Chapter 12 Working in the World

As buddhists, and particularly as practitioners of the Mahāyāna path, we are part of the human community and have the responsibility to benefit that community. We should take a more active role in helping society by employing whatever talents and abilities we possess to help others, Buddhist or not. If the human community is happy and at peace, all of us automatically benefit.

People's differing temperaments are reflected in **two types of compassion**. The first wants others to be free of their suffering and problems but still priorities happiness for oneself. The second wishes others to be free of suffering but is prepared to act to bring this about. The second compassion is courageous and actively engages with others because it drops self-centredness.

There are many ways for those who wish to alleviate misery to apply Dharma principles to their interactions with family, society, and the surrounding world. As we actively help others, we must continue to meditate on the **two methods to generate bodhicitta**, using reason and concrete examples to increase the strength and scope of our compassion and prevent it from degenerating.

Good Health and Dealing with Illness and Injury

Good health and a positive attitude are assets when we work to benefit others, so we will turn to these topics first.

Everyone desires good health, and for Dharma practitioners, it facilitates our ability to practice. For this reason we should do our best to maintain our health by eating nutritious meals, exercising and sleeping enough (but not too much!), and maintaining good standards of cleanliness. Here our motivation is not attachment to pleasure or fear of pain; it is the opportunity good health provides to use our precious human life for Dharma practice and specifically to cultivate bodhicitta and wisdom in order to benefit all sentient beings.

Balance is important. One meaning of the "middle way" is to avoid the extremes of self-mortification and self-indulgence. Physical suffering comes naturally, simply because we have a body. Deliberately **inflicting pain on our body** does not purify our mind. In fact, severe ascetic practices could become form of self-centredness if the motive is to gain a good reputation for having the ability to tolerate pain.

Self-indulgence hinders Dharma practice by consuming our time. Instead of practicing the Dharma to go beyond the saṃsāric situation of having a body under the influence of afflictions and karma, we spend inordinate energy and time pampering our body and worrying about its health and comfort. It is wiser to accept that as long as we are human beings in cyclic existence, we will have a body that is prone to illness. Falling ill is not some unusual or unique fate that we alone suffer, nor is it a punishment or indicative of failure on our part. Accepting the limitations of having a samsaric body and understanding it is the basis of our precious human life, we must use it wisely without fussing over it.

People often write to me for advice regarding illness. My responses vary according to the illness and the person's disposition. Here is my general advice.

When you are ill, you should consult a doctor and follow his or her advice. Do not abandon conventional medicine in favour of faith healing.

People may comment to a cancer patient, "Your anger caused the cancer." Such comments are mistaken and lack compassion. Diseases come about due to many causes and conditions. Blaming someone who is ill for their disease is heartless.

The mind-training practice of seeing our illness as a result of destructive actions we have done in previous lives or earlier in this life is very different than blaming the victim. Seeing illness in this way does not mean that we deserve to suffer: no one deserves to suffer. Rather, we act and experience results that accord with those actions. Daisy seeds grow into daisies; they don't produce chilies. Thinking in this way enables us to release our anger and sense of injustice and accept the situation. Doing this transforms a bad situation into a learning experience, because we understand that **if we do not like suffering results, we should abandon creating their causes** in the future. This gives us great impetus to let go of destructive actions and negative habits.

Thinking that the karma that caused the illness could have instead ripened in a far worse suffering helps put our misery in perspective. Cancer is not at all pleasant, but if that karma had ripened in an unfortunate rebirth, we would have been in an even worse situation. Reflecting in this way helps us to realise that we can in fact endure our present misery. In addition, because that karma has now ripened, its energy has been consumed and cannot afflict us again.

Distinguishing between physical pain and mental suffering is crucial. Even if your body is ill, your mind can remain peaceful. A relaxed mind will lessen your suffering and help the body heal. Sit quietly and observe the difference between the actual physical pain of the illness or injury and the mental suffering caused by fear and anxiety. By letting preconceptions proliferate and imagining all sorts of horrible things that could happen due to our illness or injury, our mind can cause us more misery than our physical condition. Instead of indulging the anxiety, bring your attention to a wholesome way of viewing the situation: contemplate the kindness of those who are taking care of you. Then, you will be filled with strong gratitude.

Remembering that tragedy is not unique to ourselves helps to broaden our view and prevents us from falling into self-pity, which only increases misery. We can contemplate, "At this very moment, many others are experiencing far worse miseries, and many of them have no protector, no refuge, and no friends to help them. I am more fortunate for I can rely on the Three Jewels, and so many friends, relatives, and even strangers—such as the hospital staff—are helping me. For someone who is ill, my situation is quite good." Then send love and compassion to others who are ill, injured, or unjustly imprisoned by wishing them to be free of misery and to have all happiness. You can combine this with the taking-and-giving meditation described in chapter 7.

Remembering that such problems are characteristic of cyclic existence helps us generate the determination to be free and to attain liberation. This gives our Dharma practice a big boost by helping us to make Dharma our priority in life, not the eight worldly concerns.[91] Suffering also has some benefits: it makes us humbler and helps us to open our heart in compassion for others.

Visualisation practices can also be useful. At the place where you experience pain, visualise the syllables of a mantra or a ball of light. Its brilliant yet gentle white light radiates and fills the painful or diseased area, purifying all illness and pain and filling the area with bliss.

Alternatively, imagine the Buddha (or Avalokiteśvara or Tārā) in front of you or on the crown of your head. Light and nectar flow from the Buddha or deity into you, purifying and healing your body and restoring the balances of the elements.

---

[91] See footnote 46 on page 66.

Doing purification to cleanse the karma causing the illness is also helpful. Purifying karma that has already ripened or is presently ripening isn't possible, but the karma that perpetuates the illness in the future can be purified. However, when karma is extremely heavy, preventing it from ripening altogether is difficult, although purification can make the result shorter or less severe. It also makes the mind more peaceful and thus better able to handle the illness.

Maintaining a Positive Attitude

Except for a few rare individuals who can devote their full energies to meditation twenty-four hours a day, most Buddhists should remain active in helping their communities. Social engagement is vital, but without meditation our work in society may not become a genuine Dharma activity. Without a social component, our practice of benefiting others may not be truly effective. Balance is important.

Whenever you can offer direct help to others, do so. In Tibet, when I saw animals on the way to be slaughtered, I would send someone to buy them, and we gave the animals shelter. In India, seeing animals in cages on trucks pains me a lot. However, I cannot pull over the trucks and buy the animals. Instead I recite mantras and prayers for them, reflect on karma and generate compassion.

Countless sentient beings toil in cyclic existence. All of them caught up in the three types of duḥkha: obvious physical and mental suffering; suffering because happy circumstances are fleeting; and suffering by being under the influence of afflictions and karma. Of course we cannot solve all of these problems. Cyclic existence remains; things will never be perfect. But making even a small contribution to one person or to ten people to help them have peace of mind is worthwhile. We have done something. Giving up hope, withdrawing and doing nothing is senseless. We are all tourists here on Earth; we stay just a short time. So let's not be troublemakers while we are here! Every being wants to be happy and has the right to be. It is our responsibility to make a contribution toward their well-being. We must do what we can. That is the purpose of our life.

