

no surprise to anyone who has contrasted the life of Buddha, an atheist, with the life of the monk Torquemada.

We have now seen that naturalistic religion is a genuine possibility, since it is reasonable for individuals to perform rituals, utter prayers, accept metaphysical beliefs, and commit themselves to moral principles without believing in

supernaturalism. Indeed, one can even do so while maintaining allegiance to Christianity or Judaism. Consider, for example, those Christians who accept the "Death of God" or those Jews who adhere to Reconstructionist Judaism.

Such options are philosophically respectable. Whether to choose any of them is for each reader to decide.



JOHN POWERS

## *Some Important Buddhist Doctrines*

JOHN POWERS teaches in the Religion Department at Wright State University. A specialist in Indo-Tibetan philosophy and meditation theory, he has published widely on various topics in Buddhist thought and practice.

### *KARMA AND REBIRTH*

**A**MONG the most basic and pervasive of these are teachings attributed to Buddha concerning karma and rebirth. These ideas were already present in the culture in which Buddha was born, and he accepted them in much the same way that his contemporaries did. According to Tibetan Buddhists, Buddha taught that one's present life is only one in a beginningless series of rebirths, and each of these is determined by one's actions in previous lives. These actions are collectively referred to as "karma." This idea specifically refers to one's volitional actions, which may be good, bad, or neutral. The Buddhist concept of karma is similar to Newton's Third Law of Motion, which holds that for every action there is a reaction. Similarly, in Buddhism, actions give rise to concordant effects: good, bad, and neutral

experiences are the direct results of good, bad, and neutral karma. This is presented as a universal law that has nothing to do with abstract ideas of justice, reward, or punishment. Every action produces a concordant reaction, and this occurs automatically. It does not require the control, intervention, or modification of any outside power, and as long as one remains within cyclic existence one performs actions (karma), and these inevitably produce concordant results.

Karmas, therefore, are being made all the time. When one speaks with a good motivation, a friendly atmosphere is created as an immediate result; also, the action makes an imprint on the mind, inducing pleasure in the future. With a bad motivation, a hostile atmosphere is created immediately, and pain is induced for the speaker in the future. Buddha's teaching is that you are your own master; everything depends on yourself.

Powers, John, "Some Important Buddhist Doctrines" from *Introduction to Tibetan Buddhism*, Snow Lion Publications, Ithaca, NY, 1995.

This means that pleasure and pain arise from virtuous and non-virtuous actions which come not from outside but from within yourself.

As long as one fails to recognize the cyclical nature of karma and rebirth, one will continue to transmigrate helplessly in cyclic existence. As we have seen in the life of the Buddha, however, it is possible to break the vicious cycle and escape from the sufferings that repeated births bring. The cycle is driven by ignorance, and the key to liberation lies in overcoming ignorance. The Buddha is the paradigm of a person who has accomplished this, and so devout Buddhists strive to emulate his example. The first requirement is the development of dissatisfaction with cyclic existence. As long as one is basically comfortable within cyclic existence, there is no possibility of release. One must develop a profound revulsion, looking back on one's beginningless births with disgust and vowing to break the cycle by any means necessary. According to Lama Thubten Yeshe, this attitude

indicates a deep, heartfelt decision definitely to emerge from the repeated frustrations and disappointments of ordinary life. Simply stated, renunciation is the feeling of being so completely fed up with our recurring problems that we are finally ready to turn away from our attachments to this and that and begin searching for another way to make our life satisfying and meaningful.

Next, one must emulate Buddha's example and develop the positive moral qualities that he cultivated. This leads to mental peace and equanimity, which are necessary to successful meditation. Without developing mental calm, one's thoughts will be so agitated that meditation will be impossible. Meditation is the key to overcoming ignorance, for through meditation one can develop insight into the true nature of reality, which acts as a counteragent to ignorance. Successful development of insight allows one to transcend the influence of karma, to end the ignorant engagement in actions that bind one to continued transmigration, and eventually to end the cycle altogether.

