ORIGIN AND SPREAD OF THE BUDDHA'S DOCTRINE

NOT ALL PEOPLE think alike. They have different needs, interests, and dispositions in almost every area of life, including religion. As a skillful teacher, the Buddha gave various teachings to correspond to the variety of sentient beings. We're going to look at the development of the two major Buddhist traditions containing these teachings, the Pāli and Sanskrit traditions. But first, we begin with the life story of Śākyamuni Buddha.

THE BUDDHA'S LIFE

In the view common to both traditions, Siddhārtha Gautama, a prince from the Śākya clan, was born and grew up near what is now the India-Nepal border in the fifth or sixth century B.C.E. As a child, he had a kind heart and excelled in the arts and studies of his time. He lived a sheltered life in the palace during his early years, but as a young man he ventured out beyond the palace walls. In the town, he saw a sick person, an old person, and a corpse, prompting him to reflect on the suffering nature of life. Seeing a wandering mendicant, he considered the possibility of liberation from saṃsāra. And so, at age twenty-nine, he left the palace, shed his royal attire, and adopted the lifestyle of a wandering mendicant.

He studied with the great teachers of his time and mastered their meditation techniques but discovered they did not lead to liberation. For six years he pursued severe ascetic practices in the forest, but realizing that torturing the body doesn't tame the mind, he adopted the middle way of keeping the body healthy for the sake of spiritual practice without indulging in unnecessary comforts.

Sitting under the bodhi tree in what is present-day Bodhgaya, India, he vowed not to arise until he had attained full awakening. On the full moon of the fourth lunar month, he finished the process of cleansing his mind of all obscurations and developing all good qualities, and he became a fully awakened buddha (sammāsambuddha, samyaksaṃbuddha). Thirty-five years old at the time, he spent the next forty-five years teaching what he had discovered through his own experience to whoever came to hear.

The Buddha taught men and women from all social classes, races, and ages. Many of those chose to relinquish the householder's life and adopt the monastic life, and thus the saṅgha community was born. As his followers attained realizations and became skilled teachers, they shared with others what they had learned, spreading the teachings throughout ancient India. In subsequent centuries, the Buddhadharma spread south to Sri Lanka; west into present-day Afghanistan; northeast to China, Korea, and Japan; southeast to Southeast Asia and Indonesia; and north to Central Asia, Tibet, and Mongolia. In recent years, many Dharma centers have opened in Europe, the Americas,

the former Soviet republics, Australia, and Africa.

I feel a deep connection to Gautama Buddha as well as profound gratitude for his teachings and for the example of his life. He had insights into the workings of the mind that were previously unknown. He taught that our outlook impacts our experience and that our experiences of suffering and happiness are not thrust upon us by others but are a product of the ignorance and afflictions in our minds. Liberation and full awakening are likewise states of mind, not the external environment.

BUDDHIST CANONS AND THE SPREAD OF THE DHARMA

Vehicle and path are synonymous. While they are sometimes used to refer to a progressive set of spiritual practices, technically speaking they refer to a wisdom consciousness conjoined with uncontrived renunciation.

The Buddha turned the Dharma wheel, setting forth practices of three vehicles: the Hearer Vehicle (Sāvakayāna, Śrāvakayāna), the Solitary Realizer Vehicle (Paccekabuddhayāna, Pratyekabuddhayāna), and the Bodhisattva Vehicle (Bodhisattayāna, Bodhisattvayāna). According to the Sanskrit tradition, the three vehicles are differentiated in terms of their motivation to attain a specific goal, their principal meditation object, and the amount of merit and time necessary to attain their goals. Teachings and practitioners of all three vehicles exist in both the Pāli and Sanskrit traditions. In general, those practicing the Hearer Vehicle principally follow the Pāli tradition, and those practicing the Bodhisattva Vehicle principally follow the Sanskrit tradition. Nowadays in our world, hardly anyone follows the Solitary Realizer Vehicle.

The Buddha's teaching spread widely in India in the centuries after the Buddha lived and was brought to Sri Lanka from India by King Aśoka's son and daughter in the third century B.C.E. The early suttas were transmitted orally by the bhāṇakas—monastics whose job it was to memorize the suttas—and according to Sri Lankan sources, they were written down about the first century B.C.E. to form what is now the Pāli canon. Over the centuries, beginning in India and later augmented by Sinhala monks in the old Sinhala language, a body of commentaries on the scriptures built up. In the fifth century the great translator and commentator Buddhaghosa compiled the ancient commentaries and translated them into Pāli. He also wrote his famous masterwork the Visuddhimagga and numerous commentaries. Another South Indian monk, Dhammapāla, lived a century later and also wrote many commentaries in Pāli. Pāli is now the scriptural language uniting all Theravāda Buddhists.

Beginning in the first century B.C.E., the Sanskrit tradition came into view and gradually spread in India. Philosophical systems in India—Vaibhāṣika, Sautrāntika, Yogācāra (a.k.a. Cittamātra or Vijñānavāda), and Madhyamaka—evolved as scholars developed divergent views on points not explained explicitly in the sūtras. Although many tenets of the Pāli tradition are shared

with one or another of these four tenet systems, it cannot be equated with any of them.

Several monastic universities arose—Nālandā, Odantapuri, and Vikramaśīla—and there Buddhists from various traditions and philosophical schools studied and practiced together. Philosophical debate was a widespread ancient Indian custom; the losers were expected to convert to the winners' schools. Buddhist sages developed logical arguments and reasonings to prove the validity of Buddhist doctrine and to deflect the philosophical attacks of non-Buddhists. The renowned Buddhist debaters were also great practitioners. Of course not all Buddhist practitioners were interested in this approach. Many preferred to study the sūtras or to practice meditation in hermitages.

Nowadays, three canons exist: the Pāli, Chinese, and Tibetan; a Sanskrit canon was not compiled in India. Each canon is divided into three "baskets" (piṭaka) —or categories of teachings—which are correlated with the three higher trainings. The Vinaya basket deals chiefly with monastic discipline, the Sūtra basket emphasizes meditative concentration, and the Abhidharma basket is mainly concerned with wisdom.

The Chinese canon was first published in 983, and several other renditions were published later. The standard edition used now is the Taishō Shinshū Daizōkyō, published in Tokyo in 1934. It consists of four parts: sūtras, vinaya, śāstras (treatises), and miscellaneous texts originally written in Chinese. The Chinese canon is very inclusive, sharing many texts with both the Pāli and Tibetan canons. In particular, the Āgamas in the Chinese canon correspond to the first four Nikāyas in the Pāli canon.

The Tibetan canon was redacted and codified by Buton Rinpoche in the fourteenth century. The first rendition of the Tibetan canon was published in 1411 in Beijing. Later editions were published in Tibet in Nartang in 1731–42 and later in Dergé and Choné. The Tibetan canon is composed of the Kangyur —the Buddha's word in 108 volumes—and the Tengyur—the great Indian commentaries in 225 volumes. Most of these volumes were translated into Tibetan directly from Indian languages, chiefly Sanskrit, although a few were translated from Chinese and Central Asian languages.

PĀLI TRADITION

Buddhism spread to Sri Lanka, China, and Southeast Asia many centuries before coming to Tibet. As our elder brothers and sisters, I pay respect to you.

