

7 QUESTIONS FOR 7 TEACHERS

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On the adaptation of Buddhism to the West and beyond.

Seven Buddhist teachers from around the world were asked seven questions on the challenges that Buddhism faces, with its origins in different Asian countries, in being more accessible to the West and beyond.

Read their responses.

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Introductory note

This book started because I was beginning to question the effectiveness of the Buddhism I was practising. I had been following the advice of my teachers dutifully and trying to find my way, and actually not a lot was happening. I was reluctantly coming to the conclusion that Buddhism as I encountered it might not be serving me well. While my exposure was mainly through Tibetan Buddhism, a few hours on the internet revealed that questions around the appropriateness of traditional eastern approaches has been an issue for Westerners in all Buddhist traditions, and debates around this topic have been ongoing for at least the past two decades – most proactively in North America. Yet it seemed that in many places little had changed. While I still had deep respect for the fundamental beauty and validity of Buddhism, it just didn't seem formulated in a way that could help me – a person with a family, job, car, and mortgage – very effectively. And it seemed that this experience was fairly widespread. My exposure to other practitioners strengthened my concerns because any sort of substantial settling of the mind mostly just wasn't happening. Yet in spite of this being fairly apparent as far as I was concerned, I also noticed a deep resistance to change, and a deep respect for the traditional teachings in traditional form that overrode what increasingly seemed an obvious failure in meeting Westerners where they were – mostly busy, stressed, neurotic and confused.

I started to consider that while many teachers I encountered truly seemed to have a high degree of insight and realisation, this might not necessarily make them good at relating to, and helping others who are in a very different mental and circumstantial position. If you come from a background of training in a monastery in traditional Buddhism – which is where most of the serious engagement with Buddhism took place in the East - you might have a realised mind, but you can't necessarily help someone who is in a busy family and work life. I also started wondering to what extent this might apply to Western teachers who, for example, have been 'professional' practitioners and seekers rather than householders with families and jobs. While they may be on the same cultural wavelength, some of them might also not be able to relate to people in these situations very effectively. Where did this leave practitioners such as myself? In addition, in Southern Africa where I live, the traditional African population was starting to engage with Buddhism in Zimbabwe and a few other places. They again were approaching it from a very different cultural orientation, and the standard traditional approach would again need a re-think. All of these questions led to this project – 7 Questions for 7 Teachers. With enthusiastic partnering from friend and publisher Erika and layout designer Damian Gibbs, we approached teachers from all around the world with our questions regarding how Buddhism should adapt to be more accessible and helpful to Westerners and beyond – such as into Africa.

Historically, Buddhism has changed markedly as it has encountered new cultures in its move from India to Tibet, to China, to Japan and elsewhere. This adaptation typically takes hundreds of years. When a Zen Master was asked about this issue, he said "The first hundred years are the hardest." In this context the introduction of Buddhism to the West

is relatively new, and Buddhism is very much in the process of adjusting to this new Western culture and beyond, such as into Africa. On the one hand changes are necessary because of the alienation inevitable when encountering the Asian cultural contexts of Buddhism, on the other hand the integrity and essence of Buddhism must not be distorted. How do we negotiate this transition? This framed our approach to teachers of different Buddhist traditions from around the globe. We were very fortunate that leading teachers and pioneers in the adaptation of Buddhism to the West responded.

The questions we asked were:

1. In summary, what would you say is the purpose of Buddhist practice, and why it is relevant beyond cultural differences around the world?
2. Given that Buddhist practice has always taken on very different forms in different cultures over the centuries, what aspects in your opinion should be adapted given the different circumstances in the west, or in Africa? For example people in the west seem rather busy, stressed, neurotic and materialistic. They also need greater rational explanations than might be done traditionally, are less strongly motivated by rebirth/reincarnation, are less devotional, and often respect only that which is scientifically verified.
3. How practically do you work with this cultural adaptation of Buddhism as a teacher, and how do you help people/your students with this?
4. In the West particularly, there seems to be an emphasis on short-term gratification. Yet fundamental transformation with Buddhist methods seems inevitably slow. How can we work constructively with this situation?
5. How can Buddhism link to other spiritual systems – can they be integrated or should they remain completely separate – in the short and long-term? (e.g. Christianity, African spiritualism, BonPo...)
6. In Asia where Buddhism has been well established for centuries there has often been a fairly close and regular link between teacher and student. For many practitioners in the West and Africa it seems more difficult to have this close teacher-student relationship with associated detailed guidance on practice, possibly because of the scarcity of resident realised teachers in many places. Do you see this as a hindrance for practitioners? And if so, what can be done?
7. Do you have any advice for practitioners who recognise the value in Buddhism but find some of the practices inaccessible because of their different cultural origins? – such as bowing or prostrating, deity visualisations, elaborate shrines, chanting or prayers in foreign languages etc

Teachers were asked to respond in whatever way they wished. Some emailed us concise answers, for others we conducted skype or in-person interviews, where sometimes one question led to others not on the list, and a broader discussion ensued. Jack Kornfield sent us a chapter from his book *Bringing Home the Dharma*, which he edited to address our questions more specifically. The chapter already addressed many of the questions we were exploring. We haven't tried to make the collection of responses similar in style or format. We present them here with all their different flavours and colours.

In the chapters to follow we have reduced the above questions into workable headings.

The teachers that responded come from many different backgrounds, have journeyed along significantly different trajectories, and span Zen, Theravada and Tibetan Buddhism.

In alphabetical order, they are:

- Dzongsar Khyentse Rinpoche – Bhutanese-born Tibetan Buddhist master, author and filmmaker involved in preserving Buddhist teachings internationally
- Jack Kornfield – American teacher of Theravadan Buddhism, international author, and pioneer of meditation and Buddhism into America
- Roshi Joan Halifax – American Zen Buddhist teacher, hospice caregiver, environmentalist and engaged Buddhist
- Ringu Tulku Rinpoche – Tibetan-born Buddhist master, non-sectarian, a scholar and author
- Rob Nairn – Zimbabwean-born teacher of meditation and Buddhism, author, and a pioneer of the adaptation of Buddhism for Westerners
- Stephen Batchelor – British ex-Buddhist monk, author, scholar and leading secular Buddhist advocate
- Jetsunma Tenzin Palmo – British born Tibetan Buddhist nun, ex mountain cave hermit, author and founder of nunnery for Himalayan girls

Our intention with this book is to support the transition of Buddhism into the West and beyond so that its extraordinary beauty and wisdom may be accessible to more people.

We hope you find it of benefit.

Dzongsar Khyentse Rinpoche

Tibetan Buddhist Master, author and award-winning filmmaker, known for disrupting complacency and challenging comfort zones amongst his students.

1. What is the purpose of Buddhist practice?

To start with, Buddhism has never been successfully adapted for use as a political or social tool. In fact, such an adaptation isn't even possible when rituals like a Buddhist marriage ceremony simply don't exist. Ironically, though, the fact that Buddhadharma can't be used to prop up social or political manoeuvrings is a sign of its great success, and is underpinned by the core Buddhist belief that anything valued highly by mind that is also influenced by hope, fear, assumptions and habitual patterns, has no fundamental worth whatsoever.

The ultimate aim of Buddhadharma is to free ourselves from making distinctions, or clinging to points of reference, which is exactly what the vast majority of modern people insist they want—for example many of you say you want to live where you can do anything you want to (which sounds to me like anarchism). The fact that so many people wish they could live unfettered lives just goes to show that human beings hate being suckered by rules and regulations, and interestingly, to be free from such conventions is exactly what Buddhism teaches us. But however vehemently someone insists they hunger for 'freedom', the inherent weakness of being 'human' is that in reality it's the last thing we really want. Instead we yearn for tyranny, order, red and green traffic lights, banks to take care of our money—the works! The circle of those who genuinely long for true freedom is extremely small, and even then, most of them only crave such license once in a blue moon, spending most of their lives falling in with the conventional codes of conduct and values. All of which means that as long as Buddhist teachers don't lose sight of the core Buddhist goal of genuine and what may superficially appear to be rather anarchic freedom, *how* Buddhadharma is taught shouldn't matter too much.

What we must bear in mind, though, is that the overtly religious aspects of Buddhism are extremely important. We must be very careful not to forget or overlook ancient Buddhist jargon and tradition—words like 'bodhichitta,' for example, and the way we fold our hands in prayer. All traditions have some kind of a religious aspect, and that religiosity is so important, even for those for whom a conspicuously religious culture is alien.

I'm also very wary of the way too many teachers (even those belonging to Krishnamurti's organization) extract just one aspect of Buddha's teachings, bury the Buddhist jargon, then claim that everything they say is their own revelation. It's complete bullshit! Every word they say can be traced back to the sutras and tantras. So never forget that these 'new age' teachers merely focus on a single point that already exists in Buddhadharma, then

present it as their own.

The beauty of Buddhism is that it already contains all possible points of view, rejecting nothing. For example, Buddhism doesn't hesitate to talk about how Buddha and enlightenment don't actually exist, while at the same time emphasizing the importance of offering incense, and both pieces of information coexist entirely harmoniously, without ever contradicting each other. Many modern teachers who are too cowardly to employ any of the Dharma's 'religious' aspects, end up missing out on what it is, in fact, one of the largest nuggets of the Buddhadharmā's wealth.

2. What aspects of Buddhism should be adapted for different mindsets in different cultures?

Everything Buddha taught can be boiled down to 'awareness' or 'mindfulness.' When Buddhists teach us to sit straight as we practise meditation, or how to bow, they are not passing on a culturally-bound instruction that's only relevant for certain people, like the necessity of wearing a burka, which is only applied to certain women, for example. Well, maybe some such instructions are taught in monasteries, but we're not talking about that here, we're talking about offering incense and flowers, circumambulation, and these kinds of practices. (In his *Bodhicharyavatara*, Shantideva even writes about how you should wash your hands.) Even reincarnation has nothing to do with culture or belief; essentially, reincarnation is rooted in mindfulness. Put it this way, because we believe that tomorrow exists and we also want to avoid stomach ache, today we'll be sure to eat good, healthy food. This is the 'mindfulness of continuity' and reincarnation is designed to help us develop this kind of mindfulness.

In fact, as I've already said, absolutely *everything* we're taught in Buddhism—sitting straight when we practice meditation, maroon robes for monks, everything—gears us up, one way or another, for mindfulness. Without mindfulness and contemplation, everything we do on the Buddhist path will be little more than useless and extremely painful self-torture.

I have to say, even very traditional Buddhist societies like those in Tibet and Thailand, are losing touch with the ritual practices connected with contemplation that bring us to the awareness of the true nature of how things really are. But the bottom line is, there's not one Buddhist practice that can be described as 'obsolete'—not one! Of course, anything influenced by specific cultures then passed on by, for example, the Thais and Tibetans, can and will change—and will keep on changing. I'm sure the Croatians will come up with their own cultural additions, as will the Poles, but I don't think it's a problem.

3. How practically do you work with the cultural adaptation of Buddhism?

Usually I emphasize the 'view,' the mindfulness of the view, which is also the perspective from which I've answered your first two questions. As long as that view is intact, I'm not fussy about which spiritual tools and methods are used.

Most of the time I base my own guesswork on the 'view', which is what makes it safe. For

example, if you know that by heading east you'll reach New York, even if you don't have clear directions, by simply walking eastwards you eventually get there. That's what I mean by good 'guesswork.' And it's really useful these days because there's such a lack of experienced teachers. Of course, if you are lucky enough to meet an experienced and skilled teacher, and he tells you that to get to New York you have to walk backwards, then by all means follow his instructions to the letter—walking backwards may be the only method that'll work for you, or the quickest or safest.

4. Do you think the current Western emphasis on short-term gratification is a problem?

There are several things that you need to learn. One is that time is relative and therefore 'slow' and 'fast' are relative. Another is that you must learn patience. That's it.

5. How can Buddhism link to other spiritual systems?

In the long and short term they should remain completely separate, but always respect each other.

6. What are your views about an appropriate teacher-student relationship today?

It all boils down to motivation. Do you really want to shrug off all your samsaric hang-ups? If you do, how much? I think people in the west find having someone bugging them all the time quite difficult, especially these days. Not only in the west but also in the east, rather than shrugging off everything that creates your personal comfort zone, you're far more interested in building it up, fortifying and securing it. If you can see the beauty of shrugging off your hang-ups, inhibitions and comfort zones, you'll probably find that having a teacher is the most effective and efficient way of going about it. But that kind of awareness is very difficult to cultivate. And on the spiritual path, the less negotiation there is, the better—best is no negotiation whatsoever.

7. Do you have any advice for practitioners who recognise the value in Buddhism but find some of the practices inaccessible?

Yes. Insisting that students chant in a foreign language is very unwise. And actually, deity practice shouldn't ever be bound by cultural habits; it's about how you understand 'deity.' But I can see why you ask this question. Usually, when we talk of the 'deity' we immediately imagine a Tibetan statue or painting, or something like that, but that's not what's meant by 'deity' at all. At the end of the day, the deity isn't a person, it's sound, everything we perceive, our experiences, a moment, and therefore should never become mixed up in local mores.

Dzongsar Khyentse Rinpoche is a Tibetan Buddhist Master who has studied under some of the great Tibetan teachers, particularly Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche. Born in 1961 in Bhutan, from a young age he has been active in preserving the

Buddhist teachings, establishing centres of learning and practice, supporting practitioners, publishing books, and teaching all over the world. He is supporting the institutionalization of Buddhist studies in various universities around the world. His books include *What Makes you Not a Buddhist* and *Not for Happiness: A Guide to the So-Called Preliminary Practices*. Under the name Khyenste Norbu he has made two awarded films *The Cup* and *Travellers and Magicians*.

For more information on Dzongsar Khyentse Rinpoche:
<http://khyentse.org/>



Jack Kornfield

This is an edited version of a chapter in Jack Kornfield's book *Bringing Home the Dharma* (Shambhala Publications, Boston Mass 2011). Used by permission of the Author.

Leading Buddhist meditation teacher, best-selling author, and pioneer in an emerging Western Buddhism – something he has “struggled with a great deal”.