From a Buddhist viewpoint, cyclic existence has been faulty since beginnings time. Because all sentient beings are under the influence of afflictions and karma, trying to create a perfect world by rearranging external conditions is impossible. Because of this worldview, Tibetans do not expect so much from external situations. They accept difficulties more readily and are more easily satisfied. With a view that does not expect fantastic happiness in cyclic existence, we will be more content with what we have. Rather than leading to apathy or complacency, having modest expectations makes our minds more stable and prevents discouragement.

When I compare the suffering in Tibet with the suffering of cyclic existence, the latter is much worse. We can't close our eyes to suffering of any kind. Looking at our own suffering, we generate determination to be free—ie compassion for ourselves. When seeing suffering of others, we generate great compassion and bodhicitta and participate in practices that contribute to their well-being.

Using Diverse Methods to Benefit Others

As limited beings, we may find it difficult to know what is beneficial for others. Sometimes our prejudice, attachment and anger colour the situation. We have preconceived ideas about how others should live their lives. The **first** step in helping others is clearing away the afflictions and self-preoccupation from our own minds.

Second, we actively cultivate love, compassion and courage in order to have the inner strength to be of assistance.

Third, we develop wisdom to determine the most skilful way to help. We may practice the **four types of awakening activity**:[92] peace; increase; control; and wrath. Initially, we practice these in meditation. **First** imagining **pacifying** the afflictions of others by encouraging them to purify their negativities. **Then** imagining **increasing** their lifespan, wisdom, and merit by inspiring them to act constructively. **Next** we imagine being able to **influence or control** their afflictions through the force of our wisdom and compassion. **Finally**, for those who are intractable, we imagine employing **wrathful means** to destroy their ability to harm others.

As example of applying these four, we have someone who is about to perform an act of cruelty. A bodhisattva (who lacks clairvoyant powers and thus doesn't know exactly what is best to do) begins with peaceful means. She uses gentle measures to intercede, pacifying that person by giving comfort, verbally addressing his concerns or using reason to dissuade him from harming someone.

If that doesn't work, she tries increasing his well-being. She may give him medicine or a gift or teach him a topic that interests him. If this too doesn't work, she will use strong pressure or influence to try to steer him in a good direction. Should that too fail, she may intimidate the person through aggressive means or destroy his ability to harm others. Such forceful action must be motivated by compassion, not by vengeance, and is used only as a last resort.

The approach here is to apply whatever techniques are most effective to relieve our own or others' difficulties. This is consistent with the advice that there is nothing a bodhisattva should not learn. We don't use just the Dharma to prevent or solve our own and others' problems. We also eat a healthy diet, exercise and use whatever type of medical treatment is suitable.

From one viewpoint, anything can be considered Buddhist if it is motivated by bodhicitta. However, just because a practice is done by a Buddhist does not necessarily make it a Buddhist practice. For example, to attain liberation, a Buddhist must practice serenity meditation. But this is not solely a Buddhist practice because practitioners of other traditions do it as well. Similarly, except for insight into impermanence and selflessness, insight in itself cannot be called Buddhist because non-Buddhists also practice it. From this viewpoint, the only techniques or practices that can specifically be called Buddhist are those directly relating to the goal of liberation from cyclic existence, eg, the meditation on selflessness.

If other disciplines, such as psychology or yoga, do not entail believing in a permanent soul or a creator and if they make us a kinder or healthier person, we

---

[92] The "**four types of awakening activity**" refer to the various enlightened activities carried out by bodhisattvas and Buddhas to benefit sentient beings and assist them on their path to enlightenment. These activities are deeply rooted in the intention of compassion and wisdom, and are broadly categorised into four types:

1. **Pacifying**: Activities aimed at calming and alleviating suffering, difficulties, and obstacles for sentient beings. This can involve healing sickness, calming the mind and removing forms of suffering or obstacles on the spiritual path.
2. **Enriching**: Activities that involve increasing virtue, merit, knowledge, and positive qualities in others. This includes blessings that enrich one's life and spiritual practice, leading to prosperity and spiritual growth.
3. **Magnetising**: These activities attract and draw beings, resources, and situations that are conducive to the fulfilment of the Dharma. It involves influencing others positively through the power of spiritual charisma and benevolent power, bringing them into the fold of Dharma practice and helping align their lives with virtuous paths.
4. **Subjugating**: This involves powerful actions that subdue negative forces and hostile elements that obstruct the practice of Dharma. Subjugating activities are undertaken with compassionate intent, aimed at transforming negativity and aggression into positive channels and protecting sentient beings from harm.

These four activities are considered expressions of the enlightened mind, manifesting in ways that are most suitable and beneficial for sentient beings according to their circumstances and karmic predispositions. They demonstrate the dynamic and skilful means employed to assist others on their path to awakening.

may use them. If not leave them aside.

Any Buddhist teaching, such as mindfulness, compassion or taking-and-giving meditation[93] can be taught to others to help them. People doing so should not consider themselves Buddhist teachers nor call secularised versions of Buddhist practices "Buddhism." They may simply say the technique they teach has its source in Buddhism. Although **mindfulness** is very popular now and is rooted in Buddhadharma, the way it is taught and practiced in secular society differs from in a Buddhist context. The purpose of secular mindfulness is to help people live better in the present, while Buddhists meditate on the **four establishments of mindfulness**[94] to attain liberation and awakening. Secular mindfulness simply observes sensation and thoughts as they arise in the body and mind; Buddhist mindfulness

---

[93] Taking-and-giving meditation refers to the practice known as **Tonglen**, which is Tibetan for "giving and taking" (or "sending and receiving"). This form of meditation is a method for developing compassion and the ability to embrace rather than reject the various aspects of experience, particularly those involving suffering.

How Tonglen Works:

The practice of Tonglen is grounded in the Mahayana Buddhist philosophy that emphasises the bodhisattva ideal of working for the liberation of all sentient beings. The meditation involves a series of steps that focus on taking in the suffering of others with the in-breath, and sending out happiness, relief, or whatever positive antidote is needed, with the out-breath.

1. **Visualisation**: Typically, the practitioner visualises a person or beings who are suffering. This could be someone known to them who is in pain or it could be a group of people or beings suffering anywhere in the world.
2. **Taking in Suffering**: With each in-breath, the practitioner imagines taking in the suffering of others in the form of dark, polluted or hot smoke. The suffering is absorbed into one's own heart where it destroys one's own self-cherishing ego or negativity.
3. **Giving Relief**: With each out-breath, the practitioner visualises expelling their own happiness, virtue or positive qualities in the form of cool, bright light or fresh air, which then goes to these others, relieving them from their suffering and granting them whatever they need (health, happiness, prosperity, etc.).

