



The Essence of
Jung's
Psychology
and
Tibetan
Buddhism

Western and Eastern Paths to the Heart

Radmila Moacanin

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& TIBETAN BUDDHISM



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Preface to the Second Edition

Preface

Acknowledgments

1 BUDDHISM

Tibetan Buddhism

Tantric Buddhism: Vajrayana

2 CARL GUSTAV JUNG

Collective Unconscious

Archetypes

The Self

Individuation

Alchemy

Synchronicity

3 METHODS IN JUNG'S PSYCHOLOGY AND TIBETAN BUDDHISM

The Cure of Souls

Emancipation from Suffering

The Spiritual Friend and the Analyst

4 ARCHETYPAL SYMBOLS

The Tibetan Book of the Dead

The Mandala

5 CONNECTIONS, SIMILARITIES, DIFFERENCES

Introduction

Consciousness and the Unconscious

Spiritual Transformation

The Union of Opposites

The Middle Way and the Madhyamaka

Ego and Non-Ego

Suffering and Methods of Healing

Redemption of God

Jung's View of Eastern Traditions

Dangers

Ethical Issues

6 CONCLUSION

Coda

Epilogue

Notes

Glossary

Bibliography

Index

About the Author

*If some great idea takes hold of us from outside
we must understand that it takes hold of us
only because something in us responds to it
and goes out to meet it*
—C. G. Jung

Since this book was first published much has happened in our world that makes the teachings of Tibetan Buddhism and the work of Jung even more relevant. The past century ended and the new one was ushered in with an explosion of violence, indiscriminate killing, and revenge: the eye-for-an-eye attitude that—as Gandhi said—leads to a blind world. In addition, our planet, the only habitat we have, one that we share with all other living beings, has been deeply wounded: earth, water, and air have been poisoned by mindless exploitation and by man-made instruments of destruction, all in the pursuit of power and self-centered interests.

In the last decade or so we have seen enormous and increasingly accelerated advances in technology with relatively few advances in the spiritual realm. Militarism, materialism, and consumerism have run amok to the point of drowning Western civilization and rapidly infecting the rest of humanity. Together they emphasize the external and disregard the inner world. As a result our world is not only blind but unconscious and asleep.

There are, however, some signs in Western culture—albeit a minority subculture—of a slowly emerging trend, a paradigm shift beyond scientific materialism to greater self-awareness and mental receptivity; to interest in meditation and the intersection of psychology and spirituality; to examining one's values and simplifying one's life, including career changes, for a more fulfilling existence; in brief, there is a trend away from *Logos*—the pure intellect that analyzes, judges, and divides—to *Eros*, which relates and connects, and brings the realization of our interconnectedness and interdependence. This shift touches our depths, opening us to larger dimensions, to the ineffable mystery of life and death, and leading us to the spiritual transformation that Tibetan Buddhism and the work of Jung are all about.

The mere fact that this book has gone through three printings and two editions and has been translated into eleven languages shows that there is a hunger for the perennial wisdom of East and West as eloquently expressed both by Tibetan Buddhism and by Jung.

Tibetan Buddhism has become relatively well known, especially since 1989 when the Dalai Lama was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. Today he is regarded by many as the world's greatest and most inspiring religious leader, thanks to his unwavering commitment to nonviolence, his unconditional respect for human life, and his reverence for all living beings and the environment within which they live. Jung, however, is still not properly understood, and his vital contributions have not been fully recognized even by Western psychology.

This second edition includes an epilogue in which I explore a few of the most significant topics at the intersection of Jung's psychology and Tibetan Buddhism, with special emphasis on their relevance

to our present world.

This book had its origins in Europe, when some years ago the Tibetan Buddhist master, Lama Thubten Yeshe, flew West from Asia to give teachings, and I flew East from America to receive them. One day in a private interview with him, knowing of my interest in Jung, he asked me unexpectedly to give a talk on Jung's psychology and its relation to Tibetan Buddhism. I protested: I was totally unprepared and knew so little about it. But Lama gently insisted. Frightened, I kept pleading with him to be excused from such an impossible task, but he was relentless and would not hear of it. For the first and only time in my acquaintance with Lama Yeshe, I truly believed we had failed to communicate. Little did I know what was to follow.

Later that very same day I quietly sat cross-legged on the floor of the meditation room in front of a large audience of Lama Yeshe's students and proceeded to deliver the talk. It turned out to be memorable and a major event in my life. From then on I was gripped by the urge to learn and experience more of the two traditions. I began traveling on that exciting journey East and West, West and East, and in my mind, each of the two disciplines supplemented, helped explain further, and enriched the other. As a result, a few years later this book was produced. Synchronistically, just as it came into being in California, Lama Yeshe arrived there after a long absence. I showed him the work and he immediately encouraged me to have it published. Once again I was reluctant, but once again it was a task from which I could not be excused.

The book attempts to draw parallels, and discuss similarities and differences, between Tibetan Buddhism and Jung's psychology. The purpose is to identify possible connections so as to make a bridge between some aspects of Eastern and Western philosophical and spiritual traditions, psychological and ethical systems.

