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THE DALAI LAMA

Essential Writings



Selected with an Introduction by
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Wisdom



The Dalai Lama's intense training in Buddhist philosophy is remarkable given the unstable political climate in which he was raised. Despite the initial invasion of Tibet by China in 1950, the Dalai Lama continued to master the complexities of Buddhist doctrine, especially the Madhyamaka (Middle Way) philosophy of the great second-century monk Nagarjuna and the vast scripture called Prajnaparamita, the perfection of wisdom literature. Both resources explore the central doctrine of emptiness, a complex notion that the Dalai Lama lucidly explains here. The doctrine of emptiness, rather than indicating some bleak nothingness, in the end signals the interrelatedness of all phenomenal events. This vast perspective offers great emotional space for understanding others, even those whom we might call our "enemies." We see, then, a cardinal instinct in Buddhism. Wisdom, that is, the capacity to see things rightly, leads to compassion. Metaphysics leads to morality. This chapter focuses on metaphysics, including theoretical and practical wisdom, and the following chapter addresses morality.

In the summer of 1958, the Dalai Lama engaged the first battery of examinations of his academic training. This included

*intense debates with scholars from the two great monastic centers near Lhasa, Sera and Drepung. He passed these exams and was told that if he'd had the same study opportunities as an ordinary monk, his effort would have been unsurpassed. With typical humility, the Dalai Lama writes in his autobiography, "So I felt very happy that this lazy student did not in the end disgrace himself."*¹

In early March of 1959, prior to his escape to India, he completed the final phase of his examination, debates before an audience of thousands of people. After an intense, exhausting day of oral examination, he was unanimously awarded the geshe degree, the Tibetan equivalent of a Ph.D. in Buddhist studies. On March 17, after a failed uprising in Lhasa and increasing political tension with the Chinese, he began his escape to India. In this we might say his scholarly training in the subtleties of Buddhist philosophy met the ultimate test in the real-world encounter with violence and oppression. In Buddhist thought, wisdom is never abstract but always moves to practical application. Wisdom sees things rightly: the absence of any final, defining quality to phenomenal events. This means, for example, the "enemy" is not something fixed or concrete. The so-called "enemy" cannot be objectified or demonized. Because of this, the Dalai Lama has practiced a meditation in which he visualizes absorbing the hatred and animosity of the Chinese and extends, instead, compassion. Why? Genuine love is unconditional, not predicated on the other's behavior or favors to us. In the Dalai Lama's meditation, Buddhist "theory" meets practice. Wisdom becomes compassion.

1. The Dalai Lama, *Freedom in Exile* (New York: HarperCollins, 1990), 129.

PREMISES

Developing wisdom is a process of bringing our minds into accordance with the way things are. — *An Open Heart*, 86

We can never obtain peace in the world if we neglect the inner world and don't make peace with ourselves.

— *A Policy of Kindness*, 95

AN ANTHROPOLOGY

We are all children of the one human race. We all bear the same longing for happiness and love within us. We all want to reduce suffering. We all know how important a good heart is.

This is a heart full of kindness, compassion, and love — from which hope and inner peace flow. So I believe that a good heart is ultimately the root and source for genuine progress. Especially today, universal responsibility, which is based on love and kindness, has become for humanity a question of survival.

— *Path of Wisdom, Path of Peace*, 78

The basic fact is that all sentient beings, particularly human beings, want happiness and do not want pain and suffering. On those grounds, we have every right to be happy and to use different methods or means to overcome suffering and to achieve happier lives. These methods, however, should not infringe on the rights of others, nor should they create more suffering for others. It is worthwhile to think seriously about the positive and negative consequences of these methods. You should be aware that there are differences between short-term and long-term interests and consequences. If there is a conflict between the short-term interest and the long-term interest, the long-term

interest is more important. Buddhists usually say that there is no absolute and that everything is relative. So we must judge according to the circumstances.

— *The Power of Compassion*, 2

One of my fundamental convictions is that basic human nature is more disposed toward compassion and affection. Basic human nature is gentle, not aggressive or violent. . . . I would also argue that when we examine the relationship between mind or consciousness, and body, we see that wholesome attitudes, emotions, and states of mind, like compassion, tolerance, and forgiveness, are strongly connected with physical health and well-being, whereas negative or unwholesome attitudes and emotions — anger, hatred, disturbed states of mind — undermine physical health. I would argue that this correspondence shows that our basic human nature is closer to the wholesome attitudes and emotions.

— *The Good Heart*, 50

All things have two sides. This is true of the human self as well. There is the egotistical self that constantly inflates itself and becomes a disastrous troublemaker. And when individuals inconsiderately assert themselves because of ego addiction, they hurt not only others but themselves. This self causes suffering. Then there is the self of the will, which lets people say: “I can, I must, I want.”