Purpose of Tonglen:

The primary purposes of Tonglen are to:

- **Develop Bodhicitta**: Cultivate the mind of enlightenment, characterised by spontaneous compassion and the wish to attain Buddhahood for the benefit of all sentient beings.
- **Reduce Self-centredness**: By focusing on the suffering of others and wishing them happiness, practitioners work to diminish their own self-centredness and attachment to personal comfort.
- **Transform Adverse Conditions into the Path**: Tonglen teaches practitioners to use difficult situations as opportunities to develop their compassion and practice the bodhisattva path.

This practice is profound and can be emotionally and spiritually challenging, as it involves a direct confrontation with suffering. It is usually taught under the guidance of an experienced teacher to ensure that it is practiced correctly and with the right intention.

[94] The **four establishments of mindfulness** are a central practice within the broader context of Buddhist meditation and are integral to the cultivation of insight and wisdom. These practices are derived from the Satipatthana Sutta and are foundational to many forms of Buddhist meditation, including those practiced in Tibetan traditions.

1. **Mindfulness of the Body**: Involves paying close attention to the physical body, observing bodily processes and maintaining awareness of physical sensations. Practices under this category include mindfulness of breathing, awareness of postures, mindfulness of activities and the contemplation of the body's impurities, which helps to reduce attachment to the body.
2. **Mindfulness of Feelings**: This refers to being mindful of feelings or sensations as they arise, acknowledging whether they are pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral. This practice helps in understanding the transient nature of feelings and reduces the reactivity towards sensory experiences.
3. **Mindfulness of Mind**:This involves observing the mind itself, noticing the mental states that arise, whether the mind is lustful, angry, deluded, concentrated, scattered, etc. It fosters a deep awareness of the mind's tendencies and conditions, allowing for greater control and equanimity.
4. **Mindfulness of Phenomena (Dhammas)**:This focuses on the dhammas (phenomena) particularly in the context of observing the **Five Hindrances** (sensual desire, ill-will, sloth-torpor, restlessness-worry, doubt), the **Six Sense Bases** (eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, mind), the **Seven Factors of Enlightenment** (mindfulness, investigation, energy, joy, tranquility, concentration, equanimity) and the **Four Noble Truths**. This establishment aids in understanding the true nature of phenomena and supports the development of wisdom.

These four are not isolated techniques but are interconnected and overlap in their aim to cultivate a deep and nuanced awareness of one's experience. They are used to develop insight into the nature of existence, leading to detachment, dispassion, and the cessation of suffering, thus paving the way toward enlightenment. These practices are often taught under the guidance of a knowledgeable teacher, as they require careful and attentive cultivation.

has an element of wisdom and leads to insight into impermanence, the nature of duḥkha, and selflessness.

A person with faith in both Christianity and Buddhism may view Jesus as a bodhisattva and visualise him as a symbol of love and compassion. However, we can't say this is a Buddhist practice. We can teach Buddhist principles to the general public without using Buddhist language or calling these concepts Buddhist. However, we should not incorporate non-Buddhist practices or concepts into Buddhism and call them Buddhism. This harms the existence of the pure Dharma.

Engaged Buddhism and Political Involvement

I have some reservations speaking about politics, the business world, so I will simply discuss general points about motivation and so forth and leave their application to the reader.

If someone can make significant spiritual progress, remaining isolated in retreat and spending most of her energy in deep meditation is worthwhile. However, this is difficult for most people, who wish to have a family and a job. In this case, live in a balanced way: maintain a daily meditation practice of whatever length is practical for you, earn your living through right livelihood and contribute to the benefit of society in general or to specific individuals in it. You will have to determine a good balance of time and energy to fit your own situation.

We need education to help others most effectively. The purpose of education is not just to learn more about the world or the living beings in it; it is to build a happier human community and to benefit animals as well. With that motivation, study whatever field interests you and seek employment that does not involve harming others or living unethically. In this way, right from the beginning, your whole life will be involved in benefiting others.

I see three ways the Buddhist community can serve society. First, we can be more active in projects that directly benefit others. Dharma centres and monasteries can either set up their own projects or participate in already existing organisations that help the homeless, provide hospice care for the terminally ill, educate children, reach out to refugees, counsel prisoners, provide healthcare and food to the poor, protect endangered species, care for the environment, etc. Some centres are already engaged in such works and I am very pleased with this.

I have also met residents of a slum in a large Indian city. Since they are from a low caste, they feel demoralised. If we treat them with kindness, respecting them as human beings like us, they feel more confident. Once, some labourers were repairing my residence in Dharamsala. At first they were shy and timid, but when I shook their hands and chatted with them, they smiled and laughed. We should not think we are special and look down on others; we have been in that situation in past lives and may be in future lives if we act recklessly now.

Second, we can use Buddhist principles and techniques to promote compassion, altruism, self-confidence, fearlessness, fortitude, and tolerance in society. Many concepts and techniques found in Buddhism for working with the mind can help others, both secular people and those of other faiths. Social activists may want to learn methods to overcome anger. Teachers may want to introduce exercises to cultivate empathy, compassion and good communication among students. We should explain these methods to others in a secular setting without speaking about Buddhist doctrine or encouraging people to become Buddhists.

Childhood is a crucial time, yet many children grow up in an atmosphere with little compassion. Their parents quarrel and divorce; their teachers do not care for them as individuals. When these children become adults and act without conscience or compassion, who can blame them? They never experienced deeper human affection. The Buddhist community can make significant contributions in schools and families by helping people build families with more warmth and affection and by showing teachers how to be involved, patient and compassionate with their students. Parents and teachers (and society in general) need to learn that teaching children to be good human beings is more important than helping them become rich or famous.

Third, we can present Buddhist ideas and practices to help those who are interested. Someone who is terminally ill may want to hear about rebirth. Healthcare professionals may be interested in the stages of dying as described in Buddhist texts. Buddhist teachings may help young people who are spiritually lost, and teaching buddha nature and compassion to the incarcerated can give them a new vision of life.

Representatives from various Buddhist groups could meet to consider taking a united stand on some issues. In that way, Buddhists can participate with concerted effort to preserve the environment and protect the beings in it, including animals. In our world many life forms that do not create problems are sacrificed to serve the purposes of human beings, who are the troublemakers. We cannot change these things at once, but it is worthwhile to voice our concerns and do whatever is possible.

Some people believe that religious practice and political involvement are contradictory and that a truly spiritual person should not be involved in politics. Several factors must be taken into consideration here. Although politics itself is not inherently corrupt or evil, a person's motivation can make it so. A person using politics to convert people to his religion or impose beliefs unique to his religion on all of society lacks respect for all beings. However, political action taken with a compassionate motivation can be another method to solve human problems, just as engineering, teaching, farming, healthcare and factory work can benefit humanity.