### THE FOUR NOBLE TRUTHS

Since Buddhism holds that the problem is a cognitive one, the solution lies in cognitive restructuring. Buddhism teaches that one has transmigrated helplessly since beginningless time under the influence of ignorance and that ignorance has led to performance of actions that have created connections with cyclic existence. In order to break this pattern, one must reorient one's thinking to accord with reality.

One of the greatest obstacles to this lies in the fact that worldly existence is full of traps that beguile the unwary and blind them to the harsh realities of the world. The world is full of suffering, aging, and death, but most of us overlook these and focus on momentary pleasures. Those who view cyclic existence in accordance with reality, however, understand that all who are caught up in it must inevitably suffer over and over again. This truth was recognized with full existential clarity by the Buddha on the night of his enlightenment, and he expressed it in a set of propositions that are referred to by Buddhists as the "four noble truths." These are: (1) the truth of suffering, (2) the truth of the origin of suffering, (3) the truth of the cessation of suffering, and (4) the truth of the eightfold path which overcomes suffering.

The truth of suffering holds that all of cyclic existence is inevitably connected with suffering. It is important to note that the term translated here as "suffering" has a wide range of connotations. *Dukkha*, or suffering, refers not only to physical pain, but also to emotional turmoil, discomfort, dissatisfaction, and sorrow. The truth of suffering is a recognition that these things are found in the lives of ordinary beings and that they generally view them as being unpleasant.

It should be noted that Buddhism does not deny the presence of happiness in human life. What it does deny is that happiness can be permanent for those enmeshed in cyclic existence, which is characterized by constant change. Even when one finds happiness, it must inevitably end, only to be replaced by loss, longing, and unhappiness. This state of affairs is considered to

be unacceptable, a by which this one transcended.

Suffering is of types: (1) the suffering physical and mental of change, which irings of happiness (are subject to char to suffering); and (the suffering end which sentient beir to being under th actions and afflictic

The first type is ordinary pains, st injuries, and emotio wish to be free from experience its opp emotional pleasure.

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Suffering is generally divided into three types: (1) the suffering of misery, which includes physical and mental sufferings; (2) the suffering of change, which includes all contaminated feelings of happiness (called sufferings because they are subject to change at any time, which leads to suffering); and (3) compositional suffering—the suffering endemic to cyclic existence, in which sentient beings are prone to suffering due to being under the influence of contaminated actions and afflictions.

The first type is easily identifiable and includes ordinary pains, such as headaches, physical injuries, and emotional pain. All beings naturally wish to be free from this type of suffering and to experience its opposite, which is physical and emotional pleasure.

The second type is more difficult to identify, since it includes things that ordinary beings mistakenly think of as being pleasurable, such as buying a new car. Looking at a desirable car for the first time, most people view it as something that will bring pleasure and happiness, not even considering the fact that all cars break down, often in inconvenient places. Moreover, they cost money for the initial purchase, for taxes, insurance, maintenance, gas, etc., and from the moment they are driven out of the dealer's lot they begin their inevitable progress toward the junkyard. What begins as a gleaming high-performance machine begins to rust, leak oil, and require repairs, until finally it becomes unusable and has to be discarded. As the Dalai Lama points out,

When you first get it, you are very happy, pleased, and satisfied but then as you use it, problems arise. If it were intrinsically pleasurable, no matter how much more you used this cause of satisfaction, your pleasure should increase correspondingly, but such does not happen. As you use it more and more, it begins to cause trouble. Therefore, such things are called sufferings of change; it is through change that their nature of suffering is displayed.

Anything impermanent inevitably leads to suffering, since eventually it breaks down, leaving one with a sense of disappointment and loss.

The third type of suffering is the basis for the first two, since it refers to the fundamentally unsatisfactory nature of cyclic existence, which is so constituted that it entails suffering for all who are caught up in it. The Dalai Lama says that

it is called pervasive compositional suffering since it pervades or applies to all types of transmigrating beings and is compositional in that it is the basis of present suffering and induces future suffering. There is no way of getting away from this type of suffering except by ending the continuum of rebirth.

Transmigrating beings experience sufferings as a result of their previous negative actions, actions motivated by afflictive emotions (*nyon mongs, klesa*). The primary afflictive emotions are ignorance, desire, and aversion. These motivate people to engage in negative actions that inevitably rebound on them, and they also tend to produce concordant mental states, leading to a vicious cycle.

