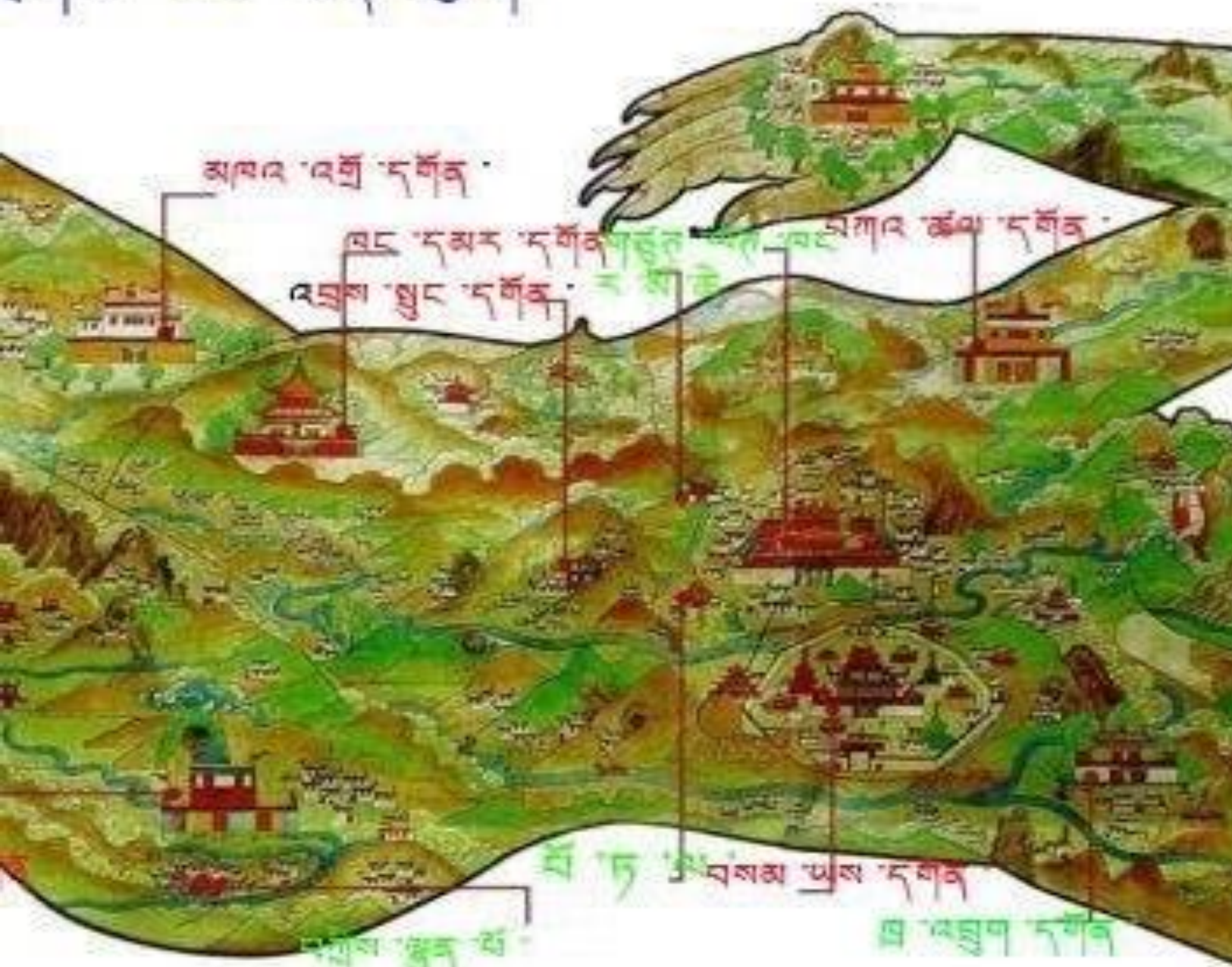


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Spirituality -- some Buddhist Worldviews

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What is spirituality for early Buddhist traditions?

