible for meditators to train their minds to become aware that they are dreaming and then use the dream state to enhance their powers of insight.

**2 Regret** is concern about past actions that we have performed, have been unable to perform, or have ordered others to perform. Regret is virtuous if we regret a non-virtuous action of body, speech, or mind. It is non-virtuous if we regret a virtuous action, or neutral if we regret a neutral action.

If we regret a non-virtuous deed before the principal karmic result occurs we can purify it, but regret while experiencing a result cannot purify the cause. For example, one who has been reborn in hell cannot change that situation by regretting the non-virtuous action that caused it, and a blind person cannot reverse their condition by regretting the karmic cause for their blindness. Buddha said that a principal karmic result that has ripened cannot be altered, there are no exceptions. This may confuse those who think that any heavy negative karma can be purified, but such purification can only occur if it is before the principal karmic result has arisen. All negative karmas can be purified before they ripen.

**3 Investigation** is the mental factor of actively inquiring into the general aspects of things. It can be virtuous, non-virtuous, or neutral depending upon the characteristic of that which is investigated.

**4 Analysis** is a discriminating analysis of the fine aspects of things. After the general qualities of the object have been thought about, analysis settles on the best or the specific qualities. It is a peaceful state of mind, no longer actively investigating the major qualities of good, bad, and so on. It clearly holds on to the object found by investigation.

Investigation is said to be a consciousness with a rough aspect, which means it is always actively involved in work, whereas analysis has a clear aspect because it holds and remains upon a specific object that has been thought about and well ascertained. Some texts say that investigation is a way of ascertaining objects in a gross manner and analysis is a way of ascertaining objects through precise checking. Both mental factors are derived from knowledge, and they can function in three ways:

- (i) Serving as a *proper basis for abiding*: in a virtuous situation, they eventually bring proper results. For example, when one meditates on selflessness in order to free oneself from cyclic existence, investigation and analysis abide on a proper basis. In this context, investigation and analysis are like divisions of the mental factors of intention or knowledge.
- (ii) Serving as an *improper basis for abiding*: for example, when one engages in investigation and analysis of a non-virtuous object which eventually brings bad results.
- (iii) Serving as a *neutral basis*, when investigating and analysing a neutral object.

We may wonder what the difference is between analysis, the ever-present mental factor of recognition, and the mental factor of knowledge.

The mental factor of knowledge has some similarities to analysis, but knowledge only attends a virtuous mind. In this presentation, *knowledge* is that which functions to analyse virtuous objects individually and separately, whereas analysis is a mental factor that holds onto a fixed, investigated object. For example, analysis holds the object “the best table” only after much work by investigation. Also, analysis can occur in the retinue of a virtuous, a non-virtuous, or a neutral mind. *Recognition* is different. It is simply knowing the different objects through the object itself: “this yellow is yellow,” or through the label: “this is blue.” The recognition attending mental consciousness apprehends objects through a label, such as “male” or “female,” whereas recognition attending a sensory consciousness does not apprehend through the label but simply through the object itself – it sees the single object blue as blue.

## *4 CONCLUSION*

That which causes us to continually remain in the cycle of death and rebirth is karmic deeds based upon self-grasping ignorance. Clinging to the mistaken idea of a real me, our mind becomes immured in self-consciousness, anger, attachment, and pride, and unable to reach out to others with love or kindness. From the thought, mine, arises effort to protect what is ours and to get what we want to be ours. Effort is karma, and creating karma based on thoughts of a real me leads to the cyclic existence of death and rebirth.

The Buddhist practitioner realises that the suffering cycle of death and rebirth is not an external phenomenon but an internal process arising from the root ignorance. Meditating on this process we see that all our actions, virtuous or non-virtuous, have some level of self-gratification behind them. Seeing the destructive function of our mental afflictions is observing the enemy. This seeing is the function of wisdom. Until we gain the direct realisation of emptiness that destroys our afflictions from the root, we must use methods to temporarily suppress them or resist their influence. This gives us the mental space to continue our investigation and analysis and learn how to avoid creating negative karma and how to accumulate positive karma.

