



Tibetan Buddhist Essentials

A study guide for the 21st century

Volume One

Introduction Origin and Adaptation

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



Venerable Tenzin Tharpa

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Volume One: Introduction, Origin, and Adaptation

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Volume 2: The Buddha's Teachings

Volume 3: Engaging Buddhism

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Venerable Tenzin Tharpa

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



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

Dear reader,

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

Thanks and prayers,

Tenzin Tharpa

Venerable Tenzin Tharpa
Sera Jey Monastery - 2018
Bylakuppe, India

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Manjushri

Praise to Manjushri

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

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

Mantra of Manjushri: Om ah ra pa tsa na di

Dedication

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

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

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

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Preface

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Introduction to This Text

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

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

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

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

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

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

Technical Considerations Within This Text

Problems with Language when sharing Buddhism

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

Translation used within this text

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

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

Problems with positing Buddhist and Indian history

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

Positing the Historical Buddha

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

Modern innovation in interpretation

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

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

Accuracy regarding this text

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

Other technical considerations

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

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

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

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

In conclusion

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

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Special thanks to:

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My wonderful editors: Nalini Ramesh and Halley Haruta.

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

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

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

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Venerable Buddhadatta and Venerable Saranananda.

From Mysore University, South India

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

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

Additionally

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

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

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

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

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

Tibetan Buddhist Essentials

Volume One: Introduction, Origin, and Adaptations

Chapter One: Introduction to Buddhism

Buddhism Fast Facts

Buddhism: A system of spiritual and mental cultivation taught by the Buddha

Founder: Siddhartha Gautama - the Buddha 563 - 483 BCE

Founded: Within the Buddha's lifetime in Northeastern India

Demographic: 470 million Buddhists worldwide, fourth largest of the world's major religions

Traditional locations: Bhutan, Cambodia, China, India, Japan, Korea, Laos, Mongolia, Myanmar, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Taiwan, Thailand, Tibet, and Vietnam

Major divisions: Mahayana and Theravada

Major traditions: Chan, Pure Land, Theravada, Tibetan, and Zen

Sacred texts:

1. Pali Canon - written in Pali - held by the Theravada Tradition
 2. Tibetan Canon (the Kangyur and Tangyur) - translated into Tibetan from Sanskrit
 3. Chinese Canon - held by the Chan, Pure Land, and Zen Traditions
 4. Mahayana sutras - written in Sanskrit and Chinese - held by Chan, Pure Land, Tibetan, Zen
-

Original language: *Spoken* - Magadhi Prakrit / *First written forms* - Pali and Sanskrit

Spiritual leaders: Monks, Nuns, Lamas (Tibetan), and Priests (Zen)

Place of ritual: Temples, monasteries, hermitages, dharma centers, and homes

Theism: Non-theistic - no creator god, although minor gods and the supernatural are accepted

Propagation: Modern Buddhists do not evangelize or try to convert others to Buddhism

Soul: The concept of any self, soul, or spirit is rejected by Buddhism

Reality: A stream of momentary experiences apprehended by a mind

Human nature: Innately good, pure, compassionate, and wise

Goal / Purpose of life: To liberate oneself and others from suffering and the cycle of rebirth

Afterlife: Rebirth and liberation from rebirth

What defines a Buddhist: A Buddhist is one who has taken refuge in the three jewels:

The Buddha - the awakened one

The Dharma - the Buddha's teachings

The Sangha - those who have realized his teachings

The term *refuge* can be understood as going for protection or safety, as if taking refuge in a shelter from a storm or taking refuge in the advice of a doctor when sick.

Buddhist practices: Study, contemplation, meditation, mindfulness, prayer, chanting, ritual

What is Buddhism

Today, as Buddhism is growing in popularity in many nontraditional Buddhist countries, many are wondering what exactly is Buddhism. Though usually labeled a religion, Buddhism occupies a unique place in the history of ideologies. Being non-theistic and not based upon a creator god, many believe Buddhism isn't a religion at all but a philosophy or way of life. Some see Buddhism as a transcendental path of peace, others, a rational and practical science of the mind. And because of its strong focus on self-improvement and the cultivation of positive mental states, some go as far as to call Buddhism a *psychological religion*, asserting it to be an early form of cognitive psychotherapy. Still others see it as a miraculous and enchanted path of mysticism and magic. However, according to the Buddha,

"My teaching is not a philosophy; it is the result of my own direct experience.

My teaching is a means of practice, not something to hold onto or to be worshiped.

My teaching is like a raft used to cross a river, only a fool would continue to carry the raft around after already reaching the other shore of liberation." ~ The Buddha

Buddhism as presented in our current age, although unique, is certainly practiced as a religion, sharing many of the common traits found in other religious traditions (mystical cosmology, supernatural beings, heavens, hells, miracles, and magic). It is also important to point out that Indian culture approaches religion in a much different way from that of the West—being both, more open and more exploratory—a style closer to Western philosophy than that of Western religion. Nevertheless, Indian religions, including Buddhism, are still often filled with all the dogma, hierarchal authority, and inflexible-minded institutions that characterize most religious traditions.

The teachings of the Buddha, referred to as *Dharma* or *buddhadharma* (Skt.; Tib. *chö*), are not the words of a god, gods, or prophet, but instead the words of a man and pertain to his direct experience of the true nature of reality. The Buddha's teachings are based on an experience that he achieved through great effort that laid at the end of a long search, a search for the answer to one question—*what is the cause of our suffering?* The answer he found was that the cause of our suffering, and the problem with existence in general, is not a physical or material one, nor can it be attributed to the supernatural. He found that the root cause of our suffering is psychological in nature. That we see ourselves and our reality in a mistaken way, which in turn leads to a distorted view of what we truly want and consequently in how we invest our time and energy. More importantly he discovered that this unhealthy psychological condition can be removed and that liberation from suffering is attainable.

The Buddha's teachings and methodology for achieving liberation is referred to as *the Buddhist path*, a path of spiritual and mental cultivation in which practitioners study, practice, and

work towards attaining its perfection. The goal of the path is liberation from suffering, which is achieved through the direct realization of the true nature of oneself and reality, a realization that forever frees oneself from ordinary mundane existence. A central premise of Buddhism is that the mind is pliable and can be transformed through training. One can transform one's negative and afflictive aspects into their positive counterparts—from suffering to happiness, and confusion to understanding.

For myself, I posit Buddhism not as a religion or philosophy but as a *Dharma* (Skt.; Tib. *Chö*), defined as *a teaching, path, and way of life*. The term Dharma is shared by all Indian traditions but is defined slightly differently by each, having no single word translation in English. The earliest use of the term, found in Brahmanism, defines Dharma as *duty, moral code, righteousness, and conduct pertaining to the proper way of living*. Within Buddhism, Dharma is commonly defined as *the teachings of the Buddha*, but can additionally mean phenomena, reality, ultimate truth, virtuous action, or universal law or order. So when I define Buddhism as a dharma, I am positing Buddhism as a teaching and method of personal cultivation. A holistic path in which one works to improve one's mind and heart within one's current life situation. Buddhism is a practical and rational path that, because of being based upon our shared core human experience, remains uniquely appropriate to all times and cultures. It is a path that dispels the obstacles that stop us from understanding ourselves, our world, and the inter-relationships we all share. The Buddha taught that life is a process of constant change, and his teachings focus on taking advantage of this fact, meaning, we can change for the better. By developing brilliant minds and compassionate hearts, we gain an unparalleled potential for improving our lives and the lives of others. Often when asked, *What is Buddhism?* I simply reply, *Buddhism is the path to freedom*.

Although Buddhists work diligently to preserve and make the Buddha's teachings available, Buddhists do not evangelize or try to convert others. People are free to take as much or as little as they feel comfortable with. Buddhism is not a movement that one has to join, but instead a perennial resource of practical wisdom and methods that can be utilized by anyone in whatever capacity one sees fit. His Holiness the Dalai Lama often advises people interested in Buddhism to remain within their own belief system while investigating to see if Buddhism may have some ideas or methods that may be useful, emphasizing the benefits of stability and support gained by remaining in one's own familiar tradition. According to His Holiness, for many Westerners it is better to stay within one's own tradition.

"Don't use Buddhism to become a Buddhist. Use Buddhism to become better at whatever else in your life you are doing already." ~ The 14th Dalai Lama

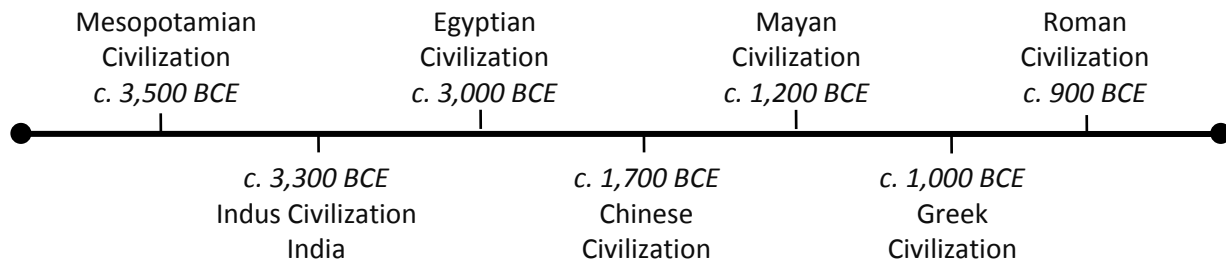
"I advise all who would like to convert to Buddhism to think carefully in a mature way before doing so." ~ The 14th Dalai Lama

The Origins of Buddhism

Pre-Buddhist India (3,300 BCE - 600 BCE)

Before we talk about the Buddha, let's first look at the world he was born into. Pre-Buddhist India was a land of many different kingdoms, cultures, religions, languages, and schools of thought. It was a culture that was largely a product of the ancient Indus Valley Civilization which originated in what is today's Western India and Eastern Pakistan. One of the oldest civilizations in the world, historians now believe the Indus Valley Civilization may have been equal to, if not surpassing, its rivals in other parts of the world in culture and standard of living.

Timeline of the Ancient Civilizations of the World



Religions of pre-Buddhist India

Pre-Buddhist India was shaped by two prominent religions, that of *Sramanism* and *Brahmanism*. The Sramana was a tradition of ascetic wandering mendicants who practiced detachment from material concerns, inward salvation, meditation, and attaining liberation through self-effort. In contrast, the Brahman tradition upheld the householder's way of life, focused on health, wealth, longevity, and offspring, gained through the practice of ritual offerings and singing hymns to appease the gods. Other distinctions of the Brahman tradition included India's caste system and one's obligation to the performance of one's duty to society and family.

Besides these two prominent traditions, there were also scores of other groups that struggled for dominance and royal patronage from local kings as well. Philosophies of monotheism, polytheism, and atheism, including rationalism and humanism, were debated continuously by scholars trying to surpass each other in the pursuit of truth. These many different groups competed freely and peacefully exemplified a culture of intellectual and religious tolerance. This profusion of Indian thought and wisdom would be the furnace in which the Buddha's teachings would be forged.

The Sramana: origin of the Buddhist and Jain religions

The Sramana was never a consolidated formal tradition, but instead consisted of many small groups that shared similar views and existed independently from society. The Sramana were strongly opposed to the Brahman practice of animal sacrifice and the corruption and formidable control that the Brahman Vedic Priests of this era had over the people. The Buddha's first teachers were Sramana, though later in his life he referred to them in a less than gracious manner as *the holders of the thirty-four wrong views*, referring to the thirty-four Sramana groups of the time. The Sramana tradition is no longer taught or practiced.

The first of the major religions to arise from the Sramana was Jainism

Sharing the Sramana's oppositions to animal sacrifice and the corruption of the Brahman Priests, the Jains founded their tradition on the principal of *ahimsa* (Skt.)—non-violence in all forms (physical, verbal, and mental). The Jains advocated vegetarianism, speaking the truth, celibacy or monogamy, and detachment from material things. What differentiated the Jains from the Sramana was their more intense asceticism and practices of self-mortification, such as prolonged fasting, breath holding, and exposure to pain, believing that liberation is attained through suffering. The Buddha's second teachers were Jains, whose teachings the Buddha quickly mastered. However, after years of extreme austerity while practicing their methods, he found that instead of leading to the cessation of suffering, these methods only made him suffer more. It was at this point that the Buddha abandoned these practices and set out on his own path. Today Jainism is one of the world's major religions and continues to flourish, mostly within India.

The second of the major religions to arise from the Sramana was Buddhism

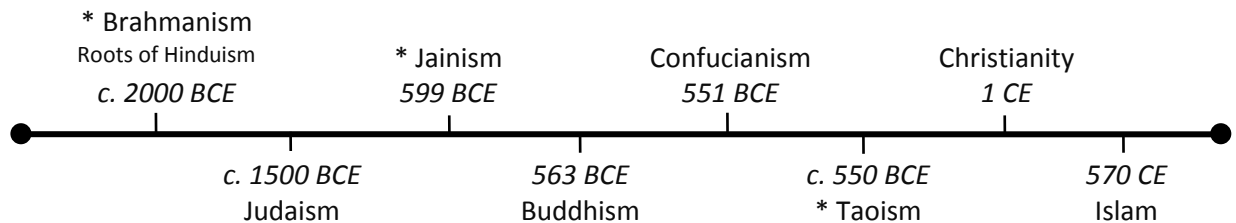
Similar to and contemporary with Jainism, *Buddhism* (Skt.; Tib. *nanḡchö*) also shares the belief in non-violence, speaking the truth, celibacy (for monastics), and detachment from material things. Differences between Buddhism and the Jains and Sramana were mainly the Buddha's unique view of the nature of reality, his rejection of the Jains' extreme practices of self-mortification, and the fact that he and his followers, unlike the Jains and Sramana, were more engaged in the world, providing teachings, guidance, and assistance to society. Conversely, ideals shared by these three traditions were,

- Non-theism - rejecting the concept of a creator god.
- The belief in *karma* - the force that propels and traps one in the cycle of rebirth.
- The concept of *samsara* - the cycle of rebirth and the suffering which it entails.
- The concept of *liberation*- freedom from the cycle of samsaric rebirth.
- That liberation is achieved through one's own efforts—not through priests or gods.
- That liberation is our birthright and can be achieved by anyone, regardless of caste.
- That ignorance—not evil or the supernatural—is the cause of life's suffering.

The Beginning of the Buddhist Era

The sixth century BCE was a time of a great awakening of human thought throughout the world. This was a philosophically rich period where rationality first began to challenge superstition and belief. It was a time that saw the emergence of many of the religions we know today and a time in which people were starting to question the established order of things and their role in the world. In the West, there was the emergence of the Greek philosophers and the beginnings of the world's first democracy. In the Middle East, we have the Old Testament Prophets. In Persia, the rise of Zoroastrianism. And in the Far East, the beginnings of Confucianism and Taoism thought in China. Meanwhile, in India, we have the emergence of Jainism and Buddhism from the Sramana, and the Upanishads arising from the Brahman Vedas. This was a truly unique period in human history which ushered in a new paradigm of human consciousness. It was a time that would forever change the course of human development and the way humanity would perceive its place in the world.

Timeline of the Origins of the Major World Religions



** Brahmanism/Hinduism, Jainism and Taoism (scripturally) believe their traditions to be hundreds or even thousands of years older than these historical dates given.*

Who was the Buddha?

Traditional dates posit the Buddha's life between 563 - 483 BCE. The story of the Buddha's life, as told within Buddhist scripture, tells of a young boy Siddhartha Gautama, born a prince of the Sakya clan in what is today's Lumbini, Nepal, near the Indian border. At the time of his birth, young Siddhartha was prophesied to become either a great king, or a great spiritual leader who would renounce the material world. His father, determined to see his son succeed him as king, surrounded the prince with worldly pleasures while forbidding him from leaving the palace grounds in order to keep Siddhartha from seeing anything that would lead him to the path of renunciation. Despite his father's efforts, as Siddhartha grew into a young man, the king was unable to keep him within the palace walls. On several occasions Siddhartha ventured outside the palace and experienced what in Buddhist literature is known as *the four sights*. And for the

first time, Siddhartha saw the suffering of the world, in the form of an old man, a sick man, a corpse, and finally a wandering ascetic who seemed to be at peace with the world.

Overwhelmed by what he saw, a resolute determination to find an answer to the suffering of the world arose within the prince, compelling him, at the age of twenty-nine, to leave his family and life of pleasure. Upon leaving the palace, he cut off his princely hair, put on ragged robes, and joined a group of wandering ascetics. It is said that Siddhartha was a man of enormous self-discipline, who quickly surpassed all his teachers and thoroughly mastered all of the spiritual practices of the day, including fasting so intensely that one day, while attempting to touch his stomach, he took hold of his spine. However, Siddhartha began to realize that these practices of extreme asceticism didn't lead to the cessation of suffering, but instead only made him suffer more, and as a result, he rejected them. This realization would become the catalyst for his *Middle Way Philosophy*, a path of moderation between the extremes of self-indulgence and self-mortification, and more importantly, a path of moderation between extreme views.

At this point, Siddhartha began to work on his own, based on the recollection of an experience he had as a young boy. It was during a royal outing when he wandered away from the group and took shelter from the hot summer sun under a rose-apple tree. As he sat, his thoughts subsided and he spontaneously entered a state of blissful meditation, experiencing a naturally arising calm and clear awareness. This experience from his youth would become the compass and set the direction for his new path, a path based on moderation which saw a healthy mind and body as essentials for success. His practice finally came to fruition on an evening of a full moon while sitting in meditation under the legendary *Bodhi* tree (fig tree) in today's Bodhgaya, India. It was this night that Siddhartha made the determination not to arise again from his meditation until he had found the answer to the question that began his quest—*what is the cause of suffering?* Subsequently, Siddhartha, while deep in meditation, conquered the last remnants of his worldly afflictions, and by shaking off the dull and dreamlike delusions of ordinary awareness, attained enlightenment and arose as *the Buddha*—the awakened one. Siddhartha had become a buddha, or more specifically, he had become *Shakyamuni Buddha* (Skt.; Tib. *sangye shakya tubpa*) *sage of the Shakya Clan*, the historic Buddha of our current age. It's told that after his awakening, the Buddha spent the next few weeks in a state of unwavering bliss. Scriptures assert that at first the Buddha was convinced that this experience could not be understood or taught to others. However, through continuous urging by the gods, he was convinced to try.

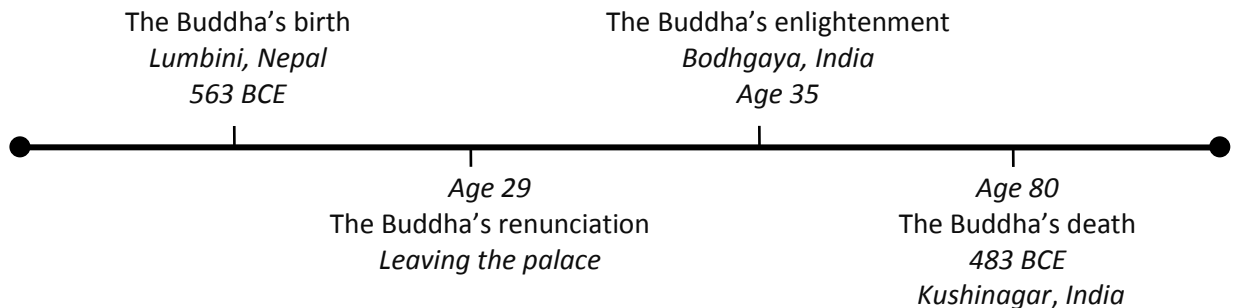
The Buddha traveled North to an area which is today's Sarnath, India, near the city of Varanasi. It is here in a deer park in front of his first five disciples that the Buddha delivered his first and most important teachings entitled *The Four Noble Truths*. Within this teaching, the Buddha shared the knowledge that emerged from his direct experience of enlightenment. This first teaching remains as the foundation for all Buddhist thought and is said to encompass all of the Buddha's wisdom. The Buddha spent the next forty-five years wandering throughout India

teaching his path of awakening. According to scriptures, the Buddha, at the age of eighty, when he believed his work to be finished, passed away in the small remote village of Kushinagar in North East India. The Buddha refused to appoint a successor and when asked by his monks, *Who will lead the sangha when you are gone?* the Buddha answered, *Whatever doctrine and discipline taught and made known by me will be your teacher when I am gone.* By this, the Buddha held his teachings as the ultimate source of authority within the Buddhist tradition.

The historical account of the Buddha's life

Historically, although records of this period in Indian history are ambiguous at best, and although there is no actual proof of the Buddha's existence, it seems reasonable to think that the Buddha as a historical figure in Indian history did actually exist. In addition, the scriptural account of the Buddha's life also seems quite plausible, though some see his life story as metaphor, for in India, stories in which great rulers abandon lives of extravagance in the pursuit of salvation are legendary. Scriptural accounts of what the Buddha may have been like as a person are few. Some accounts posit the Buddha as a protester and/or radical, rebelling against the corruption of the religions of the day, while other scriptural sources posit him as a promoter of peace and cooperation between the many religious groups. With that said, all accounts agree upon a depiction of the Buddha as coolheaded, self-disciplined, extraordinarily wise, and deeply compassionate. It's said that the Buddha and his teachings resonated so strongly with people that many became followers almost immediately upon hearing him speak. His diligence as a teacher was also legendary, claiming that during the forty-five years after his enlightenment, the Buddha taught day and night, sleeping as little as two hours an evening. The most agreed-upon opinion regarding the Buddha's death is that at the age of eighty, after eating a meal of pork given to him by a sponsor, he fell ill and died of food poisoning in Kushinagar, North East India.

Timeline of the Life of the Buddha



What is a buddha?

A buddha is a fully enlightened being who has perfected all possible virtuous qualities and in so doing is freed from the endless cycle of rebirth and the suffering that it entails. The term *buddha* (Skt.; Tib. *sangye*) is not a name but a title, meaning *awakened one* or *enlightened one*. A buddha is not a god or prophet, but a human being who has awakened from ordinary mundane existence, a being who has reached the very peak of spiritual evolution and apprehends clearly the ultimate nature of reality. A buddha is a miraculous being who is said to possess a vast array of supramundane powers, including omniscience, omnipresence, clairvoyance, seeing both past and future lives, and the ability to perform a wide range of miracles. Buddhism posits not one, but many buddhas, with future buddhas to come, for the Buddha taught that all beings have the innate potential to become buddhas. According to Buddhism, there is no being greater than a buddha. One story that gives some insight into what the Buddha thought of his own attainment is the account of the Buddha being questioned by some herdsmen:

Are you a god? - No, the Buddha answers.

Are you a prophet? – No, the Buddha answers.

Are you a teacher? – No, the Buddha answers.

What are you then? - I'm awakened, the Buddha answers.

What the Buddha Taught

“Do no evil, cultivate only good, purify one's mind, this is the teaching of the buddhas.”

~ The Buddha

India at the time of the Buddha's enlightenment was in a period of religious coercion and corruption, where the masses passively followed the authority of the Vedic Brahman priests while believing that liberation was possible only for a small select group. This was a time in which people lived lives of hopelessness, believing they were trapped in a never ending cycle of rebirth and suffering. The Buddha saw this hopelessness as the greatest obstacle for the people of the time. He sought to free people from their subjugation and lives of despair by showing that liberation was indeed attainable and accessible to all.

The Buddha's teachings were built upon thousands of years of previous Indian thought, with the belief in enlightenment, rebirth, and karma already in place long before he arrived. What was different was what the Buddha had found, a state of enlightened awakening he called *nirvana*. According to the Buddha, this was not mere hypothesis or theory but something he exper-

rienced directly for himself, an experience that changed him forever. The Buddha claimed that what he had found was an ancient wisdom that had been forgotten. When asked to describe this enlightened state he would insist that its nature could not be conveyed by language but instead needed to be experienced directly for oneself. When pressed the Buddha would simply say, *nirvana is the end of suffering*.

The Buddha's teachings are therefore a method for liberating people from suffering. His teachings derived from his direct experience in which he clearly saw that our suffering arises from our distorted and mistaken views regarding the true nature of ourselves and reality. This distorted view causes us to continually make wrong choices in our search for happiness and fulfillment, as if following a faulty map. It is because of this distorted view that we are constrained to live a narrow unsatisfactory existence in which real lasting happiness and contentment continuously elude us. Conversely, the Buddha asserted that through clearly understanding the true nature of oneself and reality, these distorted views can be removed as if washing away dirt from a window in order to produce clarity and light.

"The Buddha's teachings are a way of freeing oneself of delusions. A path that eventually leads to freedom from all suffering" ~ The 14th Dalai Lama

The earliest accounts of the Buddha's teaching are referred to as the EBTs (Early Buddhist teachings). These teachings show a more open, fluid, and adaptive style than many of today's modern traditions, devoid of any outward signs of religion (worship, prayer, ritual, or need of priests), while rejecting authority, dogma, and absolutism. For the Buddha placed authority where it belongs, upon the person themselves. The Buddha challenged each individual to do their own investigation and had full confidence that people possessed the ability to examine and recognize the truth for themselves. This is beautifully illustrated in the following passages,

"Do not go upon what has been acquired by repeated hearing; nor upon tradition; nor upon rumor; nor upon what is in scripture; nor upon the consideration 'The monk is our teacher'. Rather test ideas with your common sense, when you yourself know these teachings lead to benefit and happiness, adopt them. And if you yourself know they lead to harm or ill, abandon them." ~ The Buddha

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

It's said that the Buddha, when inviting people to hear his teachings, would use the phrase *ehipassiko* (Pali) meaning, *come and investigate*. For the Buddha believed that the true test of his teachings was through one's own examination and personal experience of them, or in the Buddha's own words, *The truth must be known for oneself*. The Buddha in his own day advocat-

ed ethical development and mental cultivation—not prayer or worship. He condemned all forms of divination and soothsaying, seeing them as low arts. In fact the further back and closer to the Buddha’s time one gets, the less religious his teachings appear. Additionally, in the early Buddhist teachings, we see Buddhism emerging as the first truly egalitarian social movement founded on the Buddha’s assertion that all beings regardless of, race, nationality, gender, or caste had the same potential for spiritual development. It’s said that the Buddha after reaching enlightenment had a vision in which he saw all sentient beings as a field of lotus flowers with each lotus in different stages of development. Some just emerging from the mud, some budding, while others in full bloom untouched by the mire below. He saw this as an excellent analogy for the spiritual development of sentient beings who all have the same potential for enlightenment but are each at different stages of development.

At the heart of the Buddha’s early teachings, the Buddha advocated universal benevolence and love for all, the qualities of virtue, nonviolence, wisdom, compassion, altruism, friendliness, self-control, honesty, personal responsibility, selflessness, passionlessness, and humility. At the same time he prescribed the abandonment of ignorance, delusions, and the attachment to worldly sense pleasures.

The Buddha as seen as a physician

Often referring to himself as a physician or healer, the Buddha had a clear and practical focus—to help people to become healthy and whole. The Buddha’s teachings focused on what is practical and therapeutic (healing), a methodized treatment for the endemic suffering that plagues mundane existence. This prescribed treatment is referred to as the Buddhist path.

The Buddha as empiricist

The Buddha posited his teachings as *not mere theory or philosophy, but a truth to be experienced for oneself*. Although science didn’t exist in the Buddha’s day, the Buddha did have a very science-like approach to his investigation, rejecting superstition and beliefs that supernatural forces had any control over one’s life or universal properties. The Buddha advocated understanding by way of analysis, reason, and experience, urging his followers to refuse to believe in anything without proper investigation.

“Just as a goldsmith would test his gold by burning, cutting, and rubbing it, so must you examine my words and accept them, but not merely out of reverence for me.” ~ The Buddha

CHAPTER TWO:

Essential Elements Shared by All Buddhist Traditions

Essential Elements Shared by All Buddhist Traditions

Over the twenty-six-hundred years of Buddhist history, there have been many different developments and interpretations of Buddhist thought; yet through its evolution and adaptations, there remains a set of core tenets that are shared by all. The following terms and concepts form the foundation of all Buddhist traditions.

Note: The understanding of these terms is needed for the subsequent presentation of the Buddha's teachings shared within this text series. Terms are listed in sequential order of understanding, with each term being the basis for the following terms. Unless otherwise specified, the terms given here follow the interpretation of the Tibetan Buddhist tradition.

The Three Jewels (Skt. *triratna*; Tib. *konchog sum*)

Jewel here refers to that which is precious and rare.

1. The **Buddha** (Skt.; Tib. *sanggye*): *the Awakened One*
2. The **Dharma** (Skt.; Tib. *chö*): *the Buddha's teachings*
3. The **Sangha** (Skt.; Tib. *gedün*): *those who have realized the Buddha's teachings*

Note 1: There is some debate about what the term *Sangha* actually pertains to. Some say Sangha refers to one's congregation of fellow Buddhist practitioners. Others posit Sangha as specifically a group of four or more fully-ordained monastics. However, according to scripture, Sangha is defined as the array of buddhas and superior beings who have directly realized the Buddhist teachings. With that said, all of the above interpretations are acceptable and commonly used.

Note 2: Within Tibetan Buddhism *lama* (Tib.) is often added, creating four jewels: Lama, Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha.

Non-violence: At the very heart of the Buddha's teachings is a deep appreciation and reverence for life. Buddhists believe that all sentient beings, even the smallest of insects, have the basic right to happiness and not to suffer.

Equality: Historically, Buddhism is believed to be the first truly egalitarian movement. The Buddha rejected India's caste system, insisting that all people regardless of ethnicity, nationality, caste, gender, or religious background were equal and possessed the same potential for spiritual development.

Responsibility: Buddhism places the responsibility for one's life where it belongs—upon oneself. Buddhism asserts that taking responsibility for one's life is the first step in mastering it and by accepting one's responsibilities one embraces genuine maturity. We must understand that it is our own intentions, decisions, and actions that have the greatest impact in the shaping of our lives. That regardless of past conditions, we alone are responsible for our future happiness and suffering.

Ethics (Skt. *śīla*; Tib. *tsultrim*): *Discipline*; Buddhist ethics are unique in the sense that they are not moral laws of a creator god or prophet, but instead are a logical set of ideals for living harmoniously in a way that is conducive to positive personal growth and the positive growth of society. Sometimes described as *logical goodness*, Buddhist ethics focus not merely on one's actions but also, and often more importantly, the intentions behind those actions.

The ten non-virtuous actions (Skt. *dasakusala*; Tib. *migewa chu*): Virtuous ethics within Buddhism is further exemplified through the ten non-virtuous actions—*ten unwholesome (unhealthy) behaviors asserted to be obstacles to spiritual growth*. For the sake of clarity, these ten negative actions are commonly contrasted with their ten opposing positive counterparts, *the ten virtuous actions—ten wholesome (healthy) behaviors that are asserted as conducive to the attainment of liberation*. These ten unwholesome and ten wholesome behaviors clearly illustrate which intentions and actions are to be cultivated and which are to be abandoned. Commonly these are grouped by actions of the body, actions of speech, and actions of the mind.

	The Ten Non-virtuous Acts	The Ten Virtuous Acts
3 Bodily actions	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Destroying life 2. Stealing 3. Sexual misconduct 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Respecting, protecting, and nurturing life 2. Respecting others' property 3. Avoiding sexual misconduct (Sexual harm either mental, emotional, physical)
4 Verbal actions	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. False speech 5. Harsh or rude speech 6. Slandorous speech 7. Idle chatter 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. Speaking the truth; being honest 5. Speaking politely and kindly 6. Speaking in ways that create harmony 7. Speaking meaningfully and moderately
3 Mental actions	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 8. Covetousness; envy 9. Ill will 10. Wrong views 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 8. Cultivating contentment and non-attachment 9. Cultivating good will 10. Cultivating right views

The Buddha's Middle Way (Skt. *madhyamapratipada*; Tib. *uma*): *The path of moderation and balance; to abide in equanimity—neither favoring or opposing; a middle way between the extremes of self-indulgence and self-mortification as well as a middle way between the extreme views of nihilism (that nothing exists) and absolutism (eternal and/or self-existent).* According to Buddhist texts, the Buddha in his early life as an ascetic had undergone many practices of extreme self-mortification prior to achieving enlightenment. However, after finding no benefit, he rejected these practices, and instead developed his *middle way path*. It's said that this middle way philosophy came to the Buddha one day while watching a musician tuning a stringed instrument. He saw that if the musician tightened the string too much it would break, but if he didn't tighten it enough it wouldn't play. He saw this as analogous to the spiritual practitioner, for whom moderation in practice and view offers the optimum potential for success. According to Buddhist scholar Prof. Richard Gombrich, the Buddha's middle way may be seen as a middle way between highly materialistic Brahmanism and excessively ascetic Jainism, the two prominent religions in the Buddha's day.