Preserving and Adapting the Dharma

One day an old woman who lived in New York went to her travel agent and asked him to get her a ticket to Tibet.

“Tibet?!” he exclaimed. “That’s a long and difficult journey. You usually go to Miami for the winter. Why not just go there?”

“I must go see the Guru,” she replied.

She got a ticket, flew to India, disembarked at the airport in Delhi, and went through all the difficulties of Indian customs. When asked where she was going, she said, “To Tibet, to see the Guru.”

After this, her journey continued by train across India to Gangtok, the capital of Sikkim. Here she secured a visa and traveled by bus up to the Tibetan border, where the guards asked, and again she replied, “I must go see the Guru.”

They told her, “You can only say three words to him.”

She replied, “I know. I know. I must go anyway.”

She then journeyed with her bags across the Tibetan plateau by bus, by jeep, by horse caravan, and finally came to a large mountain with a monastery at the top. There was a long line of pilgrims and she joined the line. After three days of waiting, it was her turn.

The guard at the door reminded her, “Only three words now.”

“I know, I know,” she said.

She entered the grand chamber and there sat the Guru, a lama with a wispy beard, wearing maroon robes. She sat down opposite him and looked directly at him. After a silent period she simply said, “Sheldon, come home.”

Sheldon has now been home for more than thirty years. He has been building Buddhist centers and teaching Buddhist meditation all around the Western world. He is engaged in the great task of bringing the heartfelt practices and awakening of the Buddha to Western soil, and teaching the dharma of liberation in skillful forms for contemporary times. In this chapter, I wish to reflect on how Buddhism is changing as it adapts to our Western culture.

In North America, starting in the 1850's there were traditional immigrant Buddhist temples for large communities of Japanese, Chinese, and later Thai, Cambodian and other Buddhist people who had migrated to America. In the past fifty years a thousand new Buddhist centers and practice groups have grown up. This is a growing generation of hundreds of thousands of newly inspired Buddhists for whom the Dharma has already brought joy and understanding into hundreds of thousands of people's lives. Though predominantly well educated and often middle class, the new North American Buddhists are no longer a small, youthful minority. They are young and old, men, women, and children, spread across every state of the union and every province of Canada. And while it is too early to know fully what form this new North American Buddhism will take, there are many remarkable developments that have begun to give it the flavor of its new home. These developments are taking root in other Western countries as well. Let us consider these.

Lay Buddhism

Each time in the past that Buddhism has been integrated into new cultures it has evolved, and new forces, flavors, and qualities have been brought to its practice. Zen Buddhism has developed with elements of Japanese aesthetics, Shinto nature religion and samurai culture. Vajrayana Buddhism in Tibet has been flavored by the shamanic Bon traditions and Tibet's unique blend of Tantra and yogic mastery. Even with this great variety of cultures and lineages, Asian Buddhist practice has been predominantly kept alive by renunciate monks and the most authentic Buddhist practice has been preserved in monasteries, where older monks live removed from the everyday society around them. For centuries in Asia, Buddhism has had a monastic, masculine, ascetic, and somewhat patriarchal flavor.

While many generations have benefited greatly from the excellent training received in these monasteries (and we certainly hope that a number of well-run and nonsexist monasteries for monks and nuns will grow in this country, providing opportunities for those who wish to experience the life of renunciation), it appears that monasteries with monks and nuns will not be the major focus of Buddhism in the West. Instead the focus is shifting to the lay community, which is at the center of practice here. Western Buddhism is being taught, practiced and developed by committed, non-monastic communities.

In this predominantly lay Western Buddhism, which includes Vipassana, Vajrayana, and Zen practitioners, several new forces on the integration and opening of the tradition are at work. There are four key themes that I have noticed developing in the past twenty-five years.

Shared Practice

Buddhism in Asia has been divided for centuries, kept within separate traditions and lineages. American and other Western Buddhists have already begun to actively learn from each other's traditions. Many Zen masters and their students have been avidly

studying the mindfulness and lovingkindness practices central to Vipassana retreats. Most Vipassana teachers have also practiced with Tibetan lamas and Zen masters. The American Vajrayana tradition has been profoundly influenced by teachings and practice forms from Zen and Vipassana. This is a remarkable development, one that is perhaps unparalleled since the ancient Nalanda University of early Buddhism. For the first time in thousands of years, Buddhists of each school have direct access to the practices and teachings of every other great tradition. New learnings, cross-fertilization, shared practices, and a more universal ground of Buddhist understanding have already grown. Distant strands of Buddhism are coming together.

With this have come unprecedented gatherings of Buddhist teachers from all traditions. In the past decades I have participated in and sponsored a series of meetings with many of the senior teachers in the West. We have met regularly in Dharamsala with the Dalai Lama, and at places like Spirit Rock Center and San Francisco Zen Center, bringing hundreds of teachers together. We have exchanged teachings and practices, considered what dharma approaches work best in the West, confided in one another our common problems, and gained insight in each other's company. The teachers who gather at these meetings are often struck by the remarkable similarities in their challenges and by the great help that their collective wisdom and practice experience can offer to one another.

Even the greatest remaining divide in North American Buddhism, the gap between the ethnic temples (such as the Burmese, Chinese, Thai, and Korean) and the quite separate "American" centers, is beginning to respond to this shared practice. Ethnic centers have primarily served immigrant communities with traditional Asian languages and dharma culture, most often offering devotional forms of Buddhism. But in recent years a number of ethnic temples like Lien Hoa Monastery in Irving, Texas, and Wat Buddhawararam in Denver, Colorado, have begun reaching out to the broader American Buddhist community by sponsoring meditation classes and including non-ethnic American teachers and programs. Some of the largest American centers have begun to reciprocate. We are learning to support one another.

Democratization

Buddhism is becoming more democratic in the context of our Western democracies. Traditionally, most Buddhist communities in Asia were hierarchical and authoritarian. Wisdom, knowledge, and practice were handed down from elders to juniors, and the running of monasteries and the sangha (the community of monastic practitioners) rested in the hands of the master or a small core of senior monks. What they decided was the way things were, and there was no questioning of their authority; students just followed. In North America and elsewhere this has begun to change. Western Buddhists are trained to think and understand for themselves and are less suited to the hierarchical models of Asia. At present in Western Buddhist communities there are strong forces for democratization and for participation in decision making by the whole community. Rather than hierarchical structures, there are structures of mutual support and appreciation. Teachers have learned to teach in teams and collaborate with one another.

As students and teachers have matured, our Buddhist communities are no longer totally teacher-centered. Many now are run by elected boards or use the ancient Buddhist practice of council, drawing on the collective wisdom of a group of teachers and committed students. The participation and inclusion of many dedicated voices will be a great vitalizing factor and a major force for change in Buddhism as it evolves in the West.

Feminization

A third and perhaps the most important force affecting Buddhism in the West has been the force of feminization. In Asia, through the monasteries and older monks, Buddhism has been primarily a masculine and patriarchal affair: masculine by virtue of the fact that it has been mostly men who have preserved and transmitted it, and more deeply patriarchal in that its language and traditions have been predominantly in the masculine mode. Buddhism has been a practice of the mind, of Logos, of understanding, through striving and attainment: of gaining enlightenment through conquering oneself. These elements, a masculine community dominated by the mind, logic, striving, the patriarchal structures, did not allow for a full participation of women and discounted feminine values. All of these are now being confronted by the powerful force of feminine consciousness that is growing in Western culture. This consciousness is already bringing about a softening and an opening of the Buddhist spirit and practice that allows for strength of mind and the masculine element, and also for the tenderness and earthiness of the feminine element. Not only is there a clear movement to abandon the superficial structures of sexism and patriarchy, there is also a more profound movement to develop the dharma as a practice of relationship with the body, the community, and the earth, and to stress interdependence and healing rather than conquering or abandoning. The language of the Dharma is becoming more feminine and the leadership is as well. The large number of mature women who are now teaching in all traditions is a visible reflection of this revitalizing feminization that is taking place.

Integration

The fourth major theme as Buddhism develops in the West is integration. In Asia, Buddhism was primarily characterized by ordained priests, monks, hermits, and forest dwellers who withdrew from worldly life into monasteries, ashrams, caves, and temples, where they created circumstances of simplicity and renunciation for their practice. The rest of the Buddhists, the great majority of laypeople, did not actually practice meditation but remained devoted supporters of the monks. However, here in the West, the laypeople are not content to be simply devotional supporters of other people's practice. Almost all Western students involved want to actually practice the path of liberation. The most frequently asked question in my more than four decades of teaching has been, "How can we live the practice in our lives?" Western practice will emphasize integration, not a withdrawal from the world but a discovery of wisdom within the midst of our lives. Western Buddhists have already begun to develop means to integrate and live the practice as householders, as family people, as people with jobs who still wish to partake of the deepest aspects of the dharma -- not by moving away to caves, but by applying the practice

in their daily lives.

In practice, this spirit of integration has already led to new dharma forms such as family retreats, shorter sesshin, “sandwich retreats” (two weekends and the weekday evenings in between), urban study groups, “secularized” dharma training like the Shambhala centers in North America, right livelihood groups, and much more. Integration and shared practices are being fostered by a dharma communications revolution, with popular journals like *Tricycle*, *Shambhala Sun*, and *Inquiring Mind*; on the Internet by groups like *Cyber Sangha* and *DharmaNet*; in a Vietnamese dharma ham radio network in Texas; and in Rev. Kubose’s daily *Dial-the-Dharma* phone teachings in Chicago and dozen popular and active Buddhist blogs.

Another powerful new stream in integrated Western dharma has been called Engaged Buddhism, encouraged by founders like Thich Nhat Hanh, Joanna Macy, Robert Aitken-Roshi, and others. Engagement in compassionate action in our society as a practice has flourished. The Buddhist Peace Fellowship, which is a hub of this activity, catalogues the growing areas of direct service, from prison dharma projects and Buddhist hospices to nonviolent peace crusades, from Buddhist environmental groups to efforts to secure justice for peoples at risk throughout the world. Zen masters like Bernie Tetsugen Glassman Roshi have created “street retreats” and projects to deal with homelessness and AIDS. Many Buddhist communities are also involved in expressing their gratitude by bringing aid to Buddhist countries in trouble: to Tibet, Burma, Bangladesh, Cambodia, and Vietnam.

Buddhist trainings have made a significant and broad entrance into mainstream Western culture through the work of teachers like Jon Kabat-Zinn, which brings mindfulness training to hundreds of hospitals, and Dan Goleman, whose *Emotional Intelligence* has offered dharma principles for use in thousands of schools and corporations.

Along with these sweeping changes, Buddhist practitioners have been integrating many of the best tools of modern Western psychology into the practice. The mindful use of therapies and trauma healing offers students the skillful means of developing insight and compassion in personal ways. This powerful change brings an emphasis on emotional health and wisdom into our intimate lives together with the more absolute aspects of traditional dharma practice. The psychological and the spiritual, the personal and the universal have now become widely understood as necessary and complementary dimensions of the dharma liberation.

All of these themes are becoming forces in Buddhist practice as it enters the twenty-first century in the West. This adaptation is taking place much more quickly here than it did in China and Tibet. For example, when Buddhism went from India to China, it underwent many centuries of integration with an indigenous Chinese culture steeped in Confucian and Taoist values before it became a part of the Chinese way. Here, because of the speed of communication and the rapid pace of our culture, the first developments of a unique Western Buddhism, instead of taking centuries, have become apparent in only decades.

Honest Assessment

It is not always an easy process, and it has been a struggle for many of us -- Buddhist teachers and students alike -- to sort out what is valuable and ought to be preserved from Asian traditions and what is merely a “container,” a structure that could be more suitably reshaped or cast off. Over the years I have struggled with this a great deal. Like a number of other dharma teachers, I had even considered quitting organized Buddhism. Here I’m not speaking of the teachings of the dharma or the discipline for renunciants; nor of the place of silence and celibacy in practice; nor of precepts, forms of bowing, or ceremonies; nor of the hardships and surrender that are, in fact, valuable parts of spiritual practice. What I have struggled with are the limitations of Buddhism as an organized religion; with the sectarianism and attachments of many of the students and teachers involved; and with the territoriality, the patriarchy, and the excessive life-denying tendencies of practice that can leave it, and some students, disconnected from their hearts.

For me, this struggle began in Asia. While traveling and practicing there, I discovered that Buddhism was a great religion just like any other -- Christianity, Judaism, Hinduism, or Islam. I saw that the majority of Buddhists in Asia do not actually practice many of the teachings. Their generosity and devotion can be beautiful. But often their practice is to go to temple devotionally, like Westerners go to church. They go once a week or once a month to hear a sermon or a few moral rules, or to leave a little money to make some merit for better business or a better birth in the next life. In fact, even among the monasteries of such countries as Thailand, Burma, Sri Lanka, and Japan, I discovered that only a fraction of the monks and nuns actually practice meditation and inner training -- perhaps only five or ten percent. The rest serve the community as priests (some very kindly) who live simply, study and learn the scriptures (preserving the tradition, but rarely practicing it), or tend the community as monastic schoolteachers or village elders who perform ceremonies and live a renunciate existence. Other monks become part of a hierarchy of bishops, archbishops, and councils of elders who are usually more involved in the organization of the religion than the practice of liberation taught by the Buddha.

Amidst this popular level of religion it was inspiring and refreshing to discover that there is also a small group of monasteries where along with devotion, the inner practices of liberation are kept alive and open to sincere followers of the Buddha’s way. Meditation trainings, systematic practices of inner purification, mindful discipline, conscious development of lovingkindness and compassion, service, study and surrender were all part of these most dedicated communities.

But even in the wisest communities it remained necessary to separate the universal teachings from the cultural container, and to overlook the problems and difficulties of certain teachers and practice temples that were “mixed bags,” where good practice was mixed with power trips, blind allegiance, or other delusions. Perhaps this sorting-out process is always necessary for the maturing of spiritual students.