It is especially important for politicians to behave ethically and develop compassion and their personal spiritual practice may help them to do so. I sometimes tell Indian politicians that they should be genuinely religious because their actions have a strong effect on society. If a hermit in the mountains lacks proper ethical restraint, few people are harmed; but if a politician does, an entire nation and even the world can be adversely affected. In the *Precious Garland*, which Nāgārjuna wrote for the Śātavāhana king, he penned many verses with instructions on how to govern effectively and fairly. Here are some examples:

> At that time [as a ruler] you should internalise firmly
> the practices of generosity, ethical conduct and fortitude
> that were especially taught for householders
> and have as their essence compassion.
>
> Just as you are intent on thinking
> of what could be done to help yourself,
> so you should be intent on thinking
> of what could be done to help others.
>
> Just as by themselves the true words
> of kings generate firm trust,

so their false words
are the best means to create distrust.

Nāgārjuna also encouraged the king to tax citizens fairly, fund a system of public education that ensures teachers are well compensated and construct public roads with rest stops and parks where people can relax and enjoy themselves.

In recent years many people have turned to Buddhist scriptures for guidance on current issues. Other people have sought confirmation of their political or social views in the Buddhadharma. Quotations to support this or that view may certainly be found in the scriptures. However, we must be open-minded and avoid thinking that everyone who calls themself a Buddhist should agree on all political and social issues. The Buddha principally taught the path to liberation from cyclic existence. When he gave advice on social, family, political, and other issues, he spoke in the context of Indian culture of the fifth century BCE. Some, but not all, of this advice can be applied and adapted to present contexts.

Some people regard the Tibet issue as political, and as Dharma practitioners they do not want to get involved. However, if we want Tibetan Buddhism to flourish and remain in our world, we need freedom in Tibet. Without having autonomy in our country, we Tibetans will have great difficulty in preserving our form of Buddhadharma. This, in turn, will adversely impact the rest of the world. Although I do not expect all Dharma practitioners to actively work for human rights and freedom in Tibet, your sympathy and moral support does have an effect.

Consumerism and the Environment

Peace and the survival of life on Earth as we know it are threatened by human activities that are bereft of humanitarian values. Destruction of nature and natural resources results from ignorance, greed and disregard for sentient beings who depend on the earth for survival. Environmental degradation also cheats future generations, who will inherit a vastly degraded planet if the destruction of the natural environment continues at the present rate. Protecting the planet is an ethical issue.

While environmental destruction in the past could be attributed to ignorance, today we have more information. We must learn to work together for something we all care about—the survival and flourishing of our planet and the beings living on it. While science, technology and industrialisation have brought much benefit, they have also been the source of many current tragedies, including global warming and pollution. When we are able to recognise and forgive ignorant actions of the past, we gain strength to constructively solve problems in the present.

Scientific predictions of environmental change are difficult for ordinary human beings to fully comprehend. We hear about global warming and rising sea levels, increased cancer rates, depletion of resources, extinction of species and overpopulation. The global economy may grow and with it extreme rates of energy consumption, carbon dioxide production and deforestation. We must consider the prospects in the near future of global suffering and environmental degradation unlike anything in human history. Then we must do our best to prevent what is preventable and to prepare for what isn't.

Human activity driven by the wish for present pleasure and convenience without care for future living beings and their environment cannot be sustained. Our greed needs to take the backseat to practical methods to care for nature and natural resources. More equal distribution of wealth among nations and among groups of people within each nation is essential, as is education about the importance of caring for the environment and each other.

Remembering our mutual dependence is a key to counteract harmful practices. Each sentient being wants happiness, not suffering. Developing a genuine, compassionate sense of universal responsibility is crucial. When we are motivated by wisdom and compassion, our actions benefit everyone, not just ourselves.

Consumerism is closely related to the plight of our environment. Although advances in science and technology may be able to offset some deleterious effects of the overconsumption of natural resources, we should not be overly confident and leave it to future generations to resolve problems we create. We human beings must consider the prospect that one day science and technology may not be able to help us in the face of limited resources. This earth we share is not infinite.

As individuals and as a society, we must practice contentment to counter our greed for more and better. No matter what we do to try to gratify our desires, we will not find total satisfaction; external goods are not capable of providing this. Real fulfilment is found by adopting the inner disciplines of self-restraint and contentment as well as the joy of love, compassion and inner freedom.

Every person and each nation wants to improve its standard of living. If the standard of living of poorer countries were raised to that of wealthier countries, natural resources would not be able to meet the demand. Even if we had the resources to provide a car to every person on the planet, would we want to? Could we control the pollution they produce?

Sooner or later the lifestyle of wealthier nations will have to change according to new imperatives. While people expect a successful economy to grow each year, growth has its limits. Rather than being unprepared and colliding with the problems these limitations entail, we should cultivate a sense of contentment and voluntary restraint. Then we might avoid or reduce the disastrous results of overconsumption. With a good heart and wisdom, we will be motivated to do what needs to be done to protect each other and the natural environment. This is much easier than having to adapt to the severe environmental conditions projected for the future.

The World of Business and Finance

Every human being has an ethical duty to humanity, a responsibility to consider our common future. In addition, each person has the potential to contribute to the common good. People in the world of business and finance are no exception; they have great potential and great responsibility for global welfare. If they think only of immediate profit, all of us suffer the consequences. This is already evident in the environmental destruction due to the unregulated pursuits of big business.

At the global level, a huge gap exists between wealthy industrialised countries and nations in which people struggle to fulfil their basic needs for survival. While children in wealthy countries complain when they cannot get the latest technological device, children in impoverished countries face malnutrition. This is very sad. Within each country, too, the rich increase their wealth, while the poor become even poorer. This is not only ethically wrong, it is a source of practical problems.

Even though governments may theoretically ensure equal rights and opportunities, this great economic disparity places the poor at a disadvantage in terms of obtaining good education and jobs. As a result, they feel discontent and discouraged, which feeds resentment toward the privileged. This, in turn, entices them to become involved in legitimate protest as well as gangs, crime, and terrorism. Social discord affects the happiness of both the wealthy and the poor.

Each person wants to leave the world having made a positive contribution; everyone wants to ensure that their children and grandchildren have good lives. Therefore I ask those involved in business and government to keep future generations in mind as you make decisions in the present.

Human activities are constructive when done with regard for the interdependence of all beings. An awareness of the profound interconnection among all beings and the planet we share inspires a sense of responsibility and concern for others, a commitment to the welfare of society, awareness of the consequences of our actions and restraint from harm. When we act with concern for only short-term interests or the welfare of only a select group or when our intention is simply to accrue money or power, our actions inevitably bring unpleasant results for everyone.

Our motivation is pivotal; for any human endeavour to be constructive, we must first check our motivation and purify it of ignorant and self-centred intent as much as possible. The most important element in a healthy and productive motivation is a sense of caring for others, an awareness of the big picture and long-term results. With such motivation, doing business and making money are fine. These activities are not inherently flawed or corrupt.

Some businesspeople tell me that increasing their profits also benefits society and their employees, they say that cutting corners to facilitate business is beneficial. I have doubts about this line of reasoning.