Wisdom and compassion

Wisdom and compassion constitute the two core aspects of the Buddhist path. These two complementary forces, when used in union, create a unique potential for positive results. They are often illustrated as two wings of a bird in which an equal balance between both wings is necessary for flight.

Wisdom (Skt. *prajna*; Tib. *sherab*): Before defining wisdom, let's first define its source, *knowledge*. Commonly, knowledge is defined as *the accumulation of information obtained through study, observation, and/or experience*, while *wisdom* can be seen as *a distilled understanding of that knowledge—a profound insight that clearly discerns that which is true, right, just, and fair*. Wisdom is that which allows one to apply precision to one's judgment, decisions, and actions. In a popular quote, philosopher Martin Fischer asserts, *Knowledge is a process of piling up facts; wisdom lies in their simplification*. In the Buddhist context, the term *wisdom* often refers to a specific kind of wisdom, the wisdom that clearly understands the Buddha's teachings and the true nature of oneself and reality. In Tibetan, the term for wisdom is *sherab*; *she* (Tib.) meaning *understanding* or *knowing*, and *rab* (Tib.; an intensifying particle) meaning, *supreme, highest, or very*. Therefore wisdom is defined as *supreme understanding*.

Compassion (Skt. *karuna*; Tib. *nyingje*): Within Buddhism, the definition of compassion is twofold: (1) *to identify with the suffering of others*, and (2) *to wish that they may be free of suffering and the causes of suffering*. The Buddhist idea of compassion is not mere pity in which one feels sorry for others from a distance or place of superiority, nor is it merely em-

pathy in which one sympathizes with the suffering of another; instead, it is fully understanding the equality of sentient life and the universality of our shared experience. It is seeing others' situations as equal to our own, their suffering as equal to our own, their hopes and fears as equal to our own, and their wish for happiness and aversion to suffering as equal to our own. When this is realized profoundly and wholeheartedly, one cannot stop from helping others. Compassion within Buddhism is not seen as a passive or static emotion, but as an active experiential quality—the act, experience, and cultivation of caring.

"Cultivating a more compassionate attitude has the effect of opening the mind. Having a calm and compassionate mind enables us to use our natural intelligence more effectively. Without a more holistic perspective it's difficult to appreciate the reality of a given situation and without that any action we take is likely to be unrealistic and therefore unsuccessful."
~ Dalai Lama

Idiot compassion: *Compassion lacking wisdom which often brings about unwanted results; compassion that benefits others at the detriment of our own wellbeing.* (E.g., Letting a homeless stranger move into your home—who then harms you). Merely possessing good intentions is simply not enough. One must utilize both wisdom and compassion in union to effectively benefit others and ourselves, for wisdom without compassion is hollow, and compassion without wisdom is foolish.

Love / loving-kindness (Skt. *maitri*; Tib. *jampa*): According to Buddhism, love is defined as *wishing someone to be happy*, but of course, this is felt at a very profound level. Another definition of love within Buddhism is *pure goodwill—the desire of bringing welfare and good to fellow beings*. In its pure form, love is free of all attachment—referred to as unconditional love. According to the Vimalakirti Sutra,

"The [unconditional] love of Superior beings is a pure love that is peaceful because of being free of grasping; not feverish, because of being free of passions; without conflict, because it is free of the violence of passions; nondual, because it is involved neither with the external nor with the internal; and accords with reality, because it is equanimous. This pure love, has as its focus, the wish to liberate all beings from suffering by teaching them the dharma, therefore it is a love that is a true refuge; a love that causes living beings to awaken from their sleep; a love that is never exhausted because it acknowledges emptiness and selflessness."
~ Attributed to Manjushri

*"Let no one deceive another nor despise anyone anywhere;
let none by anger or hatred wish harm to another;
as a mother protects her only child with boundless loving-kindness;
cherish all beings and love without limit." ~ The Buddha*

The Three Poisons (Skt. *trivisa*; Tib. *duksum*): *The three foundational afflictions of ignorance, attachment, and aversion that are the primary cause for beings' suffering. From these all other afflictions arise.* Here the term **afflictions** (Skt. *Klesha*; Tib. *nyön mong*) can be defined as *negative mental states that cloud and disturb the mind*. The three poisons are also the primary causes for the arising of the ten nonvirtuous acts.

1. **Ignorance** (Skt. *avidya*; Tib. *marigpa*): *A foundational existential confusion.* Commonly, ignorance is understood as *a lack of knowledge or education; or being uninformed or ignorant of the fact*. However, in Buddhism, ignorance is defined as *an active cognitive state of both mis-knowing and not knowing*. More specifically, ignorance is an existential confusion pertaining to the habitual misapprehension of the true nature of oneself and reality. Within Buddhism, ignorance is not bliss, it is to be trapped in a habitual state of suffering; therefore, dispelling ignorance is the primary aim of the Buddhist path. Ignorance can be transcended by cultivating its opposite quality and antidote, which is wisdom. Moreover, ignorance is the source from which the next two poisons arise, that of attachment and aversion.
2. **Attachment** (Skt. *raga*; Tib. *düchak*): Attachment within Buddhism is synonymous with desire, greed, and passion, and is defined as *wishing not to be separated from the object of one's desire; the compulsive grasping, clinging, or thirst to obtain, possess, or protect that which is desired*. Attachment can be transcended by cultivating its opposite quality and antidote, which is generosity. Is there virtuous desire? Of course, however, generally Buddhism uses the term *wish* when speaking of virtuous intentions (e.g., the wish to benefit others, the wish to attain enlightenment) and uses the term *desire* for non-virtuous intentions (e.g., worldly desires, the desire for wealth and power). Furthermore, **passion**, which is often valued in the West (e.g. artistic passion, passion for work or activities, etc.), is seen as an affliction within Buddhism, defined as *intense desire, extreme emotion, obsession, or infatuation*. Therefore, the blissful quality of *passionlessness* is coveted and cultivated by practitioners. Passion can be transcended by cultivating its opposite quality and antidote, which is equanimity.
3. **Aversion** (Skt. *dvesha*; Tib. *shedang*): Aversion within Buddhism is synonymous with anger, aggression, and hatred, and is defined as *a feeling of intense dislike; the rejection or need to harm that which is detested*. Aversion can be transcended by cultivating its opposite quality and antidote, which is compassion.

The Four Hallmarks of Buddhism (Skt. *caturmurda*; Tib. *domshi*): *Four foundational tenets held by all Buddhist traditions.* Also known as *The Four Seals of Dharma*, with the term *seal* being understood as *characteristic* or *distinction*. These hallmarks of Buddhism are asserted as being the defining factor in confirming a Buddhist text or teaching as authentic.

1. **All compounded phenomena are impermanent** (in a state of constant change)
The term *compounded phenomena* can be defined as *phenomena produced by causes and conditions*—most phenomena one can perceive or conceive are compounded. Additionally, the term *impermanent* (Skt. *anitya*; Tib. *mitakpa*) within Buddhism is defined as *that which changes moment to moment; neither fixed or static*. Conversely, Buddhism asserts that *permanent phenomena* are those which do not arise from causes and conditions and do not change moment by moment, although not necessarily everlasting. Permanent phenomena can only be known by a mental consciousness (e.g. non-created/natural space, emptiness, generic images, generic facts about things, and generic labels (blue/red, hot/cold, sweet/sour, new/old, etc.) also integer numbers, and alphabetic letters).
2. **All contaminated phenomena are unsatisfactory** (the source or nature of suffering)
Here the term *contaminated* refers to *that which is produced through the force of ignorance and related afflictions*, which pertains to all external or internal conventional phenomena, including mental phenomena (perceptions, thoughts, emotions, etc.).
3. **All phenomena are empty and selfless** (lacking independent self existence)
Meaning, all phenomena are empty of any essential essence that distinguish them as uniquely themselves. A more comprehensive presentation of emptiness and selflessness is shared later in this text series.
4. **Nirvana is true peace** (the irreversible cessation of the three poisons—ignorance, attachment, and aversion)

Note: In the Theravada tradition the four hallmarks of Buddhism are presented as **the three marks of existence** (Skt. *trilaksana*): impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and suffering.

Nirvana and samsara

According to Buddhism, there are two modes of existence: *enlightened existence*—referred to as *nirvana*, and *unenlightened existence*—referred to as *samsara*. Samsara and nirvana are not places, realms, or dimensions but instead states or qualities of the mind pertaining to the clarity or obscurity of one's mental state and therefore only exist in the minds and continuums of sentient beings.

Samsara (Skt.; Tib. *khorma*): *Wandering through or circling*, commonly translated as *cyclic existence*. Samsara is unenlightened existence and the mode of existence common to ordi-

nary beings, a state or quality of the mind pervaded by ignorance, delusions, afflictions, suffering, and habituated by wrong views and misguided intentions. Again, samsara is not a place, realm, or dimension, but instead exists only within the mind, body, and continuum of beings. Samsara is commonly defined on the debate grounds of Tibetan monasteries as *a being's mind and body under the influence of karma and afflictions*. This means that samsara is a byproduct of our ignorance and related afflictions which are perpetuated by our karma, sense desires, and craving for continued existence: and that merely possessing a mental and physical form is suffering.

"Samsara: an unhealthy psychological disposition of the ordinary state; samsaric predisposition; representing psychological bondage and moral bankruptcy."

~ Sonam Thakchoe

Samsara is depicted as a state of continuous suffering in which we are trapped, which is experienced as anxiety, fear, pain, frustration, and dissatisfaction. When saying that beings are trapped in samsara, it is not being trapped in or by something out there, but instead it is to be trapped within one's own self-generated delusions and the karma created by those delusions. Samsara is created through one's ignorance that misapprehends the true nature of oneself and reality. According to Buddhism, out of fear that arises in relation to the subtle, ethereal, and transient manner in which we truly exist—a state in which we feel unsubstantial, isolated, and vulnerable—we grasp for and thereby create an exaggerated view of our substantialness, validity, and importance. Through this same manner, we also try to create a more real and stable environment by projecting an exaggerated reality beyond that which actually exists, because the more substantial we believe ourselves and things to be, the more stable, secure, and in control we feel. We do this by imputing an additional *essence* upon things. However, this essence doesn't truly exist. Due to falsely exaggerating the importance of things, we unknowingly also create an exaggerated sense of immediacy in our lives that also doesn't exist. This immediacy is felt as feelings of heightened anxiety, fear of loss, and the need to protect and preserve oneself, one's possessions, and one's identity. It is this exaggerated reality from which Buddhists seek liberation.

Renouncing samsara

When saying we are renouncing samsara, it is not the world or the things within it that we are relinquishing, but instead, it is our own ignorance, afflictions, delusions, wrong views, negative habits, and problematic habitual tendencies that we are renouncing. To renounce samsara is to relinquish our compulsive craving and attachment to sense experience, and our unquenchable thirst for drama and excitement. Conversely, renouncing samsara is also the relinquishing of our aversions to boredom, peace, and contentment. It is to renounce

our selfish and immature attitudes, our pettiness, our need for continuous validation, and the need to feel special. To renounce samara is to develop a conviction that seeks real freedom from our own neurotic, self-centered, and unsatisfactory existence.

Nirvana (Skt.; Tib. *nyangde*): *To blow out or extinguish; to extinguish the three poisons (ignorance, attachment, and aversion).* Nirvana is enlightened existence (opposed to samsara which is unenlightened existence). It is a state or quality of the mind devoid of the three poisons, attained by practitioners who have transcended all coarse and subtle habitual wrong views, thereby clearly and unmistakably apprehending the true nature of oneself and reality. Nirvana is not a place, realm, dimension, or external phenomenon, but instead exists only within the mind, body, and continuum of beings. Nirvana is commonly defined on the debate grounds of Tibetan monasteries as *freedom from afflictions*, or more technically, *analytical cessation that has abandoned afflictions*. It is usually explained by way of negation: nirvana is not *something*, but instead the absence of something. This can be understood in the same way that the term *freedom* is understood by negation. Freedom is not a *thing* in itself: it's an absence, a freedom *from* something (e.g. freedom from tyranny, oppression, or bondage). Nirvana in this same way is the absence of ignorance, delusions, attachment, aversion, and suffering within the mind. When asked to define nirvana, the Buddha would simply say, *nirvana is the end of suffering* or in Tibetan, *nyangan le depa—to pass beyond sorrow*. Simply put, nirvana is the absence of samsara. A more comprehensive presentation of nirvana is shared later in this text series.

“Nirvana: a healthy psychological disposition of the liberated state; the attainment of nirvana representing psychological freedom and moral perfection.” ~ Sonam Thakchoe

Enlightenment (Skt. *bodhi*; Tib. *jangchub*): *To attain nirvana.* An enlightened being is a being who has irreversibly transcended all ignorance, attachment, and aversion and is liberated from uncontrolled rebirth and the mental/emotional suffering which that entails. A more comprehensive presentation of enlightenment is shared later in this text series.

Rebirth (Skt. *punarbhav*; Tib. *yangsi*): Within the various Indian traditions, rebirth or reincarnation is generally the belief that, after physical death, one's self, soul, or spirit continues on, taking rebirth into a new body and beginning a new life—changing bodies as if changing one's clothes. However, in Buddhism, which denies the notion of a self, soul, or spirit, this understanding of rebirth is rejected. Instead, Buddhism posits that one's specific identity along with one's mental and physical aggregates dissolves at death and is lost, for its only one's very subtle mental consciousness (not a self, soul, or spirit) that continues on after death. Rebirth is merely reoccurring instances or temporal spans of one's beginningless and endless stream of subtle

consciousness, instances that continuously arise, abide, and dissolve, creating a sense of multiple single lifetimes. A more comprehensive presentation of rebirth is shared later in this text series.

Cause and effect (Skt. *hetuphala*; Tib. *gyude*): *The universal property of causality*; also known as *the law of cause and effect*, which asserts that all things, without exception, arise as a result of previous causes. It's important to understand that the law of causality is a system of *probable potentialities* and not a fixed or deterministic principle (e.g., an apple seed has the probable potential to become an apple tree, but only if the right conditions are met).

“Nothing, absolutely nothing arises without causes and conditions. Whether it's external phenomena, no matter how small or subtle it may be, or whether it's any mental state that any being experiences, everything, absolutely everything that has ever existed, or has yet to exist, will have arisen out of causes and conditions.” ~ Chamtrul Rinpoche

Being a universal property, the law of causality has no judgment—knowing neither good nor bad, fair nor unfair, reward nor punishment—nor does it know fault, blame, or vengeance. The law of causality lacks any authoritative moral determination and is as indifferent to an outcome as gravity would be. Within the law of causality there are two aspects: that of *external causality*—pertaining to external phenomena, and *internal causality*—better known as *karma*—which pertains to the causality of beings.

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

“People are the products of their own delusion and karmic actions which are prompted by untamed states of mind.” ~ Lama Tsongkhapa

Merit (Skt. *punya*; Tib. *sönam*): *Positive mental imprints created through virtuous thought, speech, or actions that result in happiness in the future.* Merit is generated through one's good works (giving, abiding in virtue, mental development, protecting life, holding vows, and interaction with holy beings, sacred places, or sacred objects). A more comprehensive presentation of merit is shared later in this text series.

The collection of merit (Tib. *sönam tsok*): Collecting merit is one of the two prerequisite accumulations needed for the attainment of enlightenment (the collection of great wisdom and the collection of great merit).

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

The Eight Worldly Concerns (Tib. *jigten chögye*): Also known as *the eight worldly dharmas*. The eight worldly concerns represent our misguided samsaric attachments, goals, and motivations which are to be abandoned on the Buddhist path. We abandon these worldly preoccupations after recognizing that although these qualities may bring temporary pleasure, they cannot bring ultimate satisfaction. The Buddha taught that the path to liberation lies between these sets of dichotomies. The eight worldly concerns are divided into four pairs of opposites. It's said that any dharma activity performed with these intentions is not true dharma.

1-2 - Attachment to gain - aversion to loss

3-4 - Attachment to praise - aversion to blame

5-6 - Attachment to fame - aversion to insignificance

7-8 - Attachment to pleasure - aversion to pain

The distinctions between virtuous and non-virtuous

In Buddhism, the concepts of good and bad, right and wrong, and moral and immoral—because of being subjective and based on ideological consensus for their validity—are deemed relative truths, meaning that not everyone has the same ideas of what constitutes good and bad and/or right and wrong. A favorite quote of mine from Shakespeare, *there is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so*, positing that concepts like good and bad are merely held within

the mind and lack any true validity in nature. A Taoist story that illustrates this point is *The man who lost his horse*:

One day, a farmer's horse ran away. Upon hearing the news, his neighbors came to visit. *How terrible*, they said sympathetically; to which the farmer replied, *we'll see*. The next morning the horse returned, bringing with it three other wild horses: *how wonderful*, the neighbors exclaimed; *we'll see*, said the farmer. The following day, his son, while trying to ride one of the untamed horses, was thrown and broke his leg. The neighbors again came to offer their sympathies, saying, *how terrible*; once again the farmer replied, *we'll see*. The very next day, the army came to the village to draft young men for war, and upon seeing that his son's leg was broken, they passed him by. The neighbors congratulated the farmer on how well things had turned out for him, saying, *how wonderful*, to which the farmer replied, *we'll see*.

The moral of the story: Subjective concepts like good and bad are dependent on many causes and conditions, and results from past causes are never final but are continuously being reshaped. This, in turn, affects our perception and evaluation of these experiences. Perceptions and evaluations that they themselves also continue to change according to time, conditions, and situations.

Having said that, the idea of good and bad and/or right and wrong is not lost on Buddhists. Buddhism simply posits terminology that is less subjective, using the expressions *virtuous* and *non-virtuous*, *wholesome* (healthy) and *unwholesome* (unhealthy), or simply *positive* and *negative*. These terms as used within Buddhism lack any assignment of judgment or imposed subjective morality. *Virtue* (Tib. *gewa*) as used within Buddhism can be defined as *logical goodness—that which is proven through logic and reason to be beneficial to oneself and others*; and *non-virtue* (Tib. *migewa*)—*that which is proven through logic and reason as harmful and/or not beneficial*. Virtue and non-virtue can also be understood as directions on the spiritual path, with virtuous actions *being* those that lead to happiness, favorable rebirth, and liberation; and non-virtuous actions being those that lead to suffering, unfavorable rebirth, and bondage. With that in mind, because of being non-theistic, Buddhism doesn't posit the notion of sin, commonly defined as *to violate or go against a moral law or law of God*. However, currently within Tibetan Buddhism, due to poor translation and limited education, the English term sin is being used by both Tibetans and Westerners alike. This is due to a mistake in translating the Tibetan term *digpa* as *sin*. Correctly translated, the term *digpa* is synonymous with the Tibetan term *migewa*, meaning non-virtue.

"The wonderful challenge of Buddhism is that it does not offer any absolute formulas for virtuousness. In the Silabatta Sutra, the Buddha asks Ananda if every precept and practice taught by the dharma is holy. Ananda replies, 'Lord, that is not to be answered with a categorical answer.' ~ Hannah Tennant Moore

As far as the concept of evil, Buddhism asserts that the dark intentions and horrendous actions committed by beings as the product of ignorance and/or mental illness rather than evil. Buddhism rejects the notion of any malevolent universal property or demonic agent as being the

cause of temptation or suffering. This includes the rejection of the common religious model of our universe as a cosmos locked in battle between the forces of good and evil. Instead, Buddhism posits a natural universe that is indifferent to the strife of beings. Beings who live within self-generated realities of conflict and suffering, who's true struggle is between ignorance and understanding, not good and evil. Buddhism asserts ignorance, not evil or sin, as the source of all suffering; and that understanding and wholesome virtue as the catalysts for liberation.

"Gazing up at the stars for the first time, I laid my heart open to the indifference of the universe." ~ Albert Camus

Renunciation (Skt. *nihsarana*; Tib. *ngejung*): Within Tibetan Buddhism, the term *renunciation* is derived from the Tibetan word *ngejung*, literally, *definite emergence—the definite determination to be free, or emerge from samsara*. Therefore, within Tibetan Buddhism renunciation can be understood twofold. *First*, as an intention—a singular resolve to escape *samsara*; and *secondly*, as a practice—to strongly de-emphasize materialism and one's attachment to worldly concerns in order to limit distractions and temptations, thereby making life more conducive to spiritual practice. Personally, I still prefer the simple translation of renunciation as *the wish for freedom*.

Renunciation is not as foreign of a concept as you may think. In fact, it is something we all practice on a daily basis but are rarely aware of. We engage in renunciation whenever we practice moderation in our lives (e.g., giving up sweets in order to lose weight, quitting harmful habits to become healthy, and abandoning many behaviors we deem unproductive). One analogy that demonstrates the benefit and proper motivation behind renunciation is of an alcoholic sitting at a bar with a drink in front of him. He knows that if he has the drink it will make him feel better, bringing some temporary happiness. But he's also aware that alcohol is the cause of great suffering within his life. Because of this understanding, he decides that it's time to renounce drinking. He isn't denying the pleasure that comes from drinking but instead is acknowledging the suffering that comes from it. His decision to renounce drinking is based on wisdom derived from his personal experience. He renounces the temporary pleasure of drinking, in order to attain the long-term happiness of a healthy and prosperous life. Through this analogy, one can see that renunciation is an act derived from wisdom in the pursuit of real happiness and not a rejection of pleasure or gratification: it's to renounce limited, unreliable, and problematic pleasures. It's to understand oneself and one's needs, and then to follow that understanding to its logical and practical conclusion, a conclusion leading us to choose behaviors that are more conducive to our goal—that of achieving real lasting happiness. Within Buddhism, the renunciation of worldly pleasures can be seen as akin to trading lesser pleasures for greater ones, a sentiment coined by Tibetans as *exchanging candy for gold*.

My own path of renunciation unfolded gradually by first becoming aware of the amount of things in my life I simply didn't need and also how much of my time was devoted to their acquisition and upkeep. I began to realize the complexity they brought—or as the popular adage goes—I realized the things I owned actually owned me. I believe the process of renunciation naturally mirrors one's spiritual growth, because as one begins to awaken, the trivial nature of ordinary existence becomes clear and one naturally begins to shift one's focus away from the material and instead to the experiential—improving oneself instead of one's environment (e.g., exploring one's potential, accumulating unique experiences, learning new skills, cultivating vir-

tuous qualities and mental states). For myself, as a renunciate and monastic, I'm often asked, *why would you give up a life of comfort and pleasure to become a monk?* To this I reply, I have never rejected pleasure or comfort, but instead merely moved continuously closer and closer towards happiness, freedom, and contentment.

“There is nothing wrong with having pleasures and enjoyments. What is wrong is the confused way we grasp on to these pleasures, turning them from a source of happiness into a source of pain and dissatisfaction.” ~ Lama Thubten Yeshe

Monasticism

In no other tradition has monasticism played a more central role than in Buddhism. The Buddhist monastic order of monks and nuns, referred to as *Sangha* (Skt.), which began during the Buddha's lifetime, is among the oldest organizations in the world. In the Buddha's day, there were two kinds of monks: *forest monks*—those who lived in small groups in the forest, and *monastics*—monks who lived in larger communities within monasteries and nuns who lived in nunneries. Unlike the Sramana and Jain ascetics who lived removed from the lay community, Buddhist monastics lived on the outskirts of the cities, allowing them to be actively involved in society. The establishment of the Buddhist monastic order served as a community that could provide shelter, support, education, and a stable environment for its monastic members, allowing them to practice unimpeded. Monasteries also provided a place where the lay community could gather to receive teachings and seek guidance in their lives.

“Monasticism is a mediating institution, centrist in every sense, midway between city and wilderness, priest and hermit, noble and commoner, indirectly providing both social cohesion and mobility.” ~ Robert Thurman

What is a monastic?

A Buddhist monastic is a monk or nun belonging to the Buddhist monastic order and can be defined as *a renunciant who willingly takes vows of training in virtuous conduct; one who has abandoned lay existence and mundane worldly concerns in order to dedicate their lives fully to the Buddha's teachings and the attainment of enlightenment.* To become a monastic is to dedicate one's life to the service and benefit of others. It's to renounce the endless pursuit of worldly sense pleasures, personal gain, and misguided ambitions. It's to relinquish one's selfish and self-cherishing fixations, and to abandon the daily plotting and scheming for one's survival—including one's continuous manipulation of others in order to get what one wants. To be a monastic is to live in virtue while being sustained through the virtue of others. It's to pursue the one and only true consummation of life—which is liberation. It's often said that the household-er's life may appear more colorful, but the monastics life is clearly more stable. However, with that said, monastic life is not for everyone and one must investigate carefully to see if the monastic lifestyle would be appropriate, comfortable, and beneficial for oneself.

The interdependent relationship between monastics and the lay community

The Buddha saw a very important and mutually beneficial interdependence between the monastic order and the lay community. Monastics served as teachers, fulfilling the educational, ethical, and spiritual needs of the lay, and in return, the lay community provided monastics with simple daily sustenance so they could continue unimpeded in their pursuit of enlightenment. The Buddha believed each group served to help the other. The lay, besides providing the monastics with daily sustenance, also benefited by helping to keep the monastics pure, because if a monastic developed a bad reputation, they would lose favor and support from the lay community. In turn, monastics served as living examples of altruism, virtue, and selfless diligence, thereby inspiring the community as a whole. This interdependence between monastics and lay functioned as a wheel of virtue. For the lay community, monastics represented an object worthy of veneration, and for the monastics, besides receiving their daily sustenance, the veneration received from the laity worked to inspire and renew the monastic's commitment to achieving enlightenment for the benefit of all. This symbiotic relationship allowed both communities the opportunity to practice generosity. Some may say that monastics have it better in this arrangement, but that is to misunderstand the mindset of a monastic, for the monastic has renounced worldly concerns and any interest in money, possessions, or self-importance; possessing no desire for gain or to manipulate others for their own benefit. Monastics abandon worldly life to serve others—living lives of simplicity and poverty so as not to be a burden upon the laity. And in return, the lay community freely offers their support, believing these ideals to be of value and benefit to the community at large. In order to facilitate this symbiotic relationship between monastics and the laity, the Buddha mandated that monastics' sustenance (often only one meal per day) must be procured from the lay community; this served as a vehicle for daily interaction between the two groups.

Recognizing the work of monastics

Often, many are not aware of the level of commitment and intensity of study and training that monastics undergo. That the deep insight and profound wisdom sought by monks and nuns is gained only through vigorous study and practice. I often compare monastic training with doctors training in the West. Like medical students, novice monastics first enter the monastery to begin their formal studies and training. Upon completion of their studies, monastics then go into retreat in order to practice and gain insight into what they have learned, similar to a medical student entering residency. Upon completing their retreat or residency, both are then ready to work effectively in the world. In the West, I think monastics still remain as enigmas and are not fully appreciated for the work they do. On one hand, the West is a culture that has no problem justifying multi-million dollar contracts for professional athletes, musicians, and actors; on the other hand, it has great difficulty accepting the concept of giving a simple meal to a monastic who tirelessly and selflessly works in creating a healthy society—work from which we all benefit (promoting education, ethics, personal responsibility, basic goodness, nonviolence, and goodwill towards others). Monastics serve as teachers, writers, philosophers, social workers, social activists, but most importantly as role models of enlightened behavior.

Vinaya (Skt.; Tib. *dülwa*): *Discipline*. Vinaya is the Buddha's training system for attaining liberation, comprised of precepts of ethical conduct, monastic discipline, and training in monastic living. To become a monastic is to undertake the Buddha's Vinaya training. Buddhism, founded on ethics, believes the holding of vows to be a profound spiritual practice, bringing great benefit to the practitioner who holds them. Taking vows is to promise to uphold certain precepts or rules of ethical and virtuous behavior that are deemed conducive to spiritual practice. Vows, and the virtuous conduct they support, also benefit the monastic in others ways: by making coexistence as a harmonious community possible, by providing a model of virtuous behavior through which one may inspire others, and by clearly defining a monastic's choices and responses, creating simplicity in one's life.

Some aspects of Vinaya, vows, and monastic training:

- Monastic vows are taken for one's entire lifetime.
- Monastics are pacifists and practice non-violence.
- Monastics are prohibited from killing even the smallest of creatures.
- Monastics are prohibited from stealing, lying, or taking intoxicants.
- Monastics are celibate and prohibited from marriage or engaging in sexual activity.
- Buddhist monastics can be recognized by their shaved heads, saffron colored robes (yellow, orange, or red) and by the style in which they wear their robes—with the right arm and shoulder exposed.

Celibacy and monasticism

Many wonder why celibacy is a requirement of Buddhist monks and nuns, because within Buddhism, which does not assert the concept of sin, sexuality is not considered inherently nonvirtuous. However, the Buddha did believe that attachment to sense desire is a great hindrance for those truly wishing to achieving liberation, and that out of all forms of desire, sexual desire to be the most intense and complex. With that said, the Buddha didn't prescribe celibacy for everyone, only for monastics. For lay practitioners, the Buddha merely asked them to not commit sexual misconduct—*sexual harm, either mental, emotional, or physical*. For monastics, celibacy is seen as a practice of *transcendence* and not a repressive or subjugated rule. It is a deeply rewarding practice that leads to contentment, stability, and independence, liberating one from afflictive attachment, emotional extremes, and uncontrollable/unwanted worldly preoccupations—including freedom from the social obligations, expectations, and demands pertaining to sexuality and relationships imposed by society.

The benefits of celibacy

- To stabilize and support a life of uncompromising virtue.
- To make coexistence as a harmonious monastic community easier.
- To simplify one's life, allowing the practitioner to focus fully on attaining liberation.
- To avoid the manipulation, mistrust, suspicion that pervades the world of sexuality.
- To limit desire by learning to recognize the ebb and flow of craving and aversion.
- To recognize the all-encompassing pervasive nature of one's sexual propensities.
- To promote a virtuous and healthy relationship with the lay community.

Mystical powers, miracles, and miraculous beings

All Buddhist traditions share a belief in mystical powers, miracles, and miraculous beings. The buddhas and other superior beings are asserted to possess extraordinary powers, including the ability to perform a vast array of miracles. Buddhists believe that through Buddhist practice and meditation, special powers can be achieved, including clairvoyance, telepathy, seeing past and future lives, astral-projection, walking on water, flying, traveling through space, traveling to heavens to teach gods, making oneself as big as a giant or as small as an ant, becoming invisible, passing through solid objects, walking through mountains, diving in and out of the earth, projecting images of themselves, and multiplying into a million replicas. But most important is to gain control over the process and conditions of one's rebirth. Within Buddhism, the pursuit and cultivation of magical powers is seen as a trivial goal and a distraction to actual spiritual practice. One's first and foremost goal is enlightenment, after which these powers are said to arise naturally at their proper time.

Right view

The simplest way to understand and explain Buddhism is through the concepts of right view and wrong view(s). Right view (Tib. *yangdakpe tawa*) can be defined as *the correct perception and understanding of the true nature of oneself and reality*. For someone following the Buddhist path, this means having an accurate understanding of the Buddha's teachings and ontological model of reality. Right view is posited as the cause and condition for the attainment of liberation or nirvana, whereas wrong view(s), which are commonly asserted as the two extreme views of *nihilism* (that nothing exists) and *absolutism* (eternal and/or self-existence), are posited as the causes and conditions for continued existence in samsara. In other words, right view represents clarity, wisdom, and understanding, and wrong views represents ignorance, afflictions, and delusion. According to Lama Tsongkhapa, right view can be divided into *conceptual right view* and *experiential right view*.