One of the main problems I want to investigate is the following: since the two traditions have developed at different historical times, under vastly different sociocultural conditions and geographically at two opposite sides of the world, are they intrinsically discrete and of psychological and ethical value only to the people where each developed? Or is it possible to reconcile the two traditions, "bring the twain together," allow a cross-fertilization, synthesize and adapt the findings, methods, and wisdom of the respective systems to the needs and conditions of contemporary society regardless of geographical boundaries?

Other related questions that I will put forward for investigation are as follows. Are there possible dangers inherent in allowing the Westerner to experiment with long-established and deeply rooted Eastern traditions? Are those dangers due basically to transplantation of spiritual discipline from one culture to another—from East to West—in the way the reverse occurred when Western industrial technology was introduced in so-called underdeveloped countries of the East, causing disruption of traditional patterns of living and working and consequently often serious damage to the psychological equilibrium of the individuals concerned? Or are the dangers even more fundamental, like those that alchemists knew and warned us about—that their *opus* was "like a death-dealing poison," meaning not only hazards of chemical poisoning but also of mental aberrations. What then are the necessary precautions and safeguards, if any, in approaching the studies and practices of an Eastern spiritual discipline that has been kept secret for centuries and has only recently been revealed to the Western world?

C. G. Jung, the alchemists, and Tibetan Buddhists, have they all been in search of the same truth—Self, Philosopher's Stone, enlightenment? Have their works a common core that, if properly understood and practiced, contains a universal value?

Is there a meaningful coincidence in the eighth-century prophecy that “when the iron birds will fly the Tibetans will leave their home,” the prophecy being fulfilled in the very twentieth century that brought C. G. Jung to us?

Many Tibetans have found a new home in Switzerland, one of the most congenial places for them outside of Tibet, viewing the same Alps that inspired Jung and that are reminiscent of their own Himalayas, surroundings and visions particularly conducive for the mind to meditate and expand.

Some years back, under the impact of the very same force that made the Tibetans leave their home I too had to leave mine, and found temporarily a new home in Switzerland. It was there that my first interest in Eastern mystical traditions was born. It was in Switzerland also that I had my first encounter with the Dalai Lama. Since meeting Tibetan lamas, I have often felt grateful, in a strange way, to that “evil” force that was directly instrumental in bringing us together. For me this represents a striking example of the possibility of experiencing that “thought transformation” that the Tibetans teach, and a demonstration of the multidimensional aspects of every event.

I came into contact both with the work of Jung and with Tibetan Buddhism very spontaneously, and in each case as the result of a series of synchronistic events. Both systems had an immediate and strong impact on me, and I had an intimation that somehow they must be related in a profound and significant way, despite the fact that they were rooted in different traditions and developed under different outward circumstances.

In this book I shall try to encompass general areas of Jung's psychology and Tibetan Buddhism. These are subject matters of immense scope and complexity, in both theory and practice, and voluminous works have been produced in each of the areas. Therefore my study shall be limited to only certain issues dealt with by Jung, and the relation of alchemy to his own findings. The discussion of Buddhism will focus on tantric Buddhism and its relation to Jung's psychology. I can hardly discuss tantric Buddhism, however, without placing it in the broader context of Tibetan Buddhism in general. This is the rationale for giving a brief overview of Tibetan Buddhism. The rationale for discussing tantric Buddhism and relating it to Jung's psychology is based on my impression that the particular form of Buddhism is most directly concerned with the issues and problems that preoccupied Jung throughout his life—above all, the process of the growth of consciousness and spiritual transformation. Jung refers to it as “the tremendous experiment of becoming conscious, which nature has laid upon mankind, and which unites the most diverse cultures in a common task.”

Despite its intricate complexity and esoteric nature, Tibetan Buddhism is essentially a psychological and ethical system. And unlike other philosophical theories and spiritual approaches that have come to us from Asia, tantric Buddhism is very much a living process, bridging the gap between our deepest yearnings for symbolic and spiritual mystery, and the demands of our mundane life, always stressing that the meaning of life is in living it.

I hope to arrive at some solutions to a few fundamental issues examined, and that the results will demonstrate and point to interconnections between the two systems. I hope to be able to show that it is possible to reconcile an ancient Eastern spiritual discipline with a contemporary Western psychological system in a fruitful and meaningful way.

My profound gratitude and heartfelt thanks to my teachers, Lama Thubten Yeshe and Lama Thubten Zopa Rinpoche, who showed me the path to another reality; to Dr. Ira Progoff, who introduced me to the world of Jung; to Dr. Russell Lockhart: with his guidance the horizons of that multidimensional world expanded beyond all boundaries; to my mother, who patiently gave me invaluable help and support; to many friends and strangers in Europe and Asia, the Americas, Africa, and Australia, who with their hearts and minds contributed to this work in many different ways.

Once upon a time, in a far-off land there was a prince who had a beautiful wife and a young son. He was called Siddhartha Gautama. He had lived all his life in a big palace and according to his father's wishes never left the palace. His father, the king, was determined to protect his son and heir from seeing any misery and to offer him all the worldly pleasures of life. Indeed, Siddhartha tasted to the full all the worldly pleasures of life.