Ethical standards and ethical behaviour are neither a nuisance nor unrealistic when it comes to business matters. For me, ethics means doing what is right, and that means what is beneficial for self and others. There may be times when what is beneficial in the long-term and short-term conflict, but many other times they coincide. Overemphasis on short-term benefit often harms the long-term good, while wise attention paid to the long-term goals usually pays off.

If a company cheats its clients or customers, these stakeholders become aware of the situation and stop doing business with that company. Those customers and clients tell others about the company's deceitful practices. Those others will avoid doing business with that company. When clients are treated respectfully and charged fair prices, they will do business with that company over a long period and will refer their friends to it, thus increasing the company's long term profits.

Corporations spend an enormous amount on legal fees due to their malpractices, so even if we consider prosperity in this life, dishonest business practices ruin individuals and companies.

Buddhist practitioners have even greater reason to abandon illegal and deceitful business practices, for they understand the destructive karma involved and the three kinds of suffering effects that it produces. They know that truthful business dealings and kind interactions with others are constructive actions that bring prosperity and good relationships in future lives. Aware that happiness comes from having a contented mind, not from greedily grasping for more wealth, true Dharma practitioners conduct their business affairs honestly. Although in the short term they may not make as much profit as dishonest businesspeople, in the long term they have fewer problems and more mental peace.

In the business world compassion translates into cooperation, responsibility, and caring. Some companies now take more care of their employees, clients, and customers. They see that a pleasant working environment in which individuals are valued, respected and have a voice increases productivity. Although their main motivation for caring for others may be financial gain, they nevertheless know that

their success is dependent on others and that, therefore, kindness and fairness are important. In the end, this produces happier employees, a good working environment and a better reputation for the company. This wins public approval and support, which benefit the company.

Some people assume that compassion in business means being too soft, abandoning competition and thus not being successful. These assumptions are not correct. There are two types of competition. One is negative; eg, actively creating obstacles for competitors or cheating customers in our efforts to reach the top. The other is beneficial: we want to improve ourselves and work hard to attain our goal, but not at others' expense. We accept that just like us, others also have the wish and the right to success.

Wanting to attain a goal is not necessarily selfish. In spiritual practice, our desire to become a buddha is not self-centred; it doesn't involve promoting ourselves at others' expense. Rather, to be more capable of benefiting others, we develop our abilities and talents and work toward our goal.

There's nothing wrong with wanting to be the best. That motivation gives us initiative and encourages progress. However, what makes us the best is not always money and status. If a company makes huge profits and earns a bad name, that's not being the best! A business that benefits more people and serves the community better than its competitors has become the best.

Each person in the business and financial world is responsible for his or her own goals and actions. At the end of the day, we have to be able to feel good about what we have done. Human values are important, no matter our profession. I never heard of anyone who said on their deathbed, "I should have made more money," "I wish I had worked more overtime," or "I should have crushed that competitor."

The transformation of values in the business and financial worlds begins at the individual level. When one individual changes, the effects are felt within that person's sphere of activities. Through the ripple effect, this positive influence will spread to more people.

Media and the Arts

The media plays a vital role in investigating important issues and bringing them to the public's attention, and I appreciate their efforts in this direction. The freedom of press benefits society greatly. At the same time, those working in the media need to have compassion for the entire society and not sensationalise events in order to have larger sales. I find it frightening that people are constantly fed violence on the news as well as for entertainment. No wonder people report depression and despair and children grow into violent adults.

The media, as well as the makers of video and online games, have some responsibility for the tragedies of mass shootings. When violence becomes entertainment and when it is so normal that children see hundreds of instances of it each week on television or the Internet, it plants seeds in their minds that will affect their behaviour. Those working in the media, game design, and advertising must have the well-being of the entire society in mind, not to mention the welfare of their own children. They should use their great creative powers and intelligence to influence youth in a constructive way and to teach them good human values, kindness and respect for others.

Throughout history, the arts have been a medium for the expression of the highest human values and aspirations as well as of despair and depravity. Many people

in the arts—painters, writers, actors, dancers, musicians and others—ask me about the role of the arts in spiritual practice. As with other occupations, this depends on the artist's motivation. If art is created simply to make a name for oneself, with no concern for the effect it has on others, it has questionable spiritual value. On the other hand, if artists with compassion for the welfare of others use their talents to benefit others, their art can be magnificent artistically and spiritually.

Science

In general, the Buddha's teachings fall into three categories: Buddhist science, which involves the Buddha's description of the external world, the physical body, and the nature of consciousness; Buddhist philosophy, which contains the Buddha's theory of reality; and Buddhist religion, the practice of the spiritual path.

Interdependence and causality are central concepts in Buddhist philosophy and are now applied to all fields. Scientists in particular know that changing one thing produces ramifications elsewhere, and a fruitful dialogue between modern science and Buddhist science and philosophy has begun. Buddhists speak about Buddhist science and certain concepts from Buddhist philosophy such as subtle impermanence and interdependence. Some scientists are also interested in Buddhist assertions that ultimate reality lacks independent existence and phenomena exist by mere designation. We Buddhists do not discuss Buddhist religious practice or Buddhist concepts such as past and future lives, karmic causality, and liberation with scientists. Those topics are "our business" as the Buddha's followers.

In this interdisciplinary discussion, we are not trying to use science to validate the Dharma. Buddhists have a long history of realised spiritual practitioners who have validated the efficacy of the path through their personal experience. Buddhism has survived nearly 2,600 years without the support or approval of science; we will continue. However, our dialogue is good for society, as it is an example of the modern and the ancient learning from and complementing each other. Over the years, the dialogue has sparked many projects, for example, teaching mindfulness to help reduce physical pain and mental stress and developing programs for teachers to instruct their students in compassionate thought and action. In addition, we Tibetans have begun science education in some of our monasteries and nunneries, and a few Tibetan monks are now studying science at Western universities, bringing their knowledge back to the debate ground.

I appreciate the scientific perspective very much. Scientists are looking for truth, for reality. They approach their investigation with an open mind and are willing to revise their ideas if their findings do not correspond to their original theories. As the Buddha's followers, we too are looking for truth and reality. The Buddha wanted us to test his teachings, not to accept them blindly. This accords with the scientific way. If scientists can disprove points in the Buddhist scriptures, we must accept their findings. Because of the similarity of our approach, I do not think there is any danger in discussion with scientists. Their attitude is objective, they are open to the investigation of new things, and they are intelligent.

Within Buddhist science, as we saw in chapter 8, there are three categories of phenomena: evident, slightly obscure and very obscure. Up until now, common topics of dialogue with scientists have focused on evident phenomena and a little bit regarding slightly obscure phenomena, such as subtle impermanence and emptiness. Within the category of evident phenomena, we have discussed topics found in physics, neurology, cognitive science, psychology and so forth.

It is useful for Buddhists to study scientific findings. For example, while Buddhist literature speaks about subtle particles, scientific knowledge of that topic is more advanced. Learning about the brain's role in cognition and emotion is new and interesting for Buddhists. However, regarding perception and psychology, Buddhist literature is much richer, and psychologists and neurologists find Buddhist findings and experiences regarding attention and emotion very helpful.