"Wrong views are those held by ordinary beings, conceptual right view is that which is understood by studied practitioners, and experiential right view is that which is realized directly by superior beings and Buddhas." ~ Tsongkhapa

Both *right conceptual view* and *right experiential view* are developed through slowly habituating oneself to the Buddha's model of reality, through study, contemplation, meditation, and practice. Through the cultivation and attainment of the right conceptual view, wrong views are slowly lessened and eventually eradicated leading to a direct realization of the true nature of oneself and reality—which is synonymous with *right experiential view*. Therefore, one can assert that all studies, methods, and practices within Buddhism share the same single aim—that of achieving right view.

CHAPTER THREE: The Later Age of Indian Buddhism

The Later Age of Indian Buddhism

Buddhism as a substantial movement didn't come into its own until after the Buddha's death, during the reign of King Ashoka (269-232 BCE). The story of King Ashoka begins with young Ashoka as a tyrant king, dubbed *Ashoka the cruel*. However, later in his life, at the end of one of his bloodiest conquests, Ashoka broke down, and while grieving terribly over the aftermath of his actions, he meets a Buddhist monk on the road, repents, and converts to Buddhism. From this point on, King Ashoka becomes the most predominant figure in the propagation of Buddhism since the Buddha himself. King Ashoka was the first to rediscover the Buddhist holy sites, marking them by erecting *Ashokan Pillars* engraved with historical and Buddhist script. Despite Asoka's cruel beginnings, he is remembered in Indian history as one of India's kindest kings, emphasizing religious tolerance and Buddhist ethics. Ashoka is also believed to be the first leader in history to establish animal rights laws. In tribute to his fairness, kindness, and sense of justice, King Ashoka is commemorated by his *Wheel of justice*, which currently adorns the Indian national flag.

The Buddhist Councils

After the Buddha's death, various councils of Buddhist leaders were held to discuss monastic rules and the preservation and dissemination of the Buddha's teachings. The number of councils asserted to have been held varies among different traditions. However, all posit the occurrence of the first three councils within India as being historically accurate. The first council is posited as being held shortly after the Buddha's death, the second council one-hundred years later, and the third council being held over two-hundred years after the Buddha's death and was presided over by King Ashoka himself. The Buddha's teachings within his lifetime existed as a single tradition, referred to today as the *Hinayana tradition*. However, after his death, his teachings began to be reinterpreted, culminating in the emergence of eighteen distinct Hinayana schools within India. It was at this time that the third council was held to address reports of corruption and the spread of heretical views. The third council's aim was *first*, to affirm which teachings of the eighteen Hinayana schools were authentic, *secondly*, to compile and organize their findings, *and finally*, to purge the Sangha of heretics and false monastics. Upon the conclusion of the third council, King Ashoka entrusted those teachings, which were accepted as authentic by the council, to missionaries who propagated them in neighboring countries. The most memorable of these missionaries were King Ashoka's own son and daughter who took these teachings to Sri Lanka. At this point in history, Buddhism was still being preserved as an oral tradition with the Buddha's teachings painstakingly memorized and recited daily by monastics in order to preserve them for future generations. It wasn't until some five-hundred years after the Buddha's death, during the time of the fourth council (72 BCE), that the Buddha's teachings were first written down and recorded in Pali and Sanskrit. The written records of the Buddha's teachings were organized into three categories: *Vinaya*, *Sutra*, and *Abhidharma*, collectively referred to as *the three baskets*, which became the receptacle for all of the Buddha's

teachings. Currently there exist three Buddhist canons from which the different Buddhist traditions are derived: the Pali canon, Chinese canon, and Tibetan canon. However, no complete Sanskrit canon has survived.

The Buddhist canon: referred to as *the three baskets* (Skt. *tripitika*; Tib. *denö sum*).

Consisting of:

1. **Vinaya** (Skt.; Tib. *dülwa*): training in monastic discipline, vows, and rules of conduct.
2. **Sutra** (Skt.; Tib. *do*): string or thread; that which weaves or holds together. Discourses of the Buddha (the actual words of the Buddha).
3. **Abhidharma** (Skt.; Tib. *chöngönpa*): Literally *the study of dharma*. The repository of higher knowledge and training in wisdom, considered the first attempt to arrange the Buddha's teachings into a comprehensive philosophical system. Generally believed to have emerged after the Buddha's death around the third century BCE, consisting of cosmology, epistemology, ontology, phenomenology, metaphysics, and mind science. The abhidharma teachings have a contentious history, with many Buddhist groups assembling and transmitting their own unique versions.

Note: In an attempt to legitimize the Abhidharma, its teachings were asserted to have been taught by the Buddha himself in the heaven realms to superior beings, including his late mother, before being passed down and shared within our human realm.

The Rise of Indian Mahayana Buddhism

Sometime after the third council, a new tradition of Buddhist thought emerged, the *Mahayana* (Skt.; Tib. *tegpa chenpo*), meaning *large raft* or *universal vehicle*. Mahayanists assert the Mahayana scriptures to have been taught secretly by the Buddha within his own lifetime, which then began to surface publically sometime after 200 BCE. The origin of the Mahayana is unclear. One story tells of the Buddha entrusting the Mahayana teachings (Prajnaparamita sutras) to the king of the *Nagas* (serpent/dragon) who protected them in his underwater realm until the legendary Indian Buddhist master Nagarjuna (assumed founder of the Mahayana tradition) retrieved and propagated them at a later date. Historically, it's postulated that these teachings may have been composed within forest monasteries by superior practitioners who received them through visions of various buddhas and bodhisattvas and therefore rendered their scriptures in the voice of the buddhas thereby acknowledging their visionary source.

Founded upon the Hinayana tradition, the Mahayana scriptures were intended to complement and further elucidate and expound upon the Hinayana scriptures, offering a larger universal scope aimed of liberating society at large and not merely the individual. This universal scope made the pursuit of enlightenment accessible to both monastics and lay alike, making the Mahayana tradition very popular with the lay and especially the merchant class. Another reason

for the success of the Mahayana tradition is attributed to the rise of writing and literacy which made the Buddhist teachings less dependent on the memorized oral tradition passed down and known only by monastics.

Many mistakenly assume that the Mahayana and Hinayana traditions in early India existed as separate competing schools. However, evidence shows that these traditions actually existed side by side, with accounts of monastics from both traditions even living within the same monasteries, and thereby influencing each other greatly. Another clue in asserting their harmonious relationship is that the Mahayanist never tried to form a separate *Vinaya* (rules of monastic conduct) which is often what differentiates one Buddhist tradition from another. This would imply that the rise of the Mahayana tradition was not out of schism, but simply the emergence of additional teachings. Therefore, practitioners that followed the Hinayana teachings but in addition also followed the Mahayana teachings were called Mahayanists and those who did not embrace the new Mahayana teachings kept the designation Hinayanists. The Mahayana is traditionally a North Asia tradition found in Bhutan, China, India, Japan, Korea, Mongolia, Nepal, Tibet, and Vietnam. Although being the largest Buddhist group, the Mahayana no longer exists as a single unique tradition, but instead serves as the foundation for many modern traditions, schools, and subschools, including the Chan, Pure Land, Tibetan, and Zen traditions.

The term *Hinayana*—meaning *small raft*, was introduced by *Mahayanists*—meaning *large raft*, and is a term often deemed derogatory. However, I believe the term Hinayana was never meant to imply that it is inferior to the Mahayana, but instead merely emphasizes the Hinayana’s small scope of individual personal liberation, primarily focused on monasticism; in contrast to the Mahayana’s universal scope of enlightening society at large—for both monastic and lay alike. This can be deduced from the fact that the Hinayana teachings remained as the foundation of the Mahayana tradition, and also that every Mahayana monastic has strict vows of never disparaging the Hinayana or any other Buddhist traditions.

What Sets the Mahayana Apart

Often, differences between the Hinayana and Mahayana are merely a difference in emphasis of various shared beliefs. Generally, the Mahayana are believed to have a stronger emphasis on devotion, faith, altruism, and the accumulation of merit through good works. A strong distinction between the two is clearly the language in which each tradition was recorded, with the Hinayana being recorded in Pali script—referred to as the Pali tradition, and the Mahayana being recorded in Sanskrit script—referred to as the Sanskrit tradition. However, the greatest distinction between the two is their intention, with the Mahayana possessing a unique altruistic motivation that encompasses all aspects of the practitioner’s life—be it study, practice, work, or even mundane daily activities. The intention that everything one does is done through an altruistic

motivation towards benefiting others. Philosophically, a significant difference between the two is the way in which each posits the Buddha. The Hinayanas revere the Buddha as a supreme human sage who awakened to the truth of reality through his own efforts, and who after his death is believed to no longer be accessible to practitioners. However, the Mahayanists posit the Buddha as not merely human but as an messianic being possessing omniscience and omnipresence (all-knowing and existing everywhere) who took human form merely for our benefit. To Mahayanists, the Buddha is a universal savior, who after his death continues to emanate in countless world systems, benefiting and bestowing blessing on all sentient beings.

Mahayana philosophy (Skt.; Tib. *tegya chenpo*)

Indian Mahayana philosophy is divided into two main branches, that of the *Madhyamaka* and the *Yogacara*. Main differences between the two pertain to their often opposing views on the topics of consciousness, epistemology, and the nature of reality.

Yogachara (Skt.; Tib. *naljorcho*): Literally, *yoga practice*; also known as the *Mind Only School* (Skt. *Citta matra*; Tib. *sem tsampa*). The Mahayana Yogachara philosophy was founded by the Indian Buddhist masters and half brothers *Asanga* and *Vasubandhu* (4th century CE) and is seen as pertaining primarily to the *third turning of the wheel of Dharma*. The Yogachara thrived in India, East Asia, and early Tibet, and is thought of as more experiential—an explanation of experience rather than a system of ontology. This philosophy is often deemed as a form of *subjective idealism*, positing that reality and one's environment are a creation or projection of the mind, or more properly, that phenomena exist only in the nature of the mind. Meaning, that while phenomena are not mind, they are an aspect of the mind. Later, syntheses of Yogachara and Madhyamaka began to emerge, creating further subschools and interpretations of Mahayana thought. Today Yogachara is no longer practiced as a single philosophy. However, it continues to strongly influence many modern schools, including East Asian Mahayana traditions and Tantric Buddhism.

Madhyamaka (Skt.; Tib. *umapa*): Literally, *middle-most*; *beyond all extremes*; referred to as the *middle way philosophy*; a philosophy predominant in all modern Mahayana traditions. Founded by *Nagarjuna* (2nd century CE), Madhyamaka asserts that all phenomena lack any inherent or independent essential essence (opposed to the Yogachara view that reality is merely a projection of the mind). Here, when positing that phenomena lack essential essence, this is not implying that things don't exist, but instead is a critique about the existential nature of things. This concept is discussed further within the topic of emptiness, presented later in this text series. Madhyamaka is divided into various subschools and is the current view of all Tibetan Buddhist Schools.

Unique Elements of the Mahayana Tradition

Concepts introduced or re-emphasized within the Mahayana sutras

The three principal aspects of the Mahayana path

It's said that all of the Mahayana teachings are contained within these three principal aspects.

1. **Renunciation** (Skt. *nihsarana*; Tib. *ngejung*): *The wish for freedom; literally, definite emergence—the definite determination to be free from samsara.*
2. **Bodhichitta** (Skt.; Tib. *Jangchup kyi sem*): *The altruistic intention to become a buddha in order to liberate oneself and others from suffering.*
3. **The correct view** (Tib. *yangdakpe tawa*): *The proper understanding of the Buddha's teachings, and the true nature of oneself and reality.*

The collection of wisdom and merit

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

The two collections (Skt. *sambhar advaya*; Tib. *tsoknyi*)

- **The collection of wisdom** (Skt. *jnana sambhara*; Tib. *yeshe kyi tsok*): Pertaining to gaining a clear understanding of the Buddha's teachings, and the true nature of oneself and reality.
- **The collection of merit** (Skt. *punya sambhara*; Tib. *sönam kyi tsok*): Pertaining to merit gained through acts of altruism, study, practice, good-works, and devotion.

Bodhichitta (Skt.; Tib. *jangchup kyi sem*): *The altruistic mind of enlightenment.* Bodhichitta is perhaps the single most important aspect of the Mahayana path. According to the Mahayana, without the direct realization of bodhichitta, full enlightenment or buddhahood (to become a buddha) is not possible. The term *bodhichitta* is comprised of two words, *bodhi* (Skt.)—meaning *awakened*, and *citta* (Skt.)—meaning *mind*; together they are commonly translated as, *awakened mind* or *mind of enlightenment*. The principle of bodhichitta is comprised of the two aspects of *aspiration* and *intention*:

- The *aspiration* to achieve buddhahood
- The altruistic *intention* to do so for the sake of others

In other words, bodhichitta is *the altruistic aspiration and determination to become a buddha in order to free all beings from suffering*. When these two aspects (mental factors) arise spontaneously and simultaneously, and their union is developed to its highest potential, they become the *mind of bodhichitta*—a mind that continually and spontaneously works solely for the benefit of others. The attainment of bodhichitta requires learning to relinquish self-cherishing, while cultivating and developing cherishing of others. I often say that to practice bodhichitta is to learn to care for others with motherly intent. The cultivation of bodhichitta is accomplished

through the contemplative practice referred to as *mind training* or *mind developing*. The simplest form of mind trainings is merely the constant reflection upon the thought, *I wish to become a buddha for the benefit of all sentient beings*.

“Those who become buddhas put others before themselves. Doing so is the secret to their success on the path to enlightenment. Their determination to be of benefit to others allows them to accomplish two goals: they help others, and at the same time, without trying, they achieve their own temporary and ultimate happiness.” ~ Shechen Rabjam Rinpoche

It’s important to understand that the practice of bodhichitta needs to be rooted in the proper intention, and cannot arise from intentions related to any of the eight worldly concerns:

Attachment to gain - aversion to loss

Attachment to praise - aversion to blame

Attachment to fame - aversion to insignificance

Attachment to pleasure - aversion to pain

Bodhichitta is attained and/or experienced within two aspects,

- **Conventional or contrived bodhichitta** (Skt.; Tib. *kundzob jangchubkyi sem*): *A conceptual understanding of bodhichitta gained through study and practice*. Often arising (with some effort) within meditation, but lost when not in meditation.
- **Ultimate or uncontrived bodhichitta** (Skt.; Tib. *dondam jangchubkyi sem*): *A direct experiential realization of bodhichitta*. Arising (spontaneously without effort) within meditation, but still present when not in meditation. Ultimate bodhichitta is often referred to as a mind, for the fact that it becomes a constant and enduring mental state through which one perceives reality (explained in greater detail in volume-2: *mind and consciousness*).

The Bodhisattva (Skt.; Tib. *jang chub sempa*): *One who possesses bodhichitta*.

The term *bodhisattva* is comprised of two words, *bodhi* (Skt.)—meaning *awakening*, and *sattva* (Skt.)—meaning, *essence, being, or spirit*; together they can be translated as *one who possesses the mind of awakening*. The Mahayana tradition (often referred to as the Bodhisattva Vehicle) is founded upon the bodhisattva ideal. The bodhisattva is an advanced practitioner (monastic or lay) who possesses the altruistic aspiration and determination to attain buddhahood in order to free all beings from suffering. It’s asserted that the bodhisattva, although in a position to attain nirvana, out of great compassion to sentient beings, forgoes nirvana and instead chooses to be reborn and abide in samsara to continue to perfect themselves in order to become a buddha. Besides having high spiritual realization, bodhisattvas are said to possess extraordinary (superhuman) powers of compassion. In the Mahayana tradition, the ideal of the bodhisattva is

the embodiment of the path, as well as the immediate goal for practitioners. This ideal is captured perfectly in the following quote by the 9th century Indian Buddhist Master Shantideva.

“For as long as space endures, and for as long as living beings remain, until then may I too abide to dispel the misery of the world.” ~ Shantideva

Emptiness (Skt. *sunyata*; Tib. *tongpa nyi*): A core concept of Mahayana Buddhist philosophy. Synonymous with voidness, suchlessness, essencelessness, and identitylessness. Although found in the Hinayana and Theravada traditions (taught as selflessness), the topic of emptiness takes center stage in importance in the Mahayana tradition. Emptiness is the doctrine that all phenomena lack *inherent existence*. Here the term inherent existence (Tib. *rangshin ki drubpa*) is defined as, *that which is self-existent, self-sufficient, and possessing a substantial independent essence*. Therefore, when asserting that all phenomena lack inherent existence, we are asserting that when, through analysis, we dissect phenomena eliminating all parts, we find there is nothing remaining which is distinctly *that thing*. No single aspect can be found that exists independently from other things, that all phenomena are empty of any essential essence. *Essence* here is defined as *an inherent element or intrinsic characteristic which makes something uniquely itself*. When asserting that phenomena are empty of inherent existence, we are conversely asserting that phenomenon exist interdependently. The doctrine of emptiness does not dispute the existence of things, but instead is a revelation into *how* things exist. A more comprehensive presentation of emptiness is shared later in this text series.

Buddha nature (Skt. *tathagathagarbha*; Tib. *dezhin shegpe nyingpo*): *The innate potential of all beings to become buddhas; or the mind’s innate potential for complete clarity; further understood as the emptiness of inherent existence of the mind*. Buddha nature is often referred to as the *essence of buddhahood* or *enlightened essence*, for without it, enlightenment would not be possible. Buddha nature is posited within two aspects:

- **Naturally abiding buddha nature:** *The emptiness of inherent existence of the mind.*
- **Transforming buddha nature:** *One’s qualities that can be further developed, potentially becoming the omniscient mind of a buddha.*

“Though the capacity for achieving enlightenment is innate within all sentient beings, enlightenment itself is not.” ~ Tsongkhapa

Skillful Means (Skt. *upaya kausalya*; Tib. *tab la kepa*): *Skillful method in conveying teachings; pertaining to a teacher’s ability to adapt the teachings to the needs and aptitude of the student or particular group in order to successfully communicate the Dharma*. The Mahayana tradition posits the Buddha as a master teacher who skillfully taught different levels of teachings to different audiences in accordance with their particular needs, situations, and dispositions, rather

than imposing a single one-size-fits-all doctrine. This is said to be similar to a physician who dispenses different advice and medicines to different patients according to their immediate needs. However, with that said, if not properly understood, this skillful style of teachings can occasionally appear to offer seemingly contradictory advice or assertions. Therefore, in order to properly understand the Buddha's teachings, one has to consider the environment and audience in which each teaching is given.

Six Perfections (Skt. *prajnaparamita*; Tib. *parchin*): *The perfection of wisdom*. The practice of the perfection of wisdom is also found in the Hinayana tradition (taught as ten perfections) but within the Mahayana, the perfections become foundational and the central practice of the bodhisattva. The Mahayana's unique presentation of the perfections originates from the Mahayana *Prajnaparamita Sutras*. Mahayanists assert the perfections as the only practice and/or training which leads to buddhahood. Because of this, the perfections are often referred to as *the great mother* or *the mother of all the buddhas*, depicting the perfections as the source or womb of buddhahood. The practice or cultivation of the perfections is founded upon the altruistic intention of bodhichitta with the goal of accumulating great wisdom and great merit.

The Six Perfections (Skt. *paramitas*; Tib. *pharchin*):

1. **Generosity** (Skt. *dana*; Tib. *jinpa*): *Giving of resources, dharma, protection, care, love, one's time, and oneself.*
2. **Ethics** (Skt. *sila*; Tib. *tsultrim*): *Virtue, discipline, restraint, proper conduct, and abandoning the ten non-virtuous actions.*
3. **Fortitude** (Skt. *ksanti*; Tib. *zöpa*): *Tolerance, acceptance, patience, and endurance.*
4. **Joyous effort** (Skt. *virya*; Tib. *tsöndrü*): *Enthusiasm, energy, and diligence.*
5. **Meditative stability** (Skt. *dhyana*; Tib. *samten*): *Single-pointed concentration, mindfulness, clarity, and focus.*
6. **Wisdom** (Skt. *prajna*; Tib. *sherab*): *Transcendental wisdom and deep insight into the Buddha's teachings and the true nature of oneself and reality.*

Note: Both #5—meditative stability and #6—wisdom, pertain to meditation practice.

The Three Vehicles of Buddhism

The Three Vehicles (Skt. *triyana*; Tib. *tegpasum*): *Three unique Buddhist paths leading to enlightenment*. Here the term *vehicle* (Skt. *yana*; Tib. *tekpa*) can be translated as *raft* or *ferry*, meaning a means of arriving at the other shore of liberation, and in this context is synonymous with path or method.

1. **Hinayana** (Skt.; Tib. *thegmen*): *Small raft—the individual liberation vehicle.*
The Hinayana vehicle focuses on individual liberation and monasticism, with the aim of attaining nirvana.
2. **Mahayana** (Skt.; Tib. *tegpa chenpo*): *Large raft—the universal vehicle.*
The Mahayana vehicle focuses on reaching enlightenment as a society. It is based on the altruistic intention of bodhichitta and the aim of attaining buddhahood.
3. **Vajrayana** (Skt.; Tib. *dorje tegpa*): *Indestructible or indivisible raft—the tantric vehicle.*
Indivisible here refers to *the indivisibility of wisdom and method*. A later extension of the Mahayana, the Vajrayana is an esoteric and secret vehicle that utilizes visualization, meditation, ritual, and working with subtle mind and body energies with the aim of attaining buddhahood. Scripturally, tantra is asserted to have been taught by the Buddha and other superior beings. Vajrayana and tantra are explained further in the next chapter: *Tibetan Buddhism*.

Note: Tibetan Buddhism asserts that the three vehicles are meant to be understood as a progressive order of teachings, beginning with the Buddha's simplest teachings and ending with his most profound. Tibetan Buddhism asserts itself as the only tradition to study and practice all three vehicles, thereby claiming itself as the only complete presentation of the Buddha's teachings. Contrary to this, practitioners of the earlier vehicles reject the authenticity of the later vehicles.

The Three Turnings of the Wheel of Dharma

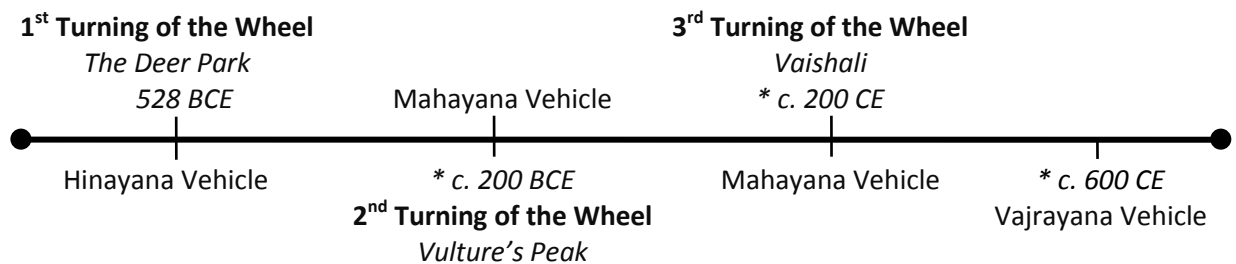
The expression *turning the wheel of dharma* can be defined as *the introduction of a momentous and new teaching by a buddha*, and can be expressed as *the Buddha turned the wheel of Dharma for the benefit of all sentient beings*. The three turnings of the wheel of dharma should not be confused with the three vehicles discussed above. Although sharing much in common, the three vehicles refer to three paths for attaining liberation, whereas the three turnings of the wheel refer to three momentous teachings of the Buddha which serve as the foundation of those paths. Each of the turnings of the wheel is said to refine, elucidate, and expound upon the meaning of the previous turning, as well as addressing any contradictions that may appear to have arisen.

The Three Turnings of the Wheel of Dharma (Skt. *tridharmacakra*; Tib. *chökhör rimpa sum*)

1. **The first turning of the wheel of dharma:** The foundation of all Buddhist traditions.
The first turning of the wheel encompasses the Buddha's earliest teachings, most notably his teachings on the four noble truths, taught by the Buddha at the Deer Park in Sarnath, near Varanasi, Northeast India (528 BCE).

2. **The second turning of the wheel of dharma:** The core teachings of the Mahayana Madhyamaka tradition, comprised of the Buddha's later teachings, including *The Perfection of Wisdom Sutras*, which contain most notably the Buddha's teachings on emptiness and skillful means. Mahayanists assert these teachings were taught by the Buddha himself at Vulture's Peak, Rajgir, India, fifteen years after the first turning of the wheel, positing that the historical date given for their emergence (c. 200 BCE.) as merely the first public surfacing of these hidden teachings.
3. **The third turning of the wheel of dharma:** The core teachings of the Mahayana Yogacara tradition comprised of the Buddha's teachings on buddha nature, while also serving to clarify views on the topic of emptiness. Mahayanists assert these teachings were taught by the Buddha himself at the ancient city of Vaishali in today's Bihar, India, thirty years after the first turning of the wheel of dharma, positing that the historical date given for their emergence (c. 200 CE) as merely the first public surfacing of these hidden teachings.

Timeline of the the 3 Vehicles and the 3 Turnings of the Wheel of Dharma



* Dates given are the historical emergence of these teachings and not necessarily when the teachings were given. Mahayanists and Vajrayanists believe that their vehicles were taught by the historical Buddha.

The Age of the Great Indian Universities

From the first century BCE to the twelfth century CE, India produced some of the greatest universities in the world. These universities grew out of the Indian Buddhist culture of their time and although centered around the Buddha's teachings, they were open to other religions and schools of thought as well. Out of this Indian age of reason and knowledge grew three important institutions: the universities of *Nalanda*, *Odantapuri*, and *Vikramashila*. Of these, the Buddhist University of Nalanda became the most renowned.

The University of Nalanda - Bihar, India (c. 400 BCE - 1197 CE)

Ancient India in its golden age ushered in an era of reason and knowledge that some historians say greatly surpassed the rest of the world at that time. At the center of this age of knowledge stood the great university of Nalanda. Nalanda was an institution that celebrated all of the different Buddhist traditions of the world, as well as non-Buddhist traditions of that time. Nalanda attracted scholars from as far as away as China, Greece, Indonesia, Japan, Korea, Persia, Tibet, and Turkey. The university trained students in the fine arts, medicine, mathematics, astronomy, and politics. However, Mahayana philosophical debate and studies on the nature of reality were at the heart of the Nalanda curriculum. At its peak, Nalanda provided dormitories for nearly ten thousand students and over two thousand professors, and was home to the greatest Buddhist philosophers in history. Today, the teachings of the great Nalanda Masters form the core curriculum of all Tibetan monasteries, a fact that His Holiness continually points out saying, *Tibetan Buddhism is the Buddhism of Nalanda*.

The Decline of Buddhism in India

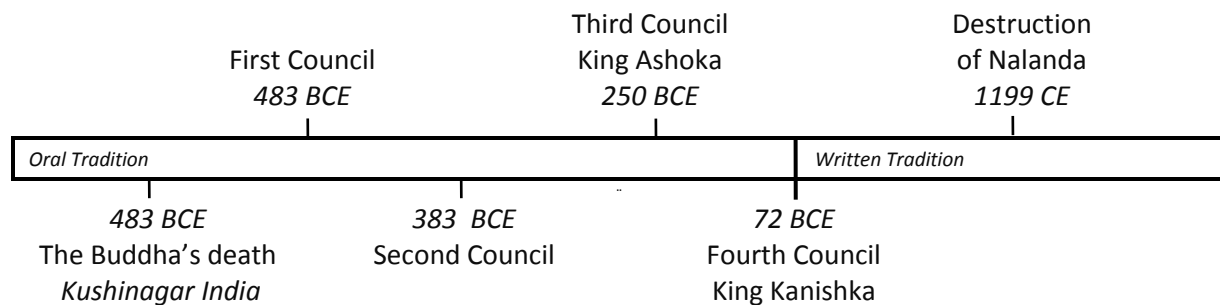
The decline of Buddhism in India is often marked by the destruction of Nalanda University in 1199 CE by Turkish Muslim invaders. It was reported that when it was sacked and set on fire, the nine-story library was so immense that it burned for three days. However, reasons given for the decline of Buddhism in India, which began as early as the 7th century CE, are not clear and are still being debated by historians to this day. As previously mentioned, the history of this age lacks any substantial historical evidence, and traditional theories simply don't answer the question of how Buddhism almost completely died out in India, while other religions, including Brahmanism and Jainism, survived. Theories for Buddhism's decline in India are many. Some include:

- The invasion of Muslim Turks who slaughtered monastics and destroyed Buddhist temples and infrastructure.
- The loss of patronage to Buddhists by the governing Muslim Turks.
- The resurgence of Brahmanism/Hinduism, causing a loss of royal patronage.
- Buddhism's unwillingness to conform to India's caste system.
- The rise and/or misuse of Tantra.
- As Buddhism was being oppressed within India, Buddhists simply relocated to neighboring countries where Buddhism was flourishing.
- Buddhism had become so institutionalized, aloof, and out of the reach of lay practitioners that after the destruction of its institutions, no lay substructure remained.
- Buddhist monasticism had degenerated, becoming corrupt, with institutions, monastics, and teachers becoming wealthy and materialistic.

- One last and possibly most interesting reason pertains to a prophecy that predicted the end of Buddhism in India; and Buddhism being the path of non-attachment, its monastics were simply content to watch it pass away.

Although Buddhism almost completely died out in India, it remained preserved in South Asia, East Asia, and in Tibet where the most secret and rarest of the Buddha's teachings the Vajrayana or tantric teachings remained protected. Buddhism never completely died out in India, for throughout history and to this present day, small pockets of Buddhists have always existed. However, Hinduism did what it does best, assimilating the Buddha into its pantheon of gods, making him the ninth of the ten divine emanations (*avatars*) of Lord Vishnu the preserver. In the end, the golden age of Indian Buddhism, beginning with the Buddha's enlightenment up to the destruction of Nalanda university, flourished and shaped India for nearly one and a half millennium.

Timeline of Later Indian Buddhism



CHAPTER FOUR: The Spread of Buddhism

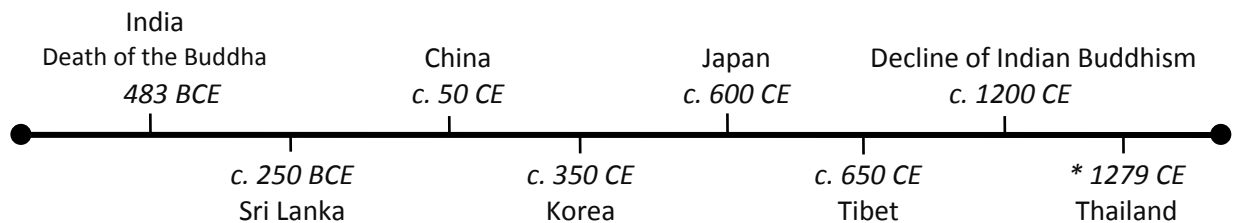
The Spread of Buddhism

As Buddhism filled the hearts and minds of the people of India, travelers, merchants, and scholars starting bringing these new ideas back to their own countries, sharing stories of a remarkable new teacher—the Buddha. Although modern Buddhists don't proselytize, early Buddhists at the time of King Ashoka did, with Buddhist missionaries being sent out into the world to share the Buddha's teachings. The spread of Buddhism helped usher in an age of enlightenment, reason, and knowledge that profoundly influenced all of Asia, while establishing the Buddha as the most predominant figure of this golden age of awakening. Even today, the influence of Buddhism can be seen throughout Asia and the world, an influence that is still shaping and benefiting the world in profound ways.

*"So much of the history of the world is seen through its military conquests and conquerors.
But the Buddha was one man who sits under a tree thinking, and changes the world."
~ Michael Wood*

With the spread of Buddhism throughout Asia, its teachings adapted to the needs of those cultures. For instance, in India, Buddhist monks relied upon the lay community for their daily sustenance. However, as Buddhism arrived in China, which possessed a strong work ethic, Chinese monastics developed the phrase, *no work, no food*. Similarly, when arriving in Japan, Buddhism adopted the spacious, formal, and often stark style of Japanese culture of that time. And now, as Buddhism is being established in the West, it is adapting to be suitable for our own time and culture.

Timeline of the Spread of Buddhism in the World



* The origin of Buddhism into Thailand is unclear. Thailand in 1279 takes Theravada Buddhism as the state religion. However, some posit the introduction of Buddhism as early as the 3rd century BCE.

