

ONE

BUDDHISM AND THE WAY

Grounding Your Meditation

Let's begin by reading the very first verse of this work that we are going to learn to practice—what the Tibetans would call the root text, the backbone of our time together, the *Mentor Devotion*. This teaching integrates both exoteric and esoteric practices into a method that energizes and accelerates your understanding and experience. The external teacher figure in Tibetan Buddhism is considered more of a friend than a mentor. Your esoteric teacher, by contrast, is one you imagine and visualize to be indivisible from the Buddha himself, someone who is a living exemplar of enlightenment. You use your mental power of imagination to propel you toward the enlightened state, to mobilize you to become like your teacher. This altered focus makes the teaching more accessible and immediate. It gives you a personal guide from the outset, a companion on the path but one who is always ahead of you, motivating you. The mentor figure empowers you, not just to play at self-transformation but actually to realize the teaching, to experience the higher goal state. Thus, “mentor devotion” is a practice of acknowledging or worshiping the Buddha in a model figure of your choice. You envision the mentor as the Buddha and strive to emulate that model until you are able to understand and embody the teaching entirely yourself. Though the teaching integrates this esoteric dimension and power, it can be practiced even by beginners and used by anyone who wants to learn its steps to travel the mainstream path to enlightenment.

As you read the following lines, go into a momentary meditational mode. Read the first verse to yourself:

*Through the great bliss state,
I myself become the mentor deity.
From my luminous body,
Light rays shine all around,
Massively blessing beings and things,
Making the universe pure and fabulous,
Perfection in its every quality.*

Take a minute to be with this image of light and perfection.

Now I will explain. The great bliss state is the state of reality—where we actually are, right here and now. It is not some elaborate place far away from where we are. The wonderful thing about the Buddha’s revelation, the Buddha’s insight, is that this reality itself *is* the great bliss state, that which he first called “Nirvana,” the extinction of all suffering, which he came to describe as “bliss void indivisible.”

The extinction of suffering and the achievement of perfect happiness and the reality of perfect happiness is the reality of our world. This was the Buddha’s good news. This is what he realized under the bodhi tree, where he first became enlightened. The bodhi tree was the original wish-granting gem tree. To find happiness or peace or enlightenment, we do not have to create some artificial world, a world apart from this world. We have to understand the nature of *this* world. And the nature of this world, when we do understand it, is revealed to us *through* our understanding, not from some other person just showing us something. Our own understanding reveals the nature of the world to us as the great bliss state of emptiness and openness. The nature of this world is superbliss, intertwined and indivisible.

This great bliss state, therefore, as the first line mentions, is the reality to which the Buddha awoke twenty-five hundred years ago, and to which millions and hundreds of millions of Buddhists over the centuries have

awakened. It is also, undoubtedly, the reality that the great founding teachers of other world traditions experienced and tasted in their own ways, and made available to people, sometimes through understanding, sometimes through faith, or sometimes through different experiences. It is the same great bliss state because it is the same reality. All beings dwell in this reality.

Unfortunately, most beings are not aware of it. They think they are dwelling in the reality of insufficiency, a self-centered reality where they are pitted against the world and the world is pitted against them. To them, the world is always suffering and always causes them frustration and always overwhelms them. The Buddha's good news is that you can actually take a break from this struggle. Relax. Ease back. He taught that where you are is actually perfect. But, of course, unfortunately, you can't know it just by my saying it, because you're so caught up in your stream of not knowing. So, the Buddha had to provide a method of education. The great teachers in all traditions provide you with arts of development and education whereby you can come to awaken from the world of delusion, in which you feel you must suffer, to the world of reality, in which you are automatically free from suffering.

The second line says, "I myself become the mentor deity." This is fascinating to put at the very beginning of the teaching, when we are thinking of ourselves as rank beginners. It challenges and empowers us at the outset.

"I myself": although I'm telling this to you, I'm the vessel through which this teaching is coming to you, I myself don't pretend to understand it fully, by any means. I'm also suffering in the world, still struggling with the world, because of my distorted perspective. However, when I say, "I myself become the mentor deity," when you yourself say, "I myself become the mentor deity," at the beginning of our practice, what we are doing is imagining ourselves as being already at the goal of awakening.

You're imagining that you actually are a buddha, you have become a buddha. You have awakened, and you're imagining what it feels like to awaken. You're imagining what it feels like to know that your reality is a great bliss state, indivisible and uninterrupted and indestructible. And you're imagining that in that great bliss state you become for others a mentor and a divine teacher, a mentor who is always present to all others in whatever

form they need.

The verse goes on, “From my luminous body”—you imagine your body no longer feels like a body of heavy flesh and blood obstructed and filled with gravity and old age and sickness and limitations and obstacles. “From my luminous body, light rays shine all around”—because once you become aware of the great bliss state that is the nature of reality, then your body itself becomes a teaching. Once you’ve become, out of your compassionate will, or from automatically wishing to manifest yourself as a mentor deity, a divine educator who can be shinningly present to everyone who needs you—once you have done that, your body becomes a light vehicle. It becomes a lens through which the light emerges from the natural state to all other beings and opens them and blesses them.

The fifth line says, “Massively blessing beings and things.” You are blessing them by bringing that light, the light of awakening, to them, causing them to look up from their treadmill, from the tunnels of desire and frustration and aversion and hatred and anger and confusion that they are charging down endlessly, round and round in an endless maze and circle. This light of reality, the light of bliss, shines on them, and they look up from their preoccupation, from their obsession, and they feel blessed by that moment of freedom, by a moment of looking up in wonder, glimpsing “the universe pure and fabulous, perfection in its every quality.” You see the universe as helping the beings. You see even the tunnels down which they run as radiating to the beings the light of reality, the light of freedom. Actually, you begin at this very end point. You are invited to taste the experience of already having reached the goal, just as the Buddha invited everyone to become as liberated, blissful, and powerful as himself. He did not hold himself above us.

This is another one of the greatneses of Tibetan Buddhism—Tibetan Buddhism is not a national thing, something “Made in Tibet,” something combined with some local traditions in Tibet—Tibetan Buddhism is Buddhism.

What is Buddhism? It is the response of awakened beings to unawakened beings’ wish to become awakened. That is what Buddhism is. When you become awakened, you realize your oneness with other beings. When you

realize your oneness with them, their suffering becomes your suffering, their delusion becomes your delusion. You feel it, just as they do. You don't imagine how they're feeling it, the way we normally do from within our self-enclosure, you actually feel it. When you feel it, then, you automatically respond to help alleviate it. You recognize, of course, that there's nothing you can do by force. There's nothing you can do by magic. There's nothing you can do *automatically* to relieve beings of that suffering. You can't sort of bliss them out instantaneously, or give them some kind of bliss-bomb explosion.

No matter how intense your own feeling is, within yourself, of joy and freedom and relief and relaxation, you can't automatically force other people into that mode. In fact, if you approach them with the very high energy of your own bliss, they will perceive that as a little bit of pressure, and they will then constrict more, and they will feel more pressure, and they will suffer more. You realize that the only way you yourself awakened and opened was to realize your selflessness, to realize that you are not an isolated, separated, absolute being, cut off from other beings, but that you, yourself, are nothing but a nexus of bliss.

You come to realize that you are empty of any intrinsic reality, separated identity, fixed, static personality, and by being empty of that, you become completely interconnected with all other beings. You don't become nonexistent, as some people fear, but you become a nexus of relationality with all other beings, with nothing resisting the delicate, intimate tendrils of relationality. Once you realize that, you realize that that infinite realm and web of relationality is bliss, and once you realize that as bliss, you have nothing left to do in the universe. Your old life is over, in a way, if in that life you had defined yourself as isolated and separated from the world, or struggling with the world to achieve a good position, to gain some sort of power or control or security or safety, or even if you were trying to flee from that interconnected universe. Instead of that, you now become the universe. Then, nothing is actually wrong in that universe. It is perfect.