For the sake of simple knowledge we may dedicate our lives to discovering new species of birds, animals, or insects, or new types of rock. But such knowledge is meaningless in terms of being able to reduce suffering and establish real happiness. On the other hand, although the list of ways in which our emotions operate could be vast, by understanding the concise list of mental factors presented here, and training our mind to abandon the harmful ones and cultivate the constructive ones, we can put an end to our suffering forever and achieve never-ending happiness. Having done so, we will be perfectly qualified to guide others on the same path that all past Buddhas have followed.

Even though this presentation of virtuous and non-virtuous mental factors speaks for itself in common-sense terms, people may reject this psychology, and the safe path that it indicates, simply by labelling it 'religious,' and therefore invalid. Yes, the root of all virtue, and therefore of all happiness, is pure ethical conduct based upon faith in the presentation of karmic cause and effect operating in this life and beyond. But it is not blind faith. It is faith based upon reasoning and it is an essential precursor to the wisdom that directly perceives reality. Without pure morality it is impossible to achieve perfect concentration, and without perfect concentration it is impossible to achieve that wisdom.

The explanation of karma shows that whatever action we do motivated by self-centred attachment to pleasure or aversion to pain in this life creates a negative karmic potency that will ripen as an unpleasant experience. All of our problems arise from this underlying cause, and the only way to escape it is to abandon attachment to this life and look beyond. Such renunciation is the foundation for establishing and observing a code of ethical behavior that, in essence, is the morality of not harming others. If, through prejudice, we deny karma and future lives, we will remain attached to the pleasures of this life and we will have no foundation for establishing and maintaining a code of pure morality. We will find no peace in this life or beyond.

## Notes

[1.](#) *The Ambrosia Heart Tantra*, Yeshe Donden and Jhampa Kelsang, Library of Tibetan Works and Archives, Dharamsala, India, 1977: “At (twenty-six weeks) the infant remembers the act in one of his former lives that led to his present situation. With this insight he recognises the nature of the round of existence and thereby has a feeling of sadness and a sense of renunciation.”

[2.](#) The cause-and-effect process called *karma* will be explained below.

[3.](#) See Aldous Huxley’s *Brave New World*.

[4.](#) The *Mahayana*, (Great, or Universal, Vehicle), refers to the vast purpose, arisen from great compassion, of taking upon oneself the universal responsibility to guide all beings out of the suffering wheel of life by attaining one’s full potential of Buddhahood. The *Hinayana*, (Lesser Vehicle), refers to the lesser purpose of attaining *nirvana*, personal liberation from the wheel of life. Buddha taught both vehicles according to the different dispositions of his listeners.

[5.](#) When conviction in the reality of rebirth is acquired, we should not have a sense of guilt for past-life actions. Just as it’s not *our fault* if we inherit some undesirable baggage in our genes, we, the persons of this life, are not to be blamed for the undesirable baggage from previous lives that we inherit with our minds. Both genetic and karmic misfortunes are realities that we must learn to deal with in a skilful way. When I see suffering being experienced by those who are apparently innocent, for my mind karmic causality is a more reasonable explanation than the simplistic “bad luck” or “will of God.”

[6.](#) Those whose minds are contaminated by *self-grasping ignorance*: clinging to the misconceived image of self.

[7.](#) *The Peaceful Stillness of the Silent Mind*, Lama Yeshe Wisdom Archive, Boston, 2004

[8.](#) When I read the entire Bible six years after becoming a Buddhist monk, I thought that if the term ‘God’ was replaced with the term ‘karma,’ then many things would make sense.

[9.](#) The best reference for information contained in this section is the chapter entitled *The Selfless* in the revised edition of Jeffrey Hopkins’ *Meditation on Emptiness*, Wisdom Publications, Boston, 1996

[10.](#) The object had the quality of empty of inherent existence before the label ‘vase,’ but only when that label was applied to it did the emptiness of inherent existence *of vase* come into existence.

[11.](#) Some forms, however, only appear to mental consciousness, the ‘sixth sense.’ For example, a single atom and the subtle physical form that manifests upon taking a vow.

[12.](#) *Meditation on Emptiness*, p. 268

[13.](#) Before great assemblies of scholars, the Buddha made four proclamations without fear of contradiction:

“I am completely and perfectly enlightened with respect to all phenomena.”

“I have fully abandoned the afflictions, the obstacles to liberation, and their imprints, the obstacles to omniscience.”

“You must abandon your afflictions and their imprints.”