When this center of the will is lacking, a person cannot deal with negative aspects, such as anger, envy, or hatred, and instead is overwhelmed by them. Our sensations and feelings react spontaneously. We want to possess something or we reject it. Only a strongly developed will can manage the various feelings.

— *Path of Wisdom, Path of Peace*, 54–55

If we examine the nature of suffering, we will find that there are certain types of suffering that are amenable to solutions and can thus be overcome. Once we realize this, we should seek their solution and the means to overcome the suffering. But there are also other types of suffering that are inevitable and insurmountable. In such cases, it is important to develop a state of mind that will allow you to deal with this suffering in a realistic way. By doing so, you may be able to accept these difficulties as they arise. Such an attitude will protect you, not necessarily from the physical reality of suffering, but from the unnecessary, added psychological burden of struggling against the suffering.

— *The Good Heart*, 54

Our attitude toward suffering becomes very important because it can affect how we cope with suffering when it arises. Now, our usual attitude consists of an intense aversion and intolerance of our pain and suffering. However, if we can transform our attitude toward suffering, adopt an attitude that allows us greater tolerance of it, then this can do much to help counteract feelings of mental unhappiness, dissatisfaction, and discontent. . . .

I think that how you perceive life as a whole plays a role in your attitude about suffering. For instance, if your basic outlook is that suffering is negative and must be avoided at all costs and in some sense is a sign of failure, this will add a distinct psychological component of anxiety and intolerance when you encounter difficult circumstances, a feeling of being overwhelmed. On the other hand, if your basic outlook accepts that suffering is a natural part of your existence, this will undoubtedly make you more tolerant toward the adversities of life.

— *Art of Happiness*, 140–41

We also often add to our pain and suffering by being overly sensitive, overreacting to minor things, and sometimes taking things too personally.

—*Art of Happiness*, 152

INTERDEPENDENCE

Since our very existence and well-being are a result of the cooperation and contributions of countless others, we must develop a proper attitude about the way we relate to them. We often tend to forget this basic fact. Today, in our modern global economy, national boundaries are irrelevant. Not only do countries depend upon one another, but so do continents. We are heavily interdependent. . . .

If we looked down at the world from space, we would not see any demarcations of national boundaries. We would simply see one small planet, just one. Once we draw a line in the sand, we develop the feeling of “us” and “them.” As this feeling grows, it becomes harder to see the reality of the situation. . . .

In a sense the concept of “us” and “them” is almost no longer relevant, as our neighbors’ interests are ours as well. Caring for our neighbors’ interests is essentially caring for our own future. Today the reality is simple. In harming our enemy, we are harmed.

—*An Open Heart*, 9–10

I would like to point out a particular element in the practice of the Bodhisattva path that might be suitable for a Christian to practice. There is a special category of teachings and practices known as *lo jong*: thought transformation, or mind training. There is a special way of reflecting upon the kindness of all sentient beings, in this context all human beings, that is described in some of the literature. For example, we can easily perceive the kindness of someone who is directly involved in our life and

our upbringing. But if you examine the nature of your existence, including your physical survival, you will find that all the factors that contribute to your existence and well-being — such as food, shelter, and even fame — come into being only through the cooperation of other people.

This is especially true in the case of someone who lives an urban life. Almost every aspect of your life is heavily dependent upon others. For example, if there is an electricians' strike for even just one day, our whole city comes to a halt. This heavy interdependency upon others' cooperation is so obvious that no one needs to point it out. This is also true of your food and shelter. You need the direct or indirect cooperation of many people to make these necessities available. Even for such an ephemeral phenomenon as fame you need others. If you live alone in a mountainous wilderness, the only thing close to fame that you could create would be an echo! Without other people, there is no possibility of creating fame. So in almost every aspect of your life there is the participation and involvement of other people.

If you think along these lines, you will begin to recognize the kindness of others. And if you are a spiritual practitioner, you will also be aware that all of the major spiritual traditions of the world recognize the preciousness of altruism and compassion. If you examine this precious mind or emotion of altruism, of compassion, you will see that you need an object to generate even this feeling. And that object is a fellow human being. From this point of view, that very precious state of mind, compassion, is impossible without the presence of others. Every aspect of your life — your religious practice, your spiritual growth, even your basic survival — is impossible without others. When you think along such lines, you will find sufficient grounds to feel connected with others, to feel the need to repay their kindness.

In light of these convictions, it becomes impossible to believe that some people are totally irrelevant to your life or that you can afford to adopt an indifferent attitude toward them. There are no human beings who are irrelevant to your life.

— *The Good Heart*, 69–70

THE AWARENESS OF CAUSE AND EFFECT FOR MENTAL TRANSFORMATION

In Buddhism we talk of two types of causes. First, there are the substantial ones. In the metaphor [of seed], this would consist of the seed, which, with the cooperation of certain conditions, generates an effect that is in its own natural continuum, i.e., the sprout. The conditions that enable the seed to generate this sprout — water, sunlight, soil, and fertilizers — would be considered that sprout's cooperative causes or conditions. That things arise in dependence upon causes and conditions, whether substantial or cooperative, is not because of the force of people's actions or because of the extraordinary qualities of the Buddha. It is simply the way things are. . . .

