

Lily to Palbar Tshomo

weaving emptiness and joy

Lily Tshering Bhutia



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This book is dedicated to my revered teacher, Tulku Thebum, my late parents, and all Buddhist teachers worldwide, whose boundless compassion continues to guide and inspire sentient beings.



Introduction

The seed for this book was planted during my transformative journey to Bhutan for a Wang (empowerment) ceremony. There, I was profoundly moved by the unwavering dedication of Buddhist masters, who endure great hardships to bring benefit to all beings. Writing has always been my passion, though my initial aspiration was to craft stories for children. Instead, I found myself drawn to share my own experiences and the profound Buddhist concepts that have enriched my life, hoping they might resonate with others.

My aim in writing this book is to offer a clear and accessible path for those curious about Buddhism, especially for readers who seek to explore its wisdom without sacrificing precious time. While I am still a student of the vast texts and philosophies of Buddhism, far from mastering them, I believe the insights I have gained can be of value to others on their own journeys.

I hope you find as much joy and inspiration in reading this book as I did in writing it. May it serve as a gentle guide to the timeless teachings of Buddhism, inviting you to discover their relevance in your own life.



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The Seventh Surprise: An Unexpected Arrival

Knock, knock! The seventh one got delayed.

So, my arrival on Earth was a bit of a surprise, like a sequel nobody asked for. I was the seventh kid to pop out of my mom—not planned, just a happy little accident. My parents had packed away the baby clothes, likely savoring their "empty nest" rehearsal, when—bam!—I arrived, eight years after my sixth sister. You could say my birth was less of a joyous occasion and more of a "well, what do we do with this one?" kind of moment. Well, they decided to raise me eventually.

A Name from the Airwaves

That's hilarious! So, my name, Lily, isn't because I'm graceful like a flower or was born in a month full of blooms. Nope, it's because my parents heard a radio jingle for a soap brand. Imagine that!

While my brothers and sisters have these awesome, traditional Buddhist names passed down through our family, I got stuck with a name that came from a radio ad. It's definitely a conversation

starter at family get-togethers. I'm used to the confused looks and the question, "Lily? Like the flower?" And I always have to follow up with the long story about the radio jingle.

But I've learned to love it. It's a reminder that my family is fun and a little bit quirky. We don't take ourselves too seriously, and sometimes the funniest stories come from the most random places. So, while my name might be silly, it's also a big part of who I am. It's taught me to embrace the unexpected and find humor in the most mundane things.

The Limping Legend

It was a real head-scratcher for everyone. While other kids were busy crawling and causing chaos, I was just sort of hobbling around, a sight that left my parents in a state of confused panic. Doctors scratched their heads, and my parents, being the classic Sikkimese Bhutia family they were, decided to go the spiritual route.

This is where things got really interesting. They started a whirlwind tour of religious gurus, each with their own special brand of "help." The Hindu gurus nearly banished them away because we're a beef-eating family—a crucial part of our culture, mind you. You get sick? You get beef soup. It's the law.

After the beef-eating debacle, some gurus tried rituals, suggesting things like "wear gold" or "do charity," which for my modest, simple parents meant one thing: a massive feast. My birth wasn't a party, but my condition certainly was. I was essentially the reason for a lot of free food, making me the unofficial pioneer of grand birthday celebrations in my family. Did it help? Not at all. In fact, it just made things more obvious. My left side decided to officially go on strike, becoming weaker than the right.

After the grand feast, my birthday became an annual extravaganza. But one year, the celebration was suddenly put on hold. The news of Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi's assassination came as a shock. We were all heartbroken; he was a beloved leader, and I had even seen him in person when I got to wave a flag for his welcome. The sadness was so profound that I couldn't bear to celebrate my birthday on that day ever again. I decided to move it to the 22nd. My parents, who had just gotten used to the 21st, were predictably confused. "Another date?" they sighed, "Isn't one birthday enough?" But they eventually gave in.

For a decade, I was the 22nd of May birthday girl. But then I discovered numerology. I learned that being a number four meant "struggle," and a life of constant hard work. Suddenly, my birthday wasn't just a celebration—it was a cosmic curse! I had to change it back. My parents' sighs could be heard across the state, but after a decade of getting used to the 22nd, they had no choice but to accept that I was back to being a 21st of May baby. And then I found that being 21st means I'm a number three, and that's a lucky number!

However, the confusion didn't end there. Due to a lapse in birth registration rules, my dad had forgotten my actual birth date by the time he filled out the form. So, in a stroke of genius, he gave me my eldest sister's birth date: March 3rd. Now every year on her birthday, I get wishes from banks.



Chapter 2

The School Years: The Storyteller

When I started school, I had a great plan: become the quiet, smart kid that every teacher loves. I aced my classes and was a teacher's pet, mainly because it was physically difficult for me to cause any trouble. I spent my days hiding behind textbooks, a fortress of knowledge protecting me from the inevitable question: "What's wrong with your hand and leg?"

Since I didn't have an answer, I became a master storyteller. To some, I'd say I fell and broke them. To others, I'd invent a dramatic tale about my sister's friends accidentally twisting my arm until it snapped. My friends were either deeply concerned or just plain entertained by my ever-changing origin story.

It wasn't until I reached the ninth grade that the jig was up. I finally got a diagnosis: cerebral palsy, with the delightful side effect of left-sided hemiplegia. Turns out, all those made-up stories about falls and twisted limbs were much less dramatic than the reality of having a brain that just decided to do its own thing.

Epilepsy? Not My Expiry Date!

The discovery of my illness was a rather dramatic, and slightly inconvenient, accident. When I was in ninth grade, my youngest brother—the one who called me the "Princess of Shyari" despite his mischievous antics—passed away. The shock was so great that my brain decided to short-circuit, and I started having epileptic fits.

My third sister, who had just finished her MBBS and become a doctor, immediately took me to a neuro specialist. Back then, finding a specialist was a big deal. We went all the way to Siliguri for the appointment. After what felt like a million tests—CT scans, MRIs, and who knows what else—the doctor called my sister over. He nodded his head slowly and delivered the grave news: my case was very serious, and they should be mentally prepared for me to not live past six months.

My family was devastated. I could see my doctor sister crying the most; she had taken on the role of my caretaker, and I knew how much it broke her heart. But as it turns out, I'm not a fan of deadlines. I've since crossed my "expiry date" from 1996 and am still going strong.

My quest for a cure led me on a journey to meet various religious gurus. While they may not have magically cured my illness, their teachings, especially the Buddhist philosophy of all life being equal, deeply influenced me and shaped my lifestyle. My parents were my first teachers in this regard. They taught me to respect all life, from not stepping on ants to honoring monks.

Every year for Buddha Purnima, we'd dress up in our traditional attire and visit monasteries, carrying offerings like fruits and lamp oil. But what I remember most is carrying sugar and rice to feed

the insects. It left such a deep impact on me that I decided to become a vegetarian.

One day, I took my newfound conviction to a whole new level. I told my mother that I would give up all foods that came from animals and plants, as I didn't want to cause any harm. "I'll just live on apples and other fruits," I declared, "because at least we won't be killing the entire plant!" My mother, in a state of utter shock, quickly made me promise to eat grains, vegetables, and milk—even if I didn't eat eggs. It seems my all-or-nothing approach to veganism was a bit much for her to handle!

As a kid, making friends was a real challenge. The few I had were all boys, not because of a crush, but because I just didn't get along with the girls. I couldn't stand the constant gossiping, and it was all a distraction from the question I dreaded: "What happened to your hand?"

You see, I have a physical difference—a limb difference, but I just say my hand and leg don't cooperate. My hand was the most obvious, but my leg was trying to keep up.

Ballet flats were a nightmare. My foot would just slip out, turning a graceful walk into a comical shuffle. They had no support, and my leg, well, it dragged just enough to make them useless. My mom, trying to help me conceal my hand, suggested I carry a hanky. But because of my hemiplegia, I would often drop it without realizing it.

My hand and leg were in a silent competition to see who could be more difficult. My hand was the obvious winner—it was the first thing people noticed. It was the star of the show, but my leg was the secret troublemaker.

Boys, bless their hearts, were a different story. They were so carefree and didn't care about social norms, they just accepted me. They were kind and didn't ask questions. They just let me be me. Over time, I became one of them, happily joining in on the "There's a beautiful bird!" hunt, which was their way of saying, "Look at that cute girl!"



Chapter 3

Techs Flopped, Trips Rocked

My dive into software engineering was a lot like trying to assemble IKEA furniture without the instructions. I was good at the parts, but the overall picture was a mess. After a year of coding and coffee, I hit a wall—a wall called low attendance. My ego, a stubborn beast, refused to let me repeat the first year, so with a dramatic flair, I decided to leave, a move that felt less like a drop-out and more like a mic-drop.

At the same time, a new, unwelcome guest arrived: depression, a side effect of some uncooperative medication. It was a dark time, and my world shrank to the size of a single thought: how to make it all stop. I became obsessed with the idea of dying, a morbid pursuit that felt a lot like trying to get concert tickets for a sold-out show—always close, but never successful. I even had a strange sense of decorum about it. Hanging seemed too... unflattering. I didn't want my final act to be the subject of gossip about a broken heart or a secret pregnancy. My ideal exit was more dramatic, more cinematic—something clean, like on an operating table. But the universe, with its twisted sense of humor, kept throwing me back. My plans became increasingly outlandish; I once considered

a local gun, thinking a mysterious death would distract everyone from the "why" and focus on the "how." It was a ridiculous thought, a last-ditch effort to control a narrative that was already spiraling.

But as with all good stories, there was a pivot. I traded my code for prose, enrolling in a distant English college. And then, I found my true calling: a travel agent. It was the perfect fit. Instead of coding my way out of problems, I was now charting new paths for others. And though I'm still waiting to sit for my final exam, I somehow became a teacher, too. I taught my nieces and nephews and even worked with schools, and I think I was good with it. My journey, it turned out, wasn't about a single destination, but about the scenic detours, the unexpected stops, and the joy of finding a new route when the old one didn't work.

From Despair to Destinations: My Unlikely Career Pivot

So, how did a girl who planned her own dramatic exit from life end up planning other people's vacations? It was all thanks to my brother-in-law, who, in a moment of sheer genius, suggested I become a travel agent. I guess he saw that my obsessive, detail-oriented brain was better suited for booking flights than for booking myself a one-way ticket to oblivion.

This wasn't just a new job; it was my version of a superhero origin story. I had to prove I was just as good as my older siblings, all of whom were now "officers" and well-educated. My parents were probably worried I'd end up as a professional hermit, so this was my chance to show them I could be a functioning member of society.

Being a travel agent transformed me. I went from a timid, school-hating nerd to someone who could argue with drivers and charm skeptical clients into a Himalayan trek. My travel agency,

Himalayan Footprints, became my stage. I wasn't just selling trips; I was selling my newfound confidence. Every time I convinced someone to brave a new destination, I was secretly giving a pep talk to my old, anxious self. It turns out, the best way to stop obsessing over your own life's destination is to get busy planning everyone else's.

The Accidental Guide: Faking Expertise with Flair

Despite being a travel agent, I was also sought after as a guide. The funny thing is, my geographical knowledge was about as reliable as a broken compass—I was notoriously bad at history and geography. Yet somehow, I became a freelance guide, and not just any guide, but one who charged triple the others. It was a classic case of faking it 'til you make it, with a lot of creative redirection thrown in.

On tours, I was in a constant state of panic, terrified of being asked a question about the history of a monastery or the name of a mountain peak. My solution? A non-stop monologue of local stories and unasked facts. I'd share funny anecdotes about the eccentricities of my neighbors, the origin of a local festival, or the strange habits of the local wildlife. I figured if I was entertaining and gave them more information than they could ever need on obscure topics, they wouldn't have time to ask the questions I couldn't answer.

My guiding philosophy was simple: if you can't be a fountain of textbook knowledge, be a good host. I'd take their money, buy them good wine, and cook them a delicious meal. It was a simple transaction: they got a fun-loving, wine-and-dine experience, and I got to avoid being exposed as a fraud. And it worked. Every tour ended with them thanking me profusely, often with a generous tip.

It was proof that sometimes, personality and a good sense of humor are worth more than a textbook full of facts.

Thyroid vs. Sisters' Style Wars

Once upon a time, my life was simple. Then, I became a travel agent and suddenly, my reflection in the mirror mattered a whole lot more. My new job meant countless meetings, from serious business talks to casual hi-tea gatherings, and I quickly realized that looking the part was half the battle. You see, when you're helping people plan their dream vacations, they need to feel like you've got your own life together first. The only problem? Just as I was embarking on this new career, my body decided to go on its own unplanned trip into the land of hypothyroidism and weight gain.

Suddenly, my closet felt like a battlefield, with my two sisters acting as opposing generals. One would insist on the timeless elegance of a salwar kameez, while the other championed the casual simplicity of jeans and a top. Shopping trips became a high-stakes sport. The moment my finger dared to point at something, a chorus of "Give her that in the largest size possible!" would erupt. It was less a shopping spree and more a public declaration of my expanding waistline.

Eventually, I staged a fashion coup. If I was going to be a "large size," I'd be a large size on my own terms. I decided to wear things that made me feel good, not just things that fit. My mother, my fiercest critic and biggest fan, was always on my case to "dress up nicely and wear makeup." I took her advice to heart, using it as a brilliant excuse to splurge on expensive clothes and cosmetics. I figured, if perfectly sculpted dolls like Miss World and Miss Universe need to put on a face to look good, then a "half-heartedly

made doll" like me absolutely reserved the right to do the same. So I went all in—focusing on my face and my wardrobe.

And then, a funny thing happened. After some dedicated self-care and medication, the extra weight from my thyroid issues finally decided to pack its bags. I guess my body finally got the memo: this travel agent had places to be, and there was no more room for extra baggage.

Office Ant to Publicity Queen:Climbing the Ranks

As a travel agent, I was the walking punchline of the office. There I was, someone who hadn't planned a trip since my last school excursion, now in charge of making other people's dream getaways come true. I didn't even know what an "itinerary" was—I thought it was just a fancy to-do list with a passport.

The industry veterans, with their years of experience, saw me as an ant they were about to step on. But I had a secret weapon: a knack for learning and a mastery of what I'll call "manipulation techniques." I didn't just learn the ropes; I wove them into my own tangled web. Before long, the ant was in charge, elected as the organization's publicity secretary. I'm still not sure why they chose me, the youngest of the bunch. Maybe it was a weird form of hazing, but whatever the reason, I absolutely loved the fame.

My career was a series of adventures. I battled unreasonable tourists, rival agents, and, it seemed, every single inanimate object on the road. I became a pro at hiding these "misadventures" from my family. I didn't want them to stop me from doing a job I was so determined to prove I could handle. Being pitied was not on my itinerary.

One particular night stands out. It was a cold November evening. After dropping off my tourists at the airport, my driver and I were on our way back home. I was tired, so I decided to take a quick nap. Suddenly, a violent jolt woke me up, and my forehead slammed into the windshield. Dazed, I looked at the glass, now cracked like a spiderweb. My head had just starred in its own low-budget action movie scene. My driver, in a tone far too calm for the situation, told me we'd had an accident and were now perched on a concrete parapet with a lovely ditch on the other side.

A normal person would have called for help, but my panic-stricken brain only had one goal: solve this without my parents finding out. My first brilliant idea was to have the driver "pull the car back" onto the road. Unsurprisingly, that didn't work. We waited for two agonizing hours for an "angel" to appear. And two of them did: a government official and a taxi driver, both heading home. The taxi driver, bless his heart, had a bigger vehicle and agreed to pull us out. Since I had no cash on me, I borrowed money from the official, promising to pay him back the next day.

Just as our vehicle was being towed, our angels were outnumbered by demons—drunk taxi drivers who saw an opportunity to demand money. I, with a bunch of dollars safely tucked away, told them I only had 300 rupees. They were not impressed. In a desperate moment, I took off my gold ring, but their drunken minds couldn't grasp its value. Seizing the moment, my driver rolled up the window and we sped off, with the demons hot on our tail. It was a real-life chase scene, minus the cool soundtrack. We finally lost them after we flew through a checkpoint, where we fully expected to be arrested but, thankfully, were not. I told the driver to take the car straight to the mechanic, and not to worry about the money.

When I finally crept into my house around 1 a.m., I discovered my mom had my room key. So I spent the rest of the night shivering on the couch, wrapped in a small carpet. The next morning, when my mom asked what time I got home, I simply said I was late and didn't want to disturb her, all while sporting a strategically placed scarf to hide the evidence of my spiderweb headbutt.

It wasn't until many years later that I finally told her the whole story. Her only response was to give me a look that said, "You broke your head and didn't even bother to tell me?"



Chapter 4

The Youngest Sibling: Exile, Mischief, and Family Bonds

When you're the youngest of the bunch, you're not exactly an equal. I was born so late that by the time I was old enough to play, my older siblings had already moved on to "adult" things. My social circle was less like a group of peers and more like a nursery, full of my slightly younger nieces and nephews. While they were inside making plans and having "secret meetings," I was outside, banished to the realm of children and forbidden from "adult talk."

I may have been exiled, but I didn't waste my time. My nieces and nephews and I were partners in crime. Even after growing up my mischievous streak led to some...questionable decisions, like piercing my ears in multiple places. It also gave me a reputation as the one to fear. I loved scaring people so much that no one would dare enter my room alone. My most epic blunder, however, was a tattoo. I wanted a cool, rebellious smiley face, but my nephew—a teenager armed with only a sewing needle and some acrylic paint—had other ideas. The result was less of an emoji and more of a cautionary tale, earning me months of relentless teasing.

Finally, I decided it was time for a cover-up. I found a tattoo parlor in Bangalore—a rare find in those days—and started sifting through designs. Everything was too big or just not me. Then, the artist showed me a picture of a fire goddess, a minimalist design in red and black. It felt like it was speaking to me, a symbol of my own inner power. I got the tattoo, and for a while, it was perfect. Everyone loved it, and I felt great.

But my goddess was short-lived. Two years later, the red ink had faded completely, leaving only a dark outline. My powerful fire goddess had transformed into an evil witch. A powerful lesson in self-expression, if nothing else.

As the youngest, I was always convinced my older siblings were in a contest for who could love Mom the most. I figured Dad was getting the short end of the stick, so I became his champion. My father was a man of quiet strength, a hardworking hero who was always doing something—whether he was in the fields or tinkering with a new invention. He was my personal superhero, a master of all trades from gardening to cooking. I'm proud to say I inherited his skills, especially when it comes to crafting a salad decoration that could make a rock look good. I always longed to be his "treasure," and his resilience was a lesson I'll never forget. He never complained, a trait I'm still trying to master.

My relationship with my mom was a whirlwind of love and occasional, short-lived disagreements. We were so close I'd tell her almost everything, censoring only the stories that might cause her to worry. From my latest crush to a hilarious workplace blunder, she was my trusted confidante. She pampered me so much that I had a "bathing assistant," which, in hindsight, is both ridiculous and an excellent example of her love. Mom's trust in me was unconditional; she only wanted me to be happy. Some nights,

she'd ask me to sleep with her, and we'd listen to her sing, tell stories. It is so amazing that every culture has stories that sounded a lot like Cinderella. Sometimes we would just lie there in comfortable silence. Asking her for money was a ritual. First came the lecture about my spending habits, followed by a handful of cash. She was also an avid doll collector, and every gift I brought her—whether it laughed, cried, or danced—was a hit.

My family dynamic was a bit... unique. With a massive age gap between me and my older siblings, it was less "close-knit family" and more "a bunch of over-eager life coaches I never asked for." They saw a blank slate; I saw a canvas they were trying to paint all over. My rebellious streak and competitive ego meant their "caring guidance" felt more like an aggressive takeover. I saw it as bullying and meddling, not the well-intentioned advice it probably was.