Modern-day Theravāda was derived from the Sthaviravāda, one of the eighteen schools in ancient India. The name Theravāda does not seem to have indicated a school in India prior to Buddhism having gone to Sri Lanka. The Sinhala historical chronicle Dīpavaṃsa used the name Theravāda in the fourth century to describe the Buddhists on the island. There were three Theravāda subgroups,

each with a monastery bearing its name: Abhayagiri (Dharmaruci), Mahāvihāra, and Jetavana. Abhayagiri Theravādins had close connections with India and brought in many Sanskrit elements. The Jetavanins did this as well, but to a lesser extent, while the Mahāvihārins maintained the orthodox Theravāda teachings. In the twelfth century the king abolished the Abhayagiri and Jetavana traditions and amalgamated those monks with the Mahāvihāra, which has since remained prominent.

Buddhism suffered greatly after the Sri Lankan capital fell to the Coḷa forces in 1017. The bhikkhu and bhikkhunī orders were destroyed, although the bhikkhu order was restored when the Sri Lankan king invited monks from Burma to come and give the ordination. The Buddhadhamma thrived once again in Sri Lanka, and Sri Lanka came to be seen as the center of the Theravāda world. When the state of Theravāda teachings or its ordination lineages in one country were adversely affected, leaders would request monks from another Theravāda country to come and give ordination. This has continued up to the present day.

In late eighteenth-century Thailand, King Rāma I began to remove elements of Brahmanism and tantric practice, although traces live on today with many Thai Buddhist temples hosting a statue of four-faced Brahmā in their courtyard. King Rāma IV (r. 1851–68), a monk for nearly thirty years before ascending the throne, witnessed the relaxed state of monastic discipline and Buddhist education and instituted a wide range of saṅgha reforms. Importing an ordination lineage from Burma, he began the Dhammayuttikā Nikāya, unified the other sects into the Mahā Nikāya, instructed both sects to keep the monastic precepts more strictly, and placed both under a single ecclesiastical authority. Revamping monastic education, he wrote a series of textbooks expressing a more rational approach to Dhamma and eliminated elements of non-Buddhist folk culture attached to Thai Buddhism. As Thailand became more centralized, the government assumed the authority to appoint preceptors to give ordination. The Saṅgha Act of 1902 brought all monastics under royal control by centralizing administrative authority for the entire saṅgha in the Supreme Saṅgha Council (Mahathera Samakhom) headed by the saṅgharāja. King Rāma V's half-brother, Prince Wachirayan, wrote new textbooks that were the basis for national saṅgha exams. These exams improved the monks' knowledge as well as distinguished the monks who would advance in ecclesiastical rank.

Colonialism hurt Buddhism in Sri Lanka, but the interest of a few Westerners in Buddhism, especially Theosophists Helena Blavatsky and Henry Olcott, spurred lay Buddhists such as Anagārika Dhammapāla to present Buddhism in more rational terms and to connect with Buddhists internationally. Buddhism provided a rallying point for Sri Lankans in dealing with colonialism and establishing an independent nation.

Colonialism did not harm Buddhism in Burma as much, and it actually stimulated the king to request monks to teach vipassanā meditation in the court. Soon laypeople from all social classes were learning to meditate. The monks

Ledi Sayadaw (1846–1923) and Mingon Sayadaw (1868–1955) set up lay meditation centers, and Mahasi Sayadaw (1904–82) passed his teachings to lay teachers. This meditation style is now popular in Burma.

The means to select a saṅgharāja differ. In Thailand, they are generally appointed by the king. In other countries monastic seniority or a semi-democratic process are used. The authority of saṅgharājas varies: some are figureheads; others such as the late Mahā Ghosananda of Cambodia have great influence by virtue of their practice, beneficial works, and advancement of social change. Thailand's saṅgharāja, a position existing since the eighteenth century, is part of a national hierarchy handling issues of importance to the saṅgha. He has legal authority over monastics, works with the secular government, and is assisted by the Supreme Saṅgha Council. In Cambodia the saṅgharāja position disappeared during the Khmer period, but in 1981 the government reestablished it.

In many cases, national governments instituted changes that had the side effect of lessening the saṅgha's traditional roles as teachers and doctors and supplanting them with secular systems of modern education and medicine. As a result, Theravāda monastics, as well as their brethren in countries following the Sanskrit tradition, have had to rethink their role in society in the face of modernization.

BUDDHISM IN CHINA

Buddhism entered China in the first century C.E., first via the Silk Road from Central Asian lands where Buddhism flourished and later by sea from India and Sri Lanka. By the second century, a Chinese Buddhist monastery existed, and translation of Buddhist texts into Chinese was under way. Early translations employed inconsistent terminology, leading to some misunderstanding of Buddhist thought, but by the fifth century, translation terms became more settled. The early fifth century also marked the translation of more vinaya texts. For many centuries, emperors sponsored translation teams, so a wealth of Buddhist sūtras, treatises, and commentaries from India and Central Asia were translated into Chinese.

Chinese Buddhism contains a diversity of schools. Some views and practices are common to all schools, while others are unique to individual schools. Some schools are differentiated based on their philosophical tenets, others on their manner of practice, others by their principal texts. Historically, ten major schools developed in China.

Some of the ten schools still exist as separate schools. The tenets and practices of those that do not have been incorporated into existing schools. Although the Vinaya school does not exist as a separate entity now, the practice of vinaya has been integrated into the remaining schools, and the saṅgha is flourishing in Taiwan, Korea, and Vietnam. While no longer distinct schools, the

Abhidharma, Yogācāra, and Madhyamaka philosophies are studied and meditated upon in the indigenous Chinese schools as well as in Korea, Japan, and Vietnam.

Changes in society in the early twentieth century spurred Buddhist reform and renewal in China. The fall of the Qing dynasty in 1917 stopped imperial patronage and support of the saṅgha, and the government, military, and educational institutions wanted to confiscate monasteries' property for secular use. Buddhists wondered what role Buddhadharma could play in their encounter with modernity, science, and foreign cultures.

This social change provoked a variety of reactions. Taixu (1890–1947), perhaps the most well-known Chinese monk of that time, renewed the study of Madhyamaka and Yogācāra and began new educational institutes for the saṅgha using modern educational methods. He also incorporated the best from secular knowledge and urged Buddhists to be more socially engaged. Traveling in Europe and Asia, he contacted Buddhists of other traditions and established branches of the World Buddhist Studies Institute. He encouraged Chinese to go to Tibet, Japan, and Sri Lanka to study, and he established seminaries in China that taught Tibetan, Japanese, and Pāli scriptures. Taixu also formulated "Humanistic Buddhism," in which practitioners strive to purify the world by enacting bodhisattvas' deeds right now as well as to purify their minds through meditation.

Several young Chinese monks studied Buddhism in Tibet in the 1920s and 30s. Fazun (1902–80), a disciple of Taixu, was a monk at Drepung Monastery, where he studied and later translated into Chinese several great Indian treatises and some of Tsongkhapa's works. The monk Nenghai (1886–1967) studied at Drepung Monastery and, upon returning to China, established several monasteries following Tsongkhapa's teachings. Bisong (a.k.a. Xing Suzhi 1916–) also studied at Drepung Monastery and in 1945 became the first Chinese geshe lharampa.