But others don't see it that way. So, the one thing that *is* lacking in that perfect universe is their seeing it as perfect, so that everyone would feel perfectly at ease within it. You may automatically wish to free them, which

could lead to frustration if, in your initial glimpse of this awakening, you lacked the compassion, the skill in liberative technique, the art to really open to others the world as you see it, to enable them to see their own reality as a reality of bliss.

Originally, the Buddha found this vision under a tree. He went there. He met with the gods. He spent six years there after having been a prince his whole life. He talked to the gods. He asked them the nature of reality. After some questioning, they revealed that they weren't sure what it was, quite. They asked the Buddha to go find out and, if he found out, to let them know. He investigated and explored more and more. Finally, after much investigation and exploring, he discovered the nature of reality, which he called selflessness, which he called profound peace, which he called luminosity, radiance, transparency, which he called uncreated—reality as it is in itself. And when the Buddha discovered that, he said, “Like an elixir is this reality which I have found, an elixir of immortality.” And he was ecstatic and joyous. At first, he said, “I don't think I will show anyone this reality. No need to bother, because they will not understand it. So, instead, I'm going to stay in the forest and not speak to anyone.” However, in doing that, he was already speaking something, and he was already leaving a teaching for beings.

The first thing the Buddha gave as a teaching, in a way, was silence. The reason that he could afford to be silent was that, in that perception, he did perceive all beings as completely free from suffering. Even beings that perceived themselves as being in hell, he saw them as having an ultimate reality that was freedom from suffering. Even hell is a great bliss state in its reality. That deep vision of reality doesn't ignore, of course, that in its unreality, the way the beings in those hells perceive it, it is hell, with its many forms of agony. But that unreality, luckily, is far less real than the true reality, which is bliss. So, the silence of the Buddha was not a silence of abandoning other beings. It was a silence that affirmed that you, in your deepest being, your deeper, deeper reality of cells, of subatomic energies, your reality of your deepest sensitivity is, in fact, freedom—no matter the theater of pain you have fascinated yourself by, gotten caught up in, or are habitually obsessed with.

Thus, silence is the Buddha's greatest expression. It's the Buddha's great teaching, what the Hindus call "You Are That" in the Upanishads. "You are the ultimate reality. You are God!" the Hindus boldly declare. But the Buddha's way of affirming that fact is by being silent, because if you are *that*, after all, if you are what the theists think is God, you already know it yourself.

Buddhism, as merely a set of responses to the needs of beings, develops as they need them. It isn't some system that emerges as a thing-in-itself out of some reality. It is not a dogma, a structure built up on the basis of reality. Buddhism is, actually, simply, an endless series of methods and arts of opening doors to reality that fit with any particular person's location and place. "Buddhism" can emerge as Christianity. It can emerge as Judaism. It can emerge as humanism. It can emerge as nihilism, even temporarily, in some special cases. It can emerge as absolutisms of various kinds. It isn't that it consists of some rigid view, some orthodox ideology, some dogmatic religion. There is no fixed institution or "religion" that can be pinned down exactly as *the* referent of "Buddhism."

A BRIEF HISTORY OF BUDDHISM

To help you understand this revolutionary concept—revolutionary still today—let me give you a brief history of "Buddhism." During the beginning of Buddhism in India, the Buddha emphasized to people, to individuals, that they needed to break away from conventional society. Conventional society in his time was not the enlightened, beautiful, luminous, exquisite India that we know today, gradually emerging from centuries of colonial oppression. India in Buddha's time was a militaristic country, like ancient Greece or Iran or Egypt, a country of city-states with armies and armor, with a rigid class system, with people enslaving and exploiting other people, with people fighting and killing and conquering other people, with nature being exploited by the beginnings of the Agricultural Revolution. Cities and excessive wealth were being built up by some people, power was sought by vainglorious warrior rulers. Buddha himself was born as such a warrior ruler, and it was predicted, even, that he could conquer that whole world should he turn his mind to worldly power, wealth, and dominion. Fortunately for the world, he didn't do an Alexander the Great number, and instead, he turned inward to

conquer himself, to conquer reality. But in the India of his time, in Eurasia of that time, Buddha saw that first of all he had to emphasize individualism for people.

The Buddha asked, “Why should you live your life fighting and struggling and producing, enslaving and being enslaved? Why shouldn’t you just leave the conventional world? Why shouldn’t you fulfill yourself instead?” Imagine yourself as the Buddha back then. You were a person. You went and sat under a tree. You suffered. You struggled. You analyzed. You meditated. You came to a deep understanding of the essential blissfulness of every element and cell and particle of life, and even the bliss in the rocks and the bliss in the earth and the bliss in the volcanoes and the bliss in the stars. And then you saw these other beings running around madly chasing ephemeral goals, power, and dominion, which they would only lose when soon they died. And then after death, they would suffer from the negative acts they had committed against others in order to get that power and dominion—even if the power were knowledge, as with a yogi, a mage, or a scientist. They would die and forget that they had caused this-and-that disaster in the process of trying to get power, and be reborn, becoming again a deer caught in the headlights in some future world.

If you were the Buddha at that time, you, too, would have asked, “How can I break them out of these routine patterns, the social collective that they are caught in and that tells them to do this and do that by instinct, that tells them God wants them to do this, go from birth to death without ever looking up from the groove down which they are driven or preordained to follow? How can I show them that their own heart is an engine of bliss, their own brain an instrument of deep wisdom?” Well, you would emphasize individualism.

You would say, “Don’t just follow these conventional, traditional ideas, even religious ideas. Don’t follow them. They are just fitting you into somebody else’s scheme. You yourself can be god. You really are that, in fact. You, yourself, are reality. You, yourself, are buddha. So, don’t follow these things. Withdraw from them. Seek your own reality. Look inside yourself with mindfulness. Look inside yourself with analysis. Minimize your negative activities and evolutionary actions, and don’t harm other beings.

Become more helpful. Or, since you can't become helpful right away, because you can't yet see clearly, at least cease to harm."

And then, Buddha did a marvelous thing. He invented the monastic system. He invented being ordained as a monk or a nun so that people would be supported by the collective to escape from the collective. The Buddha chose India for this system because India was the wealthiest place then, and there was enough surplus that people could afford to support people living outside their collective; people had the generosity to support the nonconformist, the individualist. So, Buddha invented the monastic orders for men and women, the Sangha Jewel, the renunciate, transcendent community and their lay supporters. And this system caught on like wildfire in India, because people wanted and valued it and, as all human beings do, intuitively knew that some higher happiness exists that they should be able to get.

No religion can acquire our allegiance without promising that happiness for us, at least in the afterlife, or as a taste in a ritual in this life. Most religions get us to defer that achievement to some afterlife, heaven, the happy hunting ground. Shamanic, indigenous, tribal, nonliterate religions and the great religions alike do that. Secular humanism promises it, too, but only as a sort of stressless oblivion, since they don't have a very colorful heaven but a pretty quiet, dark one, a heavenly rest. But Buddha saw higher happiness as possible for everyone, here and now. So, he created an institution that celebrated that possibility, and it became a doorway to happiness within society.

It was as if the Buddha created holes in the cheese of society—he "Swiss-cheesed" the society. And the holes were the Sangha, the community, the renunciate institution, where people would go for lifelong free lunch. They would be fed free lunch by the lay community to keep their bodies going, and then they would spend their whole life energy liberating themselves, seeking freedom, not having to produce anything for anyone, not doing any agricultural work, not doing any military work, not doing any social work. Initially.

At first, the Buddha very intelligently and practically avoided challenging the cultural and social routines too much; he challenged them only enough to gain some space for the individual. The Buddha didn't dictate to his fellow

warrior kings, “You better stop doing this, and you better not do that.” But he did respond when they visited him, and he did say, “It would be better if you don’t have war, if you don’t make violence.” He gave a list of ethics, of not killing, not stealing, not committing sexual misconduct, not lying, and so forth, like the Ten Commandments, but ten recommendations rather than commandments. But he didn’t expect the kings to follow him too quickly.