The cycle can only be broken through eliminating the motivating negative emotions. Although we have been caught in transmigration since beginningless time, it is possible for an individual to bring her own transmigration to an end. This is the focus of the second noble truth. Buddha recognized that suffering has a basis, and he identified this basis as desire motivated by ignorance. Beings suffer due to their afflicted desires, and the way to overcome suffering lies in eliminating them. In a discussion of the first two noble truths, Kalu Rinpoche indicates that Buddha

taught these subjects extensively and in great detail, and it is important for us to understand them in order to recognize the limitations of our present situation. We have to understand our circumstances and know that, given the nature of cause and effect . . . we can look forward to nothing but suffering. We have to realize that we are enmeshed in the various factors of cause and effect, which lead first to one state of suffering and on that basis to another, and so on.

When we have seen the inherent limitations of this situation, we can begin to consider getting out of it. We can begin to look for the possibility of transcending samsaric existence and all its attendant sufferings, limitations, and frustrations.

Desire is divided into three types: (1) desire for pleasure, (2) desire for continued existence, and (3) desire for non-existence. The first type is the result of contact with sense objects that one finds pleasurable, and it creates the seeds of future attachments. The second type is the common wish that one's existence will continue forever and the tendency to live as if this is the case, despite the overwhelming evidence that one will inevitably die. The third desire arises from the belief that everything comes to an end in death, and so it is wrong to find happiness in material things, or in the present life, since death is inevitable. Buddhist philosophy holds that all three kinds of desire are mistaken and that all must be overcome in order to find lasting happiness.

The third noble truth indicates that it is possible to bring suffering to an end through overcoming afflicted desire. Suffering depends on causes, and if one removes the causes, suffering will disappear. The problem is cognitive, and so the solution is also cognitive: we suffer due to false ideas about what is pleasurable, worthwhile, or desirable, and the truth of the path indicates a way to restructure one's cognitions in accordance with reality in order to bring suffering to an end.

The path is commonly referred to as the "noble eightfold path" because it is divided into: (1) correct view, (2) correct intention, (3) correct speech, (4) correct action, (5) correct livelihood, (6) correct effort, (7) correct mindfulness, and (8) correct meditative absorption.

The eightfold path outlines a course of practice aimed at overcoming suffering. The root of suffering is said to be desire based on ignorance, and the primary concern of the path is overcoming this basic cause of all cyclic existence. The parts of the path are commonly divided into three groups (called the three trainings because

each represents a particular aspect of the training program of the path). The first two members of the eightfold path are grouped under the heading of "wisdom," since they entail a basic cognitive reorientation that is necessary as an initial prerequisite for the path. The next three are classed as "ethics," because taken together they are concerned with training in moral actions and attitudes. Morality is seen as a necessary prerequisite for progress on the Buddhist path, since a person with good morality is calm and self-assured. The last three are grouped under the heading of "meditative absorption" because they are concerned with developing concentration.

Correct view consists of both positive and negative aspects: on the positive side, correct view involves knowing certain key Buddhist concepts, such as the four truths and the operation of dependent arising, or understanding what actions lead to good and bad effects. It also involves getting rid of wrong views, the most important and dangerous of which is the "view of true personhood," the view that the elements of the psycho-physical personality constitute a truly existent person. Wrong views are to be avoided not merely because they are philosophically or logically untenable, but because they are conceptual manifestations of ignorance, desire, and aversion. Holding them leads to further desire, hatred, ignorance, and ultimately to further suffering.

Correct intention involves developing a proper orientation, that is, a mental attitude that aims at following the Buddhist path to enlightenment. In cultivating correct intention, a person decides what is ultimately important, what he or she will work at. In a Buddhist context, the ultimate goal is enlightenment, and a person who has correct intention will take this as the goal of religious activity. This decision is of fundamental importance, because in order to achieve something difficult (such as enlightenment) it is necessary to devote oneself to it single-mindedly. A person with correct intention cultivates an attitude of renunciation of worldly things, avoids harming others, and engages in activities that are concordant with the goal.