The scholar Lucheng made a list of works in the Tibetan and Chinese canons to translate into the other's language in order to expand Buddhist material available to Chinese and Tibetan practitioners and scholars. In the first half of the twentieth century, Chinese lay followers had increased interest in Tibetan Buddhism, especially in tantra, and invited several Tibetan teachers to teach in China. They and their Chinese disciples translated mostly tantric materials.

Taixu's disciple Yinshun (1906–2005) was an erudite scholar who studied the sūtras and commentaries of the Pāli, Chinese, and Tibetan canons. A prolific writer, he was especially attracted to Tsongkhapa's explanations. Due to Yinshun's emphasis on Madhyamaka and the Prajñāpāramitā sūtras, many Chinese Buddhists have renewed interest in this view. He developed the schema of the major philosophical systems in Chinese Buddhism today: (1) False and unreal mind only is the Yogācāra view. (2) Truly permanent mind

only is the tathāgatagarbha doctrine, which is popular in China and has a strong impact on practice traditions. (3) Empty nature, mere name is the Madhyamaka view based on the Prajñāpāramitā sūtras. Yinshun also encouraged Humanistic Buddhism.

BUDDHISM IN TIBET

Tibetan Buddhism is rooted in Indian monastic universities such as Nālandā. Beginning in the early centuries of the Common Era and lasting until the early thirteenth century, Nālandā and other monastic universities consisted of many erudite scholars and practitioners emphasizing different sūtras and espousing a variety of Buddhist philosophical tenets.

Buddhism first came to Tibet in the seventh century through two wives of the Tibetan monarch Songtsen Gampo (605 or 617–49), one a Nepali princess the other a Chinese princess, who brought Buddhist statues to Tibet. Buddhist texts in Sanskrit and Chinese soon followed. From the late eighth century onward, Tibetans preferred the texts coming directly from India, and these formed the bulk of Buddhist literature translated into Tibetan.

Buddhism flourished in Tibet during the reign of King Trisong Detsen (r. 756–ca. 800), who invited the monk, Madhaymaka philosopher, and logician Śāntarakṣita from Nālandā and the Indian tantric yogi Padmasambhava to come to Tibet. Śāntarakṣita ordained Tibetan monks, establishing the saṅgha in Tibet, while Padmasambhava gave tantric initiations and teachings.

Śāntarakṣita also encouraged the Tibetan king to have Buddhist texts translated into Tibetan. In the early ninth century, many translations were done, and a commission of Tibetan and Indian scholars standardized many technical terms and compiled a Sanskrit-Tibetan glossary. However, Buddhism was persecuted during the reign of King Langdarma (838–42), and monastic institutions were closed. Since Dharma texts were no longer available, people's practice became fragmented, and they no longer knew how to practice all the various teachings as a unified whole.

At this crucial juncture Atiśa (982–1054), a scholar-practitioner from the Nālandā tradition, was invited to Tibet. He taught extensively, and to rectify misconceptions, he wrote the Bodhipathapradīpa, explaining that both sutra and tantra teachings could be practiced by an individual in a systematic, noncontradictory manner. As a result, people came to understand that the monastic discipline of the Vinaya, the bodhisattva ideal of the Sūtrayāna, and the transformative practices of the Vajrayāna could be practiced in a mutually complementary way. Monasteries were again built, and the Dharma flourished in Tibet.

The Buddhism in Tibet prior to Atiśa became known as the Nyingma or "old translation" school. The new lineages of teachings entering Tibet beginning in

the eleventh century became the "new translation" (sarma) schools, and these slowly crystallized to form the Kadam, Kagyu, and Sakya traditions. The Kadam lineage eventually became known as the Gelug tradition. All four Tibetan Buddhist traditions that exist today—Nyingma, Kagyu, Sakya, and Gelug—emphasize the Bodhisattva Vehicle, follow both the sūtras and tantras, and have the Madhyamaka philosophical view. Following the example of Śāntarakṣita, many Tibetan monastics engage in rigorous study and debate in addition to meditation.

Some misnomers from the past—the terms "Lamaism," "living buddha," and "god king"—unfortunately persist. Westerners who came in contact with Tibetan Buddhism in the nineteenth century called it Lamaism, a term originally coined by the Chinese, perhaps because they saw so many monks in Tibet and mistakenly believed all of them were lamas (teachers). Or perhaps they saw the respect disciples had for their teachers and erroneously thought they worshiped their teachers. In either case, Tibetan Buddhism should not be called Lamaism.

Lamas and tulkus (identified incarnations of spiritual masters) are respected in Tibetan society. However, in some cases these titles are simply social status, and calling certain people tulku, rinpoche, or lama has led to corruption. It saddens me that people put so much value on titles. Buddhism is not about social status. It is much more important to check a person's qualifications and qualities before taking that person as one's spiritual mentor. Teachers must practice diligently and be worthy of respect, whether or not they have titles.

Some people mistakenly believed that since tulkus are recognized as incarnations of previous great Buddhist masters, they must be buddhas and thus called them "living buddha". However, not all tulkus are bodhisattvas, let alone buddhas.

"God king" may have originated with the Western press and was attributed to the position of the Dalai Lama. Since Tibetans see the Dalai Lama as the embodiment of Avalokiteśvara, the bodhisattva of compassion, these journalists assumed he was a "god," and since he was the political leader of Tibet, he was considered a king. However, since I currently hold the position of Dalai Lama, I repeatedly remind people that I am a simple Buddhist monk, nothing more. The Dalai Lama is not a god, and since the Central Tibetan Administration located in Dharamsala, India, is now headed by a prime minister, he is not a king.

Some people mistakenly think the position of the Dalai Lama is like a Buddhist pope. The four principal Tibetan Buddhist traditions and their many sub-branches operate more or less independently. The abbots, rinpoches, and other respected teachers meet together from time to time to discuss issues of mutual interest under the auspices of Central Tibetan Administration's Department of Religion and Culture. The Dalai Lama does not control their decisions.

Similarly the Dalai Lama is not the head of any of the four traditions. The Gelug is headed by the Ganden Tripa, a rotating position, and the other traditions have their own methods of selecting leaders.

OUR COMMONALITIES AND DIVERSITY

Sometimes people mistakenly believe that Tibetan Buddhism, especially Vajrayāna, is separate from the rest of Buddhism. When I visited Thailand many years ago, some people initially thought that Tibetans had a different religion. However, when we sat together and discussed the vinaya, sūtras, abhidharma, and such topics as the thirty-seven aids to awakening, the four concentrations, four immaterial absorptions, four truths of the āryas, and noble eightfold path, we saw that Theravāda and Tibetan Buddhism have many common practices and teachings.

With Chinese, Korean, and many Vietnamese Buddhists, Tibetans share the monastic tradition, bodhisattva ethical restraints, Sanskrit scriptures, and the practices of Amitābha, Avalokiteśvara, Mañjuśrī, Samantabhadra, and Medicine Buddha. When Tibetan and Japanese Buddhists meet, we discuss the bodhisattva ethical restraints and sūtras such as the Saddharmapuṇḍarīka Sūtra. With the Japanese Shingon sect we share the tantric practices of the Vajradhātu maṇḍala and Vairocanābhisaṃbodhi.