But one day he disobeyed his father's strict orders never to leave the palace grounds. With his devoted companion and charioteer Channa, he passed beyond the gate and ventured into the world. He came across an old man, a sick man, and a dead man—three sights totally unknown to the young prince. He asked Channa whether he ever saw anything like that. Channa answered that old age, sickness, and death must come to all of us. For the first time in his life, Siddhartha was wounded by the arrow of a new awareness: the suffering of all humanity from which there is no escape. Finally, the fourth and decisive sight Siddhartha encountered was that of a wandering holy man. He no longer had a choice: the inner urgency, his newly discovered calling, was overwhelming, and he too had to leave his home, his royal life, and everything he cherished, including his parents, his beautiful wife, and his small son.

Silently he left the royal palace for good to embark alone on a long journey in pursuit of answers to the riddle of life. In his wanderings he met many famous learned teachers and philosophers; he studied with them and followed their methods. But none of the learned men could answer his own questions for these were no ordinary questions, not formulated in his head, but felt deeply in his heart, searching not for philosophical and metaphysical speculations but the living truth. So, Siddhartha continued his solitary journey searching for his treasure, the only treasure he so desperately wanted, and for which he was determined once more to sacrifice everything.

For many years he lived in the forest as a hermit endeavoring to gain control over his body and his mind. He was successful in his efforts, but the results were a starved, extremely weakened body and a discouraged mind, while the treasure he was seeking still eluded him. At the depth of hopelessness Siddhartha realized that his body was his most precious instrument, not to be abused through ascetic practices any more than through sense indulgence, both of which he had known so well. It was through his human body—and through it alone—that he could reach the treasure hard to find. Now it was time for the former prince and the former ascetic to change his life again, to abandon the way of self-denial and enter a more balanced path—the Middle Path. So, he took a meal, bathed, put on fresh clothes. Siddhartha then sat cross-legged under a tree to meditate and vowed not to remove himself from that spot till he found the treasure. And indeed after many days of sitting under the tree the treasure came to him: in a flash of illumination he attained enlightenment, the living truth he had been searching for. At that moment Siddhartha became the Buddha, the Awakened One.

He lived a long life bringing the treasure he discovered to many people, young and old, rich and poor, learned and uneducated, to everyone and anyone who was ready to discover the treasure for himself; for the treasure was to be found nowhere else but within the depth of each individual mind. His mortal body died at the age of eighty or so. But Prince Siddhartha Gautama—the Buddha—lives happily ever after in the minds and hearts of millions of human beings who accepted his message and made it a living reality.

This is the tale of Shakyamuni Buddha, probably one of the oldest, most often repeated, most fantastic of all tales. It has been told and has inspired countless human beings for two and a half millennia.

What was the message that Shakyamuni Buddha brought to the world? Above all that each human being has the potential to attain enlightenment and become a buddha. “Man is his own master, and there is no higher being or power that sits in judgment over his destiny.”¹ Buddha, and his followers this day, can only teach, guide, point to the path to liberation; each person must enter and walk the path alone, just as Siddhartha did. One must maintain a healthy doubt about the teachings one receives, no matter who the authority, including the Buddha, until their validity is clearly confirmed through investigation, analysis, and experience. Only when we have discovered that the teachings are valuable and applicable to our own life should we follow them. Ultimately, we are our own authority in the spiritual quest; there is no revealed truth, sacred scripture, no dogma and no savior.

The essence of Buddha’s teaching and the foundation of all subsequent Buddhist doctrine was expressed in his first sermon delivered at Sarnath, near Benares, after his enlightenment on the night of the full moon of July. In it he expounded the four noble truths:

1. suffering in life is ubiquitous;
2. the source of suffering is to be found in selfish craving and attachment of all kinds;
3. cessation, liberation, freedom from suffering is possible;
4. the path leading from suffering to liberation.

The four noble truths doctrine further elaborates on this path, generally referred to as the Middle Way because it is free from all extremes. It is also called the noble eightfold path as it specifies rules of behavior, in thought, speech, and action that lead to liberation. They are:

1. right understanding
2. right thought—purpose or aspiration
3. right speech
4. right action
5. right livelihood
6. right effort
7. right mindfulness, awareness, attentiveness
8. right concentration, or meditation

These eight categories constitute the foundations of Buddhist training, which when properly applied and followed lead to a balanced and harmonious life, benefiting both individual and society. The first two categories—right understanding and right thought—have to do with development of wisdom; the next three—right speech, right action, and right livelihood—with ethical conduct; and the last two—right mindfulness, and right concentration—with mental discipline.