A person with correct view, correct intention, and correct speech, and who practices the path correctly, will eventually attain enlightenment. Since one's spiritual liberation depends on the purification of internal defilements, the path is a process of gradual development of wisdom and moral conduct.

For monks and nuns, the path involves keeping the rules of the Vinaya, the code of conduct in the system of "in-lay" persons. For laypersons it involves abstaining from individual liberation, such as stealing, lying, sexual misconduct, and the use of intoxicants. These restrictions are based on the principle of non-harm, and they are intended to create a calm and clear mind. In order to attain liberation, one must overcome these disturbances that agitate the mind and that impede the path. Correct action involves avoiding the physical and mental attitudes that lead to suffering.

Correct livelihood involves moral training: it consists of avoiding those occupations that result in breaking the precepts, such as those that lead people to kill, steal, or engage in sexual misconduct. These occupations include hunting, fishing, and the sale of weapons, prostitution, and gambling. These occupations are avoided because they are unwholesome and they prevent a person from practicing the path.

The next three aspects of the path are concerned with meditative absorption. The path involves cultivating the previous aspects as a foundation for meditative absorption. Based on moral conduct, the path produces the conditions for pursuing the practice. Correct effort involves directing the mind toward liberation. In this practice,

A person with correct speech avoids abusive, coarse, and untruthful speech, speaks what is correct and true, speaks gently and nonbelligerently. Since one's speech is an outward manifestation of internal mental states, cultivating truthful and pleasant speech also leads to gradual development of concordant mental attitudes.

For monks and nuns, correct action involves keeping the rules of monastic discipline outlined in the system of "individual liberation," and for laypersons it involves keeping the lay precepts of individual liberation, which forbid killing, stealing, lying, sexual misconduct, and ingesting intoxicants. These rules are not simply arbitrary strictures, and they are said to have a practical basis: cultivating morality results in mental calm, and this calm is a prerequisite for later concentrations and advanced meditative states. In order to attain the higher meditative states, one must overcome the mental troubles and disturbances that agitate the minds of ordinary beings and that impede their ability to concentrate. Correct action is mainly concerned with avoiding the physical expressions of negative mental attitudes.

Correct livelihood is also connected with moral training: it consists in avoiding occupations that result in breaking the precepts, occupations that lead people to kill, lie, cheat, steal, or engage in sexual misconduct. Prohibited occupations include hunting, fishing, meat-selling, making weapons, prostitution, and other activities that involve people in evil deeds. These are to be avoided because they create negative mental states as well as bad karma, and this combination prevents a person from successfully practicing meditation.

The next three aspects of the path are concerned with meditation. A person who has cultivated the previous aspects of the path has created a foundation consisting of proper attitudes and actions. Based on morality and the calm mental states that it produces, a person has the prerequisites for pursuing the higher levels of meditative practice. Correct effort involves properly orienting the mind toward the desired goal of liberation. In this practice, a yogin overcomes negative

feelings that inhibit equanimity and meditation, such as impatience, slothfulness, excessive pride, vengefulness, concern with unimportant things such as wealth, power, etc. The yogin then focuses on the goal of liberation through concentrated meditative practice. This involves steady effort rather than spurts of enthusiastic activity.

Correct mindfulness is emphasized in Buddhist meditation manuals as being of fundamental importance in meditation. In order to attain liberation, one must initially develop awareness of what one is doing and why one is doing it. In addition, one must learn to control and regulate the mind. A person seeking liberation must move from his or her present state of confusion and random thoughts to a state of clarity and mindfulness in which he or she is aware of mental processes and attitudes and, more importantly, is in control of them.

Correct concentration requires the previous steps. Without a concentrated mind that can fix itself calmly and one-pointedly on a single object without being distracted by laxity or excitement, one cannot properly enter into the concentrations, which are advanced meditative states in which one's attention is fully concentrated on one's object of observation.

Taken together, the four noble truths constitute a summary of the Buddhist path. The truth of suffering indicates the basic problem that Buddhism proposes to overcome, and the truth of the origin of suffering shows the cause of the problem. The third truth holds that the negative elements of the human condition are not immutable, and the fourth truth indicates how a person may bring about a cognitive reorientation and transcend suffering.