Both Buddhadharma and science can benefit humanity, and both also have limitations. Science helps us understand the physical basis upon which the mind depends while we are alive. However, because scientific research requires physical measurements of external phenomena, it lacks the tools to investigate things beyond the scope of our physical senses. Although science has contributed greatly to human knowledge about some topics, it lacks the tools necessary to fully understand every aspect of human beings. Scientists can benefit from learning the vast knowledge Buddhism possesses about the mind: for example, distinguishing sensory and mental consciousness, and differentiating between minds that directly perceive their object and conceptual consciousnesses that know their objects via conceptual appearance. Buddhism also describes various levels of consciousness and how they function, as well as the power the mind gains through developing single-pointed concentration. Buddhist psychology describes mental states conducive to human happiness and those that are unrealistic and bring suffering.

I believe that in this century many new ideas and findings will come, enlarging science's field of investigation. Continuing dialogue between Buddhists and scientists is important, so both can expand their knowledge, methodologies and ways of thinking. Dialogues with scientists have been fruitful, and some of the perspectives I have gained from them are included in this book.

My main purpose in dialoguing with scientists is to bring a deeper awareness about the value to society of living an ethical life.

Scientists have found and continue to find connections between our mental states on the one hand and our physical health and the quality of our social interactions on the other. Scientific findings demonstrate the benefits of compassion, a peaceful mind and ethical living. Since the results of scientific research are respected internationally, their findings can be used to support the advancement of secular ethics for the benefit of society.

Gender Equality

Women's right to have equal opportunity in all fields must be respected. I don't believe that in the past, society in general or Buddhist institutions in particular deliberately discriminated against women. Rather, they were negligent and simply assumed that men should lead because larger and stronger bodies made them more fit to lead. But this concept is no longer valid, and it was not even true historically. Napoleon was physically small but very clever, and he became a powerful leader.

Men assumed they were intellectually superior and less dominated by their emotions. However, as the Buddha noted, men and women have the same afflictions, and men and women are equally bound in cyclic existence by these afflictions. For civilised society, intelligence is far more important than physical strength, and in this regard, men and women are equal. Everyone should have a good education and be able to use their talents and abilities to contribute to society. Equal opportunity means equal responsibility, and men and women should share these.

People tend to identify strongly according to their gender. But as Āryadeva points out (CŚ 226–27), there is no inherently existent "inner self" that is male, female or other. The body is also not an inherently existent man or woman because none of the elements that compose the body have a gender. Although from the viewpoint of emptiness, no distinction can be made between men and women, that is no excuse to ignore sexual discrimination. The status of men and women in Buddhist institutions is not equal, and this has a deleterious effect on female and male practitioners as well as on the acceptance of Buddhism in Western society. Buddhist institutions, teachers and practitioners must treat everyone equally. All forms of exclusivity are based on an attitude of "me versus them," which is not suitable for genuine practitioners. **True practitioners are humble and regard everyone as their teacher**; they work to benefit all beings.

Women must develop self-confidence and take every opportunity to make themselves equal in all fields. Some women are accomplished practitioners, but are shy and therefore do not teach or take leadership positions. Especially those practicing the bodhisattva path should develop great self-confidence, inner strength, and courage. They must take the initiative, studying and developing their qualities, and not get discouraged by the defeatist resignation that society is simply sexist. If they encounter prejudice from social and religious institutions, they should speak up, and we must work together to tackle these problems.

In the past, there has been a shortage of well-known female role models in Buddhism. This is due to lack of knowledge about great female practitioners of the past. More books and articles that focus on past and present female practitioners are needed. In India, the Buddha's stepmother was an extraordinary nun praised by the Buddha himself. The Indian nun Bhikṣuṇī Lakṣmī had a vision of Thousand-Armed Avalokiteśvara and is the first lineage holder of this practice. Nāropa's sister Niguma was a great tantric adept, as were Machik Labkyi Dronma and Dorje Pakmo in Tibet. The reincarnation lineage of Dorje Pakmo began very early on, more or less at the same time as that of the Karmapa and continues today.

The Vinaya records that when the Buddha began the nuns' order, he stated that women were able to attain liberation and become arhats and many stories of liberated women exist in the scriptures. In Tibetan Buddhism highest yoga tantra is the final authority, and here females and males are equally capable of attaining full awakening. Highest yoga tantra emphasises cultivating respect for women, and one of the root tantric precepts forbids disparaging women.

The discriminatory statements against women in the Buddhist scriptures were made due to societal circumstances at the Buddha's time and later, when the scriptures were actually written down. Since this prejudice arose due to cultural bias, it can and must be changed. Other things, for example bhikṣus being the preceptors of bhikṣuṇīs, seem like prejudice but are difficult for one person to change. A council of saṅgha elders from all Buddhist traditions would need to meet and agree in order to change that.

While bhikṣuṇīs are governed by more precepts, most of them are for their protection. Because women are more prone to being raped or bullied than men, to offset these risks the Buddha established precepts that prevent women from encountering dangerous situations.

However, in terms of rights, both men and women are equal. Just as a man has the right and opportunity to become a monk, so a woman has the right and opportunity to become a nun. The bhikṣuṇī saṅgha of fully ordained nuns is responsible

for the screening and training of women who are candidates for novice and full ordination. They are responsible for running their own communities and teaching other nuns. Bhikṣuṇīs are ordained by a process involving both the bhikṣuṇī and the bhikṣu saṅghas. The monks must teach the Dharma to the nuns when requested. Since the full ordination lineage for women did not spread to Tibet, it is my hope that it will be established and the bhikṣuṇī ordination given in the Tibetan community. It is also my hope more nuns will become teachers in their own right and abbesses in the nunneries. This has happened in Tibetan Buddhist monasteries in the West and certainly is the case in the Chinese Buddhist community.

A story in the Pāli canon tells of Bhikkhunī Soma, who was meditating one day in the forest. Māra, the embodiment of evil, appears, and with the intention of making her lose her meditative concentration, says:

> That state so hard to achieve
> that is to be attained by the seers
> cannot be attained by a woman
> with her two-fingered wisdom.[95]

Bhikkhunī Soma immediately recognised it was Māra who was trying to make her afraid, lose self-confidence and her concentration. She firmly replied:

> What does womanhood matter at all
> when the mind is concentrated well,
> when knowledge flows on steadily
> as one sees correctly into the Dhamma?
>
> One to whom it might occur,
> "I'm a woman" or "I'm a man"
> or "I'm anything at all"
> is fit for Māra to address.

In this instance "knowledge" refers to the knowledge of the four truths in the continuum of an arahant.[96] As an arahant Bhikkhunī Soma had eradicated all defilements preventing liberation. Only someone who adheres to craving, conceit and views—the defilements that lie behind false conceptualisations—is a receptive audience for Māra's rantings. Those with knowledge and vision do not grasp onto a self or fabricate identities and will not fall prey to Māra. They continue their practice and virtuous activities undaunted.