Around four hundred years after the Buddha had left his body, the Sangha institution had produced many, many free people. And these free people, in a social feedback loop, had begun to make possible more freedom for the laypeople as well as the monastics. So, the Sangha institution could intervene more actively in society, in the routine lives of Indians. At that point, the less individualistic and more social teachings, which the Buddha had quietly planted earlier with a few disciples, became more useful, and people began to spread them as a kind of social gospel—called the Mahayana, the universal vehicle, or the vehicle of society. Those monastic institutions began to reach out and actually change the routine way of living in society. They unfolded the social dimension of the Buddha’s teaching and began to change the social ethic of India. Devotionalism began to arise, cutting across the class system. Universalism began to arise, cutting across the gender system. Vegetarianism began to arise, cutting across the sacrifice system. Pacifism and nonviolence began to arise, cutting across the militaristic system. And India advanced enormously, economically and culturally. It developed the most glorious culture of the ancient world, a culture where even the pursuit of pleasure was developed to a very sophisticated art.

The pursuit of wealth created the legendary riches of India, which brought Alexander the Great to India, later brought all kinds of Central Asian conquerors to India, eventually brought the Muslims, had Columbus drooling fifteen hundred years later, and brought other European conquistadors to India. That tremendous wealth began to develop in this time.

As the wealth and society began to expand more and more, some people decided they couldn’t wait for society to achieve freedom over a long period of time, felt they couldn’t wait for enlightenment through many, many lifetimes of their own. These people decided they would achieve this perfect freedom and perfect ability to help others achieve freedom in a single

lifetime. This was the beginning of the Tantric tradition, which was very esoteric at first. In the Tibetan view, Tantra emerged at the same time as the Mahayana, around one hundred years before the Common Era, but it remained completely esoteric for seven hundred years, without a single book on it being published. In its esoteric tradition, people lived on the fringes, on the margins; they were the magical people, the magicians, the *siddhas*, the adepts.

But after about five hundred years, the kings had become more gentle, relatively speaking, tamed by serious wealth and refined pleasure. Their militaristic habits subdued, the violence level in India became relatively moderate. So the Tantric masters began to emerge into the public because so many people were ready for more immediate realization and there was less need to keep their knowledge a secret. So, the deep exploration of the unconscious, the confrontation with the dark side, the elevation of the spiritual power of woman, and the sublime arts of fierce and gentle transformation that constitute the Vajrayana, the adamant vehicle, the Tantrayana, the “weaving” vehicle, the “continuum” vehicle—these most astounding spiritual technologies were safely brought out into more general usefulness.

These were the three main stages through which Indian society developed: individualism, universalism, and esotericism. The awakening responses developed in interaction with the culture of India, with the people of India. The more and more open, more and more vulnerable, more and more ready to experience their own bliss, to accept their own reality they became, the less and less afraid of joy they became.

Of course, when a society adopts this kind of view, it becomes vulnerable as a whole. In Western historiography of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and even the beginning of the twenty-first, a society that becomes vulnerable and gentle in this way is called “decadent.” There’s something wrong with it. Its military guard is let down. The individual is no longer pitted violently against himself; he is not violent within the family, against other families. The people are not harshly disciplined in the schools, disciplined in the military academies, and therefore, they are no longer ruthless, capable of inflicting harsh violence on neighbors in conquest or

defense. According to the Western view, the whole militaristic structure of life and of the individual heart, mind, soul, body, when weakened, creates decadence. But we must remember, this is the view of a militaristic society. We're the most militaristic society history has ever seen. We have nuclear weapons, germ warfare, incredible instruments of violence. Our culture is permeated with that violence, and our minds are permeated with that violence. Even our physical posture is permeated with that violence.

From the point of view of an enlightenment world history, however, the "decadence" that India had reached was, in fact, civilization. It was gentleness. It was something like a social paradise, heaven on earth, a New Jerusalem, but in India, temporarily. And it could only be temporary in any particular country at that time, because most of the world was still seething with violence and conquest and hordes and great invasion armies.

Inevitably, the gentle culture would eventually be swept over, overwhelmed by hordes of fierce warriors. The hordes themselves, of course, were actually looking for just such gentleness and joy, bliss and peace—for a surcease of suffering. But in thinking that they had to conquer it somehow, by violence, they destroyed what they were seeking. At least they destroyed its surface manifestations. But the great *siddhas*, the adepts, the great enlightened beings, the walking, living buddhas, had foreseen this. They realized that Central Asia was filled with potential yogis who were seeking bliss but thinking wrongly that it could be conquered by violence. The *siddhas* recognized that many of these would sweep into India and topple this gentle civilization, burn the monasteries, libraries, and temples to the goddesses and the male-female union icons, what Freud might have called "primal scene" deities, which frightened them most of all. So, the *siddhas* looked up and said, "Aha! Which among all these Central Asian barbarians may be the ones we can turn to, to save this jewel-like civilization of realization, where it won't be lost for the future?"

They looked, and they saw Tibet, where the people were violent conquerors at this time. The Tibetans were, perhaps, the most fierce of all contenders, powerful emperors and violent warriors, sweeping down from their wild plateau. But they had one saving grace. Their appetite for conquest was not limitless. This was not the result of any religious ideal or any special

racial trait but was an accident of their geography. Tibetans like to live at two to three miles in altitude. Therefore, when they would conquer China, or the Central Asian Silk Route, or northern India, they would feel a little too much oxygen, too much humidity, and they would soon go back up to the high, clear altitudes. So, they didn't ever want to stay anywhere. Once they unified the great giant plateau, large as all of Western Europe, they were happy with that.

And the great adepts saw that the Tibetans were ready to develop a more steady-state society. They thus could go to the Tibetans and turn them around from external conquest to internal conquest, from other-conquest to self-conquest, from territory-conquest to reality-conquest, from sword-conquest to Dharma-conquest—Dharma, in its highest meaning, meaning “reality.” In Sanskrit, *dharma* is the jewel of the Buddha's teaching, and the word has a range of meanings, going from “thing,” “quality,” through “duty,” “law,” “religion,” up to “path,” “teaching,” “truth,” “reality,” and even “freedom,” or Nirvana itself. Capitalized as an English word, *Dharma* usually means “teaching.” The expression “Dharma-conquest” was used by the Indian emperor Ashoka (third century B.C.E.) to describe his new policy of peaceful dialogue with neighbors after giving up military conquest.

So the great adepts began to send emissaries up over the passes into Tibet: Padmasambhava in the eighth century, Maitripa in the tenth, Atisha in the eleventh, and many others. They took with them their great treasury, their wish-granting gem tree, with all of its wish-fulfilling gem fruits, including the monastic vehicle of individual liberation, the universal vehicle of love and compassion, and the adamantite vehicle of depth psychology and inner subtle energy yogas.

They took this wisdom and art up there one by one, and text by text, and tradition by tradition. They dealt with the Tibetans one by one, and they turned these ferocious, individualistic, seminomadic warriors into the great yogis. And once they got the taste for it, many Tibetan seekers began to come down to the Indian plains and cities, braving the difficult journey to find the great adepts and wise teachers.

At first, there was tremendous resistance in the general Tibetan public. The Tibetans did not just say, “Oh, yeah, great, let's all be yogis and

meditate.” Not at all. The legend is that Padmasambhava had to wrestle and fight with all the mountain deities, the fierce, savage, military deities of Tibet, and one by one, mountain by mountain, he moved into Tibet, not like a shaman but like a supershaman. He overwhelmed them and impressed them by the one thing that the Buddhist deity-wrestlers always do, they never drive the deities out completely. They never eradicate or kill them. They wrestle them down, and then, when they *could* deliver a coup de grâce, and the deities know that, they start having retreats. Of course, at first these deities needed to be pinned down or they would have run away. But once a Buddhist supershaman pinned them down, he didn’t hurt them. He gave them endless lectures.