### *APPEARANCE AND REALITY*

According to Buddhist meditation theory, the basic causes of suffering are cognitive in origin. We mentally create a vision of reality, but because of ignorance this vision is skewed and does not reflect things as they are. Some of our wrong ideas are harmless, but others lead to the creation of negative mental states, such as ignorance, desire,

or hatred. One of the most dangerous of these wrong ideas is the false notion of a self, which Buddhist meditation theory contends is innately present in all human beings. On a very basic level, every person believes in a self or soul that is uncreated, immortal, unchanging, and permanent. Contrary to some other religious systems, Buddhism denies the existence of such an entity and contends that in order to attain liberation one must eliminate the false idea of a self or soul.

There has been some disagreement among western scholars of Buddhism concerning whether or not Śākyamuni Buddha ever really advocated this idea, but there is no debate among Tibetan scholars, who view the concept of selflessness as a cornerstone of Buddhist thought and practice. In Tibetan meditation texts, the concept of a self or soul is said to be based on a false imputation, and techniques to examine this concept in order to eradicate it are an important focus of meditation literature.

But if the concept is common to all human beings, where do we get it? And if it is a false concept, why is it so universally accepted? The answer, Buddhist texts suggest, is that although there is a basis for this idea of a self the imputation is still a false one. The basis for the imputation of self is the collection of elements that together constitute the psycho-physical personality, which Buddhism divides into five "aggregates": (1) form, (2) feelings, (3) discriminations, (4) compositional factors, and (5) consciousness.

These are the constituents of all impermanent phenomena and are the basis on which we impute the notions of "I" and "mine." Taken together, they are the constituents of the individual, but we mistakenly impute something more, an essence, a self or soul. When one analyzes this concept to locate its basis, however, all that one finds are these five aggregates, none of which can constitute a self because they are constantly changing, whereas the self that sentient beings imagine is self-sufficient and enduring.

*Form* refers to things that constitute the physical world, which includes the sense organs (eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind) and their objects. These are material things composed of

the four great elements: earth, water, fire, and air. *Feelings* are our sensations of things, and these are divided into three types: pleasant, unpleasant, and neutral. They result when the senses come into contact with objects. *Discriminations* are the differentiations we make regarding objects of perception as a result of contact. They cause us to discriminate between colors, sounds, smells, tastes, tangible objects, and mental images. *Consciousness* includes the six types of consciousnesses: eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind. *Compositional factors* are volitional activities, both good and bad. Karma is included within compositional factors, since it directs the mind in particular directions, thus influencing the content of future mental states.

Taken together, these five aggregates constitute the sum total of the psycho-physical personality, and Buddhist teachers claim that the totality of an individual is included within this group. Ordinary beings, however, impute something more, an enduring, uncreated "self" that exists apart from and independently of the aggregates, but this is nothing more than a label imputed to these constantly changing factors. This mistaken notion leads to grasping and attachment, which in turn result in harmful actions, and so the mistaken belief in a self is said to be one of the most powerful factors that keep ordinary beings enmeshed in cyclic existence. According to Lama Zopa,

The door that leads us out of samsāra is the wisdom that realizes the emptiness of self-existence. This wisdom is the direct remedy for the ignorance which is both a cause and effect of clinging to the self, and which believes the self or "I" to be inherently and independently existent. . . . We then become addicted to this phantom I and treasure it as if it were a most precious possession. Wisdom recognizes that such an autonomously existing I is totally nonexistent and thus, by wisdom, ignorance is destroyed. It is said in the Buddhist scriptures that to realize the correct view of emptiness, even for a moment, shakes the foundations of samsāra.

This is not as easy as it might at first appear. The false notion of self is deeply ingrained, and

every sentient being the present lifetime. Since it has been such a long period in our basic assumption difficult to dislodge not possible to eradicate once through simple concept is untenable (a first step). One initially conceptually, through. The reasoning begins how the self appears that is autonomous of the psycho-physical.