The struggle is always more than worth it, for the heart of the Buddha’s awakening is an invitation to sanity in a world of delusion and suffering. What an extraordinary vision he

had that night under the Bodhi tree. How unutterably marvelous that one person could sit down and see into the truth of life so deeply, with such great clarity, and with such overwhelming compassion, and that this one night's vision would have the power to affect one and a half billion human beings on this earth for twenty five hundred years ... All of us involved in Buddhist practice have been touched by the depth and immediacy of this vision and inspired to continue in the face of both the external and the internal difficulties that are a part of any genuine spiritual path.

In order to have access to these teachings, there were some important lessons I had to learn. One of the first was how to "take what's good." I had teachers who were wise and impeccable like Ajahn Chah and Mahasi Sayadaw. And then I had other teachers who were skilled in certain yogic attainments, healing practices or meditation techniques, but who could be unconscious or unkind, even harmful to students. When I wanted them to be wise in every way, I was terribly disappointed.

Finally, it dawned on me that it wasn't necessary to expect everything to be perfect about a teacher, that I could simply take from them what was good. One was an excellent guide for certain meditations but also mean spirited and judgmental. I learned I could take the good teachings and leave the rest for him. I could leave it for him. If a teacher had some level of realization, or valuable practices, I could take advantage of it, and if his wisdom didn't encompass many other parts of his life, so be it. What a relief to learn that one can take what is skillful and leave the rest.

In the same way, it will take courage on the part of Western Buddhists to face the areas where Buddhism in its structures and practices is not working. To make a place for the dharma that is open and true, we will need to look honestly at what brings awakening and where we are asleep. We will also have to attend to such difficult issues as abuse of power and authority, alcohol, sexuality, and money; and attend to our political and social responsibilities. Already upheavals over teacher behavior and abuse have occurred at dozens of the major Buddhist centers in America. These are some of the problems that our teacher conferences had to face. Yet, if we respond with courage, these very upheavals can serve to focus our attention on those aspects of our communities that need more consciousness. They can help us build wise practice in such areas as sexuality, human relationships, and environmental responsibility where the expression of Buddhist tradition has been weak or medieval. Similarly, we have to examine ourselves. So many of us come to practice wounded, lonely, or in fear, wanting a loving family as much as enlightenment. That is fine, for we can use the power of practice and the sangha to support, heal, and awaken. However, many people also get stuck perpetuating their neuroses in Buddhism itself, abusing practice as a means of escape, using Buddhism to hide from difficult parts of their lives, trying to create an idealistic world, or not growing and living in the world as mature individuals. The strength of our dharma will depend on the honesty with which we address these issues and our ability to preserve what is good and leave the rest.

Those of us who helped bring Insight Meditation to America chose to simplify the

practices we learned in an attempt to offer a clear, straightforward form of Buddhist practice in the West. We left much of the Eastern culture, ritual, and ceremony behind in Asia. That is not because we don't value it (I am a great lover of ritual), but we felt that for Americans it was an unnecessary barrier. It seemed to us that for our culture, the simplicity and straightforwardness of mindfulness and loving-kindness practice would speak best to the heart of those seeking practice. And, in fact, the very simplicity of Insight Meditation retreats, without foreign costumes, rituals, and bowing, or the necessity of joining an organized church, has appealed to many thousands of people over the years. Of course, there are those who prefer or benefit from practice that includes more ritual and sacred ceremony. Fortunately, the plurality of Buddhism will provide that, too. We are blessed to have so many ways made available to us.

We will need to conserve the essential texts, core practices and rich array of trainings in each of these traditions for future generations. This will involve the dedication of a new generation of western scholars, committed lay practitioners and monastics. But conserving the tradition outwardly is not enough. What matters is that we also find a genuine path of practice and do it fully, that we take a practice and go to its very depths, which means going to the very depths of our own being. We must each find a practice that inspires us and follow it over and over again in whatever fashion makes it come alive in our body, in our heart, and in our mind. By doing this, we rediscover the greatness of heart, the truth, and the mystery that were discovered by the Buddha and which he declared should be openhanded and available to all who wish to practice.

Such practice, the practice of liberation, is not exclusive. There is no one tradition, one way, or one particular kind of practice that will awaken people. Although meditation practice seems especially beneficial for our times, there are many ways to realize truth. Even though D. T. Suzuki was a foremost exponent of Zen, he wrote that many more Buddhists were liberated through the surrender in practices of devotional Buddhism than through all the insight of Ch'an and Zen put together. In the traditional Pali scriptures which describe the Buddha's teaching, most people did not become awakened through the systematic process of meditation, and many were opened by simply hearing the universal truths he proclaimed. When the Buddha described the truths of impermanence and emptiness he evoked the liberated heart. He exhorted listeners to embrace that which is deathless, and people became enlightened. He described the happiness and freedom that comes from letting go, and many beings were awakened. Yet these truths are universal and are held by other great traditions as well; enlightenment or liberation is never the possession of any one teacher or lineage.

What is unique about Buddhism is the clarity and directness of the Buddha's expression of enlightenment and the great number of skillful means that he taught to enable others to realize it. In his forty-five years of teaching and during the twenty-five hundred years of Buddhist history, a vast range of practices for liberation have been taught, encompassing many lands and many cultures. The Buddha himself taught hundreds of techniques of awareness practice, concentration meditation, discipline, and surrender. Since his time, the masters who followed have elaborated even more fully. Now that all

these techniques are coming to the West, how can we best receive this rich Dharma feast?

First we must beware of sectarianism. The history of Buddhism unfortunately contains a great deal of sectarian pain. Zen masters put down other Zen masters. Lamas defend the turf of their own Tibetan sects, waging spiritual -- if not actual -- warfare with one another. The Sri Lankans or Burmese or Thais denigrate one another's practice. Buddhism has become divided into greater, lesser, and other numerous vehicles. This sectarianism has existed since the time of the Buddha himself. From the day he died sects began springing up based on different aspects of the dharma. Out of clinging, these sects and lineages have fought with one another and continue to do so to this day. Sectarianism grows from the idea that "our way is the best," and its divisiveness is actually rooted in misunderstanding and fear. Sectarianism is never true. As the third Zen Patriarch put it, "Distinctions arise from the clinging needs of the ignorant. There is one Dharma, not many." Or as contemporary Buddhist poet Tom Savage writes, "Greater vehicle, lesser vehicle, all vehicles will be towed at owner's expense."

The many practices of Buddhism are like paths up a mountain -- outwardly different approaches that are appropriate for different personalities and character types. Yet, through skillful guidance and practice, these paths can lead one to awakening and freedom at the summit of the mountain.

An early story of the Buddha helps us to understand this. It takes place while the Buddha is standing in a grove at one of his monasteries. A visitor remarks on how tranquil and beautiful the scene is with so many composed monks. The Buddha points to his great disciples and the students gathered around them. He notes that there are many ways that people are practicing. Pointing to Sariputta, the wisest of his disciples, he observes, "Those who have the propensity to practice through wisdom are gathered there with my wisest disciple, Sariputta. And there is my disciple Maha Mogallana, foremost in psychic powers. Those whose propensities draw them to use psychic powers as a part of their path to realization are gathered with Maha Mogallana. There is my great disciple Upali, master of the Vinaya and the discipline, and those whose tendencies would benefit by that way of practice are gathered with him. There again is another great disciple and another group of students ..." and so on. It is not wise to judge one practice against another; in fact, this is a detriment to practice. Our task is simple to find a practice that touches our heart and to undertake it in a committed and disciplined way.

Kindness of Heart, Inner Stillness, and Liberating Wisdom

Our understanding of different practices is also helped by understanding the structure of the Buddhist path, by seeing its essence and how it functions to bring about human happiness and freedom. The essential path taught by the Buddha has three parts to it. The first is kindness of heart, a ground of fundamental compassion expressed through virtue and generosity. The second is inner stillness or concentration. The third aspect of all Buddhist practice is the awakening of liberating wisdom.

All Buddhist traditions include ways of expressing compassion through the nonharming

of other beings and a generosity of heart. All Buddhist traditions offer ways to quiet the mind, nurturing concentration, steadiness, stillness, and clarity or depth of mind. And all Buddhist paths awaken insight and the transcendent wisdom of emptiness, fostering a wise and free understanding of body and mind. The practices leading to compassion, inner stillness, and wisdom are but means to the final freedom of the heart. As the Buddha himself said, “The purpose of my teaching of the holy life of the Dharma is not for merit, nor good deeds, nor rapture, nor concentration, nor insight, but the sure heart’s release. This and this alone is the reason for the teaching of the Dharma.” The purpose of the practices of virtue, kindness, nonharming, generosity, concentration, visualization, devotion, compassion, clarity of mind, of understanding and wisdom is to bring us to freedom.

As Western Buddhism becomes more mature, it will inevitably follow the historical evolution that marked the dharma’s changes in Asia. The earlier forms of Buddhism expressed the path of practice in primarily a renunciatory way. They saw the body and sexuality as impure and the concentrated mind and spiritual wisdom as pure, stressing the necessity of withdrawing from the world to embrace a life of solitude as a monk or a nun, emphasizing the need to get out of the rounds of rebirth to the cessation of nirvana, and so forth. As later Buddhist schools developed over the centuries, they shifted from a dualistic approach to a nondual one. As the nondual expression of Buddhism (which is also found in the early sutras by the Buddha) grew in predominance, the emphasis shifted to the interdependence of all life and the importance of discovering nirvana in the midst of samsara, of a liberation from greed, hatred, and delusion in this very life and on this very earth.

This nondual spirit of dharma is particularly important in our times, in a world of turmoil threatened by war and ecological disaster. The mind is able to create weapons of mass destruction and ecological disasters only when it has split off from the heart and the body. If the mind were connected with the heart and the body, with this earth, with children, with cycles of nature, it would not be possible to abstractly plan the mathematics of nuclear arms or the destruction of our environment. A nondualistic understanding, and the wisdom of interdependence, compassion, and nongreed that it teaches, are essential for the very survival of our earth. While this nondual flavor is spreading throughout Western practice, we must honor both the old and the new perspectives, for they are part of the whole.

Lest we see one as truly separate from another, Lama Govinda gives us the image of a seed and a tree as a way of connecting the variety of Buddhist practices presented in the West. Two thousand five hundred years ago Siddhartha Gautama, through his extraordinary realization, planted a seed of timeless wisdom and compassion. Over the centuries the seed has grown and produced an enormous and wonderful tree, which has a trunk and branches, flowers, and fruit. Some people claim that the roots are the true Buddhism. Others claim it’s the fruit or the flowers. They will say, “No, it’s the great Bodhisattva trunk of the tree,” or “the fruit of Vajrayana,” or “the roots of Theravada Buddhism.” In fact, all parts of the tree support one another. The leaves give nourishment

back to the roots, the roots draw in moisture and minerals, bringing nourishment up the trunk to the leaves, and they in turn provide support for the flowers and the fruit. It is all part of the whole, and to understand that is to see the creative and dynamic forces that were set loose from the seed of the Buddha's awakening.

Preserving and Adapting

Historically, all major religions, including Buddhism, have contained a basic tension -- one that persists as Buddhism comes to the West. This is the tension between tradition or orthodoxy and adaptation or modernization. Many people involved in Buddhism see it as their purpose and their duty to preserve and sustain the sutras, the tradition, and the practices just as they were handed down in their lineage from the original teachings and the great masters of old, from the time of the Buddha. Others have found it important to adapt Buddhist practice to new cultures, finding skillful means of allowing access to and understanding of the great wisdom of Buddhism without presenting it in old, ungainly, and inaccessible forms. This tension has been present since the time of the Buddha himself. Since the first council held after the Buddha's death, there have been those great teachers whose main purpose was to preserve, as literally as possible, the practice, style, and teaching of the Buddha without losing any aspect of the original expression of the truth. At the same time, there have been masters and teachers in many cultures who have seen the need to translate and adapt these teachings. Both of these ways, like the great tree of Lama Govinda, are parts of a whole. The ability to adapt Buddhism without losing its essence is dependent on the depth of the tradition that has been preserved. Yet awakening new followers and gaining support for the preservation and depth of practice must have made practice truly alive in new cultures and new times. Each part depends on the other. The very diversity of views, schools, and teachings is Buddhism's health, keeping it vital and true.

In the forty years of my own study, practice, and teaching of Theravada Buddhism, I have come to recognize very clearly that our tradition contains both -- masters who emphasize close adherence to the twenty-five hundred years of Buddhist tradition and masters who insist that practice must also be practical, as alive today as it was at the time of the Buddha. After helping to found one center (the Insight Meditation Society in Barre, Massachusetts) devoted in a beautiful way to traditional retreat practice, we have founded a center with a broader purpose in Marin County, California. Spirit Rock Meditation Center offers teachings that balance the traditional and integrative aspects of practice. On the one hand, it is a center that preserves a depth of practice through intensive retreats, traditional study, a hermitage, and so forth. On the other hand, the key need to integrate practice into our times is also addressed. We have teachings on right livelihood and service, on right speech and communication, as well as training in the development and expression of compassion in all aspects of life -- through Buddhist peace work, through family life, through ecology. This integrative practice has also developed in many other Buddhist centers. We are learning that our practice is not just sitting, not just study, not just belief, but that it encompasses how we actually live, how well we love, and how

much we can let go of our small self and care for this earth and all beings.

As Buddhism grows in the West, a wonderful new process is happening. All of us, as laypeople, as householders, want what was mostly special dispensation of monks in Asia: the real practice of the Buddha. Western laypeople are not content to go and hear a sermon once a week or to make merit by leaving gifts at a meditation center. Zen master Suzuki Roshi observed this when he wrote in his book *Zen Mind, Beginners Mind*,

Here in America we cannot define Zen Buddhists the same way we do in Japan. American students are not priests and yet not completely laymen. I understand it this way: that you are not priests is an easy matter, but that you are not exactly laymen is more difficult. I think you are special people and want some special practice that is not exactly priest's practice and not exactly layman's practice. You are on your way to discovering some appropriate way of life.

As lay Buddhists, we too want to live the realizations of the Buddha and bring them into our hearts, our lives, and our times. This is why so many of us have been drawn to the purity of intensive Vipassana retreats, or to the power of Zen sesshin, or to the one hundred thousand prostrations and three-year retreats of the Vajrayana tradition. Somehow we have an intuitive sense of the potential of human freedom and the heart of basic goodness -- the timeless discovery of the Buddha.