Later Buddhist Traditions

Throughout Buddhist history, many different interpretations of the Buddha's teachings have been asserted, including how best to traverse the path to enlightenment. Over time, these different views have slowly developed into different traditions and schools of Buddhist thought. Some traditions possess highly complex philosophical systems; others believe the intellect to be a potential obstacle to the attainment of enlightenment. Some traditions favor complex ritualistic practices, while others propose simplicity to the extreme of reciting only a single mantra (a mantra is a sequence of sacred syllables recited to accumulate merit). Nevertheless, each tradition is founded upon scriptural evidence that supports its interpretations. Because of this, today we have a rich array of authentic forms of Buddhism to choose from. This richness of Buddhist thought is due to the fact that the Buddha left us with such an abundance of teachings. Historically, most prophets or religious leaders lived short lives when compared to the Buddha, who lived a long fruitful life, teaching for over forty-five years. Despite their differences, all modern traditions of Buddhism have a shared history, they all originated in India and are all founded upon the Hinayana Buddhist Teachings.

The Theravada Buddhist Tradition (Skt.; Tib. *neten depa*): *Doctrine of the elders.*

The Theravada is generally regarded as a South Asian tradition. It is traditionally found in Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Thailand, and Vietnam. Theravadists see themselves as traditionalists presenting and preserving a more conventional and historically accurate account of the Buddha and his teachings. The Theravadists are deeply rooted in monasticism, believing it to be the most conducive lifestyle for achieving nirvana. The Theravada emphasizes diligence in study and practice, experiential insight, and self-reliance. Practices include study, contemplation, meditation, mindfulness, prayer, and chanting. Often, people confuse the Theravada tradition with the Hinayana tradition—which is a mistake. For although being very similar—sharing the same basic views and scriptures—the Theravada tradition and teachings were a later development of the Sri Lanka Hinayana teachings, teachings that originated from the authentication and consolidation of the eighteen Indian Hinayana schools during the third Buddhist council in India (c. 250 BCE). This means that historically, the Theravada tradition never existed in India. Additionally, the Hinayana, as a distinct tradition, is no longer taught or practiced, whereas the Theravada remains a popular and flourishing tradition.

Tibetan Buddhist Tradition (Skt.; Tib. *pür ki nangchö*)

A form of Vajrayana Buddhism and therefore a branch of the Mahayana. Tibetan Buddhism accepts the Hinayana, Mahayana, and Vajrayana scriptures as authentic teachings of the Buddha. Translated from Sanskrit into Tibetan, these teachings comprise the Tibetan Buddhist Canon, The *Kangyur* and *Tengyur* (Tib.). Tibetan Buddhism, like all Mahayana traditions, focuses on the

accumulation of wisdom and merit, through study, contemplation, meditation, mindfulness, ritual, chanting, mantra recitation, and good works. In addition, Tibetan Buddhism's tantric practices utilize a vast array of mental and physical techniques aimed at developing and purifying the mind, leading to buddhahood. A more comprehensive presentation of Tibetan Buddhism is shared in the next chapter.

East Asian Traditions

The Buddhism of East Asia is a complex and fascinating assortment of various Mahayana schools that represents the majority of Mahayana Buddhism in existence today. This book, being an introduction, will merely outline the major East Asian Buddhist traditions, that of Chan, Pure Land, and Zen Buddhism.

Chan Buddhism (Ch.): Literally, *meditation or meditative state*.

A branch of the Mahayana vehicle. Although Buddhism first arrived in China in the 1st century CE, Chan Buddhism—founded by the great Buddhist master *Bodhidharma*—didn't become a formal tradition until the 6th century CE. Often considered to be a combination of Indian Mahayana Buddhism and Chinese Taoism, Chan Buddhism is accepted as an authentic and unique tradition of Mahayana Buddhism. Chan is an experiential tradition, emphasizing the cultivation of direct insight into one's true nature, with the expression of that insight pervading all aspects of daily life. Chan practices include study, mindfulness, meditation, veneration, visualization, and sutra and mantra recitation.

The Zen Buddhist Tradition (Jp.; Ch. *Chan*): Literally, *meditation or meditative state*.

A branch of the Mahayana vehicle founded in 600 CE in Japan, Zen is a later development of Chinese Chan Buddhism. Some assert that the only difference between Zen and Chan is merely the pronunciation of the name. However, although having much in common, Zen differs in subtle ways, most notably differences in emphasized scriptures, monastic style, and practice techniques. Practice within Zen is mainly focused on *zazen*, literally *seated meditation*. Other practices include study, mindfulness, veneration, visualization, sutra and mantra recitation. Additionally, both Zen and Chan utilize the contemplative practice of *koans*. Koans are mind puzzles or riddles. By contemplating and/or meditating on koans, the practitioner cultivates a unique insight, while hoping to provoke *sudden enlightenment*. Some popular koans are:

- *What was the appearance of your face before your ancestors were born?*
- *What is the sound of one hand clapping?*
- Or simply focusing on an object while contemplating, "*What is this?*"

Zen often de-emphasizes mere knowledge of doctrine, favoring instead a more direct experiential understanding, and it is not overly concerned with thoughts about the afterlife, rebirth, or the nature of existence. For Zen, the focus is on the *here and now*. It's often said that Zen is more interested in sitting with the question than knowing the answer. Today, Zen is the predominant form of Buddhism in China, Japan, Korea, and Vietnam, while also thriving in many other countries throughout the world.

"Great questioning—great awakening; little questioning—little awakening; no questioning—no awakening." ~ Zen proverb

The Pure Land Buddhist Tradition: *The path of serene trust.*

Pure Land Buddhism is one of the most popular Mahayana traditions in East Asia. It is traditionally found in China, India, Japan, Korea, Taiwan, and Vietnam. The concept of Pure Land Buddhism can be found within all schools of Mahayana Buddhism, including Tibetan Buddhism, Chan, and Zen. The Pure Land School originated in India but didn't become a substantial movement until the 5th century CE, when it quickly spread throughout China and later Japan. Focused on the *Buddha Amitabha* (Skt.; Tib. *öpame*) *the Buddha of infinite light*, also known as *Amitayus* (Skt.; Tib. *tsepakme*) *the Buddha of infinite life*, Pure Land Buddhism believes that the attainment of enlightenment is no longer practical or even possible in our present degenerated era. Therefore, the goal for Pure Land Practitioners is not enlightenment within this lifetime, but instead rebirth into the Buddha realm *Sukhavati* (Skt.; Tib. *dewachen*) *the Western pure land of Amitabha*. The term *pure land* is often mistaken as similar to an Abrahamic heaven. However, although descriptions of these pure lands may resemble the idea of heaven, pure lands in Buddhism are not permanent destinations but instead wondrous realms created by buddhas where practitioners receive teachings directly, allowing them to progress rapidly and unobstructed on their path to enlightenment. Practices of the Pure Land Buddhist traditions include study, mindfulness, meditation, veneration, visualization, and sutra recitation, while often incorporating many Chan and Zen Buddhist practices as well. However, it is the practice of accumulating mantra recitations of the Buddha Amitabha for which the Pure Land Buddhist tradition is most renowned. Pure Land Buddhists claim that the recitation of the Buddha Amitabha's name, *Namo Amitabha Buddha*, or his mantra, *Om Amitabha hrih*; will ensure one's rebirth in his pure land while also aiding in overcome obstacles, purifying negative karma, receiving blessings, and protecting one from danger in one's current life. Pure Land Practitioners work to accumulate millions of mantra recitations of the Buddha Amitabha's name within their lifetime.

East Asian Mahayana Buddhism vs. Indian Mahayana Buddhism

Although there are many differences between the Indian Mahayana tradition and East Asian Mahayana traditions, the most distinctive—besides the obvious cultural and ceremonial differences—is their philosophical views. While both the Indian and East Asian traditions are commonly a mixture of Mahayana Madhyamaka and Mahayana Yogachara philosophies, East Asian traditions maintain a stronger influence of the Yogachara. Additionally, their presentations often have a different flavor, with the Indian Mahayana tradition being more intellectual, and the East Asian traditions (and some tantra schools) being more poetic. Other differences are their views on the attainment of enlightenment, namely, between the Indian Mahayana view—asserting that enlightenment is attained gradually through lifetimes of mental and meritorious development—and the Chan and Zen view—asserting that enlightenment can be attained suddenly without lengthy study or spiritual endeavor. Here, the term *suddenly* still implies many years of practice.

Secular Buddhism

Although not a tradition in its own right, Secular Buddhism is fast becoming a popular and valued genre of Buddhist thought. Secular Buddhism is a modern presentation and/or approach to the study and practice of Buddhism that can be applied to any of the various Buddhist traditions. The term *secular*, in secular Buddhism, is understood two-fold. First, as synonymous with *nonsectarian—a nonpartisan or impartial view open to all forms of Buddhist thought, including non-Buddhist thoughts* (science, psychology, other religions/ideologies). Secondly, as *a presentation of Buddhism that deemphasizes its more religious, mystical, and what appear to be merely cultural aspects*.

Secular Buddhism as a substantial movement began in the West during the late 20th century. Although Secular Buddhism is commonly seen as simply irreligious; correctly, it is a presentation of Buddhism based on the earliest Buddhist teachings (EBTs), teachings largely devoid of the religious, ceremonial, and ritualistic elements of today's traditions. Secular Buddhism attempts to clarify the Buddha's teachings by lifting them out of their presumed religious and cultural context, while further examining later works in order to determine legitimate teachings from religious or cultural adaptation.

Currently, Secular Buddhism exists as an assortment of small groups that have arisen from the various Buddhist traditions. Each of these groups may have their own unique presentations based upon what aspects of the Buddhist teachings they emphasize and de-emphasize. Today, many teachers such as Prof. Richard Gombrich, Stephen Batchelor, John Peacock, Jack Kornfield, and S.N. Goenka offer non-traditional and/or secular methods for investigating and engaging with the Buddha's teachings.

His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama has done much work to propagate the idea of Secular Buddhism. In his bestselling book *Beyond Religion*, His Holiness asserts that one does not have to

be a religious or spiritual person to engage in Buddhism. That Buddhism's science-like and philosophical approach to existential investigation, its strong focus on mental and emotional development, its unique methodology founded on the cultivation of logical ethics, and its many practical applications aimed at cultivating happiness and fulfillment in one's life can benefit anyone. A constant core message that runs throughout His Holiness's teachings is the universality and suitability of the Buddha's teachings in our modern world.

"It's ok to study Buddhism secularly without studying it religiously; for creating mental discipline requires no faith commitment." ~ The 14th Dalai Lama

"Religion is useful to the spiritual life but not indispensable." ~ The 14th Dalai Lama

The Buddhist traditions understood by geographical divisions

Besides classifying the various Buddhist traditions by their philosophical views (Hinayana, Mahayana, and Vajrayana), these traditions can also be classified geographically:

1. **The South Asian traditions** (mainly Theravada)
Most commonly found in: Cambodia, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Thailand, etc.
2. **The East Asian Traditions** (mainly Mahayana)
Most commonly found in: China, Japan, Korea, Singapore, Taiwan, etc.
3. **The Tibetan Buddhist Traditions** (mainly Vajrayana)
Most commonly found in: Bhutan, Mongolia, Nepal, Tibet, etc.
4. **Secular Buddhism** - Universal.

CHAPTER FIVE: Tibetan Buddhism

Tibetan Buddhism Fast Facts

Tibetan Buddhism: A form of Vajrayana Buddhism; a system of rapid spiritual cultivation.

Major distinction: An extension of the Mahayana emphasizing the Buddhist tantric teachings.

Founder: Siddhartha Gautama—the Buddha (563 - 483 BCE)

Founded: Tibet officially declares itself a Buddhist county in the 8th century CE.

Demographic: An estimated 20 million practitioners worldwide.

Current major schools: Nyingma, Kagyu, Sakya, and Gelug Schools.

Sacred texts: The Tibetan Canon—*Kangyur* and *Tangyur* (Tib.).

Language: Translated from Sanskrit into Tibetan.

Spiritual leaders: Lamas, Monks, Nuns, Yogis, Yoginis, Lay teachers.

Place of ritual: Temples, monasteries, hermitages, dharma centers, homes.

Theism: Non-theistic—no creator god; although minor gods and the supernatural are accepted.

Propagation: Modern Buddhists do not evangelize or try to convert others to Buddhism.

Reality: A stream of experiences apprehended by an ever-changing mind.

Human nature: Innately good, pure, compassionate, and wise.

Goal / Purpose of life: To liberate oneself and others from suffering and the cycle of rebirth.

Afterlife: Rebirth and liberation from rebirth.

Holy days:

Losar (Tib.): The Tibetan New-year: *1st day of the 1st month of the Tibetan calendar.*

Chotrul düchen (Tib.): Day of miracles: *15th day of the first month.*

Sakadawa (Tib.): The birth, enlightenment, death of the Buddha: *15th day of the 4th month.*

Chökhör düchen (Tib.): Wheel Turning Day, the Buddha's first teaching: *4th day of 6th month.*

Lhabab duchen (Tib.): The Buddha's descent from Tushita heaven: *22nd day of the 9th month.*

Goal in Tibetan Buddhism: Buddhahood (irreversible freedom from suffering)

Tibetan Buddhist practices: Study, contemplation, meditation, visualizations, prayer, chanting, ritual, accumulating merit through good works, working with subtle mental/physical energies.

Tibetan Buddhism

Pre-Buddhist Tibet

The Tibetan plateau, often referred to as the *Land of Snow* or *rooftop of the world*, is the highest region on Earth, with an average elevation of 4,500 meters (14,800 ft). Early Tibet, before the introduction of Buddhism, was a warlike land of tribal clans whose fearless horsemen would race down from the high Tibetan plateau, pillaging and wreaking havoc on neighboring countries. Tibet began its unification into a single country with the rise of the powerful clan leader *Nyatri Tsenpo*, who, upon prevailing over neighboring clans, gained control of central Tibet, thereby creating Tibet's first kingdom. Enthroned as the first king of Tibet (127 BCE), *King Nyatri Tsenpo* ushered in the age of the great Tibetan kings, with the year of his enthronement marking the first year of the Tibetan calendar which is celebrated by the holiday of *Losar*—the Tibetan New Year. From the reign of King Nyatri Tsenpo a succession of forty-two Tibetan kings followed, ending with the death in 841 CE of the forty-second and last Tibetan King, Langdarma. Following the age of the great kings, a new system of government began, based on Buddhist principles and administered by the monasteries. The success and endurance of this later Buddhist government remains as one of the few examples of the successful combining of religious and secular rule.

The religion of early Tibet - The Bön (Tib.)

Before the arrival of Buddhism in Tibet, Tibetans practiced a shamanistic/animistic religion known as *Bön*. The indigenous Bön religion, also known as *The Black Sect*, established its doctrine mainly through visions from *termas* (Tib.)—*spiritual treasures hidden by great masters and revealed at the appropriate time to tertons* (Tib.)—*treasure revealers*. Termas can be physical teachings and/or objects hidden in the ground, in rock, trees, water, or the sky. Termas can also take the form of mental objects like texts and teachings hidden in the mind of disciples. The origin of the Bön religion is unclear. Some place its beginnings at c. 400 BCE, while Bön scriptures claims it to be over eighteen-thousand years old. Although beginning as a shamanistic/animistic religion, over time it began to merge with the Buddhism imported from India. It's said that the Bön initially were opposed to the propagation of Buddhism into Tibet, but later embraced it, incorporating many Buddhist elements and practices into their own tradition. Today, differences between the two are few, with *Bönpo* monks and their monasteries appearing almost identical with their Buddhist counterparts, distinguished outwardly only by their blue vests. The Bön religion still exists today as a unique blend of Bön, Buddhist, and tantric teachings. According to His Holiness the Dalai Lama,

“Bön is Tibet’s oldest spiritual tradition and, as the indigenous source of Tibetan culture, played a significant role in shaping Tibet’s unique identity. Consequently, I have often stressed the importance of preserving this tradition.” ~ The 14th Dalai Lama

The arrival of Buddhism in Tibet

As outside invaders ravaged India, almost eradicating Buddhism from its homeland, many Indian Buddhist masters escaped into the Himalayas where the Buddha’s teachings could be protected and remain safe. The safest of regions was on the high Tibetan plateau, protected by the vast Himalayan Mountain range. Because of this, Tibet became the world’s greatest repository of Indian Buddhism recorded in Sanskrit. Although Buddhist text had started arriving in Tibet from both India and China as early as the 7th century CE, it wasn’t until the 8th century that Buddhism became the official religion of Tibet. The propagation of Indian Buddhism into Tibet was initiated by the thirty-eighth Tibetan King *Trisong Detsen*, who invited the great Indian philosopher, logician, and abbot of Nalanda University *Shantarakshita* (Skt.; Tib. *shiwa tsho*) to Tibet. However, it’s said that they encountered strong opposition from the local spirits, at which point Shantarakshita suggested they invite the great Nalanda Tantric Master *Padmasambhava* (Skt.; Tib. *pema jungne*), also known as *Guru Rinpoche*, to pacify these negative forces. With the arrival of Guru Padmasambhava and the successful subjugation of Tibet’s spirits, the construction of the first Tibetan monastery was accomplished. With the introduction of Buddhism, Tibet began a transformation, the likes of which the world has rarely seen. In just a few centuries, the people of Tibet were transformed from fierce warriors into peaceful Buddhists. This transformation is often cited as a powerful example of the transformative powers of the Buddha’s teachings.

A dark chapter for Buddhism in Tibet

The Buddha’s teachings continued to flourish in Tibet until the 9th century when a dark chapter in its propagation began, instigated by the forty-second king of Tibet, *Langdarma*, who took political power through the assassination of his own brother. Upon becoming king, Langdarma instituted a severe persecution of Buddhism throughout Tibet in support of the competing indigenous Bön religion. This included destroying Buddhist scriptures, closing monasteries, and forcing monks and nuns to disrobe. The oppression of Buddhism continued until king Langdarma himself was assassinated, ending the persecution of Buddhism in Tibet, allowing Buddhism to recover and flourish once again. Later in the 11th century, with concerns that the first transmission of Buddhism into Tibet, referred to as the *old translation school* (Tib. *nga gyur*), may have been damaged through its near eradication, a new effort was made to reestablish the Indian Buddhist teachings. This initiated the second wave of transmissions of Indian Buddhism into Tibet, referred to as the *new translation school* (Tib. *sarma*). Once again, great Indian masters

were invited to Tibet, ushering in a new renaissance and flourishing of Buddhism upon the Tibetan plateau.

Tibetan Buddhism (Skt.; Tib. *pür ki nangchö*)

Historically, Buddhism has always adapted itself to the culture into which it is imported, and in Tibet, this was no exception. With the importing of Buddhism from India and China, as well as incorporating aspects of its own indigenous Bön religion, Tibetan Buddhism became a truly unique and distinct form of Buddhism. However, it's not correct to say that Tibetan Buddhism is simply Buddhism mixed with the Bön tradition—nor can it be characterized as strictly Indian Vajrayana Buddhism. For once established in Tibet, Tibetan masters took the Buddha's teachings and philosophy to its highest level thus far, producing countless great masters who possessed profound spiritual and philosophical realizations. Tibet became a country whose sole objective was spiritual awakening and the development of an educational system that could bring as much of its population as possible towards that goal. At its peak, Tibet had over six-thousand monasteries, with more than one-quarter of its male population being monastic.

The Samye Debates

An important event in the history of Buddhism in Tibet was the *Samye Debates*, also known as the *Council of Lhasa*, held at Semye, the first monastery of Tibet. The Samye debates were centered on determining the supremacy between the Indian Mahayana teachings and the Chinese Chan Mahayana teachings, both of which were prevalent in Tibet at the time. The debates (held over a two-year period) were presided over by Tibetan King Trisong Detsen (702 CE). Rules of the debate stipulated that the winner would be officially sanctioned by the king, while the loser would have to leave Tibet. At the conclusion of the two-year debate, the Indian Mahayana scholars were declared victorious, and thereby the Indian Mahayana teachings were recognized as the official Buddhist tradition of Tibet.

Tibetan Buddhist Philosophy

Currently, all schools of Tibetan Buddhism follow the Mahayana Middle Way Consequence School philosophy (Skt. *prasangika madhyamika*; Tib. *uma talgyur*), founded by the legendary Indian Buddhist master *Buddhapalita* (6th century CE) and later elaborated on by the Indian Nalanda master *Chandrakirti* (7th century CE). The Middle Way Consequence School is a later development of the Mahayana Middle Way Philosophy (Skt. *madhyamaka*; Tib. *umapa*) and is considered the pinnacle of Buddhist philosophy. It is characterized by its use of *logical consequence reasoning—reductio ad absurdum—to reduce an opponent's argument to absurdity* (as opposed to syllogistic reasoning) while often not necessarily asserting a position of one's own.

Tantra and Tantric Buddhism

The most obvious thing that sets Tibetan Buddhism apart from other Buddhist traditions is its practice of Tantric Buddhism. Often the terms: tantra, Vajrayana, Tibetan Buddhism, and Tantric Buddhism are seen as synonymous. However, although being derived from the same source and sharing the same basic path and practices, subtle distinctions remain. The proper understanding and use of these terms is currently still under debate but I believe the most common categorization is as follows:

- **Tantra:** Referring to its own distinct tradition, as well as to specific tantric teachings, texts, and practices contained within other tradition, including Hinduism and Jainism.
- **Tantric Buddhism:** A general term pertaining to tantra within any Buddhist tradition.
- **Vajrayana:** Pertaining exclusively to Indian Mahayana Tantric Buddhism.
- **Tibetan Tantric Buddhism:** Tantra within the Tibetan Buddhist Tradition.

Tantra (Skt.; Tib. *gyu*): *A system of rapid spiritual cultivation.* Tantra is a secret and esoteric teaching and practice that harnesses psycho-physical energies through ritual, visualization, and meditation. The word *tantra* comes from Sanskrit and means *continuity* or *continuum*. More technically, it can be translated as *interwoven*, pertaining to the interwoven nature of the five foundational energies that are the building blocks of all phenomena. Additionally, the term *interwoven* can pertain to the weaving of the teachings into one's life. The term *tantra* is also synonymous with *yoga* (Skt.) and can be found in the redundant term *tantric yogas*. Here the term *yoga* pertains not to the popular exercise, but instead to the manipulation of psycho-physical energies, including the body's energy centers or *chakras* (Skt.; Tib. *korlo*). Additionally, the usage of the word *tantra* can pertain to the general tantric system of practice, or a particular tantric text, as in the *Guhyasamaja tantra*.

Tantra is a unique class of teachings and practice found in all Indian religions, including Buddhism, Hinduism, and Jainism. However, the historical origins of tantra remain unclear. Within Buddhist tantric scriptures, the tantra teachings are asserted to have been taught by the Buddha himself. Non-Buddhist scriptures assert that the tantras were passed down by gods and/or goddesses. Historically, it appears that tantra began as a loose collection of occultish practices before being consolidated and incorporated first into Hinduism (*Saivism/Shaktisim—followers of Shiva*) around the 5th century CE, and later into Buddhism and Jainism. The earliest tantras appears to emerge as a shamanistic-like movement led by Indian siddhas (tantric ascetics) who engaged in macabre practices outside of the confines of civilized society, employing highly ritualized forms of practice that often involved elements that were considered immoral (animal sacrifice, eating meat, use of intoxicants, sex, and violence). These early non-Buddhist *tantrikas* acted as astrologers, doctors, weather makers,

and exorcists. Tantric rituals and practices revered the feminine principle, the primacy of transcendent bliss through the divine union of the feminine and masculine, and the mystical transmutation of the mundane world. To this day, on the surface level, modern tantric rituals in Buddhism, Hinduism, and Jainism appear to be quite similar.

Note: Today, in the Indian subcontinent, some non-Buddhist traditions see tantra as pertaining to black magic—which it very well may have been in the past and/or in other traditions. However, tantra within Buddhism is and has always been a branch of the Mahayana tradition and remains true to the altruistic bodhisattva ideal and the principles of compassion, virtuous ethics, and wisdom. Within Buddhism, tantra is utilized to purify the heart and mind with the intention of swiftly reaching buddhahood in order to liberate beings from suffering.

Tantric Buddhism: *A general term pertaining to tantra within any Buddhist tradition.* The two main traditions of Tantric Buddhism are the Indian Vajrayana tradition (no longer practiced) and the Tibetan tradition. Other lesser known Buddhist schools that practice tantra (mainly subschools of the Chan and Zen traditions) continue to exist; however, their emphasis on tantric teachings and practices are limited and far less prominent.

Vajrayana (Skt.; Tib. *dorje tegpa*): *Indestructible or indivisible raft.* *Indivisible* here refers to the indivisibility of wisdom and method (whereas in Mahayana sutras, the cultivation of wisdom and method are separate). Vajrayana pertains to the original Tantric Mahayana Buddhism within India. Also referred to as *Mantrayana*, Vajrayana is asserted as an accelerated method for attaining the Mahayana path. Scripturally, the Vajrayana teachings are asserted to have been taught by the Buddha himself. Historically, the Vajrayana appears to have begun as a loose collection of Buddhist tantric practices which didn't coalesce into a mature tradition until the early 7th century. Although no longer practiced, the Vajrayana serves as the foundation for all modern Tantric Buddhist Traditions.

Tibetan Tantric Buddhism (Tib. *pür ki nangchö*): Based upon the Indian Vajrayana vehicle that serves as its foundation, differences between the two mainly pertain to Tibetan Buddhism's additional influences of Chinese Chan Buddhism and its indigenous Bön religion. These differences are subtle and often pertain mainly to the emphasis placed on certain shared concepts including Tibetan Buddhism's unique emphasis on spirits, Dharma protectors, meditation deities, and the *bardo* or intermediate state—a state between death and rebirth. More obvious differences between the two are Tibetan Buddhism's very distinctive appearance and unique iconography, owing to the fact that at its core it is a purely tantric presentation, a fact to which the Dalai Lama often confesses, *In hindsight, it was a mistake for Tibetans to make tantra so public.*

The Tantric Buddhist Path

Note: At this point in the text, for ease of explanation and because of their near synonymous nature, I will use the term *Tantric Buddhism* when referring to either Indian Vajrayana or Tibetan Tantric Buddhism.

Tantric Buddhism is considered by Tibetans to be the pinnacle of all Buddhist teachings and is seen as vastly superior to other Buddhist traditions. The esoteric and secret nature of tantra is due to potential psychological and physiological dangers that can occur when practiced incorrectly. Tantric Buddhism works with one's deep physical and psychological elements and existential views—views that are the basis of our accepted reality. To manipulate these elements without proper guidance from a qualified teacher is to run the risk of undermining one's mental stability and mental and physical well-being.

Within Tantric Buddhism, the *mahasiddha*, or tantric master, is held as the highest tantric practitioner, although, according to His Holiness, within the Tibetan Buddhism tradition, a fully ordained monastic holding tantric vows is considered to be the highest level of practitioners. It's said that the proper motivation in beginning the Tantric Buddhist path is when, after developing great compassion (*bodhichitta*), one is unable to bear, even for one more instant, the suffering of sentient beings, one then looks to the Tantric Buddhist path as a way of becoming a Buddha as quickly as possible in order to liberate those beings from suffering. The Tantric Buddhist path is for advanced practitioners who have established a thorough understanding of the Mahayana teachings—an understanding that is prerequisite for Tantric Buddhist practice to be effective. It's said that without the right motivation, correct understanding of the teachings, and most importantly, the guidance of a qualified teacher, practicing tantra is simply a play of fantasy.

“The profundity and swiftness of the tantra path is due to the common path (Mahayana). Without the common path tantra is just full of ritual noises (hum hum and phat phat).”
~ Lati Rinpoche

“Without an understanding of the emptiness of inherent nature of all phenomena—including those imagined in tantric practices—the practice of deity yoga (tantra) is reduced to an absurd fantasy.” ~ Alan Wallace

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

The Lama (Tib.; Skt. *guru*): Central to all tantric systems is the *lama* (Tib.; Skt. *guru*): *A tantric and/or spiritual teacher; an experienced guide that helps lead practitioners through the complex and potentially dangerous Tantric Buddhist path.* A practitioner wishing to practice Tantric Buddhism must receive permission and initiation from a qualified teacher/lama through a ceremony referred to as an *empowerment* (Skt. *abhisheka*; Tib. *wang*). Without permission, initiation, and blessing from the teacher, Tantric Buddhist practice is said to be ineffective.

Tantric Buddhist practice

Tantric Buddhism includes a vast array of different practices that utilize one's psycho-physical energy through ritual, visualization, yoga, and meditation. It's claimed that through Tantric Buddhist practice, a skilled practitioner can achieve buddhahood within one to three lifetimes or even as little as three years. As mentioned previously, Tantric Buddhism is a branch of the Mahayana vehicle and therefore generally shares the same basic aspects, elements, and path outline. However, there are also distinct differences. In Mahayana practice, the emphasis is on the creation of the *causes* for enlightenment, thus referred to as a *causal path*—attaining the prescribed accumulations that will be the cause of one's future liberation; while in Tantric Buddhism, the emphasis is on the *result* of the path, thus referred to as a *resultant path*. Meaning, through visualizing oneself as a enlightened being, with enlightened qualities, living in a pure environment, one gets a taste of the final result of the path. By generating a similitude of the mind of awakening, one's mundane sense of reality is diminished allowing one to slowly become habituated to the ultimate reality of a buddha. Additionally, Tantric Buddhist practices can also include sexual yoga (Skt. *karma mudra*; Tib. *lekhi chakgya*), representing the primordial union of the feminine and masculine. Here, the feminine representing passivity, wisdom, and emptiness and the masculine representing action, skillful means, compassion, and bliss. The practice of sexual yoga utilizes and channels sexual energy directly into one's meditation in order to generate divine meditative bliss, thereby transforming one's sexual energy into a means for awakening. Sexual desire, being an obvious internal energy, is an easy energy to work with. Meaning, it is strong and easily felt when attempting to manipulate it and move it through the body. However, sexual yoga is a purified aspect of sexual union, free from any and all ordinary attachment and desire, and only practiced by very advanced practitioners. Buddhist monastics, because of their vows of celibacy, do not engage in sexual union, but instead visualize this union while in a deep state of unattached meditation, gaining a similitude of the resultant blissful state.

"It is precisely because our present life is so inseparably linked with desire that we must make use of desire's tremendous energy if we wish to transform our life into something transcendental." ~ Lama Yeshe

Tantra in the West

Currently, tantra has captured the curiosity of many non-Buddhists in the West, with the word *tantra* being equated with esoteric or exotic sex, mystical healing, and new-age spirituality. Tantric workshops, can be found advertized in the back of magazines, guided by self-proclaimed "tantric masters" who claim the authenticity of mystical knowledge, but who clearly know very little of authentic tantric teachings. It's important to remember that tantra is an advanced practice for highly skilled practitioners and can be a dangerous practice when not taught properly. Tantric practice within any tradition was never meant for ordinary people merely seeking the ultimate orgasm.

Unique Aspects of Tibetan Buddhism

The Tibetan Buddhist Canon

A unique presentation of the Buddha's teachings (both sutra and tantra) translated primarily from Sanskrit (but also Chinese) into Tibetan and compiled into the two texts of *the kangyur* and *the tengyur* (Tib.) referred to collectively as the Tibetan Buddhist Canon.

- **The *Kangyur*** (Tib.): Meaning *translated word; the spoken words of the Buddha*. The kangyur consists of about 108 volumes of the Buddha's Hinayana, Mahayana, and Vajrayana discourses, including teachings and explanation from close disciples and other enlightened beings.
- **The *Tengyur*** (Tib.): Meaning *translated treaties*. The tengyur consisting of about 224 volumes of commentaries and treaties by the great Indian Buddhist masters explaining and elaborating on the words of the Buddha, including commentaries and treaties on the Hinayana, Mahayana, and Vajrayana teachings.

Note: The kangyur and tengyur differ slightly within each school of Tibetan Buddhism. This includes the amount of volumes contained within each school's unique presentation.