“To achieve this abandonment, you must cultivate the wisdom paths that abandon all obscurations to be abandoned.”

[14.](#) But, unlike the TV series, it only travels from the present into the future, and never into the past.

[15.](#) ‘Merit’ is creative mental power established through actions motivated by great compassion and the intention to attain enlightenment for the welfare of all beings.

[16.](#) From Hopkins, *Meditation on Emptiness*, p. 375

[17.](#) *A Guide to the Bodhisattva’s Way of Life*, Library of Tibetan Works and Archives, translated by Stephen Batchelor, chapter five, verses 7, 8.

[18.](#) Geshe Gendun Lodro, *Walking Through Walls*, Snow Lion, translated by Jeffrey Hopkins, p. 352.

[19.](#) Commentary to Shantideva’s *Bodhisattva’s Way of Life*, transcript, Nalanda Monastery, France, 1986.

[20.](#) In Sanskrit, *bodhi* means enlightenment and *sattva* means ‘being,’ or person. Out of indiscriminating compassion, bodhisattvas cultivate a sense of universal responsibility to guide all beings away from the sufferings of cyclic existence by attaining their supreme potential of enlightenment and becoming perfect guides for others. This altruistic attitude is called *conventional bodhicitta* (*citta* means mind). *Ultimate bodhicitta* is not the same, it refers to the wisdom that directly perceives ultimate reality, emptiness. In dependence upon the guidance of a previous bodhisattva, some newly generate bodhicitta in this life while others are born with it already established in their mind-streams.

[21.](#) The name of a chocolate biscuit that is said to be irresistible.

[22.](#) Why is one reborn in hell if desire for pleasure is the cause of rebirth there? The *abhidharma* says that the karma for hell rebirth ripens at death and, for example, during the intermediate state one experiences great cold. In the distance one sees the glow of a fire and, craving warmth, one is attracted to it. This desire causes death from the intermediate state and rebirth at the source of that fiery glow: hell.

[23.](#) The feeling of pleasure experienced within the sixth type of awareness, mental consciousness.

[24.](#) Vasubandhu, *Abhidharmakosa*, (commentary by Geshe Jampa Gyatso, Kopan Monastery, Nepal, 1976)

[25.](#) Perhaps an analogy to illustrate this is the quantum mechanics theory that, when not being observed, subatomic particles seem to occupy many potential positions all at once.



When the particle is measured, or observed, however, the many possibilities ‘collapse’ into one definite location. So, maybe the generic ‘liquid’ has these three potential appearances and, when observed, it appears as a particular type of liquid according to the karmic predisposition of the observer. I’m not sure if the physicists include ‘karmic predisposition of the observer’ in their theory but, why not?

[26.](#) The “eternal drop.”

[27.](#) See *Death Intermediate State and Rebirth in Tibetan Buddhism*, Lati Rinbochay & Jeffrey Hopkins, Snow Lion, USA 1985.

[28.](#) Feelings associated with mental consciousness.

[29.](#) Feelings associated with the five sense consciousnesses.

[30.](#) See Part Four.

[31.](#) Conventional truth, the way things exist at the conventional level, and ultimate truth, their emptiness of inherent existence.

[32.](#) One cannot help comparing this to the Oedipus and Electra complexes in psychology. See Part Four.

[33.](#) Bodies of light don’t leave fossils.

[34.](#) Buddhas who appear when the Dharma is not present but human society is suitable to receive the ‘turning of the wheel of Dharma.’

[35.](#) His Holiness the Dalai Lama, *The Gelug/Kagyu Tradition of Mahamudra*, Snow Lion, New York, 1997, p. 200, translated by Alexander Berzin.

[36.](#) His Holiness the Dalai Lama, *Beyond Dogma* North Atlantic Books, 1996, p. 228 – 230 (I have abbreviated the words and, I hope, not distorted the meaning.)

[37.](#) I define *blind faith* as belief in the existence of a non-existent, or in the non-existence of an existent.

[38.](#) *Ultimate reality* does not mean ultimate existence. It refers to the fact that when we subject the mind, the person, or any other thing to ultimate analysis attempting to locate the object, nothing can be found. If the object were to be found, it would inherently exist. Its non-findability indicates its ultimate nature of emptiness of inherent existence.