Though not physical, our states of mind also come about by causes and conditions, much the way things in the physical world do. It is therefore important to develop familiarity with the mechanics of causation. The substantial cause of our present state of mind is the previous moment of mind. Thus, each moment of consciousness serves as the substantial cause of our subsequent awareness. The stimuli experienced by us, visual forms we enjoy or memories we react to, are the cooperative conditions that give our state of mind its character. As with matter, by controlling the conditions, we affect the product: our mind. Meditation should be a skillful method of doing

just this, applying particular conditions to our minds in order to bring about the desired effect, a more virtuous mind. . . .

Analytical meditation is the process of carefully applying and cultivating particular thoughts that enhance positive states of mind and diminish and ultimately eliminate negative ones. This is how the mechanism of cause and effect is utilized constructively. . . .

It is only by our concerted effort, an effort based on an understanding of how the mind and its various emotional and psychological states interact, that we bring about true spiritual progress. If we wish to lessen the power of negative emotions, we must search for the causes that give rise to them. We must work at removing or uprooting those causes. At the same time, we must enhance the mental forces that counter them: what we might call their antidotes. This is how a meditator must gradually bring about the mental transformation he or she seeks. . . .

When we recognize how our thoughts have particular effects upon our psychological states, we can prepare ourselves for them. We will then know that when one state of mind arises, we must counter it in a particular way; and if another occurs, we must act appropriately. When we see our mind drifting toward angry thoughts of someone we dislike, we must catch ourselves; we must change our mind by changing the subject. It is difficult to hold back from anger when provoked unless we have trained our mind to first recollect the unpleasant effects such thoughts will cause us. It is therefore essential that we begin our training in patience calmly, not while we are experiencing anger. We must recall in detail how, when angry, we lose our peace of mind, how we are unable to concentrate on our work, and how unpleasant we become to those around us. It is by thinking long and hard in this manner that we eventually become able to refrain from anger.

— *An Open Heart*, 58–62

THE TRUTH OF NO FIXED IDENTITIES AND ITS IMPLICATIONS

Ultimately, all our difficulties arise from one basic illusion. We believe in the inherent existence of ourselves and all other phenomena. We project, and then cling to, an idea of the intrinsic nature of things, an essence that phenomena do not actually possess. Let us take a simple chair as an example. We believe, without fully recognizing this belief, that there is such a thing as an essential chair-ness, a quality of a chair that seems to exist among its parts: the legs, seat, and back. In the same way, we each believe there to be an essential and continuous “me” pervading the physical and mental parts that make up each of us; it does not actually exist.

Our grasping at this inherent existence is a fundamentally mistaken perception that we must eliminate through meditation practices of the wisdom path. Why? Because it is the root cause of all our misery. It lies at the core of all our afflictive emotions.

We can abandon this illusion of an essential quality only by cultivating its direct antidote, which is the wisdom that realizes the nonexistence of that quality. Again, we cultivate this profound wisdom, as we cultivate humility to uproot pride. We must first become aware of the improper way we perceive ourselves and other phenomena; we can then cultivate a correct perception of phenomena. . . . By directly realizing our lack of an inherent nature, we uproot the very basis of self-grasping that lies at the core of all our suffering. — *An Open Heart*, 85–86

What is the value of these observations? They have a number of important implications. Firstly, when we come to see that everything we perceive and experience arises as a result of an indefinite series of interrelated causes and conditions, our whole perspective changes. We begin to see that the universe

we inhabit can be understood in terms of a living organism where each cell works in balanced cooperation with every other cell to sustain the whole. If, then, just one of these cells is harmed, as when disease strikes, that balance is harmed and there is danger to the whole. This, in turn, suggests that our individual well-being is intimately connected both with that of all others and with the environment within which we live. It also becomes apparent that our every action, our every deed, word, and thought, no matter how slight or inconsequential it may seem, has an implication not only for ourselves but for all others, too.

Furthermore, when we view reality in terms of dependent origination, it draws us away from our usual tendency to see things and events in terms of solid, independent, discrete entities. This is helpful because it is this tendency which causes us to exaggerate one or two aspects of our experience and make them representative of the whole reality of a given situation while ignoring its wider complexities.