Lineage (Tib. *gyüpa*)

Tibetan Buddhism is a tradition deeply committed to the preservation of a pure and unbroken transmission of teachings from teacher to student that can be traced all the way back to the historical Buddha himself. This authenticity and purity of lineage is of paramount importance to every school of Tibetan Buddhism, with all schools possessing an extensive *lineage tree—a detailed record of their school's unbroken lineage*. Pure lineage authenticates the tradition, school, teacher, and the teachings taught. High Lamas may be asked to become *lineage holders* of a certain set of teachings. To be a lineage holder is to be held personally responsible for safeguarding, preserving, and propagating those specific teachings placed in one's care for future generations.

Tibetan Buddhism's unique focus on compassion

In addition to being the only existing Buddhist tradition to upholding the three Indian vehicles (Hinayana, Mahayana, and Vajrayana), Tibetan Buddhism is also the only tradition to uphold the later (10th - 13th century) teachings of the great Indian Buddhist universities. It is these teachings, and in particular the work of the legendary Indian Buddhist master *Shantideva*, whose profound and heart touching writing on altruism and the virtues of the bodhisattva path, which strongly shaped Tibetan Buddhism's unique focus on compassion and loving-kindness. Because of this, Tibetan Buddhism remains one of the warmest, most positive, and life-affirming Buddhist traditions in the world today.

Ritual within Tibetan Buddhism

Tibetan Buddhism is by far the most ritualized form of Buddhism. Where every aspect of the practitioner's life is seen as sacred and ritual is used to focus one's awareness and intentions. For Tibetans, both monastics and lay, every aspect of life is ritualized. From dances and songs sung during work, to cultural entertainment and festivals, all elements within Tibetan life (even the most mundane daily actions) are performed with an enlightened intention and are connected to the ultimate goal of awakening.

Defense of ritual

For as long as there have been humans in this world, there has been ritual. Humans have utilized ritual to mark and differentiate what is deemed significant from what is taken as mundane. Ritual is used to emphasize the importance of particular ideals, intentions, beliefs, and events, while at the same time used to unify community. Many in the West are often uneasy with the concept of ritual, without realizing just how ritualized they themselves are, and how prevalent ritual is in their culture and daily lives. From wedding ceremonies, graduations, birthdays, and holidays, to our sporting events that are teeming with symbolism, ritual is commonplace. There are patriotic rituals of singing national anthems in front of flags, and of course ritual takes center stage within all forms of worship. Our rituals include even benign fun behaviors we rarely think about. Just imagine a child's birthday without a cake and candles, or New Year's without fireworks. Then there are the everyday rituals that are so common they're not even regarded as rituals, like shaking hands, waving hello, applauding, or saying *bless you* after someone sneezes. Ritual, when understood and used properly, can be a powerful tool for working with the mind, emotion, and behavior. It is a tool that has been proven effective throughout human history.

Tantric Meditation Deities (Skt. *deva*; Tib. *yidam*)

Although deities are found in both the Mahayana and tantric traditions, in tantra the use of meditation deities is central. However, what these deities are and how they actually exist is not

often clear. Certainly, early tantra saw these deities as self-existent unique entities and the focus of their ecstatic ritual communion. In Tibetan Buddhism, there is often a divergence of opinions of just how meditation deities exist. The Tibetan lay community often regards these deities as akin to actual gods and the focus of their daily worship. However, the most current and widely held belief within Tibetan Buddhism is that meditation deities should be understood as aspects and/or archetypes of the enlightened qualities of buddhas (*compassion, wisdom, strength, purity, etc.*). These archetypes are then used in visualization practices in which one focuses their attention on these distinct enlightened aspects in order to merge their mind with the mind of the buddhas and/or guru. According to Geshe Tashi Tsering *"It is a mistake to feel that meditation deities are buddhas like the historic Buddha, who was once an ordinary being like ourselves. Rather, deities should be understood as particular enlightened qualities that become manifest by practitioners who have achieved buddhahood."* Meaning that buddhas can choose to manifest as a specific deity because of its unique benefit and/or because of possessing a strong connection or predisposition to that specific deity. With that said, the idea of specific deities existing singularly is mistaken. For example, the deity *Avalokiteshvara* (Skt.; Tib. *Chenrezig*) is the deity representing the qualities of enlightened loving kindness and compassion. However, there is not one main buddha that manifests as Avalokiteshvara, but instead Avalokiteshvara can be manifested by many different buddhas simultaneously (this pertains to all other deities as well). Therefore, when the sutras refer to deities such as Avalokiteshvara and Manjushri being present at the time of the Buddha's discourses, they are speaking about buddhas who had manifested as those deities when that particular sutra was being taught.

"Each deity in Tibetan Vajrayana is an iconic representation of a particular enlightened energy within us that we are trying to actualize. They represent a higher reality and are born from visions of inner experience." ~ Lama Govinda

Some popular deities within Tibetan Buddhism

- **Avalokiteshvara** (Skt.; Tib. *Chenrezig*): Patron deity of Tibet; *The manifestation of the buddhas' compassion.*
- **Manjushri** (Skt.; Tib. *Jamyang*): Deity of insight and knowledge; *The manifestation of the buddhas' transcendent wisdom.*
- **Tara** (Skt.; Tib. *Dolma*): Female deity that most people turn to when in need of quick assistance; *the manifestation of the buddhas' enlightened activity and the remover of obstacles.*
- **Vajrapani** (Skt.; Tib. *Chakna dorje*): Protector of tantra and holder of secrets; *the manifestation of the buddhas' power and strength.*
- **Vajrasattva** (Skt.; Tib. *Dorje sempa*): Deity of purification; *the manifestation of the buddhas' purity.*

The Tibetan Tulku System

Tulku (Tib.; Skt. *nirmanakaya*): Literally, *emanation body*; *a reincarnate lama*. A distinct feature found only in Tibetan Buddhism is the system of recognizing reincarnate lamas—referred to as *tulkus*. Common to all schools of Tibetan Buddhism, tulkus are highly venerated within Tibetan society and are often addressed by the title *rinpoche* (Tib.) meaning *precious one*. Tulkus are reincarnations of previous highly realized masters who are able to choose the manner of their rebirth. These reincarnate lamas are recognized and/or found by current masters or close disciples of the deceased master and are guided by divination, visions, and/or clues left behind by their departed teacher.

It's claimed that tulkus (usually recognized when very young) often can identify items owned by the departed master and can even identify people who were close to them in their past life. Tulkus receive a special education and are often groomed to become high teachers and/or cultural leaders. Traditionally, a tulku would be installed in the same position they held in their previous incarnation—such as the abbot of a particular monastery. In many schools of Tibetan Buddhism, if a practitioner is not born a tulku, he will rarely have the possibility to become a renowned teacher and often must settle for a subordinate teaching role.

The first tulku lineage to be established was the Karmapas of the Kagyu School of Tibetan Buddhism. It began with Dusum Khyenpa, who posthumously became the first Karmapa, initiating the precession of rebirths leading up to the present day 17th Gyalwang Karmapa, Orgyen Trinley Dorje—the current spiritual leader of the Kagyu school. The lineage of the Dalai Lamas was the second tulku lineage to be established. It began with Gedun Drupa, who posthumously became the first Dalai Lama, initiating the precession of rebirths leading up to the present day 14th Dalai Lama, Tenzin Gyatso—the temporal and spiritual leader of Tibet. Although the tulku system has no scriptural basis and remains a feature found only in Tibetan Buddhism, it is a key aspect of the cultural and religious tradition of Tibet.

Terma and Tertons (Tib.): *Terma*—*hidden treasure*; *teachings hidden by great masters or mythical beings and revealed at an appropriate time to tertons*—*treasure revealers*. Termas can be physical objects hidden in the ground, in rock, trees, water, or in the sky. They can also take the form of mental objects like texts and teachings hidden in the mind of disciples. Considered unique to Tibet, the concept of terma and tertons is a central belief in many Buddhist schools of Tibet, including the indigenous Bön tradition.

Oracles (Tib. *chö kyong*): *A spiritual medium that provides wise counsel and/or precognition of future events*. In the Tibetan culture, oracles are used by all institutions—with even the state having an official oracle. An oracle is a high Buddhist master who can go into a deep trance-like state and receive and/or channel information from spirits.

The intermediate state (Skt. *antarabhava*; Tib. *bardo*): Literally *transition; the state between death and the next rebirth*. Although found in all Mahayana traditions, these teachings were greatly expounded upon in Tibet. According to Tibetan tradition, upon death, one's very subtle consciousness leaves the physical body and enters into an intermediate state called the *bardo*. It's said that an individual can stay in the bardo state for anywhere between one and forty-nine days before being reborn again. A more comprehensive presentation of the intermediate state is shared later in this text series.

Rainbow body (Tib. *Jalü*): In the case of some high masters, it's said that after death has occurred, their corpse does not decompose, but instead starts to shrink over a period of days until it finally disappears, leaving behind only finger nails, toe nails and hair. This is usually accompanied by the appearance of mystical lights and/or rainbows. This phenomenon is referred to as the attainment of rainbow body.

Relics (Skt. *sarira*; Tib. *ringse*): After the cremation of great masters, relics are said to be found in the remaining ashes. These relics are often in the form of pearl-like formations that appear like jeweled beads. Also, bones are often found in auspicious shapes. Relics are said to be mystical emanations of the master with the ability to bestow blessings on those who look upon them.

His Holiness the Fourteenth Dalai Lama

Spiritual leader of the Tibetan people

The term *Dalai Lama* is not a name but a title, with *Dalai* (Mongolian) meaning *ocean*, and *Lama* (Tib.) meaning *spiritual teacher*. Taken together, the title Dalai Lama can be translated as *spiritual teacher possessing a wisdom as vast as the ocean*. Upon being enthroned as the 14th Dalai Lama, His Holiness received the name Tenzin Gyatso—*Tenzin* (Tib.) meaning *holder of the dharma*, and *Gyatso* (Tib.) meaning *ocean*. Taken together, they can be translated as *holder of an ocean of dharma*. The Dalai Lama's traditional and historic role has always been as the temporal, political, and spiritual leader of Tibet, representing all of the Tibetan people and all schools of Tibetan Buddhism. To the Tibetan people, the Dalai Lama is more than mere man (although he denies this at every opportunity), to them, he is a deity, a buddha, their savior and their hope for a free Tibet. When asked about this, His Holiness insists, *I'm just a simple monk*. However, for anyone who has met him, this is anything but true. His Holiness is an unparalleled Buddhist master and eminent scholar who has spent his entire life in the service of humanity.

The life of His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama, Tenzin Gyatso

Born on July 6, 1935 to a peasant family in a remote village in Northeastern Tibet, His Holiness, then named Lhamo Thondup, was two years old when a search party of high Lamas, disguised as simple travelers, came to his home. Guided by omen, mystical visions, and clues left by the late 13th Dalai Lama, they had arrived in search of a young boy that could possibly be the reincarnation of their precious departed teacher. Thondup was presented with various possessions, some of which had belonged to the 13th Dalai Lama, and was asked to choose which possessions were his. It was reported that he correctly identified all the items owned by the previous Dalai Lama and was also able to identify the disguised Lamas of the search party by name. After further tests, young Thondup was taken to the Tibetan capital of Lhasa and in 1941, at the age of six, he was recognized as the 14th reincarnation of the bodhisattva of compassion—*Avalokiteshvara* (Skt.; Tib. *Chenrezig*), the patron saint of Tibet—the 14th Dalai Lama.

As a young monk His Holiness had an extensive monastic education that eventually culminated in the prestigious *Lharampa Geshe Degree*, the highest academic degree in Tibetan Buddhism, equivalent to a doctorate in Buddhist philosophy. At this time, although being engulfed in his studies, he became more and more aware of his future role and responsibilities. As he grew into a teenager, his worries for the fate of his country and people took center stage. In 1950, the invasion of Tibet by Chinese forces began, forcing His Holiness at the young age of fifteen to be formally enthroned and assume full political power. But His Holiness's rule was brief. After unsuccessful diplomatic missions to the Chinese capital to meet with Mao Zedong, and the inability to reach a peaceful resolution to the crisis, in March of 1959, at the onset of the infamous Tibetan uprising, His Holiness was forced to flee Tibet, crossing the Himalayan mountain range for the safety of India. His Holiness was followed by thousands of Tibetan refugees also seeking asylum. Upon his arrival in India, His Holiness established the *Tibetan Government in Exile* in Dharamsala, India in order to petition the international community for help.

His Holiness dedicated the next years of his life to bringing the Tibetan cause to the world's attention. Though still a young man, His Holiness worked tirelessly to find a resolution to the crisis, but through it all, His Holiness remained sure of certain principles. Inspired by the work of Gandhi and also the writings of Martin Luther King Jr., His Holiness developed a resolve not to let hatred and violence play any role in the Tibetan fight for freedom.

In December of 1989, in recognition of his commitment to non-violence and his work in trying to find a peaceful resolve to the struggle for the liberation of Tibet, His Holiness was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. Since then, His Holiness and his message of peace and compassion have captured the minds and hearts of millions. His Holiness has become a voice of hope and optimism, and an inspiration for a better world and a more gentle and loving humanity. However, what many people don't know is that under his charismatic personality and pragmatic advice lies a scholar of unequaled rivalry. It's when His Holiness gives teachings each year to the monks of the *Three Great Seats* (the three main Gelug monasteries in South India) that he is at

his best—explaining the most difficult of Buddhist philosophy with fine precision and amazing ease. Now, at age of 83, His Holiness can be seen teaching for hours with the energy of a man half his age, only needing to stop when he sees signs of fatigue in the audience of fellow scholars. His Holiness remains one of the world’s most influential figures who continues to meet, befriend, and influence world leaders and leaders of industry. But above all this, His Holiness remains a champion of the poor and the suffering.

On a lighter note, as an indication of the great love the world has for him, His Holiness continuously tops the list of most popular world leaders, most beloved spiritual figures, and most photographed personality. He has been portrayed in movies (*Kundun* and *Seven Years in Tibet*), he is a bestselling author, a voice for interfaith dialogue, an active proponent of science, a root lama for countless Buddhist practitioners, and a mentor to millions of non-Buddhists around the world. His Holiness remains a symbol of truth, compassion, and peace to millions of Buddhists and non-Buddhists alike.

His Holiness’s work in science

From a young age His Holiness has had an affinity for science, an interest that would later culminate into a more formal involvement with the scientific community. As an outspoken advocate for the benefits of science in the spiritual life, His Holiness encourages all of his students to put logic, common sense, and evidence before tradition and unanalyzed beliefs. His Holiness often describes himself as half-Buddhist and half-scientist and has received countless awards from the scientific community celebrating his over thirty years of collaboration and support of science, claiming his long association with scientists from various fields as immensely beneficial.

“Although my own interest in science began as the curiosity of a restless young boy growing up in Tibet, gradually the colossal importance of science and technology for understanding the modern world dawned on me. Not only have I sought to grasp specific scientific ideas but have also attempted to explore the wider implications of the new advances in human knowledge and technological power brought about through science. The specific areas of science I have explored most over the years are subatomic physics, cosmology, biology, and psychology.” ~ The 14th Dalai Lama

His Holiness continues to have a close and personal dialogue with the scientific community, including befriending many of today’s eminent scientists, while jokingly claiming to be their humblest and poorest student. In 2006, His Holiness authored the book, *The Universe in a Single Atom: The Convergence of Science and Spirituality*. This book ushered in a great interest in science within the Tibetan Buddhist community and proved to be of great benefit in two ways: first, for its unique view and presentation of Western science from the Buddhist point of view, and second, for its astonishing explanation and clarification of Buddhist science.

The introduction of science into Tibetan Buddhist monasteries

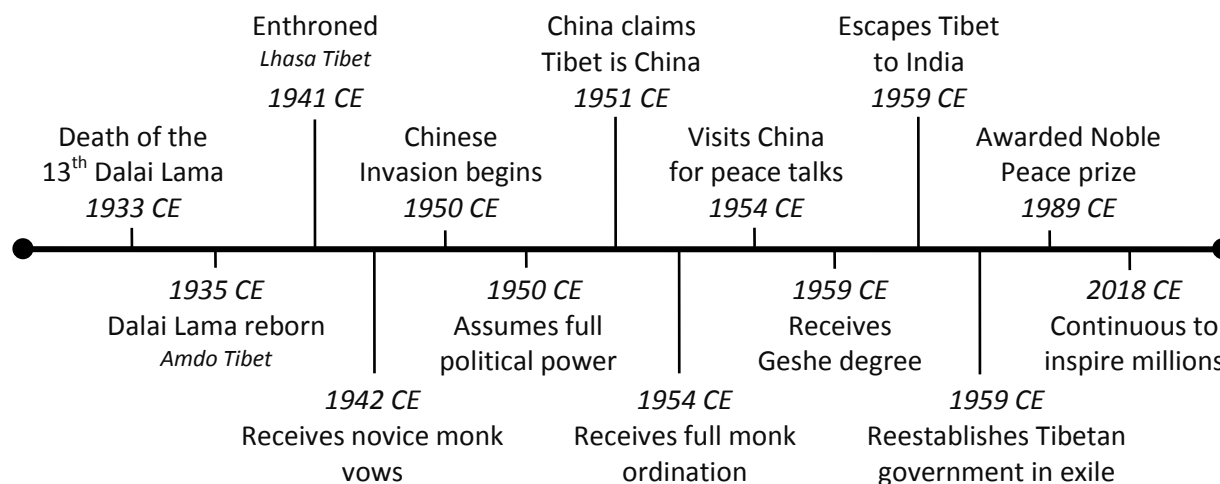
His Holiness's commitment to science has led to the compulsory study of science in Tibetan monasteries. This new development has encouraged many monks to develop a strong interest in science, psychology, and Western philosophy, forging the way for current student exchange programs between Buddhist monasteries and prominent Western universities.

"The collaboration between modern science and Buddhist science can lay the foundation for the study and promotion of inner values such as love, compassion, forgiveness, tolerance, and contentment, which are the basis for a happier world and happier century. Modern science, with its stand in carrying out unbiased experiment and objective understanding of matters, and Buddhist science which provides a detailed explanation about mind and emotions are very helpful in understanding the whole system of mind." ~ The 14th Dalai Lama

The Dalai Lama and *the Mind and Life Institute*

Through his continuing work with science, His Holiness has established and continues to support many research centers around the world dedicated to the scientific study of Buddhism and contemplative sciences. One such research center is the *Mind and Life Institute*. Besides its ground breaking research, the Mind and Life Institute has also, for the last twenty-five years, been the host of an ongoing annual conference focused on the convergence of science, psychology, philosophy, Buddhism, and contemplative studies.

Timeline of the Life of the 14th Dalai Lama Tenzin Gyatso



Timeline dates are from *Freedom in Exile*: Dalai Lama, HarperCollins Publishing 1990.

Schools of Tibetan Buddhism

There are four main schools of Tibetan Buddhism that continue to thrive both inside and outside Tibet: the Nyingma, Kagyu, Sakya, and Gelug schools. These four schools share the same basic Buddhist beliefs, customs, and tantric presentations, although their philosophical views are often somewhat different. Another distinction between the schools pertains to their balance between study and practice, with the schools often divided into study lineages—*those who emphasize study*—and practice lineages—*those who emphasize practice*. These days, in order to offset favoritism, the official position delivered by Tibetan Lamas is that all the schools are the same. However, what is really meant is that no one school is superior to another. This is asserted to prevent sectarianism and school rivalry, which has been prevalent throughout Tibetan history. In one way, this is true, for all of these schools represent the true teachings of the Buddha and are equally effective paths to buddhahood. However, these schools also have many differences. I personally believe that it's acceptable to celebrate the differences of the various schools without the concern of falling into sectarian views. Furthermore, being familiar with the distinctions of each of these schools can play an important role in understanding various teachings, instruction, and/or advice one may receive from teachers from different schools.

The Nyingma School (Tib.): *The ancients*. The first and oldest of the four schools, founded by the Indian Buddhist master Padmasambhava also known as Guru Rinpoche. The Nyingma school is considered a practice lineage due to its strong emphasis on tantric practice, ritual, and meditation. Practitioners of this school are referred to as Nyingmapas and include monastics, yogis (non-monastic renunciants), yogi householders, and lay. The Nyingmapa are gentle and humble practitioners whose main practice is the tantric teaching *Dzogchen* (Tib.) or *Great Perfection*. The goal of Dzogchen is buddhahood, which is achieved through the attainment of *the view*, meaning seeing things as they truly are, in all their radiant purity and perfection. Through the practice of Dzogchen, all aspects of one's life are turned into a mechanism for awakening.

Each of the four schools of Tibetan Buddhism has a systemized text pertaining to its own unique path to buddhahood; for the Nyingma School, this is *The Words of my Perfect Teacher* (Tib. *kunzang lame shyalung*) by Patrul Rinpoche. This text presents a clear and detailed outline and methodology pertaining to the philosophy, study, and practice of the Nyingma path. Another unique aspect found within the Nyingma tradition is the *Ngagpa* (Tib.), *a tantric yogi* (male) / *yogini* (female) *householder*. These Yogis are most often married farmers with children. Ngagpas are prohibited from cutting their hair and although they often wear monastic style robes, they also wear some white to signify that they are indeed lay practitioners. These yogis/yoginis believe that practicing dharma within the challenges of family life is the greatest means for attaining enlightenment.

The Kagyu School (Tib.): *The lineage of oral instruction*. Founded by Marpa the translator, the Kagyu school is generally considered a yogi lineage and is the second oldest of the Tibetan Buddhist schools. The Kagyu school (or more correctly Kagyu school(s), for there are many sub-schools within the Kagyu tradition) comes from the second propagation of Indian Buddhism into Tibet. The Kagyu schools are also considered practice lineages, emphasizing tantric practice, ritual, and meditation. Practitioners of these schools are referred to as Kagyupas and include: yogis, monastics, and lay. The Kagyu schools share much in common with the Nyingma. In fact, the Kagyu to this day still utilize many Nyingma practices. Differences between the two are many, but one example is the Kagyu's stronger emphasis on meditation. The main focus of the Kagyu school is the tantric teaching referred to as *Mahamudra* (Skt.; Tib. chakgya Chenpo) or *Great Seal*, and its goal of attaining buddhahood. Mahamudra emphasizes the union of wisdom and method through working directly with one's perceptions, thoughts, and emotions. The Kagyu's systemized text pertaining to its own unique path to buddhahood is *The Jewel Ornament of Liberation / Dakpo Targyen* (Tib.) by Gampopa Sönam Rinchen. Generally, the Kagyu Schools tend to have a more intense, proactive style of working with the perception and energies that are encountered. The Kagyu's uniqueness can also be seen in the way teachers work with their students. Teachers believing in drawing out and revealing student's afflictions and neurosis so they can be confronted, accepted, and then transmuted into positive workable energy. The great Karma Kagyu master Chogyam Trungpa instructed his students to meet life's energies head on and manipulate and master those energies to one's own will, in order to benefit all beings.

The Sakya School (Tib.): *The pale/grey earth*—referring to the unique grey landscape of the hills of Southern Tibet. The Sakya is the third oldest of the Tibetan Buddhist schools. Founded by Khön Könchok Gyalpo, the Sakya school is considered a study lineage emphasizing logic, debate, and academic excellence. Practitioners of this school are referred to as *Sakyapas* and include: monastics, yogis, and lay. This lineage also comes from the second propagation of Indian Buddhism into Tibet. The Sakya school believes that study and academic excellence is a necessary prerequisite for the practice of tantra. Studies include a strong emphasis on dialectic debate of the Mahayana sutras. Often seen as scholarly rivals of the Gelug school, the Sakya school has produced countless great masters/scholars. The Sakya's systemized text pertaining to its own unique path to buddhahood is *Path and Its Result* (Tib. *Lamdre*) originating from the Indian Mahasiddha Virupa. The Sakya School, having a slightly stronger emphasis on tantra than the Gelug, puts less emphasis on monasticism, with many of its masters, including its throne holders, being married lay lamas who pass down their lineages from father to son/daughter. Within some special families, all family members with a blood relations to the father are considered to be lamas.

The Gelug School (Tib.): *The Way of Virtue (the yellow hats)*. The latest and most progressive of the schools. Founded by Lama Tsongkhapa, the Gelug school is considered to be a study lineage, emphasizing logic, debate, and academic excellence. Practitioners of this school are referred to as Gelugpa and include monastics and lay. Also coming from the second propagation of Indian Buddhism into Tibet, the Gelug school asserts study and academic excellence as a necessary prerequisite for the practice of tantra. Studies include a strong emphasis on dialectic debate of the Mahayana sutras. The Gelug's systemized text pertaining to its own unique path to buddhahood is *The Great Treatise on the Stages of the Path* (Tib. *Lamrim Chenmo*) by Lama Tsongkhapa. Founded upon the earlier Kadampa school, the Gelug school places a strong emphasis on virtue and ethics (Vinaya) and is a purely monastic order. The Gelug emphasize the use of conceptional antidotes when working with afflictive qualities, believing that through focusing on positive qualities and cultivating wisdom and understanding, negative aspects naturally decrease. The Gelug teacher works from the position of spiritual friend, inspiring and working together with students to achieve academic excellence, leading to the subsequent direct experiential realization of those studies. Within the Gelug tradition, the Prasangika philosophy was further elaborated on by Lama Tsongkhapa, resulting in a truly unique interpretation of the Buddha's model of the nature of reality, a view that is favored and taught by His Holiness, and the view presented within this text; however, this unique view is not shared by the other three schools.

Other important Tibetan Buddhist schools

The Rime Movement: Pronounced *ri-mey* (Tib.) meaning, *unbiased or non-partisan*.

The Rime movement began during the late 19th century in Tibet. Fueled by religious and political suppression of non-Gelug schools, the Rime movement sought to unify and strengthen the teachings and institutions of the Nyingma, Kagyu, and Sakya schools. His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama has been a strong supporter of the Rime movement, instructing all of his students to embrace the Rime ideal.

Two important Tibetan Buddhist schools of the past

The Kadam School (Tib.): *Authoritative Word*. Founded by the Nalanda Buddhist master Atisha (1042 CE), the Kadam School was famous for re-introducing the study and practice of the Mahayana sutras to Tibet at a time when the Tibetan schools were singularly focused on tantra, while also demonstrating the compatibility of the two. The Kadam school had a strong emphasis on ethics and the teachings on bodhichitta (mind training). Eventually, the Kadam tradition became the foundation for the Gelug school, and although the Kadam

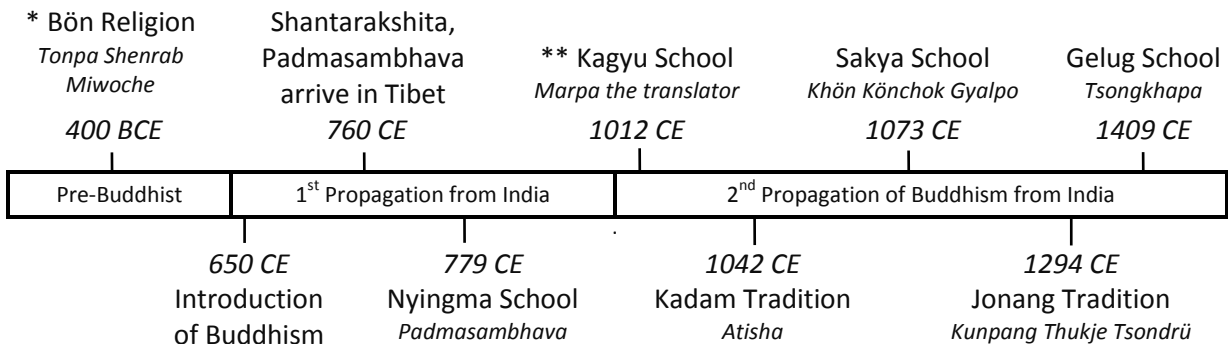
School no longer exists, its teachings, especially those of mind training, are currently practiced by all schools of Tibetan Buddhism.

The Jonang School (Tib.): Founded in Central Tibet (1294 CE) by Kunpang Thukje Tsöndru. The Jonang were renowned for their teachings on tantra, especially their presentation of the Kalachakra Tantra, and their unique teachings on emptiness. Heavily persecuted due to political rivalry, the Jonang School was believed to be extinct since the 17th century. However, the Jonang are now known to have survived and continue to this day as a distinct and important tradition.



The differences in these schools can be thought of as different flavors of ice cream. Some people may like chocolate, others vanilla, everyone has their favorite. But in the end, whichever flavor you choose, all ice cream is delicious. Likewise, all of these schools are the teachings of the Buddha and can lead practitioners to enlightenment.

Timeline of the Tibetan Schools of Buddhism



* *The Bön claim their scriptures to be over 18,000 years old.*

** *The Kagyu School began as a Yogi (non-monk) lineage. Some claim it shouldn't be considered a truly consolidated school until 1121 CE, when Gampopa Sonam Rinchen built its first monastery.*

The Chinese invasion of Tibet

In 1950, the Communist Government of China waged a vicious and brutal invasion against the peaceful people of Tibet, killing over one million Tibetans and sending thousands into exile. The Chinese invaders outlawed religion and destroyed monasteries, while imprisoning and torturing thousands, including monks and nuns. Fearing the destruction of his country's culture and its precious Buddhist Dharma, His Holiness was urged by his government to flee Tibet in order to find support for their cause. Upon leaving Tibet, His Holiness set up a government in exile in Dharamsala, India, an institution dedicated to protecting and preserving the Tibetan culture and their unique Buddhist Tradition. To this day, China continues to oppress, jail, torture, and ignore the human rights of the gentle Tibetan people.

Theories on the invasion

Many different theories are posited to explain the Chinese invasion of Tibet. Explanations suggested range from China's over-population dilemma and the Chinese government's greed for Tibet's natural resources, to the communist's hatred of religion. However, there seems to be no one answer on which everyone agrees. Many believe that the invasion was prophetic and a means of opening Tibet's closed society so their precious dharma could be disseminated into a suffering world. Still others wonder about the implications of karma in these events. However, to begin to understand the conquest of Tibet, we first need to understand the history and time in which these events occurred. In a time of global colonization and world wars that had super powers, carving up the world to their will. China had just emerged from a civil war and was in the process of becoming communist, while at the same time recovering from a brutal war with Japan. China was at the same time entrenched in Korea in a conflict with countries of the United Nations, all the while showing complete mistrust of Western powers.

Tibet - pre-Chinese invasion (1800s-1900s)

At this point in Tibetan history, Tibet and its neighbors were having many military skirmishes, including a war between Tibet and Nepal. There are reoccurring attacks on Tibet and Tibetan monasteries by China. As early as 1800, Western powers started showing interest in the Tibet plateau. By 1830, Britain and Russia were beginning to rival over potential control of Tibet and Central Asia. This rivalry continued to escalate, prompting Tibet to ban all foreigners and shut its borders in 1850. In 1865, the discovery of secret British mapping of Tibet created more distrust of foreign powers. In 1903, British forces attempted to invade Tibet, followed by China mounting several incursions starting in 1910. This led Tibet in 1913 to reassert its sovereignty as an independent country. The Chinese invasion of Tibet began in 1950, and by 1958 China was in control of Eastern and Central Tibet. On March 1st, 1959, the Dalai Lama escaped to India.