While there are differences in the texts that comprise each canon, there is considerable overlap of the material discussed in them. In subsequent chapters we will explore some of these in greater depth, but here are a few examples.

The Buddha spoke at length about the disadvantages of anger and the antidotes to it in the Pāli suttas (e.g., SN 11:4–5). The teachings for overcoming anger in Śāntideva's Bodhicaryāvatāra echo these. One sutta (SN 4:13) recounts the story of the Buddha experiencing severe pain due to his foot having been cut by a stone splinter. Nevertheless, he was not distressed, and when prodded by Māra, he responded, "I lie down full of compassion for all beings." This is the compassion generated when doing the taking- and-giving meditation (Tib.tonglen) taught in the Sanskrit tradition, where a practitioner imagines taking the sufferings of others upon himself and giving others his own happiness.

Furthermore, the altruistic intention of bodhicitta so prominent in the Sanskrit tradition is an extension of the four brahmavihāras, or four immeasurables, taught in the Pāli canon. The Pāli and Sanskrit traditions share many of the same perfections (pāramī, pāramitā). The qualities of a buddha, such as the ten powers, four fearlessnesses, and eighteen unshared qualities of an awakened one are described in scriptures from both traditions. Both traditions speak of impermanence, the unsatisfactory nature, selflessness, and emptiness. The Sanskrit tradition sees itself as containing the teachings of the Pāli tradition and elaborating on certain key points—for example, by explaining true cessation

according to the Prajñāpāramitā sūtras and the true path according to the Tathāgatagarbha sūtras and some of the tantras.

The terms Thai Buddhism, Sri Lankan Buddhism, Chinese Buddhism, Tibetan Buddhism, Korean Buddhism, and so on are social conventions. In each case, Buddhism in a country is not monolithic and contains many Buddhist practice traditions and tenet systems. Within these, there are subgroups consisting of monasteries or teachers with various affiliations. Some subtraditions emphasize study, others meditation. Some stress practicing serenity (samatha, śamatha), others insight (vipassanā, vipaśyanā), and others both together.

While one country may have many traditions in it, one tradition may also be practiced in many countries. Theravāda is practiced in Sri Lanka, Thailand, Burma, Laos, Cambodia, and is also found in Vietnam. Within Theravāda countries, some follow early Buddhism—the suttas themselves—without relying on the commentaries very much, while others follow the explanations in the commentarial tradition. Even the robes in one country or in one tradition may vary.

Similarly, Chan is practiced in China, Taiwan, Korea, Japan, and Vietnam. While Chan practitioners in all these countries rely on the same sūtras, the teachings and meditation style vary among them.

In Western countries, Buddhism from many different traditions and countries is present. Some groups consist primarily of Asian immigrants, and their temples are both religious and community centers where people can speak their native language, eat familiar food, and teach their children the culture of their homeland. Other groups in the West are composed mostly of Western converts. A few are mixed.

As followers of the Buddha, let's keep these variations in mind and not think that everything we hear or learn about another tradition applies to everyone in that tradition. Similarly not everything we hear about how Buddhism is practiced in a particular country applies to all traditions or temples in that country.

Indeed we are a huge and diverse Buddhist family following the same wise and compassionate Teacher, Śākyamuni Buddha. I believe our diversity is one of our strengths. It has allowed Buddhism to spread throughout the world and to benefit billions of people on this planet.

Extracted from:

The Dalai Lama, HH & Thubten Chodron: Buddhism; One Teacher, Many Traditions, Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2014 (pages 1-15)

THE DIVISIONS OF THE VEHICLES

VARIOUS SYSTEMS OF THOUGHT and practice are mentioned in classical Buddhist literature.[1] Such systems are referred to as *yānas* or "vehicles." There are, for instance, the various vehicles of humans and divine beings in addition to the Buddhist vehicles: the vehicle of individual liberation (*hīnayāna*), the vehicle of universal salvation (*mahāyāna*), and the vehicle of tantra (*vajrayāna*). In this context, vehicles of humans and divine beings refer to systems that outline the essential training and methods for both fulfilling the major aspirations of this life and, in addition, obtaining a favourable rebirth as either a human or a divine being. Such systems emphasize the importance of maintaining an ethically sound lifestyle—grounded in refraining from engaging in negative actions—since leading a life of righteousness and good behaviour is perceived to be the most crucial factor for ensuring a favourable rebirth.

The Buddha also spoke of another category of vehicle, the Brahma Vehicle, comprising principally those techniques of meditation that aim at achieving the highest possible form of life within *samsara*, the karmically conditioned cycle of existence. Such meditative techniques include, among other things, withdrawing the mind from all external objects, which leads to a state of single pointedness. The meditative states experienced because of having generated single-pointedness of mind are altered states of consciousness that, in terms of their phenomenological aspects and their mode of engagement with objects, closely correspond to states of existence in the form and formless realms. From a Buddhist point of view, all these diverse systems are worthy of respect since they all have the potential to bring about great benefit to many sentient beings. However, this does not mean that all these systems are complete in themselves in presenting a path leading to full liberation from suffering and from the cycle of existence. Genuine freedom and liberation can only be achieved when our fundamental ignorance, our habitual misapprehension of the nature of reality, is totally overcome. This ignorance, which underlies all our emotional and cognitive states, is the root factor that binds us to the perpetual cycle of life and death in samsara. The system of thought and practice that presents a complete path towards liberation from this bondage is called the vehicle of the Buddha (*buddhayāna*).

Within the Buddha's Vehicle there are two major systems of thought and practice: the Individual Vehicle, or Hinayana, and the Universal Vehicle, or Mahayana. The former includes the Theravāda system, which is the predominant form of Buddhism in many Asian countries, such as Sri Lanka, Thailand, Burma, Cambodia, and others. In classical Buddhist literature, the Individual Vehicle is described as having two main divisions: the Hearers'

Vehicle and the Solitary Realizers' Vehicle. A principal difference between the Individual Vehicle and the Universal Vehicle exists in their views on the

Buddhist doctrine of selflessness and the scope of its application. The Individual Vehicle expounds the view of selflessness only in relation to person or personal identity but not in relation to things and events in general, whereas in the Universal Vehicle, the principle of selflessness is not confined to the limited scope of the person but encompasses the entire spectrum of existence, all phenomena. In other words, the Universal Vehicle system understands selflessness as a universal principle. Interpreted in this way, the principle of selflessness acquires greater profundity. According to the Universal Vehicle teachings, it is only when a practitioner's experience of selflessness is rooted in this universal interpretation that the experience will bring about the elimination of the delusions and their underlying states of ignorance. It is by eliminating these underlying states of ignorance that we can cut off the root of samsara. Furthermore, a profound experience of selflessness can also lead, ultimately, to full enlightenment, a state of total freedom from the subtle imprints and the obstructive habitual tendencies created by our misconception of the nature of reality. The system of thought and practice which presents such a view of selflessness is called Mahayana, the Universal Vehicle.