But there was one exception to this war of wills: my second-eldest brother. He was the cool, versatile one who never tried to force me into his mold. While the others were busy trying to mold me, he was my partner in crime. We'd listen to classic ghazals and old Bollywood tunes, finding joy in things the rest of the world considered boring. He was the one person who saw my "rebellious nature" not as a problem to be fixed, but as a personality trait to be enjoyed. He was more a great companion than a controller, and for that, I'm eternally grateful.

Solo Star, No Tea Required

I gravitated to boys for friendship, not flirtation. They were my shield, sparing me the girls' gossip circles and my insecurities about my cerebral palsy. Their carefree vibe—chasing "beautiful birds" (code for cute girls)—let me blend in, no questions about

my hand or leg. But soon, I became the girls' nightmare. They saw me as a boyfriend-stealing threat, their glares sharper than momo spices. Me? A threat? I was just dodging drama! I'd ditch my pals mid-chat to save their relationships, playing reluctant peacekeeper in a soap opera I didn't audition for.

Life, they say, is a canvas, and my love life has been a masterpiece of contradictions. My face, a work of art from my painterly talents, was a magnet for affection. It seemed everywhere I went, Cupid's arrows were flying, but they were all aimed at my face, not my heart. It's not that I was heartless; it's that my heart had a very exclusive VIP list.

I had a checklist for my future partner that was less of a list and more of a mythical creature. He had to be a perfect blend of handsome and versatile, with a decent height and a naturally chiseled physique. Basically, I was looking for a male doll who had a PhD in everything. And then there was my biggest fear: loving someone more than my parents. The thought of leaving home and trading my parents' endless supply of love for the marital kitchen, where I'd have to make tea for someone else, was a terrifying prospect. I mean, I don't even make tea for my parents, so why would I do it for a stranger?

My deep-seated patriotism, a souvenir from my days at Kendriya Vidyalaya surrounded by army men, led me to have a soft spot for uniforms. I was always on the lookout for a man in uniform, a real-life hero who could save me from the mundane reality of civilian life. fantasized about a hero who'd sweep me from civilian drudgery—think Bollywood heartthrob in khaki. One day, I thought I had found him. He was handsome, checked all my boxes, and was basically a unicorn in a sea of horses. But, as fate

would have it, he was also married. The universe has a strange sense of humor, doesn't it?

The trust issues didn't help either. I've always had more male friends, and let's just say their behavior as partners was not a shining endorsement for the male species. I saw a lot of irresponsibility and male ego supremacy, which I found to be a huge turn-off.

“I’ve fallen in love a few times, got my heart racing! But boys are great as friends, not boyfriends. Dating them? Like asking a cat to wash dishes—fun to think about, total mess in real life.”

So, I've decided to retire my painting of the perfect man. My canvas is now a masterpiece of one. It turns out, I'm in pretty great company. The only person I need to make tea for is myself, and I can be as selfish with the good stuff as I want. It's a love story with a happy, solitary ending, and frankly, it's the best one I've ever lived.



Chapter 5

Faith Feast to Nun Spark

My spiritual journey started not with a gentle stroll, but with a full-on cannonball into a religious buffet. I didn't just dip my toes in; I was caroling at Christmas, celebrating Eid, and showing up to Hindu festivals like Durga Puja and Lakshmi Puja, probably with a plate of sweets in hand. I even picked up a few prayers from imams, because my hunger for understanding was insatiable. I was so convinced a supreme being was behind our creation, just like every religion had their own creator. I started looking for the divine in my own religion, but I couldn't figure out who.

So, I started praying to Guru Padmasambhava, drawn to his image as the Quantum Buddha. My prayer was simple, and maybe a bit morbid: I just wanted to win the race with my parents to die first. But when my dad passed away, I felt utterly wronged, like my heartfelt prayers were left unanswered. I blamed Guru Rinpoche for not listening, and I was completely heartbroken and devastated. I was on the brink of abandoning my beliefs entirely when my own guru appeared, guiding me into a world of knowledge I had been ignorant of for so long.

He led me to the path of true Buddhism, the very path that Gautama himself walked and taught. It was a path not of divine intervention or a creator being, but one of cause and effect. I learned that every being is responsible for their own birth and death. So when my mom and brother passed away two years after my dad, I was heartbroken and felt incredibly lonely. But this understanding of cause and effect helped me come to terms with the reality that everyone fears: death.

I was also greatly influenced by the small monks, whose laughter echoed in a place where they were far from their own families. Even with the problems they faced, they had learned how to find happiness. I had gone there to teach them, but in the end, they taught me how to find joy even in sorrow. I can only imagine what it's like for someone to be sent away from their family to live among strangers, but these children showed me it's possible to find happiness anywhere.

With the help of my teacher, Tulkula, I embraced a new life—one that was difficult to choose, but easy to live. I decided to become a fully ordained Buddhist nun to deepen my understanding of its philosophy and was given the new name Thubden Palbar Tshomo. Taking the novice vows was not easy; I struggled to get admission to nearby monasteries, and traveling to a distant one was impossible due to my ongoing health issues and a fragile body.

Finally, my teacher asked if I wanted to do a solitary meditation retreat. I was overjoyed. I had been practicing meditation for some time, but I longed to experience it in the traditional way.

I practiced for three years in a makeshift meditation space. I converted my sister's entire first floor into a self-made enclosure, locking myself in and covering every window and opening with clothes and plastic sheets to ensure my privacy. Also I am

especially grateful to my cousin Tashi Palzor for his unwavering support and encouragement.

Sharing the wisdom I've gained has been a truly special part of my spiritual journey. I'm so thankful for my teacher's guidance and support, which have shown me how to share these lessons with others. Even so, I'm still far from knowing everything—my journey is ongoing, and I'm always learning more. My strong wish to pass on what I've learned shows how powerful and life-changing these teachings are. They've touched my heart deeply, and I want others to feel that same sense of wonder and peace.

Buddhist stories and koans are wonderful tools for sharing this wisdom. These simple tales or puzzles don't explain ideas in a dull, intellectual way. Instead, they speak straight to the heart, helping people see life in a fresh way. For example, there's a Buddhist story about a monk who carried a heavy load of worries across a river. When he reached the other side, he kept holding onto the load until an old teacher asked, "Why are you still carrying that burden?" This story encourages us to think about letting go of our worries, rather than just being told to do so. By sharing these stories, I'm not trying to give people a strict set of rules. Instead, I want to invite everyone to explore the wisdom for themselves and find their own understanding. This makes learning more personal and meaningful.

My goal isn't to create a perfect set of beliefs that everyone must accept. I'm not someone who has all the answers—far from it—but I hope to offer a path that might help others on their own spiritual journeys. Whether someone is just starting out or has been exploring for years, I hope these insights, rooted in my own practice and my teacher's wise guidance, will shine a light on their path. By sharing these teachings with kindness and an open heart, I believe I can help others find their own sense of calm and clarity.



Chapter 6

My Journey with Buddhism: A Path of Wisdom, Not Just a Religion

My immersion in Buddhism unfolded gradually, sparked by the compassionate guidance of my teacher Tulku Thebum and the enduring influence of my late parents, whose quiet wisdom echoed the Dharma's call to kindness. What began as a simple curiosity blossomed into a profound commitment blending my lived encounters with Buddhist principles, which offered gentle insights into mindfulness and equanimity for everyday seekers. Through the generosity of mentors across traditions, I've discovered how practices like loving-kindness meditation dissolve inner turmoil, transforming ordinary moments into bridges of empathy and renewal.

The Buddhist View: A Middle Way

From a Buddhist perspective, the question of whether Buddhism is a religion or a philosophy is a bit like asking if a tree is just its trunk or its branches—it's both, and neither label fully captures its complete nature. The teachings of the Buddha are often presented as a practical path to end suffering, which can be viewed through

both a philosophical and a religious lens. Many scholars and practitioners suggest it's best to call Buddhism a 'Dharma', a term that encompasses both a cosmic law and a practical, transformative path. This highlights the practical aspect of the teachings and the absence of a creator God, which is a key distinction from many world religions.

How Buddhism Functions as a Religion

While Buddhism doesn't align with the common Western definition of religion—namely, belief in a creator God—it certainly functions as one for millions of people worldwide. It provides a framework for understanding the universe, a moral and ethical code, and a path to spiritual liberation.

A Wise Teacher and His Teachings: The core of Buddhism is the reverence for the Buddha and his teachings, known as the Dharma. While not a god, the Buddha is revered as the ultimate teacher, and his teachings provide the foundational wisdom for all Buddhists. The concept of the Three Jewels—the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha (the monastic and lay community)—is a key religious aspect, as it provides a focus of refuge and spiritual support.

Rituals, Practices, and Community: Buddhist traditions are rich with rituals, from bowing to statues and chanting sutras to making offerings. These practices serve to express devotion, accumulate merit, and focus the mind. The community, or Sangha, provides a sense of belonging and mutual support, which is a key component of religious life.

Cosmology and Rebirth: Buddhism has a complex cosmology that includes different realms of existence, such as hells, heavens, and the human world. The concepts of karma and rebirth provide a

moral and cosmic framework, suggesting that our actions have consequences beyond this life and that the cycle of death and rebirth continues until one achieves liberation. This mirrors the eschatological beliefs (beliefs about final things) found in many religions.

How Buddhism Functions as a Philosophy

At its heart, Buddhism is a philosophy of mind and reality. It offers a set of principles and tools for understanding the nature of existence and how to navigate it wisely. It emphasizes direct experience and critical inquiry over blind faith.

The Four Noble Truths and the Noble Eightfold Path: These central tenets are not dogmas to be believed but rather an analysis of the human condition. They present a clear, logical framework: identify the problem (suffering), find its cause (craving), understand that there is an end to it, and follow the prescribed path to that end. This analytical approach is characteristic of a philosophical inquiry.

Emphasis on Self-Reliance: The Buddha's final teaching, "Be a lamp unto yourselves," encapsulates this philosophical view. The path to awakening is an individual journey, and no external being can grant liberation. It's about self-effort, mindfulness, and the cultivation of wisdom. The Buddha encouraged his followers to test the teachings for themselves, like a goldsmith testing gold for purity, rather than accepting them on authority.

Fundamental Principles of Reality: The philosophical aspects of Buddhism are seen in its core ideas about reality, such as *anicca* (impermanence), *dukkha* (suffering or dissatisfaction), and *anatta* (no-self). These are not articles of faith but insights into the very nature of existence itself. They are meant to be realized through

meditation and contemplation, not simply believed. The concept of dependent origination—that all phenomena arise in dependence on other phenomena—is a profound philosophical principle that describes the interconnectedness of all things.

In conclusion, the debate over whether Buddhism is a religion or a philosophy highlights its unique nature. It is a path that combines philosophical inquiry with spiritual practice. It provides a moral compass and a supportive community, much like a religion, while demanding personal responsibility and critical thinking, much like a philosophy. Ultimately, it is a transformative path that addresses the fundamental human condition.

Sharing wisdom through stories

Buddhists love sharing stories because they reach the heart in a way that plain facts can't. Here's a new one that speaks to me: A farmer once asked a monk, "How do I find calm in a busy life?" The monk pointed to a still pond and said, "Look at the water—it reflects the sky clearly because it's calm. Your mind can be like that too." This story reminds us to slow down and find stillness, even when life feels hectic. It's not about giving us all the answers but inviting me—and you—to feel the wisdom in our own way. That's why these stories are so powerful; they make learning personal and meaningful.

Why This Matters to Me

Buddhism feels like a religion because it has teachings, a community, and a goal like Nirvana. But it's also a philosophy because it encourages me to explore life with my own mind and heart, not just follow rules or believe in a god. I'm still learning, far from having all the answers, but my teacher's guidance and the

teachings from holy scriptures has shown me that Buddhism is a practical path to less suffering and more kindness. It's not about being perfect or knowing everything—it's about offering a way to find peace, whether you're just starting out or have been on this path for years. By sharing these ideas with an open heart, I hope to spark a little light for others, just as my teacher did for me.



Chapter 7

The Buddhist View on Rebirth and Karma

In Buddhism, we believe that we are reborn into one of six different realms: the god realm, the asura realm, the human realm, the animal realm, the hungry ghost realm, or the hell realm. This cycle of rebirth is all based on karma, which is simply the result of our actions.

The Pali Canon, one of the most ancient collections of Buddhist teachings, explains this in detail. The Buddha himself talks about a special "divine eye" he gained through deep meditation. With this eye, he could actually see beings dying and being reborn. He saw some people reborn into wonderful lives and others into terrible ones.

He realized that people's next lives were a direct result of their actions in the previous one. Those who did good things with their bodies, words, and thoughts were reborn into good places, like a heavenly world. But those who did bad things were reborn into miserable states, like hell.

Essentially, the Buddha saw firsthand that our actions are what determine where we'll end up.

At its heart, Buddhism is absolutely centered on good moral conduct and cultivating virtues.

The belief is that our actions—both what we do and what we think—have consequences. This isn't just about what happens in our next life; it's also about shaping who we are right now and the kind of world we live in. By trying to be good, we purify our own minds and make a positive impact on those around us.

This is a key part of the Eightfold Path, which is essentially a guide to living a life that leads to the end of suffering. Right in the middle of that path are things like Right Speech, Right Action, and Right Livelihood. This is where we put our morality into practice, focusing on being honest and kind in everything we say, do, and how we earn a living.

So while the final goal is to be completely free from the cycle of rebirth, the whole journey is built on a solid foundation of being a good, virtuous person.

Rebirth, Reincarnation, and Tulkus

In Buddhism, rebirth isn't reincarnation—don't get it twisted! Reincarnation, like in Hinduism, has a soul (aatma) swapping bodies like outfits. Buddhism's anatta says no fixed soul exists. Rebirth is like a candle flame lighting another candle: not the same flame, but linked by cause and effect. Your karma—acts of kindness, ignorance, or crankiness—creates ripples that shape the next life, like a stream carving a new path.

No Soul, Just Karma Ripples!

Let's follow Maya, a kind-hearted villager who shares momos but sometimes snaps. Her actions—good or bad—are pebbles in a stream. When Maya dies, her physical body is gone, but her karma's ripples spark a new life: Arjun, a boy in a nearby town. Arjun isn't Maya's soul; he's a fresh candle lit by her flame. Her kindness gives him a loving family and a helpful streak, but her selfishness leaves him impatient. This is ordinary rebirth—karma and emotions keep the wheel spinning. Daily kindness can tilt the scales for a better next life, maybe even a higher realm.

Tulkus: Compassion's Comeback

Now, meet Lama Tenzin, a Tulku—a reincarnated master with a higher consciousness. Unlike Maya, Tulkus aren't dragged by karma. When Lama Tenzin dies, his compassion allows him to choose rebirth as Dawa, a boy in a devout Buddhist family in a struggling village, born to guide with love. Tulkus return deliberately, not to chase karma but to help beings, like navigators on the river of karma.

Legacy, Not Rebirth

In Maya's village, her son Rohan becomes a doctor, carrying her kindness forward. Locals call him her “next life”—not a soul swap, but her legacy. Or, when Maya turned generous after helping a neighbor, they called it her “second birth”—a fresh start, no rebirth required. Buddhist rebirth is a flow of consciousness, not a soul-hopping game. Ordinary folks like Maya ride karma's waves, while Tulkus like Lama Tenzin choose to surf back for others.

Understanding Karma: The Law of Cause and Effect

Karma is a key idea in Buddhism, often misunderstood, but simple at its core. This explanation uses plain words, a story, and examples to help anyone connect with what karma means and how it works in everyday life.

Understanding Karma: A Natural Law

Karma is essentially the force of our actions and words that shapes who we become. It's not a divine punishment or reward, as is often misunderstood. Instead, it's a natural law of cause and effect. For example, a person who lives a life of good deeds and positive thinking will find happiness in any situation. Conversely, someone who is constantly craving and dissatisfied will likely never find true contentment. Some of us might find it unfair that we face misery despite being good, while those who are harsh and unkind seem to be blessed. But that's not true; sooner or later, we will all receive the results of our actions.

A Buddhist Story About Karma

To help you understand this, let me share a story. A long time ago, there was a man who lived by a river. Every morning, he would scoop water from the river to wash his face. One day, as he was doing this, a small fish leapt into his bowl of water. The man, instead of throwing it back, decided to keep it, thinking it would be a nice pet. He placed the fish in a small jar on his table. A few days later, a great drought came. The river dried up, and all the fish in it perished. But the little fish in the jar, which the man had saved, survived. When the rains returned and the river was full again, the man released the fish, which had grown large and strong. Years passed. The man's village was struck by a famine.

The man himself was on the brink of starvation. He wandered the land, searching for food, when he stumbled upon a beautiful lake. As he approached, a giant, magnificent fish rose from the water. The fish was the one he had saved years ago. "Do you not recognize me?" the great fish asked. "You saved my life when I was a tiny fish in a dry river. Now, in your time of need, I will save yours." And with a flick of its tail, the fish created a ripple that caused thousands of smaller fish to swim to the shore, providing the man with enough food to survive the famine and help his village. The law of karma is a natural process, like a seed growing into a tree. If you plant a mango seed, you will get a mango tree. You cannot plant a thorn and expect to harvest fruit. Your good actions are the seeds you are planting now. They may not bear fruit in the way you expect, or as quickly as you desire. Your rival's good fortune may be the fruit of seeds he planted in the past. But be sure, his negative actions are also seeds, and they will, in their own time and way, bear their own bitter fruit. Continue to plant good seeds, not for a reward, but because it is the nature of a wholesome mind to do so. The results will follow, just as surely as the sun rises.

Types of Wholesome and Unwholesome Karma

Karma comes from what people do, say, or think, and it can be wholesome or unwholesome depending on their intentions. Wholesome karma comes from kind, generous, or wise choices, while unwholesome karma comes from greed, anger, or confusion. Here are some types with examples to show how they work in everyday life:

Wholesome Karma (Good Actions, Words, or Thoughts): These are choices made with love, care, or understanding, planting seeds for happiness and peace.

Helping Others: Helping a neighbor carry their groceries without expecting anything back creates wholesome karma. This might come back as someone offering help when it's needed, or it might simply bring a sense of joy.

Speaking Kindly: Telling a friend who's feeling sad, "You're doing great, and I'm here for you," plants seeds for wholesome karma. This could lead to others offering support later or foster a sense of connection and calm.

Thinking with Gratitude: Focusing on being thankful for small things, like a warm meal or a sunny day, creates wholesome karma in the mind. This can lead to feeling happier, even when life gets tough.

Small and Simple Gestures: Even small and simple gestures like saying thank you after a ride to the driver or offering a smile when meeting someone can bring lots of changes in the way people behave and the sense of happiness the other person gets. In a physical sense, there is no exchange, but in reality, both people feel happier.

Unwholesome Karma (Harmful Actions, Words, or Thoughts): These are choices driven by selfishness, anger, or not understanding things clearly, planting seeds for suffering or unrest.

Hurting Others: Yelling at someone out of frustration creates unwholesome karma. This might lead to arguments or cause others to pull away, resulting in feelings of loneliness or upset.

Being Dishonest: Lying to get out of doing something promised plants seeds for unwholesome karma. This could make people stop trusting or lead to feelings of guilt and worry.

Holding onto Jealousy: Feeling jealous of someone else's success creates unwholesome karma in the mind. This can keep a person feeling unhappy, no matter what they have. Karma is like planting seeds in a garden. Wholesome actions grow into joy, like planting flowers, while unwholesome actions grow into weeds that bring trouble. Planting good seeds feels right, not just for a reward, and the results come in their own time.