We are drawn not just to study and understand it but to practice it, realize it, and live it in our lives. One problem that immediately confronts us is that in the west we are conditioned to look for quick fixes, and short term gratification. But there is more to it than that. Of course we as teachers can make the beautiful practices of mindfulness, wisdom and compassion more accessible everywhere, and they are serving people from schools to hospitals, from business to ecology and the arts. Yet we must also remember to let students know of the depth of liberation that is possible if they commit themselves. The genuine practice of Liberation is not a quick fix, it always involves a great deal of struggle, for it means confronting ourselves, our fears, our territoriality, and our need for security. To do this skillfully, we must dedicate ourselves, often for years, and use the raft of Buddhism to carry us to the shore of liberation. But we must never mistake the raft for the shore. We are called to go beyond all clinging, beyond the small sense of self to that which is selfless and timeless. When we practice with devotion and a love for truth, we can find the limitless freedom and compassion of the Buddha in our very own heart.

As the many Buddhist traditions are shared by sincere Western students, a new freshness, integrity, and questioning have grown. We are open to learning from one another. In my own teaching and practice, I have benefited enormously from the privilege of studying with great masters in the Tibetan and Zen traditions. Even though my own heart has found its home in the simplicity of Theravada mindfulness practice, I now discover myself teaching what Suzuki-Roshi called "Hinayana practice with a Mahayana mind." In this spirit, my teaching has shifted from an emphasis on effort and striving to one of opening and healing. So many students come to practice wounded, conditioned to closing off and hating parts of themselves. For them, striving perpetuates their problems.

Instead, we now begin by awakening the heart of compassion and inspiring a courage to live the truth as a deep motivation for practice. This heart-centered motivation draws together lovingkindness, healing, courage, and clarity in an interdependent way. It brings alive the compassion of the Buddha from the very first step.

I do not want to be too idealistic. There are many problems that Buddhist communities must face -- unhealthy structures, unwise practices, misguided use of power, and so forth. Still, something new is happening in the West. Buddhism is being deeply affected by the spirit of democracy, by feminization, by shared practice, and by the integration of lay life. A Western vehicle is being created. Already this vehicle draws on the best of the roots, the trunk, the branches, the leaves, the blossoms, and the fruits -- all the parts of Buddhism -- and it is beginning to draw them together in a wise and supportive whole.

Some years ago we had the privilege of a visit to the Insight Meditation Society by his Holiness, the sixteenth Gyalwa Karmapa, head of the Kagyu sect of Tibetan Buddhism. His Holiness the Karmapa came during one of our three-month retreats. He sat on a gilded throne in our meditation hall, surrounded by 150 yogis and students to whom he gave a dharma talk and ceremonial blessing. My Indian teacher Dipa Ma Barua was also visiting IMS at the time. Because she did not speak English, as the Karmapa's Tibetan was being translated into English by his translators, that English was in turn translated into Bengali by hers.

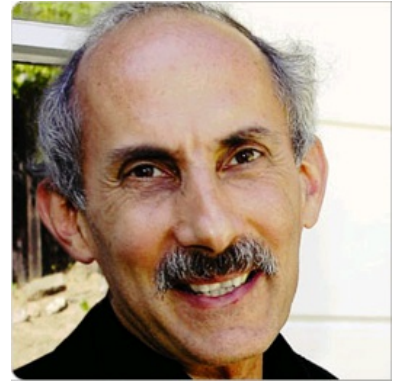
After hearing a wonderful talk by the Karmapa on the Buddhist Four Noble Truths and on the essential teachings of compassion and emptiness, Dipa Ma turned to me put her hand on my knee, and exclaimed with delight, "He's a Buddhist!" As an Indian Buddhist Master she had been going to the Buddha's enlightenment temple Bodh Gaya for twenty years. There she lived right across the street from a Tibetan temple, had seen tens of thousands of Tibetan pilgrims and Tibetan lamas at the Bodhi tree in India during the many years of her practice; yet she had never heard their teachings in translation and had never really understood that like her, they too were Buddhists.

The Tibetans, the Burmese, and the Japanese had been hidden from one another for centuries by the heights of mountainous terrain and by the barriers of language and culture. Their Buddhist traditions, and masters have finally met one another in the great melting pot of our Western culture. Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche worked with Suzuki-Roshi, His Holiness the Karmapa taught Dipa Ma, Joshu Sasaki-Roshi and Kalu Rinpoche joined hands . (As the story goes, they met at an airport in Arizona without their translators and could only sit there, hold hands, and smile at each other for an hour.) And in North America a whole new generation of teachers is continuing to carry the lamp of the Dharma as leaders of over one thousand Buddhist centers.

In the West we are seeing the awakening of the Buddha, and the Buddha is smiling very broadly, with the wisdom of Tibet, India, Japan, Thailand, Burma, and Western countries all joined in. We have been given the treasury of Buddhist practices, a cornucopia of compassion and wisdom to nourish and awaken us to our True Nature. It is a remarkable time in the history of Buddhism. For every practitioner it is a privilege to be part of this

process. May we carry the banner of the dharma wisely and offer its blessings to all.

Jack Kornfield is one of the leading Buddhist teachers in America, and is amongst the best known Buddhist authors in the West . He has been a Buddhist practitioner for over 40 years, and has been central to the introduction of meditation to the West. He trained as a Theravadan Buddhist monk in Thailand under Ajahn Chah and with other renowned masters. Upon returning to the United States in 1972, he co-founded the Insight Meditation Society in Massachusetts with Sharon Salzberg and Joseph Goldstein, and later Spirit Rock Center in California. He has written extensively on the issues encountered around the introduction of Buddhism to the West, including the benefits of psychological methods in the journey of spiritual growth. Amongst his many books are *The Wise Heart*, *Bringing Home the Dharma*, and *After the Ecstasy, the Laundry*.



For more information on Jack Kornfield: <http://www.jackkornfield.com/>

Roshi Joan Halifax

Zen Buddhist Master and engaged Buddhist, she is confident that the core teachings of Buddhism will not be lost as Buddhism moves through various cultural setting.

1. What is the purpose of Buddhist practice?

Buddhist practice is based in a vision of the three-fold training, that is Sila, Samadhi and Prajna. Sila is the practice of the precepts¹, what it is to be an awake and compassionate person in the world today. From my point of view, in the context of today's world, we are experiencing a global reach through our information technologies and also our travel capacities. Environmentally and socially, the planet is in peril. So practising the precepts, no matter whether you are African, South American, North American or Asian, really has to do with global responsibility. How we can engage in the world at a granular level but also at a global level in a way that takes into account the fundamental actualisation of compassion.

The second fold in the three fold training, Samadhi, relates to mind training, the development of the capacity for deep concentration and our ability to perceive reality clearly in an unmediated way. Of course, through our life of virtue, through actualising or living the precepts, our capacity to perceive reality is much greater because our mind is more deeply concentrated.

The third fold in the three-fold training is that of Prajna or wisdom. I always ask how we can be a wise human being today. There are a lot of smart people around, and those smart people are rattling sabres or consuming or setting up structures of competition. Those aren't the wise people. The wise people, from my point of view, are people like Mother Theresa, or Nelson Mandela, or Martin Luther King, or the Dalai Lama. Individuals who are courageous, who are realistic, but also have a quality of internal buoyancy that allows them to engage the world, making impossible tasks possible.

To me, vision is essential, and the wiser you are the more you live preceptually, and the more you live preceptually, the deeper your Samadhi is, the deeper your Samadhi, the greater your wisdom, and so forth.

So you see how these trainings, which are the synthesis of the eight-fold path, become a means for us to actualise lives of great love, of kindness, compassion, and wisdom, in our world today. This has nothing to do with sectarianism; it's just being an awake, compassionate person in the world, and it so happens that this perspective or view was articulated 2500 years ago by a person from Northern India who had a profound insight about how the world and the mind is structured. That insight has led, in some cases, to a lot of goodness in the world. I don't want to say that all Buddhists are necessarily good people either. But in any case, this a kind of summary of the purpose of Buddhist practice.

2. What aspects of Buddhism should be adapted for different mindsets in different cultures?

My opinion is that Buddhism has many different expressions at this point, but the essential teachings of the Buddha and the core practices are still at the heart of all of the different Buddhist schools, all of the different lineages. I think that we are in a very fortunate position that we are able to look at these different cultural manifestations and also have a spread of Western adaptations like mindfulness-based stress reduction, for example, or the kind of work that we do in care of the dying, or work in the prison system, or the newer kinds of Buddhism that have come out of Japan and also America. Buddhism today, as well as social structures in general, are going through a lot of change because our actions have increased reach and impact as a result of globalisation. I feel that the more secular forms of Buddhist practice and teachings can really serve people. For example, the head of a corporation who might be stressed would find mindfulness-based stress reduction helpful, or for another individual who is working in the end of life care field and is a nurse who attends dying people, learning how to do consciousness transference at the time of death, which is a powerful Tibetan Buddhist practice, could be useful.

I don't think there is a kind of theosophy or sort of global prescription that I would ever recommend. I think it's rather that we have many options available to us and that each individual or group of individuals can find something appropriate for them. This kind of varietal richness has never existed on the planet before, in terms of any religion I would say, where we as individuals or groups of individuals have options we never had before in finding a path that is more appropriate or congruent with our own make-up.

So, for example, at Upaya Zen Centre, where I am the head teacher and founder, we have a chaplaincy training programme which is a Buddhist chaplaincy training programme. It's specifically Buddhist, but we have Zen Buddhists, Tibetan Buddhists and Theravadans all in the same Buddhist chaplaincy training programme. We ordain the people in the Zen line, but they all retain their own approach. We also have Christians and practicing Jews in that chaplaincy training programme. We have people from South East Asia, mainland Asia, Japan, Europe, Canada, Mexico and so on in that programme - what is called a requisite variety in the composition of the chaplain community. And we don't try to get people to be Buddhists in the Zen way, rather we try to encourage people diving more deeply into their own lineage, in their own tradition, but to observe the Sila, Samadhi, Prajna perspective and apply it as appropriate in their individual lives.

So creating a context in Africa, for example, that's appropriate not just for Anglo-Africans or people of European descent, but for people of deep African descent is going to be the same equation that's happening in Brazil for example, where the African culture and the Indian culture of Brazil, as well as Catholicism are influencing how Buddhism is practiced there.

We have an affiliate in Brazil and are watching how this is happening in an interesting way. We have Brazilians coming to Upaya who are bringing their own sense of their

practice into our Zen centre, and I recognise that this cultural syncretism is part of what has made Buddhism so powerful in each culture that it's encountered. In other words, I think that as Buddhism finds its way into the African context it will be deeply influenced by the indigenous peoples of Africa.

3. How practically do you work with the cultural adaptation of Buddhism?

I'm not worried about distortion of the essence. I'm just interested in the experiment that is going on, and that experiment has gone on for 2500 years. When Buddhism went to Sri Lanka it was influenced by cultures of the deep south of India. When it went to China it was influenced by the Confucian cultures of China and as well by the shamanic cultures of China. When it went to Japan it was the same. Now it's in the Western World and it's also flowing into Brazil. I'm really not so worried about losing connection with the essence. What I feel is that Buddhism is a practice that allows one to turn attention to the meta-continuum and to observe what is arising within the mind. It is a process of the cultivation of attention, of social capacities. The context from the West regarding notions of stress reduction, for example, might have been somewhat in the mind of the Buddha but probably not in his foreground as he was articulating the view of Buddhism. I think Buddhism is an emergent process and will always be an organism that is in emergence, and not so much a global top-down institution.

With regards to the Four Noble Truths of the Buddha, which are the essence of his teachings, they are pretty simple and direct in a certain way, though there are many elaborations of these Truths, or what Stephen Batchelor has called the Four Tasks. I am not too concerned that we are going to be losing touch with this core teaching of the Buddha as Buddhism moves through various cultural settings.

4. Do you think the current Western emphasis on short-term gratification is a problem?

Well, I'm not so sure that the transformation processes are inevitably slow. For example, Richard Davidson, who is the director of the Laboratory for Affective Neuroscience at Madison, Wisconsin, doing research on the neuroscience of meditation, has seen some interesting effects in a very short time, so I think that we see change more quickly than we often even recognise. In terms of the development of wisdom, awakening, the deep aspects of compassion, I often compare it to oral hygiene. If you go to your dental hygienist once every year and don't brush your teeth you'll have quite a distressing event in the hygienist's office, or, on the other hand, you can take care of your teeth every day. I look at the process of meditation in this way, that it's a daily practice to keep your own mental capacities tuned at a level of attention and prosociality. And that's an ongoing process. Not everybody wants to take care of their mind, except when they're in the throes of deep suffering of course. Then they want to do something, and maybe they'll engage in a practice that helps to ameliorate their own suffering.

In our global culture I think we're seeing a kind of information addiction that has pervaded the lives of many people. With regards to indigenous people, I don't know about

Africa - I was there in the 1960's and early 1970's in Mali - but I'm very familiar with the indigenous people of the Himalayas, in Southern and Western Tibet, and I can tell you they have connected with mobile technology. Every nomad that I encountered in Tibet had a mobile phone and they were calling their compatriots miles away to see if the pasture lands were better than where they were. Almost every largish village in the Himalayas now has satellite so that indigenous people can get on the internet. It's fascinating and a little scary. I have no idea what the long term outcome of this is going to be. For example, because of the work that I've done in the Himalayas, more and more people from the Himalayan regions are logging on to Upaya's website, and I presume they are doing that not just to learn about our schedule but to learn about the kind of Buddhism we practice. This is a pretty great thing, I feel, and also I don't know what it means regarding their relationship with Buddhism in the long-term.