[39.](#) *Chambers English Dictionary*.

[40.](#) The following discussion is largely drawn from Alex Berzin’s excellent introduction to H.H. the Dalai Lama’s *The Gelug/Kagyu Tradition of Mahamudra*, Snow Lion, New York, 1997, and Geshe Rabten’s *The Mind and its Functions*, Rabten Choeling, 1992, translated by Stephen Batchelor.

- [41.](#) Colours and shapes, sounds, smells, tastes, and tangibles.
- [42.](#) H.H. the Dalai Lama, *The Gelug/Kagyü Tradition of Mahamudra*, p. 328
- [43.](#) Lama Thubten Zopa Rinpoche, personal communication, Taipei, 1990.
- [44.](#) Bill Watterson, *Calvin and Hobbes*, comic strip, 1985 – 1995.
- [45.](#) Recently, I saw the Australian Prime Minister, Julia Gillard, talking to a little girl on television. The little girl said, 'I've seen you on television.' 'Yes, said the Prime Minister, and *you* are on television right now.' 'I'm NOT on television,' said the girl indignantly, 'I'm a HUMAN.' This speaks volumes.
- [46.](#) See: [www.sanghatasutra.net](http://www.sanghatasutra.net)
- [47.](#) See *Knowledge and Liberation*, Snow Lion, by Anne Klein, p.139.
- [48.](#) Buddha advised his students:
- Rely on the teachings, not on the person;
  - Rely on the meaning, not on the words;
  - Rely on the definitive meaning, not on the interpretative meaning;
  - Rely on exalted wisdom (yogic direct perception), not on dualistic cognition.
- [49.](#) Jeffrey Hopkins, *Meditation on Emptiness*, Wisdom Publications, London, 1983, p. 92
- [50.](#) Ian Stevenson, *Twenty Cases Suggestive of Reincarnation*, University Press of Virginia, 1966.
- [51.](#) This section is mainly derived from teachings by Geshe Jampa Tegchok on Jetsun Chokyi Gyaltsen's *Knowing and Awareness*, Nalanda Monastery, France, 1985; Alexander Berzin, www.The Berzin Archives, *Mind and mental factors*; and Geshe Rabten, *The Mind and its Functions*, Editions Rabten Choeling, Switzerland, 1992.
- [52.](#) Geshe Jampa Tegchok, commentary on *Knowing and Awareness*.
- [53.](#) *Synopsis of Psychiatry: behavioral sciences, clinical psychiatry*, 6<sup>th</sup> Edition, Williams & Wilkins, Baltimore.
- [54.](#) Of course, it *can* be in the mind of someone who *thinks* they are a bodhisattva, but then they wouldn't be.
- [55.](#) Or, scarily, it selects those items that it *wants* us to read.
- [56.](#) See: the Dalai Lama, Tenzin Gyatso, *The Meaning of Life from a Buddhist Perspective*, Boston, Wisdom Publications 1992, translated by Jeffrey Hopkins.
- [57.](#) Teaching on *Twelve Links of Dependent Origination*, Nalanda Monastery, France, 1985.

[58.](#) *Buddhist Psychology, The Foundation of Buddhist Thought*, Vol 3, Wisdom Publications, Boston, 2006

[59.](#) This is being written at the time of the *Occupy Wall Street* protests happening around the world.

[60.](#) See [The Berzin Archives](#), Mind and mental factors: the fifty-one types of subsidiary awareness.

[61.](#) *The Mind and its Functions*, p.117.

[62.](#) *A Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life*, chapter seven, verses 56, 57.

[63.](#) These are the karmic results of pride.

[64.](#) The main mind associated with the five object-ascertaining factors presented here is necessarily mental consciousness, as concentration is cultivated using a conceptual image, not an object of the five senses.

[65.](#) P.D.F. Murray, *Biology*, Macmillan, London, 1961.

[66.](#) When I first heard the term “Cultural Revolution” emerging from China, I remember thinking what a wonderful concept. In its cruel execution, however, bigotry, narrow-mindedness, and intolerance won the day.

[67.](#) See, [A Leaf in the Wind](#) by Adrian Feldmann, Lothian Books, Melbourne, 2005 (Ebook version LYWA 2015).