Why Karma Matters

Karma is a teaching that helps people live with more kindness and understanding in Buddhism. It shows a natural way to shape a better life—not through fear of punishment, but through choosing love and wisdom. It's not about being perfect—it's about planting good seeds to find peace and help others do the same, whether they're just starting out or have been on this path for years. Stories like the fish tale show how karma works, sparking a light for anyone looking to understand the natural law.



Chapter 8

Taming the Mind's Troubles

Buddhism is all about training the mind to find calm and happiness. It focuses on quieting the thoughts and feelings that stir up trouble, building good qualities like kindness and patience, and truly understanding how the mind works. This explanation uses simple words and examples to help anyone see how Buddhism can bring peace by taming the mind's troubles.

What Are the Mind's Troubles?

In Buddhism, "taming the mind's troubles" means learning to handle the thoughts and feelings that make people unhappy. These troubles, called afflictions, are like poisons that mess with the mind and cause stress or sadness. They pop up in everyday life and can make it hard to feel at peace. Here are some common ones:

Craving or Desire: Wanting things to be a certain way, like wishing for more money, a new phone, or a specific feeling, such as always wanting to be happy. For example, constantly craving a better job can leave someone feeling restless, even if they have enough.

Hate: Feeling angry or disliking people or situations. This could be getting mad at a friend for a small mistake or feeling annoyed when things don't go as planned, like being stuck in traffic.

Delusion or Ignorance: Not understanding reality correctly, like thinking things last forever when they don't. For instance, someone might believe a favorite object or moment will never change, only to feel upset when it does.

Pride: Thinking you're better than others. This might look like bragging about being the best at something or looking down on someone for making a mistake.

Jealousy: Being unhappy about someone else's success. For example, feeling upset when a coworker gets a promotion or a friend buys something nice can create unease in the mind.

These troubles are like storms in the mind, stirring up chaos and making it hard to stay calm or happy.

How to Tame These Troubles

Taming these troubles isn't about ignoring them or pretending they don't exist. It's about a clear, three-step process to handle them and find peace:

Notice Them: Pay attention when these feelings show up. For example, if anger arises when someone cuts you off in line, recognize that feeling instead of just reacting. Being aware is like shining a light on the trouble to see it clearly.

Understand Them: Look at how these feelings cause suffering for you and others. For instance, craving a new gadget might make you feel stressed if you can't afford it, or it might lead to arguments

with family over money. Understanding this helps see why these troubles hurt.

Heal Them: Use tools like mindfulness (paying attention to the present moment), kindness, and wisdom to make these troubles less powerful until they fade away. For example, if jealousy creeps in when a friend succeeds, practicing mindfulness can help you notice the feeling without letting it take over. Being kind, like congratulating them, can shift the mind toward positivity. Over time, wisdom—understanding that everyone’s success is connected—can help jealousy disappear.

Each step builds on the last, like learning to calm a stormy sea. Mindfulness is like watching the waves, understanding is like seeing why they’re rough, and healing is like guiding the water to stillness.

Why This Matters

The goal of taming the mind’s troubles is to free yourself from this inner chaos and find lasting peace. Buddhism teaches that by working with these afflictions—craving, hate, delusion, pride, jealousy—people can create a calmer, happier mind. It’s not about being perfect or never feeling these troubles. Instead, it’s about learning to handle them so they don’t control you. For example, instead of snapping at someone in anger, you might pause, breathe, and respond calmly, which feels better for everyone. This process helps build good qualities like patience, kindness, and clarity, making life feel lighter. By taming the mind’s troubles, anyone can find a sense of peace that stays, no matter what’s happening around

My Journey with Pride: Learning Humility

I have often heard people talk about pride, and it's made me reflect deeply on my own Buddhist journey. Pride is a tricky thing. Though let's be real—I've barely scratched the surface, but my path as Palbar Tshomo, shaped by Buddhist teachings, has taught me how pride can block happiness and how humility can open the heart. I feel a strong urge to share this because understanding pride has changed how I see myself and others. Let me share a story and my thoughts in simple words, hoping to spark a little light for anyone reading this.

The Story of the Dancing Peacock

A long time ago, a peacock lived in a forest, and he was breathtaking. His feathers sparkled with a hundred colors, and he loved showing them off. He was so proud of his looks that he thought he was better than other creatures. This peacock was trying to follow the Buddha's teachings to become kinder and wiser. One day, he went to a village to hear a wise sage speak. At the same time, a beautiful peacock princess came to the village. When she saw his dazzling feathers, she was amazed and fell in love with him.

But the peacock let her attention feed his pride. Forgetting the teachings about staying humble, he got caught up in showing off. In front of all the other birds, he puffed out his feathers and danced wildly, trying to prove he was the best. He got so carried away that he lifted his tail too high, exposing himself in an embarrassing, improper way. The other birds felt awkward, and the peacock princess was shocked and upset. She decided she couldn't be with such a vain, shameless bird.

The peacock's pride led to a foolish moment that cost him dearly. He lost the princess, who he truly cared for, and he was humiliated in front of everyone. This story teaches me that pride can blind us to our mistakes, leading to actions that are silly or hurtful. True beauty and worth come from inner qualities like kindness and humility, not from how we look or what we have.

How Pride Feels to Me

In Buddhism, pride isn't about feeling good about your work, like when I help my nieces and nephews learn something new as a teacher. It's a sticky mindset that comes from comparing myself to others. It's thinking, "I'm better than them," "I'm just as good," or even "I'm not good enough." These thoughts come from a false idea that I'm a fixed, separate person, like a wall I build around myself. For example, when I was younger, as Lily Tshering Bhutia, I sometimes felt proud if I thought I knew more than others, like when planning trips as a travel agent. But that pride stopped me from listening to others' ideas or admitting when I was wrong, like if I messed up a booking and blamed someone else. It also made me feel small if I compared myself to someone who seemed more successful, like a friend with a fancier job. Both kinds of pride—feeling better or worse—kept me stuck, unable to grow or connect deeply with people.

Pride clouds the mind. It's like a fog that makes it hard to see clearly. If I brag about being the best at something, like teaching a lesson perfectly, I might ignore advice that could make me better. Or if I feel jealous of someone's success, like a coworker getting praise, it can make me bitter instead of happy for them. Pride blocks me from learning and building real relationships.

Finding Humility

Buddhism teaches that humility is the way to overcome pride. Humility doesn't mean putting ourselves down or thinking we are worthless. It's about seeing that everyone is connected, all facing the same struggles—like getting older, dealing with loss, or feeling unsure. When we understand this, the need to feel better or worse than others fades away. For example, instead of simply boasting about a great company that is built, the CEO can share credit with my team, which feels better and builds trust. Or instead of feeling less than someone who seems to have it all, we can celebrate their success, knowing we're all on this journey together.

Humility is like opening a door to let fresh air into a stuffy room. It clears the fog of pride. By practicing mindfulness—paying attention to our thoughts without getting lost in them—we can catch pride when it pops up, like when we feel smug after winning an argument. With kindness, like saying “good job” to someone instead of trying to outshine them, and wisdom, like remembering we all face challenges, we can let pride go. For instance, now when I share my ideas to anyone, I try to listen to their ideas instead of thinking I know best, which makes us all feel closer.

Why This Matters

The dancing peacock story sticks with us because it shows how pride can lead to foolish choices, like losing a connection or respect because we want to seem special. Yet there's so much more to uncover, but Buddhism has shown me that humility brings peace and stronger bonds. It's not about never feeling proud—it's about noticing when I'm comparing myself, seeing how it causes trouble, and choosing kindness instead. For example, saying a simple “thank you” to a driver or smiling at a stranger, like I learned on

my journey, can spread happiness without expecting anything back. These small acts of humility plant seeds for a calmer mind and better relationships. By sharing this story and lesson, I hope to help others see that true happiness comes from a humble heart, no matter where they are on their path.



Chapter 9

My Journey with Hatred: Finding Peace Through Kindness

I've often thought about how hatred can weigh down the heart, and my Buddhist journey as Palbar Tshomo has shown me a way to let it go. Learning about hatred as one of Buddhism's "three poisons" has changed how I deal with anger. I feel a deep need to share this because it's helped me find peace, and I hope it can help others too. Let me explain hatred, why it hurts, and how Buddhism offers ways to move past it, using simple words and a story from my own life.

Why Hatred Is Harmful

In Buddhism, hatred is one of three poisons—along with greed and ignorance—that cause suffering. It's like a fire that burns inside, hurting the person who holds it more than anyone else. Imagine carrying a hot coal, hoping to throw it at someone who upset you. They might not even notice your anger, but you're the one getting burned. For example, if someone wrongs you and you hold a grudge, just thinking about them can spark bad feelings—a tight chest, a racing mind—that steal your peace. Meanwhile,

the other person might be living their life, happy and unaware. Hatred traps you in a cycle of suffering that only you feel.

This cycle can grow if you let it. Anger might make you snap at others or pull away, ruining moments that could be joyful. It's like a weed in a garden, choking out the flowers of happiness and keeping you stuck, unable to enjoy life or connect with people.

A Story from My Life

To make this clearer, let me share a story from my days as a travel agent. I worked hard to plan perfect trips for clients, often checking every detail to avoid mistakes. But I had a colleague who wasn't faithful to the work. Instead of putting in effort, they blamed me for being too active and intervening, especially because they didn't want me to take help from my brother-in-law, who was skilled at coordinating travel logistics. Their blame felt unfair, and I got angry. Every time I saw them, I'd replay their words in my mind, feeling tense and upset, even when I was helping my nieces and nephews with schoolwork. My anger was like that hot coal—it burned me, not my colleague, who carried on without a care. Through Buddhism, I learned that my hatred was hurting me more and found ways to let it go, which I'll share next.

How to Overcome Hatred

Buddhism offers practical ways to release hatred and find peace, and I've been trying these in my life. They're like tools to cool that burning coal and plant seeds for kindness instead. Here are some key practices:

Patience: This means pausing when anger flares up instead of reacting right away. When your friends blame you, you want to argue back. But learn to take a deep breath and wait, letting the

anger fade like a passing cloud. It keeps us from saying things we regret.

Loving-Kindness (Metta): This is about wishing happiness for everyone, even those who've upset you. It's hard, but it works. With all those who wronged me, I started silently wishing them well, thinking, "May they find ease." It felt forced at first, but it softened my heart, like rain nourishing a dry garden. It's a powerful way to turn anger into compassion.

Mindfulness: Being mindful means noticing our thoughts and feelings without letting them take over. When I feel mad, like if someone criticizes my work, I try to catch it early, saying, "This is just anger; it'll pass." It's like spotting a spark before it starts a fire, helping me stay calm.

Understanding Impermanence: Buddhism teaches that everything changes—people, situations, even feelings. When I'm angry, like over some people's unreasonable arguments, I remind myself it's temporary, like a wave that rises and falls. Knowing this makes it easier to let go instead of holding onto the hurt.

These practices don't erase anger instantly, but they help me work with it wisely, replacing the heat of hatred with the calm of kindness.

Forgiveness in Buddhism: Letting Go of Pain

In Buddhism, forgiveness isn't about pretending your friends' betrayal doesn't hurt, like ignoring a broken promise with a fake smile. It's about freeing yourself from the heavy weight of anger and resentment. Imagine friends you trusted, people you showed kindness to, repaying you with unfaithfulness—maybe turning their backs on you after you stood by them. Forgiving them doesn't

mean you say their actions were okay. It means you stop drinking the poison of bitterness that only hurts you. It's a gift you give yourself to find peace.

Here's my story: I once held onto anger toward friends who betrayed my kindness. Their unfaithfulness stung, and I kept replaying it in my mind, losing sleep. Buddhism taught me it was like holding a hot coal—burning me, not them. Forgiveness was my way out. I pictured my anger as a heavy backpack, and letting it go felt like dropping a huge load. Suddenly, I could meet them and interact with a light heart, tending plants with joy instead of grumbling. It's like pulling out weeds and planting flowers—your heart remembers the pain but grows peace instead. Buddhism shows that freedom comes from changing how we handle our hurt, not from fixing others.

Why Forgiveness Matters to Me: My Journey Through the Hurt

Anger is like a thief, stealing your happiness while those friends who hurt you move on, unaware. I've been stuck in that trap, my mind spinning with “why me?” and “they'll pay.” But as I explore Buddhism—still learning, not an expert—I've found tools that help. Patience calms the storm, loving-kindness softens the pain, mindfulness keeps me in the present, and knowing everything passes reminds me that grudges fade like old leaves.

Letting go of my anger toward those friends changed everything. It didn't erase the hurt, but it made room in my heart for what I love: visiting young monks at a local monastery. These kids, far from their families, shine with joy. Imagine trying to share in their happiness while your heart's stuck on old pain—it's like trying to draw with a broken pencil. Forgiveness fixed that. Now, small

things feel big: saying “thanks” to a gardener or smiling at a stranger in the park. These acts of kindness, like the wholesome actions we’ve talked about, are my way of fighting anger. By sharing this, I hope to light a small spark for you, helping you find peace, wherever you are.

Why Forgiveness Matters: Breaking Free

Think of a grudge like carrying a bag of heavy rocks. Those friends who betrayed you might not even remember, but you’re stuck lugging the weight every day. In Buddhism, this is suffering—holding onto anger keeps you tied to those who hurt you, making you relive the pain. Forgiveness is like putting that bag down. It frees you to live lightly, sleep better, and enjoy life more. Buddhism teaches we’re all connected, like the interdependence we’ve discussed, so your peace spreads to others, like ripples in a pond. Who doesn’t want that freedom?

How to Practice Forgiveness: Simple Steps

Forgiveness isn’t about telling your friends “I forgive you” or acting like everything’s fine. It’s something you do inside your heart. Here are easy ways to start, based on Buddhist ideas:

Understand Karma: Want revenge? Buddhism, like we’ve talked about with karma’s role in suffering, says you don’t need it. Your friends’ unfaithfulness will catch up with them through karma, like a boomerang, in this life or later. You can let go, knowing the universe will handle it.

Feel Compassion: Think of your friends as people who are struggling, maybe acting out of their own pain or confusion. This doesn’t mean their betrayal is okay, but it helps you see them as

human, not monsters. Try thinking, “They’re hurting too.” It cools your anger, like the compassion we’ve explored in bodhicitta.

Practice Loving-Kindness (Metta): This meditation, similar to bodhicitta aspirations you’ve studied, is about wishing happiness for everyone—even those who hurt you. Sit quietly and say in your mind: “May you be happy. May you be healthy. May you be safe.” Start with yourself, then people you like, then your friends who betrayed you. It’s tough at first, but it works. I do this every time I pray, sending good wishes to the old and young and even the corrupt, self-serving politicians. It makes my day brighter. Try picturing a warm light going to them—it sounds silly but helps.

Try these daily: Write about your anger, then wish your friends well in your mind. Or take a “forgiveness walk” near the monastery, letting go a little with each step. If you mess up, don’t worry—forgive yourself and keep going.

A Story of the Buddha’s Forgiveness: The Gift He Refused

The Buddha’s stories are like a burst of energy for your heart. Once, a man full of anger stormed into the Buddha’s monastery, furious over a misunderstanding. In front of the monks, he shouted insults, trying to make the Buddha mad.

But the Buddha stayed calm, like a still lake. He listened quietly, not saying a word back. The man kept yelling until he ran out of steam, standing there out of breath.

Then the Buddha spoke gently: “You’ve brought me your anger, but I don’t want it. If I take it, I have to carry it. I choose peace, so it’s still yours.” The man was shocked. He expected a fight, not this calm response.

The Buddha added, “Throwing dirt at someone doesn’t make them dirty—it dirties your hands. Your anger can’t hurt me unless I let it. I forgive you, not because you deserve it, but because I don’t want to suffer.” The man’s anger melted away. He left lighter, realizing his hatred only hurt himself. The Buddha’s forgiveness wasn’t about excusing the man—it was about staying free.

This story is about us: We often carry anger that only weighs us down. Next time your friends betray your kindness, try the Buddha’s way—don’t take their “gift” of pain, and feel your world open up.

Forgiveness and Memory: Learn, Don’t Forget

Forgiveness doesn’t mean forgetting the betrayal. That’s not smart—it sets you up to get hurt again. Forgive, but remember the lesson. Your friends’ unfaithfulness teaches you to set boundaries, maybe keep them at a distance. It also reminds you not to betray others. Why be the bad guy in someone else’s story? This connects to the equanimity we’ve discussed, like this non-partiality, balancing fairness with caution.

Buddhism says suffering comes from craving—like wanting an apology or a different past, as we’ve explored with terms like *yang pa'i sred pa*. Forgiveness lets you accept what happened without being stuck. It’s like saving an old text but not rereading it all the time. You stay wise but free.

Beyond Forgiveness: Making It Part of Life

Forgiveness fits into Buddhism’s bigger picture, like the Four Noble Truths we’ve touched on: See the pain (the betrayal), understand why it hurts (holding onto anger), know it can end (through peace), and follow the path to freedom. Mindfulness

catches anger early, and kind intentions help you let go, like the Bodhisattva vows you've studied.

Try tonglen meditation: Breathe in your friends' pain, breathe out calm. It's hard but builds big compassion, like bodhicitta. Or write a letter about your hurt, then tear it up to let go. These tie to the wholesome actions you've asked about, like spreading kindness.

In my life, forgiveness makes every day brighter. No car for pickup? I embrace the unexpected situation and take a cab myself. A family argument? I let it go and hugged tighter next time. The best part? Seeing those young monks at the monastery, happy despite being far from home, their joy, like the purity of Lotus buds, pushes me to keep forgiving.

The Ripple Effect: Spreading Peace

Imagine forgiveness like a warm fire, spreading light. You forgive your friends, they act kinder to others, and it lifts everyone around. Buddhism's idea of connection, like the Three Jewels we've discussed, says your peace changes the world a little. Those small acts mentioned—thanking a driver or smiling at a stranger—grow from this, creating good karma.

I've seen it: Forgiving my friends made people around me friendlier—less tension, more happiness. It wasn't magic; it was me showing up free. So, try it: Pick one grudge today. Use these steps. See what changes. Forgiveness isn't weakness—it's strength, helping you face life's challenges.

The path isn't always smooth. If you stumble, be kind to yourself, like those young monks who smile through challenges. You're not alone. May your heart grow peaceful, like flowers among thorns. What's one small forgiveness you can try today? Your journey's waiting.



Chapter 10

The Three Kinds of Craving: The Roots of Suffering

The Buddha taught that craving keeps us trapped in suffering. There are three main types, each pulling us away from peace:

Craving for Pleasure: This is wanting things that feel good, like tasty food, great music, or new gadgets. You think, “If I just had more, I’d be happy.” But even when you get that new phone or perfect meal, the happiness fades, and you want more.

Craving to Be Something: This is wanting to be someone special—maybe famous, powerful, or admired. It’s tied to ego, like dreaming of being the star at work or the hero among friends. You think status will make you whole, but the chase never ends.

Craving to Not Be Something: This is wanting to escape pain, like avoiding a tough situation, running from sadness, or even wishing to disappear. Pushing away the hard stuff often makes the suffering worse.

These cravings are like traps, keeping us stuck in a cycle of wanting, chasing, and hurting. They pull us from the present, making us miss the peace right here.

A Story of Ananda and the Trap of Craving

Here's a story that shows this: Ananda, a close disciple of the Buddha, went to a village to collect alms. Passing a wealthy merchant's house, he heard a woman singing, her voice sweet as honey, with a gentle harp. The music was so beautiful that Ananda stopped, completely caught up.

He stood there, craving more. He wanted the music to go on forever and even imagined living in a fancy house, surrounded by songs all day. This craving for pleasure made him forget his purpose—collecting alms. Hours passed, the sun set, and Ananda realized his bowl was empty. Guilt hit, and he rushed back to the monastery.

The Buddha greeted him with a kind smile. “Ananda, your bowl is empty, but your mind seems full. What have you been carrying today?”