5. How can Buddhism link to other spiritual systems?

I think Buddhism actually has integrated with many spiritual systems. His Holiness the Dalai Lama and Thich Nhat Hanh have done a lot in creating contexts where there is robust interfaith dialogue and where there is deep exchange between religious streams. I will give you an interesting example. When I was given Inka, which is when I was made a Roshi, which is a so-called Zen Master, I was given Inka with two other people and both of those people were Catholic monastics. So, there you have the streams meeting, and I was completely thrilled to have the opportunity to share this with my Catholic brothers and sisters. In Switzerland I then had the opportunity to be in a Catholic Monastery and part of the transmission process for a Catholic nun who was transmitted to be a Zen Sensei as well. That's one example. I also have a student from Brazil, an Afro-Brazilian, who was initiated into the Afro-Brazilian religion as a young person. He's a renowned psychiatrist in Rio and he's also an ordained Zen priest, and is Catholic as well. So I think there's going to be a tremendous amount of syncretism in the course of the development of Buddhism in our global culture, and it's an extremely rich time in that regard. I don't think it's going to harm Buddhism. I think requisite variety is actually providing a greater breadth of approaches which is only going to strengthen Buddhism.

One important feature about South Africa, at least from an outsider's perspective, is the openness to cultural diversity that gives South Africa tremendous potential in opening up paths such as Buddhism with regards to transcending ethnic and racial differences. I think Nelson Mandela is one of these individuals who really widened this horizon. It's probably a wonderful invitation to be proactive, to move out of the white culture of South Africa and, not necessarily trying to get the indigenous people to meditate, but to actually involve oneself as an engaged Buddhist in the application of compassionate works in areas of need outside of the white culture.

7. Do you have any advice for practitioners who recognise the value in Buddhism but find some of the practices inaccessible?

Well as I've already indicated, there are expressions of Buddhism in the secular world like

mindfulness-based stress reduction, for example, or certain forms of Theravadan Buddhism coming out of the Vipassana communities in Europe and America, that are quite non-sectarian. Even within Zen in America you see forms and organisations which practice outside of conventional Zen traditional expressions. You also see organisations like Trungpa's Shambala organisation which has developed a kind of frame of reference which is unique. So I think that things will continue to change in the Western World and Africa, and forms will emerge and forms will drop away as appropriate to these cultural contexts.

Roshi Joan Halifax is a Zen Buddhist teacher, author, and a strong proponent of engaged Buddhism. Her academic background is in anthropology and psychology, and her eventful journey through life has included civil rights activism, LSD research and the profound work of being with the dying, amongst other things. She has been involved with Buddhism since the 1960s. In 1990 she founded the Upaya Zen Centre, a Buddhist monastery in Sante Fe, New Mexico, where she offers courses on Zen Buddhism as well as engaged Buddhism and caring for the dying. She is an environmentalist, and is on the board of directors of the *Mind and Life Institute* which engages with the relationship between science and Buddhism as a way of exploring reality.



Amongst her books are *Being with the Dying: Cultivating Compassion and Fearlessness in the Presence of Death* (with Ira Byock) and *Fruitful Darkness: A Journey through Buddhist Practice and Tribal Wisdom* (with Tich Nat Hahn).

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Ringu Tulku Rinpoche

“Why not?” is the favourite challenge of this erudite, beloved and non-sectarian master of Tibetan Buddhism.

1 What the purpose of Buddhist practice?

Buddhist practice is basically to reduce or end our own suffering and cultivate peace and happiness in ourselves, and then to bring that to the world around us. With Buddhist practice, first we try to change our own way of being – how we think, speak and act – in a way that is good for us and good for others. So we generate more compassion and kindness for ourselves and others, while we also try to understand things, see things, see ourselves as well as the world around us, as clearly and realistically as possible – to see things as they really are, that is what we call wisdom. So learning how to generate wisdom and compassion and to try to live our lives as positively as possible, that is basically the Buddhist practice.

2 What aspects of Buddhism should be adapted for different mindsets in different cultures?

I think since the *real* practice of Buddhism, as I said, is to work on ourselves, to work on how we see things, to work on our emotions, because when we work on trying to generate compassion, kindness and wisdom, that is exactly working on emotions. Therefore, actually the culture is not an important thing in Buddhism. It doesn't matter what culture it is; Buddhism adopts all different cultures. For Buddhism, culture is not an important thing. The important thing is the education – how we transform ourselves, how we act, how we generate compassion and wisdom and how we train ourselves is important. The teaching has to be according to the needs of the people. If they need to beat drums, let them beat drums. If they need to drink, whatever, Coca-Cola, let them drink Coca-Cola. If they need to dance, let them dance. So what if it's not what I have been trained as? I don't need to bring the same way as I have been trained to teach others, but I have to consider how I might be helpful. As Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche said all the time, “The teachers in Buddhism always needs to learn from the students.” Because it's not the subject or the system in which it is taught that is important, but how it is learned by the students.

Of course, if certain problems are more prominent in a culture, finding a way to address those problems becomes important. For example, people in Tibet are very devotional, or in India also so many are very devotional, so then you bring in that kind of teachings and you emphasise devotion and lead people through devotion. But if there are people who are more rational then bring *that* side and use that method more. So it is not a problem, it's actually a good thing.

Another example is how people in the West sometimes wish to dismiss or refute reincarnation or karma. Now it is like this: if there are people who do not believe in

rebirth, that does not mean this person cannot practise Buddhism. A person who does not believe in rebirth can also practise Buddhism. A person who does not believe in karma can also practise Buddhism. There is no problem there. But you can't say that the Buddha did not believe in rebirth or karma, then it's going too far because it's so clear in all the teachings of the Buddha that he taught about karma and rebirth.

Some people consider the Buddhist philosophy of 'no-self' as contradicting rebirth, because if there is no self, then what or where is the karma and who gets reincarnated? But from a Buddhist point of view, it is precisely *because* there is no self, that there is rebirth and karma, because if we were independently self-existing we would not be able to change and experience transformation and get reborn. But because there is nothing like that, there is a continuum. So that continuum is called rebirth, although there is no self in there which goes from one place to another, but there is a continuum. Like if you plant a flower and the flower grows and dissolves and then it seeds and again a flower grows. Because that first flower dissolved it created the current circumstances to make another growth, and then from that another. Now, it's not the same flower but it is the continuum and if that first flower has the right kind of circumstances then the next flower will grow, better or worse or whatever, so that's the karma, that's the rebirth. That's the understanding.

The Buddhists and Hindus have this debate about *atman*. Hindus think if you don't believe in *atman* you cannot have rebirth and karma and things like that. Buddhists say if you have *atman* then you can't have rebirth and karma and things like that. Of course, *atman* depends on how you perceive it.

3 How practically do you work with the cultural adaptation of Buddhism?

The important thing for me is that the main practice of Buddhism is not about culture but about self-transformation, how to become more joyful, more happy, how to manage our emotions, how to be less stressed, how to become more compassionate and see things a little more clearly. So it's best to adopt the methods that would best facilitate this for practitioners. It's a discussion with the student; it's an exchange with the student; it's learning from each other. It's not about adopting a new culture, but about finding the *essence* through the culture. Where there are humans, culture is unavoidable. So if the Tibetans come, they come with their culture, whether they like it or not. It's not that they want it, but it's there, and the same thing with Westerners – even people who don't believe in Christianity, they have lots of Christianity in them, their way of seeing things. Often they don't even know how much of their culture is there in their way of seeing things and their way of reacting. So the important thing is to recognise this, because from a Buddhist point of view, all our concepts, all our ways of thinking have been learnt. We have been conditioned. Concepts are designations that we have made. So when we understand that this is not the truth but the designation, the cultural influence, then we can look at it differently. But most of the time when we see something, we react on the assumption that this is how it *has* to be, that there is no other way. I believe that all people are the same below the thin layer of skin called culture: the culture is the skin, and

below that everybody is the same. At that level, emotionally, we're all the same. But then that level, that thin layer of culture where there is language, where there are concepts, and all different kinds of habits, that is very important because all our communications and reactions happen at that level. But underneath that, I think we are all the same.

4 Do you think the current Western emphasis on short-term gratification is a problem?

I think everybody wants quick results, not particularly Westerners, but everybody wants quick results and everybody likes to enjoy pleasure. But I also think, whether it's in the West or the East, thoughtful people would prefer the better and more significant or more permanent, positive result. People who want to achieve something big work very hard to achieve that, even in the West. They don't *not* do that because it's hard now – they go for it. So they are not only working at the level of short-term gratification. So if you clearly see that there is a long-term benefit which is much more important and much greater in the long term, then you would go for it. There are lots of people who are doing three-year retreats, there are several people who are doing numerous three-year retreats and things like that, even amongst the Westerners. So when they see there is something of deep value then they go for it, despite that it's not easy. Of course, for those who hold the view that there is no life after this one, and who just live this life and believe that after this life everything is totally finished, then why do something more? I have to live this life as happily as possible and there's no need to do anything more. But then there are still lots of people who hold these materialistic views and find that if they meditate and learn some techniques to bring more peace and more joy to their mind, there can be less stress and greater happiness, so they do it and it has good results.

Many people who get interested in the spiritual path and can credit their visit to a country like Tibet or Nepal, where they see that people there are not materialistically prosperous but their lives are deeper and more meaningful ... and then they start to think that maybe there's more to life. But it's useful to be reminded that you don't have to do everything in this life. If everything you want doesn't happen, it's alright, as we will have another chance in the next life, or next, and so on. But if you don't have that view and think *this* is the only life you have, then you may come to feel quite frustrated.

Once I was travelling and was a little late, so as I rushed toward the reception desk there was someone who was getting checked in and my luggage just touched him gently. He jumped and said, "I have only one life to live, don't touch me!" And there will be something like this reaction – only one life to live!

5 How can Buddhism link to other spiritual systems?

From the Buddhist point of view the process of spiritual growth is gradual – there are many different levels, as according to where you are. So a "path" by its definition is not ultimate. Even if I am taught the whole of the Buddhist path, I have to tread and train from where I am. When I am trying to generate a more positive way of doing things and lessen my negative actions, generating some compassion and kindness, then it doesn't

matter what view I hold, what culture I am in. Spiritual progress does not depend on labels or our sense of identity, like being a 'Buddhist'. Just because I may *say* I am a Buddhist doesn't mean I am doing all positive things. So from that point of view it is not what you profess but how you act. And so there can be very good practitioners on non-Buddhist paths, there could even be bodhisattvas and Buddhas who are not considered to be within the context of Buddhism. There are undoubtedly Buddhas and bodhisattvas who teach and live in non-Buddhist societies, and not only in human societies, but in non-human societies as well, so therefore, there can be many, many... I think this is very important to understand – from the Buddhist point of view there's not only one right, but many rights. I think, it's not that Buddhists believe that only their own philosophy and their own practices are extremely good, but others could be also very good for some people, so therefore, it's no big problem.

6 What are your views about an appropriate teacher-student relationship today?

I think this problem is solved now thanks to i-phone, i-pad, and internet. The main relationship between the teacher and student is teaching. If students receive the teaching and the guidance, then that's all, there is nothing else. Then each person has to practise themselves, whether you are with the teacher or without the teacher, or not exactly next to the teacher. To be always with the teacher, very close, means staying together, which actually also has its problems. Because if you are too close then sometimes you also have problems and relationship problems. You can see faults, whether they are their faults, or they are not their faults... you see these because when you are in a samsaric state of mind then you see all sorts of faults. In Tibet there was this saying that you should stay three valleys away from your teacher, not too close. Of course with the webcasts and online teachings one does not have that reciprocal relationship where the teacher sees the student and can give him clear personal guidance. The teacher is not seeing what the students are getting up to. But this merely means students should take more responsibility. Also, when the master is checking on the students' discipline, if the students don't have enough interest it won't work, it doesn't work, even if you beat them, it doesn't work. So it's really, eventually, totally up to you.

7 Do you have any advice for practitioners who recognise the value in Buddhism but find some of the practices inaccessible?

This is important, I think, we need to be able to go beyond this. There are some cultural ways of doing things like prostrating. I think the main thing is to understand the practice deeply. If you understand the practice deeply then I think visualisation and all these things should not be a problem because we are all visualising all the time. It's the way it's presented which is difficult sometimes, so I think the main thing is understanding. There are many, many different methods, so it's not that one has to do all those things. Nobody can or should try to take on every method that's been prescribed or taught. One has to use whatever method is most suitable to you and work through that.

Unless a student's understanding goes very deeply, the problem may arise that they struggle to distinguish between what is the culture and what is the teaching. So sometimes trying too hard to de-culturalise, or modernise, or Westernise, Africanise, sometimes can be a little dangerous, that you might throw the baby out with the bath water. So I think we have to be more patient and allow the process to happen naturally. One tries to practise. One tries to practise with little of the style that your teachers bring and then you get the sense, you get the experience, and once you get the experience, the true experience, the true realisation, then I think you really know how to do it. So this will happen, this will happen naturally as it happened in Tibet and other places also. Like Tibet, for instance, never tried to Tibetanise Buddhism, in its whole history, it never tried to Tibetanise Buddhism but it became Tibetan. They couldn't help it. It will happen in the same way, especially when all the texts are translated and then there are more people who are experienced and realised from that community and, then it will happen and it will happen more quickly in the West than in Tibet, thanks to modern technology.

At the moment Buddhism is still very new to the world outside traditional Buddhist cultures. The process of translation, not just the translation of texts, but translating the meaning also, transposing these new concepts from one culture and one language to another culture, another language, will take time. At this stage many of the translations that are there, like sadhanas, are not very good, are far from perfect. At this stage, it's not *inspiring*. It takes time, but it's getting there. It's not that one language is better than the other, it's not that. Tibetan is very holy and very sacred and so therefore if you say the prayers in Tibetan and you have blessing; if you say it in English there's no blessing - it's not like that, that's not the Buddhist way of thinking. Buddha said, "Like the language of the devas and the demi gods and nagas, all different kind of languages I teach." There are lots of translators who refuse to use certain Christian words like sin or things like that because they think it gives too much of the cultural background, so therefore it wouldn't give the same meaning. So translation is a difficult thing. I have been asked to be one of the advisors to the Kangyur translation, and so I have come to learn that every translator uses totally different terms! How can that be? And every translator says this is the one and doesn't want to budge from that. So, it will take time. But it will happen.