Such an understanding of reality as suggested by this concept of dependent origination also presents us with a significant challenge. It challenges us to see things and events less in terms of black and white and more in terms of a complex interlinking of relationships, which are hard to pin down. And it makes it difficult to speak in terms of absolutes. Moreover, if all phenomena are dependent on other phenomena, and if no phenomena can exist independently, even our most cherished selves must be considered not to exist in the way we normally assume. Indeed, we find that if we search for the identity of the self analytically, its apparent solidity dissolves even more readily than that of the clay pot or the present moment [which rapidly dissolves into the past]. For whereas a pot is something concrete we can actually point to, the self is more elusive: its identity as a construct quickly becomes evident. We come to see that the habitual

sharp designation we make between “self” and “others” is an exaggeration. — *Ethics for the New Millennium*, 40–42

The “identitylessness” of phenomena points rather to the way in which things exist: not independently but in a sense interdependently. — *Ethics for the New Millennium*, 45

If the self had intrinsic identity, it would be possible to speak in terms of self-interest in isolation from that of others. But because this is not so, because self and others can only be understood in terms of relationship, we see that self-interest and others’ interest are closely interrelated. Indeed, within this picture of dependently originated reality, we see that there is no self-interest completely unrelated to others’ interests. Due to the fundamental interconnectedness which lies at the heart of reality, your interest is also my interest. From this it becomes clear that “my” interest and “your” interest are intimately connected. In a deep sense, they converge.

— *Ethics for the New Millennium*, 47

If we examine our emotions, our experiences of powerful attachment or hostility, we find that at their root is an intense clinging to a concept of self. Such a self we assume to be independent and self-sufficient, with a solid reality. As our belief in this kind of self intensifies, so does our wish to satisfy and protect it.

Let me give you an example. When you see a beautiful watch in a shop, you are naturally attracted to it. If the salesperson were to drop the watch, you would think, “Oh dear, the watch has fallen.” The impact on you would not be very great. If, however, you bought the watch and have come to think of it as “my watch,” then, were you to drop it, the impact would be devastating. You would feel as if your heart were jumping out

of you. Where does this powerful feeling come from? Possessiveness arises out of our sense of self. The stronger our sense of “me,” the stronger is our sense of “mine.” This is why it is so important that we work at undercutting our belief in an independent, self-sufficient self. Once we are able to question and dissolve the existence of such a concept of self, the emotions derived from it are also diminished. — *An Open Heart*, 152

Through the twelve links of dependent origination, Buddha teaches that all things and all events, including all elements of one’s individual experience, come into being merely as a result of the aggregation of causes and conditions. Understanding this, in turn, can lead us to see that all things are by nature interdependent, originating entirely as a result of other things and other factors.

Buddha teaches that the very fact that something is dependently originated means that it is necessarily devoid of an essential, or independent, reality. For if something is fundamentally *dependent*, by logical necessity it must be devoid of having a nature that is independent of other phenomena, of existing *independently*. Thus it is said that anything that is dependently originated must also be, in actual fact, empty.

— *Essence of the Heart Sutra*, 30

EMPTINESS

So what is emptiness? It is simply this unfindability (the absence of an intrinsic, independent, self-existing reality). When we look for the flower among its parts, we are confronted with the absence of such a flower. That absence we are confronted with is the flower’s emptiness. But then, is there no flower? Of course there is. To seek for the core of any phenomenon is ultimately

to arrive at a more subtle appreciation of its emptiness, its unfindability. However, we mustn't think about the emptiness of a flower simply as the unfindability we encounter when searching among its parts. Rather, it is the dependent nature of the flower, or whatever object you care to name, that defines its emptiness. This is called dependent origination.

The notion of dependent origination is explained in various ways by different Buddhist philosophers. Some define it merely in relation to the laws of causation. They explain that such a thing as a flower is the product of causes and conditions; it arises dependently. Others interpret dependence more subtly. For them, a phenomenon is dependent when it depends on its parts, the way our flower depends upon its petals, stamen, and pistil.

There is an even more subtle interpretation of dependent origination. Within the context of a single phenomenon like the flower, its parts — the petals, stamen, and pistil — and our thought recognizing or naming the flower are mutually dependent. One cannot exist without the other. Therefore, when analyzing or searching for a flower among its parts, you will not find it. And yet, the perception of a flower exists only in relation to the parts that make it up. From this understanding of dependent origination ensues a rejection of any idea of intrinsic or inherent existence.

— *An Open Heart*, 154–55

The meaning of Emptiness is the interdependent nature of reality.

— *Power of Compassion*, 103

Accepting a more complex understanding of reality where all things and events are seen to be closely interrelated does not mean we cannot infer that the ethical principles we identified earlier cannot be understood as binding, even if, on this view, it becomes difficult to speak in terms of absolutes, at least outside

a religious context. On the contrary, the concept of dependent origination compels us to take the reality of cause and effect with utmost seriousness. By this I mean the fact that particular causes lead to particular effects, and that certain actions lead to suffering while others lead to happiness. It is in everybody's interest to do what leads to happiness and avoid that which leads to suffering. But because, as we have seen, our interests are inextricably linked, we are compelled to accept ethics as the indispensable interface between my desire to be happy and yours.