Ashamed, Ananda admitted he'd been swept away by the music. He told the Buddha how he craved the pleasure and let it distract him.

The Buddha nodded gently. “Ananda, that's the nature of craving. The music was beautiful, but your desire for it made you suffer. You felt loss when it ended and guilt for forgetting your duty. If you had just enjoyed the music for what it was and moved on, you'd have stayed peaceful. Your bowl would be full, and your heart light.”

“Craving is like a hungry ghost,” the Buddha said. “It’s never full, no matter how much you feed it. The more you chase it, the hungrier it gets. True peace comes from letting go of the need to cling, not from getting everything you want.”

From then on, Ananda practiced noticing his desires without letting them take over. He learned real happiness comes from being content with what’s here, not chasing what’s missing.

The Way Out: Finding Peace in a Craving World

Buddhism teaches that to end suffering, we must let go of craving. This doesn’t mean you can’t enjoy life’s pleasures—like a good meal or a laugh with friends. It means not letting them control you. Through mindfulness, meditation, and wisdom, you can watch your cravings without getting caught, loosening their grip to find real peace.

Today, letting go is hard. Even monks need money and things to get by—we can’t wander jungles like long ago. But there’s a difference between needing enough and wanting too much. We chase endless desires—new gadgets, more social media likes, a bigger house—thinking they’ll make us happy. Yet, we often feel emptier than ever. When I started writing this book, I realized I had many online “friends” but didn’t truly know them. I couldn’t turn to them for real support because our connections were shallow, built on likes, not care.

This hit me: We’re so busy earning, building, and chasing online approval that our real relationships—with family, friends, even ourselves—are fading. We scroll for happiness, but when did we last make someone smile in person? Or feel truly seen by someone who knows us? Chasing “more” leaves us lonely, anxious, and depressed, trapped in thinking only about ourselves. Like the

Buddha said, craving is a hungry ghost—always hungry, never full.

But here's hope: You don't need to give up everything. Start small. Notice when you crave that extra like, a new outfit, or an escape from a tough day. Pause. Breathe. Ask, "Do I need this to be okay?" Call a family member, share a kind word with a neighbor, or sit quietly with your thoughts. These small steps, like the wholesome karma we've discussed, build real connections and quiet that hungry ghost.

Connecting Forgiveness and Craving: A Path to Freedom

Forgiveness and craving are linked. Holding a grudge against friends who betrayed your kindness is a form of craving—wanting an apology, justice, or a different past. It keeps you stuck, like Ananda craving the music. Forgiving those friends doesn't mean their unfaithfulness was okay—it means choosing peace over pain. You learn from their betrayal, set boundaries, and move forward lighter, just as you can notice cravings without chasing them.

Those young monks at the monastery, happy despite being far from home, some who have lost their parents, show this in action. They don't crave what they've lost; they find joy now, thanks to the Dharma masters who build monasteries to offer shelter and food. Their smiles, like the purity of gtsang ba (the purest) we've discussed, inspire me to forgive and let go of craving.

A Call to You: Start Small, Spark Change

We all crave—pleasure, status, escape. And we all carry hurts, like my friends' betrayal. But you can break free. Try forgiving one small hurt today, using the steps we've shared. Notice one craving—maybe for a quick social media hit—and let it pass.

Share a kind moment with someone real—a friend, a stranger, a family member. These acts, rooted in Buddhist wisdom like *sems pa chen po* (great heart), rebuild what matters: connection, peace, yourself.

The path isn't perfect. You'll stumble, like I do. Be kind to yourself, like those monks who shine through challenges. You're not alone—millions walk this path. May your heart bloom like flowers among thorns. What's one small step—forgiveness or letting go of a craving—you can take today? Your journey's waiting, and it starts now.



Chapter 11

Delusion in Buddhism: The Root of Our Struggles

In Buddhism, delusion is the biggest troublemaker—it's the root of all our problems. It's like wearing foggy glasses that make you see the world wrong, leading to greed, hatred, and all kinds of suffering. Delusion is simply not seeing things as they really are—it's ignorance that clouds your mind and heart.

What Delusion Makes Us Believe

Delusion tricks us into believing three big lies:

Everything Lasts Forever: We act like our happiness, possessions, or relationships will never change. We think that new phone, our best friend, or a great moment will stick around forever. But everything changes—phones break, friends drift, moments pass. When they do, we suffer because delusion told us they'd last.

There's a Fixed "Me": We believe in a solid, unchanging "self"—like we're a single, permanent person who must be protected or puffed up. This makes us selfish, always worrying about "me" and "mine." Buddhism says there's no fixed "you"—just a mix of

thoughts, feelings, and experiences that keep changing, like a river flowing.

Happiness Comes from Outside: We think happiness is in things like money, likes on social media, or avoiding pain. Delusion hides the truth that real peace comes from inside, not from chasing stuff outside us. No matter how much you get, it's never enough, and you're left wanting more.

These false beliefs keep us stuck, running after things that can't truly satisfy us, like chasing a mirage in the desert.

A Story of the Farmer and the Snake: Seeing Through Delusion

Here's a story that shows delusion at work: Once, a poor farmer lived in a simple hut. One morning, he woke up to find what looked like a huge, beautiful snake curled up on his porch. Terrified, he thought, "This is a demon snake! It'll bite me and ruin my family!"

All day, he hid inside, shaking with fear. He couldn't eat or work, his mind full of dread and anger toward the snake. He saw it as the cause of all his troubles, wishing it would just disappear.

As evening came, his young son returned home. Seeing his father's panic, the boy looked at the "snake." Instead of being scared, he calmly walked over. The farmer shouted, "Son, stay away from that demon!"

But the boy just smiled and picked up the "snake." "Father," he said, "this isn't a snake—it's just an old rope, knotted up. The morning light and your fear made it look dangerous."

The farmer stared, stunned. What he thought was a deadly snake was just a harmless rope. His fear, anger, and suffering came not from a real threat but from his own delusion—his mind misreading reality.

This story is about us: We often see a “snake” (a tough situation, a painful memory, or an imagined problem) when it’s just a “rope” (a simple reality). Our fear, anger, or craving comes from this mistake. When we see things clearly, the “snake” vanishes, and we’re left with peace.

How to Overcome Delusion: Finding Clarity

The way to break free from delusion is to gain wisdom—not just book smarts, but a deep understanding of how things really are. Mindfulness and meditation help you see clearly, like cleaning those foggy glasses. When you practice being present, you notice that everything changes—your feelings, your stuff, even your idea of “you.” There’s no permanent self to cling to, and happiness isn’t in chasing things outside you.

As you see these truths, greed and hatred start to fade. You stop chasing what doesn’t last and fighting what you can’t control. Instead, you live with a clearer mind and a lighter heart, finding peace in the moment.

Connecting Delusion, Craving, and Forgiveness: A Path to Freedom

Delusion fuels craving and anger, which tie directly to forgiveness. Holding a grudge against friends who betrayed your kindness is a delusion—believing their actions define your worth or that clinging to anger will fix the past. It’s like seeing a snake where there’s only a rope. Forgiving them, as we’ve discussed, means letting go of

that delusion, just like letting go of craving. It doesn't mean their unfaithfulness was okay—it means you choose peace over pain. You learn from their betrayal, set boundaries, and move forward lighter, like seeing the rope for what it is.

Those young monks at the monastery, happy despite being far from home, show this in action. They don't cling to delusions of a permanent home or crave what they've lost; they find joy now. Their smiles, echoing the pure radiance we've touched on, stir in me a grace to release grudges, shed desires, and pierce the veil of illusion.

A Call to You: Start Small, Spark Change

We all face delusion, craving, and hurts, like my friends' betrayal. But you can break free. Try forgiving one small hurt today, using the steps we've shared. Notice one craving—maybe for a quick social media hit—or a delusion, like thinking a new gadget will make you happy forever. Pause. Breathe. Ask, “Is this true? Do I need this to be okay?” Share a kind moment with someone real—a friend, a stranger, a family member. These acts, rooted in Buddhist wisdom like *sems pa chen po* (great heart), rebuild what matters: connection, clarity, yourself.

The way forward isn't a straight shot—expect a few wobbles, like the ones that catch me off guard. Wrap yourself in the forgiving glow of those wise wanderers who sparkle through the grit. Hey, you're far from solo; a whole chorus of hearts marches alongside. Imagine your soul bursting open like wild blooms in bramble thickets, spotting harmless twine amid what seemed like fangs. So, what's your next little leap today—easing off a grudge, waving goodbye to a whim, or flipping the script on a sneaky falsehood? The story's yours to shape; let's turn the page.



Chapter 12

The Importance of Kindness and Empathy in Buddhism

In Buddhism, kindness is a cornerstone of living a virtuous life. If you truly follow the Buddhist path, loving others and showing kindness is essential because all life—every person, every creature—is equal and deserves respect. This belief flows from the understanding that we’re all connected, sharing the same struggles and joys in this ever-changing world. Kindness isn’t just a nice gesture; it’s a powerful act that can transform hearts, including your own, and bring you closer to peace and enlightenment.

The Monk and the Scorpion: Kindness Despite Pain

Here’s a story that captures this: A Buddhist monk was heading to his monastery when he reached a small stream. The only way across was a slippery bamboo log. As he started to cross, he spotted a scorpion thrashing in the water, about to drown.

Without hesitating, the monk reached down to save it. But the moment he lifted the scorpion, it stung him. He yelped in pain and dropped it back into the water. Shaking his stinging hand, he tried

again—and the scorpion stung him again. He dropped it a second time.

Undeterred, he reached down a third time. The scorpion stung him once more, but the monk kept trying.

A passerby saw this and shouted, “Why do you keep trying to save that thing? It just stings you!”

The monk, calm despite the pain, replied, “It’s the scorpion’s nature to sting. It’s my nature to save.”

This parable illustrates that Buddhist kindness isn’t rooted in seeking gratitude or shying away from discomfort—it’s an expression of pure compassion, even amid difficulty. The monk refrained from judging the scorpion or abandoning it after the stings; instead, he recognized its desperation and extended aid, faithful to his inner resolve. Such compassion embodies the Buddhist ethos of nurturing all creatures with equanimity, regardless of their reactions.

I recognize that in our modern era, few embody such unwavering resolve—humanity often grows more spiteful and sharp-tongued, where acts of goodwill might invite retaliation. Yet this shouldn’t erode our essence. While extending kindness, we must temper it with discernment, much like offering food to a famished lion without thrusting our hand into its jaws.

Empathy in Buddhism: The Power of Karuna

In Buddhism, empathy is called *karuna*, or compassion. It’s not just feeling sorry for someone—it’s a deep, heartfelt wish to ease their suffering. *Karuna* is a key step toward enlightenment, cultivated through meditation and mindfulness. It’s about truly seeing someone’s pain, feeling it in your bones, and wanting to

help them find relief. This active compassion transforms how you interact with the world, turning fleeting sympathy into meaningful action.

Take the lives of domestic helpers, for example. They often leave their own families—children, parents, loved ones—to work in strangers’ homes, sending money back to provide for those they miss. The emotional toll of being far from family, worrying if they’re safe or have enough to eat, is heavier than any paycheck. Imagine the ache of being separated from your loved ones for months or even years, always wondering if they’re okay. When you really see their sacrifice, it’s easier to meet their mistakes with patience instead of frustration. Next time you’re tempted to snap at a helper for a small error, try pausing and choosing kindness instead. That shift, rooted in karuna, not only helps them but lightens your heart too.

The Zen Story of Ikkyu: Empathy in Action

A classic Zen story about the master Ikkyu shows empathy in a powerful way. One cold winter evening, Ikkyu saw a young monk shivering from hunger and cold outside the monastery. The monk, embarrassed, tried to hide, but Ikkyu noticed him. Instead of giving a lecture or rushing to fix things, Ikkyu quietly sat beside him.

Ikkyu took out his small rice bowl and ate his meager meal slowly, savoring each bite, right there in the cold with the young monk. The monk watched, puzzled. When Ikkyu finished, he stood, went to the monastery kitchen, and returned with a bowl of warm rice and a blanket. He handed them to the young monk without a word and sat back down.

The young monk, tears in his eyes, asked, “Why did you sit and eat with me first? Why not just bring the food right away?”

Ikkyu replied, “If I’d just given you the food, you might’ve felt like a beggar, ashamed of needing help. By eating my small meal beside you, I shared your cold, your hunger. We weren’t master and student or giver and receiver—just two people, cold and hungry together. Now, eat.”

This story captures the heart of Zen empathy. Ikkyu didn’t just pity the monk from a distance; he stepped into his world, sharing his struggle without judgment. By eating first, he made the young monk feel seen, not as a charity case, but as an equal. His quiet act of sitting together turned compassion into connection, showing that true empathy means being present with someone’s pain and acting from that shared humanity.

Kindness in a Challenging World

Sometimes, people don’t respond to kindness the way we hope. Maybe you help someone, and they act ungrateful or even push back. It’s easy to feel discouraged, but Buddhism teaches us to look deeper. Perhaps that person has faced so much unkindness that they’re wary of your gesture, unsure if it’s real. Or maybe they’re caught in their own confusion, unable to see your kindness for what it is. Their reaction doesn’t mean your effort was wasted—it’s just a sign of their own struggles.

Think about planting seeds in a garden. You give them the same soil, water, and sun, but some don’t grow. Do you stop planting? No, you keep going, knowing that some seeds will bloom into flowers. Kindness works the same way. Not every act will be returned with gratitude, but that shouldn’t stop you from spreading goodness. Each kind word, each small gesture—like holding the door for a stranger or listening to a friend—plants a

seed. Some may not sprout, but others will grow, brightening the world in ways you might not even see.

In today's fast-paced world, it's tempting to guard our hearts, especially when kindness feels risky or unappreciated. But Buddhism reminds us that kindness isn't about the outcome—it's about who we choose to be. When you act with compassion, like the monk saving the scorpion or Ikkyu sharing a cold moment, you're not just helping others; you're nurturing your own peace. Those young monks at the monastery, smiling despite being far from home, embody this. Their joy, made possible by the securities' kindness in opening the temple doors, shows that compassion creates light even in tough times.

Connecting Kindness, Empathy, and Buddhist Wisdom

Kindness and empathy tie into the Buddhist teachings we've explored, like letting go of craving and seeing through delusion. Craving makes us chase selfish desires, but kindness shifts our focus to others' well-being. Delusion makes us see enemies where there are just struggling humans, but empathy helps us see their pain clearly, like spotting a rope instead of a snake. Forgiving friends who betrayed your kindness, as we've discussed, is an act of *karuna*—releasing anger to ease your own suffering and theirs.

Every small act of kindness—like thanking a coworker, smiling at a stranger, or showing patience to a struggling helper—builds the wholesome karma we've talked about. It's a step toward the purity of radiance and the great heart of *sems pa chen po*. Even when it feels like your kindness doesn't "work," keep planting those seeds. They grow in your heart and ripple outward, touching lives in ways you may never know.

A Call to You: Plant Seeds of Kindness Today

We all face moments where kindness feels hard—when someone snaps at you, when your efforts go unnoticed, or when betrayal stings, like with my friends’ unfaithfulness. But you have the power to choose compassion. Try one small act of kindness today: share a smile, listen to someone’s story, or forgive a small hurt using the steps we’ve shared. Notice when you’re tempted to hold back, and ask, “What would the monk do with the scorpion?” Keep planting seeds, even if some don’t grow.

You’ll stumble, like I do, but be gentle with yourself. Like the bamboo that bends in the storm yet roots deeper into the earth. You’re not alone—millions walk this path. May your heart bloom with kindness, like flowers among thorns, lighting up your world and others’. What’s one small act of kindness or empathy you can try today? Your journey’s waiting, and it starts now.



Chapter 13

Cultivating Virtues Through Charity

Charity is a powerful way to cultivate virtue and grow as a compassionate person. When we give to others without expecting anything in return, we practice true selflessness. By sharing what we have, we help build a caring community where people support one another during difficult times, such as poverty, illness, or loss. On the other hand, if we hoard our wealth and focus only on ourselves, we risk becoming isolated, with no one to turn to when we face our own struggles, like sickness or the loneliness of old age. True charity comes from a desire to uplift others, and even the smallest act of giving can have a profound impact when it's done with a pure heart.

This is a story about a woman named Nantuo, who lived during the time of the Buddha. Nantuo was extremely poor, with barely enough to survive. She owned no proper clothes, just tattered rags that barely covered her, and she relied on begging to get enough food to eat each day. Her life was one of constant struggle, yet her heart remained kind and full of a quiet hope to do something meaningful, even if she had so little to offer.

One evening, as Nantuo walked through her village, she saw a beautiful sight: crowds of people heading toward the monastery, carrying glowing oil lamps to offer to the Buddha. The air was filled with the warm, flickering light of countless lamps, and the atmosphere was alive with devotion. People from all walks of life—rich merchants, farmers, and families—were bringing their offerings to honor the Buddha and seek blessings. Nantuo's heart sank as she watched. She longed to join them, to offer even a single lamp to show her respect and love for the Buddha's teachings. But she had nothing—no money, no possessions, not even a drop of oil to light a lamp.

Determined to do something, no matter how small, Nantuo decided she would find a way. She spent the entire next day begging on the dusty streets, approaching strangers with her worn-out bowl, hoping to collect even a tiny amount of money. By the end of the day, her efforts paid off—she had earned just one small coin. It wasn't much, but to Nantuo, it was a treasure. With that single coin, she hurried to a local shop to buy oil for a lamp. The shopkeeper, a kind man with a weathered face, saw the desperation and sincerity in Nantuo's eyes. Moved by her determination despite her obvious poverty, he gave her a little extra oil, more than her coin could buy, as a gesture of kindness.

With her precious oil, Nantuo carefully prepared a small clay lamp. She poured the oil into it, placed a wick, and lit it, watching the tiny flame flicker to life. Carrying her lamp with great care, she walked to the monastery, where hundreds of other lamps were already glowing, their light reflecting off the walls and creating a warm, sacred atmosphere. Nantuo felt small among the grand offerings of the wealthy, who had brought large, ornate lamps filled with expensive oils. But she gently placed her humble lamp among

the others, her heart swelling with joy at being able to offer something. As she set it down, she closed her eyes and made a heartfelt wish: “May this tiny light help guide all beings out of the darkness of suffering and into the path of wisdom and enlightenment. May it bring peace and understanding to everyone.”

That night, a fierce wind swept through the monastery grounds. It howled through the trees and across the open courtyard, extinguishing every single lamp in its path. The grand lamps of the wealthy, the modest lamps of the farmers—all were snuffed out, leaving the monastery in darkness. But, miraculously, Nantuo’s small lamp continued to burn. Its tiny flame stood strong against the powerful gusts, casting a steady, gentle light that refused to fade.

One of the Buddha’s closest disciples, Maudgalyayana, was at the monastery that night. He was known for his spiritual powers and keen observation. When he saw that every lamp had gone out except for one small, unremarkable flame, he was puzzled. Surely, this must be a mistake—how could such a simple lamp withstand the wind when even the largest ones had failed? Curious, he approached Nantuo’s lamp and tried to blow it out himself, thinking it might be some trick or error. But no matter how hard he tried, the flame wouldn’t waver. It flickered slightly but burned on, steady and bright, as if protected by an invisible force.

Confused and amazed, Maudgalyayana went to the Buddha to ask about this strange occurrence. “Teacher,” he said, “a great wind came and put out every lamp in the monastery, yet one small lamp still burns. I tried to blow it out myself, but it wouldn’t go out. Why is this lamp so special?” The Buddha, with his calm and knowing smile, looked at Maudgalyayana and explained,

“This lamp belongs to Nantuo, a poor woman who gave it with a heart full of purity and love. Its light is not just from oil and a wick—it is fueled by her sincere wish for the happiness and enlightenment of all beings. Her offering, though small, was given with complete selflessness, without any thought of reward or recognition. Because of her pure intention, this light is stronger than any storm. Even if all the winds of the world or all the waters of the oceans tried to extinguish it, they could not, for it is powered by the strength of her compassion.”