After a month, a year, or a century or two, the deities got sick of the talks and said, “Okay, I guess the Dharma is useful. Buddhism is helpful. I guess I would rather be enlightened than conquer another country or two.” And because these fierce deities were used to animal sacrifices, even human sacrifices in the most ancient period, the Buddhists always made them over into vegetarians with new rituals. The deities were a little disgruntled about that at first, but then they got used to it. They lost a little weight. They felt better. It was okay.

So, in this way, from the seventh century to the seventeenth century, the Tibetans were approached by enlightened beings in various manners and ways, men and women, adepts and simple people. Once beings become enlightened, they gain the ability to manifest in whatever way they are needed and can do the most good.

After about a thousand years of self-struggle, of self-investigation, of self-insight, the nation as a whole achieved what the Indians had achieved in about fifteen hundred years. They became demilitarized. They became gentle. They became monasticized. They became tantricized. They became internally and socially compassionate and ethical, you could say. But, it took a thousand years. Of course, some individual Tibetans, even in the first century, even in the first decade, did achieve enlightenment, although the Tibetans themselves like to say that Milarepa was the first Tibetan to achieve perfect buddhahood in a single life. Milarepa lived in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, and thus benefited from more than four hundred years of collective effort by many

Tibetan individuals. And still he had to go through an arduous evolutionary process from being a criminal, even a mass murderer, to becoming a perfect buddha. He had to undergo tremendous ordeals to purify his sins, and he made heroic efforts in solitary contemplation for decades to develop all the enlightened qualities.

Just as foreseen by the great adepts at the full flower of Indian civilization from 500–600 C.E. to 900–1000 C.E., India would begin to absorb the great waves of invasion that poured in during the second millennium. With the Iranian, Turkish, and Tajik Muslim invasions followed by the Portuguese, French, and British Christian invasions, the prominence of the enlightenment institutions melted away. Nevertheless, they did remain for the Indian people, apart from the Buddhist institutions, because the enlightenment perspective had become completely absorbed into the village social fabric as “Hinduism” and was able to persist unseen beneath the oppressive weight of the various conquerors. But the monasteries, libraries, temples, and stupa-monuments were all sacked and destroyed, and all evidence of organized Buddhism was wiped out of India—which goes to show you that “Buddhism” does not consist of merely some physical institutions. It is simply the response of enlightened beings to help the unenlightened.

Back in Tibet, the Tibetans had achieved the full measure of social incorporation of Buddhism by the seventeenth century. Only at this time can we say that the culture caught up with the great adepts, the advanced beings who had taught the Tibetans earlier, so only then did the culture as a whole reflect the enlightenment civilization, the enlightenment traditions. In the seventeenth century, after centuries of war and struggles for power, something extraordinary happened, perhaps the only instance in all of Buddhist history. The Tibetan people themselves, including the feuding warlords, with a few exceptions, who fortunately were defeated in the final battles, turned to the monasteries and said, “When we produce governments, we fight each other. We fight with each other for power all the time. To have a lasting peace, why don’t you enlightened teachers, with your high reincarnations, focus a bit more on society and take responsibility for the government?”

Speaking to the lamas, speaking to the monks, they said, “We’re going to

have a buddhocracy now, not a theocracy. We're going to have a lamocracy, a monastocracy, no longer a warlordocracy, no longer will we have feudal militarism running this country. Tibet will be run by lamas, by enlightened beings. Please, be enlightened and run our country for our own individual good, for our own liberation. Let us found a polity based on the individual aspiration of every individual within it, that each being should have maximum opportunity to unfold his or her enlightenment to the maximum degree in this life." The Fifth Dalai Lama accepted this invitation in 1642, and that's when the Tibetans, in celebration of this innovation, built the Potala Palace, a symbol of their choice to live under the aegis of the great bodhisattva of universal compassion. Starting in the 1630s and '40s, and finishing in the 1690s, they spent fifty years building that amazing building, the largest palace in the world.

The Potala is built on top of a fort. Upon the fort, there is a monastery, and the dominant activity within the fort is the monastic activity. Within the monastery is a Mandala Mansion, the ideal abode of the bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara, the bodhisattva of universal compassion. Thus, three levels are fused in one: the monastic, individual vehicle level of individualism, withdrawing from the social routine to achieve individual freedom; the social level, where a bodhisattva king runs the society a certain way and the ethic of compassion becomes the dominant ethic of the society; and the magical level of the Vajrayana, the magical cosmology where time has collapsed, where the individual can achieve perfect enlightenment, can evolve to perfect buddhahood, even within this life, where evolution can be accelerated to achieve buddhahood in a single life rather than the usual process of three incalculable aeons of lifetimes, evolving over millions of years, to develop the compassion, the amazing embodiment of buddhahood, not just the wisdom, the mentality of buddhahood.

Almost all religions try to defer gratification. They say, "Well, yes, you'll be at the throne of God. You'll be with the angels in heaven if you do right, if you work hard, if you give gifts; if you do this and that, you'll be with the buddhas in the pure land." Institutions feel that if people somehow even imagine the goal too much, if they taste it too much, then they'll drop out, and they won't serve the collective. Authoritarian societies, scarcity societies, militaristic societies fear that people won't fight and die for the group, that

people will want fulfillment for themselves now, and the society will collapse. But Tibet in the seventeenth century reached the point where the society was organized around more people wanting deep inner fulfillment more than anything else.

Ironically, even if you organize a society where theoretically anyone who wants fulfillment now could try to attain it, and would be supported by everyone else doing so, many people are still afraid of that idea. They work to get a certain quality of fulfillment, then they kind of postpone getting more. They tend to harden their personal paths into institutional forms, settle down as members of an institution, and consider that other personal paths or institutions are not as good as their own. This tendency leads to institutional division and conflict, which even arises between different forms of Buddhism. Centuries ago, the great Tibetan lamas decided that the orders of Tibetan Buddhism were getting too competitive with one another. To counter this trend, they reminded everybody that the orders were all really providing insights and arts for people to open up their own inner awareness, freedom, and joy. In fact, the real Buddhist vision is that people of all religions—even the secular humanists today—are on the Dharma path, the path to reality, the path to their fulfillment, the path to happiness. We must always remember that liberation is attained as much by wisdom, by science, as by faith and religion. Wisdom and science seek experience of reality, aim to find freedom from reality, and do not merely seek a home in a constructed belief system.

There is no such thing as being saved by being a member of some group. That is simply not correct. Being a member of some group usually serves to reinforce egotism, and egotism never can bring salvation, because egotism is, itself, doomed. Egotism is ignorance; it is misknowledge; it is the *cause* of suffering. Therefore, empowering the cause of suffering by egotistically becoming a Buddhist, or egotistically becoming a Christian, will never produce happiness. You'll be a miserable, frustrated Sufi or Buddhist or humanist, Protestant or Catholic, Orthodox or Reformed Jew, Nyingma or Gelukpa Buddhist. Whenever the group membership becomes the thing, you'll be miserable, because the group will intensify your ego, and egotism simply is the key to misery.

Tibetans came to believe that we can all become perfect buddhas. They

reversed most religions' and most peoples' sense of history as a process of decay and degeneration. They stopped saying, "Well, there was a Buddha back then, but nowadays we can't really become buddhas. Maybe we can become saints. Maybe we can become bodhisattvas. In a future life, we may be born in a pure land, or in a world ready for buddhas, and we could become buddhas, after more billions of lives of evolution." Tibetans, based on the gift to Tibet of the Tantric insight into the acceleration of evolution, came to feel that people could, *in this life*, become buddhas, and that many had. And so only the Tibetans developed the unique institution of the reincarnated lama—the reincarnation institution.

All Buddhists, Hindus, and most people in the world, actually, believe in some sort of rebirth or reincarnation. In fact, the early Christians did, too, along with the Greeks and the Rabbinic Jews. They called it "transmigration." They believed that there is a continuity of life, that we've been born before, we're born after, and we'll be born again and again, endlessly.