The reasoning proceeds of whether or not that it appears. That if there is a self from or identical aggregates. If it is discovered is no connection between the self and the aggregates, since they are appears to conscious and self-sufficient, and only exist that are external to the human life is changing the psycho-physical from moment to moment should conclude that different from the aggregates to him, since an autonomous have no conceivable independent being. The Dalai

if the self or the personality separate from the aggregates integrating the aggregates out a self or personality aggregates—but on is a totally different aggregates, then the the self and the aggregates

Having eliminated exists independent of the aggregates considers the possibility

every sentient being has cultivated it not only in the present lifetime, but for countless past lives. Since it has been reified and strengthened over such a long period of time, it is deeply embedded in our basic assumptions and consequently very difficult to dislodge. Because of its strength, it is not possible to eradicate the idea of self all at once through simply recognizing that the concept is untenable (although this is an important first step). One initially understands selflessness conceptually, through a process of reasoning. The reasoning begins with a consideration of how the self appears to us, that is, as something that is autonomous, enduring, and independent of the psycho-physical continuum.

The reasoning process begins with an analysis of whether or not the self can exist in the way that it appears. The meditator first determines that if there is a self, it must be either separate from or identical with the psycho-physical aggregates. If it is different from them, then there is no connection between the self and the meditator, since they are different factualities. The self appears to consciousness as something enduring and self-sufficient, but all of us are impermanent and only exist due to causes and conditions that are external to ourselves. The only constant in human life is change, and all the constituents of the psycho-physical personality are changing from moment to moment; thus the meditator should conclude that even if there were a self different from the aggregates, it would be unrelated to him, since an autonomous, enduring self could have no conceivable relation with an impermanent being. The Dalai Lama concludes that

if the self or the person exists independently, separate from the aggregates, then after mentally disintegrating the aggregates one should be able to point out a self or person existing independent of these aggregates—but one cannot. If the self or the person is a totally different and separate entity from the aggregates, then there should be no relation between the self and the aggregates at all.

Having eliminated the possibility of a self that exists independently of the aggregates, one then considers the possibility that there might be a self

that is the same as the aggregates. If there is such a self, it must be the same as at least one of them; but when one examines each in turn one realizes that they are all impermanent, changing from moment to moment, and there is no underlying unity or essence that remains throughout the ongoing process of change. The Dalai Lama points out that the idea of a self that is identical with the aggregates is untenable because

if the self exists as single or totally one with the aggregates, then the contradiction arises that just as the aggregates are many, the self should also be multiple. Also, when this present life ceases at the time of death, the continuity of the self should also cease right then. And, if the self or the person is totally one with the aggregates, how can one have the natural feeling of the self being the master of these aggregates and the aggregates being the subjects and possessions of that self?

The only conclusion that can legitimately be reached is that the self is a fiction, a mere label superimposed onto the constantly changing aggregates, a self created and reified by the mind, but lacking any substantial reality. This reasoning process alone does not eliminate the idea, however; it merely weakens it. Because it is so deeply ingrained, the idea of self is only eliminated through repeated meditation on the reasonings of selflessness, which enable the yogin to become progressively more familiar with the understanding that there is no self or essence. The Dalai Lama concludes that "when such a realization is maintained and reinforced through constant meditation and familiarization, you will be able to develop it into an intuitive or direct experience."

Many Westerners reject this notion, contending that it would be a sort of cognitive suicide. The idea that the self (which is assumed even by people who reject religions that propound the idea) does not exist is profoundly disturbing to many non-Buddhists, but in Buddhist thought the denial of self is not seen as constituting a loss, but rather is viewed as a profoundly liberating insight. Since the innate idea of self implies an autonomous, unchanging essence, if such a thing

were in fact the core of one's being, it would mean that change would be impossible, and one would be stuck being just what one is right now. Because there is no such self, however, we are constantly changing, and thus are open toward the future. One's nature is never fixed and determined, and so through engaging in Buddhist practice one can exert control over the process of change and progress in wisdom, compassion, patience, and other good qualities. One can even become a buddha, a fully enlightened being who is completely liberated from all the frailties, sufferings, and limitations of ordinary beings. But this is only possible because there is no fixed and static self, no soul that exists self-sufficiently, separated from the ongoing process of change.