The Buddha went on to say that Nantuo’s simple offering was greater than the lavish gifts of the wealthy, who often gave with pride or expectation. Her small lamp shone brighter because it came from a heart free of selfishness, a heart that wished only to benefit others. The Buddha’s words left Maudgalyayana in awe, and he realized the profound power of a single act of kindness, no matter how small it seemed.

This story of Nantuo teaches us that the true value of giving lies not in the size or cost of the gift, but in the intention behind it. Nantuo had almost nothing, yet she gave everything she could with a heart full of love and hope for others. Her tiny lamp became a symbol of the enduring power of selflessness, shining brighter than all the grand offerings around it. It reminds us that even the smallest acts of charity, when done with a pure heart, can create a light that no darkness can overcome.



Chapter 14

Faith, Doubt, and Dedication: The Heart of Buddhist Practice

In Buddhism, faith is not about blindly accepting someone else's words or clinging to untested beliefs. Instead, it's a quiet, confident trust in the teachings and the path they offer—a trust that grows stronger with experience. The Buddha himself encouraged this approach, saying, "Don't just take my word for it. Reflect on my teachings, test them in your life, and if you find them helpful, follow them." This invitation to question and explore is what makes Buddhist faith so unique. It's not about surrendering your mind; it's about using it to discover truth for yourself.

Think of faith in Buddhism as a journey, like setting out on a long hike through unknown lands. At the start, you hear about a path that promises peace and wisdom. Something about it sparks curiosity and hope, so you take your first steps with a sense of trust. As you walk this path—through practices like meditation, kindness, and mindfulness—you begin to notice changes. Your mind feels calmer, your heart more open, your life more balanced. These small victories strengthen your confidence, like finding

steady footing on a rocky trail. Over time, with consistent practice, your trust deepens into an unshakable conviction, rooted not in someone else's words but in your own direct experience.

What's fascinating is that doubt plays a vital role in this journey. In Buddhism, doubt isn't a flaw or a failure—it's a tool for growth. The Buddha encouraged "great doubt," a kind of curious, probing skepticism that pushes you to question your assumptions and dig deeper. It's like a miner chipping away at a rock to uncover hidden gems. Doubt keeps you honest, ensuring your faith is built on understanding, not blind acceptance. For a Buddhist, the goal isn't to believe without question but to trust enough to start the journey and question enough to arrive at profound truths.

The Role of Prayer and Rituals in Buddhism

At first glance, Buddhist practices like chanting, bowing, or lighting incense might look like the prayers and rituals of other religions. But their purpose is entirely different. In Buddhism, these practices aren't about asking a higher power for miracles or divine intervention. Instead, they're tools for transforming your own mind and heart. They're like exercises for the soul, designed to cultivate inner peace, compassion, and wisdom.

When Buddhists chant or meditate, they're training their minds to let go of negative emotions like anger, fear, or anxiety. These practices create a sense of calm and clarity, helping you face life's challenges—whether it's a stressful day or a serious illness—with grace and strength. For example, rituals for someone who is sick or dying are not about begging for a cure or an afterlife reward. They're compassionate acts meant to guide the person's mind toward peace, preparing them for whatever comes next. By generating positive energy, these practices can even influence the

person's consciousness, helping them find a better rebirth or simply easing their suffering in the present moment.

This approach reflects two core Buddhist ideas: everything in life is temporary, and our actions have consequences. Chanting a mantra or lighting a candle isn't about worshipping a god—it's about turning life's difficulties into opportunities for growth. In Vajrayana Buddhism, sometimes called Tantric Buddhism, practitioners honor enlightened beings, but these aren't creator gods. They're more like spiritual guides, beings who have reached enlightenment and can help clear away negative energies. Their "help" isn't a supernatural fix but a nudge toward realizing your own potential for awakening.

The Power of Dedication: Sharing the Good

One of the most beautiful practices in Buddhism is dedication—the act of sharing the positive energy from your good deeds with others. Imagine you've just done something kind, like helping a friend or meditating for an hour. Instead of keeping the "merit" (or positive energy) from that act for yourself, you offer it to others, wishing for their happiness and freedom from suffering. It's not like giving away a piece of cake where you're left with less. In Buddhism, sharing merit multiplies its power, like lighting one candle from another to spread the glow.

Dedication is rooted in the Buddhist belief that we're all connected. Your happiness and suffering are tied to the happiness and suffering of others. By dedicating your good deeds, you're saying, "May this act benefit everyone, not just me." It's a selfless act that transforms even the smallest gesture into something profound.

Why Dedication Matters

Dedication benefits both the giver and the receiver in meaningful ways. For the person dedicating, it's a practice of letting go of selfishness. When you share your merit, you train your mind to care less about "me" and more about "we." This shift dissolves ego and greed, replacing them with compassion and generosity. I learned this firsthand in my own life. Before I became a nun, I was often caught up in my own problems, blaming others for my unhappiness. I thought I was the most miserable person in the world. But after I began meditating and studying Buddhism, I realized that suffering is universal—no one escapes it. This realization changed how I saw the world. I started feeling the pain of others, and my prayers shifted from being about me to being about them. Now, when I dedicate merit, I feel a deep sense of joy, knowing my actions are part of something bigger.

For others, dedication can have a powerful impact. Buddhists believe that shared merit can reach anyone—living or deceased. You might dedicate merit to a loved one who has passed away, wishing them a better rebirth, or to all beings, hoping they find relief from suffering. It's a way of spreading positivity across time and space, like ripples in a pond that touch every shore.

How to Practice Dedication

Dedication is simple and doesn't require elaborate rituals. After doing something good—whether it's meditating, giving to charity, or even just being patient with a difficult person—pause for a moment. Silently or aloud, say something like, "May the good from this act help all beings find happiness and be free from suffering." That's it. This small intention turns your action into an offering for the world, amplifying its impact.



Chapter 15

The Strength of Determination: The Fuel for the Path

In Buddhism, determination—known as *Adhiṭṭhāna*—is the inner fire that keeps you moving toward your goals, especially the ultimate goal of enlightenment. It's not about being stubborn or forcing your way through life. Instead, it's a steady, unwavering commitment to stay on the path, no matter the obstacles. Think of it as the grit that keeps a marathon runner going, even when their legs ache and their lungs burn.

The spiritual path is rarely easy. Distractions, doubts, and laziness can pull you off course. Without determination, it's easy to give up when the going gets tough. But with it, you gain the strength to push through challenges, whether it's the discomfort of sitting in meditation or the emotional struggles of daily life. Determination also sharpens your mind, helping you stay focused and disciplined. It's what turns good intentions into real, lasting change.

I've experienced this in my own journey. When I decided to become a nun, it wasn't a simple choice. I was already dealing with health issues, taking daily medications that caused side effects like

irritable bowel syndrome and restless legs syndrome. On top of that, I wasn't fluent in Tibetan, which made studying Buddhist texts a challenge. There were moments when I felt overwhelmed, like the path was too steep to climb. But deep inside, I knew I wanted to understand Buddhism and live its teachings. That clarity of purpose became my anchor. Every time I faced pain or doubt, my determination pushed me forward, helping me overcome both physical and mental barriers.

Building Determination Step by Step

Determination isn't something you're born with—it's a muscle you build over time. Here are some practical ways to cultivate it:

Set a Clear Intention: Before you start a task, like meditating or being kind, make a firm promise to yourself. For example, "I will meditate for 10 minutes without stopping." A clear goal gives you something to aim for.

Start Small: Begin with manageable commitments, like meditating for five minutes or doing one kind act each day. Small successes build confidence, making it easier to tackle bigger challenges.

Reconnect with Your Purpose: When you feel like giving up, remind yourself why you started. Maybe you want to find peace, help others, or grow spiritually. Keeping your "why" in mind reignites your motivation.

Stay Consistent: Practice regularly, even on days when you don't feel like it. Consistency strengthens your resolve, making determination a natural part of who you are.

In Buddhism, determination is the bridge between wishing for change and making it happen. It's the quiet strength that turns

dreams of awakening into reality, not for selfish gain but for the benefit of all beings.

A Path of Trust, Inquiry, and Compassion

Buddhism offers a unique approach to faith, one that balances trust with questioning, action with reflection. Through practices like meditation, chanting, dedication, and determination, you learn to transform your mind and heart. These tools aren't about seeking miracles from above but about discovering the potential for peace and wisdom within yourself. Along the way, you share that goodness with others, creating a ripple effect of compassion that touches the world. Whether you're just starting out or walking the path for years, Buddhism invites you to trust, question, and grow—one mindful step at a time.



Chapter 16

Meditation: The Key to Finding Peace and Understanding Yourself in Buddhism

In Buddhism, meditation is like a gentle guide, leading you to a place of inner peace and a deeper understanding of who you are and how the world works. It's not just about sitting still or trying to relax—it's a powerful practice that helps you explore your mind, clear away confusion, and discover the truth about life. Picture your mind as a cloudy sky: meditation is the breeze that softly sweeps away the clouds, revealing the bright, open sky of your true self.

For Buddhists, meditation is the heart of the spiritual path. It's not about hiding from life's problems or chasing a quick moment of calm. Instead, it's about training your mind to face life with clarity, kindness, and wisdom. Whether you're focusing on your breath, sending love to others, or noticing your thoughts without getting caught up in them, meditation helps you look inside yourself, question what you believe, and find a sense of peace that stays with you no matter what's going on around you. It's the key

to moving beyond suffering and finding a joy that doesn't depend on everything going perfectly.

My own meditation journey wasn't easy at first. I remember calling my teacher over and over, feeling overwhelmed and unsure. Sometimes, I'd be sitting there, trying to focus, and saliva would roll down my mouth—embarrassing, right? Other times, I'd get dizzy, my mind spinning like a top. I'm pretty sure my teacher must have wondered if he'd made a mistake taking me on as his disciple! But his patience was like a steady hand, guiding me through those early struggles. He never judged me, and his calm encouragement helped me keep going, step by step. That patience, along with my persistence, turned those messy beginnings into moments of growth, showing me that meditation is a journey where even the stumbles teach you something valuable.

Different Ways to Meditate in Buddhism

Meditation in Buddhism comes in many forms, each with its own special purpose, but they all work together to help you grow spiritually. The two main types are Samatha (calm abiding) and Vipassana (insight meditation). Other practices, like Metta (loving-kindness meditation) and walking meditation, add even more ways to build mindfulness and compassion. Together, these practices weave a beautiful path to a wiser, kinder you.

Samatha (Shiné): Finding a Calm and Steady Mind

Samatha, or Shiné in Tibetan Buddhism, means “calm abiding.” It's about helping your mind settle down and stay focused, like calming a choppy lake until the water is still and clear. When your mind is calm, you can think more clearly and feel more at peace.

In Samatha, you pick one thing to focus on, like your breath, a mental image of the Buddha, a candle flame, or a special word or phrase called a mantra. The breath is a favorite because it's always with you, steady and natural. You simply notice the feeling of breathing in and out, letting your mind rest on that rhythm. This keeps you in the present moment and helps you let go of distractions—like worries, daydreams, or stress.

At first, focusing can feel like trying to tame a wild puppy. Your mind jumps around, thinking about your to-do list, a memory, or even what's for lunch. That's totally normal! When I started, I'd get distracted constantly, and sometimes I'd even feel dizzy or notice saliva pooling because I was so focused on getting it "right." But Samatha is about patience. Each time your mind wanders, you gently bring it back to your breath or focus, without getting upset. Over time, your mind gets better at staying calm and steady, like a candle flame glowing strong, even in a breeze. This calmness isn't just about feeling good—it prepares your mind for deeper understanding, making Samatha a foundation for other kinds of meditation.

For example, if you're new to meditation, try sitting for 10 minutes, noticing the air moving in and out at the tip of your nose. When your mind drifts (and it will!), don't worry—just guide it back gently. With practice, your mind will feel quieter, and those moments of peace will grow longer. This focus not only relaxes you but also sets the stage for exploring bigger questions about life.

Vipassana (Lhaktong): Seeing the World Clearly

While Samatha calms your mind, Vipassana, or insight meditation (called Lhaktong in Tibetan Buddhism), helps you see the world as it really is. It's about understanding that everything—

your thoughts, feelings, and even the things you own—is temporary, connected to everything else, and not as solid as it seems. Think of it like looking at a rainbow: it looks real, but when you get closer, you see it’s just light and water, always changing.

In Vipassana, you pay close attention to your thoughts, emotions, or physical feelings, but you don’t get swept away by them. Instead, you watch them like a curious explorer. For example, if you feel frustrated during meditation, you don’t push it away or let it take over. You ask: What is this frustration? Where did it come from? Does it last forever? By looking closely, you see that thoughts and feelings come and go, like waves on a beach. They’re not as solid or permanent as they feel.

This practice helps you understand why we often feel stuck or unhappy. In Buddhism, suffering comes from holding on too tightly to things—like people, possessions, or ideas about ourselves—as if they’ll last forever. Vipassana shows you that nothing is permanent or truly “yours.” Your favorite phone, for instance, might seem important, but it’s just a bunch of parts put together, and one day it’ll break or become outdated. Seeing this helps you let go of clinging, which frees you from stress and disappointment.

In Tibetan Buddhism, Lhaktong works in a similar way but might include imagining things, like picturing your body getting older to realize it won’t last forever. This isn’t sad—it’s freeing! By understanding that everything changes, you stop being so afraid of loss and start living more fully in the moment.

Other Practices: Metta and Walking Meditation

Besides Samatha and Vipassana, other meditation practices add warmth and flexibility to the Buddhist path. Metta, or loving-kindness meditation, is like a warm hug for your heart. It’s about

growing love and kindness for yourself and others. You start by silently saying kind wishes to yourself, like, “May I be happy, may I be healthy, may I feel safe.” Then you send those wishes to people you love, people you don’t know, and even those you find hard to like. Finally, you wish happiness for every living being. Metta helps melt away anger, builds connection, and makes your heart feel open and light. When I was struggling with meditation, my teacher suggested Metta to ease my frustration, and wishing kindness for myself and others helped me feel less alone in my challenges.

Walking meditation brings mindfulness into movement. Instead of sitting, you walk slowly, noticing each step—the way your foot touches the ground, the movement of your body, the rhythm of your breath. It’s great for people who feel restless sitting still or want to bring mindfulness into daily life. I found walking meditation helpful when sitting felt too hard—focusing on each step gave my dizzy mind something steady to hold onto. It’s a reminder that you can be present and aware no matter what you’re doing.

How Meditation Changes You

Together, these meditation practices create a complete path to a wiser, kinder life. Samatha helps you calm your mind so you can focus. Vipassana helps you understand life’s deeper truths, letting go of what holds you back. Metta and walking meditation bring kindness and awareness into your daily routine. Each practice is like a piece of a puzzle, coming together to help you live with more peace and clarity.

Meditation isn’t about becoming perfect or escaping life’s ups and downs. It’s about facing life with a calm, open heart. Through

meditation, you learn to let go of habits that cause pain—like holding on too tightly, getting angry, or ignoring the truth. Instead, you grow qualities like patience, kindness, and understanding. Over time, meditation changes how you see yourself and the world, helping you handle tough moments with more ease.

For example, imagine someone who feels anxious a lot. With Samatha, they learn to slow their racing thoughts by focusing on their breath. With Vipassana, they see that their worries come and go like passing clouds, not lasting forever. With Metta, they send kindness to themselves, easing self-criticism. Together, these practices don't make anxiety disappear, but they give tools to face it with strength and calm. I saw this in my own life—when dizziness or frustration came up, meditation helped me see those feelings as temporary, and my teacher's patience reminded me to keep going.

Starting Your Meditation Journey

Meditation is like planting a seed—it takes time and care to grow, but the results are worth it. My early days were messy, with physical challenges like dizziness and moments of doubt, but my teacher's patience showed me that every step forward counts. Meditation isn't always easy—sitting with your thoughts or questioning how you see the world can feel uncomfortable—but it's deeply rewarding. Each time you practice, you uncover a little more clarity, kindness, and strength.

If you're new to meditation, don't worry about getting it perfect. Start small—try five minutes a day, focusing on your breath or saying kind words to yourself. Be patient, because your mind will wander, and you might even face moments of discomfort, like I did with dizziness or drooling. That's okay! Each time you bring your

focus back, you're building a stronger, calmer mind. As you keep practicing, meditation becomes more than something you do—it becomes a way of living, where every moment is a chance to be present, kind, and awake to the beauty of life.

In the words of the Buddha, “Meditate... don't wait, or you might regret it later.” Meditation is an invitation to discover the peace and wisdom already inside you, waiting to shine through. Whether you're seeking calm, clarity, or a deeper connection to the world, this practice lights the way, one mindful moment at a time. And if you stumble along the way, like I did, a patient teacher or your own persistence can make all the difference.

Savoring the Strawberry: Finding Joy in the Present Moment

Mindfulness isn't just about sitting in meditation all day or filling your mind with endless thoughts. It's about finding calm, letting go of past worries, and being fully present in the moment. It's not about becoming lazy or avoiding life's challenges—it's about meeting them with a clear, relaxed mind.

In an old Zen story, a monk wanders through a forest when a fierce tiger spots him and gives chase. He runs until he reaches a cliff's edge, with another tiger waiting below, snarling. Grasping a vine, he dangles between the two beasts. As he hangs there, two mice—one black, one white—begin gnawing at the vine. Danger surrounds him, yet he notices a ripe, red strawberry growing on the cliffside, just within reach. He plucks it, eats it, and savors its sweet, vibrant flavor, fully immersed in the joy of that single moment.

The tigers represent birth and death, the vine our breath, the mice day and night, and the strawberry the sheer joy of living. We all have these in our lives, but unlike the monk, how many of us truly

savor the moment? The monk doesn't panic about the tigers or cling to fears of the past. He doesn't let his mind spiral into chaos or shut down in despair. Instead, he stays present, tasting the strawberry's sweetness with a calm, clear heart. We all face the tigers of birth and death, hold onto the vine of our breath, and watch time's mice chew away. Yet how often do we miss the strawberry, letting life's pressures steal the simple, profound joy of being alive? Mindfulness invites us to pause, breathe, and embrace the moment, finding peace and delight no matter what surrounds us.

In Buddhism, impermanence (Pāli: *anicca*, Sanskrit: *anitya*) is a fundamental concept and one of the three marks of existence, alongside suffering (*dukkha*) and non-self (*anatta*). It is the understanding that all things—whether physical, mental, or emotional—are in a constant state of flux and decay. Nothing in the conditioned world has a permanent, unchanging nature.

The Meaning of Impermanence

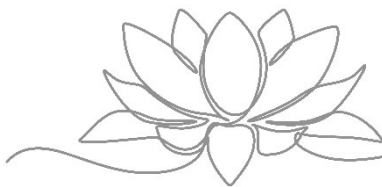
The doctrine of impermanence states that everything that arises must also pass away. This applies to all phenomena:

Physical Objects: A flower blooms and then withers. A building is constructed and eventually crumbles. Your own body is always changing, aging, and moving towards death.

Mental and Emotional States: Feelings of happiness and sadness are temporary. Thoughts and memories arise and disappear. Even our sense of "self" is not a fixed entity but a constantly changing collection of experiences and perceptions.

Impermanence and Suffering

Buddhism teaches that much of our suffering comes from our resistance to impermanence. We desire things to be permanent, whether it's our youth, a relationship, or a pleasant experience. When we cling to what is, by its very nature, transient, we inevitably face disappointment and pain. By deeply accepting that everything is in flux, we can let go of our attachments and find greater peace.