Wisdom, ethical conduct, and mental discipline are interrelated and are to be pursued simultaneously, each promoting the development of the other. Thus the philosophical, ethical, and psychological components together constitute the foundation for spiritual development.²

In the subsequent centuries, from this simple yet very profound exposition of the four noble truths and the noble eightfold path pronounced by Shakyamuni Buddha, a staggering amount of interpretations through oral commentaries and written material evolved, often contradictory and

conflicting. Some deal with plain practical issues, some with highly philosophical, metaphysical, and ontological problems, but they all claim to derive their authority from the utterances of Buddha himself. And indeed they are all variations on the same basic theme contained in the four noble truths of Buddha's first sermon. Furthermore the origin of the different and often controversial aspects of the doctrine is to be found in the very approach Shakyamuni Buddha used in his teachings, the only aim of which was to show human beings the way to emancipation from suffering, that is, liberation. Since suffering is a basic fact of life, the goal is common to all but the roads to its elimination are many. To quote the view on this issue of a contemporary Tibetan lama:

A major characteristic of all Buddha's teachings is that they are designed to fit the needs and aptitudes of each individual. Since we all have different interests, problems, and ways of life, no one method of instruction could ever be suitable for everyone. Buddha himself explained that for the purpose of reaching a particular disciple coming from a particular background, he would teach a particular doctrine. Thus there could be certain times when it might be necessary to say "yes" and others when it would be more appropriate to say "no," even in response to the same question.³

This precisely is the strength of Buddhism, namely the flexibility of its methods and practice, its emphasis on each individual's experience, not intellectual, philosophical knowledge alone, or blind faith. Nothing, no method is excluded that could lead to the ultimate goal of liberation. This endows the teachings with an exquisite ability to adapt to the conditions of various people, living in different geographical climates, different cultures, and from different historical backgrounds. In this sense Buddhism has truly a universal character, and a relevance to life, that has persisted undiminished to this day, for its wisdom is rooted in the depth of the human psyche.

With such a wide latitude in matters of instruction and practice, it was inevitable that during the ensuing centuries after Buddha's death doctrinal differences would emerge and a variety of traditions would develop. Two major systems arose: what is sometimes called the *Hinayana*, literally, the "Lesser Vehicle," and the *Mahayana*, the "Greater Vehicle." The former developed into the Buddhism now practiced in Burma, Thailand, and Sri Lanka, while the latter spread to what is now northern India, Mongolia, Tibet, Sikkim, Bhutan, Nepal, Cambodia, Vietnam, China, Korea, and Japan.

The Hinayana stresses strict moral regulations and adherence to austere vows of conduct. The ultimate goal is attainment of one's own salvation. The highest stage of individual development, the ideal human being, is called an "arhat." The word means "a slayer of the foe," and the foe is understood to be the passions.⁴

The Mahayana continues where Hinayana leaves off: the ultimate goal of Mahayanists is to seek salvation not for their own sake but for the benefit of all beings. And this goal is no less than the attainment of buddhahood. While Hinayana emphasizes austerity, self-restraint, and high ethical behavior, Mahayana emphasizes intuitive wisdom to remove the veil of ignorance obscuring our pure essence, the buddha nature dwelling in all of us and which only needs to be uncovered. To find one's true self, realize oneself, is to realize the inherent buddha nature. It has been said that "[Hinayana] emphasizes the humanity of the Buddha; Mahayana emphasizes the buddha nature of humanity."⁵

The ideal of the arhat in Hinayana is replaced in the Mahayana system by the ideal of the bodhisattva. From the ideal of a purely private salvation of arhats intent upon realizing nirvana, bodhisattvas have vowed to devote all their pursuits to the welfare of others and to work for

universal deliverance of all beings. In them any self-seeking, egoistic actions and endeavors are totally absent.

Gentle and not abusive,
Without deceit and fraud,
Full of love towards all beings—
So is a Bodhisattva.⁶

The word *bodhisattva* has been defined as meaning “heroic being,” “spiritual warrior,” “illuminated heart and valiant one.”⁷ Bodhisattvas, “gentle and not abusive,” react spontaneously to their impulse of compassion toward everyone and all, and are fully involved in the affairs of the world; they are in the midst of it, with all its struggles and tribulations. Theirs is not a negative way of denying and abandoning the world, but a positive way of affirming it and transforming it, by virtue of their great compassion and great wisdom. Their life task is to set people free from ignorance, passion, and evil.

Bodhisattvas have made the indestructible resolution to become a buddha solely for the benefit of others; they have thus single-mindedly entered and are pursuing the way of the enlightened being and become fully integrated, free from confusion and inner conflict. They have developed the means to tap the inner treasure of others, the latent seeds of enlightenment, which according to Mahayana is the common heritage of humanity. They are “...like the skillful alchemist who by virtue of the power of his chemicals can change silver into gold and gold into silver.”⁸

One naturally wonders and asks:

What is it that gives the bodhisattva this strength by which he excels all the rest? It is his capacity to sustain the comprehension of the true nature of things, his capacity to bear with every circumstance devoid of fear and anxiety, and his ability to meet every situation with unimpeded insight and unbounded compassion.⁹

I have frequently asked myself that same question while in the presence of Tibetan lamas, some of whom, I have not the slightest doubt, have attained the stage of a bodhisattva. And I have also wondered over the exquisite ability with which they are capable of affecting the minds and lives of many Westerners whose historical and cultural background and lifestyles are so vastly different from those of people born and raised in Tibet. Perhaps part of the answer lies in the following description of the bodhisattva:

From the very outset he seeks to realize the wisdom that constitutes Buddhahood, viz., the knowledge of all forms, the knowledge of all the ways of all beings. This is what gives the Buddhas and the advanced bodhisattvas the ability to keep themselves *en rapport* with every situation and render help to each individual in the way suited to him.¹⁰

Tibetan Buddhism is part of the Mahayana. When it was introduced into Tibet from India in the seventh century a.d., it met with the native Bon religion and its shamanic practices. As Buddhism spread, many Indian scholars came to Tibet and translated religious texts and their commentaries until Tibetans themselves began writing their own commentaries. It has been said that on the Tibetan soil Buddhism mixed with the local Bon cult and incorporated some of its features. The present Dalai Lama, however, denies any extraneous influences and states that “the Buddhist teaching that spread in Tibet is just the stainless teaching of India and nothing else. The Tibetan lamas neither altered it nor mixed it with another religion.”¹¹

In the course of time four major schools arose: the *Nyingma*, *Kargyu*, *Sakya*, and *Gelug*. Each of these schools traces its line-age to different Indian scholars and consequently presents variations in the mode of instructions, but Tibetans emphasize that there are no fundamental differences in the philosophy and spiritual practices. All are in quest of the same goal: enlightenment. In fact all adhere to the teachings of both Hinayana and Mahayana, and also Tantrayana (a division of Mahayana). *Yantra* is the Sanskrit word for vehicle. A contemporary lama, in one of his lectures, equated this vehicle to a path or an elevator to lift up our consciousness to enlightenment.

There are three principal aspects of that path to enlightenment, the spiritual journey: renunciation, the enlightened motive, and the correct view of reality. “Blended together they are like the fuel propelling our rocket to the moon of enlightenment.”¹² I shall now try to outline them very briefly.

Before entering the path, individuals in all their actions are motivated only by egocentric desires to acquire wealth, power, reputation, i.e., to have pleasure and escape from pain. But little do they know that the scramble for wealth, power, and any worldly aim can never bring satisfaction. This pursuit is what Buddhists call the condition of *samsara*—a Sanskrit term that means “circling.” In this life refers to our ingrained strong habit of going around and around in circles, chasing after gratification and desires, pleasures of one sort or another, which are invariably eluding us. This is the *perpetuum mobile* of mundane life: moving from one situation to another, fluctuating from one mood to another, desiring an object, acquiring and tasting it, becoming saturated, frustrated, discarding it, and turning around to start the very same process again and again. We never reach the sought-after goal, for the very characteristic of *samsara* is dissatisfaction—suffering. The term *samsara* applies also to the cycle of existence of continuous rebirths, out of which there is no escape, until liberation, that is, nirvana. In that sense *samsara* means “the round of existence.”

According to Buddhist thought the source of *samsara* is ignorance, that is, unawareness, going about in response to the promptings of hedonistic impulses, an unconscious, undisciplined, uncontrolled, scattered mind.¹³

Another kind of ignorance is our delusion that phenomena are permanent, whereas impermanence and change, is the ubiquitous law of nature. We are attached to people, objects, possessions, situations, and above all to our own body and life, and when they change, or cease to be, we experience suffering. Nurtured by the desire for permanence and non-change, “one’s mind becomes stiff and frozen.”¹⁴

Our greatest enemy is our selfishness, or as Buddhists say, ego-grasping, our self-cherishing attitude. All sufferings derive from it. The three poisons of the mind—greed, hatred, and ignorance—pollute our thoughts and actions and bring us confusion, restlessness, and pain. And as we scrutinize our own experiences, we find out that with our actions, conscious or unconscious, whether motivated by positive or negative thoughts, we plant seeds that will ripen in the future. Buddhists would say v

will suffer, or benefit, from the consequences in future lives, but also, and very much so, in this life indeed in our immediate future. This is the simple and inexorable law of cause and effect, or karma. The actions that inevitably produce future, if not immediate suffering and harm to ourselves or others are called non-virtuous, unskillful, or negative actions, while those that produce positive results are called virtuous actions.

As Buddhists repeatedly tell us, all beings, without exception, share in common the desire to avoid suffering and achieve happiness. Yet through our thoughts and actions, and due to our deluded and polluted mind, we bring to ourselves the exact opposite of what we strive for.

For Buddhists, sins are called “nonvirtuous actions.” By “virtue” they mean not only goodness and morality, but also efficacy, power, which virtuous actions indeed are capable of generating. Greed, pride, anger, and the like, then, are nonvirtuous actions that lead to mental suffering and confusion.¹⁵

As human beings we have the precious opportunity and infinite possibilities to activate high tendencies and plant virtuous seeds that lead to spiritual growth, and ultimately liberation. It all depends on our mind. When we have “hit the bottom” and have become disgusted with our misery, or endless samsaric turmoil, we develop a renounced mind.