There are different versions of reincarnation in other world teachings. In some, we are always reborn as humans. In others, we weren't born before this life but we'll be reborn after it. But almost everybody subliminally and instinctively recognizes the infinite continuity of life, including individual life as well as collective species life. The form of rebirth or reincarnation particular to Buddhism was part of the "realistic worldview" called "karma," which means "causality" and simply is Darwinian evolution with an individual twist. It is scientific. It is not some mystical idea. It's a scientific description of the continuity of life, and it has an individualistic twist because it involves the soul in that Darwinian evolution, rather than making evolution a material thing that concerns only genes and species, collectives but no individuals.

In fact, that teaching, that evolutionary perspective, that vision changed Tibetan tribalism and egotism and race egotism and clan egotism tremendously. The Tibetans didn't invent Buddhism or reincarnation, but they took them to the next level because of their sense of the immediacy of the possibility of buddhahood. In their culture, many beings became perfect buddhas, and as perfect buddhas, they didn't want to abandon their people,

whom they were helping to develop their own buddhahood. They developed the conscious reincarnation tradition so that they would not lose progress or continuity. It's a very ingenious thing. The Dalai Lama, the Karmapa Lama—many, many of them—and, of course, other great beings were reincarnated many times in other ways without being formally recognized but still continued to help and to evolve.

So, that's a general review of Buddhism. This brief introduction explains the mystery of why an elementary teaching, like our jewel tree, begins by reminding us of the goal and that we will be *at* the goal ourselves. It lets us imagine ourselves *being at the goal* to give us the taste or boost that inspires us to achieve it. It was just around 1600 that this work on mentor worship at the foot of the jewel tree was written. It codifies the mainstream path of enlightenment that was used in India and Tibet, in fact, all through the history of Buddhism. This path of enlightenment is like a great conveyor belt, like the moving walkway in an airport, except this is a walkway without walls. So, anyone can get on it anywhere, and then it will take them along. And people can even walk ahead on this great conveyor toward enlightenment, and so go faster, as you do in airports when you're rushing for your flight.

THE THREE JEWELS AND THE JEWEL TREE

Now, we turn back to the text of our quest and retreat, and we begin at the very beginning. And the very beginning is what is called “taking refuge in the Three Jewels.” The Three Jewels are the foundation of all forms of Buddhism, and the first jewel is the Buddha. The word *buddha* means “the Awakened One.” And it doesn't mean only Shakyamuni Buddha, formerly the prince Siddhartha, who became a perfect buddha in the sixth century before the Common Era in India, whom we sometimes call the “historical buddha.” *Buddha* means all those who have awakened from the sleep of ignorance and blossomed into their full potential.

Awakened and blossomed, they are teachers of others. That is their most important name, “teacher,” because that role is just as important as the fact that they're awakened themselves. Remember that awakening, freedom from suffering, salvation, if you will, liberation, omniscience, buddhahood, all

come from your own understanding, your insight into your own reality. It cannot come just from the blessing of another, from some magical empowerment, from some sort of secret gimmick, or from membership in a group. It can't even come only through your faith, although some good faith may help. It can't come through meditation, either, at least not by meditation alone. So, the most important element of Buddha to us, until we become buddhas ourselves, is that Buddha is a teacher, and he gives us a teaching. Now, teaching is not an indoctrination; it's not imposing a dogma. A teaching gives us a set of methods that we can use to develop ourselves, to learn, to think over, to meditate upon, and finally, to gain deep, profound, transforming insight, wisdom, and understanding.

So, we take refuge in the Buddha: *Namo buddham sharanam gacchami*. We take refuge in the Buddha. We mean, we turn to the teaching of the reality of bliss, the teaching of the possibility of happiness, the teaching of the method of achieving happiness in whatever form it comes to us, whether it comes as Christianity, whether it comes as humanism, whether it comes as Hinduism, Sufism, or Buddhism. The form doesn't matter. The teacher is Buddha to us, one who can point the way to our own reality for us. He could be a scientist; she could be a religious teacher.

Now, the second refuge—we take refuge in the Dharma: *Namo dharmam sharanam gacchami*. The second jewel of refuge is Dharma. *Dharma* means “to be held.” *Dharma* in its highest meaning means reality itself. Beneath that, it has a wide range of other meanings.

The highest meaning of *Dharma* is the reality that is our own reality—the reality that holds us in freedom from suffering, holds us apart from suffering, holds us in a state of bliss. Dharma is our own reality that we seek to understand fully, to open to fully. Dharma, therefore, also consists of those methods and the teaching of those methods that are the arts and sciences that enable us to open ourselves. They are also Dharma. The practices that we do, which will open us, which follow those teachings, which implement them in our lives, in our practice, and in our performance, which deploy those arts—they are also Dharma.

Virtues and ethics and practices are also Dharma. Even the qualities that we develop, the positive qualities that lead us toward freedom and reality,

those are Dharma. That is how *Dharma* came to mean a religion in some contexts, and also “duty” and other kinds of routines in Vedic Brahmanism, before Buddha used it in the liberating way. In later Hinduism, in the *Bhagavad-Gita*, *Dharma* was used by God to say, “Do your dharma,” meaning, “Do your duty.” “Follow your role as a warrior, Arjuna!” said God. “Krishna, you warrior, follow your Dharma!” That means, “Follow your duty.” But in Buddhist terms, *Dharma* means more like Joseph Campbell’s great statement, “Follow your bliss!” Bliss is your freedom. So it means, “Follow your freedom!” And it came more to mean that in India, after Buddha’s time, also in another strand in the *Gita*, in Hinduism and Jainism, as well as Buddhism.

So, the second jewel is Dharma, the real jewel of refuge in Buddhism. Ultimately, we take refuge in reality itself, because that is the only secure refuge. If we took refuge in any unrealistic thing, it could be blown down by this-and-that howling wind—but when we take refuge in reality, that is what endures. It is uncreated. It is not made by anyone, reality. It lasts. It is there, and therefore it can give refuge. The final taking of refuge, the receiving refuge in reality, is embodying reality in our being, realizing that reality is our body and breath and thought and mind. Therefore, the final refuge is only being buddha ourselves. But meanwhile, to whatever extent we can open to reality, we take refuge in reality, the second jewel.

The third jewel is the Sangha, the community of those who enjoy the jewels of refuge, who learn that teaching, seek that understanding, and work to embody that Dharma. They are consciously evolving toward being buddhas, sharing their understanding and bliss with others, as teachers of freedom to other beings, helping them discover these jewels. This includes all Buddhists everywhere and through time, in Sri Lanka, in Thailand, in Burma, in Tibet, in China, Korea, Mongolia, Japan, Vietnam, in ancient time and still now in India.

Namo buddham sharanam gacchami. Namo dharmam sharanam gacchami. Namo sangham sharanam gacchami.

All Buddhists say this, each in his own language. *Namo* means “I bow,” meaning by bowing to express trust and faith and respect, to throw yourself on the mercy of another. *Buddham* is “to the Buddha.” *Sharanam* means

“refuge,” a safe place of renewal, a resort. *Gacchami* means “I go.” So, “I bow to Buddha and resort to him as refuge.” *Resort* has a good double meaning, both “refuge” and “vacation resort,” not just some pious act of going someplace and bowing to someone and then entering some sort of prison cell. It’s like going to a vacation resort, going for a rest, to relax, restore your energy, enjoy, to get some peace. *Sharanam*, “refuge,” is related to the word *shramana*, “ascetic,” one who is “world weary,” tired of the ordinary round, willing to give up minor pleasures for the great pleasure of release, peace, bliss. A *shramana* is “one who goes to refuge” from suffering. We sometimes translate it as “ascetic.” But I like to translate it as “vacationer,” one who goes away and takes a break. *Dharmam sharanam gacchami*, “I take refuge in reality.” I go there for refuge. *Sangham sharanam gacchami*, “I take refuge in the community.” I go there to join those friends who are taking a break.