Such intellectual understanding is not enough by itself, however. Even when beginning meditators gain a conceptual grasp of the doctrine of emptiness, it does not weaken the strength of the appearances of inherent existence. People and things still appear to exist from their own side, independently of external causes and conditions. On a personal level, even when one intellectually recognizes that there is no basis for the mistaken concept of "I," this false idea still appears. As an analogy, a physicist might recognize that the table in front of her is mostly composed of space and that the matter of the table consists of infinitesimally tiny particles in a constant state of vibration, but the table still appears as a solid, hard object.

Because intellectual comprehension of a concept is not the same as fully grasping it, Buddhist texts make a distinction between three levels of understanding, which are called respectively "wisdom arisen from hearing," "wisdom arisen from thinking," and "wisdom arisen from meditating." The first type is the superficial understanding one gains from simply hearing someone else teaching something. It does not involve a great deal of analysis, but is primarily based on listening to someone and understanding the meaning of the words. Wisdom arisen from thinking comes from pondering the significance of what one has heard and gaining a deeper understanding, although this is still only conceptual. Wisdom arisen from meditating

occurs when one fully internalizes what one has learned and pondered, through comprehending with direct perception on a level that transcends merely conceptual understanding. At this level of understanding, one moves beyond dependence on the mere words of the teaching and perceives the truth directly.

### DEPENDENT ARISING

Closely connected with the idea of selflessness is the doctrine of "dependent arising," which holds that all compounded phenomena arise due to causes and conditions external to themselves, remain in existence due to causes and conditions, and eventually pass away due to other causes and conditions. The classical formulation of this doctrine expresses it as follows: "Because this exists, that arises; because this is produced, that is produced." The first line indicates that effects arise from conditions unalterably, and the second states that objects are produced from conditions that are themselves impermanent. This process is broken down into twelve steps, which are referred to as the "twelve links of dependent arising":

1. ignorance
2. action
3. consciousness
4. name and form
5. the six sources
6. contact
7. feeling
8. attachment
9. grasping
10. existence
11. birth
12. aging and death

In this process, the primary factor is *ignorance*. This is not just an absence of knowledge, but is also a consciousness that perceives reality incorrectly. It motivates beings to engage in actions, but since the basis of the actions is mistaken, the actions lead to negative reactions. The most basic

type of ignorant existent self, with things for this

In the context of the links of dependent arising, one is reborn in one of the human, demi-human, or lower transmigratory hell-being.

The definition of *ignorance*, since it is a distinctive type of thought, begins at the beginning of one's past defilements. One will have a habitually conditioned human who, in this life, for instance, is violent in the sense of engaging in vicarious negative karma.

Consciousness and form. Name and form, discriminating consciousness, form. Together, they predispose past lives. As influenced by us, we have cultivated

From this point, there arises whatever form, in short, we are perceiving there occurs this point, consciousness



type of ignorance is the belief in an inherently existent self, which leads to thoughts of acquiring things for this self to possess.

In the context of the schema of the twelve links of dependent arising, *action* generally refers to a defining action that determines one's future rebirth. If this action is meritorious, one will be reborn in one of the three good transmigrations—human, demi-god, or god. If it is a negative action, one will be reborn in one of the three lower transmigrations—animal, hungry ghost, or hell-being.

The defining action conditions one's *consciousness*, since each type of transmigration has a distinctive type of consciousness. (All are characterized by basic ignorance, however, and ignorant thoughts tend to perpetuate themselves.) At the beginning of a new life, one acquires a particular sort of consciousness, and this is determined by one's past deeds. If one is born as a human, one will have a human consciousness, which will be conditioned by one's past actions. Moreover, a human who engaged in acts of violence in a past life, for instance, will be predisposed toward violence in the present life, and unless he does something to reverse this trend, he will likely engage in violence in the present life, leading to negative karma and a lower rebirth.

Consciousness conditions the next link, *name and form*. *Name* refers to the aggregates of feelings, discriminations, compositional factors, and consciousness. *Form* refers to the aggregate of form. Together these constitute the psychophysical personality, and this is conditioned by the predispositions that have been inherited from past lives. According to Kalu Rinpoche, these are influenced by the false sense of self, which all of us have cultivated since beginningless time.