The Tantric Vehicle, or Vajrayana, which is considered by the Tibetan tradition to be the highest vehicle, is included within the Universal Vehicle. In addition to meditative practices for enhancing one's realization of emptiness and *bodhicitta*, this system also includes certain advanced techniques for utilizing the various elements of the physical body in one's meditative practice. Such feats are accomplished based on sophisticated yogic practices that principally involve mentally penetrating the essential points within the body where the *cakras*, or energy centres, are located. By means of this subtle and refined coordination of mind and body, the practitioner can accelerate the process of getting at the root of ignorance and completely overcoming its effects and imprints, a process that culminates, finally, in the realization of full enlightenment. This feature—of engaging in meditative practices involving the subtle coordination of both mental and physiological elements within the practitioner—is unique to the Tantric Vehicle.

I shall now briefly explain the historical background of Buddhism as we now know it. According to the Kashmiri pandit Śākya Śrī, who came to Tibet in the early thirteenth century, the Buddha was born in India about 2,500 years ago. This accords with the standard position of the Theravāda tradition, but according to some Tibetan scholars, the Buddha appeared in the world more than 3,000 years ago. There is also a third opinion that dates the Buddha's birth to sometime in the eighth century B.C.E. When reflecting on these conflicting

opinions regarding what is perhaps the most crucial date in Buddhist history, sometimes I feel that it is quite embarrassing that still no consensus exists on the key question of when the teacher Śākyamuni Buddha lived! I seriously think that it would be helpful if, with due respect, scientific tests were carried out on the various relics that are believed to be genuine relics of the Buddha. These relics can be found in countries like India, Nepal, and Tibet. Perhaps scientific experiments on those relics using sophisticated modern technology and chemicals could establish with greater accuracy the dates of the Buddha's existence. This would be very helpful. In the past, erudite Buddhists tried to prove their own version of the historical facts surrounding the Buddha's life mainly through logic and argumentation. Given the nature of the question, however, I think such types of proof can never be conclusive.
Despite conflicting assertions regarding the historical reckoning of his birth, there is a consensus in the literature as to the key events of the Buddha's life. We know that the Buddha was originally an ordinary person like ourselves, with all the basic faults and weaknesses of a human being. He was born into a royal family, married, and had a son. Later, however, he met the unsatisfactory suffering nature of life in the form of unexpected encounters with people afflicted by sickness, old age, and death. Deeply disturbed by these sights, the prince eventually left the palace and renounced his comfortable and sheltered princely way of life. His initial reaction to these experiences was to adopt the austere lifestyle of an ascetic, engaging in a spiritual path involving great physical penances. Later, he discovered that the true path out of suffering lies in a middle way between the extremes of strict asceticism and self-indulgent luxury. His single-minded spiritual pursuit ultimately resulted in his full awakening, or enlightenment: buddhahood.

I feel that the story of the Buddha's life holds great significance for us. It exemplifies the tremendous potentials and capacities that are intrinsic to human existence. For me, the events that led to his full enlightenment set an appropriate and inspiring example for his followers. In short, his life makes the following statement: "This is the way that you should pursue your spiritual path. You must bear in mind that the attainment of enlightenment is not an easy task. It requires time, will, and perseverance." Therefore, right from the beginning, it is crucial to harbor no illusions of a swift and easy path. As a spiritual trainee, you must be prepared to endure the hardships involved in a genuine spiritual pursuit and be determined to sustain your effort and will. You must anticipate the multiple obstacles that you are bound to encounter along the path and understand that the key to a successful practice is never to lose your determination. Such a resolute approach is very important. The story of the Buddha's personal life, as we have seen, is the story of someone who attained full enlightenment through hard work and unwavering dedication. It is ironic that sometimes we seem to believe that we, who are following in the footsteps

of the Buddha, can somehow realize full enlightenment with greater ease and less effort.

THE END OF SUFFERING AND THE DISCOVERY OF HAPPINESS

The Path of Tibetan Buddhism

His Holiness THE DALAI LAMA

Pages 82-98

Without a pure determination to be free, there is no means to achieve peace

due to fixation upon the pleasurable effects of the ocean of existence.

Embodied beings are thoroughly bound by craving for existence;

Therefore, in the beginning seek a determination to be free.

This verse explains the necessity of generating a determination to be free, or a mind seeking release from cyclic existence. Seeing the faults and shortcomings of cyclic existence and generating a very strong wish to abandon it and attain liberation is called a determination to be free. As long as you are unable to see the worthlessness of the pleasures of cyclic existence, but continue to see some meaning or attraction in them and cling to them, you will neither be able to turn your mind toward liberation nor will you realise how you are bound.

So the first line of the verse says that unless you have a pure determination to free yourself from the ocean of cyclic existence, your attempts to achieve peace will be in vain. It is our fascination with cyclic existence due to craving and attachment that binds us within it. Therefore, if we really seek the peace of liberation, the right course to adopt is to generate the determination to be free, to recognise the faults of cyclic existence and reject them. The biography of the Buddha himself can provide us with a clear understanding of the meaning of the determination to be free for our own practise.

He was born a prince in a wealthy family, was well educated, had a wife and son, and enjoyed all the imaginable worldly pleasures. Yet, despite all the alluring pleasures available to him, when he came across examples of the sufferings of birth, sickness, old age, and death, he was provoked by the sight of others suffering. He discovered for himself that, no matter how attractive external comforts may be, so long as you have a physical body like ours, which is the short-lived product of contaminated action and delusion, then such attractive external pleasures are illusory. Understanding this, he tried to find the path to liberation from suffering and renounced all worldly pleasures, including his wife and son. Through gradually increasing his determination to be free in this way, he was able to attain not only liberation, but also enlightenment.

Therefore, it is taught that we need to develop a determination to be free. Merely renouncing the comforts of cyclic existence and checking attachment and craving toward it is not enough. We must cut the stream of births. Rebirth comes about due to craving and desire, and we must cut its continuity through

the practise of meditation. Hence, the Buddha entered into a deep meditative stabilization for six years. Finally, by means of a union of calm abiding and special insight, he attained the power to overcome the hindrances presented by the aggregates and external evil forces. He eliminated the very source of disturbing emotions, and because they were extinguished he also overcame death. In this way he conquered all four evil forces or hindrances.

As followers of the Buddha, we too should try to see faults in the alluring attractions of cyclic existence, and then without attachment toward them, generate concentration and focus on the view of selflessness - understanding the real nature of phenomena.

Now, should you wonder how to practise this determination to be free, how to generate a mind that wishes to renounce cyclic existence, the next verse says:

Contemplating how freedom and fortune are difficult to find,

And that in life there is no time to waste, blocks the attraction to captivating appearances of this life.

Repeatedly contemplating action's infallible effects

And the sufferings of cyclic existence blocks the captivating appearance of future lives.

This verse explains how to check attachment first to this life and then toward future lives. In order to cut attachment toward the pleasures of this life, it is important to think about the pre-consciousness of this human life, how it is difficult to find, and the many qualities it provides. If we think clearly about those points, we will be able to extract meaning from having attained a human birth. Life as a human being is precious because with it we attain a status, quality, and intelligence which is absent in all other animals, even in all other sentient beings. We have the power to achieve great benefit and destruction. If we were to just while away our time and waste this precious potential in silly and meaningless activities, it would be a great loss.