— *Ethics for the New Millennium*, 47

I think it would be useful to reflect on a fundamental metaphysical view in Buddhist philosophy, the doctrine of emptiness. In essence, this says that the fact that things exist is very obvious and apparent; our experience of interacting with physical reality and matter is sufficient evidence for us to accept this. The question is, in what manner do they exist?

Upon examining the ultimate nature of reality, Buddhist philosophers have concluded that things lack inherent existence, that is, they do not have self-defining, self-evident characteristics. This is because if we search for the essence of matter in whatever object it may be, we discover that it is unfindable, and when we subject things to ultimate analysis, we find that they do not exist as they appear to. Therefore, by subjecting the nature of reality to such analysis, we find that things do not have the solid, objective reality that they appear to have, that there is a discrepancy between the way things appear and the way in which they exist. This conclusion prevents us from falling into the extreme of absolutism, from holding on to some kind of absolutist view of reality. At the same time, because our empirical experience validates the existence of phenomena and is all the evidence we need that things exist, we cannot deny the nominal existence of things. This frees us from falling into the extreme of nihilism.

The question then arises, if things neither exist as they appear nor possess this objective reality, while at the same time they do exist, what then is their mode of existence? Buddhism explains that they exist only conventionally, in relative terms.

—*MindScience*, 23–24

Emptiness is the ultimate nature of reality in the sense that it is the mere absence of the inherent nature, or reified projection, that we impute on reality.

—*MindScience*, 25

The reason why it is so important to understand this subtle point [emptiness] is because of its implications for interpreting our own personal experience of life. When strong emotions arise in you, say attachment or anger, if you examine the experience of that emotion you will see that underlying it is an assumption that there is something objective and real out there which you are holding on to, and on to which you project desirable or undesirable qualities. According to the kind of qualities you project on to a thing or event, you feel either attracted to it or repulsed by it. So strong emotional responses in fact assume the existence of some form of objective reality.

However, if you realize that there is no intrinsic reality to things and events then, of course, this will automatically help you to understand that no matter how real and strong emotions may seem, they have no valid basis. Once you know that they are actually based on a fundamental misconception of reality, then the emotions themselves become untenable. . . .

When you have developed a certain understanding of emptiness, albeit an intellectual one, you will have a new outlook on things and events which you can compare to your usual responses. You will notice how much we tend to project qualities on to the world. More especially, you will realize that most of our strong emotions arise from assuming the reality of

something that is unreal. In this way you may be able to gain an experiential sense of the disparity between the way you perceive things and the way things really are.

— *The Four Noble Truths*, 109–10

Mahayana practitioners devote themselves to attaining the state of a Buddha. They work at removing the ignorant, afflictive, selfishly motivated thought patterns that keep them from attaining the fully enlightened, omniscient state that allows them to truly benefit others. Practitioners devote themselves to refining virtuous qualities such as generosity, ethics, and patience to the point where they would give of themselves in any way necessary and would accept all difficulties and injustice in order to serve others. Most important, they develop their wisdom: their realization of emptiness. . . . Suffice it to say that as one's realization of the emptiness of inherent existence becomes even deeper, all vestiges of selfishness are removed and one approaches the fully enlightened state of Buddhahood.

— *An Open Heart*, 164–65

WISDOM AND TRANSFORMATION

According to Buddhism, compassion is an aspiration, a state of mind, wanting others to be free from suffering. It's not passive — it's not empathy alone — but rather an empathetic altruism that actively strives to free others from suffering. Genuine compassion must have both wisdom and loving-kindness. That is to say, one must understand the nature of suffering from which we wish to free others (this is wisdom), and one must experience deep intimacy and empathy with other sentient beings (this is loving-kindness).

The suffering from which we wish to liberate other sentient beings, according to Buddha's teachings, has three levels. The

first level includes the obvious physical and mental sensations of pain and discomfort that we all easily identify as suffering. This kind of suffering is primarily at the sensory level — unpleasant or painful sensations and feelings.

The second level of suffering is the suffering of change. Although certain experiences or sensations may seem pleasurable and desirable now, inherent within them is the potential for culminating in an unsatisfactory experience. Another way of saying this is that experiences do not last forever; desirable experiences will eventually be replaced by a neutral experience or an undesirable experience. If it were not the case that desirable experiences are of the nature of change, then, once having a happy experience, we would remain happy forever! In fact, if desirability were intrinsic to an experience, then the longer we remained in contact with it, the happier we would become. However, this is not the case. In fact, often, the more we pursue these experiences, the greater our level of disillusionment, dissatisfaction, and unhappiness becomes.

We can probably find numerous examples of the suffering of change in our lives, but here let us take for example the simple case of someone who buys a new car. For the first few days, the person may be completely happy, utterly pleased with the purchase, constantly thinking about the car, mindfully and lovingly dusting it and cleaning it and polishing it. The person may even feel that he wants to sleep next to it! As time passes, however, the level of excitement and joy is no longer quite as high. Perhaps the person begins to take the car more for granted, or perhaps he begins to regret that he didn't get the more expensive model or different color. Gradually, the level of pleasure from owning the car diminishes, culminating eventually in some form of dissatisfaction — perhaps a desire for another, newer car. That's what we Buddhists mean when we talk about the suffering of change.