Now because of Tibetans’ particular history, in which Tibet became the incubator, preserver, the crucible, the special mountain petal, high lotus where the quintessence of the Indian Buddhist civilization is cradled, Snow-Peak-Petaled White Lotus of Dharma, the Tibetans added a new context for the Three Jewels. Because of their insistence on the immediacy of enlightenment potential, they added the jewel of the lama, the spiritual teacher, the mentor. But the mentor is not a fourth jewel. That would be an incorrect interpretation. The teacher is the one who makes the Three Jewels immediate, accessible to you and me. The teacher is the mentor who embodies the Three Jewels, opens the door for us to get to them. So, that is why in our jewel tree teaching, we say first of all, “I bow to the mentor and go for refuge.” This means that you choose to envision that the mentor’s body is the living Sangha Jewel, the mentor’s speech is the living Dharma Jewel, and the mentor’s mind is the living Buddha Jewel. This makes the jewels immediate, alive, present to you. Otherwise, when you say, “*Namo Buddham*,” if you’re thinking of the person long ago in history who died and passed away and is gone far away, though you say, “I go for refuge to him,” how can you get to such a refuge?

You are saying, “I go to historical memory. I go to my faith that he once was in the world, that maybe another Buddha will come someday.” But if you think of the Buddha as long gone, there’s no one around in whom you can

take refuge. So, instead, for you, the mentor's or teacher's mind becomes the living Buddha. For your personal inspiration, your practical use, you make an icon out of the mentor, just as a Theravada Buddhist temple has an icon or statue of Shakyamuni Buddha. It's not idolatry; they never think that image *is* Shakyamuni Buddha. They think Buddha attained Parinirvana, ultimate Nirvana, thousands of years earlier. But the icon or statue helps their memory—your mind—focus on Shakyamuni Buddha.

The Tibetans have plenty of icons and statues, too, but they also learned from their Indian teachers to take the living teacher as an icon and focus their remembrance on Shakyamuni Buddha by thinking, “The mind of my mentor is Shakyamuni Buddha.” This subtle shift in focus works as a way of feeling the living presence of Shakyamuni Buddha, not gone far away but still with you, encouraging your practice.

“I take refuge in the Teaching.” The icons of the Dharma are all the texts, the scriptures. The sacred texts are the Word of Buddha. They have been transmitted through history. They were memorized as he spoke, then they were written down. Then they were copied. Then they were edited and they were corrected. But no text, actually, completely, identically, can follow what the Buddha said. They're only a memory, a commemoration, a reminder. Again, if Buddha's not there speaking, I can't find the Buddha's speech, which opens the doorway for me into reality itself. But if the mentor's speech becomes the Dharma for me, if I can see the mentor's speech as the living Dharma, I can go for refuge to that speech, I can find there the living Word of Buddha. It becomes alive for me. Dharma becomes, therefore, realizable by me, here and now. Reality's doorway opens for me, the reality of freedom and liberation comes close to me, here and now.

Namo sangham sharanam gacchami. If you think of the Sangha Jewel, the spiritual community, as great saints long past, then what's the Sangha today, some lost guys wandering around here and there? The mentor is, ideally, a monk. The mentor can certainly be, and often is (perhaps should be more often), a woman, too. He or she's a fully ordained male or female mendicant. The mentor, therefore, is a member of that same, unbroken lineage of the Jewel Community. His body is the community. Her body is restrained by the vows of individual liberation, her heart is formed by the

universal vehicle of love and compassion, the spirit of enlightenment of infinite love and compassion for all beings. So, the mentor's body becomes the living presence of the Jewel Community.

Many people say, "Well, I'm a Christian or a Sufi, a Buddhist or a Jew. But I can't be good. I'm going to be a nasty businessman all day, I'm going to be a nasty egotist. But then I'll go to church or synagogue or temple or mosque, and I'll pray to be cleansed. Jesus, or someone else, will cleanse me, Buddha or Avalokiteshvara will save me later. I'm just a hopeless sinner, and there's no way I'll deal with it." This common way of being religious is actually good, too, because, although you kind of excuse yourself six days a week, at least for a few hours on Saturday or Sunday you'll try to be one with the savior being, however you visualize the mentor being.

Now, today, this moment, I hope we can take some inspiration from Buddhism, from this essence of Buddhism, and aim to live up to our ideals more fully. We must make it twenty-four/seven to be in communion; we must follow the precepts of Muhammad and do the ethical thing and the virtuous thing, twenty-four/seven; we must not kill, not steal, not commit sexual misconduct, not lie, not cause dissension, not speak harshly, not speak meaninglessly, not hold malice, not greedily think of getting something from others, not be prejudiced or fanatical.

INVOKING OUR MENTOR

So, as you invoke your mentor to give you access to the Three Jewels and our jewel tree, you can either say or just think the following: "*I and all space full of mother beings, from now until enlightenment, take refuge in the Mentor and the Three Jewels!*" We repeat this three times, so that our own bodies, our own speech, and our own minds, the three levels of our being, from exterior to interior, all are seen and all go into the refuge of Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha, made immediate by the presence of the unbroken lineage of the Lama Mentors.

The *Mentor Devotion* says, "*I and all space full of mother beings, from now until enlightenment, take refuge in the Mentor and the Three Jewels! I and all space full of mother beings, from now until enlightenment, take refuge*

in the Mentor and the Three Jewels! I and all space full of mother beings, from now until enlightenment, take refuge in the Mentor and the Three Jewels!”

Then, we repeat the refuge resolution three times: *Namo gurubhyoh. Namobuddhaya. Namodharmaya. Namasanghaya. Namogurubhyoh. Namobuddhaya. Namodharmaya. Namasanghaya. Namogurubhyoh. Namobuddhaya. Namodharmaya. Namasanghaya.*

Next, we repeat the vow to perform the particular practice of the *Mentor Devotion*:

For the sake of all mother beings, I myself will become a mentor deity to install all beings in the supreme exaltation as being mentor deities themselves. For the sake of all mother beings, I will become a mentor deity to install all beings into the supreme exaltation as being mentor deities themselves. For the sake of all mother beings, I will become a mentor deity to install all beings in the supreme exaltation as being mentor deities themselves.

If you say this as a Christian, you would say, “For the sake of all mother beings, I will become a Christ, in order to lead all beings to becoming a Christ. For the sake of all mother beings, I will become a Christ, in order to lead all beings to becoming a Christ. For the sake of all mother beings, I will become a Christ, in order to lead all beings to becoming a Christ.”

This is like the teaching of the *Imitatio Christi* that we have from the medieval Christian monastic period. The “Imitation of Christ” expresses the resolve that “I will live up to the mystical body of Christ. I will embody Christ’s virtues.” And you don’t necessarily mean that you are vowing you will follow Jesus’ physical path, that you’re going to have yourself crucified. Some medieval Christians did just that, however. For example, the Jesuits in their Stations of the Cross meditation, which Ignatius taught, visualize themselves carrying the cross and going to Golgotha, going through the whole thing. In that sense, they have a visualization of being crucified.

But when you say, “I will practice a path, I will become a Christ, I will

imitate Christ, for the sake of all my mother beings, so that they, too, can come to an understanding where they, too, can become a Christ,” you’re rising to a spiritual level that is in all the teachings—in which the “kingdom of God is within you.”

If you do this as a humanist, you say, “I will become Socrates, the wisest of all, who knows he or she knows nothing but who seeks to harness the soul and the passions and make them work with the Apollonian drive of reason, to harness them to the chariot of reason, so that the intelligent passions guided by the reins of reason lead us to a full and a benevolent and altruistic life, leaving a good legacy to all beings, even though I, myself, think of myself as not having a future life, I think of myself as just part of my lineage as a humanist.”

In this way, the Three Jewels can find parallels; “I take refuge in the Buddha” would correspond for a Christian to “I take refuge in the Christ.” “I take refuge in the Dharma” to “I take refuge in the Holy Ghost” or “in the Holy Spirit”; that is, “I take refuge in the reality, as God knows it, or the Holy Spirit knows it, not the deluded reality of ignorant beings.” And “I take refuge in the Sangha” to “I take refuge in the holy community of all the great saints and all the great monks, and even the laypeople who are trying to do something positive within that tradition.”