- In Latin 'Spiritus' = 'Breath'
- The notion of 'soul' as in the breath and then leaving the material body at death has led to philosophic ideas of dualism (Plato, Descartes' Cartesian model) in which there is a clear divide between spirit or soul and material physicality or matter.
- This is not reflected at all in early Buddhist traditions, which hold that *nama* (name) and *rupa* (form) are inextricably intertwined.
- Hence, things pertaining to the spirit, whether human or non-human, infuse the materiality of all things. There can be no clear divide between mind and matter, between spirit and body and a worldview of this nature is one that whose false binaries have misunderstood the true nature of existence.
- As discussed last week, that which is named a 'human' (with given names such as 'Dawn' or 'Jack') refers to but a moment in a stream of becoming—neither the name or the form are permanent—in which momentarily arising consciousnesses (including elements of varying degrees of subtlety) are labelled 'human', 'elephant', 'cat' etc. across multiple lifetimes.

Moments of Becoming...

*Reincarnation entails no hierarchy of
sentience*



Implications for Buddhist traditions...

- Thus 'spirituality', or the breath in being, is understood as embodied: a lived experience rooted in a momentary becoming in which name and form are inseparable.
- In the context of this understanding and worldview, expressions such as 'so and so is a very spiritual person', that we hear used in the Western, English-speaking world, make very little sense.
- It does, however, make sense to say that every one of us, in whatever manifestation we are currently arising across our multiple lifetimes, is on a spiritual journey. Insofar as we have breath in the sense of sentience, this is the case.
- And it follows that there are multiple kinds of options for engagement across and within our lifetimes. We make choices as to how we live and how our embodied becomings are patterned, both across and within lifetimes.
- We could term these choices we make, and our manifestation of their patterns across and within lifetimes, our 'spiritual practices'.
- So what does this look like in Buddhist contexts...



- ‘The spiritual journey is, in essence, from distraction to awakening, and also from the personal to the universal. ... In this ‘going forth’ the heart opens and self-concern is realized as the shadow of concern for the welfare of all – “What can I gain from my practice, my efforts?” is replaced by, “What can I offer?”’

— Amaro Bhikkh
(Thai Forest Monk)



<https://www.theguardian.com/travel/2025/jan/21/why-samye-monastery-tibet-is-my-wonder-of-the-world>



https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A-oOc_xQxgA

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Later Buddhist traditions, such as those found in Tibetan regions we will discuss today, the 'spiritual journey' was less wandering and more monastic or cave-based, largely due to necessary environmental adaptations.

What is a 'spiritual Journey' for Tibetan Buddhist traditions: embodied practice

- The path to enlightenment in Tibetan Buddhist thought, is a spiritual journey that may involve crossing vast terrains or sitting still. What is important in the process is the energy propelling the journey and the karma that creates.
- This is the thing (or sequential momentarily arising temporality of things) that unifies all these choices of practice, path or journey for Tibetan Buddhist practitioners—the motivational factor of generating *bodhicitta*
- *Bodhicitta* can be broadly defined as the altruistic intent to attain enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings—is what needs to be generated in order for any meditational practice to succeed in an ultimate sense, and this involves a radical transformation of the psychospiritual body-mind continuum.

Tibetan Buddhist Practices -- Path to Enlightenment

'Buddhahood is not just a question of 'knowledge' in an intellectual or cognitive sense. It is thought of as grounded in a total transformation of the mind-body of the practitioner. One has to be a buddha in order to see and understand the world as a Buddha does, and that involves achieving a radical transformation of the emotional and physical basis of one's existence.'

Geoffrey Samuel, *Introducing Tibetan Buddhism*, 2012, p. 27



<https://smarthistory.org/jowo-rinpoche-jokhang-temple-tibet/>
Photo: Ziyi Xu

Generating bodhicitta in Tibetan Traditions: ways and means – spiritual practices



Ritual Practice in Leh Community gathering to consecrate the ground for a temple.

<https://www.dalailama.com/news/laying-the-foundation-stone-for-the-new-jokhang-in-leh-and-blessing-the-dharma-centre-at-choglamsar>

Generating bodhicitta in Tibetan Traditions: ways and means – spiritual practices



household rituals –
daily meditation and
offerings at
household shrine



Saving lives –
dedicating merit

<https://highpeakspureearth.com/tibetans-and-fish-part-ii-do-tibetans-eat-fish/>



kora (*skor ra*) – circumambulation of
sacred spaces and structures (the
'lingkhor' in Lhasa is shown here)

<https://www.tibettravel.org/tibet-travel-advice/kora.html>

As indicated in the course book, 'spirituality' is 'a kaleidoscopic category' (p.34)...

If we think of it as a 'subjective orientation to the world' (p. 35), or a chosen response to the (re)patterning of embodied living, what does 'spirituality' mean for you?

Photo: Dawn Collins, Brockwell Park, South London, October 2026