The spiritual practitioner needs to cultivate awareness and recognition of this level of suffering. Awareness of this level of suffering is not unique to Buddhists; the aspiration to gain freedom from the suffering of change can be found among non-Buddhist practitioners of meditative absorption.

But the third level of suffering is the most significant — the pervasive suffering of conditioning. This refers to the very fact of our unenlightened existence, the fact that we are ruled by negative emotions and their underlying root cause, namely, our own fundamental ignorance of the nature of reality. Buddhism asserts that as long as we are under control of this fundamental ignorance, we are suffering; this unenlightened existence is suffering by its very nature.

If we are to cultivate the deepest wisdom, we must understand suffering at its deepest, most pervasive level. In turn, freedom from that level of suffering is true nirvana, true liberation, the true state of cessation. . . .

Understanding suffering in this way is the first element of genuine compassion. The second element of genuine compassion, loving-kindness, developing a feeling of intimacy with and empathy toward all beings, must be accomplished on the basis of recognizing our interconnectedness and interdependence with them. We must develop a capacity to connect with others, to feel close to others. This can be accomplished by consciously and intentionally recollecting the limitations and the harmful consequences of self-cherishing — cherishing only one's own well-being — and then reflecting upon the virtues and merits of cherishing the well-being of others.

— *Essence of the Heart Sutra*, 49–52

Suffering is a disease we all have. By diagnosing these three types of suffering, we can, over time, get a grasp on the full scope of the disease.

— *How to Expand Love*, 89

“Pervasive conditioning” [refers to] the fact that our own mind and body do not operate completely under our own control, but under the influences of karma (tendencies created by previous actions) and emotions such as lust and hatred. In ordinary life we are born from and into the pervasive influence of karma and afflictive emotions. Even when we do not think we are feeling anything, we are under the influence of causes and conditions beyond our control—stuck in a cycle that is prone to suffering. When you realize how this cycle makes you susceptible to all sorts of unwanted events, you want to get rid of it as much as you would want to remove a speck of dust from your eye.

—*How to Expand Love*, 89

“Renunciation” does not refer to the act of giving up all our possessions, but rather to a state of mind. As long as our minds continue to be driven by ignorance, there is no room for lasting happiness, and we remain susceptible to problem after problem. To cut through this cycle, we need to understand the nature of this suffering of conditioned existence and cultivate a strong wish to gain freedom from it. This is true renunciation.

—*Essence of the Heart Sutra*, 38

Nagarjuna [second-century Buddhist philosopher] writes in his Letter to a Friend, “We wish happiness but we chase sorrow. We wish to avoid sorrow but we run directly to it.” All beings seek happiness; but most of them, lacking knowledge of how to gain it, find themselves continually immersed in frustration and pain. What we need is an effective approach.

—*The Path to Enlightenment*, 35

The five aggregates are the physical and mental elements that together constitute the existence of an individual. Since the five

aggregates are devoid of intrinsic existence (i.e., existing independently or separate from causes and conditions), so too is the individual being constituted by those aggregates. And since the “I,” the individual, is devoid of intrinsic existence, devoid of self, so too are all things that are “mine” devoid of intrinsic existence. In other words, not only does the individual — the “appropriator” of physical and mental aggregates — lack intrinsic existence, all the physical and mental aggregates — the appropriated — also lack intrinsic existence. . . .

As we go through this process of negation, it may seem we are in danger of arriving at the specious conclusion that nothing exists. But, if we understand the meaning of emptiness clearly, as I hope we will begin to, we’ll see that this is not what is meant.

— *Essence of the Heart Sutra*, 84

If one understands the term “soul” as a continuum of individuality from moment to moment, from lifetime to lifetime, then one can say that Buddhism also accepts a concept of soul; there is a kind of continuum of consciousness. From that point of view, the debate on whether or not there is a soul becomes strictly semantic. However, in the Buddhist doctrine of selflessness, or “no soul” theory, the understanding is that there is no eternal, unchanging, abiding, permanent self called “soul.” That is what is being denied in Buddhism.

— *Healing Anger*, 30

The world is made up of a network of complex interrelations. We cannot speak of the reality of a discrete entity outside the context of its range of interrelations with its environment and other phenomena, including language, concepts, and other conventions. Thus, there are no subjects without the objects by which they are defined, and there are no objects without subjects to apprehend them, there are no doers without things done. There is no chair

without legs, a seat, a back, wood, nails, the floor on which it rests, the walls that define the room it's in, the people who constructed it, and the individuals who agree to call it a chair and recognize it as something to sit on. Not only is the existence of things and events utterly contingent, but, according to this principle, their very identities are thoroughly dependent upon others.