Chapter 17

Understanding Emptiness in Buddhism

Buddhist teachings often face misinterpretation in modern contexts, particularly the concept of emptiness (*shunyata* in Sanskrit, *suññatā* in Pāli), which is frequently confused with "nothingness." These terms are distinct: emptiness does not mean that nothing exists or that reality is a void. Rather, it refers to the profound insight that all phenomena—whether physical objects, mental states, or the sense of self—lack inherent, independent existence. Everything arises through dependent origination (*pratityasamutpada*), relying on causes and conditions, and is marked by impermanence (*anicca*), meaning it will eventually change and dissolve. This understanding does not deny the existence of the physical world or the self; instead, it highlights their transient, interconnected nature. A table is real and functional, but it's not eternal or self-sustaining—it depends on wood, a carpenter, and time, and it will one day decay. Similarly, the self is real in a conventional sense but lacks a fixed, unchanging essence.

Emptiness is one of the three marks of existence in Buddhism, alongside impermanence and suffering (*dukkha*), and is central to all major traditions—Theravada, Mahayana, and Vajrayana. In Theravada, emptiness is often explored through mindfulness of the body and impermanence, as seen in the *Satipatthana Sutta*. In Mahayana, texts like the *Heart Sutra* emphasize emptiness as the ultimate nature of reality, famously stating, “Form is emptiness, emptiness is form.” In Vajrayana, emptiness is integrated into tantric practices, where the body and universe are seen as interdependent manifestations of enlightened awareness. Across these traditions, emptiness is not a nihilistic denial of reality but a liberating insight that frees us from clinging to fixed ideas, fostering wisdom and compassion.

To deepen this understanding, Buddhist practitioners often engage in meditations like the contemplation of the 36 parts of the body, which reveals the impermanent and empty nature of the self. This practice, rooted in early Buddhist texts and adapted across traditions, helps us see that the self is not a solid, eternal entity but a collection of transient, interdependent parts.

The Meditation on the 36 Parts of the Body

In Buddhism, monks and lay practitioners alike practice mindfulness of the body (*kāyānupassanā*), which includes meditating on the 36 parts of the body, as outlined in texts like the *Satipatthana Sutta* (Theravada) and various Mahayana and Vajrayana teachings. These parts are systematically listed—examples include hair, skin, teeth, blood, bones, heart, liver, kidneys, saliva, tears, sweat, and more, up to 36 in some traditions. The exact number varies slightly (Theravada typically lists 32 parts, while some Mahayana and Vajrayana traditions include

additional elements like fluids or tissues), but the purpose remains the same: to investigate whether any single part, or the body as a whole, constitutes a permanent, independent “self.”

In this meditation, practitioners mentally dissect the body, observing each part’s characteristics. For example, a monk might focus on saliva, noting how it forms when eating, dries in moments, and depends on food, hydration, and bodily processes. Saliva is real but not “you”—it changes and cannot exist alone. Similarly, tears arise from emotions or irritants, then evaporate, relying on glands and external triggers. Bones seem solid but erode with age, depending on calcium and bodily systems. By examining each of the 36 parts, practitioners see that the body is a composite of impermanent elements, each arising and ceasing due to conditions, none containing an inherent “self.”

This practice directly reveals emptiness because it shows that the “self” we cling to is not a singular, unchanging entity but a temporary collection of parts, all interconnected and impermanent. It also reinforces impermanence, as each part—whether hair that falls or a heart that beats—changes and decays. Across Buddhist traditions, this meditation dismantles the illusion of a fixed self, aligning with the broader teaching that all phenomena are empty of intrinsic existence.

A Story to Illustrate Emptiness

To clarify this concept, consider this classic story inspired by Zen traditions, which humorously corrects a common misunderstanding of emptiness while reflecting broader Buddhist wisdom:

Once, a group of novice monks gathered in a temple garden, discussing the concept of emptiness. They agreed that the world,

including their own bodies, was empty and that the self was merely a mental construct. A wise old monk, tending to a nearby tree, overheard their conversation and approached. He asked, “What is this emptiness you speak of?” One young monk replied confidently, “Everything is empty! The body, the self—it’s all an illusion created by the mind.” The old monk nodded thoughtfully, then pointed to a large rock nearby and asked, “Is that rock in your mind alone?” The young monk hesitated but answered, “Yes, it’s a projection of my mind.”

The old monk smiled and said, “Then your mind must be very heavy to carry such a rock!” The young monk looked puzzled, so the old monk continued, “Come, let us meditate on the 36 parts of the body to understand this better.” The monks sat in meditation, and the old monk guided them: “Observe your hair, your skin, your bones, your heart. Is any one of these parts ‘you’? Is the liver ‘you’? Or the blood? Are these parts permanent, or do they change and decay?”

As the young monk contemplated each part—hair that falls, skin that wrinkles, bones that weaken, saliva that dries—he realized that no single part was a fixed “self,” nor was their combination an eternal entity. The body was real, tangible, yet impermanent and interdependent, like the rock, which depended on geological processes, time, and the earth’s conditions. The old monk concluded, “Emptiness does not mean the body or the rock does not exist. It means they lack an inherent, unchanging essence. They arise, change, and pass away due to conditions. To see this is to understand emptiness.”

This anecdote underscores that emptiness is not about denying the reality of things—like the rock’s weight or the body’s presence—but about recognizing their lack of a permanent, self-sustaining

essence. Misinterpreting emptiness as total non-existence leads to absurd conclusions, as the story playfully shows. It reflects a universal Buddhist insight, applicable in Theravada's focus on mindfulness, Mahayana's emphasis on ultimate truth, and Vajrayana's transformative practices.

Examples of Emptiness in Everyday Contexts

To deepen this understanding, here are practical examples that illustrate emptiness and impermanence in everyday life, drawn from Buddhist philosophy across traditions:

A Candle's Flame: A candle's flame burns brightly, casting light in a quiet room, but it flickers and dies when the wax or oxygen runs out (impermanence). The flame depends on wax, a wick, air, and a spark to exist (emptiness). It's real and warm in the moment but lacks an independent core—it cannot burn alone and will not last forever. This mirrors how phenomena, like the body's parts, exist interdependently.

A River's Flow: A river seems like a solid, singular thing, but its water is always moving, never the same from one moment to the next (impermanence). It depends on rain, gravity, and the riverbed to exist (emptiness). The river is real—you can touch its water—but it's not a fixed entity, much like the self, which is a flow of changing parts and experiences.

A Child's Drawing: A drawing made with chalk on a stone path is vibrant but washes away in the rain (impermanence). It relies on chalk, the child's hand, and the stone surface (emptiness). The drawing is real and meaningful while it lasts, but it lacks an inherent, unchanging essence, similar to how the body's 36 parts are real but transient.

The Sound of a Bell: The sound of a temple bell rings clearly, then fades into silence (impermanence). It depends on the bell, the striker, and air to carry the sound (emptiness). The sound is real—you hear it—but it’s not a permanent thing, just as emotions like joy or anger arise and pass, empty of fixed existence.

A Moment of Laughter: Laughter shared with friends feels vivid and alive, but it fades as the moment passes (impermanence). It relies on a joke, your mood, and the company of others (emptiness). The laughter is real but not a solid, standalone thing, reflecting how mental states, like the body’s parts, depend on conditions.

A Woven Basket: A basket seems sturdy and whole, but it frays or breaks over time (impermanence). It depends on reeds, the weaver’s skill, and use (emptiness). It’s real and useful but not self-existent, much like the self, which is a composite of interdependent parts.

These examples show that emptiness and impermanence are not abstract or nihilistic but practical insights that help us live with less attachment. Recognizing that things are real yet fleeting and interconnected allows us to appreciate them without clinging, reducing suffering and fostering a sense of freedom.

The Path to Freedom Through Emptiness and Impermanence

Understanding emptiness and impermanence is central to the Buddhist path to liberation. The Heart Sutra, a key Mahayana text, declares, “Form is emptiness, emptiness is form,” meaning that all phenomena—physical forms, thoughts, or emotions—are real in a conventional sense but empty of inherent existence. This

insight is echoed in Theravada's focus on the three marks of existence (anicca, dukkha, anatta) and Vajrayana's view of reality as a dynamic interplay of emptiness and appearance. The doctrine of dependent origination explains that all things arise from causes and conditions, like a seed needing soil, water, and sun to become a tree. Nothing exists independently, and everything is subject to change.

The meditation on the 36 parts of the body is a powerful tool for experiencing this directly. By examining parts like tears, sweat, or blood, practitioners see that no part is a permanent "self," and the body as a whole is a temporary, interdependent system. This practice, common across Buddhist traditions, supports mindfulness of impermanence (anicca), revealing how attachment to the body or self leads to suffering (dukkha). It also aligns with the concept of non-self (anatta), showing that what we call "self" is a collection of the five aggregates (form, sensation, perception, mental formations, and consciousness), all of which are empty and impermanent.

This understanding is liberating because it frees us from clinging to fixed ideas—about ourselves, others, or the world. For example, seeing the body's parts as empty helps us let go of pride in appearance or fear of aging. Recognizing the impermanence of emotions like anger allows us to observe them without being consumed. This fosters equanimity, compassion, and wisdom, as we see all beings as interconnected and transient, sharing the same nature.

Connecting to Broader Buddhist Teachings

The meditation on the 36 parts aligns with core Buddhist teachings across traditions. In Theravada, it's part of the

Satipatthana Sutta's mindfulness practices, helping practitioners develop insight into impermanence and non-self. In Mahayana, it complements the Heart Sutra's teachings on emptiness, showing how the body's form is both real and empty. In Vajrayana, it's integrated into practices that visualize the body as a mandala of interdependent energies, empty yet luminous. Together, these teachings point to a reality that is vibrant yet fleeting, real yet not fixed.

By practicing this meditation, Buddhists experience that the body, while tangible, is not a solid self. This insight extends to all phenomena—rocks, emotions, thoughts, or even a temple's incense smoke—revealing their empty and impermanent nature. Far from nihilism, this understanding encourages living fully in the present, appreciating each moment without grasping, and cultivating compassion for all beings caught in the cycle of change.

Conclusion

Emptiness and impermanence are not ideas to fear but gateways to freedom. They teach us to hold life lightly, like a breeze passing through an open window. By meditating on the 36 parts of the body, we see the self as a fleeting, interconnected process, not a fixed thing. This insight, rooted in the Heart Sutra, dependent origination, and the three marks of existence, helps us let go of attachment, embrace the present, and find peace amid life's constant flow. Whether through Theravada's mindfulness, Mahayana's wisdom, or Vajrayana's transformative practices, this understanding leads to compassion, wisdom, and liberation for ourselves and all beings.



Chapter 18

The Flow of Life: Birth, Death, Interdependence, and No-Self

Life feels like a series of beginnings and endings—births and deaths, wins and losses, hellos and goodbyes. But what if these moments aren't as separate as they seem? What if life is less like a straight line with a clear start and finish, and more like a river, endlessly flowing, shifting, and reshaping itself? In my journey to understand life's deeper rhythms, I've come across ideas from Eastern philosophies, particularly Buddhism, that have changed how I see myself and the world: birth and death as constant transformations, interdependence as the web connecting everything, and no-self as the freedom of letting go of a fixed "me." These concepts aren't just abstract—they're practical, offering a way to find peace in life's ups and downs. Let me break them down, share some stories, and show you how they've helped me see life as a beautiful, interconnected dance.

Birth and Death: The Pulse of Change

When we think of birth, we picture a baby's first cry or the start of something new—a job, a relationship, a dream. Death, on the

other hand, feels final: a loved one passing, a chapter closing, or even the fading of youth. But what if birth and death aren't just big moments but tiny ones happening all the time? Imagine life as a river. Water flows in from upstream, carrying new ripples—what we might call “birth.” It moves on, merging into the sea or evaporating—what we might call “death.” Yet it's all one continuous stream, never truly starting or stopping. Our lives are like that: every moment, old cells in our body die, new ones form; old habits fade, new ones emerge.

Take a candle flame, for instance. Lighting the wick feels like the flame's “birth.” As it burns, it dances, shifts, consumes wax—living its fleeting life. Blow it out, and the flame is “gone.” But is it? The heat lingers in the air, the melted wax reshapes the candle, and the smoke curls upward, joining the atmosphere.

When my favorite flower plant died, it felt like a small death, a part of me vanishing. Yet, I've found comfort in the idea that nothing truly begins or ends; it simply transforms. This perspective helped me embrace the change, not fear it, and notice new opportunities. Just like seeds sprouting from the soil enriched by what came before, every ending in life is built on what's passed, pulsing with constant renewal.

Interdependence: The Web That Holds Us

Nothing exists alone. This idea, called interdependence, is like noticing that life is a vast web where every thread connects to countless others. A single tug ripples across the whole. Everything—every person, object, or moment—depends on countless causes and conditions to exist. Without them, nothing would be.

Consider your morning coffee, a simple pleasure you cherish. That cup isn't just a thing—it's a story of interdependence. The beans came from soil fed by rain, warmed by the sun, tended by farmers' hands. Those beans were harvested, roasted in factories with machines and workers, shipped across oceans by trucks and boats fueled by countless resources. At home, you brewed it with water, electricity, and a coffee maker designed and built by others. If any piece were missing—no rain, no farmer, no truck—your coffee wouldn't exist. This is true for everything: our clothes, our phones, even our thoughts shaped by books, conversations, and experiences.

Interdependence humbles us. When we are frustrated with someone, remember they're part of the same web—shaped by their own struggles, joys, and conditions. Helping them helps the web, which includes us. It's why kindness matters: every act ripples outward, like a pebble in a pond. This perspective shifts how we navigate conflicts or setbacks. Instead of blaming one person or thing, we try to see the web of causes—like when a delayed flight isn't just the airline's fault but a chain of weather, schedules, and human choices.

No-Self: Letting Go of a Fixed “Me”

The Buddhist idea of no-self (anatta in Pali, bdag med in Tibetan) might sound odd, like saying you're not real. But it just means there's no permanent “you” that stays the same forever. What we call “I” is a mix of thoughts, feelings, memories, and experiences, always changing and connected to everything else. Think of it like a river—it looks solid, but it's really just water flowing, shaped by rain, rocks, and the land.

Imagine who you were as a kid. Maybe you loved certain games or were scared of the dark. Now, as an adult, your likes and fears are different, and even your body has new cells. Are you the same “you”? Or are you a stream of moments, shaped by your family, friends, and life’s ups and downs? When something tough happens, like a mistake or a lost opportunity, you might feel like a “failure.” But no-self says there’s no fixed “you” to label—just a moment that will pass, ready to change.

This idea is freeing. It helps you let go of thoughts like “I’m not good enough” or “this is who I am.” Instead, you see yourself as a flow, like clouds shifting in the sky. It makes it easier to forgive yourself and not cling to being a certain way to feel okay.

How It Connects: A Life Without Walls

No-self, interdependence, and the cycle of birth and death are like threads in one cloth. Birth and death aren’t just about being born or dying—they’re about constant change, like starting a new job or ending a friendship. Everything depends on other things—your food, your home, the people around you. No-self shows there’s no separate “you” outside this web. Together, these ideas make life feel like a dance where everything is connected, nothing lasts forever, but nothing is truly gone.

When life brings a challenge, like missing out on a goal or starting something new, these ideas help. The end of one thing is just a change, tied to many causes—like choices, luck, or other people’s actions. Your “self” isn’t stuck in one role; it’s ready to grow. This turns worry into wonder: what’s next?

A Zen Story: The Monk and the Broken Bowl

This story comes from the Zen tradition, inspired by teachings in the Gateless Gate (Mumonkan, Case 40), retold simply to show no-self and interdependence.

Long ago in Japan, a young monk named Soma lived in a quiet temple. He loved a plain wooden bowl his sister had carved for him. He used it every day for rice and felt it was part of who he was—a careful, humble monk.

One morning, while washing dishes, Soma dropped the bowl, and it cracked in two. He was heartbroken, thinking, “This bowl was special! Now I’ve ruined something important.” He ran to his teacher, Master Hana, holding the broken pieces.

Master Hana looked at the bowl and smiled. “Soma, was this bowl ever really ‘yours’? The wood came from a tree, grown by rain and sun. Your sister’s hands shaped it, her skill learned from others. Even your love for it came from your memories together. The bowl was never one thing—it was part of a big web, always changing. And you, Soma, are not just ‘the monk with the bowl.’ You’re a flow of moments, not a fixed person.”

Soma sat by the temple pond, watching the water ripple. He saw how it moved but stayed in a pond. Slowly, he understood: the bowl’s breaking wasn’t a loss of “him.” The wood would return to the earth, his sister’s love stayed in his heart, and new days were coming. He wasn’t stuck as “the monk who broke the bowl.”

The next day, when another monk was praised for his meditation, Soma smiled and thought, “I’m happy his calm heart helps the temple. May it grow.” This was *mudita*, joy in others’ goodness, which came easily once he saw there was no fixed “self” to

compare. Soma felt lighter, like a leaf floating on the pond, part of the world's endless flow.

The Lesson

This Zen story from the Mumonkan shows no-self and interdependence. Soma's broken bowl teaches that nothing—not a treasured object nor the “self”—is permanent or separate. Everything comes from countless causes, and holding onto a fixed idea of “me” brings pain. By letting go, Soma found freedom and could practice *mudita* (in Tibetan, *dga' ba*, pronounced “ga-wa”), feeling happy for others' good qualities. When change comes—a “death” like an ending or a “birth” like a new start—look at the web of life. You're not one fixed piece but part of a vast, flowing stream, always moving together.



Chapter 19

Mastery Isn't Achieved Overnight. It's Built in The Everyday.

Practicing Compassion Toward All Beings

As a learner, I've found that practicing Buddhism in daily life is not only achievable but deeply enriching for regular people. It doesn't demand becoming a monk or mastering complex texts. Instead, it's about weaving core Buddhist principles—mindfulness, compassion, and ethical living—into everyday routines in practical, accessible ways. Among these, cultivating compassion stands out as a powerful practice that fosters connection with all beings and reduces personal suffering. By recognizing our shared existence and approaching others with kindness, we can embody Buddhism's essence. Below, I'll elaborate on how to practice compassion toward humans and other beings, including mindful pest control, in a way that aligns with Buddhist teachings.

Practicing Compassion Toward All Beings

Compassion, or *karuna* in Buddhism, is the sincere wish to ease others' suffering, paired with *metta* (loving-kindness), the desire

for their happiness. A core Buddhist insight is that all beings—humans, animals, and insects—share the universal experiences of birth, aging, sickness, and death. Many people, caught in ignorance or distraction, fail to see this shared reality. As practitioners, once we understand this, we're called to act with greater kindness and patience, even when it's difficult.

For instance, it's easy to feel annoyed by someone's actions—a harsh boss, an impatient stranger, or a quarrelsome relative. I used to hold onto anger in such moments, letting it fester. But through Buddhist practice, I've learned to reframe my perspective, seeing all people as part of one human family. Just as a family has members who are delightful or difficult, we don't disown them. We may clash, but we reconcile, knowing everyone faces their own struggles. Now, when someone wrongs me or sparks conflict, I allow myself to feel the initial frustration but work to release it quickly, avoiding grudges. This doesn't mean excusing harmful behavior; it means freeing myself from resentment's weight, aligning with the Buddhist principle of non-attachment.

To practice this, try a simple reflection when someone upsets you: "This person is suffering, just like me." Silently wish them well, saying, "May they find peace." This metta practice, even if brief, softens your heart and builds patience. Over time, treating others as family—flaws and all—reduces conflict and fosters understanding.