Therefore it is important that we recognize our capacity, our qualities, and supreme intelligence, which other sentient beings do not possess. If we can identify these things, we will be able to appreciate and use them. The power of the human brain and human intelligence is marvellous. It is capable of planning ahead and can engage in deep and extensive thought, as other sentient beings cannot. We should then steer it in the right direction, so that it can contribute significantly to peace and harmony in the world and within all sentient beings.

Let us take the example of nuclear energy. There is great power within a nuclear particle, but if we use that power wrongly or mishandle it, it can be very destructive. Nowadays we have nuclear missiles and other weapons, the very names of which make us afraid because they are so destructive. They can cause mass destruction in a fraction of time. On the other hand, if we put

nuclear power to use in a constructive way, it can be of great service to humanity and sentient beings at large. Similarly, since human beings have such capacity and power, it is very important that they use it for the benefit of all sentient beings. Properly employed, human ingenuity can be a great source of benefit and happiness, but if misused it can bring great misery and destruction.

It is from the point of view of this keen intelligence that we should think about the significance of our precious human life. However, it is also important to understand that the life of a free and fortunate human being is not only meaningful and difficult to find, but it is also short lived.

The next two lines say that if we think repeatedly about the infallible connection between causes, our actions, and the sufferings of cyclic existence, we will be able to cut our attachment to the next life. At present we engage in many levels of activity to obtain clothing, food, and a good name. In addition, our experiences in the latter part of our lives are dependent on the actions we have performed in the earlier part. This actually is the meaning of actions and results. Although it is not the subtlest interpretation, when we talk about actions and results, actions include any of the things we do in order to obtain any kind of happiness or pleasure. The results are the effects we achieve thereby. Therefore, in the first part of our lives we engage in certain kinds of activity that we think will lead to some kind of happiness or success in the future. Similarly, we engage in certain kinds of action in this life so that we may be able to achieve a good result in our next life. In other words, our experiences in the latter part of our lives are dependent on the actions we have performed in the earlier part of our lives, and our experiences in future lives, whether pleasant or unpleasant, are dependent on the actions that we have committed in former lives.

These actions are done by either body, speech, or mind and so are termed physical, verbal, and mental actions. From the point view of the result that they produce, they can be termed wholesome, unwholesome, or neutral actions. Wholesome actions give rise to pleasant results, unwholesome actions give rise to unpleasant results, and neutral actions lead to a feeling of equanimity. Then there are actions that will definitely give rise to a result and those that will not. For example, when an action comes into being, it is first motivated, there is an intention, then it is actually implemented, and finally it is brought to a conclusion.

Now, when the intention, action, and conclusion are all very strong, it is definite that the action will give rise to a result, whether good or bad. On the other hand, if the intention is very strong but you don't put it into effect, or at the end, instead of thinking you have completed the deed, you regret what you have done, then that particular action may not produce an effect at that time. If these three aspects - intention, application, and conclusion - are not present, the action is classified as indefinite. From the point of view of the basis

experiencing the result, there are actions that give fruit in this very life, actions that give fruit in the immediate next life, and actions whose fruits will be experienced in many lives after the next.

Then there are two levels of actions which can be classified as projecting and completing actions. Projecting actions are those actions which are responsible for projecting us into a particular life through birth as a human being, animal, or other state of being. Completing actions are those that determine the quality of whatever life you are born into. For example, despite being a human being you may be perpetually poor. Right from birth, your sense faculties may be damaged or your limbs crippled. On the other hand, your complexion may be radiant and you may have a natural strength. Even born as an animal, you might, like a pet dog, have a comfortable home. These kinds of qualities or defects that you inherit right from birth, that are additional to the actualisation of a particular birth, are the result of completing actions. So actions can be termed projecting or completing according to their function. It is possible that although the projecting action is wholesome, the completing action is non-virtuous, and that although the completing action is unwholesome, the projecting action is virtuous.

Whether a particular action is positive, like faith in the Buddha, or negative like attachment, if in its own terms it is pure, it can be seen as completely white and virtuous or completely black and unwholesome. If the preparation, application, and conclusion of a particular action are totally virtuous, then that action can be seen as a virtuous action. But if it results from impure preparation, application, and conclusion, then it can be seen as an unwholesome action. If it is a result of a mixed intention, pure application, and impure conclusion - in other words, if it is a mixture of both positive and negative qualities - then it can be called a mixed action.

It is the “I”, or the person, who accumulates an action and experiences its results. Although these different levels of actions are the product of the thinking of a particular sentient beings, they are not produced by a creator of the world. There is someone who creates the action because when we talk about action, the word itself clearly implies that there is an actor or agent who performs that action, but it is not an external agent.

How does an action give rise to a result? For example. When I snap my fingers, I stop immediately and the action is complete, leaving behind a result. If you ask what that result is, it is the mere disintegration of the action, and the disintegration of an action goes on continuously. So, when we talk about the result of a particular action, it is the mere disintegration or part of the disintegration or the cessation of that particular action. To clarify the point, it is a kind of potency left behind by the disintegration of that action, which is responsible for bringing forth many other conditioned phenomena.

If you wonder where the imprint of that potency of the disintegration or cessation of that particular action is left, the answer is on the continuum of the consciousness existing during the immediate moment of the cessation of the action. There are occasions when the consciousness is alert and awake, and there are occasions when the consciousness is latent, for example when we are in deep sleep or when we faint. Therefore, the consciousness is not a wholly reliable place to deposit such potency. Sometimes it is very subtle and sometimes it is very coarse, so the consciousness provides only a temporary basis for such imprints.

Hence, if we seek an ultimate explanation, it is the mere I, or the person, which carries the potency of a particular action. This explanation is based on the ultimate explanation of the highest school, that is, the Middle Way Consequentialist School. I used the words *mere I* to clarify that the "I" or the person has only nominal, not inherent, existence. It is only designated and does not exist by itself. It is not something that you can point at with your finger. The word *mere* indicates an "I" which is merely designated by name and thought, and negates a self-supporting or independent "I". The negation of an inherently existent or self-supporting "I" does not mean that the "I" does not exist at all; it has a nominal existence. This mere "I" or person becomes the basis on which the imprint or potency of an action is left. In general, the "I" is designated to the collection of the physical and mental aggregates.

When we talk about the physical body and the consciousness, which is the basis of designation of the "I", with reference to a human being, it is principally the consciousness which becomes the basis of designation of the term "I". The consciousness has many levels, some of them coarse and some of them subtle. The physical body of the human being can also be divided into many parts, such as the eye, the ear and so forth. These physical parts again become a basis for the designation of the consciousness. For example, the eye-consciousness is designated to the eye, the ear consciousness to the ear, and so forth. But if you try to find the subtlest basis of designation of consciousness, it seems that the nerves and pathways of the brain are actually the basis of designation of mental consciousness. Then there is also talk of the bases of the sense powers and these are supposed to be very subtle. It is not clear whether such bases of the sense faculties can be found in the brain or somewhere else. It will be an interesting object to research,

Let us take an example: in order to generate eye-consciousness, many conditions or causes are necessary. The dominant cause is an indefectible eye sense-power. Having a particular form within its focus becomes the objective condition. However, despite the presence of such conditions, it is not definite that an eye-consciousness will arise. This indicates that a third condition, the immediately preceding condition, which is a consciousness, is required, in addition to the external objective condition and internal dominant condition of

a sense power. Therefore, in order for the eye sense-consciousness to arise, all three conditions are necessary.