Ringu Tulku Rinpoche is a Tibetan Buddhist Master, born in Tibet, and trained in all schools of Tibetan Buddhism under many great masters including HH the 16th Karmapa. Since 1990 he has been traveling the world teaching meditation and Buddhism and is author of many books including *Daring Steps Toward Fearlessness* and *Path to Buddhahood*. He has been awarded two Khenpo titles – the equivalent of a spiritual doctorate. He participates in international Science and Buddhism dialogues, and his non-sectarian approach to Buddhism, deep experience and insight into the needs of modern practitioners have led to



his being a sought-after teacher all over the world. He is one of the key translators for HH Karmapa and founder of KFE – Karmapa Foundation Europe.

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Rob Nairn

Teacher of meditation and Buddhism in Southern Africa, he feels that “neurosis is the main issue that needs to be taken into account” in Western Buddhism because it complicates our approach to Buddhist practice greatly.

1. What is the purpose of Buddhist practice?

The purpose is, first of all, to enable people learn about their own minds and discover what hidden forces are driving them. That then enables them to get in touch with the causes of their suffering, the so called mind poisons, which we prefer not to know about. Then comes the most difficult part of practice which is learning to embark on a way of living which purifies the mind poisons, and in daily life this means learning to become honest with ourselves about the fact that we do get angry, we can get proud, we do get jealous and we are greedy. We normally live in a state of denial about these and project them onto other people – which is a favourite device everybody uses to avoid facing themselves – and this prevents us becoming mature, and second, becoming free from the causes of our own suffering and the causes of suffering for others.

You could say that our practice goes through stages – there is formal training in the form of meditation or pujas², and then there’s the more ‘involved with life’ practice, which is learning to live in a way where we’re constantly aware of the fact that the mind poisons are arising and displaying in our minds, and that generally we either act them out or project them onto other people. Both acting out and projecting prevent us facing, coming to terms with and freeing ourselves from these poisons. Then beyond these initial practices you can move into much more specialised ones such as Mahamudra³, where you need to be able to rest your mind sufficiently to experience the condition beyond conceptualization. This is where we start getting towards experiencing the nature of mind. These latter meditations are not possible if we haven’t done the preliminary work of exposing, purifying and freeing the mind from at least the first few layers of mind poisons.

Interviewer: Can you give an example of an easily recognizable mind poison that most people would be able to relate to?

I would say most people have got a predominant mind poison, which could be anger, jealousy, pride or greed, and then most people have a secondary and a third. Those are the five mind poisons – greed, hatred, delusion, jealousy and pride.

2. What aspects of Buddhism should be adapted for different mindsets in different cultures?

Here in Africa I would say there are two situations we need to consider – one is where people are very ‘Europeanised’, and there you would get people very much reflecting what

has developed in the European psyche – such as in Europe, America and Australia. Then there is the African context where people have not been as heavily influenced by European-type culture.

In the European culture, neurosis⁴ is the main issue that needs to be taken into account, and the complexity that it produces in the way the European mind works. It probably isn't adequately taken into account in the traditional Buddhist practices coming to us from the East. In general what I find is that Buddhist teachers from the East tend to view the neurotic Westerner as unable to practice properly, unable to relate adequately to the Buddhist teaching, and therefore at a disadvantage. This is typical of a movement from one culture to another, because if you read about the movement of Buddhism from India to Tibet, it was even worse – the Indian teachers said Tibetans will *never* be able to learn dharma. It took 200 years for the dharma to mutate into a form that could be effectively practiced by the Tibetans, and then they became extremely powerful dharma practitioners. I can see exactly the same thing happening here with the Eastern teachers who come from a very different culture, and therefore approach things in a very different way and may not have a good understanding of how the Western mind works. Often they feed unprocessed chunks of Buddhism from an Eastern context to Westerners and are then critical of Westerners for not being able to digest what they are presenting to us.

I think it is very hopeful that a number of young Westerners have become very profound practitioners and they are designing methods of working with the mind that are extremely different and much more effective than what's coming from the East. I think what we're seeing in the West is not just the effects of the neurotic mind, but also the impact of scientific training, because the scientific mind is basically one that is prepared to investigate in an objective way exactly what is there, free from assumptions. A lot of scientists of course themselves fail at this, but if you can develop this attitude in relation to your own mind, then this whole training to become less compulsively absorbed by your mental content, to become the impartial witness of your own experience, produces a very powerful and speedy way of being able to allow the mind to reveal all its causes of suffering, which is exactly what the Buddha did. The Buddha sat objectively witnessing his own mind, and in the process he discovered dukkha⁵, its causes, the possibility of liberation, and the path to liberation.

I think what we're doing with our new Western path is learning to work with neurosis and seeing that neurosis is actually something that can be beneficial. The reason is that it cracks the mind open. People who are experiencing neurosis are in pain, because the definition of the word neurosis essentially includes the word 'pain'. And therefore they are driven to do something about their minds, and this is what pushes them into deeper and deeper levels of practice. In the beginning these look very messy, look nothing like the practices brought from the East, and often they don't look like proper practices to those brought up with traditional Eastern Buddhism, but there is a definite level of authenticity in their journey. I think what they are doing is breaking through and working directly with the tangible manifestations of the mind poisons in a way which is free from conceptual confusion. Of course the big problem amongst Westerners is intellect – it's a

very intellectual culture. I would say the vast majority of Westerners study Buddhism at an intellectual level, learn all the words, learn all the concepts, and think they know it all, and don't get anywhere. The Buddha said that the intellectual approach is actually further from the truth of dharma than anything else. So we have both positive and negative elements in Western characteristics and approaches.

Interviewer: Given that the Tibetan and other Eastern teachers have a genuine intention to help people, is it just that their different culture and approach is so deeply imbedded that they find it difficult to teach more appropriately for Westerners?

It's exactly that. And it's difficult for them to see where they're missing Westerners. I've tried talking to a few Tibetan lamas about this, and their responses are sometimes like the church in the medieval ages – if you question anything you're immediately accused of being doubting. So the scope for having a conversation which includes enquiry is excluded. And what I'm also learning is that Tibetans tend not to discuss things with one another. If we Westerners have a problem we would sit down and discuss it, but they don't discuss issues and problems very much. Many of them also make massive assumptions about Westerners, and I've seen this even in lamas for whom I have tremendous respect. Now this is where I think Tibetans are missing their connection with Westerners hugely. And I can see they are puzzled by this. They cannot see it. They don't know how to create the ground where you can say "listen, do you know what I'm experiencing, and do you know the effect what you're saying has on me?". The context for them to learn more about us is missing, therefore they - at least the older Tibetans - continue to apply their assumptions to us and mainly see our faults and weaknesses. It's rare for them to see any value or strength in the Western way.

What's so interesting is the gap they are leaving is being filled by Western psychologists, and in a lot of areas, particularly in compassion training, Western psychology is overtaking and displacing Buddhism in the Western world. I think the real advance in compassion training will not come through Buddhism. It will come through psychology, and this is happening right now.

Interviewer: 'Displacing Buddhism' is quite a thing to say. I presume this displacement is in the area of preparatory practices leading up to the enquiry into 'nature of mind', but the 'nature of mind' enquiry still doesn't have a Western context for engaging with it.

How many Westerners actually get to the point where they can explore nature of mind? Very, very few. You have a few who through some quirk of their background are able to do this and get to Mahamudra understanding, but these are infinitesimal numbers. It seems to me that what's happening at the moment is that a massive potential is being wasted. A huge number of students who could really benefit by the deeper teachings of the lamas are either not attracted to them or are attracted and then get put off because they don't feel they are making a connection. I've seen this, even after years of practice. I've seen people who have done 20 or 30 years training under lamas just pack up eventually and go off and do something else, because it's just not working for them. And very often the Tibetans can't see why. You know Einstein's definition of insanity – more of the same

thing and expecting a different outcome. At the moment that's what a lot of the older Tibetans are doing – more of the same old approach, be more strict, be more rigid. And that's exactly what doesn't work.

Interviewer: People in the West seem rather busy, stressed, neurotic and materialistic. They also need greater rational explanations than might be done traditionally, are less strongly motivated by rebirth/reincarnation, are less devotional, and often respect only that which is scientifically verified. How do you work with this situation?

With most Westerners if you talk about rebirth and karma, they glaze over because they ask “where's the proof?” So I think if Buddhism is really going to make an extensive contribution in the West we've got to move more and more into the area of only teaching stuff that's provable in one way or another. A lot of this can be done through psychology. With advances in neuroscience some of what the Buddha taught is provable through for example the MRI scan. With that sort of evidence it's far more feasible to make a deduction that maybe something happened before we were born, for example, because psychologists have discovered that experience starts after 4 months in the womb when consciousness begins to stir. So we now know there is life before birth if you take the actual birth as the beginning.

For people who are really steeped in a Western culture it's going to be problematic to talk about rebirth, and even karma and cause and effect, so the intelligent thing to do is to say we don't need to use those words. I think we should just see how the Western mind works and then present the teachings in a way that is accessible for them. This is how Buddhism has always worked - if you look at how it was in North India and then Buddhism as it developed in China and Japan, they're very different. And then Buddhism as it developed in Tibet was very different. So Buddhism is going to develop in the West with its own unique style. Chogyam Trungpa said he thinks it will come to the West through psychology. What that means is that through psychology we can show that thinking in a certain way produces a particular effect. For example the studies done with mindfulness training show that within 8 weeks neural pathways change through this practice due to neuroplasticity. Now that is the sort of information that talks to Westerners.

Interviewer: do you see the secular mindfulness movement as something positive that leads in the same direction as Buddhism?

Extremely positive. People are tending to talk about mindfulness as if it's not Buddhism. Let's remember that the Buddha taught that practice starts with mindfulness training – as taught in the Satipatthana sutra and the Anapanasati sutra. Some fundamentalist Buddhist scholars are starting to proclaim that there's a difference between secular mindfulness and Buddhist mindfulness. They maintain that it's different because Buddhist mindfulness is associated with teachings on ethics and other things. Well I don't see that. Sure, the Buddha taught all of that, but when he taught mindfulness specifically he didn't talk about ethics and other things as part of mindfulness practice. He just taught the basic mindfulness discipline. Then at another time and place he talked

about ethics and so on. Of course there's a whole lifestyle that goes with Buddhism, and so it should, even if you're doing mindfulness. But secular mindfulness has taken the specific training and has cast it in a form that is accessible to millions of people without any kind of religious overtones. Therefore people who are put off by religious associations have access to it, and that's increased the scope of Buddhist accessibility by millions. Maybe ten times what would happen if it came under the guise of Buddhism. So mindfulness, to my mind, is Buddhism at the level the Buddha taught. Remember that the Buddha was not a Buddhist and the Buddha did not teach Buddhism, he merely approached the society in which he lived where it was functioning, and said 'the problem you're having is this, and the way to deal with it is this'. And I think we should go back to that, which is exactly what mindfulness does. It's saying the problem we have is that we've got all these psychological issues, and the way to work with it is to train in mindfulness in order to gain access to the workings of your mind. So I don't go with this distinction people are trying to make between Buddhism and mindfulness.

Interviewer: What do you think the implications of the busyness and stressfulness of typical Western life are on the way we might engage on this journey?

Well I suppose the busyness and stressedness is the way greed and delusion are manifesting in our culture, which have always been there in any culture – its just the particular form they're taking. And I suppose what it means is that we need to introduce people to mindfulness in a way that helps them contend with these conditions. Basically what this means is that their initial introduction will have to be with a very light touch. For a person who is busy and stressed you can't say 'now go straight in and do a 1 month retreat' because their minds just couldn't do that. So you give them a gentler introduction where they can find small ways of disengaging from their stress and busyness. Of course what drives this is anxiety and desire – so they can start getting some sense of what is driving them and then begin to let go of that in a gentle way and get more into practice from there. But whether there are unique problems I'm not sure. Certainly our society is speeding up, and maybe this busyness is producing a more intense form of neurosis. So maybe its enabling people to come in touch with their suffering more quickly – I'm not sure.

Interviewer: So it's not as if neurosis is particular to our Western society, it might just be a question of degree?

I think all societies have neurosis – its just a question of how it manifests. In our society it manifests in relation to emotions like anger and greed. When I look at Tibetans it seems that their main problem is pride. And I think this is why Tibetan teachers are always hammering people for being proud, overlooking the fact that its not the main Western issue as far as I can see.

3. How practically do you work with the cultural adaptation of Buddhism?

I've already answered that to a large degree. The big adaptation I've gone for is to try and express as much of Buddhism as possible in psychological terminology, but more

importantly, try to keep the conceptual approach to an absolute minimum. This enables Westerners to get in touch with their own experience because this is where we tend to be weak. Westerners have great difficulty in getting in touch with their own feelings, and then to accept and live with the way they feel. So what you'll find is most Westerners tend to veer off into theorizing, intellectualising, and rationalizing as soon as there's any movement towards feeling. If you follow the normal way of teaching Buddhism it just offers them every escape they want because it has a massive amount of material to enable them to do those things, and it moves them away from where they need to be. So my emphasis is always to come back to your practice, and then try and get in touch with your own direct experience. I've introduced a lot of psychological methods which Buddhism doesn't have to enable people to connect with feeling, and stay in connection with it. Then a little bit of overview is useful to help them understand what's going on, because they do need some conceptual framework. This helps them understand why their experience is going the way it is, and why particular forms of training will work. We have of course basic training in meditation or mindfulness, but other forms of mind training are also valuable, such as meditations and antidotes to work with the mind poisons.

So in general I've tried to assess the psychology of Westerners, assess their immediate needs, present dharma in a way that meets those needs, and then use that as a basis for moving forward into helping them broaden their perspective of themselves and life, and life's potential. They can then let go of limiting views of themselves and life, and relax into a much more open and expansive way of embracing what life is really offering.

Interviewer: You talked about introducing psychological methods. Can you give a few more examples?