Interfaith

Buddhists should try to create friendly and respectful relations with people of other faiths. For me, Buddhism is the best and it suits me perfectly. But it may not the best for everyone. Therefore I accept and respect all religious traditions.

Jains, Buddhists, and one branch of Hindu Sāṃkhyas do not believe in a creator God, while Jews, Christians, and Muslims do. If we look only at this, we see a big difference among religions. However, the purpose of the religious theories of no-God and of God is the same: to make better human beings. Human minds are so varied and different that one philosophy cannot suit them all. Many philosophies are needed to suit the many kinds of mentality.

All great religious leaders endeavour to lead their followers away from selfishness, anger and greed. All emphasise relinquishing violence and rampant material-

---

[95] "Two-fingered" indicates a woman's wisdom, because as the cook in a household, she tests the rice between two fingers to see if it is cooked. She also cuts thread while holding the ball of cotton between two fingers.

[96] Arahant is a female version of arhat.

ism. By understanding their common function and aim, we will see that the superficial differences in religious theology are due to differences in the spiritual needs of people in a particular place at that time. Knowing this, we can avoid sectarianism, partisanship and disparaging any authentic religious teaching.

This variety in religions is a blessing, not a difficulty. Just as there is a tremendous variety of food, giving each person the opportunity to eat what suits their taste and constitution, the great variety in religion enables each person to choose the belief system most suitable for them. Trying to make everyone accept the same religion is impossible and would not be beneficial.

Some people find it more comfortable to believe in a creator. Being a God-fearing person, they are disciplined and careful in their actions. Other people may be more conscientious regarding their motivations and behaviour when they believe that the responsibility lies with them. Both approaches have the same purpose in encouraging people to live ethically and be kind to each other.

My Christian and Muslim friends weep with faith when they pray to God, and their lives are devoted to service to others. I appreciate my Christian brothers and sisters who make great effort to educate others. Hindus also work in education and healthcare. Their selfless effort to help others is due to devotion to God. People of other religions who practice sincerely create good karma and will have good future lives. However, **virtuous actions alone will not lead to nirvāṇa**, because that depends on realising selflessness.

Some individuals may misinterpret the teachings of their religion or use religion to incite hostility. I have never encountered true religious teachings that preach hatred and violence. We should abandon all such actions in the name of religion.

Many centuries ago Buddhists suffered under Muslim invaders in India, but now the Muslims in Bodhgaya[97] help the Buddhist pilgrims there. Each year when I go to Bodhgaya, we share food. Sincere Muslim practitioners are very good human beings. It is not important to generalise about all people of a certain faith based on the harmful actions of a few who misuse their religion to justify destructive actions.

Although all religions have a similar purpose and similar values, we must not blur the distinctions. We do not need to say that our beliefs are the same in order to get along. We can note and respect the differences, knowing that due to the diversity of religions everyone will be able to find a faith that suits them.

In our interfaith discussions, investigating the meaning of words and concepts is important. Sometimes we hastily conclude that because the words are the same, their meaning is also. The meaning of “blessing,” for example, is not the same in Buddhism as in theistic religions. Conversely, we may think because traditions use different vocabulary, their meanings are unrelated. This may not be the case.

More contact and communication among religious leaders and their followers are needed to promote mutual understanding and harmony. I suggest four activities in this regard. First, religious and theological scholars should meet to discuss points of similarity and difference among faiths. This will promote awareness of the similar purposes of all religions and respect for their doctrinal differences.

In addition, practitioners of various faiths should meet to talk, pray and meditate together. This will bring deeper experiences that lead to seeing the value of other religions. Furthermore, people can go on pilgrimages together, not as tourists but

[97] A village in the state of Bihar, north-eastern India, where the Buddha attained enlightenment.

to visit and pray together at the holy places of different religions. In this way, they will experientially realise the value of other religions.

Last, religious leaders should come together to pray and speak about remedying problems in the world and allow the media to cover the event. When citizens of the world see religious leaders working harmoniously together, they will feel more hopeful and will become more tolerant themselves.

Bishop Tutu, whom I admire greatly, suggested a fifth practice: religions should speak in a united voice on issues of global concern such as wealth inequality, human rights, the environment and disarmament.

An important element in religious harmony is mutual respect, which entails refraining from aggressive attempts at conversion. As mentioned in chapter 1, when I give lectures on Buddhist topics in the West, I tell people that they should follow their family religion unless it does not suit their needs. The same is true in countries that have traditionally been Buddhist: the people there should remain Buddhist unless it does not suit them. In Mongolia, China, Korea and some other Buddhist countries, Christian missionaries have strongly promoted their religion.

Sometimes it is necessary to say frankly to others that their attempts to convert others are harmful. It causes friction in families, especially when one family member converts and then pressures others to do the same. On one occasion some missionaries came to see me, and I candidly told them not to try to convert people in traditionally Buddhist countries because it creates discord and confusion in society. Once, some Mormons invited me to their headquarters and arranged for me to give a public talk in Salt Lake City. Here too I frankly said, “Doing missionary work among people who do not follow a religion with a philosophical basis is fine, especially if they perform animal sacrifices or other harmful practices. However, in places where the population follows their own traditional religion that has an ethical and philosophical basis, it is not good to proselytise. Maintaining harmony in society is far more important.”

Incorporating Practices from Other Religions

Changing religion is a serious matter that should not be taken lightly. Some people prefer to follow the religion of their birth yet find it helpful to incorporate certain methods from other traditions into their own spiritual practice. While remaining deeply committed to their own faith, some of my Christian friends practice techniques for cultivating meditative concentration that they learned from Buddhism. They also use methods such as visualisations that enhance compassion and meditations to strengthen fortitude and forgiveness. This does not interfere with their refuge in God.

Similarly, Buddhists may learn and incorporate some aspects of Christian teachings into their own practice. One clear example is in the area of community work. Christian monastics have a long history of social work, particularly in education and healthcare, areas in which the Buddhist community lags behind. One of my friends, a German Buddhist, told me after he visited Nepal, that over the last forty or fifty years Tibetan lamas have constructed many large monasteries. However, they have built very few hospitals and schools for the public. He observed that if Christians had constructed new monasteries, they would include schools and hospitals for the general population. We Buddhists can only hang our heads and agree that he is right.

Some of my Christian friends have taken serious interest in the Buddhist philosophy of emptiness. I have told them that since the theory of emptiness is unique to Buddhism, it may not be wise for them to look into it deeply. Doing so may cause difficulties in their Christian practice, because if they pursue the theory of emptiness and dependent arising that underlies the Buddhist worldview, it challenges the worldview founded upon belief in an absolute, independent, eternal creator. Adopting the Buddhist idea of emptiness would harm their deep faith in God, and this would not benefit them.

When we are beginning spiritual practitioners, it is good to develop a sense of reverence for the teachers of all religious traditions. At the beginning of our spiritual path, we can be both a practicing Buddhist and a practicing Christian or Jew. However, as we go further into spiritual practice, we reach a point where we need to accept one philosophical view and deepen our understanding of that. This is similar to new university students benefiting from studying many subjects but at a later point choosing to major in one.