From this basic dualistic or discursive consciousness there arises the sense of self, of "I." At the same time, whatever forms are seen, whatever sounds are heard—in short, whatever phenomena are experienced—are perceived as some version of "other." In this way there occurs a definite split into self and other. At this point, although there is no physical basis for consciousness, there is nevertheless a sense of

embodiment, of identity coalescing. There is also the sense of naming things in the phenomenal world.

The *six sources* are the sense powers of eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind. As the form aggregate develops, these also mature, and the process is influenced by the previous four members. As the sense powers develop, one begins to have contact with external things, and this contact is also conditioned by the previous stages. *Contact* is the coming together of object, sense faculty, and consciousness. It conditions the next link, *feeling*, which has the function of discriminating some things as pleasant, some as unpleasant, and others as neutral in accordance with how they are distinguished in contact.

All of these are conditioned by ignorance, and so they are all mistaken with respect to their appearing objects. As one develops ideas of pleasure, pain, and neutrality, one begins to grasp at things that are pleasant and avoid things that are unpleasant. Thus one experiences *grasping* and *attachment*, the eighth and ninth links of the process.

These in turn create the basis for continued *existence*. Existence results from grasping and attachment: when one becomes attached to the things of cyclic existence, one assures that in the future one will again be reborn in cyclic existence. This is a predisposition that began with ignorance, which in turn led to actions, and these led to contact and grasping.

All of these taken together constitute the link to future *birth*. Due to the force of previously generated desires, a being who is about to be reborn feels desire toward its future parents. If the being is to be reborn as a male, it will feel desire toward its future mother, and if it will be a female, it will feel desire toward its future father. Moreover, the type of being for which it will feel desire is determined by the nature of its past karma. If its karma destines it for rebirth as a human, then it will feel desire for human parents, and if it will be reborn as an animal, then it will feel desire for animal parents, and so forth. It will be drawn toward a male and female who are about to copulate and who are appropriate for its future life situation.

The completion of the process of rebirth occurs when the future father impregnates the future mother, and the being takes rebirth in the appropriate life situation. The moment of physical birth is the culmination of this process.

The final factor, *aging and death*, begins at the moment of birth. Everything that is born is moving toward death, and in each moment cells are dying and being replaced by new ones. Eventually the process begins to break down and one's physical condition degenerates. The inevitable result is death, and so Sogyal Rinpoche asks,

What is our life but this dance of transient forms? Isn't everything always changing: the leaves on the

trees in the park . . . the seasons, the weather, the time of day, the people passing you in the street? And what about us? Doesn't everything we have done in the past seem like a dream now? . . . The cells of our body are dying, the neurons in our brain are decaying, even the expression on our face is always changing, depending on our mood. What we call our basic character is only a "mindstream," nothing more.

Most beings are beguiled by the transitory things of cyclic existence and seek to acquire those that are perceived as pleasant. They are blind to the inevitable results of such actions, which only bind them to continued existence.



## RAMAKRISHNA

### *Many Paths to the Same Summit*

RAMAKRISHNA (1836–1886) is perhaps the best-known Hindu saint of modern times. He had his first experience of spiritual ecstasy at the age of seven. He worshipped Rama, Krishna, Shiva, Kali, Allah, and Jesus.

**G**OD has made different religions to suit different aspirants, times, and countries. All doctrines are only so many paths; but a path is by no means God Himself. Indeed, one can reach God if one follows any of the paths with wholehearted devotion. One may eat a cake with icing either straight or sideways. It will taste sweet either way.

As one and the same material, water is called by different names by different peoples, one calling it water, another eau, a third aqua, and another pani, so the one Everlasting-Intelligent-Bliss is

invoked by some as God, by some as Allah, by some as Jehovah, and by others as Brahman.

As one can ascend to the top of a house by means of a ladder or a bamboo or a staircase or a rope, so diverse are the ways and means to approach God, and every religion in the world shows one of these ways.

As the young wife in a family shows her love and respect to her father-in-law, mother-in-law, and every other member of the family, and at the same time loves her husband more than these; similarly, being firm in thy devotion to the deity

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