The main example of a psychological method is around people's difficulty with their emotions. The typical approach of standard psychotherapy might be to look at the emotion like anger or greed or self-hatred, and see how to enable the person to work skillfully with that emotion so that it is less of a problem for them. But what I've discovered is that the presenting emotion isn't always the real problem. The real problem is the way people *feel about how they feel*, and most people don't even realize that that's what's going on in their minds. But if you can get them to take a step back to look at the way they feel for example about their anger, what you'll almost always find is *that* is the feeling that holds the anger in place and prevents them ever being able to accept, come to terms with and then let go of the anger. So this is a typical psychological device, where you realize the presenting condition is not the issue. Sure you could use a Buddhist mind poison antidote and it would slowly work, but a much swifter way is to get in touch with the actual energy that's holding the anger in place and preventing the person seeing what's going on around the anger. So this is why I use the exercise called HIFAWIF (How I Feel About What I'm Feeling⁶).

The other psychological method I use extensively is the enquiry process. It's not purely psychological but there's a lot of psychological training involved in applying it skillfully. Enquiry is basically compassion, insight and wisdom training combined, where you look

at your own mind and start enquiring into it in a very objective, accepting way. In this way you encounter the underlying energies that are causing whatever mind states are there, and allow them to reveal themselves rather than blocking them, because a lot of the traditional Buddhist practices result in people blocking and suppressing without realizing it. You see if you just teach ethics to people, if you just teach taking vows and that sort of thing - those are very good - but if people don't understand the subtlety of the psychological process surrounding them they just end up suppressing, and then they go into denial and seize up, and they block inner psychological energies and no growth is possible.

Interviewer: so would you say the oriental mind is more inclined to accept the internal mess? Or is it less of a mess?

My experience of oriental people is limited, but from what I've seen they don't have guilt, they don't have the level of self-attacking that Westerners have, therefore their fundamental psychological position is much simpler – not in the sense of being unintelligent – but less complex, and therefore they are able to be much more direct in their dealings with themselves. They are able to move much more immediately towards what has to be done without a whole lot of complex, subtle energies that cancel out their efforts. You know very few Westerners can move straight towards a psychological point such as getting in touch with their anger or grief, or getting in touch with a neurosis – they have to go into all sorts of convoluted issues around it first, such as endless rationalization, avoidance and denial.

4. Do you think the current Western emphasis on short-term gratification is a problem?

Through the influence of advertising, amongst other things, we are a culture that feels that everything should be gratifiable immediately. It doesn't just mean gratification, it extends to fixing as well. Our allopathic medicine fixes things much more quickly than traditional medicine used to do. We have this belief that things should change as soon as we do some thing. And our minds are locked into that. Now quite clearly this doesn't work in terms of our dharma practice, and I would say its one of the biggest problems facing us. The way I've started to work with it right at the outset is to start introducing people to their own experience in such a way that they can see that what's involved is not sudden change but process. So we start looking at ourselves not as entities that can change at the flick of a switch, but as a manifestation of a process. As soon as people start internalising that, they can then start looking at the process and see how it is operating at many levels, and the more they practice, the deeper the levels that are encountered.

So that's the big picture. In the short-term the first focus is to give people some access to the immediate level of practice in a way that they can connect with and can see that something happens. This is where I find mindfulness is so powerful, because the way we teach mindfulness is with, first, recognizing the unsettled mind, second, learning to settle the unsettled mind, and third, grounding. This really works for people because as soon as you do the exercise for recognizing the unsettled mind, people are able to look at

themselves and realize, yes, what's going on in my mind is the unsettled mind. And straight away teachers need to emphasise that there's nothing wrong with that. Because normally when people see their minds are unsettled they think there's something wrong, and start feeling inferior or somesuch. So you don't only introduce them to the unsettled mind, but help them straight away to realise that as soon as you see something, you usually have an attitude about it. That's a subtle thought. And the *attitude* is what is likely to sink the ship, so identify the attitude straight away. People are likely to be critical of themselves for having an unsettled mind, so straight away you say to them there's no need to be critical because that is the human condition. Now for most people that is a huge relief straight away. 'Ah! I don't have to criticize myself, I'm not worse than everybody else, I'm not inferior...' – all the things they probably believe about themselves without realizing it.

Then we do the exercise 'settling the unsettled mind' and we do this simple breathing exercise which affects the autonomic nervous system, so that straight away from a physiological level there is a change – the mind relaxes because the breathing affects that particular level of the nervous system. In something like half an hour I would say 80% of people notice an immediate change from going through those exercises. Often it blows their minds. I see that as the answer – these practices which are simple, very direct, immediate, and gives them the confidence to realize 'Ahah! No hocus pocus, no mysterious religious belief. I just do these simple things and I can see my mind change straight away'. Then you can introduce them to the resting mind, and if that is done in the right way they learn how to rest their minds, and you go on from there. And now you can tell them its going to take you the rest of their lives. And they think 'OK I can do that because it works, and I'm not beating myself up trying to do something and getting no result for 20 years', because a lot of the traditional ways of teaching meditation don't work. So people sit there for months and years trying these approaches and getting no benefit, which discredits them.

Interviewer: Why don't some of the traditional methods work?

They often don't take into account the immediate workings of the mind. They say 'sit down and relax and empty your mind' for example. How often have you heard that? Have you ever tried that? It's worse than useless, because it won't work and you will think there's something wrong with you or something wrong with the teacher. Either way its going to discredit the whole thing. People are going to go on having thoughts, so let's stay in touch with reality and realize the issue is not the presence of thoughts, but the way you relate to them. You need to slowly direct them along these lines so they can understand and do the practices effectively.

Interviewer: I guess accepting the internal messyness is a big point to be emphasized at the beginning.

It's a huge one, and once again the Eastern teachers often don't address that. They might even come into the picture with the belief that they have to set the example of perfection. So they are in a trap straight away, because they can't admit that they are human and

have weaknesses and failings. They have to present themselves as perfect, especially if they are nuns or monks. And therefore the message they give is 'if you want to be successful you've got to be perfect'. This is a problem because we are not perfect, we're a mess. So we need to adopt a different approach. We say 'you are a mess, but that's OK, that's the beginning'. Just like you don't expect a baby to behave like an adult – it can't do it. You accept the stages of growth, and go on together. That's how we should approach this journey as well. Accepting the messiness is definitely the beginning point.

5. How can Buddhism link to other spiritual systems?

If you look at Christianity for example, when it infused the West it took over a lot of pagan celebrations and festivals, which I don't think modern Christians would readily acknowledge. So the question is to what degree the religion can absorb the local cultural forces that are beneficial without compromising the actual message of that religion. And Buddhism is famously adaptable. If you look at how it adapted to Taoism and Confucianism when it went to China, and when it went to Japan it adapted to Shintoism. Buddhism has always displayed this capacity to adapt in its outer form to cultural conditions, but always maintained the purity of the Buddha's teaching. When we talk about this I think we should remind ourselves that Buddhism is unlike the book religions – it doesn't depend on people believing. It depends on people practicing and finding out for themselves. So this is why the emphasis of Buddhism is on how you practice, not what you believe or what you profess. And if you work from that point of view, then obviously Buddhism can use tools - as long as they're not harmful - to enable people to gain access to what the Buddha was really saying, which is that you are capable of liberating your mind if you train your mind. And you might train in this way or that way from an external perspective, but these are the fundamental principles you always stick with, because the Buddha was always very clear about these. So if you approach from that direction, I would say that Buddhism is already starting to use forms of training from our culture like psychology, which the Buddha never talked about, but which are useful instruments for making Buddhism accessible.

In Africa, in particular Zimbabwe, in many ways the spiritual traditions resonate particularly with Vajrayana⁷ Buddhism, so Buddhism can use those methods to help people gain access to the deeper teachings that the Buddha offered. It's always about a system of gaining access, rather than changing the essential. Changing the essential would compromise what the Buddha taught and then it wouldn't be Buddhism anymore.

Interviewer: you talk about Buddhism's flexibility, but if you look at the short-term picture there doesn't seem to be a flexibility – for example the preservation of purely cultural elements in Tibetan Buddhism.

My impression is that the Tibetans feel they may be threatened with extinction, and therefore many Tibetans are very concerned with trying to rescue their culture, which was totally immersed in Buddhism. The two were inseparable. Because of this, at the moment you're getting a lot of rigidity. But don't overlook the fact that a lot of the young lamas are

just departing from this approach, and some of them are rejecting it. They are seeing it as an obstacle to Buddhism. It's a tough time for Tibetans. The culture is threatened, and I think some of the more traditional Tibetan Buddhist centres in the West are beginning to look more like museums – repositories of Tibetan cultural methods. From one point of view this is completely authentic, but let's not imagine that's how Buddhism is going to come to the West, because I don't think it is. There will always be some Westerners who can relate to the traditional Tibetan way of doing things, but the approach of Westerners thinking they have to turn themselves into pale-skinned Tibetans doesn't seem to work.

6. What are your views about an appropriate teacher-student relationship today?

If you look at the way Mahamudra was taught in Tibet for example, it depended very much on this regular contact between teacher and student, and what that meant was a very small proportion of people had access to that level of teaching. In a monastery of perhaps a thousand monks, maybe only 20 or 30 would have close contact with the guru. The rest would be doing menial tasks, pujas and other activities. Now Buddhism is coming to the West, and millions of people are wanting to engage with it. They are often doing it through books, but also through recordings, videos, through various forms of communication which weren't previously available, and I think this is calling for a much more intelligent approach. What it demands now is not that the student asks 'what do I do' and the teacher gives an instruction and he or she goes off and does it. What is more appropriate now is 'this is why you do it, and this is how, and these are the problems you are going to face'. So there's a huge elaboration of detail needed which wasn't necessarily there in Tibet for example. The information and the guidance has to be found in a much more diverse way, so there's a bigger emphasis on the student doing much more work, finding out, and making mistakes. There are a lot of casualties along the way, but you are also getting students developing a very intelligent and profound understanding of what they're taught. Interestingly, I gave a lecture in Harare a few months ago, and the wife of a Bhutanese diplomat was there. She came up afterwards and was amazed, she said "you know I've grown up in a Buddhist country but we never talk about Buddhism like this. We never actually have Buddhism explained in terms of basic principles and why Buddhism is the way it is. We don't know this." So what you've tended to get in these cultures is practitioners who are good on devotion, and seem able to get in touch on certain levels. And that seems to be about it. The picture in the West is totally different. People have got to use their intelligence, use their discrimination, make mistakes, and learn from these.

Interviewer: You talked about devotion – that's something a lot of Westerners struggle with. How important is it?

It's crucial, because devotion is that capacity to open your heart to the truth. Words like faith, devotion, and grace, which are essential energies for the practices, have been disgraced and discredited by the churches and people claiming to represent religion, but who aren't doing it properly. If you use those words in the West the vast majority of people just shut down immediately and won't listen to you anymore. So we can't use

them. We have to approach it differently. We help people prepare and say if you work through the psychological methods you arrive at a certain point where you have to develop confidence in your own inner wisdom. That's the beginning of faith, and that's the beginning of devotion.

7. Do you have any advice for practitioners who recognise the value in Buddhism but find some of the practices inaccessible?

What I'm finding is, for example with Vajrayana, if you can articulate the underlying principles to people in terminology they can understand, and which relate to existing methods of understanding they already have, they can see the sense of it, see why it works, and they can start engaging. Then I think for most Westerners the first effective training is probably something like mindfulness so they can see a result. Certain personality types, but not all, can relate to those methods which were so prevalent in the East like the pujas. With correct introduction some people can really get into them. But I don't think we should expect the majority to be able to relate to those. Just as in Christian churches the majority didn't necessarily relate to ritual. So I don't think it's all that different to our historical past.

Interviewer: Isn't it a bit of a tragedy that not many people will relate to Vajrayana given that it is supposedly a quick vehicle?

Well Vajrayana was never something practiced by the masses. Nor was Mahamudra practiced by the masses. Generally the masses are able to connect and work with something a lot simpler and more immediately accessible. And this isn't being critical of the masses, it's just that we need to meet people at the level at which they can work, and it may take somebody 20 years of doing basic mindfulness, working with the mind poisons, developing compassion, doing some mind training, to get to the point where they might even show an interest in Vajrayana. And then some people may not necessarily need to. If you look at Tibet for example, someone was telling me that as many nomads became enlightened as people in monasteries. Now those nomads would not have been doing complicated Vajrayana practices. They probably were reciting the *mani* mantra⁸ all day and leading good lives and not doing harm. So although Vajrayana is presented as this swift path, it can be practiced in this totally simple way, remembering the central issue of Vajrayana is to engage a symbol of transformation, and allow that symbol to transform the mind. That's the core. All the rest is context around that.

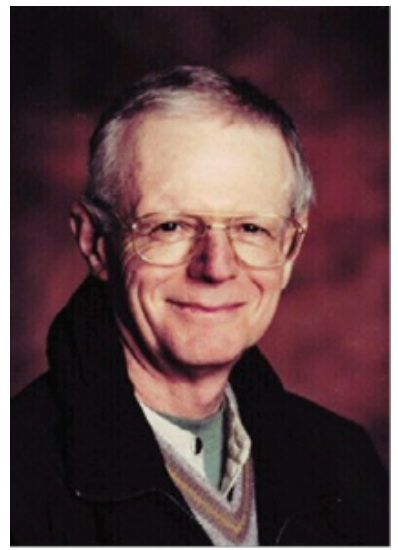
I think this initiative is very important because there are huge numbers of people getting very disenchanted by Tibetan Buddhism.

Rob Nairn is a teacher of meditation and Buddhism, and regularly gives courses in South Africa, Zimbabwe and the United Kingdom. He resigned as professor of criminology at the University of Cape Town in 1980 to pursue Buddhism full time. He has extensive experience in psychology. His Buddhist training was largely under the guidance of Tibetan teachers at Samye Ling

Monastery in Scotland, where he also completed a 4-year retreat. Author of three books: *Tranquil Mind*, *Diamond Mind* and *Living Dreaming Dying*. He has a keen interest in presenting Buddhist philosophy and practice in a way that is accessible to the Western mind.

For more information on Rob Nairn:

<http://www1.robairn.net/>



Stephen Batchelor

Former monk in both Tibetan and Zen traditions, author, teacher, known for piercing sense of humour and irreverence for holy cows.