The gateway to all spiritual paths, whether leading to personal Liberation or Supreme Enlightenment, is the Fully Renounced Mind. Just as a passport, visa, vaccinations and sufficient money are necessary before we can undertake a long journey, so also is this state of mind essential if we are to follow the Dharma successfully.... What exactly does such a mind renounce? We must develop renunciation of the causes of suffering, the mental afflictions themselves.... Renunciation does not imply that we should give up our enjoyments or possessions. There have been many highly realized beings who have been kings, wealthy merchants and the like. It is not our possessions but our ignorant, clinging attitude towards them that must be abandoned.¹⁶

It needs to be emphasized that, contrary to popular belief, what the mind renounces is suffering in samsara, a miserable alienated way of life, the existential despair—or to put it differently, renounces unconsciousness, darkness of the mind, the mind that is not awakened. When the mind is conscious, awakened, then samsara is no more, there is no dissatisfaction. Indeed the word *buddhi* means simply that—awakened one.

The mind has the potential to be awakened; in fact it has an urge to awake, yet it sleeps in ignorance and delusions. When unobstructed by ignorance it experiences peace and bliss. Some, if not most people, have such experiences at least a few rare times in their lives: genuine love, aesthetic experiences, encounters with extraordinary human beings, altered states of consciousness. These are brief, fleeting moments when we have a glimpse of another state of mind, another level of existence and a recognition that it is within our power to attain it, here and now. We also come to realize that it is not the external environment, but our mind, our own inner world, that adjudicates over our happiness or suffering. This is like finding a wish-fulfilling jewel.

But the fully renounced mind in itself is not sufficient to achieve full enlightenment, according to the Mahayana school, which consistently stresses that any action must be motivated by the intention to benefit others and not merely oneself. Thus to the concept of the renounced mind must be added “the mind of enlightenment,” the enlightened motive, or so-called *bodhichitta*, which constitutes the second of the three principal aspects of the path to enlightenment.

With the awakening of the mind of enlightenment, one becomes vitally interested in the welfare of other beings. In fact, Tibetan Buddhists always refer to all sentient beings, not only humankind. “Like oneself, all sentient beings are afflicted by suffering; thus even the smallest insect is similar to oneself in not wanting suffering and wanting happiness.”¹⁷ From the awareness of the interior states of mind—conscious and unconscious, and the law of cause and effect that determines them, one reaches an expanded awareness that includes others. From ego-involvement, a self-cherishing attitude focusing solely on one’s own being, one moves on to another level where one perceives the advantages and the necessity to cherish others.

Here too the law of cause and effect reigns supreme. From close interpersonal relationships, family, social and international relations, the roots of all conflicts and wars lie in self-cherishing attitudes. Virtuous actions toward others—in body, speech, and mind—such as refraining from killing, stealing, lying, using harsh language, and developing compassion and generosity, bring genuine and lasting pleasure and satisfaction. These actions, free from egocentricity, have an energizing effect on the person who performs them, and paradoxically by losing one’s ego in a selfless activity one finds one’s Self.

The effects can be easily checked: these are the best moments in anyone’s life. They are found in the presence of works of art of any kind—which is precisely the function of art—in true communication with another human being, in creative activity. They are found, though, even in small, simple acts of everyday life, whenever one steps out of one’s self-imposed egocentric prison.¹⁸ The enlightened motive moves one, first to be concerned with the sufferings of others, and as a next step to develop a strong motivation to attain enlightenment for the sake of others, that is, to guide them to liberation. This is the way of the bodhisattva who knows that the only way to inspire, assist, and guide others to liberation is to have first followed the path oneself and attained enlightenment. But even before one has made that determination, every action that has been touched by the mind of enlightenment, *bodhicitta*, even the smallest, most mundane action, becomes powerful. Thus, “it is said that giving a handful of food to a dog if done with *bodhicitta*, brings us more benefit than giving the universe of jewels to every living being without such motivation.”¹⁹

The third of the three principal aspects of the path to enlightenment is the correct view of reality, or the wisdom of voidness, *shunyata*. This is the most difficult concept to comprehend, and it must be grasped through direct experience not merely through intellectual understanding. Yet it is at the heart of all Buddhist teachings and inseparable from the two other principal aspects of the path. It cannot be explained and understood through rational analysis but only through gradual development of intuitive wisdom. The training in this higher wisdom is essential because misconceptions about reality are the basic source of all suffering.

The ego’s misconceptions about reality...keeps us in bondage, whether it be the iron bondage of worldly existence or the golden bondage of a spiritual way of life. The iron bondage is our continual mental and physical suffering in the cycle of dissatisfied existence known as *samsara*, while the golden bondage is that of being enslaved to misconceptions and false philosophies.... The highest goal is to be free of *all* bondage.²⁰

The concept of *shunyata*, emptiness, has given rise to much misinterpretation and distortion. *Shunya*, a Sanskrit word, means “relating to the swollen.” According to the Buddhist scholar Edward Conze, the etymology of the word expresses the unity of opposites, namely what is swollen from the

outside is hollow inside; our personality is both swollen by the five *skandhas*²¹ and empty of a self. There is no independent, inherently existent, unrelated self, or “I” as we have been accustomed to think. The nature of all phenomena is emptiness. Philosophically, this is the principle of relativity of all things and conditions. But it is also the principle of limitless potentiality, non-exclusiveness; emptiness can contain and produce everything. A synonym for *shun-yata* is non-duality. On this subject the *Lankavatara Sutra* says:

...what is meant by non-duality? It means that light and shade, long and short, black and white, are relative terms...and not independent of each other; as Nirvana and Samsara are, all things are not-two. There is no Nirvana except where is Samsara; there is no Samsara except where is Nirvana; for the condition of existence is not of mutually exclusive character.²³

The lack of a separate, permanent “I” does not imply its total nonexistence, which would be nihilism, another extreme and dogmatic viewpoint, equally wrong. Thus there is a conventional “I” that we all have, that exists on the relative level of reality, while on the ultimate, absolute level of reality it does not exist. The existence of the five *skandhas* is conventional truth, while the void nature of all phenomena is absolute truth.²⁴ This distinction between the relative, mundane, and absolute/ultimate truth is central to the philosophy of *Madhyamaka* (Middle Way), (which I shall return to in a later chapter). According to the present Dalai Lama, it is “a theory which remains supreme among all the theories of different Buddhist schools.”²⁵ At this point it is important to emphasize again the Buddhist view that the misconception about reality and the belief in an independent, fixed existence of the self is the source of all suffering, and that “realization of *sunyata* is like the knife that cuts the root of ignorance.”²⁶

With tantric Buddhism or Vajrayana—the third vehicle, although part of the Mahayana school—Tibetan Buddhism reaches its highest and most magnificent development. By following the short path of tantra—also known as the Diamond Vehicle—the adept may reach enlightenment in one single lifetime, while according to Buddhist thought all other graded paths take an extraordinarily long time—“aeon upon aeon,” to attain buddhahood.

Tantra, a Sanskrit word, relates to the concept of weaving, suggesting activity, continuity, and also interdependence and interrelatedness. Tantric Buddhism is based on the philosophy of Madhyamaka, which is essentially the concept of the middle way, the view free of the two extremes: eternalism and nihilism. It is interested neither in theoretical and metaphysical speculations, nor in the ascetic practices of some other sects. Its emphasis is on the method, on activity and continuity. The methods are complex, at times bewildering, strange, and incomprehensible to the uninitiated, suggestive of primitive superstition and shamanic magic. Yet in their essence they are all but different methods of spiritual transformation: ways of transmuting any and all aspects of samsaric life—positive, negative or neutral—into transcendental wisdom. All obstacles, negativities, passions are harnessed and transmuted into vehicles on the path to enlightenment. Good and evil are transcended and flow back into pure spiritual essence, which is the ultimate nature of the universe. This is the direct, short path to liberation, the most powerful one, as it entails a radical revolution of consciousness, but it is by no means an easy path, nor devoid of dangers. It is far from being primitive (in the negative sense of the term); quite to the contrary, it is a most sophisticated method of spiritual growth and transformation. Mircea Eliade points out that there are parallels between

...tantrism and the great Western mystero-sophic current that, at the beginning of the Christian era, arose from the confluence of Gnosticism, Hermetism, Greco-Egyptian alchemy, and the traditions of the Mysteries.²⁷

The goal is the same as in all other schools of Buddhism—namely, enlightenment—but it is enlightenment here and now, and not in any inconceivable future. It aims at the permanent destruction of suffering—the sole concern of Buddha as expressed in his very first sermon on the four noble truths—and follows the conviction that there is an alternative in this existence to the misery of mundane life. It is important to note that before entering the tantric path the adept must be familiar with and practice at all times the fundamental steps of the Hinayana and Mahayana schools. Restraint, self-awareness, training of the mind, compassion, and cultivation of wisdom are necessary foundations before one ventures into the diamond path. In fact a tantric master of the eleventh century, Atisha, “based his teaching on the idea that Hinayana, Mahayana and Vajrayana could not be regarded separately but must be seen as aspects of a single path.”²⁸ Looking at the three yantras together, they are a consistent and natural evolution in Buddhist theory and practice.

Tantra implies continuity—the continuity of the movement of one’s life and inner growth, when spiritual practice is consciously pursued. And practice leads to an understanding of the interwovenness of all phenomena, the relationship between microcosm and macrocosm, mind and universe, matter and spirit—an idea that bears a striking similarity to the findings of modern science.

It could be said that the aim of Buddhist tantra is to penetrate into, harness, and transform the dynamic forces of the universe, which are no different from the psychological forces and archetypes

constellations of our own psyche. But this cannot be done through the exercise of discursive thought or application of abstract theories, but only by being deeply immersed in actual practices. Due to the enormous wealth of those practices,²⁹ tantra has given rise to many misunderstandings and misconceptions. In the Western world it has often been equated with magic and exotic sexual practices.