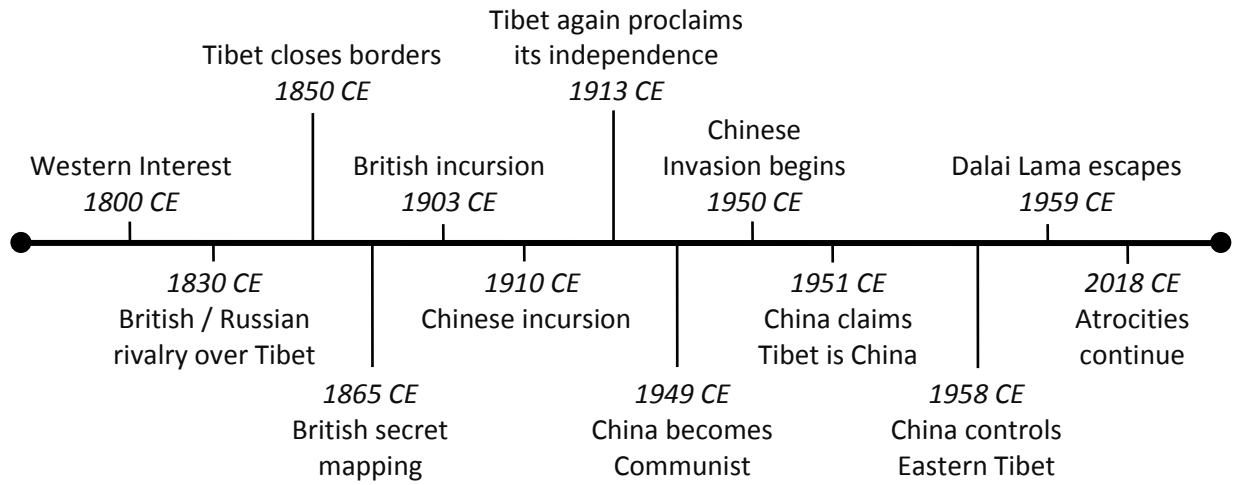
It's clear that all the reasons given thus far were contributing factors for the invasion. However, I believe the main reason for the invasion of Tibet was that China saw the world eyeing the viability of control over Tibet—and thereby central Asia—and sought to defend its borders. Historically, the high ground of Tibet, with its access to China's rivers and water sources, was the perfect staging ground for an assault on China. Once China seized and gained control over the Tibetan plateau, the Himalayan mountain range served as a natural barrier for the defense of China.

Murder, genocide, and torture

Although the reasons for the invasion given above can make some sense within a political view, they cannot begin to justify the viciousness and brutality of the Chinese invaders under the leadership of the communist leader Chairman Mao Zedong. Historically, Tibet had always enjoyed a reputation for having wise and powerful lamas, which was a potent diplomatic tool for maintaining Tibet's sovereignty. Tibetan Lamas were employed as council and had a high degree of influence in both the Chinese and also Mongolian courts. But with the rise of communism, China began to reject and despise religion, hence devaluing the Tibetans in their eyes. The Tibetans who were once revered for their wisdom were now seen as ignorant and backward people. Chinese propaganda posited themselves as liberators, freeing the Tibetan people from an oppressive feudal regime presided over by exploitive lamas, in which Tibetan lay peasants lived lives of utter slavery under the affluent monasteries—a portrayal that is, of course, the textbook antagonist of the communist movement. The Tibetans, once de-humanized by the Chinese, allowed for the accounts that followed: monks and nuns being murdered and tortured, children being forced to shoot their own parents, and the imprisonment of thousands in work camps. Historians posit that during his reign, Chairman Mao Zedong killed between twenty-five and forty million people, most of whom were his own Chinese citizens, meaning that Mao Zedong murdered more of his own people than any other ruler in history.

I'd like to make one personal note about the Chinese account of these events, referred to by the Chinese Government as the liberation of the Tibetan people. As stated above, I have known and lived among Tibetans for nearly two decades and have talked to Tibetans from every walk of life both monastic and lay. I've listened to eyewitnesses to these events and I have personally seen the scars of torture on the bodies of monks, nuns, and lay people who escaped the Chinese forced labor camps. I've heard all their stories. But I have never heard, even once, of a Tibetan who didn't wish for Tibet to return to exactly the way it was before the Chinese invasion, so they could once again return home and live under the loving guidance of their beloved Dalai Lama.

Timeline of the Chinese Invasion of Tibet



Timeline dates taken from *Freedom in Exile*: Dalai Lama, HarperCollins Publishing 1990.

CHAPTER SIX: Today's Modern Buddhism

Today's Modern Buddhism

Up to the present chapter, we have covered the history of the spread of Buddhism from its roots in India from the time of the Buddha up to its early expansion through Asia, to roughly 1,200 CE, which corresponds to the decline of Buddhism in India. The later spread of Buddhism across Asia into countries such as Cambodia, Laos, Singapore, Taiwan, and Thailand developed in much the same way as it did in its earlier propagation, through a process of slow integration over a considerable amount of time. Therefore we need not go into a detailed presentation of Buddhism's later Asian expansion. However, in the West, differences in ideology, religion, and culture created a unique history of Buddhism's integration and thereby merits a closer look.

Buddhism's propagation into the West

Traditional dates place the first meeting of Indian and Western cultures around the 4th century BCE with the invasion of India by Alexander the Great. However, many scholars believe the initial meeting may have happened much earlier than previously thought, with evidence showing trade in the region being far more extensive and far-reaching than previously believed. Many scholars theorize that Indian thought may have had a much early influence on the Greeks and early Greek philosophy, thereby having an influence in the shaping of Western thought. However, even if Buddhism and/or Indian thought did play a role in early Western philosophy, Buddhism, as a distinct tradition, didn't become of any substantial interest to the West again until the late 19th century. This later curiosity began mainly with European interest in Theravada Buddhism and American interests in Zen Buddhism. Tibetan Buddhism didn't begin to emerge into the West until after the Chinese invasion of Tibet, with the escape of the Dalai Lama and many important lamas into India, sometime after 1951. This exodus of Tibetan Buddhism into the West ushered in a new renaissance of Buddhist thought throughout the world. Pure Land Buddhism didn't become of interest to the West until sometime in the later 20th century.

Western adaptation

Buddhism, throughout its long history, has always adapted itself to the needs of the people and culture in which it is transplanted. In Tibet, as in other countries, Buddhism had to serve the needs of both the educated monastic community as well as the illiterate and uneducated lay. And now in the West, where Buddhism is quickly growing in popularity, becoming a respected and trusted tradition, it too is adapting and tailoring its style, presentation, and methods to fit the mindset of Westerners—monastic as well as lay. While giving a teaching in America, His Holiness mentioned how pleased he was that Westerners are practicing Buddhism, but also expressed concern, stating that he hopes Westerners don't repeat the mistakes made by Tibetans, namely, the overemphasis on ceremony and devotional practices, although these practices within their proper context are important.

The current renaissance of Buddhism in India

For nearly seventy years, India has been experiencing a resurgence of Buddhism and Buddhist thought. This is due to a serendipitous convergence of three forces. First, through the work of the late Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, author of India's democratic constitution, who worked to confront India's unjust caste system by emancipating millions from their low caste Hindu standing through conversion to Buddhism (Neo-Buddhism or Navayana—new vehicle), creating large communities of Buddhist lay practitioners in and around central India. Second, through the work of the Maha Bodhi Society, the first revival of a truly Indian monastic tradition (Theravada). Maha Bodhi is currently flourishing and expanding, establishing monasteries and Dharma centers throughout India. Third, the exodus of Tibetan Buddhist refugees into India leading to the creation of Tibetan Buddhist monasteries and Dharma centers throughout India.

Buddhism as a religion and/or institution vs. Buddhism as an ideology

I believe a distinction needs to be made between *the Buddha's teachings*, and *the Buddhist religion and institution*—what today is referred to as Buddhism. The Buddha's teachings as an ideology are timeless, boundless, and beyond cultural distinctions—being as relevant today as they were some 2,600 years ago. It's true that the world and things within it have changed dramatically throughout the centuries. However, the psychology pertaining to the human condition remains basically the same—in the form of our hopes, fears, desires, aversions, and existential inquiry. Conversely, Buddhism as a religion or institution can often be inflexible, overly traditional, overly ceremonial, and uncomfortable with innovation and change—often more concerned with the preservation of the Buddha's teachings than their actual realization. In fact, throughout Buddhist history, its greatest minds had to fight an uphill battle in introducing new thought and innovation. Some may object to the sight of a Buddhist monk in a coffee shop talking on his smart phone while sipping a latte, but perhaps this monk has a better grasp of the actual Buddha's teachings than most of us. For it's only when one truly understands the meaning of the teachings and how they correspond to our modern lives and situations—and not merely abiding within its religious customs, dogma, and/or superstitions—that the true significance of the Buddha's wisdom becomes clear. With that said, Buddhist institutions clearly hold a vital role in the support and preservation of the Buddha's teachings, offering monastic support, educational structure, and group cohesion. However, to take Buddhism as merely an authoritative agent to be blindly obeyed is to strip it of its transcendent essence and wisdom—reducing it to a mere shadow of the Buddha's teachings.

Tibetan Buddhist Views on Modern Topics

Because of the many different traditions, schools, and teachers who possess their own unique views, and due to the fact that many of our modern issues didn't exist at the time of the Buddha, these topics can be challenging to address and therefore remain open to interpretation.

Technology: Generally, Buddhism has no reservations about technology. Philosophically, Buddhism doesn't see objects themselves as possessing inherent meaning and/or value; rather, it is the person that imputes meaning upon the world. Take, for example, a gun, which itself is neither virtuous nor non-virtuous (bad or good). It can be used to kill or protect, and any presumed value lies within the intentions of the user. Buddhism views technology in this same way, believing that when used within a proper intention, technology is an extraordinary tool for improving the quality of life. For example, the internet has been the single greatest tool for disseminating the Buddha's teachings ever known, bringing Buddhism into the home of millions, no matter how remote. However, the internet can also be a great distraction and a surrogate for real human interaction. If not properly utilized, technology runs the risk of diminishing the human experience and increasing one's already exaggerated sense of reality, driving us further into delusional existence (through media drama, video games, movies, erotica, etc.) Buddhism simply asserts technology as a tool, which, like all tools when utilized with proper intention, can benefit the world in amazing ways.

Human rights: One of the core tenets of Buddhism is the principle of equality. Many posit Buddhism as the first truly egalitarian movement in history—being open to all, regardless of caste, nationality, gender, ethnicity, religious or social status. However, in spite of that fact, currently there are many traditional Buddhist countries that suffer from racial, social, and gender inequality—although this is seen as a cultural bias rather than a result of Buddhist ideology.

Sexuality: Of course, within Buddhism, celibacy is a requirement of monastics, with monks and nuns voluntarily holding vows of chastity as part of their training. However, outside of the vows for monastics, the Buddha had little to say about sex. The Buddha never prohibited sex within the lay community, but instead urged *appropriate* sexual behavior. The term *appropriate* (for lack of a better term) is defined as *not to engage in sexual misconduct*. Here the term sexual misconduct refers to *sexual harm of any kind (physical, mental, or emotional)*.

"Sexual misconduct is sexual behavior that is unwise and unkind." ~ The 14th Dalai Lama

The Zen master Thích Nhất Hạnh defines unwise sexual activity as *that which lacks love and commitment*. His Holiness the Dalai Lama asserts that appropriate use of sexuality is fine for lay practitioners but advises them to subdue extreme lust and attachment, and abandon unwise or unkind sexual behavior. This fits well into our modern sensibilities surrounding sexuality (e.g., how infidelity causes great emotional and mental harm, and of course, forcing or coercing someone to engage in sexual acts clearly causes physical, emotional, and mental harm). The Buddha in his day didn't draw strong distinctions between the different worldly desires as we

do today and simply saw all sense desires as obstacles to serious spiritual practice. In fact, the Buddha was far more focused on pointing out the dangers of hatred and anger rather than those of sense desire, for within Buddhism there is no idea of sin. Instead, asserting *virtue—thoughts, intentions, and behaviors that lead to happiness and liberation; and non-virtue—thoughts, intentions, and behaviors that lead to suffering and bondage*.

While early sutras make no moral distinctions among the many possible forms of sexual activity, later Buddhist masters—some five hundred years after the Buddha—began to add their own views about sexuality, culminating in the expression, *the right organ, in the right object, at the right time*, meaning that only heterosexual vaginal intercourse during the evening hours is acceptable sexual behavior. Again, sexual behavior is not considered wrong or sin per se, but it is often considered non-virtuous because of being a potential source of afflictive emotions (desire, lust, attachment, jealousy, envy, etc.). With that said, within Tibetan Tantric Buddhism the practice of tantric sexual union (discussed previously) is considered the highest and most profound of Buddhist practices. This demonstrates that the sexual act itself is neither virtuous nor nonvirtuous; rather, it's one's intention and quality of mind behind the act that determines its merits. Lastly, it's important to know that the Buddha held an entirely wholesome view of humanity, seeing us in a much greater light than we often see ourselves, believing that worldly desires, of all kinds, are low, vulgar, and not worthy of us. The Buddha believed in our innate virtuous nature and our potential for absolute purity.

Women's' rights: Within the Buddha's lifetime, India, like most of the ancient world, held women to a lower standard. And although the Buddha's acceptance of women into the monastic order is regarded as revolutionary for its time, some still assert because he had to be asked numerous times before agreeing, that he himself must have been biased. However, the truth is, allowing women into the monastic order was a socially dangerous concept at that time, when there were no woman priests, ascetics, or religious leaders. The initiative to accept women into the monastic order is attributed to the Buddha's cousin and attendant Ananda who pressed the Buddha until he agreed. The order of Buddhist nuns began with the ordination of the Buddha's own stepmother who became its first female member. However, later after the death of the Buddha, during the first council, Ananda was officially reprimanded by the council masters for being chiefly responsible for the creation of the nun order. This misogynistic bias can be seen throughout Buddhist history, a bias that was equally prevalent in Tibet where women were openly held as inferior, being referred to by the derogatory term *kyemen* (Tib.) or *low birth*—a term deeming female birth as less preferred. Often, nuns were even advised to pray to be re-born as males in their next lifetimes.

Today, in the Tibetan tradition, nuns are not able to become fully ordained and in most schools they are not allowed to receive high academic degrees. Sadly, changes in this clear bias are happening slowly with nunneries still taking a back seat to monasteries in education and standard of living. On a bright note, in April 2011 German nun Kelsang Wangmo made history by becoming the first female *Geshe* (Tib.) ever in the Tibetan tradition—achieving the academic degree of *Geshema* (female Geshe) the highest academic degree of the Gelug school. Additionally, at the time of finishing this text, the first class of Himalayan nuns have just passed their Geshe exams and have been bestowed the title of Geshema. However, nuns still lack the ability to take full ordination in the Tibetan Tradition, something the current Karmapa has vowed to

make happen. The topic of women's rights is of course profoundly import in the West, not only because of our commitment to gender equality, but also for the fact that women make up the majority of Buddhist practitioners in the West. With that said, there is much work to be done in embracing the feminine and overcoming the engrained sexism that still exists within Buddhism today. His Holiness remains deeply committed to gender equality, stating, *I call myself a feminist. Isn't that what you call someone who fights for women's rights?*

"The world will be saved by the Western woman." ~ The 14th Dalai Lama

"This should be a more "feminine" era – an era when women make greater contributions to society. If we continue to devalue what women have to offer, we will continue harming women and continue overlooking and devaluing these virtues that are considered "feminine." And these are precisely the virtues that the world needs more now."
~ 17th Gyalwang Karmapa - Orgyen Trinley Dorje

GLBTQ rights: The terms gay, lesbian, bisexual, or any equivalent terms are never mentioned in Buddhist scriptures, and therefore generally considered as non-issues within Buddhism. Therefore any negative attitudes towards the GLBTQ community within traditional Buddhist countries are cultural views and not supported by Buddhist scriptures. However, early scriptures do mention the gender categories of *ubhatovyanjanaka* and *pandaka* (Pali) which may be translated as hermaphrodite, eunuch, and/or transgender. Although there appears to be no condemnation or prejudice towards these groups, they were prohibited from becoming monks or nuns over concerns that they may entice fellow monastics into breaking their vows of celibacy. As far as transgender in Tibetan culture is concerned, there are many stories of youths spontaneously switching genders (anatomically), a belief many hold true to this day. Within this belief there is never any sense of moral judgment towards the transgender person. It is seen as a natural and accepted aspect of life and the transgender person is openly accepted and free to live within their new identity. In general, with regards to social issues, the Buddha was always very concerned with the public image of the Sangha, because social acceptability and being seen as a virtuous institution was vital to the survival of the Sangha. Because of this, social norms and attitudes, even ones with which the Buddha may have disagreed, needed to be strongly considered with regards to the appearance and rules of the Sangha.

His Holiness, on one of his first visits to the West, was asked about his view on homosexuality, upon which he gave what I believe to be the traditional monastic view to any sexual question: that sex is only appropriate within traditional penis-vaginal intercourse. However, for myself, being familiar with Tibetan and monastic culture, I knew what a private and embarrassing question that may have been for His Holiness. Tibetans are not prudish, but they are sexually private people, and things of this nature are not talked about publicly, especially by a celibate lama. Also, I believe at this early meeting, His Holiness may have been trying to come to terms with many of these modern Western issues. For as a spokesman for the emergence of Tibetan Buddhism, he may have been overly concerned with protecting the image of Tibetan Buddhism in the eyes of the world and other world religions. His Holiness some years later seemed to have become more comfortable with some of these Western topics and addressed this issue further. In a 1994 interview with the gay publication *OUT Magazine*, in what I believe to repre-

sent his true sensibilities, His Holiness asserted, *If someone comes to me and asks whether homosexuality is okay or not, I will ask 'What is your companion's opinion?' If you both agree, then I think I would say, 'If two males or two females voluntarily agree to have mutual satisfaction without further implication of harming others, then it is okay.*

Currently in the GLBTQ community, Buddhism has gained great popularity. Many, feeling disfranchised and oppressed by their own traditional religions, find the open, nonjudgmental, and rational characteristics of Buddhism a welcome change. In today's Western Buddhism, there are no limitations for GLBTQ practitioners, whether that pertains to one's ability to gain enlightenment or one's work or occupation within Buddhist institutions, be it monastic, teacher, student, or administrator. Currently at Sera monastery at the time of writing this text, there are several openly gay Western monks who claim their sexuality is a non-issue pertaining to their studies and friendships. However, I'm told that gay Tibetan/Himalayan monks living in monasteries must keep their orientation secret or risk teasing and bullying, which usually ends with them having to leave the monastery.

Euthanasia, suicide, capital punishment, and abortion: Because these four topics all pertain to the death process, I've chosen to group them together. Within Buddhism, these related topics all share the same basic premise—that Buddhism, at its foundational core, pronounces a profound reverence for all life and a resolute commitment to its protection. The Buddha was clear that the taking of life, especially human life, as potentially the most negative of all actions, though still insisting that it is the intention behind the act that is the deciding factor in its presumed non-virtue. While keeping this in mind, let's look at these often controversial topics.

Euthanasia: *The practice of intentionally ending a life in order to relieve pain and suffering.* The common Buddhist view on euthanasia is twofold. There are some teachers that claim the suffering experienced during the death process is beneficial in order to burn off negative karma pertaining to this life, while others believe that a positive state of mind leading up to death is of the utmost importance and needs to be maintained at all cost. This may include ending a life in order to avoid untreatable, agonizing physical pain, and/or negative mental states. Buddhism asserts that the mental and emotional state of the dying person has a profound influence on the quality of one's rebirth. His Holiness, while believing all life to be sacred and of the utmost importance to protect, also believes euthanasia to be permissible in exceptional circumstances—for those in an irreversible comas or those suffering untreatable pain and agony due to an incurable disease. The great progressive master Lama Yeshe, while teaching on this subject, recounted a story from the Buddha's time, of a monk of high spiritual attainment who, because he was in great untreatable pain, asked his disciple to kill him. The disciple then suffocated his master with a pillow. Because the disciple's motivation was virtuous, the Buddha said that he had created no negative karma, only virtue. Through this story we can see that for Buddhists it's clear that it is the intention behind the action that decides its merits.

Suicide: *Self-euthanasia.* Generally, Buddhism posits suicide, because of being an act of killing—even if it is oneself, as a non-virtuous act. Believing that, to throw away one's precious human life shows a sad disregard for one's innate potential. The common notion of suicide,

in which one ends their life because of being in great despair, offers no escape from one's suffering, because again, one's mental state has a profound influence over one's rebirth, and the despair one is trying to escape from will simply follow them into their next life, while potentially creating a low or poor rebirth. Another notion of suicide is when one makes a rational choice to end their life, in order to escape unbearable or untreatable pain and suffering. For high practitioners, this may also include ending one's life in order to avoid uncontrollable negative mental states. This is achieved through the tantric practice of *powa*. *Powa* is a method of ejecting one's consciousness, allowing the practitioner to choose how and when their consciousness will leave the body, with the goal of attaining a *perfect death*. Within the sutras, there are several accounts in which the Buddha understood and approved of monks taking their own lives to end unbearable pain related to terminal illness. Even the story of the Buddha's own death calls into question the merits of suicide, in which the Buddha, on the day of his death, because he was omniscient, surely knew that the meal being served to him was spoiled, but ate it anyway. He then forbade anyone else in partaking and insisted that the leftovers be buried after the meal. After this, the Buddha fell ill and died from food poisoning. Was the Buddha practicing skillful suicide? Again, in the end, it's one's intention that is the deciding factor of the merits of suicide. With that said, within Buddhism each life is seen as precious and a fortunate opportunity in which to work out, eradicate, and free ourselves from negative karma, habitual negative mental states, and embedded discursive emotions. For a Buddhist, each life offers a singularly unique opportunity for achieving liberation, but only if we possess the courage and resolve to take advantage of it.

Capital punishment: *The death penalty; to be put to death by the state as a punishment for a crime.* Within Buddhist scriptures, the Buddha never addressed capital punishment per se, but his teachings on forgiveness and love speak volumes.

"If a person foolishly does me wrong, I will return to him the protection of my boundless love. The more evil that comes from him, the more good will go out from me."

~ *The Buddha.*

However, with that said, today some Buddhist countries do implement the death penalty. On this subject His Holiness remarked:

"My overriding belief is that it is always possible for criminals to improve, and that by its very finality, the death penalty contradicts this. Therefore, I support those organizations and individuals who are trying to bring an end to the use of the death penalty."

~ *The 14th Dalai Lama.*

Abortion: His Holiness asserts that, *According to Buddhist precepts, abortion is an act of killing, although there are exceptions.* His Holiness goes on to say, *I think it's better to avoid it, although it would be permissible in certain cases, such as when the life of a mother is threatened, but it's best to judge it on a case by case basis.* Buddhism embraces the complexity of this difficult issue understanding that one must consider the wellbeing of the unborn child, the protection of the mother's life, as well as the quality of life for all persons involved. As

far as the current debate on when life actually begins, Buddhism asserts that life begins at the moment of conception, which is the moment consciousness enters the fertilized egg.

As far as the karmic consequences of abortion are concerned, first, Buddhism asserts that the consciousness of beings as beginningless, endless, and indestructible, believing there is no way of stopping the rebirth process. If a being's rebirth is interrupted, as in the case of an abortion, consciousness merely seeks out another appropriate set of parents with which it has a karmic connection. And as far as the accumulation of negative karma pertaining to the act of abortion, the karma created by the act arises from one's intentions and subsequent emotional residue pertaining to the act (e.g., how one feels about the act, and whether they believe they made the best decision for everyone involved).

Social and political activism: The role and views of the Buddhist practitioner pertaining to life, community, and society are often misunderstood. First, many believe that Buddhism teaches disengagement from the world—this is wrong. It's true that the practice of secluded retreat is often a part of some practitioner's training. However, afterward, the practitioner then re-enters society possessing a greater ability to benefit their community. For the Buddha's teachings actually pertain to how to engage *properly and fully* with the world, to engage intelligently, sensibly, honestly, through wisdom, compassion, and a deep sense of altruistic responsibility. *Secondly*, pertaining to civic responsibility and/or social and political activism, there is no precedent within scriptures of civic or social activism within the Buddha's time or thereafter. However, in the later Buddhist monasteries of India, politics was included as a subject of study for monastics. Historically, Buddhist monastics have consistently been pacifists and opposed to involvement in political matters. So here we must rely on logic, reason, our own sense of civic responsibility, and the advice of current teachers. One example is of Vietnamese Buddhist monks during the Vietnam war who believed their duty was to passively engage in meditation as the war raged on around them, instead of helping the suffering. This obvious gaffe in wisdom and compassion led to the concept of *Engaged Buddhism* by the now renown Vietnamese Zen Master Thích Nhất Hạnh, in which he led his fellow monastics into helping the suffering by reminding them of their vows to protect and care for others. Tibet is another example, for when the Chinese brutally attacked this gentle Buddhist country, all members of society, lay and monastic alike, were engaged in its defense. For the Buddha's teachings pertain to liberation from bondage, which includes all forms of bondage and oppression: mental, physical, financial, social, cultural, religious, and often most importantly, liberation from our own uncontrolled minds and habitual tendencies. Therefore, the practice of Buddhist activism or pro-social action is where one cultivates and transmutes their Buddhist and/or bodhisattva intentions into actions that benefit one's community and the world at large. Personally I find this subject is addressed brilliantly by Professor Robert Thurman in a piece he wrote entitled, *The Politics of Enlightenment*:

"It is an essential form of Buddhist practice to participate in politics, to vote, to speak out, to encourage those who agree to reason with those who disagree. It is wisdom. It is meditation. It is compassion. It is ethics." ~ Robert Thurman

The Peace Grant initiative

During the Mind & Life conference in Brussels (2016) His Holiness the Dalai Lama asserted, *It is not enough for you to be compassionate! Prayer and meditation are not enough! You must also act!* This statement started a growing movement of individuals committed to funding research, education, and innovation needed to properly enact positive social change. This led His Holiness and the Mind & Life Institute to the founding of the PEACE grants, an initiative supporting science, scholarship, evidence-based applications, and novel interdisciplinary approaches to investigate and nurture wholesome mental qualities and behaviors related to Prosociality, Empathy, Altruism, Compassion and Ethics (P.E.A.C.E.)

"With our practice, we can turn our gaze and our heart toward the very dilemmas of our time and enter as activists who cool and soothe the situation." ~ Jack Kornfield

A New and Exciting Era for Buddhism

"The 20th century was a century of war and violence, now we all must work together to see that the 21st century is a century of peace and dialogue." ~ The 14th Dalai Lama

The twenty-first century is proving to be a golden age for Buddhism. With today's modern scientific achievements in neuroscience, MRI brain mapping, and psychology, Buddhists have never before had such a vast array of tools at their disposal for the examination of reality and the Buddha's teachings. Today, there are countless research centers around the world dedicated to the scientific study of Buddhism and/or contemplative sciences. Also, as mentioned earlier, access to the internet may be the single greatest advantage for modern Buddhism: people, even those living in rural towns and villages, can research Buddhism with the click of a mouse. One can ask questions on countless online forums, find a dharma center in their area, or watch videos of prominent masters of the various Buddhist traditions. Through the use of these new tools, influences from Western thought, and the ongoing work of current progressive Buddhist masters, Buddhism is once again in the process of adapting to accommodate its new environment. However, this time the environment is unique, one of great complexity and diversity, of many ideologies, cultures, and views. It is also an environment that is far less trusting of religion, with fewer and fewer people aligning themselves with formal religious traditions, while often merely labeling themselves as *spiritual*, which for Buddhism is not a problem. According to His Holiness, it is perfectly acceptable to study, practice, and benefit from Buddhism without any formal commitment or a need to take on the label Buddhist. Additionally, His Holiness goes onto say, *it's a mistake for the West to merely copy Tibetan Buddhism, whilst following and propagating the many mistakes made by Tibetans. For each form of Buddhism is uniquely adapted to serve that particular culture it is transplanted in.* Some say Buddhism is simply returning to its roots, by once again becoming more open and less dogmatic—with many of its formidable cultural and religious boundaries beginning to soften. Even within the great Tibetan monasteries in India, a new atmosphere of openness is emerging. Clearly His Holiness is chiefly

responsible for this new progressive atmosphere by continuously advising monastics to embrace a broader view. Today monastics can be seen exploring other Buddhist traditions and non-Buddhist traditions alike. In fact, it's common to see Tibetan monastics in their bright red robes attending Theravada meditation retreats, or Korean monastics in their humble gray robes at His Holiness's teachings.

"It is important to adopt the essence of Buddha's teaching, recognizing that Buddhism, as it is practiced by Tibetans, is influenced by Tibetan culture and thus it would be a mistake to try to practice a Tibetanized form of Buddhism." ~ The 14th Dalai Lama

Rejoicing in our current golden age

Many religions posit that we are living in a *dark age*, a time of decline and corruption, and sadly, Buddhism is often no exception. Many Buddhist teachers tell of the difficulties and obstacles that our modern dark age presents in the attainment of enlightenment. Nevertheless, here I would like to assert His Holiness's advice, *When science and Buddhism disagree, we go with science*. And here, scientific research clearly paints a different picture of our current age. There has been a great deal of research of late on the subject of quality of life, including the history of compassion and/or violence. In his ground breaking book, *The Better Angels of Our Nature* (2011), renowned scientist Prof. Steven Pinker asserts that, although every generation has always intuitively felt that things are getting worse, research asserts quite the opposite—positing the current age in which we live as being the most peaceful and benevolent in all of human history, and that mankind has continuously been on a steady path of becoming more altruistic, benevolent, non-violent, and educated. This coincides with His Holiness's thoughts, that although modernity has ushered in formidable complexity and a vast array of new and perplexing problems, life is, and has been, continuously getting better.

Buddhism in the 21st century

This subsection pertains to the question of how we should regard and hold Buddhism within our modern age. Today, there are a myriad of choices available for those exploring the Buddha's teachings. We currently have traditional masters representing the past, progressive masters representing the future, great scholars representing the scriptural teachings, and great yogis representing its practice and realization. However, when reflecting on the different variety of views, traditions, and paths, many questions arise. How exactly are we going to regard Buddhism in the 21st century? Do we posit all Buddhist scripture as prophetic and infallible? Or do we see Buddhism as merely philosophical in nature—hypotheses founded through logic and reason? Can the essence of Buddhism only be handed down through teacher-disciple lineage? Or are the scriptures and their commentaries—written by the very hands of the great masters—most reliable? I hold the belief that there is no single proper way of engaging Buddhism. To assert one method, teaching, or tradition is simply not realistic. I believe it's essential to restrain our habitual need to reify the teachings into a single narrow narrative, and instead to embrace the totality and magnificence of these converging views, to allow oneself to float upon this ever

changing stream of Dharma, and to realize that these different views don't threaten each other but instead, each in its own way, adds great clarity to the whole.

"To be a 21st century Buddhist means having a fuller knowledge of modern education, modern science, and all these things, and also utilizing modern facilities, but also at the same time having full conviction about Buddha's teachings, about infinite altruism, bodhichitta, and the view of interdependency. Then you can be a genuine Buddhist and also belong to the twenty-first century." ~ The Dalai Lama

Conclusion

For over 2,600 years, the Buddha's teachings have proven to be a stable and trusted model for harmonious and ethical living, while also being a tried-and-true treatment for the endemic suffering that plagues common existence. Currently, the Buddhist path is followed by more than 500 million people worldwide and although it has been reinterpreted through the ages, it still remains consistent with its core message of benevolence, nonviolence, ethical living, wisdom, altruism, moderation, and balance. The Buddha's teachings, although being first shared over two millennia ago, clearly remain relevant to our current time. For although our world has changed in so many ways, and despite all of humankind's cultural and developmental differences, human psychology—in the form of our hopes, fears, and needs—has changed very little. The great Indian Buddhist scholar L.M. Joshi puts this brilliantly when saying:

"A remarkable feature of Buddhism is its universality. The scope of the Buddhist teaching is coextensive with the whole of humanity." ~ L. M. Joshi

In regards to Tibetan Buddhism in particular, it's hard to believe that just over sixty years ago Tibetan Buddhism was all but unknown to the world, before emerging after being forced out of its hidden Himalayan abode by a brutal Chinese invasion, an atrocity that continues to this very day. But today, Tibetan Buddhism has become an accepted and increasingly popular ideology, currently being practiced in nearly every country in the world. This is undeniably due to the work of His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama and other great Tibetan masters. And because of being the only modern Buddhist tradition to fully preserve and practice all three vehicles of the Buddha's teachings (the Hinayana, Mahayana, and Vajrayana) including the only tradition to uphold the later teachings of the great Indian Buddhist universities. It was these later teachings, and in particular the work of the legendary Indian Buddhist master Shantideva, whose profound and heart touching writing on altruism and the virtues of the Bodhisattva path, that strongly shaped Tibetan Buddhism's unique focus on compassion and loving-kindness.