1. What is the purpose of Buddhist practice?

The purpose of Buddhist practice, as I understand it, is to enable individuals to flourish fully as human beings in the philosophical, ethical and contemplative context of an eightfold-path that includes our view of the world, our intentions, words, acts, work, efforts, mindfulness and concentration. Throughout its history, Buddhism has repeatedly demonstrated that it presents a way of life open to all, irrespective of gender, nationality, ethnicity and cultural background.

2. What aspects of Buddhism should be adapted for different mindsets in different cultures?

One of the key challenges facing Buddhism today is to differentiate as clearly as possible between the beliefs and worldviews of ancient India in which its teachings are traditionally embedded (e.g. reincarnation, hells and heavens), and the ideas, values and practices that constitute its transcultural core (e.g. conditionality, compassion and meditative awareness). As Buddhism seeks to find its voice in modernity, it cannot ignore the findings of historical-critical scholarship concerning its textual tradition, those of the natural sciences concerning its view of the human organism, and those of the liberal, egalitarian and democratic traditions concerning its structures of power and hierarchy.

3. How practically do you work with the cultural adaptation of Buddhism?

I do my best to honour and interpret the core teachings and practices that have been handed down since the time of the Buddha, while articulating them in ways that respond effectively to the individual and collective suffering of our world today. I divide my time between writing books and leading retreats, both of which constantly challenge me to clarify my views in the light of the needs of my readers and students.

4. Do you think the current Western emphasis on short-term gratification is a problem?

I doubt very much that people in the modern West are the first to have been interested in short-term gratification and reluctant to engage in long-term spiritual transformation. This is simply the human condition. Many who are drawn to Buddhism are seeking a way of life that provides a heightened sense of well-being in the here and now as well as a framework for cultivating virtues and insights that lead to fulfillment over the course of their entire life, and culminate in a positive legacy for those who will remember them after their death. If Buddhism is to address the concerns of all people – householders as

well as monks and nuns – it has to find ways to address both short and long-term needs.

5. How can Buddhism link to other spiritual systems?

All forms of Buddhism that we know today are hybrids that emerged out of an interaction between Buddhist teachings and elements of Asian cultures. Even the earliest known forms of the Dharma were inflected by the worldviews of ancient India. Buddhism, as is amply illustrated throughout its history, thrives and grows in its interactions with non-Buddhist systems of thought and practice. To seek to isolate and protect the Dharma as though it were a hot-house plant is likely to result in self-referring and alienated ghettos of believers with an exaggerated sense of their own importance and little understanding of or sympathy for the world around them.

6. What are your views about an appropriate teacher-student relationship today?

“After my death,” the Buddha said to Ananda, “do not think you will have no teacher: the Dharma will be your teacher.” He did not encourage dependency on spiritual teachers, but sought to make his students autonomous and “independent of others in the teaching”. While it can be of great valuable to receive guidance from an experienced and wise teacher, the aim of the teacher should be to get the student to stand on his or her own feet as soon as possible. Over the centuries, however, Buddhist institutions have tended to concentrate authority in the teacher, which has often led to the student remaining forever disempowered. Rather than being a hindrance, I feel that the absence of teachers and institutions in the non-Buddhist world offers students the opportunity to find their own ways to create a Buddhism that responds to their needs rather than copying uncritically whatever is handed down from a revered past.

7. Do you have any advice for practitioners who recognise the value in Buddhism but find some of the practices inaccessible?

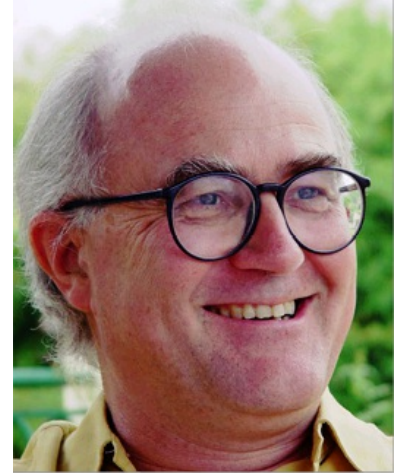
Find out what works for you and pursue it with all your heart. Engage yourself fully with whatever practices lead to greater wisdom and compassion. Do not let yourself be diverted from your deepest intuitions by the charisma, intelligence or pressure of others. In the end, life itself is your greatest teacher. Learn from your mistakes.

Concluding remarks on the spread of Buddhism into Africa

The spread of the Dharma to Africa offers an unprecedented challenge to Buddhist teachers and communities to engage with indigenous cultures and traditions that are different from those of Asia, Europe and America. If the Dharma is to take root in the African continent, it is likely that it will assume forms and practices that are influenced by the rich heritage of African ethics, religion and culture. Yet as long as Buddhism is in its infancy on the continent, it is important that Africans immerse themselves in the Dharma by learning its classical languages, studying its canonical texts, participating in sustained meditation retreats, and absorbing the wisdom passed down by its practitioners over the

ages. With more and more resources available on the internet, I would encourage Africans to engage widely with the international Buddhist cyber-sangha in order to enrich your knowledge of as many forms of Buddhist thought and practice as possible. Do your best to keep an open mind, and beware of getting drawn into the sectarian divisions and disputes that have bedevilled Buddhism throughout its history in Asia. “The future,” as the Dalai Lama once said about Buddhism in the West, “is in your hands.”

Stephen Batchelor is a Buddhist teacher, scholar and prolific author. He spent over 10 years as a monk in the Tibetan Buddhist Gelugpa tradition, and then in the Zen Buddhist tradition in Korea for several years. He is possibly best known today for his secular approach to Buddhism as expounded in his well-known books *Buddhism Without Beliefs*, and *Confessions of a Buddhist Atheist*. He says if there was a word ‘non-theist’, he would call himself that, because atheism implies a conclusion that is rather presumptuous. Stephen considers it important to return to the Pail Canon as a reliable source of Buddhist wisdom. His exploration into Buddhism’s role in the West has earned him both “condemnation as a heretic and praise as a reformer”.



For more information on Stephen Batchelor: <http://www.stephenbatchelor.org>

Jetsunma Tenzin Palmo

Ex-mountain cave hermit of 12 years and Buddhist nun, she has the unusual perspective being deeply steeped in traditional Buddhism in India as a woman, yet with a Western background.

1. What is the purpose of Buddhist practice?

Buddhism is a science of the mind with a deep understanding that our happiness and suffering is mainly caused by our internal responses to outer circumstances. It is based on the premise that our egoistic desires cause much of our problems and therefore to release our ego grasping will reduce our suffering. Our mind is disturbed by afflictive emotions such as greed, anger and jealousy so we need antidotes to deal with these mental poisons and help us to regain our psychological health and well-being.

2. What aspects of Buddhism should be adapted for different mindsets in different cultures?

Basically all people everywhere want to feel happy and to avoid painful experiences. The growing interest in meditation shows that there is an appreciation that a stable, well-tamed mind brings happiness. Because of the increasingly hectic pace of modern life, our minds are cluttered with mainly useless thoughts and emotions. Complicated visualisations and elaborate philosophical speculation sometimes only strain a mind already overloaded and weary. So it is helpful to consider practices which emphasise allowing the mind to rest and become more clear and focused. An appreciation of simplicity and contentment in daily life is also helpful - gratitude for what we already have rather than endless craving for what we have not.

Buddhism also gives us tools for cultivating qualities such as loving kindness, compassion and patience which open the heart to others and help us to learn and grow through the difficult circumstances we may encounter in our lives.

An appreciation of karma and rebirth helps us to accept that we are responsible for our lives and that our responses to present events and other people will fashion our future. We are always making choices and whether they are skillful or not will shape who we become and to a large extent what patterns our life will follow.

The basic Five Precepts of non-killing, non-stealing, sexual responsibility, non-lying or cheating and abstinence in regard to intoxicants, is a way to live in this world harmlessly and harmoniously. These basic rules of conduct are timeless and relevant in all societies.

3. How practically do you work with the cultural adaptation of Buddhism?

Nowadays the majority of people interested in spiritual matters are lay people with families, jobs and social lives. Therefore to emphasis renunciation of home life is not

helpful. Instead it is important to recognise that daily life *is* our Dharma practice, rather than thinking that practice is when we are meditating or reading a spiritual book, and dealing with our family or colleagues is worldly activity. If we can use our daily activities as an opportunity to develop generosity, ethical conduct, patience and kindness then this becomes a perfect Dharma practice. Where better to cultivate these essential qualities on the path than in the society of others?

4. Do you think the current Western emphasis on short-term gratification is a problem?

It is like growing a tree – after preparing the ground and planting the seed it takes time and application for this seed to transform into a sapling and eventually grow into a tall tree. Likewise we have to work on the garden of the mind – pulling out the weeds of mental defilements and digging down to loosen the heavy soil of our habitual tendencies. Then planting and encouraging the growth of healthy plants such as compassion, kindness and wisdom.

5. How can Buddhism link to other spiritual systems?

On the whole Buddhism is known for its tolerance and ability to adapt. Many adherents of other faiths practise Buddhist meditation in order to help them become better Christians or Hindus or whatever. Also much of the Buddhist view is what could be called ‘enlightened common sense’ which highlights the understanding of other religious traditions and often supplies the tools needed to transform our negativities. We know we should not be angry or greedy but Buddhism shows us how to work with and transform these negative emotions which cause so much damage to ourselves and the world around us.

6. What are your views about an appropriate teacher-student relationship today?

Even in Asia nowadays the genuine teachers are usually so busy running their organisations or travelling around the world that it is difficult for the average student to develop a close relationship. So many would-be aspirants are searching for the perfect teacher. However in the meantime our minds are like wild horses – good potential but untamed. Before we can train a wild horse it has to be calmed and encouraged to be trusting and amenable to training. Likewise our wild distracted minds need first to be quietened down and able to stay focused. Without a basically calm, flexible and workable mind we cannot be trained to go further. This basic stage of practice we can usually manage for ourselves after some initial instruction. We should remember that even the best of teachers can only give guidance but cannot walk the path for us.

7. Do you have any advice for practitioners who recognise the value in Buddhism but find some of the practices inaccessible?

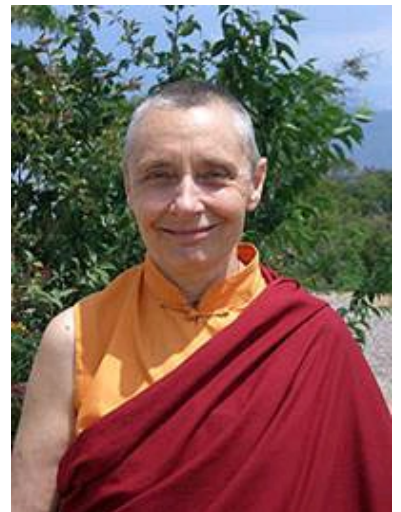
Buddhism is intended to help us to overcome the negative aspects of our mind and

cultivate the positive qualities. Ultimately we can transcend our ordinary conceptual thinking to become aware of a higher level of consciousness – known as the nature of the mind or buddha-nature – which is pure awareness, empty and clear, the heart of wisdom and compassion. Any methods which help us to open to this realisation could be helpful. Sometimes we resist certain forms – such as bowing – because they seem alien and unnecessary. But if we recognise their meaning, such as being an aid to overcoming our pride and egotism, then the form becomes meaningful and natural.

While half of the Buddhism imported from Asia is Dharma and half is culture, it is not always so easy to separate the two. So we should not be too quick to discard without first questioning the meaning behind the form and why we are so ready to reject it. Many people reject ideas and concepts that are unfamiliar without examining and scrutinising them carefully.

On the other hand we are **not** trying to become Tibetans or Japanese. Too ready an assimilation of foreign customs might also indicate a lack of confidence in being ourselves – hiding behind the correct outer forms. So it takes discrimination and experience to know what to retain and what to discard.

Tenzin Palmo has become a Buddhist legend and a role model for women to attain spiritual enlightenment. Born in the East End of London in 1943, from an early age she strove for perfection. This deep yearning inspired her to commit her life to attain enlightenment in the body of a woman in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition. Tenzin Palmo secluded herself in a cave in the Himalayas where she spent 12 years doing intensive spiritual practices. *Cave in the Snow*, the book by Vicki Mackenzie, describes these experiences: she faced unimaginable cold, avalanches, blizzards, wolves, grew her own food – and was happy. Since 1999 she has taken on the daunting task of establishing a nunnery in northern India for the indigenous young women who seek spiritual and intellectual realisation – including the almost extinct yogini tradition known as ‘togdenma’. Author of books including *Reflections on a Mountain Lake* and *Into the Heart of Life*. In 2008 Tenzin Palmo was given the rare title of ‘Jetsunma’ (Venerable Master) by HH the 12th Gyalwang Drukpa, in recognition of her spiritual achievements and her efforts for the status of female practitioners in Tibetan Buddhism.



For more information on Tenzin Palmo: <http://www.tenzinpalmo.com/>

¹ Precepts: the Buddhist code of ethics (not killing, not stealing, sexual responsibility, not lying or cheating and abstaining from intoxicants)

² A ‘puja’ is a structured practice linked with a particular deity such as Chenrezig (Tibetan) or Avalokiteshvara (Sanskrit). It typically involves preparatory prayers, a core part of visualizing the deity and mantra recitation, and a

dissolution phase with various closing prayers.

³ Mahamudra is the realization of ultimate truth, and is one of the trainings in the Kagyu Tibetan Buddhist tradition. The word means the 'Great Seal'.

⁴ Neurosis – although there are different opinions on the meaning of the word neurosis, here it is used in the sense of being 'a substitute for authentic pain' (as per Carl Jung's description). In other words neurotic behaviour occurs when the authentic pain experienced because of a particular situation or event is blocked in some way.

⁵ Dukkha is often translated as 'unsatisfactoriness' or 'suffering'

⁶ HIFAWIF essentially involves allowing a presenting emotion to be personified or take some form – which then makes it easier to explore the feelings and attitudes towards this form (i.e. the presenting emotion) which are holding it in place.

⁷ Vajrayana is a special aspect of Mahayana Buddhism which uses techniques such as visualisation and mantra in the path to enlightenment

⁸ OM MANI PEME HUNG – a common mantra in Buddhism linked with the deity practice of Chenrezig.

Acknowledgements

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