As to the origins of the tantra, as well as the similarity or differences between Hindu and Buddhist tantras, there is much controversy and no definitive agreement. According to one author, there was not one particular person who introduced tantra into Buddhism at any particular time, but rather that it has been gradually incorporated in the course of centuries.³⁰ The same author maintains that there are no fundamental differences between Hindu and Buddhist tantras.³¹

Other scholars, by contrast, such as Lama Govinda and Benoytosh Bhattacharyya maintain that tantric Buddhism is not an offspring of tantric Hinduism, as claimed by some; it was crystallized in a definitive form by the third century A.D. Both scholars affirm that despite outward appearances of similarity between the two systems, there are fundamental differences. The main difference, according to Lama Govinda, lies in the concept of *shakti*, the active power, and the creative feminine aspect of *Shiva*, the highest god. This aspect does not enter into the system of tantric Buddhism. In the latter the central idea is not *shakti*—power, but *prajna*—knowledge, intuitive wisdom.³² It would be hard enough to differentiate wisdom and power in the context of Vajrayana. Wisdom ultimately is power, albeit not the power of the sword, but the force capable of affecting transformation, and Buddhists repeatedly talk about the power of the mind.

These issues may not be of major significance as far as the practice of Vajrayana is concerned. However, since there is considerable confusion on this point, it is important to be aware of them, and to recognize the proper distinctions as well as the equivalents between the two tantric systems.

The polarity of male and female principles is a basic Vajrayana concept, and their union is the goal of all tantric practices. Through this union of opposites all duality is transcended into an absolute unity. This is the highest spiritual reality in the path to enlightenment—in fact it is enlightenment itself.

In Buddhist iconography the principle of union is represented by deities and their consorts in ecstatic embrace, enjoying great bliss.

According to all schools of Tantra, bliss is the nature of the Absolute.... The Absolute is realized by us when we realize our self as perfect bliss. In all our ordinary experiences of pleasure we have but a momentary glimpse of the same bliss as constitutes the ultimate nature of our self. But these experiences of pleasure, because of their extremely limited and defiled nature, bind us to a lower plane of life, instead of contributing to our advancement towards self-realisation.³³

Bliss, nirvana, enlightenment become synonymous in tantric Buddhism—the total immersion of the ultimate nature of the self and the not-self in the oneness of the perfect bliss.³⁴ The sexual and spiritual practices—the erotic mysticism, so much misunderstood in the West—are based on this principle, when sexual bliss becomes divine bliss and the instrument for highest spiritual attainment.

Buddhist tantra holds that the human body is the microcosm that embodies the truth of the macrocosm. Absolute reality contains all dualities and polarities: noumenon and phenomenon, potentiality and manifestation, nirvana and samsara, *prajna* (wisdom—female principle) and *upaya*

(method to attain wisdom—male principle), *shunya* (void) and *karuna* (compassion). Within their own bodies tantric disciples achieve the reunion of the two polar principles, that is, the primordial unity that excludes all discrimination and includes all differentiations. Or, in other words, through the medium of their bodies they transcend the mundane, phenomenal world and experience nonduality—the completeness preceding all creation, the great bliss. All tantric practices, rituals, and meditations—the so-called *sadhanas*—have as their aim this realization.

This is the dialectic of opposites, the theme of the Madhya-maka philosophy, the Middle Way, that encompasses and embraces all. But tantric disciples are more concerned with direct knowledge of that state, achieved in the actuality of their practice.

Right in that moment when the Great Compassion arises Emerges nakedly and vividly the Great Voidness. Let me always find this unmistakable Two-in-One Path And practice it day and night.³⁵

The Tibetan Buddhist symbol of the two-in-one is *yab-yum*, the father-mother divine couple embrace, seen in Tibetan sacred art, and which both inspires and expresses visually the experiences and visions of meditation. Lama Govinda states that in these symbols there is no association whatever with physical sexuality. They portray only the union of male and female principles—the eternal female qualities, as those of the “Divine Mother,” or transcendental wisdom. “...Instead of seeking union with a woman outside ourselves, we have to seek it *within ourselves*...by the union of our male and female nature in the process of meditation.”³⁶ Lama Govinda holds the view that sexual polarity has to be recognized as a mere incident of universal polarity and has to be overcome.³⁷

Only if we are able to see the relationship of body and mind, of physical and spiritual interaction in a universal perspective, and if in this way we overcome the “I” and “mine” and the whole structure of egocentric feelings, opinions, and prejudices, which produce the illusion of our separate individuality, then only can we rise into the sphere of Buddhahood.³⁸

Nevertheless conjugal intercourse (*maithuna*) has been practiced by tantric Buddhists as a sacred ritual, based on the same concept of the union of male and female principles. S. B. Dasgupta examines the argument of the tantric Buddhists in defense of their unconventional practice of *maithuna*. They emphasize that everything depends on the purity of the mind: actions motivated by and done with wisdom and compassion, with a pure mind, cannot but be pure. But they also warn that it is a very dangerous path for the uninitiated. “That which drags the uninitiated fool to the hell of debauchery may help the initiated yogin to attain enlightenment.”³⁹ The vital point is the adherence of the yogin and yogini to their vow to perform any action with a compassionate mind and with wisdom, that is, with knowledge and understanding of the void nature of all phenomena. So it is said that:

As some medicine is sweet to taste and at the same time cures disease, so also is the bliss coming out of the combination of Prajna (wisdom) and Upaya (compassion)—it destroys the afflictions easily and smoothly.... Again, what to one is a rope for hanging oneself, is the remover of bondage to the other.”⁴⁰

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