From the viewpoint of an individual who is going deeper into their spiritual path, practicing one religion is important. However, from the perspective of society at large, it is important to adhere to the principle of many religions and many truths. At first glance, these two concepts—one truth, one religion versus many truths, many religions—seem contradictory. From the perspective of an individual spiritual practitioner, the concept of one truth and one religion is valid. From the viewpoint of wider society, the concept of many truths and many religions is cogent. There is no contradiction.

A Nonsectarian Approach

In the past, sectarianism has created many problems and harmed both individuals and the Buddhist community. It arose mainly due to lack of personal contact among practitioners of different Buddhist traditions, leading to lack of correct information about each other's doctrine and practices. Unfortunately, in recent years it has spread to international practitioners and Dharma centres as well. Now, with better means of transportation and communication, practitioners from diverse traditions can learn about each other and meet together easily.

Sectarianism can take many forms. Sometimes it is motivated by jealousy or conceit. Other times it is done with "compassion," telling students that they will get confused if they go to other teachings or that other traditions are preliminaries to their own, higher tradition. Sometimes sectarianism arises due to ignorance in which someone believes he understands another system but in fact does not comprehend it correctly. Some people are prejudiced against other traditions or teachers due to a misdirected sense of loyalty to their own teacher or tradition.

Misunderstandings that lead to sectarianism may arise when comments made in relation to a specific individual are generalised for everyone at all times. Milarepa's demeaning remarks about scholars were the former. He was speaking about specific people who lived at that time and did not mean that all scholars did not practice purely or that being a scholar was worthless. If people misunderstand and think that all study of the scriptures is a waste of time, that will create friction between Buddhists who study a lot and those who don't, harm the existence of the Buddhadharma in the world, and inhibit individuals who want to learn.

The only solution to sectarianism is to study and practice other Buddhist traditions in addition to our own and to develop a broad understanding of all of the

Buddha's teachings. Instead of identifying with a specific tradition, we should consider ourselves simply Buddhists; after all, when we take refuge it is in the same Three Jewels, not in a specific Buddhist tradition or teacher. You may still principally follow one Buddhist tradition, but when you need clarification in specific areas, learn the details from whichever tradition gives the fullest presentation of that point and incorporate that explanation into your practice.

In the past, especially in the late nineteenth century in Tibet and now in India as well, many Tibetan masters were nonsectarian. Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche, his main teacher Khyentse Chokyi Lodro and his main disciple Trulshik Rinpoche were all nonsectarian. They belonged to the Nyingma tradition, but from the time they were young, they received teachings from many different spiritual mentors. In the 1940s, a Geluk lama in Amdo invited Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche to his area to give teachings and Rinpoche also received teachings from this Geluk lama.

The previous Dalai Lamas have practiced in multiple lineages. According to their biographies, the first three Dalai Lamas were basically Geluk but had a nonsectarian approach and received teachings from all traditions. The Fifth Dalai Lama received teachings from Sakya and Nyingma teachers, although not as many from Kagyu masters. The Seventh Dalai Lama did not have much connection with Nyingma or Sakya and the Thirteenth Dalai Lama was nonsectarian. He received Nyingma teachings as well as Geluk and included in his writings is a text about Vajrakīlaya, a deity central to the Nyingma tradition. One of my debate teachers, Lodro Chonyi from Mongolia, was a great scholar and good practitioner. His main teacher also practiced Nyingma, principally Hayagrīva. He told Lodro Chonyi that the Thirteenth Dalai Lama mainly practiced two deities: Yamāntaka and Vajrakīlaya.

When I was young, I was a strict Gelukpa but later became nonsectarian. One reason I recommended that people not worship the spirit Shugden is because I value the nonsectarian approach and the freedom to receive teachings from various spiritual mentors, and this spirit is opposed to this. My understanding of clear light has been greatly enhanced by hearing teachings on Dzogchen and Mahāmudrā in addition to Tsongkhapa's explanation of the different levels of mind. Now I read texts of all traditions; studying explanations on the same topic from different perspectives helps me immensely to gain a fuller understanding. In these days when the Buddhadharma is degenerating, nonsectarianism is essential. Quarrelling and fighting in the name of religion is foolish and wrong.

According to practitioners, the various explanations of a topic come to one point. For example, in Dzogchen, sometimes you meditate on emptiness as an affirming negative as taught in the text of a great scholar who has actual meditation experience. Although emptiness is a non-affirming negative, due to this specific way of practice, it may be useful to see it as an affirming negative.[98] Knowing these different perspectives is helpful; one day we'll know for ourselves through our own experience.

Once an elderly monk requested me to teach bodhicitta according to a Kagyu text. I was not familiar with the text. Unable to fulfil his wish, I felt sad. Unfortunately, not many Tibetan lamas can teach all four Tibetan traditions. I hope in the future that both Tibetan and Western practitioners will remedy this. More knowledge

---

[98] As a non-affirming negative, emptiness is the absence of inherent existence; it doesn't establish anything positive. An affirming negative will negate one thing while establishing another. "The emptiness of the mind" negates inherent existence in terms of the mind. "The mind's emptiness" establishes the mind as having the attribute of emptiness.

about each other's tradition enriches our own practice. Practitioners should have as broad a perspective as possible, without being confused by the multiplicity.

Furthermore, Tibetan contact with the Zen, Pure Land and Theravāda traditions has not been adequate. During the years I've lived in exile, my relationship with the Pope and other Christian leaders has seemed closer than that with Theravāda, Zen and Pure Land masters. On a personal level, I would like to have more contact with other Buddhists, and for the good of Buddhism in the world, I would like all the Buddhist traditions to be closer. One reason for writing *Buddhism: One Teacher, Many Traditions* was to give Buddhists from all traditions accurate information about one another's doctrine and practices. In doing so, it becomes clear that the foundation for all our traditions is the same. We take refuge in the same Three Jewels, we see the world through the perspective of the four truths of the āryas, and we all practice the three higher trainings and cultivate love, compassion, joy, and equanimity. All Buddhist traditions speak of selflessness and dependent arising. Just because we may approach some of these topics from different perspectives, that is no reason to criticise one another.

Within Tibetan Buddhism, we find scholars refuting one another's position. We should examine why they are doing this and the reasons they use to support their positions. If we do not agree, we can respond with reasons backing our understanding. Doing this furthers our own and the other's understanding and is not disrespectful. When debating the view in *Recognising the Mother*, Changkya Rolpai Dorje says, "I am not disrespecting you. Please pardon me if you are offended." Debating ideas is different from being arrogant regarding our own tradition and denigrating others. While we may disagree with others, it is important to respect them and their traditions.

Coming together as disciples of the same Teacher, we Buddhists will have closer relationships. We could speak with a common voice about difficult social and environmental issues and promote nonviolence and tolerance. This would definitely please the Buddha and benefit all sentient beings.