— *The Universe in a Single Atom*, 64

[In the *Flower Ornament Scripture*] . . . in beautiful poetic verses, the text compares the intricate and profoundly interconnected reality of the world to an infinite net of gems called “Indra’s jeweled net,” which reaches out to infinite space. At each knot on the net is a crystal gem, which is connected to all the other gems and reflects in itself all the others. On such a net, no jewel is in the center or at the edge. Each and every jewel is at the center in that it reflects in itself all the others. At the same time, it is at the edge in that it is itself reflected in all the other jewels. Given the profound interconnectedness of everything in the universe, it is not possible to have total knowledge of even a single atom unless one is omniscient. To know even one atom fully would imply knowledge of its relations to all other phenomena in the infinite universe.

— *The Universe in a Single Atom*, 89

The theory of karma is of signal importance in Buddhist thought but is easily misrepresented. Literally, *karma* means “action” and refers to the intentional acts of sentient beings. Such acts may be physical, verbal, or mental — even just thoughts or feelings — all of which have impacts upon the psyche of an individual, no matter how minute. Intentions result in acts, which result in effects that condition the mind toward certain traits and propensities, all of which give rise to further intentions and actions. The entire process is seen as an endless self-perpetuating dynamic. The chain reaction of interlocking

causes and effects operates not only in individuals but also for groups and societies, not just in one lifetime but across many lifetimes. — *The Universe in a Single Atom*, 109

There seems to be a consensus among all Buddhist traditions that so far as the actual elimination of the afflictive emotions and cognitive events is concerned, the application of wisdom is necessary; it is indispensable. . . .

Insight into selflessness is seen as the direct antidote to delusions, or afflictive emotions and cognitive events, and insight into the ultimate nature of reality or the ultimate emptiness of phenomena is seen as the direct antidote that would root out the imprints and the residual potencies that are implanted in one's psyche by the delusions. — *Healing Anger*, 47

If you know that someone is speaking badly of you behind your back, and if you react to that negativity with a feeling of hurt or anger, then you yourself destroy your own peace of mind. One's pain is one's own creation. There is a Tibetan expression that one should treat such things as if they were wind behind one's ear. In other words, just brush it aside.

— *Healing Anger*, 55

When someone inflicts harm or injury upon us, if instead of responding positively by developing patience and tolerance we retaliate and take revenge upon him or her, then it will establish a kind of vicious circle. If one retaliates, the other is not going to accept that and he or she is going to retaliate, and then one will do the same, and it will go on. When this happens at the community level, it can go on from generation to generation in a vicious circle. So the result is that both sides suffer. The whole purpose of life is spoiled. For example, in the refugee camps, from childhood hate grows, and some people consider

that strong hatred good for the national interest. I think this is very negative, very short-sighted. —*Healing Anger*, 58

For people who have the problem of self-hatred or self-loathing, for the time being it is advisable that they not think seriously about the suffering nature of existence or the underlying unsatisfactory nature of existence. Rather they should concentrate on the positive aspects of existence, such as appreciating the potentials that lie within oneself as a human being, the opportunities that one's existence as a human being affords. In the traditional teaching, one speaks about all the qualities of a fully endowed human existence. By reflecting upon these opportunities and potentials, one will be able to increase one's sense of worth and confidence. —*Healing Anger*, 66

How can we eliminate the deepest source of all unsatisfactory experience? Only by cultivating certain qualities in our mind-stream. Unless we possess high spiritual qualifications, there is no doubt that the events life throws upon us will give rise to frustration, emotional turmoil, and other distorted states of consciousness. These imperfect states of mind in turn give rise to imperfect activities, and the seeds of suffering are ever planted in steady flow. On the other hand, when the mind can dwell in wisdom that knows the ultimate mode of being, one is able to destroy the deepest root of distortion, negative karma and sorrow.

Our grasping at an inherently existent reality is not something with any strong support. The quality of concreteness, which is our ordinary process of perception we project upon everything, has no actual basis in the objects of our knowledge. The sense of inherent self-being that we feel is there in objects is merely a creation of our own mind, and, if we were to investigate for ourselves, it is unmasked as the source of all

our suffering. From this grasping at inherent existence stems the entire range of delusion, emotional afflictions, and their ill-directed activities. Alternatively, by eliminating this method of viewing things, we eliminate the direct source of distorted states of mind as well as the activities they produce.