[68.](#) Lama Yeshe: *Ego, Attachment, and Liberation: overcoming your mental bureaucracy*, Lama Yeshe Wisdom Archive, Boston, 2006. From teachings given during a five-day meditation retreat near Melbourne in 1975. I was ordained six months after attending that retreat.

[69.](#) True suffering and the true source of suffering.

[70.](#) A qualified teacher should have ten qualities:

- 1 *Pure morality*: with the discipline of maintaining pure vows, the teacher can lead by example.
- 2 *Single-pointed concentration*: endows the mind with serenity, joy and undistracted attention.
- 3 *Discriminating awareness*: a mind thoroughly pacified by the wisdom seeing reality.
- 4 *Qualities of virtue and knowledge* superior to our own.
- 5 *Pure motivation* of enthusiasm and love in teaching, with no desire for fame or wealth.
- 6 *Learned* with a wealth of scriptural quotations, having thoroughly studied all the teachings.
- 7 *Deep and stable realisation of emptiness*.
- 8 *Ability* to express the teachings clearly, eloquently, and in the right order according to our capacity to learn.
- 9 *Loving concern* and great compassion for us.
- 10 *Great patience*: never becoming tired in giving teachings to all levels of student.

[71.](#) Shantideva, *A Guide to a Bodhisattva's Way of Life*, chap. 6, verse 93.

[72.](#) *Turning Suffering and Happiness into Enlightenment*, Jikme Tenpel Nyima, 1865 – 1926.

[73.](#) The three physical actions of killing, stealing, and sexual misconduct; four verbal actions of lying, abuse, slander, and gossip; and three mental actions of covetousness, maliciousness, and wrong view.

[74.](#) Teachings on *Lorig*, Nalanda Monastery, France, 1985, edited transcript.

[75.](#) See: *The Exalted Sublime Golden Light Sutra*.

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Please reference the LYWA online glossary at [LamaYeshe.com](http://LamaYeshe.com)

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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 FPMT website also offers teachings by His Holiness the Dalai Lama, Lama Yeshe, Lama Zopa Rinpoche and many other highly respected teachers in the tradition, details about the FPMT's educational programs, an online learning center, a complete listing of FPMT centers all over the world and, especially, those in your area, a link to the excellent FPMT Store, and links to FPMT centers—where you will find details of their programs—and other interesting Buddhist and Tibetan pages.

### *FPMT Online Learning Center*

In 2009, FPMT Education Services launched the FPMT Online Learning Center to make FPMT education programs and materials more accessible to students worldwide. While continuing to expand, the Online Learning Center currently offers the following courses:

*MEDITATION 101*  
*BUDDHISM IN A NUTSHELL*  
*HEART ADVICE FOR DEATH AND DYING*  
*DISCOVERING BUDDHISM*  
*BASIC PROGRAM*  
*LIVING IN THE PATH*  
*SPECIAL COMMENTARIES*

*Living in the Path* is particularly unique in that it takes teachings by Lama Zopa Rinpoche and presents them in theme-related modules that include teaching transcripts, video extracts, meditations, mindfulness practices, karma yoga, and questions to assist students in integrating the material. Current modules include: *Motivation for Life*, *Taking the Essence*, *What Buddhists Believe*, *Guru is Buddha*, *Introduction to Atisha's text*, *The Happiness of Dharma*, *Bringing Emptiness to Life*, *The Secret of the Mind*, *Diamond Cutter Meditation*, *Refuge & Bodhicitta* and *Seven-Limb Prayer*.



All of our online programs provide audio and/or video teachings of the subjects, guided meditations, readings, and other support materials. Online forums for each program provide students the opportunity to discuss the subject matter and to ask questions of forum elders. Additionally, many retreats led by Lama Zopa Rinpoche are available in full via audio and/or video format.

Education Services is committed to creating a dynamic virtual learning environment and adding more FPMT programming and materials for you to enjoy via the Online Learning Center.

Visit the OLC here: [onlinelearning.fpmt.org](http://onlinelearning.fpmt.org)

## **What to do with Dharma Teachings**

The Buddhadharma is the true source of happiness for all sentient beings. Books like this show you how to put the teachings into practice and integrate them into your life, whereby you get the happiness you seek. Therefore, anything containing Dharma teachings, the names of your teachers or holy images is more precious than other material objects and should be treated with respect. To avoid creating the karma of not meeting the Dharma again in future lives, please do not put books (or other holy objects) on the floor or underneath other stuff, step over or sit upon them, or use them for mundane purposes such as propping up wobbly chairs or tables. They should be kept in a clean, high place, separate from worldly writings, and wrapped in cloth when being carried around. These are but a few considerations.