As an example to elucidate this point, there are occasionally cases of people who after a long illness become so physically weak that their heartbeat and all physical functions stop. When they enter into such a deep coma that no physical activity or function can be perceived, the doctor declares them clinically dead. However, sometimes after a few minutes or even hours, despite the apparent lack of physical activity, the person starts breathing again, the heart starts beating, and physical functions are regained. This revival, despite the previous cessation of all physical functions, shows the unavoidable presence of a mental condition that immediately preceded it. When that immediately preceding condition - a consciousness - is present, the person can come back to life again. Similarly, in the case of a sense consciousness, the mere presence of the dominant condition and the objective condition is not sufficient to generate a particular consciousness.

According to the Buddhist view, when we talk about the various levels of consciousness of a particular human being which are designated to the various parts of the body, then we are referring to the coarser levels of consciousness of a person. These consciousnesses are called consciousness of a person. These consciousnesses are called consciousnesses of a human being because they are dependent on particular parts of a human body. Therefore, when a human being dies, all the coarser levels of consciousness that are dependent on the physical body also seem to disappear, but it is interesting to note that their arising as entities of consciousness does not come about merely due to the presence of the physical body. They are produced as entities of clarity and awareness, such as eye-consciousness, ear-consciousness, and so forth in dependence on conditions other than the body. There is a fundamental cause that generates these consciousnesses as entities of clarity and awareness, and according to the various conditions it encounters, consciousnesses cognizing form, sound, and so forth arise. This shows that there is a consciousness independent of the coarser physical body, but when it encounters coarser conditions, it appears in the form of coarser consciousness.

Consciousness has a much subtler nature, and if you examine that subtler nature, then the real, substantial cause of that consciousness can only be another continuum of consciousness which preceded it, irrespective of whether there is a physical body or not. Therefore, there is plainly a kind of innate natural mind, which is total pure and clear. When this pure state of the mind comes into contact with different levels of the physical body, consciousness also manifests itself more or less coarsely, depending upon what particular physical body it is being designated to. But if you examine the real nature of the mind, it has an existence independent of the coarser levels of the physical body.

Such a pure, natural state of mind, which exists independently of the physical body, is called a primordial clear light or the primordial consciousness – a consciousness which has always been present. Compared to this, coarser consciousnesses are adventitious because they are sometimes present and at other times absent. This primordial innate clear light consciousness is the real basis of designation of a sentient being or person. So, whoever has this kind of consciousness, this pure state of mind, is termed a sentient being, and this is the main criterion that differentiates sentient beings from other living things and other phenomena. No doubt a person, or "I", is attributed to the total aggregate of the physical body and the consciousness, but it is the primordial innate clear light that is the exclusive basis of designation of a person, and not the physical body. Even plants and flowers have a kind of physical body, but since they lack this kind of innate subtle consciousness they are not referred to as persons. Whatever your shape, form, or outer aspect, anyone who possesses a continuity of consciousness and has feelings, perception and so on is referred to as a person. Therefore, different texts explain that the "I" or the person has been attributed to the continuity or stream of consciousness.

Although specific consciousnesses vary according to different occasions, and coarser levels of consciousness are dependent upon various physical bodies, the subtlest level of consciousness, the mere entity of clarity and awareness, the primordial innate clear light consciousness, is independent of the physical body. The nature of consciousness has no beginning. If you try to trace the origin of consciousness, you can go further and further back, but you will not reach a point at which you can say, this is where this consciousness came into being. Therefore, it is a kind of natural law that consciousness came into existence from beginningless time.

This is also a more realistic explanation, because if you accept a beginning of consciousness, you either have to assert a creator of consciousness, or you have to say that consciousness arises without any cause. This is preposterous, out of concern for which consciousness has been explained as beginningless. If you ask why it is beginningless, we can only say that it is a natural law. If we observe carefully, there are so many things in this world whose continuity can be traced from beginningless time. But if you ask, what their real and ultimate origin is, you can find no answer. This is simply their nature. If you ask why physical forms appear in the entity of form, it is simply due to their nature. If we say that this comes about without cause or from unrelated causes, why can it not occur causelessly now when it could previously occur without cause?

Therefore, according to the Buddhist view, if you ask whether there is a beginning to consciousness, the answer is that the continuum of consciousness is beginningless, the origin of the "I" or the person is beginningless, and birth is beginningless. And if you ask whether these things have an end, again the answer is negative if you are thinking about the mere continuum of

consciousness or the mere continuum of a person. But there is an end to the impure mind, the impure state of a person, and there is also a limit to birth, because when we talk about birth we are referring to something which has been produced through contaminated action and delusion.

So because of the beginningless of birth, later experiences of suffering and pleasure are connected to actions performed earlier. The different kinds of deluded actions or virtuous actions that a person accumulates in different lives are connected with results in different lives. For example, if you commit some virtuous or negative actions in this life, then you will have to experience their results later on. Similarly, you may have committed some virtuous or unwholesome actions in a past life, whose result you will have to experience in that very life or in this life. If you have not accumulated such actions, then you will never experience their effects. On the other hand, if you have accumulated a particular action, then generally speaking you will never escape the result: sooner or later it will bear fruit. Similarly, if one has accumulated a positive action, the result will be definitely positive. Those kinds of actions are called definite actions, but there are also actions whose results are not very definite because the proper conditions or situations were not present. Furthermore, there are actions which seem of minor importance, but whose results multiply rapidly, depending upon circumstances, situation, and conditions. So, there are many kinds of action: definite action, indefinite action, actions that multiply greatly, as well as the fact that the results of actions not done will not be encountered and that actions once done will not dissipate.

Usually, all our daily actions arise from some wish or desire. For example, if you wish to go somewhere, then you actually set out and go; if you wish to eat something, then you look for something to eat and eat it. Desire can be classified into two types, one which is negative and another which is logical and creative. For example, the wish to attain liberation from cyclic existence results is a reasonable undertaking, therefore it is a sound and logical desire. On the other hand, to generate attachment toward a particular object, such that you wish to obtain or achieve something, is an impure desire and usually arises from a misconception of phenomena as existing independently or inherently. Most of the work that we do in cyclic existence, and the desires that we generate, are the result of this kind of illogical reasoning.

Familiarising our minds with positive qualities and trying to achieve goals like liberation are logical desires. Still, it is possible that in particular cases an individual's wish to attain liberation is assisted by the conception of true existence. However, every wish for worldly perfection is based on the ignorance that conceives of true existence. On these grounds, it is better to classify desire in two ways: one, the result of correct reasoning, and the other, the result of incorrect reasoning.

The result of desire based on the conception of true existence is cyclic

existence. Still, there is another kind of desire based on sound reasoning that does not project cyclic existence, but aspires to attain the supreme attainments and qualities of the Buddha, the Dharma, the Sangha, and Nirvana, the state beyond suffering. There is a wish and desire to attain them.