As a Jew, you would say, “I take refuge in Moses.” “I take refuge in the Dharma” would become “I take refuge in the Torah, the law.” (Actually, *Dharma*, means “law” in secular India or China, in East Asian society, and *Dharmashastra* means “law school” in India today.) And, for the Sangha, “I take refuge in the community of the rabbis and saints and Hasidic masters.”

In earlier days in all of the Abrahamic traditions, there were plenty of angels and divine beings, many different kinds, not just the one absolutely transcendental God. The Abrahamic One God has all his angels, all his spirits and beings there benevolently to bless you. At Armageddon, Jesus is supposed to come down with an army of them. Today, modern secularism has people pretend there’s not much of that. But the Buddhist tradition hopes to inspire other traditions to use their own teachings to live up to their ideals. This is how the *Mentor Devotion* hopes to inspire all Buddhist traditions as well, to make the Buddha’s presence more immediate. The Buddha’s life is

not just something in a historical past, with us left behind and lost here. The Buddha is not meant to be envisioned as a presence whom we will encounter in some world in the future. We should, rather, make the Buddha immediate for ourselves. We should connect ourselves to the Buddha's immediate presence in our minds, intentions, and actions. We do not just aim to emulate or admire the Buddha, the ancient saints, and bodhisattvas. We aim to become buddhas today, saints today, bodhisattvas today, at our level of ability.

THE JEWEL TREE MEDITATION

Now, before we meditate on anything that we want to understand deeply, we have to visualize the setting and focus our minds. In this practice, throughout the book, we will create the wish-fulfilling jewel tree, the wish-granting gem tree. As you read the text here, read it meditatively, that is, just try to see the images as the words go along. Don't grasp for the physics or mechanics behind it or try to analyze it. Don't get frustrated and feel it's complicated. Just go with it. Think of the images as creating a huge, wish-granting jewel tree right there before you, as if suddenly you were Jack before the Beanstalk—you came around the corner, and there was this giant beanstalk reaching up into infinite space, except this is a tree, it is made of jewels, and it bears jewel fruit.

We create a foundation for this celestial setting by visualizing ourselves giving away the universe. We say "OM" to invoke the universal, divine energy of all buddhas and gods and deities and teachers and prophets and saviors of all traditions throughout the universe. "OM" invokes their presence and their energy and their blessing. "AH" celebrates that this permeates us through and through, and radiates through our invocation to all beings everywhere. And "HUM" integrates this energy in this moment, in this situation in which we currently are. So, "OM AH HUM" is like "Amen," from the cosmic vibration of divine energy in the universe. If you're a Jew or Christian or Muslim, you can say "Amen," or the Arabic or the Hebrew version of "Amen."

The ancient text of the *Mentor Devotion* says:

Primal wisdom in reality appear as inner offering and individual offerings and works to create the distinctive bliss-void wisdom in the fields of the six senses, extending outer, inner, and secret clouds of offering, totally filling earth, sky, and all of space with inconceivable visions and sacred substances.

This means, just think of everything that you can think of, every beautiful thing that you know of, not only your own possessions but things you've admired in museums or seen in advertisements or seen in movies—any beautiful gems, flowers and gardens, landscapes and planets—all of it. And think of giving it all away to the enlightened beings, to the savior beings in the universe. This is a way of giving up your ordinary perception. To make offering is to give up your possession and perception of things that get in your way and can keep you from seeing clearly, and to turn them over to the pure perception of the enlightened being, of the divine being to whom it never looks imperfect, who can see beauty in everything, can see all joy and bliss in everything, in reality. So, you're giving it away, giving it up, giving over your perception to a higher perception.

So, always in your meditative practice, you begin by visualizing yourself as giving away the world, entrusting it to the care of more enlightened beings and so giving yourself permission not to worry about it for a while, turning your focus inward to your own spiritual unfolding. We'll come back to this point again and again.

If you are doing this practice in the context of another tradition, in place of the mentor that I visualize in the crown of the jewel tree as indivisible from His Holiness the Dalai Lama, or Buddha, you can visualize Jesus, Mother Mary, Muhammad, al-Khidr, Moses, Krishna, or Socrates. You put there whatever mentor you have, whatever teacher you know whose immediate presence inspires you most deeply. And you don't have to have just one.

Now, here's the description from our *Mentor Devotion* text:

In the middle of the all-good offering clouds arranged in the vast heavens of bliss-void indivisible; in the crown of the miraculous, wish-granting gem tree, radiantly beautiful with leaves, flowers, and fruits; on a sparkling jewel

lion throne on cushions of spreading lotus sun and moon sits my thrice-kind root mentor, the actuality of all enlightened beings.

His form is of a fulfilled mendicant with one face, two arms smiling radiantly, right hand in the Dharma-teaching gesture, left hand flat in meditation, holding a bowl of elixir. He wears the three robes glowing saffron color, head beautiful with the yellow scholar's hat. At his heart sits the omnipresent lord Vajradhara, with one face, two arms, sapphire blue in color, holding vajra and bell, embracing Lady Vajradhatu Ishvaree, goddess of the diamond realm; both partners ecstatic in the play of bliss and void, resplendent with multifaceted jewel ornaments, draped with divinely wrought silken clothes, adorned with the signs and marks of perfection, surrounded by halos of five-colored rainbows, shining like the sun.

He, my lama mentor, sits in the cross-legged vajra posture. His five body-mind systems are really the five bliss-lords; his four elements, the four buddha-ladies; his sense media, nerves, muscles, and joints, the eight bodhisattvas. His body hairs are the 21,000 immortal saints. His limbs are the fierce lords. His light rays are protectors and fierce spirits, and the worldly gods lie beneath him. Around him sit in rows an ocean of live and ancestral mentors, archetypal deities and divine mandala hosts, buddhas, bodhisattvas, angels, and defenders of the Dharma [Christ, prophets, gods, goddesses, teachers of every variety and every tradition on all planets in all universes].

The three doors of all these deities' body, speech, and mind are marked by the three vajras: OM on the crown, AH at the throat, and HUM at the heart. The iron-hook tractor beams of light rays from their heart HUMs draw wisdom-hero spiritual duplicates of all deities from their natural abodes. Wisdom heroes and visualized heroes become indivisible and substantially present.

The jeweled lion throne is in the central crown of the jewel tree, which is this vast tree that rises before us from our position on a hill high above earth, out of an island in a jewel lake that sits below us on the top of the world. And this vast tree rises there, shining radiantly, filling us with rainbow light.

And at each branch and on each leaf, there sits another heavenly angel. Whatever beings it makes you feel good to imagine—your parents, your teachers, whoever it may be for you—are your heavenly host. They are not my heavenly host—I am, of course, visualizing my own version, following the *Mentor Devotion*, but you should visualize your own heavenly host. The host could be she, it could be he, it could be Buddhist, it could be Christian, it could be Jewish, it could be secular humanist. Whatever you want. Taoist, Confucian, Hindu, Jain, or all of them together—the vast perennial host of enlightened beings. And from them, light rays sparkle and flow down to us, melting our sense of ordinariness, our ordinary self-image, our ordinary self-identity, our ordinary feeling of being just Joe or Jeff or Jim or Bob or Ann or Nena, in an ordinary world, in an ordinary building. We temporarily suspend that whole thing. We're in a sacred shrine space, a force field, filled with rainbow energy, with luminous solar light, intense, blazing, powerful, buoyant energy.

We're enfolded in communion with the mentor lama because of that energy. We're lifted out of our normal perspective, our normal self-limiting self-image, and our potential is unfolded. We're capable of understanding any new thing. We're capable of seeing more deeply any old thing. We're capable of being close to Christ, close to Muhammad, close to Buddha, close to God, close to Mary, close to Goddess.