For myself, I find Tibetan Buddhism among the most positive and life-affirming of the various traditions of Buddhism. With its colorful culture and cheerful manner, Tibetan Buddhism offers an unparalleled warmth and hopefulness, while possessing an unmatched richness in its philosophical scope and in its variety of unique practices. Additionally, I find the scholarly work of the Tibetan Masters, especially the work of Lama Tsongkhapa, in interpreting the great Indian Masters, to be profound and revelatory—interpretations that make the teachings clear and accessible. I personally believe humanity owes a great debt to these brilliant masters and noble guardians of the Buddha’s Dharma, the lamas of Tibet.

Appendix

Buddhist Symbols, Ritual Implements, and Paraphernalia

Symbols Shared by All Buddhist Traditions



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



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



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



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



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



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



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



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



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

Tibetan Symbols



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



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



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

Tibetan Buddhist Ritual Implements



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



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

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

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



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



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



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

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



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



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



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



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



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



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



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



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



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



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



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



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



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



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



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



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



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



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



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



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



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



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

Other Tibetan Paraphernalia



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



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



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



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



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



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

The 8 Auspicious Symbols in Tibetan Buddhism

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



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



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



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



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



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



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



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



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

Foundational Deities



The Buddha (563 - 483 BCE)

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

Mantra: Om mune mune mahamunaye svaha



Avalokiteshvara (Skt.; Tib. *Chenrezig*)

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

Mantra: Om mani padme hum



Manjushri (Skt.; Tib. *Jamyang*)

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

Mantra: Om ah ra pa tsa na di



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

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

Mantra: Om vajrapani hum



Tara (Skt.; Tib. *Dolma*)

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

Mantra: Om tare tutare ture soha



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

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

Mantra: Om vajra sattva hum

Glossary of Buddhist Terms

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

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

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

Absolute truth: See ultimate truth.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Bardo (Tib.): *See intermediate state*.

Bell: *See vajra and bell, See appendix*.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

1 & 2 - Is the universe eternal or transient?

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

5 & 6 - Is the universe finite or infinite?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Canon: See Buddhist canon.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Consciousness: Consciousness is conceptually divided into two aspects.

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

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

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

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

Cyclic existence: See samsara.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Desire: *See* attachment

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Dolgyal (Tib.): *See* Shugden.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Eight sufferings of human beings

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

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

1-2 - Attachment to gain - aversion to loss

3-4 - Attachment to praise - aversion to blame

5-6 - Attachment to fame - aversion to insignificance

7-8 - Attachment to pleasure - aversion to pain

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

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

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

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

Full enlightenment: See buddhhahood.

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

Eternalism: See absolutism.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The four immeasurable thoughts:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Four reliances (Skt. *catuhpratisarana*; Tib. *tönpa shi*): Four keys applied for properly understanding a text's true meaning.

1. Rely on the Dharma, not on the teacher
2. Rely on the meaning, not the letter
3. Rely on the definitive meaning, not on the interpretive meaning
4. Rely on wisdom, not on your ordinary mind.

Four seals: See four hallmarks of Buddhism.

Four thoughts that turn the mind (towards renunciation) (Tib. *lodoknamshi*):

1. The preciousness of human birth
2. Impermanence and the certainty of death
3. The relentless nature of causality (karma)
4. The disadvantages of samsara

Four vehicles for traversing the path

The four vehicles (Skt. *yanas*; Tib. *thegpa shi*): the term *vehicle* can be translated as *raft* or *ferry*; meaning a means of arriving at the other shore of liberation, and in this context is synonymous with path or method.

1. **Hearer vehicle** (Skt. *sravakayana*; Tib. *nyantö thegpa*)
2. **Solitary realizer vehicle** (Skt. *pratyekabuddhayan*; Tib. *ranggyal thegpa*)
3. **Bodhisattva vehicle** (Skt. *bodhisattvayana*; Tib. *jangsem thegpa*)
4. **Vajrayana vehicle** (Skt. *tantrayana*; Tib. *gyü thegpa*)

Fourteen unanswered questions of the Buddha

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

Full enlightenment: See buddhahood.

Full moon days (Tib. *tsepa chung*): A powerful day for practice and a good day for taking the Mahayana precepts and Medicine Buddha practice. Full moon days occur on the 15th of every Tibetan lunar calendar month.

Gelong (Tib.): *See* monasticism.

Gelongma (Tib.): *See* monasticism.

Getsul (Tib.): *See* monasticism.

Getsulma (Tib.): *See* monasticism.

Gelug School (Tib.): *The way of virtue (the yellow hats)*. The latest and most progressive of the schools. Founded by *Lama Tsongkhapa*, the Gelug school is considered a study lineage, emphasizing logic, debate, and academic excellence. Practitioners of this school are referred to as Gelugpa and include monastics and lay. Coming from the second propagation of Indian Buddhism into Tibet, the Gelug school asserts study and academic excellence as a necessary prerequisite for the practice of tantra.

Geshe - male / geshema - female (Tib): *Virtuous friend*; highest academic degree of the Gelug School. There are four levels of *geshes*: *lharam* (highest), *tsokram*, *rigram*, and *lingse*.

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

God realm: Highest of the six desire realms and home of the *devas* (Skt.) *lha* (Tib.); godlike beings possessing beauty and long life, who live in a state of blissful sensory pleasure.

Gods: *See* devas.

Great Exposition School (Skt. *vaibhashika*; Tib. *chetakmawa*): A Hinayana philosophy.

Grounds and paths (Tib. *salam*): Ten grounds and five paths pertaining to a bodhisattva's development, attainments, and abandonments on the path to buddhahood.

Grounds, path, and fruition (Tib. *shi lam debu sum*): The Mahayana path can be understood within three divisions:

1. **The ground** (Skt. *asraya*; Tib. *shi*): The foundation for all practice—the two truths.
2. **The path** (Skt. *marga*; Tib. *lam*): Practice of accumulation—the two collections.
3. **The fruition** (Skt. *phala*; Tib. *depu*): Attaining buddhahood—the two buddha bodies.

Guru (Skt.; Tib. *lama*): Spiritual and/or tantric teacher.

Guru devotion: A tantric practice of supplicating the guru in order to develop inspiration, faith, and devotion.

Guru puja (Skt.; Tib. *lama chöpa*): A tantric ceremony of prayer, chanting, and making offerings to the three jewels and one's guru. Like all pujas, this is a request for blessings, purification, and the clearing of obstacles. The guru puja ceremony is performed on the 10th and 25th of every Tibetan lunar calendar month.

Guru Rinpoche: See Padmasambhava.

Guru yoga (Skt.; Tib. *lame naljor*): A devotional tantric practice in which one visualizes one's root lama as a buddha. Besides being used to attain blessings and assistance along the path, guru yoga is aimed at merging one's mind with the wisdom mind of one's root lama.

Hinayana (Skt.; Tib. *thegmen*): *Small raft*—the individual liberation vehicle. The Hinayana vehicle focuses on individual liberation and monasticism, with the aim of attaining nirvana. The original and earliest teachings of the Buddha. The Hinayana should not be confused with the later Theravada tradition.

Hell realm: Home of hell beings (Skt. *narakas*; Tib. *nyalba*) a realm that beings who, because of their past negative karma, are horribly and continuously tortured. Within the Buddhist hell realm, there are eight hot and eight cold hells. Often imagined as existing deep below the surface of the earth.

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

Householder vows (Skt. *upasaka samvara*; Tib. *genyen kyi dompa*): Householder vows are a set of five precepts for lay practitioners wishing to deepen their commitment to their practice. These vows can be taken for a designated amount of time or for one's entire life.

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

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

Hungry ghost realm: Home of *hungry ghosts* (Skt. *pretas*; Tib. *yidag*); beings who are tormented by continual and unsatisfied cravings. Depicted with huge bellies representing their insatiable desire, and tiny mouths and throats representing their inability to satisfy their desire.

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

Idiot compassion: See compassion.

Ignorance (Skt. *avidya*; Tib. *marigpa*): A foundational existential confusion. Within Buddhism, ignorance is defined as *an active cognitive state of both mis-knowing and not knowing*; the habitual misapprehension of the true nature of oneself and reality.

Impermanence (Skt. *anitya*; Tib. *mitakpa*): An essential doctrine of Buddhism. Asserting that all of *conditioned* existence, without exception, is transient and in a constant state of flux. No conditioned phenomena is fixed or permanent, and all things are in a state of constant change. *Conversely*, permanent phenomena can only be known by a mental consciousness (e.g., non-created/natural space, emptiness, generic images, generic facts about things, and generic labels (blue/red, hot/cold, sweet/sour, new/old, etc.) also integer numbers, and alphabetic letters).

Imprints: See karmic imprints.

Imputation (Skt. *parikalpita*; Tib. *kuntak*): *Labeling*; the act of imputation, sometimes referred to as *superimposition*, requiring a mind and a valid basis of imputation.

Individual liberation vows (Skt. *pratimoksha samvara*; Tib. *sothar kyi dompa*): Literally, *towards liberation*. An expression of the Hinayana vehicle, this group of vows encompass both monastic vows and lay vows. The individual liberation vows are contained within the Buddha's teachings referred to as *Vinaya* (Skt.; Tib. *dülwa*) which mainly deal with ethics and monastic discipline and is the Buddha's prescribed training system for attaining liberation.

Inherent existence (Tib. *rangshin ki drubpa*): That which is self-sufficient and/or self-existent and does not change moment to moment; (1) That which does not rely on causes—coming into being by its own power, (2) That which does not rely on parts—coming into being without dependence on parts, and (3) That which does not rely on labeling—coming into being without dependence upon imputation by a mind.

Initiation: See empowerment.

Insight meditation: See meditation.

Intermediate state (Skt. *antarabhava*; Tib. *bardo*): Literally *transition*; the state between death and the next rebirth.

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

Jainism (Skt.): An Indian religious traditions. Contemporaries of Buddhism, the Jains founded their tradition on the principal of *ahimsa* (Skt.) or non-violence in all forms (physical, verbal, and mental). The Jains assert speaking the truth, celibacy or monogamy, detachment from all material things, and an intense style of asceticism and practices of self-mortification, such as prolonged fasting, breath holding, and exposure to pain.

Jhanas (Pali; Skt. *dhyana*; Tib. *samten*): *See* meditative concentration.

Jonang School (Tib.): Founded in Central Tibet by *Kunpang Thukje Tsöndru* (1294 CE). The Jonang were renowned for their teachings on tantra, especially their presentation of the Kalachakra Tantra, and their unique teachings on emptiness. Heavily persecuted due to political rivalry, the Jonang School was believed to be extinct since the 17th century. However, currently the Jonang are known to have survived and continue to this day as a distinct and important tradition.

Kadam School (Tib.): Authoritative word. Founded by the Nalanda Buddhist master Atisha (1042 CE), the Kadam School was famous for re-introducing the study and practice of the Mahayana sutras to Tibet (a time when the Tibetan schools were singularly focused on tantra) while also demonstrating the compatibility of the two. The Kadam school had a strong emphasis on ethics and the teachings of mind training. Later, the Kadam tradition became the foundation for the Gelug school, and although the Kadam School no longer exists, their teachings, especially those of mind training, are currently practiced within all schools of Tibetan Buddhism.

Kagyu (Tib.): *The Lineage of the oral instructions*. Founded by Marpa the translator, the Kagyu school is generally considered a yogi lineage and is the second oldest of the Tibetan Buddhist schools. The Kagyu school (or more correctly Kagyu school(s), for there are many sub-schools within the Kagyu tradition) comes from the second propagation of Indian Buddhism into Tibet. The Kagyu schools are considered practice lineages emphasizing tantric practice, ritual, and meditation. Practitioners of these schools are referred to as Kagyupas and include yogis, monastics, and lay.

Kalpa (Skt.; Tib. *kalpa*): Aeon; the period of time between the creation and recreation of a universal system.

Kangyur (Tib.): *See* Tibetan Buddhist canon.

Karma (Skt.; Tib. *le*): The driving force behind samsaric cyclic existence; the process of cause and effect when pertaining to the lives of sentient beings, asserting that all intentional actions (deliberate actions), whether physical, verbal, or mental, have consequences. Karma (intentional actions) either positive, negative, or indifferent—performed by body, speech, or mind—subsequently produce *karmic imprints* or potentialities upon the mind. These imprints then lead to future *karmic results* that correspond with the nature of those actions—with virtuous karmic imprints leading to positive results (happiness and favorable rebirth) and non-virtuous karmic imprints leading to negative results (suffering and unfavorable rebirth).

Karmapa (Tib.): A title pertaining to the system of recognizing reincarnate lamas (*Tulkus*). The first Tulku lineage to be established; belonging to the Kagyu School of Tibetan Buddhism. Beginning with Dusum Khyenpa who posthumously became the first Karmapa, initiating the precession of rebirths leading up to the present day 17th *Gyalwang Karmapa, Orgyen Trinley Dorje*—the current spiritual leader of the Kagyu school.

Karmic imprints (Skt. *vasana*; Tib. *bakchak*): Karmic imprints are created when our feelings become involved, as a kind of mental/emotional residue left behind from feelings related to our intentions, thoughts, actions, reactions, and experiences. Karmic imprints influence and distort our perceptions, choices, and actions, thereby coloring and shaping our current as well as future thoughts, actions, and experiences.

Kaya (Skt.: Tib. *ku*): See Buddha bodies.

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

Khatak (Tib.): See offering scarves. See appendix.

Kilkhor (Tib.; Skt. *mandala*): See mandala. See appendix.

Kleshas (Skt.; Tib. *nyön mong*): See afflictions.

Kora (Tib.): See circumambulation.

Lama (Tib.; Skt. *guru*): Spiritual and/or tantric teacher.

Lamrim (Tib.): The stages of the path. A graduated presentation of the complete path to enlightenment as taught by the Buddha. First presented in this form by the Indian master Atisha (11th century). Further lamrims were composed by various scholars, most renown being Great Treatise on the Stages of the Path (Tib. Lamrim Chenmo) by Lama Tsongkhapa.

Liberation: *See* nirvana.

Lineage (Tib. *gyüpa*): A pure and unbroken teacher-student transmission of teachings. Pure lineage authenticates the tradition, school, teacher, and teachings taught. High Lamas may be asked to become *lineage holders* of a certain set of teachings. Being a lineage holder is to be held responsible for personally safeguarding, preserving, and propagating those specific teachings placed in one's care for future generations.

Lojong (Tib.): *See* mind training.

Lotus flower (Skt. *padma*; Tib. *pema*): Representing enlightenment; as a beautiful flower that grows out of mud, the lotus symbolizes purity arising out of impurity and the transmutation of destructive emotions into wisdom. *See* appendix.

Love / loving-kindness (Skt. *maitri*; Tib. *jampa*): Wishing someone to be happy; pure goodwill—the desire of bringing welfare and good to fellow beings.

Madhyamaka (Skt.; Tib. *umapa*): *See* middle way philosophy.

Mahamudra (Skt.; Tib. *chakgya chenpo*): The great seal; the primary tantric practice of the Kagyu school. The union of great bliss and emptiness culminating in buddhahood.

Mahayana (Skt.; Tib. *tegpa chenpo*): Large raft; the universal vehicle. Founded upon the Hinayana tradition, the Mahayana focuses on reaching enlightenment as a society. Based on the altruistic intention of bodhichitta and the aim of attaining buddhahood. Mahayana is considered a North and East Asian tradition, traditionally found in Bhutan, China, India, Japan, Korea, Nepal, Tibet, and Vietnam. Asserted to have been taught secretly by the Buddha within his own lifetime, believed to surface publically sometime after 200 BCE.

Mahayana philosophy (Skt.; Tib. *tegpa chenpo*): The philosophy of the Mahayana tradition, consisting of two main branches, the *Madhyamaka* and the *Yogachara*. Main differences between the two pertain to their often opposing views on the topics of consciousness, epistemology, and the nature of reality.

Main minds (Skt.) *chitta*; Tib. *tso sem*): Synonymous with specific consciousness or divided consciousness. The six main minds consist of five *sense main minds* and one *mental main mind*. The *five sense main minds* are direct sense perceivers possessing the ability to link one's external sphere of sensory activity with one's internal sphere of perception, while the *one mental main mind* is a direct mental perceiver possessing the ability to cognize, conceptualize, think, reason, etc. The six main minds are visual, auditory, olfactory, gustatory, tactile, and mental main minds.

Maitreya (Skt.; Tib. *sanggye champa*): The next (5th) wheel turning buddha of this aeon.

Maîtri (Skt.; Tib. *jampa*): See love / loving-kindness.

Mala (Skt.; Tib. *theng wa*): See prayer beads. See appendix.

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

Mandala offering: The tantric offering practice in which one visualizes offering all of their wealth to the three jewels and all sentient beings.

Mani pills (Tib. *mani rilbu*): Special blessed herbal pills made and prayed over by Lamas. Mani pills are eaten for blessings and healing. See appendix.

Manjushri (Skt.; Tib. *Jamyang*): Deity of insight and knowledge; the manifestation of the buddhas' transcendent wisdom. See appendix.

Mantras (Skt.; Tib. *ngak*): Literally, instrument of thought; a tool for working with the mind. Mantras are sacred syllables or incantations that are considered enlightened speech and asserted to have psychological, spiritual, or even magical powers. The recitation of mantras is used to purify, accumulate merit, protect, heal, or to cultivate virtuous qualities such as compassion, wisdom, and/or long life. Mantras, either as single syllables or syllabic phrases, can be recited alone or chanted or sung in groups.

Mara (Skt.; Tib. *Dü*): *The demon of reification*; a metaphor and personification of one's self-grasping ignorance, afflictions, samsaric delusions, and/or obstacles to Dharma practice. Mara is the embodiment of the false self, wrong views, and desire for samsaric sense pleasures. In the story of the Buddha's enlightenment, Mara (the Buddha's own ignorance, delusions, and afflictions) is the tempter that the Buddha must overcome prior to his awakening. Within Jainism, the term *mara* is synonymous with money.

Meditation (Skt. *dhyana*; Tib. *gom*): *A method of mental cultivation with the purpose of developing and transforming the mind*; a technique/practice that develops insight, wisdom, concentration, clarity, and mental stability; a foundational practice for cultivating an understanding and realization of the Buddha's teachings.

- **Calm abiding meditation** (Skt. *shamatha*; Tib. *shine*): Also referred to as *mindfulness meditation*. Calm abiding is a passive meditation used to calm and stabilize the mind.
- **Insight meditation** (Skt. *vipassana*; Tib. *lhakthong*): An active contemplative and/or analytical meditation used to cultivate deep insight and wisdom.

Meditative absorption (Skt. *samadhi*; Tib. *tingedzin*): A meditative state of single-pointed concentration characterized by the feeling of great serenity and bliss. Attained through the practice of meditative concentration (Skt. *dhyana*; Tib. *samten*; Pali. *jhana*), utilizing both calm abiding and insight meditations.

Meditative concentration (Skt. *dhyana*; Tib. *samten*): Cultivated meditational states of mind leading to perfect equanimity and awareness; found in all forms of Buddhism as well in Hinduism and Jainism. Buddhism asserts eight levels of meditative concentration, four meditation levels of form, and four greater levels called formless meditations. Meditative concentration corresponds with the fifth of the six paramitas (concentration) as well as the seventh of the eightfold path (right consciousness) and utilizes both calm abiding and insight meditations.

Mental factors (Skt. *chaitasika dharma*; Tib. *semlay jungwa chö*): Literally, *phenomena arisen from the mind*. Generally there are fifty-one mental factors which are aspects of the main minds which function in apprehending attributes or characteristics of phenomena while also possessing the ability to condition, influence, and/or color the minds.

Mere I (Skt. *pudgala*; Tib. *gangsak*): See person.

Merit (Skt. *punya*; Tib. *sönam*): Positive mental imprints created through virtuous thought, speech, or actions that result in happiness in the future.

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

Method: See union of wisdom and method.

Middle way path (Skt. *madhyamapratipada*; Tib. *uma ki lam*): The path of moderation and balance, neither favoring or opposing; a middle way between the extremes of self-indulgence and self-mortification as well as a middle way between the extreme views of nihilism (that nothing exists) and absolutism (eternal and/or self-existent).

Middle way philosophy (Skt. *madhyamaka*; Tib. *uma*): Literally, middle-most; beyond all extremes. The predominant philosophy of today's Mahayana traditions and Tibetan Buddhist schools. Founded by the legendary Indian Buddhist master *Nagarjuna* (2nd century CE), Madhyamaka asserts that all phenomena lack any inherent or essential essence.

Middle way consequence school (Skt. *prasangika madhyamika*; Tib. *uma talgyur*):

The current philosophy of all Tibetan Buddhist schools. Founded by the legendary Indian Buddhist master *Buddhapalita* (6th century CE) and later elaborated on by the Indian master *Chandrakirti* (7th century CE). The Middle Way Consequence School is a later development of the Mahayana middle way philosophy (Skt. *madhyamaka*; Tib. *umapa*), and is considered the pinnacle of Buddhist philosophy. Defined by its use of *logical consequence reasoning—reductio ad absurdum*—to reduce an opponent's argument to absurdity (as opposed to syllogistic reasoning) while not necessarily asserting a position of one's own.

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

Mindfulness (Skt. *smṛti*; Tib. *tenpa*): Translated as recollection, awareness, or attention. Simply put, mindfulness is the absence of mind wandering, and can be understood twofold. First, to recall, remember, or keep in mind the Buddha's teachings and instructions, as well as remembering to stay engaged in mindfulness. Secondly, as a practice of present or open awareness.

Mind Only School (Skt. *chittamatra*; Tib. *semtsampā*): See Yogachara.

Mind training (Tib. *lojong*): Also known as *mind developing*, or *attitude transformation*. A practice of contemplation with the aim of cultivating bodhichitta (the mind of enlightenment). Mind training is practiced by all schools of Tibetan Buddhism.

Monasticism: A monk or nun in the Buddhist *monastic order*; a renunciant who willingly takes vows of virtuous conduct and poverty; one who has abandoned lay existence and mundane worldly concerns in order to dedicate their lives fully to the Buddha's teachings and the attainment of enlightenment.

Monastics: Ordained monks and nuns usually residing in monasteries or nunneries.

- **Fully ordained monk** (Skt. *bhikṣu*; Tib. *gelong*).
- **Fully ordained nun** (Skt. *bhikṣuṇī*; Tib. *gelongma*).
- **Novice monk** (Skt. *sramanera*; Tib. *getsul*): Apprentice monk in training.
- **Novice nun** (Skt. *sramaneri*; Tib. *getsulma*): Apprentice nun in training.
- **Rabjung** (Tib.; Skt. *anagarika*): Renunciant; not yet a novice but permitted to wear robes, shave their head, and live in a monastery or nunnery.

Monastic vows (Skt. *pratimoksha*; Tib. *sothar kyi dompa*): An aspect of the individual liberation vows and therefore an expression of the Hinayana vehicle. Monastic vows are taken for one's entire life and consist of the promise to uphold the precepts of proper conduct of an ordained monk or nun, mainly comprised of: ethical conduct, monastic discipline, and training in monastic community living. See individual liberation vows.

Mudras (Skt.; Tib. *chakgya*): Symbolic and/or sacred hand gesture used in tantric rituals. Mudras are common to all Buddhist traditions and can be seen in images of the Buddha. Hand mudras are combined with mantras and virtuous intention to create a union of body, speech, and mind utilized for practice.

Nagarjuna (Skt.; Tib. *lutub*): Legendary 2nd century Indian Buddhist master and founder of the Madhyamaka philosophy. Considered the father on the Mahayana tradition and seen as the most important Buddhist master after the Buddha himself.

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

New moon days (Tib. *tse sumchu*): A powerful day for practice and a good day for taking the Mahayana precepts or Medicine Buddha practice. New moon days occur on the 30th of every Tibetan lunar calendar month.

Ngöndro (Tib.): See preliminary practices.

Nihilism (Skt. *uccheda drsti*; Tib. *che ta*): The term nihilism, used within its Buddhist context, is a dangerous misunderstanding of the Buddha's teachings on emptiness, in which one mistakes emptiness as nothingness. People that have fallen into this wrong view believing that nothing exists, while also seeing concepts like virtue, goodness, honesty, compassion, and the Buddhist path itself as equally nonexistent and therefore inconsequential.

Nirvana (Skt.; Tib. *nyangde*): *To blow out or extinguish; to extinguish the three poisons*. Nirvana is enlightened existence (opposed to samsara which is unenlightened existence). A state or quality of the mind devoid of the three poisons, attained by practitioners who have transcended all coarse and subtle habitual wrong views, thereby clearly and unmistakably apprehending the true nature of oneself and reality.

The four types of nirvana

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

1. **Natural nirvana** (Tib. *rangzhin nyangde*): The ultimate nature and/or quality of the mind that is empty of inherent existence possessing a primal *potential* for purity. This is not an actual nirvana but the basis for attaining nirvana. Liberation is attained through recognizing and cultivating this foundational quality and potential of the mind.
2. **Nirvana without residue** (Skt. *nirupadhisheshanirvana*; Tib. *lhakchäpe nyangen dä*): The experience of nirvana by superior beings while in meditative equipoise—meditating on ultimate reality. The term residue pertains to a remaining subtle habit of still perceiving phenomena as inherently existent. It's only while in meditative equipoise on ultimate reality that superior beings are free of this habitual residue.
3. **Nirvana with residue** (Skt. *sopadhisheshanirvana*; Tib. *lhakmäpai nyangen*): The experience of nirvana by superior beings while not in meditation, or meditating on something other than ultimate reality. An experience of nirvana in which the practitioner still possesses a subtle habit of perceiving phenomena as inherently existent.
4. **Non-abiding nirvana** (Skt. *apratisthitanirvana*; Tib. *minepay nyangende*): The experience of nirvana by buddhas; synonymous with full enlightenment, supreme nirvana, or buddhahood. Non-abiding nirvana is the irreversible cessation of the three poisons, all rebirth, all suffering (both physical and mental), and any habitual residue of perceiving the appearance of phenomena as inherently existent. It is referred to as non-abiding nirvana, for although buddhas have attained buddhahood they do not merely abide within it. That is, buddhas are not bound by either samsara or nirvana, for while focused on the meditative equipoise of that nirvana, they simultaneously emanate into countless realms in order to act for the benefit of countless beings. Non-abiding nirvana is the final and supreme goal of Mahayana practitioners.

Noble eightfold path (Skt. *aryastangamarga*; Tib. *pagpelam yanlak gyüpa*): The Buddha's prescribed path to enlightenment, consisting of right view, right intention, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration.

Nominal existence (Tib. *mingtsam*): Existing by way of name and label; also known as imputed origination.

Non-abiding nirvana (Skt. *apratisthitanirvana*; Tib. *minepay nyangende*): See nirvana.

Non-dual (Skt. *advaya*; Tib. *nyime*): Not two; undivided consciousness in which the dichotomy of subject and object is transcended; and/or the union of conventional and ultimate reality is realized.

No-self (Skt. *anatman*; Tib. *dakme*): The Buddha's doctrine that asserts that sentient beings, like all phenomena, are empty of any inherent essential essence.

Nyingma (Tib.): *The ancients*; the first and oldest of the schools of Tibetan Buddhism. Founded by the Indian tantric master *Padmasambhava* also known as *Guru Rinpoche*. Originating from the first propagation of Indian Buddhism into Tibet, the Nyingma is considered a practice lineage emphasizing tantric practice, ritual, and meditation. Practitioners of this school are referred to as Nyingmapas and include yogis, monastics, and lay.

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

Omnipresent (Skt. *sarvatraga*; Tib. *kunkyab*): Being present everywhere at once.

Omniscience (Skt. *sarvajnata*; Tib. *namkhyen*): All knowing; having infinite knowledge.

Oracles (Tib. *chö kyong*): A spiritual medium that provides wise counsel and/or precognition of future events. In the Tibetan culture, oracles are used by all institutions—with even the state having an official oracle. An oracle is a high Buddhist master who can go into a deep *trance-like state* and receive and/or channel information of coming events from spirits.

Padmasambhava (Skt.): Also known as *Guru Rinpoche*; the eighth-century Indian tantric master predominant in establishing Buddhism in Tibet. Highly revered by followers of the Nyingma school, which he founded.

Pali: The scriptural language of the Theravada Tradition; one of two of the Buddhist scriptural languages, the other being Sanskrit.

Paramitas (Skt.; Tib. *pharchin*): See perfections.

Parinirvana (Skt.; Tib. *yongsu nyangan ledempa*): Within the Hinayana and Theravada traditions, parinirvana is the *final* nirvana of the arhat, attained after the death of the gross aggregates.

Passion: see desire.

Patience (Skt. *ksanti*; Tib. *zöpa*): Good-natured tolerance to the un-desirable. One of the six perfections.

Pecha (Tib.): Tibetan scripts; rectangular loose-leaf books, usually with cardboard or wooden covers. Pechas are usually wrapped in ornate cloth for their protection. See appendix.

Perfections (Skt. *paramitas*; Tib. *pharchin*): The practices of a bodhisattva.

The Six Perfections (Skt. *paramitas*; Tib. *pharchin*):

1. **Generosity** (Skt. *dana*; Tib. *jinpa*): Giving of resources, dharma, protection, care, love, one's time, and oneself.
2. **Ethics** (Skt. *sila*; Tib. *tsultrim*): Virtue, discipline, restraint, proper conduct, and abandoning the ten non-virtuous actions.
3. **Fortitude** (Skt. *ksanti*; Tib. *zöpa*): Tolerance, patience, acceptance, and endurance.
4. **Joyous effort** (Skt. *vīrya*; Tib. *tsöndrū*): Enthusiasm, energy, and diligence.
5. **Meditative stability** (Skt. *dhyana*; Tib. *samten*): Single-pointed concentration, mindfulness, clarity, and focus.
6. **Wisdom** (Skt. *prajna*; Tib. *sherab*): Transcendental wisdom and deep insight into the Buddha's teachings and the true nature of oneself and reality.

Person (Skt. *pudgala*; Tib. *gangsak*): Synonymous with being, sentient being, "I", mere "I", individual, entity, experiencer, and agent. The person exists as a subjective unifying identity, imputed in dependence upon a unique stream of uninterrupted consciousness, mental and physical aggregates, and stream of experiences.

Pharchin (Tib.; Skt. *paramitas*): See perfections.

Phenomena (Skt. *dharma*; Tib. *chö*): That which can be known; both external phenomena—known by the senses, and internal phenomena—known by the mind (thoughts, ideas, emotions, feelings, etc.).

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

Pilgrimage (Tib. *nyekor*): A journey for the purpose of spiritual insight and revelation, usually to spiritually significant destinations.

Pointing-out instructions (Tib. *ngo trö kyi dampa*): The direct introduction to the nature of the mind. In many of the Tibetan Buddhist schools, pointing-out instructions, also known as mind transmissions, are received during the time of an empowerment. In pointing-out instructions, the teacher, during an empowerment, or when they deem the student ready, draws out an experience or taste of the true nature of mind from the student's mind.

Powa (Tib.): A method of ejecting one's consciousness at the time of death. Powa allows the practitioner to choose the proper moment to induce their subtle consciousness to leave their body; used to attain a *perfect death* by allowing the practitioner to escape bad mental states, unconducive environments, or a prolonged or agonizing death process.

Prajna (Skt.; Tib. *sherab*): See wisdom.

Prasangika Madhyamika (Skt.; Tib. *uma talgyur*): See Middle Way Consequence School.

Pratimoksha vows (Skt.; Tib. *sothar kyi dompa*): See individual liberation vows.

Pratyekabuddhas (Skt.; Tib. *rangyal gi jangchub*): See Buddha.

Prayer beads (Skt. *mala*; Tib. *theng wa*): Used to count the amount of mantras, prostrations, or ritual offerings made during practice. Malas traditionally have 108 beads and can be made of any material (wood, stone, crystal, jewel, seed, metal, bone, or plastic) and come in many different colors that may be associated with particular deities or symbolic meanings. See appendix.

Prayer flags (Tib. *lung tha*): Inscribed with auspicious symbols, invocations, prayers, and/or mantras. Hung between trees, around temples, homes, or mountain ridges to bless the surrounding area and to bring good fortune. As the wind blows, their prayers and blessings are carried by the wind. Traditionally in five color sets (yellow, green, red, white, and blue), representing the elements of earth, water, fire, wind, and space. See appendix.