If we did not classify desire into two types as mentioned above, we might think that desiring liberation was improper, that desiring religious practise was improper, and that even wising for happiness was also improper. No doubt there are different modes of desiring your own happiness, but what is clear is that so long as we have attachment and a conception of a truly existent self, those actions characteristic of cyclic existence will continue to be created.

Generally speaking, once an action has been accumulated, the result has to be experienced. Therefore, although we may be enjoying the delights of cyclic existence just now and intense sufferings are not manifest, since we are not free from the actions' shackles and snares, we have no security and no guarantee of lasting happiness. This is the perspective from which this particular text says:

If you think repeatedly about the infallible law of actions and results.

And the sufferings of cyclic existence.

You will be able to stop attachment to the next life.

By understanding the infallible law of actions and results, you will be able to see that unless you completely purify your actions, whatever kind of apparent enjoyment and pleasure you find in cyclic existence will be unreliable. Having understood this, you will not be confused by the pleasures of cyclic existence and will be able to curb your attachment to the next life.

As a human being in cyclic existence we normally encounter four kinds of suffering: the suffering of birth, old age, sickness and death. Right from birth, we are faced with sufferings; our life begins with suffering. At the same time, the process of aging begins and we start to encounter different degrees of sickness. Even when we are healthy, we encounter a lot of disturbances and confusion. Finally, the chapter of our life is closed with the sufferings of death.

When we talk about someone who is in cyclic existence, we are referring to a sentient being who is uncontrollably under the sway of contaminated actions and delusions. Because we are overpowered by contaminated actions and delusions, we repeatedly have to take birth in a cycle; therefore it is called cyclic existence.

Of the two, contaminated action and delusions, it is delusions which are mainly responsible for casting us into cyclic existence. When we are free of delusions, we attain liberation. Delusions are states of mind which, when they arise within out mental continuums, leave us disturbed, confused, and unhappy. Therefore, those states of mind which delude or afflict us are called delusions or afflicted

emotions. They are the negative qualities which make us unhappy when they arise within us. It is these internal disturbances, and not external conditions, that really make us suffer.

As long as we have these evildoers residing within us, happiness is impossible. So, if we really want to transform ourselves and achieve maximum happiness, we must identify these deluded states of mind and eliminate them. Enlightenment, the state of greatest happiness, cannot be actualised by any other means than by transforming our minds. Usually, on an ordinary level, we think of delusions like attachment and anger as qualities that make life meaningful and colourful. We think that without attachment and anger our whole society or community would become colourless and without life. But if you think carefully about it and weigh up the qualities and disadvantages of delusions like attachment and anger, you may find that in the short term they give you some relief and make your life colourful. But on closer scrutiny, you will find that the fewer of these delusions we have, even though life may be less colourful, the more we will develop inner calm, inner strength, and lasting happiness. Consequently, our minds will be happy, our physical health will improve, and we will be able to engage successfully in virtuous activities.

Of course, you might feel that your life now is colourless, unattractive, and without meaning. But if you think carefully and look for your own and other sentient beings' long-term benefits, you will notice that the more you control your delusions the greater your peace of mind and physical well-being will be. In pursuit of physical health many people do various kinds of yoga exercises. No doubt this is very good for them, but if they were also to do some mental yoga that would be even better. In short, as long as your mind is disturbed and unsound, you will continue to encounter problems and sufferings. And as long as your mind is under control, disciplined, and free from these faults, the more you will gain inner strength, calm, peace and stability, due to which you will be able to be more creative. From our own experience that we have more suffering when our minds are more disturbed by faults, we can deduce that when our minds are completely clear, our experience of happiness will be stable.

Up to this point we have been discussing the faults, sufferings and delusions of cyclic existence. On the one hand, we have to think about the faults and sufferings of cyclic existence and generate aversion to them, and on the other we need to ascertain the possibility of attaining nirvana, the cessation of suffering – the complete elimination of delusion. If you were to ask "Is there really a method by which we can attain liberation, or a method by which we will be able to eliminate sufferings and delusions completely?" it would be worthwhile asking weather nirvana or liberation actually exists.

Liberation or cessation is the nature of the mind on the occasion of the complete annihilation of defilements by their antidotes. When you think about the sufferings of cyclic existence and you weary of them, you look forward to

nirvana, liberation, as an alternative. Let us say that we have a defiled and deluded mind. When the defilements of the previous moment of the continuum of this particular consciousness are completely eliminated, the very nature of that purified consciousness is liberation, nirvana or true cessation. In other words, the teachings say that the cyclic existence that we are presently experiencing is not eternal, because it has arisen from causes and conditions, and they can be counteracted.

If you ask what the cause of cyclic existence is: it is ignorance, the conception of true existence. And what is the remedy for such ignorance? It is the wisdom realising emptiness or wisdom realising the real nature of phenomena. Now, these two qualities, ignorance, which is the cause of cyclic existence and the wisdom realising emptiness, which is the antidote to ignorance, cannot abide simultaneously in the continuum of one human being, because they are mutually exclusive. Although both observe the same object, their modes of apprehension are completely opposed to each other. Therefore, they cannot both abide in one person's continuum with equal strength. As one is strengthened, the other is weakened.

If you examine these two qualities carefully, you will find that whereas ignorance has no valid support or foundation, the wisdom realising emptiness does. Any quality that has a valid foundation can be strengthened and developed limitlessly. On the other hand, because the conception of true existence lacks a valid foundation, when it encounters the wisdom realising emptiness, a valid mind based on correct reasoning, it is weakened such that it can finally be eliminated altogether. So, ultimately, the wisdom realising the nature of phenomena will be able to uproot ignorance, the source of cyclic existence.

If we examine how attachment and anger arise within us when our minds are calm and clear, in what way we crave the object, how it appears to us and how we generate a conception of true existence toward it, we will be able to see how these delusions arise within us. Although we may not gain a direct understanding, we can make some correct assumptions.

How are attachment and anger supported by the conception of true existence? When, for example, you are very angry with somebody, notice how at that time you see that person as completely obnoxious, completely unpleasant.

Then later a friend tells you: no that person is not completely obnoxious, completely unpleasant, because he has this or that quality. Just hearing these words, you change your mind and no longer see the person you were angry with as completely obnoxious or unpleasant. This clearly shows that right from the beginning, when you generate attachment, anger, and so forth, the mental tendency is to see that particular person or object not as merely pleasant or unpleasant, but as completely pleasant or completely unpleasant. If the person

is pleasant, you see him or her as completely attractive, 100 percent attractive, and if you are angry with them, you see whatever quality they have as existing inherently or independently. Therefore, this mode of apprehending phenomena as existing inherently or truly provides a strong basis for the arising of delusions like attachment and anger.

From such explanations you can make an assumption that in general this quality, liberation or nirvana, does exist. It is a phenomenon. Not only does it exist, but it is something that you can achieve within your mental continuum.

If you train yourself in the twin practises of [1] thinking about the disadvantages and sufferings of cyclic existence, and [2] the possibility of attaining liberation, then you will be able to generate a determination to become completely free from cyclic existence.