

Chapter 1 Introduction

Developing Pure Motivation

Throughout this book, on my part as teacher, I have tried to develop as pure a motivation as possible to benefit you, the reader. Likewise, on your part, it is important to approach these teachings with a good heart and good motivation.

For those readers who are practicing Buddhists, and who take attainment of full enlightenment as their ultimate spiritual aspiration, it is also **important for you to maintain the goal of becoming a good human being and warm-hearted person**. With this aim you can ensure that your efforts here are beneficial, and will help you to accumulate merit and create positive energy around you. As you prepare to read this teaching, **you should first take refuge in the Three Jewels and reaffirm your generation of the altruistic mind, aspiring to attain full enlightenment for the benefit of all beings**. Without taking refuge in the Three Jewels, your practice does not become a Buddhist practice. And without generation of the altruistic aspiration to become enlightened for the sake of all sentient beings, your activities do not become that of a Mahayana Buddhist. Some readers, no doubt, are not practicing Buddhists, but will nevertheless have a serious interest in the Buddhist teaching.

Some readers will be from other religious backgrounds, such as Christianity, and will have an interest in certain aspects of Buddhist techniques and methods for spiritual transformation. For the readers who are not practicing Buddhists, you also can generate a good heart and good motivation as you prepare yourself to read these teachings; and if you find certain techniques and methods that you are able to adopt and incorporate into your own spiritual life, please do. If, on the other hand, you do not find any such helpful methods, you can of course simply put the book aside.

As for myself, I am just a simple Buddhist monk, with a deep admiration and devotion to the teachings of the Buddha, and particularly to his teachings on compassion and the understanding of the deeper nature of reality. I do not have any pride in my own ability to fully represent the rich spiritual teachings of the Buddha, however I do try my best to shoulder the responsibility history has placed on me by sharing my personal understanding of the Buddhist teachings with as many people as possible.

Many reading these teachings will, as their principal aim, be seeking methods to transform their mind. On the part of the teacher it is desirable, if possible, for him or her to have complete knowledge of the topics on which he or she is teaching. On my part, as far as I am concerned, I cannot claim to have full, complete knowledge of the topics I am dealing with here. However, the text we are studying is predominately about the doctrine of emptiness, and I do have a deep admiration for the philosophy of emptiness, and whenever I have the opportunity, I try to reflect on it as much as I can. Based on my little experience (I can claim at least a little experience) I have a sense that it is a living philosophy and that an **understanding of emptiness does have an effect**. Also, I feel emotionally connected to the idea of emptiness. This is as much of a qualification as I can claim for teaching this text.

Intellect and Faith

For all readers, whether you have developed a deep interest in Buddhism and are embarking on a spiritual path to explore the rich teachings of the Buddha, or whether you are just beginning, it is important not to be blinded by faith alone; taking everything on board simply on the basis of faith. If you do, there is the danger of losing your critical faculty. Rather, the **object of your faith or devotion must be discovered through a personal understanding derived through critical reflection**. If, as a result of your critical reflection, you develop a sense of deep conviction; then your faith can develop. Confidence and faith developed on the basis of reason will certainly be very firm and reliable. Without using your intellect, your faith in the Buddha's teachings will simply be an unreasoned faith with no grounding in your own understanding.

It is important to study to expand your own personal understanding of the Buddha's teachings. Nagarjuna, the second century Indian master, states that **both faith and intelligence are crucial factors** for our spiritual development, and of the two, faith is the foundation. He clearly states, however, that for faith to have sufficient power to drive our spiritual progress, we need intelligence, a faculty that can enable us to recognise the right path and to cultivate deep insights. Your understanding should not remain, however, merely at the level of knowledge and intellect. Rather, it should be integrated into your heart and mind so that there is a **direct impact on your conduct**. Otherwise your study of Buddhism will be purely intellectual and will have no effect on your attitudes, your conduct, or your way of life.

The Root Text

In Tibetan Buddhism the root texts, such as the sutras and tantras, are the original words of the Buddha himself. In addition, there is the Tengyur, the extensive collection of treatises composed by authoritative Indian scholars. There are also thousands of commentarial works written by many great masters from all four traditions of Tibetan Buddhism. The root text we are using for this present teaching is "Wisdom," the ninth chapter of *The Way of the Bodhisattva (Bodhicharyavatara)*, written in the eighth century by the great Indian master Shantideva.

I received the transmission of this text from the late Khunu Rinpoche, Tenzin Gyaltzen, who was a great meditator and spiritual teacher. He specialised in the practice of generating the altruistic mind of awaken-

ing, based on Shantideva's text. Khunu Rinpoche received the transmission from the renowned Dza Paltrül Rinpoche.

I will be using two important references as the basis of my commentary on Shantideva's text. The first is by Khenpo Künpal and reflects the terminology of Nyingma, the Old Translation school. The other is by Minyak Künsöd, who although a student of Paltrül Rinpoche, was himself a follower of the Geluk school and therefore used the terminology of the Geluk tradition. As I give the exposition of the root text itself, I will also highlight where these two experts give divergent interpretations of Shantideva's ninth chapter. Let's see how it goes!