The force that severs this inborn process of grasping at true existence is the higher training in wisdom. This is the most important method in the quest for eternal liberation. However, to intensify and stabilize the higher training in wisdom, one should also cultivate the higher trainings in meditative concentration and ethical discipline. — *The Path to Enlightenment*, 129–30

SENSIBILITIES AND TRUTHS

You are your own protector; comfort and discomfort are in your hands. — *Advice on Dying*, 61

One of the Tibetan Kadampa masters, Potowa, said that for a meditator who has a certain degree of inner stability and realization, every experience comes as teaching; every event, every experience one is exposed to comes as a kind of learning experience. I think this is very true. — *Healing Anger*, 45

The more honest you are, the more open, the less fear you will have, because there's no anxiety about being exposed or revealed to others. So, I think that the more honest you are, the more self-confident you will be. — *Art of Happiness*, 280

So I think that to a large extent, whether you suffer depends on how you *respond* to a given situation. For example, say that you find out that someone is speaking badly of you behind your back. If you react to this knowledge that someone

is speaking badly of you, this negativity, with a feeling of hurt or anger, then *you yourself* destroy your own peace of mind. On the other hand, if you refrain from reacting in a negative way, let the slander pass you by as if it were a silent wind passing behind your ears, you protect yourself from that feeling of hurt, that feeling of agony. So, although you may not be able to avoid difficult situations, you can modify the extent to which you suffer by how you choose to respond to the situation.

— *Art of Happiness*, 152

An open heart is an open mind. A change of heart is a change of mind.

— *An Open Heart*, 84

Control over one's future evolution is to be won during one's life, not at the time of death. The yogi Milarepa said, "Fearing death I took to the mountains. Now I have realized the ultimate nature of mind and no longer need to fear." The root cause of one's spiritual development is oneself. Buddha said, "We are our own savior or we are our own enemy." Until now we have lived largely under the power of delusions and, as a result, although we instinctively desire happiness we create only the causes of frustration and sorrow. We wish to avoid suffering, but because our minds are not cultivated in wisdom, we run directly toward suffering like a moth caught in the light of a flame.

— *The Path to Enlightenment*, 33

It is the nature of cyclic existence that what has gathered will be dispersed — parents, children, brothers, sisters, and friends. No matter how much friends like each other, eventually they must separate. Gurus and students, parents and children, brothers and sisters, husbands and wives, and friends — no matter who they are — must eventually separate.

While my senior tutor, Ling Rinpochoy, was healthy, it was almost impossible, unbearable, for me to think about his death. For me, he was always like a very solid rock on which I could rely. I wondered how I could survive without him. But when he suffered a stroke, after which there was a second, very serious stroke, eventually the situation allowed part of my mind to think, “Now it would be better for him to go.” Sometimes I have even thought that he deliberately took on that illness, so that when he did actually pass away, I would be ready to handle the next task — to search for his incarnation.

In addition to separating from all our friends, the wealth and resources that accumulate over time — no matter how marvelous they are — eventually become unusable. No matter how high your rank or position, you must eventually fall. To remind myself of this, when I ascend the high platform from which I teach, just as I am sitting down, I recite to myself the words of the Diamond Cutter Sutra about impermanence:

View things compounded from causes
 To be like twinkling stars, figments seen with an eye
 disease,
 The flickering light of a butter lamp, magical illusions,
 Dew, bubbles, dreams, lightning, and clouds.

I reflect on the fragility of caused phenomena, and then snap my fingers, the brief sound symbolizing impermanence. This is how I remind myself that I will soon be descending from the high throne.

— *Advice on Dying*, 94–95

In the Buddhist text *A Guide to the Bodhisattva Way of Life*, the great scholar Shantideva mentions that it is very important to ensure that a person does not get into a situation which leads to dissatisfaction, because dissatisfaction is the seed of anger. This means that one must adopt a certain outlook toward one’s

material possessions, toward one's companions and friends, and toward various situations.

Our feelings of dissatisfaction, unhappiness, loss of hope, and so forth are in fact related to all phenomena. If we do not adopt the right outlook, it is possible that anything and everything could cause us frustration. For some people, even the name of the Buddha could conceivably cause anger and frustration, although it may not be the case when someone has a direct personal encounter with a Buddha. Therefore, all phenomena have the potential to create frustration and dissatisfaction in us. Yet phenomena are part of reality and we are subject to the laws of existence. So this leaves us only one option: to change our own attitude. By bringing about a change in our outlook toward things and events, all phenomena can become sources of happiness, instead of sources of frustration.

—*Power of Compassion*, 52–53

When, at some point in our lives, we meet a real tragedy — which could happen to any one of us — we can react in two ways. Obviously we can lose hope, let ourselves slip into discouragement, into alcohol, drugs, unending sadness. Or else we can wake ourselves up, discover in ourselves an energy that was hidden there, and act with more clarity, more force.

—*Violence and Compassion*, 140

Spiritual happiness is not like that gained through materialistic, political, or social success, which can be robbed from us by a change in circumstances at any moment and which anyway will definitely be left behind at death. As spiritual happiness does not depend solely upon deceptive conditions such as material supports, a particular environment, or a specific situation, then even if these are withdrawn it has further supports.

—*The Path to Enlightenment*, 34