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.

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. Venerable Gyatso is currently a resident monk at Thubten Shedrup Ling Monastery.

Other titles by Venerable Gyatso include [A Leaf in the Wind](#) and [The Perfect Mirror](#).

# Receive 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

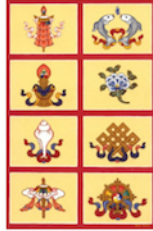
[Email](#) [PDF](#) [Large Print](#)

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 pages they did for all the turkeys killed for Thanksgiving, and Rinpoche's thoughts about this holiday.



#### OUR WORK TOGETHER

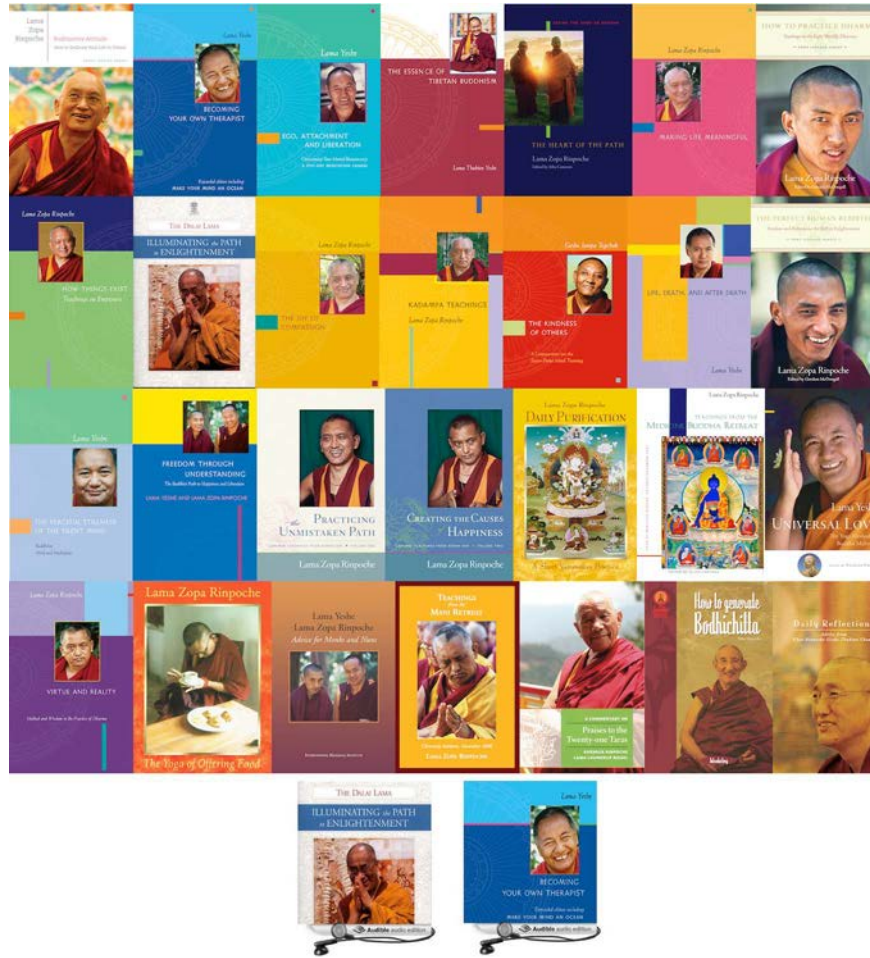


Last week we sent you an email about [our annual year-end appeal](#). Our sincere thanks to those of you who donated during Lhabab Duchen to give us an excellent start to this year's appeal. To date we have raised over \$6,000 towards our \$50,000 goal.

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](#).

## Explore more from LYWA



Find them all by visiting [LamaYeshe.com](http://LamaYeshe.com)

## Connect with LYWA



Come explore the LYWA social media community!



*May whoever sees, touches, reads, remembers, or talks or thinks about these teachings 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.*