Prayer wheels (Tib. *manikorla*): Spinning round hollow drums filled with scrolls of mantras. It's believed that when one spins the wheel, the merit gained is the same as if one recited all the mantras contained within it. Prayer wheels can be small enough to fit in your hand or some so large it may take several people to turn. See appendix.

Precepts (Tib. *cheпа*): Guidelines of personal conduct intended to stabilize one's thoughts and behavior in order to facilitate swift spiritual progress. See vows.

Preliminary practices (Tib. *ngondro*): Most schools of Tibetan Buddhism require that students, after being initiated into the tantric path, begin preliminary or preparatory tantric practices. These practices are designed to purify negative karma, accumulate merit, and reduce pride, while preparing the student psychologically, physically, and emotionally for tantric practice. These preliminary practices consist of 100,000 accumulation of: prostrations, ritual mandala offerings, purification mantras, and guru mantras.

Prostrations (Skt. *namaskara*; Tib. *chaktsal*): Prostrations are long, full-body bows that serve as a form of offering and an antidote to pride. Prostrations are performed to show reverence and humility to the three jewels and teachers while also being a great source of merit and purification.

Prostration board: A long, smooth, and flat board placed on the ground that aids in doing prostrations.

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

Pujas (Skt.; Tib. *tsok*): To honor or revere; a practice found in all Indian traditions. Commonly, the term puja pertains to a religious gathering. More precisely defined as a religious expression of devotion, worship, and supplication for the purpose of gaining inspiration, blessings, and merit. Puja performances or ceremonies include prayer, mantra recitation, chanting of scripture, supplication, and making offerings (candles, flowers, food, incense, etc.) Pujas may be large formal ceremonies within monasteries, temples, or dharma centers, or informal ceremonies performed in homes by small groups, or even by individual practitioners as part of their daily practice.

Pure lands (Skt. *buddhaksetra*; Tib. *tak shing*): Also known as buddha fields or pure realms. In Mahayana Buddhism, pure lands are celestial dwellings or pure abodes of buddhas. A realm beyond samsara that transcends time and space. Pure lands are created each time a bodhisattva attains buddhahood and is established through their great merit and virtuous activities. Superior beings can visit to receive teachings directly from the buddha of that pure land, a realm where all conditions are conducive to the practice of Dharma and the attainment of enlightenment.

Pure Land Buddhism: The path of serene trust. One of the most popular Mahayana traditions in East Asia. Traditionally found in China, India, Japan, Korea, Taiwan, and Vietnam. Focused on the *Buddha Amitabha* (Skt.; Tib. *öpame*), Pure Land Buddhism can be found within all Mahayana schools. Although originating in India, Pure Land Buddhism didn't become a substantial movement until the 5th century CE.

Purification (Tib. *jongwa*): Buddhism asserts purification not as the purification of a self, soul, or spirit—which Buddhism rejects; but instead as the purification of one's view. The eradication of ignorance, delusions, and afflictions from the mind.

Rainbow body (Tib. *jalü*): In the case of high masters, after death has occurred, their corpse does not decompose, but instead over a period of days starts to shrink until it finally disappears with only finger and toe nails and hair left behind. The appearance of mystical lights and/or rainbows is said to accompany this event. This phenomenon is referred to as the attainment of rainbow body.

Realization: To gain a direct experience of emptiness and/or the true nature of reality.

Rebirth (Skt. *bhava*; Tib. *yangsi*): Synonymous with reincarnation; the belief that sentient beings' subtle minds at the time of death *transmigrate* and take rebirth. The goal of Buddhism is to escape the cycle of rebirth and the suffering which it entails.

Refuge (Skt. *sarana*; Tib. *kyabdo*): Formal initiation into the Buddhist path. Practitioners take refuge and the accompanying refuge vows in a refuge ceremony, thereby formally becoming a Buddhist practitioner. The term refuge can be understood as going for protection or safety, as if taking refuge in a shelter during a storm, or taking refuge in the advice of a doctor when sick.

Refuge field: See merit field.

Refuge vows (Skt. *zaranagati*; Tib. *kyabdo*): Formal initiation into the Buddhist path. Practitioners take refuge and *refuge vows* in a *refuge ceremony* thereby formally becoming a Buddhist practitioner. Traditionally, refuge vows consist of: *three prescriptions, three prohibitions, and five precepts*.

Reification: Super-imposition; to consider abstract concepts to be substantially real; to impute solidity upon the ethereal, or to exaggerate the substantiality of phenomena.

Reincarnation: See rebirth.

Relative truth: See conventional truth.

Relics (Skt. *sarira*; Tib. *ringse*): After the cremation of great masters, relics are said to be found in the remaining ashes. These relics are often in the form of pearl-like formations, jeweled beads, or bone fragments found in auspicious shapes. Relics are said to bestow blessings on those who look upon them. See appendix.

Renunciate vows (Tib. *rabjung*) Leaving the householders life; a monastics first vows taken upon entering a monastery. While the *rabjung* (person), usually a child, may appear to be a monastic, they are not officially a monk or nun until taking novice vows. Becoming *rabjung* and abiding within its precepts, allows the practitioner to live within the monastic community. Renunciation vows consist of three commitments and five vows.

Renunciation (Skt. *nihsarana*; Tib. *ngejung*): Definite emergence—the definite determination to be free, or emerge from, samsara; simply defined as the wish for freedom.

Retreat centers (Tib. *richö*): Also known as hermitages; usually located in remote locations away from the hustle and bustle of monastic life. The objective of retreat is to give the practitioner the time and space to cultivate a deeper understanding of their studies, through which profound insight and a direct realization of the teachings can be attained.

Right view (Tib. *yangdakpe tawa*): The correct perception and understanding of the true nature of oneself and reality. For someone following the Buddhist path, this means having an accurate understanding of the Buddha's teachings and ontological model of reality. Right view is posited as the cause and condition for the attainment of nirvana and buddhahood, whereas wrong view(s) are posited as the causes and conditions for continued existence in samsara.

Rime movement (Tib.; pronounced *ri-mey*): Meaning *unbiased* or *non-partisan*.

Originating in Tibet in the late 19th century and fueled by religious and political suppression of non-Gelug schools, the Rime movement sought to unify and strengthen the teachings and institutions of the Nyingma, Kagyu, and Sakya schools. His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama has been a strong supporter of the Rime movement, instructing all of his students to embrace the Rime ideal.

Rinpoche (Tib.): *Precious one*; a title used for high lamas or *tulkus* (Tib.)—reincarnate lamas.

Root lama (Tib. *tsawe lama*; Skt. *guru*): *Main teacher*; most often tantric. In Tibetan Buddhism, a student may have many teachers within their life, but only one root lama.

Sadhana (Skt.; Tib. *drubthab*): Tantric practice texts.

Sakya School (Tib.): *The pale earth*—referring to the unique grey landscape of the hills of Southern Tibet. The Sakya is the third oldest of the Tibetan Buddhist schools. Founded by *Khön Könchok Gyalpo*, the Sakya school is considered a study lineage emphasizing logic, debate, and academic excellence. Practitioners of this school are referred to as *Sakyapas* and include monastics, yogis, and lay. This lineage comes from the second propagation of Indian Buddhism into Tibet.

Samadhi (Skt.; Tib. *tingedzin*): *See* meditative absorption.

Samaya (Skt.; Tib. *damtsig*): *See* commitments.

Samsara (Skt.; Tib. *khorwa*): Wandering through or circling; commonly translated as cyclic existence. Samsara is unenlightened existence and the mode of existence common to ordinary beings. A state or quality of the mind pervaded by ignorance, delusions, afflictions, and suffering; a state habituated by wrong views and misguided intentions.

Samskaras (Skt.; Tib. *düche*): *See* compounding factors.

Samyaksambuddhas (Skt.; Tib. *thekchen gi jangchub*): *See* Buddha.

Sangha (Skt.; Tib. *gedün*): *Harmonious community*. A Buddhist spiritual community or congregation. There is some debate about what the term *Sangha* actually pertains to. Some say Sangha refers to one's congregation of fellow Buddhist practitioners. Others posit Sangha as a group of four or more fully ordained monastics. However, according to scripture, Sangha is traditionally defined as the array of buddhas and superior beings who have directly realized the Buddha's teachings. With that said, all of the above interpretations are acceptable and commonly used.

Sanskrit: An ancient language of India, no longer spoken. The primary literal and philosophical language of Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism. The language of the Buddhist Mahayana canonical texts and tradition.

Secular Buddhism: A modern approach to the study and practice of Buddhism that deemphasizes its more religious, mystical, and cultural aspects. This approach attempts to clarify the Buddha's teachings by lifting them out of their presumed religious and cultural context, while further examining later works in order to determine legitimate teachings from religious or cultural adaptation.

Self (Skt. *atman*; Tib. *dag*): Synonymous with *false self* or *illusory self* (Tib. *gagcha dag*). According to the Buddha, the self does not exist, but instead is merely an exaggerated mistaken view of the specific person, believing the person (one's identity) to exist inherently and independent from the aggregates.

Sentient being: A being possessing a mind (people, animals, insects).

Shakyamuni Buddha (Skt.; Tib. *sangye shakya tubpa*): (563-483 BC)

The historic Buddha—the awakened one; fourth of the Buddhas of this aeon. Born *Siddhartha Gautama* of the Shakya clan in Lumbini, Nepal, near the India border. See appendix.

Shamata (Skt.) See meditation.

Shambala (Skt.; Tib. *deyung*): A mythical Himalayan kingdom inhabited by enlightened beings.

Shantideva (Skt.; Tib. *Shilha*): Eighth century Indian Buddhist master who propounded the middle way consequence school. Author of *A Guide to the Bodhisattva Way of life*, a profound and heart touching text on altruism and the virtues of the bodhisattva path. The writings of Shantideva strongly shaped Tibetan Buddhism's unique focus on compassion and loving-kindness.

Shastras (Skt.; Tib. *tenchö*): Treatises on the sutras.

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

Shugden / Dorje Shugden (Tib.): Also known as *Dolgyall* (Tib.). A worldly spirit previously practiced by many followers of the Gelug school. His Holiness the Dalai Lama has declared Shugden a harmful spirit and has banned its worship and practice. Currently, a great controversy is ongoing, created by Kelsang Gyatso founder of the *New Kadampa Tradition* (NKT) a Buddhist school considered by many to be a dangerous cult.

Siddha (Skt.; Tib. *drubtob*): A spiritual master who possesses siddhi. See siddhi.

Siddhi (Skt.; Tib. *ngödup*): Supernatural and/or psychic powers of various kinds attained through meditation and/or tantric practices.

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

Single-pointed concentration (Tib. *tingdzin tsechik*): Pertaining to a type of meditation as well as to its attainment. The ability to stay focused on any given object for an extended amount of time.

Six elements (Skt. *mahabhuta*; Tib. *kham tuk*): Also known as the *six foundational or irreducible elements*. The names of these elements are merely metaphors pertaining to six foundational qualities that are the building blocks of empirical existence: earth, water, fire, wind, space, and consciousness.

Six perfections (Skt. *prajnaparamita*; Tib. *parchin*): *See* perfections.

Six realms: *See* desire realm.

Six session guru yoga (Tib. *thün tuk*): A prayer and/or practice recalling one's tantric vows, pledges, and tantric intentions. A daily commitment/requirement if one has taken a tantric empowerment. Recited three times in the morning and three times in the evening.

Sixteen aspects of the four noble truths: A contemplation practice; four characteristics that counteract four distorted concepts pertaining to each truth.

Skandhas (Skt.): *See* aggregates.

Skillful means (Skt. *upaya kausalya*; Tib. *tab la kepa*): *Skillful method in conveying teachings*. Pertaining to a teacher's ability to adapt the teachings to the needs and aptitude of the student or particular group in order to successfully communicate the Dharma.

Snow lion (Tib. *kang seng*): Celestial animal and emblem of the snowy mountain ranges of Tibet. The snow lion symbolizes power, strength, and fearlessness, while also seen as the personification of primordial playfulness, joy, and bliss. The snow lion's roar is said to embody the sound of emptiness, courage, and truth. *See* appendix.

Sojong (Tib.; Skt. *posadha*): A confession and purification ceremony for ordained monastics, used to repair damaged vows. Performed bi-monthly on every full moon and new moon.

Solitary realizer (Skt. *pratyekabuddha*; Tib. *rangsangye*): *See* four vehicles.

Spirits (Tib. *namshe*): Spirits can be both helpful and harmful, and although often powerful, they are still unenlightened beings trapped within samsaric existence and rebirth. Harmful spirits may create obstacles for humans, while helpful spirits may be called upon or channeled for divination, protection, or even temporal wealth or power. However, spirits cannot aid in the attainment of liberation.

Spiritual: An often vague term referring to existential beliefs and feelings related to one's virtue, higher purpose, and altruistic responsibility towards other beings—usually attributed to a soul or spirit. This term is also used to discern a distinction between the positive qualities of religious beliefs from their supposed negative institutional or dogmatic attributes.

Sramana (Skt.): A pre-Buddhist Indian religious tradition of ascetic wandering mendicants, consisting of many small groups that shared similar views who existed independently from society. Practices included detachment from material concerns, inward salvation, meditation, and attaining liberation through self-effort. The origin of Jainism and Buddhism.

Sravakabuddhas (Skt.; Tib. *nyenthoe ki jangchub; savakabuddha*): See Buddha.

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

Suffering: (Skt. *duhkha*; Tib. *dukngal*): Physical, mental/emotional, and existential pain, anxiety, and/or misery.

Sunyata (Skt.; Tib. *tongpa nyi*): See emptiness.

Superior bodhisattva (Skt. *arya bodhisattvas*; Tib. *jangsem pakpa*): One who has attained a direct and non-conceptual realization of emptiness and thereby has entered both the path of seeing and the first of the ten bodhisattva grounds.

Sutra (Skt.; Tib. *do*): Meaning, string or thread; that which weaves or holds together. The discourses of the Buddha (the actual words of the Buddha) and discourses by his major disciples. The sutra collection is one of the three divisions of the Buddhist canon. Additionally, within Tibetan Buddhism, the term sutra can pertain to the Mahayana teachings. See *Buddhist canon*.

Sutra School (Skt. *sautrantika*; Tib. *dodewa*): A Hinayana philosophy.

Tantra (Skt.; Tib. *gyu*): A system of rapid spiritual cultivation. A secret and esoteric teaching and practice that harnesses psycho-physical energies through ritual, visualization, and meditation. The word tantra comes from Sanskrit, meaning continuity, continuum, or interwoven. Tantra is an ancient teaching and practice found in most Indian religions.

Tantric Buddhism: A general term pertaining to tantra within any Buddhist tradition. The two main traditions of Tantric Buddhism are the Indian Vajrayana Tradition (no longer practiced) and the Tibetan Tradition. Other lesser know Buddhist schools that practice tantra (mainly subschools of the Chan and Zen traditions) continue to exist; however, their emphasis on tantric teachings and practices are limited and far less prominent.

Tantric vows (Skt. *tantra samvara*; Tib. *sangngak kyi dompa*): An expression of the Vajrayana vehicle and initiation into the tantric path. Tantric vows and precepts are secret and focus on ethical, mental, and physical behavior.

Tara (Skt.; Tib. *Dolma*): The female deity that most people turn to when in need of quick assistance; the manifestation of the buddhas' enlightened activity and the remover of obstacles. See appendix.

Tathagata (Skt.; Tib. *deshin shekpa*): Thus gone; an epithet of the Buddha.

Ten non-virtuous actions (Skt. *dasakusala*; Tib. *migewa chu*): Destroying life, stealing, sexual misconduct, false speech, harsh or rude speech, slanderous speech, idle chatter, covetousness/envy, ill will, and wrong views.

Tenets (Skt. *siddhanta*; Tib. *drubta*): A fundamental topic of study in Tibetan monasteries; four unique cross samples of the major historical Buddhist philosophical views:

1. Middle Way (Skt. *madhyamika*; Tib. *umapa*): A Mahayana philosophy.
2. Mind Only (Skt. *chittamatra*; Tib. *sem tsampa*): A Mahayana philosophy.
3. Sutra School (Skt. *sautrantika*; Tib. *dodewa*): A Hinayana philosophy.
4. Great Exposition School (Skt. *vaibhashika*; Tib. *chetakmawa*): A Hinayana philosophy.

Note: Each of these philosophical schools can be further divided into various subschools.

Tengyur (Tib.): See Tibetan Buddhist canon.

Terma and tertons (Tib.): *Terma*—hidden treasure; teachings hidden by great masters or mythical beings and revealed at an appropriate time to *tertons*—treasure revealers. Termas can be physical objects hidden in the ground, in rock, trees, water, or the sky. They can also take the form of mental objects like texts and teachings hidden in the mind of disciples.

Thangka (Tib.): Scroll paintings depicting deities, mandalas, or aspects of practice, used as a focal point of meditation and tantric practice in which one visualizes deities and their respected qualities while making offerings and requests for blessings. Hung on the walls of temples, shrine rooms, practitioner's rooms, and homes. See appendix.

Theravada (Skt.; Tib. *neten depa*): Doctrine of the elders; a later development of the Hinayana tradition; generally regarded as a South Asian tradition found in Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Thailand, and Vietnam. Theravadists see themselves as traditionalists, presenting and preserving a more conventional and historically accurate account of the Buddha and his teachings. The Theravada Tradition is deeply rooted in monasticism, believing it to be the most conducive lifestyle for achieving nirvana. Theravada accepts the Pali canon as the only source of authentic Buddhist texts.

Thirty-seven aids to awakening: Pertaining to the third aspect of the three higher trainings—the training in wisdom. Also referred to as the thirty-seven factors leading to a purified state. These thirty-seven aids along with the development of the six perfections, and the cultivation of bodhichitta, are used to traverse and accomplish the five bodhisattva paths leading to Buddhahood.

Three excellences (Tib. *dampa sum*): Also known as the *three noble principles*. These three aspects serve as a basic outline for proper practice. (1) Setting one's intention, (2) abiding in the proper attitude (3) dedication of one's merit.

Three great objectives (Tib. *thö sam gom sum*): study, contemplation, and meditation.

Three higher trainings (Skt. *trisikṣa*; Tib. *lhagpe labpa sum*):

1. **Ethics** (Skt. *adhisīlasikṣa*; Tib. *tsultim kyi labpa*): Holding vows and/or monastic rules, altruistic responsibility, creating virtue, abstaining from the ten non-virtuous actions.
2. **Concentration** (Skt. *samādhisikṣa*; Tib. *tingngedzin kyi labpa*): The method aspect of the path pertaining to mental cultivation and the stabilization of one's meditation and mind.
3. **Wisdom** (Skt. *prajñasikṣa*; Tib. *sherab kyi labpa*): The wisdom aspect of the path pertaining to attaining the proper understanding of the Buddha's teachings.

Three jewels (Skt. *triratna*; Tib. *konchog sum*): Jewel refers to that which is precious and rare.

1. The **Buddha** (Skt.; Tib. *sanggye*): The awakened one.
2. The **Dharma** (Skt.; Tib. *chö*): The Buddha's teachings.
3. The **Sangha** (Skt.; Tib. *gedün*): Those who have realized the Buddha's teachings.

Three marks of existence (Skt. *trilaksana*): impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, and suffering.

Three poisons (Skt. *trivisa*; Tib. *duksum*): Ignorance, attachment, and aversion. *Note*: With the addition of pride and envy these make up **the five poisons**.

Three principal aspects of the Mahayana path: It's said that all of the Mahayana teachings are contained within these three aspects.

1. **Renunciation** (Skt. *nihsarana*; Tib. ngejung).
2. **Bodhichitta** (Skt.; Tib. *Jangchup kyi sem*).
3. **The correct view** (Tib. *yangdakpe tawa*).

Three realms of samsaric existence (Skt. *tridhatu*; Tib. *kham sum*): Buddhism asserts samsara as consisting of three distinct realms of existence:

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

Three turnings of the wheel of Dharma (Skt. *tridharmacakra*; Tib. *chökhör rimpa sum*):

Three momentous teachings of the Buddha which serve as the foundation of the various Buddhist traditions. The expression, *turning the wheel of dharma*, can be defined as the introduction of a momentous and new teaching by a buddha.

Three vehicles of Buddhism (Skt. *triyana*; Tib. *tegpasum*): three unique Buddhist traditions that can lead practitioners to enlightenment.

1. **Hinayana** (Skt.; Tib. *tegmen*): See *Hinayana*.
2. **Mahayana** (Skt.; Tib. *tegpa chenpo*): See *Mahayana*.
3. **Vajrayana** (Skt.; Tib. *dorje tegpa*): See *Vajrayana*.

Tibetan Buddhism (Skt.; Tib. *pür ki nangchö*): A later form of Vajrayana Buddhism and therefore a branch of the Mahayana. Tibetan Buddhism accepts the Hinayana, Mahayana, and Vajrayana as authentic teachings of the Buddha.

Tibetan Buddhist canon: A unique presentation of the Buddha's teachings translated primarily from Sanskrit (but also Chinese) into Tibetan and compiled into the two texts of *the kangyur* and *the tengyur* (Tib.).

- **The Kangyur** (Tib.): Meaning translated word; the spoken words of the Buddha. The kangyur consists of 108 volumes of the Buddha's Hinayana, Mahayana, and Vajrayana discourses, including teachings and explanation from close disciples and other enlightened beings.
- **The Tengyur** (Tib.): Meaning translated treaties; consisting of 224 volumes of commentaries and treaties by the great Indian Buddhist masters explaining and elaborating on the words of the Buddha, including commentaries and treaties on the Hinayana, Mahayana, and Vajrayana teachings.

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

Tripitika (Skt.; Tib. *denö sum*): See Buddhist canon.

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

Tsawe lama (Tib.; Skt. *guru*): See root lama.

Tsok offering (Tib.; Skt. *ganacakra*): Tsok is a commitment for tantric practitioners and used to restore vows and pledges. A tsok offering is a ceremony in which food and drink are offered to the three jewels and then distributed among the participants to enjoy at the end of the ceremony. The tsok ceremony is performed on the 10th and the 25th of every lunar calendar month, usually combined with Guru puja.

Tulku (Tib.; Skt. *nirmanakaya*): Emanation body; a reincarnate lama. A distinct feature found only in Tibetan Buddhism; a system of recognizing reincarnate lamas, referred to as *tulkus*. Often called by the title *Rinpoche* (Tib.) meaning *precious one*, tulkus are common to all schools of Tibetan Buddhism and are highly venerated within Tibetan society. The practice of recognizing reincarnated masters is unique to the Tibetan Buddhism Tradition. Famous tulkus include His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama and the 17th Gyalwang Karmapa.

Tumo (Tib.; Skt. *chandali*): *Inner-heat*; a practice of purification through burning off negative karma. An interesting side effect of this practice is the significant rise of one's metabolism and body temperature which can be used to protect oneself from winter elements when in retreat.

Twelve links of dependent origination (Skt. *nidanas*; Tib. *dendel yenlak chunyi*): The Buddha's model of the mechanism of cyclic samsaric existence, illustrating how the sequence of uncontrolled rebirth occurs. The twelve links are ignorance, karmic formation, consciousness, name and form, sense bases, contact, feeling, craving, grasping, existence, rebirth, and aging and death. See dependent origination.

Two collections (Skt. *sambhar advaya*; Tib. *tsoknyi*):

- **The collection of wisdom** (Skt. *jñana sambhara*; Tib. *yeshe kyi tsok*): To gain a clear understanding of the true nature of oneself and reality.
- **The collection of merit** (Skt. *punya sambhara*; Tib. *sönam kyi tsok*): To gain merit through acts of altruism, practice, good-works, and devotion.

Two natures: Found only in the Gelug School, the premise of the two natures assert that all phenomena (internal or external / conventional or ultimate) possess and exhibit two distinct *objective* aspects or natures through which they are known, a conventional nature and an ultimate nature (opposed to the two truth which are *subjective* perceptions). However, with that said, it's important to remember that both of these natures are asserted as lacking any inherent existence or independent essence.

- **Conventional nature** (Tib. *nekab kyi neluk*): The *objective* common everyday aspects of phenomena.
- **Ultimate nature** (Tib. *nelug thar thug*): The *objective* yet empty aspect of phenomena.

Two truths (Skt. *dvasatya*; Tib. *denpa nyi*): Two distinct manners in which phenomena and reality can be perceived, *conventionally* and *ultimately*.

- **Conventional truth** (Skt. *samvritisatya*; Tib. *kundzob denpa*): Superficial or relative truth; one's *subjective* everyday perception of phenomena and reality.
- **Ultimate truth** (Skt. *paramarthasatya*; Tib. *dondam denpa*): Absolute or final truth; the subtlest *subjective* perception pertaining to the emptiness of phenomena.

Ultimate nature (Tib. *nelug thar thug*): See two natures.

Ultimate truth (Skt. *paramarthasatya*; Tib. *dondam denpa*): See two truths.

Union of wisdom and method (Tib. *tabshe sungdel*): Synonymous with buddhahood; the cultivation and merging of the paths of wisdom and method. *Wisdom*—pertaining to one's intellectual and rational side, ultimate truth, and the collection of wisdom pertaining to a clear understanding of the Buddha's teachings and the true nature of oneself and reality; and *method*—pertaining to one's emotional and intuitive side, conventional truth, and the collection of merit generated through acts of altruism, practice, good-works, and devotion.

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

- **Vajra** (Skt.; Tib. *dorje*): Meaning thunderbolt or diamond. A ritual scepter symbolizing the masculine principle, compassion, skillful means, and indestructibility.
- **Bell** (Skt. *ghanta*; Tib. *dilbu*): The necessary counterpart to the vajra. Symbolizing the feminine principle and the wisdom of emptiness.

Vajra cross (Skt. *visvavajra*; Tib. *dorje gyatram*): Also referred to as the *double dorje*; symbolizing the foundation of the physical world. Whether vertical or in X-form, it is an emblem of stability, protection, immovable determination, and all-accomplishing wisdom. This is a mark often used as a seal or stamp impressed on the plate at the base of a statue that protects and keeps prayers/relics inside. See appendix.

Vajrapani (Skt.; Tib. *Chakna dorje*): Protector of tantra and holder of secrets; deity and manifestation of the buddhas' power and strength. *See* appendix.

Vajrasattva (Skt.; Tib. *Dorje sempa*): Deity of purification and manifestation of the buddhas' purity. *See* appendix.

Vajrayana (Skt.; Tib. *dorje tegpa*): Indestructible raft—the Indian Buddhist tantric vehicle.

An esoteric and secret vehicle that utilizes visualization, meditation, and ritual, while working with subtle mind and body energies, with the aim of attaining buddhahood in as short as one lifetime. Scripturally believed to be taught by the Buddha to the gods and bodhisattvas in the heaven realms within his own lifetime, it's believed these hidden teachings first began to surface publically sometime after 600 CE.

Vipassana (Skt.): *See* meditation.

Vinaya (Skt.; Tib. *dülwa*): The Buddha's training system for attaining liberation, comprised of precepts of ethical conduct, monastic discipline, and training in monastic living. To become a monastic is to undertake the Buddha's Vinaya training. Part of the Buddhist canon. *See Buddhist canon*.

Virtue (Skt. *sila*; Tib. *gewa*): That which is proven through logic and reason to be beneficial to oneself and others and leads to happiness, favorable rebirth, and liberation.

Non-virtue (Tib. *migewa*): That which is proven through logic and reason as harmful and/or not beneficial and leads to suffering, unfavorable rebirth, and bondage.

Vows (Skt. *samvara*; Tib. *dompa*): A solemn pledge or promise to oneself, one's teacher, and the three jewels to uphold various prescribed precepts. *See* precepts, individual liberation vows, bodhisattva vows, tantric vows.

Wang (Tib.; Skt. *abhisheka*): *See* empowerment.

Wheel of Dharma: *See* Dharma wheel. *See* appendix.

Wisdom (Skt. *prajna*; Tib. *sherab*): Supreme understanding; a profound insight that clearly discerns that which is true, right, just, and fair.

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

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

Yana (Skt.; Tib. *thegpa*): See four vehicles.

Yidam: see deities.

Yoga (Skt.; Tib. *gyü*): Union; a general term for mental, spiritual and physical techniques or practices in Indian religions. In Tibetan Buddhism, the word yoga and tantra are synonymous and usually refer to tantric ritual practices.

Yogachara (Skt.; Tib. *naljorchöpa*): Yoga practice; also known as the *Mind Only School* (Skt. *Citta matra*; Tib. *sem tsampa*); a branch of the Mahayana, the Yogachara philosophy thrived in India, East Asia, and early Tibet. Founded by the Indian Buddhist masters and half brothers *Asanga* and *Vasubandhu* (4th century CE), the Yogachara is seen as pertaining primarily to the *third turning of the wheel of Dharma* and is thought of as more experiential—an explanation of experience rather than a system of ontology. Often seen as a form of *subjective idealism*, asserting reality and one's environment as a creation or projection of the mind, or more properly, that *phenomena exist only in the nature of the mind*. Today, the Yogachara is no longer practiced as a single philosophy. However, it continues to strongly influence many modern schools, including East Asian Mahayana Traditions and Tantric Buddhism.

Yogis: (Plural) Non-monastics tantric practitioners usually residing in isolated retreat.

- **Yogi** (Skt.; Tib. *naljorpa*): Male tantric practitioner.
- **Yogini** (Skt.; Tib. *naljorma*): Female tantric practitioner.
- **Householder yogis** (Tib. *ngagpa*): Dedicated non-monastics tantric practitioners. Commonly married with children; often farmers residing in lay communities.

Zen Buddhist Tradition (JP.; CH. *Chan*): Literally, meditation or meditative state. A branch of the Mahayana vehicle found in Japan, Vietnam, and Korea. Founded in Japan (600 CE), Zen is a later development of Chinese Chan Buddhism. Some assert that the only difference between Zen and Chan Buddhism is merely the pronunciation of the names. However, although having much in common, Zen differs in subtle ways, most notably differences in emphasized scriptures, monastic style, and practice techniques. Practice within Zen is mainly focused on *zazen*, literally *seated meditation*.

Recommended Reading

Novice reading

His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama

My Land and My People. 1962. New York. Potala Publications.
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The Meaning of Life. 2000. Wisdom Publications.
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For the Benefit of All Beings. 2009. Shambala Publications.
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Buddhism: One Teacher, Many Traditions. 2014. Wisdom Publications.

Lama Thubten Yeshe

Becoming Your Own Therapist. 1998. Lama Yeshe Wisdom Archive.
Make Your Mind an Ocean. 1999. Lama Yeshe Wisdom Archive.
The Essence of Tibetan Buddhism. 2001. Wisdom Publications.
The Peaceful Stillness of the Silent Mind. 2004. Lama Yeshe Wisdom Archive.

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What Makes You Not a Buddhist. 2008. Shambala Publications.

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Cave in the Snow. 1999. Bloomsbury Publishing.
Reflections on a Mountain Lake. 2002. Snow Lion Publications.

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Don't Believe Everything You Think. 2013. Snow Lion Publications.

Pema Chödrön

Comfortable with Uncertainty. 2003. Shambala Publications.
When Things Fall Apart. 1996. Shambala Publications.

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A Guide to the Bodhisattva Way of Life. 1997. Snow Lion Publications.

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Richard Gombrich

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Elizabeth Napper

Dependent-Arising and Emptiness. 1989. Wisdom Publications.

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The Three Principal Aspects of the Path. 1999. Snow Lion Publications.

Eight Verses for Training the Mind. 2001. Snow Lion Publications.

Geshe Tashi Tsering

The Four Noble Truths. 2005. Wisdom Publications.

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Relative Truth, Absolute Truth. 2008. Wisdom Publications.

The Awakening Mind. 2008. Wisdom Publications.

Emptiness. 2009. Wisdom Publications.

Tantra. 2012. Wisdom Publications.

Advanced reading

James Blumenthal

The Ornament of the Middle Way. 2004. Snow Lion Publications.

Chandrakirti

Introduction to the Middle Way. 2004. Shambala Publications.

Clear Words. 1998. Paljor Press.

Dagpo Rinpoche

The Pearl Garland. 2012. Editions Guepele, India

Georges Dreyfus

The Sound of Two Hands Clapping. 2003. University of California.

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