Extending Compassion to Animals and Mindful Pest Control

Compassion in Buddhism extends to all living beings, including animals and insects. Every creature, from a soaring bird to a crawling ant, is born into its form by nature's design, just as we

are. A lion, for example, cannot eat grass—its body requires meat, and it acts according to its instincts. Similarly, a mosquito bites not out of spite but to survive. Recognizing this shared existence encourages us to approach animals with empathy, minimizing harm whenever possible.

In daily life, this means being mindful about how we interact with other beings, especially when it comes to pest control. Insects like mosquitos or ants can disrupt our living spaces, but Buddhism’s precept of non-harming (ahimsa) urges us to act thoughtfully. Before reaching for a pesticide or swatting an insect, pause and ask: “Is this absolutely necessary? Is my living environment totally affected?” For example, a single ant in your kitchen may not require drastic action—gently guide it outside or seal entry points to prevent more. However, if pests pose a serious threat, such as a termite infestation damaging your home or mosquitoes carrying disease, pest control may be justified to protect your health and environment. Even then, choose the least harmful methods, like natural repellents, traps, or professional services that prioritize minimal impact. This mindful approach balances compassion with practicality, honoring the Buddhist commitment to reduce suffering for all beings.

To extend compassion further, make conscious choices: use cruelty-free products, consider reducing meat consumption if it feels right, or feed stray animals. Small acts, like leaving water for birds or supporting animal welfare, reflect the understanding that all creatures seek to avoid pain, just as we do.

Practical Steps to Cultivate Compassion

Here are actionable ways to integrate compassion into daily life:

Daily Intention: Each morning, commit to one kind act for a person and one for a non-human being (e.g., sparing an insect unless your environment is severely affected).

Metta Meditation: Spend 2-5 minutes daily repeating: “May I be happy, may others be happy, may all beings be happy.” Include a difficult person to expand your compassion.

Pause Before Reacting: When angered, take three deep breaths and recall the other’s shared humanity before responding.

Mindful Pest Control: Before using pest control, assess if your living environment is truly compromised. Opt for non-lethal solutions (e.g., sealing cracks, using repellents) when possible.

Acts of Kindness: Perform one compassionate act daily, like helping a colleague or donating to an animal shelter.

Learn from Nature: Observe animals or plants for 5 minutes weekly, reflecting on their shared struggle for survival.

Why Compassion Matters

Practicing compassion reshapes how we engage with the world. By seeing all beings as interconnected, we reduce anger, stress, and isolation, aligning with Buddhism’s aim to end suffering. It’s not always easy—loving difficult people or sparing pests when your home is affected takes effort—but small, intentional steps build a habit that grows naturally. Compassion becomes a lens for living, bringing peace to ourselves and others.

By embracing this practice, we live out the Buddhist teaching that all beings deserve kindness, regardless of their actions or form. For regular people, this approach makes Buddhism a practical,

transformative part of daily life, requiring only mindfulness and a willingness to try.

Simple baby steps towards mindfulness

As I navigate life today, I can't help but notice an irony. We've advanced so much—new gadgets, apps, and conveniences pop up constantly, all meant to make our lives easier. Yet, despite these innovations, we often feel restless, like true comfort and peace are slipping away. It is not about one or two; so many people around the world are struggling mentally and emotionally. Stress, worry, and anxiety weigh us down, stealing our happiness. That's why we have to turn to mindfulness, a core Buddhist practice that helps us find calm in this chaotic world. Mindfulness isn't about sitting cross-legged for hours in meditation. For someone like me, a regular person with a busy life, it's about learning to be fully present in simple, everyday moments.

To me, mindfulness means choosing to focus on the here and now, letting go of the constant mental chatter about yesterday or tomorrow. In a world buzzing with notifications, packed schedules, and endless to-dos, this feels like a lifeline. For example, after I've started practicing mindfulness during my meditation. I focus on my breath for a few seconds and then start to scan my body from hair to toes. It helps pull me into the moment, quieting my mind. It's amazing how such a small act can feel so grounding.

I've also found mindfulness in everyday routines like walking or eating. When I walk to the store or around my neighborhood, I try not to get lost in thoughts about bills or deadlines. Instead, I focus on my steps—feeling my feet touch the ground, noticing the rhythm of my breath, or looking at the trees swaying in the breeze. Similarly, when I eat, I slow down. Take an orange, for instance:

I pay attention to its smell, the sweet-tangy flavor, and the juice that oozes out of each bite. These moments help me stay present, cutting through the stress that builds up when my mind is all over the place.

Mindfulness has also been a game-changer when emotions run high. If I'm in a dilemma of overbearing pressure or frustrated with a friend, I pause for a moment. I take a deep breath and quietly ask myself, "What am I feeling right now?" Maybe it's anger or irritation. Just naming it creates a little space, so I don't react impulsively. This reflects what I've learned from Buddhism: observe your thoughts and feelings without getting caught up in them. It doesn't solve everything, but it helps me respond with clarity instead of letting stress take over.

Here's how you can also try weaving mindfulness into your life, and I think anyone can try these:

Pick a Daily Task: choose one routine—like brushing teeth or bathing—and focus on it for a minute or two. Notice the toothpaste's minty taste or the warm water and soap on the hands.

Breath Breaks: A couple of times a day, stop for three deep breaths, focusing only on the air moving in and out. It's like a mini-reset.

Mindful Listening: When someone's talking to you, put away distractions and really listen, noticing their words and tone. It makes conversations feel deeper.

Use Reminders: keep a small stone on your desk with "Be Present" written on it. When you see it, let it remind you to come back to the moment.

These steps don't take much time or effort, but they'll help you find peace in a world that often feels overwhelming. The irony of our modern lives—surrounded by conveniences yet starved for calm—doesn't have to define us.

As I've learned from Buddhist teachings, the present moment is where life happens. By practicing mindfulness in small, intentional ways, I'm rediscovering happiness and balance, one moment at a time.

Practicing Generosity: The Buddhist Path to Giving and Inner Joy

As I've learned more about Buddhism, I've come to see how much it encourages charity. Giving isn't just about helping others—it fills our hearts with joy and brings blessings in return. When I give, I feel a deep sense of happiness, like I'm connected to something bigger. I truly believe that our kindness comes back to us, maybe not always in obvious ways, but in the warmth of gratitude, the peace in our hearts, or the unexpected ways life rewards our goodness.

This belief that kindness returns in meaningful ways inspires a life of giving.

Charity doesn't have to be grand or complicated, especially for those of us trying to live meaningful lives as regular people. It's about starting small with what we can offer. For example, we might share a meal with someone hungry, like giving a few small packets of biscuits to a person on the street. Or we could donate a few hundreds to a local shelter or buy warm clothes for someone in need during winter. These small acts make a difference and feel deeply rewarding. But we've learned to be thoughtful about giving. Charity should lift people up, not enable harmful habits. For instance, giving money to someone who might use it for alcohol or

who refuses to help themselves isn't the kind of support Buddhism encourages. Instead, we focus on giving wisely, in ways that truly help.

One way we feel especially called to give is by supporting underprivileged children. When we think about how much we spend on our own kids—their clothes, toys, food, and school—it's eye-opening. If we can set aside just a tenth of that to help a child in need, it could change their life. For example, we might buy school supplies, like notebooks or pencils, for a child who can't afford them, or donate to a program that provides meals for kids. Imagine how hard it must be for children left to struggle in society; this moves us to act. Even a small contribution, like paying for a child's notebook or a warm jacket, can give them hope and a sense of care.

Charity isn't always about money, though. Sometimes, it's about giving our time or skills. We can help an elderly neighbor by carrying their groceries or spending a few minutes chatting to brighten their day. We could also teach something simple, like helping a young person learn to read or sharing a craft skill like knitting with someone curious. These acts of kindness are just as meaningful as donating money. For instance, spending an afternoon helping a community center organize books for kids can spark joy for both the giver and receiver, creating a sense of lightness and connection.

Here are simple ways to make generosity part of our lives, and anyone can try them:

Start Small: Share a meal, donate some money to monasteries where they support so many underprivileged kids, or buy some clothes for someone in need.

Be Thoughtful: Give to those who truly benefit, like children or families struggling, rather than enabling harmful behaviors.

Support Children: Dedicate a small portion, like a tenth of family spending, to help kids with school supplies or food.

Offer Time: offer voluntary services like teaching, helping others if you have time.

Notice the Joy: After giving, take a moment to reflect on the feeling—perhaps journal about the happiness it brings.

Buddhism teaches that generosity softens our attachment to material things, opening our hearts to true peace. Whether through a small donation, a helping hand, or a kind word, every act of giving brings blessings—sometimes as gratitude, sometimes as inner calm. By starting small and giving wisely, we can make generosity a simple, powerful way to brighten the world and our hearts, even in busy lives.

Practicing Respect and Letting Go of Ego in Daily Life

Buddhism teaches that letting go of ego—our sense of pride or self-importance—is key to living with peace and harmony. One powerful way to do this is by practicing respect for others, which helps dissolve pride, one of the core poisons in Buddhist philosophy. Respect is simple: it means giving others space to be themselves and approaching them with kindness and understanding, even when their views differ from ours. Everyone has their own unique perspective, shaped by their experiences, and recognizing this fosters humility and connection.

Practicing respect starts with small, intentional actions. For example, when talking with a friend who disagrees with you, instead of arguing to prove your point, listen fully to their

perspective. Nod, ask questions, and let them express their thoughts without interruption. This shows you value their individuality and quiets the ego's urge to dominate. Another way is to be considerate in shared spaces—like at work, avoid taking over a colleague's project or dismissing their ideas. Instead, acknowledge their contributions, even if you'd do things differently. This creates a sense of mutual respect and reduces pride.

Being understanding also means accepting others' differences without judgment. For instance, if a family member has habits that annoy you, like leaving dishes out, pause before reacting. Consider their perspective—maybe they're stressed or distracted—and respond with patience instead of criticism. This practice aligns with Buddhism's call to let go of ego-driven reactions, helping us see others as equals navigating their own struggles.

A Zen Story: The Two Monks and the Visitor

To illustrate respect and letting go of ego, consider this Zen story:

In a quiet monastery, two monks lived and practiced together. One monk was blind in one eye, which sometimes made him feel self-conscious. One day, a wandering monk visited their monastery, seeking shelter for the night. The two monks welcomed him warmly, sharing their simple meal of rice and vegetables. As they ate, the visiting monk noticed the one-eyed monk's appearance and, without thinking, blurted out, "It must be hard to practice with only one eye. Do you struggle to see the truth?"

The one-eyed monk paused, then smiled gently. "The truth isn't seen with eyes alone," he said. "My heart sees clearly, and that's enough." His calm response surprised the visitor, who expected defensiveness. The other monk, observing quietly, added, "We all

have our limitations, but respect for each other's path lets us grow together."

The visiting monk felt a pang of shame for his careless words. Instead of judging him, the two monks invited him to join their evening meditation. As they sat in silence, the visitor reflected on his pride—his assumption that his perspective was superior. By morning, he bowed deeply to both monks, thanking them for the lesson in humility. "You've shown me," he said, "that true seeing comes from letting go of ego and honoring others as they are."

This story shows how respect—accepting others without judgment—dissolves pride. The one-eyed monk didn't cling to ego by taking offense; instead, he responded with wisdom and kindness, creating space for the visitor to learn.

Practical Ways to Practice Respect and Let Go of Ego

Here are simple ways to weave respect and humility into daily life:

Listen Fully: When someone shares their opinion, listen without planning your response. For example, let a coworker explain their idea before offering yours.

Give Space: Allow others to be themselves. If a friend prefers solitude, don't push them to socialize—respect their needs.

Pause Before Judging: When annoyed, like if someone cuts you off in traffic, consider their perspective—maybe they're rushing to an emergency.

Acknowledge Others: Thank someone for their help, like a cashier or neighbor, to show appreciation for their unique role.

Reflect on Ego: At day's end, ask, "Did I act out of pride today?" Journaling about a moment you let go of ego can reinforce humility.

Buddhism teaches that letting go of ego through respect opens the heart to peace and connection. By giving others space to be themselves and embracing their differences, we free ourselves from pride's grip. The Zen story reminds us that true wisdom lies in humility and kindness, transforming not just our interactions but our entire way of being.

Finding Joy in Others' Happiness- Understanding Mudita:

Mudita is a beautiful Buddhist practice that means feeling genuine happiness for someone else's success or good qualities, without any jealousy or envy. Instead of comparing yourself to others or focusing on what you don't have, you celebrate their happiness and strengths. It's not about sharing their joy as if it's yours—it's about cultivating your own joy by appreciating the good in someone else. This shift in perspective can lighten your heart and deepen your connections.

A Simple Example

Imagine your friend Sarah lands a big promotion at work. Instead of thinking, "Why not me?" or feeling left behind, you focus on her effort and excitement. You notice how she stays positive, supports her team, or works late nights to earn this. You let yourself feel happy, thinking, "I'm so glad Sarah's hard work paid off! I hope she keeps shining." This focus not only feels good but can strengthen your friendship and bring you peace.

Another Example

Picture your neighbor Mike, who sometimes annoys you with loud late-night parties. Instead of staying frustrated, you look for his good qualities. Maybe you see him helping an elderly neighbor with groceries or notice his cheerful greetings to everyone. You think, “I’m happy Mike’s so kind; I hope that kindness grows.” This small act of noticing his positive side can ease your irritation and help you feel more at peace.

Tibetan Term

In Tibetan Buddhism, *mudita* is called *dga' ba* (pronounced “ga-wa”), capturing the essence of pure, heartfelt joy for others’ goodness.

How to Practice Mudita in Daily Life

Practicing *mudita* is like training a muscle—it gets stronger with small, intentional steps. Here are practical ways to weave *mudita* into your everyday routine:

Start with Small Moments: Notice someone’s success or kindness, like a coworker finishing a project or a stranger helping someone on the street. Pause and silently say, “I’m happy for their success” or “May their kindness grow.” Even a brief thought can spark joy.

Shift from Comparison: When you feel envious—like when a friend gets praise or a sibling achieves something—gently redirect your focus. List one or two things you admire about them, like their effort or generosity, and let yourself smile for their happiness.

Reflect on Good Qualities: Each day, pick one person—a family member, friend, or even someone you don’t know well. Think of one positive trait they have, like patience or creativity, and wish for

it to flourish. For example, “I’m glad my sister is so patient with her kids; may it bring her more joy.”

Use Meditation: Set aside a few minutes to practice a mudita meditation. Sit quietly, picture someone who’s happy or doing well, and repeat phrases like, “May your happiness continue,” or “I rejoice in your good qualities.” Start with people you like, then try it with neutral or difficult people to stretch your practice.

Celebrate Others Out Loud: Share your joy for someone’s success. Tell a friend, “I’m so happy you aced that test!” or thank a colleague for their great idea. Expressing mudita aloud reinforces it and spreads positivity.

Notice Your Feelings: When envy or resentment pops up, don’t judge yourself. Instead, see it as a signal to practice mudita. Ask, “What’s good about this person?” and focus on that. Over time, this habit rewires your mind to find joy instead of comparison.

Keep a Mudita Journal: At the end of the day, write down one moment where you felt happy for someone else’s success or kindness. It could be as simple as appreciating a barista’s cheerful service. This helps you notice and savor mudita moments.

Why It Matters

By practicing mudita, you train your mind to focus on the positive in others, which can make you feel happier and more connected, even in tough situations. It softens feelings of envy, builds stronger relationships, and helps you see the world as a web of shared goodness. Over time, mudita becomes a natural way of living, filling your heart with joy that flows freely, like a clear stream.

The Joy of Visakha

This story, drawn from the Dhammapada Commentary, illustrates *mudita* and is rooted in Buddhist texts.

Long ago in Savatthi, a generous woman named Visakha was a devoted follower of the Buddha. She was wealthy and kind, often sharing food and supplies with monks and the poor. One day, a group of monks visited her home, praising a young monk named Anuruddha for his wisdom and gentle nature. His meditation was so deep that he radiated peace, and his teachings inspired many.

Some people in Visakha's household whispered, "Why is Anuruddha so special? We work hard too, but no one praises us." Visakha overheard and smiled. She gathered them and said, "Anuruddha's goodness doesn't take away from yours. His calm heart and wise words help others find peace. Let's be happy for him and wish for his qualities to grow." She led them in offering alms to Anuruddha, saying, "May your wisdom shine and bring joy to many."

Visakha's heart felt light as she practiced *mudita*. Instead of comparing, she rejoiced in Anuruddha's virtues, and her household followed her example. Their envy faded, replaced by warmth and connection. The Buddha later praised Visakha, saying, "To find joy in others' goodness is a treasure that brings peace to all."

This story shows how *mudita* transforms envy into shared happiness, reminding us to celebrate others' light as part of life's beautiful web.

Reflection on Suffering, Karma, and Human Responsibility

Suffering is an inherent part of life, yet the human body is a precious vessel that carries both our wholesome and unwholesome karma, guiding us toward our next existence. Unlike animals, whose lives are often marked by greater suffering due to ignorance and instinct, humans possess the unique ability to discern between good and bad actions. Animals, driven by their nature, may engage in behaviors like predation or even infanticide—such as lions or dolphins—without understanding the karmic consequences. Even pets, though cared for, live under human control, lacking true autonomy.

Humans, however, have the freedom to choose between virtuous and harmful actions. This awareness makes our existence profoundly valuable, and we must cherish it by avoiding fixation on extreme sorrow or fleeting joy. Let me share a personal experience to illustrate this. I have a deep love for plants, particularly lotuses, for their beauty and symbolic significance. After much care and patience, I nurtured a lotus through harsh weather. One day, I noticed a bulb sprouting, which filled me with joy. As it grew larger and healthier, my happiness deepened. But when it finally bloomed, constant rain caused the flower to droop downward, unlike the upward-facing blooms I had hoped for. Naturally, I felt disappointed. Yet, with time, I let go of my sadness, finding contentment in the fact that it bloomed at all.

This experience mirrors the transient nature of life's joys and sorrows. We must acknowledge our mistakes, repent sincerely, and move forward without dwelling on past wrongs—whether they are ours or those done to us. Equally important is our responsibility to future generations. We must teach our children to be kind,

compassionate, and disciplined while preserving their innocence. We should guide them to stand strong, support their growth, and encourage them to protect themselves without harming others. By being both a mentor and a friend, we can listen to their moments of happiness and sadness, celebrate their achievements, and gently correct their missteps.

Zen Story: The Two Lanterns

In a small village cradled by misty hills, there lived an old lantern maker named Hana. Her lanterns were renowned for their beauty, each one crafted with care and lit with a soft, steady glow. One evening, a young traveler named Kael visited Hana's workshop, seeking wisdom for his restless heart.

Hana welcomed him and placed two lanterns before him. One glowed with a warm, golden light, its flame steady and serene. The other flickered with a wild, erratic spark, casting restless shadows on the walls.

"These lanterns represent the heart," Hana said. "The golden one shines with kindness, patience, and clarity—your wholesome deeds. The flickering one burns with anger, attachment, and ignorance—your unwholesome deeds. Both reside within you, and both seek to light your path."

Kael gazed at the lanterns, puzzled. "How do I choose which one to carry?" he asked.

Hana smiled. "You do not choose one and discard the other, for both are part of you. Instead, tend to the golden lantern. Feed its flame with acts of compassion and moments of stillness. When the flickering lantern flares, do not curse its shadows—simply observe it, and let its fuel burn low."

Kael frowned. “But what if the flickering lantern overtakes the golden one?”

Hana handed him a small wick. “Each day, you trim the wick of your heart with mindfulness. The golden light grows not by fighting the dark but by nurturing what is bright. Walk your path with care, and the golden lantern will guide you.”

Kael stayed with Hana for days, learning to craft lanterns and tend their flames. One morning, as he prepared to leave, he noticed his own heart glowing softly, like the golden lantern, though the flickering spark still danced faintly within. He thanked Hana and set off, carrying both lights, but choosing to let the golden one lead.