We're not far away from them. There they are in this giant jewel tree, fulfilling all our wishes for happiness. Light flows from them as if it were liquid elixir, jewelline, flowing, brilliant, radiant light, filling us in every pore, pouring into the crown of our head, driving away all doubt and anxiety and self-concern, as if they were only shadowy, flickering things in our heart and mind and body. They're just washed out of us and flow away. We're in this magical environment in front of Lake Manasarovar, the highest lake in the world, the most crystal lake in the world, with the magical island and the magical world tree, wish-fulfilling gem tree, growing out of that lake with all the heavenly beings shining on all the Hindu gurus, Krishna, Shiva, Uma, Radha, Rama, Sita, Hanuman, Saint Teresa, Hildegard of Bingen, St. Francis, Thomas Merton, all together there. They are looking particularly happy, chatting with each other, sitting on their branches of this jeweled, jingling tree in this radiant light. And they are happy because we are meditating on

something beneficial.

We are in our retreat space. We are visualizing ourselves in this space of all potential, space of all fruition. And we're going to turn our mind to a path of evolution, accelerating evolution for the sake of all beings. We want to join their being to those beings who have become a refuge for others, being free and blissful themselves. And now, we imagine that around us on this bluff, sloping down toward the lake, are all the beings that we know, all the beings that we're barely acquainted with, and all the beings that we don't know, all in human form. If you talk to animals and animals can talk to you, you can have some animals, too. And they're all around us, but they don't see that jewel tree at the moment. But they see us, and they're looking at us, and as we fill up with light as it flows down for us in blessings from the jewel tree, and from the mentor deity in the jewel tree, the mentor beings, the savior beings, the goddesses, the gods, as it flows down to us, we fill up with that light, and it reflects out from us to the beings around us, and so we feel, "Well, they're not seeing those mentor beings and the jewel divine tree, but they're seeing us."

And as much as we find communion and we become luminous, to that extent they will receive that blessing through us. So, we are accomplishing this understanding for them. And we look at them, and we think of our loved ones there, and, of course, we want any benefit we have in our mind, any opening, any joy, any happiness, immediately to be shared with them.

We're doing it for them. Even those we don't know, they could be our intimates. They could be our loved ones. They have been in previous lives, they will be in future lives. And they could be in this life, we could get to know them. So, we send them the same loving blessing, see them as equal to our loved ones. Then, there are the beings that don't like us, and we don't like them, and even thinking of them being there is almost offensive, because we can't stand them. But we must put them there anyway. And we radiate and we bless them and we reflect that, actually, they were our loved ones in previous time. They certainly were; they will be again. We will find out, because enemy becomes friend, friend becomes enemy. Both friend and enemy become unknown. Unknown become both friend and enemy. All these keep changing in their roles and relationships to us, again and again. So, we

must try to feel equally positive toward all of the beings around us, and equal love and blessing and affection, equal commitment to opening their minds and hearts as our minds and hearts open.

And when they see this light from us, even the ones who don't like us, they're kind of intrigued by it. They send back a vibration—in the case of the loved ones, of gratitude; of the unknown ones, of interest; of the unloved ones, a kind of challenge. But all of it is energy, and it comes back to us in the form of more encouragement and energy. And then we send the light back, our gratitude and our offering, our feeling of turning over the world to the enlightened beings in the refuge jewel tree. We create a kind of figure eight of positive energy, positive reinforcement between us and the jewel tree and all the beings around us. We sit at this nexus point of energy for all of our meditations. And all of our meditations and reflections in the future sessions will be within the context of this environment. Even though we may not be able to see it in any detail, we may not be able to visualize it clearly at first, or hold it firmly, we shouldn't feel frustrated or worry about it—we should just know it's there.

We can grow used to this great image, like a familiar room or favorite place in nature. We automatically can imagine that we have come into this luminous realm at the beginning of any meditation session. We can enclose all of our life and especially spiritual practices within the environment of this wish-fulfilling jewel tree, so that we're not in the space of our ordinary, limited, frustrating, and disappointing reality. We're in a space of infinite potential, infinite possibility, infinite luminosity, infinite openness, and endless friendliness.

We feel at home in this. We develop a feeling of being at home here in this space. We can spend time visualizing specific branches or the whole tree or the lion throne or individual figures whom we know, even the glowing face of our most beloved mentor lama, Jesus, Mary, the Great Goddess, Krishna, or Buddha. The beings above us feel really happy when we do this, when we enter this connection with them.

The *Mentor Devotion* has us bring our actual mentors into our visualizations:

The three doors of all these deities' body, speech, and mind are marked by the three vajras: OM on the crown, AH at the throat, and HUM at the heart. The iron-hook tractor beams of light rays from their heart HUMs draw wisdom-hero spiritual duplicates of all deities from their natural abodes. Wisdom heroes and visualized heroes become indivisible and substantially present.

We see on the crown of every single one of the beings a diamond OM letter, could be in Sanskrit or English, OMs on the crowns of their heads, all of them, ruby red AHs standing at the throats of all of them, and deep blue sapphire HUMs standing at the hearts of all of them, glowing and radiating and sparkling. Once we feel the mentor deities are really there, we salute them, make offerings to them, invite them, and then receive their blessings. We'll look at the salutations and offerings in the next chapter, but the *Mentor Devotion* here formulates the invitation and the blessing:

You are mentor! You are archetypal deity! You are angel and protector!

From now until enlightenment, I seek no other savior!

With compassion's iron goad, please take care of me,

In this life, the between, and future lives!

Save me from the dangers of both life and liberation!

Grant me all accomplishments!

Be my eternal friend! Protect me from all harm!

By the power of thus praying three times, the vital points of the mentor's body, speech, and mind emit white, red, and blue elixir light rays, first one by one and then all together, which dissolve into my own.... A duplicate of the mentor melts in delight and blesses me completely.

And from the white OM, diamond light rays flow to a white OM on top

of our head and merge with our body, and our body becomes living diamond in substance and blessed by them, and one with them, and we feel very blessed in our body, healed. And then, the white OM, that white diamond light, goes out to all the bodies of the beings around us. It reflects out from us, and they feel healed, and their bodies feel empowered. And then, next, the ruby red AHs at their throats radiate ruby rays, and they flow to us, like liquid red jewel elixir, and fill the ruby red AHs at our throat, and bless our speech. And our speech becomes one with their speech, and then, this red AH reflects out from our throat, goes to the throats of all beings around us, which become marked by red AHs, and their speech is blessed. And then, the blue HUMs radiate liquid sapphire light rays that flow down to us, to the blue HUMs in our heart, and fill our heart with the mind of all buddhas, the oneness with the reality of all buddhas, deep, sapphire blue. And this blue then reflects out from our heart to the hearts of all the beings around us, and they are bound by a deep blue, sapphire blue, in total communion with us.

Then, finally, the white, the red, and the blue all simultaneously radiate from all the divine beings, all our mentors and all their attendants and all the ocean of angels and all the heavenly host of beings and Socrates and Marys and Buddhas and St. Teresas, and flow to us simultaneously in three brilliant jewel rays of white, red, and blue, and fill our body, speech, and mind with the body, speech, and mind of all buddhas. And the mentor beings are so delighted that we're visualizing this, they flow into us, they melt and dissolve into us.

And we no longer can see the jewel tree, and it flows into us, and it becomes one with us, it enters and merges with us. And our heart becomes one with the jewel tree and with all the mentor beings, and Socrates and Buddha and Jesus all become one and become present and manifest in our heart. And then we feel so delighted and charged and buoyant and energized by this that we want to dedicate the merit of our meditation and our reflection to all the beings around us, and we dissolve into pure jewel light and flow into all of them, and they become charged with light, and our being merges with each one of them, infinite numbers of them. We become one with them. We dissolve and disappear.

And everything becomes a vast, great bliss state, great bliss-void-

indivisible jewel state. And then, the beings around us on their own think, “Where did we go in the ordinary mind? What happened? So-and-so was sitting there, shining out upon me.” The moment they think that, we think, “Where are we?” Then we’re back in our ordinary mind at the conclusion of that meditation.

This is our first encounter with the wish-granting jewel tree of Tibet.

OM AAH HUUM