This story, inspired by Zen principles, reflects the themes of your reflection—acknowledging the duality of wholesome and unwholesome karma, the importance of mindful choices, and the transient nature of joy and sorrow. It emphasizes tending to positive actions without becoming fixated on suppressing the negative, aligning with the idea of guiding oneself and others toward a balanced, compassionate life.

The Gift of Expecting Less: A Path to Happiness and Peace

Not expecting things from others is a big advantage. It's hard to do, but once you get used to expecting less, you feel much happier and more at peace.

It's natural for people to want the same amount of love and thanks back when we give love or kindness to someone. But that's not healthy. It can make us feel bitter and heartbroken if we don't get what we want in return.

Buddhism doesn't encourage romantic relationships partly because of this. We pick a partner because we want their love and support. We hope they'll care for us, understand us, and not complain. When they don't give us exactly what we expect, we get upset. We forget that they want the same things from us. With friends, we don't expect as much. We might want some care, but we don't rely on them completely.

Having too many expectations makes us selfish. It clouds our clear thinking.

Here's a real example from my life. When my parents were alive, they spoiled me a lot—maybe because of my health issues. Every time I got a fever, my mom would ask in her soft voice how I felt, and that would make me worry so much that my fever got worse and I'd end up in the hospital. I'd expect my family to visit and show they cared. Now that my parents are gone, and after starting meditation, I almost never get a fever anymore. It's true. Even with other sicknesses, I don't tell anyone unless it's really bad. I'm working hard to lower my expectations.



Chapter 20

My Life as a Buddhist Nun: Finding Peace in Simplicity

When people hear I've become an Ani, the Tibetan term for a Buddhist nun, they often wonder what my life is like. Some applaud my choice to renounce worldly attachments, calling it inspiring, while others ask if I turned to this path out of depression or a need to escape. I'll be honest: at first, I did want to ease my personal sorrows. But my decision to become an Ani came from a deeper place—a heartfelt desire to dive into Buddhist philosophy and live its teachings fully. It wasn't about running away; it was about choosing a life of meaning and understanding.

I'd be lying if I said my life is now free of pain or illness. I've shared before about my ongoing health struggles, and those challenges persist. Yet, Buddhism has taught me to accept them with grace. When pain strikes, I think of others who suffer—like elderly people with chronic ailments or children facing hardships. This reflection, inspired by the compassion practices I've learned, brings a sense of calm. It puts my struggles into perspective, reminding me I'm not alone in life's difficulties. I cry often, maybe

more than I used to. After solitary meditation retreats, I find myself weeping for the world's suffering—not out of despair, but from a deep sense of connection and helplessness in the face of so much pain. These tears feel different; they're a release, a way of embracing the Buddhist call to care for all beings.

I don't live in a remote jungle or a bare monastery. Instead, I stay in my sister's spacious home, surrounded by modern conveniences like a laptop and washing machine. But I've learned not to cling to these things. Buddhism's teaching of impermanence—*anicca*—has shifted how I see them. They're useful but fleeting, not defining who I am. In the past, I obsessed over my appearance, spending on expensive clothes or makeup to hide imperfections. Now, I let that go. My sister's house has mirrors everywhere, and where I once felt self-conscious, I now laugh when I catch my reflection. The shape in the mirror is just a moment, not something to fix or fret over. It's freeing to smile at imperfection.

My daily routine is simple and grounding: I eat, pray, sleep, and sometimes do things I enjoy, like reading or tending to small tasks. I've found joy in this simplicity, unburdened by others' expectations except for the guidance of my teacher. For example, I might start my day with a mindful breakfast, noticing the taste of rice or the warmth of tea, then spend time in prayer or meditation to cultivate compassion, drawing on teachings like those of Thich Nhat Hanh, whose words I've admired. Some afternoons, I study Buddhist texts or rest to honor my body's needs. There's no pressure to perform or prove myself, which feels like a gift.

Here's how I live out Buddhist principles in my daily life:

Accepting Impermanence: I see pain and illness as temporary, letting go of attachment to my physical state.

Cultivating Compassion: I reflect on others' suffering during my own pain, fostering empathy and calm.

Living Simply: I embrace a routine of eating, praying, and sleeping, finding joy in small, meaningful moments.

Letting Go of Vanity: I release worries about appearance, laughing at my reflection with self-acceptance.

Using Possessions Mindfully: I use tools like a laptop without clinging, aware of their impermanent nature.

Buddhism teaches that peace comes from understanding suffering, impermanence, and compassion. As an Ani, I'm learning to live this truth—not by avoiding life's challenges, but by meeting them with wisdom and an open heart. Each tear for the world's pain, each laugh at my reflection, and each quiet moment of prayer deepens my journey toward inner peace. This path isn't about perfection; it's about embracing life's fleeting nature with kindness and clarity.

Lesser-Known Aspects of Buddhism

Here are some fascinating, lesser-known facts about Buddhism, its figures, and their symbolic elements, presented in a clear and simple way, including details about Guru Rinpoche's consorts, Akasagarbha, Tara, and Aniruddha (often referred to as Aniket in some oral traditions):

Buddha's Family

Many know about Devadatta, Gautama Buddha's jealous cousin who tried to harm him. Less known is that Buddha had twin half-siblings: a brother, Nanda, and a sister, Sundari Nanda. They were born to Buddha's father, King Siddhodana, and his

stepmother, Maha Prajapati, who was also Buddha's aunt and raised him after his mother, Queen Maya, died seven days after his birth.

Buddha's son, Rahula, was born to fulfill an Indian tradition requiring a child before becoming a monk. When Prince Siddhartha (Buddha before enlightenment) heard of Rahula's birth, he said, "A Rahula is born, a fetter has arisen," meaning the child could tie him to worldly life. King Suddhodana named the child Rahula, meaning "fetter." Later, Rahula was called "Rahula the Lucky" because he was Buddha's son and attained enlightenment.

The 28 Buddhas

Buddhism recognizes 28 Buddhas, including Gautama Buddha (the historical Buddha) and Maitreya (the future Buddha). In the Theravada tradition, they are grouped into three periods:

First Period: Taṇhaṅkara, Medhaṅkara, Saraṇaṅkara, Dīpaṅkara.

Second Period: Koṇḍañña, Maṅgala, Sumanā, Revata, Sobhita, Anomadassī, Paduma, Nārada, Padumuttara, Sumedha, Sujāta, Piyadassī, Atthadassī, Dhammadassī, Siddhattha, Tissa, Phussa.

Third Period: Vipassī, Sikhī, Vessabhū, Kakusandha, Koṇāgamana, Kassapa, Gautama.

Other Buddhist traditions may have different lists of Buddhas.

The Curls on Buddha's Head

The curly patterns on Buddha's head have two main explanations:

Snail Martyrs Legend: A story says that while Gautama Buddha meditated under the hot sun, 108 snails crawled onto his shaved head to shield him from the heat. They sacrificed their lives, and the curls on Buddha statues honor their selfless act. This is a legend, not a historical fact.

Ushnisha: The true meaning is the ushnisha, a bump on Buddha's head symbolizing his vast wisdom and enlightenment. It's one of the 32 special traits of a Buddha. Early statues showed it as a topknot, but later it became a bump with curls representing his short hair. It also marks Buddha as the "King of the Dharma" (spiritual teachings).

Padmasambhava's Lotus Hat

Padmasambhava, or Guru Rinpoche, is a key figure in Tibetan Buddhism who founded the Nyingma tradition. His lotus hat (Pema Zha), tall and pointed with upturned flaps, has deep meaning:

A sun and moon on the hat represent compassion (sun) and wisdom (moon), needed for enlightenment.

A vulture feather at the tip symbolizes awareness that rises above worldly problems.

The hat's slight tilt shows non-duality, meaning all things are interconnected.

The hat, possibly a gift from the King of Zahor, is worn by monks and lay teachers in the Nyingma tradition.

Padmasambhava's Five Consorts

Guru Rinpoche had five main consorts who helped spread his teachings in Tibetan Buddhism:

Mandarava: Born in Zahor (now Himachal Pradesh, India), she was a princess who attained enlightenment with Guru Rinpoche and is linked to long-life teachings. She's often shown with him in art.

Yeshe Tsogyal: Born in Karchen, Tibet, she was Guru Rinpoche's main consort and a revered master. She hid his teachings (terma) for future generations.

Belmo Sakya Devi: A Nepalese princess who received teachings from Guru Rinpoche in the Kathmandu Valley.

Kalasiddhi: An Indian yogini who helped Guru Rinpoche with tantric practices.

Tashi Khye-Dren: A Tibetan consort who assisted Yeshe Tsogyal in preserving the Dharma.

These women are honored for their spiritual mastery and role in the Nyingma tradition.

Akasagarbha, the Bodhisattva of Boundless Space

Akasagarbha, meaning “space-womb” or “sky-matrix,” is a Mahayana Bodhisattva known for his vast wisdom and compassion. His story is told in the Akasagarbha Sutra:

Great Vow: He vowed to help all beings, especially those suffering in lower realms due to serious wrongs, by purifying their karma if they sincerely repent and say his name.

Roles:

Purifying Karma: He cleanses negative thoughts and actions like greed or hatred.

Aiding Memory: In Japan (as Kokuzo Bosatsu), he helps students and artisans memorize sutras through practices like reciting his mantra at dawn.

Removing Obstacles: His “sky-like” nature clears spiritual barriers, making the mind vast and clear.

Appearance: He’s shown seated, holding a wish-fulfilling jewel (granting needs) in his left hand and a sword (cutting ignorance) in his right, symbolizing his calm wisdom.

Tara, the Female Bodhisattva

Tara, meaning “star” or “she who saves,” is a beloved female Bodhisattva in Tibetan Buddhism, known for her swift compassion and ability to save beings from fear and suffering. Her story, from the Tantra of the Origin of Tara, highlights enlightenment in a female form:

Princess Jñana Chandra: As a compassionate princess named “Moon of Wisdom,” she gave offerings and helped others. Monks suggested she pray to be reborn as a man to achieve Buddhahood, but she rejected this, saying spiritual attainment doesn’t depend on gender. She vowed to help all beings in a female form. After years of meditation, she became Tara, a guide to cross the “ocean of suffering.”

Twenty-One Forms: Tara appears in many forms, with two main ones:

Green Tara: Active and compassionate, shown with one leg extended to help quickly, protecting from fear and danger.

White Tara: Linked to long life and healing, with seven eyes (three on her face, one on each palm and foot) for all-seeing compassion.

Tara's story inspires female practitioners, showing enlightenment is possible for all, regardless of gender.

Aniruddha, the Disciple with Divine Eye

Aniruddha (sometimes called Aniket in oral traditions, meaning "homeless" or one without attachment), was a cousin of Gautama Buddha and one of his foremost disciples, known for his divine eye (clairvoyance). His story illustrates losing physical sight but gaining profound inner vision:

Aniruddha was born into the Sakya clan and ordained as a monk alongside his brothers, including Ananda. He struggled with anger and sleepiness early on, hindering his meditation.

To overcome this, he practiced mindfulness of the body relentlessly, without sleeping for seven days. This intense effort led to the development of the divine eye, allowing him to see beings across realms and distances, far beyond ordinary sight.

Later in life, Aniruddha became blind due to old age or karma from past lives, losing his physical eyesight. However, his inner divine eye remained intact and even grew stronger, symbolizing that true wisdom transcends the body. He continued teaching and serving the Buddha, using his spiritual insight to guide others.

Buddha declared Aniruddha foremost among disciples in the divine eye. His story teaches that physical limitations cannot dim inner enlightenment, emphasizing detachment from the senses and the power of diligent practice.

Khata Offering in Tibetan Buddhism

The khata, a white silk scarf, is a traditional offering in Tibetan Buddhism, used in Tibet, Bhutan, Nepal, and Mongolia. Its origins include:

Pre-Buddhist Roots: Tibetans may have used sheep's wool or tsampa (roasted barley flour) to welcome guests, later replaced by silk scarves.

Silk Road Influence: Chinese envoys offered silk as a sign of friendship, possibly adopted by Tibetans.

Buddhist Shift: Teachers like Guru Rinpoche encouraged silk scarves over animal skins to promote non-violence.

The white khata symbolizes purity, goodwill, and good luck. It's offered during greetings, farewells, ceremonies, or events like weddings, with both hands and a bow to show respect. Khatas also come in five colors (blue, white, red, green, yellow) for the five elements.

Seven Water Bowls Offering

In Tibetan Buddhism, offering seven water bowls (yonchap) daily, popularized by Atiśa in the 11th century, uses water for its purity and availability. The bowls represent offerings for a guest in ancient India:

Drinking Water: Purity and refreshing all beings.

Washing Water: Cleansing negative karma.

Flowers: Beauty and impermanence of enlightenment.

Incense: Pure moral conduct.

Light: Wisdom that removes ignorance.

Perfume: Joyful effort on the spiritual path.

Food: Nourishment for body and mind.

The mindful ritual of cleaning and filling the bowls cultivates generosity and purifies karma.

Offering Alcohol in Buddhism

Buddhism has five basic rules for good living. The fifth rule says: Don't drink alcohol or use drugs that make your mind fuzzy. This helps you stay clear-headed and kind, without careless mistakes.

For monks, it's a strict no—no drinking at all, after some early slip-ups like getting drunk by accident on alms rounds.

But in Tibetan Buddhism (called Vajrayana), offering alcohol in special rituals has a big meaning. It's not for partying—it's a way to let go of "good vs. bad" ideas and turn everyday stuff into spiritual power. You do it to honor gods and protectors, only if you're trained. Alcohol and meat are sense offerings. And it is often wrathful deities who are associated with the 5 bodily senses. Of course, in Buddhism, 'wrathful' does not mean morally bad. Indeed, wanting to experience any or all of the 5 senses is considered to be the primary condition necessary for human life to be conceived.

Examples:

Tsok Parties: On the 10th and 25th days of the moon month, groups share food and a sip of alcohol (like holy nectar). It clears your ego and builds good luck.

Serkyem Pour: Pour "golden drink" (tea or alcohol) to guardian spirits. The spill means endless blessings and quick help against problems.

Ganesh in Buddhism

Ganesh (Ganapati) appears in Tibetan and Japanese Buddhism, unlike his Hindu role:

Subdued Deity: As Vinayaka, he's shown tamed by protectors like Mahakala, symbolizing wisdom overcoming obstacles.

Enlightened Protector: As Maharakta Ganapati in Tibetan Buddhism, he's a red, multi-armed emanation of Avalokiteshvara, removing obstacles and aiding merit. In Japan, as Kangiten, he's a deity of bliss.

This shows Buddhism's adaptation of local deities to support spiritual growth.

Shiva in Buddhism

Shiva (Maheśvara) appears in Mahayana and Vajrayana Buddhism:

Subdued Deity: He's shown tamed by protectors like Mahakala, representing wisdom over ignorance.

Enlightened Protector: In some sutras, Shiva is an emanation of Avalokiteshvara, guiding beings through compassion, reflecting Buddhism's use of local deities.

Kṣitigarbha's Great Vow

Kṣitigarbha (Jizō in Japan, Dizang in China) is a Bodhisattva who vowed to save all beings, especially those in hell realms, as told in the Sutra of the Original Vows:

Brahmin Maiden: As Sacred Girl, he saved his mother from hell by making offerings and vowed to save all beings in hell.

King and Monk: As a king, he vowed to guide his subjects to enlightenment, while his monk friend became Shakyamuni Buddha.

Great Vow: “I won’t become a Buddha until all hells are empty, from Shakyamuni’s time to Maitreya’s.”

He’s shown as a monk with a staff (for the six realms) and a jewel (Dharma’s light). In Japan, he protects children and travelers.

Nagas in Buddhism

Nagas, serpent-like beings, have key roles:

Protectors: The Naga king Mucalinda sheltered Buddha from a storm, symbolizing protection and peace.

Guardians: They protect sacred texts, like the Prajnaparamita Sutras, given to Nagarjuna.

Transformation: Their skin-shedding symbolizes spiritual renewal, and their water link represents purity.

Beings: Nagas are semi-divine, guarding temples and aiding or harming based on respect.

Mahapajapati Gotami’s Role

Mahapajapati Gotami, Buddha’s aunt and stepmother, raised him after his mother’s death. She became the first nun by persistently requesting ordination with 500 women, shaving her head, and walking far to meet Buddha. After Ananda’s advocacy, Buddha agreed, affirming women’s enlightenment potential. She became an Arhat and founded the Bhikkhuni Sangha.

Prayer to Guru Rimpoche for welfare of all sentient beings

Guru Rimpoche, Compassion's Light,
In realms of torment, hear our heartfelt plea.
For those in hells, where fires rage and freeze,
Born of dark deeds like harm and endless greed—
Their cries echo through iron chains of pain,
Grant them release, let mercy cool the flame.
O Guru Rimpoche, Eternal Guide,
The hungry ghosts wander in thirst and want,
Their swollen bellies, mouths like needle's eye,
From grasping hands that clutched what others sought.
No drop of water, no crumb to sustain—
Shower your blessings, fill their void with rain.
O Guru Rimpoche, Wisdom's Pure Flame,
The animals clash in wild, instinct's thrall,
Devouring kin in ignorance's game,
No peace in forests, no rest in the squall.
They fight and flee, bound by fear's cruel chain—
Awaken their hearts, lead them from the plain.
O Guru Rimpoche, Beacon in the Night,
We humans toil in samsara's vast wheel,
Chasing illusions, blind to what's real,
Suffering loss, desire's endless reel.
Trapped in our cycles of joy laced with grief—
Illuminate truth, bring us sweet relief.
O Guru Rimpoche, Conqueror of Woes,
The asuras burn with envy and pride,
Warring with gods in realms of false delight,
Their egos clash like thunder in the tide.
Devas in splendor, yet jealousy reigns—

Soothe their fierce storms, dissolve their binding chains.
O Guru Rimpoche, Master of All Realms,
Dark forces grip us, hard to break their hold,
Once caught in the shadows, the climb is so steep.
I offer my merits, though humble and small,
Take on their burdens, let karma dissolve.
In boundless compassion, embrace one and all—
May every being find freedom's true call.

Echoes of a Gentle Wish

In the shadow of ancient stones, a monastery stands,
Where whispers of peace echo through the halls.
There, a young soldier approached, eyes burdened with sands
Of distant battles, his voice a fragile call.
"Is killing bad karma?" he asked, seeking light,
I nodded yes, a silent truth in the air.
"But what of us," he pressed, in the fading twilight,
"Who slay not by choice, but to survive, to bear
The weight of duty, the chains of need?"
His words carved deep into my wandering mind,
A scar of sorrow, a question that bleeds—
How fragile the line where fate and heart entwine.
Oh, imagine a world unbound by political schemes,
Where borders dissolve like mist in the dawn.
No thrones of ambition, no war-torn dreams,
Just humanity's thread, unbroken, redrawn.
Soldiers as guardians, not wielders of fire,
Extending hands to heal, to lift, to save.
Building bridges from ruins, quenching the pyre,
Turning swords into plows for the lives they crave.
Leaders, once rivals in shadows of power,
Now gather as friends under open skies.
Focusing on joy, in each blooming hour,
Making citizens thrive, where happiness lies.
Instead of clashing in thunderous strife,
They join hands in games, like children at play.
Laughter replaces the edge of the knife,
Smiles linger long after the day fades away.
How beautiful, this vision, a tapestry spun

From threads of compassion, woven with care.
In a world without walls, under one shared sun,
Where peace is the anthem, and love fills the air.

I extend my heartfelt gratitude to my family and friends, whose quiet support and encouragement have brought joy and fulfillment to my life. I am also deeply thankful to the many sources that have shared profound insights on Buddhism, enriching my understanding and inspiring the creation of this book.